



BWRDD GWASANAETHAU CYHOEDDUS
Blaenau Gwent
PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD

The Blaenau Gwent We Want

Three Years of Progress

2020/21





The Blaenau Gwent We Want

Three Years of Progress (2020/21)

Disclaimer: This Annual Report has been produced and published under the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This published document is part of an on-going approach to improve well-being in Blaenau Gwent.

The most up to date version of this document is available on the Blaenau Gwent Council website:

<https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/council/partnerships/partnership-working/>

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg





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Policy & Partnerships

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Municipal Offices

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Ebbw Vale

Blaenau Gwent

NP23 6XB



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Blaenau Gwent
PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD

Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board Partners



Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub
De Cymru



South Wales
Fire and Rescue Service



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Forewords

The Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board (PSB) was formed in 2016 under the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015.

The PSB brings together public services operating locally and regionally and focuses on improving the well-being of current and future generations in the Blaenau Gwent area. It oversees the delivery of our Well-being Plan 'The Blaenau Gwent We Want' 2018 to 2023.

One of the statutory requirements on us as a PSB is to produce an annual report setting out the progress we have made towards achieving the Well Being Plan objectives.

2020/21 has given us some unique challenges as we responded to and continued to live with the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have continued to work together as a PSB during 2020 and 2021 including reflecting on the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on our communities and the focus of our work programme to help with recovery from the pandemic moving forward.

I am therefore pleased to share our annual report for 2020/21 highlighting the important work that has been undertaken across our communities.

Councillor Nigel Daniels

**Chair of the Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board
Leader of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**



Since the pandemic struck, mental health has been a particular concern for all, but particularly for young people. Many young people have suffered from poor mental health, due to the fact that their Education became virtual for the majority of an academic year, so they didn't receive the same support they would normally receive through face to face teaching. In so many cases the isolation of not going to school, college or university and not seeing friends on a daily basis, has had an adverse effect on mental health. In addition to this,

many young people were not able to continue with their sports and activities, which meant that they weren't gaining the rewards that physical activity gives them.

The priorities for recent Youth Mayors have focused on mental health in young people, by promoting positive body image and improving mental health through sport and physical activity. Therefore, a regularly discussed topic in the Youth Forum meetings has been promoting mental health and well-being in young people. As a Youth Forum we have done a project promoting positive body images, the outcome of which was a video that would support young people with these issues: [Blaenau Gwent CBC: I Decide Me - Positive Body Image Campaign](#). In addition, this year's Youth Mayor was successful in obtaining a grant to help a local gym introduce a Youth Academy. The facility will enable young people to train on age appropriate equipment and learn basic skills to pass on to help other young people.

Many young people have jobs in the hospitality and retail industry, which have been massively affected by the economic impact of the pandemic. Some businesses were forced to close and others had to make staff redundant after permanent closure. The furlough scheme has benefited these industries and their staff a great deal, by providing them with an income during their closure. However, some young people may have been saving to buy their first home and with the reduced or lack of income and the housing market increase, this has become increasingly difficult. It will have forced those young people to live at home with their parents or carers for longer.

Lastly, as for all generations, the inability to socialise during lockdown has led to mental health issues amongst young people, as they were isolated from friends and family. As we emerge from the pandemic, it is important as young people for us to have our voices heard and be given opportunities to maximise social, economic and cultural well-being within our communities.



Darcy Howell – Blaenau Gwent Youth Mayor

Introduction

Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board (PSB) was established in April 2016 as part of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (“the Act”). It is a partnership of key public bodies that by working together have a huge responsibility to create a place we want to live in now and in the future.

The Act is a ground-breaking piece of 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 Well-being Goals](#).

The Act places 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 following [five ways of working](#), pictured below:



Our Annual Report contains video content to show some of the great work that has been taken forward during 2020-21. If you see the ‘video’ icon (left) in this document you can click on it to watch the clips, all of which are hosted on external websites.

Meeting our requirement under the Act

As a Public Services Board (PSB) we agreed our five-year Well-being Plan in April 2018 and it was published on Friday 4 May 2018, in-line with statutory guidance.

Our plan was the result of a comprehensive programme of involvement and collaborative work to develop a coherent plan for delivering well-being. It prioritises five key well-being objectives set out below to take forward in order to bring about positive changes for local people and communities:

Our Well-being Objectives

1	Blaenau Gwent wants everyone to have the best start in life...	Ensuring early years of future generations are healthy, happy, free from harm and ready to succeed.
2	Blaenau Gwent wants safe and friendly communities...	Creating safer communities, where people feel safe and have good social connections, are socially responsible and have a good cultural life.
3	Blaenau Gwent wants to look after and protect its natural environments...	Creating a vibrant area that lives in harmony with its natural environments, using resources in a fair and sustainable way.
4	Blaenau Gwent wants to forge new pathways to prosperity...	A place where people thrive and achieve their full learning and lifelong potential.
5	Blaenau Gwent wants to encourage and enable people to make healthy lifestyle choices in the places that they live, learn, work and play.	A place where people live longer with better health, a place where healthy behaviours is the 'norm'.

Further information on how we developed our plan, along with supporting documents is available within our local well-being plan [‘The Blaenau Gwent We Want, 2018-23’](#).

Click the link in the image below to hear more about this years Annual Report from the current Blaenau Gwent Youth Mayor.



Celebrating Our Progress 2020/2021

Due to the COVID19 pandemic, many partnership programmes suffered delays and periods where the work was paused whilst partners focussed on responding to the pandemic and supporting vulnerable residents. Some of the works undertaken in response to the pandemic are still ongoing but partners are now working well together to bring the programmes forward and up to speed.

Although life in Wales has changed considerably over recent months, the focus and vision of The Blaenau Gwent We Want' Well-being Plan remains relevant and very important to achieve.

The pandemic showed us how communities can come together and support each other, the third sector's ability to flex and adapt its services to meet individual need and the commitment and resilience of professionals who care for the most vulnerable members of our society.

During our third year, the Blaenau Gwent PSB retained focus on making progress towards achieving the below well-being objectives, many of which have been heavily impacted by COVID19 restrictions. Working in partnership with sponsors, stakeholders and community members proven to be crucial in providing support to those in need as well as maintaining our well-being targets and below objectives:

- Best Start in Life for Everyone, through the Early Years Integration Transformation Programme
- Safe & Friendly Communities, through the Age-Friendly Communities Programme and Community Safety partnership activity.
- To Look After and Protect the Environment, through the Climate Change Mitigation programme.
- To Forge New Pathways to Prosperity, through the Foundational Economy programme.
- To Encourage and Enable People to Make Health Lifestyle Choices, through the Integrated Well-being Network and Sustainable Food programmes.



INTEGRATION is a key aspect of the Blaenau Gwent PSB's approach to well-being. The IWN, Sustainable Food, Climate Change and Age-Friendly programmes are all interlinked, with local public and 3rd sector organisations working in partnership together to achieve healthier, greener and more prosperous communities across Blaenau Gwent.



The Best Start in Life for Everyone

Early childhood is a critical stage in life that can determine much of a person's future well-being.

Over the course of the **First 1,000 Days** (from conception to the second birthday), a child develops behaviours and the ability to think and reason as part of their cognitive development. This sets the stage for lifelong health, learning and achievement, developing relationships, and what is eventually passed on to future generations.

The Early Years Integrated Transformation Project (EYITP) tests a new way of working, which challenges traditional organisational and professional boundaries to ensure effective collaboration for 'hard to reach families'. That puts families first based on what matters to them.

Details of how we made progress towards ensuring **the best start in life for everyone** across Blaenau Gwent are outlined below.



Other Developments

As part of the preparation, a number of consultation events have taken place - these have included a workshop held with regional partners to ensure the Directors from Education and Social Services buy-in, support and shape the approach at a Blaenau Gwent level.

Additional preparation and consultation work has taken place during January and February 2020, in the form of a management briefing which included sharing the findings of Vanguard and the new principles for the EYITP and receiving feedback which was fed into the regional steering group. Managers representing Flying Start, Families First, Head Teachers, Early Years providers and leads within health, including; Health Visiting, school nurse and midwifery, attended.

At the heart of this project is the aim of creating an integrated and responsive early years system that is accessible for all families to address 'What Matters' to them, this has driven meetings with third sector organisations to explore

Work with the community will continue in order to build resilience where there are support groups led by parents for parents. Reducing the need for commissioned services and bringing in specialist support when needed.

The pilots have been confirmed to be rolled out in 2021/22 by Welsh Government, with more local authorities being asked to be pathfinders. The award of £350,000 for 2021/22 has been confirmed to be split between Blaenau Gwent CBC, Caerphilly CBC, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Newport CC and, an extra £50,000 for the role of the Project Coordinator.

The expansion of the full Cwm Pilot went ahead and included all Health Visitors caseloads, as agreed by the PSB in March 2021. Phase 2 of Brynmawr (Bryn Farm) and Nantyglo 1 (Winchestown) also began in April 2021.

An early evaluation report has been completed and submitted to WAG.

