



VOLUNTARY SECTOR LIAISON COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE
AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON THURSDAY, 23RD JUNE 2022 AT 10.30 A.M.**

PRESENT:

Vice Chair (Presiding): Mrs L. Jones (Menter Caerfilli)

Councillors:

R. Chapman, P. Cook, K. Etheridge, C. Gordon, T. Parry, D. W. R. Preece, H. Pritchard, J. Sadler, Mrs E. Stenner, S. Williams, W. Williams and J. Winslade.

Together with representatives from:

GAVO (S. Tiley and K. Dawson), Groundwork Wales (K. Stevenson), Parent Network (S. Northey), The Youth Centre Cefn Hengoed (J. Pritchard) and Town and Community Councils Representative (H. Llewellyn).

Also present:

K. Peters (Corporate Policy Manager), P. Massey (Policy Officer), V. Doyle (Policy Officer), L. Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer) and J. Lloyd (Committee Services Officer).

RECORDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting would be live-streamed and a recording made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items - [Click here to view](#). The Committee was advised that voting on decisions would be taken via a show of hands.

1. TO APPOINT A CHAIR FOR THE ENSUING YEAR

It was moved and seconded that Councillor Mrs D. Price be appointed as Chair. By way of a show of hands this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that Councillor Mrs D. Price be appointed as Chair of the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee for the ensuing year.

2. TO APPOINT A VICE CHAIR FOR THE ENSUING YEAR

It was moved and seconded that Mrs L. Jones (Menter Caerfilli) be appointed as Vice Chair. By way of a show of hands this was agreed by the majority present.

RESOLVED that Mrs L. Jones (Menter Caerfilli) be appointed as Vice Chair of the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee for the ensuing year.

In the absence of Councillor Mrs D. Price, who was unable to join the meeting due to technical difficulties, Mrs L. Jones (Menter Caerffili) presided as Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. E. Fussell, Mrs D. Price and L.G. Whittle, together with representatives of GAVO (A. Palmer and G. Jones) and SSAFA Gwent.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

5. VOLUNTARY SECTOR LIAISON COMMITTEE HELD ON 17TH MARCH 2022

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee meeting held on 17th March 2022 be approved as a correct record.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee held on 17th March 2022 (minute nos. 1 – 8) be approved as a correct record.

6. MATTERS ARISING

In response to a Members query, it was explained that there shall be a Chair and Vice Chair for the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee, one from the elected Members of the Council and one from the Voluntary Sector representatives. The Chair and Vice Chair will rotate each year unless otherwise agreed. Furthermore, it was agreed that the Terms of Reference for the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee would be circulated to Members of the Committee following the meeting.

7. BRIEFING NOTE: MATTERS RAISED BY THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR LIAISON COMMITTEE

Update Report on Grants to the Voluntary Sector, Welsh Church Acts Fund, Community Empowerment Fund and Technical Assistance Fund Grant Schemes.

It was noted that at the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee meeting held on 17th March 2022 a formal request was made for a report encompassing the criteria, eligibility, publicity, application process and the amount remaining in the various budgets in relation to grant schemes operated by the Policy and Partnerships Team within the Council. The Policy Officer provided the Committee with a detailed update in relation to the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Fund, Welsh Church Acts Fund, Community Empowerment Fund and Technical Assistance Fund grant schemes. It was highlighted that application forms are not available online as it is preferred to have an initial conversation with potential applicants, to understand what their proposed project entails and to check that it meets the appropriate application criteria.

Following the update, a Voluntary Sector representative raised concerns regarding the application process, in that the applications forms are not available online, particularly in relation to the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Fund which offers very small grants to voluntary

sector organisations. Concerns were also raised in relation to how the grants for the Welsh Church Acts Fund are administered. In response, the Policy Officer explained that, in line with Financial Regulations, payments in relation to the Welsh Church Acts Fund are made in arrears as any upfront payments would be considered as a loan. With regards to the application process the Policy Officer acknowledged the points raised and agreed to review the application form for the Grants to the Voluntary Sector Fund being made available online. The Committee was advised that the application form for each of the various grant schemes can be requested via e-mail as well as over the telephone and reiterated why the application forms are not available online. The need for an initial conversation with potential applicants, so that an understanding of what their proposed project entails and to check that it meets the appropriate application criteria was emphasised. Council Officers will then work with potential applicants to ensure that the application process is as straightforward and simple as possible.

