



BLAENAVON TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL FINANCE MEETING
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 13th of NOVEMBER 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 Bladenavon and remotely.

In attendance:

Councillors in attendance: M. Wheeler, (In the Chair), N. Matthews, L. Cowles, J. Hunt, L. Evans, S. Keen, A. Lewis, S. Templeton, I. Parfitt.

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

Visitors: Ashleigh Taylor, Chairperson of the World Heritage Group (online)

Members of public: L. Harris, B. Ford, J. Hawkins.

The finance meeting was opened at 6:30pm by the Deputy Mayor Councillor Wheeler who welcomed everyone and expressed thanks for attendance.

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 Porter
- Cllr Beavan

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

All members in agreement.

Resolved - Apologies accepted.

3. Declarations of Interest.

- Cllr Hunt – Personal – Agenda item 4

4. To receive an update from Ashleigh Taylor (Chairperson of the World Heritage Group) relating to Heritage Day 2025.

Ashleigh Taylor provided members with an update regarding plans for World Heritage Day 2025, which will celebrate the 25th anniversary of World Heritage status.

The celebrations will begin with an official launch on the 6th of December 2024, with the inscription events taking place between 27th of November - 2nd December 2025.

A series of events is being coordinated throughout the year, including a lantern walk starting at the Heritage Railway and finishing at the Workmen's Hall. This free event welcomes community participation, with donations encouraged. VIPs have been invited, including the mayor who have been asked to attend and give speeches.

Additionally, a three-day weekend World Heritage Day Festival is planned, featuring a traditional parade on the Saturday and a proposed event at Garn Lakes on Sunday, possibly organised and run by the Town Council. Efforts are underway to involve local groups, the Heritage Railway, and the World Heritage Centre in events throughout the year.

A website to promote and advertise these activities is in development, with a prototype expected by 6th of December 2024. A printed programme and merchandise are being considered.

Following discussion by the group, a suggestion is to refurbish the UNESCO room at the World Heritage Centre.

Challenges also include the need to transition into a Community Interest Company (CIC) to simplify grant applications.

The estimated budget for the year's events is £20,000, with proposed funding of £10,000 from Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC) and £5,000 - £10,000 from Blaenavon Town Council (BTC). Last year's event costs totalled £13,000, and fundraising efforts throughout the year are expected to cover the costs of a closing Winter Ball in 2025.

Ashleigh then invited questions from members.

Members raised a series of questions. They inquired about the fundraising efforts completed so far, whether local businesses, partner groups, and organisations had expressed interest in the 2025 celebrations, and if accessibility had been addressed, particularly for those with mobility issues.

Members also asked if transport between event sites had been considered. It was also suggested a potential fundraising 10k race could be organised.

Ashleigh responded and explained that the group had only recently re - established eight weeks ago and that the lantern walk would be their first fundraising event.

Ashleigh also confirmed that local groups and businesses had shown an interest in the 2025 celebrations, and work is ongoing to convert this interest into firm commitments.

Regarding mobility and sustainability concerns, Ashleigh requested that Cllr Hunt forward any relevant information or suggestions. She expressed enthusiasm about the idea of a 10k fundraiser race and will take the proposal to the group for further consideration.

Members thanked Ashleigh for an informative update. Ashleigh then left the meeting.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

5. Council Meetings: To confirm the minutes of the Council Finance Meeting held on the 9th of October 2024.

Minutes were read for accuracy with no amendments.

It was proposed by Cllr Keen and seconded by Cllr Cowles that the minutes be accepted.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Minutes approved as a true and accurate record.

6. Responsible Finance Officer's Update: To receive and consider the October 2024 financial update.

Mr Warren (RFO) forwarded to members the October 2024 financial reports electronically in advance of the meeting which detailed the following areas:

- Income and Expenditure
- Credit Card Payments
- Cheque Payments
- Bacs Payments
- Cash Book Transactions
- Bank Reconciliation
- Project Expenditure
- Budget
- VAT
- Bank Statements
- Petty Cash

Mr Warren presented to members each of the above areas of finance for October 2024 and highlighted any relevant information.

