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THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND

9th June 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Executive Committee will be held in Virtually Via Microsoft Teams (if you would like to attend this meeting live via Microsoft Teams please contact committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk) on Wednesday, 16th June, 2021 at 10.00 am.

Yours faithfully

Michelle Morris
Managing Director

AGENDA

Pages

1. SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION

You are welcome to use Welsh at the meeting, a minimum notice period of 3 working days is required should you wish to do so. A simultaneous translation will be provided if requested.

We welcome correspondence in the medium of Welsh or English. / Croesawn ohebiaith trwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg.

2. APOLOGIES

To receive.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS

To receive.

MINUTES

4. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 5 - 22

To consider the Minutes of the Meeting held on 14th April, 2021.

5. SPECIAL EXECUTIVE 23 - 28

To consider the Minutes of the Special Meeting held on 21st April, 2021.

GENERAL MATTERS

6. TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS

To discuss.

7. CONFERENCES, COURSES, EVENTS AND INVITATIONS 29 - 30

To consider.

DECISION ITEMS - CORPORATE SERVICES MATTERS

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To consider the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

DECISION ITEMS - ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

10. ADOPTION OF LITTER AND FLY-TIPPING STRATEGY 35 - 60

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.

11. **HIGHWAY CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAMME 2021 – 2022** 61 - 74

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.

DECISION ITEMS - EDUCATION MATTERS

12. **SCHOOL ORGANISATION POLICY (2021/24)** 75 - 94

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Education.

MONITORING ITEMS - CORPORATE SERVICES

13. **COMMERCIAL STRATEGY QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING** 95 - 100

To consider the report of the Interim Chief Officer Commercial.

14. **CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY - QUARTERLY UPDATE** 101 - 110

To consider the report of the Interim Chief Officer Commercial.

MONITORING ITEMS - EDUCATION

15. **EDUCATION DIRECTORATE – RESPONSE TO COVID-19** 111 - 134

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Education.

16. **BLAENAU GWENT EDUCATION SERVICES SELF-EVALUATION AND BUSINESS PLANNING** 135 - 164

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Education.

17. EXEMPT ITEM

To receive and consider the following report which in the opinion of the proper officer is/are an exempt item taking into account consideration of the public interest test and that the press and public should be excluded from the meeting (the reason for the decision for the exemption is available on a schedule maintained by the proper officer).

DECISION ITEM - ENVIRONMENT

18. CHARITABLE LAND, FORMER YSGOL GYMRAEG, KING STREET, BRYNMAWR 165 - 174

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.

To: Councillor N. Daniels (Chair)
Councillor J. Collins
Councillor D. Davies
Councillor J. Mason
Councillor J. Wilkins

All other Members (for information)
Manager Director
Chief Officers

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

SUBJECT: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 14TH APRIL, 2021

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

**PRESENT: Leader of the Council/
Executive Member Corporate Services
Councillor N.J. Daniels (CHAIR)**

**Deputy Leader/Executive Member –
Regeneration & Economic Development
Councillor D. Davies**

**Executive Member – Education
Councillor J. Collins**

**Executive Member – Environment
Councillor J. Wilkins**

**Executive Member – Social Services
Councillor J. Mason**

WITH: Managing Director
Corporate Director Social Services
Corporate Director Education
Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services
Chief Officer Resources
Interim Chief Officer Commercial
Head of School Improvement and Inclusion
Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
Press Officer

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
	<p><u>ONE MINUTE SILENCE – HRH DUKE OF EDINBURGH</u></p> <p>The Leader acknowledged that last Friday, it was with great sadness that we heard of the passing HRH the Duke of Edinburgh. The Leader felt that this marked the end of a long and distinguished era in history and on behalf of Blaenau Gwent he wished to offer condolences to the Queen and the wider members of the Royal Family.</p> <p>In the absence of a formal Council meeting the Leader asked the Executive Committee to observe a one-minute silence as a mark of respect to HRH the Duke of Edinburgh.</p>	
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from:-</p> <p>Councillor S. Thomas, Chair of Social Services Scrutiny Committee Councillor S. Healy, Chair of Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee Councillor J. Hill, Chair of Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Councillor G.A. Davies, Vice-Chair of Regeneration Scrutiny Committee</p> <p><u>INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME</u></p> <p>The Leader welcomed the recently appointed Luisa Munro-Morris, Head of School Improvement and Inclusion to the Executive Committee. The Leader advised that both himself and the Executive Member for Education felt it appropriate for the Officer to attend to ensure she felt part of the team straightaway.</p>	

	<p>The Leader expressed his congratulations to the Officer on an impressive interview and was delighted that the position was accepted. The Leader felt confidence that the Authority could be assured that the schools improvement programme was in safe hands. The Leader noted from conversations with the Executive Member for Education that the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion would complement an already strong and committed team.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest and dispensations were received.</p>	
	<p><u>MINUTES</u></p>	
No. 4	<p><u>SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 24th March, 2021.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
	<p><u>DECISION ITEMS - CORPORATE SERVICES MATTERS</u></p>	
No. 5	<p><u>GRANTS TO ORGANISATIONS</u></p> <p>No grants to organisations were received.</p>	

No. 6

**PUBLIC SPACE CCTV SYSTEM ANNUAL
MONITORING REPORT 2020**

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Chief Officer Resources (SIRO CCTV), Head of Community Services and Interim Chief Officer Commercial.

The Chief Officer Resources advised that the report outlined the Council's draft Public Space CCTV Annual Monitoring Report 2020 which covered the period 1st September 2019 – 31st December 2020. The report which was detailed in Appendix 1 was the first of what will be Annual Monitoring Reports in line with the Surveillance Camera Commissioner's Code of Practice, to support the development of a holistic approach to raising its standards and compliance.

The Chief Officer further spoke to the report and noted the progress made in conjunction with the compliance with the Surveillance Camera Commissioner's CCTV Codes of Practice. The successful engagement sessions with Members were acknowledged and it was reported that the feedback from these meetings would be included in the Forward Work Programme.

It was also reported that the report had been considered by the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee who supported Option 2 with an additional recommendation for consideration by the Executive Committee. The Scrutiny Committee further recommend that the Executive Committee investigate the possibilities of extra funding for the system in liaison with the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and a paper be brought back to the Scrutiny Committee to review the equality of provision across the County Borough.

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services added that there were technical challenges around cameras in terms of download speed and Wi-Fi connections. However, he stated that this did not result in any loss in footage and further work was needed to address this matter.

The Managing Director referred to previous discussions with the Police and Crime Commissioners Office where it had been confirmed that additional funding would not be available as the system did not include live monitoring. It was felt that without this function the investment could not be supported.

There had been further proposals that this be taken forward on a Gwent wide basis, however since the pandemic in March 2020 priorities had been placed in other areas. Therefore, the Managing Director advised that should these discussions be recommenced the Authority would participate in order to reach a solution.

The Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration felt it was important that the Council had adequate Wi-Fi connections across the Borough to support improving systems. The Executive Member felt that the Police and other partners had vested interests in CCTV in towns, particularly around covert cameras which would be more beneficial in some instances.

The Leader supported the recommendation brought forward by the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee and concurred that the Authority needed to be involved in discussions going forward to be part of a Gwent wide working arrangement. The Leader hoped that CCTV would feature highly on the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme over the coming 12 months as it was important to our communities and therefore to ensure we protect and enhance our communities the infrastructure needed to be in place.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Annual Monitoring Report (including its supporting appendices) be approved following which the report would be published and sent to the Surveillance Camera Commissioner. The Executive Committee further supported the recommendation from Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee to investigate the possibilities of extra funding for the system in liaison with the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to review the equality of provision across the County Borough.

DECISION ITEMS - EDUCATION MATTERS

No. 7 EAS BUSINESS PLAN 2021-2022 (DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION)

Consideration was given to the report of the Managing Director, EAS.

The Corporate Director Education spoke to the report which outlined the full contents of the draft EAS Business Plan 2021-2022 and referred the Executive to the Education Aims as detailed in the report.

The Corporate Director Education added that the report had been fully supported by the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee.

The Executive Member for Education noted the report which was self-explanatory and concurred that the Education Aims which had been co-constructed was exactly what the Authority needed coming out of the pandemic. The Leader concurred with the comments and stated that these were areas that there was continued dialogue.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

No. 8

**BLAENAU GWENT EDUCATION ADMISSIONS
POLICY FOR NURSERY AND STATUTORY
EDUCATION 2022/23**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

The Corporate Director Education spoke to the report which detailed the outcome of the annual review and consultation process associated with the Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education and outlined the primary changes made to the document for the 2022/2023 academic session.

The Executive Member for Education welcomed the report and was pleased to see that as a Local Authority we would be able to work with Abertillery Learning Community in terms of admissions.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and agreed it be published by 15th April, 2020.

**DECISION ITEMS –
REGENERATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS**

No. 9 DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager – Business & Regeneration.

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services gave an overview of the Destination Management Plan update and summarised the context of the Plan. The Corporate Director advised that Blaenau Gwent had a strong manufacturing links, however there was also strong links to tourism and the Plan ensured that both organisations, businesses and people work together to deliver agreed targets. The Corporate Director further noted the cross cutting themes and five main themes as detailed in the report and reported that the Scrutiny Committee had supported the Plan.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development advised that the industrial areas in South East Wales over the years had not been viewed as a tourism or attraction to come and visit Wales, however there was now a turning point. The Executive Member added that he had recently attended a Valleys Regional Park meeting with other authorities and there was now an opportunity to sweat the historical assets and green spaces of our valleys. There was a vast majority of green spaces in Wales, although Wales was normally promoted via our beautiful costal paths and beaches. Although these are available, there was also green areas such as Cwmtillery Lakes, Bryn Bach Parc which was available in Blaenau Gwent and led to other green spaces across the Valley.

The Executive Member felt that going forward there was a need to look at accommodation and transport in the Borough as well as out of Blaenau Gwent. The Leader concurred with the comments raised and welcomed the transport aspect as it was vital in achieving the aspirations of the Plan

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the BGDMP 2020-25 be endorsed.

<p>No. 10</p>	<p><u>CIVIC CROWDFUNDING</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Team Manager Connected Communities.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services provided a detailed overview of the report and informed that the report had been supported by the Scrutiny Committee who welcomed that this was a different way in accessing funding and supporting local community groups.</p> <p>The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development welcomed this new structure which provided community groups with an opportunity to work together and access funding in a different way. It was hoped that this would bring groups together from across the Borough and gave the Council a key role to play in working with local groups. The Executive Member noted dialogue undertaken around crowdfunding and felt it was a new and positive way to access funding for communities.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 2; namely the submission of a CCRCDC Challenge Fund application for a civic crowdfunding platform be approved, acting as the lead authority. The implementation of a regional crowdfunding platform, inclusive of Blaenau Gwent, to support solutions to locally identified projects and challenges; subject to funding award also be approved.</p>	
<p>No. 11</p>	<p><u>ADVANCED ENGINEERING CENTRE & MTC REPORT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services noted the report which had two components, firstly manufacturing technology catuplut (MTC) UK Centre for Excellence of future of manufacturing. The Corporate Director added that as part of work with Tech Valley it was asked where Blaenau Gwent’s skill base was needed to be competitive over the next 10 years. A survey was undertaken which identified that “SME businesses are not currently in a financial position that would encourage any significant investment in either staff training or new equipment.</p>	

As a result of the survey it was reported that it had been recommended that the Advanced Engineering Centre offered a range of technology awareness programmes that would allow SMEs to explore, at minimal cost, the benefits of deploying a range of technologies with the potential to improve the efficiency of their business, while also developing additional revenue streams via diversification into additional products and services. It was with these recommendations that the teams at Coleg Gwent and the Local Authority have considered carefully the equipment purchases for the facility and a vision to develop an Advanced Engineering Centre which would create an environment that would attract hi-tech inward investors within the Advanced Manufacturing sector.

The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services welcomed the involvement of Coleg Gwent who wished to work in partnership with the facility and would underpin the revenue funding to deliver the range of skills required. The Corporate Director noted that the former Monwel building would be converted to the training facility with the Council being the owner with a long lease to Coleg Gwent. A bid had been submitted to Tech Valleys to fund capital works and these costs would cover equipment as it was expected to be a state of the art facility.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development welcomed the report and referred to a report published upon the closure of the Steelworks where one of the key statements was that the way out of poverty was through education. The Executive Member felt that the Council was achieving this with the reports that had been presented. There had been many mentions of Blaenau Gwent not having the skill base or abilities in certain areas, however that was no longer the case, via teams in schools and Coleg Gwent working closer together than we have been in many years. This Centre would be part of a bigger picture and although these skills were the top end there was still a need for electricians and bricklayers and Coleg Gwent had these training facilities which needed to be promoted.

The Executive Member concluded that as the Authority moved forward as partners with Tech Valleys and the City Region, it was anticipated that businesses would look across the valley to Blaenau Gwent and it gave him great pleasure to present this welcomed report.

The Executive Member for Education concurred with comments raised and share the enthusiasm for apprenticeships which are important. This was a fantastic opportunity and partnership between Education and Regeneration which provided exciting opportunities for our young people.

The Leader advised that this report was collectively welcomed by the Executive which set Blaenau Gwent and the Region on a different level one that should have been tackled years ago. The Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration's passion for his area, his push, drive and his insistence that these areas come to the fore should be recognised and appreciated. The Leader expressed a great credit to the Executive Member and concurred that the report provided exciting opportunities for our young people.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 2; namely

- the MTC report and associated recommendations be endorsed; and
- the TV submission for the refurbishment of Monwel into the AEC be noted and endorsed.

DECISION ITEMS – SOCIAL SERVICES

No. 12 REVISED SAFE REDUCTION OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER STRATEGY 2020 – 2025

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Social Services.

The Corporate Director Social Services spoke in detail to the report which provided a revised Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy. The Corporate Director noted that the initial Strategy had been in place for 3 years and due to the good work in reducing the number of children being placed into care it was felt that it would be beneficial to refresh and review the Strategy. The Corporate Director further noted the main recommendations, objectives and stated that the impact had not only been in reducing the number of children needing to be bought into care, but also on the budget pressure on the Social Services Directorate and the Council.

It was reported that an overspend of £2.5m was reported in 2016/2017 and had reduced significantly to an underspend of £75,494 in the 2019/2020 financial year, therefore it was hoped that the continuation of the Strategy would further enable Children's Services to manage their budgets going forward.

The Executive Member for Social Services welcomed the report and noted the major decision taken in 2017 when there was an increased rise in children coming into care. The Executive Member advised that the Edge of Care Team, which had been part funded by Social Services and a grant from Welsh Government, was put together to tackle the rise in children coming into care. In July 2018 the numbers were approximately 237, however the Executive Member was pleased to report that today in 2021 the number was 199. The Executive Member felt that this was a great achievement and reflected the excellent work achieved by the Team over the years.

The Executive Member noted other work which had also been undertaken in partnership with colleagues in Monmouthshire with children with more complex needs in care. This work also saw a decline in numbers from 18 to 12. These reductions demonstrated that our Social Services Team was fully committed to looking after children in our communities and was performing well. The Executive Member expressed how pleased he was with the excellent work undertaken by the staff in Social Services.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development concurred with the comments raised and recognised the fantastic work being undertaken in Social Services.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

DECISION ITEMS - ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

No. 13 POSITION REPORT FLY GRAZING HORSES

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 2; namely that the Executive supported the existing process for the removal of horses set out in the report with the use of contractors and the costs associated with this and that the Council look to work with partners, and be granted permission to pursue enforcement with regard to the Control of Horses Act in prolific areas in line with the Wellbeing Plan Objective 2.

MONITORING ITEMS - CORPORATE SERVICES

**No. 14 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING -2020/2021,
FORECAST OUTTURN TO 31 MARCH 2021
(AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2020)**

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The Chief Officer Resources spoke in detail to the report which provided the Executive with the forecast financial outturn position across all portfolios for the financial year 2020/2021 as forecast at 31st December, 2020. The Chief Officer outlined the key points of the report and gave an overview of the impact on the budget as detailed in the report.

The Leader thanked the Chief Officer for the overview of the report and requested that a Cost Pressure Sub Group be arranged in order to give consideration to the Action Plans. The Chief Officer Resources confirmed that the Team was currently working on the provisional outturn in order to provide a more updated position to the Cost Pressure Sub Group.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and appropriate challenge be provided to the financial outcomes noted the report.

No. 15

**CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING, FORECAST FOR
2020/2021 FINANCIAL YEAR (AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2020)**

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The Chief Officer Resources outlined the report and referred to the projects which had reported significant overspends, as follows:-

Household Waste recycling Centre - £204,095
Lime Avenue Business Park - £234,710

The Chief Officer Resources advised that both overspends have been identified as relating to increased costs caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, discussions with funding bodies are ongoing to request additional funding

It was also reported that Welsh Government confirmed financial support for costs incurred as a result of flood damage during March 2020. As a result, the quarter two forecast over-spend of £24,000 in relation to Flood Recovery Works was now expected to be mitigated. Therefore, the Council's own resources would not be required for the repair works on Aberbeeg Road, therefore it was proposed that the £405k allocation be reinstated to the Big Arch project as agreed by Council on 23rd July, 2020.

The Leader advised that these issues had been considered at the last Council meeting and the capital programme had been realigned accordingly.

The Leader also referred to the Household Waste Recycling Centre at Roseheyworth where delays had been due to the pandemic, however it was hoped that these additional costs would be superseded due to the imminent opening and invited the Executive Member for Environment to provide an update.

The Executive Member for Environment was pleased to report that the second Household Recycling Centre at Roseheyworth would be opening on Monday via the online booking system. It was advised that residents could ring or book online and this had been very well received so far. There had been some issues and queries in terms of what could be accepted, however, it was hoped that these issues would be addressed via a press release which was due to be published ahead of opening.

The Leader welcomed this good news and noted that it was another project that this administration had been committed to deliver.

The Leader also referred to additional monies for highways works and advised that a meeting would be arranged in the coming weeks to develop a programme of works on residential roads and streets to continue the work commenced in 2017. It was hoped that following these discussions a series of works could begin in the coming months.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1; namely the appropriate challenge to the financial outcomes in the report be provided; continued support for the appropriate financial control procedures agreed by Council; and the budgetary control and monitoring procedures in place within the Capital Team, to safeguard Authority funding be noted.

No. 16

USE OF GENERAL AND EARMARKED RESERVES 2020/2021

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The Chief Officer Resources outlined the key points of the report and advised that although the reserves were in line with targets set by the Authority it was critical that Council ensure an appropriate level of reserves to support its financial sustainability. In comparison to other Welsh Authorities, Blaenau Gwent still had one of the lowest levels of general and earmarked reserves.

The Leader noted the appropriate level of reserves and advised that the Authority still had some way to go in comparison with the overwhelming majority of local authorities throughout Wales. It was important that there was that additional financial resilience behind the Authority as there would be added pressures on Local Government in the months and years ahead. The Leader reiterated that the stance that this Authority take financially at budget setting times was the correct one as it was about the long term benefit of the Council.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and

- the forecast use of general and earmarked reserves for 2020/2021 be considered;
- consideration be given to the impact of the £0.552m favourable variance for 2020/2021 would have on the budgeted contribution to the General Reserve;

- the forecast increase of the General Reserve in 2020/2021 to £7.151m, being 5.28% of net revenue expenditure (above the 4% target level) be noted; and
- challenge to budget overspends and implement appropriate service Action Plans, be continued where required.

Maintenance of general reserves at an adequate level is crucial to the Council being able to meet future liabilities arising from risks for which specific provision has not been made.

MONITORING ITEMS – EDUCATION

No. 17 ESTYN THEMATIC REVIEW – BLAENAU GWENT’S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

The Corporate Director Education spoke to the report which related to the Estyn Thematic Review report which outlined narrative on the corporate response to the COVID-19 situation, particularly supporting the schools during the emergency period. The Corporate Director noted that the Thematic Review letter was attached at Appendix 1 and stated that the letter was positive overall and referred to the highlights of notable practice. The Corporate Director advised that the Review findings provided assurances that the Council/Education Directorate had handled the emergency response well in supporting schools, but clearly there are also areas to learn moving forward.

At the invitation of the Leader, the Corporate Director Education provided the positive feedback received from the collective meeting undertaken with the Council’s Regulators.

The Corporate Director Education advised that the information presented by Estyn was constructive in terms of where the Directorate and the Council was currently placed. It was pleasing to note that they identified strong corporate collaboration and work across the Council as the Estyn Local Government for Education Services (LGES) Framework was based on the Corporate work of the Council, the Corporate Director noted that it was not solely the work of the Education Directorate but importantly the way the Council supported learners across the board. The 3 areas Estyn identified for the Council to concentrate on was known to officers, there was acknowledgment that the Council knew schools well and were in a good position to support schools who needed support. It was anticipated that where schools were identified as underperforming, there are encouraging signs with the potential to be removed from an Estyn Category in the future.

The Executive Member for Education noted positive report and felt that the emergency response had been handled well with effective and strong collaboration work across the Authority and with schools which demonstrated the good relationships. The Executive Member wished to extend thanks to the Education Directorate and Departments across the Council as well as school based staff who worked together effectively during this pandemic for the benefit of our learners.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development concurred with the comments raised and stated that the work across the board had been excellent and he felt that these links with schools have become stronger.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

No. 18 **WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS (WPLS)**
ANNUAL RETURN 2019/20

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

MONITORING ITEMS - SOCIAL SERVICES

No. 19 **CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESPONSE TO VULNERABLE CHILDREN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Social Services.

The Corporate Director Social Services provided an overview of the report which gave information on how Children's Services changed the way in which services have been delivered throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Department had approached the pandemic on a regional basis and both Adults and Children Services heads of service met on a Gwent wide basis and determined how to address the pandemic. The Corporate Director further spoke to the report and highlighted how the regional working was taken forward in Blaenau Gwent.

In terms of the recent meeting held with the Council's Regulators, the Corporate Director Social Services advised that CSIW were positive of managers and staff and how they continued to deliver services for the communities in Blaenau Gwent and how well we worked with partners, both corporately and with other colleagues during the Covid-19 pandemic. The CSIW had assurance and confidence in Social Services in continuing to provide services going forward.

The Corporate Director Social Services added that the Social Services Scrutiny Committee had supported the report and noted their appreciation of staff across the Social Services Directorate for their work undertaken with families during the pandemic.

The Executive Member for Social Services wishes to reiterate his thanks for the work undertaken during the pandemic. The joint working undertaken across the Council had been outstanding and the positive comments received by CSIW had been welcomed.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

	<u>EXEMPT ITEM</u>	
	<u>DECISION ITEM – SOCIAL SERVICES</u>	
No.	<p><u>UPDATE ON LEGAL COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILDREN’S SERVICES</u></p> <p>Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer regarding the public interest test, that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and that the report should be exempt.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the public be excluded whilst this item of business is transacted as it is likely there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).</p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Social Services.</p> <p>RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report which contained information relating to the financial/business affairs of persons other than the Authority be accepted and Option 1 as detailed in the report be approved.</p>	

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

SUBJECT: SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 21ST APRIL, 2021

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

**PRESENT: Leader of the Council/
Executive Member Corporate Services
Councillor N.J. Daniels (CHAIR)**

**Deputy Leader/Executive Member –
Regeneration & Economic Development
Councillor D. Davies**

**Executive Member – Education
Councillor J. Collins**

**Executive Member – Environment
Councillor J. Wilkins**

**Executive Member – Social Services
Councillor J. Mason**

**WITH: Chief Officer Resources
Corporate Director Education
Corporate Director Social Services
Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services
Head of Corporate Compliance and Legal Services**

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	

<p>No. 2</p>	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from:-</p> <p>Managing Director Interim Chief Officer Commercial</p>	
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>The following declaration of interest was raised:-</p> <p>Councillor J. Wilkins – Item No. 7 - Business Rates Relief – Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief – 2021/22</p>	
	<p><u>DECISION ITEMS - EDUCATION MATTERS</u></p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>WELSH-MEDIUM PRIMARY SCHOOL: STATUTORY NOTICE PERIOD OBJECTIONS REPORT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Education advised that the purpose of the report provided an overview of the Statutory Notice/objection period outcomes and recommendations, in relation to the proposal to build a new 210 place Welsh-medium primary school with co-located childcare provision, in the Tredegar/Sirhowy Valley. The Corporate Director recalled previous decisions taken in relation to formally consult and approval for the outturn report by the Executive Committee.</p> <p>The Corporate Director outlined the consultation process and noted that the proposal was largely supported. The Corporate Director further highlighted the correspondence received and outlined the next steps. It was felt that the wide spread support was further demonstrated by the Statutory Notice period with only 1 letter of objection being received. This had been mainly in relation to how the development impacted the resident and the correspondence indicated that the resident supported Welsh-Medium education.</p>	

The Executive Member for Education noted that the report was self-explanatory and concurred that the report highlighted that there was high levels of support for the new Welsh-Medium school.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1; namely the Objections report, associated documents and course of action, be agreed and proceed to Decision Notification stage (which was required within 7 days of the decision being made, as per the Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018, version 2).

No. 5

PROPOSAL TO CONSULT ON PEN Y CWM CAPACITY INCREASE

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.

The Corporate Director Education advised that the purpose of the report was to request that the Executive Committee approved that the Authority formally consult in relation to the proposal to extend the capacity of Pen y Cwm Special School from 120 to 175 pupils which would accommodate the demand for places. The Corporate Director informed that Pen y Cwm catered for pupils between the ages of 3-19 years across a broad spectrum of complex special educational needs. The placements were available for both Blaenau Gwent pupils as well as pupils from other local authority areas. At present the School was over capacity and currently had 141 pupils on roll, which included a wide range of disabilities and difficulties.

The Corporate Director Education advised that the proposal to extend the capacity at Pen y Cwm Special School from 120 to 175 places from September 2021 was to facilitate the extended capacity. The Council would remodel the existing learning environment to create additional classroom spaces and associated facilities. In addition, the Council would work with the school to develop a long-term plan to support sustained growth and development.

The Corporate Director added that the proposal would be delivered in two parts, as follows:-

Part 1, to increase the capacity of Pen y Cwm Special School from 120 to 175 places in preparation for 2021/22 academic year, which would involve physical works to the existing building including:-

- Re-location of the Post 16 base (including 3 classrooms, a common room, life skills room, toilets and hygiene facilities)
- Re-location of the current administrative area and office space (including a staff room, PPA room, conference facility and a small meeting room)
- Creation of 2 additional primary classrooms
- Creation of 1 additional secondary classroom and associated Facilities
- Re-location of the soft-play area to the ground floor
- Re-development of the Science and Technology room

Part 2, the development of a long-term plan to secure additional capacity to facilitate sustained growth and development.

The Corporate Director noted the benefits and advantages of the proposal and outlined the consultation requirements. The Corporate Director reported a correction to the date outlined which should read 6th June, 2021 and not 6th May, 2021 as noted. This consultation period was inclusive of 20 school days.

RESOLVED accordingly.

The Corporate Director further outlined the capital and revenue implications and noted that the capital costs would be funded through Welsh Government grants, however in terms of revenue it was reported that Pen y Cwm Special School was funded in accordance with Blaenau Gwent Council's Fair Funding policy and would receive resources on the same basis as any other school within Blaenau Gwent, based upon pupil numbers and the area of the school building. In April 2020/21 pupil funding at Pen y Cwm Special School for Age Weighted Pupil Unit and Category funding was £2,277,494 this figure was based upon the 141 pupils on roll. It was noted that based on the average pupil cost of £16,925, the AWPU/ category funding costs for 175 pupils would be circa £2.9 million, which was an increase of £575,450, if all places were to be fully allocated.

The Corporate Director also noted that the Authority currently had 20 ALN pupils educated outside the Local Authority at a cost of £896,000. If Pen y Cwm Special School was able to increase capacity, there would be opportunities to consider making education provision for some of the 20 pupils back in Blaenau Gwent.

The Corporate Director referred to Appendix 2 which detailed the sensitivity analysis around the mix of pupils and outlined a range of funding options from the Individual School Budget. The report also detailed the risks if the proposal was not taken forward in terms of placements and financial risk of Out of County Places for the Authority.

The Executive Member for Education welcomed the report and felt that the proposal would benefit more children and young people by ensuring they had access to learning closer to home. The Leader concurred with the comments raised and felt that the report demonstrated Blaenau Gwent's continued commitment to our learners.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1; associated documents be accepted and the Executive Committee formally agreed to consult upon the proposal.

DECISION ITEMS - CORPORATE SERVICES MATTERS

No. 7

BUSINESS RATES RELIEF – RETAIL, LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY RATES RELIEF – 2021/22

Councillor Wilkins declared an interest in this item and remained present during discussions.

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The Chief Officer Resources noted the lateness of the report which had been due to the confirmation from Welsh Government that the scheme would be extended to 2021/22. The Chief Officer referred to the report which sought adoption from the Executive Committee on behalf of the Council, of the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief – 2021/22 scheme (RLHRR), as a section 47 discretionary rate relief for 2021/22.

The Chief Officer advised that during the Covid-19 response and recovery Welsh Government had frozen business rates for 2021/22 at 2020/21 levels. In order to provide a fiscal stimulus for businesses in Wales, Welsh Government announced the extension for grant funding to provide the RLHRR scheme for 2021/22. The actual funding allocation for Blaenau Gwent for the 2021/22 scheme had yet to be confirmed, however an estimated allocation of £3.5M to allow delivery of the scheme was anticipated which based on an initial assessment would benefit 328 business as a result of adoption of the RLHRR scheme.

The Leader welcomed the report and the continued support from Welsh Government in this area.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 2; namely the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief – 2021/22 scheme be adopted on behalf of the Council, to supplement the Council’s discretionary rate relief scheme.

Agenda Item 7

Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Executive**

Date of meeting: **16th June, 2021**

Report Subject: **Conferences, Courses, Events and Invitation Report**

Report Submitted by: **Democratic Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	09.12.2020	N/A	

1. **Purpose of the Report**

To present a list of Conferences/Courses for consideration and determination by the Executive.

2. **Scope of the Report**

2.1 Army Broadcast Event – 9th June, 2021

To approve the attendance of Councillor Brian Thomas, Armed Forces Champion.

3. **Options for Consideration**

3.1 To seek approval for attendance at the above.

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

REPORT SUBJECT: **GRANTS TO ORGANISATIONS – 16th June 2021**

REPORT AUTHOR: **RHIAN HAYDEN**

**LEAD OFFICER/
DEPARTMENT** **CHIEF OFFICER RESOURCES,
RESOURCES**

ABERTILLERY

Abertillery Ward – Councillor J. Holt

1.	Abertillery Bluebirds FC	£75
2.	Falcons Martial Arts	£75
3.	Adam Street Allotments	£100
4.	Abertillery Netball	£75
5.	Bishop Street Allotments	£100
6.	Old Tyleryan RFC	£100

Cwmtillery Ward – Councillor M. Day

1.	Falcons Martial Arts	£75
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Llanhilleth Ward – Councillors J. Collins

1.	Abertillery BG RFC	£50
2.	Zion Miners Chapel	£150

Llanhilleth Ward – Councillors L. Parsons

1.	Abertillery BG RFC	£50
2.	Zion Miners Chapel	£150

Six Bells Ward – Councillor D. Hancock

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------|------|
| 1. | Cwmtillery Racing Pigeon Club | £200 |
| 2. | Six Bells Community Hall | £300 |

Six Bells Ward – Councillor M. Holland

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------|------|
| 1. | Abertillery Bluebirds FC | £100 |
|----|--------------------------|------|

BRYNWAWR

Brynmawr Ward – Councillor J. Hill

- | | | |
|----|-------------|------|
| 1. | Karabo Gwet | £150 |
|----|-------------|------|

EBBW VALE

Badminton Ward – Councillor C. Meredith

- | | | |
|----|----------------------|-----|
| 1. | Falcons Martial Arts | £75 |
|----|----------------------|-----|

Ebbw Vale South Ward – Councillors J. Millard & K. Pritchard

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|------|
| 1. | Ebbw Vale Cricket Club | £100 |
| 2. | Toppers School Of Dance | £200 |

NANTYGLO & BLAINA

Blaina Ward - Councillor L. Winnett

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------|------|
| 1. | Retired Police Dogs of Gwent | £500 |
|----|------------------------------|------|

Blaina Ward - Councillor J. Morgan

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------------|------|
| 1. | Blaina and District Cricket Club | £200 |
|----|----------------------------------|------|

TREDEGAR

Central & West Ward – Councillor M. Moore

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|------|
| 1. | Nantybwich and Waundeg Community Flat | £200 |
|----|---------------------------------------|------|

CHIEF OFFICER RESOURCES

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Agenda Item 10

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.06.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 03.06.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **16th June 2021**
Report Subject: **Adoption of Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. Joanna Wilkins / Executive Member Environment**
Report Submitted by: **David Watkins – Team Manager - Street Scene**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
23/03/2021	25/03/2021	28.05.21			12.04.21	16.06.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The report is to seek approval from the Executive Committee for the adoption of a new Council Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy for 2021-2026.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 Scope

2.1.1 This report provides information on the rationale, relevance and benefit that a Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy would have to support the Council in the effective and efficient management of litter and fly-tipping across the County borough.

