

# **Rogerstone & Bassaleg Joint Burial Board**

## **Minutes of the Burial Board Meeting**

**Tuesday 12th December 2023**

**Held at Graig Community Hall, Welfare Grounds, Cowshed Lane,  
Bassaleg NP108HZ & Also via Zoom Remote Attendance**

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### **Present:**

Cllr A Hobbs (R), Cllr S Bowen (R), Cllr N Tarr (G), Cllr J Harris (G), Cllr J Reynolds (Zoom) (R),

### **Apologies**

Cllr S Mlewa (R), Cllr S Jones (R), Cllr P Appleton (G), Cllr K Sayer (G)

### **Absent**

Cllr N Upham (R)

## **1. Minutes of the Last Meeting**

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

## **2. Matters Arising**

Para 2.2 - Members discussed the ongoing cemetery development works along with the improvements which have been implemented since the crisis report of 2019, which advised that only a handful of new burial plots remained & the future operation would be in jeopardy. The progress which has been made since the report was discussed, in particular:

- The re-mapping & new detailed scaled drawings of the cemetery
- The identification & implementation of 3 schemes to extend the viable operation of the cemetery, which is now anticipated to be in excess of 10 years with potential to extend to 15 years plus
- The regular planned maintenance regime which has been implemented, new sponsored benches, new waste bins, new notice board, redecorated entrance gates & the cutting back perimeter of hedges as far as practicable
- The high number of compliments on the cemetery being received & requests to pre-book a plot (however, pre-booking applications are not accepted)
- Moving to e banking, digital first correspondence & other economies from revised working practices

- Operational & reserve finances which are at the highest level they have been, which now gives investment opportunities
- Independent verification of service compliance by Wales Audit which resulted in the past 3 years returns receiving Unqualified Audit Opinions (2022 / 2023 not yet received)

Members however recognised there is still ongoing development work required to maintain & further improve service standards

### **3. Clerks Report**

#### **3.1 Burials**

To give Members an indication of demand, the following has been taken from in 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023 Figures shown in brackets are last years figures

- 6 new full burial (7)
- 8 existing plot full burials (6)
- 2 new cremated remains (2)
- 0 existing plot cremated remains (3)

#### **3.2 Operational**

##### **3.2.1**

Representations have been made to Wales Audit regarding the Annual Return Outcome Reports for 2019 / 2020 / 2021 & 2022 which have still not been received. It is concerning not to have had either of these reports after such a long delay, however Members will be able to take some comfort from the Internal Audit Review(s) which did not raise any issues & were issued in a timely manner & reported to Members.

Wales Audit have been chased up for an explanation several times but the e mails were unanswered.

A further e mail was sent to the Audit Manager who replied on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023 to say that he would look into his records & get back to us shortly.

A reply was received on 20<sup>th</sup> October which included some, but not all of the outstanding Audits (to be discussed under Agenda Item 5)

##### **3.2.2**

Following a tender exercise, a contractor has been appointed to remove the road to the rear of the cemetery & reinstate with subsoil & topsoil. A timber post & rail fence has been included in the tender to prevent cars driving over or parking on existing graves.

The tender has been extended to include cutting back the vegetation to the rear of the cemetery & moving the existing fence line back towards the small watercourse, which will improve the aesthetics of the cemetery & possibly yield additional burial plots.

The works is planned to be undertaken in two phases with the fence line works commencing in October / November 2023 & the road removal / reinstatement in February / March 2024.

### **3.2.3**

Members were pleased to hear that we have received a number of further positive comments complimenting the Burial Board on the maintenance & upkeep of the cemetery. There has also been a number of requests to pre-book cemetery plots which have been declined & the reasoning behind the decision explained

### **3.2.4**

There have been several incidents of black bags & rubbish left outside the cemetery which has been cleared away by RCC staff. However, since signs regarding Fly Tipping were erected at the cemetery entrance the practice has now discontinued

## **3.3 Financial**

The income & expenditure transactions of the day to day revenue account from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023 to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023 are as follows:

### September

Income: £787.35

Expenditure: £174.50

### October

Income: £2456.40

Expenditure: £2210.69

### November

Income: £939.50

Expenditure: £0

### Account Balances at 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023

Current Acc: £44700.77

Reserve Acc: £75621.31

A Member queried why there was no detail of the income & expenditure, the Clerk reminded Members that they were sent a detailed expenditure profile as part of the Agenda pack on 4<sup>th</sup> December.

NB

The Clerks salary will be one end of year transfer to Rogerstone Community Council payroll.

#### **4. Wales Audit Outcome Reports**

Wales Audit have finally returned some of the outstanding Annual Returns (all copied to Members prior to the meeting) dating back to 2018 / 2019. The notices of Conclusion of Audit were posted on 20<sup>th</sup> October but there were no requests to view.

Members discussed each of the returns with the outcomes summarised as follows.:

- **2018 / 2019 Audit Outcome – Qualified**
  - (i) Annual Return not signed by Chair
  - (ii) (ii) Unable to confirm that accounts were approved as accounts were not published
  
- **2019 / 2020 Audit Outcome Unqualified.**

No matters to draw to the Burial Boards attention.
  
- **2020 / 2021 Audit Outcome Unqualified**

No matters to draw to the Burial Boards attention.  
NB Members were concerned that the Burial Board Audit was wrongly sent to Rogerstone Community Council.
  
- **2021 / 2022 Audit Outcome Unqualified**

No matters to draw to the Burial Boards attention.
  
- **2022 / 2023 Audit Still not complete**

The Auditor undertaken the Audit has left the service & the Audit Manager says he thinks they were waiting for further information, but does not know what.

Members acknowledged each of the Audit Outcomes received & were pleased with the 3 previous years unqualified results, the Qualified Audit pre-dates any current Members & the Clerk. However, Members expressed concern on how useful or fit for purpose they are at this stage given the unacceptable lateness of up to 4 years. Members were also disappointed & concerned that last years Audit still has not been completed.

It was agreed that representations will be made upon receipt of any inappropriate invoices for these Audits.

#### **5. Any Other Urgent Business**

##### **5.1 Financial Planning**

The Clerk has met with independent financial planning advisors to discuss the options for a longer term investment plan for the current Reserve Account. An options advice note was previously circulated which was presented to Members.

Members discussed the necessity not to take unreasonable risks with the reserve fund but at the same time recognised the benefit of well informed longer term financial planning. It was agreed to invite DS Howell Ltd to present a financial options appraisal to the Aril meeting.

## **5.2 Burial Board Administration Planning**

The Clerk advised Members that he would like to reduce his working hours therefore will bring forward an administrative options paper during 2024, subject of course to Members approval.

## **6. Date of Next Meeting**

The following meeting dates were agreed:

- Tuesday **2<sup>nd</sup> April 2024**, 7.00pm in Tydu Community Hall
- Tuesday **25<sup>th</sup> June 2024** (AGM), 7.00pm in Graig Community Hall

Hybrid facilities via a laptop will be available for each meeting.