

BLAENAVON TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES OF THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 25th SEPTEMBER 2024 AT 6.30 PM.

Pursuant to the requirements of Section 47 of the Local Government and Elections
Wales) Act 2021, the meeting was held on a hybrid basis in the Council Chamber at 101,
High Street Blaenavon and remotely.

In attendance:

Councillors: Cllr. N. Matthews (In the Chair) L. Cowles, T. Porter, M. Wheeler, S. Templeton, S. Keen, L. Evans, A. Lewis, A. Beavan, J. Hunt.

Officers: Kevin Warren (Chief Officer), Kerry Jones (Assistant Chief Officer)

Visitors: None present.

Members of public: None present.

The Full Council meeting was opened at 6:30pm by Mayor Cllr Nathan Matthews who welcomed everyone and expressed thanks for attendance.

Cllr Matthews paid tribute to the late Graham Walby, former Councillor and Mayor of Blaenavon. Councillors Wheeler and Cowles attended the funeral on September 10, 2024, to represent the council.

1. To receive any questions from the public.

None received

2. To receive and accept apologies.

The Chief Officer informed the chairperson that the following apologies had been received:

- Cllr Jones.
- Cllr Parfitt.

It was proposed by Cllr Hunt and seconded by Cllr Wheeler that the apologies be accepted.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Apologies accepted.

3. Declarations of Interest

- Cllr Hunt Item 18 Prejudicial
- Cllr Wheeler Item 18 Personal
- Cllr Cowles –Item 18 Prejudicial
- Cllr Evans Item 18 Personal
- Cllr Beavan Item 18 Personal

4. To receive a TCBC update from Ward Councillors.

Cllr Matthews updated members that during the Blaenavon Town Council Strategy Day, it was emphasised that all three Ward Councillors should attend Town Council meetings as per standing orders.

This is also outlined in the draft Torfaen Communities Charter. Engagement between Ward Councillors and Town Councillors is encouraged to promote collaborative partnership between local government tiers.

Invitations were sent to all three Ward Councillors. Cllrs Janet Jones and Nick Horler provided responses for non-attendance which were forwarded to all members prior to the meeting.

The responses were placed on the projector screen for the benefit of members. The response from Cllr Horler was as follows.

"Due to the short notice and lack of clear agenda I respectfully regret I am unable to attend this meeting on Wednesday as I also have a family commitment that evening . However, in future if you have any agenda items of mutual interest of BTC and TCBC I would be happy to attend.

I believe the draft Torfaen Charter being set up by all Community Councils with David Leech, which I have not seen, is going to be signed off in October and I look forward reading the outcomes and objectives therein.

I also politely point out as a known fact that BTC has no jurisdiction over a higher tier Ward Members who represents TCBC, BTC cannot command their attendance to council meetings in view of the contents of my email I will not be engaging in any further correspondence regarding this matter."

The response from Cllr Janet Jones was as follows.

"I will not be attending the meeting on Wednesday evening. In the first instance it was extremely short notice and secondly, I would like to remind you that as ward councillors we are under no obligation to attend community council meetings.

I am also aware of the proposed charter and David Leech working with all community councils.

However, I am led to understand that this is not being signed off until late October, when I look forward to reading it with interest.

I close by reiterating that I will not be engaging in any more emails on this issue."

Members noted that this is not the first time both Ward Councillors have declined invitations to attend Town Council meetings.

Members expressed their disappointment regarding the non-attendance, particularly given the pressing issue of the closure of the care home in Blaenavon. It was felt that now, more than ever, close cooperation between Town and Ward Councillors is needed.

The Chief Officer confirmed that the invitations had been sent with over three clear days' notice as per standing orders.

In line with standing orders, invitations will continue to be sent to all three Ward Councillors to attend future Town Council meetings.

Cllr Cowles thanked members for the opportunity to provide the following TCBC update:

Cllrs have recently returned from summer recess, resulting in a brief update. Cllr Cowles's time has been largely dominated by the closure of the Arthur Jenkins care home in Blaenavon.

