



Blaenau Gwent Finance and Performance Report

2022-23





Introduction	3
Blaenau Gwent in numbers	4
Key Achievements / Investing in Blaenau Gwent	5
Our Council, our vision and priorities	8
Infographic—Your council tax 2022/23	9
Strategic Links	10
Money and Finance	11
National Well-being Goals & Sustainable Development	13
Service User Voice	14
Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent	15
- Our contribution to the National Well-being Goals	16
- Our contribution to Sustainable Development	17
- Case Studies	22
- How the service user voice has informed service delivery	25
Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient	26
- Our contribution to the National Well-being Goals	27
- Our contribution to Sustainable Development	28
- Case Studies	33
- How the service user voice has informed service delivery	36
Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities	37
- Our contribution to the National Well-being Goals	38
- Our contribution to Sustainable Development	39
- Case Studies	43
- How the service user voice has informed service delivery	47
Ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place	48
- Our contribution to the National Well-being Goals	49
- Our contribution to Sustainable Development	50
- Case Studies	56
- How the service user voice has informed service delivery	58
Managing our Performance and what our regulators told us	59
Risk	61
Our focus for the future	68

INTRODUCTION TO BLAENAU GWENT

Blaenau Gwent, as an area, is relatively small geographically. It is 42.09 sq. miles being, at most, 15 miles north to south and 8 miles east to west. It is a place of heritage and dramatic change, with a sense of its past but its eyes firmly on the future. Covering an area of approximately 10,900 hectares and with a population of 66,900, Blaenau Gwent is divided into 14 political wards, represented by 33 elected members.

Blaenau Gwent is defined physically by the beautiful mountain tops which divide and watch over its vibrant, bustling valleys. The three main rivers, the Sirhowy, the Ebbw and the Tillery, slip south through towns and villages which, to the untutored eye, often seem to merge together into one. Make no mistake, however - each community proudly maintains its own character and traditions.

Although the towns give the county borough a busy, urban feel, Blaenau Gwent is actually a largely rural area. Forty five per cent of the land area is undeveloped, and the greater part of this is defined as open countryside. Wherever you are in the County, beautiful countryside is never far away.

Blaenau Gwent Council strives to provide its residents with high quality facilities offering opportunities for each person to improve their quality of life. Through focusing on delivering against our key priorities, as set out in the Corporate Plan, we can continue to transform Blaenau Gwent into a more prosperous and welcoming area that plays a part on both the regional and national stage.

Blaenau Gwent is changing from the powerhouse of heavy industry for which it was justly-famous, into a modern, green and economically dynamic region, linked by rail and road to the commercial opportunities of the future, and by heritage and community to its roots.

Blaenau Gwent Council Vision:

Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities

The Council Vision is supported by five Core Values which reflect who we are as a Council, how we do things and how we are shaping the future by ensuring these apply to everything we do. The Core Values are:

Respectful, Inclusive, Collaborative, Accountable and Supportive

Blaenau Gwent Cabinet

Blaenau Gwent Council's Cabinet is made up of the Leader of the Council and four other Elected Members, called Cabinet Members. Each Cabinet Member looks after an individual area of responsibility, called a portfolio. They make decisions on how your money is spent and how services are delivered. The Cabinet is responsible for delivery of the Corporate Plan. A full list of all Elected Members, including information about how to find your local Member, is available on our website: [Councillors and Committees | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](http://Councillors and Committees | Blaenau Gwent CBC (blaenau-gwent.gov.uk))

BLAENAU GWENT CABINET



Cllr Steve Thomas
Leader of the Council
Cabinet Member
Corporate Overview and Performance



Cllr Helen Cunningham
Deputy Leader of the Council
Cabinet Member Place and Environment



Cllr John C Morgan
Cabinet Member Place and Regeneration



Cllr Sue Edmunds
Cabinet Member People and Education



Cllr Hadyn Trollope
Cabinet Member People and Social Services

- The 2021 Census identified that Blaenau Gwent had a **decrease in population** from around 69,800 in 2011 to 66,900 in 2021, equating to a **4.2% reduction**, making Blaenau Gwent the second **smallest population in Wales**. Overall, Wales has seen an increase of 1.4% in population.

- Although Blaenau Gwent has the second smallest population, it is the sixth **most densely populated area** of Wales's 22 local authority areas, with **615 residents per square kilometre** up from 148 residents per square kilometre in 2011.

- In Blaenau Gwent, **one in five people (20.3%) are aged 65 years and over**. Across Wales, this is 21.3%, a higher percentage than ever before. Blaenau Gwent has also seen an increase of 9.0% in people aged 65 years and over, a decrease of 7.5% in people aged 15 to 64 years, and a decrease of 5.4% in children aged under 15 years.

- Between the last two censuses, the **average (median) age** of Blaenau Gwent increased by two years, from 41 to **43 years** of age.

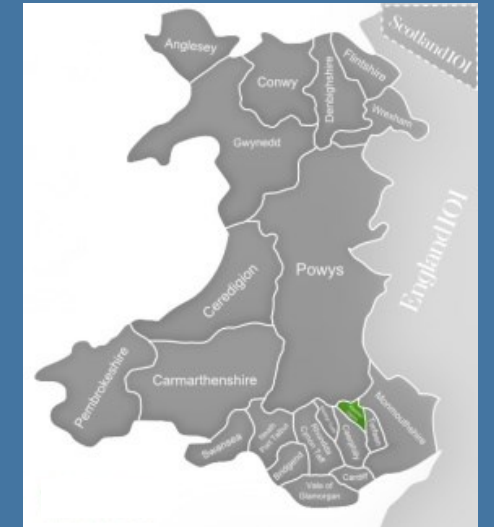
- The **percentage of Welsh speakers** in Blaenau Gwent **fell from 7.8% in 2011 to 6.2% in 2021**. In 2021, there were around 1,200 fewer Welsh-speaking Blaenau Gwent residents (over the age of three years) compared with 2011. The number of people who did not speak Welsh decreased by 1,300. Across Wales, the percentage of Welsh speakers fell from 19.0% to 17.8%.

- In the latest census, around **58,900** Blaenau Gwent residents said they were **born in Wales**. This represented **88.0%** of the local population. The figure has decreased from just over 63,000 in 2011, which, at the time, represented 90.3% of Blaenau Gwent's population. England was the next most represented, with around 5,600 Blaenau Gwent residents reporting this country of birth (8.4%). This figure was up from around 4,900 in 2011, which, at the time, represented 7.1% of the population of Blaenau Gwent. The number of Blaenau Gwent residents born in Poland rose from around 350 in 2011 (0.5% of the local population) to around 650 in 2021 (0.9%).

- In 2021, **56.4%** of Blaenau Gwent residents reported having **"no religion"**, making it the most common response in this local authority area (up from 41.1% in 2011). Across Wales, the percentage of residents who described themselves as having "no religion" **increased from 32.1% to 46.5%**.

- In 2021, Blaenau Gwent has the **highest proportion of children in low income families** in Wales with **32.2% living in relative poverty** and **21.9% in absolute poverty**.

BLAENAU GWENT IN NUMBERS



66,900
people

43
average age

30,300
households

4,239
Children living in poverty



25 schools
across

9000+
pupils

31 sites

416km
of public roads being
maintained by the council

300km
of public rights of way

1,490
Active enterprises

4,035
Welsh speaking residents

INVESTING IN BLAENAU GWENT

Blaenau Gwent Council Planning Committee have approved for the property developer, Mercia Real Estates, to change the use of the former shopping mall site at Festival Park, Ebbw Vale into a mixed use business centre. The alterations will eventually provide nine buildings which would accommodate 28 units of varying floor space from 89 to 790 square metres. The overall application is deemed to be a major development as the site area is in excess of 1 hectare.

PCI Pharma Services, a leading global contract development and manufacturing organisation, will be expanding their world-class facility in Tredegar. The expansion will address the growing and urgent need for specialty global manufacturing services within the oncology arena.

Further Electric Vehicle infrastructure has been installed across the region and has continued to be rolled out extensively in 22/23. This has included the installation of a Electric Vehicle infrastructure at further 12 sites across Blaenau Gwent.

Money from the Home Office's Safer Streets fund is being invested into youth services in Brynmawr and Tredegar to support young people who are at risk of becoming involved in crime or anti-social behaviour. A dedicated youth worker will be appointed to engage with young people and a bespoke youth shelter has been built in Welfare Park, Brynmawr. Young people from Brynmawr were consulted as part of the funding bid and said they would feel safer if they had a dedicated space to call their own. They helped to design the shelter which will act as a focal point for youth outreach.



Ambitious and innovative delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place



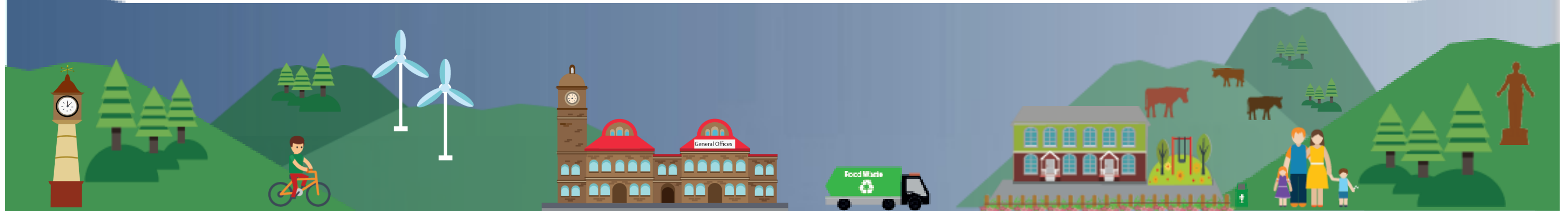
Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent



Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities



Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

51.1%

Of **people aged 16 years** and over were **employed** in 2021, this is a rise from 48.2% in 2011 and is **Wales's largest rise**

£4.75
M

Was **spent on our road network** between 2017 and 2022

£3.9
M

Increased funding was **provided directly to schools** in 2022. The Education portfolio received a 17.17% increase in funding overall.

400+

community litter picker volunteers in Blaenau Gwent who have collected **2,471 bags of general waste** and **248 bags of recycling** over the year

91%

Of the **business units** on the Council's portfolio are **occupied**

Data is showing that the Council is **reducing its carbon emissions** on an annual basis

210

Places to be provided as part of the new **Welsh Medium seedling provision** to be opened in Blaenau Gwent September 2023

The Council is working with Keep Wales Tidy to support **'Not up my street'** a new national campaign to **tackle Fly-tipping.**



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

2

Residential properties have been purchased this year to provide residential care **for children with more complex needs**, saving money and allowing them to be looked after closer to home .

Throughout 22/23 **referral rates** to both the children's and adults **IAA** Teams **increased**, despite this, the majority of referrals have been dealt with within statutory timescales

Funding has been provided to residents to improve energy efficiency and **reduce fuel poverty** of social rented homes

Safeguarding citizens is central to the work of the Council and **work has progressed** to further **strengthen** these arrangements

£127,527

Participatory budgeting provided **16 community groups with monies** to deliver local **well-being project** at its second participatory budgeting programme, Community Voice, Community Choice.

6,132

Customers have been **supported** face to face in our **Community Hubs** across the borough since April 2022

3,736

questionnaires were completed by members of the public on the budget consultation which were used to inform the Council's budget for 2023/24. This equates to over **5.5% of the area's population**

The **UK Competitive Index** has identified that **our competitiveness has moved upwards** relative to other local authority areas.



OUR COUNCIL, OUR VISION AND OUR PRIORITIES

In 2022 we published our new Corporate Plan for 2022-2027 which includes four long term priorities for Blaenau Gwent Council to deliver. These priorities, also known as well-being objectives, set out an ambitious programme of activity for the Council over the next five years and beyond, and have been developed in order to support our communities to thrive. The people of Blaenau Gwent are at the heart of all that we do and the Corporate Plan is our commitment to the communities of Blaenau Gwent to provide modern and high quality services which support economic growth and well-being and require the Council, communities and partners to work in new and innovative ways to drive change and transform the area in order to have a positive impact on the lives and well-being of current and future generations.

Our Corporate Plan priorities are

- To maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent** - The outcome from the effective delivery of this will be an increase in the resilience of the community, providing high quality educational and skills opportunities to create a thriving economy from birth onwards, minimising dependence and maximising independence
- Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities** - The outcome from the effective delivery of this will be that Blaenau Gwent Council greatly reduces its carbon emissions, provides an environment which supports growth and well-being and connects communities
- An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place** - The outcome from the effective delivery of this will be that Blaenau Gwent Council works in partnership to provide high quality services to meet local need, and improve the quality of life and well-being within the community
- Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient** - The outcome from the effective delivery of this will be an increase in the resilience of communities, where everyone is welcome and safe and which minimises dependency and maximises independence

You can view the full Corporate Plan on the link here . <https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/media/1teddyur/final-corporate-plan-2022.pdf>

Progress of the Corporate Plan

The next part of this report is to tell you how we are performing against these Well-being Objectives. Our assessment over pages 16 –59 will tell you how we have performed during the year 2022/23, detailing a snapshot of progress, what difference we have made, what has gone well, what have we learnt and where do we need to improve. Through focusing on delivering against the main priorities set out in the Corporate Plan we can begin to transform Blaenau Gwent into a more prosperous and welcoming area that plays a part on a regional and national stage. It is about achieving real outcomes for the people of Blaenau Gwent and is underpinned by solid and sustainable business plans, ensuring the Council can be held to account for what it has promised to deliver.

Corporate Plan 2022/27

Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent



Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities



An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place

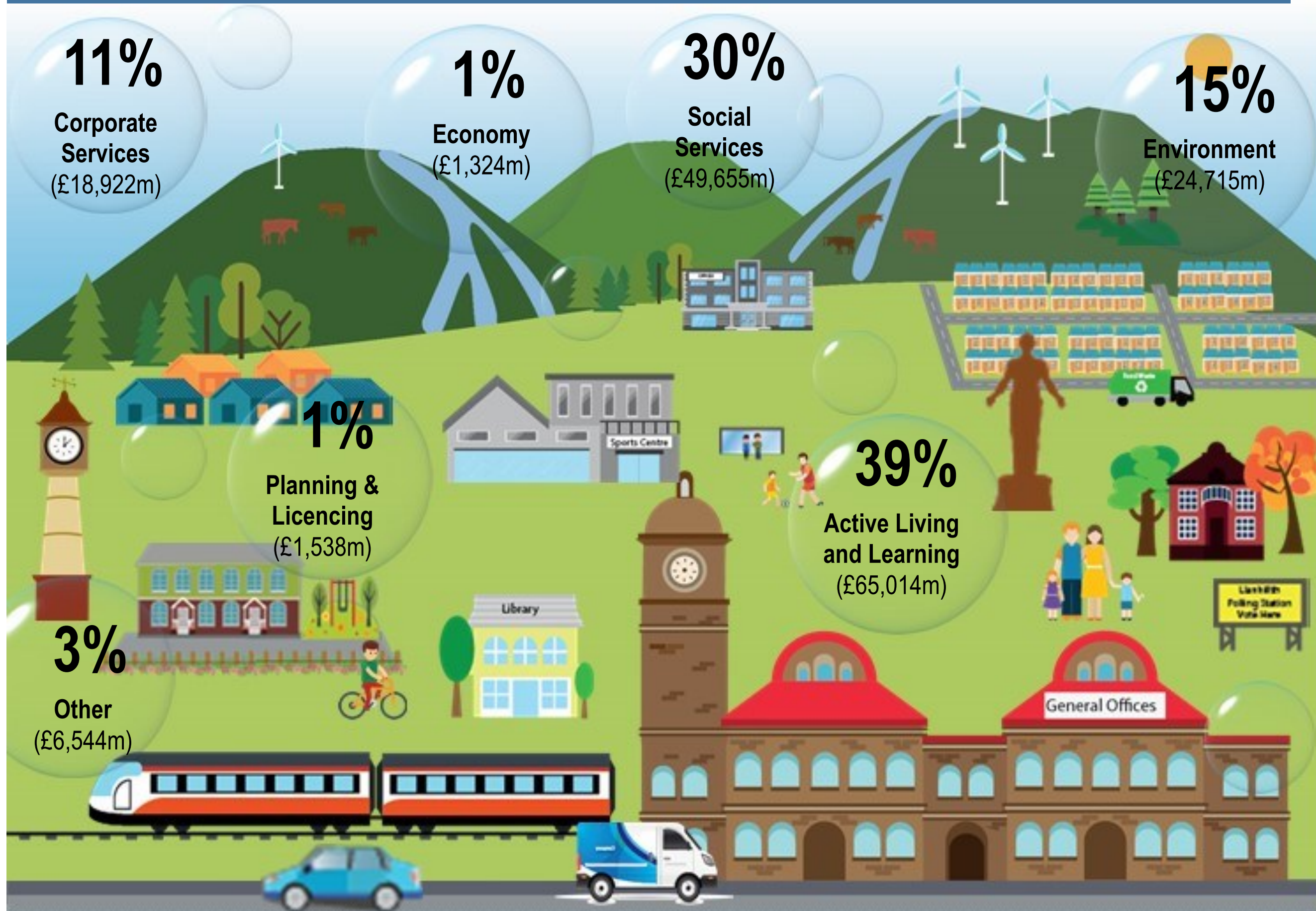


Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient



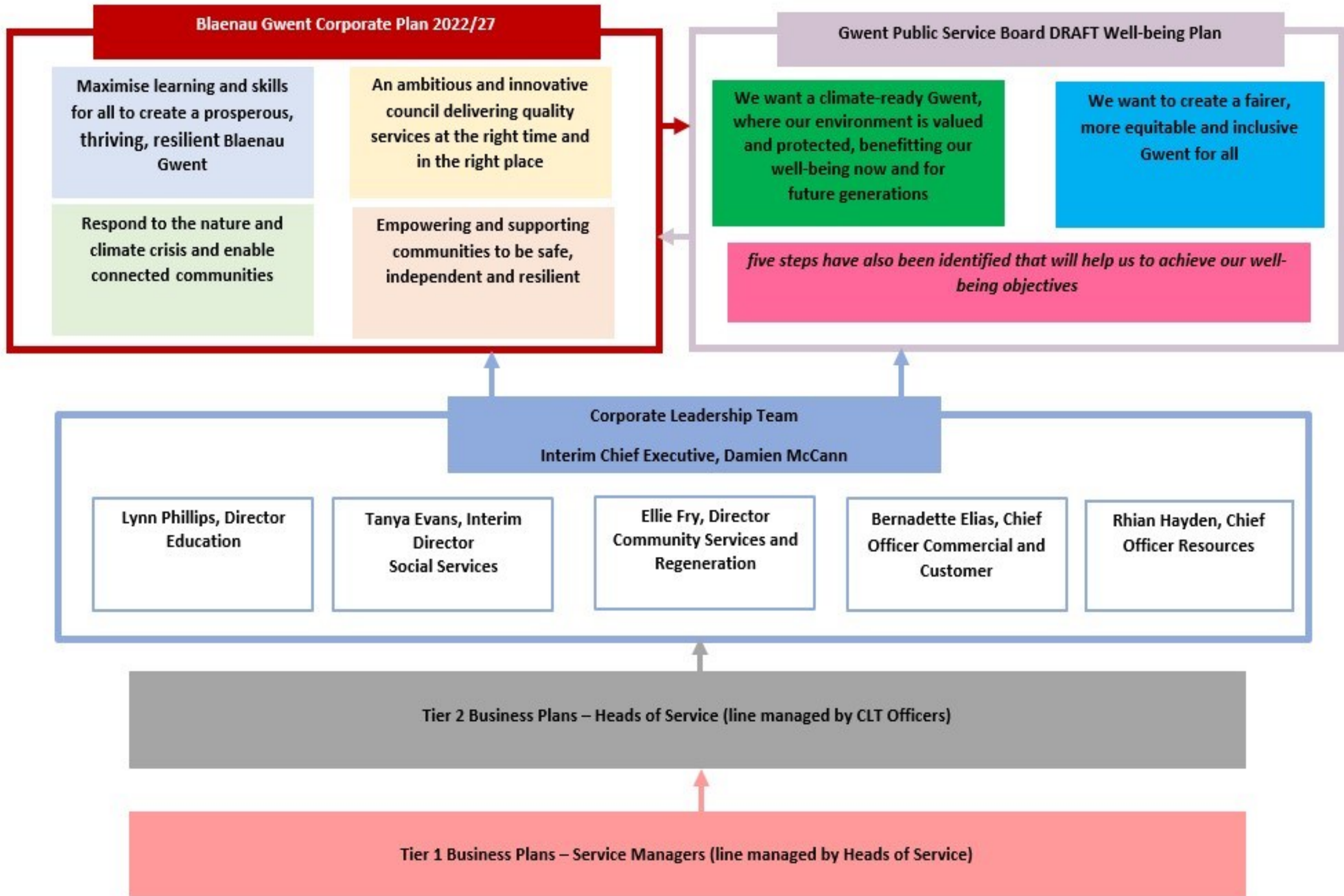
YOUR COUNCIL TAX 2022/23

- Council Tax accounts for 20.9% of funding, 79.1% comes from other financial sources.



How your council tax was used to support the services we provided

OUR STRATEGIC LINKS



MONEY AND FINANCE

The overall forecast outturn across all portfolios as at 31st December 2022, is an adverse variance of £1.568. The forecast overall financial position across all portfolios at 31st December 2022 is shown in the table below:

Portfolio/Committee	2022/2023 Revised Revenue Budget	2022/2023 Forecast Outturn @ 31 Dec 2022	Favourable/ (Adverse) Variance	Favourable/ (Adverse) Variance (after Net transfers from Specific Reserves)
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Corporate Services & Financial Management & Strategy	17.92	16.77	1.15	1.65
Social Services	49.94	51.01	(1.07)	(0.54)
Education & Leisure	68.31	69.22	(0.91)	(0.37)
Economy	1.79	1.76	0.03	0.04
Environment	29.66	30.42	(0.76)	(0.64)
Planning	1.44	1.45	(0.01)	0.01
Licensing	0.13	0.13	0	0
Total	169.19	170.76	(1.57)	0.15

During 2022/23 this Council has been faced with significant financial challenges as a result of the cost of living crisis and the impact on pay levels and soaring costs of goods and services. If the Council does not utilise alternative methods of service delivery and other approaches to mitigate the impact of financial pressures, this will result in reductions to services significantly impacting their availability and quality. This has been identified as a corporate risk and has been scored as critical.

The average local government pay increase for the year equated to 6.3% considerably above the 4% budgeted for, resulting in a cost pressure of £1.1m.

Inflation has been above 10% throughout the year driven by a variety of factors including global supply chain issues, the impact of the UK leaving the EU on recruitment & retention of staff and the Ukraine war and subsequent supply difficulties (and increased costs) of commodities (gas, wheat etc.).

Highlighted below are examples of the more significant cost pressures experienced during 2022/23.

Further details can be found by accessing the quarterly budget monitoring reports considered by Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

To view the full report along with associated appendices please click the following link:- [Agenda for Corporate & Performance Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 16th March, 2023, 10.00 am](#)

- Corporate Services - Council Tax Collection (£0.3m) -The cost of living crisis is impacting upon individuals ability to pay Council Tax and it is expected that the Council's bad debt provisions will increase during 2022/23.
- Education - Home to School Transport (£0.608m) -Soaring fuel costs during the year impacted upon suppliers with the Council at risk of Home to School contracts being surrendered. To mitigate this risk the Council agreed a temporary 20% uplift to contract values for the year.
- Social Services - Legal Fees (£0.313m) -For 2022/23 legal fees for children's services is forecasting a pressure of £0.7m, this is being partly offset by the application of a £0.4m specific reserve.
- Social Services - Children Residential Placements (£0.745m) -Whilst the number of children looked after remains stable, residential out of county placements are a high cost provision and a small number of additional placements (2) for children with complex needs together with one secure placement has increased costs significantly compared to the budget.

MONEY AND FINANCE (CONTINUED)

The adverse variance for 2022/23 is assumed to be funded by the application of specific reserves as follows:-

- £237,280 from the Supporting Additional Capacity Reserve (which includes additional resources for areas such as Health & Safety, Civil Contingencies, Payroll, Decarbonisation and Digital)
- £110,329 from the Election Reserve to cover the cost of the May 2022 Local Elections
- £47,940 from the Community Safety & CCTV Reserve (to support a new Policy Officer for CCTV until the SLA with Caerphilly CBC is established)
- £30,000 from the Discretionary Housing Payments Reserve (to support payment of DHPs to residents in excess of the 2022/23 DWP allocation)
- £72,479 in relation to the Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) Service (Environmental Health Officers) – part funded from balance on TTP Reserve £4,514 and £67,965 from Covid19 Response & Recovery Reserve
- £56,298 from the Infrastructure Staffing Reserve (to support new Welsh Government Legislation requirements)
- £48,455 from the Homelessness Transitional Funding Reserve (to fund a specialist EHO for empty properties)
- £523,418 from Social Services (relating to displaced grant expenditure, cost of living increases in excess of grant allocation in relation to Early Years Childcare and Legal Fees)
- £545,000 from the Inflation and Service Cost Pressure Reserve in respect of the 20% uplift in Home to School Transport.

