

Pembrey and Burry Port Town Council
Annual General Meeting
Wednesday 16th May 2018

Councillors Mrs Linda Edwards, Mrs Pam Every, Mrs Amanda Fox, Peter Freeman, John James, Stephen James, Robert John, John Hedley Jones, Mrs Shirley Matthews, Mrs Lisa Mitchell, Mrs Karen Morris, David Owens, Hugh Shepardson, Michael Theodoulou, Mrs Moira Thomas, Bob Walpole and Mrs Mary Wenman

In attendance: Alan Howells (RFO) and Shan Loudon (Administrative Officer)

Minute taker: Ed Davies (Administrative Assistant)

(Former OAP Hall 6.30pm – 7.15pm)

1. Opening Prayer

The opening prayer was given by Reverend Nicholas Jones.

2. To receive apologies for absence

None to receive as all members were present.

3. To receive members' declarations of interest in respect of the business to be transacted.

Members were presented with forms to declare their interests, to be returned at their earliest convenience.

Cllr David Owens requested that any declarations of interest related to any items to be discussed on the evenings agenda should be made.

Cllrs Stephen James, Mrs Shirley Matthews, Michael Theodoulou, Mrs Mary Wenman, Mrs Karen Francis Morris, Bob Walpole and John James all stated that they had no interests to declare other than those they had made the Council aware of previously.

4. To receive a valedictory address by retiring Town Mayor.

Cllr David Owens began his address by reading aloud the resignation letter from Mr Geraint Davies (formerly Councillor) as follows:

“Dear Mayor/ Proper Officer,

Please accept this letter as my resignation as Councillor of Pembrey and Burry Port Town Council.

Having become a Councillor in 2015, I was elected with a view to assist in the running of the town, helping to improve facilities and to work together with others to help the community, as a whole, prosper.

Over the last six months it has however become a political battle, with personal attacks having a direct impact on myself and my family. This is not the reason I became a town councillor and therefore I do not wish to continue in this capacity.

I apologise for the inconvenience this will cause to the town council during this difficult period and I thank you for all the positive work you contributed to my time as a councillor.”

Cllr David Owens continued:

“You will note that Geraint refers to personal attacks on himself and what’s worse his family. Geraint is a hard working family man born and brought up in Burry Port who is a public servant and has done more for Burry Port, particularly the junior sections of the rugby club, than most of us sitting round this table. Those of you present at the junior and mini rugby festival over the bank holiday weekend will testify to that.

It is an absolute disgrace that he has been forced out of the democratically elected office as a councillor by the actions of a small number of vindictive people.

Not only have we lost the services of a thoroughly decent man but this Council could now be faced with a bill of some four to five thousand pounds to organise another election. Money that could have been better spent on improving services for the people of the town who elected us to do just that.

Of course Geraint is not the only Independent Councillor who has been subjected to personal attacks and character assassinations on Facebook, some of which have been racially aggravated. The same applies to the Plaid Cymru member. I have to advise you that copies of such Facebook posts have been forwarded to the police as the large numbers from the same handful of people would suggest a conspiracy against non Labour members in what I believe to be an attempt to destabilise this democratically elected Council. Some such Facebook posts have even accused the non-Labour Councillors of criminal behaviour.

While all this has been going on I am not aware that the Labour Councillors around this table have done anything to try to influence or control such behaviour for the good of the Council and the residents we represent.

I have been told that the Labour group have posted their own personal attack against the nominated Mayor for the coming year on their official Labour Facebook page.

They have also challenged the professional integrity of the Town Clerk.

One issue has been allowed to dominate the efficient functioning of this Council over the past months which has led to a breakdown in relationships between members and resulted in the lack of trust that exists today. It had also damaged the previously positive relationships that existed between this Council and the RNLI, Dementia Group and Carnival Committee.

This Council has been democratically elected and it is inevitable that we will not agree with each other all the time. In fact debate and the management of differences is a sign of a healthy organisation.

Little did I realise that the public present at our meetings would distort the discussions to suit their personal agendas by flooding Facebook with their versions of what was said and by whom.