A Councillor representative raised several issues in relation to the report and a suggestion was made to the way in which the Council can promote the various grant schemes to the Voluntary Sector to increase awareness and show partnership working, by way of a letter sent directly to all the voluntary organisations. During the debate a number of concerns were raised regarding the Community Empowerment Fund and particular attention was drawn to the underspend in the budget for 2021/22. A request was made for the Cabinet Member, Councillor Mrs E. Stenner, to take forward these concerns to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Cabinet and ask that they look at the whole criteria, the marketing and engagement and monitoring of the every ward throughout the County borough which have not spent their allocation and put in an effective strategy where Officers lobby and monitor the elected Members to ensure the voluntary sector colleagues are getting the money they deserve.

The Corporate Policy Manager addressed the issues raised and advised the Committee that there was an underspend in the Community Empowerment Fund budget in 2021/22 due to the grant scheme going live late in the year. Members of the Committee were informed that training has been undertaken with local elected Members to advise them of the fund and the fund has also been promoted through the Council's social media channels in order that voluntary organisations and community groups can approach their elected Members. It was acknowledged that more can be done in terms of promotion, engagement and awareness raising, which will be taken forward. It was highlighted that further training sessions with elected Members, as a reminder and also with the new cohort of members, will be undertaken over the coming months. In relation to the surplus available in the Welsh Church Acts Fund the Corporate Policy Manager explained that the budget had transferred from the Finance section to the Policy and Partnerships Team and how it has significantly reduced over time.

The Committee was informed that there are many wards where elected Members have actively tried to promote the Community Empowerment Fund, but no local community groups have come forward with project ideas.

Following on from a previous discussion, a question was raised regarding financial regulations and whether they are different for each local authority. The Committee was advised that an enquiry would be made, and a response would be circulated via e-mail following the meeting.

In response to a Member's comments regarding multiple applications received in a single ward in a single round, the Policy Officer explained that the allocation equates to an amount of £4,940 per ward Member and organisations may be offered less than the maximum amount or approved projects where the total cost is less than £4,940 can be awarded a grant of up to 100% of the project costs. Members were advised that a report will be considered by CMT in terms of how the underspend can be utilised and once the process has been completed it will be reported to elected Members and the Voluntary Sector. In conclusion the Policy Officer clarified that the criteria for the Community Empowerment Fund, currently, allows Members of a single ward to merge their funding pots. However, there is no criteria to merge pots across ward boundaries as the allocations are made per ward Member. The Officer explained that in order for this to be considered the criteria would need to be revisited.

The briefing note was discussed and noted by the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee.

8. COMMUNITY BUILDING SURVEY - VERBAL UPDATE.

Mr K. Dawson, the Development Officer for GAVO, provided an update on the Community Building Survey. The Committee was informed that there were 11 respondents when the survey was initially circulated and an additional 2 respondents when it was circulated a second time. A request was made for Councillors to engage with representatives of their local community centres and community buildings to encourage them to fill out the questionnaire, which will be circulated once more.

The Policy Officer pointed out that under the COVID Hardship Funds, community groups were able to apply for assistance, which included capital grants that enabled building works. A suggestion was made to the Development Officer for GAVO in that he contacts the Business Support Team to request a list of the organisations who accessed those funds so that they can be contacted directly.

The Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee noted the update.

9. GAVO, THE ROLE OF YOUR LOCAL COUNTY VOLUNTARY COUNCIL (CVC) - PRESENTATION.

Mr S. Tiley, the Chief Executive Officer for GAVO, delivered a presentation to introduce the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO). The presentation outlined who GAVO are, what they do and their role and that of the Third Sector. Members of the Committee heard how GAVO was established in 1927 and is now the longest-standing and largest County Voluntary Council in Wales. Their vision is a society where communities, individuals, partner organisations and the third sector work together in a culture of equality, shared ownership, responsibility, and support to build a sustainable future.

It was agreed that the presentation would be shared with the Committee following the meeting, which included the contact information for GAVO.

The Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee noted the presentation.

10. ITEMS OF INTEREST CONCERNING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR FROM COMPACT PARTNERS

There were no items of interest concerning the Voluntary Sector from Compact Partners.

The attendance of Compact Partners at the Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee meetings was addressed, and it was requested that they be contacted to encourage more participation at the meetings.

The meeting closed at 12 noon.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 29th September 2022, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR