



BLAENAVON TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 22nd of JANUARY 2025 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, M. Wheeler, L. Evans, S. Templeton, S. Keen, I. Parfitt, A. Lewis, J. Hunt, Porter (online).

Officers: Kevin Warren (Chief Officer), Kerry Jones (Assistant Chief Officer), Sophie Johnson (Community Wellbeing Development Officer).

Visitors: Cllr Jones and Horler (TCBC)

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 altered the running order of the agenda so that agenda item 13 will follow agenda item 4 for continuity.

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 Beavan

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

None received.

4. To receive a TCBC update from Ward Councillors.

Cllr Cowles provided the following update:

TCBC have approved collaborative working with Blaenau Gwent. Over the past six months, Stephen Vickers has served as the joint Chief Executive for both Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent councils.

Following this period, a review was conducted with input from council members, senior officers, the Welsh Government, and representatives from the WLGA. The debate was extensive, resulting in a recorded vote of twenty-nine in favour and eight against.

Cllr Cowles, along with Cllrs Horler and Jones, supported the decision. Cllr Cowles viewed it as a positive step, citing cost savings and the benefits of collaborating with a council of similar size and challenges.

Blaenau Gwent will hold its vote at their Full Council meeting, if agreed Stephen Vickers will be the permanent joint Chief Executive for both councils.

If agreed, moving forward, both councils will remain independent, each maintaining its own budget, councillors, and council meetings. There will also be opportunities for shared reviews.

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme was discussed, it remains unchanged and was approved for the next financial year.

On January 28th, the Crosscutting Resources and Business Overview Scrutiny Committee will discuss financial planning in preparation for TCBC's 2025/26 budget setting.

Since the last meeting, Cllr Cowles has continued to report issues to TCBC as they are brought to his attention by the public. If any members have concerns or receive reports of TCBC related issues, they are encouraged to contact Cllr Cowles.

Resolved: Members noted update.

Cllrs. Horler and Jones provided an update on the proposed RWE wind farm development, emphasising the potential impacts on the local area. They detailed the questions they had raised during the TCBC full council meeting.

Cllr Jones requested that the TCBC steering group meeting be brought forward ahead of the February 10th deadline for submissions to Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW).

A number of concerns were raised, including the potential impact on the World Heritage status, the effects on the town, disruption to road networks, consequences for residents, and the effect on the surrounding landscape.

Also, concerns were raised about the impact on bridleways and cycle paths, which could see significant changes due to the development.

Cllr Jones asked TCBC planning officers if a public inquiry could follow the planning meeting which was confirmed.

Members discussed the impact of the development and shared their concerns.

Cllr Hunt expressed concern about the wind farm development and its impact on the environment and community. He also voiced disappointment with Cllr. Gauden's response to Cllr. Horler's question.

Cllr Evans asked whether Cllrs Horler and Jones had inquired about the establishment of a buffer zone around the heritage site protected areas. Cllr Horler confirmed that this had not been raised but noted that Rebecca Hartley had been investigating the matter before taking a leave of absence.

The update concluded with Cllr Jones offering their condolences to the council and to Cllr. Parfitt following the passing of the late Cllr Alan Jones.

Cllrs Horler and Jones then left the meeting.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

13. To discuss and make any relevant determinations concerning the proposed Abertillery Wind Farm Development of National Significance.

The Chief Officer updated members on the RWE wind farm planning application. A working group was established in November 2023 to draft a response to RWE regarding the Abertillery/Abersychan wind farm development.

On 16th December 2024, correspondence was received from PEDW, outlining the next steps in the planning process and the Town Council's role as a community consultee. This was shared with all members prior to the meeting.

The Council's response to RWE was unanimously agreed upon at the November 2023 Full Council meeting and has since been submitted.

A response to PEDW is required by 10th February 2025. Cllr Joanne Gauden confirmed that a local impact Report will be completed and presented at the TCBC Planning Committee meeting on 5th February 2025.

Cllr Matthews provided an overview of the council's response, which was displayed on-screen. Cllr Hunt added insights on the impact on the natural environment.

Members held a detailed discussion on the impacts and planning gain of the RWE Wind Farm proposal.

Cllr Matthews proposed submitting an amended response to PEDW, including points 1–5 while excluding point six, with submission by 10th February 2025. This was seconded by Cllr Cowles.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Chief Officer to make alterations to the report and submit to PEDW by 10th February 2025.