2.2 Background

2.2.1 Keep Wales Tidy's (KWT) Caru Cymru received funding through the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government.

2.2.2 A successful application was made to Caru Cymru for £30,000pa over a three-year period commencing 2019/20. The project aim is to improve the quality of the environment for everyone. The project emphasis is on long term behavioural change rather than continuing to rely on just cleaning up.

2.2.3 The Caru Cymru scheme supports projects that make environmental improvements within residential areas by developing benefits for people, businesses and their communities.

2.2.4 The funding application was to include the appointment of a Local Environmental Quality (LEQ) Officer who would work with existing Litter champions and groups along with engaging with schools and community groups to raise awareness, educate and promote Local Environmental Quality issues within the borough, raise awareness and support long term behaviour change, unfortunately this has been delayed due to the Covid pandemic.

- 2.2.5 It was identified that for the Council to have a more effective and positive impact on the scheme, a relevant strategy and supporting policies would be required to support the management of the project's aim. Therefore, included in the funding application was for a specialist LEQ consultant to be appointed to review the Street Cleansing Service and draft a Blaenau Gwent Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy.
- 2.2.6 A tender process was commenced in November 2019, with the contract being awarded to Red & White Resource Ltd.
- 2.2.7 The consultant commenced work in January 2020, which involved:
- Spending time in Blaenau Gwent to get an understanding of the area, its communities and issues.
 - Collation of all litter data, demography, and operational processes
 - Meeting and interviewing all relevant stakeholders such as Keep Wales Tidy, Blaenau Gwent Litter Champions, Volunteer Groups, Officers and Frontline Street Cleansing staff.
- 2.2.8 A thorough review and analysis of the cleansing service and the feedback from stakeholder meetings and interviews allowed the consultant to draft an independent and objective Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy for Council consideration and adoption.
- 2.2.9 Unfortunately, the commencement of the Covid 19 pandemic in March 2020 prevented additional site visits and follow up stakeholder workshops, however it was felt that the information and data obtained to that point (20th March 2021) was sufficient in order to complete a draft Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy for adoption by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.

2.3 **The Strategy (Appendix 1)**

- 2.3.1 From the information ascertained from the consultation process with stakeholders, a shared vision and a number of key objectives have been established for the new Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy 2021-2026 that will deliver recognised environmental improvements to ensure Blaenau Gwent realises the shared vision, these are;

The Vision

- 2.3.2 *“To radically reduce litter and fly-tipping so we can improve our natural habitats as well as our wild and urban landscapes, increasing pride and awareness of our local heritage and desire to keep it litter free.”*

2.3.3 **Key Objectives**

1. To have a strategy that provides a framework for action.
2. To reduce litter and fly-tipping in Blaenau Gwent over the next five years.
3. To build on success of our litter champions and have a strong connection within the local communities on litter and fly-tipping issues.
4. To deliver an effective communication and engagement plan for the prevention of litter and fly-tipping.
5. To have an improved understanding within the local community of issues around litter and fly-tipping.

6. To provide effective and efficient council services that make the best use of the resources available to tackle litter and fly-tipping, including enforcement.

2.3.4 **Action Plan (appendix 2)**

2.3.4.1 The strategy action plan (five years) sets out key actions to be undertaken during the lifespan of the strategy 2021-2026, these are set out under four themes, as follows:

1. Influence
2. Engage
3. Adopt Best Practice
4. Empower

2.3.4.2 The timelines associated with the key actions within the action plan are set out as follows:

- short-term – One to two years
- medium-term – two to three years, and,
- long-term – three to five years

2.3.5 The full strategy document is attached at appendix 1 with the action plan attached at appendix 2.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The Community Services Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 12th April 2021 supported the adoption by the Council of the Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy.

3.1.1 **Option 1 (preferred)**

To approve the adoption of the draft Blaenau Gwent Litter and Fly-tipping Strategy 2021-2026

3.2

3.2.1 **Option 2**

To not approve the adoption of a new Blaenau Gwent Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy 2021-2026.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 The Litter and Fly-tipping Strategy 2021-2026 links into the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-2022 'Strong and Environmentally Smart Communities': to re-invest in environmental services to address the issues created by fly-tipping, dog fouling, littering, grass cutting, street cleansing and pest control.

5. **Implications**

5.1 **Benefits**

- Adoption of a Litter and Fly-tipping Strategy will see Blaenau Gwent as one of only two Local Authorities in Wales to have a specific litter and fly-tipping strategy providing a strategic direction that supports its aim to improve the local environment quality to the benefit of the community.
- The Strategy will raise awareness, educate and promote Local Environmental Quality issues in Blaenau Gwent.
- The Strategy will identify ways to communicate the impact of litter and assist behavioural change projects.
- The Strategy will provide a route to establishing other supporting policies i.e. a litter and dog bin protocol.
- The strategy and action plan will support the council with the submission of bids/applications to external funding providers.

Dis-benefits

5.2

Increased service standard expectation from the community.

5.2.1

Risks

5.3

Risks Option 1

5.3.1

- Service standards may not improve if the Strategy is not adopted.
- The action plan may be more challenging than anticipated.
- The strategy may be required to be delivered over a longer period.
- Should the strategy not be adopted then the Council will have no strategic direction for dealing with litter and fly-tipping matters.

Risks Option 2

5.3.2

- Should the strategy not be adopted then the council will have no clear strategic plan for dealing with litter and fly-tipping going forward.
- Key partners may withdraw their support.
- Service change opportunities may be lost.
- The council would have no strategic document to use as a basis for securing external funding opportunities.

Budget

5.4

The service reviews and subsequent Strategy provision has been funded by Welsh Government.

5.4.1

5.4.2

The three-year funding programme of £30,000 per year from 2019/20 will assist with the implementation costs of the strategy objectives and policies with the council continuing to support the ongoing associated revenue costs for the services provided.

5.4.5 It is anticipated that the strategy action plan will be delivered within existing revenue resources.

5.5 **Legal**

5.5.1 Enforcement is a key area of work within the new Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy and will require ongoing legal support from the Council's Environment, Legal and Estates teams.

5.6 **Human Resources**

5.6.1 There will be a need to appoint an LEQ officer on a fixed term basis, this will be funded by Welsh Government through the grant already awarded.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

6.1.1 Littering across all local authorities in Wales is monitored through the Welsh Government's Local Environment Audit and Management System (LEAMS). LEAMS records two issues in the street scene environment. Firstly, street cleanliness and Secondly it records Adverse Environmental Quality Indicators (AEQI) - this would include fly-posting, graffiti, dog fouling, vandalism, weeds and detritus. Audits have been published on an annual basis since 2007.

6.1.2 The Cleanliness Indicator in Blaenau Gwent has continued to increase in recent years and have shown that the percentage of highway that is of a high or acceptable standard of cleanliness has consistently been over 90% in the last three years with figures reaching 100% by the end of 2019/20. In addition, whilst fly-tipping continues to be a problem in Blaenau Gwent, the time taken to collect the waste has reduced over the past year.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

6.2.1 Public consultations and litter champion surveys, have identified that the impact of litter has a detrimental impact of the perception of the local environment. Therefore, the strategy outcomes and policies will put systems in place to improve the environment to the benefit of the whole community.

6.2.2 Strategy implementation will allow for engagement with schools and community groups to raise awareness, educate and promote Local Environmental Quality issues within the borough.

6.2.3 Engagement with other key stakeholders such as the business community, KWT and LHB to holistically achieve the ownership of improving the Local Environment for residents.

6.2.4 The Council will have a document that sets out the strategic direction for dealing with litter and fly-tipping matters, resulting in protecting the local environment and tackling the problem of litter and fly-tipping through partnerships.

6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

6.3.1

Extensive consultation was undertaken through a Street Cleansing review to provide the necessary information needed in the drafting of this Strategy, this included engagement with the following:

- Blaenau Gwent Member Engagement
- Keep Wales Tidy
- Litter Champions
- External partners/Community Groups
- Welsh Government
- Departmental officers

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

6.4.1 A five year action plan has been developed identifying key actions to be undertaken on a short-term, medium-term and long-term basis over the next five years 2021-2026.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The consultant has undertaken a fundamental review of the Street Cleansing service.

The findings of the review formed the basis of the strategy and identified the Key Objectives, and actions to improve the Local Environmental quality for the future.

There will be a need both corporately and operationally to adopt some service changes to ensure it is fit for purpose for residents, visitors and sustainable going forward.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

6.6.1 There are opportunities to work with housing associations, community groups, individual volunteers, trusts and local businesses to secure ways to raise awareness, change behaviour and share responsibility.

6.6.2 The consultant reported that the engagement process had been successful with participation and involvement particularly from the volunteers being very high and positive and will benefit the wider community.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

6.7.1 The content of this report has been considered across a number of services including; Education, Environmental Services, Community Services, and Community Safety.

6.8 ***EqlA(screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)*** **N/A**

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The five-year action plan will be monitored through Scrutiny and the Executive with quarterly update performance reports being submitted together with an annual LEAMS report being submitted.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 - Litter Strategy 2021-2026
- Appendix 2 – Litter Strategy Action Plan 2021-2026

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LITTER & FLY-TIPPING STRATEGY 2021-2026



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to extend thanks to all those that have helped contribute towards this Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy during what has been a truly unusual year. The commitment, enthusiasm, friendliness and offers of support from the Council and volunteer Litter Champions alike left us feeling welcomed and part of the local fight against litter.

Input from Council staff, Keep Wales Tidy, volunteers, local schools, businesses and the public we met in Blaenau Gwent proved invaluable and insightful in developing this pioneering Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy. As one of the first in Wales to make this commitment we feel honoured to have made a positive contribution in bringing these views together to form a platform for change.

Red & White Resource

FOREWORD

I am delighted to present the first ever Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy for Blaenau Gwent. This five-year Strategy is a bespoke document for Blaenau Gwent and has been developed to focus on litter and fly-tipping, bring together our existing resources and enable them to work cohesively to reduce the impact across our area.

Litter and fly-tipping remains an avoidable problem, we all have a responsibility to help tackle it!

Litter and fly tipping affects us all! A clean, litter-free, healthy environment has an important role to play in our overall well-being, in our economy, on tourism to the area and also has a deep impact upon the local wildlife and our ecosystems. The results are that litter and fly-tipping detracts from the beauty of Blaenau Gwent and leaves a lasting negative impression on both residents and visitors.

Blaenau Gwent is an area of outstanding beauty which I am immensely proud of. However, currently litter and fly-tipping remains a persistent everyday issue, as well as a long-standing environmental challenge that needs addressing now!

This Strategy sets out the policies that have been designed to specifically tackle the causes of litter and fly-tipping, help prevent it, and manage the collection and disposal more effectively. It frames and prioritises operational delivery going forward with a clear recognition of the need for better communication, more education and improved public awareness as well as embracing enforcement action where needed.

In order for prevention to prevail long term, significant support from and for local communities is critical. It is important to pay tribute to an already highly active and valuable body of litter champions and community groups working across Blaenau Gwent in the continued war on litter and fly-tipping. The litter champion scheme is a success story that has been instrumental in reducing litter. The dedicated individuals and the impact they have are a true example to other areas across Wales. As a litter champion myself, I am passionate about my role and the positive impact we can make collectively.

Tackling the problem of litter and fly-tipping can only be done in partnership. This document outlines how each group of key stakeholders fit into the big picture by doing their part to support the strategy and the new shared vision. We hope that people will take it upon themselves to make the difference by disposing of litter and rubbish responsibly and encourage others to do the same.

At the heart of this ambitious and vital Strategy is the need to change behaviour around litter and fly-tipping. We want to create a culture here in Blaenau Gwent where littering and fly-tipping is socially unacceptable.

I acknowledge we have significant work to do, but I believe that collectively we have the experience, desire and expertise to change behaviours and make Blaenau Gwent a cleaner place to live, work and visit.



Joanna Wilkins

Executive Member - Environment - Councillor Joanna Wilkins

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VISION

'To radically reduce litter and fly-tipping so we can improve our natural habitats as well as our wild and urban landscapes, increase pride and awareness of our local heritage and the desire to keep it litter free.'

INTRODUCTION

Litter and fly-tipping is an issue that affects us all. We have all seen litter on street corners, on the side of highways and footpaths and in town centres. Similarly, fly-tipping is a common blight recognised by most in our many natural beauty spots in the countryside. Litter and fly-tipping will always have a negative impact on the local environment, looking unsightly, attracting further degradation of the area, and costing the local council thousands to clean up every year.

Litter such as crisp packets, fast food wrappers, chewing gum, drinks containers, cigarette butts and dog fouling also includes detritus (including fallen leaves and blossom fall). Fly-tipping is removing waste from where it was produced with the deliberate intention of disposing of it unlawfully on public or private land. The scale of fly-tipping ranges from a bag of rubbish, to a boot full of garden waste and large scale dumping of construction or demolition waste.

From extensive conversations across residents, staff, schools, businesses and litter champions it is an accepted view that litter and fly-tipping currently have a significant and far-reaching social, health & well-being, environmental, and economic impact on Blaenau Gwent as a place to live, work and visit.

Significant resources are employed across the country collecting litter and fly-tipping dropped or dumped by local people and visitors alike. Regular cleaning is resource intensive and does not stem the flow. There is a need therefore to include preventative measures such as education, awareness and enforcement in the fight against litter and fly-tipping.

Bringing all these issues together and acting as a call to arms for stakeholders requires a strategy. Wales is currently the only nation in the UK not to have a litter strategy even though it is the most talked about 'on the doorstep' issue.

This Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy has been developed in the absence of a National Strategy, but recognises the Welsh Government's commitment and early work in developing a plan for Wales.



613
REPORTS
OF LITTER
IN BLAENAU
GWENT
IN 2019

POLICY CONTEXT

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is a principal litter authority as defined by Section 86 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Section 89 of the same Act requires the Council to keep land and highways, as far as is practicable, free of litter and refuse. Most public open space and highways are covered by the legislation which also provides powers for the litter authority to take a range of enforcement action including community protection notices and fixed penalty notices to help tackle the problem of litter and fly-tipping.

Whilst at the moment nationally across Wales household recycling rates have exceeded current targets, there has been little focus on waste prevention. It is time for bold and ambitious targets for waste reduction overall, including plans and investment for the transition to a circular economy. Whilst these targets are largely embedded within the waste and recycling service, street cleansing cannot escape the reality that litter is closely related to the products we buy, how they are packaged and sold, and how we discard what is not needed.

A circular economy that 'closes the loop' is about recognising the value of products and seeing them differently. Waste is a valuable resource that if not handled and captured correctly, will cause problems for future generations. Now is the time for action.

The Council supports the Government's view on producer responsibility and the need for a move towards a more sustainable circular economy. In particular, the Council would welcome the move towards improving the recyclability and recycling of the many different elements of litter, as well as realigning the responsibility for the clean-up cost of litter and fly-tipping.



WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, 2015, was founded on a desire to fundamentally deliver on improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It is worth noting that Wales was one of the first countries to introduce a ground breaking law of this nature. The Act was at the forefront of modern thinking when it comes to supporting communities. It goes as far as saying that a total of 44 public bodies, including Local Authorities, the NHS, Fire and Rescue and a number of other public servicing organisations, are required by law to deliver upon seven well-being goals.

Of these goals, the 'Globally Responsible Wales' has particular bearing on this Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy. It takes into consideration ownership of environmental crime and the need for each generation and organisations to maintain high environmental quality standards for the generations that follow.

Fundamentally we know that putting a stop to litter and fly-tipping is an integral part of achieving our goal of becoming a zero-waste nation by 2050. This however will require huge behavioural change on a global scale, meaning each little corner of the planet must do their bit. In this Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy it is intended that we can do our bit here in Blaenau Gwent.



THE COST OF LITTERING AND FLY-TIPPING

Littering is an offence that costs the people of Wales in excess of £70 million per annum². Litter, fly-tipping, dog fouling and fly-posting blight the local environment to such an extent that it can influence people's choice of where to live, affect their health and well-being and have a severe impact on the local wildlife and environment.

The environmental policy landscape is however, changing. At the time of writing, a consultation is imminent on new EPR legislation for the UK and a Deposit Return Scheme which could have a transformational affect for covering the costs and impacts of litter but may also generate the required cultural change to recycling outside of the home.



MEASURING LITTER

The issue of litter in Wales is dealt with as a partnership between Welsh Government, Keep Wales Tidy, Natural Resources Wales and the 22 Welsh Local Authorities. The Welsh Government provides funding to enable Keep Wales Tidy to deliver cleanliness assessments across Wales, using the Local Environmental Audit and Management System (LEAMS). LEAMS records two issues in the street scene environment. Firstly, a street's cleanliness is measured using the amount of litter found within a 50 metre space of any given street at a point in time. Secondly, it records Adverse Environmental Quality Indicators (AEQI). This would normally include: fly-posting; graffiti; dog fouling; vandalism; weeds; and detritus. Once the data is collected the country wide audits are published in annual surveys by Keep Wales Tidy, dating back to 2007.

²Welsh Government, Litter, May 2013, [accessed 7 June 2017]

02 VISION & OBJECTIVES

CORE VALUES OF THE COUNCIL

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has a vision for **“Proud Heritage - Strong Communities - Brighter Future”** The Corporate Plan³ has taken this vision and created five core values that inform this Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy.



VISION

This Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy has been developed as a result of the Council’s desire to tackle litter in Blaenau Gwent. With external funding to help provide additional resource and expertise the Council has taken an in-depth look at the way in which local people feel about litter and fly-tipping, the impact on the local communities and environment, together with how the Council deals with the issue on a day-to-day basis. With a changing National policy landscape, the Council will seize this opportunity to create a platform for change.

This time to reflect has resulted in some new and pioneering ideas being brought forward to bring about the necessary change. This Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy needs to bring together partners, co-ordinate activities and put communication at the heart to ensure we can challenge the status quo and change current practices, attitudes and behaviours.

³Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan Priorities 2020-22

'To radically reduce litter and fly-tipping so we can improve our natural habitats as well as our wild and urban landscapes, increase pride and awareness of our local heritage and the desire to keep it litter free.'

KEY OBJECTIVES

The following key objectives will deliver recognisable improvements to ensure Blaenau Gwent realises the shared vision.

- 01 To have a strategy that provides a framework for action.
- 02 To reduce litter and fly-tipping in Blaenau Gwent over the next five years.
- 03 To build on the success of our litter champions and have a strong connection within the local communities on litter and fly-tipping issues.
- 04 To develop an effective communication and engagement plan for the prevention of litter and fly-tipping.
- 05 To have an improved understanding within the local community of the issues around litter and fly-tipping.
- 06 To provide effective and efficient council services that make best use of the resources available to tackle litter and fly-tipping, including enforcement.



DEMOGRAPHY & POPULATION

Blaenau Gwent in South Wales with its majestic valleys is undoubtedly an area of beauty, standing on the fringes of the Brecon Beacon National Park. The area is steeped in history, rich in culture and heritage stemming from its industrial past and roots in coal mining, iron and steel works.

The five towns of Abertillery, Blaina, Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale and Tredegar have easy access to road and rail links to the City of Cardiff, offering increasing levels of economic regeneration to the area. Of the 32,000 dwellings over half are terraced properties (52%).

With 2.2% of the Welsh population, Blaenau Gwent has almost 69,000 residents. Almost three quarters of the working-age population of Blaenau Gwent are economically active. The economy of the area is driven by the service industry⁴ however, significant investment, a framework for regeneration and support from the Welsh Government⁵ will provide a platform for the area to develop a greater skilled workforce that can compete in the current climate.

⁴PMP Recruitment, Regional Profile for Ebbw Vale and Blaenau Gwent

⁵www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/story/news/the-economic-future-of-blaenau-gwent-first-minister-confirms-support/, June 2020

IMPACT ON THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT



Notwithstanding the natural beauty of the County, Blaenau Gwent is not exempt from the blight of litter and fly-tipping. The demography of the area reflecting some areas struggling with economic regeneration, the nature of the landscape also lends itself to litter and fly-tipping problems. The Valleys of Blaenau Gwent provide a natural 'tunnel' for wind-blown litter which is evident in the major towns and villages.

The refuse and recycling services provided by the Council utilise a combination of wheeled bins and boxes with the residual waste element collected every three weeks. Whilst driving higher recycling rates the 'stacked' boxes can also contribute to wind-blown litter. In high winds precariously stacked or overfull boxes can result in recycling being scattered on local streets

The town centres in Blaenau Gwent suffer the usual night-time economy litter problems together with occasional substantial blights of litter such as chewing gum. Whilst not unusual, they do reflect a lack of pride and a sense of neglect if left unmanaged. The open landscape and quiet country lanes of Blaenau Gwent unfortunately lend themselves to extensive incidents of fly-tipping.



04 CURRENT SERVICES & STANDARDS

RESOURCES EMPLOYED

The street cleansing service in Blaenau Gwent is delivered through the Council's own direct workforce. The teams delivering the service utilise mechanical sweepers and caged vehicles to maintain cleanliness standards across the County. The teams are nominally allocated individual areas and litter is collected from the streets and the many litter bins situated in each area.

The service has been subject to the cost pressures associated with the recent public sector austerity although the Council has sought to invest where possible in the service as one of the corporate priorities. The action plan sets out how the Council can best use the resources available to achieve our ambitions set out in the strategy and allow the Council to move towards a more planned and less reactive approach as part of managing the daily volume of call and reports received from the community.

The strategy sets out how the council maintains and improves standards of cleanliness across Blaenau Gwent with the available resources. In addition, whilst large amounts of litter and fly-tipping is collected, very little is currently recycled, despite the fact almost half of the Litter Champions surveyed reported they do regularly recycle some of the litter they collect⁶.



⁶Blaenau Gwent CBC Litter Champion Survey, February 2020

⁷Code of Practice on Litter & Refuse (2006)

⁸How Clean are Our Streets? All Wales Local Environmental Audit and Management System Report 2018-19

⁹Blaenau Gwent CBC, Cleanliness Survey Databases 2016-2019 & Blaenau Gwent Assessment of Performance 2019-20

MONITORING & PERFORMANCE



100%
OF STREETS
INSPECTED OF
AN ACCEPTABLE
LEAMS
STANDARD

Each year the Council, together with Keep Wales Tidy carry out surveys of their area to measure street cleanliness standards. This is replicated across the whole of Wales using a standard methodology known as LEAMS (Local Environmental Audit and Management System) and therefore allows comparative statistical measures of how each local authority is performing.

The surveys are conducted across all zones as defined by the Code of Practice⁷ and adapted by the Council.

The National picture in Wales shows the All Wales Cleanliness Indicator Score continuing to improve year-on-year (surveys began in 2007). However, common everyday items such as fast food and smoking related litter continue to be found on many streets in Wales⁸, and Blaenau Gwent is no exception.

ZONE 01

Town centres, shopping streets, transport centres and busy public places.

ZONE 02

Terraced housing and flats.

ZONE 03

Detached and semi-detached housing and industrial estates.

The Cleanliness Indicator in Blaenau Gwent has continued to increase in recent years and have shown that the percentage of highway that is of a high or acceptable standard of cleanliness has consistently been over 90% in the last three years with figures reaching 100% by the end of 2019-20⁹. In addition, whilst fly-tipping continues to be a problem in Blaenau Gwent, the time taken to collect the waste has reduced over the last year.

These results appear to mask operational issues that reflect an overall lack of resilience within the service, with resources being unavailable on a regular basis. This causes variances in performance on a day-to-day basis and frustrations within the workforce. The excellent results should not deflect from the amount of litter that is generated and reported. Evidence gathered during the development of this Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy including those of Litter Champions, staff, local business and local news reports suggest that whilst standards are relatively high as reported by the LEAMS, they are not consistently high enough for the communities in Blaenau Gwent.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Council has recruited over 200 Litter Champions enrolled to provide a considerable and valuable additional resource. A recent survey suggests that for every 6-8 active Litter Champions could equate to an additional Street Cleansing Team Member. Whilst Litter Champions are supported through some equipment from the Council, there is a demand for more effective and widespread communication and awareness raising within the community.



**DAYS PER MONTH
LITTER CHAMPIONS
ARE COLLECTING**

LITTER BINS

Litter bins are part of the everyday street scene that we all recognise. The many guises of bins ranging in purpose, size, ease of access and construction mean there are a myriad of combinations for Authorities to consider. This Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy is not concerned with the choice or corporate design to be adopted – this is clearly an issue for the Council to consider. The number, purpose and type of bin is an operational and strategic decision that will impact on usage, public buy-in to the anti-litter message and cost.

Considerable experience tells us that the more litter bins that are present in an area does not necessarily correlate with less litter. In addition, unsightly damaged or unusable bins attract further accumulation of litter and even fly-tipping. Litter bins have all-too-often expanded in numbers with little regard for their impact on the local street scene or environment. In addition, whilst the cost of a litter bin may be relatively small, it's continual maintenance and servicing costs can easily and quickly become unmanageable.

The introduction of a protocol to cover how decisions are made for the introduction or removal of litter bins would not only streamline the process but would capture all the necessary factors needed to make an informed judgement.

Whilst recycling-on-the-go is relatively new in the UK and results are variable with respect to quality of materials collected via dual purpose litter bins, the Welsh Government is currently considering the introduction of a deposit return scheme (DRS) for drinks containers. A further consultation has recently ended in 2020 on the reform of the extended producer responsibility (EPR) that would see producers of items commonly found in litter being made responsible for its collection and recycling, including costs.

A recent study looking at the composition of litter in Wales suggests up to 15% of litter could be captured by a DRS with around a third likely to fall within the EPR reforms¹⁰.

¹⁰ Composition analysis of litter waste in Wales, Welsh Government, June 2019

**OS
TACKLING
& FLY-TIPPING
LITTER**

Abertillery

CLEANING PRACTICES

A small fleet of mechanical sweepers and caged tippers provide the mechanical resource to support the street cleaning staff. The mechanical sweepers operate on roads and pavements predominantly concentrating on the removal of detritus and biodegradable waste. The Council employs the common practice seen across Wales of collecting mixed loads of litter (litter bin waste, dog bin waste and collected litter) and fly-tipped material in small caged tippers.

622 TONNES OF LITTER COLLECTED ANNUALLY IN BLAENAU GWENT 

The Authority operates a frequency-based approach to cleaning, a commonly used approach to ensure areas of historical high littering are cleaned more frequently than others that are less littered. Whilst this approach seems logical, it takes no account of variables inherent in the management of litter. Local events, seasonality, weather, time of day, availability of resources and efficiency of practice employed to clear up litter are all variables that have a direct and profound impact on litter.

With reduced budgets in recent years and high levels of competition for the valuable resources left, many Authorities have moved to a more efficient and intelligent mode of operation. Using up-to-date zoning information resources are deployed in area teams to concentrate efforts in the parts of greatest need. By adopting an area-based approach the teams take local responsibility for an area centered around a high usage area such as a town. Each team has access to mechanical sweeping capabilities as well as caged tippers (the vehicle of choice for all street cleansing operations) and a small team of individuals that take responsibility and build a sense of pride in their area. Linking these to local volunteer groups and Litter Champions adds to the development of community cohesion and inevitably higher standards of cleanliness.

SERVICE EFFICIENCY

It is clear from historical information that resource utilisation is an issue for the Council. Workforce resilience is sometimes interrupted with drivers in particular being drawn to other service areas at short notice. The result is that not only is the service difficult to plan, but that cleanliness standards peak and trough markedly. Importantly, the efficiency of the resources utilised in street cleaning services is reduced during periods of interruption.

A service review of all resources and policies that impact upon service delivery would provide an opportunity to reflect upon utilisation and service efficiency. A stable workforce that has the right tools, plant, equipment and fleet will result in a more effective and efficient service.



EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Keep Wales Tidy provides an excellent resource platform for schools across Wales. Recognising the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals agreed by World Leaders in 2015, the Eco-schools Wales programme includes an informative and innovative package on litter for Key Stage 2 children¹¹. Getting the message across to children of school age is an investment in time for future generations.

To change adult behaviour is more challenging. Numerous studies on behaviour change suggest that campaigns at all levels using different media types will be needed to achieve long-term sustainable change in behaviour. Despite numerous high-profile campaigns and media coverage littering continues in all walks of life. The challenge for Blaenau Gwent will be how to get the most from limited resources but great ambitions. Joint projects such as the Smoke Related Litter campaign with Keep Wales Tidy, and sourcing additional support for stakeholders and schools in Blaenau Gwent will be key to delivering the strategic objectives of this Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy.

14
ECO-SCHOOLS
IN BLAENAU
GWENT 

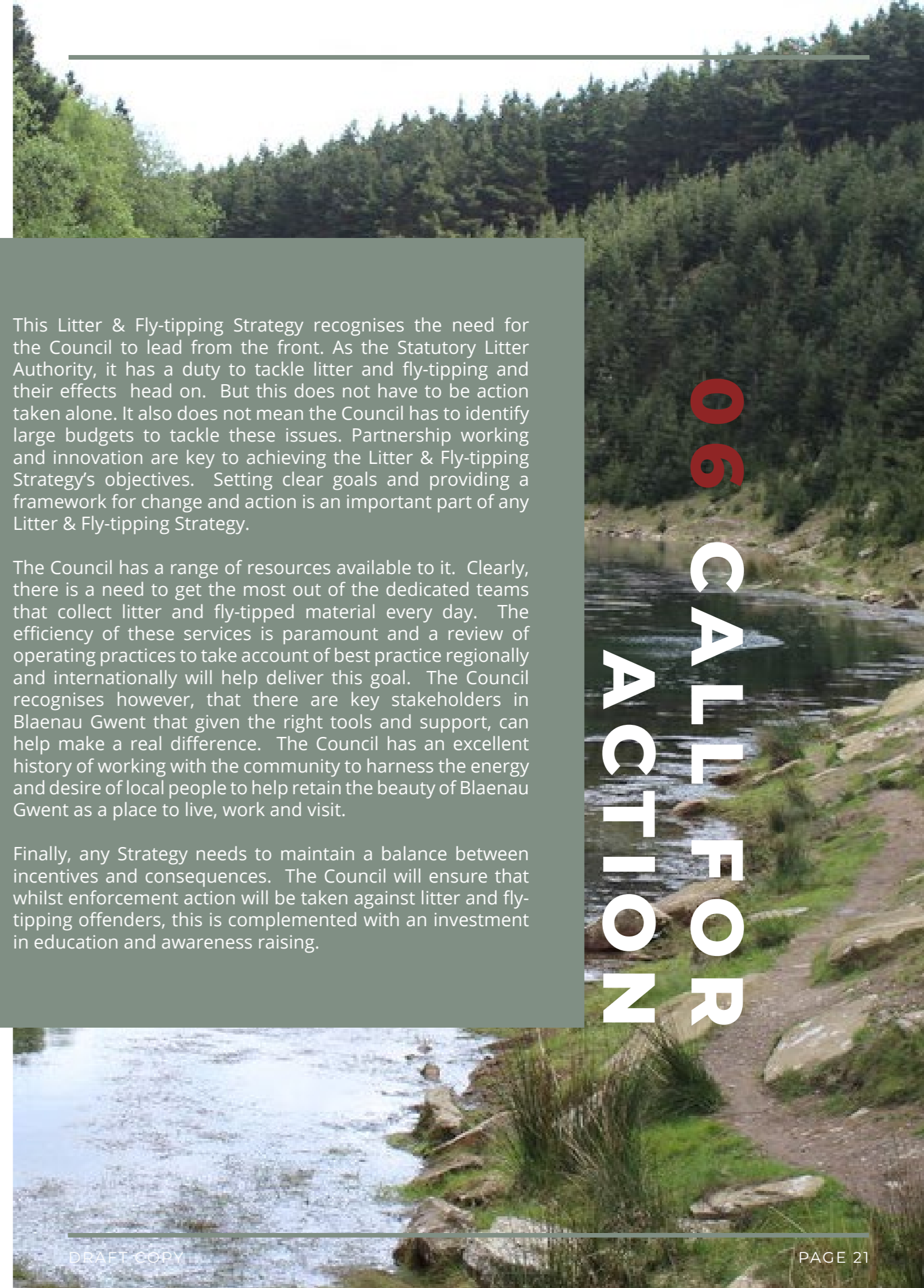
¹¹Keep Wales Tidy Eco-Schools Wales Topics, www.keepwalestidy.cymru

ENFORCEMENT

The enforcement of the law on litter and fly-tipping varies enormously across the country. The powers available to Litter Authorities provide a good foundation in acting as an important deterrent in the fight against litter and fly-tipping. With the public offering regular reports of litter and fly-tipping local authorities have a responsibility to investigate and uphold the law on littering. When combined with education and awareness campaigns effective enforcement can help reduce the incidents of litter and fly-tipping significantly. Joint agency approaches with the Police, National Resource Wales and local media groups have proved very successful in raising awareness to littering and also reducing the incidence of litter through direct campaigns that help highlight environmental crime.



