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Garw Valley Community Council
Annual Report 2023/2024

15th July 2024

Introduction:

This Annual Report covers Councillor Gareth Andrews' year as Chairperson of the Community Council, supported by Councillor Neal Harwood-Scorer as Vice-Chair, which commenced on the date of the Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2022 and ran for 12 months. This is the Community Council's third Annual Report.

A Community Council is a corporate body and its lawful acts, assets and liabilities are its own and not those of its individual members. Any decisions taken by the Community Council are the responsibility of the whole council regardless of voting on a particular issue. The Community Council raises its money through the Precept - a levy which its residents pay through the Council Tax. It has powers which allows it to spend this public money on the services which it provides.

Council meetings are held on the third Monday of the month at 6.30 pm and meetings move around the Garw Valley wards so that members of the public from all wards can access face-to-face meetings or they can join via zoom. The exceptions to this are that the council is in recess in August and in May its Annual Meeting takes place at 6.00 pm prior to the Ordinary Council meeting at 6.30 pm. The December meeting, which is a precept setting meeting, is sometimes held earlier in the month as it is a Precept setting meeting. Committee meetings are held on an ad hoc basis and include Finance & Resources, Events and an Employment & Disciplinary committees.

Objectives:

The council's objectives are:

- To continue to serve the Garw Valley Community
- To be a competent council
- To offer equal opportunities
- To be globally responsible and environmentally friendly

Councillors:

The Garw Valley Community Council serves 4 wards - Bettws, Blaengarw, Llangeinor and Pontycymer and is served by 13 Councillors who are either elected or co-opted. A local election takes place every 5 years. Once elected, Councillors cannot act as a councillor until they've signed a formal declaration of acceptance of office form. They also undertake to abide by the Code of Conduct that has been adopted by the Council and must undertake training on the Code of Conduct. At present this is the only mandatory training they must undertake.

Councillors do not receive a salary, but are entitled to claim a one-off payment of £156 per year to cover wifi, telephone calls etc., a one-off consumables allowance of £52 to cover printing costs and a one-off attendance allowance of £30. They can elect not to receive some or all of the payments. A list of payments made each year is published on the council's website.

Councillors must also individually make Declarations of Interest and must decide themselves whether to leave a meeting if an issue being discussed is of personal or prejudicial interest. When summoned to a meeting councillors will be provided with an agenda, minutes of the last meeting and relevant reports or papers associated with the items being discussed to enable them to prepare for a meeting properly as they are acting on behalf of the electorate and represent the views of the community in discussions. No single councillor can decide on behalf of the council.

The community councillors serving the Garw Valley Community Council in 2023/2024 were:

Bettws:

Councillor Neal Harwood-Scorer (Independent)

Councillor Martyn Jones (Labour)

Councillor Rees Jones (Labour)

Councillor Michelle Trowbridge (Labour)

Blaengarw:

Councillor Gareth Andrews (Labour)

Councillor John Coles (Independent)

Councillor Marlene Thomas (Labour)

Llangeinor:

Councillor Deb Davies (Independent)

Councillor Christine Lloyd (Independent)

Pontycymer:

Councillor William Davies (Labour)

Councillor Heather Griffiths (Labour)

Councillor Maxine Lewis (Labour)

Councillor Glyn Walters (Labour)

Three of the community councillors are also Bridgend County Borough Councillors and serve all 4 wards. They are:

- Councillor Heather Griffiths
- Councillor Martyn Jones
- Councillor Maxine Lews

Chairman:

The Chairperson is elected by the members at the annual meeting held in May each year and holds the position for a year. The Vice-Chair is also elected at that meeting and also holds the position for a year. It is the council's practice that the Vice-Chair on completion of a year's service moves on to become the Chair. The Chair holds a casting vote in the event of a tied vote, but cannot make decisions on behalf of the council.

