



BLAENAVON TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 27th 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 Blaenavon and remotely.

In attendance:

Councillors: Cllr. N. Matthews (In the Chair) L. Cowles, M. Wheeler, S. Templeton, S. Keen, I. Parfitt, A. Lewis, A. Beavan, J. Hunt (18.43 hrs), T. Porter (19.21 hrs).

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.

1. Motion of Condolence for former Councillor Alan Stephen Jones.

Blaenavon Town Council expresses deep sadness at the death of Cllr Alan Stephen Jones and offered sincere condolences to his family. They recognised Cllr Jones's enduring commitment to public service and his contribution to Blaenavon, serving as mayor on three occasions.

Members and officers relayed their condolences in respect of Cllr Alan Jones.

Motion of condolences was proposed by Cllr Matthews and seconded by Cllr Wheeler.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Condolences approved.

2. To receive any questions from the public.

None received.

3. To receive and accept apologies.

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

- Cllr Evans
- Cllr Porter – will attend late (19.21 hrs)
- Cllr Hunt – will attend late (18.43 hrs)

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

Resolved: Apologies accepted.

4. Declarations of Interest

- Cllr Cowles – Items 15&18 - Personal

5. To receive a TCBC update from Ward Councillors.

Apologies received from Borough Cllrs Jones and Horler were forwarded to all members prior to the meeting.

Cllr Cowles shared the following update with members:

Following the passing of Cllr Alan Jones, a minute's silence was held in his memory during the TCBC full council meeting at the Civic Centre, Pontypool.

As part of his leader's update, Cllr Anthony Hunt paid tribute to Alan's memory.

Cllr Cowles informed Nick Thomas-Symonds MP of Alan's sad passing and expressed his heartfelt condolences to Lesley, Sarah, and all of Alan's close family and friends during this difficult time.

Arthur Jenkins Update

- Four residents remain in the home.
- Relatives were informed on 21/11/2024 that negotiations between Hafod and Spectrum are ongoing. However, an in-principal agreement has been reached, making a transfer of ownership highly likely.
- Hafod has advised that a handover process will begin on 26/11/2024. During this process, Hafod will meet with residents and their relatives to introduce the RI from Spectrum.
- Following the introductions, staff from Spectrum will work alongside Hafod staff until the proposed handover date of 6th December 2024.
- The transfer of the service to Spectrum is planned to take effect at midnight on 6th December 2024.

Caveat

While progress is encouraging, the transfer is dependent on the formal signing of the necessary agreements between Hafod and Spectrum. Although it is not yet finalised, there is good reason to be optimistic that the process will proceed as planned

Inclement Weather Update

Members will be aware of the severe impact of Storm Bert over the weekend. Despite extensive preparations, including infrastructure inspections, clearance efforts, and staff deployments, the unprecedented rainfall posed significant challenges for both communities and support services.

Officers who were actively addressing flooding issues over the weekend are now prioritising inspections of our infrastructure to identify ongoing risks to our communities. These inspections will require them to be on-site for several days, limiting their availability in the office. There may be delays in response times as a result.

Patience will be necessary as they address specific concerns. However, Cllr Cowles is happy to receive reports from members about any unreported hotspots and will ensure they are relayed to the team promptly.

Full Council Meeting – 9th November 2024

Aside from the points highlighted in Cllr Janet Jones' written update, there is nothing further from that meeting that would be particularly relevant to report to members. However, it was heartening to hear Cllr David Daniels mention Cllr Alan Jones in his response to a member's question about the Arthur Jenkins Care Home.

He acknowledged how Alan continued to advocate for the residents and staff there, demonstrating his unwavering commitment right up until the end.

The roll-out of red recycling bags is ongoing. There have been reports of individual houses being missed while the rest of their street received deliveries. If members become aware of any such issues, please pass them on to Cllr Cowles.

Members briefly discussed staffing at the Arthur Jenkins Care Home. Spectrum has indicated they may offer employment to staff following redundancy as they are not prepared to proceed with a TUPE transfer from Arthur Jenkins.

