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THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND

15th September 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Executive Committee will be a Hybrid Meeting - Via MS Teams/Abraham Derby Room at the General Offices, Ebbw Vale (if you would like to attend please contact committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk) on Wednesday, 22nd September, 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 7 - 22

To consider the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 21st July, 2021.

5. SPECIAL EXECUTIVE 23 - 28

To consider Minutes of the Special Executive held on 26th July, 2021.

6. SPECIAL EXECUTIVE 29 - 32

To consider the Minutes of the Special Executive held on 1st September, 2021.

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8. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 10TH NOVEMBER, 2021 35 - 40

To receive the report.

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10. **ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE 2020/21** 45 - 102
- To consider the report of the Service Manager Performance and Democratic.

DECISION ITEMS - EDUCATION MATTERS

11. **HOME TO SCHOOL AND POST 16 TRANSPORT POLICY REVIEW 2022 - 2023** 103 - 146
- To consider the report of the Corporate Director Education.
12. **EDUCATION ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN REVIEW** 147 - 186
- To consider the report of the Corporate Director Education.
13. **INCLUSION STRATEGY AND REVIEW (2021-2022)** 187 - 192
- To consider the report of the Corporate Director Education.

DECISION ITEMS – REGENERATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

14. **INVESTMENT IN MICRO-HYDRO DEVELOPMENT** 193 - 214
- To consider the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.
15. **PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY APPROACH – TOWN CENTRES** 215 - 224
- To consider the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.

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16. **COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING (APRIL-JUNE 2021)** 225 - 238

To consider the report of the Chief Officer Commercial and Customer

17. **COMMERCIAL STRATEGY QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING (APRIL-JUNE 2021)** 239 - 250

To consider the report of the Chief Officer Commercial and Customer.

18. **SICKNESS ABSENCE PERFORMANCE 2020/21** 251 - 260

To consider the report of the Head of Organisational Development.

MONITORING ITEMS - EDUCATION

19. **EDUCATION SERVICES – MAIN SELF-EVALUATION REPORT (SER)** 261 - 420

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Education.

20. **SAFEGUARDING SELF-EVALUATION OUTCOMES** 421 - 434

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Education.

MONITORING ITEMS – REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

21. **REGENERATION & DEVELOPMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT** 435 - 462

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

22. **PROGRESS UPDATE ON DECARBONISATION PLAN** 463 - 522

To consider the report of the Managing Director.

MONITORING ITEM - SOCIAL SERVICES

23. **UPDATE ON STRATEGY TO SAFELY REDUCE THE NUMBERS OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER** 523 - 530

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Social 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

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

SUBJECT: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 21ST JULY, 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
 Head of Regeneration
 Head of Community Services
 Head of Organisational Development
 Chief Accountant
 Service Manager – Young People and Partnerships
 Head of School Improvement and Inclusion
 Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance
 Press Officer

AND: Mr. P. Sykes, Aneurin Leisure Trust

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
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>No apologies for absence were received.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest and dispensations raised.</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 9th June, 2021.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd June, 2021.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	

DECISION ITEMS – CORPORATE SERVICES

No. 6

**PROPOSED EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2021-2022**

Consideration was given to the report of the Leader of the Council.

RESOLVED that the Executive Forward Work Programme 2021-2022 be presented to the July Executive.

No. 7

GRANTS TO ORGANISATIONS

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

The following grants were received following publication of the report:-

ABERTILLERY

Abertillery Ward - Councillor N. Daniels

1.	Old Tyleryans RFC	£100.00
2.	Abertillery Belles FC	£100.00
3.	Bishop Street Allotments	£70.00
4.	Adam Street Allotments	£70.00
5.	Abertillery Senior Netball Club	£70.00
6.	Tillery Dragons Junior Netball	£70.00
7.	Abertillery BG RFC	£100.00
8.	Abertillery Cricket Club	£100.00
9.	Abertillery Town Band	£100.00
10.	Abertillery Bluebirds FC	£100.00
11.	Abertillery Ladies Orpheus	£70.00
12.	Abertillery Excelsiors FC	£100.00
13.	Abertillery Excelsiors Juniors FC	£100.00
14.	Ebbw Fach Choir	£70.00

Llanhilleth Ward - Councillor N. Parsons

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|------|
| 1. | Llanhilleth & District Bowls Club | £100 |
| 2. | Abertillery Excelsiors AFC | £100 |

Six Bells Ward - Councillor D. Hancock

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 1. | Six Bells Tenants & Residents Association | £100 |
|----|---|------|

EBBW VALE**Beaufort Ward - Councillor G. Thomas & S. Healy**

- | | | |
|----|--|------|
| 1. | Chair of the Council's Charity Appeal | £100 |
| 2. | Beaufort Tenants and Residents Association | £500 |
| 3. | Raglan Terrace WOAP | £100 |
| 4. | Beaufort Hill Ponds & Woodlands Preservation Soc | £100 |
| 5. | Beaufort Male Choir | £100 |
| 6. | Beaufort hill Primary School | £150 |
| 7. | Ebbw Vale Works Museum | £100 |

Cwm Ward - Councillor G. Davies & D. Bevan

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------------------|------|
| 1. | Cwm Lighting Committee | £500 |
| 2. | New Cwm Institute | £500 |
| 3. | Cwm Livestock Society | £200 |
| 4. | Cwm Boxing Club | £200 |
| 5. | Cwm Scouts | £200 |
| 6. | Cwm Weightlifting Club | £200 |
| 7. | TK's & Community Group | £300 |
| 8. | Cwm Pigeon Club | £200 |
| 9. | Cwm British Legion Poppy Appeal | £200 |
| 10. | Cwm Primary School PTA | £200 |
| 11. | Waunllwyd & Victoria Events | £500 |
| 12. | Waunllwyd OAP | £300 |
| 13. | Waunllwyd Youth & Community Club | £300 |
| 14. | RTB Football Club Junior Section | £200 |
| 15. | Tirzah Baptist Church | £100 |

	<p>RESOLVED accordingly.</p> <p>FURTHER RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing that the report be accepted and the information contained therein noted.</p>	
<p>No. 8</p>	<p><u>WORKFORCE STRATEGY 2021-2026</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development.</p> <p>The Head of Organisational Development spoke to the report which provided the Executive with the opportunity to consider and challenge the draft Workforce Strategy 2021-2026. The Officer outlined the key points of the report and referred to Appendix 1 which detailed the Draft Strategy.</p> <p>In response to a question raised, it was confirmed that the action plan would be monitored through Corporate Overview and Executive.</p> <p>The Leader also asked how the consistency of the workforce engagement would be monitored. The Head of Organisational Development advised that the first year was focussed on agile working, and there is a dedicated engagement plan to support. This included webinars for managers and workshops to engage staff - the processes would be monitored/ discussed by the Corporate Leadership Team. There is also a Corporate Communication Plan which includes a dedicated element for staff. The Officer added that the processes in place would continue to be reviewed and there was an annual review of the agile working arrangements which would engage the workforce.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the proposed draft Workforce Strategy 2021-2026 be supported prior to be presented to Council for endorsement (Option 1).</p>	

**DECISION ITEM –
REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS**

No. 9

COMMUNITY MUNICIPAL INVESTMENT

Consideration was given to the report of the Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities.

The Head of Regeneration provided a detailed overview of the report which sought approval to take forward Community Energy Investment as a financial instrument to fund low carbon energy generation infrastructure and technology to provide energy and heat to Blaenau Gwent residents and businesses.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development welcomed the report and noted that this was the initial stage of the pilot and overtime further reports would be presented to inform the Executive how the programme was progressing. The Executive Member stated that one of the major costs to residents and businesses was energy and this pilot looked to reduce these overheads, therefore the investment in renewable energy and how energy was produced was key to the Authority. This was an excellent investment opportunity for residents and businesses and the Executive Member hoped that this project would secure energy savings going forward.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1; namely - proceed with Launching a Community Bond:-

- a) Proceed with the SocialRes Project and work towards development of a Community Bond offer.
- b) This would include undertaking initial due diligence of the legal agreements and overall approach but funding was available through abundance in order to carry out the required evaluation
- c) By pursuing Option 1 the Council would gain access to lower cost, financial investment to support with development of pipeline projects outlined in the Energy Prospectus 2019.
- d) This could be used to replace or alongside Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) funding. If the pilot was successful further bond offers could be considered in the future.

	<u>DECISION ITEM – EDUCATION MATTERS</u>	
No. 10	<u>LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION SERVICES SAFEGUARDING POLICY</u> Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education. RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the draft policy as presented be approved (Option 1).	
	<u>DECISION ITEMS – ENVIRONMENT MATTERS</u>	
No. 11	<u>COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER – DEIGHTON FIELD & SIRHOWY GARDENS, TREDEGAR – TREDEGAR TOWN COUNCIL</u> Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services. RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the transfer of the two areas on a 99-year lease with no break clause be permitted (Option 3).	
No. 12	<u>POSITION REPORT – STRAYING ANIMALS</u> Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services. The Head of Community Services provided a detailed overview of the report and reported issues of straying animals within the County Borough. The Head of Community outlined the scale of the issue and locations where problems were frequently reported. The Head of Community Services also referred to the Action Plan which had been developed in conjunction with officers and stakeholders to resolve incidents. It was advised that the report was a multi-departmental report and the Action Plan clearly set out those responsible for each action. The Head of Community Services informed that the Community Services Scrutiny Committee had supported Option 2 and raised points which was included in the Action Plan. The Scrutiny Committee also asked that cost implications be reported to monitor the costs of the scheme.	

The Executive Member for Environment stated that this was a position statement, a starting point in an attempt to resolve the issues of straying animals across the Borough.

The Executive Member added that the Scrutiny Committee was keen to be involved in the process and although formal meetings had not taken place due to the pandemic, the Executive Member informed that she had met with individuals informally to discuss various concerns. These meetings are key and the Executive Member was keen to recommence meetings with Members going forward.

The Leader noted that the Executive had been involved in the Working Group and was aware of the good work being pursued across the Council and welcomed the commitment of the Executive Member to address these issues.

The Deputy Leader concurred with the comments raised and noted that these were concerns regularly raised by residents. The Deputy Leader welcomed the action plan and the commitment of the Executive Member.

The Executive Member for Social Services further concurred with the comments raised and thanked the Executive Member for Environment on the progress made in relation to straying animals across Blaenau Gwent.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive made recommendations for changes to the approach/Action Plan as set out in the report be approved (Option 2).

CHANGE OF AGENDA ORDER

MONITORING ITEMS – EDUCATION

No. 19 ANEURIN LEISURE TRUST PERFORMANCE AND MONITORING REPORT (APRIL 2020 – MARCH 2021)

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

The Service Manager – Young People and Partnership outlined the performance of the Aneurin Leisure Trust and clarified the future performance monitoring arrangements in place between the Trust and Council. The Service Manager noted the work which had been prioritised since April and the response to Covid-19. In terms of monitoring performance, the Service Manager referred the Executive to the visual scorecard which had been developed by the Trust. The current reporting arrangements, along with the new governance structure would ensure that the performance of the Trust was transparent and accountable. The reports would be presented to CLT, Scrutiny Committee, Executive and the new Joint Strategic Partnership Group on a six monthly basis.

The Service Manager further advised that the working relationship between the Council and Aneurin Leisure Trust had greatly improved during phase 2 of the review. This positive working relationship had continued to improve throughout lockdown into the re-opening phase. This had been enhanced through the weekly structured meetings between the link officer and senior managers in the Trust during the first six months of lockdown.

The Leader welcomed Mr. P. Skyes, Aneurin Leisure Trust to the Executive and Mr. Sykes welcomed the working arrangements between the Trust and Education.

The Executive Member for Education wished to thank the Trust for their hard work and support given to the Council during the last 18 months. The Executive Member looked forward to building on the relationship with the Trust as the Council and the Trust moved forward into more business as usual working arrangements.

	<p>The Leader concurred with the comments raised and commended the Trust on the work undertaken as the facilities within sports centres, libraries and adult education centres were excellent. The Leader welcomed the enhanced working relationship between the Council and Trust which was an example of positive partnership working.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted along with the annual performance and the proposals for future reporting arrangements (Option 1).</p>	
No. 18	<p><u>EDUCATION DIRECTORATE – RECOVERY AND RENEWAL PLAN</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted, associated documentation and proposed course of action (Option 1).</p>	
No. 20	<p><u>IMPROVING SCHOOLS PROGRAMME 2021</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion spoke to the report which provided an overview of the schools that had been inspected, including schools that had presented as a cause for concern, their progress and the work delivered or currently underway to continue to support their improvement.</p> <p>The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion further noted to the process for school categorisation which had not taken place since 2020 and referred to Appendix 1 which identified the significant process made in schools during recent times.</p> <p>The Executive Member for Education welcomed the overall progress made in relation to schools causing concerns. There had been positive progress made in Sofrydd Primary School, Abertillery Learning Community and Brynmawr Foundation School and the Executive Member felt the actions taken with concerns at the River Centre was more than appropriate at this stage.</p>	

The Leader concurred with the comments raised which echoed discussions with the EAS in terms of schools in Blaenau Gwent.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and information contained therein be noted (Option 2).

MONITORING ITEMS – CORPORATE SERVICES

No. 13 END OF YEAR 2020/21 FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager Performance and Democratic.

The Head of Organisational Development referred to recent discussions at the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee in relation to sickness absence. The Officer wished to provide an update on the end of year figure which was 11.67 days taken per employee which was a decrease in 2.24 days per employee compared to the previous year. This was an improved position. The Head of Organisational Development added that if Covid-19 related sickness was removed from the figure it would be 9.98 days per employee. This being a further reduction of 1.69 days. The Head of Organisational Development added that a report reviewing sickness absenteeism performance would be presented to Corporate Overview in the Autumn.

The Leader noted the improved performance, however there was further progress to be made and asked how the Executive could be assured that there was a consistent approach to monitoring sickness absenteeism.

In response, it was reported that quarterly monitoring reports were presented to the Corporate Leadership Team and these reports would then be considered at their respective Departmental Meetings. During the last year the sickness levels had been regularly reviewed and OD colleagues had assisted managers in the process. The Head of Organisational Development suggested that monitoring and consistency would feature as part of the sickness absenteeism report.

The Managing Director reiterated that sickness absence was monitored quarterly by the Corporate Leadership Team to ensure a consistent appropriate was being undertaken, particularly in relation to long terms absences. The Managing Director had hoped that the improvements made could be built upon going forward to further reduce the sickness absenteeism across the organisation.

The Managing Director further referred to the report which detailed end of year performance and stated that it had been a year like no other. During Quarter 1 the Authority had been severely impacted by the pandemic with major changes for staff and schools. The Managing Director wished to express thanks to all staff who had shown outstanding commitment during the pandemic. Also, the Managing Director referred to the strong partnerships which had been formed with the Trust and Tai Calon as well as the wider across Gwent. It was hoped that these partnerships would be continued.

The Leader echoed the comments raised and expressed thanks to everyone across the organisation. The Leader also referred to the pace in which the changes had been made and it was hoped that this pace would also be continued.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 1).

**MONITORING ITEMS –
REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**No. 14 DEVELOPMENT OF BUSINESS ENERGY MODEL TO ENABLE
BUSINESS PARKS TO ACHIEVE NET ZERO OUTCOMES**

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

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

<p>No. 15</p>	<p><u>COVID-19 RECOVERY – ECONOMY</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and any additional avenues of engagement and/or actions be endorsed (Option 1).</p>	
	<p><u>MONITORING ITEMS – ENVIRONMENT</u></p>	
<p>No. 16</p>	<p><u>FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (2016- 2022)</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the progress made over the previous 12 months be noted (Option 1).</p>	
<p>No. 17</p>	<p><u>LOCAL AIR QUALITY PROGRESS REPORT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the content of the 2019 Air Quality Progress Report for Blaenau Gwent CBC in relation to the continued monitoring and ongoing review of air quality within Blaenau Gwent by the Environmental Health Section in fulfilment of the Authority’s statutory duties in compliance with Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 be noted.</p>	

MONITORING ITEM - SOCIAL SERVICES

No. 21

SAFEGUARDING PERFORMANCE INFORMATION FOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND EDUCATION – 1ST APRIL TO 31ST MARCH 2021

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

The Corporate Director Social Services referred to the report which provided safeguarding performance during the first 12 months of pandemic and assured the Executive that the safeguarding process and visits had continued through the pandemic to ensure that children were kept as safe as possible the same as every other year.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the approach and information detailed in the report be noted (Option 1).

EXEMPT ITEMS

DECISION ITEMS – ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

No. 23

CENTRE OF OPERATIONS - PROJECT UPDATE AND OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE

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.

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>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community 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 2 as detailed in the report be approved.</p>	
No. 24	<p><u>ADDITIONAL HIGHWAYS MAINTENANCE WORKS 2021 – 2022</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 Head of Community 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 2 as detailed in the report be approved.</p>	

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

SUBJECT: SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – 26TH JULY, 2021

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

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

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

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

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

WITH: Managing Director
Corporate Director Education
Corporate Director Social Services
Chief Officer Resources
Chief Officer Commercial
Head of Community Services
Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance
Communications and Marketing Manager

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>An apology for absence was received from Councillor D. Davies.</p>	
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest and dispensations raised.</p>	
	<p><u>MONITORING ITEMS – CORPORATE SERVICES</u></p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING – 2020/2021 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>The Leader advised the reports had been considered at the Joint Scrutiny Committee and asked the Chief Officer Resources to provide an update of discussions from the meeting.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Resources outlined the report which updated the Executive on the provisional outturn against revenue budget for the financial year 2020/2021 across all portfolios. The Chief Officer noted the table which indicated that the provisional outturn was lower than the budget by £2.639m across all services. This was after an initial net contribution to specific reserves of £8.5m. It was added that in reviewing the year end position, and in support of the Council’s financial resilience, a further transfer to earmarked reserves of £1.2m had been made with the balance of £1.4m transferring to General reserves. The Chief Officer advised that due to the continued response and the recovery to be taken forward with regard to the pandemic additional reserves had been allocated.</p> <p>The Chief Officer spoke to the report detailing the hardship funding the Authority had received from Welsh Government, Covid support payments made to schemes which had been administered by the Authority on behalf of Welsh Government and summarised the favourable and adverse variances across all portfolios.</p>	

The Chief Officer Resources pointed out the provisional outturn indicated that school balances increased to £3.7m with only one school currently in a deficit position and reported that schools had seen a similar impact on their budget as the Council during the pandemic and additional funding had been being provided by Welsh Government. This funding supported schools in their response to Covid-19, however, the Chief Officer added that this was a one-year benefit and did not answer the ongoing cost pressures the school and Council would face in ongoing years.

