



BLAENAVON TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 23rd of APRIL 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, J. Davies, A. Lewis, J. Hunt, T. Griffin, I. Parfitt, T. Porter.

Officers: Kevin Warren (Chief Officer), Kerry Jones (Assistant Chief Officer), Sophie Johnson (CWD Officer).

Visitors: J. Jones, N. Horler (TCBC Cllrs)

Members of public: Olivia Osmond.

The Full Council meeting was opened at 6:30pm by Mayor Cllr Nathan Matthews 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 Lewis
- 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 Janet Jones provided the following update:

Cllr Jones attended two scrutiny meetings, including chairing the Social Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Committee. Cllr Jones visited several schools across the borough and provided an update to members on the shortage of Speech and Language Therapists in Torfaen.

Cllr Jones highlighted the importance of the Flying Start initiative and urged Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC) to request additional funding from the Welsh Government to support early years provision providers.

Cllr Jones also met with the Youth Offending Scrutiny Committee, which includes representatives from multiple agencies such as Social Services, the Police, and Health Services, to address concerns around antisocial behaviour.

As part of this work, Cllr Jones visited Coed Llan Farm, which has developed a comprehensive programme aimed at supporting young offenders.

During scrutiny discussions, Cllr Jones raised concerns over the poor condition of some school buildings within Torfaen. However, there have been developments, including the installation of a new pitch and dance studio at Abersychan Comprehensive School, which will also be accessible to the public.

Torfaen currently operates a Pupil Referral Unit, but due to increasing demand from both primary and secondary pupils, there may be a need to establish an additional unit in the north of the borough.

Social worker caseloads have recently been reviewed. Recruitment and retention of qualified social workers remain a challenge. TCBC is addressing this by sponsoring candidates through the Open University, requiring them to commit to a three-year period of service in the borough upon qualification.

Lastly, Cllr Jones submitted a motion calling on TCBC to support victims of domestic and sexual abuse. Feedback indicates that many victims feel unsupported, particularly by the police. The motion stresses the need for improved support services and better education around these issues.

Cllr Nick Horler provided the following update:

Cllr Horler has attended a number of scrutiny and Full Council meetings. He also attended his final Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) meeting, having lost his seat due to recent political changes within Gwent.

The new tennis court in Blaenavon has officially opened; however, there have been incidents of antisocial behaviour. In response, a camera will be installed to monitor the area.

Cllr Horler is actively working to address ongoing fly-tipping issues at Johnson's Mine, Forgeside Road, and The Coity.

He has also been contacted regarding concerns about defibrillators within the town. Several units have not been properly maintained, and some guardians were unaware of the ongoing costs. Cllr Horler continues to support this initiative and is exploring fundraising opportunities to sustain the project.

Members were also updated on 'The Hustle,' a collaborative project involving Torfaen, Monmouthshire, and Blaenau Gwent councils, along with Gwent Police.

The initiative focuses on tackling environmental issues such as illegal off-roading, littering, and fly-tipping. The Chief Officer in Torfaen is seeking to arrange a joint meeting to progress this work further.

Finally, Cllr Horler commended Cllr Griffin for proposing an initiative to care for deceased individuals in the borough, who have no known family or friends. Cllr Horler submitted a motion to TCBC supporting the idea, which has since been approved, and an action plan is now in place.

Cllr Cowles provided the following update:

Cllr Cowles updated members that during the Full Council meeting of Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC) held in April, three public questions were submitted by students from Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw (YGG):

1. What are the plans to rejuvenate town centres in the borough?
2. What strategies are currently in place to minimise antisocial behaviour?
3. As YGG is the only 3–19 Welsh-medium school in Torfaen, what are the council's plans to promote the Welsh language beyond the school environment?

These questions were answered by executive members, and their responses will be published in the meeting minutes.

An update from the Torfaen Education Service highlighted that Estyn has published an effective practice case study on the local authority.

In addition, a revised Education Improvement Plan for 2025/26 has been collaboratively developed. All inspection reports, letters, and minutes for Torfaen schools are available on the Estyn website.

Pupil attendance continues to show improvement, although it remains below pre-pandemic levels. Exclusion rates remain high across the borough.

Cllr Cowles also shared that Cllr Janet Jones has been appointed as the council's Champion for Violence Against Women and Girls. Cllr Jones confirmed her appointment and agreed to conduct the role until May.

Due to other commitments, she has asked for a successor to be considered. She urged members to support the motion she submitted, which aims to improve support for victims of violence.

Cllr Matthews proposed that the matter be listed as an agenda item for a future meeting.

Cllr Cowles noted that all Torfaen members have received training on violence against women and girls and confirmed that local statistics in this area remain high.