Substantial work has been done to align Flying Start and Generic Health Visiting services in line with the pilot's new way of working. Which has resulted in Flying Start and Generic Health Visiting managers being co-located with the plan for all Health visitors regardless of if they are Flying Start or Generic. Hubs are based in Tredegar, Blaina and Ebbw Vale and another hub is proposed in

Abertillery if needed. Flying Start services will still remain but health teams will work more closely supporting families based on needs.

The currently electronic system used by Flying Start, Families First and Social Services in BG is WCCIS. Plans are underway to bring Health onto this one file system which will enable services to be fully integrated resulting in better outcomes from families. ABHB and WG have approved a pilot of WCCIS with the Early Year Integration Transformation Programme Pilot. This part of the pilot went live during September 2020.

Substantial work has been done to improve communication and notification of antenatal mums, this has resulted in a new process developed which is currently being piloted. This system will enable the community midwifery to access enhanced support from the pilot team based on family's needs.

Next Steps

- The award of funding for 2021/22 meant that the proposed expansion of the Cwm Pilot to include the full pilot Health Visitors caseloads as detailed above could go ahead from April 2021.
- It also meant that the agreed roll out of Phase 2 into Brynmawr 2 (Bryn Farm) and Nantyglo 1 (Winchestown) could go ahead from April 2021, the size of which is dependent on funding and caseload numbers.

Safe and Friendly Communities

Blaenau Gwent PSB wants to build on this strong sense of community by developing safe and friendly communities, using a **place-based approach to support our communities and citizens of all ages.**



During our first two years, this objective has focussed on tackling key community safety issues and ensuring that Blaenau Gwent can be recognised as an area of age-friendly communities. However, in the third year we had to refocus and direct most of our attention and efforts to help and support the most vulnerable members of the community.

COMMUNITY SAFETY HUB

The Blaenau Gwent Community Safety Hub was established April 2019. The multi-agency partners who regularly attend the Hub have contributed to the delivery of commitments set out in the 'Blaenau Gwent We Want' Well-being Plan 2018-2023 and the Police and Crime Commissioner's Policing Plan for Gwent.



During 2020/21, the Hub became a virtual meeting of partners and information sharing using digital technology due to the Covid19 restrictions. Through the virtual Hub, partners have effectively discharged a broad range of community safety statutory functions:

- Prevent crime and reduce offending & reoffending amongst children and adults;
- Tackle anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment; and respond to Community Trigger requests;
- Combat the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances;
- Support victims of crime (including domestic abuse, hate crime and exploitation);
- Supporting children and adults at risk of radicalisation.

An Information Sharing Protocol was implemented to ensure the appropriate, safe and legal sharing of personal information between the multi-agency partners. This was a vital method of communication during the initial stages of the Covid19 pandemic to support the most vulnerable in our communities.

Outcomes

Partners have worked together through the Hub to review Planning/Building Control arrangements at particular premises, met with the local Business

Community to discuss concerns, maintained positive contact with elected members and key residents, in addition to considering all vulnerabilities and risks of harm to certain victim cohorts.

Members of the Hub have worked with victims from local businesses, the local community, neighbours, visitors to the area, victims known to the offenders etc. to address and prevent organised crime, illicit drug use and drug dealing, robbery, burglary, violence and intimidation, domestic violence, and anti-social behaviour. The Hub has helped to reduce offending amongst twenty identified targeted individuals, known prolific offenders, known petty offenders, offenders in tenuous accommodation arrangements, substance misusers, and rough sleepers.

Local Business Community and residents pleased with the response / reduction in victimisation, crimes and anti-social behaviour / accommodation manager working more effectively to manage their tenants.

Learning and next steps

Information sharing and knowing what is going on in our area enabled us to tackle issues we wouldn't have been aware of without this partnership approach.

It demonstrated that the Hub has enabled United Welsh to strengthen their partnerships with Police, Fire, Tai Calon, and victim support and community safety. This has enabled us to deal with ASB more efficiently and has increased tenant's satisfaction. It has also opened up great opportunities to share good practice.

Generally, there is a feeling of much better understanding, it was also apparent the partnership is working well this year and improvement can be seen.

The New 2022-2026 Police & Crime Plan by the Gwent Police & Crime Commissioner.

The Police and Crime Commissioner, Jeff Cuthbert is working on a new police and crime plan and needs the public's say on what they think should be a priority, in terms of tackling Anti-Social Behaviour and improving community safety in their area. By completing the survey members of the public can state what they think these priorities should be.



Click ctrl and then on the photo to be forwarded to the consultation survey.

AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

The concept of Age-Friendly Communities (AFCs) was developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as part of a global initiative to identify the changes needed for cities and communities to adapt to and benefit from ageing populations.

AFCs make life better for all people who live in a community, particularly as they age. They recognise lonely people in the community and encourage activities that people of all ages can participate in. Decisions on what it means to be age-friendly sit closer to local communities; ensuring local people have a voice based on their own lived experiences. Being age-friendly means designing our communities and services *with* older people, not just *for* them.

The eight domains of an AFC identified by the WHO are:



The purpose of the Age-Friendly Blaenau Gwent programme is to ensure that future generations of older people are well equipped for later life by highlighting the challenges faced by today's older generations and secure a commitment from public service providers and local partners to continue to develop age-friendly communities across the borough.



Due to the COVID19 pandemic, many activity groups were closed down with no further notice. Some of them continued to engage and run via the virtual events/platforms, this however highlighted issues with Digital

Exclusion/Inclusion and sight and hearing problems faced by older people, which quite often make it hard or prevent them from participating in an online activities.

This prompted partners to come together and support older people or anyone unfamiliar with I.T. to stay involved with their hobbies and interest during and beyond the COVID19 pandemic.

Progress:

- BGCBC and GAVO hosted an Age-Friendly Consultation in February 2021 to engage with our partners and members of public to gather their opinion and feed it back into a consultation response, as well as gathering useful insight for the age-friendly assessment and action plan.
- There is also continues engagement with the 50+ Forum and the 50+ Stakeholder Network via regular virtual updates and the above mentioned virtual consultation event on what makes, or would make, local communities more age-friendly for older people. GAVO and other partners are also promoting and supporting local organisations and individuals so they can continue with their Group Activities and Virtual meetings.
- New post-COVID Age-Friendly action plan was developed via the age-friendly steering group. Current memberships include GAVO, BGCBC, ABUHB, Aneurin Leisure Trust, Police & Crime Commissioner's Officer, and 50+ Forum reps, recently approved by the PSB in July 2021.
- The Locality Response service was set up in late March 2020 in response to the Covid19 pandemic, in order to signpost vulnerable residents



towards the support they needed to obtain food, collect prescriptions, get advice or simply have someone to talk to. More information is provided in the Covid19 chapter on page 49.

Case studies from engagement with the 50+ community

- Some community members said their friends are not interested in digital technology e.g. one attendee's sister joined one of the online classes and was coping with the lessons until the class was changed to a different video conferencing platform. The lady lost the interest and stopped as it was too difficult for her to keep up with the training and the material.
- "... People with Dementia are being supported differently with no face to face services and perhaps at most two calls a week, we must try and pick back up this service. Julies also supports MIND which has not run since last March but feels calls are not always the best way and for many who are being supported face to face is the best option."
- "... Just before lockdown I felt really redundant and felt I didn't know what I had left to give but COVID jolted me into saying how can I respond and what can I do. I am part of a belief that focuses on building strong communities and is open to everyone. We have been having Zoom meetings and developed a family virtual group, which wouldn't have happened if it weren't for the pandemic."
- "...We were lucky when things changed our funder was flexible and allowed us to divert funding to the task force which has supported the current work. We have looked into 121 online learning with their young people and starting to think of ways to re-engage with the 200 members of the 60+ group.

Looking After and Protecting our Environment

We must address the challenges caused by climate change and loss of natural habitats in order to look after and protect our environment. To do this we need to improve our urban green spaces, walk, cycle, use public transport and recycle more, and look after our land and Blaenau Gwent's fabulous countryside in a more sustainable way.

Read on for more information about how the PSB's Climate Change programmes are aiming to address these challenges.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Action against climate change was identified as a priority by the PSB under the 'look after and protect the environment' objective. The Well-being Assessment identified a number of impacts from climate change that could have significant effects on local services and infrastructure, including more frequent and intense rainfall events, wetter warmer winters and hotter drier summers. Our climate actions can also address other well-being issues that are important to residents (such as local natural spaces, health and cost of living).

There are two main forms of climate action. Mitigation actions that prevent the release of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases that cause climate change (e.g. reducing energy use) and adaptation actions that respond to the changes which are predicted, or are already taking place, due to climate change (e.g. improving flood defences). The PSB will be addressing both types of action through two distinct projects:

Climate change and reducing carbon emissions is often seen as a national or international issue, but some of the most far-reaching options for emissions reduction are led by actions that are inherently local, including urban planning, travel options and the buildings sector, with its relatively localised supply chains. There is a lot we can do locally and we want to focus on these actions.

In particular, understanding the overall picture of how to reduce our territorial emissions (all the carbon that is emitted in Blaenau Gwent) and identifying where there are gaps in what we are already doing locally.