The Chief Officer Resources further spoke to the report and provided an overview of the Bridging the Gap Programme.

The Chief Officer Resources noted discussions at the Joint Budget Scrutiny Committee and advised that a request had been made by Members that future reports so Members could understand the impact of Welsh Government funding received against specific budgets. It was reported that at present the information was detailed against respective Portfolios, therefore this amendment to would be made going forward. The Chief Officer added that the Committee had agreed to recommend the preferred Option 1,

The Leader welcomed the report and outturn figure for the year which had been challenging across the public sector. The Leader felt that the Authority and other authorities had handled the situation very well and was pleased to report this position.

The Leader added that over the last few years, building on the Council's financial resilience was key for this administration and it was felt that this report positioned the Authority well to deal with any risks that may arise. There were areas which need to be looked at and adverse variance addressed and the Leader reported that he was happy to take this forward with the respective Portfolio Holder and Chief Officer Resources. However, there was no major area of concern and there was mitigating circumstances for the adverse variances which was no reason for concern.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the appropriate challenge to the financial outcomes in the report was provided (Option 1).

<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING, PROVISIONAL OUTTURN FOR 2020/2021 FINANCIAL YEAR (AS AT 31ST MARCH 2021)</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Resources provided the Executive with an overview of each Portfolio’s provisional outturn capital expenditure against funding approvals for the 2020/2021 financial year. The Chief Officer reported that the overall provisional financial position as at 31st March, 2021 indicated a £161k underspend against a total in year capital budget of £17.78m and detailed the short and long term impact on the budget as outlined in the report.</p> <p>With regard to the Joint Budget Scrutiny Committee discussions, the Chief Officer Resources reported that discussions had been around the overspending areas and confirmed that concerns had been addressed.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the appropriate challenge to the financial outcomes in the report. Was provided; and b) the appropriate financial control procedures agreed by Council continue to be supported; and c) the budgetary control and monitoring procedures in place within the Capital Team, to safeguard Authority funding be noted. 	
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>USE OF GENERAL AND EARMARKED RESERVES 2020/2021</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Resources spoke to the report which detailed information in relation to the draft outturn reserves position for 2020/2021. It was noted that the overall level of both general & specific/earmarked reserves had increased during the year from £14.7m to £28.6m, an increase of £13.9m and the Chief Officer noted the factors which had contributed to the increase.</p>	

The Chief Officer Resources advised that the position of reserves provided a buffer to deal with unexpected future issues. The significant elements of the earmarked sums related to grant funding held in respect of specific projects or services that would be utilised in delivering the relevant service outcomes. The Chief Officer anticipated that in future years it was probable that there would be restrictions on public spending in order to mitigate the extraordinary levels of borrowing incurred by Central Government in dealing with Covid-19. The Chief Officer felt that it was prudent to retain the appropriate levels of earmarked and general reserves to assist with such a funding situation that potentially could be similar to that experienced during the last decade during the years of austerity.

The Chief Officer Resources reported that the Joint Scrutiny Committee understood the need to maintain good prudence going forward in respect of reserves to ensure good financial resilience of the Council.

The Leader advised that there was regular monitoring of reserves by respective portfolio holders and collectively by the Executive. The monitoring of reserves had been enhanced in the last few years which had strengthened the financial resilience of the Council. The level of reserves had not been nowhere near where they should be and although current levels are more favourable further work was needed to ensure the Authority was in a better position for the future. The Leader concurred that at some point in time the monies distributed to Welsh Government and other governments from Central Government would need to be addressed, however Leader had hoped that it would not be as severe as austerity years and the responsible politicians must do all they can to ensure that going forward the Authority was prepared to cater for future budgets.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and

- a) considered the use of general and earmarked reserves during 2020/2021;
- b) the significant increase in general and earmarked reserves as a result of the exceptional circumstances in the 2020/2021 financial year be noted;

- c) the draft outturn position of the General Reserve at £7.820m represents 5.78% of net revenue expenditure, above the 4% target level be noted;
- d) the need for ongoing prudent financial management given the potential for future public spending restrictions required to fund the impact of Covid-19 be considered; and
- e) the continued challenge to budget overspends was given and implement appropriate service Action Plans, where required.
- f) The maintenance of usable reserves at an adequate level was crucial to the Council being able to meet future liabilities arising from risks for which specific provision has not been made.

No. 7

BRIDGING THE GAP (BTG) PROGRAMME 2021/2022

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

The Chief Officer Resources spoke to the report which provided an update on the Strategic Business Reviews, including the provisional outturn for 2020/2021 and latest assessment of the financial achievement for 2021/22 onwards. The Chief Officer Resources advised that the Programme would continue to be reviewed to ascertain any changes in the assumptions. If there was a need for such changes these would be reflected in the Medium Term Financial Strategy and be presented to Members in the autumn.

The Chief Officer Resources noted the questions raised in the Joint Budget Scrutiny Committee which had been addressed.

The Leader noted the report and advised that the next report to be considered alongside the Medium Term Financial Strategy would be key to the Bridging the Gap Programme. The Leader had hoped the report would provide a full understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on the planned strategic business reviews and welcomed any new streams to be considered.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the appropriate challenge to the Bridging the Gap programme was provided (Option 1).

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

**SUBJECT: SPECIAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE –
1st SEPTEMBER, 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: Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services
Chief Accountant
Chief Officer Commercial & Customer
Head of School Improvement and Inclusion
Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance**

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
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>The following apologies for absence were received:-</p> <p>Managing Director Corporate Director Education Head of Organisational Development</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest and dispensations raised.</p>	
	<p><u>DECISION ITEM – EDUCATION MATTERS</u></p>	
No. 4	<p><u>PROPOSAL TO CONSULT ON AN INCREASE IN CAPACITY AT PEN Y CWM SPECIAL SCHOOL</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion advised that the report provided the outcomes of the statutory notice/objection period in relation to the proposal to increase the capacity at Pen y Cwm Special School. The report also detailed the next steps as part of the statutory processes which was required in line with the School Organisation Code and the associated decision making processes. The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion further spoke to the report and provided an overview of the statutory notice period outcomes and the consultation process.</p> <p>The Executive Member welcomed the report which would benefit the children and young people of Blaenau Gwent who access Pen y Cwm Special School.</p>	

The Executive supported the report and it was felt that Pen y Cwm Special School was a much needed facility which benefited Blaenau Gwent and wider communities as well as ensuring that local children and young people were able to access such an excellent facility in Blaenau Gwent.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and agreed the associated documents to 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). (Option 1)

DECISION ITEMS - CORPORATE SERVICES MATTERS

No. 5

REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL ANNUAL LEAVE DAY FOR WORKFORCE

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development.

The Chief Officer Commercial & Customer advised that the report sought agreement from the Executive of a request made by the Joint Trade Unions (Unison, GMB and Unite) to grant an additional day's leave for the workforce (other than those staff employed by schools), as a one off, for 31st December, 2021. The Chief Officer added that the Joint Trade Unions had raised the proposal at the consultation meeting with the Corporate Leadership Team and the Executive on the 28th July, 2021. The Joint Trade Unions felt that an additional day's leave would acknowledge the excellent work carried out by staff in response to the Covid 19 pandemic.

The Leader welcomed the report and reiterated that the Joint Trade Unions had put this request forward to Executive and CLT which was readily agreed as it was an appropriate way for the Council to acknowledge the outstanding work which had been undertaken during the pandemic.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Executive supported the Trade Union's request and granted the 31st December, 2021 (this year only) as an additional day's leave for the workforce (other than those staff employed by schools). (Option 1).

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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: **September, 2021**

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

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, events and invitations for consideration and determination by the Executive.

2. Scope of the Report

2.1 Wales Festival of Remembrance 2021 6th November, 2021

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

2.2 Reserve and Cadets Association for Wales Event 7th October, 2021

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

2.3 Merchant Navy Day 2nd September, 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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Agenda Item 8

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 13.09.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**

Report Subject: **Forward Work Programme – 10th November 2021**

Portfolio Holder: **All Portfolio Holders**

Report Submitted by: **Cllr Nigel Daniels, Leader / Executive Member
Corporate 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)
X	x	07.09.21				22.09.21		

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 To present the Executive Forward Work Programme for the Meeting on 22nd September 2021.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 The Executive Work Programme is a key aspect of the Council's planning and governance arrangements and supports the requirements of the Constitution.
 - 2.2 The topics set out in the Work Programme link to the strategic work of the Council as identified by the Council's Corporate Plan, corporate documents and supporting business plans.
 - 2.3 All Scrutiny Committees and the Council Forward Work Programmes have been aligned to the Executive Forward Work Programme.
 - 2.4 As the document is fluid there is flexibility to allow for regular review between the Chair and the Committee.
3. **Options for Recommendation**
 - 3.1 **Option 1**
To agree the Forward Work Programme as presented for the Meeting on 10th November 2021.
 - 3.2 **Option 2**
To suggest any amendments prior to agreeing the Forward Work Programme.

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Executive Committee Forward Work Programme

Executive Meeting Date: Wednesday 10th November 2021

Report Submission Deadline Date to Liz Thomas: Tuesday 19th October 2021

*Reports received after this date will be included on the next agenda of Executive

Decision: 4 Items
Monitoring: 19 Items
Information: 3 Items

Report Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Scrutiny Meeting Date	Council Meeting Date
DECISION ITEMS				
Portfolio: Leader / Corporate Services				
Grants to Organisations	Approval To agree the Grants to Organisations.	Rhian Daly	N/A	N/A
Welsh Language Promotion Strategy	Decision Policy review and development.	Andrew Parker	Corporate Overview - 22.10.21	N/A
Portfolio: Deputy Leader / Regeneration and Economic Development				
Tredegar Place Making Plan	Decision To approve the proposals for placemaking in Tredegar.	Amy Taylor	Regeneration – 03.11.21	N/A
Ebbw Vale Placemaking Plan	Decision To approve the proposals for placemaking in Ebbw Vale.	Amy Taylor	Regeneration - 03.11.21	N/A
MONITORING ITEMS				
Portfolio: Environment				
Community Services Directorate Performance report	Performance Monitoring Members to monitor the performance of the Directorate.	Richard Crook Clive Rogers	Community Services – 04.10.21	N/A
Waste and Recycling Performance 2020/21	Performance Monitoring Members to monitor the performance.	Matthew Stent	Community Services – 04.10.21	N/A
Portfolio: Leader / Corporate Services				
Medium Term Financial Strategy / Bridging the Gap	Performance Monitoring To provide Members with an update on the MTFS / Bridging the Gap programme.	Rhian Hayden Bernadette Elias	Corporate Overview – 22.10.21	Council 25.11.21

Report Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Scrutiny Meeting Date	Council Meeting Date
COVID 19 Recovery - Workforce	Performance Monitoring To ensure that Members are aware of arrangements to support the workforce recovery and renewal activity from the pandemic and to monitor progress.	Andrea Prosser	Corporate Overview – 22.10.21	N/A
Revenue Budget Monitoring 2021/22	Budget Monitoring To provide members with an expenditure forecast at the end of quarter 1 across all portfolios for 2021/22.	Rhian Hayden	Joint Budget – 27.09.21	N/A
Forecast Capital Expenditure 2020/21	Budget Monitoring To provide details of each portfolio's forecast capital expenditure against allocation at the end of quarter 1	Rhian Hayden	Joint Budget – 27.09.21	N/A
Forecast of General and Earmarked Reserves	Budget Monitoring To present report at the end of quarter 1 detailing the actual and forecast use of general and ear marked reserves.	Rhian Hayden	Joint Budget – 27.09.21	N/A
Portfolio: Education				
Provisional KS4 School Performance	Performance Monitoring To provide a summary of performance in line with accountability changes to ensure that children and young people achieve in line with expectations, particularly at KS4.	Luisa Munro-Morris/Michelle Jones	Education and Learning – 19.10.21	N/A
Education Directorate Recovery and Renewal	Performance Monitoring To ensure that Members are aware of arrangements to support schools and learners to recovery from the pandemic and to monitor progress (Summer term 2021 progress on an agreed theme).	Luisa Munro-Morris / Claire Gardner/ Michelle Jones	Education and Learning – 19.10.21	N/A
Improving Schools and School Inspections	Performance Monitoring To provide Members with an update on any inspection report findings (when available) and progress within schools which a school causing concern or subject to Council intervention. (Overview 2020/21 academic year)	Lynn Phillips/ Luisa Munro Morris / Michelle Jones	Education and Learning – 19.10.21	N/A
MyConcerns	Performance Monitoring To provide members with an overview of the MyConcerns model and the progress made to date in its implementation	Michelle Jones	Joint Safeguarding – 23.09.21	N/A

Report Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Scrutiny Meeting Date	Council Meeting Date
Prevent Action Plan and Thematic Review	Monitoring To provide members with an overview of the work undertaken to mainstream Counter Terrorism's Prevent Extremism objectives in respect of Local Government Education Settings.	Helena Hunt	Joint Safeguarding – 23.09.21	N/A
Keeping Learners Safe	Monitoring To provide members with an overview of the revised keeping learners safe guidance, how it is discharged and how the LA assures itself that the safeguarding arrangements across LGES settings give no cause for concern.	Michelle Jones Sarah Dixon Helena Hunt	Joint Safeguarding – 23.09.21	N/A
Portfolio: Deputy Leader / Regeneration and Economic Development				
Lime Avenue Business Units and Box Works Closure report	Performance Monitoring Members to receive the closure report.	Nick Landers	Regeneration – 03.11.21	N/A
Aneurin Bevan report	Decision To approve the report findings.	Owen Ashton / Moe Forouzan	Regeneration - 03.11.21	N/A
Portfolio: Social Services				
Children's and Community Grant	Budget Monitoring Provide update on the CCG	Tanya Evans	Social Services – 07.10.21	N/A
Developing a BG MYST Team	Monitoring Provide update on the development of a BG MYST Team	Tanya Evans	Social Services – 07.10.21	N/A
COVID 19 Recovery - Community	Performance Monitoring To ensure that Members are aware of arrangements to support the community recovery and renewal activity from the pandemic and to monitor progress.	Michelle Church / Ceri Bird	Social Services – 07.10.21	N/A
Director of Social Services Quarter 1 and 2 update	Performance Monitoring Members to receive the quarterly update of the Director of Social Services Annual report.	Damien McCann	Social Services – 07.10.21	N/A
INFORMATION ITEMS				

Report Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Scrutiny Meeting Date	Council Meeting Date
Annual Health and Safety Report	Information To provide an update on performance of the Annual Health and Safety report.	Andrea Prosser	Corporate Overview – 22.10.21	N/A
STEM Programme	Information To provide information on the programme.	Beth McPherson	Regeneration – 03.11.21	N/A
Kickstart Employment Placement	Information To provide information on the programme. Members.	Beth McPherson	Regeneration – 03.11.21	N/A

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

REPORT SUBJECT: GRANTS TO ORGANISATIONS – 22nd Sept 2021

REPORT AUTHOR: RHIAN HAYDEN

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

ABERTILLERY

Abertillery Ward – Councillor M. Cook

1.	Abertillery Bowls Club	£100
2.	Abertillery Junior Bowls Club	£100
3.	Old Tyleryan RFC	£100
4.	Pan y Pwdyn Allotment Association	£100
5.	Abertillery BG RFC	£100
6.	Shore Mixed Martial Arts	£100
7.	Ebbw Fach Choir	£100
8.	Friends of Six Bells Park	£100
9.	Abertillery Museum Society	£50
10.	Cwmtillery Racing Pigeon Club	£50
11.	Bishop Street Allotments	£50
12.	Adam Street Allotments	£50
13.	Abertillery Town Band	£100
14.	Abertillery Excelsiors AFC	£100
15.	Six Bells Bowls Club	£100
16.	Abertillery Orpheus Choir	£100
17.	Abertillery Museum Society	£50

Abertillery Ward- Councillor J. Holt

1.	Abertillery Town Band	£100
2.	Blaenau Gwent Food Bank	£50
3.	Ebenezer Baptist Church Abertillery	£100

Cwmtillery Ward – Councillor J. Wilkins

1.	Abertillery Excelsiors FC	£100
2.	Abertillery BG RFC	£100
3.	Abertillery Bowls Club	£100
4.	Abertillery Netball Club	£100
5.	Abertillery Belles FC	£100
6.	Cwmtillery Fishing Club	£100
7.	Abertillery Business & Professional Ladies Association	£50
8.	Wyndam Vowles Community Centre	£50
9.	Abertillery Cricket Club	£100
10.	Six Bells Bowls Club	£50
11.	Falcons Martial Arts	£100
12.	Retired Police Dogs of Gwent	£50
13.	Adam Street Allotments	£50
14.	Bishop Street Allotments	£50
15.	Tillery Road Residents Association	£50
16.	Blaenau Gwent Foodbank	£100
17.	Blaentillery Allotments	£50

Llanhilleth Ward – Councillor J. Collins

1.	Blaenau Gwent Food Bank	£100
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Llanhilleth Ward – Councillor N. Parsons

1.	Abertillery Town Band	£50
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BRYNMAWR

Brynmawr Ward – Councillor J. Hill

1.	Blaenau Gwent Food Bank	£100
2.	Community Hope Project	£100
3.	Ebbw Vale Works Museum	£100
4.	Brynmawr S.O.T.S Group	£100

Brynmawr Ward – Councillor L. Elias

1.	BGfm	£100
2.	Brynmawr FC	£100

3.	Brynmawr Dragons	£100
4.	Market Hall Cinema & Arts Trust	£100
5.	Royal British Legion	£50
6.	Hospice of the Valleys	£100
7.	Brynmawr Interact	£100
8.	Brynmawr Rotary	£100
9.	Friends of North Ebbw Fach Interact	£100
10.	Zion Baptist Church	£100
11.	Bethesda Parents & Toddlers Group	£50
12.	Libanus Presbyterian Church	£50
13.	Brynmawr & District Museum Society	£100

EBBW VALE

Badminton Ward – Councillor C. Meredith

1.	Ebbw Vale Cricket Club	£100
2.	Love Wales	£75
3.	Glanffrwd Allotment Association	£150
4.	Glyncoed Community Shop	£150
5.	Toppers School of Dance & Drama	£100
6.	Ebbw Vale Operatic & Dramatic Society	£50
7.	2 nd Beaufort & Rassau Scouts	£150
8.	St. Davids Church	£100
9.	Badminton OAP Association	£100
10.	Ebbw Vale Indoor Bowls	£50
11.	Tredegar Operatic Society	£50

Badminton Ward – Councillor G. Paulsen

1.	Ebbw Vale Cricket Club	£100
2.	Love Wales	£75
3.	Glanffrwd Allotment Association	£150
4.	Glyncoed Community Shop	£150
5.	Toppers School of Dance & Drama	£100
6.	Ebbw Vale Operatic & Dramatic Society	£50
7.	2 nd Beaufort & Rassau Scouts	£150
8.	St. Davids Church	£100
9.	Badminton OAP Association	£100
10.	Ebbw Vale Indoor Bowls	£50
11.	Tredegar Operatic Society	£50

Beaufort Ward – Councillors G. Thomas & S. Healy

1.	Beaufort Hearts	£1,300
2.	2 nd Beaufort & Rassau Scouts	£50
3.	Garnlydan AFC	£70
4.	Beaufort Theatre	£70

Ebbw Vale Rassau Ward – Councillors D. Wilkshire

1.	Ebbw Vale Works Museum	£150
2.	Beaufort Male Voice choir	£150
3.	Rassau & Beaufort Bowls	£150
4.	Rassau OAP	£200
5.	BG Young Stars	£100
6.	Puddleducks	£250
7.	Ebbw Vale Christmas Lights	£100
8.	Hospice of the Valleys	£75
9.	Pen y Cwm School	£100
10.	Rock Chapel	£150

NANTYGLO & BLAINA

Blaina Ward – Councillor L. Winnett

1.	Blaina Ladies Bowls	£100
2.	Blaina Men's Bowls	£100
3.	BGfm	£50
4.	Ystruth Ladies Hut	£200

CHIEF OFFICER RESOURCES

Agenda Item 10

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 13.09.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**

Report Subject: **Assessment of Performance 2020/21**

Portfolio Holder: **Leader / Executive Member Corporate Services**

Report Submitted by: **Gemma Wasley, Service Manager Performance and Democratic**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	26/08/21	07.09.21			21/09/21	22/09/21	30/09/21	

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to present the Council's Assessment of Performance 2020/21 (attached at Appendix 1) for consideration.