Additionally, as previously mentioned, Bannau Brycheiniog National Park plans to introduce voluntary contactless parking charges at Keepers Pond and Fox Hunter car park. These machines are expected to be installed shortly.

Finally, Cllr Cowles attended the official opening of the newly refurbished tennis courts, which are a significant improvement.

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.

Members raised a series of questions regarding the recently introduced initiative to ensure dignity for individuals who pass away without family or friends.

Cllr Horler was asked whether this initiative could be extended to local town and community councils, potentially involving volunteers earlier in a person's life - such as through a 'buddy' system, to provide companionship during their final days.

Cllr Horler clarified that there were only three unattended funerals in Torfaen over the past year. He explained that the responsibility for such cases lies with Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC) and expressed concern that involving town or community councils could unnecessarily complicate the process.

Cllr Griffin emphasised that the initiative is not a care-based programme but a commemorative one. To reduce risk and avoid added bureaucracy, the approach focuses solely on ensuring a representative is present at funerals.

As the initiative's coordinator, Cllr Griffin would be notified by TCBC in such cases and would then arrange for a volunteer to attend the burial or cremation on behalf of the council. He clarified that this would be the extent of volunteer involvement.

A follow-up question was raised regarding whether there is a default option between burial and cremation. Cllr Griffin explained that, at present, burial is the default, although discussions are ongoing. It was also noted that burial currently has a lower carbon footprint than cremation.

Resolved: Members noted the updates.

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.

- 27th March attend website design meeting
- 18th April attend Cllr Griffin's acceptance of office
- Preparing for a busy period ahead including attending the One Voice Wales awards where Cllr Matthews will be delivering two presentations.

Also attending VE Day events at Blaenavon Heritage school, Arthur Jenkins Care Home, raising of the flag ceremony and St Peter's Church VE Day service. The twinning visit scheduled for May 9th and attending the Ironworks on the 10th of May as an invited guest to the Victorian Extravaganza event including tea with Queen Victoria.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

6. Council Meetings: To confirm the minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on the 26th of March 2025.

Minutes were read for accuracy with no amendments.

It was proposed by Cllr Lewis and seconded by Cllr Wheeler 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 12 within the minutes, informed Educational Achievement Service and Cerys Sheppherd, Chair of Governors of the appointment of Cllr Davies as the town council representative to Ysgol Bryn Onnen.

Item 19 within the minutes, informed One Voice Wales of the council decision to renew membership for 2025/26. The fee has been transacted and received.

Item 20 within the minutes, as per members instructions, on 14th April invited Neil Jones, TCBC to a council meeting, in relation to mountain fires. A second email was sent today with no reply to date.

Item 23 within the minutes, as per members instructions contacted Ioan James and informed him of the decision not to support his request at this time. Also, updated Matthew Cox of the decision to support Blaenavon Blues with a donation of £250 which was transacted on 27th March.

Item 24 within the minutes, as per members instructions contacted Mr Brian Lewis, Head of Site, Big Pit to request he attend a meeting.

Mr Lewis attended the April 2025 Finance meeting. To be discussed further at agenda item 10.

Also, as per members instructions on the 9th of April telephoned Mr Cyril Turner, Secretary of Blaenavon Branch RBL and explained the council decision not to follow national guidelines on order of precedence and yield to march behind Blaenavon Branch RBL at the 2025 remembrance parade. This will be discussed further at agenda item 22.

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 Wheeler provided updates on recent meetings attended:

On the 7th of April 2025, attended the opening of the tennis courts.

On the 14th of April 2025, participated in the World Heritage Day hybrid meeting. Various matters were discussed including road closure costs, which have been forwarded to the Chief Officer.

Cllr Wheeler was authorised to become the third signatory for payments out of funds.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

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

The Community Development and Wellbeing Officer's report for April 2025 will be forwarded to all members following the meeting.

Sophie provided the following overview:

Befriending Film Club

Film club continues to be well attended and will be taking place on Friday 25th April. TVA will be in attendance to hold an engagement session for the Community Transport initiative.

Mums & Daughters Fitness Sessions

The sessions continue to be well attended.

Community Swimming Session

The next session takes place on April 25th and will return to its usual Friday morning, allowing for greater community participation.

Cook Stars Session

The April session is fully booked and will take place at Bethlehem Chapel.

Arthur Jenkins Community Choir

Sessions have now restarted, taking place every Tuesday 2pm-3pm. Members are welcome to attend.

Fashion Show

Tickets have sold out for the show, which is due to take place on Tuesday 6th May at the World Heritage Centre.

Outdoor Cinema – Blaenavon Heritage Railway 29th & 30th July 2025

Tickets launched on April the 4th 2025 for a two-week exclusive period for Blaenavon residents only, this will be followed by general sale. Sales have been slow initially; however, Wonder Cinema and the Heritage Railway will now also promote the event.