Members were invited to ask any questions in relation to the information presented.

One question was raised. How was the Chief Officer finding the new finance IT system? The Chief Officer responded that it's becoming easier to use following recent training. Currently,

two systems are still in operation, hopefully the transition to the new system will follow when the budget-setting process is complete.

Members were happy with the presentation.

It was proposed by Cllr Templeton and seconded by Cllr Lewis that the financial report for October 2024 be accepted.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Financial update for October 2024 accepted by members.

7. To discuss and make any relevant determinations regarding the 25th Anniversary of World Heritage Site Status.

A detailed discussion took place amongst members regarding the 25th anniversary of the World Heritage Site status, highlighting the importance of this milestone as a significant achievement.

Members agreed that a series of events throughout the year would be good, potentially with a larger event hosted by the Town Council at Garn Lakes on the Sunday. However, the capacity to organise such events needs to be assessed.

The proposed events hold enormous potential for educational activities, guided walks, and smaller events throughout the year. It was emphasised that Blaenavon Town Council's involvement is crucial.

Additionally, members discussed the need to review and consider allocating £5,000 to £10,000 in funding to support the World Heritage Day Group which will be addressed during the upcoming budget-setting process.

The group also discussed inviting other Town and Community Councils within the borough to participate.

Members expressed interest in incorporating interactive information panels for engagement, which could be maintained by the Council and other community groups and organisations, as well as exploring options to expand the Heritage Site, suggesting a buffer zone which it doesn't currently have.

The discussion also included proposals for collaboration with other heritage sites within the borough and with TCBC which included accessible transport links between towns and key locations across the area.

The Chief Officer added that with the suggested events and a larger event hosted by the Town Council, the total funding required could amount to £20,000. A working group was also suggested to address budget setting and capacity for planning these events.

A further discussion took place in relation to the appointment of members to the working group. Cllrs Matthews, Hunt, Lewis, Templeton, and Keen agreed to be appointed to the working group.

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

All members in agreement.

Resolved: 25th Anniversary World Heritage Site working group established with the following Cllrs appointed namely Matthews, Hunt, Lewis, Templeton and Keen.

8. To discuss and make any relevant determinations relating to Blaenavon Town Council's attendance at the Community Review meeting held at the Civic Centre Pontypool on the 5th of November 2024.

A detailed discussion took place amongst members regarding the Community Review meeting held at the Civic Centre Pontypool on the 5th of November 2024.

During the meeting, it was strongly felt that Blaenavon Town Council's (BTC) detailed response, particularly pages 5-14, had not been discussed by the Task and Finish group.

There was no evidence of this engagement in the minutes which BTC only recently received. To date, no minutes from the 5/11/24 meeting have been received. The few lines in the minutes that referenced the Town Council's concerns were deemed wholly inadequate, adding to the frustration.

Members expressed disappointment that the task and finish group seemed to have disregarded BTC's detailed submissions, leaving members to feel that decisions had already been made without genuine consultation.

Concerns were also raised about whether proper policies and procedures had been followed, and questions arose about what BTC could do if they had not. The lack of rebuttal to BTC's response and the absence of clarity in the process further aggravate the situation.

There was significant confusion about the transparency of the task and finish group. Cllr Evans queried whether the meetings were public and why, as a ward member, Cllr Cowles had not been notified of their dates. Cllr Cowles stated that his understanding was that Town, or Community Cllrs could not be part of the group and that the meetings were private, but he, too, was unclear about their exact nature.

There were further concerns about the consultation process and its methodology. BTC noted that there is no legislation in Wales governing the minimum or maximum size of town or community councils and questioned where the task and finish group had derived their member-electors ratios.

BTC's February 2024 response had addressed these points, but it appears this was not considered. Additionally, the digital consultation process, with only forty responses (0.84%), was criticised as unrepresentative and unsuitable as a basis for decision-making.