Staff:

The Clerk & (RFO) is employed by the council to carry out its administration, financial management, asset management, project management, health & safety and other professional duties. She is responsible for the line management of the Community Warden. The Clerk works on a part-time basis.

The Community Warden is the only other member of staff and is mainly responsible for the council's leased land at Parc Calon Lan and some community maintenance duties.

The Clerk takes instruction from the whole council and not individual members.

The Clerk is the council's 'Proper Officer' and all correspondence should be sent to the Clerk.

Council Contact Details:

Ann Harris

Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer to the Garw Valley Community Council

PO Box 377, Bridgend CF31 9PS

Tel: 07949451690

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Visit us at: www.garwvalleycc.co.uk

Council Assets:

The council leases land at Parc Calon Lan (Blaengarw/Pontycymer) from Bridgend County Borough Council. There is a Visitor Centre, toilet and car park on site. It also manages and maintains a sitting out area in Lluest.

Finance & Accounts:

Each year the council's accounts undertake an internal and external audit. The full audit statement for 2022/23 is published on the council's website and is dated. The council's internal audit was carried out this month for the audit for the year ending 31st March 2024 and again no concerns or issues were raised, the council has now submitted its audit for examination by the Auditor Wales

Budget:

The budget for 2023/24 includes the precept and other income from VAT reclaims, bank interest, refunds for footpath work and maintenance of the Community Path from Pontycymer up the valley under an Agency Agreement with Bridgend County Borough Council and the balance carried forward from the previous year which is split into general reserve and earmarked reserves. The full budget is published each year on the council's website on the finance page. The council has maintained its precept at a constant level in recent years based on council tax band D. The Budget for the 2023/2024 year and the annual statement of accounts for the last audit which is for 2022/2023 are shown on the finance page of our website.

Income:

The council's main income is its precept - in 2023/24 this remained at £120,001.

Financial Donations:

Included in its budget each year is a sum for donations to be used following receipt of requests from the community and the community council also includes items in its budget for local events, play schemes etc. .

In 2023/24 the council spent £16,537.18 on the following:

- Donation to Air Ambulance Wales £25.00
- Donation to Ronald McDonald House £25.00
- Donation to Marie Curie Cancer Care £25.00
- Donation to Summer Play Scheme at the Richard Price Centre £500.00
- Llangeinor Community & Wildlife Gardens £1,200
- Bettws FC Fun Day £343.60
- Purchase of container for use by Bettws FC £3,198.00
- Garw Valley Community Awards £30.00
- Free Christmas Concert £563.50
- Christmas chocolate gifts for the children of all 5 primary schools in the valley £1,144.08
- Provision of children's activity schemes during school holidays £9,083.00
- School Community Awards vouchers £250.00
- Donation to Kids Cancer Charity £25.00
- Donation to Eisteddfod Rhondda Cynon Taff £25.00
- Donation to Hope Rescue £25.00
- Donation to Cancer Information & Support Services £25.00
- Donation to Bridgend Carers Centre £25.00

Memberships and Representatives:

The council maintains an annual membership of One Voice Wales, the Town and Community Council sector's voice which liaises with the Welsh Government. This membership ensures that the council's opinions on consultations by the Welsh Government is heard, it provides appropriate training for staff and councillors, including Code of Conduct training which is mandatory. It also gives the Clerk/council guidance on legislation and procedures and ensures the council is compliant with new legislation.

In addition there is an opportunity for a councillor to be a representative on the One Voice Wales area committee, the larger council's committee and the national conference.

The council is also represented by one of its councillors on the Bridgend County Borough Council Forum and on each of the primary schools' board of governors. Some of our councillors are also LEA representatives on the board of governors.

Policies and Guidelines:

New policies are prepared and adopted at council and new process have been put in place to ensure the council is data compliant.

All the council's policies and guidelines are published on its website.

These include:

- Standing Orders
- Financial Regulations
- Complaints Procedure
- Vexacious Complaints Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Social Media Policy

Agendas, Minutes, Accounts and Contact Details are also available on the council's website, as are the council's training plan, its annual report, councillor attendance figures for the previous year, our biodiversity reports and any statements we publish.