VE Day 80 Events

The garden party planning for the community event at the Arthur Jenkins Residential Home is all booked and confirmed.

Also, a service is planned for 8th May at St Peters Church at which will be discussed further in the agenda.

Blaenavon Heritage School and Ysgol Brynn Onnen schools have confirmed they will take part in a poetry competition.

Community Transport

In partnership with TVA the CWD Officer attended two engagement sessions at the Heritage Centre and the Resource Centre. Whilst there has been positive feedback from residents about the scheme, there is little appetite to volunteer.

Cllr Hunt asked if digital exclusion effected the uptake of cinema tickets.

Furthermore, Cllr Hunt was concerned that the noticeboards within the Resource Centre had several outdated posters and information displayed. That there is no reception for the building or no one updating the noticeboards.

The CWD Officer explained that she updates the noticeboards with town council posters and if space is required removes outdated posters, however it is not her responsibility to maintain the Resource Centre noticeboards.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

10. To discuss and make any relevant determinations relating to the request for sponsorship regarding Big Pit Apprenticeships.

At the April 2025 Finance meeting, Brian Lewis, Head of Site and Mine Manager at Big Pit National Coal Museum, gave a presentation to members regarding sponsorship for the museum's apprenticeship scheme.

A request was made for £2,500 per annum over a three-year period.

A detailed discussion took place amongst members.

It was proposed by Cllr Matthews to support the sponsorship with £2,500 per year for a three-year period. This was seconded by Cllr Griffin.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Sponsorship supported with £2,500 per year for three years.

11. To receive an update and make any relevant determinations regarding the Town Council's VE Day 80 events taking place on the 3rd and 8th of May 2025.

The VE Day 80 poster for the *Service of Peace* was shared with members ahead of the meeting, and the service programme was displayed on screen. Bells at St Peter's Church will ring from 6:00pm with the service beginning at 7:00pm.

Invitations have been sent out, and several confirmations have already been received. All arrangements for the service are now finalised and in place.

Plans for the VE Day 80 *Garden Party*, held in partnership with Arthur Jenkins Care Home, have also been confirmed. The event will feature entertainment from the Pashy Pops, vintage mascots, inflatables, a face painter, vintage games, a balloon artist, and various stalls.

Cllr Davies confirmed that preparations at the care home are complete, with only final patio work scheduled for completion this week.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

12. To receive an update and make any relevant determinations regarding the Town Council's forwarded Twinning Event taking place on the 9th of May 2025.

The Chief Officer provided members with an update on the event planning progress to date.

A formal invitation has been sent to the Mayor of Hrastnik via the Slovenian Embassy. A commemorative plaque has been ordered, and a civic hamper has been prepared.

Nick Thomas-Symonds and the Youth Ambassadors have confirmed their attendance. All venues scheduled for visits have been briefed, and arrangements for buffet lunch and transport are in place.

The visit is scheduled to begin at 11:00 a.m. at the Heritage Centre. If time allows a brief stop at Keepers Pond to view the local landscape will also be included.

All plans are now confirmed, with the only outstanding detail being the final number of attendees from Hrastnik.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

13. To discuss and make any relevant determinations regarding the appointment of a Community Youth Representative.

A draft notice outlining the criteria and application process was circulated to all members prior to the meeting and displayed on screen.

Members discussed the selection and interview process.

It was proposed that candidates be interviewed by a panel comprising two Officers and two Councillors, with the panel's recommendations to be presented at the May 2025 Full Council meeting. The advertising of the vacancies was also discussed and agreed upon.

Cllr Matthews proposed, and Cllr Parfitt seconded, that the interview panel would consist of Cllrs Hunt and Griffin, along with Officers Kerry Jones and Sophie Johnson.

All members in agreement

Resolved: The youth representative vacancies to be advertised. Interview panel has been appointed.

14. To receive an update and make any relevant determinations regarding the Community Transport Initiative.

As previously outlined, the pilot initiative is now underway. Two consultation sessions have been held, attended by the CWD Officer and Jo Lloyd from TVA, at both the Resource Centre and the Heritage Centre.

The Chief Officer is still awaiting a response from Aimi Morris at TVA regarding the structure and setup of the working and steering groups.

Members enquired whether any volunteer drivers had been recruited so far, and what methods had been used to attract them.

The CWD Officer confirmed that no drivers had been recruited to date. Recruitment efforts have included engagement sessions, posters, and social media promotion.

Cllr Wheeler noted that Sandra Keen may have expressed an interest in volunteering as a driver. The CWD Officer agreed to follow up and contact her.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

15. To discuss and make any relevant determinations in relation to the current position of TCBC's Community Review.

Correspondence had been circulated to all members prior to the meeting and was also displayed on screen. The Chief Officer provided members with an update.