Also it is a fact that the Ombudsman has ruled that Council meetings are the place for debate and freedom of speech.

Little did he realise that he would be inundated with so many unsubstantiated complaints from members who have made personal attacks and accusations of bullying behaviour when they could not get their own way.

Again these disagreements and complaints have invariably been linked to the same issue that has dominated our proceedings previously mentioned.

Moving on.

When I started my year of office I determined to present a fair, balanced and open approach to all members. I believed that the best way to do that was to work closely with the Clerk and try to adhere whenever possible to Financial Regulations, Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and advice from the Clerk, Monitoring Officer and Ombudsman when required to do so.

I say this because I feel that any society, or organisation within that society, needs to observe a set of rules and procedures, sometimes being the law of the land. In our democracy decisions are invariably decided on a majority vote and as long as everyone has their say the majority carries the day and I believe everyone should be bound by the decision even if they don't like it. In our case this should be true of Council resolutions but we have experienced a number of instances when that has not been the case. Unless we accept this fundamental premise we are not going to make much progress in delivering what we were elected for.

The other pre-requisite for the effective operation of any organisation is that confidential information must remain confidential but we have experienced a large number of instances when confidential information has been disclosed to people outside the Council, including some sections of the press, which has caused us serious difficulties further contributing to the breakdown of trust between us.

On a more positive note some things, but not enough, have been achieved, The Council was again the winner of the Wales in Bloom Small Town Award and commended for our entry in Britain in Bloom.

The transfer of budgetary control to the main committees has been a success as has been the increased utilisation of our facilities resulting in more income generation.

The completion of the job evaluation programme (with one exception) and the finalising of a range of employment policies has been achieved.

The legal transfer of the parks from Carmarthenshire County Council was completed but there still remains some substantial work to be done in conjunction with CCC in order to finalise the operational requirements.

Working together with the Bowls Club Officers we have developed a successful partnership which secures the asset, provides security for the Club and opens up further potential for the Council.

The Food Bank over Christmas received huge support from the community.

Looking forward I will continue to put the interests of the community of Pembrey and Burry Port first and will work with anyone who has that same priority. However it will be difficult to forget the personal attacks that I have suffered from within and outside the Council. My

family will keep reminding me of the attacks I have experienced in what could have been a more positive experience as Mayor of our town that has so much potential.

However as I have said previously “You can only play the hand you are dealt”

Of the many events I attended, the year ended on a high with the Schools Concert bringing together so much young talent from our schools and Burry Port Junior Band. It just reinforced my belief in what can be achieved by working together.

Finally I want to thank all the staff for their dedication and their support particularly in the last few months during the absence of the Clerk and TSO. I also wish the Clerk a speedy recovery and look forward to her return. I thank the Rev. Nic Jones for religiously attending our meetings to deliver the opening prayers. I also want to thank the councillors who have supported me and worked so hard during the year, and my family for their unstinting support. It is time to move on to the next chapter in the development of this Council as one that has a clear focus of serving the community who elected us.

It has been a privilege to be the Mayor and I wish the new Mayor and Deputy Mayor success in their roles and offer my full support to them. I ask that we all support them and each other in the year ahead.

Thank you.”

5. Election and appointment of the Mayor for the 2018/19 civic year

Cllr David Owens nominated Cllr Robert John to be Mayor, seconded by Cllr Hugh Shephardson.

In the ensuing vote 9 members voted in favour with 8 against and 0 abstentions. It was therefore **RESOLVED** that Cllr Robert John be appointed as Mayor for the 2018/19 Civic year. The Immediate Past Mayor, Cllr David Owens invested the Mayor, Cllr Robert John with the Chain of Office.

6. Mayor’s Declaration of acceptance of office and acknowledgement.

Prior to making his declaration of acceptance of office, Cllr Robert John read out the following:

“You will recall the statement, read out by Councillor John James at the last Council meeting, in which my suitability to assume the office of Mayor was brought into question.