The General reserve is forecast to increase by £0.148m, the net impact of use of specific reserves.

THE NATIONAL WELL-BEING GOALS

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is ground-breaking legislation which aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The vision of this legislation is expressed in the seven National well-being goals.

Each of our corporate priorities, as described on page 6, have been prioritised in order to collectively meet these seven goals.



‘Maximising learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent’ leading to a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales and a more equal Wales.

‘Responding to the nature and climate crisis and enabling connected communities’ leading to a globally responsible Wales, a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales and a healthier Wales.

‘An ambitious and innovative council and delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place’ leading to a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a more equal Wales and a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language

‘Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient’ leading to a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

The Act also puts a duty on public bodies to apply the **sustainable development principle** which states they 'must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. The sustainable development principle is made up of the five ways of working, pictured to the right:



Integration



Collaboration



Involvement



Long Term



Prevention

THE SERVICE USER VOICE

The voice of our citizens are vital to ensure that the services we deliver are based around their needs and are making a positive impact to our communities.

We currently have a range of opportunities for people to be involved in decision making and to have a say on the services that we run. Some examples are provided throughout the report and link to our corporate objectives.

A recent example has been our budget engagement consultation which focused engagement with residents on setting the council's budget and priorities for the year ahead.

A total of 3,740 budget survey questionnaires were returned to the council, with all but four being valid for analysis. This means a valid response of 3,736, which equates to over 5.5% of the area's population.

Although we currently have options for people to get involved we know that we can do better, this will be a priority for the organisation for the year ahead through the development of our Engagement and Participation Strategy. Previous and current consultations can be found here:

[Consultations | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](http://blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)

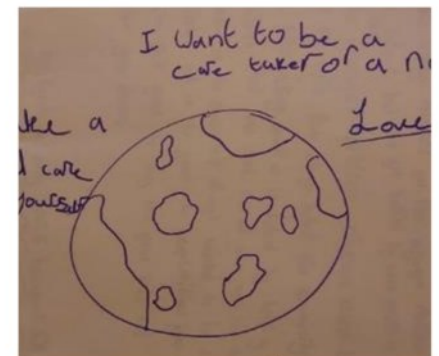
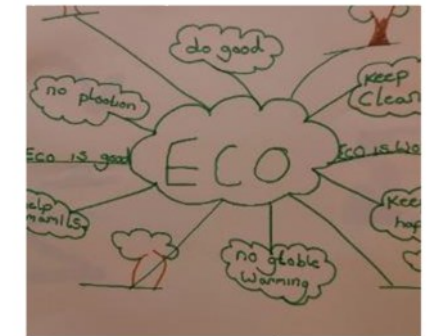
Current ways people can get involved can be found here:

[Engagement Forums | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](http://blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)

This will be covered in the priorities for the year section of the report.



What you told us...



A REFLECTION ON 2022/23



Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent

In the following section, pages 16 to 26, you will find details of work delivered over the past year to **'Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent'**. This work demonstrates the councils commitment to increasing the resilience of the community and making Blaenau Gwent a thriving economy to live, learn and work in . There are examples of where we are providing opportunities for citizens of all ages to obtain high quality education and skills, which, over time, will support the creation a thriving economy from birth onwards. Our work aims to mitigate the effects of poverty and ensure that all individuals within our community are provided with every opportunity to live and work independently.

The section includes:-

- **Our contribution to the National Well-being Goals** - A summary of how we worked towards achieving this priority and contributing to making Wales more prosperous, resilient, healthier and equal.
- **Our contribution to Sustainable Development** - Examples of how we have focussed on the long term; delivered preventative work; worked collaboratively; worked in an integrated manner ; and engaged effectively.
- **Our contribution to Improving Outcomes** - Data and evidence to support the reflection summary.
- **Case Studies** - Highlights of some pertinent areas of work undertaken.
- **Service User Voice** - Examples of engagement, enabling the voice of our citizens to inform the services we deliver based around their needs.

All of the above provides a snapshot of progress during the year.

DID YOU KNOW ...

Blaenau Gwent saw Wales's largest percentage-point rise in the **proportion of people aged 16 years and over who were employed**

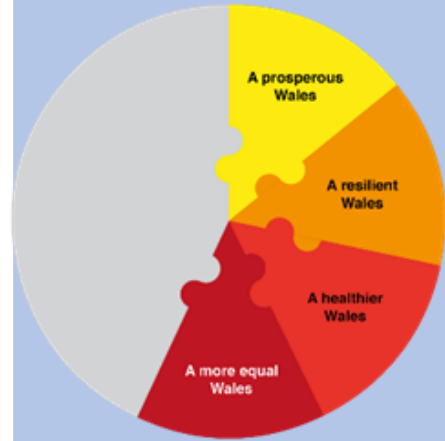
48.2% in 2011 to 51.1% in 2021.

During this period (2011 to 2021) Blaenau Gwent saw an improvement in the percentage of people aged 16 years and over who were employed (excluding full-time students)..



In 2021, Blaenau Gwent had the lowest **percentage of adults in employment working 15 hours or less** (out of all 22 Welsh local authority areas).

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATIONAL WELL-BEING GOALS



Over the past year, work has been delivered as part of the priority '**Maximising learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent**'

The authority aims to ensure that all children and young people are given the best start in life, enabling them to grow into fruitful adults living a healthy and fulfilling life whilst contributing to society and forming a valuable part of their community. Good progress has been made within our education services since it was last inspected by Estyn around ten years. Areas identified for improvement have largely been addressed and it is recognised that senior officers and elected members have a strong commitment to education, which is reflected in the funding given to schools and education services.

The local authority works to make sure that suitable education provision is provided in order to meet the needs of every child and young person. Over the past decade, the local authority has successfully reduced surplus places in schools and improved the conditions of its school buildings with continual works being completed to ensure that the suitability, condition and accessibility of the whole school estate is fit for purpose.

Welsh-medium education provision is being developed with additional accommodation in the development stages. The new school will be developed via a seedling growth model from September 2023. There have also been some positive developments in the provision for pupils with additional learning needs, with existing provision receiving extensive improvement works.

There are many strengths in the local authority's work to reduce the impact that deprivation has on educational outcomes by providing support to low-income families and households. This work includes providing free school meals, period equity, vulnerable learners support, Youth Service and youth support services, family engagement officers, school holiday provision and post 16 transport. There are also many strengths in the services to support the well-being of children and young people and to promote positive relationships. Support has been provided to schools to provide an environment where health and well-being is at the heart of the curriculum, ensuring support and appropriate interventions are accessible to all, with a specific emphasis on vulnerable and disadvantaged learner categories. A whole school approach self evaluation tool pilot has been introduced which encourages schools to assess the key barriers to learning and to provide specific support relating to the emotional and mental well-being of the child. It encourages schools to question how inequality can impact on the learning and life outcomes of a child and fosters an inclusive and caring environment.

Close monitoring of school/learner progress and educational outcomes has continued and the number of schools that we have that are causing concern has reduced. The Key Stage 4 (KS4) results demonstrated progress and the free school meals (eFSM) learner outcomes and the achievement gap was reduced, despite eFSM levels increasing. The Youth Engagement and Progression Framework has been implemented ensuring that young people who are at risk of becoming an individual that is not in education, employment or training (NEET) are known and supported and the number of NEET remain low.

The Tech Inward investment continues to be championed through the Tech Valleys Initiative. This supports our vision for the South Wales Valleys to be a globally recognised centre for developing new technologies to support cutting-edge industry by 2027. Hybrid units have been completed this year and are now fully occupied with tech firms and an immersive classroom has been developed for both education and skills development on the Works site, Ebbw Vale.

To assist with enhancing and stimulating economic development within Blaenau Gwent, we have progressed with improving the corporate commercial property portfolio as part of a Joint Venture with Welsh Government, under the Tech Valleys initiative. A facility called Regain II will enable us to house two Small Medium Enterprises on the Works site, one of the key inputs for the UK Competitive Index, and provide some managed workspace in the Thales Campus situated on Lime Avenue.






The council has worked with the Cardiff City Region (CCR) to achieve two large investment deals for companies in Blaenau Gwent and, in turn, improve our competitiveness. The UK Competitive Index continues to rank Blaenau Gwent as last, however, our competitiveness has moved upwards relative to other local authority areas. The Council was successful with a bid to the Shared Prosperity Fund HiVE bid - the facility will cost in the region of £12M and will support the objectives of the Tech Valleys programme and the aims of the Welsh Government Manufacturing Action Plan (2021) which highlights steps needed to develop a resilient, high value manufacturing sector with a highly skilled and flexible workforce able to deliver the products, services and technologies necessary for our future economy. The facility is supported by the findings that manufacturing is the largest skills gap by sector in Wales (21%) and the need to improve higher vocational and technical education. There is currently no advanced engineering facility of this kind across the Heads of the Valley region. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 specifies two highly relevant challenges for places like ours, namely, equipping everyone with the right skills for a changing world and the need to build capacity for lifelong learning.

The Aspire, Shared Apprenticeship Programme continues to effectively deliver apprentices for businesses in Blaenau Gwent and for the Council. We also effectively delivered the Kick Start plus scheme for the first part of the year supporting new businesses (from 6 months to 3 years) to develop and expand using placements who they can train and then take on as new staff. This scheme has now been replaced with the Quickstart Programme offering 6 month supported paid work placements to anyone aged 16+ who are unemployed or economically inactive, to gain valuable experience and enhance employability skills to increase their chances of finding full time work once the placement has ended.

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Some examples of the work aligned to the Sustainable Development Principles over the past year, whilst meeting our aim of

'Maximising learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau has included the following:-

-  Working in partnership /collaboration with Gwent Public Service Board, South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB), Town Centre Forums, Business Hub, Enterprise Board, Greater Gwent Health, Social Care and Well-being Partnership, Gwent Frailty, WAST, Cost of Living Sub Group , Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, Education Achievement Service, Regional Partnership Board, Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, Local Nature Partnership Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen, Tech Valleys , Valley Task Force, Gwent Wide Adult Safeguarding Board (GWASB).
- The Employment and Skills Strategy has been produced and agreed; The plan will provide opportunities to raise aspirations and support economic growth through partnership working. It outlines a range of priorities to ensure individuals and businesses have access to the right support in terms of skills and employment.
- The authority has worked with its regional school improvement service to strengthen the challenge and support it provides to schools. This work has greater impact for children in non-maintained and primary age settings than for young people in secondary age settings.
-  Although it is recognised that evidence to show long term improvement will take time, we know that the work undertaken now to ensure that all children and young people are given the best start in life, will enable them to grow into fruitful adults living a healthy, fulfilling life whilst contributing to society and forming a valuable part of their community. Work demonstrates that we are delivering higher levels of language acquisition and reading across the board, and overall enabling positive outcomes and attainment.
- We have continued to support children and young people to be in a good position to find skills and employment at the appropriate times and our NEET figures demonstrate our achievements in this area.
- In order to enhance and stimulate economic development within the Borough it has been identified that it is a priority to improve the corporate commercial property portfolio.
- An Education Centre has been constructed to enable opportunities for school children and community groups to learn about the benefits of recycling, what happens to materials, the benefits of a circular economy and encourage people to take responsibility for their waste.
-  We work with a focus on integration between education and regeneration and we are progressing well with achieving a reduction in the percentage of adults aged 16-24 with no qualifications.
- Our integrated work between education, regeneration and SRS is ensuring that effective digital communication methods and systems are in place for our community to grow. / Digital development will provide children and young people with opportunities to learn in these fast advancing digital times that we live in. As shown in the body of the report, internal systems are being updated to move towards more online communication and ICT methods for both new school and existing school settings delivered through our Sustainable Communities for learning / Progress in skills.
-  Work to provide good quality education services and local employment opportunities such as Vulnerable Learners support, Youth Service and Youth Support Services prevent the impacts of poverty and material deprivation from getting worse
- The Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme has continued to enhance skills development within the manufacturing and engineering companies to develop business growth; whilst tackling unemployment and providing aspirational opportunities for young people across the local authority.
- Blaenau Gwent were runners up in the National Training Federation awards - Tomorrows Talent 2022
-  The Council has engaged with schools over the last year to develop a two-page template to be used as their School Equality Plan. This approach clearly aligns to the organisation's Strategic Objectives for 2020 to 2024, as well as allowing them to deliver on outcomes specific to their school. It also will allow case studies and good practice to be identified as we go forward.



Integration



Collaboration



Involvement



Long Term



Prevention

IMPROVING OUTCOMES

The Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone's performance in 2022 continues to be **good** and provides clear **value added** to a range of learners across some areas of very high deprivation. The transformation of post 16 provision across the County Borough has delivered;

- more post 16 learners;
- a greater range of courses, particularly for vocational provision;
- improved attainment levels, in most measures.

The Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone's performance

saw a **97.8%**

overall pass

rate for A*-E, which

is in line with the Welsh average.



All A-Level learners studying at the Learning Zone achieved their first choice university

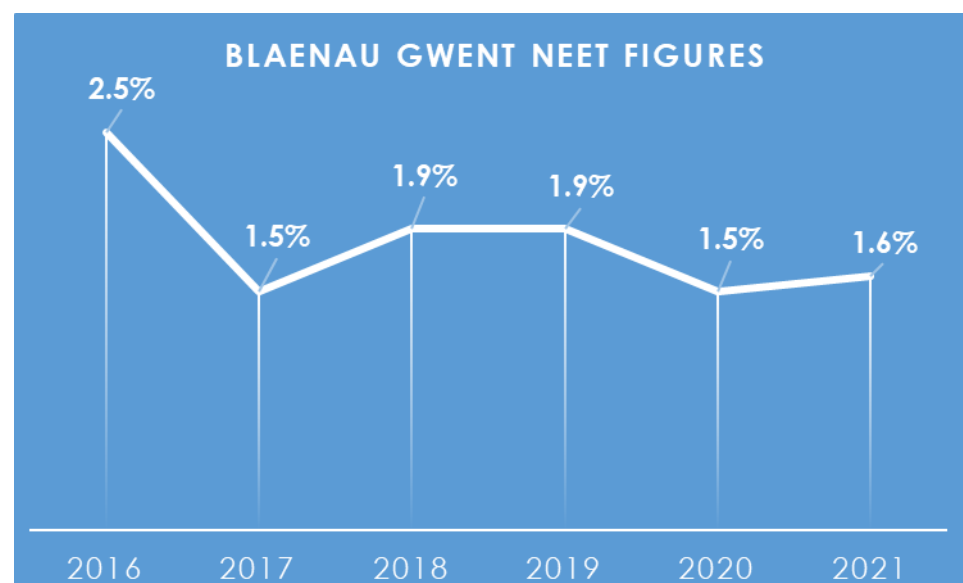


Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent



Key Activities

The number of young people **NEET** (not in education, employment or training) on leaving year 11 was **1.6% (9 young people)** for 2021. This is a 0.9% decrease since 2016. During this time, Blaenau Gwent's ranking in Wales has improved from having the 4th highest levels of NEETS in 2016, 10th highest in 2021.



The proportion of pupils eligible for **Free School Meals** have increased to circa **33%**, the highest of all **Local Authorities** in Wales by a significant margin



Aspire, Shared Apprenticeship Programme continues to deliver apprentices for businesses in Blaenau Gwent and for the Council. In total we have around **40 apprentices**

Key Stage 4 (KS4) results for 2022 **demonstrated progress** and were in line with the school development plan targets set by the four secondary settings. There were improvements in 29 out of 32 key measures

Kick Start Plus

supported new businesses from 6 months up to 3 years, to help them develop and expand. The implementation of the programme was very successful with the **delivery of over 100 placements**

A new scheme **Quickstart** is due to be launched which offers 6 month paid work placements for unemployed residents within Blaenau Gwent.

32 businesses have expressed an interest in taking part in the scheme offering at least 1 placement each



Two of our Primary Schools have taken part in training on anti-discrimination offered by our regional West Gwent Community Cohesion Team.

This saw **over 60 pupils** (Year Five and Year Six) exploring themes of: Similarities and Differences; Identity; Exploring diversity; Communities Culture and Cohesion; Belonging and Inclusion; and Prejudice.



Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent



Two large Cardiff Capital Region investment deals have been delivered this year for companies in Blaenau Gwent.

A **UK Competitive Index** (UKCI) deep dive has identified that Blaenau Gwent has increased its competitiveness and moved upwards relatively to other local authority areas.

Competitive Index Ranking CCR March 2022

	2013	2016/17	2018/19	2021/22
1. Cardiff	134	↑ 128	↓ 134	↑ 133
2. Monmouthshire	167	↑ 162	↑ 158	↑ 147
3. Newport	232	↑ 228	↑ 191	↓ 198
4. Vale of Glamorgan	225	↓ 253	↓ 257	↓ 272
5. Bridgend	294	↑ 283	↑ 270	↓ 289
6. RCT	367	↑ 355	↑ 282	↓ 323
7. Torfaen	366	↑ 352	↑ 341	↓ 342
8. Caerphilly	374	→ 374	↑ 309	↓ 331
9. Merthyr	378	↑ 376	↑ 359	↑ 358
10. Blaenau Gwent	379	↓ 379	↓ 362	↑ 362*

*Figures are all relative, ranked across all other local authorities.
BG productivity gap between next to last was worsening and has now improved.

Despite our position not changing in the overall table, this is the **first time we have made a positive move in the last six years.**

The **Tech Valleys programme** has a vision "In 2027 the South Wales valleys and Blaenau Gwent in particular, will be a globally recognised centre for the development of new technologies, to support cutting edge industry" In support of this vision :-

The Council and Coleg Gwent have proposed to develop an **Advanced Engineering Centre** which will create an environment that will attract hi-tech inward investors within the Advanced Manufacturing sector. This includes a full refurbishment of the Former Monwell Building located on Letchworth Road, Ebbw Vale to create a state-of-the-art, carbon-neutral and entirely digital education facility, training the future workforce in advanced engineering disciplines such as robotics, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, autonomous manufacturing, simulation, and augmented reality.



The proposed date to be operational and welcoming first students is anticipated to be September 2024. Business case for the refurbishment cost was successful, plans are now progressing to start the construction phase.

Regain 2 -The team are working with Tech Valleys to develop an Enterprise Hub for Blaenau Gwent. The facility will support individuals and new businesses by creating a managed workspace with hot and warm desk spaces and will also include separate offices for hire on the first floor. **Construction is progressing well with completion programmed for Autumn 2023.**

REGAIN2 anticipated contract sum being £5,484,996.99





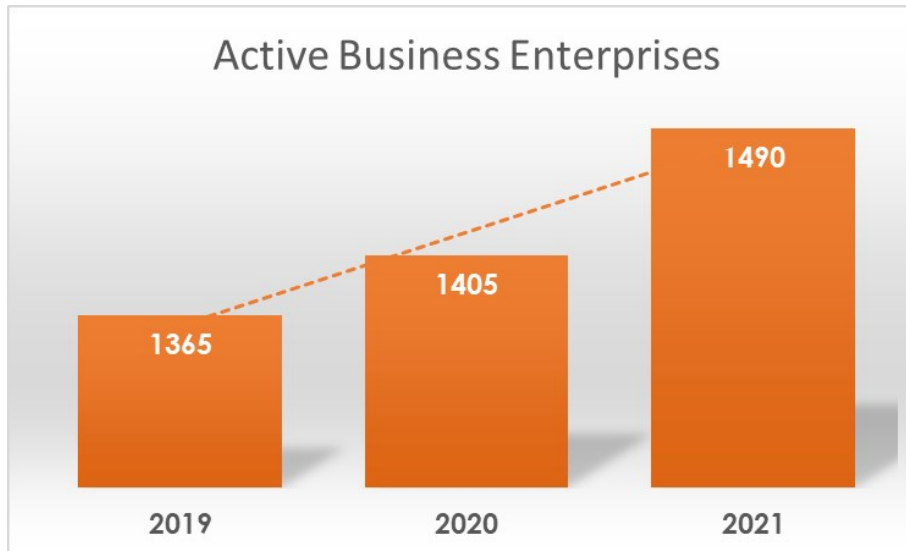
Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent



Cymunedau Dysgu Cynaliadwy
Sustainable Communities for Learning

The delivery of the Sustainable Communities for Learning **Band B programme** is well underway with an **investment of circa £26m** into the school estate.

The suitability and condition of the school estate is improving with circa 61% categorised as A/B



There were **1.2% more businesses start-ups** in Blaenau Gwent during December 2022 compared to the corresponding period of 2021. This growth rate ranks **Blaenau Gwent** at **5 out of the 22 Welsh districts.**

We have seen a **reduction** in **Schools Causing Concern** from **6 schools in 2019** to only **2 schools in 2022.**

Current remodelling of the **River Centre Secondary Campus** is subject to investment **circa £450,000.**

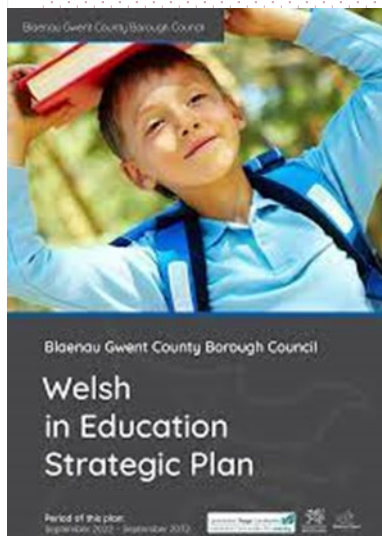
Our Hybrid Units:

- 9 out of the 9 units are now occupied – Thales UK, Apex Additive Technologies Ltd and new business PNR Pharma Limited.



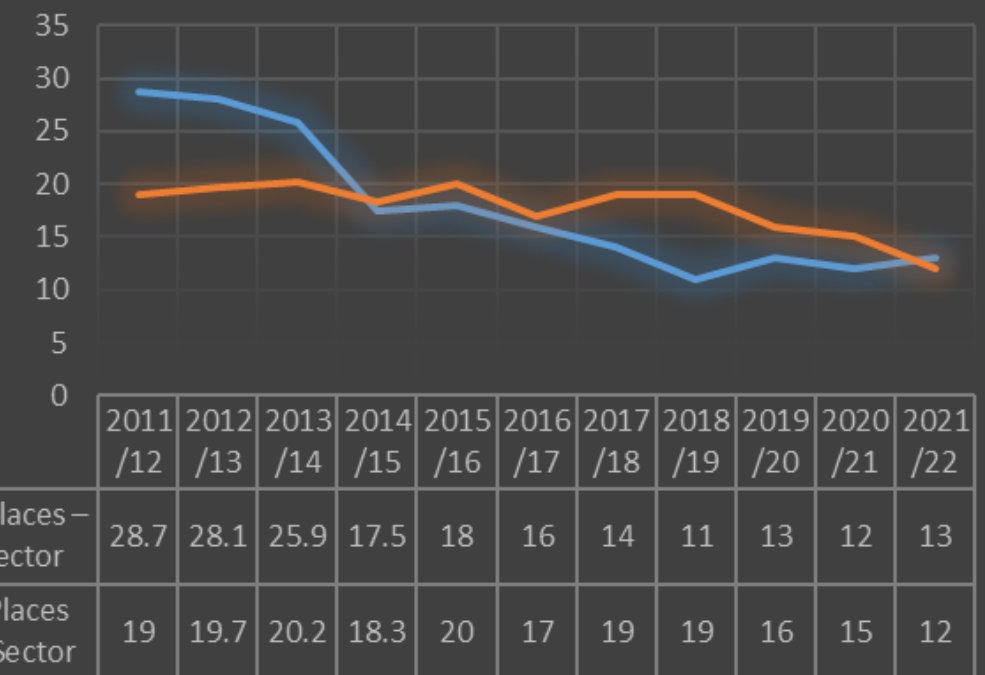
WESP—The plan sets out how the local authority will carry out its education functions to improve and increase the use of Welsh in Education over the next ten years.

The plan will contribute to Cymraeg 2050 initiative, where the Welsh Government wants to have 1 million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050



School Surplus Places (%)

Surplus places have reduced to the targets set in the School Organisation Policy at 15%.



The Local Authority does have some elements of sufficiency of school places emerging that will need to be monitored closely, especially in the secondary/special school sectors.



Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent



Percentage of people aged 16-64 that are in employment-

(As of Oct 21 – Sep 22)

Blaenau Gwent stood at 74.6% compared to 73.4% in Wales

CiNER continues to progress following the approval of planning. The glass manufacturing facility is a major investment which will bring much needed jobs to Blaenau Gwent and the region, both during the construction phase and when fully up and running.



The Planning Department continue to work with the Ciner Consultancy Team to deliver this landmark investment project on Rassau Industrial Estate

Early intervention for homelessness has meant that

64%

of potentially homeless households were

prevented

from becoming **homeless**

during the period

April 2022 to December 2022.