A meeting was held on September 11th with Cllr David Daniels (Executive Member) and David Leech regarding the care home. Numerous telephone conversations have also occurred over the past few weeks. This will be covered further at agenda item 11.

Cllr Cowles explained that scrutiny meetings are scheduled to commence in October 2024, and he has been reappointed to the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee with updates to follow once meetings begin.

Only one full council meeting has taken place since the summer recess, held on September 17th. Councillors have now received the annual report from the Ethics and Standards Committee, which consists of eight members namely three Borough Cllrs, one Community Cllr, and four independent members.

The Public Service Ombudsman for Wales has published the annual report for 2022/23, which includes a section on Code of Conduct Complaints. There has been a decrease in complaints compared to the previous year, particularly regarding town and community council members.

The Annual Scrutiny Report provided an overview of the scrutiny activity undertaken by the council's five scrutiny committees detailing main topics scrutinised during 2023/24, along with outcomes and future improvement plans.

Cllrs David Thomas, Alan Slade, and Jason O'Connell have formed a new political group named Reform UK Wales, with Cllr David Thomas as the leader.

Cllr Cowles further explained that he raised a question at the TCBC full council meeting to Cllr David Daniels, Executive Member for Adult Services and Housing.

The question addressed the impact of the Arthur Jenkins Home closure on the community and sought assurances on TCBC's support during this difficult time.

He also inquired whether the council had urged Hafod to explore alternative funding or management models to keep the home operational.

Cllr Daniels provided a thorough response and has been exceptional in his communication regarding this issue. Further update at agenda item 11.

A healthcare provider is currently in discussions to potentially take over the care home. TCBC is negotiating with Hafod about an extension, with further details still being discussed.

Cllr Cowles informed members that he continues to serve on the governing bodies of Blaenavon Heritage VC School and Abersychan Comprehensive School, as well as the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

5. Mayor's Announcements: To receive the mayor's announcements.

The mayor provided members with a summary of events and functions attended during the last month.

- 27 July attended the Blaenavon Artisan Market.
- 2 August along with the Chief Officer (CO) attended Big Pit National Coal Museum where they met with Brian Lewis the Mine Manager, and apprentices, to discuss the success of the Big Pit Apprenticeship scheme which was part-funded by Blaenavon Town Council.
- 6 August alongside officers and Cllr Keen, met with Kat Fox-Madeley to discuss the Blaenavon Artisan Market.
- 13 August along with the CO and Cllr Hunt, met with Chris Jones to discuss the evaluation of the Blaenavon Townscape Heritage Programme.
- 27 August attended the Wonder Cinema event at Blaenavon Ironworks.
- 3 September met with Ashleigh Taylor to discuss the proposals for the 25th anniversary celebrations for World Heritage site status.
- 4 September along with the CO and Cllr Wheeler, met with David Leech, Director of Communities, TCBC to discuss community strategies.
- 12 September along with fellow Cllrs, presented a defibrillator to Blaenavon World Heritage Centre.
- 15 September attended the community litter pick at Forge Side.

• 19 September – attended the Blaenavon Town Council Strategy Day event.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

6. Council Meeting: To confirm the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on the 24th of July 2024.

Minutes were read for accuracy with no amendments.

It was proposed by Cllr Wheeler and seconded by Cllr Templeton that the minutes be accepted. All members in agreement.

Resolved: Minutes approved as a true and accurate record.

7. Chief Officer's Update: To receive the Chief Officer's update.

The Chief Officer (CO) provided members with the following update:

Item 9 within the minutes as per instructions from members, a formal complaint against the Workmen's Hall will be finalised and forwarded to the mayor for discussion.

Item 12 within the minutes as per instructions from members on the 25th of July 2024 a booking form was forwarded to the Workmen's Hall requesting a Civic Event for the 18th of October 2024.

