

Blackwood Town Council



Draft Minutes of the Special Meeting of Blackwood Town Council held on Monday 29th June at Blackwood Town Council Offices

Present Cllr G Etheridge, Cllr C Clark, Cllr M Gwynne, Cllr D Davies, Cllr L Perkins, Cllr C Erasmus, Cllr J Griffiths, Cllr R Mills, Cllr N Dix, Cllr P Cook

1. Apologies for Absence.

Cllr D Box, Cllr A Farina-Childs, Cllr Kevin Etheridge

2. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Clark in respect of item 5 and information on the Inner Wheel and Councillor Griffiths in respect of item 5 and Ty Hafan

3. Out-turn 2025/26 - Accounting Statement 2025/26

The Clerk presented her report which showed the actual expenditure out-turn was £160,338.83 (compared with a budget of £114,700) while Income was £103,403.06 (compared with a budget of £94,590) resulting in a requirement of £56,935.77 from Reserves (compared with an original estimate of £20,110) to balance the accounts. Reserves/ balances as at 31st. March 2026 now stands at £86,974.54, albeit with £25,000 General Reserves/ £22,457 earmarked for Christmas Lights/ £20,851.22 Community Infrastructure Levy (with specific criteria attached to spending) & £18,666.32 Other.

Variances between budgets and out-turn were highlighted, and the Balance Sheet & breakdown of Reserves were also explained.

Whilst noted that some of the overspends were one off items, concerns were raised that use of reserves needed to be prudent and continual review of expenditure was needed.

Members recognised it was difficult to generate much income other the precept, and that room rental was one potential area. That perhaps the current charging policy be reviewed, whilst also looking to further promote the facilities available.

It was explained that the Accounting Statement as presented showed the same figures in a slightly different format for Audit purposes.

Having had the opportunity to compare both members satisfied themselves all was in order, and it was resolved the Accounting Statement be approved and accepted.



4. Annual Return

In consultation with the community, we have developed a vision & purpose for the Council and used this vision to inform the Council's plans, budget & activities. Members were not confident in answering this positively and agreed to answer No with the following explanation

While the Council had hoped to make consultation on the vision and purpose a priority for 2025/26; this has not yet been possible. Circumstances within the Council especially retirement of the long-standing Clerk and employment of new Clerks has impacted on what could be achieved.

Some work has been done on a community survey of residents' priorities and there will be opportunities to continue this at our forthcoming public events. However, Council feels that with elections in May 2027. It would be prudent to wait until the new Council is in place to consult on a long-term vision and purpose.

In respect of Statements 2 to 6, Members agreed they were confident these could be answered positively.

Governance Statement Question 7 -Answer No (related to internal audit aspect)

We have maintained an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems throughout the year and have received a report from the internal auditor.

This requires Town Council to agree they have made proper arrangements and accepted responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge, including arranging for a competent person, independent of the financial controls and procedures, to give an objective view whether these meet the needs of the body.

Members were not confident, given the situation, in answering this positively and agreed to answer No with the following explanation

The Council has faced a series of exceptional and unforeseen circumstances during the current financial year, which have materially impacted its administrative and governance arrangements. These include:

- The resignation of the Deputy Clerk over the Christmas period 2024;
 - The appointment of a new Clerk in April 2025, who subsequently did not take up the post as anticipated in May 2025;
 - The untimely death of the Council's previous Internal Auditor earlier this year;
- and

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- As a result of the above, the necessity for our outgoing clerk to step in to undertake an interim administrative role to ensure continuity of Council operations.

In our case, John undertook the role of Interim Clerk until the end of October during the current financial year, in order to maintain essential governance and operational functions at a time of significant organisational instability.

I fully recognise that the Internal Audit function must be independent of the Council's management and administration, and that any prior involvement in such roles—particularly within the same financial year—may compromise that independence.

However, given the exceptional and unavoidable circumstances outlined above, the Council now faces considerable difficulty in securing an Internal Auditor within the required timescales.

Accordingly, I would be grateful for your advice on the following:

1. Whether, in these specific and evidenced circumstances, any form of dispensation or temporary relaxation of the independence requirement may be considered; or
2. Whether alternative arrangements may be acceptable in order to enable the Council to meet its statutory obligations for completion of the Annual Return; and
3. Whether a delayed submission or other mitigation steps would be appropriate in this case.

The Council is committed to maintaining the highest standards of governance and transparency and is keen to ensure that any action taken is fully compliant with Audit Wales requirements.

I would be pleased to provide any additional information or supporting documentation that you may require, and I remain available to discuss this matter further if helpful.

John ostensibly retired on 31st. March 2025, having given notice months in advance, but circumstances outlined realistically necessitated him to act in an Interim capacity, much longer than anticipated.

It had been Town Councils aim to ask John to act as Internal Auditor for the 2025/26 Accounts and he thankfully agreed, but now we have this problem.

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Thank you for your consideration.

Yours faithfully,

In respect of Statements 8 and 9, Members agreed they were confident these could be answered positively, however with regard statement 10 because we don't meet the criteria re, power of competency - no qualified Clerk at present and the number co-opted Members to Elected members, this would have to be answered NO. Furthermore, statement 11 regarding Trust Funds was not applicable to us.

It was, therefore, resolved the Annual Governance Statements be approved & accepted.

Members then received the Annual Internal Audit Report, and after a brief discussion on issues raised resolved it be approved and accepted.

The Clerk also presented the Explanation of Variances for each of the identified lines on the Accounting Statement in some detail.

Members noted that some variances were significant, and it was suggested that perhaps each variance have more of a narrative attached.

It was proposed by Cllr D Davies & seconded by Cllr M Gwynn that all the above be approved for submission to Audit Wales, and this was unanimously agreed.

The Annual Return will now be signed by the Mayor on behalf of Town Council and submitted to the external auditors together with any supplementary information requested.

The necessary Notice of Appointment of Date for the Exercise of Electors Rights will be posted on our web page and Notice Board as Audit Wales direct.

Budget Monitoring Report to 2nd June 2026

The Clerk reported this was work in progress, and to date there had been a small underspend on insurance.

An overpayment of the Mayors Allowance was queried, this being an error by the Clerk. The allowance had also been incorrectly recorded in the Policy & Finance Minutes of 18th. May, but had been corrected at the Policy & Finance meeting held on 15th. June

5. Annual Report

The Mayor circulated the draft annual report that he and the Deputy Mayor had produced. He went through each page. Councillor Dix gave apologies as he had to leave the meeting at 7.50pm. Queries/comments were as follows:-

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- Public Toilets: to be discussed at separate meeting
- Clarified that the cenotaph is a cenotaph and not a war memorial (categorised by size)
- Community Garden, clarification needed on land ownership and visit needed to assess current condition. Councillor Mills has made some enquiries with the local garden centre for assistance and has made enquiries re land registry. There are also biodiversity packages available via One Voice Wales
- There is some repetition in the document; the Mayor explained that Priorities had a statement and a section explaining what had been done.
- Community survey suggested that it is repeated at the Beach Party but possibly split the survey into one for Blackwood Residents and one for visitors to the Town. It may be possible to widen the questions to tie in with other issues such as footfall.

It was unanimously agreed to adopt the Annual Report.

Date of next meetings:

6th July Full council 6.30pm

20th July Policy & Finance 6.30pm