Percentage of adults 16-64 with no qualifications (2021) in Blaenau Gwent - **16.3%** . With the Wales average being **8.1%**

Average gross annual pay for people who live in Blaenau Gwent and work full time (January 2022) - **£28,040** which is lower than the Wales average of £29,265.

The **Arts Award project** for children aged 11-21 years provides opportunities to gain new skills as well as an academic qualification. The project benefits all children who attend school or are home educated.



Working age population (16-64) in Blaenau Gwent with NQF level 4 and above - **26.7%**, compared to **41.4%** across Wales (January 2021 to December 2021)



Percentage of working age people who are economically active (Oct 2021 to Sept 2022) - **76.3**

Male – 80.1
Female – 72.8

91%

of the **business units**

on the Council's portfolio are **occupied**

In 2019 the **business survival rate**

in Blaenau Gwent was

92.1%

with the Wales figure being 90.7%



As part of 'Maximising learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent' work on developing a Welsh Medium Seedling Provision has commenced.



The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022-2032 is a 10-year plan, Blaenau Gwent has an ambitious target of increasing the Year 1 cohort (750 pupils) taught via the medium of Welsh to 75 pupils -10% by 2032 (baseline as per plasc 2021 data 29 pupils - 4%). As part of this plan Blaenau Gwent will open a **210 place Welsh Medium Seedling Primary School** on the Chartist Way Site, in the Tredegar/Sirhowy Valley.

The school will be developed via a seedling growth model from **September 2023**. The Council are currently in the process of letting the contract for the new build and it is anticipated that the new school building will be completed for occupation by September 2024. The school will open initially in its temporary location of Bedwellty House, Tredegar for nursery and reception pupils, with a new year group being added each year. Initial governance arrangements will be under Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg with a view to reviewing this after an initial 2/3 year period. Education Transformation are currently working with the Welsh in Education Forum (WEF) and Rhag in order to promote the new provision.



In order to support the seedling provision and develop increased capacity across childcare and early years' settings, a further 2 Welsh medium childcare settings are being established – at the Glyncoed Primary new build site, and in the new Tredegar seedling school provision. Currently there are 2 well established childcare provisions located in Brynithel and at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg.



Case Study - As part of 'Maximising learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent' we have enhanced skills via the Aspire Scheme



Aspire

Shared Apprenticeship Programme

NATIONAL
APPRENTICESHIP
WEEK 2023

Ffion Kelland
Electrical Engineer

Employer
PCI Pharma
Tredegar




Case Study

BACKGROUND

What did you do before the apprenticeship?

I was in college studying L3 Enhanced Electronic / Electrical Engineering, also working part time in Morrisons.

Why did you choose to do an apprenticeship?

To gain hands on experience with an employer. To earn money whilst gaining a good standard of education.

Why did you chose this area of work?

My family has a history of Engineering. I like to get hands on and doing practical work and felt that engineering would be a good opportunity.

I didn't get any Career's advice, but my brother had followed the Engineering route and I got good advice off him.

I also attended an Open Day at Coleg Cymoedd, where I could speak to the tutors and have a look around the facility.

WHAT PARTS OF THE JOB DO YOU ENJOY?

What does your role involve?

Day-to-day maintenance of the facility, working alongside contractors. Any installations or modifications required. We are a vital cog in the machine to keep everything working.

What is your favourite aspect of the role?

I enjoy the social aspect of going to work. I like being hands-on and learning practical skills. I feel supported by the team around me and everyone is always willing to help me.

Challenges you have faced.

Being the only female in the department was difficult initially, but everyone has helped me to settle in and feel part of the team.

What would you say to a friend who wanted to do an apprenticeship?

Just go for it, attend open days, work hard in school to get the qualifications.

Speak to companies like Aspire who will support you through the interview process and will assign you a mentor, who helps and guides you throughout your entire apprenticeship.

Without Aspire I would never have been aware of the fantastic opportunity at PCI in Tredegar who have given me so much help and support over the past 3 years.

Plans for the future, after you have completed an apprenticeship?

To be employed by PCI, and potentially do some more qualifications in the future.

I would also like to promote more females into the world of engineering as there are so many avenues to go down to gain a rewarding career with the Engineering Industry.

Apprenticeships
Working for you...





Case Study - As part of 'Maximising learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent' we have enhanced digital learning opportunities



5G Wales Unlocked is the innovation project behind the new immersive 360-degree immersive environment in Ebbw Vale – just one of several trials demonstrating how ultrafast technology like 5G could transform rural communities, from powering tech innovations in agriculture, to improving rural transport and education and bolstering the tourism industry. Using a localised 5G network by project partners BT, the classroom uses the high-speed connectivity to project inspiring and educational video content onto all four walls in a 360-degree format, providing an immersive experience. School lessons can be delivered across a variety of curriculum-related themes —taking children and young people on a journey of the senses as they 'dive' into the detail of a plant cell or explore the surface of a planet.

What's more, the experience isn't limited only to the pupils using the Immersive Environment. Thanks to the ultrafast 5G connection, live link-ups have also been established — allowing learners to discover the fascinating history of heritage sites such as Raglan Castle, with a live virtual tour from a Cadw custodian located at the site. The live link-ups, using Cisco technology, can also be used to connect classrooms across the country — meaning pupils can work collaboratively with other learners, and educators can enhance their own lessons in partnership with other schools.

A draft **ICT strategy** will be issued to schools for consultation during the Spring term 2023, the Vision for ICT within Education is as follows:

These areas have been focused on heavily over the past 2 years, we will continue to progress these in line with the Digital competency framework.

- Infrastructure and Connectivity
- Digital Inclusion
- Device Sustainability
- Migration to and use of Hwb
- Digital tools and resources
- Training and Development
- Online Safety
- Support for Schools
- Education Management and support systems
- Blaenau Gwent corporate approach and overview

'To secure continued development ensuring that all learners regardless of age or demographic have continued safe access to a blend of digital resources, hardware and cloud-based learning throughout the course of their education.'



HOW THE SERVICE USER VOICE HAS INFORMED SERVICE DELIVERY

*Youth Forum
represented Blaenau
Gwent at a national
annual conference*

The Blaenau Gwent youth forum provides opportunities for young people living in Blaenau Gwent to have a voice on issues that impact them, and to become actively involved in local decision making. The forum also helps to develop the skills and experience of young people in the community in a variety of ways helping to build their confidence, and develop their communication and social skills.

Members of the youth forum are involved in a range of activities including being involved in several pieces of work which has represented Blaenau Gwent at a national level.

In 2022, the Blaenau Gwent youth parliament representative attended a 3-day annual conference which was held in the University of Hull and included over 200 young people from across the country.



The event provided an opportunity for young people to develop their debating skills by researching specific topics and using persuasive arguments to share their views.

In November the youth parliament representative, Rhianna attended the House of Commons in order to debate on a number of topics. The House of Commons visit involved young people from across the UK and Overseas Territories coming together.

Rhianna was able to respond and provide her views on the Cost of Living Crisis and the impact that it will have on health which was greatly received.

Rhianna Lewis our UK youth parliament member [Rhianna Lewis - UK Youth Parliament member for Blaenau Gwent | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](#)
Link to House of Commons Case Study [Rhianna Lewis November 2022 | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](#)

**Over
200 young
people
attended
from across
the country.**



In the following section, pages 27 To 36, you will find details of work delivered over the past year to ‘**Empower and support communities to be safe, independent and resilient**’. This work demonstrates the councils commitment to creating an area where everyone is independent, welcome and safe. There are examples of how we ensure community safety, promote awareness and understanding whilst encouraging and celebrating diversity which in turn strengthens community spirit and resilience

The section includes:-

- **Our contribution to the National Well-being Goals** - A summary of how we worked towards achieving this priority and contributing to making wales prosperous, resilient, more cohesive and equal.
- **Our contribution to Sustainable Development** - Examples of how we have focussed on the long term; delivered preventative work; worked collaboratively; worked in an integrated manner ; and engaged effectively.
- **Our contribution to Improving Outcomes** - Data and evidence to support the reflection summary.
- **Case Studies** - Highlights of some pertinent areas of work undertaken.
- **Service User Voice** - Examples of engagement, enabling the voice of our citizens to inform the services we deliver based around their needs. Altogether providing a snapshot of progress during the year.

All of the above provides a snapshot of progress during the year.

DID YOU KNOW ...

In 2021, **41.5%** of Blaenau Gwent residents **described their health as "very good"**, increasing from 40.7% in 2011.

Those **describing their health as "good" rose from 30.7% to 32.7%.**

The proportion of Blaenau Gwent residents **describing their health as "very bad" decreased from 2.7% to 2.3%,**

while those **describing their health as "bad" fell from 8.5% to 7.0%.**

Blaenau Gwent saw Wales's joint second largest percentage-point rise (alongside Rhondda Cynon Taf and Caerphilly) in the

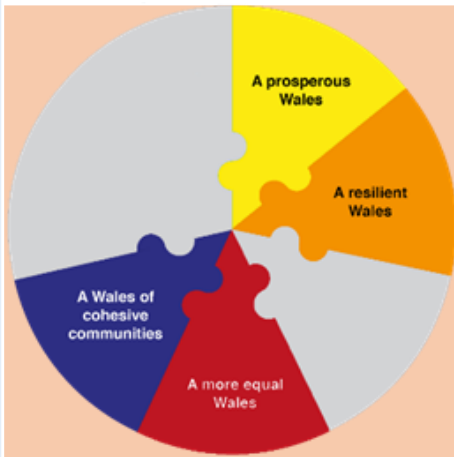
proportion of non-disabled residents from 71.6% in 2011 to 75.4% in 2021



In 2021, just **over 1 in 40 people (2.8%)** reported **providing between 20 and 49 hours of unpaid care each week**, compared with 2.5% in 2011.

The proportion of Blaenau Gwent residents (aged five years and over) that **provided at least 50 hours of weekly unpaid care decreased from 4.4% to 4.3%.**

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATIONAL WELL-BEING GOALS



Over the past year work has been delivered as part of the priority '**Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient**'

Safeguarding our citizens is central to the work of the Council and good progress has been made to strengthen the corporate safeguarding arrangements in place. This includes the development of a corporate safeguarding training framework being implemented across the council and compliance of each directorate is being monitored. The Blaenau Gwent website has been updated making it easy for the public to access safeguarding information and our corporate safeguarding report has been enhanced to provide a full council performance picture, as it is recognised that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Audit Wales reviewed the safeguarding arrangements which found that the Council needs to take action to fully comply with previous recommendations and also to strengthen its monitoring arrangements of third parties, which will be tested by Internal Audit to evidence and strengthen monitoring and safeguarding arrangements.

The way in which the council works together has contributed well to improving multi-agency working and the support schools receive to manage the needs of pupils and their families more effectively. In school counselling services and youth support services are in place and working well. Our dedicated staff and the implementation of integrated systems and processes assist in preparing our children and young people for the world as safe, independent and resilient members of society.

The Social Services Directorate continues to have dedicated Information Advice and Assistance Teams for both Children and Adult Social Services. These teams are the first point of contact for the public who wish to access advice and support and for professionals making referrals. The teams take a preventative approach to ensure needs are met at the earliest opportunity, by providing the right services to prevent needs from escalating.

The council ensures that it provides a varied range and level of preventative services. To ensure that the correct services are in place, a population needs assessment was completed for 22/23. Extensive consultation took place when undertaking this assessment, and, based on the data, priorities were set for each part of the population including children and young people, older people, including those with Dementia, people with physical disabilities and sensory impairment, people with learning difficulties, people with Autism, people with mental health issues and carers in need of support. A regional action plan has now been developed to meet the needs identified for each population group. These actions will be driven forward by the various strategic partnership boards that sit under the Regional Partnership Board and the Integrated Services Board.

The council has contributed to a regional Winter Plan with the aim of preventing people entering hospital, and when in hospital facilitating discharge as soon as possible. Work has also taken place with providers of residential care to enable early discharge from hospital for those with short term nursing needs.

This year, 2 residential properties have been purchased to provide residential care for children with more complex needs so they can be looked after closer to home as opposed to outside of Blaenau Gwent and even Wales.

A self assessment has been completed on the children public law outline process as requested by the Care Inspectorate Wales. Six deep dive inspections occurred across Wales, we now await the outcome of the report and any learning to take forward from this.





The Council plays a crucial role with its partners in supporting the Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership, which aims to build a local food system that is healthy, affordable, resilient and fair. It has supported communities in the borough with community growing projects, food organisations and a shop local network. In supporting people through the cost of living crisis there is currently a focus on providing opportunities for people who are struggling to get access to food through a number of food bank or food support providers. In 2022/23 the Council provided support through overseeing the Food Distribution Support Grant with over £80,000 being available to groups.

The authority established a cost of living cross party group in September 2022 which is supported by an operation group responsible for implementation of an action plan. The action plan focuses on support for residents, local businesses and promotes partnership working. The work on the cost of living crisis is inextricably linked with the poverty agenda. As an anti-poverty council, we will do everything within our power to support people trapped in poverty and those who are most vulnerable. By valuing and promoting good health, education and learning we can help people to reach their full potential. This in turn will contribute to creating better informed and connected communities throughout Blaenau Gwent that are fair, open and welcoming to all; where everyone gets to play an active part.

In November 2022 staff across the council were encouraged to participate in White Ribbon Day. This day looks to engage people to prevent violence against women and girls by addressing its root causes. Those participating considered how to create a world of equality and safety for women.

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Some examples of the work aligned to the Sustainable Development Principles over the past year, whilst meeting our aim of **'Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient'** has included the following:-

-  Working in partnership /collaboration with Gwent PSB, West Gwent Community Cohesion Programme, Local Community Safety Partnership, Safer Gwent , Gwent Community Cohesion Team, Other Local Authorities, Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan priorities, Wales Strategic Migration Partnership, UK Resettlement Scheme Programme, Aneurin Bevan Health Board.
- The Regional Partnership Board (RPB) is in place to manage and develop services to secure strategic planning and partnership working between local authorities and Local Health Boards and to ensure effective services, care and support are in place to best meet the needs of their respective population.
- Whilst working collaboratively with the Aneurin Leisure and Awen Trust in a Council client function role, work has continued to ensure that all children and young peoples' well-being needs are catered for.
- Individual, collaborative and integrated work contributes to our aim of keeping our communities safe.
-  The Council has continued to deliver its community safety initiative to support crime reduction whilst also implementing preventative measures to ensure long-term reductions in crime and disorder.
 - Well-being of children and young people is a priority for us and part of this includes raising the profile of play by improving the quality and equity of play provision throughout the Borough. We have refurbished and maintained existing play provision to acceptable levels and developed new initiatives based on identified need.
 - Long term succession planning in respect of sustainability of our services and staff is ongoing and in respect of our social care staff and an Induction Programme was developed and advertised for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW). The first sessions started in June 2022 and continued on a weekly basis. Feedback from the sessions revealed that the cohort of newly qualified social workers found the sessions extremely beneficial and that they felt much more prepared to carry out their roles confidently.
-  Prevention initiatives have been provided in order to protect, support and empower those who are vulnerable, such as support provided as part of the Ukrainian Initiative.
 - Referrals into the Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) service have continued to rise this year and we continue to approach referrals in an outcomes manner by establishing what matters to the customer.
 - LGBTQ+ support groups for children and young people are still in operation across Blaenau Gwent. The support groups provide appropriate information and the opportunity to speak about feelings, empowering young people to ensure their voice is heard within a safe space.
 - Trading Standards activity contributes to crime reduction and the protection of vulnerable people from scams and rogue traders.
-  We have taken an integrated approach to challenge racism and hate crime, and also promote inclusion and celebrate the region's diversity.
 - We deliver council wide integrated services in respect of safeguarding.
 - We work with our communities and partners to deliver integrated responsive care and support.
-  We have successfully raised awareness and understanding of numerous International and National Equality and Cohesion Campaigns via social media, as well as delivering on specific initiatives with staff, communities and stakeholders, for example, the Youth Forum, Citizen Panel etc.
 - As a council all work has an emphasis on the service user and ensuring that the service users voice is heard is paramount in order for them to shape the services they receive.
 - For our young people supported by our social services directorate, consultation with our children and families occurs on a case by case basis and is captured in the care planning documents of each child.
 - We regularly communicate with Schools on Equality and Diversity – Regular educational bulletins are prepared to provide schools with key equality and diversity information, resources, policy information, training and support relevant to educational settings.



Integration



Collaboration



Involvement



Long Term



Prevention

IMPROVING OUTCOMES



Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient



Safeguarding is recognised corporately as being everybody's responsibility. The Safeguarding Policy has recently been updated.



Trading Standards activity contributes to crime reduction and protection of vulnerable people from scams and rogue traders. Intervention visits were made to **100%** of identified vulnerable potential scam victims during the period.

Blaenau Gwent has been recognised by Social Care Wales for the outcomes approach taken. Staff have been asked to speak at a number of national events to share our approach to this area of practice. The department has received a number of compliments from people receiving this approach to practice and told of how this has improved their outcomes.



Key Activities

This year so far we have seen a slight **increase in the numbers of Children Looked After**, moving from **198** at the end of **2021/22** to **204** children at the end of **quarter 3 22/2023**

In 2021, **4.2% of Blaenau Gwent residents** (aged five years and over) reported providing up to **19 hours of unpaid care** each week. This figure **decreased from 6.6% in 2011**.

The **Transitional Capital Funding Programme** – supported Tai Calon and Linc Cymru with funding bids to **refurbish 4 empty homes for Ukrainian Families**.

The Blaenau Gwent Well-being Partnership has poverty as one of its priorities so work undertaken by the cost of living (col) group will be reported into this partnership. Some of the successes of the col group are:-

- Supporting **27 warm hubs** across Blaenau Gwent with grant funding
- Supporting **19 foodbanks** across Blaenau Gwent with council funding
- Funding extra citizens advice support until November 2024
- Supporting **458 referrals** to the **Fuel bank partnership**

35.52% of children were in poverty in 2020/21.

*Source: End Child Poverty Coalition

Welcome to your Wellbeing Map for Blaenau Gwent

Supporting our communities well-being is a key priority. The Blaenau Gwent Integrated Well-being Network Team recently launched a new online map that connects people of Blaenau Gwent to everything that can help their mental and physical well-being in their local area.

The Authority are currently offering **Universal Primary Free School Meals** to 6 full time Nurseries, Reception pupils and to pupils in years 1&2. There has been a continuing increase of the take up of meals for the 19 active school days in September the catering department served:

- 78 Nursery Pupils
- 367 Reception Pupils
- 484 Pupils in year 1
- 424 pupils in year 2

Total meals served 1,353

Throughout 22/23 referral rates to both children's and adults IAA Teams increased, despite this **all referrals have been dealt with within statutory timescales.**

The Rate of older people in residential & nursing home care per 1,000 population aged 65 or over has **reduced since 2021/22**





Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient



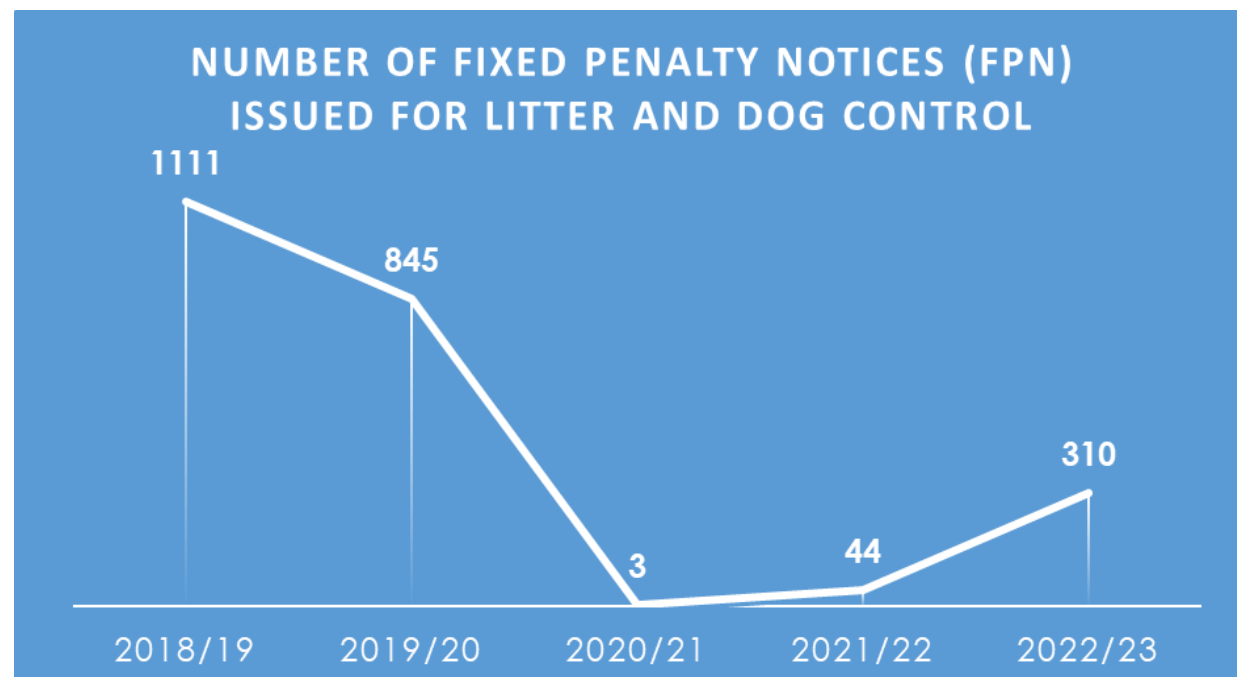
Trading Standards aims to ensure a fair, safe and equitable environment for all who purchase and sell goods and services in Blaenau Gwent. This is undertaken through a range of intervention, advice and enforcement activities with businesses and consumers. The team works closely with partner agencies in order to gather intelligence and enforce the legislation covering areas such as Weights and Measures / Food Labelling and composition / Counterfeit Goods/ Product Safety / Pricing/ Rogue Trading and Doorstep Crime /Consumer Credit/ Misdescribed Goods /Scams and Age Restricted Sales. More information on the work of Trading Standards can be obtained at [:About Trading Standards | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](https://tradingstandards.gov.wales/) <https://tradingstandards.gov.wales/>



Blaenau Gwent's **Food Hygiene** Service continues to deliver against it's programme of planned inspections and post COVID-19 recovery work. **154 inspections** were **completed** at **high risk** businesses by the close of December 2022 (end of Quarter 3). This work has continued alongside our other ongoing programmed and reactive workload.



The **Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation** states that Blaenau Gwent has 47 areas **6** of which are in the **10% most deprived** in Wales.