We recognise the importance and need for enforcement as a complementary tool in the fight against litter. Prevention of litter and fly-tipping is more effective and desirable than cleaning up after it has been discarded. The costs associated with collecting litter and fly-tipping run into the millions across Wales and as a Country we have recognised the need for a coordinated approach to prevention by the investment in Keep Wales Tidy. This approach is also needed for enforcement.



This Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy recognises the need for the Council to lead from the front. As the Statutory Litter Authority, it has a duty to tackle litter and fly-tipping and their effects head on. But this does not have to be action taken alone. It also does not mean the Council has to identify large budgets to tackle these issues. Partnership working and innovation are key to achieving the Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy's objectives. Setting clear goals and providing a framework for change and action is an important part of any Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy.

The Council has a range of resources available to it. Clearly, there is a need to get the most out of the dedicated teams that collect litter and fly-tipped material every day. The efficiency of these services is paramount and a review of operating practices to take account of best practice regionally and internationally will help deliver this goal. The Council recognises however, that there are key stakeholders in Blaenau Gwent that given the right tools and support, can help make a real difference. The Council has an excellent history of working with the community to harness the energy and desire of local people to help retain the beauty of Blaenau Gwent as a place to live, work and visit.

Finally, any Strategy needs to maintain a balance between incentives and consequences. The Council will ensure that whilst enforcement action will be taken against litter and fly-tipping offenders, this is complemented with an investment in education and awareness raising.

06 CALL FOR ACTION

POLICY STATEMENTS

01. DEMONSTRATE STRONG COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

- Blaenau Gwent CBC will use its powers, influence and position in the local community to help promote the reduction of litter and fly-tipping within the County.
- The Council will strive to lead by example and be an exemplar Council in the fight against litter and fly-tipping across Wales.

02. INTRODUCE A LITTER BIN PROTOCOL

- Blaenau Gwent CBC will develop a document that identifies a fair and equitable system for managing litter bins, ensuring they are sited appropriately, effectively and efficiently across the County.
- The protocol will recognise that litter bins form part of a package of proposals to tackle litter, including community engagement, and that in some circumstances litter bins are not the right solution.

03. PRIORITISE THE PREVENTION AND COLLECTION OF LITTER AND FLY-TIPPING & USE OUR RESOURCES EFFECTIVELY

- Provide and manage our in-house street cleansing resources to maximum capacity making best use of new and innovative methods, equipment and fleet.
- Ensure all staff have effective and appropriate levels of training.

04. USE TECHNOLOGY TO HELP IDENTIFY AND TACKLE LITTER MORE EFFICIENTLY

- Use digital mapping expertise within the Council to identify litter and fly-tipping hotspots and target resources more effectively.
- Improve the digital process for street cleansing from notification to completion.

05. USE OUR ENFORCEMENT POWERS TO DISCOURAGE ANTI-SOCIAL ENVIRO-CRIME

- The Council will promote effective enforcement of the law on litter and fly-tipping and use all powers at their disposal to bring those responsible for enviro-crime to account.
- The Council will work in partnership to ensure our enforcement work attains maximum publicity and actively promotes the 'Keep Wales Clean' message.

06. PROMOTE GOOD PRACTICE THROUGH EFFECTIVE 'LITTER PREVENTION' COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMUNITIES WITHIN BLAENAU GWENT

- The Council will develop a communications plan for promoting the key messages concerning litter and fly-tipping shared across a wide range of on and offline channels for adoption of appropriate campaigns throughout the year.
- Work with other agencies such as the Welsh Assembly, Natural Resources Wales and other authorities in the Region to ensure a coordinated response to anti-litter and litter prevention are promoted in Blaenau Gwent.



07. WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OUR STAKEHOLDERS

- Work with the business community to 'adopt' areas around their premises, either individually or as a group and help report incidents and maintain cleanliness standards e.g. volunteer days for staff.
- Adopt a multi-agency approach with the Police, Natural Resources Wales Agency and business community to help identify and enforce those responsible for enviro-crime; such as fly-tipping incidents.
- Work with neighbouring authorities to pool resources where there is potential to introduce efficiencies e.g. joint campaigns, joint purchasing of equipment such as specialist mechanical sweepers or covert monitoring equipment.

08. PROMOTE AND SUPPORT LITTER CHAMPIONS

- Introduce a 'hub' support scheme (online and physically) for Litter Champions which provides appropriate tools, technical/health and safety packs through a 'library of resources' style system e.g. litter pickers, vests, hoops, downloadable PDFs, etc.
- Promote good communication practice within the groups and celebrate successes through an award scheme and annual event.



NEXT STEPS

This Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy provides the Council, for the first time, the opportunity to move forward in the fight against litter and fly-tipping. In adopting the Strategy, the Council can lead on a pioneering plan to reduce the impact of litter and fly-tipping on the communities in Blaenau Gwent. The accompanying Action Plan identifies key actions over the next five years that will deliver the four themes of: Influence; Engage; Adopt Best Practice; and Empower.

The Council will demonstrate its commitment to this Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy by adopting the Policy Statements and seeking to implement these through the Action Plan. This Action Plan will provide transparent and robust actions that are realistic and deliverable throughout the life of this Strategy.

INFLUENCE

Develop robust relationships within the local community to help the adoption of the shared vision of the strategy and encourage it to be embraced and supported in the communities everyday behaviour. Use every opportunity to bring the fight against litter and fly-tipping on to the agenda wherever possible.

ENGAGE

Reaching out to the communities of Blaenau Gwent to gain buy-in to this Strategy is crucial to its success. The Council has a rich and valuable community engagement tool in over 200 Litter Champions. For this resource to work effectively throughout the key stakeholder chain, and to reach out to the wider communities, regular investment and quality communication is required.

ADOPT BEST PRACTICE

Consider well researched best practice examples of communication, messaging, protocols, operational efficiency, and innovation that could be successfully introduced into Blaenau Gwent and improve our prevention, collection and enforcement of litter and fly-tipping.

EMPOWER

Create the right environment for individuals including staff, volunteers and the community, to communicate and act in the best interests of the Council. To provide an arena in which the street cleansing service can develop and grow with the aim of increasing efficiency and improving our performance.

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ACTION PLAN TO SUPPORT POLICY STATEMENTS

The Policy Statements developed as part of the Litter and Fly-tipping Strategy are designed to demonstrate a clear commitment by the Council to focus on litter and fly-tipping and take decisive action within the resources available to it.

This Action Plan has been developed to identify key areas of activity that the Council can lead upon to help demonstrate commitment to the policies individually, as well as collectively to lead key stakeholders in delivering the Strategy over the next five years.

The actions developed have been grouped into short-term (one to two years), medium-term (two to three years) and long-term (three to five years). This overlap allows flexibility in adopting the actions within a work programme of an already busy service area. The Action Plan is presented according to the four themes identified within the Strategy.



LEADERSHIP

Blaenau Gwent Council is the Principal Litter Authority and arguably has the greatest responsibility for maintaining a clean local environment. The statutory powers afforded the Council mean local residents, businesses and visitors look to them for decisive action to tackle enviro-crime. It is therefore imperative the Council demonstrates strong leadership within the community and set the standards for others to follow.

In this role it is proposed that the Council identifies a lead officer and member to champion the fight against litter and fly-tipping. This is likely to be the Executive Member for the Environment as the portfolio for street cleansing currently rests in this area. The senior officer identified together with the Executive Member for the Environment will provide leadership and focus for the Litter and Fly-tipping Strategy, taking ownership of the Action Plan and the work programme contained within it.

The timetable for delivering the key actions identified in this Action Plan reflect the Litter & Fly-tipping Strategy period 2021-2026. In adopting the Action Plan the Council commits to developing a detailed annual work programme that delivers these key actions within the four identified themes.

INFLUENCE



SHORT-TERM

- Identify a lead officer and member to champion the fight against litter and fly-tipping.
- Develop a five-year work programme for the implementation of the Action Plan.
- Identify key stakeholders for a Focus Group on litter and fly-tipping and agree terms of reference and frequency of meetings, that takes a multi-agency approach to litter prevention, management and enforcement.
- Develop proposals for an Environmental Charter that recognises a community-led approach to identifying litter problems and a route for volunteering as well as taking pride in the local area (<https://www.litterwatch.org.uk/about-us>).
- Develop and adopt a communication plan to promote litter prevention.



MEDIUM-TERM

- Work with the Focus Group to apply for funding for key projects that will help deliver the terms of reference of the Group.



LONG-TERM

- Secure long-term commitment from local business leaders to support key litter prevention and management initiatives via an Environmental Charter and display on the premise.

ENGAGE



SHORT-TERM

- Identify a budget for supporting the work of the Litter Champions using a hub-based approach.
- Using the newly identified Focus Group, identify key funding opportunities for projects that tackle litter and fly-tipping e.g. Welsh Government, Keep Wales Tidy and Wrap Cymru.
- Identify methodology for capturing public satisfaction with cleanliness standards across Blaenau Gwent.
- Work with Keep Wales Tidy to build strong educational anti-litter package in Blaenau Gwent and promote within schools across the Council area.



MEDIUM-TERM

- Identify key stakeholders within the business community to champion the Environmental Charter and strengthen links between existing business forums.
- Implement communication plan recommendations.



LONG-TERM

- Preparation for Strategy review in 2025 for new strategy to commence in April 2026.

ADOPT BEST PRACTICE



SHORT-TERM

- Develop and adopt a litter bin protocol that uses a fair and equitable scoring system for ensuring the right number of litter bins are in the most appropriate places.
- Investigate the use of technology for asset management i.e. QR codes on litter bins.
- Work with Keep Wales Tidy on ensuring accurate data provisions for LEAMS surveys and collation of survey results achieved .
- Work with the Council's enforcement team to identify key activities and partner authorities for joint initiatives. e.g. purchase of remote covert CCTV cameras.
- Create an inter-departmental working group to review and build a closed-loop approach to the use of existing technology (i.e. web-based reporting and digital mapping) within service delivery with the aim to improve efficiency.



MEDIUM-TERM

- Identify up to ten key improvement projects across Blaenau Gwent e.g. providing a co-ordinated approach to 'deep-cleaning' an area of concern for local communities.
- Review zoning (Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse) for Blaenau Gwent using key personnel and stakeholders.
- Implement technology solutions such as QR codes on litter bins
- Make use of the jet wash machine to support the marketing campaigns (e.g. jet washed messages on pavements).

EMPOWER



SHORT-TERM

- Review the Street Cleansing resources to identify resource requirements, including training, to deliver an effective and efficient service
- Conduct a workshop with the Litter Champions to identify a more partnership-based approach
- Create a 'hub' support scheme (online and physically) to enable Litter Champions
- Provide the foundations for good communication practice within the groups and celebrate successes through an award scheme and annual event
- Provide LEAMS training to a wider audience including staff and volunteers



MEDIUM-TERM

- Secure budget and implement any service changes from resource review
- Compile lessons learnt and closed loop from the LEAMS survey to ensure the results are taken into account in annual service planning



LONG-TERM

- Commence strategy evaluation process to identify successes and lessons learnt for the next strategy including monitoring through the scrutiny process

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Agenda Item 11

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.06.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 03.06.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **16th June 2021**
Report Subject: **Highway Capital Works Programme 2021 – 2022**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. Joanna Wilkins, Executive Member Environment**
Report Submitted by: **Head of Community Services, Clive Rogers**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
13.05.21	20.05.21	28.05.21			07.06.21	16.06.21	29.07.21	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on progress of the current Highway Capital Works programme 2017 – 2021 and present options around a future 2021 – 22 works programme.

2. Scope and Background

Highways Capital Works Programme 2017 – 2022

- 2.1 Building on the success of a previous Highways Capital Works Programme, which improved the nature and condition of the classified network, a programme targeting unclassified/ residential roads was approved by the Authority in 2017.
- 2.2 A capital sum of £2.115million was generated from a 20 year prudential borrow based on revenue contributions of £130k per year.
- 2.3 This Capital Sum has been augmented by Welsh Government Highways Refurbishment grant funding over the period 2017 to 2021 as detailed below:

Funding	Amount
Prudential Borrowing	£2,115,000
WG Grant 2017-2018	£553,000
WG Grant 2018-2019	£380,065
WG Grant 2019-2020	£409,776
WG Grant 2020-2021	£383,000
WG Refurbishment Grant 21/22 & carry over 20/21 WG Revenue Grant	£602,000
Total	£4,442,841

Network

- 2.4 The current gross replacement value of the Highway Network is estimated at £1.093 billion and is the Authority's most valuable material asset.

- 2.5 Un-classified roads make up 74% of the total Highway network [198 miles] and forms the majority of the local road network – residential roads & rear lanes. The majority of reactive maintenance and insurance claims relate to the unclassified network.
- 2.6 Public perception of highways normally relates to the condition of local residential roads [un-classified roads]. Reactive repairs to pot holes and rutted surfacing are costly and the less effective way of maintaining the highway.

Planned maintenance works as against reactive maintenance are the more cost effective way of maintaining the highway network.

- 2.7 The overall % of poor conditioned Un-classified roads pre-commencement of works was 17%. As a result of the previous three years this figure has been maintained at 11.4%.
- 2.8 To date **82** Residential highways have been resurfaced along with priority works to the A & B Classified Network.

A schedule of Works completed to date can be found in **Appendix A:**

2018/19 Phase 1 Programme of Works

2019/20 Phase 2 Programme of Works

2020/21 Phase 3 Programme of Works

Highway Capital Works Programme 2021-22 – Priorities & Options

- 2.9 Welsh Government Refurbishment Grant is awarded to Authorities on the basis that it will be expended in line with Authority's Highways Asset Management Plan [HAMP].
- 2.10 In accordance with the HAMP, with its identified priorities & risks to the Blaenau Gwent Highways Network, it is proposed that the 2021/22 programme will continue to pay due attention to high priority works to the Network whilst retaining a focus around improving the residential/ unclassified network.
- 2.11 Following on from the previous works programme it is proposed that a priority ranking of residential streets is determined, utilising the assessment matrix criteria that was developed in line with the specific features associated with residential highways as follows:

See **Appendix B:** Highway Assessment Matrix – Residential Roads

See **Appendix C:** Highway Assessment Matrix – Residential Roads: Worked Example

2.12 Additional Programme of Welsh Government Highway Related Funded Works 21/22

Listed below are other Highway related schemes receiving WG funding for 21/22

Local Transport and Resilient Road Fund – £1,695,000

Local Transport Fund

- Bedwellty Pits, Tredegar – improve a sub-standard junction, provide a suitable footway and bus stop infrastructure - £990,000

(the Authority is not allowed to utilise the grant for possible compensation claims by the resident as part of the scheme so there is a risk that any successful claims may fall to the Authority)

- Bus Stop Infrastructure through-out the Borough - £405,000

Resilient Road Fund - £300,000

- Aberbeeg Road A4046 – A feasibility study to assess the road condition and to support future scheme development between Cwm and Aberbeeg - £300,000

Road Safety Revenue and Safe Routes in Communities - £64,971

Road Safety Revenue Grant

- Road Safety (staff costs) to deliver Kerb Craft and National Standard Cycle Training (NSCT) - £39,971

Safe Routes in Communities

- Safe routes in communities – a feasibility study to assess footway links to Georgetown Primary School via Mafeking Terrace or an alternative route - £25,000

Active Travel Fund - £399,000

Core Allocation - £364,000

- The Works Site to Ebbw Vale Town Centre sustainable link – feasibility study.
- Minor Works
- Heathfield, Tredegar.
- The Dingle, Brynmawr.

Glyncoed, Ebbw Vale.

- Upgrade existing footpath - £35,000 (feasibility/minor works)

3. Options for recommendation

3.1 Option 1: Highest Priority Residential Road in each Ward [16 total] & Blaenant Industrial Estate Road – Estimated Total Cost £602,000

Residential Roads: 16 schemes – 1 per Ward

- Southend and Walter Street, Georgetown
- Mount Pleasant Road, Ebbw Vale North
- Institution Terrace, Ebbw Vale South
- Maes-y-Cynw Terrace, Llanhilleth
- Jubilee Road and Graig Road, Six Bells
- Powell Street and High Street (section), Abertillery
- Coronation Street, Blaina
- South and Hereford Street, Beaufort
- Aneurin Crescent, Brynmawr

- King Street, Cwm
- Railway Terrace, Sirhowy
- Stable Lane & Parkville, Tredegar C&W
- School Road, Rassau
- Waunheulog, Nantyglo
- Victoria Street, Cwmtillery
- Rhyd Y Blew Roundabout, Badminton
- Blaenant Ind Est Resurfacing

Option 2 (Preferred Option): As Option 1 plus A & B Priority Roads & Highway Safety Works – Estimated Total Cost £912,000

A & B Priority Roads:

- A4048 Heathfield Full Reconstruction Works
- A4046 Cwm Bypass Resurfacing

Highway Safety Traffic Management Works: -

- Crash Barrier Replacement at A4281 Garnlydan
- Crash Barrier Replacement at A467 Abertillery

4. Evidence of how does this topic support the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

4.1 The report has been developed to provide an update on progress of the current Highway Capital Works programme 2017/22 and supports the key priorities identified in the Corporate Plan namely – “reinvestment in highways and improvements to the residential network”.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)

Option 1 can be fully funded from the WG 21/22 funding allocation of £602,000

Option 2 (preferred option)- the estimated costs of £912,000 will require additional funding of £310,000 when compared to Option 1. The current level of the Council’s Capital Programme Contingency funding is £1.26 million, agreeing the additional funding will reduce this contingency to £0.95 million.

Appendix D provides the updated capital programme if option 2 is agreed.

The investment proposed in the report is in addition to the routine highways maintenance works funded by the Council’s revenue budget.

5.2 Risk including Mitigating Actions

There are risks associated with not maintaining the highway infrastructure in terms of highway safety and increased insurance claims, increased reactive maintenance and public perception.

5.3 Legal

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

5.4 Human Resources

There are no staffing implications associated with this report.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 Performance Information and Data:

The overall % of poor conditioned Un-classified roads pre-commencement of works was 17%. As a result of the previous years investment this figure has been maintained at 11.4%.

6.2 Expected Outcome for the Public

Improved quality of residential highways. Improved safety to highway network.

6.3 Involvement (Consultation, Engagement, Participation)

Where relevant, consultation, engagement and involvement with the public, members and interested parties have been carried out as part of the delivery requirements of the programme.

6.4 Thinking for the long term (forward planning)

Investment in the residential highway network in Blaenau Gwent is identified to ensure sustainability for the future, bringing our roads up to a good standard and improving our highway infrastructure to meet the service requirements of the future.

6.5 Preventative Focus

By investing now will prevent problems getting worse with our infrastructure, thus making prudent decisions to invest now rather than later when the costs are likely to be higher through further deterioration and inflation.

6.6 Collaboration / partnership working

N/A.

6.7 Integration (across service areas)

N/A.

6.8 EQIA (screening and indemnifying if full impact assessment is needed)

An EQIA is not relevant to the content of this report.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

7.1 These works are bi-annually reported to Corporate Overview Scrutiny (Contracts over £500k) and Annual Progress report to The Chair and Members of Community Services Scrutiny Committee.

Background Documents / Electronic Link

Appendix A: 2018 – 2021 Phases 1 - 3 Completed Programmes of Works

Appendix B: Highway Assessment Matrix – Residential Roads

Appendix C: Highway Assessment Matrix – Residential Roads: Worked Example

Appendix D: Capital Programme – impact of proposals

Appendix A

2018/19 Phase 1 Programme of Works

Total Cost: £1,861,800

Summary:

Work Package 1:

- 4 Residential Highways,
- 2 Class A roundabouts
- Total Resurfaced Highway Area/length: 24,125m² / 2.5 miles

Work Package 2:

- 20 Residential Highways:
- Total Resurfaced Highway Area/length: 49,830m² / 5.2 miles

Work Package 3:

- 28 Residential Highways:
- Total Resurfaced Highway Area/length: 33,196m² / 3.5 miles

Other Highway related Works:

- Replaced 7 no. Vehicle containment systems (crash barriers).
- 4no. new bus shelters.
- Civil Parking Enforcement Traffic Order Survey Works

2019/ 20 Phase 2 Programme of Works

Total Cost: £1,254,041

Summary:

Work Package 4:

- 6 Residential Highways
- Total resurfaced Highway Area: 12,918m² / 1.5 miles

Other Related Works:

- Tredegar By-Pass surface dressing
- Six Bells Highway Improvement Traffic Signal Scheme
- Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE)
- Industrial Estates Street Lighting Upgrade
- Development of HAMP, Highway Maintenance Plan & Winter Maintenance Plans [WG/WLGA/CSS[W] collaboration]

2020/21 Phase 3 Programme of Works

Total Cost: £725,000

Summary:

Work Package 5

- 24 residential highways (40,937m² / 5.1 miles)
- Tafarnaubach Ind Est (7000m² / 0.6 miles)
- Llangynidr Road (3650m² / 0.3 miles)
- Total resurfaced highway area: 51,587 / 6.0 miles)

Other Related Works:

- Crash Barriers
- Illuminated Traffic Signs
- Traffic Management Features
- Variable Speed Safety Signage

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Appendix B: Highway Assessment Matrix – Residential Roads

1A Highway Condition (50%) - FRONT / MAIN LANES		
Category / Score	Square Area / Score	Total Score / %
4 (5)	Plus 2000 (5)	10 (50%)
4 (5)	1000 - 2000 (4)	9 (45%)
4 (5)	1000 - 500 (3)	8 (40%)
4 (5)	less than 500 (2)	7 (35%)
3 (4)	Plus 2000 (5)	9 (45%)
3 (4)	1000 - 2000 (4)	8 (40%)
3 (4)	1000 - 500 (3)	7 (35%)
3 (4)	less than 500 (2)	6 (30%)

1B Highway Condition (50%) - REAR LANES x 0.5 = (25%)		
4 (5)	Plus 2000 (5)	10 (25%)
4 (5)	1000 - 2000 (4)	9 (22.5%)
4 (5)	1000 - 500 (3)	8 (20%)
4 (5)	less than 500 (2)	7 (17.5%)
3 (4)	Plus 2000 (5)	9 (22.5%)
3 (4)	1000 - 2000 (4)	8 (20%)
3 (4)	1000 - 500 (3)	7 (17.5%)
3 (4)	less than 500 (2)	6 (15%)

Example: Location A Street	
1A - very poor condition	45%
2 - High Maintenance cost	24%
3 - 3 insurance claims in last 10 years	3%
4 - serves 50 - 99 properties	10%
TOTAL	82%

2 Maintenance Costs (30%)	
Costs over 5 years	Score / %
Plus £10,000	10 (30%)
£9,999 - £5,000	8 (24%)
£4,999 - £3,000	5 (15%)
£2,999 - £1,000	3 (9%)
Less than £1,000	1 (3%)
£0.00	0 (0%)

3 Insurance Claims (10%)	
No. in last 10 years	Score / %
plus 5	10 (10%)
4	8 (8%)
3	5 (5%)
2	3 (3%)
1	1 (1%)
0	0 (0%)

4 Property Location (10%)	
No. of Houses	Score / %
*150 +	10 (10%)
* 100 - 150	8 (8%)
50 TO 99	5 (5%)
20 TO 49	3 (3%)
1 TO 19	1 (1%)
0 / rear access	0 (0%)

* Also linked with other highways and can be combined in to one scheme

Appendix C: Highway Assessment Matrix – Residential Roads: Worked Example

PRUDENTIAL BORROWING SCHEME																																					
	(1A) HIGHWAY CONDITION FRONT LANE (50%)					(1B) HIGHWAY CONDITION REAR LANE (25%)					(2) MAINTENANCE COSTS (30%)					(3) No. INSURANCE CLAIMS (10%)					(4) PROPERTY LOCATION (10%)																
	SCORES	10	9	8	7	6	9	8	7	6	5	10	8	5	3	1	0	10	8	5	3	1	0	10	8	5	3	1	0	TOTAL	F %						
PERCENTAGE %	50%	45%	40%	35%	30%	25%	23%	20%	18%	15%	30%	24%	15%	9%	3%	0%	10%	8%	5%	3%	1%	0%	10%	8%	5%	3%	1%	0%									
STREET / ROUTE																																					
EXAMPLE STREET	X										X												X						X						30	82%	

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2021/22 to 2025/26 (if Option 2 agreed)

Appendix D

	2019/20 £	2020/21 £	2021/22 £	2022/23 £	2023/24 £	2024/25 £	2025/26 £
<u>Social Services</u>							
Community Equipment & Adaptations	279,000	279,000	279,000	285,000	285,000	285,000	285,000
Minor Works/Health & Safety	60,000						
	339,000	279,000	279,000	285,000	285,000	285,000	285,000
<u>Environment</u>							
Disabled Facilities Grants & Living Independently HRG	475,000	420,000	469,000	200,000	200,000	200,000	200,000
Corporate Landlord/ Minor Works /DDA		320,000	320,000	280,000	280,000	300,000	300,000
Tredegar Townscape Heritage Initiative	125,000						
European Structural Fund Capital Match Fund	520,200						
Tredegar Company Shop	200,000						
Tech Valley Initiative	500,000	0					
Data Centre Move	240,000	152,000					
Constrained Units/ Industrial Units Improvement Programme	0	0	0			300,000	300,000
Big Arch	241,800	640,000					
Cemeteries	210,000	250,000	250,000	300,000	0		
	2,512,000	1,782,000	1,039,000	780,000	480,000	800,000	800,000
<u>Education</u>							
Band B Welsh Medium Remodelling	280,000						
Band B Secondary School Remodelling			70,000	280,000	1,510,000	750,000	750,000
New 420 place primary in Ebbw Fawr valley		2,100,000	945,000	105,000	0		
Band B Welsh Medium Seedling Provision		350,000	0	0	0		
Minor Works	150,000						
Total 21st Century Schools	430,000	2,450,000	1,015,000	385,000	1,510,000	750,000	750,000
<u>Other</u>							
Equipment Replacement	0		0	61,000	61,000	61,000	61,000
Civic Centre Demolition	0	650,000				0	0
General Offices and Community Hubs		180,000					

ICT Investment			161,000	161,000	161,000	161,000	161,000
Highways Investment	45,000		912,000	0	0		
City Deal Commitments	0	194,000	1,220,900	2,441,800	0	0	0
Staff Support Recharges	524,000	524,000	524,000	524,000	474,000	400,000	400,000
TOTAL	3,850,000	6,059,000	5,150,900	4,637,800	2,971,000	2,457,000	2,457,000
FUNDING							
Capital Programme Funding							
USB	-1,973,000	-1,932,000	-1,905,000	-1,905,000	-1,905,000	-1,905,000	-1,905,000
General Capital Grant	-1,868,000	-1,938,000	-1,911,000	-1,201,000	-1,201,000	-1,200,000	-1,200,000
Digital Transformation Funding			-161,000	-161,000	-161,000	-84,452	0
Highways Capital & Revenue Maintenance Funding			-603,000				
Useable Capital Receipts Capital Programme	-400,000	-650,000	0	0	0	-327,000	-327,000
Useable Capital Receipts - Separate Projects	-260,000						
Total Funding	-4,501,000	-4,520,000	-4,580,000	-3,267,000	-3,267,000	-3,516,452	-3,432,000
Original funding for future allocation							
Excess expenditure / (Surplus funding) in year	-651,000	1,539,000	570,900	1,370,800	-296,000	-1,059,452	-975,000
Excess expenditure / (Surplus funding) including brought fwd	-2,096,767	-557,767	13,133	1,383,933	1,087,933	28,481	-946,519

Capital Contingency Remaining

-946,519

Agenda Item 12

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.06.21
Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 03.06.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **16th June 2021**
Report Subject: **School Organisation Policy (2021/24)**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. Joanne Collins, Executive Member Education**
Report Submitted by: **Lynn Phillips, Corporate Director of Education**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
31.3.20	31.3.20	28.05.21			20.4.20	16.06.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to approve the review of the School Organisation Policy (2021-24). It is proposed that the revised policy is adopted and implemented from the start of new academic year 2021/22.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Council's Education Directorate and the 21st Century Schools Programme Board take the view that well-planned changes of the school estate contributes to raising standards. The Council initially developed and adopted the School Organisation Policy in January 2015, which provided the strategic blueprint for managing the school estate. In 2017, the document was reviewed and approved by the Council's Executive Committee. It is now time to carry out a further review to reflect the policy, especially in light of key strategic developments over the last 4 years and the impact of COVID-19.
- 2.2 Blaenau Gwent CBC has a proven track record of delivering significant school transformational change, such as Abertillery Learning Community, the Works developments and Home to School and Post 16 Transport consultations. The Education Directorate remains focussed on improving educational performance. Blaenau Gwent's schools have untapped potential to improve themselves, and there is significant potential to transform the current approach into a model that is determined by schools for schools; where the reliance on external agencies to improve is reduced and the capacity for schools to work with others in order to improve is increased.

2.3 The School Organisation Policy (2021-24) reflects the changing national, regional and local landscape and strategic developments, which shape and inform school organisation. The changes that have been made are indicated within the red text (please refer to **Appendix 1** for further information). The revised School Organisation Policy (2021-24) sets out 8 strategic priorities in line with the future direction and associated areas of development, which will inform and underpin school organisation and planning processes. The policy and associated priorities will be subject to annual review. These include:

- 2.4
 1. Duty – Planning and Provision of School Places
 2. School to School Support and Collaboration
 3. Management of the School Estate – School Organisation
 4. School Size, Suitability, Condition & Operation
 5. Promoting Access to Education
 6. The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
 7. Information and Communication Technology in Schools

2.5 The Council remains committed to providing children and young people with high quality education and training to contribute to the economic regeneration of the County Borough in line with the Corporate Plan vision and outcome statements.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 This report has been previously discussed by Education DMT, CLT and the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee.

3.2 **Option 1:** Executive Committee accept the proposed changes to the Blaenau Gwent School Organisation Policy 2021.

Option 2: Members of the Executive Committee provide contributions relating to improvements that can be made to the policy, prior to the policy being approved by Committee.

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 There is a statutory requirement upon the Council to ensure that all relevant school organisation proposals are compliant with the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code (2018, version 2). For proposals requiring a business case, all such documents are developed in accordance with the HM Treasury Green Book, Five Case Model.

4.2 Education is a strategic priority within the Council's Corporate Plan and the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan, of which school organisation is an essential component in securing: improved access to education, education facilities (including condition and suitability), provision and standards throughout the school estate. The 21st Century Schools Programme also features as a priority in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), and

consequently, has generated a high-level of support from the capital programme.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget***

There are no direct budget implications associated with this report.

5.2 ***Risk***

5.2.1 Raising educational standards is a strategic risk on the Corporate Risk Register (CRR). Effective school organisation will contribute to mitigating this risk. Moreover, there are robust risk management arrangements in place whereby school organisation priorities and associated identified risks are regularly monitored, reported and escalated via the 21st Century Schools Programme Board, Department Management team and Corporate Leadership team.

5.2.2 The high-level risks associated with programme delivery at present, include: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic along with financial, resourcing and programming implications. Effective monitoring and reporting processes have been established for all priorities. The 21st Century Schools Programme Board monitor policy implementation, with core groups established to monitor and review resourcing, progress, timelines and finance on a monthly basis.

5.3 ***Legal***

5.3.1 There are no direct legal implications associated with this report, other than the requirement for the Local Authority to follow the statutory processes set out within the Welsh Government School Organisation Code. Education are supported by the Council's Legal section, along with independent expert advisers as required, in fulfilling the obligations associated with regulated activity.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

The School Organisation Policy has been developed by the Education Transformation team, who oversee implementation and review of the policy within Blaenau Gwent.

The Corporate Director, supported by Wider Corporate Leadership Team, will have a key role in ensuring the key human resource-related actions and activities are effectively supported and delivered.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

Education has a track record of successfully delivering significant school organisation proposals.

6.1.2 To date the following outcomes have been achieved in line with the 21st Century Schools Programme:

- All 4 projects have been delivered, securing successful conclusion of the Band A Programme, on programme and profile.

- The Band A programme has been subject to internal review and evaluation, internal audit, along with 4 external Gateway Reviews. The latter demonstrates excellent progress and strong programme/project management arrangements are in place. Learning from the Band B Programme has been used to inform Band B development and implementation.
- Welsh Government have approved all Business Case submissions to date in line with delivery of the Band B Programme.
- Band B projects are currently on profile and programme.

6.1.3

Capacity calculations were determined for each of the schools in November 2019, which informed the final admission numbers published within the Blaenau Gwent School Admissions Policy 2021/2022. The School Admissions Policy consultation, review and capacity assessments for 2022/23 admission round have been successfully implemented.

6.1.4

Surplus places in both the primary and secondary sector are projected to decrease further over the next 2 years, taking the primary percentage to 9% and secondary to 12%, by the 2023/24 academic year – with the overall combined projected status falling from 14% in Jan 2020 to 10% in 2024.