Members also discussed the frequency that roadside gullies are cleaned and suggested that a survey might be needed to assess the condition of the drains.

Resolved: Members noted the update from Cllr Cowles.

6. 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.

- 6th of November – attended the opening of the Garden of Remembrance at the Cenotaph.
- 10th of November – took part in the Blaenavon Remembrance Day Parade and laid a wreath on behalf of Blaenavon Town Council at the Cenotaph.
- 11th of November – attended the Armistice service at Blaenavon Cenotaph.
- 16th of November – attended the Blaenavon Town Council’s Christmas Market at Blaenavon Workmen’s Hall.
- 20th of November – With fellow Cllrs, attended the Torfaen Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) group workshop at the Council chamber.
- 22nd of November – Attended and gave a speech at Blaenavon Town Council’s Christmas Lights Switch on event at Market Square.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

7. Council Meetings: To confirm the minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on the 23rd of October 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 accepted.

8. Chief Officer’s Update: To receive the Chief Officer’s update.

The Chief Officer provided members with the following update:

Item 22 within the minutes as per the instructions from members, on the 24/10/24 a £250 grant was transacted to Blaenavon Blues AFC and a £225 grant transacted to Twinkle Toes Dance Group. Confirmation has been received from both organisations thanking the Town Council for their generous support.

Since the last Full Council meeting, and as per the update regarding the complaint submitted to TCBC regarding Blaenavon Workmen’s Hall Ltd. An update has been received today from TCBC which has been forwarded to members for their information. The Chief Officer will of course be advised by members regarding any further response.

On the 30/10/24 attended an online training input delivered by AdvantEdge finance relating to the Councils transfer from the Receipts and Payments platform to Income and Expenditure aligned to gross income. A further meeting with AdvantEdge is planned for early next year to discuss the transfer for the 2025/26 financial year.

On the 31/10/24, together with the Assistant Chief Officer, held a meeting with Aimee Morris and Dan Watkins from Torfaen Voluntary Alliance within the Council chambers to receive an update on the Participatory Budget Programme across Torfaen.

Dan has been appointed to manage the programme, and they requested advice from the Town Council regarding our experiences of running a PB programme. Dan will be holding drop-in meetings with local groups to advise on the PB programme moving forward.

Also, on the 31/10/24 together with Cllr Templeton, attended a Torfaen Local Council Partnership Committee meeting online together with other Town and Community Councils within Torfaen.

The responses to the draft Torfaen Charter were discussed with a determination for more work to be completed on this based on the responses from other Councils. An update was provided to the committee regarding the Town Council's events in November 2024.

On the 5/11/24 together with Cllrs Wheeler, Templeton, Cowles, and Lewis attended a Community Review meeting at the Civic Centre. The Council's position on the review to date was explained and minutes were requested from the task and finish group meetings.

These have now been received and have been disseminated to members for their perusal and next steps. This will be discussed further at item 13 within the agenda.

On the 7/11/24 together with Cllrs Keen and Evans attended an online meeting with representatives from the HDRC research team to discuss the terms of reference for the programme.

On the 10/11/24 together with the Assistant Chief Officer and Cllrs attended the Remembrance Day Event within Blaenavon. Another successful event organised by the Town Council which was well attended.

On the 14/11/24 held a meeting with Aimee Morris from TVA together with representatives from the Community Transport Association and TCBC within the Council chambers to discuss community transport issues within Blaenavon and how this could be improved using a multi-agency approach involving grant funding.

The discussions were positive, and a follow up meeting is planned for early December 2024. Members will be updated accordingly and motion this as an agenda item in due course.

On the 16/11/24 together with the Assistant Chief Officer and Cllrs attended the Town Council's Xmas Market Event within the Workmen's Hall. Another successful event with forty stall holders and it was well attended.

On the 20/11/24 together with Cllrs attended an in-person workshop within the Council chambers with representatives from the HDRC research team. The information generated from the workshop will be used to populate the HDRC initiative across Torfaen.