During **2022/23** **78 Fly-tipping offences** were captured on CCTV



We have continued to improve housing conditions by way of financial assistance and support with the following being completed during the period April -December 2022:-

- **42 adaptations** completed at a **cost of £444,492.**
- **15 Empty Properties grants** completed at a **cost of £462,845.08**
- 2 Home Improvement loans issued
- 2 Houses to homes loans issued and another 2 awaiting approval

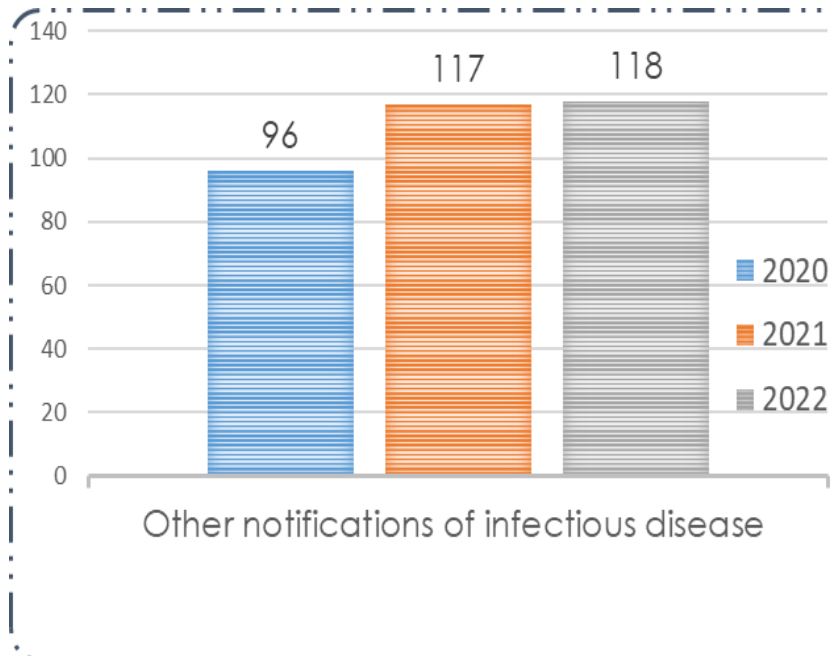


Blaenau Gwent are continuing to provide support to the resettlement scheme for Ukrainian people. Once in initial accommodation, Ukrainian arrivals are supported to resettle into more medium and longer-term 'hosting' accommodation within communities. **Blaenau Gwent Council is working to seek new expressions of interest for hosts, and then inspect relevant properties to ensure they are safe and suitable.**

In 2022/23 the Council provided support overseeing the **Food Distribution Support Grant** with over **£80,000** being available to groups

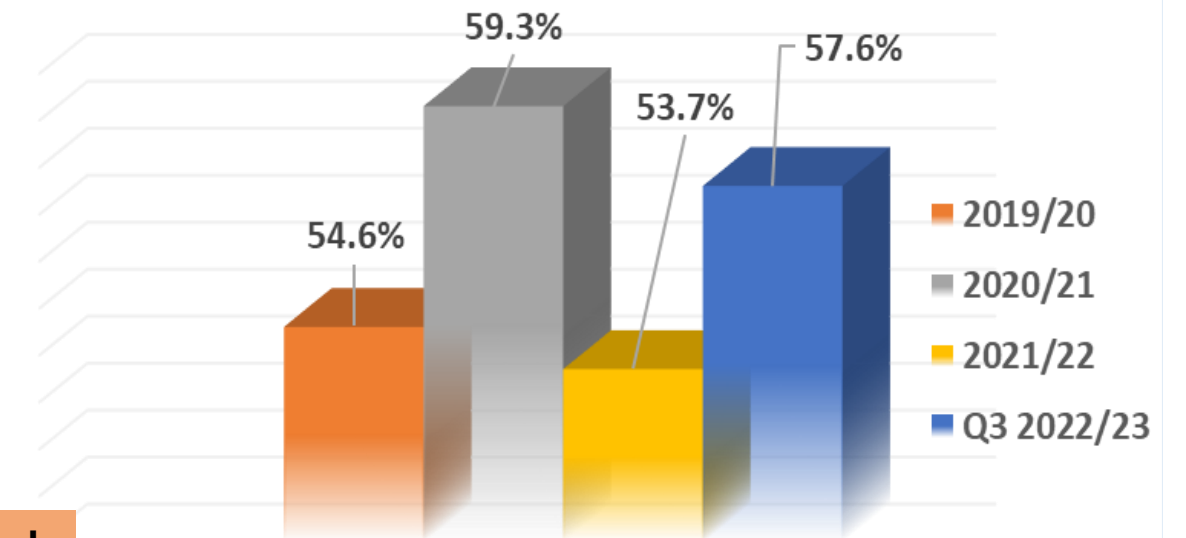


Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient



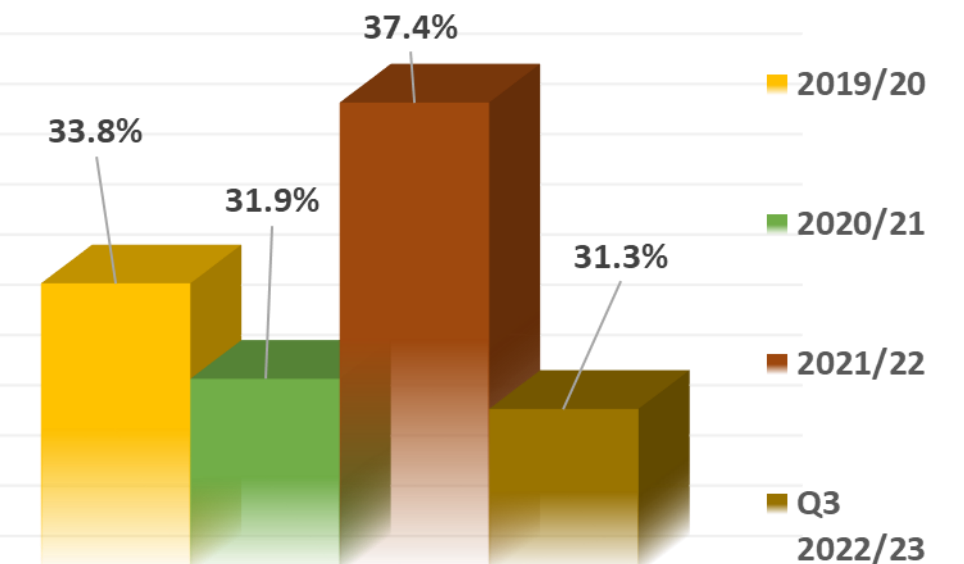
We continue to respond to notifications of infectious disease for which the Local Authority have a duty to investigate. The number of recent reports of such infectious disease cases are provided here together with comparisons from previous reporting year periods (note these indicate Q1-3 only and do not include any requests for advice in respect of COVID-19)

PROPORTION OF CHILDRENS SERVICES CASES SUPPORTED BY PREVENTATIVE SERVICES

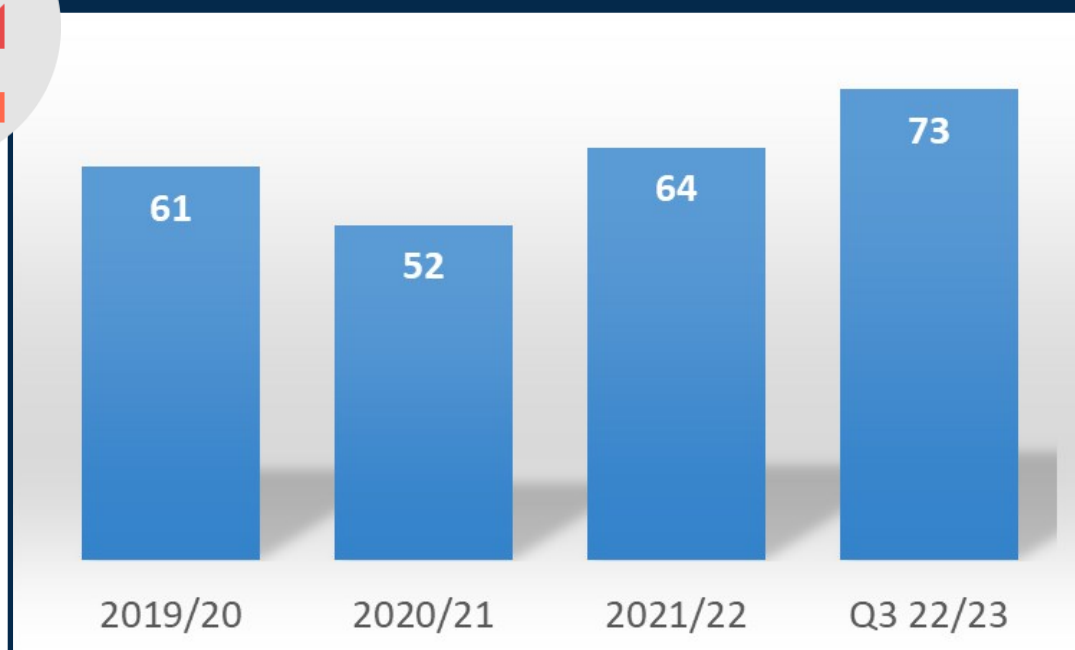


Despite targets still being met we have seen a **decline** in the **% of overall premises that are broadly compliant with food hygiene standards** in comparison to pre-pandemic figures. At the close of the reporting year for 2018/19 performance was reported to be at 92.3%. In comparison with the current position of 91.7% this is a **drop of 0.6%**.

PROPORTION OF ADULTS SERVICES CASES SUPPORTED BY PREVENTATIVE SERVICES



The NUMBER OF CHILDREN on the CHILD PROTECTION REGISTER has INCREASED



We successfully delivered three **Children's Grand Council** sessions to a cohort of **59+ pupils** within Blaenau Gwent.

- Children's Rights
- Why we have a Children's Grand Council
- How children and young people can get involved
- Healthy relationships food
- Gwent Well-being Plan consultation

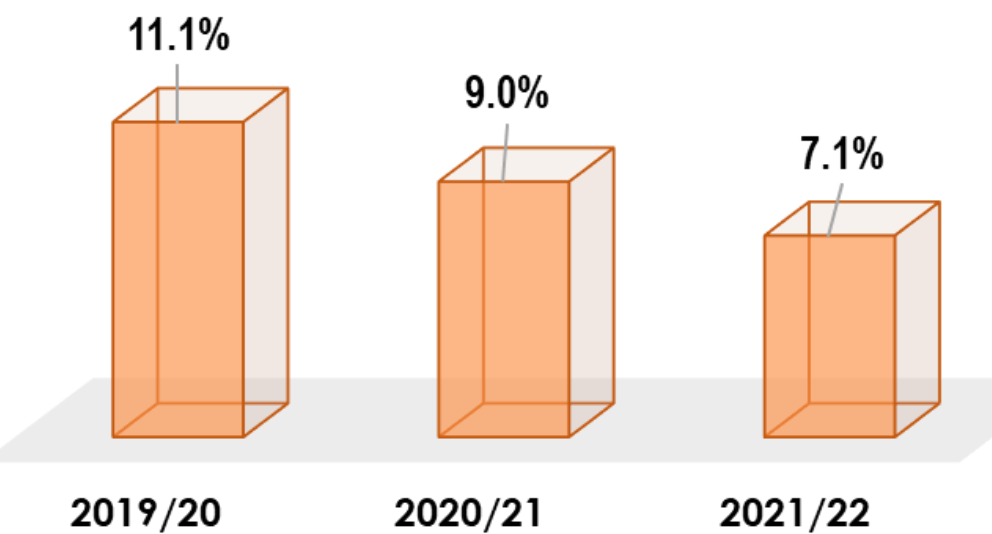
As at May 2022 **5,751 Households** in Blaenau Gwent were claiming **Universal Credit**



Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient



The % of children looked after who have had 3 or more placements during the year reduced over the past 3 years.



Healthy life expectancy at birth in Blaenau Gwent:

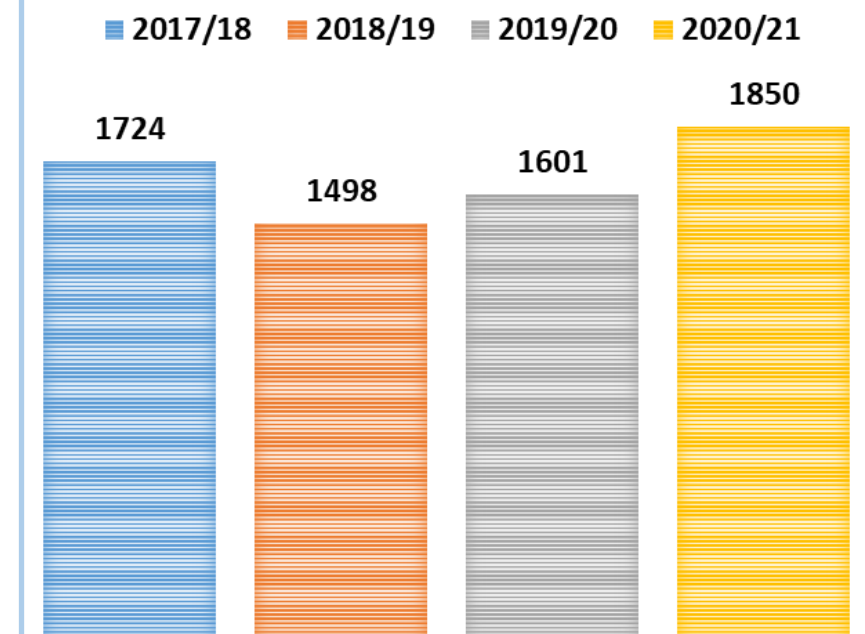
Male - 55.6
Female - 56.5

Healthy life expectancy at birth in Wales:

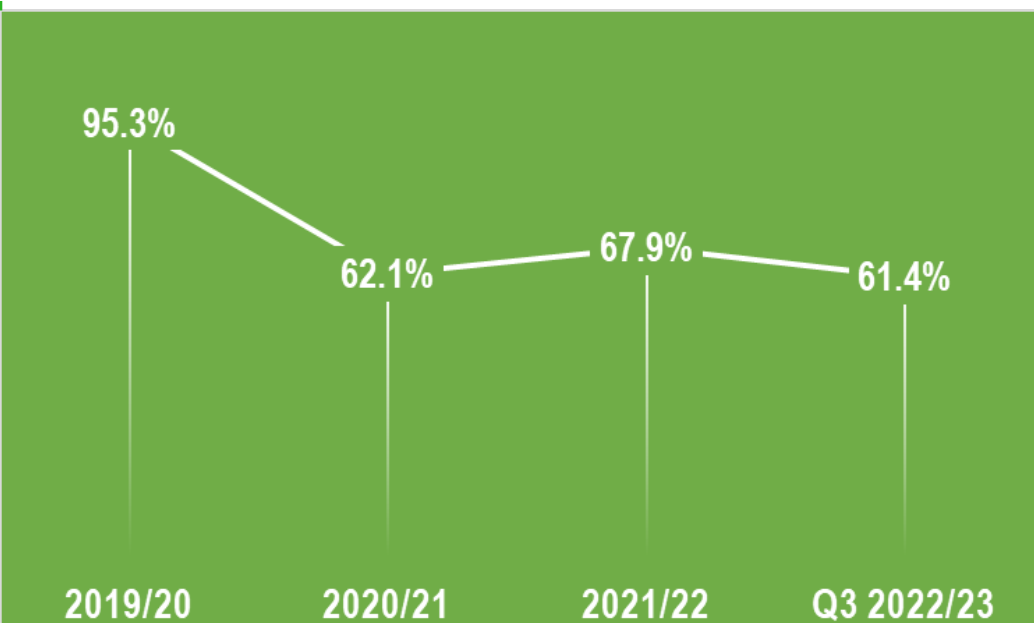
Male - 61.5
Female - 62.4

We continue to support young carers to ensure that they are supported, and their voices are heard. A weekly **Young Carers group** is held and on average **22 members** regularly attend. On average, 32 Young Carers attend residential events or planned

Latest data, 2020/21, shows the number of children living in working families in absolute low income was the highest it has been in 4 years.



The % of adult protection enquiries completed within statutory timescales has decreased



A new **Community Café and Community Pantry** has been opened at Pen-y-Cwm Special School & Ebbw Fawr Learning Community's Primary Phase and was officially launched by the Blaenau Gwent MP, Nick Smith. This is a joint venture between the two schools who share a site. The Community Café will be **run by post-16 pupils** from Pen-y-Cwm and will provide valuable work experience to pupils as well as a welcoming space for parents and the wider community. The aim of the Community Pantry is, like **a foodbank, to provide food to families in both schools when needed.** Ebbw Fawr Primary Phase's Heddlu Bach are taking the lead on organising and stocking the community pantry.

Social media campaign - working within Blaenau Gwent supporting an individual with a diagnosed learning disability to live as a fulfilled life as possible.



<https://fb.watch/jxhvxtmZ3o/>



Case Study -As part of 'Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient' we have continued to deliver the Community Voice, Community Choice Programme



In Blaenau Gwent, all children, young people and their parents have the opportunity to participate in decisions which affect their lives. They will have access to services that meet their needs, and the opportunity to shape how these services are planned and delivered.

"Participation means that it is my right to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing an action that might affect me. Having a voice, having a choice."

"Participation is a process not an event and Empowerment is the outcome". (Crowley, A. 2004)



As part of our partnership and community work to support this, a second participatory budgeting programme, **Community Voice, Community Choice was held.**

16 community groups were successfully voted by the public to receive monies to deliver local well-being projects (a total of **£127,527**) at a community event held at The Beaufort Theatre, Ebbw Vale.

Since October 2022:

- **11 community groups** received monies from the Household Support Fund / Cost of Living Food Distribution Support Grant to provide direct help to local communities in need; and
- **21 community groups** received monies from the Loneliness and Isolation Grant.



Case Study -As part of 'Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient' we have participated in the global resettlement scheme.



The number of cases of Ukrainian people resettled under various resettlement schemes and welcomed into the borough is detailed in the table and includes cases from;

- The Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) – formally known as the Syrian Resettlement Programme (SRP). Programme now concluded. 2015 – 2020
- The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and/or the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). Programme remains live – engagement ongoing
- Asylum Dispersal Scheme (ADS). Programme remains live – engagement ongoing
- UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS). Programme remains live – engagement ongoing
- The Homes for Ukraine Scheme (HFUS). The number includes those arrivals who have been resettled either directly into Blaenau Gwent via an individual sponsor (IS) for example with a host and those who have been resettled into the Blaenau Gwent community after a short stay at a Welcome Centre i.e. those who initially arrive via Welsh Gov’s Super Sponsor route (SS).

Programme	Year of arrival	Family size	Children included?	Ages of children on arrival
VPRS	2016	5	Y – 2 children	6, 3
VPRS	2016	5	Y – 3 children	16, 7, 7
VPRS	2017	5	Y – 3 Children	9, 6, 5 months
VPRS	2018	5	Y – 3 Children	8, 7, 5
Subtotal 20 (including 11 children)				
ARAP/ACRS	2021	5	Y – 3 children	9,6,4
ARAP/ACRS	2022	4	Y – 2 children	8, 5
Subtotal 9 (including 5 children)				
ADS	Sept 2022	4	Y – 2 Children	10, 6
ADS	Oct 2022	5	Y – 3 Children	13, 6, 4
ADS	Oct 2022	3	Y – 2 Children	14, 11
ADS	Dec 2022	3	Y – 1 Child	3
ADS	Jan 2023	5	Y – 1 Child	17
ADS	Feb 2023	4	Y – 2 Children	4,3
ADS	Mar 2023	4	Y – 2 Children	13, 12
Subtotal 28 (including 13 children)				
UKRS	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Subtotal 0				
HfUS	March -Present	77	Y - 26	Ranging from 1 - 18 years
Individual Sponsor arrivals – 29				
Super sponsor arrivals – 48				
Grand Total (all schemes). 134 people (including 55 children of school age)				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers do not include children who were born in Wales after the case was resettled into the borough • Numbers do not include spontaneous arrivals or those temporarily placed under the homelessness duty by another local authority into the borough • Numbers do not include any Ukraine Family Visa Scheme arrivals 				

Breakdown of local participation in global resettlement. Figures up to date as of 12/04/2023.



Case Study -As part of 'Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient' we have developed a 'Smart' Flat



In order to further develop TEC services in Blaenau Gwent a Smart Flat was developed, in partnership with Tai Calon Community Housing Group, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and the Community Housing Group. The Smart Flat was officially launched in November 2022 and is an 'exhibition' flat, which showcases the range of new and innovative technologies available to support people to remain independent within their own homes. Technologies available include: home automation, sensory room, my home helper, my memo board and smart technologies including smart plugs and a Canary monitoring system.

The intended outcome of the Smart Flat is to promote awareness and increase the uptake of TEC as a solution to improve people's well-being and independence, thus reducing the need for statutory health and social care interventions. The Smart Flat is available to families/carers and practitioners, providing them with the opportunity to visit, view and try the different technologies available.

The launch of the Smart Flat generated a lot of interest and has been visited by a number of Health and Social Care colleagues as well as Local Authority Council Members and Members of the Senedd. The box provides a snapshot of some of the positive comments that have been received to date.

At the launch we welcomed 15 people to view the Smart Flat and we have had a further 34 visitors to the flat to date (1st February 2023).

Professionals visiting the Smart Flat identified the main barrier to TEC is the need for private funding from families and carers not only the equipment but also for some of the annual/monthly subscription costs attributed to technologies. This is now even more pertinent due to the additional pressures caused by the current cost of living crisis.

*'enable them to live their lives more **independently**, with **less intrusion** from services'*
'Excellent' 'hugely helpful to residents' 'benefit many people in the future'
*'safety features which will be very important to the families of service users and help to **prevent loneliness and isolation**'*
*'amazed how far technology has come in recent years to support individuals **remain living in their own homes in the community**'*
*'especially impressed how **easy it was to use**'*
*'support and **monitor a person's progress** before they return to their own home and with the specific equipment they would then need long term'*
*'extremely helpful in **reducing the number carer calls** some people have'*
'reassuring for family members as well, with the added support of technology'
*'assist people to remain **independent in their own homes**'*
*'particularly like the sensory room, I think it's fantastic and could promote people to engage in activities which could **lessen boredom and isolation.***

The SMART Flat was officially launched in November 2022!

and is now available to be viewed by anyone interested in seeing what Assistive Technologies are available.

Take the virtual tour here:
<https://kuula.co/share/collection/7qyw0?logo=0&info=0&fs=1&vr=1&sd=1&initload=0&thumbs=1>

Working in partnership with:





Blaenau Gwent Smart Flat

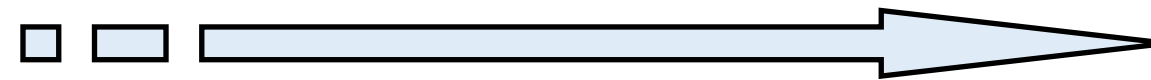


HOW THE SERVICE USER VOICE HAS INFORMED SERVICE DELIVERY

In October 2022, the first in person Children's Grand Council session of the academic year took place, it was also the first in person session in over two years due to the Covid 19 pandemic. The session was divided into a number of workshops based around several themes which included what resilience meant to them and what a safe community looks like.

51 pupils attended the session.

The Children and young people were asked if they understood what the term **resilience** meant? Some of the answers provided are shown in the box to the right



The children and Young people came up with some good answers as to what they understood about resilience, this was also explained using an elastic band to demonstrate something being pulled and then bouncing back into shape.

How safe do you feel in your community?

All reported they feel really safe within their community but did highlight that there were not a lot of evening activities to engage children which means many hang around, although this is not intimidating as it may be for some people.

The Youth Forum were asked to provide feedback to Gwent Well-being Survey:



Never giving up

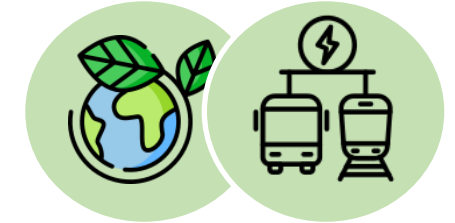
If something doesn't work keep doing it

Keep trying

Being strong

When something bad happens it's

about dealing with it



In the following section, pages 37 To 48, you will find details of work delivered over the past year to **'Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities'**. This work demonstrates the councils commitment to reducing our carbon emissions, providing an environment which supports growth and well-being. There are examples of where we are working to ensure that the natural and built environment is protected and enhanced, air pollution is minimised, preventing ill-health and creating a healthy, attractive and sustainable area to live.

It is broken down into:-

- **Our contribution to the National Well-being Goals** - A summary of how we worked towards achieving this priority and contributing to making Wales more prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible
- **Our contribution to Sustainable Development** - Examples of how we have focussed on the long term; delivered preventative work; worked collaboratively; worked in an integrated manner ; and engaged effectively.
- **Our contribution to Improving Outcomes** - Data and evidence to support the reflection summary.
- **Case Studies** - Highlights of some pertinent areas of work undertaken.
- **Service User Voice** - Examples of engagement, enabling the voice of our citizens to inform the services we deliver based around their needs.

All of the above provides a snapshot of progress during the year.

DID YOU KNOW ...

Of Blaenau Gwent households, in 2021
16.0% were rented privately, up from 12.8% in 2011.

Blaenau Gwent was ranked **11th-highest** out of the 22 Welsh local authority areas for the percentage of households **private renting.**

Latest Air Quality Exposure Data shows-

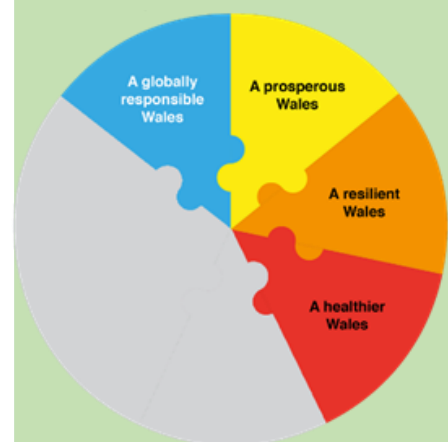
Average micrograms of NO₂ at residential dwelling locations per m³:

2017/18 - 8
2018/19 - 7
2019/20 - 8
2020/21 - 6



Blaenau Gwent is **responsible for maintaining 416km of public highway.**

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATIONAL WELL-BEING GOALS



Over the past year work delivered as part of the priority **'Responding to the nature and climate crisis and enabling connected communities'**

The Council has established a Climate Group, which has a focus on the organisational issues for decarbonisation and climate change. The Decarbonisation Plan identifies 38 actions to take forward, the Climate Group are looking to identify which of these actions need to be prioritised and have most focus first, these will include some 'quick wins' as well as the 'big ticket' items. Financial impact, funding, metrics and timescales will also be key considerations when prioritising the actions.

Private sector wind farm applications have started the Development of National Significance (DNS) Welsh Government planning process and Blaenau Gwent have to provide a scoping opinion on each one, which is, in itself, a significant report.

There are potential benefits that Welsh Government have set out in their guidance on 'local and shared ownership of energy projects in Wales'. Investigation has just started into how the authority and community could invest in the three projects that are currently at planning stage. This will be reported further in 2023/24.

Electric vehicle charging infrastructure has been rolled out extensively in 22/23 and refurbishment projects such as HIVE (Monwell building refurb) scores highly in terms of decarbonisation.