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.

- 1st of December – attended the Blessing of the Crib.
- 3rd of December – attended Croesyceiliog and Llanyravon Community Council awards evening.
- 4th of December – attended the budget setting group meeting.
- 6th of December – attended the launch of the 25th Anniversary of World Heritage Status and gave a speech at Blaenavon Workmen's Hall.
- 7th of December – attended Blaenavon Male Voice Choir annual community concert.
- 15th of December – attended and gave a reading at St Peter's community carol service.
- 16th of December – attended the funeral of the late Cllr Alan Jones.
- 21st of January – attended the One Voice Wales Gwent Valleys area Committee meeting.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

6. Council Meetings: To confirm the minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on the 27th of November 2024.

Minutes were read for accuracy with no amendments.

It was proposed by Cllr Evans and seconded by Cllr Templeton that the minutes be accepted.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Minutes accepted as a true and accurate record.

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

The Chief Officer provided members with the following update:

Item 16 within the minutes as per the instructions from members, on the 28/11/24 a £250 grant was transacted to both Wales Air Ambulance and Llantarnam Grange.

Confirmation has been received from both organisations thanking the Town Council for their generous support.

On the 16th of November attended a Torfaen Local Council Partnership Committee meeting. However, the agenda was quite limited, so there is nothing significant to report.

The Chief Officer believes the structure of these meetings should be reviewed and better aligned with the Torfaen Charter. As a result, he will be proposing a motion at the next meeting to initiate this.

On the 28th and 29th of November the Chief Officer conducted the interim internal audit process with Mr Andy Smith, Community Finance Solutions. The report had been forwarded to all members.

On the 4th of December attended the budget setting working group meeting.

Following the November 2024 meeting with Aimi Morris (TVA), the Community Transport Association, and TCBC, where community transport issues within Blaenavon were discussed, a further meeting was held on January 9th, 2025, to discuss the creation of a Community Transport Hub within Blaenavon.

This topic will be included for discussion at the February 2025 Finance meeting.

On the 16th of December attended the funeral of the late Cllr Alan Jones.

On January 21st, 2025, attended the One Voice Wales Gwent Valleys area committee meeting, where the newly elected Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner, Jane Mudd, provided an update. The minutes will be forwarded to members when received.

The Chief Officer suggested inviting Jane Mudd to a future Town Council meeting to provide an update and allow members to ask questions about the policing strategy for Blaenavon.

Also, since the last meeting, the Chief Officer has held weekly briefing sessions with the mayor and deputy mayor discussing Council operational and financial matters and 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 provided the following update:

Cllr Evans attended the World Heritage Steering Group meeting. There were thirteen items listed on the agenda. Item one took considerable time to discuss. Agenda item three had no report from Gwent Police. All other agenda items were postponed.

Cllr Evans will forward an update to members when received.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

Cllr Wheeler provided the following update:

On the 3rd of December - attended Circulate Furniture Recycling Centre to donate selection boxes to the TCBC Santa Appeal 2024.

On the 4th of December – attended the budget setting working group meeting.

On the 6th of December – attended the 25th Anniversary of World Heritage status post lantern walk event at the Workmen’s Hall. The walk had been cancelled due to bad weather.

On the 9th of December – attended Blaenavon Town Band concert at Victory Church.

On the 11th of December – attended the meeting of the Mic Morris Trustees. Over £1000 was donated to young Torfaen athletes.

On the 15th of December – attended the Christmas Carol Concert at St Peter’s Church.

On the 16th of December – attended the funeral of the late Cllr Alan Jones.

On the 21st of December – attended the One Voice Wales Gwent Valleys area committee meeting.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

Cllr Templeton provided the following update:

On the 6th of December – attended the 25th Anniversary of World Heritage status post lantern walk event at the Workmen’s Hall. Due to bad weather the walk had been cancelled.

On the 16th of December – attended the funeral of the late Cllr Alan Jones.

On the 20th of January 2025 - attended the Veterans’ Support Hub at the new time of 5pm. Unfortunately, attendance was extremely low, with only two participants. Efforts will be made to increase numbers and evaluate after the next meeting.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

Cllr Keen provided the following update:

On the 3rd of December - attended Ysgol Bryn Onnen Governor’s meeting.

The school conducted a lockdown exercise.

One member of staff has resigned.