On the 22/11/24 together with the Assistant Chief Officer and Cllrs attended the Town Council's Xmas Light switch on event at Market Street carpark. This was another successful event which was again well attended and has received numerous positive responses on social media together with an article in the South Wales Argus on the 26/11/24.

Thanks were offered to Chris Langford for his outstanding support.

On the 28th and 29th of November the Chief Officer will be undertaking the interim internal audit with Community Finance Solutions ahead of the budget setting process on the 4th of December.

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.

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

Cllr Templeton provided the following update:

On 18th November 2024, Cllr Templeton attended the Veterans' Support Hub at the Cons Club. Unfortunately, attendance was very low, with only two participants. It is believed this may be due to the timing of the meeting, and a request to hold future sessions in the evening is being considered.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

Cllr Hunt provided the following update:

Cllr Hunt attended a meeting of the Eastern Valleys Local Access Forum, which covers Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent. The forum focuses on rights of way issues and is currently seeking funding. Membership is open to all interested members.

Additionally, Cllr Hunt will be attending the Torfaen Museum Trust board meeting on 28th November. The board is in the process of searching for a new chairperson, Cllr Hunt will provide an update in due course.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

Cllr Wheeler provided the following update:

Cllr Wheeler attended the Torfaen Community Transport AGM, where the existing Officers were reappointed. Cllr Gauden suggested to the manager that they consider reaching out to local Town and Community Councils, such as Blaenavon town Council with donation requests.

Cllr Wheeler attended the World Heritage Day Committee meetings, which were held virtually on 11th, 14th, and 25th November. All Cllrs are invited to join the Twilight Lantern Walk which will take place on the 6th of December. Members of the public are also welcome to join the walk, mustering at the Ironworks at 5.15pm.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

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

No update was provided by the Community Development and Wellbeing Officer due to current medical leave.

Resolved: Noted by members.

11. To review and discuss the Town Council Xmas Event / Lights Switch on 2024

The Christmas Lights Event was a resounding success, with an excellent turnout. The mayor expressed thanks to Chris Langford for his outstanding contributions over numerous events and years. Special appreciation was also extended to the Chief Officer and Assistant Chief Officer for their dedication and effort in organising and coordinating the complex event.

Feedback received, and as shared on social media, has been overwhelmingly positive. Cllr Beavan highlighted that, in addition to the extensive planning required, both officers went above and beyond by working a 13-hour day to ensure the event's success.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

12. To receive, discuss and make any relevant determinations relating to the Welsh Government's recent report regarding the Democratic Health of Community and Town Councils.

The report had been forwarded to members prior to the meeting.

The Democratic Health of Community and Town Councils Group was established by Rebecca Evans, Minister for Local Government, in April 2023 to address the challenges of low engagement and participation in town and community councils. The group's report investigates these issues and proposes options for improvement.

The report highlights several concerns, including a low awareness of town and community councils, particularly among young people and the public. It notes confusion between town and community councils and principal councils, a negative perception of town and community councils aligned to limited diversity and inclusion.

The challenges faced by Cllrs were also emphasised, such as abuse on social media, heavy workloads, and poor governance.

The report stresses the need for cultural and structural changes to enhance diversity, transparency, and the public image of councils. It proposes two potential solutions:

1. **Rebuilding the Sector:** This approach involves raising awareness, promoting inclusion and diversity, and providing enhanced training to improve councillor skills.

2. **Modernising the Governance Model:** This more radical option acknowledges that the current statutory framework, established in 1974, may no longer be fit for purpose in today's context. It suggests the need for significant constitutional changes, although such reforms would take considerable time, potentially 10 years or more to implement.

The report calls on Welsh ministers to decide between these two approaches. However, the Chief Officer expressed concerns about the feasibility of the proposals, citing a lack of clear direction. He also noted the extended time limit required to implement the second option.