The Assessment of Performance 2020/21 fulfils the statutory obligations placed on the Council as part of the requirements of the Local Government Measure (Wales) 2009.

It is to be noted that the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 has been replaced by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 therefore this Assessment of Performance will be the last under these regulations.

In future the Council will still be required to develop reports on the progress made against the Corporate Plan and also implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

2. Scope and Background

In July 2020, Council approved a refreshed Corporate Plan 2020/22. The Plan was reviewed as part of the response and learning to date from COVID 19 and what the Council is aiming to achieve by the end of the Plan in 2022.

This resulted in some amendments being made to the Outcome Statements in order to better demonstrate the contribution different areas across the Council will contribute to achieving them, enhancing the 'One Council' approach. The Corporate Plan 2020/22 Outcome Statements 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**

All Council planning is aligned to the Corporate Plan.

There is a statutory requirement for the Assessment of Performance to be translated and published by 31st October each year. This is then subject to external audit by Audit Wales.

The Council is required to undertake an assessment of performance of the previous year. Appendix 1 details the progress the Council has made during 2020/21 and also includes an assessment of the work undertaken as part of the response to the global pandemic, COVID 19.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 At their meeting on 21st September Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee considered the Assessment of Performance 2020/21. Any comments from this meeting will be fed into Executive Committee verbally.

Option 1

Endorse the retrospective progress made and included within the Council's Assessment of Performance for 2020/21 and be assured that it fulfils all required statutory legislative requirements before being submitted to Council for approval.

Option 2

As above but provide amendment to the document before submission to Council.

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

The Assessment of Performance 2020/21 provides retrospective information on the activity that has been undertaken by the Council over the past year.

There is a statutory requirement under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to undertake an assessment of performance and for this information to be publically available by 31st October each year.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act requires the Council to develop and report on Well-being Objectives.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Financial information for 2020/21 is included within the Assessment of Performance provided at appendix 1.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There is a reputational risk if the Assessment of Performance 2020/21 is not approved by Council and published before the statutory deadline of 31st October 2021.

The Assessment of Performance is subject to external audit by the Audit Wales who will assess for compliance against the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

5.3 ***Legal***

There is a statutory requirement as part of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to develop an annual assessment of performance and have this published by 31st October each year.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 has a statutory requirement to develop a set of Well-being Objectives. The Assessment of Performance includes the Well-being Objectives and an assessment of them.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report. All activity to implement the Assessment of Performance is identified within the relevant business plan and monitored as part of the quarterly Joint Finance and Performance Report.

6. ***Supporting Evidence***

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

The Council has a requirement to measure a number of national performance indicators known as Public Accountability Measures (PAMs). The PAMs consist of a small set of “outcome focussed” indicators. They reflect those aspects of local authority work which local authorities agree are considered to be important in terms of public accountability. All Council’s in Wales are required to submit their performance against the PAMs. This information has been included within the Assessment of Performance at appendix 1.

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

To provide the public with information with regard to how the Council is performing and what activity is being undertaken for the people of Blaenau Gwent.

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

Information to populate the report is taken from officer business plans.

Engagement remains a key priority for the Council and the Well-being Objectives / Improvement Objectives are intended to ensure that all services are focussed on their customers and communities through strong engagement and communication.

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

The Well-being Objectives / Improvement Objectives look to implement activity that would impact communities in the longer term.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***
The Assessment of Performance looked to undertake preventative activity i.e. people to remain in their own home for as long as possible.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
Collaboration is a key activity for the Council and where possible, collaborative activity is taking place.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***
The Assessment of Performance is integrated as it identified activity for officers across the Council with business plans identifying how the work would be undertaken.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***
Decarbonisation and current activity is included within the Assessment of Performance. A key action under the theme, '*Protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities*', is, '*To be carbon neutral by 2030*'.

6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***
The report does not include any 'strategic decisions' as defined by the Socio-economic Duty. Therefore, a Socio-Economic Duty Assessment was not required.

An assessment will be required when formulating and agreeing the new priorities as part of the next Corporate Plan from 2022 onwards.

6.9b. ***Equality Impact Assessment***
An EqlA has been undertaken on the Assessment of Performance 2020/21 and no negative impacts against the protected characteristics have been identified.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1

The Corporate Plan priorities and activity have been included within the business plans of directorates. These are monitored on a quarterly basis and reported through the Joint Finance and Performance Report to Corporate Overview and Executive Committees.

Background Documents

- *Appendix 1 – Assessment of Performance 2019/20*



Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol
Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council



Blaenau Gwent Assessment of Performance 2020/21

Foreword

Blaenau Gwent is a place like no other. At the head of the Gwent Valleys Blaenau Gwent provides a unique and vibrant environment to live, work and play. With a heritage that is firmly based on an industrial past, we are a place that is changing to respond to new economic opportunities. The Tech Valleys Vision, Valleys Regional Park and Cardiff Capital Regional Deal combined with new transport links including the soon to be completed Heads of the Valley Road and rail routes to Cardiff bring a bright future. Together with the amazing location and surrounding parkland our people and communities make Blaenau Gwent great. Our people have influenced on the local, national and international stage in art, sport and politics for many generations – putting Blaenau Gwent on the map for all the right reasons.

The role of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and its partners is to maximise on the assets we have, doing more with less and doing it better. It is right that we recognise the challenges we face. The decline of heavy industry continues to impact on employment prospects and intergenerational opportunities. We face issues with health and wealth inequality, the rise of online shopping and the impact on our town centres and social issues affecting our families and young people.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been devastating globally and will have a significant detrimental impact on the economy and the way we live, work, learn and socialise for the foreseeable future. The Council has had to respond to this unprecedented situation and has done so at pace, bringing an innovative approach to problem solving and changes in service delivery, ensuring that the health and well-being of our residents and communities has been the driver for our decision making and actions.

As a Council we face increasing demand and costs for some of our services but we are tackling these issues head on with our partners, businesses and the local community. We are looking at how we spend our money to achieve the best outcomes for our residents, we are supporting new and existing businesses, we are looking at our assets to achieve new income streams and we are removing barriers to enable residents to access what they need. All in all, we are looking forward to a positive future.

Blaenau Gwent Vision -

Proud Heritage

Strong Communities

Brighter Future

Councillor Nigel Daniels, Leader of the Council and Michelle Morris, Managing Director Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, A Year in Summary 2020/21

This Assessment of Performance 2020/21 provides a self-reflection of the past year implementing the Council's Corporate Plan and Well-being Objectives as well as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. We have started to adapt practices and case studies and examples have been provided throughout the document to showcase the positive work that we are undertaking as a Council.

The Council is embracing the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (known as the 'Act') and is starting to adapt the way that it works. As part of this, we are working collectively to adapt the culture of the organisation and embed the ethos of the Act into all that we do. It is recognised however that we are still in the early years of implementing the Act and there is still more to do over the coming years.

In 2021 the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act came into force. This Act is a substantial piece of legislation covering electoral reform, public participation, governance and performance and regional working. It is designed to be a more streamlined, flexible, sector-led approach to performance, good governance and improvement. The intention is for councils to be proactive in considering how internal processes and procedures should change to enable more effective planning, delivery and decision-making to drive better outcomes. The Council is actively working to implement this Act which will also replace the current improvement duty for principal councils set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

The Corporate Plan is a very important strategic document for the Council which clearly sets out our priorities and how we will target our limited resources in order to support these objectives. The political leadership are keen that the priorities in the plan align with what local people have told us is important to them during public engagement events, in particular that they want strong and clean communities and they want to see our economy grow for the wellbeing of our future generations. Education and Social Services continue to be priorities as we work to improve standards in our schools so that all children and young people reach their full potential and we continue to look after the most vulnerable people in our communities against increasing demand for these services.

Notable service activity from the year 2020/21 is identified throughout this document.

COVID 19

On 23rd March 2020, the UK Government announced an unprecedented UK-wide 'lockdown' in order to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus. This resulted in the Council moving to the delivery of Critical Services only (as defined in the Emergency Management Plan), redeploying staff into these services, and ceasing all democratic meetings with immediate effect.

The declaration of a national health emergency led to the establishment of Emergency Planning arrangements in the region, under the Civil Contingencies Act 2005. The Gwent Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) was convened for its first meeting on 14th March 2020. The SCG is chaired by Gwent Police and includes the Local Health Board, all five local authorities and Category One Responders.

In accordance with our Emergency Planning arrangements the GOLD Group was established in Blaenau Gwent and commenced meetings on 19th March 2020. This comprises of all members of the Corporate Leadership Team, supported by the Civil Contingency Manager and

Communications Manager. The strategic aim of GOLD remains to delay and mitigate as far as practicable the spread and impact of Coronavirus within our community.

Heads of Service and Service Managers were convened as the Emergency Response Team, to support GOLD, with the Aneurin Leisure Trust, Tai Calon, GAVO and Joint Trade Unions also members of the Team. These Groups continue to meet to ensure the proper management of the emergency response in Blaenau Gwent.

When the lockdown began the Council shifted its sole focus to the emergency response. This resulted in delivery of only critical services with other available resources being redeployed to support the response. A particular focus was Adult Social Services, supporting some of the most vulnerable in the community, refuse collection and recycling and public protection, with all Councils taking on significant new enforcement responsibilities under the Coronavirus legislation.

The response involved:

- School closures and the creation of School Hubs to support key workers, by providing childcare for their children, and vulnerable learners.
- Supporting families eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) with over 2,000 supported.
- The creation of the locality response teams to provide an offer of support for the 3,521 shielding residents and 1,353 vulnerable residents (over 70 or living alone). This work included support to the delivery of weekly food boxes, arranging shopping, collection of prescriptions and befriending calls etc.
- Unprecedented support provided to local businesses, enabling them to access Government financial support schemes, with the aim of protecting our local economy from the worse impact of the Pandemic.
- Staff working from home with very low attendance in the office. This has been supported by the rapid deployment of Microsoft TEAMS which is enabling the Council to work in a totally different way based on running virtual teams and meetings.
- Suspending formal council and committee meetings at the end of March. The AGM was held, virtually, on 2nd April 2020.
- Elected Members undertaking their roles whilst working remotely.

The Welsh Government and local government have had a shared commitment to work in partnership. This shared leadership was demonstrated and strengthened throughout the crisis with an unprecedented level of dialogue and engagement and openness.

The medium to long term financial consequences of the pandemic for local business and the public sector is not yet fully known. Certainly the impact on the Council's finances in 2020/21 would have been significant without the additional support provided by the Welsh Government to fund the additional costs of dealing with the emergency and the loss of income experienced as a direct consequence of the pandemic (£11.9m). This financial support when combined with additional unbudgeted grants and reduced costs, due to closure of buildings and new ways of working, has meant that we are reporting a favourable financial position at the year-end which has enabled us to enhance our reserves to deal with unexpected issues / pressures in future.

COVID 19 Recovery and Moving Forward

In an emergency the Council would normally deal with the response and then move into recovery phase to support the community back to normal. What is clear is that dealing with Covid-19 is very different. As a Council we will need to continue to respond to the pandemic, ensuring the safety of staff and the community as well as moving towards recovery. There is a Recovery Co-ordination Group (RCG) leading the recovery

work in Gwent and also a local recovery group within the Council. As part of this the Council will need to take a community leadership role in understanding the impact of the pandemic on the community and identifying the interventions that need to be put in place to support recovery – this includes recovery for the local economy. Recognising that this is a task that will be delivered in partnership with other organisations across the Region. Locally the Council will look to focus on four priority areas:

- Learners;
- Community;
- Economy; and
- Workforce.

Blaenau Gwent also needs to continue to be part of the wider regional and national work to recover and create a stronger future.

The nature of the emergency has meant that the Council has had to support both response and recovery side by side, placing a further demand on resources.

It is also the case that so much about the way we live our lives has changed and we will not simply return to normal once Covid-19 is under control. There is now the opportunity for the Council to build on the positive work over the past 18 months with the expectation being that we do not seek to return to the way things were before but harness the positive aspects of the response to strengthen and modernise the Council, adopting new working practices and challenging how we did things before, in order to map out an ambitious future, create a stronger organisation and to sustain the strong relationships forged with our communities and partners. It will not be a case of delivering services as we have done before, service delivery will have to change to take into account the learning from the pandemic as well as continuing to work proactively to plan for any potential future 'peaks.'

Despite the impact that the pandemic has had, it is possible to identify positive experience and good practice from the way the Council and community has responded in Blaenau Gwent. It is clear there is a real opportunity to hold onto these positives and to not simply return to normal but to build on our work to create a stronger and more resilient organisation and community.

The areas where this can be demonstrated include:

- the way the Council has adopted new technology and modern working practices at pace, enabling it to continue operating with staff and Elected Members almost entirely working from home.
- The targeted support provided to the more vulnerable in our communities with services coming together into multi-functional teams and working very effectively with partners and community and voluntary groups.
- The strong use of data and information to build our business intelligence about our community and the increase in digital service delivery and contact to ensure we can continue to deliver services in a way that is safe for staff and residents.
- There has been strong support for local businesses – which will need to continue – and a step change in how we communicate with our residents about service changes and the decisions being made by the Council, resulting in a real sense of a better connection with the community and an appreciation of the work of key front-line staff.

The next steps will be really important to ensure we use this experience to build that stronger organisation and Place in Blaenau Gwent, rather than simply reverting to normal.

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to present the performance of the Council at the end of the reporting period 2020/21. This sets out the key activities and measures used to monitor our performance of the Council's Corporate Plan.

In July 2020, Council approved a refreshed Corporate Plan 2020-22. The Plan was reviewed as part of the response and learning to date from COVID 19 and what the Council is aiming to achieve by the end of the Plan in 2022. This resulted in some amendments being made to the Well-being Objectives in order to better demonstrate the contribution different areas across the Council will contribute to achieving them, enhancing our one Council approach. The overall emphasis of each Well-being Objective has not changed and this includes the supporting activity beneath the Objectives still being aligned to our business planning, monitoring and reporting processes.

The global pandemic has also provided the opportunity to consider if everything previously prioritised was still important and if any areas of importance needed to be highlighted e.g. climate change. It was agreed that a refresh of our corporate priorities should be undertaken to reflect the impact of the pandemic and ensure the focus of business planning up to 2022 delivers on the outcomes needed to support the community and local economy.

From these considerations, the Corporate Plan 2020-22 Outcome Statements 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**

There are new areas of activity identified in the refresh including our ambition to become a low carbon Council and Borough; the opportunity to accelerate agile working and the successful deployment of technology to improve how we work and the impact we have, as an organisation, on the environment.

In order to meet the statutory legislative requirements', the Council has implemented the following:

- **The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:** the report uses the priorities within the Council's Corporate Plan as its Well-being Objectives.
- **Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009:** the report also uses the priorities within the Council's Corporate Plan as its Improvement Objectives.

All of these areas have supporting actions and measures which are monitored as part of the Council's business planning process. The Corporate Plan has been strategically aligned to the Public Service Boards Well-being Plan and also identifies how each area supports the progression of the Well-being Goals.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

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

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

Working with the Public Service Board to improve the well-being of Future Generations

Blaenau Gwent Public Service Board (PSB) was established in April 2016 as part of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015. It is a partnership of key public bodies that, by working together, have a huge responsibility to create a place we want to live in now and in the future. As a PSB we agreed our Well-being Plan in April 2018 and it was published on Friday 4th May 2018, in-line with statutory guidance.

