



MINUTES OF BRIDGEND TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
Wednesday 8th March 2017 at 7.00pm at Carnegie House Council Chamber

<u>Present:</u>	Cllr R Morgan (Mayor) Cllr R Burns Cllr D Burns Cllr E Hughes Cllr A John Cllr M John Cllr C Webster Cllr C Lewis	Cllr M Lewis Cllr F Sykes Cllr H Morgan Cllr B Parish Cllr S Baldwin Cllr D Unwin
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Absent: Cllr R Marsh

Pre-meeting business

- Mayor made a statement regarding recent press coverage of the Motions presented to Council for discussion. He suggested that the Motions had been misinterpreted by the press.
- Cllr H Morgan made a statement regarding his comments to the press prior to the meeting. He explained that although he had expressed a view about the Motion, he had not made a final decision and was prepared to listen to the debate before coming to a conclusion.
- Town Clerk provided an overview of Declarations of Interest pertinent to the meeting.

1. To receive apologies for absence:

Apologies were received from Cllr O Byrne, Cllr R Thomas & Cllr M Voisey

2. To receive Members' Declarations of Interest in respect of the business to be transacted:

It was noted that the following Councillors had been previously nominated to represent BTC on the Town Twinning Committee: Cllr F. Sykes, Cllr D. Burns, Cllr R. Burns, Cllr B. Parish, Cllr H. Morgan and Cllr. R Morgan.

- Cllr D Unwin declared a personal interest in matters relating to Brynteg Comprehensive School (direct) and Bryntirion Comprehensive School (indirect)
- Declarations recorded in “Declaration of Interest” Register.

3. To Discuss “Notices of Motion” as set out in the letter calling for an Extra Ordinary Meeting in accordance with Standing Order 2.5 (below).

Standing orders

2.5 An extraordinary meeting of the Council may be called at the request of two members. Such a request must be presented to the Mayor in writing, and duly signed. Should the Mayor fail to call an extraordinary meeting within seven days the said members may convene an extraordinary meeting of the Council.

- Mayor provided Members with a recess of ten minutes to read four pieces of correspondence that had been received prior to the meeting.
- Mayor used his discretion to invite an officer of the Town Twinning Committee to speak to the Council on behalf of Town Twinning members who were sat in the public gallery.
- Mrs M Walters, Secretary of the Town Twinning Committee, spoke of the history of Town Twinning relationships and stated that the Committee have been pleased to have the support of Bridgend Town Council in past years. She added that in real terms, the Town Twinning Committee needs financial support from Bridgend Town Council for student exchanges. Mrs Walters explained that although there had been misunderstandings regarding the draft constitution, the Town Twinning Committee had met with BTC representatives to discuss amendments to the constitution. She also reassured Members that Safeguarding and Terrorism policies had been prepared since concerns were raised by the Town Council.

Mayor asked Members to consider Motions A1 & A2 below:

A1

- I. In view of considerably changed circumstances in the Town Twinning arrangement in recent years between Langenau — showing a complete lack of activity — and Villenave d'Ornon showing educational involvement solely between our two local Comprehensive schools with regular student exchanges arranged largely by teachers from both schools, this Council acknowledged that responsibility for these activities be wholly devolved to the Bridgend Town Twinning enthusiasts and educational establishments with immediate effect.

- II. Conduct for such future activity would absolve the Town Council from any direct responsibility and any funding sought from the public purse would be assessed alongside all other applications for grant aid from other organisations
- III. Should there be a request, from time to time, for official civic visits in either direction, these be considered on their merits and the Town Council allocate proportionate public funds as may be thought appropriate at that time.
- IV. Both Twin Town Authorities be advised accordingly with suitable explanations.

A2

- I. The Town Council RESOLVES to withdraw from all Town Twinning Charters and Friendship links and all the associated obligations.
- II. That the Town Clerk notifies the Charter Mayors and relevant administrators that the Council decision does not reflect any criticism on them.
- III. The Town Council requires that the Standing Orders and Financial Regulation consider a new committee to deal with any local organisation involved with European visitors and/or student exchanges.

Debate:

- A lengthy discussion took place regarding the signatories of the Motion.
- It was noted that Cllr R Burns, Cllr D Burns and Cllr C Lewis have been active members of Town Twinning and over the years had expended far more of their personal money and time on hosting people during Town Twinning exchanges than the remuneration that they had received from public funds.
- Cllr D Unwin stated that he has supported Town Twinning for many years and clarified that the Motion was not 'anti Town Twinning'. He explained that due to changes in both Council regulations and the introduction of a Town Twinning Charter in recent years it was now time to review Town Twinning arrangements. He highlighted that the purpose of the Motion was not to sever all ties with the European Twin Towns but was intended to propose a change in governance for the Town Twinning relationships.
- Cllr Unwin highlighted that the Town Twinning Committee includes professionals from both local comprehensive schools who are better placed to deal with issues such as safeguarding and policies needed for student exchanges.
- Cllr R Burns stated that he had never opposed Town Twinning and had only expressed concern regarding public funds.
- Cllr R Burns spoke of the lack of clarity regarding the relationship between Bridgend Town Council and the Town Twinning Committee and explained that the Motions are intended to address this situation. He added that new financial regulations and audit procedures had recently been introduced and stressed the need for complete transparency when administering public funds.
- Cllr R Burns explained that the relationship with Town Twinning needed to be formalised.
- Cllr R Burns acknowledged that although Bridgend Town Council is committed to Town Twinning relationships, the Council must show due diligence when considering budgets. He added that no Council could guarantee automatic

funding to any organisation and all funding requests should go through a grant application process and be evaluated accordingly.