We are working closely with businesses and housing providers across Blaenau Gwent to assist with SAB (drainage applications) at planning stage. Last year saw the completion of the Brynmawr food retail park where the team worked closely with the developer and investor to bring the development forward as it had been caught between Welsh Government legislation and needed a retrospective SAB permission.

The Council takes part in regional initiatives like Resilient Greater Gwent which collaborates to support ecology, deal with invasive species, and grow sustainable communities which brings together all the components of environmental resilience; and Nature Isn't Neat – which alters verge grassland management to encourage pollinators for ecological improvement. We have worked with schools and volunteers throughout the year to improve the litter picking across the authority. This has improved the visual and environmental appearance of Blaenau Gwent and continues to grow in importance.

The environment is already excellent in Blaenau Gwent for tourism and the work around visitor attraction and encouragement is mostly built around this theme. Work to respond to the climate emergency is continuing from the Welsh Government advice and the climate assembly held where key local challenges have been identified.

Our recycling figures have improved again this year, moving closer to our target figure. Achieving the 70% target is going to be a huge challenge; the aim being to reduce the amount of residual [black bag] waste being collected, and increasing recycling participation across the Borough. Assuming the total municipal waste remains constant, to achieve 70%, the Council would need to reduce residual waste and increase recycling by 1562.44 tonnes. For every 1% increase there would be a need to divert 308.66 tonnes from the residual tonnages to recycling/composting tonnages. This is made more difficult by things like smaller gardens in the area overall and so the green waste figures are generally lower than other areas. This is the first full year of operation for the integrated front line service and we have established the frontline enforcement service alongside; this has resulted in a decrease in the numbers of fly-tipping incidents.






Ultra-low emission vehicles are being trialled with frontline services to enable the team to consider the pilot in the fleet replacement programme. Options to progress the decarbonisation of the Council's fleet still need to be developed. A long term programme of works to reduce the annual carbon emissions and energy costs of our buildings continues to make progress.

The regeneration team have worked together with Tai Calon to bid for funding to assist with a grant for a property modification at Solis One to enable a start-up heat pump business to move into the rear of the Registered Social Landlords offices. This will help to build the local decarbonisation economy in the area and offer new skills to the local community. Alongside this, initiatives like ECO4 are being delivered; the primary goal of this grant is to support low-income households who are unable to upgrade their homes and heating systems.

We aim to ensure that decarbonisation measures are at the forefront of our future planning and this includes educating our young 'future adults' in order for them to lead the way to a bright net zero future. Environment and biodiversity considerations form the basis of all new school buildings and existing school upgrades and we encourage nature friendly management on school grounds. Effective partnership working enables us to provide advice and guidance to support our children and young people around biodiversity, decarbonisation, equalities, diversity and inclusion. These partnerships with schools and the Children's Grand Council are very effective and not only inform but support our children and young people to have a voice. We are and will continue to deliver effective sustainable communities for learning which are environmentally friendly and support the delivery of our educated young people who will in the future form our connected communities.

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Some examples of the work aligned to the Sustainable Development Principles over the past year, whilst meeting our aim of **'Responding to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities'** has included the following:-

-  Working in partnership /collaboration with Gwent PSB, Local Authorities in Wales, CCRCD, Transport for Wales, Climate Ready Gwent, Local Nature Partnership Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen, Dwr Cymru Welsh Water and Natural Resources Wales.
 - Partnership working has allowed us to deliver projects such as the Optimised Retrofit Programme, which was funded by Welsh Government as part of the Innovative Housing Programme. This allowed us to provide funding, direct to Registered Social Landlords, to improve the energy efficiency and reduction of fuel poverty of social rented homes in Blaenau Gwent. All 4 partner Registered Social Landlords in Blaenau Gwent took part (Tai Calon, Linc Cymru, United Welsh and Melin).
 - Collaborative work under the Gwent Green Grid Project's 'Nature isn't Neat' strand to improve grassland management and pollinators has taken place and cutting regimes on verges being altered for ecological improvement.
-  Projects within our environmental action plan have included protecting the environment and working towards new zero carbon.
 - The delivery of wind generation projects and hydro generation projects supports long term thinking with regards to fuel consumption.
 - This year we have developed a new brochure for Travel Trade for Abertillery.
-  Integrated work across the council to develop and monitor the delivery of a Decarbonisation Strategy and an Environment and Biodiversity Strategy both of which outline responsibilities to support these agendas across all Councils services. Through a joined up approach to service delivery the Council will be able to achieve more and use less resources.
 - The Council has established a Climate Group. The Group is chaired by the Chief Executive, includes three key members of CLT (Director Education, Director Environment and Regeneration and Chief Officer Resources) , the Member Champion for Climate Mitigation and Unison. The group meets six weekly and has a focus on the organisational issues for decarbonisation and climate change.
-  Prevention is at the forefront of our thinking and biodiversity and eco-system resilience work continues across all areas of the council.
 - The Frontline Enforcement service utilises CCTV to target highway lay-bys subject to prolific fly tipping, proactively carrying commercial waste disposal checks and proactively targeting known unofficial domestic waste collection locations to reduce and prevent negative behaviours in the community.
 - We continue to manage sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) to deal with storm water locally (as close its source as possible), to mimic natural drainage and encourage its infiltration, attenuation and passive treatment . All SuDS applications, enquiry responses and inspections are ongoing throughout the Borough.
-  Support to local community groups is continuing with local litter champions being provided with materials, equipment, staff support and the collection of waste following clean up and clearance.
 - School biodiversity information events and school ground engagement developments are continually delivered and are well received.
 - Wales biodiversity week was used to promote the Greater Gwent Nature Recovery Action Plan .
 - Events continue to be delivered to schools regarding Natural Resource Management.



Integration



Collaboration



Involvement



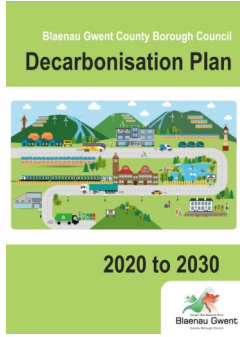
Long Term



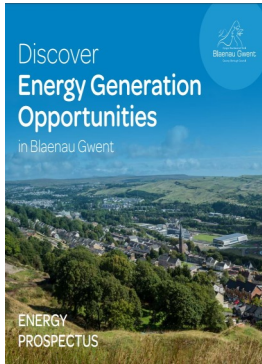
Prevention

IMPROVING OUTCOMES

Blaenau Gwent Council's Decarbonisation Plan continues to be delivered by the council as a whole.



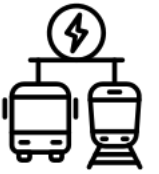
The Energy Prospectus has been designed to stimulate interest in energy development across the borough that will facilitate a supply of renewable energy to meet the future energy needs of Blaenau Gwent



Cardiff Capital Region City Deal secured funding from Welsh Government to **install rapid charge points for taxi ranks and to purchase 44 wheelchair accessible electric taxis for trials** to take place across the region. The taxis were to be offered under a 30 day free trial for taxi drivers. **Two** of the 44 **taxis have been made available for Blaenau Gwent** and the trial will run until 30th November 2023.



Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities



Key Activities

Up to 2022/23 financial year there has been almost **£800,000** allocated in the Councils Capital Programme for the **Cemetery Capacity Works** associated with Cefn Golau, Dukestown, Brynmawr and Brynithel Cemeteries.



Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure – An initial Gwent project led by Blaenau Gwent installed a total of **73 charge points across 35 sites**

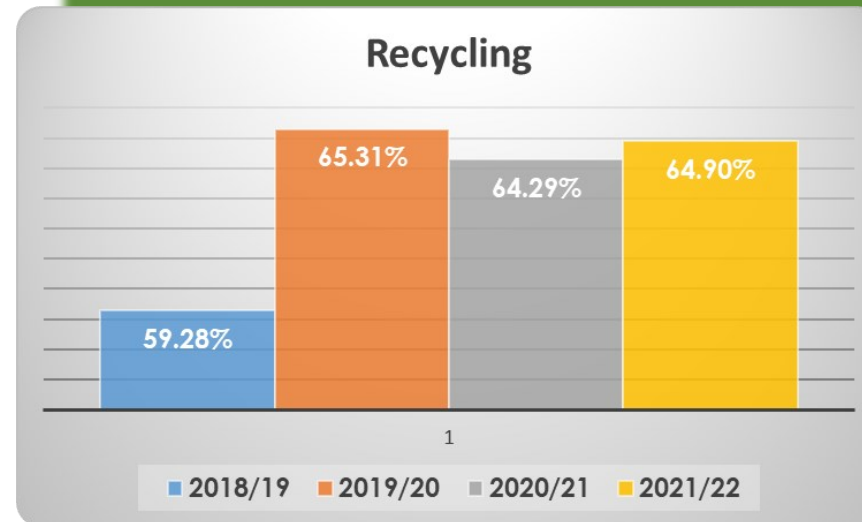
in Gwent. We have also worked with Cardiff Capital Region City Deal on a number of projects to install further EV infrastructure across the region and has continued to be rolled out extensively in 22/23.

This has included the **installation of a EV infrastructure at further 12 sites across in Blaenau Gwent.**

A further regional bid for funding has been submitted to the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) and if funding is agreed this will increase EV infrastructure across the region further.



Welsh Government set a statutory recycling target of recycling 70% by 2024-25, towards which Blaenau Gwent has made significant moves in the direction of achieving over the last few years.

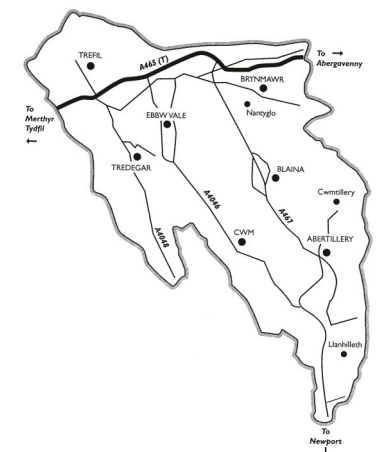


65% of waste produced was recycled as at the end of quarter 3 2022/23

It was reported that **98.8%** of streets in Blaenau Gwent were **clean** during 2022/23.

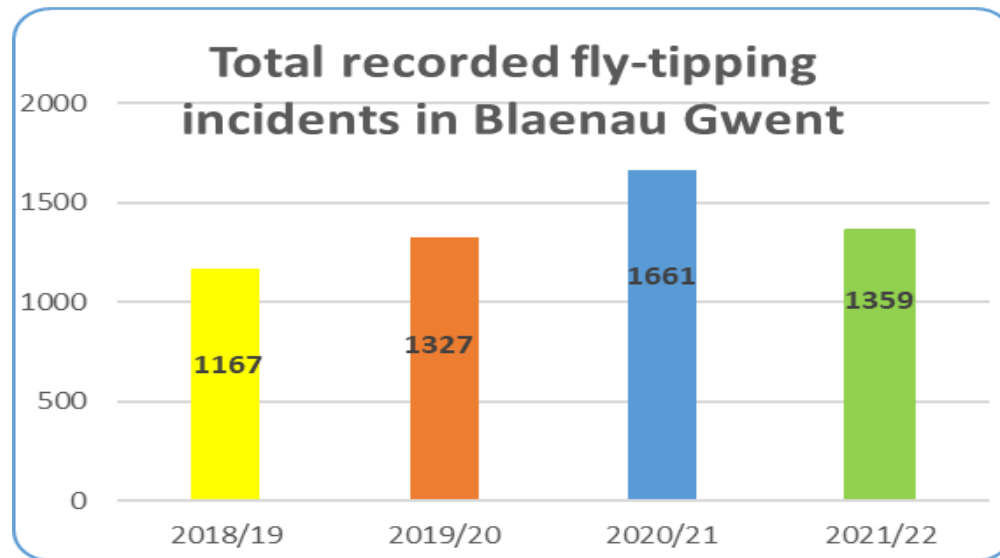
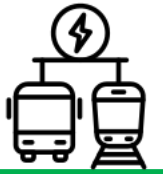
% people satisfied with local area as a place to live:

- 2020 - 74%
- 2019 - N/A
- 2018 - 66%
- 2017 - N/A
- 2016 - 66%





Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities



700 Fly-tipping incidents were reported during April to December 2022, the average number of days taken to clear was **4.7 days**

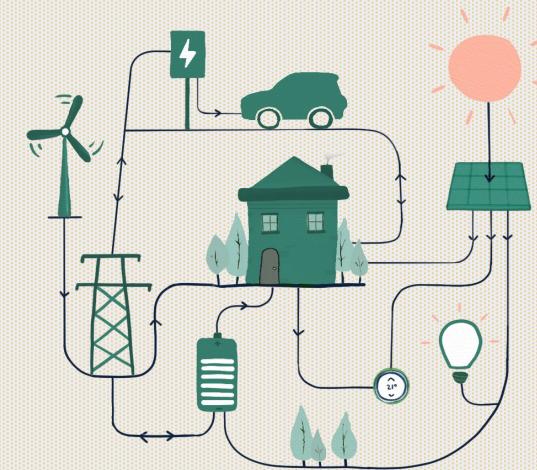
We've joined forces with Keep Wales Tidy to support **'Not up my street'** a new national campaign to tackle Fly-tipping. Fly-tipping in Wales has been on the rise in recent years, and it has a devastating impact on the environment and our local communities. Whilst illegally dumped rubbish looks bad, it is also dangerous and expensive to remove.



The nationwide campaign is being run as part of Caru Cymru (a Welsh phrase meaning 'Love Wales') – an inclusive movement led by Keep Wales Tidy and councils to inspire people to take action, and care for the environment

The Council works to improve homes across Blaenau Gwent with the aim of increasing energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty.

Making homes more energy efficient helps to tackle the climate emergency and also helps people living in poverty save money on energy bills.



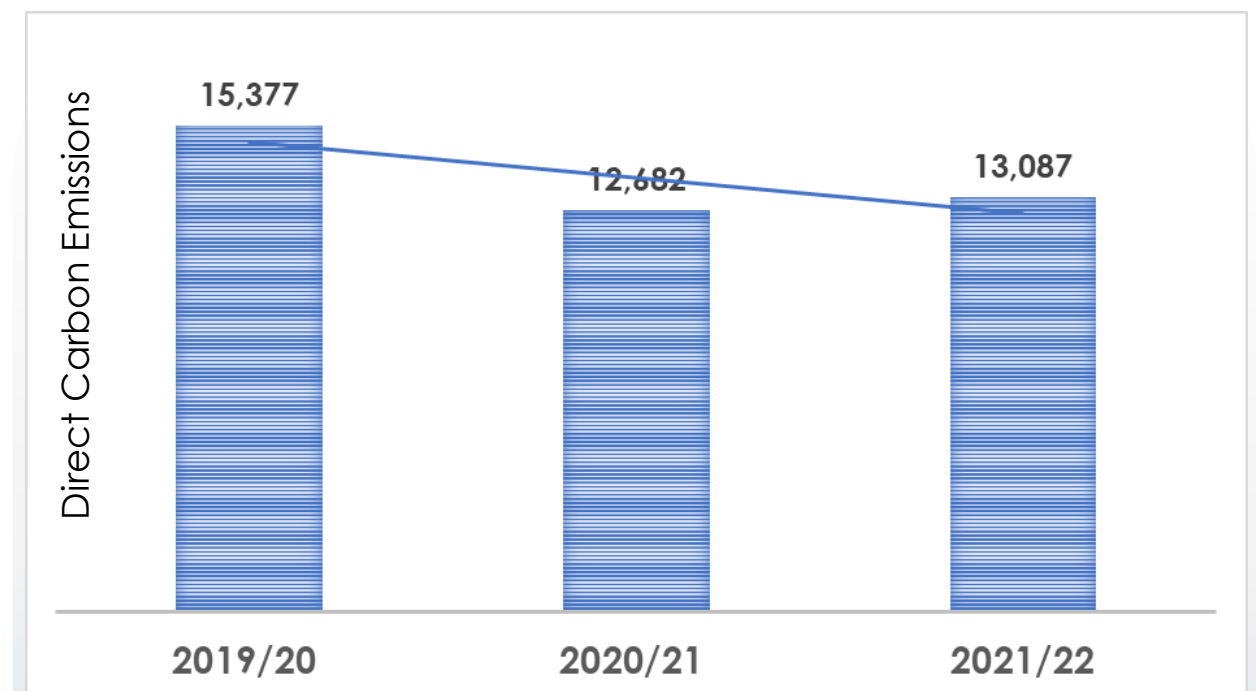
The current gross replacement value of the Highway Network is estimated at **£1.093 billion**

From 2017 to 2022 a total of **£4.75 million** was spent on our road network

As part of the programme of work **103 residential highways were resurfaced** along with priority works to the A and B classified road network.

The overall percentage of poor condition unclassified roads before the programme started was 17% and after the had dropped to 11.4%

BLAENAU GWENT CARBON FOOTPRINT - tonnes CO₂e/year



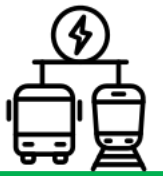
Change from Base Year Change from Last Year

↓ -15%

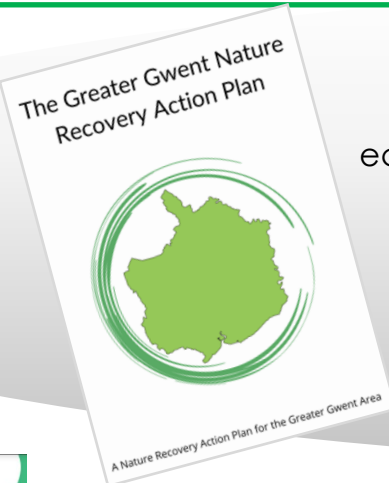
↑ 3%



Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities



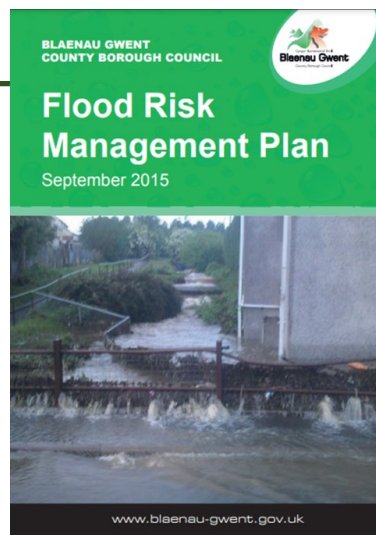
Resilient Greater Gwent project Nature Recovery Action Plan .



The Council takes part in regional initiatives like **Resilient Greater Gwent** which collaborates to support ecology, deal with invasive species, and grow sustainable communities which brings together all the components of environmental resilience; and **Nature Isn't Neat** – which alters verge grassland management to encourage pollinators for ecological improvement. School involvement is key in these initiatives and over

1100 school children have benefited

from being involved in understanding natural resource management workshops.



Progress continues to deliver the Councils

Flood Management Plan

and natural flood risk management continues .

Other works to support this during the period include:-



Work with schools has continued in respect of the Keep Wales Tidy "**Spring Clean**" Initiative with **30 workshops** being held over the period. There are over 400 volunteers on the Councils records, for community litter picks and although not all active at any one time they have together collected **2,471 bags** of **general waste** and **248 bags** of **recycling** was collected over **a number of Litter** pick sessions

New drainage to alleviate flooding has been completed at Newchurch Rd / Beaufort Terrace Roundabout.

Investigations relating to flood incidents and requests for assistance ongoing at Pantypwdyn Rd, Reservoir Rd, and Brynithel Estate.

Ongoing Schemes include Glanfrwyd Avenue, Ebbw Vale, culvert renewal (waiting for commencement date). Trash screen renewal at Newchurch Rd. (waiting for commencement date).



Wind Generation

Projects are ongoing. A planning application has been submitted for the installation of a wind turbine at Silent Valley former landfill site. The application is being considered by Planning Officers and will go through the normal determination process. Work will be undertaken on a business case for investment alongside the planning process. If planning consent is achieved the Council will be asked to consider a business case for investment.



Hydro Generation - Initial

investigation and feasibility studies for small scale hydro generation opportunities within the wards of Cwm and Llanhilleth presented two sites with some potential for hydro generation. These were presented

to Scrutiny and Cabinet for consideration and it was determined that the potential returns and payback were not sufficiently positive for the projects to be developed further at this time.

Funding is being sought to further develop the feasibility of a hydro generation scheme at Silent Valley. If the funding is secured work will be undertaken to investigate the option to utilise hydro generation to power electric pumps.



As part of 'Responding to the nature and climate crisis and enabling connected communities', Blaenau Gwent has continued to deliver the Destination Management Plan



The **Destination Management Plan 2020-25** is the strategic document that sets out our vision for a visitor-focussed way forward for tourism development in the area. It's main output is a Destination Action Plan which sets out practical steps that if taken forward jointly by all stakeholders, can make a positive difference; improving the quality of the visitor experience and growing the visitor economy.

Weatherman walking – Brynmawr to Abergavenny screened on BBC1. Repeat showings of 2 previous episodes in Blaenau Gwent



Out and about in the bountiful valleys of Blaenau Gwent



New destination page on Visit Wales web site [Things to do in Blaenau Gwent | Visit Wales](#)



Blogger visit in July covering camping, adventure activities, walking and food. Partnership project with Southern Wales. Stayed at Parc Bryn Bach Camp site. Visited Guardian, Tredegar Arms, and took a walk, a dip in the lake at PBB and evening meal at Tredegar Arms. [Sheep Walking to Forest Bathing- Southern Wales on a Budget \(wordpress.com\)](#)



The Blaenau Gwent Destination Management Plan could benefit local businesses, residents and visitors alike through developing a more prosperous economy, pleasant environment and inspiring pride in our heritage.

Wales online listed **SIRHOWY IRONWORKS** as one of the

[25 incredible ancient monuments with mind-blowing history you can visit in Wales - Wales Online](#)





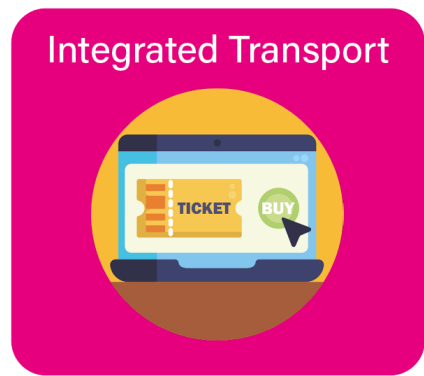
Case Study -As part of 'Responding to the nature and climate crisis and enabling connected communities', we have developed a Climate Action Plan for delivery.



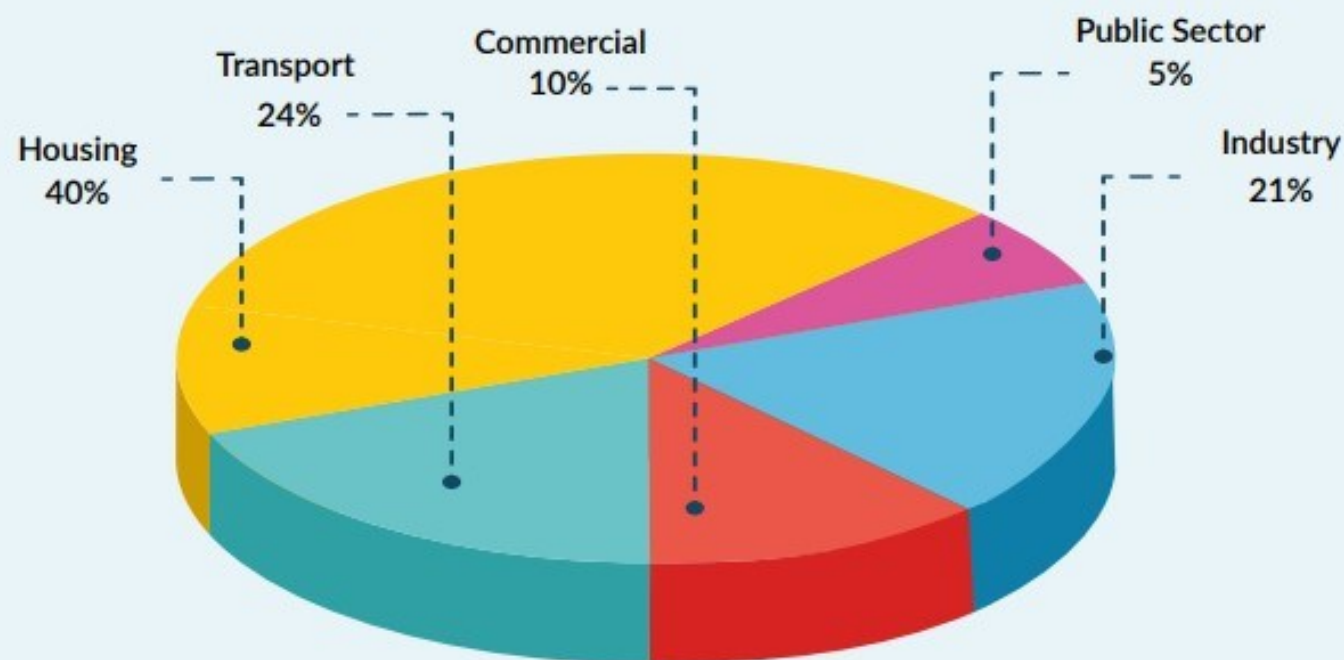
Local partner organisations in Blaenau Gwent have agreed to work together to deliver actions in response to the five recommendations of the Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly. These actions are focused on elements of the recommendations that can be delivered locally at the Blaenau Gwent level, and will form the basis of an ongoing Climate Action Plan. <https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/media/q1gas5v1/climate-assembly-well-being-partnership-actions-summary.pdf>



Blaenau Gwent Climate Priorities



Where do Blaenau Gwent's Carbon Emissions Come From?