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

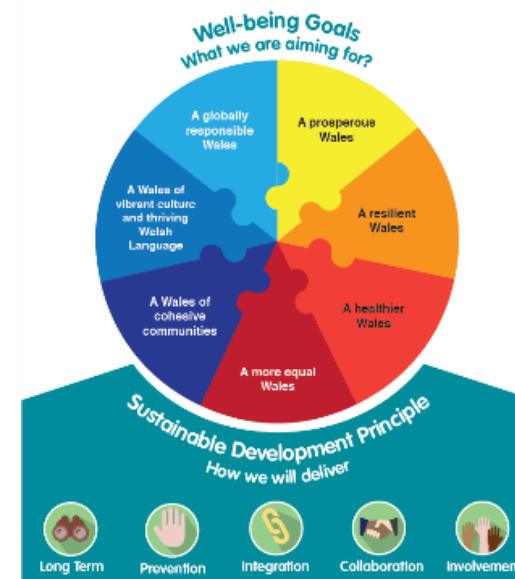
Further information on the development of the plan can be found in the plan itself and its supporting documents which are available on our website by following the link: <http://www.blaenaugwentpsb.org.uk/well-being-plan.aspx>

The PSB is working towards five well-being objectives as outlined in their Well-being Plan 2018-23:

- The best start in life for everyone
- Safe and friendly communities
- Look after and protect the natural environment
- Forge new pathways to prosperity
- Encourage healthy lifestyles

The PSB has developed a Strategic Work Programme which was signed off in January 2020. This Work Programme has identified five High Level Actions to be taken forward:

- First 1,000 days and Early Years Pathfinder;
- Building a healthier Gwent / Integrated Well-being Networks;
- Climate Change;
- Blaenau Gwent Sustainable Food Programme; and



- Foundational Economy.

Each of the high level actions has an identified PSB Sponsor.

Regional Gwent Public Service Board

The Act also provides for two or more PSBs to be able to merge if it would assist them in contributing to the achievement of the well-being goals. There have been discussions at the Gwent-wide leadership group 'G10' and at each PSB about the merger of the Gwent PSBs to form a single regional PSB. The decision to do this must be agreed by each of the individual PSBs as the statutory bodies. Each PSB in the Gwent region has agreed this in principle. The PSBs and G10 have also considered the importance of maintaining strong local partnerships in each area to support delivery of the Well-Being Plan and also other partnership work.

The drivers for the change to a regional approach and Plan considered by the G10 leadership were:

- improving the well-being of people across Gwent by strengthening governance, accountability, improving collaborative working and supporting a clearer partnership landscape;
- providing the catalyst for a regional well-being assessment and well-being plan that maintains local accountability.
- opportunities to align partnership legislation and PSB statutory duties for a more strategic overview of areas such the Crime and Disorder Act, Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) and the Children's Act.
- opportunity to develop regional scrutiny arrangements.
- opportunity of aligning the focus of both the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) and PSB that will reduce duplication of activity, align strategic priorities and much closer collaboration over assessment, planning and delivery functions.
- The approach supports the Welsh Government review on 'strategic partnerships' and specifically recommendation 3 of the recent Audit Wales Review of Public Services Boards.

The current Well-Being Plans (2018-2023) form the delivery arrangements for the next two years and these will continue to be delivered by the local partnerships (One Newport; The Blaenau Gwent We Want; The Caerphilly We Want; Our Monmouthshire; Torfaen Public Services Board) supported by the regional PSB, and scrutinised by partnership Scrutiny Committees in each of the local areas.

On 21st July 2021 Council approved:

- To move to a regional PSB as outlined in the report with the importance of maintaining strong local partnerships;
- To establish regional scrutiny and the developing arrangements, and to receive further details as appropriate;
- The local assessment of well-being, to be agreed by 5th May 2022, will be part of the PSB Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2021/22;
- To support the proposed regional PSB terms of reference and requirements to make any relevant changes to committee structures and constitution;
- The development of Local Delivery Partnerships to be considered in local scrutiny work programmes; and
- To continue to support Scrutiny of the current Well-being Plans to 2023 through existing local partnership Scrutiny arrangements

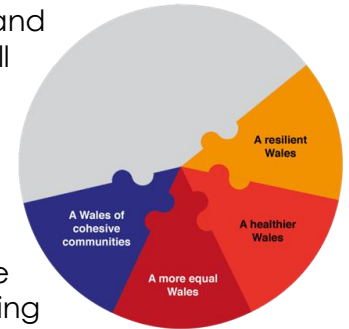
Arrangements for local delivery are still being explored in order to build on and strengthen the local partnerships already in existence that has supported the Blaenau Gwent PSB.

To enable people to maximise their independence, develop solutions and take an active role in their communities

Why this is important

The Council wants to encourage and support people to make healthy lifestyle choices to enable children, young people and families to thrive. Research has proven people demonstrating positive healthy behaviours from birth through their life will lead to greater independence, and people being free from complicated health conditions later in life and reducing costs to public services. This in turn could reduce demand on services and ensure the services that are provided are high quality, efficient and responsive to local people's needs.

With reduced funding and increasing demand on services the Council can no longer do everything it has done in the past. The focus must be on those actions that will have the greatest impact. Safeguarding the most vulnerable people in the community continues to be a top priority for the Council alongside transforming the aspirations of residents and valuing fairness and equality in everything we do.



Priorities

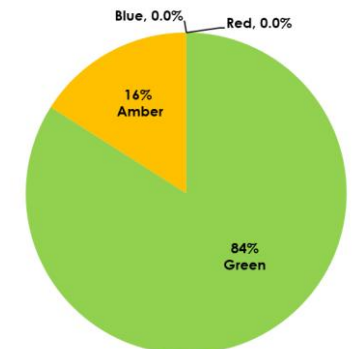
- To improve accessibility, provision of information and advice to enable people to support their own well-being;
- To work with people and families to make sure they have a say in achieving what matters to them;
- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater;
- To promote and facilitate new ways of delivering integrated responsive care and support with partners;
- To continue our programme of public engagement and respond in a timely and effective way to feedback;
- To build a collaborative culture between services, partners and communities working together and with people directly to shape and deliver services. i.e. (Community Asset Transfers);
- To put effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm; and
- To develop a partnership approach to maximising income reducing the impacts of Poverty.

Overview 2020/21

Throughout 2020/21 there has been progress in the implementation of the priorities supporting delivery of this objective but it is recognised that there is still further work to do to fully implement the aims and objectives. As at 31st March 2021, the Council evaluated performance and activity against this objective as mainly successful as 84% of the actions were green (on target) and 16% amber (behind target with manageable issues). This objective remains high on the Council agenda. The Council is looking to address the areas that will have a long term benefit, ensuring that the needs of people of all ages and future generations are at the centre of service design and delivery.

Some key areas of activity include:

The **Council's Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy** 2017-2020 has three clear objectives:



1. To support families to stay together;
2. To manage risk confidently and provide support at the edge of care; and
3. To provide affordable high quality placements.

Each of the objectives has a number of actions aligned to them and these actions are embedded within the Council's business planning. Since the implementation of this strategy the Local Authority has seen a very slow but steady decrease in the numbers of children becoming looked after. Despite the pandemic significant progress has been made in relation to implementing the objectives of the Strategy.

The Blaenau Gwent Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy has been independently evaluated by Worcester University. The findings acknowledge the considerable work undertaken in relation to implementing the strategy. It concluded that the strategy and its underpinning objectives are broadly appropriate at the current time. The report highlights areas of progress towards meeting the objectives and the considerable challenges related to taking the strategy forward, not least in relation to developing and sustaining a stable, highly trained workforce and creating and sustaining a range of high quality, flexible local placements. The report offers twenty main recommendations grouped around six themes:

1. Strategy development;
2. Workforce issues;
3. Partnership working;
4. Placement capacity;
5. Interventions; and
6. Strategy implementation.

The recommendations have been considered and have been translated into actions under the 3 objectives which underpin the refreshed 2020 - 2025 Strategy.

The **Regional Partnership Board** has been focused on how organisations had worked collectively during the Coronavirus pandemic and what had worked well, not so well and any future lessons.

The Integrated Care Fund is currently governed via the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) structures and the grant funding is administered through the ICF performance monitoring unit within Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB). The fund can be accessed by sectors that support the priorities of the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) and the overarching population needs assessment for Gwent. The grant supports the delivery of the key priorities in the areas of:

- Older people with complex needs and long term conditions including dementia
- People with Learning Disabilities
- Children with Complex Needs due to disability or illness
- Carers, including young carers

There continues to be close working with partnership organisation delivering ICF capital projects. As a region we are able to fully deliver Year 3 of our Capital Investment Plan, albeit delivery timeframes have slipped due to the impact of the pandemic on procurement and contracting. Our own proposal for Augusta House is one such project that has slipped and is now likely to be completed hopefully by the end of 2021.

The current Blaenau Gwent ICF allocation for revenue is £950,275 (Adult Services) and £372,909 (Children Services). The allocation of capital ICF for BG is currently £544,979 - (£375,829 – Adult Services and £169,150 – Children Services).

Within Blaenau Gwent we have been successful and proportionate in accessing this fund since its inception. Projects we have developed have been aligned to our strategic priorities including both the 'Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent in the 21st Century' Strategy and the Safe Reduction in Children Looked After Strategy alongside the wider cultural changes required following the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and Welsh Government's new long term plan for health and social care 'A Healthier Wales' including alignment to the 'Gwent transformational offer'.

The Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) funding will no longer be provided via the ICF governance mechanism and has therefore been removed from the guidance and allocation letter. The £2million previously utilised for WCCIS implementation has been repurposed for a new priority area 'Safe accommodation for children with complex, high end emotional and behavioural needs'. This priority area has been introduced in direct response to the Children's Commissioner for Wales' report, No Wrong Door and in line with current Ministerial priorities.

In response to this priority area, and the invitation for applications, a regional proposal to develop a children's residential home at Windmill Farm, Newport was submitted to Welsh Government on 10th February 2021. This is an integrated model of delivery using ICF Capital. The proposal also sets out the opportunity of exploring joint commissioning methodologies for a wider cohort of children with complex needs.

The Gwent RPB was successful in receiving £13.4 million to support:

- The development of early intervention and prevention services (Integrated Wellbeing Networks);
- The development of primary and community care services (Compassionate Communities);
- The redesign of child and adolescent emotional and mental health services (Iceberg model);
- The development of an integrated 'Home First' discharge model; and
- The development of workforce planning and organisational development to underpin transformational activity.

An additional £10 million across Wales was announced by the Minister for Health and Social Services on the 24th January 2020 for Regional Partnership Boards, the Board agreed that this funding be equally split between Health and Social Services on a 50:50 basis and subsequently was shared equally between the Gwent local authorities. An additional £191K was allocated to Blaenau Gwent on top of the £133K from the Winter Plan to flexibly spot purchase step up/step down beds, to purchase additional domiciliary care packages, to purchase additional social work capacity over bank holidays and weekends and funding for hiring an additional 4x4 vehicle for adverse weather conditions. There were also some separate bids for additional health capacity locally and some Gwent wide bids for equipment e.g. single handed hoists.

The joint **My Support Team (MyST)** between Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire provides a multi-disciplinary intensive therapeutic fostering service for Children Looked After. The Team work intensively with children currently in residential care with the aim of bringing them back to live closer to Blaenau Gwent and be placed with foster carers or family members. The Team also works with those children in care who present with complex needs and are at risk of going into residential care, to prevent this from happening.

At the heart of the MyST is the relationship developed between workers with the children and their support networks. The small numbers the MyST work with at any one time allows their work to be very intensive, providing 24/7 support to the child and their carers.

It should be noted that throughout the COVID 19 pandemic, MyST continued to provide direct interventions to young people during lockdown, including 24 hours on call and managed risky complex situations and young people. Four children were stepped down from residential care during extremely difficult conditions (three of them in the first lockdown period and one during the summer of 2020).

Throughout 2020/21 the Social Services Directorate responded to the **COVID-19** pandemic as well as continuing service delivery to ensure that the most vulnerable residents and children continued to get the care and support they required, both in their own homes and registered settings. The significant input from staff and volunteers at all levels across organisations was extremely positive which enabled services to adapt to change in working conditions and was key to the response across Blaenau Gwent and the region.

Children's Services

- The Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) service was maintained throughout the pandemic and prioritised home visits to safeguarding investigations, children on the Child Protection Register, Children Looked After and care leavers and those children on the 'edge of care'.
- Child Protection Conferences, Core Groups and Reviews were undertaken virtually as have all Court attendances. However, contested Court Hearings and Final Hearings were postponed. A number of digital platforms have been used to undertake these virtual meetings. These have included teleconferencing, SKYPE and Microsoft TEAMS.
- The number of Children Looked After stands at 200 (down from a high of 237). The My Support Team has continued to engage with the most complex children in residential care by providing face to face support in line with public health guidance. The service also saw a decrease in the numbers of children in residential care reduce from a high of 18 down to 13.
- Children's Services have been able to continue working throughout the pandemic outbreak and meet the needs of our children and families. Three Flying Start children's hubs remained open for children of keyworkers throughout the pandemic. Some of the Families First staff have been redeployed to help the Supporting Change Team to support those children on the 'edge of care' as this is one of our highest priorities and seen as an even higher risk area during the COVID-19 crisis.

Adult Services

- The Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) service was maintained throughout the pandemic and have prioritised home visits to families and individuals to undertake safeguarding investigations.
- At the outset of the pandemic day services and the respite care facility had to close to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable people and to maintain social distancing and to ensure resources were concentrated at caring for people in their own homes and care homes. However, a respite facility was available in case of an emergency to prevent carer breakdown.

- The service successfully redeployed staff from community options to care homes and home care teams to provide cover when staff became sick or more residents require 1:1 support due to isolation. There was a reduction in the care families required from domiciliary care agencies. This has been principally driven by family members providing care while they are off work and the fear that domiciliary care staff may transmit the virus into their homes. It is felt that demand will increase as more people return to work.
- From the start of lockdown Adult Services had to be available 7 days a week to ensure the service could react appropriately to the issues being faced i.e. getting recovering COVID-19 patients home, ensuring care homes and domiciliary care agencies were being supported and provided with PPE, and reacting and supporting NHS colleagues to maintain bed capacity within the hospital system. This meant staff working on the wards at community and acute hospitals including working on the COVID-19 wards.

Progress has been made with the **Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) Action Plan** throughout 2020/21.

An audit was concluded in October 2020 to identify children looked after who were at risk of exploitation which showed that between January 2019 and September 2020:

- 14 children had been identified as being at risk of exploitation.
- 10 children were deemed at risk Child Sexual Exploitation (9 children were female and 1 child was male).
- 3 children were believed to be at risk of 'Missing' (1 was female and 2 were male).
- 1 child was deemed at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation.

The audit concluded that the social work teams involved had recognised exploitation risks and were effectively working with the children to help reduce these risks by holding regular risk assessment meetings to monitor and review the potential risks of exploitation. Additionally, Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings are held on a quarterly basis.

At the end of academic year 2019-2020, 162 children of statutory school age were looked after by Blaenau Gwent local authority. The majority of children who are looked after by Blaenau Gwent continue to be educated within Blaenau Gwent and attend mainstream schools. A small proportion of our children looked after attend more specialist education settings. Just over half of our children looked after have additional learning needs and 20% have a statement of special educational needs.

During academic year 2019-20, a total of 15 young people who were looked after by Blaenau Gwent completed their statutory school studies. All but 2 children were awarded recognised qualifications in Summer 2020. All 15 children are engaged in post 16 learning opportunities. Of the young people who were looked after and completed their statutory studies in summer 2020 half had additional learning needs and 2 had a statement of special educational needs.

A new Supported Lodgings advertising and promotion scheme has been developed and is run by Llamau and funded by the Housing Support Grant. There have been 3 new supported lodging providers recruited by the Authority in a short time. There has been the creation of 10 young person flats in Tredegar that has housed 17 clients to date. Unfortunately, 1 bedroom flats are still in short supply across the Authority and desperately needed.

A review of the '**Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent in the 21st Century**' Strategy was due to have been undertaken during 2020/21 at the end of the 15-year lifespan with a view to relaunching a further 5 to 10-year strategy from April 2022. Unfortunately, this work was impacted by the

COVID pandemic and capacity within Adult Services to undertake this significant and important task. However, the Local Authority has recently worked with colleagues in Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) to secure funding, via the Welsh Government Transformation Grant, to employ a project lead to support this review. The post will implement a partnership approach to both the revision of the Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent in the 21st Century' Strategy and the ABUHB Place Based Care Strategy.

The Council has an active role in trying to reduce the impact of **poverty** across Blaenau Gwent. Free School Meals monitoring systems are working well, the application round opened bi-weekly throughout the school closures, for newly eligible families to apply for the provision. Effective Partnership work between Education and Benefits assists with the process of reviewing applications and determining eligibility. Processes have also been put in place for providing Free School Meal direct payments to families, that have been asked to self-isolate as a result of being a contact of a COVID-19 case. The number of adults (aged 18+) receiving a service in the community who receive a direct payment has decreased this year, with 120 in receipt in 2019/20 and 113 in receipt in 2020/21.

The **Safeguarding** service developments continued despite the pandemic. The police restructured the Public Protection Service allowing the development of local, multi-agency, all age safeguarding, early intervention and prevention hubs. These hubs were piloted in Newport and Blaenau Gwent and led to improving:

- early information sharing;
- timely decision making;
- improved quality of PPN referrals;
- improved integrated service responses to children and families; and
- timeliness of referral pathways and effectiveness of support and interventions offered by the Early Intervention Projects.

The various meetings required under the Wales Safeguarding Procedures have continued to take place but by virtual means. This has seen greater participation of partners, however some children and families initially struggled to engage with the process. The department saw this process as crucial so worked with these families to engage. The Regional Safeguarding Board continued to meet virtually and increased its frequency to monthly to ensure safeguarding data is regularly monitored and so that partner agencies could share intelligence on emerging safeguarding issues in the region. The board led on raising awareness of the need to report safeguarding concerns across the region and lobbied Welsh Government to take a national approach to this.

Sustainable Development

Long Term	<i>The initial Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy was a 3-year strategy and is due to end this year. It is recognised that the refreshed strategy needs to be longer term in recognition of the significant work required to continue and maintain the downward trend in numbers of children looked after.</i>
Prevention	<i>The Living Independently Strategy promotes preventative services including reablement and assistive technology as a model that promotes personal independence and management of a person's own well-being. The strategy delivers a preventative and early intervention approach to minimise the escalation of need and dependency on statutory services.</i>
Integration	<i>Both the Integrated Care Fund and transformation grant funded projects provide the opportunity to test innovative practices and work collectively to progress integration and partnership working across the Gwent region. All Integrated Care Fund projects focus as much as possible on how Health and Social Services can integrate to provide a seamless service model for recipients of health and social care provision.</i>
Collaboration	<i>Blaenau Gwent has its own local, multi-agency, all age safeguarding, early intervention and prevention Hub with elements shared such as health and education jointly with Caerphilly. The hub serves both children and adults and whilst early days the initial feedback is mainly positive.</i>
Involvement	<i>Two consultation exercises have been undertaken with foster carers in the last 12 months and this has produced good evidence that foster carers feel supported and have received a good service from the placement and locality teams.</i>

Performance Indicators – Owing to the review undertaken on the Corporate Plan in 2020, the national indicators will be provided to support the implementation of the objective. The national Social Services Performance Framework for 2020/21 has been deemed an experimental year by Welsh Government. A review will be undertaken nationally to consider the information returned across all 22 local authorities.