Every council is now required to publish a draft summary of each full council meeting on its website within 7 days of the meeting and these can be found on the meetings page.

Global Responsibility:

The Council recycles its waste paper and ink and toner cartridges are disposed of responsibly. In addition, a programme of footpath maintenance and an agency agreement with Bridgend County Borough Council as well as environmental maintenance of trees and hedgerows and grass cutting and floral displays that encourage bees and aid the environment are a priority.

Welsh Language:

The council's Clerk & RFO and one of its Councillors is a Welsh speaker and we can respond to verbal and written communication in Welsh.

Community Engagement:

The council arranges children's activity schemes during the school holidays, supports local events and is mindful of the importance of Remembrance Sunday. The Chair and members attend Remembrance services within the Pontycymer ward, Bridgend Town and the local area. The council has good relationships with local organisations within the valley, V2C, BCBC and South Wales Police including the local PCSOs. The council also provides a Christmas display of decorations, lights and trees in all 4 wards and each year tries to improve this provision and floral baskets, planters and has a programme of spring bulb planting.

Achievements in 2023/2024:

- Improved the environmental provision within the Garw Valley. This was achieved with on-going maintenance in Parc Calon Lan floral display baskets, flower beds, grass cutting, footpath maintenance, weed spraying, tree and hedge maintenance.
- To improve Parc Calon Lan. This was achieved by putting provision in the budget for the lakes at Pontycymer and Blaengarw to be cleared of pondweed and the reeds cut back every other year. In 2023/24 work was carried out to the lake in Pontycymer, continued maintenance and replacing some of the litter bins.
- Christmas lights were increased in Blaengarw, with additional provision in the Bettws ward.
- Replaced some of the community bins.
- Installed cameras to protect wildlife in the park.
- Continued employing a contractor to cut the grass at Pen Parcau Bettws and behind Glengarw Flats, Blaengarw
- Improved the sitting out area in Lluest by removing the 3 old benches and replacing the, adding a bin, cleaning up the area and installing a planter with summer and winter planting.
- Removed unsightly, old, unused Communities First noticeboards in Llangeinor, Lluest and Pontyrhyl.
- Purchased 4 Lamp Lights of Peace to mark the 80th Anniversary of D-Day in readiness for June 2024.
- Employed a contractor to cut back trees along the riverbank at Prospect Palace and trimmed trees along the edge of the Visitor Centre car park at Parc Calon Lan
- Organised a free Christmas Concert at the Richard Price Centre
- Carried out maintenance on the mountain bike trails.

Plans for 2024/2025:

- To provide 10 hanging baskets in Blaengarw, Bettws and Pontycymer and increase the number provided in Llangeinor village to include Lluest, Tylagwyn and Pontyrhyl.
- To clean up the area known as the Pocket Park in Pontycymer by clearing overgrowth and power washing the paviers. Install a defibrillator and a hanging basket and install a Tommy Silhouette next to the remembrance plaque.
- To refurbish the Strand by installing a 3 tier planter, a new retaining wall, new steps, new benches in front of the retaining wall, some hanging baskets and install a Tommy Silhouette and manage the trees.

- To mark the 80th Anniversary of D-Day by planting red, white and blue flowers in the planters, installing a Tommy Silhouette in each ward and marking the anniversary day by lighting the Lamp Lights of Peace in each ward.
- Repair the base of the War Memorial in Pontycymer
- Following a successful grant funding application to replace the 4 footpaths around the monument in Parc Calon Lan, plant trees and sow wildflower seeds.
- To continue the lake maintenance and removal of pondweed and cut back the reeds
- To continue to run both our Community Awards and School Community Awards
- To arrange another concert, in 2024 in the Blaengarw ward
- To continue working with REACH to support a grant funding applications to add further facilities in Parc Calon Lan