The distribution of climate emissions in Blaenau Gwent highlights the importance of the housing and transport recommendations.

Blaenau Gwent Carbon Emissions 2005 - 2019



Carbon Emissions have fallen 33% in Blaenau Gwent over the 14 years from 2005 to 2019. However, it is important to remember that these figures only includes emissions that are released in Blaenau Gwent and we also consume a lot of things that are made outside Blaenau Gwent that are not included in these figures.



Case Study -As part of 'Responding to the nature and climate crisis and enabling connected communities', we support the local economy by encouraging tourism within the area.



Blaenau Gwent's Visitor Economy—This is a summary of the annual tourism economic impact research undertaken for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council by Global Tourism Solutions (UK) Ltd for 2021

Blaenau Gwent received
299,710 visitors
in 2021

Staying Visitors spent **168,910 nights** in Blaenau Gwent.
The **average length of stay was 2.5 days.**

62,160 Visitor Days
were generated by
visitors to Blaenau
Gwent in 2021

Visitors support the FTE
of **254 jobs** locally.
25.9% of these work in
the food and drink
sector, 22% in
accommodation.

In 2021 Blaenau Gwent welcomed
233,990 Day Visitors



Day Visits generated
£9.3 million for the local
economy in 2021

Visitors spent an
extra
35,340 days
in Blaenau
Gwent in 2021
up 132%

Visitors staying overnight
contribute **£19.07million** to
local businesses in 2021.

Visitors staying in Blaenau Gwent hotels and B&Bs in
2021, generated **£10.29million** a 145.7% increase
over 2020.

Visitors
contribute
£28.37m to
the local
economy, up
43.2% on 2020.

Staying Visitor **increased by
43%** between 2020 and 2021

Visitors to Blaenau Gwent spent **£4.2million** on local
accommodation and £5.6 million on food and drink.



Case Study -As part of 'Responding to the nature and climate crisis and enabling connected communities', Natural Resource Management is on the agenda for our schools



49 events were delivered to schools regarding **Natural Resource Management**

School	Number of pupils	Number of events
Blaen Y Cwm	193	9
Glanhowy	153	7
Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg	47	2
Ebbw Fawr Primary Phase	144	6
Pen Y Cwm	29	3
Beaufort Hill	103	5
Sofrydd	12	1
St Mary's CiW	112	4
Willowtown	143	6
Coed Y Garn	84	3
Deighton	23	1
SHEP Roseheyworth	25	1
SHEP Willowtown	51	1



Pupils from Blaen Y Cwm and Deighton Primary took part in a **Bug Bonanza workshop** exploring insects and other small creatures in the school grounds and from the local area.



Beaufort Hill pupils wanted to discuss **ways of managing the school grounds for wildlife.**

Pupils from Ebbw Fawr, Beaufort Hill and Willowtown Primary all took part in a **Super Seed workshop** where we took a close look at seeds from trees locally and in the school grounds.



Pupils pond dipping



with a total of **1143 children** benefiting from these events

HOW THE SERVICE USER VOICE HAS INFORMED SERVICE DELIVERY

Respond to nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities

During the year a two-day climate change session took place with children and young people as part of the Children's Grand Council sessions



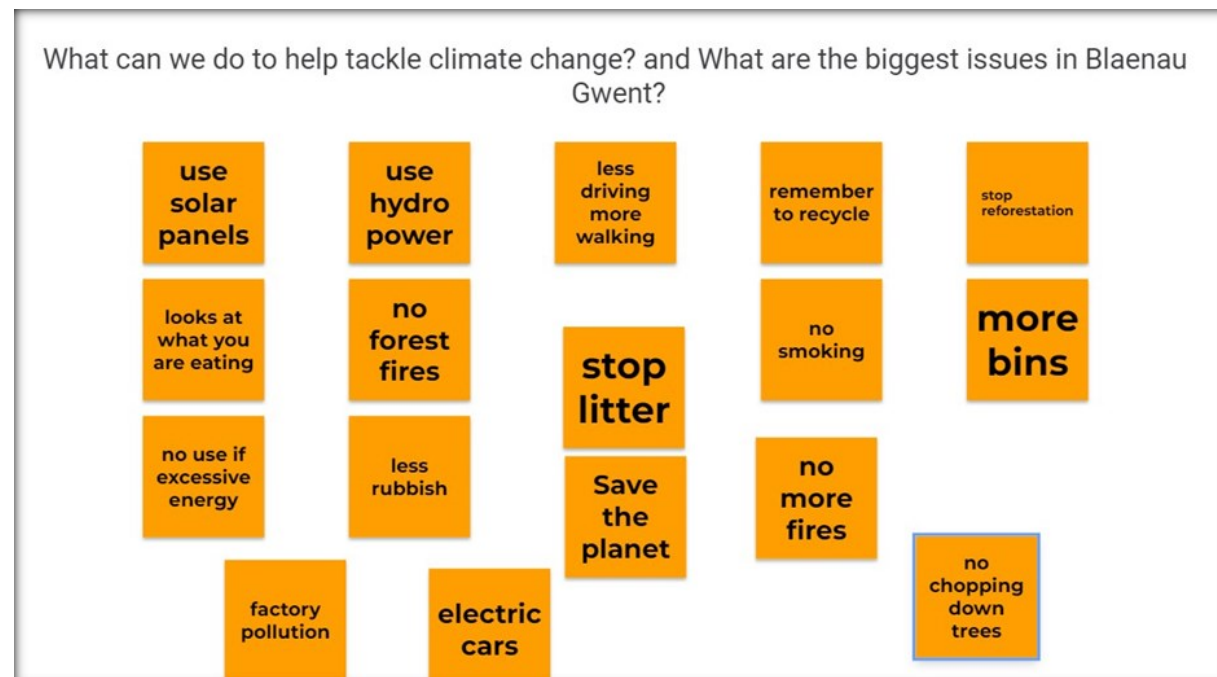
Mara Moruz became the new Deputy Youth Mayor who set out her priority around climate change and the steps she would take over the next two years.

30 young people took part in the session and discussions were based around a number of questions relating to climate change and zero carbon.

Following these discussions, the young people received presentations around different ways to help the environment through using mascots.

The Deputy Youth Mayor talked about her journey with Climate Change and presented the following film to explain why and how she got her school to sign up to the "Let's Go Zero Campaign"

Film link here [A message from Let's Go Zero Youth Ambassador, Mara. - YouTube](#)



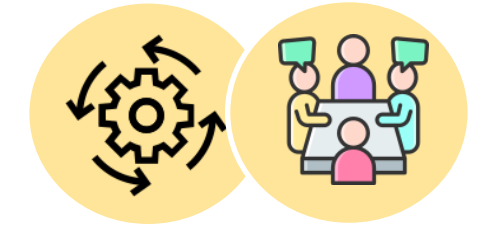
What did our young people tell us?

What do you think the biggest issues around climate change?

- Global warming
- Sabotaging young people's futures
- Killing the coral reef and other animals
- Scary because animals and habitats are dying
- Increase in natural disasters
- World is getting hotter, world not being there forever, scary to not have a world to wake up to
- Oxygen from the trees but they are cutting them down so it's running out
- Deforestation - not enough oxygen
- Plastic pollution in the ocean
- Frustrating - people think it's not a big deal and not taking it seriously but it is

What do you think zero carbon is?

- No carbon dioxide - zero carbon in the air
- Less carbon in the atmosphere
- Cars giving carbon dioxide out as a gas



Ambitious and innovative council and delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place

In the following section, pages 49 To 59, you will find details of work delivered over the past year to **'Empowering ambitious and innovative council and delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place'**. This work demonstrates the councils commitment to creating a fair and equitable area for all. There are examples of how we work in partnership to ensure high quality services meet local need, and act as a commercially minded council to improve the quality of life and well-being within the community. Engagement and consideration of the citizens voice along with monitoring of data and intelligence ensures that we are delivering required services whilst remaining financially resilient within these difficult times. A positive recruitment and retention strategy remains paramount and supports our focus on the future and maintaining a strong and resilient council. It is broken down into:-

- **Our contribution to the National Well-being Goals** - A summary of how we worked towards achieving this priority and contributing to making Wales more prosperous, resilient, have a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language and be equal.
- **Our contribution to Sustainable Development** - Examples of how we have focussed on the long term; delivered preventative work; worked collaboratively; worked in an integrated manner ; and engaged effectively.
- **Our contribution to Improving Outcomes** - Data and evidence to support the reflection summary.
- **Case Studies** - Highlights of some pertinent areas of work undertaken.
- **Service User Voice** - Examples of engagement, enabling the voice of our citizens to inform the services we deliver based around their needs.

All of the above provides a snapshot of progress during the year.

DID YOU KNOW ...

Blaenau Gwent **is the most densely populated area** out of all authorities across Wales.

Approx **615 people live per square kilometre**

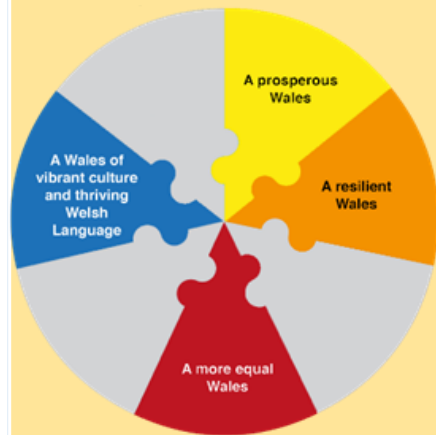
Blaenau Gwent saw Wales's second-largest percentage-point **fall in the proportion of people who identified as "Welsh only"** (from 72.4% in 2011 to 68.0% in 2021).

During this period (2011 to 2021), Blaenau Gwent went from having the third-highest to the fifth-highest percentage of people who identified as "Welsh only" (out of all 22 Welsh local authority areas).



During 2022/23 around **3,000 training opportunities** (online and face to face), were **taken up** by approximately **2,000 Council and school based staff.**

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATIONAL WELL-BEING GOALS



Over the past year, work has been undertaken to delivery the priority '**an ambitious and innovative council and delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place**'

As a major employer in Blaenau Gwent, the council are aware that any action which impacts on the workforce will also directly impact the community and levels of aspiration, income and employment. We provide and commission some of the most important services to the community, working with a range of other public, private and voluntary organisations in ensuring that public services are delivered to high standards. Our Workforce Strategy demonstrates the Council's commitment and investment in its workforce and wants staff to feel engaged and motivated so that the best services can be delivered to the residents of Blaenau Gwent. There are clear drivers for change focussed on agility and sustainability by reducing environmental impact as well as property related costs that can be reinvested into front line services, improve resilience, organisational and individual outcomes, customer focus, and create a better work life and corporate social responsibility. This is a five-year strategy focussed on the future, integrating the Council's vision, objectives, financial planning arrangements and improving the Council as an employer. This includes working with services to achieve ambitions for the community and for schools to become sector leading.

The delivery of energy and digital infrastructure across the Blaenau Gwent area continues. A number of public buildings have had superfast fibre installed through a Welsh Government and UK Government initiative. Other tech developments like the Silent Valley wind turbine have not progressed so quickly due to the complex planning requirements on site. However, at Quarter 4 the planning process is almost complete and 2023/24 will see the implementation of the turbine.

The Council recognises the importance of succession planning and currently have Aspire Shared Apprentices in post. Aspire are investigating further funding through Shared Prosperity Funding (SPF) and Welsh Government funding to expand the provision.

The performance of all directorates depends on the effectiveness of the department culture. This is a difficult task when the teams and sections are working hard to deliver priorities amongst continual rounds of savings and non-competitive public sector salaries. However, a healthy culture is a major attractor and is important to those looking for a job in the public sector. With staff retention as a key aim for the authority, creating the right culture is key. The aim of the council is to set standards that assist with the positive nature of the culture including; embracing a change mind-set – this is central to growth and innovation, and puts people outside their comfort zone to enable change and growth; working as a team – working together, discussing problems together and backing each other up; empowering people to make decisions; embedding a sense of responsibility including holding everyone accountable; and lastly, continuous improvement.

In order to develop more commercial models to deliver effective services directorates work together and will establish multi-disciplinary teams to develop commercial change projects for future delivery. Initial projects were identified and included within the public consultation on the budget savings proposals for 2024/25 onwards, and these included the Wind Turbine at Silent Valley Site, Parc Brynbach Solar farm, Rassau lorry park, Nantyglo School Site Development, Tredegar Industrial Estate Expansion, Ebbw Vale police Station, Tafarnaubach Wind Turbine and Civic Centre Site Development. These will be investigated further and prioritised as it is recognised that they cannot all be delivered immediately. These projects will be developed from the opportunities that we have identified. The areas that we are investigating deliver benefits to the community through sustainable energy, local facilities and environmentally sound building projects.

All directorates aim to deliver effective and efficient services within financial constraints. The financial outlook for the public sector will be challenging over the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and close financial planning and management will be essential to achieve an effective use of available resources.



It is recognised that one of the main strategic risks identified for certain directorates is dependency on external funding to support key services and the workforce. One example of this is the Social Services Directorate who continue to have dedicated Information Advice and Assistance Teams (IAA) for both Children and Adult Social Services. The new adult services IAA structure went live in April 22 and is no longer reliant on grant funding, this means the team is now more sustainable. The Children's IAA team is still funded by a mixture of core and grant funding which is a risk if future grant funding is removed.

The cumulative corporate sickness absence levels as at the end of quarter 3 (December 2022) have been reported as slightly over the Local Authority Corporate target of 10 days per FTE and this will be reviewed at the end of the reporting year, when quarter 4 figures are available.

Following the implementation of an Agile Working Policy, an online survey and face to face workshops were undertaken at the end of 2022 to consider the impact of the Policy on staff and to understand the positives and negatives with regard to staff working practices. The policy will be reviewed further in 2023 and updated where necessary.

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Some examples of the work aligned to the Sustainable Development (SD) Principles over the past year, whilst meeting our aim of being **'an ambitious and innovative council and delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place'** has included:-

-  Working in partnership /collaboration with Gwent PSB, other Local Authorities in Wales, Trade Unions, Town and Community Councils, Welsh Government, WLGA, Audit Wales and SRS.
- Ongoing discussions with Welsh Government to expand funding resources such as Aspire offering and demonstrate demand for digital and engineering degree apprenticeships.
- We are currently leading a project that looks at how the council sets out and describes information and content, and testing if it is understood by residents, and how it can be improved to assist them in accessing our services. This content design project is being done in collaboration with other local authorities, and will assist in setting our organisational approach to inform how we communicate in a way which is more easily understood.
-  We recognise that digital progression is the future and, as a council, we aim to develop effective digital infrastructure and improve connectivity within the borough by promoting digital participation. For example, within Planning Services work has taken place to procure a new digital system to improve and streamline processes and data storage/accessibility resulting in a more efficient and effective way of working.
- The Strategic Commercial and Commissioning Board has been strengthened to include a clearer focus on how it supports achievement of the ambitions set out in the commercial strategy. Commercial activity is far more evident in the bridging the gap proposals to support the Medium Term Financial Strategy, ranging from third party spend, cost shift for transactions, and more efficient channels. A review of the commercial strategy is planned for the end of the year which will assist in how we target our efforts on areas that need progressing.
- Recruitment and retention difficulties have impacted on services. All directorates have developed a workforce plan for 2022/23 with a detailed action plan to address these issues. In addition, the ongoing work corporately will support directorates to recruit and retain staff by further modernising the Councils approach and marketing the Council as an 'Employer of Choice'. Whilst the risk remains high staffing pressures in some services have eased with successful recruitment to vacant roles. In addition, other measures that will support in the longer term include effective workforce and succession planning, the management of sickness absence, and where appropriate working regionally/nationally.
-  We always work with a preventative approach, preventing problems from getting worse and continually aiming to improve services. This approach has led to numerous improvements ranging from maintaining our corporate assets such as buildings, roads, bridges etc. to preventing safeguarding issues developing by encouraging everyone with a concern about themselves, a child or adult at risk of abuse or neglect, to report it. Our website has recently been updated making this process as easy as possible.
-  Integrated work throughout directorates has continued to ensure effective delivery of all services and projects such as Integrated work with Coleg Gwent and the refurbishment of the Monwell Building into a high value engineering centre (HIVE). The £12.5 million investment will deliver an Advanced Engineering Centre close to our Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone campus, which will offer high-quality engineering education to equip young people with skills for the future.
-  The Council recognises the critical need to communicate and engage staff in service delivery, transformation, change, new commercial thinking and financial efficiency. This is currently undertaken through a number of methods: regular one to one performance coaching, annual performance reviews, team, staff and management meetings, a regular newsletter from the Chief Executive, a staff newsletter, managers brief, engagement in financial planning, a dedicated engagement and consultation framework with the Trade Unions as well as bi-annual staff surveys.
- We engage with citizens and give them an opportunity to have a say on the issues that affect them and their community by running a number of engagement networks such as a Citizen Panel, Voices of our Valleys, Youth Forum and 50+ Network.
- Continued staff engagement in respect of the agile working arrangements is important to give staff a way to share their views and to drive forward decisions on how we programme support to assist with the cultural shift. This work has been planned out and undertaken and an analysis of findings and feedback is planned for the end of the year.



Integration



Collaboration



Involvement



Long Term



Prevention

IMPROVING OUTCOMES

The Council has agreed a budget for 2023/24, and is planning to invest a total of **£182million** into providing services for the people of Blaenau Gwent. Significant budget gaps remain to be addressed during the year in preparation for 2024/25 onwards

At Quarter 4 Blaenau Gwent had **45 data breaches**. This is **higher than the previous 12 month period** which was 37 data breaches in total. No pattern or single cause for this increase as been identified but this will **continue to be monitored**.

Women and men are paid equally for doing equivalent jobs across the Council, with a predominantly female **workforce (77.3% female, 22.7% male)**, occupying a high percentage of jobs across all four pay quartiles. Furthermore, our gender pay gap is significantly lower than the national UK average



Ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place



Key Activities

Following a detailed analysis of available systems and procurement process a new planning system has now been secured which enables us to have a web presence where the public can view and comment on planning applications online. Customers can also book Building Regulations appointments online. By having a web presence we improve our customer services and can streamline processes more effectively.



Development of a Strategic document and action plan assists the Council to transition to a Homeless Rapid Re-Housing Approach. **Rapid Rehousing** is a recognised approach which ensures that anyone experiencing homelessness can move into a settled home as quickly as possible, rather than staying in temporary accommodation for long periods of time.

Members have been involved in the council position in relation to Homelessness and the Housing Waiting List.

6,132 customers

have been supported face to face in our **Community Hubs** across the borough since April 2022.

Below are our most popular queries we receive day to day in Hubs

Benefits queries	1005
Blue Badges	937
Bus Passes	402
Council Tax queries	616
Cost of Living Support	1924
Discretionary Assistance Fund Application	134
Food Bank Referrals	213
Fuel Bank Vouchers	586
Housing queries	103
Waste and Recycling	242

Blaenau Gwent Community Hubs



Blaenau Gwent Community Hubs offer residents easy access to services in local communities operating out of town centre libraries.

Services Available include:

- Council Tax and Non-Domestic rates information and advice.
- Benefits information and advice including Universal Credit, Council Tax reduction, free school meals, school clothing grants and benefit overpayments.
- Apply for a Blue Badge.
- Make bulky waste bookings, get waste/recycling timetables, make a booking at a HWRC site and order new recycling receptacles.
- Pick up waste bags - including dog waste, food waste and hygiene waste
- Requests for information on many other Council services.
- Offering help and guidance on many other organisations.

Opening Times:

Location	Opening Hours	Day
Abertillery Library	9am - 5pm Tuesday, Thursday & Friday Closed: 1pm - 2pm 10am - 5pm Wednesday Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Tuesday, Wednesday Thursday & Friday
Brynnaur Library	9am - 5pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Monday, Tuesday Thursday & Friday
Ebbw Vale Library	9am - 5pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Monday, Tuesday Thursday & Friday
Tredgar Library	9am - 5pm Monday, Tuesday & Friday Closed: 1pm - 2pm 10am - 5pm Wednesday Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Monday, Tuesday Wednesday & Friday
Blaina Library	9:30am - 5pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Monday
Cwm Library	9:30am - 5pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Thursday
Llanhilleth Institute	10am - 5pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Wednesday

For further information visit your local Community Hub or call 01495 311556. Website: www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

A Flying Start project and a 'Ti a Fi' group has been established which will promote the **Welsh Language** to mother and babies. The purpose of the project is to **provide younger generations an opportunity to play and learn a new language** before attending school whilst raising the importance of early years education and the Welsh Language.



Ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place

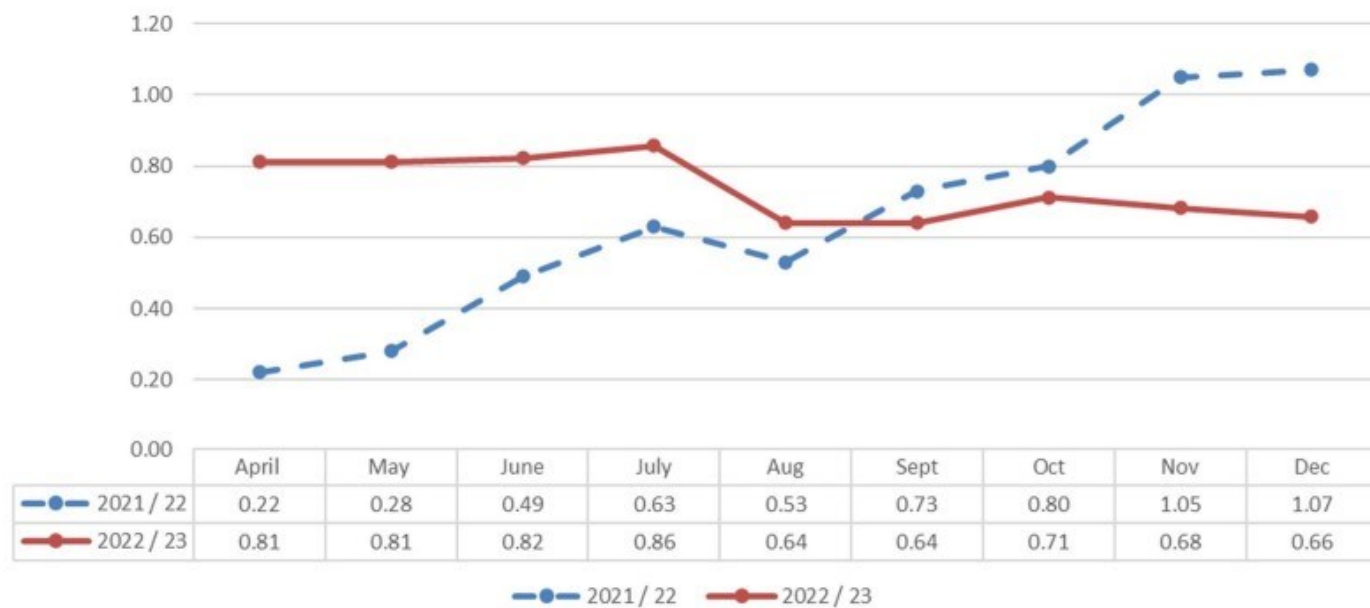


Council staff sickness absences have risen from 11.67 in 2020/21 to 16.74 in 2021/22. Even when removing absences due to Covid-19, the figures rose from 9.98 to 14.2, above the council's target of 10 days per full-time member of staff. (FTE)

As at quarter 3 the cumulative outturn for council staff sickness absences stands at 11.98 (10.38 excluding Covid absences) well above the target figure for this period of 7.50

MONTHLY ABSENCE STATISTICS BY DIRECTORATE

Corporate Services Directorate



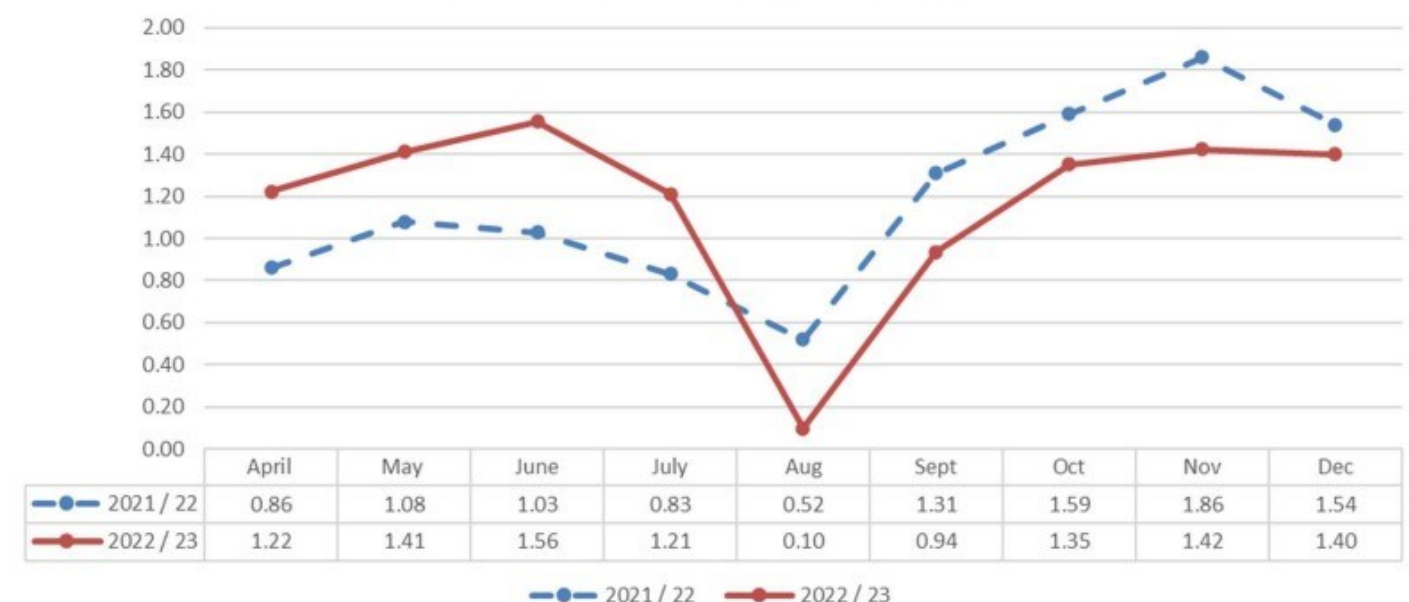
Regeneration & Community Services Directorate



Social Services Directorate



Education Directorate (inc. Schools)





Ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place



Our Strategic Equality Annual Plan has been published detailing progress towards delivery of the plan.