6.1.5

The Division of Responsibilities Guidance and associated procedure were successfully implemented during the 2019/20 academic session.

6.1.6

Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2019/20 self-assessment is based upon key progress in line with each priority area. The self-assessment overall RAG rating has been sustained at Amber, with the rate of completion against the 2019/20 action plan as follows:

- 84% (or 49 actions) are complete;
- 7% (or 4 actions) ongoing; and,
- 9% (5 actions) actions in development.

6.1.7

In relation to ICT developments, to date the following outcomes have been achieved:

- Over 1,500 devices and 141 Mi-Fi units have been distributed to digitally disadvantaged learners.
- 2,247 devices have been ordered to replace end of life devices throughout the school estate. Set-up and distribution is programmed throughout the autumn-term 2020 and spring-term 2021 in line with Welsh Government procurement timelines.
- All school sites have been fully migrated and their connectivity addressed under the ICP
- Infrastructure upgrades have been completed in all school sites.
- Device and infrastructure audits have been completed and updated for all schools.

6.1.8

Excellent progress has been made overall, with school organisation priorities on track for 2021/22.

- 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***
Ensuring equality of access to quality education opportunities and facilities for all children and young people.
- 6.3 ***Involvement***
Partner, stakeholder and end user needs and engagement are of paramount importance and a key focus of both policy development, ongoing school organisation priorities and associated processes. Consultation and statutory processes in line with school organisation priorities and proposals, seek to ensure that all decisions are informed by the views, opinions and needs of stakeholders and those affected by the proposals.
- 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term***
The policy seeks to provide a medium to long-term strategic direction for school organisation, ensuring a sustained focus on key priorities and activities, whilst also securing appropriate resources to support effective delivery.
- 6.5 ***Preventative focus***
The policy seeks to ensure that key priorities are determined and achieved, to ensure that Blaenau Gwent has the right schools, in the right place at the right time; to effectively facilitate high quality provision and outcomes for staff, children, young people and communities. There is a key focus on collaboration and improvement to support development and growth within each school setting.
- 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
The Vision for Education is based upon a school led, self-improving, collaborative approach. The School Organisation Policy plays a fundamental part in improving partnership arrangements with the schools and their respective communities. In addition, the Policy details key priorities which will be delivered via a team officers from across all Council directorates, along with external partners such as the Shared Resource Service Wales.
- 6.7 ***Integration***
Service integration is essential to ensure effective policy implementation, particularly between the Council and its schools. The Policy established a framework for systematic integration.
- 6.8 ***EqlA***
An equality impact screening assessment has been undertaken, the results of which indicate that there is no adverse impact upon the protected characteristics, but a positive in terms of disability, whereby provision is set to be reviewed and improved.
7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 Policy implementation will be the responsibility of the Education Transformation team, overseen by the 21st Century Schools Programme Board and Education Directorate Management team, with assurance provided by Corporate Leadership team. The Policy will be subject to annual review.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

- **Appendix 1** – Blaenau Gwent School Organisation Policy 2021-24

Blaenau Gwent School Organisation Policy

(March 2021)

DRAFT



Version 2

Strategic Overview

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has undertaken a review of the School Organisation Policy (2015), which was last reviewed in 2017, along with the associated Education Transformation Strategy. The review takes account of key strategic developments that have taken place between 2017 and 2021, influencing the landscape and implementation of school organisation throughout Wales, the South East Wales region and ultimately Blaenau Gwent. The purpose of this document is to set the strategic direction for the organisation of the school estate within the County Borough from 2021 onwards - subject to annual review.

The Welsh Context

Over the course of the last 4 years, there have been a number of significant and impactful developments within the field of Education, influencing progress, delivery, future plans and objectives.

In March 2021, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant changes within both school operation, access to and the delivery of education. Local Authorities and schools have been through an extensive emergency response period over the course of the last year. This has included, the closure and repurposing schools to support childcare for key workers and vulnerable learners in line with the emergency response; planning for recovery in line with the reopening of schools partially towards the end of the summer-term 2020, with full reopening from the start of the autumn-term 2020. The emergency response is ongoing with recovery planning being a key focus over the course of 2021 and beyond.

During the pandemic, schools and settings have seized opportunities to explore innovative ways of working and delivering meaningful learning experiences, through a creative blended learning approach. Leaders have placed high priority on the wellbeing of learners and staff, whilst simultaneously being engaged in reflecting upon and refining their approaches to teaching and learning. Moving into uncharted waters in terms of international understanding of what constitutes effective distance and blended learning, it has been important for schools to collaborate and learn together.

The Curriculum for Wales Framework is being developed for settings and schools in Wales. Following a consultation period which ended in July 2019, the refined version became available in January 2020, with schools trialling their planned approaches. The new curriculum will be implemented throughout Wales from 2022, and is based on the following principles, resulting from the Donaldson Review - an independent review of Curriculum and Assessment arrangements in Wales – Successful Futures (2015):

- The new national curriculum should be organised as a continuum of learning from 3-16 without phases and key stages;
- Progression should be described in relation to a continuum of learning in each area of learning and experience from where a child enters education to the end of statutory schooling; and,

- There are clear expectations that primary and secondary schools would have to work together much better, rather than secondary education being seen as a 'new beginning'.

Welsh Government subsequently developed the Digital Competency Framework (in line with the Donaldson report, and 'A Curriculum for Wales – a Curriculum for Life', 2015). The DCF establishes a framework for the delivery of ICT across the curriculum that will enable the development of a digitally skilled pupil population in the use of technologies, whilst preparing them for future progression routes and career pathways. It is recognised that supporting digital skill building will potentially stimulate the local economy and economic activity.

In December 2017, the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) was passed by Welsh Government. The aim of the ALN Act is to create a unified process for children and young people 0-25 that will improve outcomes with a single statutory framework. The ALN Act provides the legislative framework to improve the planning and delivery of additional learning provision, through a person-centred approach to identifying learner needs earlier, putting in place effective support and monitoring, and adapting interventions, ensuring the desired outcomes. From September 2021, all Councils have a responsibility to ensure that the requirements of the ALN Act and accompanying Code are in place to support learners aged 0-25 and that they work effectively with other agencies such as Health to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people.

Prior to the pandemic, schools in Wales were showing signs of improvement in terms of attendance, Foundation Phase outcomes, Key Stage 2/3 performance and importantly the proportion of learners achieving 5 A* - C grades (L2+). There has also been some evidence in recent years of an improvement in the performance of pupils entitled to free school meals. These improvements have been brought about through the hard work of pupils, teachers and school leaders who have worked effectively in partnership with Local Authorities and other key partners.

The National Model for Regional Working has effected two significant changes to the school improvement landscape;

- i) The model defined school improvement more clearly, and placed clear responsibilities on Local Authorities to work through formally established regional services to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom and the quality of school leadership.
- ii) Underpinning the structural change was a fundamental change in the methodology for school improvement across Wales since 2014; stakeholders have been working towards creating a self-improving school led system. This is defined as a model where the key players in the education system take shared responsibility for their own improvement and for the improvement of others.

Welsh Government, in Qualified for Life and the National Model, has identified this as its ambition for the education system in Wales. The self-improving school led system is part of a whole system approach involving clear roles for Welsh Government, Local Authorities, Consortia and Schools.

The National landscape, however, for regional services and the extent of school to school collaborative working varies across Wales. **Local Authority based services have**

been placed under increasing pressure during a significant period of financial austerity, also more recently, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is, however, an exciting time for Local Authorities and Schools, as there is a greater sense of ambition and a clearer focus on the future. It has been important for schools and Local Authorities to take a self-help approach to developing greater resilience to change. Schools require well developed systems in place to support sustainable progress, in order to continue to improve pupil outcomes in the years ahead.

The national picture is clearly advocating a more collaborative working agenda for all partners in the self-improving school system. Blaenau Gwent is well placed to respond to the changing landscape at a national level.

The Blaenau Gwent Context

Blaenau Gwent is the most economically challenged Local Authority area in Wales and there is a determination to improve educational performance across the board, but particularly at Key Stage 4. The Education Achievement Service deliver a wide range of school improvement services via an agreed Business Plan on behalf of the Council. The Business Plan supports the role Local Authorities have in delivering their statutory function, addressing their individual improvement priorities and promoting improved pupil outcomes. The strategic priorities for Blaenau Gwent contained within the Post COVID Recovery Business Plan April 2021 – March 2022 are to:

- Minimise the impact of COVID-19 on learner development and progress including improving the digital competency of all learners and staff in the wider Blaenau Gwent school community;
- Ensure high quality leadership and teaching that secures good progress for all learners, particularly the vulnerable and those who are eFSM;
- Improve wellbeing for learners at all stages of development;
- Secure strong progress in skills, particularly in English and mathematics at key stages 3 and 4; and,
- Support schools who are identified as causing concern through regional protocols to secure improvement, in conjunction with the EAS.

Blaenau Gwent schools have demonstrated that they have significant potential to move to an improvement model that is determined by schools for schools, in turn securing the capacity for collective improvement across the system.

The Council's policy advocates the all-through schooling approach. This model and approach is not unique to Blaenau Gwent and has historically focussed upon school re-organisation as a means of creating unified governance and leadership arrangements to consolidate the relationships between schools. Indeed, Blaenau Gwent has created **3 all-through learning communities** during recent years. This approach, however, is at the more formalised end of the spectrum of school to school working and responds to key strategic drivers, such as the need to significantly improve standards and/or sustainability of the school estate.

Education has initiated a schools funding review for implementation over the next 3 years, with a key focus on securing appropriate financial resource for schools across the 3-16 age range.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council remains committed to providing children and young people with high quality education and training, to contribute to the economic regeneration of the County Borough. The vision set out within the Corporate Plan (2020-2022) is:

- Proud heritage
- Strong Communities
- Brighter Future

In addition, the Education Directorate's vision (2017-21) is:

'Securing excellent achievement and wellbeing for all learners through a partnership, school-led self-improving system'.

Over time, within the self-improving school system, responsibility and control would be transferred through schools collaborating, which operate in a spirit of mutual challenge and support between school leaders and their colleagues who are committed to achieving more ambitious and better outcomes for all learners.

Blaenau Gwent acknowledges the key components of a self-improving school system are broadly agreed as:

- Autonomy
- Accountability
- Capacity building
- Choice/diversity
- System leadership

The Council accepts that such a transformation will create challenges and it is likely that organisational, structural and cultural barriers will need to be removed, however, the following benefits can be delivered:

- a shift in much of the responsibility for school improvement moving from Local Government/Consortia to Blaenau Gwent's schools over time;
- Blaenau Gwent's schools commit to developing a professional learning culture by commissioning and leading on the school improvement agenda;
- school leaders and governors sharing collective responsibility and accountability for the continual improvement of the schools working in partnership;
- partnerships of schools working collaboratively to challenge and support each other to achieve ambitious outcomes for all learners; and,
- a primary focus on teaching and learning; progression and continuity; and reducing variation in and between schools.

School Organisation – the Strategic Direction

The revised School Organisational Policy (2021-24) sets out 8 strategic priorities in line with the future direction and associated areas of development, which will inform and underpin school organisation and planning processes. The policy and associated priorities will be subject to annual review.

1. Duty – Planning and Provision of School Places

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there is sufficient provision of school places to meet the anticipated demand for education. Parents can apply for their child to be educated at a school of their preference. The Council has to manage the allocation of places to its schools in line with the Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education.

All children in Wales between the ages of 5 and 16 are entitled to a free place at a state school, whilst nursery children are entitled to a free part-time educational places from the term following their third birthday. The types of school provision in the County Borough are:

- Community maintained schools, managed in partnership with Councils;
- Faith Schools such as Voluntary Aided schools; and
- Foundation School, which have more autonomy than maintained schools.

Blaenau Gwent has a track record of managing school places effectively, and the position on surplus places is an improving picture. **The position in line with the latest all-Wales dataset (January 2018/19) is as follows:**

- 13th (out of 22 Local Authorities) for primary;
- 10th (out of 22 Local Authorities) for secondary; and,
- 11th (out of 22 Local Authorities) in terms of the combined primary and secondary position.

The School Organisation Policy (2021) sets a target for surplus places of less than 15% for both primary and secondary sectors.

In addition, Education are working to facilitate effective pupil place planning within the special school sector, inclusive of resource base and other specialist provision for pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). The first phase of this work involves a proposal which seeks to secure increased capacity at Pen-y-Cwm Special School. A detailed review of ALN provision will be undertaken over the course of the next 3 years. As part of this review consultation and engagement with key stakeholders will be key to ensuring that informed decisions are made based upon the needs of learners.

2. School to School Support and Collaboration

There are two main elements of legislation, which are supported by regulation and code that govern the process for changing the organisational arrangements of schools. These are:

- School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, **which is supported by the by Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2018, version 2);** and,
- Federation of Maintained School (Wales) Regulations 2014, which is made under the Education Wales Measure 2011.

In 2015, Estyn reported on school to school collaborations and identified 'nearly all' schools are involved in some form of partnership working with the other schools. In

most schools in Wales there are cluster collaborative working arrangements in place, and approximately 50% have other school to school working arrangements that are self-generated. This level of engagement with collaborations within the Local Authority and the region has developed considerably since this time, with a strong culture of partnership growing amongst school leaders, and an outward-facing approach to development and improvement. Engagement in regional professional learning programmes and networks is very strong within the Borough. This was exemplified in Spring 2021 by Blaenau Gwent having the highest number of schools within the region taking part in the Celebrate, Support, Share and Refine EAS pilot, which focused on schools' development of provision and practice in distance and blended learning.

As per the Welsh Government's School Organisational Code (2018, version 2) Councils can use their powers for school re-organisation. Whilst the powers remain, the use of school organisation powers is not the preferred option presented in this policy, as the Council is advocating a self-improving schooling system. The spectrum of school support and collaboration includes:

- Self-generated collaboration;
- Brokered support;
- Collaboration or 'soft' federation, which can involve a 'soft governance' model
- 'Hard' federation; and,
- School re-organisation

The term 'federation' describes a formal and legal agreement by which a number of schools (between two and six) where governance arrangements. The key drivers for considering federation should be the benefits that such an arrangement would bring for children and young people in the federating schools to enhance provision. There is no single blueprint for federation and the design and operational workings of a federation will depend entirely on the circumstances of the individual schools and the focus or the purpose of working together. Federation models, however, can offer distinct advantages to collaborative working between schools. The main characteristics of the range of collaborative working options are shown in **Appendix 1**. The Council's Education Directorate is committed to supporting schools considering greater collaboration through the change process, and consequently, has developed a 'Governors Guide' to progressing school to school working. The Guide covers some key points for consideration, including;

- School to school collaboration, partnerships or federations are bespoke arrangements. It is not a 'one size fits all approach';
- Federation models can be led by Governing Bodies or the Council;
- 'Hard federation models require a formal consultation process and can take up to 125 days to implement.
- The Education Directorate will support schools throughout the process.

The Education Directorate will continue to engage schools in the County Borough in the collaborative working agenda seeking to establish opportunities for greater collaboration. School to school working has advanced over the course of the last year, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Management of the School Estate – School Organisation

The management of the school estate seeks to secure improved condition and suitability of education facilities in line with the creation and management of sustainable education system in Blaenau Gwent. This process not only informs key school organisation priorities and the 21st Century Schools Programme, but facilitates effective access to education throughout the Borough in line with key developments such as housing.

Since the establishment of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (1996), there has been a substantial change across the school estate, which has resulted in significant improvements in the quality of school learning environments.

In 1996/97 there were 32 primary schools, 1 special school, 1 pupil referral unit and 6 secondary schools. The position as of 2021 has been reconfigured to:

- 2 secondary schools (inclusive of 1 Foundation school)
- 2 3-16 Learning Communities (All through school model)
- 2 Special schools
- 1 Welsh-medium primary school
- 18 primary schools (4 of which are Faith schools)

The 25 schools serve a pupil cohort of 9,279 including nursery age pupils. Post 16 provision is provided in partnership with Coleg Gwent through the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone.

4. School Size, Suitability, Condition & Operation

The position for building suitability and condition as at September 2019/20, based on categorisations ranging from A (good) to D (Bad) is shown in **Appendix 2**. The overall status and quality of the school estate is improving, mainly from significant capital investment and the rationalisation of aging school buildings.

The size of a school and its capacity is influenced by a range of factors. The School Organisation Policy (2021) advocates the following school size framework principles:

- Schools, where numbers on roll are forecast to be less than 90 pupils should be reviewed
- Nursery provision to be co-located and part of the governance structure of statutory school provision
- Primary schools with a minimum capacity of 210, other sizes to include 360,420 and 630 places.
- Secondary schools being no smaller than 600 places
- Middle schools – all through school and provides continuity for students in one organisation with a single leadership and management structure and the size of the school will be flexible.

The Council has a minor works, maintenance and planned works programme to improve the condition, suitability and operation of Education assets/facilities, with the

2021/22 programme currently underway. The capacity of each school is reviewed annually throughout the autumn-term in line with pupil numbers, operation and changes in the use of school facilities. This process informs the admissions policy arrangements for the preceding year.

5. Promoting Access to Education

In 2018, the Council consulted upon their home to school and post 16 distance limits in line with the award of free transport. The Council's agreed limits are more generous than those set out within the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 ("the Measure"), and the Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009 (the "Regulations"). As a result of the consultation and associated outcomes, it was determined by the Council's Executive Committee that the distance limits would remain unchanged for the term of office of the existing Council, with elections scheduled to take place in 2022. Blaenau Gwent Council reviews the Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy on an annual basis, with the last review having taken place in 2020, for implementation from September 2021.

The School Organisation Policy advocates greater school to school collaboration and this is likely to have implications for Home to School Transport. This policy, therefore, sets out a principle that any school organisation/collaborative arrangements between schools is subject to a full transport impact assessment prior to determining the proposal. The transport impact assessment may also consider changes to existing school catchment areas, which could require consultation processes to be followed.

The Blaenau Gwent Accessibility Strategy is also scheduled for review, with a view to securing continued improvement and access for those in greatest need. The Strategy and associated Action Plan will undergo review in 2021, for implementation from 2022. Access to education is also facilitated by the Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education, which was last reviewed in January 2021, for publication on the 15th of April and implementation from September 2021.

6. 21st Century Schools Programme

The 21st Century Schools Programme is a long-term strategic investment in the education estate throughout Wales. The Programme is broken down into phases of investment, categorised as Bands. The Band A Programme in Blaenau Gwent, successfully concluded on programme and on profile in the autumn-term of 2019. The Council works closely in partnership with the Welsh Government, to secure funding in line with the delivery each project within the Programme, via the HM Treasury 5 Case Model.

The Band A programme which concluded in 2019, resulted in an investment of £20.25m into the school estate, and consisted of:

- 2 new build primary schools in the Southern Ebbw Fach Valley
- 2 remodelling projects of a comprehensive school in Tredegar and remodelling of a Primary School in the Ebbw Fach North valley.

The Band B programme will result in £19.6m into the school estate, with more emphasis on remodelling, consisting of:

- 1 New build primary along with remodelling of 3 primary schools in the Ebbw Fawr Valley

- 4 Secondary school remodelling projects to include transition into Band C
- Remodelling of the exiting Welsh-medium Primary School in the Northern Ebbw Fach Valley

The Blaenau Gwent Band B Programme investment objective are as follows:

- **Investment Objective 1:** to raise standards and achievement in line with localised targets at foundation phase, KS2, KS3 and KS4; and secure improved transition into post 16 learning.
- **Investment Objective 2:** to create a sustainable model for the 21st Century school estate in consideration of both capital and revenue investment, along with the condition and suitability of buildings.
- **Investment Objective 3:** to establish effective management and provision of school places, by having the right schools in the right place at the right time.
- **Investment Objective 4:** to implement the 21st Century Schools Programme in line with local, regional and national school organisation policy; ensuring synergy between progression, development and implementation.
- **Investment Objective 5:** meeting the needs of vulnerable learners.

In addition to the Band B funding envelope, Blaenau Gwent Council received confirmation in October 2018, that they were successful in securing £6 million via the Welsh-medium Capital Grant, along with £200,000 from the Capital Childcare Grant. The grants were awarded in line with the proposal to create a new 210 place Welsh-medium primary school and associated childcare facility in the Tredegar/Sirhowy valley. This proposal is currently subject to statutory processes.

The 21st Century Schools Programme is instrumental in securing delivery aligned to the Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan (2020/22), the outcome statements associated with the plan are:

- Protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities
- Support a fairer sustainable economy and community
- To enable people to maximise their independence, develop solutions and take an active role in their communities
- An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities

The 21st Century Schools Programme (Band A) features as a key priority in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

7. The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan

In 2017, Welsh Government carried out a rapid review of Welsh in Education Strategic Plans throughout Wales. The review acknowledged the need for change, not only in terms of individual plans' ambitions, but also in terms of the legislative framework set out by Welsh Government. The review also highlighted a need to change the regulations and guidelines, along with a significant change in the Welsh Government and local authority approach to planning. Consequently, Welsh Government reviewed the legislative framework associated with the WESP, with the key focus being the creation of a framework which enables local authorities to develop long-term strategic plans.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Welsh Government required Local Authorities to submit their first draft 10-year plan to the Welsh Ministers by 31 January 2021; however, in light of the pandemic and associated emergency response requirements, the submission timeline has been updated. Following the drafting and subsequent consultation period, the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) Regulations 2019, along with the draft guidance were laid on 5 December 2019 and came into effect on 1st January 2020. Local Authorities must submit their first draft 10-year Plan to the Welsh Ministers on 31st January 2022, with the plan operational from September 2022.

The Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Forum has already begun working on a draft 10-year plan for consultation and approval by 31st January 2022. Within Blaenau Gwent and throughout the South East Wales Region, there is a focus on the growth of Welsh-medium education. The Council are currently at statutory notice stage on a proposal to develop a second Welsh-medium primary school. A key priority going forward, will be to work with neighbouring authorities to secure Welsh-medium provision at secondary, ensuring effective and sustainable progression opportunities for Blaenau Gwent learners from 2028 onwards.

8. Information and Communication Technology in Schools

In 2017, Education and the Shared Resource Service (SRS) worked in partnership with schools to review the status of and to enhance ICT infrastructure and connectivity throughout the school estate, whilst also addressing gaps and consistency issues. As a result, the Education Infrastructure and Connectivity Project was established implemented between 2019 and 2021. The project sought to improve the delivery of teaching and learning, whilst also facilitating delivery in line with the Digital Competency Framework, and effectively contributing to the overall curriculum aspirations for Wales. This work also built upon the outcomes realised as a result of the Living in Digital Wales (LiDW) Programme, 2014.

During 2019, the Welsh Government launched the Hwb EdTech (HET) initiative, which over a 3-year period, will realise an investment of over £2 million throughout the school estate, with future Waves of the programme currently under development. The status of the Infrastructure Connectivity Project placed Blaenau Gwent strong position to further enhance the infrastructure in line with the Hwb EdTech initiative. Strong progress has been made to date in line with infrastructure, connectivity and device upgrade throughout the school estate. The key focus for 2021/22 will be the development and implementation of an Education ICT Strategy, which establishes a clear vision for school's ICT, whilst enhancing the delivery of teaching and learning, and positively influencing pupil outcomes.

Appendix 1

Differences between types Federations (NFER)

Characteristics	Informal Loose Collaboration	Soft Federations	Soft Governance Federation	Hard Governance Federation
Statutory/non-statutory	Non-statutory – schools can form informal collaborations without having to follow regulations.	Non-statutory – schools can set up soft Federations without having to follow regulations.	Statutory – soft governance Federations are established using Collaboration Regulations made under Section 26 of the Education Act 2002.	Statutory – hard governance Federations are established using Federation Regulations made under Section 24 of the Education Act 2002.
Governing body	Each school has its own governing body, with representatives on a joint committee that meets informally on an ad hoc basis.	Each school has its own governing body, with representatives on a joint committee that meets.	Each school has its own governing body, with representation and delegated powers on a joint governance/ strategic committee.	Single governing body, shared by all schools in the Federation.
Common goals and plans	All schools share common goals and work together on an ad hoc basis and through informal agreements.	All schools share common goals; joint committee recommendations, but it is up to the individual governing bodies to authorise decisions/ plans.	All schools share common goals through the Service Level Agreement (SLA) and protocol; Joint committee can make joint decisions/ recommendations in specified agreed areas, but not all.	All schools share common goals through SLA and protocol; having a single governing body allows for efficient, streamlined decision-making in all areas.
Common budget	No, but if the schools want to commit to a budgetary decision affecting all schools, each individual school's governing body would need to approve this.	No, but it could make budgetary recommendations for the group which in turn would have to be approved by each individual school's governing body.	No, but if the joint/strategic committee has budgetary powers delegated to it, it can make prompt budgetary decisions on behalf of schools in the Federation.	No (technically), but whilst each school receives and must account for its own separate budget, there is considerable scope, through the single governing body, to use the pooled budgets across the schools in the Federation.
Shared Staff	Unlikely to have common management positions, but if they do exist, they would have to be agreed in a protocol or contract.	Common management positions and appointments but need to have a protocol or contract to underpin commitment to shared posts.	Common management positions and appointments but need to have a protocol or contract to underpin commitment to shared posts.	Common management positions and appointments agreed by single governing body in a simple and effective manner. Schools can agree to have a single executive head teacher responsible to the schools in the hard Federation.

Appendix 2

Overall Building Condition and Suitability Ratings - The 2019/20 position for building condition and suitability is categorised as A (good) to D (bad) and summarised below:

	A	B	B/C	C	D
Primary (19 Schools – 19 buildings)					
Condition	0	11	0	7	1
Suitability	3	7	9	0	0
Secondary (2 schools – 2 buildings)					
Condition	0	1	0	1	0
Suitability		1	0	1	0
Middle (2 schools - 6 buildings)					
Condition	4	1	0	1	0
Suitability	4	1	0	1	0
Special (2 schools- 4 buildings)					
Condition	1	1	0	2	0
Suitability	1	2	0	1	0

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Agenda Item 13

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.06.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 03.06.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **16th June 2021**

Report Subject: **Commercial Strategy Quarterly Performance Monitoring**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Nigel Daniels, Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Services**

Report Submitted by: **Bernadette Elias, interim Chief Officer Commercial**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
w/c 22/3/21	25/3/21	28.05.21			16/4/21	16.06.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide the quarter 4 (January- March 2021) progress update against the Commercial Strategy.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Commercial Strategy, approved by Council in September 2020, sets out key themes which support a commercially minded organisation:

- A focus on the residents' experience of existing and new services;
- An understanding of our investments including return on investment (benefits), profits and losses;
- Developing our brand, trusted to deliver quality services;
- Spend control;
- Using data, technology and insights wisely;
- Having an agile workforce aligned to opportunities

- 2.2 Our commercial activities are driven by the ambitions within the strategy:

- Excellence in Commissioning and Procurement;
- Creation of an investment Portfolio;
- Managing commercial activities through profit and loss accounting;
- Creation of a Commercial and Entrepreneurial Culture;
- Excellence in Contract and Supplier Management.

- 2.3 These are delivered through the Commercial Services Team but clearly involve all services, suppliers and partners. The response to Covid-19 pandemic has, and continues to have, an impact on the delivery of the strategy. Despite this, substantial progress has been made in quarter 4, with the key activity summarised in section 6.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee recommended Option 1 at its meeting on 16th April 2021.

3.2 **Option 1:** that the Executive Committee accepts the quarter 4 progress update against the Commercial Strategy.

3.3 **Option 2:** that the Executive Committee considers the quarter 4 progress update against the Commercial Strategy and suggests areas for improvement.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 The Commercial Strategy is a critical organisational strategy for the future sustainability of the organisation. It supports the Corporate Plan and the priority to be '*An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities*'.

4.2 It is aligned to the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Bridging the Gap programme and it also supports delivery against the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

A number of the digital projects have attracted Welsh Government funding and this is being used to support our digital ambitions aligned to the commercial strategy.

It is intended that this strategy complements and supports the Medium Term Financial Strategy and key aspects of its delivery are included in the Bridging the Gap Programme.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The risks associated with underperformance against the strategy will be mitigated through a whole Council adoption of the ways of working.

5.3 ***Legal***

The Head of Legal and Compliance is a member of the Strategic Commercial and Commissioning Board. Where alternative delivery models are explored due diligence will be undertaken before any decisions are made.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

Where changes in service delivery or role are identified normal human resources processes and policies will be applied including consultation with the Trade Unions.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 *Performance Information and Data*

Key activity undertaken in Q4 (January to March 2021) under the following themes and ambitions in the Commercial strategy:

6.1.1 Excellence in Commissioning and Procurement

Strategic Commissioning and Commercial Board (SCCB)

- Agreed terms of reference for the Strategic Commissioning and Commercial Board (SCCB) are in place. The Board has a revised schedule of meetings and a forward work programme which reflects the ambitions set out in the commercial strategy. This includes early consideration of potential commercial activity to test ideas, with the Board taking the leading role for this Bridging the Gap review.
- A robust monitoring and reporting process for the Bridging the Gap programme is being finalised and will be a standing agenda item for the Board, enabling appropriate check and challenge. This process will also support the reporting of the Bridging the Gap programme through the democratic arrangements.
- A review of the Terms of Reference of the Transactional Procurement Group is being undertaken including to define their role in the check and challenge of contracts and procurement plans, ensuring effective support for the SCCB in this work.
- A process to enable effective 'check and challenge' of third party contracts and commercial opportunities has been established.
- A bespoke baseline financial assessment (profit & loss) to quantify and challenge trading operations is under development by Resources colleagues. This will support the bridging the Gap review by providing a clear financial picture of commercial activity.

Procurement plans

- Collation of departmental procurement plans to inform the 2021/22 procurement work programme has been undertaken. This supports better organisational oversight and provides the basis for the check and challenge process.
- Continued interrogation of the Council's 3rd party expenditure to ensure value for money opportunities will be built into the check and challenge and supports the Bridging the Gap programme.
- Contract management meetings are undertaken to ensure current contracts remain fit for purpose and realise the intended social, environmental and economical outcomes.

6.1.2 **Customer Focused – A focus on the residents’ experience of existing and new services**

Contact Centre

Following feedback an action plan was developed focussing on areas within the Contact Centre including:

- A review of the answerphone message to ensure more streamlined easier and efficient way of contacting the Local Authority;
- Looking at options in relation to a locally based service provision of the out of hours’ service;
- Working with colleagues within Community Services identifying opportunities to improve the customer experience;
- Focussed on the training requirements for the staff, undertaking skill set analysis and training needs assessments and developing training plans.

Locality Response Team

- 200 residents supported throughout the quarter with a wide range of assistance given from food shopping to supporting residents to apply for grants
- 49 Discretionary Assistance fund applications submitted for emergency payments
- 30 Citizens Advice referrals
- 47 food vouchers allocated to residents

It is anticipated the Locality Response Service will link into the Community hubs approach as a natural progression, supporting a face to face delivery for our residents where required.

6.1.3 **Using data insights and technology wisely**

Digital programme

Working with the Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS Wales) to deliver better public services for Wales, funding has been secured to explore more user focussed and efficient ways of service delivery:

- Participation in collaborative Adult Social Care project with Neath Port Talbot and Torfaen local authorities, looking at unavoidable contact at the front door;
- Participation in a collaborative ‘Making LAs an easier place to pay’ project with Neath Port Talbot and Torfaen local authorities, which will also link to the Bridging the Gap income recovery work stream. The project is moving into ‘alpha’ testing phase looking to work with an identified service area, which is currently being scoped.

- Commencement of a Tech Valleys funded project focusing on website and back room functionality and the interaction for residents, with focus on waste and recycling services. This project also includes the establishment of a Digital apprentice position which is currently being scoped.
- The recent application to the Welsh Government Digital Democracy fund was successful. The main focus of this project is on user research with 16-25 year olds, to gain a better understanding of how young people would wish to access the democracy and their experiences if they do so currently.
- Expression of Interest submitted to Local Government Digital Transformation fund to build the Digital, Data and Technology skills of our staff. This will enable user research to inform future service delivery and support our residents to find, understand and interact with our services in a common and accessible way.
- Setting out a 12-month digital programme that includes digital projects, corporate activity linked to the ICT investment roadmap and development of a leadership and training programme for both officers and Members raising awareness and understanding of the scope and opportunities of our digital ambitions and activity.

Data and intelligence hub

- The establishment of an internal hub of officers from all Directorates has progressed, led by the corporate policy and performance teams. This work supports the enabling Bridging the Gap review of using data and behavioural insight. The use of data in a more insightful way was one of the key learning points from the organisational reflection on the response to the Pandemic. The intelligence hub looks to build on this ambition, gaining a better understanding of what our data tells us and how that impacts on services for our communities.
- User research, which forms a key part of our digital projects and approach, will also be supported by the hub.

