



Summary (Decisions) of the Finance Meeting of Blaenavon Town Council held on **Wednesday the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2025 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 **12<sup>th</sup> of March 2025**.

**In attendance:**

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

Absent; Cllr Templeton.

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

Visitors: Aimi Morris and Jo Lloyd (Operational Executive Officer and Wellbeing Engagement Officer- Torfaen Voluntary Alliance (TVA).

Members of public: None present.

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 Hunt
- Cllr Porter

It was proposed by Cllr Weeler and seconded by Cllr Keen that the apologies be accepted.

All members in agreement.

**Resolved:** Apologies accepted.

### **3. Declarations of Interest.**

None declared.

### **4. To receive a presentation from Aimi Morris and Jo Lloyd (Operational Executive Officer and Wellbeing Engagement Officer- Torfaen Voluntary Alliance) relating to a joint pilot Community Transport Development initiative for Blaenavon.**

Aimi and Jo provided members with an overview of the pilot project for community transport within Blaenavon and Forgeside.

North Torfaen, including Blaenavon, and Forgeside, faces transportation challenges, particularly affecting elderly residents, those with mobility issues, and low-income families. Blaenavon, due to its rural isolation, is most impacted.

A feasibility study and community engagement have highlighted the need for a transport scheme to improve access to essential services. The proposed scheme will initially focus on medical appointments and local social outings, expanding to other events in the future.

TVA and Blaenavon Town Council will work in partnership with other organisations and the community to oversee the initiative. It is hopeful that the scheme will launch in mid-2025, following recruitment of volunteer drivers, and a part-time coordinator.

Key goals include better healthcare access, stronger community bonds, and long-term sustainability to support wider rural areas.

Members raised several questions regarding the initiative, including the number of drivers needed for the initial setup, the eligibility criteria for volunteer drivers, the cost of the service for passengers, driver reimbursement rates, expected travel distances and time commitments, as well as car and insurance requirements.

Aimi and Jo confirmed that five to six drivers are needed to establish the scheme. All drivers will undergo a DBS check and receive appropriate training. Passengers will pay a fixed charge, while drivers will be reimbursed at a rate of 45p per mile.

The expected travel distances and time commitments will be discussed during the interview process. It was also emphasized that while drivers must inform their car insurance providers, participating in the scheme will not impact their insurance.

Aimi and Jo advised that any further questions could be forwarded to them and then left the meeting. (18.56hrs)

Members discussed concerns regarding the community transport project, particularly the challenge of recruiting volunteer drivers. Cllrs Wheeler and Evans, both with experience as community transport drivers, highlighted issues such as lengthy hospital wait times.

A feasibility study by BRIDGES had previously identified a lack of volunteers, leading to project failure. Cllr Cowles suggested that sourcing volunteers within Blaenavon through the Town Council and TVA could improve success.

There is also uncertainty about the time commitment required from Town Council officers, and the risk associated with this. Additionally, the possibility of using the council officers as a base for a transport hub was mentioned but remains undecided. It was emphasised that the project must not interfere with the Town Council's own plans.

Members discussed the level of commitment TVA expected from the Town Council and whether officers had the capacity to support the project.

The Chief Officer highlighted the limited resources available and sought clarity on the council's role, noting potential risks. The council offices room hire would generate income, but staff costs, including pensions and national insurance, had not been accounted for.

Members agreed that further details were needed regarding officer involvement.

Cllr Wheeler proposed that the Chief Officer contact Aimi Morris of TVA for an update on the funding application and arrange a follow-up meeting at a Town Council meeting. This was seconded by Cllr Beavan.

All members in agreement.

**Resolved:** Chief Officer to contact Aimi Morris following the outcome of the funding application and invite TVA to a future Town Council meeting.

**5. Council Meetings: To confirm the minutes of the Council Finance Meeting held on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2025.**

Minutes were read for accuracy with no amendments.

It was proposed by Cllr Cowles and seconded by Cllr Keen 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 January 2025 financial update.**

Mr Warren (RFO) forwarded to members the January 2025 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 (Bank Statement 177)
- Project Expenditure
- Budget
- VAT
- Petty Cash

Mr Warren presented to members each of the above areas of finance for January 2025 and highlighted any relevant information.

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

Members reviewed the invoice for the Workmen's Hall hire cost for the 2024 Christmas Market and discussed the possibility of not hosting a market in 2025. Alternative venues with more affordable hire fees were also suggested for consideration.

Members were happy with the presentation.

It was proposed by Cllr Lewis and seconded by Cllr Keen that the financial report for January 2025 be accepted.

**Resolved:** Financial update for January 2025 accepted by members.

**7. To receive, consider and make any relevant determinations regarding Blaenavon Town Council's final response to TCBC's Community Review.**

The draft response had been forwarded to members prior to the meeting for their consideration and displayed on screen.