A response was received two weeks later stating that a decision could not be made due to Board members being on holiday. A further email was received one week later, on the 8th of August 2024 stating that the requested date of the 18th of October was unavailable, but the 11th of October 2024 was available. This date was secured.

On the 12th of September 2024 the Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) spoke with Board member Terry Gardner and outlined the Town Council requirements, this was followed up in an email.

Terry confirmed that he would be meeting with the Chair of the Board that day and an invoice would follow. No invoice was received.

On the 17th of September 2024, the ACO enquired again with Terry Gardner to confirm if he had forwarded to the Chair of the Board the email as no invoice had been received.

On the 24th of September, the CO spoke with Terry Gardner and enquired about the invoice. Terry Gardner contacted the Chair of the Board and requested that conformation of the Town Council requirements and invoice needed to be sent to the Town Council.

An invoice was received today, 25th September 2024. These matters will be further discussed at agenda item twelve.

Item 18 within the minutes as per the instructions from members £240 has been transacted to Blaenavon Scout Group. Conformation from Cara Boddington has been received with thanks to the Town Council.

As per the instructions from members £300 has been transacted to TCBC for the Nifty Thrifty Project.

Conformation from Julian Allen, TCBC has been received with thanks to the Town Council. The CO has requested a breakdown of how many families were supported from within Blaenavon. There has been no update on this as yet.

On the 2/8/24 together with the mayor the CO attended at Big Pit and met with the apprentices the Town Council have sponsored. Mine manager, Brian Lewis thanked the Town Council for their support. A press release was completed on this and reported within the Free Press and Abergavenny Chronicle.

Since the last meeting, the CO has conducted several induction sessions with Cllrs Templeton and Lewis which were valuable for both Cllrs and the CO covering relevant roles aligned also to financial governance.

On the 5/8/24 together with the ACO and CWDO they completed the third session of training provided by Edge IT relating to the new finance system. Since the training, a considerable proportion of the CO's time has been building the new system which members have now seen during this month's Finance meeting.

On the 13/8/24 together with the mayor and Cllr Hunt they provided the Council's final evaluation interview in relation to the completion of the Townscape Heritage Project. The final report will be sent to the Town Council in due course which will be forwarded to members for further discussion.

On the 3/9/24 together with the mayor in the council chambers, they held a meeting with Ashleigh Taylor chairperson of the World Heritage Group to discuss the 25th anniversary and the role that the Town Council would be playing in its delivery.

On the 4/9/24 together with the mayor they held a meeting in the council chambers with Dave Leech TCBC regarding community strategy opportunities.

On the 12/9/24 the CO held a team's meeting with Gareth Cooke, TCBC regarding the GIS mapping system. Conformation has been received that the CO will now be given access to the system and will update members further regarding its use and how this will assist the Town Council.

On the 18/9/24, the CO held a meeting in the council chambers with Andy Smith, Responsible Finance Officer for Cwmbran Community Council to discuss the AdvantEdge finance system in order to obtain further advice regarding its operation.

Since the last meeting, the Chief Officer has held weekly briefing sessions with the mayor and deputy mayor discussing Council operational and financial matters together with operational meetings with his fellow officers relating to future planning and current projects.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

8. To receive Cllr updates regarding recent attendance at outside bodies committee meetings, together with any relevant community / partnership engagement.

Cllr Evans informed members that on the 4th of September 2024 he attended the Churches Working Together Group meeting. There are several events upcoming, namely: on the 29th of September there will be a Harvest Festival Service at Bethlehem Chapel. Donations of tinned and dried foods are being accepted.

On the 4th of October 2024, Bethlehem Chapel are holding a McMillan coffee morning between 11:00am – 1:00pm. There are also plans for an informal religious event 'Messy Church.'

The Blessing of the Crib will be independent of the Town Council's Christmas Lights switch on event this year. The religious event will be held on the 1st of December 2024 at 3:30pm. Discussions included the possibility of a parade in the town.

