

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO:	<u>THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL</u>
SUBJECT:	<u>EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL – 4TH NOVEMBER, 2021</u>
REPORT OF:	<u>DEMOCRATIC OFFICER</u>

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR M. DAY (DEPUTY CHAIR,
PRESIDING)

Councillors P. Baldwin
D. Bevan
J. Collins
M. Cook
N.J. Daniels
D. Davies
G. A. Davies
G.L. Davies
P. Edwards
L. Elias
D. Hancock
K. Hayden
S. Healy
R. Hill
W. Hodgins
M. Holland
J.E. Mason
C. Meredith
J. Millard
M. Moore
J.C. Morgan
J.P. Morgan
G. Paulsen
K. Pritchard
K. Rowson
T. Smith
B. Summers

B. Thomas
 G. Thomas
 S. Thomas
 H. Trollope
 J. Wilkins
 D. Wilkshire
 B. Willis
 L. Winnett

AND: Managing Director
 Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services
 Corporate Director of Social Services
 Chief Officer Resources
 Chief Officer Commercial and Customer
 Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance
 Service Manager – Performance & Democratic
 Communications and Marketing Manager
 Press and Publicity Officer
 Policy Officer

ALSO: Mr. Antony Metcalfe – Royal British Legion –
 Area Manager for Wales

Ms. Lisa Rawlings – Regional Armed Forces
 Officer

Observers - Representatives from the Royal
 British Legion Branches within the
 County Borough

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
1.	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
2.	<u>APOLOGIES</u> The following apologies for absence were received from:	

Councillors M. Cross, J. Holt, H. McCarthy, L. Parsons, T. Sharrem and representatives of the Ebbw Vale Branch of the Royal British Legion.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

4. HONORARY 'FREEDOM OF THE COUNTY BOROUGH' - THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

The Chair commenced by explaining that an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council had been convened for the sole object, notice of which was now given, of considering and if thought fit passing a resolution in the following terms, which resolution, pursuant to Section 249 (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, must be passed by not less than two-thirds of the Members voting thereon.

The Chair, thereupon, continued by proposing the following Motion:

“That in pursuance of Section 249 (5) of the Local Government Act 1972 the Council of the County Borough of Blaenau Gwent do hereby confer the Honorary Freedom of the County Borough of Blaenau Gwent upon The Royal British Legion to mark the 100th year Anniversary of the Royal British Legion in 2021 and in recognition of the dedicated charitable work undertaken by local branches (Abertillery, Beaufort, Blaina, Brynmawr, Cwm, Ebbw Vale, Rassau and Tredegar) across the County Borough which supports serving and former service men and women and their families. Also, in recognition of the wide range of people in the County Borough who raise funds every year to support the Royal British Legion and Armed Forces Community.

That the Council do embrace the privilege of admitting the said The Royal British Legion as Freemen of the County Borough of Blaenau Gwent”.

This Motion was seconded.

At this juncture, Councillor Brian Thomas the Council's Armed Forces Champion advised that the Freedom of Borough was the highest award that Blaenau Gwent Council could confer, and he was delighted to take this opportunity on the centenary of the Royal British Legion to recognise the dedicated work undertaken by countless volunteers through local branches in Blaenau Gwent over many years. It also reflected the strong community support in Blaenau Gwent for the armed forces. Many men and women from Blaenau Gwent had proudly served in the armed forces, and this award recognised the excellent work that the Royal British Legion had done over many years to support these serving and former service men, women and their families.

Unfortunately, whilst this award was unable to be presented in person today arrangements would be made for it to be presented at a later date. The Armed Forces Champion concluded by again expressing his appreciation to the many volunteers across Blaenau Gwent who contributed to the important work of the Royal British Legion and said he was proud to also second the Motion to award the Freedom of the Borough to The Royal British Legion.

It was, thereupon, unanimously RESOLVED that The Royal British Legion be made Freeman of the County Borough of Blaenau Gwent.

At this juncture, the Chair extended a warm welcome to Mr. Antony Metcalfe, Area Manager for Wales for the Royal British Legion, Ms. Lisa Rawlings, Regional Armed Forces Officer and to the representatives from the Royal British Legion Branches in the County Borough.

Mr. Metcalfe was then invited to respond:

Mr. Metcalfe said it was a great pleasure to receive on behalf of the Royal Legion British, the Freedom of the County Borough of Blaenau Gwent.