There is a large financial deficit, and further savings are looking to be made. A budgetary meeting will be held to discuss the issues.

On December 9th - attended the Five Locks Canal Committee meeting, where discussions took place regarding the new canal wharf to be built in Cwmbran. This will include showers, toilets, and security.

Cllr Keen suggested adding signage to any barriers following issues at Pontymoile and noted that there are only four parking bays, one of which is designated for electric vehicles. Cllr Keen asked for consideration to be taken into account for disabled access and parking.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 5th, 2025.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

9. To receive an update from Sophie Johnson - Community Development and Wellbeing Officer (January 2025)

Sophie gave thanks to the Chief Officer, Assistant Chief Officer and members for the support offered to her during her period of absence.

Sophie provided attendance records for the following:

Befriending Film Club:

- September – 45
- October – 50
- November – 53
- December – 61

Attendance has been consistent, with good numbers attending each month.

Film club is taking place this Friday, the film is Operation Mincemeat.

Mums & Daughters Fitness Sessions:

- October – 58
- November – 60
- January – 57

These sessions are part funded by Torfaen Sports Development. Since the re - launch, with new day and time numbers have increased. The sessions are agreed up until March and will be reviewed in February Full Council meeting.

Community Kit Room

The project, in partnership with Torfaen Sports Development is ready to be launched within the next few days, alongside a press release and social media posts.

Circulate Furniture Recycling are also part of the project and can now accept and store donations.

Potential New Projects:

Community swimming and cook stars sessions during February half term, fashion show, Covid-19 Day of Reflection event and VE Day 80 events.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

10. To ratify the Town Council Budget and Precept for 2025/26.

The proposed budget for 2025/2026 was considered at the Town Council Finance meeting on 8th January 2025.

Members accepted the draft budget for 2025/26 with an agreement for the precept to be £205,710.

It was proposed by Cllr Wheeler and seconded by Cllr Keen to formally ratify the draft budget for 2025/26.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Budget for 2025/26 ratified with a precept of £205,710.

11. To discuss and make any relevant determinations regarding the casual vacancy for a Blaenavon Town Councillor.

The Chief Officer informed members that TCBC had not received any requests for a by-election, and the deadline for requests had passed on December 11th, 2024.

Therefore, the co-option notice has been prepared and is set to advertise the vacancy starting January 23rd, 2025. The deadline for applications will be noon on February 10th, 2025.

It is hoped that expressions of interest will be received from potential candidates, with the selection process to take place at the Full Council meeting on February 26th, 2025.

Cllr Matthews proposed following the Chief Officer's recommendation to fill the vacancy at the February 2025 Full Council meeting. This was seconded by Cllr Cowles.

All members in agreement

Resolved: Co-option notice to be advertised from 23rd January 2025 - 10th February 2025 with the selection process at Full Council meeting on 26th of February 2025.

12. To discuss and make any relevant determinations regarding the COVID-19 Day of Reflection on the 9th of March 2025.

Cllr Matthews informed members that the Covid-19 Day of Reflection will take place on Sunday, March 9th, 2025.

This event will provide an opportunity for communities to come together in a day of reflection and remembrance of the Covid-19 pandemic, which occurred five years ago.

Recognising the vital role parks and outdoor spaces played during those challenging times, Cllr Matthews proposed planting a tree in Blaenavon Flower Park and holding a small service near the existing Town Council memorial bench.

This was seconded by Cllr Hunt.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Chief Officer to make relevant enquiries with TCBC regarding planting a tree within the Flower Park.

14. To discuss and make any relevant determinations concerning the Blaenavon Digital Charter.

Cllr Matthews informed members that the Youth Ambassadors had created a digital charter focused on promoting positive online behaviour and addressing issues of toxicity and abuse.

The charter highlights the responsibilities of individuals and organisations within Blaenavon.

Cllr Matthews proposed that Blaenavon Town Council endorse and sign the charter. This was seconded by Cllr Hunt.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Blaenavon Digital Charter to be signed by Blaenavon Town Council.

15. To discuss and make any relevant determinations concerning a Blaenavon Town Council Tourism Strategy.

Cllr Matthews updated members that this year sees Blaenavon celebrate twenty-five years of World Heritage status.

Cllr Matthews believes that the Town Council could have a stronger role to support tourism in Blaenavon and make aware the attractions Blaenavon has to offer. This could include co-opting local businesses who often have a different perspective to Councillors.