Cllr Templeton provided an update for the August and September 2024 Veterans' Support Hub meetings. Unfortunately, Cllr Templeton was unable to attend but has received feedback that five attendees were present at the meetings plus the CWD Officer, members from the Celt Plus Team and a short visit from a member of the RBL, Blaenavon Branch.

Cllr Wheeler attended the funeral of the late Graham Walby, former Councillor and Mayor of Blaenavon.

The next meeting for the World Heritage Day Team will be held at Big Pit on the 30th of September 2024 and is listed for 4 hours.

Cllr Hunt updated members on the Parks and Recreation grounds consultation. Discussions included potential funding for new access gates at the Flower Park, though funding for resurfacing the paths remains uncertain.

There were also ongoing talks regarding improvements for aquatic habitat areas. Cllr Cowles, who was also in attendance, added that bench seating and efforts to make the park more attractive were also discussed. The project is still in its early stages and further developments will be seen moving forward.

Cllr Matthews informed members that he had received a message from the Chair of Blaenavon Workmen's Hall Board, requesting a meeting.

It was agreed that quarterly meetings between the Town Council and the Workmen's Hall would be held to improve communication and working relationships.

It was proposed by Cllr Matthews that Cllr Wheeler also attend the meetings. This was seconded by Cllr Templeton.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Quarterly meetings to be facilitated between Blaenavon Town Council and Blaenavon Workmen's Hall Board.

9. To receive an update from Sophie Johnson - Community Development and Wellbeing Officer (July 2024)

The CWD Officer was unable to provide an update as she is currently on medical leave.

Resolved: Noted by members.

10. To receive, discuss and make any relevant determinations relating to Blaenavon Town Council signing up to the recent Wales Statement of Solidarity and Togetherness. (Cllr Hunt)

Cllr Hunt informed members that following the recent disturbance and civic unrest in Stockport there has been widespread acts of racism and islamophobia.

A Wales Statement of Solidarity and Togetherness has been initiated by Climate Cymru, with several organisations across Wales endorsing it.

Cllr Hunt has encouraged organisations to support the initiative, with signatures being actively sought from Torfaen Voluntary Alliance, Torfaen Access Forum and the Museum Trust agreeing to sign the statement.

Cllr Hunt proposed that Blaenavon Town Council sign the statement, this was seconded by Cllr Matthews.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Blaenavon Town Council to sign the Wales Statement of Solidarity and Togetherness.

11. To discuss and make any relevant determinations relating to recent update regarding the Arthur Jenkins Residential Home.

An update had been received from David Leech, TCBC and forwarded to all members ahead of the meeting.

Cllr Cowles informed members that he had spoken with Cllr Daniels earlier today. David Leech provided to members a detailed update on the current situation.

The Council is still negotiating with Hafod to extend the three-month notice period to February 2025. This extension is being considered due to the interest expressed by other healthcare providers in taking over the care at the home. Discussions are ongoing.

Cllr Cowles urged members to exercise caution when speaking to the public, advising them to manage expectations carefully and avoid raising false hope in what is a sensitive issue for the residents, their families, and staff. TCBC are working diligently to extend the notice period and preserve the care services at the home.

Cllr Cowles also mentioned that if there are any significant changes before the next Town Council meeting, he will provide updates via the Chief Officer.

Members discussed the possibility of additional care providers and whether TCBC had contacted or been approached by any companies. The request for an extension of the notice period was also raised, with questions about whether Hafod had indicated an agreement to this extension.

Additionally, there were discussions about how the commissioning process in Torfaen operates and the possibility of Cllr Daniels attending a Town Council meeting in the future. Cllr Cowles acknowledged these questions and will relay them to Torfaen, providing any updates as they become available.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

12. <u>To receive an update and make any relevant determinations</u> regarding the <u>Town</u> Council Civic Event and Awards Evening 2024.

The Chief Officer provided members with an overview of the event to date.

The date and time for the event are confirmed for October 11th, 2024. Setup will begin at 5:30 pm, and the evening will conclude at 10:00 pm. Event booklets and ID lanyards have been ordered through Promocorp. Feedback forms have also been prepared for the event.