Members reviewed the draft response to TCBC's Community Review. The Chief Officer provided an overview, highlighting concerns relating to the TCBC task and finish (T&F) working group's handling of responses, lack of recognition of feedback, and the absence of rebuttals to concerns raised.

A key issue was the proposed reduction in Cllr numbers from 12 to 10, which the Town Council strongly opposed.

Members, together with the Chief officer attended a meeting at the Civic Centre with the T&F working group, but the outcome was disappointing. The Town Council requested and received copies of all meeting minutes, which were shared with members.

There were concerns that the T&F group may have been misled, as the Electoral Commission has not provided electoral member ratios, and there is no standardised Cllr size policy in Wales. This raises doubts about the basis of the group's recommendations.

The Chief Officer consulted the Democracy Boundary Commission Wales and provided comparisons with other councils who had recently completed community reviews namely Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion County Councils. An example was provided namely Neyland Town Council which has a smaller electorate (2,684) yet an increase in Cllr numbers had been recommended from 12 to 13.

After a detailed discussion, Cllr Wheeler proposed amending the draft response and presenting it at the February 2025 Full Council Meeting for approval by members. This was seconded by Cllr Cowles.

All members in agreement.

**Resolved:** Final response to TCBC's Community Review to be amended and presented in February 2025 Full Council Meeting for approval by members.

**8. To receive an update and make any relevant determinations regarding the Covid 19 Day of Reflection event on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2025.**

The Chief Officer explained that planning is underway for the planting of a tree in the Flower Park as part of the Covid-19 Day of Reflection event on March 9th. Landlord consent is required, and the necessary paperwork has been requested from Dan Morris (TCBC). Suitable tree species were identified in consultation with Rachel Edwards, an ecologist with (TCBC).

The Chief Officer met on-site with Phil Grimes, Tree Policy, and Operations Officer (TCBC), to determine the location. It was agreed that a Rowan tree will be planted next to the Town Council's Covid-19 memorial bench.

The Community Wellbeing Development Officer (CWDO) has reached out to Sue Driscol (Bethlehem Chapel/Churches Together Group) and Craig Brown (Heritage Funeral Services) to invite their involvement and is awaiting their response. Members discussed event promotion, attendees together with the planting process.

Cllr Lewis proposed purchasing a tree for the event, to be planted by Mayor Cllr Matthews, with steps taken to promote the event. This was seconded by Cllr Cowles.

All members in agreement.

**Resolved:** Rowan tree to be purchased and event promoted for March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

A further discussion about timing and consideration for church services took place, Cllr Wheeler proposed that the event start at 12 midday. This was seconded by Cllr Beavan.

All members in agreement.

**Resolved:** Event to be scheduled for midday on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

**9. To discuss and make any relevant determinations regarding the maintenance of civic insignia and civic collections 2025.**

Prior to the meeting, documentation from Cllr Matthews was forwarded to all members which provided an overview of the Town Council insignia, which dates back to 1952 when the Coat of Arms was granted.

Members reviewed historical scrolls and agreed they should be preserved and displayed in a cabinet, with civic collections properly maintained. It was noted that name engravings are outdated, the portrait gallery requires updates, and a repair is needed to the chains of office.

Additionally, there are several Town Council items currently on loan at Blaenavon Community Museum which need to be updated, recorded as assets, and have their loan agreements renewed with the museum.

Cllr Wheeler proposed that the current Civic insignia be maintained and updated, and that the council engage with the museum to renew the loan agreement relating to Town Council assets. This was seconded by Cllr Beavan.

All members in agreement.

**Resolved:** Civic insignia to be maintained and loan agreement for Town Council assets at Blaenavon Community Museum to be renewed.

**10. To receive, discuss and make a determination regarding an evaluation report relating to the Mums and Daughters Projects 2025.**

The Community Wellbeing Development Officer forwarded feedback forms to all members prior to the meeting and provided an overview of the Mums & Daughters exercise project.

The project received excellent feedback, with many participants giving top scores. Attendance has remained high since the change in day and time, and if numbers continue to grow, a cap may be necessary due to room capacity limits.

The project is run in partnership with Torfaen Sports Development, which covers 50% of the costs. Social media feedback has been incredibly positive with praise for Blaenavon Town Council.

Cllr Parfitt, who attended and observed two sessions, shared that they were well attended and considered the project a great success, offering good value for money.

There is a possibility of a larger room becoming available once the rugby training group moves to outdoor sessions. However, the CWDO highlighted that this could slightly increase costs due to increased room hire fees, though the expense would be shared with Sports Development.

Cllr Wheeler proposed continuing the project for another six months in partnership with Torfaen Sports Development, maintaining the 50% cost-sharing agreement. This was seconded by Cllr Parfitt.

All members in agreement.

**Resolved:** Mums and daughters project approved for a further six months.

**11. 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.

Meeting ended at 20.17hrs.