



Town Clerk's Report December 2020 – January 2021 For Information



This report provides details of the work undertaken by Bridgend Town Council staff and information for Councillors attention for the period 14th December 2020 – 19th January 2021.

1. Staffing

As cases of Coronavirus increased throughout December, Wales entered Tier 4 restrictions and Welsh Government instructed that 'You must work from home if you can'. In January the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Chair of Personnel held a remote meeting and it was agreed that access to Carnegie House should be for essential reasons only and all office staff should work from home until further notice.

On 8th January, Welsh Government announced that unless the rates of community transmission in Wales reduce significantly by 29th January, most children will work from home until the February half term. For this reason, staff have been advised that they can work flexibly to undertake their roles but will not be expected to work excessive hours in the evenings to make up their hours.

Arrangements have been made for the Maintenance Team to work individually outdoors as much as possible and they have been instructed not to go into the Town Hall Maintenance Depot together. Provision of an additional, separate storage area for Outdoor Workers equipment is also being arranged.

Further to last week's announcement and new legislation regarding Covid-19 health and safety in the workplace, we are currently undertaking new risk assessments for Carnegie House and the Town Hall based on the current Covid-19 situation, restrictions and use of the buildings.

The job description for a new Senior Finance and HR Officer has been written, however due to the pandemic and impact on Council priorities this will now be advertised in March 2021.

2. Council Work Priorities

During a meeting of the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Chair of Personnel at the beginning of January, staff priorities (excluding the day-to-day work of running the Council which will continue as normal) will include:

- Arranging Town Council and committee meetings to deal with any urgent business and to appoint committee's for the remainder of the mayoral year.
- To negotiate a new SLA with BCBC for the provision of on-going ICT services for BTC staff.
- To issue the allotment tenancy agreements from April 2020 and arrange collection of allotment rent for the current financial year via online payments and cheque.
- To remotely liaise with architects and contractors regarding the brief for the refurbishment of the Town Hall and arrange remote Council meetings to review costs and move forward with official tender process to appoint a contractor.
- To seek quotes and appoint contractors to undertake essential Facilities and statutory compliance work required in this financial year.
- To seek a planning consultant and progress with the new pedestrian access project for the Town Hall.

Work that was planned for January but will now be postponed includes:

- Advertising and recruiting for the Senior Finance & HR Officer role and seeking HR legal advice – Deferred to March.
- Preparations for the end of the financial year/audit for end of March 2021 (access to building required for printing) – Deferred to March.

- Planning for re-opening of Carnegie House and Wartime Bridgend event – Deferred until further information is available regarding Covid-19 restrictions.
- Backlog of meeting resolutions to action and starting of a range of new Council project – Will be reviewed dependant on workload and Covid-19 restrictions.

3. Precept

Bridgend County Borough Council have been informed of the Bridgend Town Council Precept requirement for 2021/22.

4. Christmas

Unfortunately both dates for the Christmas open top bus tour of the wards had to be cancelled; Sunday 13th December was cancelled due to inclement weather and Sunday 20th December was cancelled due to Wales entering Tier Four coronavirus restrictions.

5. Councillor Vacancies in Oldcastle & Morfa wards

At the beginning of the pandemic there was a relaxing of the 'six month' rule for Councillors attendance at meetings, however the new legislation *Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020* issued on 22nd April 2020 (and circulated to all Councillors) explained that this ended on the first day after the 22nd April 2020 on which a meeting is held.

As Bridgend Town Council held a remote annual meeting on 22nd June and has continued to hold remote meetings since, Councillors that have not attended any meetings for a period of 6 months from 22 June to date and have not requested formal approval from the Council for their absence, automatically lose their seat.

Rebecca Porter (Oldcastle ward) and Roger Marsh (Morfa ward) have not attended a Council meeting during for six months and therefore under Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 they are now disqualified and cease to be councillors.

The Electoral Office are aware that we now have vacancies in the Oldcastle and Morfa wards and will provide guidance on the procedures for casual vacancies during the pandemic in due course.

6. Town Hall

Although 4 architects responded to the brief for the refurbishment work for the Town Hall project by the deadline of 5th January 2021, no quotes have been received from building contractors.

I have liaised with Members of the Town Hall Working Group via email and it has been suggested that the deadline for quotes is extended and that additional building contractors are invited to respond to the brief.

A list of additional contractors (both local and further afield) has been prepared and Cllr David Unwin has suggested that the deadline for receipt of quotes is extended to 5th February 2021.

The Project Manager, Mr Bob Burns has prepared a Project Review Report for Councillors attention (see separate document) and the next steps for this project can be discussed under agenda item 17.

7. Community Engagement/Town Council Newsletter

As discussed in previous meetings, in order to improve communications with local residents, provide support and signposting during the pandemic and keep the public informed about Council projects such as the Town Hall, re-opening of Carnegie House facilities, new projects etc. the team have been working on creating a new Town Council newsletter.

Most of the content has been written, however, there can also be a section in the newsletter for Ward updates / Councillor / Committee news. The newsletter will be circulated to Members in plain text format for consideration within the next couple of weeks and Councillors will be asked for comment and any contributions you may have for this section.

It is hoped that the newsletter can be distributed to residents in March both in hard copy and made available on our website and via social media channels.

8. Newbridge Fields

Last year I was contacted by a consultant appointed by BCBC in relation to the development of a strategy for Newbridge Fields. I have now been contacted again and have been asked in the first instance I can attend a remote meeting with the company and an offer has been extended for a representative to attend an online meeting of Council to provide an introduction to the project for Councillors. A written overview of the project has been circulated to you for information.

If Council agree, I can invite a representative to attend the February Town Council meeting.

9. Future meetings

In December it was suggested that a Community Engagement Committee meeting would be called in January to discuss the phased reopening of Carnegie House in 2021. Due to the new Tier 4 restrictions and the uncertainty regarding re-opening public buildings we did not schedule this meeting.

The next meeting of the Town & Community Council Forum is scheduled for 15 February 2021 at 4.00pm.

A draft timetable of future Town Council meetings for 2021 has been prepared and is included on the agenda for discussion.

Leanne Edwards
Town Clerk