6.2 *Expected outcome for the public*

Through the delivery of the strategy the Council will become more effective in the deployment of its resources to ensure value for money is achieved and investments are made in activities that deliver the best outcomes for the public. This strategy will also contribute to the financial resilience and sustainability of the organisation, therefore protecting front line services.

6.3 *Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)*

As a key part of the commissioning cycle to ensure service specifications take account of the needs of service users. Any changes to service delivery models will be consulted on in the usual way.

6.4 *Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)*

This strategy is at the heart of the medium and long term planning for Blaenau Gwent and recognises not only where the Council needs to seek

new income streams but also where it needs to review how it deploys its current expenditure.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The Commercial Strategy is designed to support the needs of the Council now and in the future, including supporting financial resilience.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

There are opportunities through this strategy to consider commercially advantageous ways of working across local authorities and the Public Service Board. This strategy seeks to identify commercial opportunities to work with suppliers across public sector organisations and to spend the Blaenau Gwent pound wisely.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

The strategy takes a whole council approach. It promotes transparency across the organisation, building best practice outside of directorate silos and promotes the maximising and sharing of skills and learning.

6.8 ***EqlA***

Screening for impact on protected characteristics will be undertaken as per usual procedures. In addition, individual procurements consider the ability to realise social, environmental and economic benefits through the inclusion of Community Benefits and Social Value contractual clauses.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 Quarterly progress is reported through the democratic process. The strategic commercial and commissioning board monitors activity set out within its terms of reference. Grant funded projects specify monitoring arrangements which will be complied with.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

N/A

Agenda Item 14

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.06.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 03.06.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **16th June 2021**

Report Subject: **Corporate Communications Strategy - Quarterly Update**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Nigel Daniels, Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Services**

Report Submitted by: **Bernadette Elias, Interim Chief Officer Commercial**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
w/c 22/3/21	25/3/21	28.05.21			16.04.21	16.06.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To consider the quarter 4 update (January to March 2021) against the Corporate Communications Strategy.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Corporate Communications Strategy was approved by Council in September 2020.
- 2.2 There are 6 themes which drive the communications delivery:
- Build and maintain a strong reputation;
 - Residents know how we are delivering council priorities;
 - Informed and engaged staff;
 - Ensure marketing campaigns are well planned, targeted and provide value for money;
 - Promote the use of digital communications channels and encourage self-service where appropriate;
 - Make sure residents are informed in advance of and at times of emergency.
- 2.3 The response to the Covid-19 pandemic which started in March 2020 and continues, has meant that the delivery of the strategy has almost entirely focused on the theme relating to communication at times of emergency. During this time of unprecedented challenge, the importance of digital and social media has become even more significant.
- 2.4 As previously reported to committee, the Corporate Communications Team is a key member of the Gwent Local Resilience Forum Warning and Informing Group. This group is responsible for aligning communications and communicating key information to the residents of Gwent during the Covid-

19 pandemic, ensuring a consistent approach between local partners, PHW and Welsh Government. The content has been a mixture of partner material (Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, Health Board) and content created by the team maximising their creative skills.

- 2.5 The dynamic and fast moving nature of the Pandemic has required an almost constant flow of information and content being produced by the Communications Team, with the aim to produce clear and effective communication, coordinated between all sectors.
- 2.6 The aims of the Communication Plan for the Covid-19 response are:
- To provide strategic direction for organisations involved in communicating a major incident or a situation where a multi-agency response is required;
 - To ensure that the Gwent public, stakeholders, the media are informed in a timely manner about an outbreak and what they need to do to reduce transmission and to keep Wales safe;
 - To ensure consistent use of terminology;
 - To ensure that there is clear leadership and coordination of all communications activities, and that all communications activities are aligned with and supportive of each other – in line with the Gwent Warning and Informing Plan and the All Wales Communicable Disease Outbreak Plan for Wales (Welsh Government, 2020a);
 - To ensure that communications activity and messaging around an outbreak in Wales is carried out in line with the overall Welsh approach to dealing with the pandemic;
 - To effectively communicate and share information with the communities and individuals directly affected to maintain confidence and compliance with guidance / expectations;
 - To align with existing Keep Wales Safe Communications campaigns.
- 2.7 As the National picture moves between response and recovery, so will the focus of the communication activity.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 The Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee recommended Option 1 at its meeting on 16th April 2021.
- 3.1 **Option 1:** That the Executive considers and accepts the quarter 4 (January to March 2021) update against the Communication Strategy.
- 3.2 **Option 2:** That the Executive Committee considers the quarter 4 (January to March 2021) update against the Communication Strategy and suggests areas for improvement.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 The Communication Strategy supports the Corporate Plan and the Well Being plan as part of the governance framework.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

There is no direct impact on budgets.

The majority of Council communications uses digital channels. Much of the material used in the first half of 2020 was created by partners like Welsh Government and Public Health Wales to manage the Covid-19 pandemic. Individual marketing campaigns are often externally funded by partners (eg WRAP).

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The Corporate Communications Team will work with colleagues and partners to ensure communications plans are delivered in a timely manner.

5.3 ***Legal***

All internal and external communications activities will take account of any legal issues that may arise from publications and potential challenge.

Communication activities reflect the decision making of the Council and any exempt items will be treated in confidence. Communications relating to individuals will also protect their privacy rights.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

There are no human resource implications.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

Key activity for the quarter is outlined in Appendix 1. This includes:

- Trace, track and protect key information communicated;
- Lockdown information and promoting the required response from the public under the restrictions in Wales;
- Schools and learners remote learning arrangements communicated;
- Vaccine programme key information;
- Internal communication channels continued including the MD message, briefing for Elected Members and staff information;
- 197,000 visitors to the Council website;
- 4,900 social media posts – an average of 400 per week; and
- Working with service areas to promote key information.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

The focus in late 2020 and early 2021 has been on managing crisis communications and the response to Covid-19. The main objective has been regular and timely information for the public to keep them informed in a rapidly changing environment.

Communications regarding the delivery of essential public services, changes to services and introduction of brand new services has been a feature. Improving access to relevant information delivered in a timely manner utilising multiple channels.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

Research will be carried out with residents on a regular basis to check the impact of our external communications activities. Internal communication will also be measured for impact through regular staff engagement activities.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The role of the Council in building the reputation of the area and shaping Blaenau Gwent the place is significant. The Communication Strategy articulates the approach the Council will take to ensure the longer term objectives of the Corporate Plan and The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 are represented and the impact of the Council's work is promoted positively.

This remains our long term objective but the response to Covid-19 and its unprecedented challenges has meant short term focus on this.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

It is anticipated that effective and proactive communications will contribute to education and information campaigns designed to influence behaviour. Campaigns relating to littering, recycling and fly tipping and fostering are examples of this, however, across the life of the Communications Strategy there will be many other areas of behavioural change that will be significant.

This remains our long term objective but the response to Covid-19 and its unprecedented challenges has meant short term focus on this.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The Council works with other local authorities, partners and Welsh Government on a regular basis to deliver local, regional and national campaigns

6.7 ***Integration*** (across service areas)

Opportunities for promoting cross cutting service impact will be identified as part of the communication campaigns and particularly in relation to integrated marketing. Developing our reputation as a trusted brand will include demonstrating how our services collectively impact in positive ways for our households and businesses.

6.8 ***EqIA***

Material is produced in different formats and improving website accessibility remains a priority.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Quarterly progress reporting against the Communications Strategy is part of the forward work programme of Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee and the Executive Committee.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Summary of key activity for the quarter

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Facebook

2,775
POSTS



15,000

FACEBOOK
FOLLOWERS

2,300
INTERACTIONS

5.19
MILLION
REACH ON
FACEBOOK

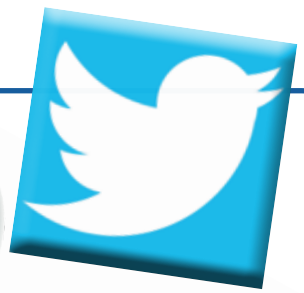


Twitter



11,980

TWITTER
FOLLOWERS



26.35

MILLION
REACH ON
TWITTER

2,119
TWITTER
POSTS

Website

197,000
VISITORS

1.5M
PAGE
VIEWS

75%
RETURNING
VISITORS



Top 7
most
popular
pages

- 1 HOME PAGE**
- 2 WASTE & RECYCLING**
- 3 MY SERVICES**
- 4 COVID-19**
- 5 SEARCH RESULTS**
- 6 JOBS**
- 7 PLANNING**

Appendix 1 Internal Communications



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol

Blaenau Gwent

County Borough Council

MD Message

**Managing Director Message
Coronavirus (Covid-19 Update)**
Blaenau Gwent
Date: Friday 13 March 2021

The situation in Blaenau Gwent and Wales continues to improve and the latest update from Public Health Wales shows that the number of confirmed cases in Blaenau Gwent is now at 37 per 100,000 population - the lowest level since early last Autumn.

The vaccination programme is also working very well and is spreading up the next few weeks as more doses, in particular of the Oxford Astra Zeneca vaccine become available. A new clinic also opened this week in Bedwellty House operated by Tredegar Health Centre which will extend our capacity and support the existing operation in the General Offices, Ebbw Vale.

I would like to thank everyone for their hard work and compliance with the strict measures which have been in place since early December. I appreciate that this has been really difficult but your compliance has helped drive the case numbers down.

Welsh Government announces some important changes to lockdown

The latest review of restrictions announced by Welsh Government today will see a number of measures eased in the next few weeks.

From Saturday 13 March

- 'Stay at home' becomes 'stay local'. The rule of thumb is that you should think local as a five-mile radius from where you live but there is flexibility to extend this in rural parts of Wales.
- Four people from two different households can meet up outdoors to socialise, including in gardens - children are excluded from the number.

**Managing Director Message
Coronavirus (Covid-19 Update)**
Blaenau Gwent
Date: Friday 8 January 2021

As we move into 2021 things are still moving very quickly as we continue to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. First, I would like to recognise and thank all the staff who worked over the holiday period across all services, dealing with the response to Covid 19. We are expecting the next few months to remain challenging. The case incidence in Blaenau Gwent has fallen over the last 10 days and is showing signs of stabilising. However, as testing picks up and the impact of the holiday break becomes clear, we expect cases to increase again. At this stage we just don't know what impact the lockdown will have and how the new more infectious variant of the virus identified in officials is that the new variant will become more dominant in Wales and that the spread of the pandemic will increase, as will the R Number.

There is some light at the end of the tunnel as the second vaccine developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca was approved for use in the UK on 30 December 2020. This is really welcome news because it is much easier to store and transport than the Pfizer vaccine and can therefore be rolled-out to a wider population more quickly.

The vaccination programme is in its early stages and it will take some time before it is widely available to more people. It is important that we all follow the rules to protect ourselves and others and you should continue with regular handwashing, social distancing and wearing a mask when required. The requirement to work from home where possible is still firmly in place and plenty of advice and guidance has been previously sent out to staff.

Weekly staff Guidance

COVID-19 GUIDANCE
Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance
Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

Contents

- Compliance with health and safety requirements 3
- Face masks / Face coverings 3
- National Covid measures 4
- Christmas bubbles 4
- Covid-19 Vaccination programme 5
- Contact Details for Employees/Communication 5
- Important Covid-19 information/advice for employers and employees 6
- Self-isolation rules 6
- Self-isolation Support Schemes and Covid-19 SSP Enhancement Scheme 7
- Action for managers in the event of a positive covid case and guidance regarding who might constitute a close contact 7
- Test, Trace and Protect 8
- Mask Testing 8
- Keeping records of staff, customers and visitors: test, trace, protect - Action for all managers and buildings responsible persons 9
- Testing and contact tracing in educational settings 10
- Operational guidance for schools and settings from the autumn term 10
- Extremely Vulnerable, Vulnerable Groups & Living with Vulnerable Individuals 10
- Covid-19 Individual Risk Assessment 11
- Workers who have Multiple Roles 11
- Prepared Workers 12
- Health and Social Care Professionals 12
- Social Distancing within the Workplace 12
- Minimising risk of coronavirus in workplaces and public premises 13
- Managing the risk of Covid-19 in the Workplace 13

1 Issued 17.12.2020

COVID-19: GUIDANCE

Guidance

All employees have a duty to look after their own health, safety and welfare, and that of their colleagues, which includes following and keeping up to date with the advice in operating with the Council to ensure a safe workplace. Employees must seek official advice that may be easily accessible, rather than taking up resources unnecessarily. This guidance is not intended to provide advice to cover all scenarios. Case by case advice may need to be sought from the appropriate internal officers and external agencies.

Compliance with health and safety requirements

The legislation and guidance around social distancing and other health and safety measures are designed to keep us all safe and it is your responsibility to follow these. For staff not working in front line services homeworking should be undertaken wherever possible. However, if possible, staff must observe social distancing rules by virtue of their role should apply strict hygiene rules to their environment and must wear appropriate PPE (e.g. face masks) at all times when unable to apply the 2 metre rule.

These measures are critical to the health and safety of all staff and non-compliance can adversely impact the individuals responsible but also those around them. Accordingly, failure to comply with health and safety requirements such as social distancing (in roles where this is possible) and the wearing of appropriate PPE may result in disciplinary action.

Face masks / Face coverings

From 27th July 2020, face coverings have been mandatory on public transport. Guidance regarding when and where to wear a face covering is available: [here](#). From 1st September, face coverings became mandatory in indoor public places across Wales. Guidance on measures to be taken by employees and managers of settings in offices if social distancing can be maintained, if the public visit any public building, however, then they should wear face coverings.

any limited cases, some employees have felt unable to wear face masks or face coverings. The links at the end of this section provide detailed information regarding reasons as follows:

If either PPE (face masks) or face coverings are required by a covid-19 related risk assessment (e.g. if general health and safety at work

3 Issued 10.12.2020

Regular members team briefings

Elected Member Update
Blaenau Gwent
14 DECEMBER 2020

Dear Member

I am writing to update you on the latest position in relation to schools in Blaenau Gwent and our plans for the remainder of this term.

I know that many of you have expressed concerns about the self-isolation status of pupils in our schools, and the potential that this could occur over the Christmas period which many will have planned to spend with their loved ones. As the Executive Member for Education, I share these concerns. I can now inform you that a decision has been made that will see all our schools make a move to remote learning for pupils from Thursday, 10th December 2020, with sites closing on Wednesday, 9th December. This decision has been made in full consultation with our Headteachers, who were unanimously supportive of the move.

You will know that schools have developed robust home learning plans over the course of this year and, whilst sites will be physically closed, they will continue to provide high quality teaching and learning via the digital platforms which parents and carers will already be familiar with. Teaching staff will continue to work to deliver teaching and learning remotely until the end of term on Friday, 18th December and to support families with any remote learning requirements they may have. Headteachers are clear that this approach will ensure that learning can continue and indeed be enhanced until the end of this term. Devices remain with those previously digitally excluded learners so no pupil should be disadvantaged in that way as a result of this decision.

We will support those families eligible for Free School Meals through the direct payments system.

This decision has been made in the best interests of our schools, in recognition that cases of COVID-19 in Blaenau Gwent remain amongst the highest in Wales, and is supported by health professionals working on the Covid response in the borough.

Our fantastic teaching and school support staff have worked so hard to support learners throughout this very difficult year, and we are thankful for their hard work and dedication to our children and young people.

Kind regards,
Councillor Joanne Collins
Executive Member for Education

**Member Brief
Estyn update**
Blaenau Gwent
19 FEBRUARY 2021

Dear Member,

Last year, Welsh Government asked Estyn to review the work of local authorities in Wales in relation to how they have supported Schools and Education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The period reviewed was from March 2020 to October 2020, and placed the emphasis on how we worked to re-open schools and how we supported our most vulnerable pupils here in Blaenau Gwent.

We have worked positively with our schools and education settings on the challenge of supporting children and young people to continue learning through the Coronavirus Pandemic, and will do so in line with Welsh Government regulations.

Estyn recently received formal written feedback from Estyn in relation to their findings. I am pleased to tell you that overall this was positive about the work that has taken place with schools and young people in Blaenau Gwent.

Estyn also recognises four areas of notable practice, covering:

- Strong collaboration across the Local Authority;
- Beneficial support for vulnerable pupils by the Educational Psychology service;
- The work of the local authority youth service; and,
- Effective sharing of ICT resources.

Estyn acknowledges that we approached our response to the COVID-19 emergency through a joint working between corporate colleagues from across several services, and that this joint working between corporate colleagues from across several services has been effective in supporting children and young people, their families and the community.

Appendix 1 COVID-19 Response

Schools

Gweithio gyda'n hysgolion i gadw Blaenau Gwent yn ddiogel ac yn dysgu



#DiogelCymru #CadwCymru

Working with our schools to keep Blaenau Gwent safe and learning



#KeepWalesSafe #KeepWalesLearning #reassurance

We're working with our schools to keep Blaenau Gwent safe & learning. More learners have returned to the classroom. Schools have all the necessary COVID-19 safety measures in place, but parents and carers can help to Keep Education Safe, too.

Schools have all the necessary COVID-19 safety measures in place, but you can help us too by:


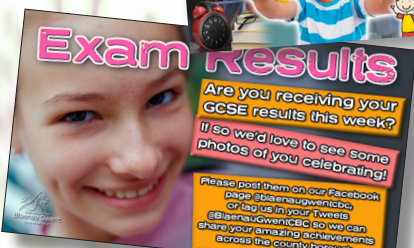
- Not lingering at or around the school grounds and mixing with other parents
- Wearing a face covering at pick up and drop off times
- Keeping a 2metre distance from everyone else
- Sticking to any staggered start/finish times and one way systems.
- Not attending at the school for any other reason apart from picking up or dropping off your child, there are other ways to contact and speak with your child's teachers.

Thank you
Together, let's #KeepWalesSafe

Exam results

Are you receiving your GCSE results this week? If so we'd love to see some photos of you celebrating!

Please post them on our Facebook page @BlaenauGwent or tag us in your Tweets @BlaenauGwent so we can share your amazing achievements across the county borough

Track, Trace, Protect

THE GWENT TEST, TRACE AND PROTECT SERVICE IS CONTACTING OVER 89% OF ALL COVID-19 POSITIVE CASES AND THEIR CLOSE CONTACTS WITHIN 24 HRS.

YOU WILL ONLY GET A CALL FROM 02921 961133

PLEASE ANSWER ALL CALLS FROM THIS NUMBER. YOU MUST ISOLATE IF YOU GET A CALL OR AN ALERT FROM THE NHS COVID-19 APP

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A CASE NUMBER AND COULD BE ENTITLED TO £500.

ISOLATING PROTECTS YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY AND SAVES LIVES

For further information visit www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Get a test if you have symptoms



Contact tracing is not about enforcement or surveillance.

It is to protect your health and the health of your friends, family, colleagues, and community.

Together we'll keep Wales safe.



Temporary mobile testing unit available for another week in Nantyglo



If a contact tracer calls, self-isolate immediately

They'll usually call from 029 2196 1133

Lockdown

Exercise locally

Together we'll keep Wales safe gov.wales/coronavirus



Stay home

Together we'll keep Wales safe gov.wales/coronavirus



There is a new strain of coronavirus in Wales. It spreads faster and more easily

It's more important than ever to follow the rules

- Stay home. Limit contact with others
- Wash hands, keep your distance and wear a face mask when needed
- Work from home whenever you can

Together we'll keep Wales safe gov.wales/coronavirus

ALERT FOR BLAENAU GWENT

Due to a sharp increase in coronavirus cases in this area, new restrictions are in place to protect people's health and prevent further spread.

For more information and to keep informed visit gov.wales/local-lockdown

Vaccines

Mae Brechu yn achub bywydau
Vaccination saves lives

End Jan	Mid Feb	Spring	Autumn
All care home residents and staff	Frontline health and social care staff, all over 70s and all clinically extremely vulnerable	All over 50s and everyone in line with JCVI guidance because of underlying health conditions	All other eligible adults, in line with JCVI guidance

Vaccination follows the JCVI priority lists (Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation)

Together we'll keep Wales safe gov.wales/coronavirus

CORONAVIRUS

Coronavirus vaccinations are free of charge. The NHS will never:


- ask for your bank account or card details
- ask for your PIN or banking passwords
- arrive unannounced at your home to administer the vaccine
- ask for documentation to prove your identity, such as a passport or utility bills

Coronavirus vaccine scams

OFFICIAL

Mae Brechu yn achub bywydau
Vaccination saves lives

The vaccine has been proven as safe and effective by the MHRA.



GIG CYMRU / NHS WALES / Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru / Public Health Wales

Mae Brechu yn achub bywydau
Vaccination saves lives

NHS professionals make sure that having a vaccine is the right thing for you

- Safe
- Effective
- There to protect you



Agenda Item 15

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.06.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 03.06.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **16th June 2021**

Report Subject: **Education Directorate-Response to COVID-19**

Portfolio Holder: **Executive Member of Education, Cllr. Joanne Collins**

Report Submitted by: **Corporate Director for Education, Lynn Phillips**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
25.03.21	01.04.21	28.05.21			20.04.21	16.06.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Executive Committee with an opportunity to review the Education Directorate's response to the COVID-19 situation, particularly supporting the schools during the emergency period.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Members will be aware that the Corporate Director of Education provides a verbal update to Scrutiny Committee regarding the response to the COVID-19 emergency. This report provides the background, context and a current view of the response, in particular how the Council has and will continue to support schools during the pandemic. The report reflects on the activity covering both the Autumn and Spring terms.

2.2 School Re-opening - September 2020

The Council's corporate response during the Autumn term focussed on preparing for all of our learners returning to whole school settings. The Blaenau Gwent Whole School Re-opening Guidance document outlined the local approach and is a key source of reference for implementation in schools. It provides schools with a strategic framework for a safe and effective return to whole school working. It continues to be a dynamic emergency response situation, and therefore, the Council has continued to work with the schools to review the planning arrangements and amend the guidance accordingly e.g. the use of face masks and social distancing requirements. A summary of the main considerations that were most pertinent to the whole school re-opening is provided below;

- Blaenau Gwent adopted a strategic approach to whole school re-opening (September 2020) for consistency purposes;
- Executive Headteacher School Planning Groups for secondary, primary and special schools are established;
- Re-opening from 1st September involved a common approach across the school estate;
 - 2 planning days
 - 2 transitional year group planning days

- Whole school reopening from the 7th September (WG expectation 14th September)
- Re-opening was relatively successful e.g. pupil attendance is in range of 85%-80%, but some pupil learning regression has been identified;
- School support services - cleaning regimes further enhanced, a flexible catering offer and transport in place;
- Blended learning was put in place for learners who were self-isolating through identification of positive cases;
- FSM direct payments continued for learners not in school;
- There was initially a relatively stable position on school based workforce, however, increasing cases were experienced amongst school based staff, especially following the Autumn half term break;
- Positive COVID-19 cases for pupils increased significantly towards the end of term that resulted in many classes, year groups and one school closure on health and safety grounds; and,
- The Council took a decision to move to remote learning for all learners with the exception of vulnerable learners and support for critical workers in mid-December 2020.

2.3 School Provision – Spring Term 2021

Following the Christmas break, nationally it was determined that due to the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic that schools would initially only provide direct face to face provision for vulnerable learners and support for critical worker families. All learners, however, were engaged through remote learning. Blaenau Gwent's schools participated in a regional survey in relation to remote and blended learning and the results of that survey are shown in appendix 1, which provides a useful insight into the effectiveness of the offer and areas for further consideration e.g. parental skills to support learners in home settings. This position changed in February 2021 with the move for Foundation Phase learners returning to face to face teaching and learning.

2.4 Recently, the recent Welsh Government announcement confirmed arrangements for more pupils to return to face-to-face teaching, subject of course to COVID-19 data continuing to move in the right direction. The Welsh Government's plan includes a return for the remainder of primary pupils (years 3 to 6); Year 11 secondary pupils and some 'check-in' provision for all other year groups. As always, the top priority for the Council and all our schools is to consider safety and minimise the disruption to learning for our children and young people. The Council has worked closely with our Headteachers to agree a common approach to this wider return for learners across Blaenau Gwent. This included:

- From Monday, 15th March 2021 all primary pupils will attend at their school full time.
- Year 11 learners will primarily attend at their school from the 15th March, but with the flexibility for an element of remote learning, which will be determined by the individual school and communicated to parents.
- There will also be provision for Year 10 pupils and this will be largely one day per week prior to the Easter break.

- The Minister for Education has also confirmed that schools should look to offer some limited provision for all remaining secondary pupils (years 7, 8 and 9) in order for them to catch up with their teachers prior to the Easter holiday. Therefore, during the week commencing 22nd March learners in these year groups were offered a full day 'check in' session at their school. There was a flexible localised approach to the days and times the pupils attended their school. These arrangements are to ensure that we can safely manage the numbers of pupils on site following this extended period away.

2.5 **Planning Arrangements – Spring Term 2020**

A Planning Group with representation from Education, Environmental Health, Health and Safety, Community Services, Civil Contingencies and SRS; are continuing to work with schools to oversee school reopening arrangements. Remote/blended learning continues where children are not in school on any given day, or where they are shielding or self-isolating.

The Council and our schools continue to offer provision for the children of critical workers where they are eligible and where required (up to the age of 14). This provision should only be accessed in line with the Welsh Government criteria and as a last resort where no other childcare options are available to parents. Support for learners eligible for Free School Meals continues. In circumstances, where children were learning from home; self-isolating; shielding or no onsite catering is available, that support will continue to be via direct payments. The following number of direct payments were issued over a week during March to eligible pupils in school years 3 and above, no payments were sent to Foundation Phase pupils:

- w/c 8/3/2021 – 1,768 payments; and,
- the application process is now initiated and closed on a weekly basis, to provide support to newly eligible families.

School based staff that have agreed to participate in twice weekly testing and at the time of drafting this report, Lateral Flow Testing is in the third week of implementation.

- There have been newly identified positive cases in schools since the relaxation of remote learning all resulting in class closures with the class contacts being required to self-isolate for a period of 10 days.
- ICT device requirements for digitally disadvantaged learners are being reviewed with schools on a weekly basis, with a view to identifying, rebuilding and distributing devices within a 7-day period (dependent on device and associated resource availability).
- The Executive School Planning Groups for both Primary and Secondary (including Middle and Special Schools), continue to take place on a fortnightly basis.

2.6 Recovery – Priorities

It needs to be acknowledged that the impact of 12 months' disruption to teaching and learning is far reaching. Recovery will need to be planned in the short, medium and long term for learner development and progression. The Council has established a corporate recovery framework (appendix 2) and a key strand of this work will be a learning sub-group that will be led by the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion, with regular reporting into Corporate Leadership Team. The Education Directorate's top priority in the EAS business plan is to;

Minimise the impact of COVID-19 on learner development and progress, including improving the digital competency of all learners and staff in the wider Blaenau Gwent school community.

The Estyn Thematic Review report previously presented to the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee provided a positive overview of the Council's response in supporting our schools during the pandemic. Moreover, a full School Operational Guidance review is underway, along with additional training packages and information sessions for school leaders.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 This report has been previously discussed by Education DMT and CLT. The Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee considered and accepted the report at its meeting on 20th April 2021.

Option 1: Executive Committee accept the report as presented.

Option 2: Executive Committee are requested to consider the information detailed within the report and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate recommendations to the Committee.

This report provides the Executive Committee with important emergency response and statutory information, as well as opportunity to identify where progress has been made and where further improvement is required.

4. Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

4.1 One of the objectives in the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan is for every child to have the best start in life. The Council seeks to ensure that provision is appropriate and able to meet the needs of children and young people, so that their progress is in line with ambitious expectations. This is particularly pertinent in an emergency crisis situation.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 Impact on Budget

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report, however, it should be noted that the impact of the COVID-19 emergency response on both Council and school revenue budgets is being closely monitored. The

Education Directorate Q3 revenue budget monitoring report's position demonstrated a favourable variance circa £290,000, mostly attributable to the reduced provision of transport and out of county support for vulnerable learners. There are, however, some significant cost pressures that are being managed through school support services, such as cleaning, but there is WG Hardship funding available to offset aspects of the additional cost burdens at this point in time.

5.2 Risk including Mitigating Actions

There are two strategic risks associated with this report;

1. The impact of COVID-19 on learner progression and pupil regression. This is being mitigated through the Council, EAS and Schools working in collaboration to support learners across the board; and,
2. The risks associated with the provision of safe learning environments to minimise the potential transmission of COVID. There are comprehensive risk assessments in place to mitigate the risks, but the situation is constantly under review and appropriate remedial action is taken e.g. self-isolation protocols are implemented.

5.3 Legal

This report provides information relating to the emergency response requirements as well as the specific Education obligations set out the School Standards and Organisation Act Wales (2013) to support strategic and operational activity to improve pupil outcomes and wellbeing.

5.4 Human Resources

Colleagues in Organisational Development provide a weekly analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the Education Directorate's workforce. There are increasing cases amongst the workforce, but this has resulted in only a limited impact on service delivery within schools at the time of drafting this report.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 Performance Information and Data

Across the board, the emergency response from the Council and its schools has been effective, especially in the following aspects of work: -

- Re-purposing of schools – supporting children of key workers & vulnerable learners;
- Re-opening schools – from the 29th June 2020;
- Preparing for academic year 2020/21, particularly whole school re-opening from September 2020, in line with WG expectations;
- Spring term arrangements and the move to more face to face learning.

6.2 Expected outcome for the public

There is a commitment from the Council and its schools to provide quality education for our children and young people to improve their life chances, despite the challenges faced during the emergency crisis.

6.3 Involvement

There has been extensive involvement of key stakeholder both corporately and across the school estate. The planning groups for secondary, primary and special schools that are established, including Headteacher representation has secured a collaborative and corporate response.

6.4 Thinking for the Long term

This report largely reflects on the emergency response to date, however, there are robust governance arrangements in place to support the next stages of the emergency for the foreseeable future.

6.5 Preventative focus

The Council's emergency response has facilitated a preventative approach to minimising the transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

6.6 Collaboration / partnership working

The report outlines the significant amount of partnership working at a strategic and operational level. This has resulted in a strengthening of the working relationships between the Council and the schools.

6.7 Integration

The emergency response has been a 'One Council' approach.

6.8 EqIA

There is no requirement for EQIA assessment since there only a limited change of policy and guidance associated with this report.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

7.1 The report has been presented to the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee and then subsequently through to the Executive Committee for monitoring purposes.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Blaenau Gwent Primary Schools – Blended Learning Survey

Appendix 2 – Response and Recovery Structure

Blaenau Gwent Primary Schools – Blended Learning Survey – February 2021 (Follow-up)

Context

- This additional survey was circulated to all primary schools on behalf of the LA
- The questions focused on a qualitative response to the following questions on Blended and Distance Learning within each school.

Questions

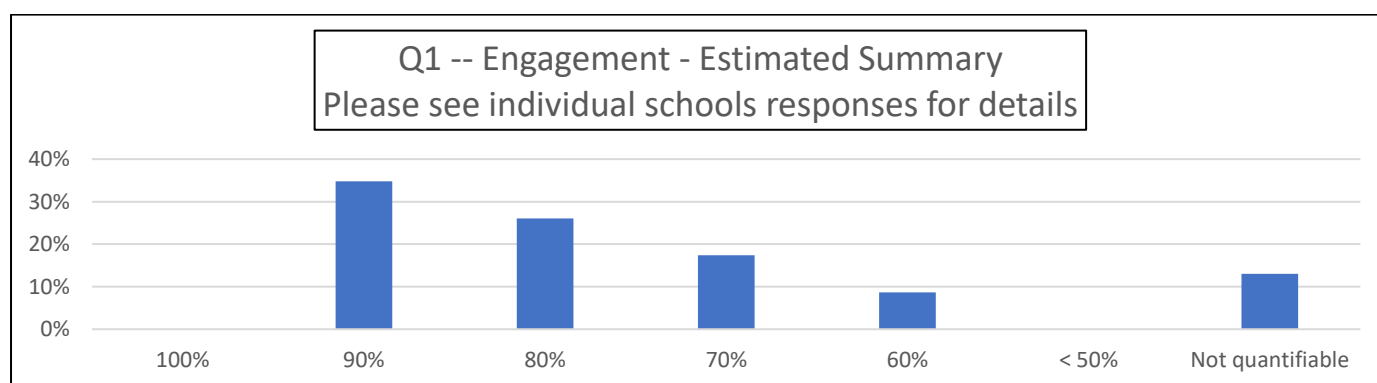
1. How would you describe the current level of engagement with the distance and blended learning offer in your school?
2. What strategies have proved successful in engaging those hard to reach?
3. Where pupils can't access learning on line, what provision has been made?
4. What strategies have proved successful in providing face to face wellbeing check-ins with all learners?
5. Within the current context, what approaches have you used to evaluate current provision?
6. Have you identified concerns re workload on staff? If so, what have you been able to do to alleviate these?
7. What is the general feedback from parents? Have there been any particular compliments or concerns?
8. Since September, please identify an example of an area of particular good practice in your school.
9. When engaging with PL, which activities / approaches have been especially effective?
10. Would the school benefit from any bespoke support? - in which area?
11. What do you envisage are the major challenges for your school in regard to full return?