Cllr Matthews presented a draft Terms of Reference for a proposed working group, which had been shared with members prior to the meeting and displayed on-screen, along with the Red Kite report.

While many concepts in the report remain relevant, some recommendations have yet to be implemented.

Members discussed ways to enhance Blaenavon as a tourist destination but expressed scepticism about whether a similar approach would work across Torfaen as a whole.

Suggestions included introducing an eco-friendly vehicle to connect the heritage sites across Torfaen.

Members also noted that the current Torfaen Tourism Strategy constrains Blaenavon's potential and proposed broadening tourism efforts to incorporate the wider areas such as the Brecon Beacons, Abergavenny, and the Wye Valley.

Cllr Mathews proposed to form a tourism working group. This was seconded by Cllr Templeton.

All members in agreement.

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

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

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Tourism working group established.

16. To discuss and make any relevant determinations regarding the creation and implementation of a Personnel and Establishment Committee.

A draft Terms of Reference for a proposed Personnel and Establishment Committee was shared to all members prior to the meeting.

It was proposed that the committee would meet three times a year, in March, July, and November.

Meetings would require the appointment of a chairperson, with minutes recorded in accordance with the procedures for committee meetings. The Assistant Chief Officer will function as the clerk for these meetings.

A discussion took place in relation to the appointment of members to the committee as per the draft Terms of Reference, to include five Cllrs plus the Chair of the Council.

Cllrs Lewis, Templeton, Hunt, Cowles, Parfitt, and Matthews (Chair of the Council) agreed to be appointed to the working group.

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

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Personnel and Establishment committee established.

Further discussions were held regarding the appointment of a Chairperson for the Committee.

Cllr Templeton expressed interest to serve as Chairperson. This was proposed by Cllr Cowles and seconded by Cllr Evans.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Chairperson for the Personnel and Establishment committee will be Cllr Templeton.

17. To discuss and make any relevant determinations relating to quotations received regarding utilities supply.

Quotations from energy providers for a three-year gas and electricity supply were shared to all members prior to the meeting.

Members reviewed the different tariffs and discussed the requirements for installing smart meters.

Cllr Keen proposed opting for the cheapest gas supplier. This was seconded by Cllr Evans.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: To proceed with the most cost-effective utility supplier for gas.

A further discussion took place amongst members, the possibility of securing a dual fuel tariff discount with suppliers was also considered.

It was agreed that the Chief Officer would consult the broker regarding dual fuel tariffs and proceed with the most cost-effective supplier(s) based on the outcome of the enquiry.

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

All members in agreement.

Resolved: To proceed with the most cost-effective utility supplier(s) for gas and electricity.

18. To discuss and make any relevant determinations relating to Blaenavon Town Council's Heritage Litter Picking group.

The Assistant Chief Officer updated members on attendance, the volume of litter collected, and the locations covered during 2024.

Members discussed the continuation of the monthly litter-picking sessions. Cllr Matthews proposed maintaining the sessions at the original meeting time of 10:00 a.m. this was seconded by Cllr Templeton.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Litter picking monthly sessions to continue.

A Further discussion was held regarding the location for February's litter-picking session.

Cllr Matthews proposed focusing on the Hillside Avenue and Giles Road areas, with the group meeting at the Resource Centre. This was seconded by Cllr Hunt.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Litter picking location agreed.

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.

All proposed project forms submitted were forwarded to members prior to the meeting.

Cllr Lewis provided members with details of the proposed project, namely:

Fashion Show Fundraising Event

A fashion show would support residents with limited access to clothing options within the local area.

The company hosting the event will provide all necessary equipment, a range of ladies' clothing and accessories, promotional materials (digital and hard copy posters and tickets), models for the evening, and a compère to host the show.

The Council must ensure a minimum of eighty attendees; failure to do so will result in a £300 fee. Ticket sales will generate a profit for the council if attendance targets are met.

Due to lack of availability at Blaenavon Constitutional Club, a new venue is being sought, with room hire being the only expense to the council.

This project aims to benefit the community by providing accessible fashion opportunities with limited shopping and transport options.

A discussion took place amongst members.

It was proposed by Cllr Hunt and seconded by Cllr Wheeler to authorise the project.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Fashion Show Fundraising Event authorised.