Invitations have been sent via email to attendees and their guests with reminder follow-ups sent today. A total of eighty-nine guest have confirmed their attendance to date, with the capacity being one hundred and forty-eight.

The buffet for one hundred guests is confirmed, a photographer will be in attendance as well as entertainment from The Pashy Pops.

Piping Hot Cwmbran are providing a solo bagpiper at no cost, while Enchanting Heart will be providing table and room decorations free of charge.

Following the meeting, Cottonfield Embroidery will be notified of the award winners so they can finalise the award plaques.

Members discussed the attendees, which include a diverse range of partners the Council collaborate with, local town and community councils, dignitaries, and a broad selection of local groups. Media cover for the event was also discussed.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

13. <u>To receive, discuss and make any relevant determinations relating to the key themes and immediate actions highlighted from the Town Council's Strategy Development Day held on the 19th of September 2024.</u>

Cllr Matthews explained that the day was beneficial, featuring informal discussions about various projects and activities.

To enhance the visibility of the Town Council, the suggestion of using ID lanyards was put forward, which was an excellent idea. Additionally, the idea of creating a strategy document for collecting data and feedback from residents was discussed, as this could assist with future grant applications.

The members who were present expressed interest in taking on additional services and considering it as part of the strategy over the next few years.

The Chief Officer observed that the four-hour session could have been extended, as there was a wealth of positive, proactive thinking.

Four key themes emerged from the discussions:

- Identifying community needs.
- Securing grant funding.
- Additional services.
- Supporting and promoting heritage and tourism.

There is potential for the council to grow and develop these areas over the next few years.

Members discussed the day and proposed holding a future strategy day to consider the feedback forms from the Civic Award Event.

Cllr Matthews confirmed that this could take place early in the new year, following the collection of feedback from several other town council initiatives scheduled for later this year. It was requested that the date be set as early as possible to allow Cllrs to arrange time off work to attend.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

14. To discuss and make a determination regarding potential Town Council projects for allocation into the Project Action Plan 2024/25. Relevant updates or new projects as notified.

None received.

15. To receive, discuss and make a determination regarding planning applications.

The Chief Officer had forwarded the planning applications to members ahead of the meeting, there were four which presented as follows.

- **DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED**: 20-meter 5G monopole
- LOCATION: Heritage Court, Blaenavon (Already decided)
- DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: Conversion of ground & first floor common rooms into a 2-storey dwelling
- LOCATION: Trem Y Mynydd Blaenavon
- DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: To site a static caravan and fenced area.
- LOCATION: Whistle Inn, Blaenavon
- **DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED:** 2 x new residential dwellings (resubmission of planning)
- LOCATION: North of Llanover Road, Blaenavon

Resolved: No objections from members.

16. To receive, discuss and make a determination regarding grant application requests.

The Chief Officer forwarded two donation requests to members prior to the meeting for their perusal.

Members discussed the donation requests, namely:

Dawn West – Blaenavon Town Band – Competition trip.

It was proposed by Cllr Beavan to support the request. This was seconded by Cllr Hunt.

All members in agreement.

Resolved – Application authorised.

Anne Cousins - Piping Hot – Purchase equipment.

It was proposed by Cllr Cowles to support the request. This was seconded by Cllr Keen.

All members in agreement.

Resolved - Application authorised.

17. To receive, discuss and make any relevant determinations concerning items relating to correspondence.

Mair Sheen (TCBC) sent a thank-you card to the Town Council, expressing her gratitude for the support she had received in her role as THP project manager over the years.

Cllr Matthews proposed to adhere to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. This was seconded by Cllr Hunt.

All members in agreement.

Resolved - Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 was adhered to.

By virtue of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the basis that disclosure thereof would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

The recording of the meeting was confirmed as stopped at 19.38 hrs by the Chief Officer.

Cllr Matthews altered the running order of the agenda to allow Cllrs Hunt and Cowles to participate in the meeting before they needed to leave due to their declared prejudicial interest.