Much was made of my ‘unpredictable outbursts and aggressive and intimidatory behaviour in Town Council meetings, directed mainly at female Labour Councillors’.

Reference was made to the advice ‘to reflect on my language’, offered by the Ombudsman in a letter relating to a complaint about me by Councillor Linda Edwards.

However, Councillor Edwards was disingenuous to the extent that she omitted to read the full content of the Ombudsman’s letter which stated the following:

- No reference could be found in any council minutes of allegations of misconduct being made.
- Councillors should expect frank and robust exchanges of view.
- Councillors should develop a ‘thick skin’.
- The complaint would not be investigated.

I find it difficult to believe that Councillor Edwards, given her previous role in local politics in Lichfield, Staffordshire, would have no experience of the ‘rough and tumble’ of local politics.

Cllr Mrs Linda Edwards left the meeting at 6.50pm

It further stretches credulity that, given the serious nature of the complaints, no Labour Councillor intervened or made comment at the time, or even at the next meeting when minutes were approved. Indeed, when Councillor Morris expressed concern at the anger displayed at a recent Regeneration meeting, not one of the female Labour councillors professed awareness of the planned, prolonged and targeted abuse suffered by Independent councillors over the previous year.

Cllrs John James and Mrs Amanda Fox left the meeting at 6.52pm

Cllrs Mrs Shirley Matthews and Bob Walpole left the meeting at 6.53pm

Such has been the disgraceful depths plumbed by Labour supporters, outright lies, misinterpretation and innuendo have been the order of the day. Almost daily allegations of corruption, racial remarks aimed at an individual and use of the most foul and indecent language across a range of social media have forced Independent councillors to place these matters in the hands of the Police.

Cllrs Mrs Moira Thomas and Mrs Mary Wenman left the meeting at 6.54pm

Following the posting of that statement on the local Labour Party Website and other social media, I have been pleasantly surprised and heartened by the level of support expressed for me by many, including those of Labour supporters and voters. What has not surprised me is that those comments have been deleted without exception. Could it be support that they do not want to acknowledge. I leave that to others to deliberate upon.

Notwithstanding my disappointment, and that of colleagues and supporters, at what took place, there may just be the first encouraging signs of possible agreement between all councillors to put our differences aside and come together on the way forward. For my part I pledge to be open, honest and fair in all that I undertake during my year in office.

There is much to do to address coming legal obligations and the further transfer of assets from the County Council, all of which will place additional burdens upon the Council.

That work will require the efforts of us all, to pull together, as we seek the improvements that our community expects us to deliver.

We will look to utilising particular strengths and expertise of people, in our community and together we councillors and our public can only serve to enrich the lives of everyone in

Pembrey and Burry Port. There is truth in the idea that genuine partnerships can achieve great things.

Lets start that journey together.”

Cllr Mrs Karen Francis Morris stated that she had been subjected to angry behaviour and shouting during meetings, and that it had been deeply upsetting at the time. Promises had been made that it wouldn't happen again, and although there had been a lapse, since that occasion things had been fine.

Cllr Robert John replied that if his comments had been misinterpreted then he apologised unreservedly. He added that the majority of social media posts on the matter were lies and that these hadn't been put up by Independent Councillors, and that no apologies had been made.

Cllr Mrs Karen Francis Morris stated that she accepted that some things had been wrong but that some of the confidentiality issues had come from the Independent side also.

Cllr Mrs Karen Francis Morris left the meeting at 6.57pm

Cllr Robert John then read aloud his Declaration of Acceptance of Office, signed the document and returned it to the Proper Officer. Following this Cllr Robert John thanked his fellow Councillors for their support and extended to his Labour colleagues that they work together to meet the Council's legal obligations and possible further asset transfers. He stated that he felt acceptance was needed, that what has gone on in the past hasn't been helpful and that they all need to work to re-build trust on behalf of the people of Burry Port.

7. Election of the Deputy Mayor for the 2018/19 civic year.

Cllr Peter Freeman nominated Cllr Mrs Lisa Mitchell, seconded by Cllr Mrs Pam Every.