Climate Change Mitigation

There are significant opportunities to enhance prosperity through mitigation actions to decarbonise Blaenau Gwent. For example, the potential for job opportunities associated with retrofitting housing, or to improve access to jobs and education at the same time as decarbonising transport. The climate steering group facilitates collaboration and identify distinct pathways to decarbonisation in different areas such as housing and transport. The steering group includes: relevant strategic decision makers, climate expertise and community representatives (including young people).

In 2017, the Welsh Government set the ambition of achieving a carbon neutral public sector by 2030. In doing so, we recognised the public sector is uniquely placed to influence emissions far more widely than its own, relatively small direct emissions in areas such as transport, energy and land use. As well as tackling the issues of air pollution, this approach can have a positive impact on the local economy by reducing energy costs and by creating investment opportunities for the low carbon economy.

In March 2019, the Welsh Government published Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales¹, including Policy 20 which can be found on the following website: <https://gov.wales/prosperity-all-low-carbon-wales>: Support the public sector to baseline, monitor and report progress towards carbon neutrality. Achieving this aim will require, amongst other things:

- Achieving net zero carbon emissions through actions to reduce emissions and increase the removal of carbon from the atmosphere;
- Understanding the priorities, costs, stakeholders and wider impacts of actions;
- Improving understanding of opportunities to implement climate change mitigation;
- Improving understanding of the role of the public sector in influencing change in the wider society and economic system

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council declared a climate emergency in September 2020 and has a Decarbonisation Plan which reiterates the organisation's ambition to be Carbon neutral by 2030.

Progress:-

- A Climate Change Mitigation Steering group was set up during summer 2020 and decision-making process established, with a clear focus on developing a climate plan for Blaenau Gwent territorial emissions, based on a science based carbon budget.
- Brief given to experts to calculate carbon budget for Blaenau Gwent and suggest possible timescales for achieving carbon neutrality within this carbon budget.
- The most important areas for mitigation action in Blaenau Gwent were identified through the mitigation partnership and via public engagement on these issues to inform the borough-wide approach – see more details below.

CASE STUDY – CLIMATE CHANGE CITIZENS ASSEMBLY

Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly



The Blaenau Gwent Climate Change Citizens Assembly was the first of its kind in Wales. In March 2021, it brought together residents from the Blaenau Gwent area to address the question: ‘What should we do in Blaenau Gwent to tackle the climate crisis in a way that is fair and improves living standards for everyone?’

Click the link in the image above for more detailed information about the Assembly!

44 participants attended the first Climate Change Citizens Assembly in Wales. The members met for a total of 23 hours to hear evidence from over 20 different experts, discuss the issues, and produce recommendations for what local public service organisations, communities and individuals could do to address the climate crisis and improve lives for people in Blaenau Gwent.

The assembly members explored the following themes in the learning phase:

- Introduction to climate change
- Issues of fairness and the just transition
- How change happens
- Housing - retrofit, new build, fuel poverty, jobs & skills
- Nature and green space
- Transport

In the deliberation phase, the assembly members made recommendations under the following themes:

- Housing retrofit
- Housing new build
- Nature and green space
- Transport
- Poverty
- Communication
- Education
- Waste and recycling

5 recommendations received over 80% of the vote and were officially passed by the Assembly. The table below shows the recommendations as drafted by assembly members.

Theme	Recommendation	% Support
Transport	<p>Establish an affordable, integrated road & rail transport system accessible throughout BG.</p> <p>A one ticket system that links to bus, rail & cycle schemes - inclusivity for purchasing of tickets (digital or paper).</p> <p>Accessible all hours with safety via lighting, CCTV and to keep maintained.</p>	91
Transport	<p>Establish & improve a safe, easily maintainable infrastructure for walkers & cyclists, for either recreational or work purposes,</p> <p>with access to the public transport network. Including lighting & CCTV & storage for bikes.</p>	88
Housing retrofit	<p>Train local tradespeople, create qualifications and upskill local businesses, involve FE colleges and local Universities, future proof it and provide the right courses to enable them to do the work in all green construction</p>	86
Green space and nature	<p>Implement a programme of woodland preservation and reforestation of BG, using the right tree in the right place for the right reason, increasing opportunities for jobs, biodiversity and connecting woodlands. Making sure the skills are available so we can create green jobs, e.g. saw milling and timber framed housing.</p>	86
Housing New Build	<p>Ensure that all new build properties are built using the latest sustainable technologies (E.g. Glanffrwd development as a template), employing local builders and providing a variety of accommodation types appropriate for all inc. homeless/single occupancy up to large families</p>	81

The Blaenau Gwent PSB is currently considering these recommendations and holding a set of workshops to engage with partners on these issues throughout autumn 2021.

ACTIVE TRAVEL

As part of the Blaenau Gwent Active Travel Programme, the council are encouraging local people to walk, or cycle, as part of their everyday journeys.



Active travel helps increase physical activity levels which can lead to improved mental health and physical well-being. It cuts down unnecessary traffic, which improves air quality, increases the areas attractiveness, lowers our carbon emissions and enables families to get about more safely.

The programme focuses on improving existing walking and cycling routes as well as develop new ones. It will help connect towns and villages across Blaenau Gwent, in particular where there are facilities such as schools, leisure centres, employment sites, local shopping districts and transport interchanges which people can walk short distances to.

Partners urged people to get involved in a conversation about how we can improve our existing walking and cycling routes and where facilities are needed, with a view to continue to provide additional opportunities for people to get involved.

All of the information gathered will be used to inform the development of the Active Travel Network Map for Blaenau Gwent, which will capture a 15-year plan for infrastructure and improvements, reflecting the priorities of local people.

Forging New Pathways to Prosperity



In 2020, the percentage of those aged 16-64 economically inactive in Blaenau Gwent was at 26% and the average unemployment rate was 4.3% between Jan – Dec 2020. These figures were both higher than the Wales average of 24.3% (economically inactive) and 3.8% (unemployment rate), partly due to the success of the manufacturing and retail industries in Blaenau Gwent which were both hit hard during the first six months of the Covid19 pandemic.

The consequences of this can still be seen in our communities and town centres, but we are working hard to help create jobs and mitigate against the economic impact of the Covid19 pandemic in order to bring about the scale of change required to meet the area's economic development needs.

Over the past year, the following the PSB and local economic well-being programmes have attempted to mitigate against the effects of rising unemployment and economic inactivity associated with Covid19, and maximising economic opportunities for prosperity.

Universal Credit Support

During the Covid19 pandemic, the Tai Calon income support team adapted their working procedures in order to maintain a high quality service, continue to provide financial support, and support tenants' well-being. The team focussed on supporting an additional number tenants who claimed Universal Credit since March 2020, providing tailored advice and preventing arrears by agreeing flexible, affordable payment plans.

The collaborative approach between local registered social landlords, the Council, DWP, support providers and the third sector has mitigated the significant risk to income and the risk of growth of debt. Incomes have reduced and debt is now being managed better by service users.

FOUNDATIONAL ECONOMY

The foundational economy can be described as economic sectors that provide everyday essential goods and services including; infrastructure, utility, retail, food, housing, construction, health, care and education. The associated services and activities are provided by a range of public sector, SME and larger companies.

The foundational economy operates in those areas where there is a continuous, every day demand for services, facilitating the needs of a given community and also serves as an important source of local employment.

Despite the potential the Foundational Economy offers, historically there have been challenges, not least;

- Lack of recognition as a priority sector for growth, comparable to sectors such as manufacturing, ICT etc.
- Low skilled/low wage employment; with a tendency for part time opportunities fulfilled by females
- Displacement of local businesses by larger operators

In responding to the known challenges the PSB in January 2020 considered that there was an opportunity to work collaboratively to better understand the sector and consider growth opportunities including, the dynamics between firms of different sizes, behavior of organizations, supply chain and

procurement opportunities, support innovation, improving management, fill skills gaps, develop progression routes and explore new business model.

The PSB will be considering the way forward for this programme of work when it has had time to reflect on the impact COVID-19 has on its wider well-being plan.

Relating to the WG Innovation Fund award, a working group to scope the work was established (BGCBC and RSLs), at the project outset, prior to COVID 19.

There was a clear programme of work agreed, in relation to:

- Analysis of procurement spend.
- Exploration of continuity across procurement process.
- Business engagement and associated contract opportunities (including supply chain).

Reflective of COVID 19 and associated circumstance progress on the project, particularly from LA perspective stalled. As a result, an initial draft analysis of procurement of spend was concluded prior to Christmas but progress to this point was significantly delayed and conflicting resource priorities remain, making delivery against the fund and the intended outcomes unachievable.

Community Case Studies

The **Communities for Work** and Communities for Work Plus programmes are delivered by GAVO in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions and employment partners across Blaenau Gwent. Both programmes offer support to people of all ages who are unemployed or economically inactive.



The programmes aim to help people to secure employment through a personal development plan, which includes training and employment advice tailored to the individual.

GAVO employs 40 staff to deliver the programmes across all of the Blaenau Gwent communities and has a base in each of the 4 main town centres, Tredegr,

Ebbw Vale, Brynmawr and Abertillery and has additional outreach venues within all of these areas to ensure that those participants who are unable to reach town centres can access the support they need to seek and secure employment.

During the Covid19 Pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, the team has continued to support people into employment using alternative methods of engagement and mentoring support and have been responsible for engaging with 608 with 307 securing employment opportunities.