Responses

- Full responses to each question have been shared with both the LA and Principal Challenge Adviser in an accompanying sortable and searchable Excel Spreadsheet.
- For selected questions it has been possible to provide a quantitative summary, using estimation in some cases and for others counts of references. Where this is possible this is included below

Q1 - Engagement

Engagement (Summarised by school and quantified by EAS)	Number of Schools	Percentage Schools
100%	0	0%
90%	8	35%
80%	6	26%
70%	4	17%
60%	2	9%
< 50%	0	0%
Not quantifiable	3	13%
	23	100%



Q2 – Strategies

Strategies	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Telephone	18	22.8%
Loan of IT	13	16.5%
EWO	6	7.6%
Live Lessons	6	7.6%
Paper workpacks	6	7.6%
Communication	5	6.3%
Support for Vulnerable Pupils	3	3.8%
Class Dojo	2	2.5%
EWS	2	2.5%
Wellbeing	2	2.5%

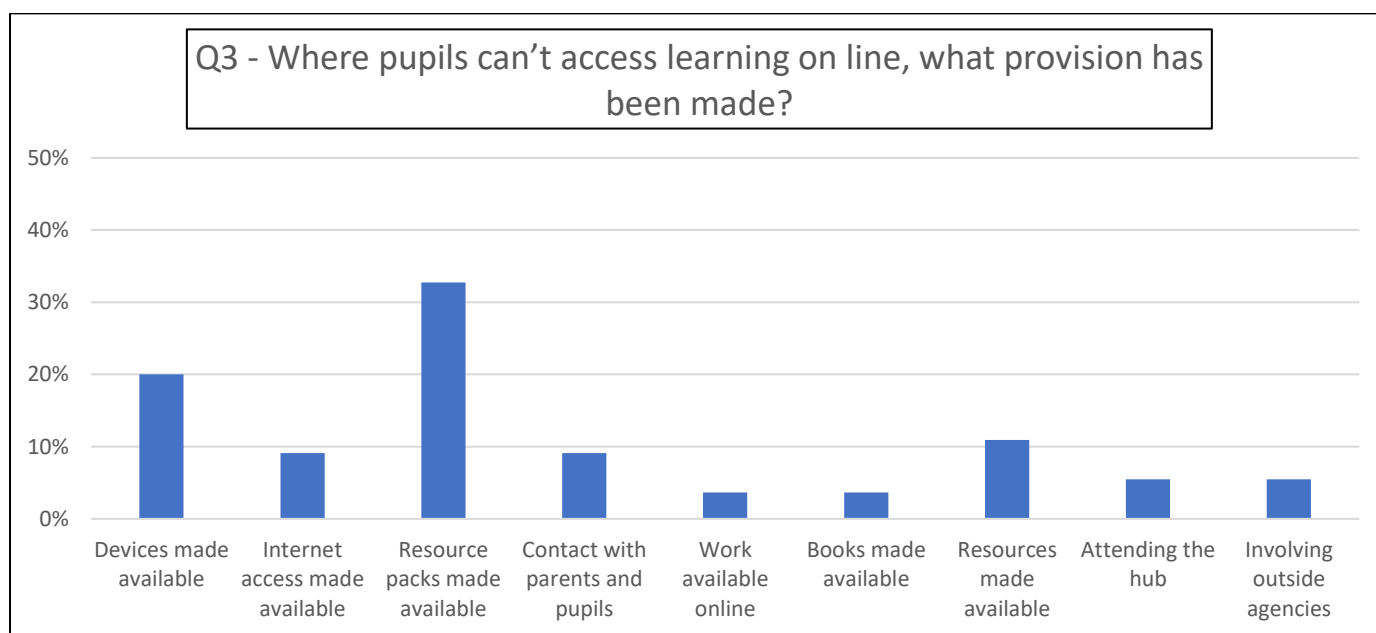
Adaptation for Needs of Pupils	1	1.3%
Engagement with External Agencies	1	1.3%
Family Engagement Officer	1	1.3%
Flexibility of expectation	1	1.3%
House visits	1	1.3%
Live check in for lessons	1	1.3%
Offer of Alternative Methods of Engaging	1	1.3%
Online Teaching	1	1.3%
Process for non-engagement	1	1.3%
Rewards	1	1.3%
Support with IT	1	1.3%
Text messages	1	1.3%
Tracking of Engagement	1	1.3%
Vulnerable Learner Lead	1	1.3%
Weekly Check-in	1	1.3%
Y11 email hotline	1	1.3%
	79	100.0%



Q 3 – Provision

Provision	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Devices made available	11	20.0%

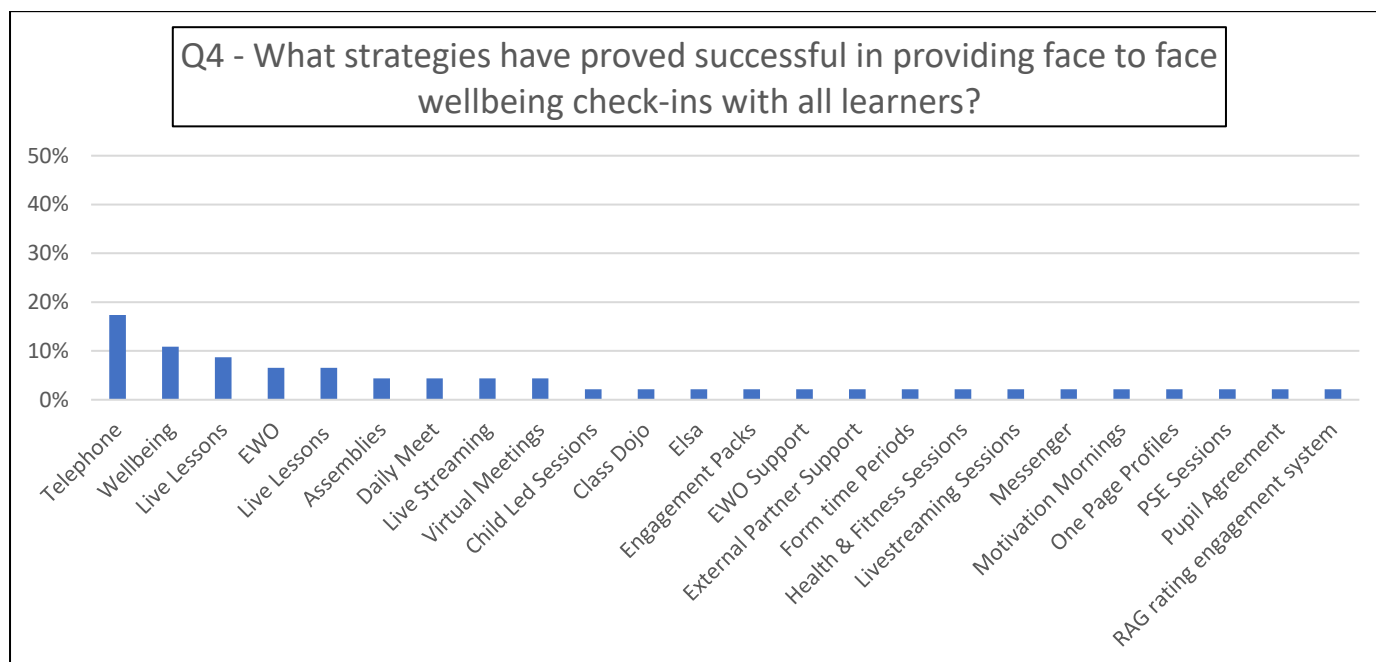
Internet access made available	5	9.1%
Resource packs made available	18	32.7%
Contact with parents and pupils	5	9.1%
Work available online	2	3.6%
Books made available	2	3.6%
Resources made available	6	10.9%
Attending the hub	3	5.5%
Involving outside agencies	3	5.5%
	55	100.0%



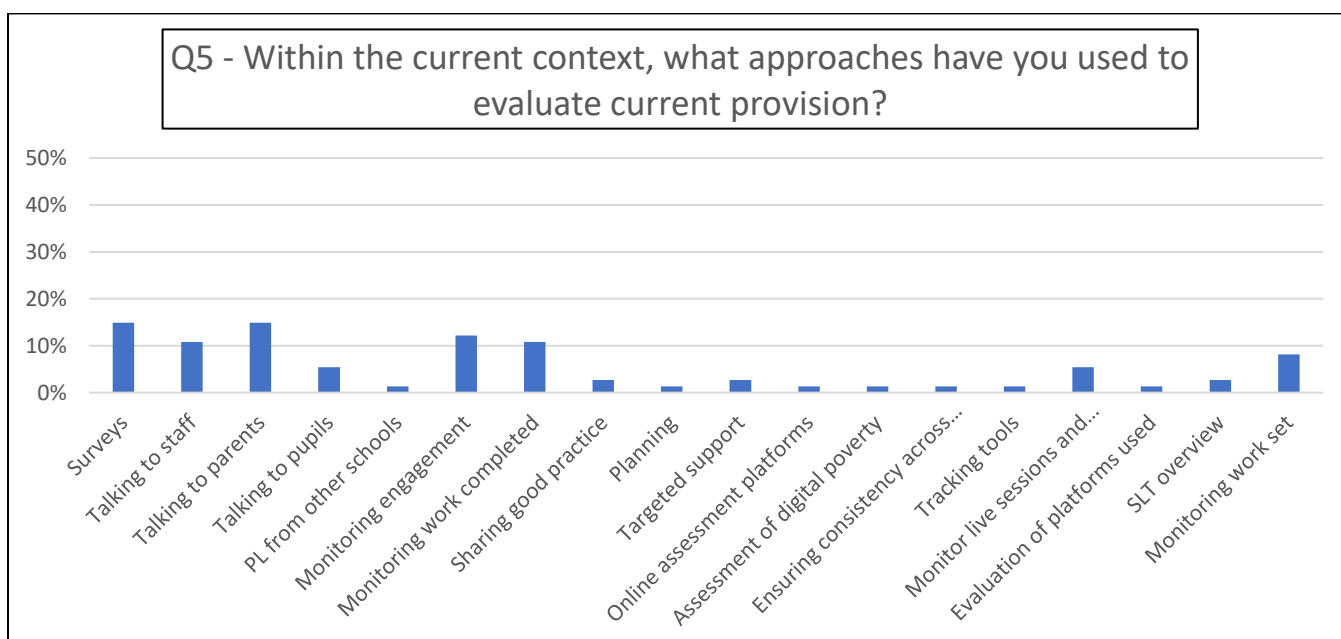
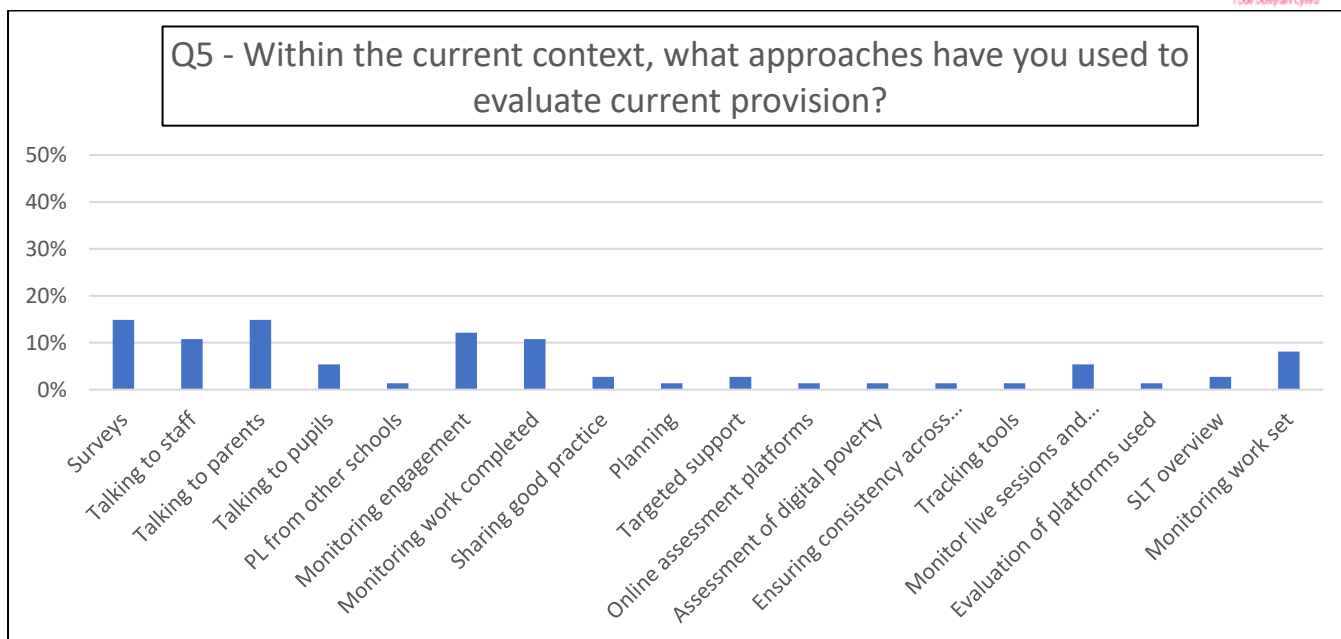
Q4 – Strategies for wellbeing

Strategies	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Telephone	8	17.4%
Wellbeing	5	10.9%
Live Lessons	4	8.7%
EWO	3	6.5%
Live Lessons	3	6.5%
Assemblies	2	4.3%
Daily Meet	2	4.3%
Live Streaming	2	4.3%
Virtual Meetings	2	4.3%
Child Led Sessions	1	2.2%
Class Dojo	1	2.2%
Elsa	1	2.2%
Engagement Packs	1	2.2%

EWO Support	1	2.2%
External Partner Support	1	2.2%
Form time Periods	1	2.2%
Health & Fitness Sessions	1	2.2%
Livestreaming Sessions	1	2.2%
Messenger	1	2.2%
Motivation Mornings	1	2.2%
One Page Profiles	1	2.2%
PSE Sessions	1	2.2%
Pupil Agreement	1	2.2%
RAG rating engagement system	1	2.2%
Referral to EWO in no contact	1	2.2%
SAP sessions	1	2.2%
Thrive	1	2.2%
Virtual Check-ins	1	2.2%
Welfare Sessions	1	2.2%
Wellbeing Check-ins	1	2.2%
Wellbeing Hub	1	2.2%
Wellbeing Sessions	1	2.2%
Wellbeing Wednesday	1	2.2%
	46	100.0%

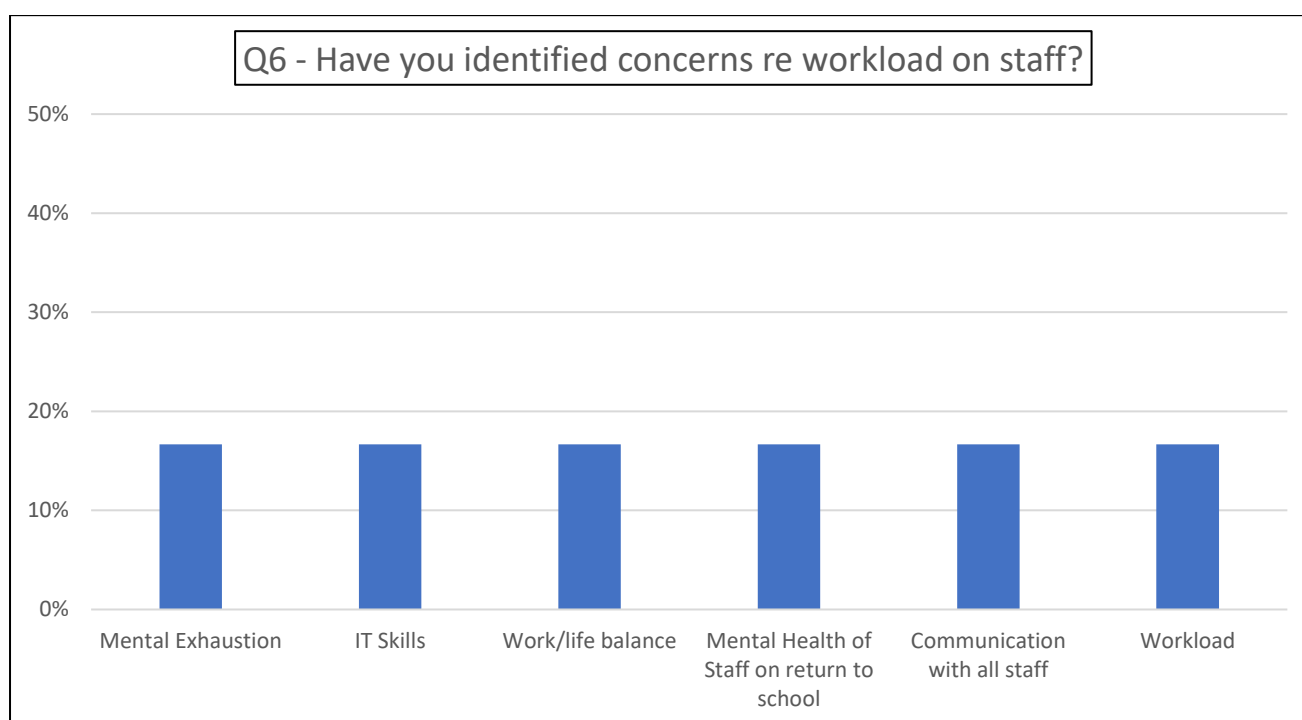


Q5 – Approaches to evaluation



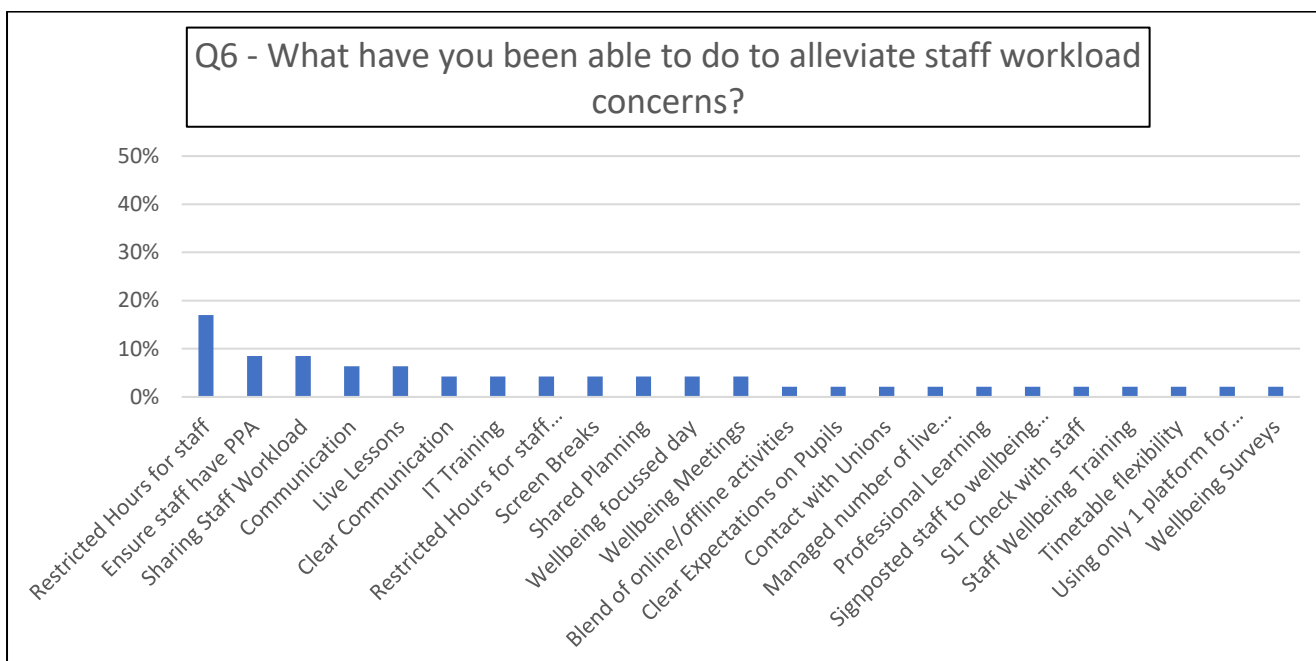
Q6 – Workload Concerns and Solutions

Workload Concerns	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Mental Exhaustion	1	16.7%
IT Skills	1	16.7%
Work/life balance	1	16.7%
Mental Health of Staff on return to school	1	16.7%
Communication with all staff	1	16.7%
Workload	1	16.7%
	6	100.0%



Workload Solutions	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Restricted Hours for staff	8	17.0%
Ensure staff have PPA	4	8.5%
Sharing Staff Workload	4	8.5%
Communication	3	6.4%
Live Lessons	3	6.4%
Clear Communication	2	4.3%
IT Training	2	4.3%
Restricted Hours for staff outside school hours	2	4.3%
Screen Breaks	2	4.3%
Shared Planning	2	4.3%
Wellbeing focussed day	2	4.3%
Wellbeing Meetings	2	4.3%
Blend of online/offline activities	1	2.1%
Clear Expectations on Pupils	1	2.1%
Contact with Unions	1	2.1%
Managed number of live lessons per day	1	2.1%
Professional Learning	1	2.1%
Signposted staff to wellbeing resources	1	2.1%
SLT Check with staff	1	2.1%
Staff Wellbeing Training	1	2.1%

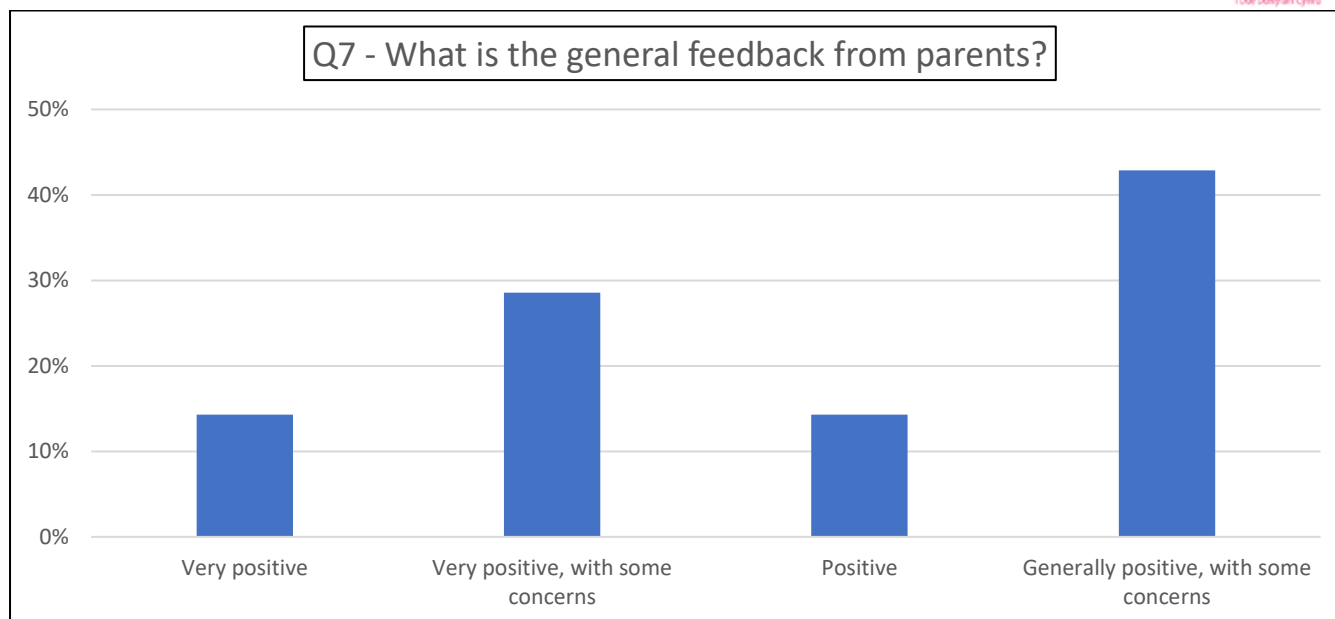
Timetable flexibility	1	2.1%
Using only 1 platform for classes	1	2.1%
Wellbeing Surveys	1	2.1%
	47	100.0%



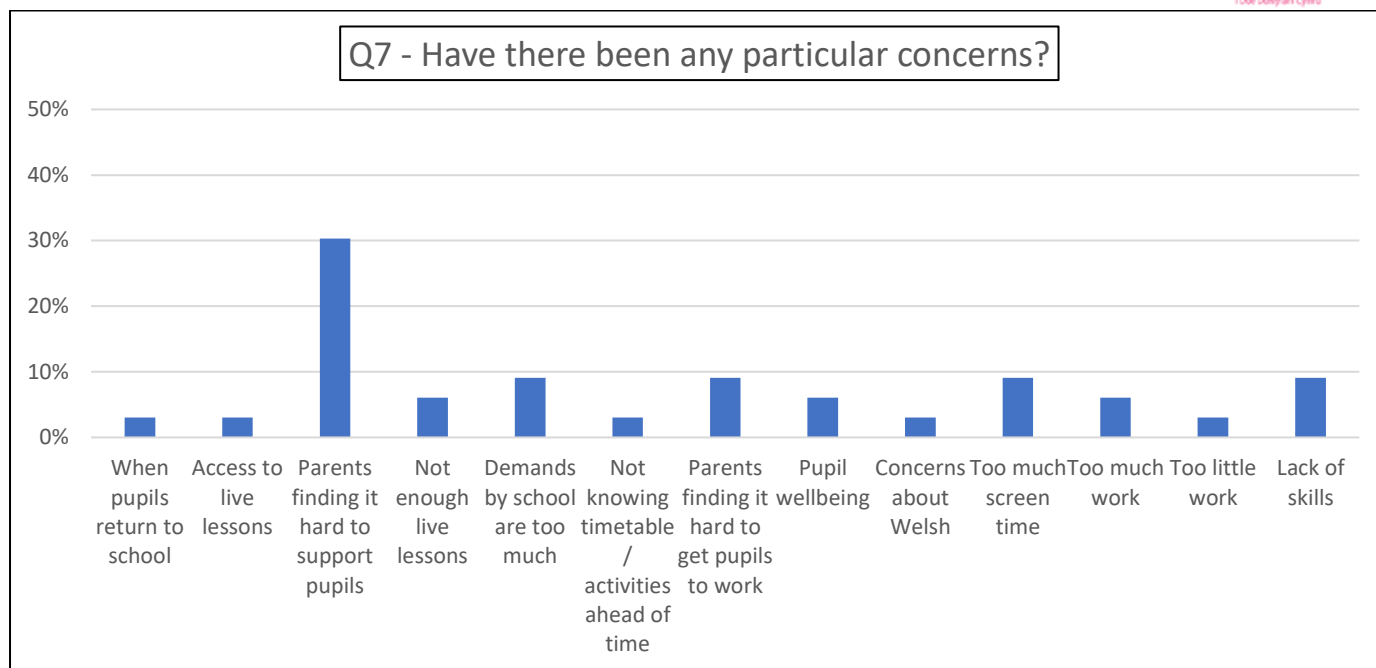
Q7 – Feedback

Q7 - Feedback	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Very positive	1	14.3%
Very positive, with some concerns	2	28.6%
Positive	1	14.3%
Generally positive, with some concerns	3	42.9%
	7	100.0%

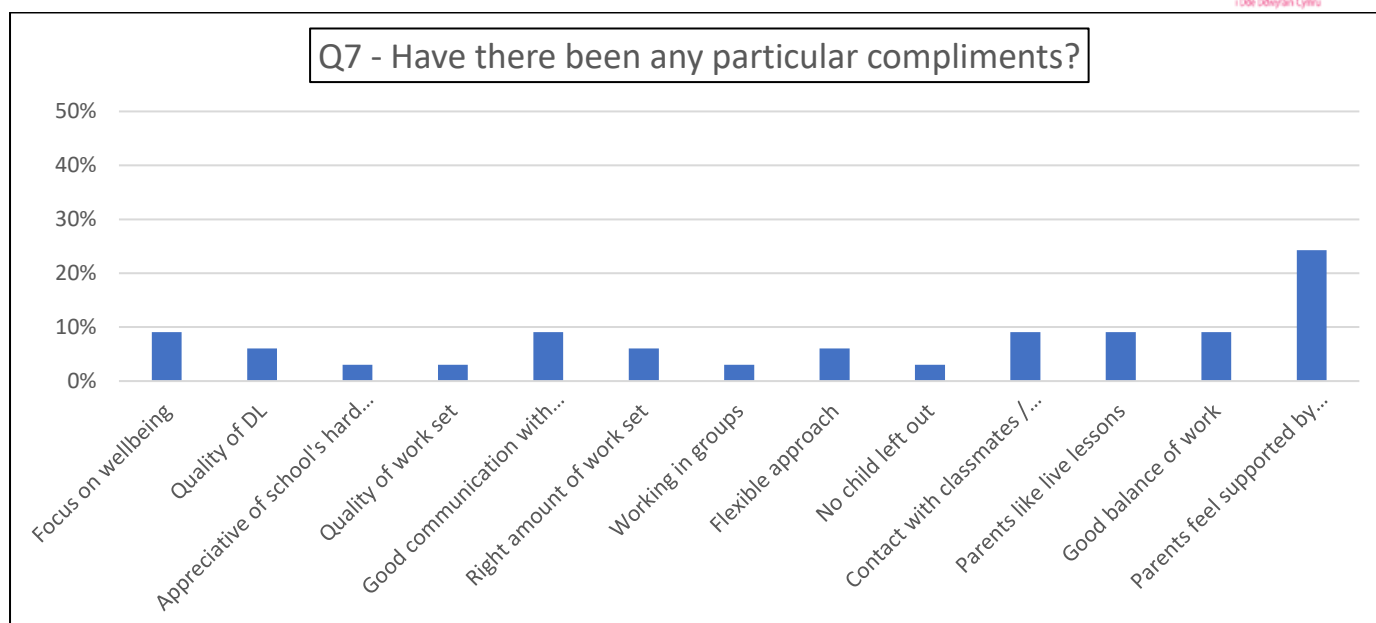
Of the concerns listed:	No. of mentions	% of mentions
When pupils return to school	1	5.9%
Parents finding it hard to support pupils	6	35.3%
Demands by school for work engagement	1	5.9%
Parents finding it hard to get pupils to work	2	11.8%
Pupil wellbeing	1	5.9%
Concerns about Welsh	1	5.9%
Too much screen time	1	5.9%
Too much work	1	5.9%
Too little work	1	5.9%
Parents lack of skills	2	11.8%
	17	100.0%



Of the concerns listed:	No. of mentions	% of mentions
When pupils return to school	1	3.0%
Access to live lessons	1	3.0%
Parents finding it hard to support pupils	10	30.3%
Not enough live lessons	2	6.1%
Demands by school are too much	3	9.1%
Not knowing timetable / activities ahead of time	1	3.0%
Parents finding it hard to get pupils to work	3	9.1%
Pupil wellbeing	2	6.1%
Concerns about Welsh	1	3.0%
Too much screen time	3	9.1%
Too much work	2	6.1%
Too little work	1	3.0%
Lack of skills	3	9.1%
	33	100.0%



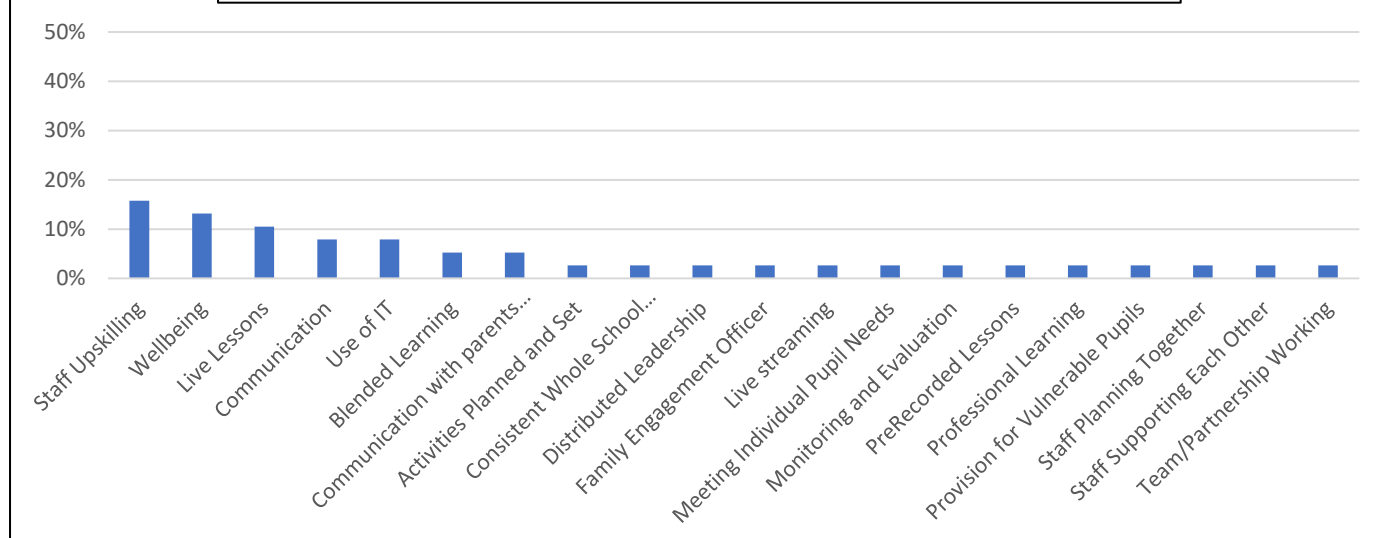
Of the compliments listed:	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Focus on wellbeing	3	9.1%
Quality of DL	2	6.1%
Appreciative of school's hard work	1	3.0%
Quality of work set	1	3.0%
Good communication with parents / pupils	3	9.1%
Right amount of work set	2	6.1%
Working in groups	1	3.0%
Flexible approach	2	6.1%
No child left out	1	3.0%
Contact with classmates / teacher	3	9.1%
Parents like live lessons	3	9.1%
Good balance of work	3	9.1%
Parents feel supported by school	8	24.2%
	33	100.0%