Performance Indicator	Outturn 2018/19	Outturn 2019/20	Outturn 2020/21	Trend	Comments
The number of contacts for adults received by statutory social services during the year	3,511	3,941	4,572	↑	The department continues to see an increasing demand for support and includes where we have seen increasing pressures due to the COVID 19 pandemic.
The number of contacts for adults received by statutory social services during the year where advice or assistance was provided	2,979	3,333	4,255	↑	
The total number of packages of reablement completed during the year	Not available		232	N/A	No trend data available as not previously collated
The total number of services for adults started during the year (residential, domiciliary and day care and short breaks)	380	414	310	↓	This reduction in new services being offered is as a direct consequence of impact of pandemic and ability for our most vulnerable to access provisions outside of their home i.e. day centres / care homes / respite due to COVID restrictions.
The total number of reports of an adult suspected of being at risk received during the year	491	518	532	↓	These numbers fluctuate in a month by month basis but a proportion of the increases during 20/21 will be attributed to COVID related incidences and outbreaks across social care settings.
The number of contacts for children received by statutory social services during the year	3,823	4,183	4,512	↑	The number of contacts received has increased year on year. However, the number of those contacts receiving statutory advice and assistance has decreased. This demonstrates that referrals are being successfully rerouted to our preventative services
The number of contacts for children received by statutory social services during the year where advice or assistance was provided	908	638	623	↑	
Number of Children with a care and support plan at 31 st March 2021	576	669	556	↓	These numbers fluctuate according to demand. It is impossible to attribute one factor to the rise and fall as it is predicated on a set of complex socio economic factors
The total number of children on the Child Protection Register during the year	107	115	96	↑	The number has declined over the past 3 years which indicates that much work is being done to reduce risk preventing the need for children's names being placed on the CPR

Case Studies

Frailty Team, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board



Immediate access to information, better team working, and improved communications are just some of the benefits that have been gained by an integrated frailty team since they began using WCCIS (Welsh Community Care Information System).

The Community Resource Team (CRT), made up of staff from Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, launched a pilot project to use WCCIS as a single system for managing referrals.

Prior to the pilot, the referral process was complicated with a number of systems and points of access in use. Initially referrals would be routed through the Gwent Frailty Programme Single Point of Access who would log the information on the Gwent Frailty system and transmit to the CRT who would then transfer the referral to be logged on WCCIS.

For example, a hospital occupational therapist may log a reablement request via the Single Point of Access and the Gwent Frailty Portal but the adaptation to the home, which would be a social services function, would need be requested via WCCIS. Now all referrals for the majority of CRT functions come through the Blaenau Gwent Adult Social Services Information, Advice and Assistance Team and are logged in one place.

“Managing everything on one system has so many benefits and the transition was fairly easy as most staff were used to using WCCIS...You don't have to log onto separate systems for information which means it's far more efficient and there is better communication, particularly for patients who are no longer receiving requests for multiple information from multiple people. There is better team working and it eliminates duplication.”

Around 50 staff were involved in the pilot to move to the one system approach.

Carers Engagement Team

The Carers Engagement Team work with carers to provide support to them in time of need.

Many calls have been received after seeing the Facebook Post. Carers are saying that they are relieved to know that there is a service available specific to them and their needs and concerns. Most concerns, throughout the pandemic, have been around caring for individuals that live separately and when one or both parties fall in to the high risk category. Carers have appreciated having the opportunity to talk their concerns through, to know who to contact and how to get help should they need it going forward.

Lady A contacted the team as she had concerns about getting food deliveries arranged for her vulnerable brother and sister-in law as she was self-isolating. Her brother and sister-in law had carers to the home four times a day and relied on getting their meals delivered. Lady A had tried and failed to get an online delivery slot and local volunteers in Tredegar couldn't cover the Six Bells area. The team considered the information they had on local information and services and were able to provide list of services that were able to help.

Lady B contacted the service as she was worried that her Carers Allowance would be affected as she was having to step back from a lot of her practical support. The service contacted Carers Wales on Lady B's behalf. The response was that emotional support was being recognised as part of the 35hrs carers support.

Some positive comments into the service have included:

- *"It's been so good to have had someone to talk to about all of this – so glad this service exists"*
- *"I feel so much better now I've spoken with you and been able to talk it all through with someone – feel clearer about what I can do now"*
- *"I am so thankful for your time. I can't believe there is someone interested in me and who has truly listened to my side of the story"*
- *"So glad for the phone call, I've really enjoyed talking to you"*
- *"It's frightening and I'm glad to be able to talk to somebody"*
- *"Thank you for thinking of me, I wasn't expecting anyone to ring"*

Supporting Change Team

Throughout the pandemic, the team has continued to be fully operational; with an increased compliment of staff re-deployed from early intervention and prevention services. Where at all possible, staff have maintained home visits supporting children and families to continue living together safely. Where it has not been possible to visit families in their own homes, due to the family's own vulnerabilities, staff have maintained regular contact via telephone and through the use of video conference calling.

The Community Connector Service has been adapted with the Community Connector now providing home-based activity packs to vulnerable families to keep children occupied during this difficult time. Telephone contact has been maintained between the Education Support Service, Families and School Professionals to ensure that children are as equipped as possible to return to school when they re-open. The Family Group Conference Service has been maintained and where feasible conferences have been coordinated virtually.

The Placement Team

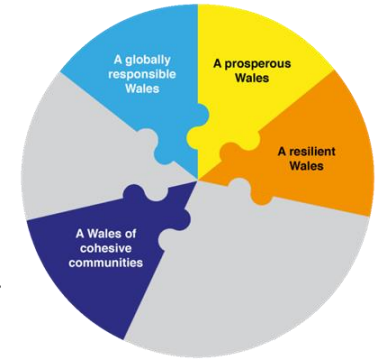
The team recently had the opportunity to deliver a small token of thanks and appreciation to all of the foster carers in Blaenau Gwent. They shopped on-line to purchase small gifts and put together gift bags for the carers and the children to enjoy. This has hopefully helped to support the valuable work our foster carers are doing during this very difficult time. Certainly the response was really positive with a number of carers emailing their thanks, as the example below shows.

"Hope you're all well. Just wanted to say thank you for the Easter gifts we received today. I was in a bit of a fluster when the lady came to drop them off as I was doing a video call with CP and the guardian, but it was such a nice surprise for us all – Thank you". [Feedback from a Foster Carer]

Protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities

Why this is important

Blaenau Gwent has a rich heritage and its buildings and countryside are part of Blaenau Gwent's attractiveness as a place to live, work and visit. The local environment should be used to help improve the health and well-being of families and communities and be enhanced for future generations to continue to enjoy. There is also a real desire to see the communities where people live kept clean, tidy and useable, creating areas that people can be proud of. Through focusing on delivering against the main priorities set out in the Corporate Plan we can begin to transform Blaenau Gwent into a more prosperous and welcoming area that celebrates its heritage and plays its part on the regional and national stage. We will continue to invest in our neighbourhoods so that they are places where people are proud to live. The environment remains as a high priority for the community.



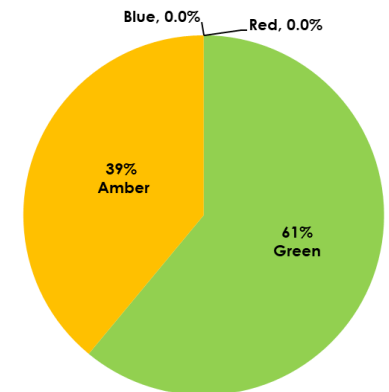
Priorities

- To re-invest in highways maintenance particularly improvements to our residential roads, streets and pavements;
- To increase rates of recycling to enable us to achieve national targets;
- To re-invest in environmental services to address the issues created by fly-tipping, dog fouling, littering, grass cutting, street cleansing and pest control;
- To improve the access to and quality of open spaces for the benefit of our communities, businesses and visitors; and
- To work with partners to provide a variety of homes
- To develop an excellent digital infrastructure including internet and mobile network connectivity that can support the needs of the whole community.
- To develop a portfolio of potential energy opportunities to deliver economic, business and community benefits
- To improve the quality of our school buildings to help learners achieve great outcomes
- To be a carbon neutral Council by 2030

Overview 2020/21

Throughout 2020/21 there has been progress in the implementation of the priorities supporting delivery of the objective but it is recognised that there is still further work to do to fully implement the aims and objectives over the remainder of the Corporate Plan.

As at the 31st March 2021, the performance was evaluated as being mainly successful as 61% of the actions were green (on target) and 39% were amber (behind target with manageable issues).



The environment remains as a high priority for the community. The Council is looking to improve the area so that it is somewhere to be proud to live. Through focusing on delivering against the main priorities set out in the Corporate Plan the Council can begin to transform Blaenau Gwent into a more prosperous and welcoming area that celebrates its heritage and plays its part on the regional and national stage. Investment will continue to be made throughout Blaenau Gwent so that it is an area that people are proud to live in and be a part of.

Some key areas of activity include:

The **Highways Capital Works Programme** is an ambitious programme that looks to improve the highway infrastructure across the borough. Each year, the programme is reviewed in order to prioritise works. The 2020/21 programme provided a focus on improving the residential / unclassified network as this makes up 74% of all of Blaenau Gwent roads. Also, the majority of reactive maintenance and insurance claims relate to the unclassified network. In addition to the resurfacing of the highest priority ranked roads, other works undertaken included safety barriers, illuminated traffic signs and speed reduction measures.

The overall percentage of un-classified roads in a poor condition pre-commencement of works was 17%. As a result of the works there has been a 5.6% reduction of poor conditioned unclassified roads. The figure now stands at 11.4%.

All schemes within the Highways Capital Works Programme for 2020/21 have been completed. A Programme for 2021/22 is being developed and works are subject to Welsh Government Grant Award & Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Capital funding provision. In 2019 the Council introduced **Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE)**. This means that the Council has the powers to enforce its own Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs), whereby any Penalty Charge Notices (parking tickets) issued carried a financial penalty.

The staffing for the service is provided by Caerphilly County Borough Council via a Service Level Agreement. The Council currently has two civil parking enforcement officers. Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council provide a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) processing service, under the name of the South Wales Parking Group. Both these vital administration arrangements are working well in supporting Blaenau Gwent civil parking enforcement.

Civil Parking Enforcement gives the Council the powers to tackle wider transport and environmental issues such as traffic congestion, road safety and to safeguard the interests of residents, blue badge holders, transport operators and local businesses. It also allows the Authority to target enforcement in key areas such as town centres and other areas where indiscriminate parking creates potential risks to pedestrians and other road users, like parking congestion in the immediate vicinity of schools. This is in line with the Council's priorities around safe and sustainable communities.

The Council would not be able to manage and enforce Traffic Regulation Orders within the Borough without an effective CPE service. Indeed, the introduction of CPE has allowed the Council to successfully monitor and target areas where complaints of illegal and dangerous parking are received. The Council receives a high volume of requests for consideration of parking enforcement.

In partnership with the LA Support Ltd the Council has worked towards improving **street cleanliness**, in line with the community and corporate priority. Against the backdrop of a difficult financial climate, Blaenau Gwent has utilised a cost effective environmental enforcement service that reinforces the Authority's zero-tolerance approach to these Environmental Offences.

For several years Blaenau Gwent was identified as having some of the dirtiest streets in Wales by annual surveys carried out by Keep Wales Tidy. Street cleanliness is consistently considered to be a priority for constituents during community engagement exercises. However, recently, the Council has been one of the top performing local Authorities in Wales for the issuing of Litter and Dog Control fixed penalty notices.

Recently the total number of litter fines has decreased and littering complaints have reduced slightly in comparison to previous years, however it does need to be noted that the service was suspended for a time owing to COVID 19.

The number of fines being issued for Dog Control Order offences has decreased slightly. While there has been a slight decrease in fines issued for dog control offences, 2019/20 saw the lowest level of complaints regarding dogs since the enforcement initiative began.

Enforcement Officers are directed to patrol specific areas based on complaints received, particularly in relation to dog control offences. Enforcement Officers work closely with the Authority's dog warden to identify and seize unattended stray dogs, which can be the cause of significant issues associated with dog fouling.

The Council has a three-year delivery project in place supporting the **regional South East Wales Resilient Uplands (SEWRU) project (2018-2021)**. This project also supports the Carbon Reduction Strategy and includes enhancement of our Upland Heath and Bog habitats which are an excellent Carbon Sink. Enhancing these habitats will improve their performance in terms of carbon sequestration, making a positive contribution to the carbon reduction strategy.

The SEWRU is a collaborative project arrangement, involving Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Councils, Natural Resources Wales, Police, Fire and Rescue Services, Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Brecon Beacons National Park. Torfaen County Borough Council is the project Lead for the collaboration.

To date the project has identified and completed several peatland restoration projects, produced common land management plans (including a detailed management plan for Mynydd Llanhilleth), restored many kilometres of commons boundary stock fencing, installed physical barriers to reduce landscape crime on commons and managed important upland heathland to reduce fire risk and facilitate conservation grazing. SEWRU is currently working with Gwent Police and other partners to update the NRMP and produce upland-focussed landscape crime management plans for each common within the project.

The Council was successful in receiving funding from Caru Cymru for a 3-year period from 2019/20 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. The scheme supports projects that make environmental improvements within residential areas by developing benefits for people, businesses and their communities.

The funding application included 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 work was delayed due to the Covid pandemic.

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.

In 2020 the Council approved a new **Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy 2021-2026**. The vision for the strategy is:

“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.”

The strategy includes an action plan setting out the key actions to be undertaken during the lifespan of the strategy 2021-2026, these are set out under four themes:

- Influence
- Engage
- Adopt Best Practice
- Empower

The Council has statutory duties under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems. In order to comply with the Act, the Council is implementing a **Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan**. Progress includes:

- Environment Champions meetings, with ten champions in the network representing all Service Areas and Councillors.
- Environment objectives included within the relevant service area business plans to monitor progress
- Blaenau Gwent leading on the Blaenau Gwent on the Move Project (PSB funded project) with associated biodiversity benefits on the Ebbw Fawr Trail.
- Paperless pay slips and expenses
- Ongoing development of outside spaces
- The inclusion of ecosystem resilience in the Local Development Plan 2018-2033
- Five Local Nature Reserves were designated in March 2019
- Engaged with 17 schools providing indoor and outdoor learning sessions linked to the natural environment
- Schools built as part of the 21st Century Schools programme built to excellent Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) standard.

In 2018/19 Blaenau Gwent exceeded the statutory Welsh Government **recycling** target of 58% for the first time, achieving 59.28%. In 2019/20 this success was built on and exceeded the new higher target of 64%, attaining 65.31%. The unverified figure for 2020/21 has the recycling figure to be 64.29%. The next challenge will be continuing to improve performance and working towards the 70% target which will come into force from 2024/25. This has been achieved through the hard work and dedication of the Waste Team in partnership with WRAP and with support from the Communications Team, Performance Team, Senior Management, The Elected Leadership and most importantly, the residents of Blaenau Gwent. This year on year success has seen Blaenau Gwent move from 22nd in 2017/18 to 11th in 2019/20 when compared to all other Welsh Local Authority's, this is as a direct result of the significant improvement we have accomplished in the collection of dry recycling materials at the kerbside. The Welsh Government, through Local Partnerships, approached Blaenau Gwent to develop a regional facility for municipal wood waste reprocessing at Silent Valley. Following confirmation from Blaenau Gwent agreeing to be the Lead Authority on the project, the Welsh Government allocated funding to develop the project to an Outline Business Case (OBC). The OBC introduces a viable opportunity for the public sector to set up and operate its own waste wood recycling facility. The OBC sets out the case for public sector capital investment into a public-owned, wood waste recycling facility in South East Wales, harnessing a configuration of advanced wood recycling machinery installed in a purpose-built

processing building at Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's (BGCBC) Silent Valley waste site. The five cases of the OBC (Strategic, Economic, Commercial, Financial and Management) explore how the proposed integrated wood recycling facility can realise significant cost savings, economic and environmental benefits for the public sector.

It is proposed that with government support in the form of capital funding, this project will enable Blaenau Gwent and participating Local Authorities to create an effective public sector investment model to create a more efficient and transparent approach to the management of its waste wood in South Wales.

Blaenau Gwent has seen a lot of investment over recent years with regards to **new build housing**. Most recently £2.1m was allocated to support the delivery of **affordable housing** at former Ebbw Vale School Site and Glanffrwyd. Development work to progress additional housing sites within Blaenau Gwent is ongoing including:

- Consideration of a residential development at the Abertillery Leisure Centre
- An options appraisal paper has been drafted in respect of Six Bells Plateau
- A development brief for the Civic Centre has been prepared and an options paper will form part of the Ebbw Vale Placemaking Plan. This will inform residential development opportunities at this site, for implementation following the civic centre demolition

The Council has been part of a number of **pilot digital projects** with a focus on the user experience and customer journey. The projects have included a number of service areas including Social Services and Community Services supporting internal awareness and capacity building in the service re-design approach. Additional training has been accessed via the WLGA with more planned. Directorate digital roadmaps are being developed, highlighting areas of opportunity for service redesign and better use of technology and systems. A prioritisation and planning exercise is underway and activity being scoped to support services included in the new operating model.

Digital infrastructure is being developed in areas of Blaenau Gwent including within town centres and other innovative projects through the GovTech Catalyst.

In December 2019 the **Energy Prospectus** was approved. The prospectus provides a mechanism through which a range of available development opportunities within Blaenau Gwent can be promoted and is a means of engaging proactively with potential investors, scheme developers, other Local Authorities and community groups in an effort to stimulate local energy development and supply. This will in turn address the fuel poverty challenges we currently face.

Through progression of the prospectus the Council had set out its aspirations of taking a pro-active approach to addressing future energy challenges. One of the key areas which will directly impact on future energy requirements is the understanding of energy infrastructure across the area. In some parts of Blaenau Gwent there are constraints within existing grid infrastructure that will impact upon the deliverability of projects. **Cardiff Capital Region City Deal** through Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council have secured £1.3million from the Welsh Government Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV) fund to support the delivery of infrastructure to support taxis in the transition to low emission vehicles. Blaenau Gwent has identified sites where infrastructure would be required and shared details of the procurement approach taken by the Gwent Authorities.