The GAVO team, through the employability team have been/are responsible for the delivery of Training Academies which takes a participant through all associated training, work experience placement through to interview and employment. Sectors include:

- Construction
- Care
- Health and Social Care
- Retail
- Teaching Assistant
- HGV/LGV
- Security

Mental Health Support and prioritising Disabilities:

In additional to the core delivery, the team have secured monies from the legacy fund to support participants with mental health needs through a service level agreement with MIND. It is a support that is designed to specifically support job seeking residents of Blaenau Gwent in need of low level mental health support in light of the pressure and anxiety not only created by the extended period of Covid-19 lockdown and social distancing restrictions but also the pressures places on individual mental health from unemployment, debt and poverty.



INTEGRATION – this demonstrates the key link between maximizing opportunities for prosperity by supporting people into employment and ensuring they have access to appropriate mental and physical well-being services to help people lead healthy, prosperous lifestyles.

The programmes engage specifically with people who have been unemployed for a significant period of time. With the right type of support, previously unemployed people have progressed into sustainable employment after undertaking volunteering, work trials and training to equip them with the skills they needed to enter into the world of work.

This support has been particularly valuable during the uncertain economic opportunities associated with the COVID19 pandemic, as demonstrated by the **case study** below.

“ST joined the project in March 2020 (initials changed for confidentiality). When ST joined us they were unemployed and living in their van. They were keen to find work but due to their mental health, they felt this would be in roles they had already become familiar with as well as being outdoors. Common roles such as production would not have been conducive to their mental health issues but they were open to consider alternative jobs.

It was evident that even though they were keen to work, they had multiple barriers that we would need to support them with in order to overcome first.

They were living in their van, showering in the local leisure centre. The only company they had were the dogs who lived with them. ST explained to me that when we met they were feeling ‘lost’ with no clear direction. ST also mentioned how frightened they felt with the situation they were in. This was exasperated when Covid hit.

I helped them put some tailored CV’s together and It was here that ST then suggested going self- employed. The reason for this is that they felt very uncomfortable trying for roles that they’d never done before and this definitely had a negative effect on mental health. When we discussed this further, ST felt this would definitely address concerns they had and I began supporting them by enthusiastically encouraging them to do this and by referring him to Business Wales.

ST had support from Business Wales in building their business plan and I felt that to provide further support, I would suggest training which would compliment their self-employment goals. Having discussed the business and what they intended to do, I suggested carrying out training in Chainsaw use as well as First Aid Training. ST was keen and attended the training courses, successfully completing both.

As well as the funding administered by Business Wales which has enabled ST to get workshop tools and rent for a new business unit, I also encouraged them to approach a Jobcentre Work Coach in order to apply for their Flexible Support Fund. This enabled ST to obtain a Metal Collector Licence and CFW paid for a DBS check and a Waste Carrier Licence.

ST can now start their business and is already potentially gaining customers through his promotional social media platforms and as their business plan is multi-faceted, each part complimenting the others, ST is confident that this will provide consistency in orders, regular income and a sustainable business and in turn, a higher quality of life."



GAVO Volunteering continued to support the Covid response across the borough with partners including Volunteering Matters, through the provision of DBS checks for volunteers enabling them to be engaged with the Blaenau Gwent Open Access Playschemes and the One Life Autism Group holiday club for children with autism. GAVO also took part in a virtual Freshers Fayre with Coleg Gwent to promote volunteering with students.

Job Centre Plus: Disability Employment Support

Examples of some of the support provided by the JCP's Disability Employment Support team during 2020-21 are outlined in the case studies below. Case Study 1 was a great example of where Disability Employment Advisor advocacy and time benefits the user.

Case Study 1 – *'My Direct Support customer was referred to me by the United Welsh Employability officer. They had worked together and my customer had been on an active inclusion placement but the placement and support had expired. My customer was very keen to work but was limited digitally and needed myself to advocate on their behalf. I would send CV's off for them and ring employers and recruitment agencies on their behalf. They were not keen on support from anyone else but using my persuasive skills they started the work and health programme.*

I still spoke to my customer every few days as they were comfortable with my support. They would visit recruitment agencies but not know where to go so would ring me out of the blue and I would ask for directions via Google Maps to where they had to go. We had long chats about what was correct for the customer because of support they received in the past I wanted to make sure they knew how working would affect their Universal Credit. I advised the customer of production vacancies with a local company I knew and provided them with the details of who to contact, and how to apply. They have now started employment with them and have thanked me for all the support I have given them.'



Case Study 2 – *'Claimant was initially a well-being call who had lost friends and family during Covid and was in a high state of anxiety as they have elderly parents. They were extremely isolated. Our employee referred them to Active Monitoring with Mind who supported them via phone. Our employee considered the mild to moderate mental health DPS but this wasn't suitable as the claimant couldn't stop crying and found it too overwhelming. Speaking about mental health is not something the family do. The claimant told our employee they couldn't afford a washing machine so their mum was doing it and our employee liaised with the Work Coach to facilitate a budgeting advance, which was agreed.'*

The claimant didn't have any digital skills so our employee contacted Cyfle Cymru, they weren't delivering courses due to Covid but the course tutor agreed to support on a 1-2-1 basis F2F. The claimant has been twice and is due to go again. The first time they attended they said they had washed their tracksuits in their new washing machine and was wearing their best one, they'd also had his haircut and the tutor at Cyfle commented on how well presented they were. They will look at employability once the claimant is confident digitally. They use their journal with basic words but now they're using it more confidently and our employee has spoken with the WCTL about getting the claimant a tablet to practice their skills. The claimant has told our employee that they are fed up of the grey and wants a bit of colour back in their life.'

Encourage and Enable People to Make Healthy Lifestyle Choices

The PSB wants to encourage and enable people to make healthy lifestyle choices in the places they live, learn, work and play in order to promote good health and reduce levels of disease and poor health.

Everyone should be able to access good, healthy food to enable us to eat at



least five portions of fruit and veg a day to protect against diet-related ill-health. We should also be able to access appropriate health and community support services that are close enough to where we live and work.

SUSTAINABLE FOOD

Food poverty is a complex issue and therefore preventing it requires systemic and concerted efforts from a range of public, private and third sectors.

The Blaenau Gwent Sustainable Food programme will help develop an ambitious but realistic plan for improving the food system within Blaenau Gwent. This will form the basis of a bid for two years of funding from the Sustainable Food Places programme.

The sustainable food plan, which will be based on consultations with communities, businesses and anchor institutions, will cover all key food issues, including:

- how to tackle food poverty and diet-related ill-health;
- how to build a prosperous and diverse local food economy;
- how to transform catering and procurement;
- Building public awareness, active food citizenship and a local good food movement;
- positively support tackling the climate and nature emergency; and end food waste.



INTEGRATION - The Blaenau Gwent Sustainable Food programme takes an integrated view of food that takes into account the social, environmental, cultural, and economic aspects of food and supports the positive aspects of food as well as addressing the needs and challenges.

Due to the impact of COVID 19, people may have become more reliant on Food Banks and Independent Institutions providing emergency food supplies, which can potentially lead to a further issue with food poverty and hunger in local communities going forward.

Progress

The Blaenau Gwent Public Service Board identified the establishment of a sustainable food programme and a local food partnership as one of its priorities. The partnership has received support from Tai Calon (PSB

programme sponsor), Food Sense Wales, Natural Resources Wales, GAVO, ABUHB, and Blaenau Gwent Council to join a cohort of local authority areas in Wales working to establish a cross-sector food partnership and develop a plan to transform our local food system.

The approach is intended to prevent food poverty rather than just respond to it. Without this shift in focus there is a risk that food banks become an institutionalised fixture of Blaenau Gwent communities. Food aid should not replace the dignity and choice afforded to those who can afford to buy food.

Next Steps

Before the Covid19 pandemic, sustainable food partners identified some opportunities that presented themselves in the coming 12-24 months to improve on the current position.

These included:

- Increased employment opportunities – high spec
- Keeping people (particularly young people) in the area through better employment opportunities
- Develop aspirations amongst young people through the education system
- Develop better partnership working amongst local businesses by encouraging them to create partnerships with other companies
- Businesses could use their entrepreneurial skills to help people facing food poverty through food waste projects and other charitable approaches
- Introducing a service that provides food, training, and employment skills etc. at the point of contact
- Workers in local communities feel more supported
- Greater joined up partnership working between businesses, local authority, Third Sector and community groups
- Reduce the stigma behind free school meals

Tai Calon in partnership with Aneurin Bevan Health Board, Natural Resources Wales, GAVO and BGCBC successfully appointed a Sustainable Food Coordinator role in May 2021, to help take on these recommendations by

mapping the food landscape of Bleanu Gwent and overseeing the development of the Sustainable Food Plan.

The Food Poverty Grant was used to support organisations to access, store and distribute additional supplies of good quality food, including good food surplus, in particular, larger amounts of fresh food, boosting the capacity of organisations to provide good quality, nutritious food to their customers. It was used in a variety of ways to suit the requirements in each authority, for example but not limited to: purchasing fridges, freezers and cooking equipment.