This can be accessed via the following link:-

<http://cc-mgov-01/documents/s13784/CO2303D17%20-%20Report%20meeting%20requirements%20of%20the%20Equalities%20Act.pdf?LLL=0>

The Council, along with our partners across Gwent through our Public Services Board, are working towards becoming a **Marmot Region** that aims to **tackle and reduce inequalities**, via the Marmot principles to:

- Give every child the best start in life
- Enable all children, young people, and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
- Create fair employment and good work for all
- Ensure a healthy standard of living for all
- Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
- Strengthen the role and impact of ill-health prevention
- Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together
- Create fair employment and good work for all
- Tackle racism, discrimination, and their outcomes



Council unanimously agreed to award Eva Clarke the Freedom of the Borough, the highest accolade the can the Council can bestow. Eva Clarke was born in a concentration camp and was one of only three babies that survived. Eva is also the first woman to receive the Freedom of the Borough in Blaenau Gwent.

Eva has worked so hard over the years to ensure the stories of those survivors have been told, ensuring their memories live on and what they endured is never forgotten. Eva has strong links with South Wales, and Blaenau Gwent particularly. The award ceremony took place in March 2023.



Elected Member Training – This reporting year coincides with a new Council following the local election held in May 2022. To support all elected members, both new and returning, a **Member Induction Programme** was put in place. One of the core courses was on Equality and Diversity. The training was co-delivered by an equality and diversity specialist company, Red Shiny Apple, and a representative from Victim Support. The training focused on giving elected members an understanding of the legal responsibilities in relation to Equality and Welsh Language. It provided an overview of the Council's equality and diversity policies which promote our PSED commitments (for example, the Integrated Impact Assessment). The session also focused specifically on hate crime and equality issues for people with protected characteristics. We also encourage our elected members to consider e-modules available online developed by the WLGA which further support them to understand their duties.



Ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place



Progress continues to be made with both internal and external partners to **build digital innovation** into how we plan and deliver services. The focus remains building services around the user. The organisation is now exploring how digital solutions can form part of that, for the benefit of residents and the organisation. This work **supports the commitment to decarbonisation** as well as the potential for avoiding cost or realising efficiencies. External partners and **projects include the WLGA digital transformation fund, where Blaenau Gwent are leading on a project looking at how people access our services and how we can improve, as well as being involved in a number of projects on the programme.** A key focus of this area of work is understanding barriers to digital participation within our communities and developing support for those who wish to improve their digital skills

An external review of customer experience and access has been undertaken and findings will be presented at the end of the year. This will inform the organisational approach and the customer services strategy. Work included mapping the customer journey as they accessed council services, interaction with a sample of residents who had recently utilised council services, and meetings with staff including in the community hubs to see how arrangements work in practice.

The Budget for 2023/24, has been agreed following widespread engagement with residents on savings ideas and spending priorities.

The Council had earlier warned of difficult decisions about services following its financial settlement from the Welsh Government, which, at 6.5%, is significantly below the all Wales increase of 7.9%. Like all organisations, the Council is facing some well-publicised financial pressures, despite increased funding from Welsh Government to almost £140 million. These pressures include the global pandemic, cost pressures, rising inflation, soaring energy and fuel costs and social care demands.

As a result, the funding gap for next year's Budget is £ 6.6 million. Council Leader, Cllr Steve Thomas, said councillors had listened to and considered residents' concerns about savings proposals when preparing to debate and set the Council budget.

A range of savings, efficiencies and income-generating projects worth just over £3million was agreed upon at the meeting to close the budget gap, as well as a draw on reserves of £ 4.3 million. A number of proposals which would have affected frontline services valued by residents were rejected by councillors.

Schools in the borough are to receive a 4.2% uplift in funding after councillors voted to increase this to take into account the cost pressures they face as they recover from the pandemic.

A 3.45% increase in Council Tax was also agreed upon.

Significant budget gaps remain to be addressed during the year in preparation for 2024/25 onwards.





Ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place



The Authority's reserves have improved over the last few years.

In order to balance the 2023/2024 budget, a net draw from reserves of £4.3M is required. Reliance on the use of reserves to balance the budget in future years will impact on the financial sustainability of the Council. To mitigate this further, strategic business reviews will be developed and implemented to support a balanced budget moving forward. The use of reserves will be monitored and reviewed during the financial year in order to ensure that they are maintained as a sustainable level in the medium term.

The following saving proposals were **agreed**:

- Growth Strategy – Housing - £150,000.
- Review of Fees & Charges for income generating services across the Council - £100,000.
- Reduction in the Transformation Fund - £270,995.
- [Removal of Commercial and Contract Management Budget - £271,000.](#)
- Removal of Additional Pension Costs Budget - Aneurin Leisure Trust - £152,000.
- Third Party Spend (Establish a Professional Buying Team) - £396,550.
- Review of Telephony - £48,000.
- [Review of Electronic Document Management & Retention System \(EDRM\) - £104,000.](#)
- Members Remuneration – £50,000.
- General Offices Income Generation - £60,000.
- Members Grants (Special Levy) £8,910.
- Prevention & Early Intervention - Establishment of MYST Team - Invest to Save Scheme - £416,000.
- Reduction in Legal Fees Budget (Children's Social Services) - £175,000.
- Utilisation of the Children & Communities Grant - £21,025.
- [Review of Provider Manager Capacity \(Supported Living and Augusta / Community Options\) - £25,000.](#)
- Reduction in Community Options (day services bases) - £143,170.
- Reduction in Transport at Community Options - £58,200.
- Closure of Mechanical Link - £41,000.
- Regeneration Income – £30,000.
- Removal of Dog Waste Bag Provision - £14,596.
- [Move to Fortnightly Collection for Green Waste - £75,000.](#)
- Industrial Units - £100,000.
- Review of SLA Contracts - £20,000.
- Review of Operational Buildings - £250,000.
- Commercial Activity & Investment - £50,000

The above proposals totalled £3.03m.

Council Tax increase of 3.45%. The total use of reserves would amount to **£4.3m.**

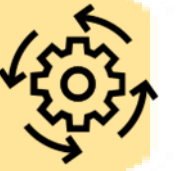
The following budget proposals were **not agreed**:

- Home to School Transport Service Review.
- Aneurin Leisure Trust Management Fee – Review of Service Provision.
- Move to 4 Weekly Refuse Collection.
- Closure of all Play Areas.
- Reduction in Street Cleansing Provision.
- Reduction in Street Lighting Provision.
- Public Toilet Provision - Withdraw Funding.
- Waste - Closure / Part Closure of HWRC's.
- Waste - Reduction in Recycling Rounds.
- Removal of School Crossing Patrollers.
- Removal of Match Funding re: Subsidised Bus Service.
- Discontinuation of Pest Control Treatment Service.
- Cease Support for Armistice Parades.
- Reduction in Enforcement Wardens.
- Income Generation - Cwrt Mytton.
- Capping of Community Domiciliary Care High-Cost Packages.
- Closure of Supported Living Bungalow – Reducing from 4 to 3.
- Income Generation - Hydrotherapy Pool (Bert Denning).
- Outsource / Closure of Cwrt Mytton.
- Review of In-House Domiciliary Care Service and Potential Externalising of Extra Care.
- The Leader of the Council further proposed 4.2% increase in the Individual Schools Budget (ISB).





Case Study -As part of being an ‘Ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place’, we engaged with the community to plan our budget and services



Blaenau Gwent Council, like other Councils, faces extreme financial challenges as the Government continues to reduce the amount of money that is spent on our public services.

The after effects of the Covid pandemic and the monetary crisis as a consequence of the war in Ukraine have caused a “perfect storm” of soaring inflation, energy costs and material prices that have impacted how we deliver our services to the public. At the same time, the UK Government continues to make reducing the national debt a priority with strict spending policies in place. Its latest Spending Review for 2023-24 did not deliver for Wales. Also, there are significant cost increases for pay awards, and increased demands on service areas such as social care, homelessness, additional learning needs and home to school transport.

To meet these challenges, we must think about the way we provide services to make savings, and how we can generate income. This may mean us having to reduce, change or stop some services or look at alternative delivery models.

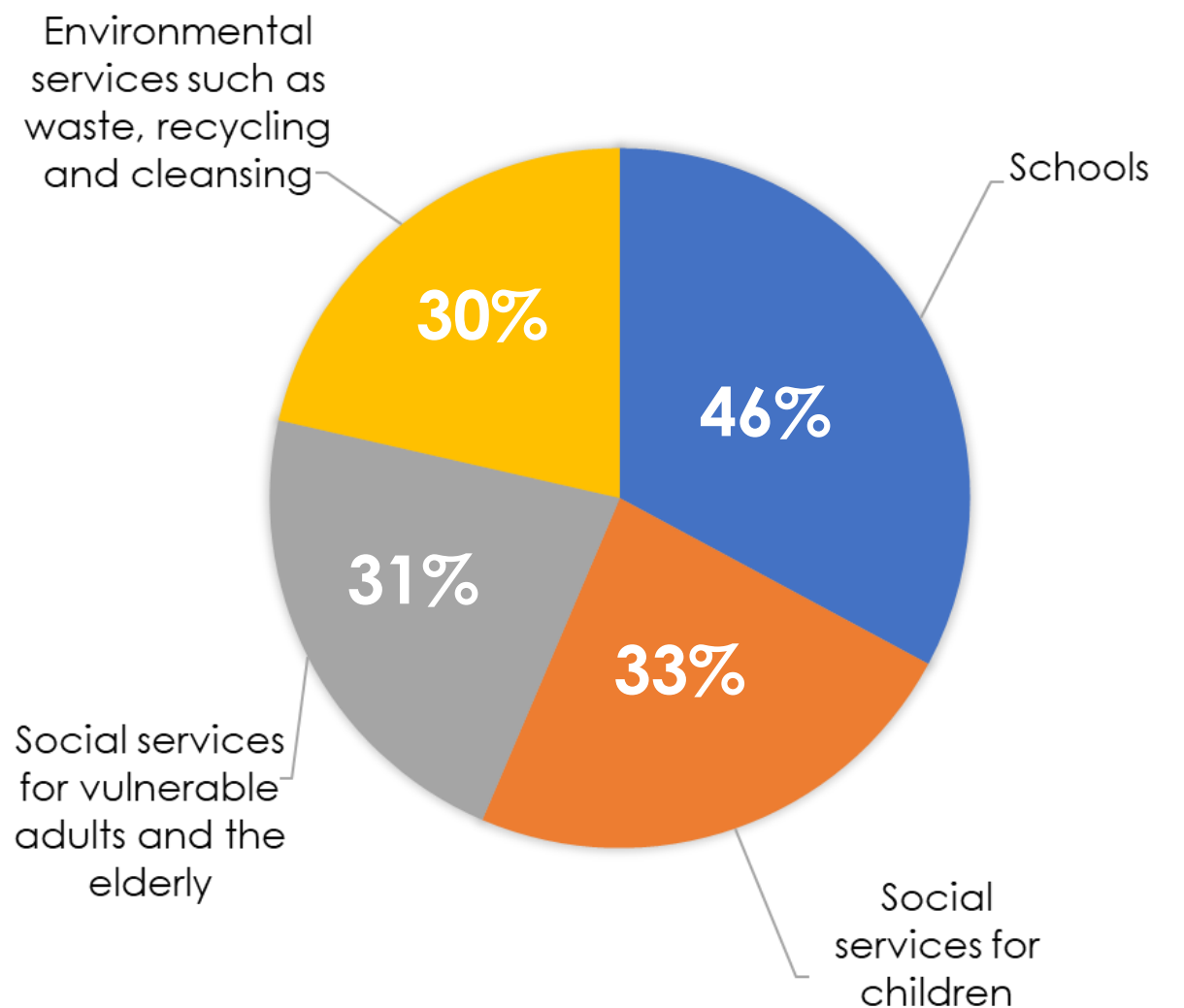
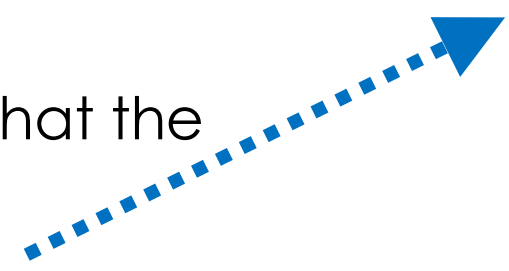
Our engagement programme gave people the opportunity to share their views to help us plan our budget and services from April 2023 until March 2024 and beyond. The programme consisted of a number of public events, surveys and other ways to engage people to help shape the decision making processes.

A total of **3,736 valid questionnaires** were returned which equates to over **5.5% of the area’s population.**

This is by far the highest level of response witnessed for a budget engagement survey carried out by the council (previous response levels have never been above 600).

The majority of respondents identified that the

following services **should be prioritised:**





Case Study -As part of being an 'Ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place', Blaenau Gwent supports Welsh Language rights day



On Welsh Language Rights Day in December 2022, Blaenau Gwent Council, together with the Welsh Language Commissioner, encouraged the young people of Wales to ensure that they are aware of their rights and to remember to use the Welsh language in their daily lives.

This annual event is held on the date the Welsh Language Measure came into force over a decade ago.

Young people were the focus of this year's campaign and that was entirely appropriate according to the Deputy Commissioner for the Welsh Language, Gwenith Price,

"It can be perceived as a cliché but our young people are our future and we need to ensure that they play a leading role in protecting and using the language in their everyday lives.

"In my latest assurance report it was noted that many feel that the opportunities to use the Welsh language consistently have increased but that organisations need to improve the way they facilitate and guarantee Welsh language services.

"In the same way we need to use and demand our rights and it's great to see our young people leading the way. This day allows us to not only highlight the rights, but to highlight the need to use them throughout the year."

"As a university student I have seen a positive change in the way the university deals with the Welsh language and we now need to build on that platform for the future.

Another star of the campaign is Elen Madrun Llewelyn-Evans, a 17-year-old student at Ysgol Gyfun Penweddig, Aberystwyth,

"It is good to know that young people's voices are being heard and that they are listened to, as we are concerned about the future in so many different areas. After all, our future is what is under discussion.

"It was great to be a part of making this film and I hope it will have the necessary impact as we continue to increase the use of Welsh in every aspect of our lives."



HOW THE SERVICE USER VOICE HAS INFORMED SERVICE DELIVERY

Ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place

Participatory budgeting is a democratic process that enables local people to have direct decision-making power over how public budgets are spent. The overarching aim of Participatory Budgeting are to increase community participation in decisions affecting their lives and to enable spending decisions that better reflect local needs and address inequity.

In November 22, Blaenau Gwent supported the Gwent Public Services Board in delivering its second participatory budgeting programme, Community Voice, Community Choice.

16 community groups were successfully voted by the public to receive monies to deliver local well-being projects (a total of **£127,527**) at a community event held at The Beaufort Theatre, Ebbw Vale.

Throughout the process the community have been involved in the planning and development of the participatory budgeting event. Members of the group were given training and took part in a series of supported delivery sessions to shape the programme, invite bidders to apply for funding, judge whether applications fit the set criteria, and plan the decision day where the wider community will be invited to vote.



Regular updates on how groups are successfully implementing their projects from the money received is provided here:

[Community Voice, Community Choice Blaenau Gwent | Facebook](#)



MANAGING OUR PERFORMANCE AND WHAT OUR REGULATORS TOLD US

The Council is subject to numerous internal and external audits and regulatory reviews each year. These are undertaken to ensure the Council provides value for money, services are being run efficiently and effectively, and that improved services are being delivered.

Audit Wales have recently concluded a number of reports. Each of these reports has included proposals for improvement. The Council will now work to implement these proposals.

Current Reports:

- Assurance and Risk Assessment Review – two proposals for improvement
- Corporate Safeguarding Follow Up - two proposals for improvement
- 'A Missed Opportunity' Social Enterprises - three proposals for improvement
- Springing Forward - six proposals for improvement
- 'Time for Change' Poverty in Wales - one proposal for improvement
- 'Together We Can' Community Resilience and Self-Reliance - two proposals for improvement

As with all proposals for improvement received from an auditor, the Council will identify a lead officer or group who will work to progress the proposals for improvement. Regular monitoring then takes place within the relevant business plan.

All audit reports are taken through the democratic process and reported to the Governance and Audit Committee.

Audit Wales Reports still in Progress:

- Examination of the Setting of Well-being Objectives
- Unscheduled Care Project
- Review of Planning Service
- Building Safety
- Brown Field Sites
- False Fire Alarms
- Digital Strategy Review
- Use of Performance Information – Service User Perspective and Outcomes

The outcome of each of the above named reports is expected within 2023/24.

CARE INSPECTORATE WALES - Throughout 2022/23, Blaenau Gwent Social Services Department did not undergo a Local Authority inspection by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). However, a national study, undertaken across all local authorities and Health, was received on the National review of the use of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) in Wales 2021-22. The full report can be found here: <https://www.careinspectorate.wales/sites/default/files/2023-02/230207-dols-2021-22-en.pdf>

Children's Services across Wales are currently gathering information for the CIW review on Child Protection Rapid Review (CPRR), with the outcome expected in 2023/24. The purpose of the review is to understand to what extent do current structures and processes in Wales ensure children who are in need of care, support and protection are appropriately placed on, and removed from, the Child Protection Register when sufficient evidence indicates it is safe to do so.

ESTYN - **At the end of 2022**, Blaenau Gwent Council was subject to an Estyn inspection with the three inspection areas being Outcomes, Education Services and Provision and Leadership and Management.

You can read the Estyn report in full [here](#).

Archwilio Cymru
Audit Wales



Arolygiaeth Gofal
Cymru
Care Inspectorate
Wales

MANAGING OUR PERFORMANCE AND WHAT OUR REGULATORS TOLD US

(continued)

The Draft Statement of Accounts for 2021/2022 were presented to the Governance & Audit Committee on 16 November 2022. As reported at that time, the principal reason for delay in submission related to the resolution of the significant issue identified by Audit Wales.

In their report on the audit of accounts for 2020/2021 Audit Wales identified issues in relation to errors identified within the Fixed Asset Register which resulted in a misstatement of the Capital Adjustment Account and Revaluation Reserve. Given that Audit Wales have indicated that there is a high probability for the accounts to receive a qualified opinion. This would have an adverse reputational impact on the Council in demonstrating that appropriate governance arrangements are in place to manage the reporting of its strategic financial affairs. However, in order to conclude the audit of the 2021/2022 Accounts, the Council could accept the qualification of these accounts on the understanding that the causes of this qualification are remedied for the 2022/2023 financial year, i.e. a programme of asset revaluation and re-lifting is implemented.

As it is not possible to undertake and review the revaluation of assets internally in compliance with RICS requirements, external valuers will be required to provide this service. Valuations are also required for the procurement of insurance cover, the absence of which would be a material risk for high-value assets.

Over time it is possible that the value of assets may become materially misstated, for example during periods of rapidly changing prices. In order to reduce the potential for this type of misstatement, the Council's rolling programme of revaluations will be actioned over a period of 3 years instead of 5 years.

A procurement exercise is being undertaken to commission external valuers to provide the required asset information, including revaluations for financial accounting and insurance purposes, alongside an annual review of asset lives.

The Council is awaiting confirmation from Audit Wales that qualification of the 2021/2022 Accounts with appropriate correction in 2022/2023 is an acceptable course of action. If this is agreed, the financial audit can recommence in order to conclude the work required in relation to Property Plant and Equipment.

The work by Audit Wales and the Council to conclude the 2021/2022 Accounts combined with the timescales required for the revaluation process may have a consequential impact on production of the Statement of Accounts for 2022/2023.