Cllr Matthews provided members with details of the proposed project, namely:

World Heritage 25 - Social Media Campaign

In 2025, Blaenavon will celebrate 25 years as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This project aims to raise awareness, promote tourism, and engage the community through a series of weekly social media posts, highlighting key historical themes, sites, and stories.

Posts could be scheduled as “World Heritage Wednesdays” as an example and shared widely with partners to maximise reach. The project has no financial cost, relying on officer time and content provided by Cllr Matthews.

Expected outcomes include increased engagement, tourism promotion, and strengthened local pride in Blaenavon’s rich heritage.

A discussion took place amongst members.

It was proposed by Cllr Hunt and seconded by Cllr Wheeler to authorise the project.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: World Heritage 25 - Social Media Campaign authorised.

The Community Development Officer provided members with details of the proposed projects, namely:

Swimming Project and Cook Stars Project

Cook Stars

To offer two sessions during February and the Easter half-term.

Previous sessions were highly popular and well received, with full bookings and a waiting list. These additional sessions will provide an opportunity for those who were previously unable to attend.

A brief discussion took place amongst members.

It was proposed by Cllr Hunt and seconded by Cllr Keen to authorise the project.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Cook Stars Project authorised.

Swimming

To continue offering free swimming sessions (six) at Pontypool Active Living Centre, along with free transport during school holidays in 2025, in partnership with Torfaen Leisure Trust.

Previous sessions have been extremely well received, with consistently positive feedback. These sessions are open to all residents, encouraging families to stay active together and offer an activity which older residents can participate in.

Torfaen Leisure Trust remains committed to the project and will continue to provide one-hour pool hire free of charge.

A brief discussion took place amongst members.

It was proposed by Cllr Matthews and seconded by Cllr Templeton to support the project.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Swimming Project authorised.

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

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

- **DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED:** Installation of air sourced heat pump.
- **LOCATION:** Rear garden of The Old Police Station, Church Road, Blaenavon

- **DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED:** Works to Sycamore tree with TPO.
- **LOCATION:** Bantree, Ty Fry Farm, Upper Hill Street, Blaenavon

- **DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED:** Increase the quantity and storage of hazardous substances.
- **LOCATION:** Unit one, Gilchrist Thomas Industrial Estate, Blaenavon

Resolved: No objections from members.

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

None received.

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

- **Letter from Captain James**

The Chief Officer forwarded the letter from Captain James to all members prior to the meeting.

In December 2024, the Chief Officer received a letter from Captain James, on behalf of the Blaenavon Branch of the Royal British Legion (RBL) regarding concerns over the order of the parade at the Remembrance Day event 2024.

The Chief Officer confirmed that the parade followed RBL national guidelines relating to remembrance order of precedence, as per previous years. This was supported with input from Cllr Templeton, a 24-year veteran and also the parade marshal.

Blaenavon Town Council oversees the event and are responsible for managing event planning, road closures, risk assessments, dignitary attendance, order of service booklets, and press coordination, while the RBL conducts the service at the cenotaph.

RBL guidelines outline a parade order, which was followed, though there was an unexpected change in the wreath-laying sequence, moving the mayor's position further down the list.

Cllr Matthews noted that RBL guidelines allow for some variations and emphasised the council's commitment to organising the event with proper etiquette and maintaining a positive relationship with the RBL.

Cllr Matthews proposed writing to Captain James to clarify the council's rationale, establish clearer communication, and agree on the parade and wreath-laying order in advance to prevent future misunderstandings.

This was seconded by Cllr Cowles.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Chief Officer to respond by letter to Captain James.

The Assistant Chief Officer requested to present a time-sensitive matter regarding a donation allocation to Blaenavon Santa, who once again supported Blaenavon Town Council at the Christmas Lights Switch-On event.

This year, Blaenavon Santa has chosen **CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)** as their charity, in memory of **Jessica Jones**, a local young woman who sadly passed away in 2022 at the age of twenty-six.

A **GoFundMe** page has been set up for direct donations to the charity.

Last year, the Town Council donated **£250** to Blaenavon Santa's chosen charity.

A brief discussion took place amongst members.

It was proposed by Cllr Hunt to award £250 to CALM. This was seconded by Cllr Keen.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: £250 to be transacted to CALM via the GoFundMe page.

Meeting ended at 20:26

Signed Chairman: *W. Matthews*

Date: 26/2/25.