Below case studies showcase how the Sustainable Food Programme and The Food Poverty Grant helped local institutions and community members throughout the Covid19 pandemic:

Community Case Studies

TK's Community Group is a group of a few volunteers who rely upon end of day food donated from Tesco and Greggs. We also have a "Tin on the Wall" running monthly where volunteers collect street by street donations. Funds have been utilized to purchase equipment needed to store the food overnight so it can be given away following day, this is due to collection times from the supermarket. Click on the link in the image below to see a video that provides more information about the important work TK's Community Group are carrying out locally.



Blaenau Gwent Community Meals Service provides cooked meals to citizens of Blaenau Gwent, 5 days a week. This includes frozen meals to those citizens that require meals over the weekend. The service received funding from the EU Transition Fund Food Poverty Grant to purchase an additional large freezer to store increased stock levels to secure the continued delivery of meals to vulnerable citizens.

Ebenezer Church Food Larder is supporting families in need in the local area by operating a Food Bank which provides meals, deliveries and Food Packages.

Brynmaur Rotary Stronger Together Project is using this equipment to support those in difficult situation by purchasing the equipment needed to safely store, distribute and deliver food products to those families and individuals who need it the most in a local community

Kings Arms Community Group is a constituted Christian Community group, based in Brynithel and associated with Brynithel Community Church. Funding is needed to support families on low incomes who are identified through bags of hope which include ingredients and instructions for a healthy meal to cook from scratch. They also linked up with local school and others working with vulnerable families locally.



INTEGRATED WELL-BEING NETWORK

Blaenau Gwent Integrated Well-being Network (IWN) is a partnership initiative taking a place based approach to bring together professionals and community members to improve health and well-being in a specific geographical area. The identified areas in Blaenau Gwent are Brynmawr and Tredegar.

There are **four main areas** of focus for each network:



Place-based Collaboration

Bringing together professionals and community members to build relationships and work together to make the best use of what we have in communities

People who deliver services and support

Supporting people to work co-productively, building on their strengths to find their own solutions and connecting primary care teams to well-being resources.

Community-based Hubs

Connecting people with health and well-being resources, activities and other people. Linking community hubs to improve their well-being role and ensuring communities are able to access the right services and support locally.

Easy Access to Well-being information

Ensuring people have easy access to well-being information through different channels including, family, friends, link workers, community hubs, community champions or through online tools such as [DEWIS Cymru](#).

Progress

An online questionnaire was undertaken in January 2021 to ascertain community views in relation to wellbeing in light of COVID 19. Five IWN collaborative meetings have taken place involving both professionals and community members, outcomes include professionals working in partnership

and a list of community concerns being identified. Informal engagement with communities has taken place to provide support during the COVID 19 restrictions and to address issues and concerns

Within the meeting access to befriending services for those who are isolated was listed as a priority. Opportunities involving physical activity for families was recognised as an issue which is being looked into. The IWN has been reconnecting with communities responding with partners to the issues that had been identified such as; mental health, digital inclusion and information regarding services and support available within the community.

Multi agency steering groups have been convened to address identified areas.

- Funding has been secured from the NCN to employ a DEWIS coordinator until March 2022 to support increased community access to local services and support
- A Blaenau Gwent Mental Health Pathway is being developed which aims to illustrate local support and referral criteria
- Connect Five – Mental Health training has been rolled out across Blaenau Gwent for frontline staff and volunteers
- A pilot project with a supported living provider is being planned to increase digital inclusivity using volunteers to support residents to use digital devices. Training is also being arranged for library staff and community volunteers.



- A further IWN collaborative was held in May 2021 with a focus upon partners supporting community groups to bid for Participatory Budgeting funding
- The Sunday stroll in Brynmawr Welfare Park is being taken forward

Due to the local focus of the programmes aims to work on a place basis, it is recommended that the programme continues at a local level and will be monitored through the new BG local well-being delivery partnership arrangements.

CASE STUDY – IWN Well-being Friends

Blaenau Gwent wellbeing Friends is an integral part of the Integrated Wellbeing Network in Blaenau Gwent.

Wellbeing Friends are community members who agree to receive regular updates about wellbeing information and have informal conversations with their friends, families and colleagues as a mechanism to disseminate information wellbeing, services and support across the borough.

Wellbeing Friends were invaluable during the pandemic ensuring up to date information regarding COVID rules, access to local support for those shielding and self-isolating was disseminated across the borough. Dissemination of information via word of mouth is important as not everyone has access to the internet.

The opportunity to be a Wellbeing Friend gave those who were shielding a chance to volunteer without leaving their homes.



Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Friends Coffee Morning

Thursday 11th March - 11am

Bring your coffee and join us to look after your wellbeing and have a chat

This month we are joined by Kathryn Evans talking about Stop Smoking Wales and local community centre's

E-mail wellbeing_training.ABB@wales.nhs.uk for the link



The virtual Blaenau Gwent coffee mornings began in the autumn of 2020. The purpose of the coffee morning is twofold, an opportunity for wellbeing friends to come together and chat to enhance their own wellbeing and a chance for guest speakers from organisations to give updates about their services. A regular newsletter is also published to share wellbeing information.

Currently in Blaenau Gwent there are 155 community members who have signed up to be Wellbeing Friends. A Facebook page - [Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Friends | Facebook](#) has also been created that currently has 630 followers. Posts are frequently shared

Wellbeing Friends have been a valuable resource, collating information regarding the impact of COVID on communities. They have taken part in online surveys. They have had conversations with their networks highlighting priorities from communities including: access to mental health support in Blaenau Gwent, Digital inclusion and access to information regarding wellbeing support and services in Blaenau Gwent

EDUCATION PROGRAMMES FOR PATIENTS (EPP)

EPP Cymru provides a range of self-management health and wellbeing courses and workshops for people living with a health conditions or for those who care for someone with a health condition. It enableS people to manage their health and live active and fulfilling lives, empowering people and carers of people with long term conditions to self-manage their illness.

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board is the only health board in Wales that commissions the third sector to deliver EPP. As Blaenau Gwent's programme is delivered by GAVO the programme was able to adapt during the pandemic and continue delivery. This provided an exciting opportunity to develop a virtual programme appropriate for Covid 19 and beyond.

New Ways of Working

An established social media channel allowed the programme to continue communicating with the general public on other resources, such as mental health helplines.

Free NHS Post Covid Management Course

Are you experiencing the symptoms of Long Covid?

Know someone who is?

Maybe we can help....



Forthcoming Virtual Courses


Course Name	Day	Time	Dates
Dual Post Covid Support Session	Wednesday & Friday	11.00 am to 12.15pm	21st & 23rd July 2021
Dual Post Covid Support Session	Monday & Tuesday	11.00 am to 12.15pm	9th & 10th August 2021
Dual Post Covid Support Session	Monday & Wednesday	11.00 am to 12.15pm	23rd & 25th August 2021
6 wk Post Covid Support Course	Tuesday	10.30am to 12.00pm	7th Sept to 12th Oct 2021

The Above courses are for the support of patients with Post Covid symptoms.

You will find 2 types of courses listed, 6 week and a Dual session which is 2 sessions within 1 week, they are very different and it is suggested that attending both will provide knowledge and guidance to greater confidence and management of the condition and it's symptoms.

Currently all our courses are being delivered virtually, until we can return to community centres. All EPP courses are led by trained tutors, who live with a health condition or care for someone with a health condition. For more info or to book a place on a course, contact the EPP Team via email: epp@gavo.org.uk

Find us on Facebook to keep up-to-date with new courses etc.
Search: **education programme for patients** or @epgwent on Twitter



In addition to signposting to existing resources the EPP programme developed some mindfulness videos via the GAVO YouTube channel. There are a series of six videos that anyone is able to access at their leisure. Referred patients are provided with links to these to aid their wellbeing outside of formal courses.

A Walk on the Beach - YouTube

As face to face delivery of courses were suspended due to Covid 19 the EPP team at GAVO developed online courses. This meant making content appropriate for a virtual platform and staff quickly acquiring new skills. GAVO's lead trainer delivered a train the trainer programme for the virtual platform, where each tutor was assessed and quality assured to deliver online. Online courses were piloted with and feedback taken trusted partners including trainers from the Wellbeing Friends programme to ensure they were appropriate for patients. The online EPP courses adapted by GAVO are now being delivered by health board led EPP programmes across Wales.

The EPP programme was able to adapt during Covid 19 and the original aims were still reached.

1. Developing partnership working with Primary Care, through attending NCN cluster meetings to inform them of the EPP

service, the referral process and availability of self-management courses.

2. Deliver courses for patients with chronic health conditions across Blaenau Gwent.
3. Provide courses to support patient's mental health.
4. Provide support for people experiencing persistent pain in Blaenau Gwent.
5. Increase the number of volunteer tutors.

Case Studies

58 year old –diagnosed with type 2 diabetes three weeks before course began, experiencing hypos:

“You stopped me being scared, you helped me to understand my illness and to be positive about the future and I realise now with a few adjustments the future is bright and Diabetes is not a death sentence if you just make some time to look after yourself.