Cllr Hunt highlighted the conflict between the report's recommendations and the local reorganisation of town and community councils, which includes a reduction in Cllr numbers.

He noted that while the report emphasises the need to increase diversity, reducing the number of Cllrs would increase workloads, creating additional barriers for those who may already find it difficult to participate.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

13. To receive, discuss and make any relevant determinations relating to the survey responses regarding the TCBC Community Review.

It was explained to members that during a meeting with Cllr Yeowell (TCBC) Chair of the community review task & finish group held on 5th November 2024 at the Civic Centre, Blaenavon Town Council's concerns were raised. Minutes from all task and finish group meetings since 2023 were requested, and these have now been received and shared with all members.

Members discussed the meeting and as a result believed that the community review terms of reference were not followed. The responses submitted by the Town Council in February / March 2024 were neither acknowledged nor addressed.

The lack of recognition or rebuttals has serious implications, particularly with the potential reduction in Cllr numbers, which would increase workloads. There has been no recognition of this issue, which contrasts with the Welsh Government's stance.

Furthermore, there is no set maximum number for Cllrs who are elected to Town and Community Councils. Blaenavon Town Council's achievements, which surpass those of other councils in Torfaen, have also not been acknowledged, raising significant concerns.

Members discussed addressing the deficit issue, including the possibility of involving the Local Government Ombudsman, which the Chief Officer will investigate.

Cllr Matthews proposed that the working group draft a response to be reviewed at the January finance meeting, ahead of the Torfaen Full Council meeting in February 2025. This was seconded by Cllr Wheeler.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Community Review Working Group to draft a response for the January 2025 Finance meeting.

14. To appoint a Councillor representative to the Blaenavon World Heritage Site Caring for the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape Group.

The Chief Officer explained to members that Cllr Jones was the appointed representative to the Blaenavon World Heritage Site Caring for the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape Group.

However, due to Cllr Jones passing, a new member will need to be appointed.

Cllr Hunt expressed an interest in becoming the representative for the Town Council.

It was proposed by Cllr Matthews and seconded by Cllr Beavan that Cllr Hunt be the Town Council representative.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Cllrs Hunt to be the appointed representative to the Blaenavon World Heritage Site Caring for the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape Group.

15. 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 four which were presented as follows.

- **DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED:** Change of use from first floor flat to B&B facilities, five ensuite bedrooms.
LOCATION: The Whistle Inn Blaenavon.
- **DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED:** Change of use of redundant building to flats
LOCATION: 4 Market Street, Blaenavon.
- **DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED:** New detached garage
LOCATION: Oak Tree Cottage, Varteg Road, Blaenavon.
- **DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED:** Extension to existing dwelling & replacement of detached garage and workshop.
LOCATION: The Cottage, Varteg Road, Blaenavon.

Resolved: No objections from members.

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

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

Members discussed the donation requests, namely:

- **Hannah Mitchell - Wales Air Ambulance.**

It was proposed by Cllr Beavan to support the request with a £250 donation. This was seconded by Cllr Hunt.

All members in agreement.

Resolved – Application authorised.

- **John Cunningham - Torfaen Community Transport.**

A discussion took place amongst members regarding the availability and frequency of Torfaen Community Transport within Blaenavon.

It was proposed by Cllr Hunt to support the request with a £250 donation. This was seconded by Cllr Wheeler.

The donation was rejected, with two votes in favour and seven against.

Resolved – Application not supported.

- **Louise Jones – Williams - Llantarnam Grange.**

It was proposed by Cllr Cowles to support the request with a £250 donation. This was seconded by Cllr Beavan.

All members in agreement.

Resolved - Application authorised.

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

None received.

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 was confirmed as stopped by the Chief Officer at 19.21 hours.

[REDACTED]

18.To receive, discuss and make a determination regarding an update from the appointed working group relating to the Assistant Chief Officer role and salary review November 2024.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Meeting ended at 20:16

Signed Chairman: *N. Matthews*

Date: 22/1/25.