- Cllr R Burns stated that the Town Twinning Charter is a formal document which was signed in 2015. He explained that there is an expectation to fulfil the requirements of the Charter, however, nothing has been done to date. Cllr Burns highlighted that there is an expectation that Bridgend would host a conference in the coming years and expressed a concern regarding funding for such an event.
- Cllr E Hughes made reference to the Motions and expressed an intention on how she would vote.
- Cllr H Morgan spoke of his support of Town Twinning and expressed an intention on how he would vote.
- Cllr H Morgan highlighted that the financing for Town Twinning in France and Germany is very different to that in the UK and suggested that BTC decline any invitation to hold the conference in Bridgend due to the funding implications of hosting such an event.
- Cllr R Burns stated that the Motion would include withdrawing from the Charter.
- Cllr C Webster spoke of her support for Town Twinning and the student exchanges.
- Cllr M John suggested that a decision regarding the future of Town Twinning should be deferred to the new Council after the May election.
- Cllr B Parish referred to 'disbanding' the Town Twinning Committee which Cllr Unwin strongly refuted.
- Cllr Parish requested clarity on the proposed BTC Town Twinning group.
- Cllr R Burns proposed an amendment to Motion A1 & A2.

Amendment to the Motion:

- I. In view of changed circumstances since the current Villenave d'Ornon Charter was signed and the diminished CIVIC Town Twinning arrangements between Langenau and Bridgend this Council acknowledges that responsibility for friendship, social and individuals twinning activities be wholly devolved to the relevant Town Twinning organisation with immediate effect.
- II. Conduct for such future twinning activities means the Town Council will not have any direct responsibility and any funding sought from the public purse would be assessed alongside all other applications for grant aid from other organisations.
- III. Should there be a request, from time to time, for official civic visits in either direction, these be considered on their merits and the Town Council allocate proportionate public funds as may be thought appropriate at that time.
- IV. Both Twin Town and Friendship link Authorities be advised accordingly with suitable explanations.
- V. That the Town Clerk notifies the Charter Mayors and relevant administrators that the Council decision does not reflect any criticism on or of them but reflects local changes.
- VI. The Town Council requires that the Standing Orders and Financial Regulation Group consider a new committee to deal with any local organisation involved with European visitors and/or student exchanges.

- Cllr R Burns summarised the Motion and stated that the revised Motion clarifies a funding process and a change to Standing Orders.
- Mayor declared a five minute recess for Members of the Town Council to consider the amended Motion.
- Mayor clarified that the amended Motion superseded the previous Motions A1 & A2.
- Mayor used his discretion to allow Mrs Lindy Hutchinson, Treasurer of the Town Twinning Committee to address him.
- Mrs Hutchinson provided an overview of the finances of the Town Twinning Committee and spoke about the costs incurred for the student exchange. She explained that funding provided by Bridgend Town Council is allocated to covering the cost of student activities when French students visit Bridgend. Mrs Hutchinson stated that the Town Twinning Committee had concerns regarding the timing of grant funding requests in relation to the forward planning needed for the student visits. Mrs Hutchinson clarified that fundraising carried out by the Town Twinning Committee is primarily used to fund the cost of adult activities when delegations from France, such as the Choir, visit Bridgend. Mrs Hutchinson emphasised that the Town Twinning Committee were keen to keep the status quo.
- Cllr C Lewis stated that her main concern was that the money provided by Bridgend Town Council was being used towards funding activities for French children and not being used for the children of Bridgend. Cllr Lewis explained that in her view, public funds raised in Bridgend should go towards making the French exchange visits more accessible to disadvantaged children in Bridgend.
- Cllr C Lewis highlighted that although Town Twinning activities had at one time been solely funded by BTC; times have now changed and there is greater scrutiny associated with the administration of public funds.
- Mayor used his discretion to permit Debra Walsh, Subject Leader, Modern Foreign Languages at Brynteg School to address him.
- Debra Walsh explained that Brynteg School have a 'hardship fund' available for disadvantaged children to help towards student exchange trips. She also stated that the teachers have a duty of care for the children whilst they are abroad and at no time would they expect Bridgend Town Council to have a duty of care for the children when they are in France.
- After hearing all aspects of the debate the Mayor asked Members to consider the amended Motion. The motion was moved and seconded.

Result of vote:

Members in favour of the amended Motion	7
Members against the amended Motion	7

- Town Clerk requested a recess to investigate a legal matter. Mayor granted a recess.
- After further investigation the Town Clerk advised that due to the fact that two Members had expressed an intention on how they would vote prior to hearing

the remainder of the debate, she was obliged to advise them that they should consider whether or not to declare a Prejudicial Interest.

- Cllr E Hughes confirmed that she did not wish to declare a Prejudicial Interest.
- Cllr H Morgan confirmed that he did not wish to declare a Prejudicial interest.
- Town Clerk advised that in the case of an equality of votes, the Chairperson may give a casting vote.
- Mayor made a statement prior to providing a casting vote.
- Mayor highlighted that annual funding cannot be guaranteed by the Council. He also explained that the Motion would see the Town Twinning Committee becoming a self-governing body, free of the constraints of Bridgend Town Council. The Mayor expressed his personal support for Town Twinning and vowed to continue to support Town Twinning on a personal level however he stated that the rules and regulations imposed on Bridgend Town Council make the current situation difficult.
- The Mayor provided a casting vote in favour of the amended Motion.

Meeting closed at 9.30pm

Signed.....
Mayor

Date.....