You and Hillary are amazing, I have so much respect for you and what you do for people”

BG resident in their 50s after attending a pain management course:

“I live with fibromyalgia and felt my life would never be the same. I had to give up my job as a teacher, I stopped going out and could not even clean the house, six weeks into the course I have action planned and started food shopping again, I have learned to pace and plan to clean my home. The course has made me feel normal again. At the end of the course EPP ask for a six month goal, I feel so positive that I am going to find part time employment again.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

The Participatory Budget (PB) programme is a democratic process which offers public funding to applicants who demonstrate that their project contributes to COVID19 recovery and/or meets one of the well-being plan objectives to improve well-being amongst our communities.



Planning for the Blaenau Gwent PB programme began at the end of 2020. It was decided that the fund would focus on well-being and Covid19 recovery during 2021, at a time when our communities would need most support as life returns to normal.

During spring 2021, A decision-making panel comprising community members from across Blaenau Gwent have been appointed with voting events planned to take place at the end of September 2021. Members of the group were given training and take 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.

**CYMUNED
BLAENAU GWENT
DEWCH I'N HELPUS NI
I'CH HELPUS CHI**

Mae MutualGain yn gweithio gyda chymuned Blaenau Gwent i benderfynu sut y gellid gwario £250,000 o arian cyhoeddus o fewn yr ardal i helpu'r gymuned gael adferiad o COVID-19.

Os hoffech gymryd rhan a dysgu sgiliau newydd yng nghyswllt Democratieth Cyllidebu Tŷn gwybodaeth Arweinyddiaeth gymunedol Gwneud penderfyniadau

Mae Cyllidebu Cyfranogol ddull gwneud penderfyniadau lle mae'r gymuned yn llunio a datblygu'r broses cyllido, gan alluogi'r gymuned i gyflwyno celsiadau ar gyfer cyllid.

Yn dewch draw ac ymuno â'n grŵp cynllunio gwych a chwarae eich rhan

Felly rydym angen i CHI, y gymuned, i ymuno â'n grŵp cynllunio i arwain cynllunio a chyflwynu ein rhaglen Cyllidebu Cyfranogol!

Byddem yn neilltuo! yn hoffi i bobl ifanc ymuno â ni i wneud y penderfyniadau allweddol fydd yn galluogi'r gymuned i gynnig am gyllid i gefnogi prosiectau newydd neu bresennol. Felly dewch draw a helpu Blaenau Gwent i ddefnyddio'r cyllid hwn i gael adferiad o COVID-19!

gymryd rhan, neu ganfod nwy, anfonwch e-bost at antigua@mutualgain.org

**BLAENAU GWENT
COMMUNITY
COME AND HELP
US TO HELP YOU**

MutualGain are working with the community of Blaenau Gwent to decide how **£250,000** of public money could be spent within the area to help the community recover from COVID-19

If you would like to get involved and learn new skills in relation to:

- Democracy
- Budgeting
- Information handling
- Community leadership
- Decision making

Participatory Budgeting is a decision making tool where the community shape and develop the funding process, allowing the community to submit applications for funding.

Then come and join our fabulous planning group and play your part

So we need **YOU**, the community, to join our planning group to lead the planning and delivery of our Participatory Budgeting programme!

We would especially welcome the involvement of **young people** to join us in making the key decisions that will enable the community to bid for funding to support existing or new projects.

To get involved, or find out more, email antigua@mutualgain.org

So come along and help Blaenau Gwent use this funding to emerge from COVID 19!

89 funding applications were submitted by local organisations and community groups during August 2021, with successful bids meeting the criteria to enhance well-being and help local communities recover from the Covid19 pandemic being invited to produce a short video outlining the benefits of their project or programme at the voting events during September and October 2021.

Regional Well-being Activity

Blaenau Gwent PSB works in partnership with other local authorities and PSBs across Gwent and wider South Wales to achieve our collective well-being goals, led by the G10, which is a Gwent regional strategic partnership group of Chief Executives and Leaders, supported by the delivery work the Gwent Strategic Well-being Action Group (GSWAG).

BUILDING A HEALTHIER GWENT

Building a Healthier Gwent is a programme led by ABUHB that sets out the actions that, taken together, would achieve the ambition of people that live in Gwent living more of their lives in good health in all our communities.

The ambition is for the places where we live, work, learn and play in 2030 to make it easier for people in our communities to live health, fulfilled lives.



COLLABORATION & INVOLVEMENT – Blaenau Gwent PSB partners worked together with the Health Board to facilitate various engagement events across Blaenau Gwent, workshops with elected members and specific community groups.

GWENT REGIONAL TRAVEL CHARTER

The Gwent Sustainable Travel Group led by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) is taking work forward to develop a Sustainable Travel Charter for Gwent to be considered by GSWAG. The group project plan sets out an ambition to launch the Gwent Travel Charter during 2020/21.

A Gwent sustainable travel charter will support an integrated approach to delivery against carbon reduction, healthy and active lifestyles and sustainable travel priorities for the five Public Services Boards. All PSB partners in Gwent along with a number of other public sector bodies are being given the

opportunity to sign up to the Gwent Charter. In Blaenau Gwent, this piece of work sits under the PSB's Climate Change Mitigation programme.

Gwent Healthy Travel Charter

Gwent Public Sector Commitments 2020-23



Working together, for our sites in Gwent, we commit to...

Communications and leadership

Establish a network of sustainable travel champions, including senior staff and managers who routinely promote and model active and sustainable travel behavior

Agree and use consistent communications messages with the public, visitors and staff on healthy travel and reducing unnecessary travel

Promote and consider healthy travel options and benefits across wider functions, such as: procurement, conferences, and when advertising roles in our organisations

Review together our travel expenses policies, to encourage uptake of sustainable travel

Collaborate with partners and provide strategic leadership and planning on healthy and sustainable travel

Public transport

Explore discounts for staff on Transport for Wales rail services and with local transport providers

Walking, cycling and public transport

Contribute to an interactive map showing all walking and cycling infrastructure and public transport links for our main public sector sites in Gwent

Cycling

Offer the cycle to work scheme to all staff (including e-bikes)

Assess and provide as appropriate secure cycle storage and showers at all main sites

Improve access to bicycles at work where appropriate, e.g. pool bikes and hire bikes

Explore and promote cycle training and maintenance sessions

Agile working

Increase availability and uptake of tele- and video-conferencing for meetings where appropriate

Improve flexible working options, including home working, and develop a culture of agile working across public sector sites

Ultra-low emission vehicles

Review the current and future need for electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure on our sites

Review our fleet and procurement arrangements (where applicable) for introduction of ultra-low emission vehicles

Between us, we will...

Reduce the proportion of journeys commuting to and from work made by car from 87% to 77%

Increase the proportion of staff who use public transport to travel to and from work from 3% to 8%

Increase the proportion of staff who work from home 1 or more days per week from 14% to 25%

Increase the proportion of vehicles used during the day which are ultra-low emission from <1% to 5%

We are organisations across Gwent committed to sustainable travel

For the latest list of signatories and to read more about the Charter please visit healthytravel.wales/gwent

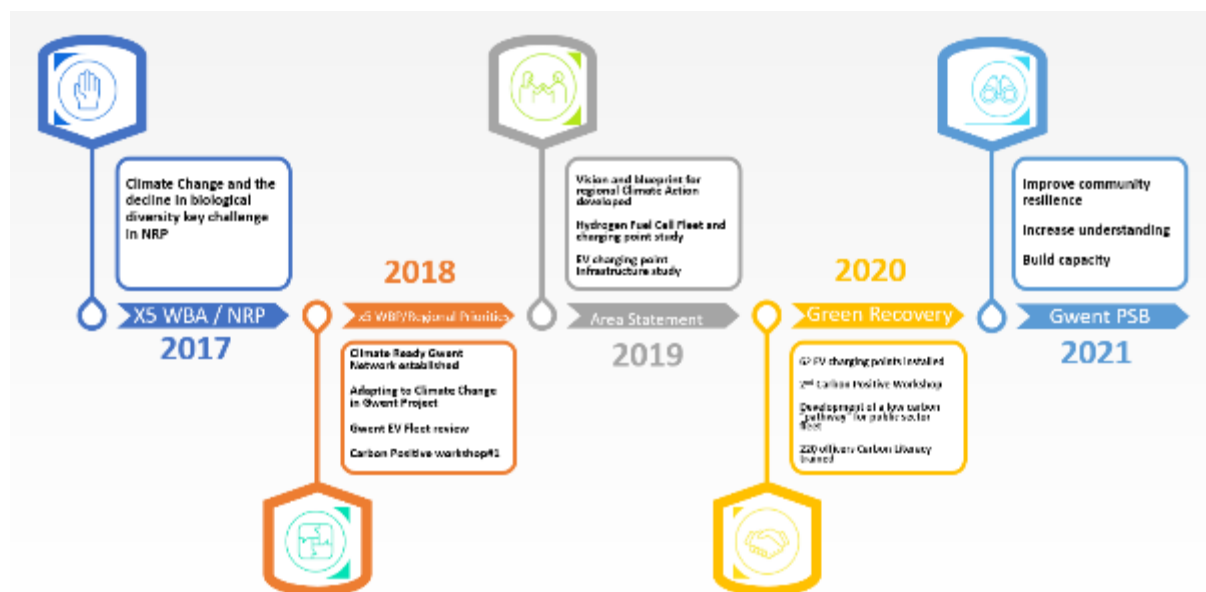
Climate Ready Gwent (*more details below*) has been supporting the development of the charter. This work led by ABUHB aims to support and encourage staff and visitors to the sites of Gwent PSB partners to use healthy and sustainable modes of transport. 4,373 questionnaires were completed by staff from partner organisations across Gwent about how they travel to and from work and during the working day. This survey will be repeated on an annual basis to help measure progress.