In the ensuing vote 9 members voted in favour, with 0 against and 0 abstentions. It was therefore **RESOLVED** that Cllr Mrs Lisa Mitchell be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the 2018/2019 civic year. The Mayor, Cllr Robert John invested the Deputy Mayor with the Chain of Office.

8. Deputy Mayor's Declaration of acceptance of office and acknowledgement

Having made her Declaration of Acceptance of Office, Cllr Mrs Lisa Mitchell indicated that it was a pleasure and a privilege to be elected as Deputy Mayor, which reflected the confidence which her fellow Councillors have in her.

9. Vote of thanks by the Mayor to the Immediate Past Mayor

The Mayor, Cllr Robert John thanked Cllr David Owens for everything which he had done during his year in office and for adhering to the rules and regulations as he had set out to do.

The Mayor, Cllr Robert John presented the Immediate Past Mayor, Cllr David Owens with a Past Mayor's medallion.

10. Review and adoption of Standing Orders.

Cllr Michael Theodoulou informed the Council that there was still more work to do to finish the review and to update the Standing Orders due to disagreement over the levels of delegation of authority and plenary powers the Council should impose on its standing Committees. He felt that a thorough review was required and **PROPOSED** that a working group of 2 Labour and 2 Independent members be tasked with that work and to report back to the Town Council once complete. This was seconded by Cllr Mrs Pam Every.

In the ensuing vote 9 members voted in favour, with 0 against and 0 abstentions. It was therefore **RESOLVED** that the working group be set up.

11. Review and appointment of Standing Committees.

Cllr Michael Theodoulou stated that other than the issues relating to plenary powers the review of the Standing Committees had been agreed as follows:

- Facilities and Assets Committee
- Regeneration and Wellbeing Committee
- Finance, Governance and Personnel Committee

These Committees would continue to operate within the remits of the previously established committees as stated on 21st October 2015.

In addition, the Chairs Committee would continue to operate, and it was reaffirmed that the Committee did not have any powers of decision except in cases of emergency. It would continue to have responsibility for line management of the Clerk and assessment of the Committees work.

Membership of the standing Committees was agreed to consist of 4 Independent members, 3 Labour members and 1 Plaid Cymru member.

Membership of the Chairs Committee would consist of the elected Chairs of each Committee.

Each standing Committee would elect its own Chair and Vice Chair

The Committees would allow the appointment of non-Town Council members to relevant Sub-Committees to access the expertise within the community on specific issues.

The Audit Sub-Committee membership would be set by the Town Council and would meet as and when it was needed.

Members were reassured that non-Town Council members would not have a vote on any matters.

Cllr Michael Theodoulou **PROPOSED** that the appointment of the Standing Committees be accepted, seconded by Cllr Stephen James.

In the ensuing vote 9 members voted in favour, with 0 against and 0 abstentions. It was therefore **RESOLVED** for the Committee structure to be approved.

12. Review and appointment of representatives on outside bodies and organisations

Cllr Robert John read aloud the list of existing appointments as follows:

Outside Body	Current Representative
One Voice Wales	Cllr Peter Freeman Cllr Michael Theodoulou
Town and Community Councils County Liaison Forum	Cllr Robert John
Friends of Burry Port Harbour	Cllr Robert John
PACT	Cllr John James
School Governing Bodies	
Pembrey	Cllr Mrs Shirley Matthews Term 8 th June 2015 – 7 th June 2019
Parc y Tywyn	Cllr Mrs Moira Thomas Term 18 th June 2016 – 17 th June 2020
Burry Port Community	Cllr Robert John Term 1 st September 2013 – 31 st August 2017

Cllr Stephen James **PROPOSED** that the members be reappointed unless they wished to stand down, seconded by Cllr Michael Theodoulou.

Members were informed that the Police had ceased their involvement with PACT.

In the ensuing vote 9 members voted in favour, with 0 against and 0 abstentions. It was therefore **RESOLVED** that the stated members be reappointed.