

## MAESTEG TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of an **EXTRAORDINARY HYBRID** meeting of the **Council** held remotely via Microsoft Teams and at the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Talbot Street, Maesteg, on **Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2024**.

### **PRESENT:**

### **COUNCILLORS:**

#### **IN PERSON:**

**R Martin (Mayor)**

F Abedalkarim, P Davies, C Knight, A LeGeyt, G Thomas, G Williams and I Williams

#### **ONLINE:**

AR Davies, C Davies, P Jenkins, R Penhale-Thomas and L Thomas,

#### **APOLOGIES:**

R Collins, R Lewis and M Rowlands,

#### **No APOLOGIES:**

A James,

### **DECLARATION OF INTEREST:**

Cllrs C Davies and G Williams declared an interest in any items that may relate to Caerau Men Shed.

Cllrs C Davies, P Davies, P Jenkins, and R Penhale-Thomas declared an interest in any items that may relate to Bridgend County Borough Council

### **593. TO RECEIVE THE INTERNAL AUDITORS REPORT**

Members were provided with the Internal Auditors Report and the Mayor welcomed Mr GW Davies MBE to the meeting to present his Internal Auditors Report.

Members thanks the Internal Auditor for his comprehensive report and raised the following questions:

- 1) S137 – this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> incident regarding S137 are you aware of what other T&CC's do?

The Internal Auditor advised that Maesteg Town Council is stricter than other T&CC's that he has previously worked for (Llan Middle CC, Llan Lower CC, Garw Valley CC & Ynysawdre CC).

- 2) S137 - The suggestion of asking for bank statements before and after from applicants creates additional work for the clerks and for the applicants, is this necessary?

The Internal Auditor advised this is a suggestion only, however applicants should be made aware that this is public money and applicants should be accountable for its use.

3) S137 - A few members also advised that they are also part of charities and they usually have some money in reserve for emergency work and can always provide receipts for purchases.

4) S137 – Can you explain why you have mentioned the use of S137 for anniversary gifts? In your opinion how should we pay for these gifts?

The Internal Auditor advised that this was originally from the Mayors Fund which made more sense, however the Clerk advised that the Council were advised following a SLCC training session that gifts should be paid from S137. The Internal Auditor advised that having looked at some Community Councils in England they do not use S137 but the council have a ‘whip around’ and pay out of their own money. Members agreed that MTC should continue using S137 for gifts as it does benefit the families of the recipients.

5) A member thanked the Internal Auditor for his report and asked if he is in the opinion that the current practices of cheques and balances safeguard the Council?

The Internal Auditor advised that the records were very well kept and safeguarded the Council.

6) A member stated that MTC still has a large balance and should we do more to spend this?

The Internal Auditor advised that having read minutes there is a vast programme to spend so should be ok.

7) Chair of Finance advised that MTC has an investment strategy with the CCLA, do you have any comments on this?

The Internal Auditor advised that this is a good investment and has one of the best for investment returns.

8) Are there any other concerns?

The Internal Auditor advised that within the report I detailed concerns about grant payments to groups whereby I was telephoned by a resident who had concerns that this particular group had not spent the grant as requested. One of these grants was returned however the other grant received for a ‘warm hub’ had not been used accordingly. Members queried how this alleged ‘warm hub’ grants had not been spent accordingly as it would be difficult to prove. The Internal Auditor advised that it could be proved with receipts, attendance registers etc. A member advised that they had attended the warm hub in question on a number of occasions, however a similar question had been raised with another organisation and its difficult to say what was spent on the warm hub and what wasn’t an example is if a packet of biscuits had been purchased and opened in a general session and then brought out in the warm hub session how much of this packet could be proved to have been used in the warm hub and how much for the other general session?

The Internal Auditor advised that this needs to be investigated as the public want answers, receipts have been provided but there are no dates on the receipts, MTC should conduct interviews with the complainant and the recipients. A member asked what evidence does the complainant have? The Internal Auditor advised that this is why formal interviews should be made. Another member stated that these allegations had been made to them and that the same receipts had been sent to another organisation for a similar grant. Chair of Finance advised that from a business point of view the Internal Auditor is a sub-contractor of the Council and any formal complaints should be made to the Council and not to the internal auditor. Once a formal complaint is received Council can then investigate. A member stated that when the complainant came to them they advised they had also emailed the Clerk. The Clerk advised that the Clerk email address had been copied into emails sent to the Internal Auditor and that all of these emails had been forwarded to all members. It was **agreed** that the Chair of Finance and RFO should write to the complainant for a formal complaint to Council, following this the Council will investigate the matter.

9) Regarding the bus service, a member advised that there is the option in the future for this to be rolled out to other areas and to also recover some of the costs by users using their bus passes.

10) A member noted that within the report it states that Audit Wales have yet to complete the audit for 2022/23 – how does this affect MTC?

The Internal Auditor advised that he had spoken to Audit Wales who are aware of MTC concerns and will chase this up.

11) The Internal Auditor advised that MTC had received additional NNDR bills from BCBC and recommends that MTC contact a professional Surveyor to challenge the Valuation Office and BCBC.

Cllr I Williams **proposed**, seconded by P Junkins that a professional surveyor is contacted to challenge the valuation office and BCBC.

12) The Chair of Finance asked that when quotes are received they are valid for 30 days, occasionally by the time Council look at them the 30 days has exceeded and the quotes sometimes change slightly. Would it be permissible for the Council to change the financial regulations to allow a 10% + or – on quotes?

The Internal Auditor advised that this would be acceptable and permissible.

The Mayor, Chair of Finance and members thanked the internal auditor for his diligence and for preparing the end of year internal auditor's report.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- To accept the Internal Auditors Report
- Write to the complainant and ask if they wish to make a formal complaint
- Contact a professional surveyor to challenge the valuation office and BCBC.

- To make a change to the Financial Regulations to allow 10% increase / decrease in accepting quotes.

**594. ANNUAL RETURN OF ACCOUNTS YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023**

Members were provided with copies of the Annual Return for the Year ended 31 March 2024. Clerk proceeded to go through the Annual Governance Statement and members answered each item accordingly. The form was signed by the Clerk & RFO and the Chair of the Meeting, Deputy Mayor Cllr C Davies.

**RESOLVED:**

- Annual Return Year Ended 31 March 2024 form completed, signed and dated by RFO and Chair of Meeting (Mayor).
- Annual Return Form, Internal Auditor's Report to be sent to Audit Wales and placed onto the website

At the end of the meeting members thanked the Clerk for the work involved in completing the Annual Return

**Minutes emailed to all Councillors to Read on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2024**

**Minutes accepted at a HYBRID meeting of the Council held on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

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**Mayor**