Q8 – Examples of Good Practice

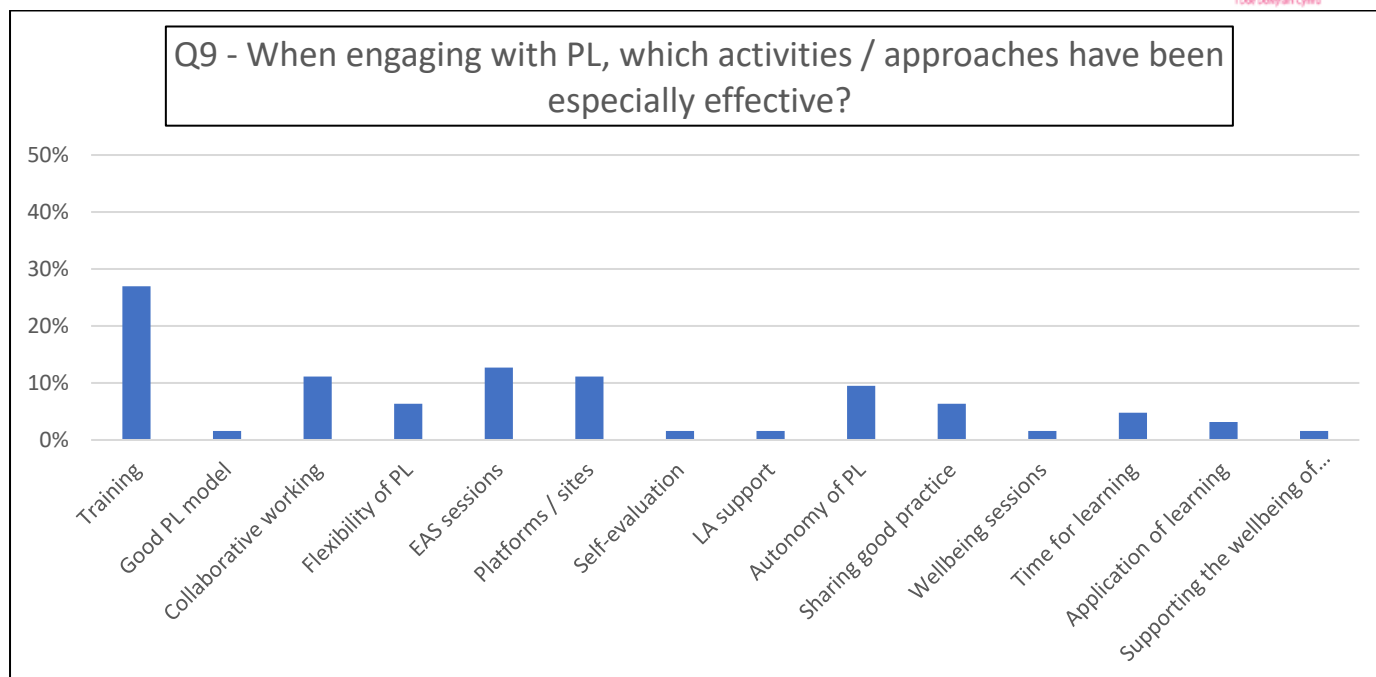
Examples of Good Practice	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Staff Upskilling	6	15.8%
Wellbeing	5	13.2%
Live Lessons	4	10.5%
Communication	3	7.9%
Use of IT	3	7.9%
Blended Learning	2	5.3%
Communication with parents and stakehodlers	2	5.3%
Activities Planned and Set	1	2.6%
Consistent Whole School Approach	1	2.6%
Distributed Leadership	1	2.6%
Family Engagement Officer	1	2.6%
Live streaming	1	2.6%
Meeting Individual Pupil Needs	1	2.6%
Monitoring and Evaluation	1	2.6%
PreRecorded Lessons	1	2.6%
Professional Learning	1	2.6%
Provision for Vulnerable Pupils	1	2.6%
Staff Planning Together	1	2.6%
Staff Supporting Each Other	1	2.6%
Team/Partnership Working	1	2.6%
	38	100.0%

Q8 - Since September, please identify an example of an area of particular good practice in your school.



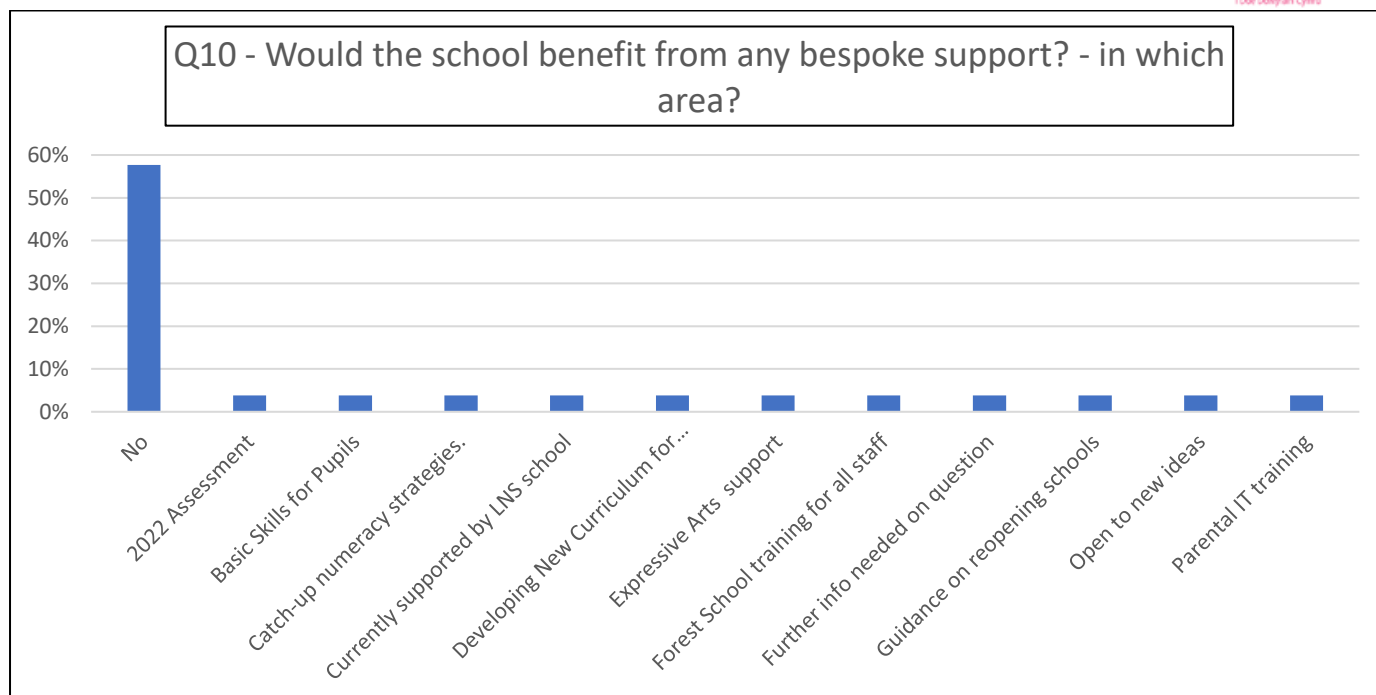
Q9 – What’s been effective?

Q9 - What’s been effective?	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Training	17	27.0%
Good PL model	1	1.6%
Collaborative working	7	11.1%
Flexibility of PL	4	6.3%
EAS sessions	8	12.7%
Platforms / sites	7	11.1%
Self-evaluation	1	1.6%
LA support	1	1.6%
Autonomy of PL	6	9.5%
Sharing good practice	4	6.3%
Wellbeing sessions	1	1.6%
Time for learning	3	4.8%
Application of learning	2	3.2%
Supporting the wellbeing of pupils	1	1.6%
	63	100.0%



Q10 – Support Needed

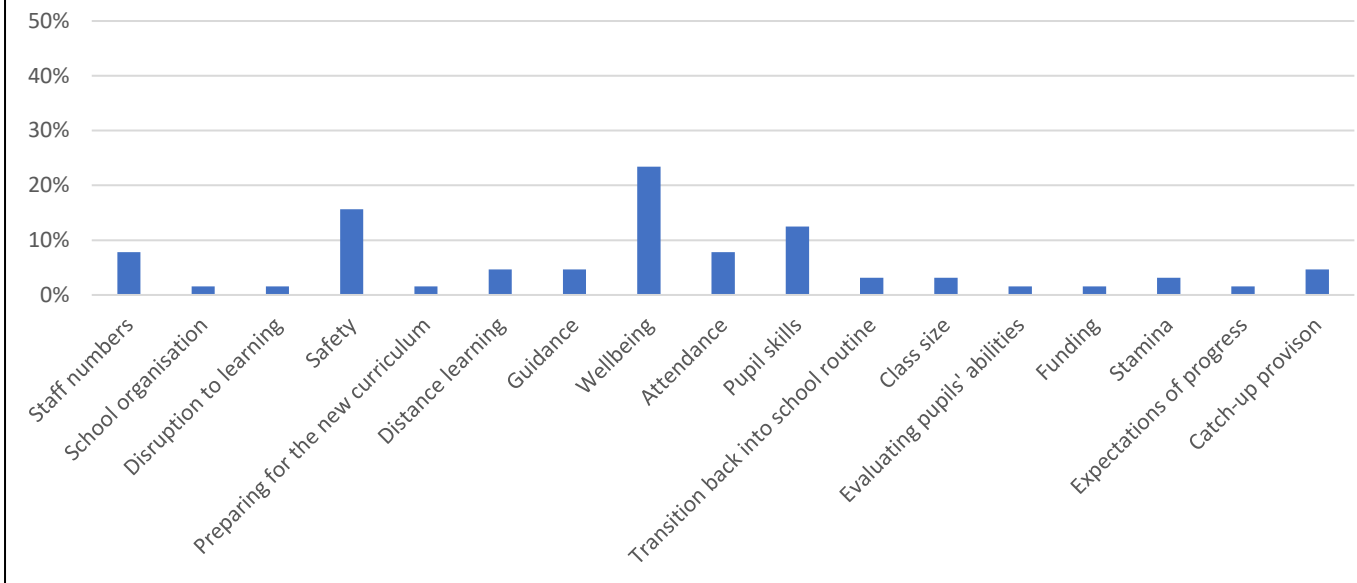
Type of Support	No. of mentions	% of mentions
No	15	57.7%
2022 Assessment	1	3.8%
Basic Skills for Pupils	1	3.8%
Catch-up numeracy strategies.	1	3.8%
Currently supported by LNS school	1	3.8%
Developing New Curriculum for Wales	1	3.8%
Expressive Arts support	1	3.8%
Forest School training for all staff	1	3.8%
Further info needed on question	1	3.8%
Guidance on reopening schools	1	3.8%
Open to new ideas	1	3.8%
Parental IT training	1	3.8%
	26	100.0%



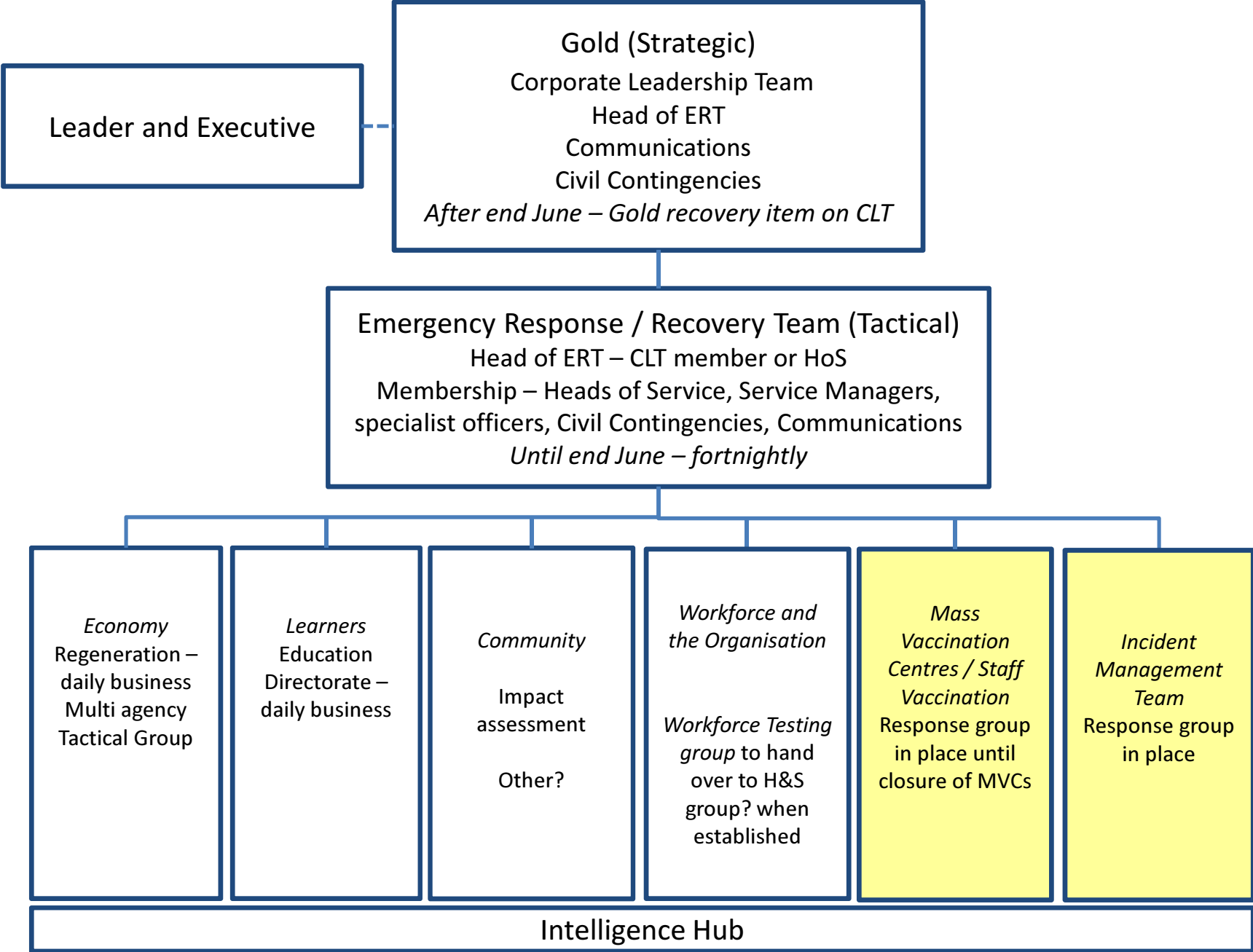
Q11 – Major challenges to full return

Q11 - Major challenges to full return	No. of mentions	% of mentions
Staff numbers	5	7.8%
School organisation	1	1.6%
Disruption to learning	1	1.6%
Safety	10	15.6%
Preparing for the new curriculum	1	1.6%
Distance learning	3	4.7%
Guidance	3	4.7%
Wellbeing	15	23.4%
Attendance	5	7.8%
Pupil skills	8	12.5%
Transition back into school routine	2	3.1%
Class size	2	3.1%
Evaluating pupils' abilities	1	1.6%
Funding	1	1.6%
Stamina	2	3.1%
Expectations of progress	1	1.6%
Catch-up provision	3	4.7%
	64	100.0%

Q11 - What do you envisage are the major challenges for your school in regard to full return?



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Agenda Item 16

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.06.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 03.06.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **16th June 2021**

Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Education Services Self-Evaluation and Business Planning**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Joanne Collins, Executive Member for Education**

Report Submitted by: **Lynn Phillips, Corporate Director of Education**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
✓	✓	28.05.21			20.4.21	16.06.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to provide the Executive Committee with an opportunity to review the findings of ongoing self-evaluation and business planning processes undertaken within the Education Directorate, across the Council and with key partners.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 Blaenau Gwent Education Services are committed to self-review and self-improvement and view these processes as being fundamental to securing ongoing improvement in outcomes, quality and effectiveness. The Education Directorate has adopted a standardised approach for self-evaluation (SE) that is now embedded into the day to day practice. This has been reviewed to align with Estyn's new inspection framework for Local Government Education Services (LGES). This report looks at the emerging findings against the inspection framework for Local Government Education Services (LGES), which will inform evaluations of progress against the key improvement priorities set out in business improvement plans.

2.2 The Summary Self-Evaluation Report (SER) attached as appendix 1 provides a high-level narrative and sets out the arrangements for effective self-evaluation. The findings from the SER are reflected as actions for improvement in the Directorate's Business Plans at Directorate, Service and Team level. Effective self-evaluation means that the Directorate remains focussed on improving the right things.

2.3 Over recent months, extensive work has been undertaken within the Education Directorate to align the governance processes to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation is taking place, avoiding duplication and enabling evidence to support a number of different planning processes. This 'golden thread' links:

- The Well-being Plan;

- Corporate Plan;
- Council's Recovery Themes;
- LGES
- EAS Business Plan;
- Political Priorities;
- Education Improvement Plan;
- Tier 2 Business Plans; and
- Tier 1 Business Plans.

2.4 As part of this work, a review of the Education Improvement Plan (EIP) has been undertaken, which has resulted in a revision to the priorities of the Directorate:

- Improving educational outcomes and wellbeing for pupils at all stages of development, but particularly at KS4, through effective governance arrangements;
- Delivering the vision for education based on a school-led self-improving system and to support all learners in a modern and safe environment that is fit for the 21st Century;
- Transforming education in line with curriculum, qualifications and ALN reform that is fit for the 21st Century;
- Delivering effective community based learning and recreation provision to meet need; and,
- Creating a performance/business culture for Education and Leisure that delivers continuous improvement in service delivery and value for money.

2.5 A review is ongoing to fully align the Tier 1 and 2 business plans to the EIP. It should also be recognised that the recovery implications for learners associated with 12 months of teaching and learning disruption are far reaching. The Education Directorate's top priority in the EAS business plan linked to recovery is to;

Minimise the impact of COVID-19 on learner development and progress, including improving the digital competency of all learners and staff in the wider Blaenau Gwent school community.

2.6 A comprehensive data set of school performance, coupled with evaluations of impact and effectiveness of Council based and brokered support feeds into the overall evaluation. It should be noted, however, that self-evaluation is an on-going process and the SER will consider the 2019-20 provisional KS4 and Post 16 results during the 2020-21 academic year, however, there needs to be acknowledgement of the relaxation of performance measures across the education sector.

2.7 A comprehensive self-evaluation process helps identify those areas where progress has been made and where further improvement is required. Emerging findings, via ongoing self-evaluation is captured every Autumn and Spring time as well as via quarterly performance and finance reporting

mechanisms. Moreover, it is the high-level points only, which are presented in the narrative in this report shown under Section 6.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 This report has been discussed previously by Education DMT, CLT and Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee.

Option 1: to accept the report as presented.

Option 2: Members consider the information detailed within the report and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate recommendations prior to Executive Committee approval.

3.2 This report provides the Executive Committee with important self-evaluation, as well as opportunity to identify where progress has been made and where further improvement is required.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 **Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

One of the objectives in the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan aims for every child to have the best start in life. Through effective self-evaluation and improvement planning processes, we seek to ensure that provision is appropriate and able to meet the needs of children and young people, so that their progress and performance is as good as it ought to be.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

5.1.1 The Council allocates approximately £45.1 million (2020/21) to schools via the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) to provide high quality education and to improve pupil outcomes. The Council's total gross budgeted expenditure per pupil for 2020/21 was £6,628 which is the 3rd highest in Wales and £436 above the Welsh average of £6,192.

5.1.2 For 2020/21 the funding delegated to schools was 85.7% which is above the all Wales average and ranked 1st when compared to the family of schools, (Local Authority Budgeted Expenditure on Schools 2020/21). The Education Directorate has an improving position on a 'value for money' basis, in that performance and school categorisation has improved significantly and the overall central funding has reduced, in line with public sector austerity measures.

5.1.3 The Council commissions the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to deliver the statutory functions of school improvement. The annual financial costs being circa £350,000. Schools categorisation profile has improved over the

last 5 years against a backdrop of decreasing financial contributions to the EAS: this therefore, effectively represents good value for money. The Education Directorate holds the EAS to account for the impact and effectiveness of their work in schools in Blaenau Gwent.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

5.2.1 Risk is associated with weak self-evaluation that fails to accurately identify those areas where good progress has been made and where further improvement is needed. Strong self-evaluation helps services target resources at greatest need and hence bring about improvement precisely where it is needed.

5.2.2 Risk is associated with underperformance and ineffective processes to improve performance and progress in identified schools. Failure to raise standards is identified as a key risk to the Council, both in terms of reputation and pupil life chances. This is reflected in the Education Directorate and EAS risk registers.

5.2.3 Mitigating actions include:

- strong self-evaluation processes, which accurately identify those areas which need to improve the most;
- the routine monitoring of quantitative and qualitative information, regular quality assurance meetings between the Council and the EAS, regular quality assurance meetings within the Education Directorate and across teams, school inspection findings and school categorisation results; and,
- the progress schools make towards targets is also monitored on a termly basis. School safeguarding processes are also closely monitored.

5.2.4 Holistic support packages are devised via regular cross service meetings between OD, Finance, Health and Safety, Education and School Governor Support Services. School level performance data is regularly analysed and evaluated to identify emerging trends.

5.2.5 The quality of provision i.e. the quality teaching and learning in classrooms is monitored and supported via the EAS. The quality of school leadership is also supported extensively by the EAS via a range of programmes and school-to-school networks.

5.3 **Legal**

This report provides information about statutory, end of Key Stage school performance underpinned by processes set out the School Standards and Organisation Act Wales (2013) support strategic and operational activity to improve pupil outcomes.

5.4 **Human Resources**

None for this report.

6. Performance Information

6.1 Performance

Areas where good progress has been made:

- The Corporate and Education Directorate's response to COVID-19 has been effective and this is discussed in the Estyn Thematic Review commentary.
- School inspection and school categorisation profile has improved significantly with no primary schools in follow up and excellent practice identified in a number of schools;
- GCSE L2 English and Capped 9 improved, albeit the results in 2020 were provided through Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) and not through external examinations;
- GCSE A*/A grades improved in English and Maths;
- Planning arrangements for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform are well developed.
- The partnership with Schools, Coleg Gwent and Post 16 providers has strengthened through the establishment of the Post 16 Strategic Partnership Board. A-level A*-C and A*-E grades continue to be strong and were greater than all-Wales means;
- Value-added progress in English and Maths, reading and numeracy for our 7 and 11 year olds have improved in 2019-20;
- The Youth Service exceeded that of the all-Wales means for reach and accredited learning outcomes. The levels of NEETs at 1.5% are at their lowest levels i.e. 9 young people;
- Primary persistent absenteeism reduced to below that of the all-Wales means;
- The School Based Counselling Service provides good support;
- Permanent exclusions reduced;
- Strong progress through the 21st Century schools programme with robust programme management arrangements in place;
- Secure progress against the Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP), including the Welsh medium new school moving to Statutory Notice stage.
- Headteacher induction and support programme was very well received by aspiring and new Headteachers;
- The staff wellbeing survey results were good; and
- The Council and EAS are evidencing improving value for money.

6.2 **Areas where further improvement is required:**

- Higher levels of language acquisition in our very young children in the early years. This will be a real focus of the recovery programme from COVID;
- Improved attainment of eFSM pupils and particularly our more able pupils in the early years and throughout education;
- Improve school attendance;
- Progress between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, particularly in English, Maths and Science;
- Reviewing provision for pupils with additional learning needs e.g. Pen-y-Cwm Special School capacity requirements;
- Continuing the work with Schools Causing Concern (SCC), particularly the two schools in an Estyn category; and

- Reduce school exclusions and support parents/carers who opt to Elective Home Educate (EHE), which has seen an increase linked to COVID.

The Council will continue to work with partners across the Council, for example, Children's Services, Regeneration, Legal, Finance and Organisational Development to focus the work on improving pupil outcomes and supporting school leaders. The Council will also continue to work with the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to support our school leaders to improve pupil outcomes and wellbeing. There are changes that it is anticipated be introduced to the reporting and accountability framework for academic year 2020-21 linked to the COVID-19 emergency response, particularly a relaxation in the requirements for School and Council performance reporting arrangements.

6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

The Directorate's self-evaluation processes are aligned with LGES and the regional policy for monitoring, supporting, evaluation and intervention in schools through the categorisation process is derived from the National Categorisation Framework. The categorisation process will be suspended in academic year 2020-21.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

Analysis of individual school performance data is a key element in ensuring that schools are known well by the Council so that appropriate support and intervention can be directed towards areas of greatest need. Effective self-evaluation processes ensure that resources are targeted at greatest need and secure improvement in longer term.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

Through effective self-evaluation processes, support and monitoring of school performance, early identification of emerging areas for improvement can be identified with consequent early intervention to secure improvement. The effectiveness of the Council's monitoring, support, evaluation and intervention programmes ensure that preventative action is taken early in order to minimise the escalation of concerns.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The Council collaborates with neighbouring local authorities through the South East Wales Consortium for the provision of school improvement services from the Education Achievement Service (EAS) and a range of pupil support services for specific groups such as visually and hearing impaired learners.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

Effective monitoring, support, evaluation and intervention are fundamental to the Council's wellbeing objectives.

6.8 ***EqIA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)***

There is no requirement for EQIA assessment since there only a limited change of policy or practice. However, implementation of the Council's monitoring, support, evaluation and intervention practice in schools has a

positive impact on children and young people and on staff within a particular school. By improving the quality of education, standards and wellbeing are improved for all children and young people.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

7.1 Monitoring of the emerging findings of self-evaluation is an important mechanism for ensuring that Members of the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee and the Executive are sufficiently informed to enable them to make informed decisions regarding the quality of education provision and hence pupil outcomes and wellbeing. There are well-established processes in place to ensure that self-evaluation is used to inform business plans to secure further improvement.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

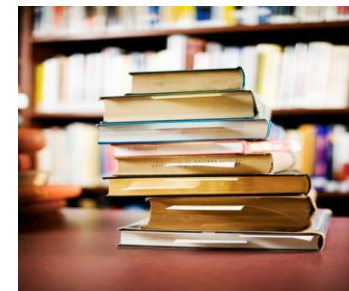
Appendix 1 – Summary SER

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Education Directorate Self-Evaluation Summary Report Date: Spring 2021



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Blaenau Gwent - Context

Blaenau Gwent has 25 schools and their status is detailed below:

- 2 are Maintained 3-16 Learning Communities,
- 1 Foundation Comprehensive,
- 1 Maintained Comprehensive,
- 1 x Maintained 3-18 Special School,
- 1 x Maintained 3-16 SEBD Special School; and,
- 19 Primaries (of which 4 are voluntary aided / faith schools)

There are currently circa 9,000+ pupils on roll across all Blaenau Gwent schools.

The organisation, End Child Poverty, released new data in October 2020 with findings showing that the highest rates of child poverty in Wales are in Pembrokeshire and Blaenau Gwent. Blaenau Gwent is one of 5 counties in Wales to have seen a rise in the proportion of children living in poverty since 2015. The impact of poverty on children is well documented, with children from low-income families more likely to experience worse physical and mental health; do less well in school; and have fewer opportunities in the future. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) captures the extent of deprivation as a proportion of residents living in each lower super output area (LSOA). The eight considerations of the WIMD are: income; employment; health; education, skills and training; geographical access to services; housing; physical environment; and community safety. Blaenau Gwent has the highest percentage of its LSOAs areas in the most deprived areas across Wales at 10%, for income (19.1%), education (27.7%), and community safety (23.4%).

The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals in Blaenau Gwent was almost 30% during 2010-16 and the highest of all LAs in Wales by a significant margin. The proportions declined during 2016-19, but BG remained the 2nd highest in Wales for all LA schools and highest for secondary schools during 2018-19. Given the evidential relationship between pupil performance and deprivation (using eFSM as a proxy indicator), pupil outcomes in BG would be expected to be among the lowest in Wales. However, within Blaenau Gwent we have high ambitions for all of our learners and our socio-economic standing is a challenge that we are working to overcome to the benefit of all of our children and young people.

Overall, the 2019 WIMD figures and high eFSM eligibility reflect very high levels of deprivation within the authority. They also indicate the significant consideration required to improve educational outcomes to levels within other similar LAs and to consistently match the all-Wales averages. 2018-19 performance figures show that Blaenau Gwent has achieved parity, and indeed, out-performed some LAs in a number of measures confirming the progress being made within its schools. The 2020 KS4 and Post 16 KS5 provisional results will be included in the Summary SER via the performance data pack during the Autumn term to inform the on-going self-evaluation process, however, there is recognition the outcomes were awarded via the Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) and/or the awarding examination body's assessed grade.

Executive Summary:

This Executive Summary is a high-level analysis of key strategic areas of progress, and importantly, aspects of work identified for improvement across the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework. There are clearly more details in the Main Self-Evaluation Report (SER), however, the Executive Summary provides a high-level synopsis to enable the Education Directorate, the Council and key partners to understand and focus on critical strands of work to continue to improve outcomes for children and young people across the County Borough. The information detailed in this document regularly features in the self-evaluation reports presented to Scrutiny and Executive Committees. The Council will continue to work with partners across the Council, for example, Children's Services, Regeneration, Legal, Finance and Organisational Development to focus the work on improving pupil outcomes and supporting school leaders. The Council will also continue to work with partners, such as the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to support our school leaders to improve pupil outcomes and wellbeing. There are changes that will be introduced to the reporting and accountability framework for academic year 2020-20 linked to the COVID-19 emergency response, particularly a relaxation in the requirements for School and Council performance reporting arrangements. Clearly, the Education Directorate will need to remain focussed on self-evaluation procedures, as outlined in the review of the SE Policy 2020, particularly an analysis of the provisional KS4 and Post 16 results during the autumn term 2020. This information will only be used for the SER and not for accountability purposes.

Blaenau Gwent's Education Services are committed to self-review and self-improvement and view these processes as being fundamental to securing ongoing improvement in outcomes, quality and effectiveness. The Education Directorate has adopted a standardised approach for self-evaluation (SE) that is now embedded into the day to day practice. This has been reviewed to align with Estyn's new inspection framework for Local Government Education Services (LGES). This Summary SER looks at the emerging findings against the inspection framework for Local Government Education Services (LGES), which will inform evaluations of progress against the key improvement priorities set out in business and improvement plans.

Key Strategic Areas of Progress

Areas where good progress has been made:

- The Education Directorate has Council approval to establish a new leadership and management structure that includes additional capacity for school improvement;
- The Corporate and Education Directorate's response to COVID-19 has been effective and this is discussed in the Estyn Thematic Review commentary;
- School inspection and school categorisation profile has improved significantly with no primary schools in follow up and excellent practice identified in a number of schools;
- GCSE L2 English and Capped 9 improved, albeit the results in 2020 were provided through Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) and not through external examinations;
- GCSE A*/A grades improved in English and Maths;

- Planning arrangements for Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform are well developed;
- The partnership with Schools, Coleg Gwent and Post 16 providers has strengthened through the establishment of the Post 16 Strategic Partnership Board. A-level A*-C and A*-E grades continue to be strong and were greater than all-Wales means;
- Value-added progress in English and Maths, reading and numeracy for our 7 and 11 year olds have improved in 2019-20;
- The Youth Service exceeded that of the all-Wales means for reach and accredited learning outcomes. The levels of NEETs at 1.5% are at their lowest levels i.e. 9 young people;
- Primary persistent absenteeism reduced to below that of the all-Wales means;
- The School Based Counselling Service provides good support;
- Permanent exclusions reduced;
- Strong progress through the 21st Century schools programme with robust programme management arrangements in place;
- Secured progress against the Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP), including the Welsh medium new school moving to Statutory Notice stage;
- Headteacher induction and support programme very well received by aspiring and new Headteachers;
- The staff wellbeing survey results were good; and
- The Council and EAS are evidencing improving value for money.