In accordance with members' instructions, the Chief Officer wrote to Cllr Anthony Hunt, Leader of Torfaen County Borough Council, in February 2025. To date, no response has been received.

There has also been no update from Torfaen regarding the on-going community review.

At a meeting held at the Civic Centre, Pontypool attended by Cllrs Matthews, Cowles, and Wheeler, along with the Chief Officer a request was made by the Chief Officer for a copy of the meeting minutes. These have not yet been provided.

Members were asked to consider the ongoing lack of response from Cllr Hunt. Cllr Cowles informed members that he had spoken with Cllr Hunt about the Community Review. Cllr Hunt advised that he had been in discussions with Caroline Geneve-Jones.

Cllr Cowles reported that there appeared to be no concerns regarding the boundaries of the Blaenavon wards, which are expected to remain as East and West. However, there have been ongoing discussions between Cllr Hunt, Caroline Geneve-Jones, and Cllr Yeowell, Chair of the Community Review Committee, concerning a proposal to reduce the number of Blaenavon Town Cllrs from twelve to ten.

Cllr Cowles assured members that Cllr Hunt is seeking to arrange a meeting to discuss the matter further.

A discussion followed, during which members expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of response from the Leader of TCBC and considered possible avenues to escalate the issue.

Cllr Cowles proposed to follow up with Cllr Hunt and report back to members at the May Finance meeting. This was seconded by Cllr Matthews.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: Cllr Cowles to consult with Cllr Hunt and provide an update at May 2025 Finance meeting.

16. To discuss and make any relevant determinations regarding the appointment of a Blaenavon Town Council Chaplain.

The Chief Officer informed members that a number of Town and Community Councils within the sector have appointed Chaplains to provide support and advice on a range of matters.

During a recent conversation with Father Walters, he raised this subject and expressed his willingness to offer his services to the Town Council.

The Chief Officer agreed to present the matter to members for consideration.

Members discussed whether a Chaplain was necessary and, if so, in what capacity. The Chief Officer clarified that the role would be purely supportive and advisory, with no involvement in debate or voting on Council matters.

It was proposed by Cllr Parfitt and seconded by Cllr Hunt that the Chief Officer gather further information and make additional enquiries.

All members in agreement.

Resolved: That the Chief Officer seek further information and make enquiries with SLCC and One Voice Wales.

17. To discuss and make a determination relating to rearranging the annual meeting date for May 2025.

Cllr Matthews proposed that the Annual Meeting be rescheduled to Monday, 12th May 2025, and stated he was willing to remain as Mayor until that date to allow the meeting to proceed.

The proposal was seconded by Cllr Cowles.

Councillor Griffin abstained from voting.

Resolved: The Annual Meeting will be held on Monday, 12th May 2025.

18. To discuss and make a determination regarding potential Town Council projects for allocation into the Project Action Plan 2025/26. Relevant updates or new projects as notified.

None received.

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

None received.

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

Correspondence from TCBC regarding proposed works was forwarded to all members prior to the meeting and displayed on screen.

The proposed works include the installation of a disabled parking bay on Charles Street, Blaenavon, and the introduction of waiting restrictions at four locations: Duke Street, Elgam Avenue, Llanover Road, and Hill Street/Heritage Gardens, Blaenavon.

The document was presented for members' consideration.

Resolved: Members noted the update.

An email from Kat Fox-Madely of TGSB Markets and Events was forwarded to all members prior to the meeting.

The email contained a request for a £2,000 sponsorship contribution to support the Torfaen Pride event.

Members discussed the request in the context of the Town Council's current budget and noted that previous Torfaen Pride events, held over several years, had been funded by Torfaen, with no prior requests made to the Town Council for financial support.

It was proposed by Cllr Wheeler and seconded by Cllr Cowles that the Town Council does not support the funding request due to budget constraints.

Cllr Hunt proposed an amendment to support the event with a lesser amount.

There was no seconder for the amendment.

Cllr Hunt voted against the proposal not to support the event.

All other members in agreement.

Resolved: Torfaen Pride event not supported.

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.

Proposed by Cllr Matthews and seconded by Cllr Hunt.

All members in agreement.

Olivia Osmond left the meeting at 19.57 hrs

Recording confirmed as stopped by the Chief Officer at 19.58 hrs

Cllr Matthews changed the running order of the agenda. Agenda item 21 will follow agenda item 23.

22. To receive and make any relevant determinations relating to potential defamation of Blaenavon Town Councillors.

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23. To note, discuss and make any relevant determinations relating to recent correspondence.

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21. To receive and make any relevant determinations relating to the Chief Officer's appraisal 2024/25

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Recording restarted at 20.22hrs

Meeting ended at 20.22 hrs

Signed Chairman:



Date: 28/5/25.