Funding was secured in 2020/21 to carry out small scale hydro generation investigations within the wards of Cwm and Llanhilleth through the **Rural Development Programme**. Identification of sites for further investigation and up to two sites for feasibility analysis will now follow. If suitable, this work could provide the area with a small portfolio of hydro generation projects that can be considered further for investment and delivery. Discussions are ongoing with Western Power Distribution to ensure the infrastructure readiness for future business investment.

Sustainable Development

Long Term	The 21 st Century Schools Programme is a long-term investment programme that, at present, spans the period 2014 to 2034. The Band B element covers the period 2019 to 2025. Its emphasis is on delivering a school estate that is fit for purpose and contributes to raising educational standards,
Prevention	A consultant has undertaken a fundamental review of the Street Cleansing Service. The findings of the review formed the basis of the Litter and Fly Tipping Strategy and identified the key objectives, and actions to improve the local environmental quality for the future.
Integration	The development of the regional wood recycling facility required support from Technical Services, Planning, Procurement, Legal and Finance. Also integration with Chief Commercial Officer to develop the asset as a commercial opportunity.
Collaboration	The Welsh-medium Regional Planning of School Places and Demand Group have identified that a regional solution to the anticipated shortfall in Welsh-medium secondary school places is the highest priority.
Involvement	Extensive consultation was undertaken through a Street Cleansing review to provide the necessary information needed in the drafting of the Litter and Fly Tipping Strategy, this included engagement with Blaenau Gwent Member Engagement, Keep Wales Tidy, Litter Champions, External partners/Community Groups , Welsh Government and Departmental officers

Performance Indicators - Owing to the review undertaken on the Corporate Plan in 2020, the national indicators will be provided to support the implementation of the objective.

Performance Indicator	Outturn 18/19	Outturn 19/20	Outturn 20/21	Trend	Comments
Percentage of highways inspected of a high or acceptable standard of cleanliness	94%	97%	99%	↑	High standards of performance have been improved.
Average number of working days taken to clear fly-tipping incidents reported to the authority during the year	2	4	6	↓	New reporting system implemented during 2018/19. The impact was not seen until Q2 which resulted high numbers during Q1 (2018-19). In 2020-21 Q1 and Q2, high number reported due to service disruption during the initial stages of the pandemic.
Average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)	207	312	373	↓	Due to capacity issues there has been a lack of capacity to deliver the grants.
Number of visits to local authority sport and leisure facilities during the year where the visitor will be participating in physical activity per 1,000 population	9115	7838	1061	↓	Figures impacted owing to the closure of the Leisure Centre because of the pandemic and then restrictions on numbers. Online classes were delivered during lockdown but capacity was not available to record the number of participants.
Percentage of principal A roads that are in overall poor condition	3.9%	2%	1.8%	↑	Improvement based on the investment of Capital money and reduction of survey length.
Percentage of principal B roads that are in overall poor condition	4.4%	4.9%	4.8%	↑	As above
Percentage of principal C roads that are in overall poor condition	14%	5.3%	5.2%	↑	As above
Percentage of food establishments which are 'broadly compliant' with food hygiene standards	95.6%	91.5%	91.2%	↔	Very minor reduction in figure
Percentage of waste reused, recycled or composted	59.28%	65.31%	64.29%*	↓	Very minor reduction in figure but exceeding Welsh Government target.

* Unverified Figure

Case Studies

New five-year council litter and fly-tipping strategy supported by Council

Blaenau Gwent Council is one of the first councils in Wales to develop its own litter and fly-tipping strategy, which has been designed to build on the successful work of its past schemes and to reduce the problem of illegal littering.

The new strategy includes a comprehensive action plan to show how the council and its partners can work together and reduce the impact of waste crime throughout the borough. There are a range of actions specifically for tackling this growing problem which include, community engagement, enforcement, education and awareness. Overall the plan will ensure the borough's residents, landowners and businesses understand their waste responsibilities.



The council has recruited over 200 Litter Champions who are provided with equipment, whilst increased partnership work (through a multi-agency approach Police, Natural Resources Wales Agency) will help identify those responsible for enviro-crime, such as fly tipping incidents. At the heart of our 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.

Councillor Joanna Wilkins, Executive Member for the Environment says:

“Fly-tipping and littering is an awful stain on our beautiful landscape and towns. Not only is it an illegal eyesore but often adds to the risk of flooding by blocking water courses and drains. Our new litter and fly-tipping strategy will show our commitment to keeping Blaenau Gwent a clean and green environment, making it not only a great place to live and work but also to visit. As fly-tipping has been on the increase this new approach will help reduce the current yearly clean-up costs. Maintaining clean streets and our environment has been a high priority for the council for a number of years and the minority of illegal fly-tippers have a negative impact on the majority of our responsible residents. We are doing everything we can to try and stop it and I am sure the people of Blaenau Gwent will show the same commitment as we introduce this new strategy”.

The five-year bespoke strategy aims to significantly reduce the existing litter and fly-tipping issues and adhere to the document's 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 desire to keep it litter free”.

Blaenau Gwent **Community Benefits**

Wild flower and Tree planting with ESP at Georgetown Primary School, Tredegar



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council



'It was fantastic to be able to help out at Georgetown School, with their new plants and trees for the pupils to plant and watch grow. Helping local and community schemes is a core value for ESP, and so we were pleased to be able to be involved'.

Danilo Bettosi, Associate Director - Earth Science Partnership

Project Title: Earth Science Partnership

Contract Lead: Blaenau Gwent CBC

Project Date: April 2021



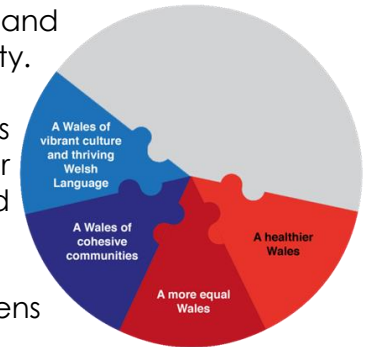
Support a fairer sustainable economy and community

Why this is important

Improving the provision of Education services is vitally important to ensure that teaching and learning in both school and community settings is achieving ambitious outcomes for all, and therefore, supporting a fairer and sustainable community.

Improvements in educational standards are complemented through investing in community and regeneration services to support a fairer and sustainable economy. This is a key strand of work Blaenau Gwent, including working with a number of regional programmes including the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (including the Metro scheme), Tech Valleys and the Valleys Task Force.

This objective remains high on the Council's agenda. The Council is looking to support the well-being agenda of all citizens as including supporting improvements in attainment to provide opportunities to future generations.



Priorities

- Support all learners to achieve improved outcomes;
- To improve pupil outcomes, progress and wellbeing;
- Improve skills and promote digital participation;
- To work with partners to provide effective employment support and access to skills development (Apprenticeships);
- To increase the start-up business rate, retention and growth of local businesses and attract new inward investment;
- To actively participate in partnerships such as Tech Valleys and CCRCO to attract investment; and
- To work with partners to develop a new vision for our town centres ensuring their long term future.

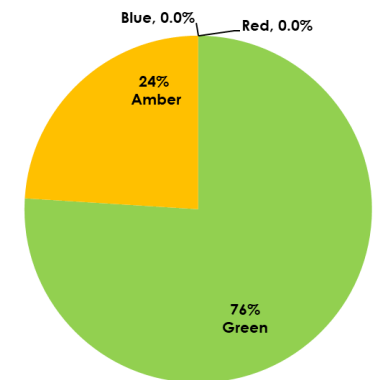
Overview 2020/21

There has been substantial progress in the implementation of this objective but it is recognised that there is still further work to do to fully implement the aims and objectives.

As at the 31st March 2021, the performance against this objective was evaluated as mainly successful as 76% of the actions were green (on target) and 24% were amber (behind target with manageable issues).

Some key activity includes:

In 2020-21 the Council appointed a permanent Corporate Director of Education and the Education Directorate has a new Leadership and Management team in place, involving greater capacity for school improvement through a newly appointed Head of School Improvement and Inclusion post. Permanent appointments have also been made to the Service Manager positions for Education Transformation and Business Change as well as Young People and Partnerships. This has created capacity and a strong team to take the Education Directorate forward, especially in the way that we support children and young people in school/college and



community settings.

Strong progress has been made on the **Welsh medium School provision** in Blaenau Gwent with the consultation concluded and implementation planned from September 2023. By 2029 the school will be fully established, with all year groups from Nursery to Year 6 operational. The full implementation of the new school will include a new 210 places Welsh-medium primary school in the Tredegar /Sirhowy valley.

The development of the school will support implementation of the **Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)** 2017-20, which is directly aligned to both the Welsh Government's and the Council's Welsh Language strategic frameworks.

Throughout 2020/21 **Education and its schools** have had to respond to the changing requirements with regards to supporting the education of pupils throughout the pandemic. The focus for Education has clearly been supporting a safe return to school for learners and staff, however, throughout each phase of the pandemic the range of support to schools has flexed in order to respond to emerging learner and school improvement needs. The EAS, the commissioned school improvement service has worked closely with the Council, school leaders, staff and governors to support the identified needs. A high-level summary of the extensive work that is ongoing to support schools is detailed below, but clearly this is not an exhaustive list:

- Securing re-purposed school provision for key worker families and vulnerable learners throughout the COVID pandemic;
- Providing timely communication and access to virtual networks for school settings and governors, in line with the Welsh Government's Continuity of Learning Plan (CoLP);
- Supporting adaptive and innovative blended learning to enable children and young people to continue with learning in home settings;
- Providing bespoke leadership support to schools and settings with a focus on self-evaluation, quality assuring current provision and planning for return;
- Supporting circa 2,200 families entitled to Free School Meals (eFSM);
- Providing wellbeing resources and guidance materials, particularly to support remote learning;
- Continuing to provide a range of professional learning that meets the needs of the entire workforce (and governors) over the 2020-21 academic year; and,
- Support for circa 1,400 digitally disadvantaged learners with funding of £600,000+ support from the EdTech initiative.

The Welsh Inspectorate body for Education, Estyn undertook a Thematic Review across Wales to consider how Local authorities and regional consortia supported schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19. The review covered the period June to November 2020 and the report was published in January 2021. **Estyn undertook a Thematic Review** across Wales to consider how Local authorities and regional consortia supported schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19. The review covered the period June to November 2020 and the report was published in January 2021.

The report focused specifically on two aspects:

- Promoting learning – the quality of the learning offer and how has this been supported through further guidance and professional learning?
Supporting vulnerable pupils – how did the local authority targeted services; and,
- Support to vulnerable pupils to support them to engage in learning? What barriers still exist?

In Blaenau Gwent there were two sessions convened with Estyn Local Authority Link Inspectors (LALI) during the Autumn term and they also interviewed a cohort of Blaenau Gwent's Headteachers.

The BG Estyn Thematic Review letter is positive overall and highlights four cameos 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.

The narrative from the Estyn Thematic Review findings provides assurance that the Council/ Education Directorate has handled the emergency response well in supporting schools.

A school improvement and learner **Recovery and Renewal Action Plan** has been developed to support for all learners, including wellbeing considerations. There is an extensive impact assessment that covers all key stakeholders and this will be used to inform the Recovery and Renewal programme of activity and business planning moving forward.

The **Youth Service** also supported young people throughout the emergency period in both school and community settings. The team liaised with secondary schools regarding support for school-age young people on a weekly basis along with the following key activities:

- Providing emotional wellbeing support for young people.
- Emergency support for young people in crisis, including the provision of food.
- Resources to support Elective Home Educated (EHE) young people and families in line with requests.
- Reviewing the 'stay at home' campaign with vulnerable 18-25 year olds (liaising with local partners such as Gwent Police).
- Providing support for young people experiencing homelessness issues.

The **Blaenau Gwent 21st Century Schools Programme** continues to deliver improvements in the school estate. The Band A programme was completed on time and to budget and generated an investment of more than £21m into the school estate, including new schools such as the Tillery Street and Six Bells Campuses that form part of the Abertillery Learning Community.

The delivery of the **21st Century Band B programme** is continuing and will be delivered over the period 2020-25. The Band B investment and new Welsh medium school will realise a further circa £26m investment into the school estate to transform the provision. The Band B planning arrangements are well underway, including the submission of business cases to WG. Moreover, the digital infrastructure has improved significantly across the schools in response to COVID and in line with the HWB EdTech initiative. The next step is to deliver a BG ICT Strategy for schools to improve T&L in the classroom.

The Welsh Government rolled out the Hwb EdTech (HET) initiative which provides a £2 million investment **ICT Infrastructure** throughout the school estate to improve access for learners to the latest in digital developments, in line with the Welsh Government's Digital Competency Framework.

The status of the ICP placed Blaenau Gwent in a strong position to further enhance infrastructure in line with the Hwb EdTech funding. This meant that we were able to incorporate the additional work programme into the ICP, and realise efficiencies in terms of both time and resources.

During the Spring-term 2020, Welsh Government announced funding to address the needs of digitally disadvantaged learners and associated device replacement in schools, including a **Hwb In-schools Infrastructure Grant Scheme (HISIG)**. This aspect of the device-based funding was initiated earlier than planned, to address issues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the funding allocation for Blaenau Gwent was confirmed as £605,254. The criteria for the funding included: device replacement costs, servers, licensing to support re-build and programming of end of life (EOL) devices to meet the needs of digitally excluded learners; along with Mi-Fi units to support home-based connectivity. Despite the impact of COVID-19, which has resulted in both school access and resourcing issues, along with extensive additional planning and risk assessment requirements; excellent progress has been made in line with delivery of the ICP. In addition, sustainability planning is underway to address the associated long-term strategic priorities throughout the school estate. Schools and relevant partners have already been consulted upon and agreed key underlying principles. A detailed plan will be developed for implementation from September 2021.

The **Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone** delivers an annual performance report to the Council. The 2020 performance continued to improve overall. The transformation of post 16 provision across the County Borough has delivered:

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

The partnership between the Council and Coleg Gwent has matured and a systematic approach is in place to share data at a strategic and operational level. The partnership was developed further through the establishment of a **Post 16 Partnership Board** with representation from the Education Directorate, Coleg Gwent, work based learning providers and Blaenau Gwent secondary school settings. There are also representatives from colleagues in Regeneration to encompass the broader skills and economic development agenda, contributing towards the Blaenau Gwent Employment and Skills Plan. Through this, learner experiences have been improved by providing a wider breath in the provision on offer and the curriculum being delivered by industry experts with links to companies such as Thales, TVR and Tech Valleys. the opportunities for our young people through these learner pathways into Further Education have been very much strengthened.

The Education Portfolio has also changed in 2020-21 to include the client function for the **Aneurin Leisure Trust**. This is transforming the relationship between the Council and the Leisure Trust, with a new five-year agreement in place. A Leisure and Libraries Strategic Partnership Board has been established, which is Chaired by the Leader of the Council. The ALT financial position has improved significantly and the Trust has supported the Council exceptionally well during the COVID-19 pandemic and with the community hub provision, in line with the new operating model.

As part of the **Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCR)**, the Council has worked closely with Transport for Wales (TfW) on a number of project components put forward as part of the Metro Plus scheme in Blaenau Gwent. This includes both the Ebbw Valley line and the Abertillery spur. The work progressing with the Metro Plus (Phase 1) work is part of a programme of 10 transport schemes which are part of the wider metro infrastructure. These Metro Plus schemes are not individual projects, but a programme of regional enabling infrastructure, to stimulate economic

growth and regeneration across Cardiff City Region, supporting the sustainable mobility of people, and improving the way people make their economic contribution. Merthyr Council is the financial host for this program.

Work is continuing on the improvements to the Ebbw Valley line to increase frequency of services and will be continuing over the next few years to enable the line to take more train capacity. The design work on the Abertillery line is being tested as part of the infrastructure and scheduling work to provide a service to Cardiff and Newport.

CCR has been awarded £1.3million from the Welsh Government Ultra Low Emission Vehicle (ULEV) Transformation Fund to assist with the transition to Low Emission across the region. One of the projects within this is the Taxi ULEV project, providing charging infrastructure on taxi ranks for the sole purpose of charging taxis.

Sites in Blaenau Gwent have been agreed as Abertillery, Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale and Tredegar. The second part of the project is to provide some electric taxis to each local authority to encourage take up of these.

As part of the CCR Blaenau Gwent have put forward 10 sites on Council owned land/car parks across the borough, to be included within the tender, for the installation of 22kw charging points. CCRCDD developed a £35million Viability Gap Fund, a targeted funding programme to bring forward new homes on key strategic housing sites across South East Wales.

CCR Investment panel received a proposal from Aspire BG to roll out the offer across the Region to provide support for Industries of the Future in 2020. The Investment panel have requested a review to be undertaken of the existing apprenticeship landscape across SE Wales, specifically focussing on Shared Apprenticeship Programme aspect and Industries of the Future. The review work will identify gaps in service delivery and business needs. We are still awaiting the outcomes of the review to understand whether the Aspire proposal will be funded. This has been delayed, but we are expecting it by the summer.

The Council continues to work with **Tech Valleys** to develop and deliver projects, including completion of the Business Park on the Works Site, development work around a Future Skills Academy and a range of other projects in development.

The **Blaenau Gwent Destination Management Plan** (BGDMP) is a strategic document that sets out priorities for tourism development in Blaenau Gwent over the period 2020-2025 and complements the new Visit Wales Tourism Action Plan over the same period.

The BGDMP aims to ensure that people, businesses and organisations work together in a coordinated way to deliver agreed targets and priorities for investment. The plan identifies six Cross Cutting Themes and five main themes and priority areas. The cross cutting themes are Business development, Challenging and changing perceptions, Partnership working, Research and Analysis, Skills and Transport. The main themes are Business Tourism; Culture, Heritage (including the Home of the NHS) and Genealogy; Events and Green/Eco Tourism (including Outdoor Activity, Trails and Town Centres).

The BGDMP and associated Action Plan have taken account of national, strategic and local trends and priorities. The Plan and Action Plan have been developed by the Destination Partnership which comprises representatives from the Private, Public and Third sectors.