Archwilio Cymru
Audit Wales



Arolygiaeth Gofal
Cymru
Care Inspectorate
Wales

MANAGING OUR RISKS

<p>Risk Reference CRR1 Risk Description: Failure to deliver and sustain the changes required to ensure that vital services are prioritised within the financial constraints faced by the Council. Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team / Interim Chief Executive Portfolio holder: Councillor Steve Thomas Risk Updater: Chief Officer Resources / Chief Officer Customer and Commercial</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>The Cost of Living Crises resulted in significant pressure for 2022/23 which is expected to continue into 2023/24, 2024/25. In year local government pay awards average in excess of 6% and inflation 10% and expected to rise and not to come down quickly, Welsh Government settlement is not expected to be where it needs to be.</p> <p>If the Council does not utilise alternative methods of service delivery and other approaches to mitigate the impact of financial pressures and demand challenges the result will be reductions to services significant impacting their availability and quality. Transformational change projects will be required reflecting the ambitions within the new Corporate Plan as well as in addressing the financial pressures associated with increasing demands and expectations for services. There will be challenges associated with developing the new skills and capacity required to manage significant change at a time of diminishing resources and using approaches that are relatively new concepts to the Council.</p> <p>Bridging the Gap (BtG) Proposals are being developed for 2023/24 onward. The Council has a good record of delivering but these are unprecedented times and in facing the challenges, the Council needs to ensure that its governance arrangements for business cases / savings proposals are robust. Regular reporting on the achievement of BtG and the development of new business cases / savings proposals will be progressed to CLT and Members.</p> <p>The 2023/24 Budget was approved on 23 February 2023. As part of the budget, Members agreed Strategic Business Reviews of £3m and £4.26m use of reserves to fund the approved budget. Members were also presented with initial suggestions for Commercial opportunities & investment proposals for progression in 2023/24 onwards. Business cases for these proposals will be developed and constructively challenged by multi-disciplinary teams from across the Council (external expertise may also be required in some cases). To develop capacity and capability in this area CIPFA delivered 2 bite size 'better business case' training sessions on 29 March 2023 attended by 36 staff members from across the Council.</p> <p>Work is processing to further embed the Council's commercial and business ambitions. Officers have undertaken a midterm review of the Commercial Strategy, which will be presented to the Strategic Commercial Commissioning Board on 27th March 2023. An officer group to progress commercial & business opportunities (BaCON) has been established. Terms of Reference have been agreed and an initial meeting was held on 1st March 2023. Officers have engaged with SOLACE & CIPFA to develop a commercial framework to support the development of project specific business cases.</p> <p>As at Quarter 4 the risk score has been increased to Critical.</p>	<p>Critical</p>

MANAGING OUR RISKS (Continued)

<p>Risk Reference: CRR2 Risk Description: Failure to ensure that the Councils ICT arrangements provide assurance in terms of operational functionality and data security and enable the required digital transformational change. Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team / Chief Officer Customer and Commercial Portfolio holder : Councillor Steve Thomas Risk Updater: Digital Board / Information Security Officer (SRS)</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>New risk for 2022 2023.</p> <p>This risk being is re-escalated to the Corporate Risk Register to reflect risk arising from the Council’s reliance on ICT for service continuity, the importance of ICT in transforming services and the risk from cyber attacks.</p> <p>During 2022 Audit Wales provided Councils with its findings from a national study re Cyber Resilience. To provide assurance, the Chief Information Security Officer provided an overview of the Council’s arrangements to the Governance & Audit Committee.</p> <p>As part of a planned approach of raising awareness of the importance of Information Security & Data Protection (as well as highlighting individual responsibilities) a number of on line events have taken place throughout the year led by the Data Protection Officer and the Chief Information Security Officer. These culminated in a Phishing exercise being undertaken, Blaenau Gwent’s results were very pleasing.</p> <p>Progress continues to be made with both internal and external partners to position and build digital innovation into how we plan and deliver services. The focus remains building services around the user, the organisation is now exploring how digital solutions can form part of that, for the benefit of residents and the organisation.</p> <p>A position statement against the objectives set out in the Business Case on the Shared Resource Service (SRS) Wales were shared with Governance and Audit Committee 8th March 2023.</p> <p>The SRS has a comprehensive Risk register in place. Key risks highlighted to the Strategic Board are global supply chain, cyber security awareness and recruitment and Retention of SRS staff. The risk register include mitigations for all key risks.</p>	High
<p>Risk Reference CRR4 Risk Description: Safeguarding - Failure to ensure adequate safeguarding arrangements are in place for vulnerable people in Blaenau Gwent Risk Owner - Corporate Leadership Team / Interim Director of Social Services Portfolio holder: Councillor Hayden Trollope Risk Updater: Interim Director of Social Services / Director of Education / Strategic Safeguarding Leads Group</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>The Corporate Safeguarding Leads Group is well established and has maintained a regular core group of senior representatives from across the Council. The Group meets four times per year. The group has been responsible for driving forward the recommendations made following an inspection by Audit Wales in 2019. Audit Wales returned to Blaenau Gwent Council in May 2022 to review this work and published their report, ‘Corporate Safeguarding Follow-up’ in November 2022. This report looked at what progress the Council had made to address the outstanding recommendations and proposals for improvement in their previous report in October 2019. Although the report recognised that the Council has taken action to strengthen its corporate safeguarding arrangements, it concluded that the Council had not yet fully addressed previous recommendations. The Council needs to take further action to fully comply with the recommendations in the October 2019 report and additionally needed to strengthen its monitoring arrangements of third parties to assure itself that they comply with the council’s safeguarding policies. The report was presented to Governance and Audit Committee in Quarter 4 and the Corporate Safeguarding Leads Group will undertake implementation of the recommendations identified.</p> <p>The Council received the final report from the Estyn Local Government Education Services Inspection. The inspection was positive in terms of the work undertaken by the Council and recognised the improvements made to the collation of safeguarding information by introducing the “My Concern” system to record and report incidents and related pupil demographics. There was a recognition that officers and elected members are committed to safeguarding young people and received suitable safeguarding training. There was recognition that the education and children’s services work together to improve multi agency working ensure that schools received support to manage the needs of pupils and their families more effectively. It was also noted that elected members are beginning to develop their understanding of safeguarding in education and challenge appropriately the content of reports they receive.</p> <p>In Children’s Services, vacancies in the locality teams have been filled by a combination of staff seconded onto the Social Work degree course and newly qualified workers. There is still 1 vacancy which is being advertised. The challenge will now be to retain these staff. The locality teams are starting a new way of operating from January 2023 which should allow better management of workload. All safeguarding referrals continue to be managed in line with the Wales Safeguarding procedures. An internal audit has taken place in relation to safeguarding processes across the directorate. Reasonable assurance was given. Despite good progress being made low vacancy rates will now need be sustained in addition there are savings targets attributed to the workforce which could impact of the departments safeguarding ability.</p>	High

MANAGING OUR RISKS (Continued)

<p>Risk Reference CRR 14 Risk Description: Failure to improve staff attendance rates within the Council will lead to an unacceptable impact on the ability of the Council to deliver services effectively and financially Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team / Chief Officer Customer and Commercial Portfolio holder: Councillor Steve Thomas Risk Updater: Head of Organisational Development</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score High
<p>Sickness absence statistics and a briefing note went to CLT in January 2023. The key headline was that the Council had already exceeded its annual target for sickness absence by the end of quarter 3. CLT were asked to discuss performance data and factors affecting absence levels with their DMT's and to cascade information to all Managers within their Services regarding the importance of timely and accurate recording within iTrent, with an emphasis on policy compliance.</p> <p>The sickness absence statistics and a briefing note in respect of Quarter 4 will be reported to CLT in April 2023.</p> <p>Staff wellbeing and good mental health remains a focus, with a range of measures in place including the ongoing Wellbeing Wednesday's, which supports physical and mental wellbeing.</p> <p>Progress against the further controls in place to mitigate against further impacts of this risk are ongoing.</p>	Critical
<p>Risk Reference CRR 19 Risk Description: If the Council does not manage its information assets in accordance with requirements set down within legislation then it may be faced with financial penalties and possible sanctions that hinder service delivery. Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team / Chief Officer Resources Portfolio holder: Councillor Steve Thomas Risk Updater: Information and Governance Officer</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score High
<p>Annual reviews of the Information Security and Acceptable Use Policies have been undertaken and accepted at the March 2023 Information Governance Forum and will now progress.</p> <p>Changes to Data Protection legislation currently progressing through Parliament are likely to impact the way the Council handles information but aren't currently thought to change the risk in any way. The changes will continue to be monitored and any risks or changes identified and escalated appropriately.</p> <p>As part of a planned approach of raising awareness of the importance of Information Security & Data Protection (as well as highlighting individual responsibilities) a number of on line events have taken place throughout the year led by the Data Protection Officer and the Chief Information Security Officer. These culminated in a Phishing exercise being undertaken, Blaenau Gwent's results were very pleasing.</p> <p>For Quarter 4 there were 11 data breaches identified and the total for the year stands at 45. This is higher than the previous 12 month period which was 37 data breaches in total. No pattern or single cause for this increase as been identified but this will continue to be monitored. No breaches during Q4 were reported to the ICO.</p>	High
<p>Risk Reference CRR 20 Risk Description: There is a risk that increasingly complex needs and demand for services provided by Social Services and Education in particular for Looked After Children, will put further significant pressure on the Council's budget. Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team / Interim Director of Social Services Portfolio holder: Councillor Hayden Trollope Risk Updater: Interim Director of Social Services</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>CRR20 to be removed from the Corporate Risk Register CRR20 is to be de-escalated from the Corporate Risk register but will remain on the Social Services Directorate Risk Register. Impacts of this risk will now be picked up under CRR30 Cost of Living Risk and any financial impact via CRR21 and CRR20 (Financial risks).</p>	

MANAGING OUR RISKS (Continued)

<p>Risk Reference CRR 21 Risk Description: The Financial resilience of the Council could be at risk if the Council does not ensure that financial planning and management decisions support long term stability and sustainability. Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team / Chief Officer Resources Portfolio holder: Councillor Steve Thomas Risk Updater: Chief Officer Resources</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy was reviewed in December 2022 and a number of assumptions around future pay and inflationary uplifts were changed to reflect the expected financial environment for 2023/24 onwards. WG provisional settlement for Blaenau Gwent is 6.5% (the lowest increase in Wales). Whilst this increase is above the 3% indicative increase announced in 2021 it is not sufficient to fund the forecast cost increases resulting budget gaps increasing to in excess of £23m over a 5-year period.</p> <p>The 2023/24 Budget was approved on 23 February 2023. As part of the budget, Members agreed Strategic Business Reviews of £3m and £4.26m use of reserves to fund the approved budget. Members were also presented with initial suggestions for Commercial opportunities & investment proposals for progression in 2023/24 onwards. Business cases for these proposals will be developed and constructively challenged by multi-disciplinary teams from across the Council (external expertise may also be required in some cases. To develop capacity and capability in this area CIPFA delivered 2 bite size 'better business case' training sessions on 29 March 2023 attended by 36 staff members from across the Council.</p> <p>Use of the Market Intelligence gathered from the Strategic Commercial Commission Board (SCCB) to support the councils budget setting process for 23/24 and beyond.</p>	High
<p>Risk Reference CRR 22 Risk Description: The Financial resilience of the Council could be at risk if the Council does not ensure that financial planning and management decisions support long term stability and sustainability. Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team / Chief Officer Resources Portfolio holder: Councillor Steve Thomas Risk Updater: Chief Officer Resources</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>The Council is vulnerable to rising cost pressures associated with inflation. The rising cost of construction materials, food supplies, energy costs and staff wages will all have an impact on the costs of service delivery, at a time when our budgets uplifts are unable to keep up with rising cost of living. Consequently there is a risk to the Council's ability to maintain levels of service delivery and has the potential to disrupt our ability to achieve our wellbeing objectives and key priorities as a council such as major capital programmes such as the Sustainable Communities for Learning (formerly 21st Century Schools) programme, Council housing programme and other transformation projects.</p> <p>The revenue budget outturn for 2023/24 is forecasting an adverse variance of £1.6m which will need to be funded by specific reserves. The council is experiencing significant cost pressures across a number of services driven by the cost of living crisis currently being experienced.</p> <p>For 2023/24 as part of the agreed budget, assumptions around pay and inflation have increased and other specific cost pressures have been built to, costs are expected to outstrip income such that £4.26m use of reserves will be required to fund the approved budget. This is not sustainable in the longer term and new / emergency pressures could exacerbate the position. The Cost Pressure sub group will be re-established for 2023/24 to monitor and challenge overspending areas.</p>	Critical
<p>Risk Reference CRR 24 Risk Description: There is a risk around adverse impact on business following leaving the EU, overlaid with emerging from the pandemic and with the war in Ukraine – with increased costs; time delays; shortage of resources – both human and product Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team Portfolio holder: Councillor Steve Thomas Risk Updater: Corporate Leadership Team</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>CRR24 to be removed from the Corporate Risk Register</p> <p>CRR24 is to be retired from the Corporate Risk Register and the exit from the EU will be picked up under CRR30 (Cost of Living Risk) and financial impacts under CRR21 and CRR22 (financial risks)</p>	

MANAGING OUR RISKS (Continued)

<p>Risk Reference CRR 30 (a) Risk Description: Impact of cost of living (inflationary) increase driven by a number of crosscutting forces on our communities have created significant challenges for those already in need. Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team / Interim Director of Social Services Portfolio holder: Councillor Hayden Trollope Risk Updater: Cost of Living Crisis Operational Working Group</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>New risk for 2022 2023. The cost-of-living crisis has created a scenario where the cost of everyday essentials such as energy and food is rising over and above average incomes. There are a number of crosscutting forces behind this evolving crisis, which reflects the complex and interconnected nature of our global markets. The cost of living is expected to rise further during the immediate to medium term and we will need to support our communities and citizens to navigate and overcome the worst impacts of this crisis. It is anticipated that these increasing pressures are being felt by those households whose budgets have the least capacity to absorb financial pressures. As an authority we recognise that we do not control all the necessary levers to mitigate against the full impact of this crisis however we recognise the need to focus on the steps we can take to alleviate the effects of the crisis. A Cost Of Living Crisis Operation Group has been established who will provide officer oversight of the action plan developed in relation to the local authority's response to the Cost of Living Crisis. Meetings take place monthly and the group consider proposals for new actions to be included in the action plan.</p> <p>Meetings take place Monthly prior to Cross Party Member Led working group on COL and all actions report into this group which is chaired by the Leader.</p> <p>The action plan focuses on warm hubs and maximisation of the WG grant to support the HUBS, Distributing the £100K allocated by the Council to BG foodbank and other smaller food banks, receiving feedback from CAB on the impact of the £50K donation from the Council, to keep the information booklet up to date on what support is available in relation to food, housing, fuel and general support.</p> <p>1st Panel meeting held in January to discuss the warm hubs bids. 5 applications approved in January and 20 in February. £23K of the £27K grant money has been used. Hub officers will be visiting the hubs over the coming months. Monitoring information will also be gathered from the Flying start warm hubs and the hubs in libraries.</p> <p>18 applications were made by foodbanks in February which has resulted in the £70K put aside by the Council has been maximised and an additional £10K from grants has also been used.</p>	Critical
<p>Risk Reference CRR 30 (b) Risk Description: Impact of cost of living (inflationary) increases on businesses in Blaenau Gwent. Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team / Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services Portfolio holder: Councillor Hayden Trollope or Councillor John Morgan Risk Updater: Cost of Living Crisis Operational Working Group</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>A Cost Of Living Crisis Operation Group has been established who will provide officer oversight of the action plan developed in relation to the local authority's response to the Cost of Living Crisis. The action plan includes support for local businesses. Meetings will take place Monthly and the group will consider proposals for new actions to be included in the action plan. Meetings take place Monthly prior to Cross Party Member Led working group on COL and all actions report into this group, which is chaired by the Leader.</p> <p>The Council has been allocated money from the shared prosperity fund with the purpose of supporting local businesses. Formal guidance for the shared prosperity fund is awaited.</p>	Critical
<p>Risk Reference CRR 30 (c) Risk Description: Impact of cost of living (inflationary) increases on the Council (and staff) resulting in increased levels of service demand Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team / Interim Director of Social Services Portfolio holder: Councillor Hayden Trollope Risk Updater: Cost of Living Crisis Operational Working Group</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>Support for the workforce by providing information and practical support in relation to the cost of living include the wellbeing Wednesday offer which will incorporate information from the booklet developed for staff, a specific Manager brief will be developed in relation to the cost of living so managers are clear on what support is available to staff, CoL of leaflets will be made available to staff who don't have access to computers.</p> <p>To ensure all staff are receiving CoL information OD to run a report to identify the GAPS in service areas where we don't have individual employee personal e mail addresses. This will enable a more targeted approach to dip sampling to ensure all staff are receiving the COL information. Also agreed managers brief on COL would be recirculated. Work has been done by OD to identify staff who have not provided a person e-mail address by which to receive council information and then prompt line managers and staff to update these details on itrent.</p>	Critical

MANAGING OUR RISKS (Continued)

<p>Risk Reference CRR 25 Risk Description: The 2 schools in an Estyn category and currently in receipt of Council Intervention fail to make appropriate progress against the Statutory Warning Notice to Improve and their Post Inspection Action Plans. Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team / Director of Education Portfolio holder: Councillor Sue Edmunds Risk Updater: Director of Education / Education DMT</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>Continuing the work with Schools Causing Concern (SCC), particularly the two schools currently in an Estyn category.</p> <p>Brynmawr Foundation School (BFS) - continues to be subject to a Local Authority Warning Notice to improve and intervention is in place. The revisited Statutory Warning Notice was released to Brynmawr Foundation School on 8th March with a focus on the pace of improvement required. A further ESTYN monitoring visit will take place in the last week of March 2023. The Education Directorate is working with the EAS and the school in relation to the pace of progress in improving teaching and learning and a review was undertaken in March 2023 with Cardiff High School (support school). Wellbeing support set up with BFS, first learner to start in January 2023. Agreed the school will receive support as a Team Around the School in addition to the Multi-agency approach, first TAS will be in April 2023.</p> <p>The River Centre (RC) - The Governing Body of the school remains under statutory intervention because of the Statutory Warning Notice to improve following an Estyn inspection July 2022, where the school was placed in Special Measures. The Post Inspection Action Plan has been submitted to Estyn and an initial monitoring visit took place on 15th December 2022 which reviewed the PIAP and the LA Statement of Action. The outcome of this visit was that the PIAP was viewed as appropriate for addressing the setting's recommendations.</p> <p>A member briefing is scheduled for March to provide updates against the 7 Estyn recommendations. There is a focus on developments of teaching and learning of skills in the PIAP. Significant progress on the RC secondary site in respect of building improvements and the school site re-opened to pupils after February half term. The school is experiencing recruitment difficulties to key posts. The LA is supporting with this. 13 TA vacancies advertised and successfully filled March 2023.</p> <p>The Council received the final report from the Estyn Local Government Education Services Inspection which identified 3 recommendations for improvement that the local authority will use to update its improvement plans. One of the areas being a recommendation to 'accelerate improvements in provision for secondary age pupils in schools causing concern'. The areas for development take account of shortcomings identified through the inspection process. The local authority's plans are to be updated during the Spring term and the revised Education Improvement Plan (EIP) and Self-Evaluation Report (SER) will be reported to the People Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet early in the Summer term for both scrutinisation and to seek approval. Development work has already begun on addressing the recommendations.</p>	High
<p>Risk Reference CRR 26 Risk Description: Business Continuity. The on-going COVID 19 pandemic presents a continued risk to service delivery. Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team Portfolio holder: Councillor Steve Thomas Risk Updater: Corporate Leadership Team</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>CRR26 to be removed from the Corporate Risk Register</p> <p>CRR26 is to be retired from the Corporate Risk register as it relates specifically relates to business continuity around the COVID 19 pandemic. The Corporate Risk CRR5 which covers Business Continuity will be re-escalated to the Corporate Risk Register to cover all significant risks around business continuity to Council Services</p>	
<p>Risk Reference CRR 5 Risk Description: There is a risk that the Council's Business Continuity processes are not robust enough to enable the provision of critical services in an emergency. Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team / Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships. Portfolio holder: Councillor Steve Thomas Risk Updater: Civil Contingencies Manager</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>New risk for 2022 2023. CRR5 (Business Continuity) is being re-escalated to the Corporate Risk Register to replace CRR26 "Business Continuity. The on-going COVID 19 pandemic presents a continued risk to service delivery". CRR5 will cover all significant triggers, which could affect the Council's resilience.</p>	High

MANAGING OUR RISKS (Continued)

<p>Risk Reference CRR 27 Risk Description: There is a risk that identified staffing pressures in social services will result in an inability to deliver services particularly in provider services and domiciliary care. Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team / Interim Director of Social Services Portfolio holder: Councillor Hayden Trollope</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>CRR27 to be removed from the Corporate Risk Register</p> <p>CRR27 is to be de-escalated from the Corporate Risk register but will remain on the Social Services Directorate Risk Register. Impacts of this risk will now be picked up under CRR28 (recruitment and retention)</p>	
<p>Risk Reference CRR 28 Risk Description: Failure to maintain appropriately skilled, adequate staffing resources will lead to an unacceptable impact on the ability of the Council to deliver services effectively Risk Owner: Corporate Leadership Team / Chief Officer Customer and Commercial Portfolio holder: Councillor Steve Thomas Risk Updater: Head of Organisational Development</p>	
Progress Update	Residual Risk Score
<p>New risk for 2022 2023</p> <p>The impact of recruitment and retention difficulties whilst a corporate risk has had a more significant impact on certain services as individual aspirations have changed post pandemic and with the cost-of-living crisis. All directorates have developed a workforce plan for 2022/23 with a detailed action plan to put in place measures to address these issues. In addition, the ongoing work corporately will support directorates to recruit and retain staff by further modernising the Councils approach and marketing the Council as an 'Employer of Choice'. Whilst the risk remains high with no significant changes, staffing pressures in some services have eased with successful recruitment to vacant roles. In addition, other measures that will support in the longer term include effective workforce and succession planning, the management of sickness absence, and where appropriate working regionally/nationally.</p> <p>Particular difficulties have been experience in Social Services, in Children's Services vacancies in the locality teams have been filled by a combination of staff seconded onto the Social Work degree course and newly qualified workers. There is still 1 vacancy, which is being advertised. The challenge will now be retaining these staff. The locality teams are starting a new way of operating from January 2023, which should allow better management of workload. All safeguarding referrals continue to be managed in line with the Wales Safeguarding procedures In relation to provider services there has been increased recruitment to vacancies in some areas. Community options staff are still redeployed to supported living to manage the vacancies there, however these staff are moving back to the substantive posts over the next 2 months as vacancies have been filled.</p> <p>Presentation of Recruitment and retention data delivered by the Head of Organisational Development to Corporate Leadership Team on 16th February using statistical data as at 31st January 2023. Further analysis will be available in the year end Workforce Profiles</p> <p>Annual workforce profiles will be developed during April 23 following the financial year. Workforce plans for each Directorate to be reviewed May 2023 – opportunity for support from WLGA</p>	<p>High</p>

OUR FOCUS FOR THE FUTURE

As a council we are looking to '**Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent**'. Alongside the many achievements detailed throughout this report we recognise that the following areas will require further development and improvement:

- Improve attendance and attainment rates and reduce school exclusions in both Primary and Secondary sectors;
- Focus on Higher levels of language acquisition and reading across the board, but particularly in our very young children in early years;
- Focus on improving the pace of change for Schools Causing Concern;
- Develop a vision and strategy for the future provision of ALN;
- Respond to the recommendations from the recent Estyn Inspection;
- Continue to examine the opportunity for new industrial space across the borough;
- Supporting the community to gain the right skills for a changing world and build capacity for lifelong learning;
- Progress with the development of CiNER and Regain 2 to support growth and investment into the area; and
- Work to further improve our competitiveness across the UK.



Maximise
learning and
skills for all
to create a
prosperous,
thriving,
resilient
Blaenau
Gwent'



OUR FOCUS FOR THE FUTURE

As a council we are looking to '**Empower and support communities to be safe, independent and resilient**'. Alongside the many achievements detailed throughout this report we recognise that the following areas will require further development and improvement:

- Re-establish and strengthen existing engagement networks as well as establish new opportunities for people to get involved;
- Ensure the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy 2020 – 2025 actions are regularly monitored, implemented and reviewed;
- Continue to implement the regional action plan to meet the needs identified within the population needs assessment;
- Take forward any learning from the outcome report requested by Care Inspectorate Wales on Public Law process;
- Ensure that preventative support is available for adults and their unpaid carers, that promote and maintain personal independence; and
- Provide support to those impacted by the cost of living crisis via actions identified by the Cost of Living Member and Officer Groups.



Empower
and support
communities
to be safe,
independent
and resilient



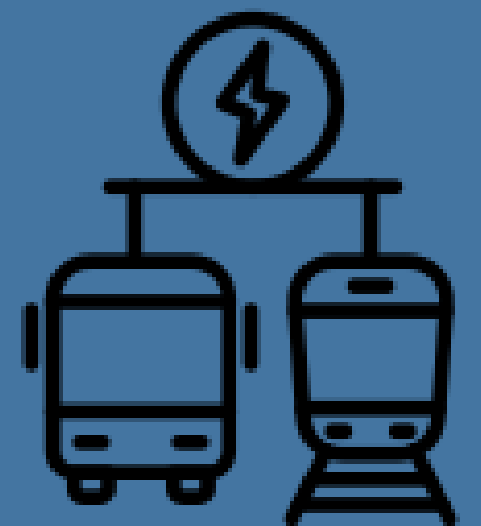
OUR FOCUS FOR THE FUTURE

As a council we are looking to '**Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities**'. Alongside the many achievements detailed throughout this report we recognise that the following areas will require further development and improvement:

- Our Climate group will work to prioritise key actions from the Decarbonisation plan in order to work towards achieving the Welsh Government Net Zero Targets of reaching a 63% reduction by 2030, an 89% reduction by 2050 and a 100% reduction by 2050;
- Continue to work towards the recommendations made by our climate assembly;
- Continue to support the national campaign to tackle Fly- Tipping (not up my street);
- Continue with the delivery of the Energy Prospectus to interest in energy development across the borough to facilitate a supply of renewable energy to meet the future energy needs of the area including consideration of wind and hydro generation projects; and
- Continue to work towards meeting the Welsh Government statutory recycling target 70% by 2024-25.



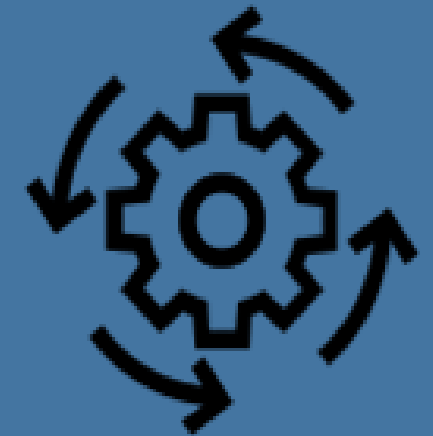
Respond to
the nature
and climate
crisis and
enable
connected
communities



OUR FOCUS FOR THE FUTURE

As a council we are looking to be '**An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place**'. Alongside the many achievements detailed throughout this report we recognise that the following areas will require further development and improvement:

- Gain a greater understanding of the barriers to access digital solutions within our communities and develop support for those who wish to improve their digital skills;
- Engage effectively across the organisation, with partners and key groups to develop the new Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028;
- Progress the Engagement and Participation Strategy to ensure the voice of the community is considered when planning and decision making;
- Responding to the recommendations from the Welsh Language Commissioner;
- Further embed safeguarding arrangements across the whole Council;
- Progress the Workforce Strategy including consideration of recruitment and retention across the Directorates;
and
- Work to reduce the sickness levels across the Council.



An
ambitious and
innovative
council
delivering
quality
services at the
right time and
in the right
place





CONTACT DETAILS

If you require any further information or have any feedback you wish to share, please:

Write to us:

Head of Governance and Partnerships
Corporate Services
General Offices
Steelworks Road
Ebbw Vale
NP23 6AA

Call us:

(01495) 311556

Email us:

pps@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Visit our Website:

www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol

Blaenau Gwent

County Borough Council