Key Strategic Areas for Improvement

Areas where further improvement is required:

- Higher levels of language acquisition in our very young children in the early years. This will be a real focus of the recovery programme from COVID;
- Improve attainment of eFSM pupils and particularly our more able pupils in the early years and throughout education;
- Improve school attendance;
- Improve progress between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, particularly in English, Maths and Science;
- Reviewing provision for pupils with additional learning needs e.g. Pen-y-Cwm Special School capacity requirements;
- Continuing the work with Schools Causing Concern (SCC), particularly the two schools in an Estyn category;
- Reduce school exclusions and support parents/carers who opt to Elective Home Educate (EHE), which has seen an increase linked to COVID; and
- Overall, the revenue financial position of schools is favourable; however, there are a few schools with a revenue budget deficit that needs to be redressed e.g. Abertillery Learning Community.

1.1 Standards and Progress Overall - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

Foundation Phase

- Almost two-thirds of schools improved LLCE results in 2019, while a similar proportion of schools exceeded their targets in MD.

Key Stage 2

- LA-level FP-KS2 value-added progress in:
 - NC maths was above the national figure;
 - Language was a little higher than expected in 2019; and
 - Progress in reading was seen in about two-thirds of mainstream schools (about half in 2019) and numeracy reasoning was better than expected in most schools.
- The majority of schools had similar or higher L4+ results compared to their 2019 targets.
- School categorisation and inspection outcomes have improved in recent years.

Key Stage 3

- Two out of four schools improved L5+ English outcomes and three schools improved their L5+ oracy and writing results in 2019.
- L6+ outcomes improved for English 2017-19 and particularly for 2019.
- Three of the four schools improved L6+ outcomes in English and Welsh 2nd language during 2019 and three schools improved their reading and writing results.
- At LA-level literacy outcomes (oracy, reading & writing) all improved in 2019 with modest improvements made in MFL & PE.
- LA-level KS2-3 value-added progress in reading improved from the previous year.
- LA-level progress in numeracy reasoning was also better than expected and twice that for reading.
- Three of the four mainstream secondary schools maintained or improved progress for NC English.

Key Stage 4

- Capped 9 points score improved in 2019 and achieved the LA target.
- The proportion of learners gaining A*/A grades improved in both English and maths in 2019.
- The LA-level Welsh Bacc result was higher than expected in relation to the LA's eFSM entitlement.
- Higher than expected ranking in relation to eFSM except for numeracy and science. This was particularly so for the Skills Challenge Certificate result which ranked 7th out of the 22 Welsh LAs.
- The proportion of learners attaining A*-C grades in Welsh 1st language increased in 2019 with an improving trend during the last 2 years. 17% of the Welsh-medium cohort attained A*/A grades in Welsh 1st language.
- Abertillery improved outcomes in all but one performance indicator in 2019.
- The proportion of learners gaining A*/A grades in maths improved in every mainstream school in 2019 and in 3 out of 4 mainstream schools for English & capped 9 points scores.

Post-16

- At A level and AS level, the proportions of learners attaining A*-C and A*-E grades were a higher than the all-Wales means in 2019.
- For vocational courses, attainment rates in 2019 were similar to or higher than in the previous year except for L3.
- Entry level learners were 100% successful.

Youth Service

- In 2018/19, 2,010 (17%) of 11-25 year olds were registered as Reach and supported by the Youth Service (Wales 16%). Of these, 301 (15%) gained 456 nationally recognised accreditations.
- In addition, the Youth Service recorded 7,298 anonymous contacts during 2018-19 through the 11-18 Counselling Service, C Card, detached youth work, outreach and out of school activities and events, 1,000 more than previous year.
- Current data indicates 1.5% of learners being NEET (9 learners). The all Wales figure has not yet been published.

1.1 Standards and Progress Overall - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

Areas identified for Improvement and Action Required

Foundation Phase

- BG and national averages at LO4+ and LO5+ fell for all performance indicators during the last 2 years with the fall being greater for BG in 2019, increasing the performance gap.
- LO6+ differences between BG and national means in 2019 were greatest for PSD.
- A majority of schools attained lower than target results in 2019 indicating inaccuracy and unreliability within school target setting procedures.
- **There is a need to develop value-added procedures for Reception Year to Y2 in order to determine the progress made by pupils within the Foundation Phase.**

Key Stage 2

- Welsh and Welsh 2nd language outcomes fell to a greater extent in 2019 with the latter having a declining trend during the last 2 years.
- L4+ writing outcomes fell more noticeably in 2019.
- Underperforming schools (for NC assessments) the same as in previous years and these continue to be of concern with regard to pupils' learning and standards achieved.
- FP-KS2 value-added progress in NC language moved below the national figure.
- **A minority of schools had inconsistencies between NC and national test progress scores. This questions the accuracy and reliability of assessment procedures within these centres.**

Key Stage 3

- L5+ outcomes fell in 2019, particularly for maths, science, art, history and geography. All results were lower than the 2019 national means and particularly so for MFL and history. These falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. There is a concern regarding assessment reliability at two of the four LA schools.
- A majority of schools had results below their 2019 targets at both L5+ & L6+. Results also indicate target setting as generally unreliable in schools at KS3 (as in previous years).
- LA-level KS2-3 value-added progress in NC English and maths fell considerably in 2019 and was well below the national figure in both subjects. Progress in NC maths was barely adequate and was unsatisfactory in NC English.
- A significant proportion of pupils regressed more than 10 SAS points in both reading and numeracy reasoning during 2016-19. An inordinate number of these pupils were from one centre.
- Some schools had inconsistencies between NC and national test progress scores. This questions the accuracy and reliability of assessment procedures within these centres.

Key Stage 4

- Results for the new National Measures and in relation to the LA's eFSM entitlement were all lower than the national means.
- The proportion of learners gaining L2+ and 5 A*/A grades in 2019 was below the LA targets and fell by about 2%, well below the national mean.
- L2 maths & numeracy outcomes fell in 3 out of the 4 mainstream schools in 2019.
- Learner outcomes for Tredegar fell in over one-half of performance indicators in 2019.
- KS3-4 value-added progress:
 - declined for both English and maths in nearly all schools during 2017-19 compared with previous years; and
 - for maths was much weaker than for English in all mainstream schools.
- Too many pupils failed to progress (or even regressed) in English and particularly in maths in KS4 during 2017-19. On average, pupils at Abertillery and Brynmawr made no progress or regressed in maths during 2017-19.
- For WG modelled estimates, all residuals were negative except for the Welsh Bacc Skills Challenge result.
- Welsh 2nd language full-course results fell for all grade indicators in 2019 (as was the case nationally) and were lower than the all-Wales figures for higher grade levels.
- The proportion of pupils achieving no qualifications doubled to 2.4% in 2019 and was over twice as high as the all-Wales average.

Post 16

- The proportion of learners attaining higher level grades (A*/A) at both A and AS level has increased in 2019, although is still below the Wales benchmark level so is an area for further improvement.
- There has been a small dip in vocational success rates in 2018-2019 and there is room for improvement at L2 courses, which is currently at 80% completion rate. Success rates across the board, however, remain relatively strong.
- Embed process initiated in October 2019, where Coleg Gwent provides monthly updates on retention rates and specific learner withdrawals.

Risk Considerations

- The risk of failure to continue to make progress on raising educational standards in two schools (ALC and BFS) features in the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) and risk mitigation is monitored by Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and Elected Members via Scrutiny and the Executive Committees.

1.2 Standards and Progress of Specific Groups - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

Foundation Phase

- All LO6+ gender differences were lower than the all-Wales means and particularly so for LLCE.
- Almost one-third of statemented pupils attained LO5+ in LLCE and MD. Both results were higher than the 2018 national means.

Key Stage 2

- L4+gender differences were lower than the all-Wales means.
- Mean progress scores for boys & girls (as NC levels) were higher than expected during KS2. On average, boys had lower FP outcomes in 2015 but made similar NC progress to girls during KS2.
- Boys made greater progress in both reading and numeracy reasoning during 2015-19.
- Mean progress scores (as NC levels) for eFSM & non eFSM pupils were similar to or higher than expected.
- Over one-half of ethnic minority pupils attained L5 in both English and maths. The mean NC levels were higher than for the whole Y6 cohort in 2019 and national test scores in both reading and numeracy reasoning were also higher.
- All but one LAC progressed at least 2 NC levels for language during KS2 and all but 2 did so in maths during 2019.
- The mean NC progress rates for LAC during 2015-19 were similar to those for the whole cohort in both subject areas.

Key Stage 3

- L6+ gender differences were lower than the all-Wales means in each core subject, lower than the previous year for most non-core subjects and lower than the national means for about one-half of non-core subjects. L6+ English results also improved in 2019 with a consequent narrowing of the performance gap compared with national outcomes.
- On average, boys made greater progress in numeracy reasoning than girls during KS3 and so reversed the gender gap.
- eFSM and non-Efsm – 2019:
 - differences were lower than the national averages at both L5+ and L6+;
 - eFSM pupils made greater progress at reading and numeracy, narrowing the performance gap; and
 - Mean progress scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were better than expected.
- Statemented pupils made, on average, very good progress in reading & numeracy reasoning throughout 2016-19.
- All but 2 of the 16 ethnic minority pupils with matched NC results attained L5 or better in English and maths in 2019. Over two-thirds of EM pupils attained L6 or better in both subjects.
- 2 pupils reached L7 in English and 5 did so in maths.

- The mean progress rates for LAC in reading and numeracy reasoning during 2016-19 were notably higher than the whole cohort.

Key Stage 4

- KS3-4 progress for eFSM pupils during 2017-19 was similar to or better than that for non-eFSM pupils.
- MAT pupils made far more progress than the Y11 cohort as a whole in both English language / literacy and in maths / numeracy during 2017-19.
- The proportions of SEN pupils attaining A*-C and A*-G grades in English language and maths was relatively high, much improved compared to previous years and generally similar to those for non-SEN pupils.
- Ethnic minority pupils had similar outcomes and average progress rates to non-EM pupils in English language.
- In English language / literature and in maths / numeracy compared to the whole Y11 cohort:
 - Young offenders generally had higher outcomes;
 - LAC had similar outcomes; and
 - Low attenders had similar or higher outcomes.

1.2 Standards and Progress of Specific Groups - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

Areas identified for improvement and Required Action

Foundation Phase:

- Boys' outcomes continue to be below those of girls in each main performance indicator. However, girls' higher level (LO6+) results have fallen noticeably more than for boys during the last 2 years.
- eFSM pupils had lower outcomes than non-eFSM pupils in nearly all performance indicators in 2019 and the differences generally increased during 2017-19.
- Except for LLCW (attributable to just one Welsh medium school in BG), LO6+ outcomes were lower than for Wales as a whole during the last 4 years.
- BG pupils on SA and SA+ had lower outcomes than those seen nationally (in 2018).

Key Stage 2

- Boys' outcomes continue to be below those of girls in each main performance indicator. While L5+ gender gaps closed in 2019, this was due to girls' results falling more than for boys.
- eFSM pupils had lower outcomes than non-eFSM pupils in all performance indicators in 2019. The differences were higher than the national means for most indicators and increased during 2017-19.
- eFSM pupils made less progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS2.
- About 6% fewer BG pupils attained L5+ in English and about 7% fewer in maths compared to Wales in 2019.
- Only one BG pupil was recorded as attaining L6+ (in English) in 2019.
- About 4% fewer BG pupils attained SAS >115 in reading and about 7% fewer in numeracy reasoning compared to Wales in 2019.

- The proportions of pupils attaining L4 or better in language fell for all SEN groups in 2019. All outcomes were below the 2018 national means.
- SA and SA+ pupils had considerably lower reading scores than non-SEN pupils in 2015 and, on average, made much less progress during KS2.
- SA pupils had considerably lower numeracy reasoning scores than non-SEN pupils in 2015 and, on average, regressed in in this skill area during KS2.

Key Stage 3

- Boys' outcomes continue to be below those of girls in a majority of performance indicators. While L5+ & L6+ gender gaps closed in 2019, this was predominantly due to girls' results falling more than for boys.
- Boys' mean NC progress scores were lower than for the girls in both English & maths.
- Boys made less NC progress than girls in both subjects during KS3 and so widened the gender gap.
- eFSM pupils had lower outcomes than non-eFSM pupils in all performance indicators in 2019 (but the differences were lower than the national means).
- eFSM pupils made less progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS3 and so widened the performance gap.
- L6+ outcomes in maths and particularly science fell during the last 3 years and decreased a little more than that observed nationally.
- About 10% fewer BG pupils attained L6+ in English and in maths compared to Wales in 2019.
- About 7% fewer BG pupils attained L7+ in English and about 12% fewer in maths compared to Wales in 2019.
- Except for stated pupils, SEN results were lower than the 2018 national means.
- On average, SEN pupils made less NC progress than non-SEN pupils during KS3 and particularly so for SA+ pupils in maths.
- On average, SA and SA+ pupils made much less progress in reading and numeracy reasoning than non-SEN pupils during KS3.
- NC and national test scores of young offenders were much lower than mainstream averages. Progress rates were also lower than for mainstream pupils. A significant proportion of YOs failed to progress in either NC English or NC maths during KS3.
- Both NC and national test outcomes were, on average, lower for LAC than for other mainstream pupils.

Key Stage 4

- Boys' outcomes continue to be below those of girls in each main performance indicator. Where the performance gaps between boys and girls narrowed, it was usually due to a fall in girls' outcomes rather than an improvement in those for boys.
- The proportion of pupils attaining 5 A*/A grades fell by about 2% in 2019 and was well below the national mean.
- KS3-4 progress rates for boys and girls in English language / literacy during 2017-19 were just about adequate while those for maths / numeracy were unsatisfactory. The weak progress in maths was a main contributing factor to low school and LA performance at GCSE.
- River Centre pupils had lower outcomes and average progress rates in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy compared to the whole Y11 cohort.
- Ethnic Minority pupils had lower outcomes and KS3-4 progression rates in maths / numeracy than in language. This suggest that support for language development is generally effective at KS4 but that EM pupils may find more difficulty in transposing their language skills within a mathematical context.

Risk Considerations

- The risk of failure to continue to make progress on raising educational standards in two schools (ALC and BFS) features in the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) and risk mitigation is monitored by Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and Elected Members via Scrutiny and the Executive Committees.

1.3 Well-being and Attitudes to Learning - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- Standards of wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good in most primary and secondary schools. High proportions of both primary pupils and their parents expressed positive views about their children's wellbeing in schools.
- All pre-schools and schools participate in effective Healthy School and Pre-School programmes with exemplar work being recognised nationally and there are effective sport and physical activity programmes e.g. swimming programmes with high levels of achievement for learners in place. The proportions of CYP attending sports centres and enjoying PE in school on a weekly basis is higher than the national averages.
- An effective 11-18 counselling service is in place with very positive feedback from attendees, with an extended service for 18-25 year olds.
- BG is one of only a few Councils to have a fully compliant 3rd School Sport Survey to inform more targeted work.
- Three out of four BG secondary schools exceeded the WG modelled figures for attendance in 2018-19.
- Relatively low rate of fixed-term exclusions compared with other LAs in Wales.
- Improving procedures for tracking Children Missing Education (CME).
- An improving trend of increased opportunities for *pupil voice* in BG schools and greater learner participation in decision-making.
- Accredited outcomes for registered young people with the Youth Services are strong and above the Welsh mean.

1.3 Well-being and Attitudes to Learning - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

Attendance and persistent absenteeism - Primary:

- To improve primary school attendance in BG from 94.2% to equate at least to the all-Wales mean of 94.6%.
- To improve primary unauthorised absence in BG from 1.4% to above that of the all-Wales means which is 1.4%.
- To work to reduce PA in the primary sector to well below that of the all-Wales means i.e. Wales= 1.8%, BG=2.0%.

Attendance and persistent absenteeism - Secondary:

- To improve secondary school attendance from 92.9% to 93.8% (all-Wales means).
- To reduce unauthorised absence in the secondary sector in BG from 2.2% to below that of the all-Wales means (1.7%).
- To reduce persistent absenteeism in the secondary sector in BG from 5.0% to below that of the all-Wales means which is 4.6%
- To continue to reduce the numbers of pupils excluded in primary and secondary sectors.
- To continue to improve pupil behaviour in one school in particular and staff response to pupil concerns.

- To further enhance pupil voice activities to inform self-evaluation planning activities.

Risk Considerations

- The risk is that low school attendance has an impact on pupil progression and learning, particularly in light of the COVID-19 emergency.

2.1 Support for school improvement - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- The LA has established a Head of School Improvement and Inclusion post in the new structure to add capacity in this area of work.
- The LA has improved and detailed knowledge of individual, class and school performance particularly in relation to value-added progress.
- Improved coordination of support to schools via good partnership working between the LA and EAS.
- Improved School Categorisation and School Inspection profile over the last 3 years.
- Good outcomes / progress for identified vulnerable groups in recent years.
- The Council is swift in its use of statutory powers which are kept under review.
- The process for the appointment of LA Governors is now well established and there is evidence of improved governance in a majority of schools.

2.1 Support for school improvement - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

- Partnership work between BG Inclusion Services and EAS Challenge Advisers needs to develop further.
- Support to improve early language acquisition and general skill development in the early years.
- Support to improve the effectiveness of learning & teaching of English / reading & maths / numeracy within KS3 & 4 with a particular focus on eFSM pupils and vulnerable groups.
- Support to improve the effectiveness of PDG grant planning and implementation.
- Increasing the number / proportions of learners who achieve higher level outcomes at each key stage, but particularly in the Foundation Phase.
- Support for assessment and target setting procedures within schools, with a particular focus on formative (assessment for learning).
- Increasing opportunities for schools to share good practice.

Risk Considerations

- The risk is that the COVID-19 emergency response has impacted upon learner progression across the board, but particularly in KS4 and early year's skill development e.g. language acquisition.

2.2 Support for Vulnerable Learners - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

Good progress has been made through the comprehensive ALN provision:

- A report to consider Pen-y-Cwm capacity will be presented to Scrutiny Committee in the Spring 2021;
- Readiness for the implementation of the ALN reform to support learners presenting ALN is strong;
- The ALN Service has been established, providing strategic support to the Education Directorate and to schools;
- ASD provision is in place;
- The Service has undergone a review and is being reconfigured to meet the diversity of present need;
- Resource Base provision has improved, particularly for pupils who experience Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD);
- Excellent practice has been secured in Pen-y-Cwm Special School; and
- Estyn judgements in school inspections for care support and guidance remain good or better.

Practice to identify pupil progress using matched data (also for specific pupil groups) is now in its second year and is helping to identify where further improvement in provision is needed, for example:

- in KS3 in particular and in identified schools;
- in the progress rates between KS 3 and KS 4 in English and Maths; and
- to secure improved progress for all vulnerable groups, including eFSM and particularly during and between KS3 and KS4.

2.2 Support for Vulnerable Learners - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

Areas identified for improvement and Required Action

- The quality and effectiveness of support to increase attainment of young pupils in the early years and at the end of the Foundation Phase (particularly eFSM but not solely) needs to improve so that progress rates going forward for these learners is accelerated significantly.
- The quality and effectiveness of support provided for all vulnerable learners needs to improve so that attainment and progress increases significantly both during and between KS3 and 4. The quality of provision and effectiveness of leadership and management of inclusion, in these Key Stages, needs to improve, particularly in identified schools and settings, and for the specific groups in this report.
- Exclusions: Monitoring of pupil level exclusion data by all Inclusion teams has improved and is effective, informing the quality of Officers' work and dialogue with individual schools. The establishment of the Safer Schools Partnership approach is beginning to support improved partnership work which will help reduce exclusions in the longer term. Work is currently focussed on two secondary settings in particular to reduce exclusions.
- Revolving Door Approach: there needs to be effective support in the River Centre provided to pupils presenting with difficult behaviour and those reluctant to attend school. Further developments are needed to develop capacity within mainstream settings to enable pupils to remain in, and return back to their host schools, particularly for KS3 pupils. There is a pre-warning notice letter in place for the school and a service agreement is required between the River Centre and the Council to formalise the arrangements.

- ALN: the LA and EAS need to work more closely to support schools in improving analysis of pupils with SEN who perform below expected levels to ensure that all pupils show good progress in line with their ability from their individual baselines, particularly for those pupils in KS3 at SA and SA +level. Such analyses are to include the impact of targeted interventions
- ALN in Early Years: Panel arrangements are effective in providing support for EY pupils with ALN. However, developing ALN capacity-building in EY is in the early stages of development and needs to be accelerated.
- EHE practice by schools for those on the cusp of EHE needs to be more targeted.
- Young People who offend: all children involved with YOS to have access to 25 hours of education. At KS3 and 4, teachers and schools need to improve levels of support for pupils in line with required improvements for mainstream pupils. Schools and the LA will review their current methodology for SEN categorisation in KS4 to ensure pupils receive the required support necessary for them to attain outcomes aligned to their ability, with a particular emphasis on improving progress and outcomes of pupils in GCSE maths. Ensure the YOS fully implement their Literacy & Numeracy Strategy. Ensure that the recommendations made by ESTYN via their thematic report are fully implemented.
- EPS Service: to secure further improvements in blended working with Children's Services, exploring how the EPS can work more effectively within Early Years settings and with the Early Years ALNLO. Work with colleagues in the wider Inclusion team and regionally to continue to provide support and challenge for schools in line with the ALNET Act. In particular, this will need to look at developing ALNCo's role to become more strategic, while also building the skills of the wider workforce to meet the needs of vulnerable learners. Work to develop more consistent practice within and between schools around behaviour management, in its widest sense, to include a clear focus on the high quality research undertaken by the EPS around SEBD, literacy and assessment as well as developing schools' understanding of the ACEs agenda (with awareness training provided via EAS on a cluster-basis) and further attention to schools supporting the work of their ELSAs.
- Pregnant School Girls and Young Mums: To ensure that as an LA we are made aware of these pupils in a timely basis, so that exclusions, attendance, support and any alternative provisions are monitored and reviewed on a monthly basis and in compliance with the policy.
- Review the Pen-y-Cwm capacity to meet the increasing demand for places.

Risk Considerations

- The strategic risk relates to meeting the increasing demand for places in Pen-y-Cwm and provision at the River Centre.

2.3 Support for Other Services - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- The Council's 21st Century Schools investment objectives are clearly aligned to the Vision for Education in improving educational standards and this is evidenced in a positive Gateway Review in 2019. Preparations for the Band B programme are well structured and deliverable.
- The Youth Service is good, taking account of its statutory duties and meeting them effectively, providing a wide range of universal and targeted opportunities for young people aged 11-25. NEET's levels are at their lowest levels i.e. 1.5% (9 young people). Effective participation structures are embedded across the Youth Service. The Independent 11-18 Counselling Service is very effective. The service is line managed by the Youth Service, which allows a co-ordinated approach to wellbeing between all projects.

- The Council has an enhanced knowledge of school capacity linked to the effective annual monitoring processes that are in place; along with an on-going facilities review/management protocols and effective admissions processes. This is evidenced by the annual review and publication of the School Admissions Policy.
- Strong progress is being made in relation to surplus places reduction, with the Council seeing an overall reduction in both the primary and secondary sectors over the last 6 years; with a continued decrease projected for both primary and secondary over the next 2 years, taking the primary percentage to 11% and secondary to 9%, by the 2021/22 academic year – with the overall combined projected status as 12%. There are very few sufficiency issues within Blaenau Gwent schools at present.
- Blaenau Gwent's Post 16 provision is provided in partnership with Coleg Gwent at the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone in Ebbw Vale. The Learning Zone's Self-Assessment Report (SAR) recognises that there is an effective partnership approach between the Council and Coleg Gwent, which is resulting in improvements to the participation rates of Post 16 learners, a broadening of the learning offer and increasing attainment levels for both academic and vocational learners. The 'A' Level A*-E pass rate is approaching 99% and well above the national average and the vocational learning success rate (retention/attainment) is over 80% against all levels. The ALIS tertiary benchmarking data places the Learning Zone in the top 8% of Post 16 learning institutions for added value across the UK.
- The Council have a highly effective system in place linked to forecasting and monitoring pupil place requirements; this is evidenced pupil projection accuracy, which was at 97% for primary and 94% for secondary during the 2019/20 academic session and has been continually high over the last 3 academic years.
- The Council has good arrangements in place to support the co-ordination of early years, childcare and play to ensure sufficiency. Childcare is a rapidly developing sector in Blaenau Gwent and has grown from 142 registered places in 2002, to 1332 places currently. The sector continues to develop in response to emerging needs.
- The Welsh medium proposal is at Statutory Notice stage (Spring 2021).

2.3 Support for Other Services - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

- The delivery of the WESP targets is dependent upon the Welsh medium seedling proposal.
- The ET and Youth Services are very dependent upon external funding and sustainability is a key consideration. Therefore, continued monitoring of team capacity is required in order to assess capacity requirements and secure/ sustain the positive progression of service priorities. The ESF Inspire funding risk is escalated.
- There is a need to consider the management of the home to school and college transport operations and/or how the Environment/Regeneration and Education Directorates develop procedures, and agreements that are able to more effectively address identified gaps in reviewing the policy.
- A review of online admissions is required, in order to further improve parental engagement with the admissions process, and address the current ineffective online system. A business case is under development, in line with the use of Capita One's online module, which is the system used within current neighbouring and other Councils throughout Wales. This will require investment, which will be beneficial in the long-term and could enhance partnership working and data monitoring with other Council.

Risk Considerations

- There are risks associated with the revenue implications associated with the Youth Services Inspire initiative, which is currently funded through European (ESF) funding.
- Responding to the COVID-19 emergency to ensure that learner progression is maintained in safe and blended learning settings.

3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- The improving School Categorisation and School Inspection profile over the last 3 years demonstrates the increased effectiveness of leaders and managers in Local Government Education Services in Blaenau Gwent.
- The Council considers all evidence and implements its full use of statutory powers, where applicable.
- The impact of good, effective leadership is demonstrated through programme completion for example, the opening of Six Bells. There is strong progress through the 21st Century Schools Band A programme and approval of Band B programme for 2019 to 2025 period.
- Regional leadership is being exercised well by senior officers.
- Appointment of a Corporate Director of Education post during the autumn term 2020. This has been followed with a review of the Education Directorate's structural requirements, including securing school improvement capacity.

3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

- To continue to develop officer expertise through the Professional Learning offer.
- To further develop member led self-evaluation activity across key service areas located within Local Government Education Services, for example via the Scrutiny sub-group looking at wellbeing in schools.
- To continue to develop Member understanding and effectiveness via the Member Development Programme.

Risk Considerations

- There are risks associated with securing appointment to the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion role for the Education Directorate, with recruitment initiated in the Spring term.

3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- The Self-Evaluation Policy (reviewed September 2020) and the SE Toolkit clearly sets out the ongoing cycle for self-evaluation processes and reporting. The FADE approach to writing evaluations is now embedded into routine practice. Processes are totally aligned with corporate

policy. The Education Directorate is confident in its SE processes and their ability to sustain continual improvement. The Council is swift in its action and use of full statutory powers where applicable, to secure the improvement required.

- Partnership working between the Council and the EAS is strong and is subject to significant joint working and quality assurance. Impact evaluations reveal that the EAS and direct work of Challenge Advisers is having a positive impact on outcomes, provision and the quality of leadership. The School Categorisation and School Inspection profile has improved significantly over the last 3 years effectively evidencing the effectiveness of our self-evaluation processes. Improvement has been secured in EFLC (out of SI), in Glyncoed Primary School and to a certain degree in ALC (ESTYN monitoring visit summer term 2019). Progress in ALC will continue to be monitored.
- The Post 16 Partnership Board established formally during the Autumn term 2020.

3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

- To continue to engage Members in meaningful self-evaluation activity, for example the Scrutiny sub-group looking at wellbeing in schools.
- To continue to ensure that business plans bring about the improvement required.
- To continue to engage with a wider stakeholder group when undertaking evaluations, particularly Headteachers and Children and Young people.

Risk Considerations

- The risk is that self-evaluation and improvement planning fails to deliver improved outcomes for learners.

3.3 Professional learning - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- Senior Officers now hold Chair positions across a number of all Wales groups; this supports their ongoing professional development.
- 121 coaching sessions are embedded as routine practice.
- PDR underpinned by an effective 360 process is now also an embedded process. This also includes contributions from Headteachers for senior Officer's PDR i.e. the Corporate Director for Education and Head of Education Transformation.
- New Headteacher and aspiring deputy induction learning offer is in place and led by an experienced Headteacher.

3.3 Professional learning - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

- To engage in more formal evaluations of the impact and effectiveness of CPD for Directorate officers.
- To develop further cost neutral ways in which officers can continue to engage in professional development activity set against a backdrop of Council austerity measures.

Risk Considerations

- The risk is that there is less resources to support professional learning and this impacts on the Directorate and schools' improvement journeys.

3.4 Safeguarding - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- All education services including commissioned services have an up to date safeguarding policy in place, as appropriate the safeguarding policy is cross referenced in other policies
- In all school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils' needs meet statutory requirements
- A review of school inspections for the last three years demonstrated that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirement and give no cause for concern.
- The matrix has been instrumental in collating data on safeguarding
- There is an effective working relationship in place between the Corporate Director for Education, Strategic Safeguarding lead, Deputy Strategic Safeguarding lead, and Professional Lead for Community Safety in discharging the PREVENT duty and emergency planning procedures
- Established and effective systems are in place to monitor vulnerable groups e.g. gypsy traveller, EHE, pregnant mums, MARAC, EHE and monitoring child performance
- The Operation Encompass work has progressed very well and supports schools in this regard.
- The 360-degree safe Cymru Policy has been agreed by the Executive and is in the process of being implemented in all schools
- The training offer for education settings is now embedded as part of a corporate professional learning framework

3.4 Safeguarding - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

- Continue to develop policy and practice that is responsive to emerging school concerns in line with the Vision for Education of school led improvement in a contextual safeguarding approach.
- Digitalisation of the safeguarding matrix to be developed and streamlined to enable greater readability, including the roll-out of MyConcern now that the Council has secured a revenue budget.
- Provide greater flexibility in the training offer to increase the uptake of safeguarding training by school governors with specific reference to the COG and Safeguarding Governor
- Reinvigorate business as usual practices to inform routine business working arrangements such as the collection of data to inform performance reports to Joint Safeguarding Scrutiny

Risk Considerations

- There is a risk that the roll-out of the safeguarding package MyConcern is not implemented fully across the school estate.

3.5 Use of Resources - Areas where good progress has been made and how we know

- The school's Individual Schools Budget (ISB) has been prioritised. Schools have been given a 3.6% uplift for 20/21. Capital has been secured to match fund the 21st Century Schools Programme. Overall, schools have healthy balances across the school estate.
- Strategic Education Improvement Manager and Service Manager for Inclusion now in post and fully functional.
- Staffing review of officers without line management responsibility completed.
- Financial Efficiency Savings: devised, approved and budget agreed for 2019/20. No savings are required for FY 20/21.
- SENCOM Review completed – BG contributed extensively to the review and supports the findings.
- GEMS provide good value for money.
- Arrangements with the regional Education Achievement Service (EAS) provide good value for money.
- There is good engagement of Blaenau Gwent elected members in the governance arrangements of the EAS; thereby effectively holding the EAS to account.
- Use of resources i.e. Education staffing have been significantly streamlined to ensure greater value for money.
- 21st Century Band B Programme has been approved.
- The Education Transformation, Youth Service and Inclusion Services provide good value for money.
- Schools have worked strategically with the Directorate to establish a Premature Retirement Contribution budget for staff terminations.
- Majority of schools have signed up to the 3 year SLA arrangement for support services with the Council.

3.5 Use of Resources - Areas for improvement and how we are going to do it

- The corporate 'Bridging the Gap' programme continues to facilitate greater effectiveness and efficiencies, where available.
- To review the Education Directorate Professional Learning Programme so that it provides an effective, overarching strategy; which links professional learning with the findings of self-evaluation and the broad aims of the Directorate.
- Continue to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of staff professional learning on outcomes, wellbeing, provision and the quality of leadership of LGES e.g. FADEs.
- The viability of other SEWC regional services needs to be kept under close review to ensure sustainability and value for money going forward.
- Schools' deficit balances in the secondary sector have increased in one school and needs to be kept under close review going forward; timely support to be provided by the LA through the ALC Corporate Group.

- To escalate the risk level for Youth Service’s funding position as ESF comes to an end in 2022. The Shared Prosperity Fund is being explored.
- There will need to be close monitoring and support for schools predicting surplus and deficit budgets, particularly for the two all-through schools.
- Effective monitoring of the out of county placement revenue budget is required.
- Facilitating robust Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and partnership arrangements with key partners, such as the EAS to ensure effective and sustainable provision for schools.

Risk Considerations

- The revenue financial position of Education is likely to be impacted by the continued response to the COVID-19 arrangements.

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