He firstly took the opportunity to express his appreciation to the Chair, Councillor Malcom Day, the Armed Forces Champion, Councillor Brian Thomas for their very kind

remarks and to all Members of the Council for their unanimous support to bestow the Freedom of the Borough on The Royal British Legion and said it was a privilege and honour to be in attendance.

Mr. Metcalfe continued by noting that the Freedom of the Borough had been presented to mark the 100th year Anniversary of the Royal British Legion in 2021 and in recognition of the dedicated charitable work undertaken by local branches (such as Abertillery, Beaufort, Blaina, Brynmawr, Cwm, Ebbw Vale, and Tredegar to name but a few) across the County Borough which supports serving and former service men and women and their families. This was also, in recognition of the wide range of people in the County Borough who raise funds every year to support the vital work of the Royal British Legion to support the Armed Forces Community.

This was a very special year for the Legion, it marked the centenary of its formation on the 15th May, 1921. The Legion was formed in the aftermath of the most destructive war the world had seen and brought together four ex-servicemen's organisations under one unifying umbrella. The first poppy appeal in November 1921 raised £106,000 (£5.3 million today) and since then the appeal was an annual feature of the Remembrance calendar. This year, 40,000 volunteers would distribute millions of poppies across the U.K. and abroad, the aim of which was to raise £45 million to support the Legion's vital work.

The fact that the Legion still existed 100 years later, as a charitable organisation was testament to its ability to adapt and change. Over the last 100 years the Legion had supported its three main charitable aims, i.e. that of welfare, campaigning and remembrance.

The Legion was recognised for Remembrance and the annual poppy appeal but also behind the scenes it was the largest provider of welfare support to the armed forces community. Nationally, the Legion respond to close to over a 100,000 requests every year, and spend £1 million a week on care, immediate needs and other such grants, with each

and every one resulting in a life changing outcome for that individual and their families.

The last two years of the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on everyone in many ways, and Mr. Metcalfe at this juncture expressed his best wishes and condolences to those who had lost someone close.

The pandemic, however, had also demonstrated the best in everyone, communities rallying around those struggling, isolated and in need, charities, community and volunteer groups stepping up to support the health services and the huge success of the vaccination programme.

The nation had seen the Armed Forces Community take on many additional responsibilities, supporting the nations response to Covid-19, building the Nightingale Hospitals, running vaccination centres, supporting ambulance crews and maintaining the flow of PPE were just a few examples. There were also the ongoing operations across the world and the final drawdown from Kabul this summer in Op PITTING. The Armed Forces Community was there for everyone and the Legion would always be there for them.

As the Legion celebrated its 100 years, it was under no illusion that its work was done. The Legion stood ready to continue to hold governments to account, to step in and support where there was a need worldwide and would continue uphold Remembrance, as a source of social good that was relevant for all communities. The Legion stood ready and prepared for the challenges as it moved forward into its next hundred years.

Mr. Metcalfe concluded by again expressing his appreciation for this tremendous honour.

Members were then invited to comment.

A Member said that he had always supported and would always continue to support the Royal British Legion and he fully supported the decision to bestow the Freedom of the Borough on the organisation. However, he expressed his view that the Council in future years needed to provide

further assistance to the Royal British Legion by taking over the responsibility for the road closures (previously undertaken by Gwent Police) for the Remembrance Parades. He felt that this responsibility should not be for the event organisers namely, the Town/Community Councils to co-ordinate and manage.

The Leader of the Council commenced by sharing the welcome that colleagues had extended to the Royal British Legion and congratulating the Legion on its centenary. He echoed the comments made by those Members who had paid tribute to everyone involved and the dedicated work undertaken across Wales and in local branches by the Royal British Legion and paid tribute particularly, to the absolutely phenomenal work that the local branches in Blaenau Gwent did. The Leader continued by expressing his appreciation to all the volunteers for the tireless work and support they provided every year to the Royal British Legion. Blaenau Gwent had a very proud association with the Royal British Legion and conferring the Freedom of the Borough on the Legion was a fitting and an appropriate tribute to such a long standing, proud and respected organisation.

With regard to future years, work had already been undertaken with officers and indeed the organisations who traditionally organised Remembrance Parades on an annual basis to ensure the continuity of these parades and ceremonies well into the future.

The Chair concluded by stating that the Royal British Legion did fantastic work and provided phenomenal support to serving and former service men and women and their families and the Council would do everything it could to continue to support the Legion for future years to come.

The Chair, thereupon, thanked everyone for attending and declared the meeting closed.