CLIMATE READY GWENT

GSWAG also known as the Gwent Strategic Well-being Action Group initiated The Gwent Ready Gwent project in 2019. By working together they aim to regionally facilitate change in the form of activities within the public around climate adaption and collaborative decarbonisation equipping them for the changes we have ahead. The decision to take an integrated and collaborative approach to Climate Action was based on all the wild fires and flooding experienced in the local area over recent years.

By prioritising Climate Action in this way, public bodies in the Gwent area have chosen to approach this challenge in a way that contributes to multiple well-being goals and objectives, seeking to ensure the needs of future generations are not compromised by the actions or inaction of today.

Delivery 2020 – 2021



Improved health and resilience of our ecosystems to maximise their ability to protect, prevent and reduce climate impact across Gwent and take the necessary steps towards decarbonisation

- **Throughout 34 sites in Gwent 62 new dual electric vehicle 22kw fast charging units have been installed.** The grant of £465,000 from UK Government's Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV) was used in the partnership of Torfaen County Council, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Newport City Council, Caerphilly County Borough Council and Monmouthshire County Council with match funding from each local

authority. Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales both contributed funding towards a feasibility study to support development of the project.

Increased understanding of the climate change risks and opportunities and of the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across Gwent

- **Gwent specific Carbon Literacy training co developed and rolled out across public sector. 220.** Training was given to all individuals across the Gwent public sector. Individuals who received the training included; Chief Execs and Elected members. The training was designed by CRG which was a Gwent Specific Carbon Literacy training course, it is hoped that this training will be reached further through a “train the trainer” programme in 2021/22.

Increased capacity of organisations and individuals by ensuring that they have the tools, skills and guidance necessary to allow them to adapt to the impacts of climate change and reduce and eliminate greenhouse gas emissions across Gwent

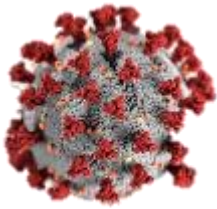
- **Second Carbon Positive Workshop delivered.** Sharing best practice, advice and guidance, promoting a peer to peer learning opportunity and using the network to help set its own agenda, including Blaenau Gwent’s carbon baselining experience.
- **Increasing our network.** In 2020 the reach of the network has expanded, increasing by **733%** to 220 up from approximately 30 at the beginning of 2019.
- **Climate Ready Gwent supporting the CLES project on progressive procurement.** The CLES, The Centre for Local Economic Studies, was funded by Welsh Government with work with “anchor institutions across the public sector to make systemic change within all local economics in Wales which has been supported by CRG officers. Incorporating decarbonisation outcomes e.g localising food chains.

LOOKING FORWARD: UK AFGHANISTAN RESETTLEMENT SCHEME

Blaenau Gwent together with all five local authority areas in Gwent are supporting the UK Afghanistan Resettlement Scheme in 2021. The UK Government established a bespoke resettlement scheme this year for Afghan interpreters and other personnel who have worked with the UK in Afghanistan.

The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) launched on 1 April 2021. Under the policy, any current or former locally employed staff who are assessed to be under serious threat to life are offered priority relocation to the UK regardless of their employment status, rank or role, or length of time served.

The council is supportive of Global Resettlement and has been working in partnership to help families from conflict areas resettle in Blaenau Gwent for over five years. The council has agreed to support the Afghan Resettlement and Assistance Scheme as part of our wider commitment to Global Resettlement earlier this year.



Considering the Wider Impact of COVID-19

The physical, social and mental well-being of all Blaenau Gwent residents has been a key priority for all public services providers during the Covid19 pandemic. Services were adapted immediately and lessons were learned quickly to ensure any household needing help with advice, shopping collections, prescription deliveries, or simply someone to talk to were supported effectively.



Action to support our communities was a collaborative effort between local and regional partners, as well as being preventative in nature through signposting residents to the appropriate help or advice services at such a difficult time many people.

LOCALITY RESPONSE TEAMS

In March 2020, Blaenau Gwent Council set up Locality Response Teams to support those Shielding and other vulnerable residents across Blaenau Gwent.

The Teams were set up to respond to requests from vulnerable residents looking for help from within their community for things like shopping, picking up prescriptions, dog-walking, befriending calls, or anything else they were struggling with during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The Teams comprised of redeployed council staff from a variety of different service areas, as well as Aneurin Leisure Trust (ALT) staff who were also redeployed in collaboration with the council to assist our communities. Much of the work has been carried out remotely, with council and ALT staff able to safely work from home speaking to residents and community groups via telephone and managing cases online. Some council staff also safely delivered prescriptions and grocery shopping orders to many of our hardest to reach residents.



The Locality Response Teams & the volunteers and community groups they work with have been absolutely vital to the Covid-19 response in ensuring vulnerable people are well supported. They have continued to support hundreds of households and the feedback from the residents has been extremely grateful and positive.

Here's what two of the team members had to say about their redeployment to the Locality Response Teams during the early part of the pandemic in 2020:

"The work has been very rewarding and eye-opening. It's been a great experience to become a friendly voice and a source of support for some of our most vulnerable residents, and I'll miss some of my regular calls when I return to my usual role."

"I have enjoyed working with the Locality Teams so much, it's a totally different role to my usual day to day role. The assistance we have given to vulnerable, elderly and shielding people has been an invaluable service, which they have all been incredibly grateful for. This is something that Blaenau Gwent Council can be truly proud of."

COVID19 Locality Response Case Studies

April 2020

A 36-year-old who lived with their two dependent children and their 60-year-old parent who they care for due to long term health issues. They work part time as well as claiming some top up benefits. They had to self-isolate with their children for the second time and has lost a total of 28 days from work and will not be paid by their employer as they are on a zero hours' contract.

They rang the contact centre to see if there was any financial support they could get as they were struggling financially, had little food at home and their utility meters were on emergency credit and due to run out.

Support Needs Identified

- Financial advice and assistance

Support Provided

- Issued with a food voucher from the local food bank and this was delivered to them the next day
- Referral made to Citizens Advice Bureau for Fuel top up vouchers through their energy redress scheme and they contacted them the following day and issued the individual with a £49 top up credit for gas and electricity.
- Application made to the British Red Cross through their Red Rose Hardship fund grant and they were able to award resident with 3 x payments of £120 by sending them a payment card and pin code the following day which they can use £120 per month for 3 months.
- Discretionary Assistance Fund application made and they were awarded £80 the following day, paid directly to their bank account.
- Individual added to a list of people who could be entitled to the self-isolation payment grant through the Local Authority.

Outcomes

The individual was able to feed their family with the food parcel and then complete online shopping with a total of £440 received in grants as well as top up their utilities and keep the heating on in the house until their self-isolation period ended and they were able to go back to work. They rang to say how pleased they were with all the help they had received and doesn't know how they would have managed without it.

May 2020

Background Information

45 year old lives alone with very little money to feed themselves or their cat and has fallen behind with their utility bill payments. They have been struggling with their mental health due to their financial situation and the loneliness and isolation caused by the COVID19 pandemic. The person was on medication for a health condition but had not received a NHS shielding letter. They were capable of shopping for themselves but could not afford the essential food and cleaning supplies for themselves or and their cat.

Support Needs Identified

- Understanding and/or acceptance of the current situation and its implications
- Financial advice and assistance
- Lonely and isolated
- Mental health support

Support Provided

- Reassurance that there is advice and support services available to them and a referral to the council's Supporting People team.
- Application to Discretionary Assistance Fund and Biscuit Tin Fund on the individual's behalf to help them secure some essential items like food, cat litter and cleaning products in the short term.
- Signposting to other mental health support organisations.
- Contacted their GP for clarification about whether or the person's health condition should have entitled them to a NHS shielding letter.

Outcomes

- Felt much better and more positive after the initial conversation with the locality team coordinator
- Supporting People team to help with budgeting and help assess whether they're entitled to claim any additional benefits, as well as to provide support for their mental health. This has been allocated to POBL and they will be in touch shortly.
- Discretionary Assistance Fund and Biscuit Fund application made, recent DAF applied so have to wait a few more weeks before re-applying for this, the Biscuit Tin have been in touch to say referral has been received and will be actioned by tomorrow
- Ongoing mental health support from an outside organisation to help manage the impact of abuse the individual suffered during their childhood, supplied details of contacts and support.

COMMUNITY CASE STUDY – Tredegar Community Taskforce

The volunteers of the Tredegar Community Task Force are everyday normal people who stood up in unusual circumstances, putting the well-being of the community before their own. Cymru Creations has led this tremendously

outstanding community work in Tredegar (the birth place of Aneurin Bevan who started the NHS) whilst delivering positive outcomes for those most vulnerable across Blaenau Gwent.