Financial implications were also raised, particularly regarding the potential merger of East and West wards. This could lead to significant financial burden on BTC. Members requested clarity on Torfaen Council's position on this issue.

Given these concerns, BTC plans to submit a further response to the consultation, incorporating evidenced arguments about the potential negative impacts of the proposed changes on the community.

A further meeting will be required to address BTC's concerns and ensure that their input is genuinely considered. There is also a need for Torfaen Council to provide clarification on the legislative and methodological basis for their decisions and respond directly to BTC.

A further discussion amongst members resulted in changes to BTC's working group, with Cllrs Cowles and Evans joining the existing members, Cllrs Wheeler, Hunt, and Matthews.

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

All members in agreement.

Resolved: The established Community Review working group added Cllrs Cowles and Evans.

9. To discuss, review and make any relevant determinations relating to the community feedback received from the Civic Event 2024.

Feedback documentation was forwarded to all members ahead of the meeting and shared on the projector screen.

Cllr Matthews provided an overview to members relating to the feedback received.

Members discussed the responses received. Three key priorities emerged

- Health and wellbeing.
- Heritage and tourism.
- Business support, including addressing the cost of living.

Over 80% of respondents expressed a desire for more community forums and meetings to improve engagement with the community, local businesses, and groups. Whilst most of the feedback was constructive, there was some confusion regarding the distinct roles and responsibilities of the Town Council and the Borough Council.

It was asked whether there had been any mention of digital exclusion; however, no feedback on that issue had been received.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

10. To receive and note the appropriate sum under Section 137(4)(a) of the Local Government Act 1972, Section 137 Expenditure Limit for 2025-26.

The Chief Officer forwarded all documentation to members ahead of the meeting and provided the following update.

The maximum expenditure allowable under Section 137(1) and 137(3) for the financial year 2025/26 has increased to £11.10 per elector, up from £10.81. With an estimated electorate of 4,740, the total allowable expenditure for 2025/26 will be £52,014.56.

These figures will be incorporated into the budget-setting process.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

11. To receive, discuss and note the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Draft Annual Report 2025 to 2026.

The Chief Officer shared the draft report with members ahead of the meeting, drawing attention to pages 11–22. He updated members that, starting from September 2024, the panel proposes that the Town Council's returns need only reflect the total amount spent on mandatory payments of £156 and the £52 set rate for consumables.

As outlined on page 21, the report highlights the salary costs relating to Borough Councillors, including salary increases and appointments to committees, with the total cost for the three Borough Councillors estimated to be approximately £100,000. This was shared for members to note.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

12. To receive, discuss and make any relevant determinations regarding the documentation received from Bruno Peek, Pageant master VE Day 80, highlighting Town and Community Council sector arrangements for VE Day 8th of May 2025.

The Chief Officer forwarded the documentation to all members ahead of the meeting.

A discussion was held regarding the VE Day 80 celebrations, emphasising the event's significance. It was suggested that the celebrations could be combined with the 25th anniversary of the Town Council. Potential events could mirror the D-Day 80 event.

Suggestions included raising the flag and making a proclamation at the cenotaph, holding a service of peace at St Peter's Church, and involving the town bands, choirs, young people and community groups. There was also mention of a possible street party organised by the Town Council.

The Chief Officer explained that discussions had taken place with Father Chris Walters who expressed interest in supporting the Town Council with the event. St Peter's Church has been provisionally booked for May 8th, 2025, and a certificate of recognition from the King's Pageant Master had been received.

A working group will be needed to plan the event, and Cllrs Templeton, Matthews, Keen, Lewis, and Wheeler agreed to form the working group.

It was proposed by Cllr Cowles to accept the arrangements for the VE Day 80 celebrations and the appointed members of the working group. This was seconded by Cllr Hunt.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: VE Day 80 celebrations agreed and working group established with the following Cllrs appointed namely Cllrs Templeton, Matthews, Keen, Lewis and Wheeler.

13. To receive an update and make any relevant determinations regarding the Remembrance Day Parade 2024.

Members discussed the event and agreed it was exceptionally well planned and organised, with excellent community attendance. Appreciation was extended to the Chief Officer for the significant effort involved in planning, including arranging road closures, conducting risk assessments, and preparing the order of service.

