

CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to: Ethics and Standards Committee
Date of meeting: 17 September 2021
Title: Monitoring Officer Matters – update
Purpose of the report: To inform Members of MO matters

For information an article P***ed off Mayor rants at the ‘sheer hell’ of being a community councillor newspaper report (press article)
<https://nation.cymru/news/ped-off-mayor-rants-at-the-sheer-hell-of-being-a-community-councillor/>

Recommendation(s): To note the copy of the article for information.

Reasons for decision: For information .

Contact Name: Dana Jones
Designation: Democratic and Services Officer
Date of Report: 1 September 2021
Acronyms:

P***ed off Mayor rants at the ‘sheer hell’ of being a community councillor

24 Jun 2021 4 minutes Read



Briton Ferry Town Council Community Hall, where the council usually meets.
Hannah Neary, *local democracy reporter*

A town council mayor launched into an angry tirade about the “sheer hell” of being a community councillor during a heated public meeting.

Cllr Byron Barnett, a Labour member of Briton Ferry Town Council and former town mayor, was responding after he was asked how he had spent his £500 mayor's allowance for 2020/21.

During the meeting on April 28, Cllr Barnett, who represents Shelone Wood, said he noticed "personal jealousy" from other members and he never wanted to become a town councillor.

He said: "There's no other mayor before me that's had to put up with this crap. Only me and I'm p***ed off with it, I've got to be honest. Forgive my language but I am. Enough is enough.

"I've had three years, one year as deputy mayor and two years as mayor and it's been sheer hell. I would never want to do it ever again.

Satan

"I've picked up from certain councillors personal jealousy and I don't like it. Where is Satan lurking in this one?"

Town and community council members in Wales who occupy senior positions such as mayor receive a £500 allowance. Other town council members receive £150.

The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales recommendations on politicians' pay states that community councillors are entitled to receive the payments and they should receive the monies "as a matter of course" and not be required "to opt in to receive the payments".

Cllr Barnett had been asked how he had spent his £500 in an email to the town clerk from a constituent and became drawn into a row about how he spent it in the town council meeting.

Cllr Barnett said his mayor's allowance went towards his services to constituents, which includes family history research and legal and financial advice.

He said he offers free advice to local residents on "a wide range of things" such as "investigating husbands who are trying to hide properties from their wives".

He said he usually advises residents from Briton Ferry Community Resource Centre, a library run by volunteers, or from home under lockdown restrictions.

Cllr Sylvia John, who represents Cwrt Sart, said the things Cllr Barnett spent his allowance on are "irrelevant to the town council".

The Labour member added: "Family history and such is not really our remit. I appreciate the work that the mayor does in the resource centre but the resource centre is nothing to do with the town council."

Cllr Barnett said: “Nevertheless Sylvia, I serve the constituents.. They come to the library and they want free advice, they get it. I’m there whether I’m as a councillor or as a trustee.

“I don’t draw a distinction there at all. We provide a free service for our community and we keep our constituents very happy indeed.

“It’s still time consuming.. My time, my expenses, my computer, my electricity and I do it for free. We are not making money out of this.”

He also said he told Cllr Barry Kaines he did not want to become mayor when he was elected.

‘I didn’t want it’

“When I became mayor, no disrespect to Barry... I told him I didn’t want it.

“I didn’t want it and to be honest with you I didn’t even want to become a town councillor... I have done three years and it’s been three years of hell.

“I don’t have animosity against anyone at all but I get really peeved when somebody’s doing it to me and I don’t like it. It hasn’t been easy for me and I don’t like it.”

Cllr John said: “No one disputes it’s been easy... nobody’s been having any functions of any kind over the last twelve months, that’s why the question was asked.”

Cllr Barnett said: “It’s not my fault there’s a lockdown... we’ve got staff members who are in Liberty Hall, they’ve been on furlough for the last twelve or whatever months, and they get full pay. Nobody’s questioning anything there. Why question me?