As part of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee a Town Centre Task and Finish Group has been established to consider the key areas for inclusion within the future **Town Centre Strategy**. The key areas are:

Infrastructure:

- Traffic Orders / Parking Enforcement across the Towns
- Pedestrian zones and their overall impact upon town centre viability
- Parking facilities and availability
- Town Centre Gateways and Wayfinding

Retail and Enterprise

- Recognising current challenges resulting from COVID-19
- Developing an enterprise culture to compliment other projects being delivered by the Council such as the Boxworks including the potential for pop-up town centre space that could allow test trading and supporting businesses to use start-up retail premises.
- Supporting outdoor markets
- Along with infrastructure and physical retail premises consider additional support town centre businesses may need to continue to operate.
- Identifying training and development opportunities to help businesses to operate and grow in the future

Image

- Minimising negative perceptions of town centres.
- Promoting positive news stories as much as possible
- Highlighting the essential services that are provided to our community.
- Creating a sense of place and enhance the overall town centre experience.

Digital Communications

- look at how the Council can use digital communications to promote and support town centres, exploring the use of social and digital media.
- Supporting those who want to trade online
- Installing free public Wi-Fi across the town centres

Delivery Approach

- Development of a partnership model for delivery of the strategy

Sustainable Development

Long Term	Close work with Welsh Government is ongoing to shape support programmes whilst continuing to support business on response and recovery in the long term.
Prevention	Within the Employment and skills plan there is acknowledgement of current employment, skills and attainment figures relating to the local population and our relatively weak performance comparative to other areas within the region. The plan seeks to address this by putting in place measures to address current performance.
Integration	The Business & Innovation Team have been working in conjunction with Estates, Finance, Technical Services & Legal to prepare the necessary legal documents & marketing materials for the new Hybrid Units that will be available at The Works site in early 2021. Viewings have already taken place with 5 of the 9 units at lease stage (by one Global business). The remaining 4 are being marketed and will be available during May.
Collaboration	COVID 19 has posed significant challenges for town centres - collaborative working through Town Centre Facilitator, Task & Finish Groups and partners has and will continue to be key for town centre recovery.
Involvement	CCRCD are formally launching the Viability Gap Fund Opportunity, which may stimulate additional interest from land owners and developers to work with BGCBC to bring forward development. Engagement with existing partners on the identified sites will continue. Consultation and engagement would also form part of any planning applications associated with a given development site.

Performance Indicators - As a result of the review undertaken on the Corporate Plan in 2020, the national indicators will be provided to support the implementation of the objective. There are robust governance arrangements in place between the Council and the EAS to monitor school performance. The reporting of Council/School level performance data has been relaxed in Wales by WG due to the COVID 19 pandemic. However, Blaenau Gwent's schools Summer 2020 KS4 results improved overall and were in line with the targets set in the 4 secondary settings School Development Plans (SDPs). Preparations are well underway for KS4 Centre Determined Grades in 2021. The BG Learning Zone's Post 16 A and A/S Level results are shown below, which continue to remain strong.

Performance Indicator	Outturn 18/20	Outturn 19/20	Outturn 20/21	Quarterly Performance Trend	Comments
% achieving A-Level (Key Stage 5) A*-E	100%	100%	99.1%	↓	Small decline seen at A Level, but in line with Welsh national average.
% achieving AS-Level (Key Stage 5) A*-E	90.9%	92.7%	94.1%	↑	Upward trend in positive progression for AS Level
Percentage of empty private sector properties brought back into use during the year through direct action by the local authority	4.6%	6%	2%	↓	Decline in 2020/21 due to transferring staff resources to Covid 19 infection control work including the Empty Property Officer.
Number of additional dwellings created as a result of bringing empty properties back into use	-	12	0	↓	2019-20 Increase arose from additional number of conversions to flats within previous empty properties. No additional dwellings were created from other empty properties during the 2020/21 year.

Case Studies

Aspire Blaenau Gwent

The success of a pioneering Apprenticeship Programme that is breathing new life into the advanced manufacturing sector across two South Wales local authority areas has been recognised with a prestigious national award. **Aspire Blaenau Gwent & Merthyr Tydfil's Shared Apprenticeship Programme** won the Large Employer of the Year award at the virtual Apprenticeship Awards Cymru 2021 ceremony in June.

The Shared Apprenticeship Programme was created six years ago to tackle high unemployment and relatively low skill levels within the manufacturing industry.

The programme has directly benefited 123 apprentices as well as companies that have adopted its innovative approach. Learners are rotated around host employers to plug skills gaps by training on-the-job and working to achieve units towards their apprenticeship.

Celebrating outstanding achievement in training and apprenticeships, the Apprenticeship Awards Cymru 2021 saw 35 finalists compete in 12 categories.

Highlight of the work-based learning calendar, the awards showcased businesses and individuals who have excelled on the Welsh Government's Apprenticeship and Traineeship Programmes and gone the extra mile to achieve success during these unprecedented times. Jointly organised by the Welsh Government and the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW), the awards had Openreach, the UK's digital network business and passionate supporter of apprenticeships, as the headline sponsor.

The Apprenticeship Programme in Wales is funded by the Welsh Government with support from the European Social Fund. Welsh Government apprenticeship programmes have benefitted 50,360 people across South East Wales since May 2016.

Aspire's Shared Apprenticeship Programme was first established in 2015 when Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone Board identified a significant lack of employees with skills at Level 3 and above in Blaenau Gwent. Two years later, Merthyr Tydfil joined to develop its business growth and enhance skills whilst tackling unemployment.

Aspire is now working with both Coleg y Cymoedd, who link with Coleg Gwent, and Coleg Merthyr Tydfil to foster the next generation of skilled workers through apprenticeships covering Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, ICT, Applied Science, Quality Engineering as well as Business/Commercial Administration and Finance.

With a target to recruit 20 new apprentices every year, Aspire has achieved a 100% success rate through a team facilitating their employment with hosts and then dealing with any issues as they occur. More than 30 employers have engaged with the programme



Support to Businesses

The Crucial work undertaken as part of Welsh Government's £100m Tech Valleys programme in Blaenau Gwent, established to support high value, sustainable jobs, attract investment and create opportunities, has enabled companies including Insurgo Media Services to really kick on in the area.

Insurgo are tape media experts and specialists in the supply and support of tape media. They provide services to support the data throughout its lifecycle and handle environmentally-friendly data disposal for end-of-life tape. The company required additional space to support their growth plans, and have now taken on four units, two of which are newly refurbished in the business park. In 11 years the company has grown from a back bedroom business to now occupying six units on Roseheyworth, and will likely need more as time passes.

Insurgo's Managing Director Gavin Griffiths said: "Within 12 months we hope to double our current workforce of 16 as we progress our main plan to become global leaders of secure tape disposal services. We have patented technology granted in six countries, and a further 46 patents pending globally.

"We have the best environmental credentials of any tape disposal method in the world, and we're aiming to start working on the only 100% recycling method of all tape media formats in Roseheyworth. The refurbishment of the business park allows us to stay where we want to be and grow our service offering, enabling us to recruit and expand the team. It's an ideal base for us."

The extensive work at Roseheyworth involved the refurbishment of four dilapidated business units, repairing the roof, doors and windows, and adding suspended ceilings, new flooring and heating systems, creating an additional 12,386ft² / 1,150m² of floor space. The Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating has improved from 'G' to 'C' through the use of energy efficient aluminium double-glazed panels, void insulation, and the fitting of LED lighting throughout.

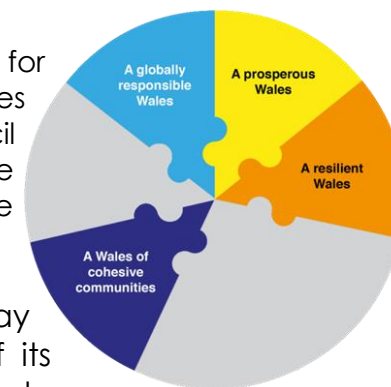
Councillor Dai Davies, Deputy Leader of Blaenau Gwent Council and Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development said: "The investment in Roseheyworth by Tech Valleys is really welcome news and demonstrates our commitment to working with businesses based in Blaenau Gwent. It has helped create modern premises to help these great local businesses with their expansion plans creating more job opportunities in the local area."



An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities

Why this is important

The Corporate Plan provides the focus for delivering lasting change for the area. It also provides the platform for transforming Blaenau Gwent into a more confident and capable Council. The ambition is to deliver better outcomes for the people of Blaenau Gwent and that ambition is underpinned by solid and sustainable plans, ensuring the Council can be held to account for what it has promised to deliver. Maximising the impact of resources to deliver those outcomes sits at the heart of this priority, including; understanding costs, controlling expenditure, maximising income and aligning resources to the needs of residents, businesses and visitors to build a Blaenau Gwent for the future.



Central to delivering this objective is looking at an approach to working in a cost effective and efficient way across the Council supported by strong leadership. The Council has worked hard to achieve 80% of its projected savings targets which has continued to support the financial resilience of the Council and has been identified as an area of good practice by Audit Wales. Clear and visible leadership has been evident throughout the past year with support to addressing the pandemic as well as implementing a new leadership development programme, put in place to support the Council's new working arrangements.

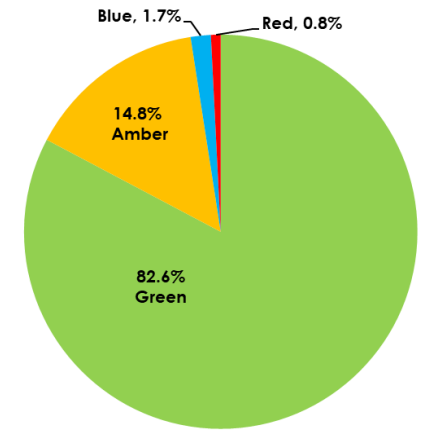
Priorities

- To demonstrate clear and visible leadership to deliver a viable and resilient Council;
- To ensure effective forward financial planning arrangements are in place to support the Council's financial resilience;
- To support and develop a workforce that has the capacity and capability to be productive and responsive to future demands;
- We will deliver online services that are simple and convenient, improving the relationship between residents, business and the council;
- COVID 19 – safe working environment for our staff and service users;
- We will work in an agile way, capturing learning and seeking continuous improvement;
- To develop a more commercial organisation to generate income and deliver cost reductions to make local services sustainable and raise money to re-invest in our priorities; and
- To be a strong and effective partner and collaborate where possible to deliver financial, business and community benefits.

Overview 2020/21

Throughout 2020/21 there has been progress in the implementation of the priorities supporting delivery of this objective but it is recognised that there is still further work to do to fully implement the aims and objectives.

As at the 31st March 2021, the performance of this objective was evaluated as being mainly successful as 82.6% of actions were green (on target), 14.8% were amber (behind target with manageable issues), 0.8% Red (significant issues) and 1.7% was blue (completed).



Some key activity includes:

The **Commercial Strategy** was approved by Council in September 2020. The Strategy brings together themes that will contribute to Blaenau Gwent Council being commercially minded and focused within the context of maintaining the Council's core purpose to provide public services delivering social value.

The response to the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the delivery of the Strategy. However, focus has been given to building on the initial 'Bridging the Gap' Strategic Business Review of third party expenditure with work being undertaken on:

- Excellence in Commissioning and Procurement; and
- Excellence in Contract and Supplier Management.

Work in the early part of 2021/22 looked to re-ignite our approach to:

- Managing commercial activities through profit and loss accounting;
- Creation of an Investment Portfolio; and
- Creation of a Commercial and Entrepreneurial Culture.

Progress of the Strategy is governed through a newly created Strategic Commissioning and Commercial Board.

The Corporate **Communications Strategy** was approved by Council in September 2020. Its main objective is to ensure that, as a commercial organisation, the Council is seen as a trusted brand delivering quality services.

Through implementing the Strategy, the Council is looking to deliver excellent, innovative and cost effective two-way communications, building a positive reputation and increasing trust and confidence that the Council is delivering services that meet resident, businesses and visitor's needs.

The Strategy has six themes, however, since the COVID 19 pandemic, focus has been on one specific theme, to 'make sure residents are informed in advance of and at times of emergency'. Informing staff and members has also been key throughout this period.

During the unprecedented challenge that the pandemic brought, and the move to remote working, meant that the importance of digital and social media became even more significant. The fast moving environment required an almost constant flow of information and content being produced by the Corporate Communications Team.

The Council's Corporate Communications Team was also a key member of Gwent Local Resilience Forum Warning and Informing Group. This group had responsibility for aligning communications and communicating key information to the residents of Gwent during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring a consistent approach between local partners, Public Health Wales and Welsh Government. The content was a mixture of partner material (Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, Health Board) and content created by the team using their creative skills.

The **Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)** is a key element within the Council's strategic planning framework. It is this financial framework which will support the Council's financial resilience and ensure it operates sustainably.

The MTFS provides a future look over the next five years in order to:

- assess the spending requirements that the Council is likely to face;
- delivering the priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan; and
- highlights the level of cuts (reducing or stopping services) that will need to be made to ensure the Council can set a balanced budget each year.

The MTFS proposes the approach that the Council will take to respond to the financial challenges over the next five-year period. This will be an iterative process and one that will be developed and refined as the Council's funding position from Wales Government becomes clearer and strategic business reviews are further developed and implemented.

During the year, the Medium Term Financial Strategy has been reviewed, and subsequently in March 2021, Council agreed its budget for 2021/22 which included a planned contribution to reserves of £1.2m.

The provisional out-turn financial position of the Council for 2020/21 is a net favourable variance of £2.7m against a net revenue budget of £152.1m. In an unprecedented year with service delivery impacted by COVID 19 the positive variance arises for several reasons including:

- a significant amount of Welsh Government funding compensating the Council for additional costs and lost income; and
- additional grants received and underspends across services.

The positive out-turn has resulted in an increase in reserves, a move towards strengthening the Council's financial resilience.

In August 2020 the Council received its 'Supporting Financial Resilience Follow Up Review' from Audit Wales. The review sought to answer the question, 'Can the Council provide assurance that it has addressed the proposals for improvement detailed in the 2018 Supporting Financial Resilience review output?'

The main findings from Audit Wales was that, 'the Council has responded positively and is making progress against the proposals for improvement and has future work planned to fully address them'.

Audit Wales found that:

- the Council is taking steps to understand and address the reasons for its lower than average council tax collection rates and high staff costs;
- the Council has developed a central grants register and is beginning to manage grants more strategically;
- the Council is making good progress with its strategic review of fees and charges;
- the Council is strengthening its financial planning and management arrangements;
- although levels of useable reserves remain low, the Council has taken proactive steps to improve its position and the MTFS demonstrates an ongoing commitment to strengthen the General Reserve; and
- the Bridging the Gap programme is making effective use of data and further work is underway to improve the way the Council uses data.

The **UK exited the EU** on 31st Jan 2020 and entered a **transition period** until 31st December 2020, during which the UK's relationship with the EU remained largely the same as it was.

A level of uncertainty still remains as to what the full implications of exiting the EU will be for local authorities in Wales. This uncertainty, combined with the ongoing impact of the Covid19 pandemic, has impacted the scope of preparedness activity and modelling that can be undertaken at local authority level.

The Core Planning Group continued to meet during the pandemic to facilitate EU transition preparations. The Group receives information from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and Welsh Government about the national picture, as well as information from the Home Office regarding the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). Blaenau Gwent is also represented on the WLGA Brexit Coordinator network.

The WLGA submitted a bid to the Welsh Government's EU Transition Fund for each Welsh local authority to receive £45,000 funding during 2019/20 and 2020/21 towards corporate capacity support for resourced work on preparing for and responding to exiting the EU. The Council has received this funding to support the corporate Brexit planning work. This funding, for all 22 councils in Wales, was secured by the WLGA as part of their Brexit Transition Support Programme. A decision is awaited from Welsh Government on whether funding for local authorities will continue in 2021/22, with representations being made about the importance of the funding for councils to respond to the impact of EU transition. Monitoring the local impact and undertaking work to maximise opportunities and mitigate against any risks from the UK's exit from the EU will help to create a more resilient and prepared local authority for the public.

The **Agile Working** is aligned to the Council's new Operating Model and Working Arrangements, approved on 25th March 2021.

The Policy will look to introduce a new model of working across the Council, incorporating modern working practices, seeking to enhance employees' working experience, maximise performance and productivity and deliver the greatest value to the organisation, in terms of improving service delivery, as well as realising financial gains.

The Agile Working Policy is a key enabler in delivering the future working model. It also links to the Council's vision for sustainable development including sustainable economic growth, de-carbonisation and the health and well-being of both staff and the community.

The policy clearly sets out Corporate, management and employee responsibilities and includes:

- Designation of roles into one of three workstyles, defined as; Homeworker, Agile Worker, Service/Community Worker;
- Proposes payments to support homeworking for the Homeworker (£26 per month tax free) and Agile Worker (£12 per month tax free);
- Details the standard equipment which the Council will provide to home/agile workers. Reasonable adjustments may necessitate additional equipment
- Focuses on health, safety and welfare including employee/employer responsibilities;
- Outlines data protection, security and confidentiality requirements; and
- Demonstrates commitment to equal opportunities/reasonable adjustments and to treat staff in a fair, equitable and consistent manner and to comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

The policy will improve employee well-being, engagement and performance, aid employee recruitment and retention and reduce absences.

A **staff survey** was undertaken in 2020 to consider the impacts of COVID 19 and working remotely as well as considerations for future working. From the survey analysis it shows the majority of staff:

- rate their productivity as the same or better compared since homeworking;
- feel they are appropriately supported;
- feel they have a healthy work/life balance; and
- rate their wellbeing as fair, good or very good.

The **Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) Service** was put in place as a response to tracking COVID 19 in order to enhance health surveillance in the community, undertake effective and extensive contact tracing, and support people to self-isolate where required to do so.

Welsh Government set out its Strategy for leading Wales out of the coronavirus pandemic in May 2020 based on 3 pillars:

- The measures and evidence by which current infection levels will be judged upon and transmission rates for coronavirus in Wales;
- The principles by which proposed measures will be examined to ease the current restrictions; and
- Enhancing public health surveillance and response system to enable prevention of infection and track the virus as restrictions are eased.

Contact tracing starts with self-reporting of symptoms, followed by testing suspected cases, tracing the contacts of those who have tested positive and then protecting families, friends and communities through self-isolation.

In Wales, there exists a robust public health system delivered by local health boards. As local authorities have significant expertise in contact tracing the TTP services are being run from within local authorities unlike in England.

Blaenau Gwent TTP Service is a regional approach with four other local authorities across Gwent (Caerphilly, Newport, Monmouthshire and Torfaen) all working in partnership with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Public Health Wales.