Tredegar Community Task Force was established by Cymru Creations in the very early stages of the COVID19 outbreak. Cymru Creations are a small community interest business specialising in film making whilst supporting an extensive over 60s social club and a Youth Film Academy.

This team of film makers, ex-teachers, steel industry workers, local councillors, and those who are self-employed, have all risen to the challenge in a time of uncertainty and crisis, and furthermore, they are succeeding. Every day the staff and volunteers continue to make deliveries and provide support to whoever requires our help, and milestones continue to be surpassed.



On 10th March 2020 a unanimous decision was made by the Taskforce to stand up and support those who needed it the most.

It is remarkable the speed at which Cymru Creations stood up a brand new community service weeks ahead of many official organisations and governing bodies. The Taskforce offered a range of vital support and quickly became a forerunner in responding to the COVID19 emergency within Blaenau Gwent.

The council's Locality Response Teams have worked closely with the Taskforce throughout the pandemic in order to source local support for shielding residents in need of prescription or shopping deliveries.

Cymru Creations' office based in The Little Theatre, Tredegar, proved invaluable as the Headquarters for the operation. Kevin Phillips from Cymru Creations led on the coordination of local groups in the area to support the community by any means necessary. The theatre was transformed into a fully functioning base of operations, complete with social distancing markers, notice boards, and personal protective equipment for all their volunteers.

It was clear immediately that the Taskforce was very much needed. The project quickly grew from just four volunteers to a group of thirty strong, with the small team taking over 200 calls a day due to the extensive promotional work with the community and referrals from the council's Locality Response Teams. Volunteers were carrying out 50-70 prescription collections per day; 30-60 shopping deliveries per day; and delivering 250 bags of free food parcels per week. The food parcels were sourced from working in partnership with Jesus Cares, Fair Share, McDonalds, Tesco, Braces.

Since March, the Taskforce has supported all members of the community, not just in Tredegar, but other towns in the Blaenau Gwent area as well. They also distributed educational packs and sanitary products for children and young people unable to attend school during the pandemic.



For more information about the work of the Taskforce since March 2020, please click the link in the image below to watch a video produced by Cymru Creations.



Befriending Support Services

Blaenau Gwent residents were able to benefit from Telephone Befriending services provided by Third Sector organisations like Volunteering Matters and Age Cymru Gwent, as well as digital Friendship sessions online for young people and those with learning disabilities. This became a very important source of support, guidance and general contact with outside world for many isolated members of our community, especially older people and anyone living alone.

It has been pleasing to see many of these services being maintained beyond the initial lockdown, as the loss of this type of support could have a big impact on vulnerable people in our community.

Case studies present a strong need to continue a Telephone Befriending Service as well as evidence of support given to those who need it and even successful fraud prevention.



Will you be my friend?

Promoting Friendships for People with Learning Disabilities

Wednesday 9th September 2020
11.00am - 1.00pm

Online Zoom conversation will be held to discuss 'Friendships'. This topic has been identified as a priority area for people with learning disabilities especially in terms of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on creating and maintaining friendships. You are invited to come and listen to the experiences of people with learning disabilities as well as ask questions and share ideas on how more opportunities can be developed to strengthen these friendships moving forward.

The four breakout rooms will be used to help focus the conversation and provide a range of experiences and insight:

1. Friendships for Young People: what are the issues and desires of young people with learning disabilities
2. Friend or Staff: identifying the differences between paid workers and friends - boundaries, barriers and expectations
3. Friendships Work Both Ways: what does a good friendship look like
4. Where Can I Go to Make Friends: safe places, opportunities, community integration

Registration will be via Eventbrite ticket:

[CLICK HERE](#)



Staying in touch. We have been able to use our funding from BGCBC to buy I-pads so we can have online meetings with members. We still need to have a voice, no decision without us!

We have received funding to issue ipads to more of our members. If you would like an Ipad and know others who would like one please contact dawn@rctpeoplefirst.org.uk we can talk about what you need to do for us to provide you with one



We held a Zoom conference on friendships



If you are a person with a learning disability in BG and would like to tell us What Matters to you, email us at:

enquiries@rctpeoplefirst.org.uk

And we will get back to you.



Digital Inclusion

Collaboration between partners and stakeholders like GAVO, People First, Aneurin Leisure Trust, the IWN and Volunteering Matters have been encouraging the promotion of existing and the introduction of new digital inclusion programmes or training to help older people or anyone unfamiliar with I.T. to access key online services and stay involved with their hobbies and interest during and beyond the Covid19 pandemic.

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BLAENAU GWENT PSB, JULY 2020

The PSB believes that Public Services Boards across Wales collectively play a vital role in achieving well-being outcomes for our local areas during and beyond the Covid19 pandemic. We have taken a proactive approach as a PSB in Blaenau Gwent moving from initial response and now looking ahead towards recovery, reconstruction and beyond.

The special PSB meeting held in July 2020 provided the opportunity for a discussion space focussed on the theme 'Covid-19 – Reflections, lessons learned, where next?', facilitated by Academi Wales. Providing the Board with a pause and reflect space, the discussion centred around 3 questions;

- What has worked well
- Areas which have not worked so well; and
- What this means in terms of how we reflect and refocus the well-being objectives and priorities within our local Well-being Plan over the next 18 months.

The session identified the importance of partnership working and continuing to support community resilience as key themes, as well as the importance of the use of data and intelligence, digital transformation, community cohesion and the foundational and green economies.

It was acknowledged that many of the existing programmes initiated in the current strategic work programme and outlined throughout this document continued to be appropriate, if anything even more so, to mitigate the long-term effects of the crisis.



INTEGRATION – In recognition of the effects Covid-19 has had on communities in Wales and the greater impacts being felt by certain population groups, we are currently supporting the implementation of a Pilot Community Impact Assessment (CIA) approach which will take account of the social, economic, environmental and cultural impact of the pandemic across 3 population groups. Learning from the pilot will enable us to consider how we can scale up the CIA approach to support local and regional recovering planning.

COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

During 2020/21 Blaenau Gwent council undertook a Community Impact Assessment to consider the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on six specific community and population groups:-

- Parents with Young Families (children 0-8 years);
- People with Learning Disabilities (all ages); and
- Young People/Young Adults (14-25 years)
- Those aged over 50 years old and in need of social care support
- New Vulnerables – those aged 65 and over

The CIA aimed to assess the impact of the Covid19 crisis and public services' recovery plans on the identified population groups, as well as identify any actions public services need to take in order to reduce vulnerabilities and increase the resilience of this groups going forward.

The CIA captured key areas for assessment including issues related to well-being objectives. The learning captured during the CIA process will be fed into the PSB's 2020/21 work programme and will be vital in identifying future priorities for the well-being of Blaenau Gwent residents.

Next Steps for the PSB Well-being Programme

In this rapidly changing context the Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board shares the view of the vital role PSBs will need to collectively play in achieving well-being outcomes for our local area. The BG PSB is taking a proactive approach in looking ahead towards recovery, reconstruction and beyond.

The PSB has identified several key themes for recovery, such as the importance of partnership working and continuing to support community resilience. Key work streams and enablers aligned to our existing well-being plan work programme have also been identified, such as the importance of the use of data and intelligence, digital transformation, community cohesion and the foundational and green economies.

Many of the existing programmes initiated in the PSB's current strategic work programme continue to be appropriate, if anything even more so, to mitigate the long-term effects of the pandemic. The PSB and wider local well-being partnership will continue to focus on the following 2020/21 well-being programmes:-

High Level Action	PSB Lead	Delivery Method
Age-Friendly Communities	Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations	Deliver against the new Age-Friendly Action Plan
Foundation Economy	Coleg Gwent	Investigating the opportunities for prosperity through the Foundational Economy
Climate Change Mitigation	Blaenau Gwent Council	Build on the recommendations from the Climate Assembly to develop a borough-wide decarbonisation programme

Sustainable Food	Tai Calon Community Housing	Working together as a Sustainable Food Partnership to tackle food insecurity and encourage local food growth
Early Years Integration Transformation	Aneurin Bevan University Health Board	Expansion of virtual early years' service pilot in Nantyglo and Brynmawr
Integrated Well-being Network	Aneurin Bevan University Health Board	Implementation of regional project locally in Tredegar and Brynmawr, linking in with ABUHB's Building a Healthier Gwent programme

The new regional Gwent PSB will take responsibility for the development and delivery of the Well-being Plan 2023 onwards however in order to do this, it will need support from partnerships in each of the local areas of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen.

A new Local Well-being Partnership (LWP) group for the Blaenau Gwent We Want well-being plan will be established to focus on local delivery of the well-being objectives and any regional well-being priorities set by the Gwent PSB.

Following the formation of the regional PSB, the BG LWP will interact with the new Gwent PSB with considerations being given to how each of the five local arrangements across Gwent impact/influence the regional partnership landscape going forward. Furthermore, there is a commitment that all partner organisations involved in the work of the BG PSB within the new local well-being delivery arrangements for Blaenau Gwent will continue to work in partnership together towards the BG We Want well-being goals through the work programme as set out above, to continue to support our local communities to prosper and recover from the Covid19 pandemic.



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