



Summary (Decisions) of the Finance Meeting of Blaenavon Town Council held on **Wednesday the 13th of November 2024 at 6:30 pm** on a hybrid basis in the Council Chamber at **101, High Street, Blaenavon** and remotely in accordance with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

The full minutes of the meeting are subject to confirmation at the Council Finance Meeting to be held on Wednesday the **8th of January 2025**.

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

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 (0.008%), 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.

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 BTC. 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, community groups, and animals. There was also mention of a possible street party organised by BTC.

The Chief Officer explained that discussions had taken place with Father Chris Walters who expressed interest in supporting BTC 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.

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) informing that £157.99 of the £300 donation for the school uniform project remains unspent.

After a brief discussion, 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.

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 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 BTC 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 litter pick 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.

Meeting ended at 20.06 hrs.