19. To receive, discuss and make any relevant determinations relating to the Town Councillor nominations received for the Blaenavon Civic Awards 2024.

Blaenavon Town Council Special Awards

All members were invited to submit nominations for the Blaenavon Town Council Special Awards for consideration.

Members discussed all the nominations received

Awarded: Blaenavon World Heritage Day Committee.

This was proposed by Cllr Hunt and seconded by Cllr Porter.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Blaenavon World Heritage Day Committee.

Awarded: Terry Evans.

This was proposed by Cllr Hunt and seconded by Cllr Beavan.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Terry Evans.

• Awarded: Joy Merrifield.

This was proposed by Cllr Evans and seconded by Cllr Matthews.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Joy Merrifield.

• Awarded: Ashleigh Taylor.

This was proposed by Cllr Evans and seconded by Cllr Hunt.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Ashleigh Taylor.

18. <u>To receive, discuss and make any relevant determinations relating to the public nominations received for the Blaenavon Civic Awards 2024.</u>

Members of the public were invited to submit nominations for Blaenavon Town Council Civic Awards for consideration.

Members discussed all the nominations received.

• Awarded: John Rodger

This was proposed by Cllr Cowles and seconded by Cllr Hunt.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for John Rodger.

Awarded: Circulate Recycling Furniture (first award).

This was proposed by Cllr Hunt and seconded by Cllr Wheeler.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Circulate Recycling Furniture.

Awarded: Circulate Recycling Furniture (second award).

This was proposed by Cllr Hunt and seconded by Cllr Templeton.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Circulate Recycling Furniture.

• Awarded: Deni Harvey

This was proposed by Cllr Templeton and seconded by Cllr Keen.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Deni Harvey.

• Awarded: Blaenavon Table Tennis Club

This was proposed by Cllr Evans and seconded by Cllr Keen.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Blaenavon Table Tennis Club.

Awarded: Darren Pearce.

This was proposed by Cllr Hunt and seconded by Cllr Keen.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Darren Pearce.

Cllrs Cowles and Hunt left the meeting at this point due to their declared prejudicial interest (20.00 hrs)

• Awarded: Volunteers of Blaenavon Community Museum & Volunteers of Blaenavon Workmen's Hall.

This was proposed by Cllr Matthews and seconded by Cllr Wheeler.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Volunteers of Blaenavon Community Museum & Volunteers of Blaenavon Workmen's Hall.

Awarded: Blaenavon Heritage Railway.

This was proposed by Cllr Keen and seconded by Cllr Beavan.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Blaenavon Heritage Railway.

• Awarded: John Brown & the Priest family (Blaenavon Santa)

This was proposed by Cllr Evans and seconded by Cllr Beavan.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for John Brown & the Priest family (Blaenavon Santa)

Awarded: Forgeside RFC Community Garden.

This was proposed by Cllr Evans and seconded by Cllr Matthews.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Forgeside RFC Community Garden.

• Awarded: Bethlehem Chapel

This was proposed by Cllr Lewis and seconded by Cllr Keen.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Bethlehem Chapel.

Awarded: Torfaen Take a Stroll (Mr & Mrs Dowle and Mr & Mrs Phillips)

This was proposed by Cllr Keen and seconded by Cllr Wheeler.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Torfaen Take a Stroll (Mr & Mrs Dowle and Mr & Mrs Phillips)

Awarded: Khyra Payne

This was proposed by Cllr Keen and seconded by Cllr Evans.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Khyra Payne.

• Awarded: Kate Balmond

This was proposed by Cllr Matthews and seconded by Cllr Templeton.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Kate Balmond.

• Awarded: Leanne Mason

This was proposed by Cllr Evans and seconded by Cllr Templeton.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Civic Award authorised for Leanne Mason.

Recording resumed: 20.20 hours Meeting ended: 20.21 hours

Signed Chairman: W. Hattheur Date: 23/10/24.