Cllr Templeton raised concerns regarding the wreath-laying process which he believed was not conducted in the correct order. Cllr Templeton clarified that the proper sequence should place the Deputy Lord Lieutenant first, followed by the mayor, and then other dignitaries.

This year, the mayor's position in the order was sixth or seventh, which was deemed inappropriate, especially as the event is a combined Town Council event. It was emphasised that this should be addressed in the future. Mayor, Cllr Matthews assured members that no personal offence was taken.

Additional concerns were highlighted regarding the sound equipment, which was noted to be insufficient, with many residents and Cllrs expressing similar feedback. The same issue was reported during the Gardens of Remembrance Service.

It was noted that the order of service did not include the list of wreath-layers. Furthermore, there was a noticeable lack of public singing, and it was suggested to include choirs in the future.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

14. To receive, discuss and make any relevant determinations regarding the e-mail received from Julien Allen (TCBC Building Resilient Communities) regarding the School Uniform Event 2024.

An email was received from Julian Allen (Building Resilient Communities at TCBC) explaining that £157.99 of the £300 donation for the school uniform project remains unspent.

After a brief discussion by members it was proposed by Cllr Evans and seconded by Cllr Cowles that the remaining funds be returned to BTC.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Chief Officer to facilitate the return of funds namely £157.99 from TCBC.

15. To receive and note the National Joint Council for Local Government Services Pay agreement for 2024/25.

The Chief Officer forwarded the National Joint Council (NJC) pay agreement to all members ahead of the meeting.

The pay award will be backdated to April 2024. TCBC Payroll have been informed and will implement the changes in this month's salaries. As the NJC pay agreement aligns with the

contracts of employment within the Town Council, the update is for members' information only.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

16. To discuss and make a determination regarding the setting of a suitable date for the budget setting working group to prepare the 2025/26 draft budget.

A brief discussion took place amongst members. The working group discussed available dates and times. It was proposed by Cllr Matthews and seconded by Cllr Lewis for the meeting to take place on Wednesday 4th December 6.30pm at council chamber.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Budget setting working group meeting to be held on Wednesday 4th December 2024.

17. To discuss and make a determination regarding the location for siting the Town Council's Xmas Crib 2024

Cllr Matthews explained that an email was received from Janet Jones, on behalf of Churches Working Together, requesting that the crib be located in Bethlehem Chapel Court.

The Chief Officer informed members that having conducted a site visit at Bethlehem Court it was established that the power supply within the court had been removed, a waste bin had been placed in the location, and the crib could no longer be attached to the newly refurbished wall of Munchies without their consent.

Members discussed alternative options for the crib, suggesting that the Churches could hold their own religious service independently of the lights switch-on event. It was noted that Sue Driscoll had attended a previous Town Council meeting but did not raise this request at the time.

Given the physical constraints and short notice, it was agreed that this could be revisited for next year. Cllr Cowles proposed sending a detailed letter of explanation to the Churches Group, this was seconded by Cllr Evans.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Chief Officer to write to Churches Working Together explaining the Council's determination based on the information presented.

18. To discuss and make any relevant determinations in relation to a suitable location for the next Town Council litter pick on the 17th of November 2024.

A brief discussion took place amongst members. It was proposed by Cllr Templeton and seconded by Cllr Hunt that the location for the November 2024 litter pick take place at Haymans Fields at the new trial time of 1.30pm

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Litter pick location for November 2024 to take place at Haymans Fields.

19. 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.

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 members of the public left the meeting at 20.06 hrs. The Chief Officer confirmed recording was stopped at 20.06 hrs

20. To receive, discuss and make any relevant determinations in relation to Blaenavon Town Council's capacity review November 2024.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Resolved: Members noted the update.

Recording was restarted at 20.25 hrs

Meeting ended at 20.26 hrs

Chairman Signed: *M. H. H.*

Date: 8/1/25