The TTP service is in operation 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm, operating across bank holidays and deals with:

- New cases for tracing by Tracers, where contacts are identified;

- Contacts of positive cases identified are contacted by Advisors who carry out daily check ins over the period of isolation. The Advisors will look out for symptoms, give advice around self-isolation making sure this is maintained through the isolation period. Also link into the Locality Response Teams and Benefits Teams for the Self Isolation payment scheme;
- Backward tracing of cases;
- Heavily involved in the variant tracing; and
- Lateral Flow Testing.

In response to the pandemic, the Council put in place arrangements to support the most vulnerable within the community and those shielding by setting up **Locality Response Teams**. The Teams were established across the borough and support included the collection of medication and shopping for those that had no other support and also signposting to other agencies. Staff across the Council were redeployed to the Locality Teams and activity was monitored to ensure that the provision met demand.

Through recent learning from COVID 19 the Council has looked to establish **Community Hubs**. These will operate from Libraries to create more accessible services to the public including benefits, council tax and community services. The Hubs will deliver services in a new and modern way.

At the outset of the pandemic and the national lockdown, a decision was made, alongside other Local Authorities, to suspend the full schedule of formal **Council Committees** at the end of March 2020. Blaenau Gwent put in arrangements for the AGM to be held virtually, one of the first in Wales to do so on 2nd April. Arrangements were also put in place for Executive, Planning and Full Council to meet virtually before the Summer Recess. The full committee cycle was re-established from September 2020.

At the outset of the pandemic arrangements were put in place to provide all members with laptops to ensure that they could still take part in meetings and engage with constituents and one another. Elected Members responded to the need to move to more agile working, and did so at a pace. During the initial implementation phases there were inevitably some 'teething' problems experienced. To support Members to move to more agile working a number of activities were undertaken, including:

- Sourcing, distribution and set up of laptops for all members;
- Council implementation of Microsoft Teams;
- Specific guidance on how to set up laptops to enable the use of Microsoft Teams;
- Test session held prior to the formal Planning Committee which was the pilot for the use of Teams;
- Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny meeting held where, 'how to run a virtual meeting' was included on the agenda;
- Specific guidance and support on using emails, diary management and accessing documents;
- Offers for 'buddying' with officers of the Democratic Services Team to support members who felt this would be of value;
- Ongoing support to check in with members on any issues they were experiencing to access committee meetings; and
- Specific guidance on using Teams in the committee environment.


As part of the Council's **new Operating Model and Working Arrangements**, the Council's **Democratic Hub** will be relocated from the Civic Centre to the General Offices in Ebbw Vale. As part of this the Council Chamber needed to be relocated. This provided an opportunity for the Council to reflect on learning from COVID 19 and also to prepare for legislative requirements that would needed to be put in place as part of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, such as remote access, hybrid meetings and the recording of meetings.

The Council has procured a new delegate system which supports remote access enabling members, officers, the press and public the opportunity to observe a meeting remotely or attend physically. The intention of enabling remote access is to support work / life balance and to protect well-being. The arrangements should also support working members and those with parental or caring responsibilities, providing a more diverse democratic arrangement.

Sustainable Development

Long Term	The decisions made as part of the Bridging the Gap programme are designed to support the long term financial resilience of the Council and to influence the design of services for the future.
Prevention	The Commercial strategy is designed to support the needs of the Council now and in the future. It is designed to build financial resilience and to prevent the need to seek service cuts.
Integration	The Test, Trace and Protect 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.
Collaboration	An effective partnership approach was taken to support one another throughout the pandemic, ensuring that the services that were running were appropriately supported and resourced. Partners included the Leisure Trust, Housing and the voluntary sector.
Involvement	When the Council brought its CCTV system back in-house, there was extensive involvement and consultation with Gwent Police who also represented views from town centres traders.

Performance Indicators - Owing to the review undertaken on the Corporate Plan in 2020, the national indicators will be provided to support the implementation of the objective.

Performance Indicator	Outturn 19/20	Outturn 20/21	Quarterly Performance Trend
Number of working days/shifts per full-time equivalent (FTE) local authority employee lost due to sickness absence during the year	13.9	11.6	

Case Studies

Locality Team - During the COVID 19 pandemic, when many vulnerable people were advised to shield and self isolate, Mrs X was referred to Locality Team from the foodbank. This referral was made as Mrs X was contacting the food bank constantly for food but was also ringing them to take the food back that she did not want/need. As Mrs X did not have a support network via friends or family, it was suggested that Mrs X may benefit from a buddy or good neighbour scheme. A referral was made to Cymru Creations for regular shopping support as was a referral to the Citizens Advice Bureau for a benefits check; to ensure Mrs X was getting all of the benefits to which she was entitled.

Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) - A family had been identified as contacts of someone who had tested positive for covid-19 and been told to self-isolate for 10 days. The service contacted the family to see what support was needed. It was felt that food shopping would be manageable but that support would be needed to walk the dog. Using the local volunteer list, compiled of Blaenau Gwent staff members who had offered their services to people who were shielding or self-isolating, someone was identified to support the family and walk the dog.

Community Hubs - A customer came to the Community Hub with her family who had recently moved from Hong Kong and bought a flat and a business in the area. They had a number of queries in which the team were able to directly support including:

- help amending the liability on their flat and their business rates - the service was able to made a referral in the Council Tax system so that the liability could be directly amended.
- how to register their son at a local school - the telephone number for school admissions was provided as well as information on how to register.
- how to register for a National insurance number – information provided from gov.uk website which included showing the customer the online application form
- how to register for a NHS number - advised the customer that they could register with a local GP surgery who would issue then with an NHS number.

The family were very happy with the service provided and that all of their queries had been answered.

Case Studies - Climate Change

People in Blaenau Gwent were invited to share their views and solutions for tackling the climate crisis in what was Wales' first climate assembly to discuss climate change.

The Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly was held online during two weekends in March bringing residents together from across the borough to address the question: "What should we do in Blaenau Gwent to tackle the climate crisis in a way that is fair and improves living standards for everyone?"

10,000 households in Blaenau Gwent received written invitations to register their interest in participating. From those who applied to be involved, 50 people were then randomly selected to take part and learnt about climate issues facing their community, discussing the themes of housing, nature and transport before proposing and debating potential solutions.



Michelle Morris, Managing Director, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council said:



"Climate change is a global issue and it's absolutely vital that we act now to protect our environment for the well-being of future generations and I am sure that the Climate Assembly will help us all focus on this. As a Council we recognise the importance of the challenges and we recently approved a new Decarbonisation Plan. We're already taking a number of actions to reduce our carbon impact such as improving the energy efficiency of our schools; our public buildings and our street-lighting and also reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill. This Plan will see us take a more strategic approach towards achieving carbon neutrality and will help us to prioritise work in a number of key areas of our operations which, with some changes, can make a significant contribution towards our carbon neutral aim."

How we keep track of what we are doing

The application of the Sustainable Development Principle and the reach of the Well-being Objectives mean changing the ways in which we work. The Council has focused on seven key corporate areas as part of implementing the Act. Below provides an update against the core set of activities that are common to the corporate governance of public bodies, recognising that there is still more to do in these areas over the coming years.

Performance management - The Council has a well-established performance management framework in place which supports all aspects of service planning, delivery and improvement. As part of this, the Council's Well-being Objectives, as identified within the Corporate Plan, have been used to shape all service planning throughout the Council. A 'golden thread' has been developed from the Corporate Plan throughout the organisation.

As part of our business planning arrangements, progression of the sustainable development principles has been included and is reported on against each Well-being Objective.

On a quarterly basis, the Council receives performance monitoring of the Corporate Plan as part of the Finance and Performance Report. Alongside this reporting, there are a number of other performance reports that are reported internally and through the democratic process.

Financial planning - The Council continually reviews its financial management and planning arrangements to enable it effectively demonstrate how we use resources to deliver sustainable long term outcomes to both current and future generations. This is especially difficult against a backdrop of annual resource allocations from central Government. Consequently, there will be a need to adapt to ongoing changes during the lifetime of these Objectives and further review them accordingly.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is a key element within the Council's strategic planning framework. It is this financial framework which will support the Council's financial resilience and ensure it operates sustainably. The MTFS brings together all known factors affecting the Council's financial position and forms the basis for decision making. The MTFS includes a forward look over the next five years to assess the spending requirements the Council is likely to face when delivering the priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan, and highlights the funding requirement that will need to be made to ensure the Council can set a balanced budget each year.

Financial Management

<u>Revenue Budget</u>	Revised Budget 2020/21	Provisional Outturn 2020/21	Variance Favourable / (Adverse)
Portfolio			
Corporate Services & Financial Management & Strategy	16.730	15.408	1.322
Social Services	45.352	44.231	1.121
Education / Leisure	62.128	61.765	0.363
Economy	1.215	1.195	0.020
Sub Total (1)	125.425	122.599	2.826
Environment	25.532	25.644	(0.112)
Planning	1.118	1.170	(0.052)
Licensing	0.070	0.093	(0.023)
Sub Total (2)	26.72	26.907	(0.187)
Total	152.145	149.506	2.639

Current Revenue Budget Provisional Position:

The overall financial position across all portfolios at 31 March 2021, is a favourable variance of £2.639m (1.7%), against a total revenue budget of £152m. The figures are provisional and subject to external audit. The outturn is a significant improvement on the forecast financial position at the end of December 2020, at which time the forecast was a favourable variance of £0.6m.

Capital Budget Provisional Outturn 2020/21

The overall provisional financial position as at 31st March 2021 indicates a £161k underspend against a total in year capital budget of £17.78m.

A number of infrastructure projects are reporting an underspend at year end, the total cost of the works was less than the in-year grant approval allocated by the Welsh Government, therefore the grant allocation was not able to be claimed in full. Future year funding of £52m which consists of approved external grant and the authorities own funding will be carried forward into future financial years. The authorities own Capital Programme Funding will be carried forward to the financial year 2021/2022 in accordance with slippage procedures.

<u>Capital Budget</u>	Funding 2020/21	Future Funding	In Year Budget 2020/21	Expenditure	Variance Favourable / (Adverse)
Portfolio					
Corporate Services & Strategy	1,455,306	1,333,726	1,211,580	121,580	0
Social Services	5,660,930	4,728,032	121,580	868,325	5,325
Economy	19,863,349	12,020,218	873,650	7,843,131	0
Education and Active Living	30,005,965	28,133,649	7,843,131	1,863,475	8,841
Environment	8,819,944	5,161,384	1,872,316	3,624,612	33,948
Infrastructure	3,710,982	929,843	6,658,560	2,668,503	112,636
All Portfolios	971,335	343,020	2,781,139	628,315	0
Total Capital Funding	70,427,811	52,649,872	628,315	17,617,941	160,750

Risk management – the Council's Risk Management Mission Statement is '*Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council will adopt best practices in the identification, evaluation and cost-effective control of risks to ensure that they are eliminated or managed to an acceptable level.*'

To ensure that the Council meets the risk management requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, our risk management approach ensures that long term risks and challenges to both service delivery and our community are considered.

The Council believes that risk management is a vital component to ensuring that it becomes a high performance organisation. We are committed to ensuring that risk management is embedded throughout the Council as managing risks will lead to more effective use of resources, direct improvements to services, customers and stakeholders, as well as improving corporate governance and performance. As part of these arrangements, the Corporate Risk Register is reviewed quarterly and reported to Members as part of the Finance and Performance Report.

Procurement – procurement activities are facilitated in compliance within existing legal obligations; predominately defined within the Public Contract Regulations (PCR's) 2015 as well as the Council's internal Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs). The Council has adopted the Welsh Procurement Policy 2012 (amended 2015) and applies these principles to all commissioning and procurement requirements. To support the implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, including Community Benefits, at the outset of each procurement, client and procurement officers determine project scope and consider opportunities for the inclusion of the Act and Community Benefits.

Corporate planning – the Council has fully aligned all of its planning to the Corporate Plan which includes the Well-being Objectives. These are central to the organisation and future work planning and strategies are aligned to these areas. The Sustainable Development Principles, Environment Act and Decarbonisation have been included within the business planning template used across all service areas. The five ways of working are also captured within the Corporate Reporting Template, this is supported by guidance which is reviewed and shared periodically.

Workforce - In the early summer we took the opportunity to pause and reflect on how the Council had responded to the initial surge in the virus. From this we identified that staff and Elected Members had responded admirably to the challenge of remote working and the investment that had previously been made in technology had stood the Council in good stead. The realisation that we can run our business and deliver services in a very different way, be more in line with modern working practices and reduce our costs and impact on the environment has opened up new opportunities for us to make a step change now and not to simply return to how we operated before. A survey of staff conducted late in 2020 shows that staff have responded positively to home working and consider that the Council has handled the change well. This shows support from staff to continue working in a more agile and flexible way and the positive impact this has had on productivity and a reduction in staff absence due to sickness.

On 25th March 2021 Council approved a new Operating Model & Working Arrangement incorporating modern working practices to enhance employees' working experience, maximise performance and productivity and deliver the greatest value to the organisation, in terms of improving service delivery, as well as realising financial gains. The Agile Working Policy is a key enabler in delivering the future working model. It

also links to the Council's vision for sustainable development including sustainable economic growth, de-carbonisation and the health and well-being of both staff and the community.

Assets – Owing to the pandemic and in line with Government guidelines, where possible, staff have been working from home in order to prevent workplace and community transmission of the virus. This meant that office based staff and Elected Members worked remotely since March 2020, moving towards digital based platforms with offices closed and staff only attending offices where necessary.

Welsh Government has an ambition for 30% of the workforce to work from home or remotely. The vision being to reduce the numbers commuting to work and keeping more people working in their local communities. The Council has an opportunity, now, to be at the forefront of delivering this national ambition by making a step change in how we work, how we deliver services and to improve access to council businesses and services for our residents.

In October 2020 Council approved a new operating model and working arrangements for the Council moving forward, this included:

- Development of a democratic facility at the General Offices;
- Development of community hubs in town centres; and
- To vacate and demolish the Civic Centre.

Since the decision, the Member Working Group along with Officers and Trade Union representatives worked to develop a model for new working arrangements, based on agile working, which will allow the organisation to operate out of its remaining offices at Anvil Court, ViTCC, General Offices and other appropriate Council buildings.

This approach supports the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan priority to be an efficient organisation and to operate using modern working practices in a way which supports our workforce, effective service delivery and improves access to Council business for our residents. It also supports the priority to regenerate the site in Ebbw Vale opening up the opportunities for investment in new homes and community facilities in the centre of the community. The continuing of working from home will also support delivery of the Council's ambition, as set out in the Decarbonisation Plan, to reduce our carbon emissions to a point where our impact is net zero carbon.

Finally, this also supports the delivery of the Bridging the Gap Programme which seeks to reduce the cost of our corporate property estate through a process of rationalisation and introduction of more modern and efficient workplaces.

The Strategic Equalities Plan

The Council is committed to implementing the Equality Act 2010 and this is evidenced by the Blaenau Gwent Strategic Equality Plan 2020/24. The Plan was developed using research and engagement as well as developing a Member's Task and Finish Group. The plan contains the Council's Equality Objectives:

- We will be an organisation who ensures fairness and equality is in everything that we do;
- We will be an equal opportunity employer with a workforce that values equality and diversity;

- We will support children and young people, particularly those with protected characteristics, to achieve their learning ambitions;
- We will promote and support safe, friendly and cohesive communities;
- We will ensure there is meaningful involvement with people who have protected characteristics and key stakeholders that represent their interests; and
- We will strive to tackle inequality caused by poverty for people who have protected characteristics.

The plan and supporting documents can be found at <http://cc-mgov-01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1134&Mid=2172&Ver=4&LLL=0>

Decarbonisation

The Council supports the Welsh Government's ambition for the Welsh public sector to be carbon neutral by 2030. In order to respond to this, the Council has developed a Decarbonisation Plan 2020 to 2030 with the ambition of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. The plan sets out how we intend to deliver on this ambition over the next ten years. Alongside the plan, a Decarbonisation Programme Management Board has been established with the responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the plan including: coordination; performance management; communication; and delivery.

On page 44 is a case study detailing Blaenau Gwent's Climate Assembly which was one of the first Climate Assemblies in Wales. In March 2021, it brought together 50 people from the Blaenau Gwent area to address the question: What should we do in Blaenau Gwent to tackle the climate crisis in a way that is fair and improves living standards for everyone?

The Welsh Language Annual Report

The Welsh Language Annual Report for 2019/20 sets out the highlights and key pieces of work, which demonstrate how we, as a Council, have endeavoured to meet the requirement set by the Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice issued in September 2015.

Standard 145 requires Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to produce a strategy detailing how it will promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language over the next five years. The aims of the Blaenau Gwent's Welsh Language Strategy are linked with the Welsh Government's vision to create a million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050. In order to meet a target of 44% increase of Welsh speakers by 2050, we would need to gain an additional 2,324 Welsh speakers against the 2011 Census Blaenau Gwent baseline of 5,284. Therefore, this represents an average annual increase of 70 additional Welsh speakers, i.e. 3% of the target figure of an additional 2,324 in Blaenau Gwent for the next 33 years.

The Council has identified the following three Welsh Language Promotion objectives:

- Promote and encourage the use of the Welsh language within the families and the community;
- Increase the provision of Welsh language education and informal activities for children and young people and to increase their awareness of the value of the language; and
- Increase opportunities for people to use Welsh in the workplace. Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2017-22.

On the 30th November 2019 the Council had a Performance Monitoring Visit from the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office. The meeting was very positive, with discussions covering the following areas of interest:

- Findings of monitoring work in 2018-19 in relation to the organisation;
- Rights in Use 2018-19, the Commissioner's 2018-19 assurance report which encourages organisations to have robust internal arrangements to ensure compliance, increase workforce capacity to improve provision, and prompt people to use services in Welsh;
- Internal arrangements to ensure compliance;
- Increasing workforce capacity;
- Prompting people to use services in Welsh;
- Increasing the use and number of speakers in Welsh; and
- Operational matters

Elected Members

Throughout the 2020/21 year members have engaged in a number of training and learning sessions as part of the Member Development Programme, which is linked to the priorities within the Council's Corporate Plan and Committee Forward Work Programmes. All Senior Salary Holders also undertook a Personal Development Review which was externally facilitated. From each of these sessions a personal action plan was developed, to be implemented throughout the coming year.

External and Internal Regulation

The Council is monitored by a number of regulatory bodies, the main of which are:

- Audit Wales;
- Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW); and
- Estyn.

The Council monitors all proposals for improvement it receives from both internal and external auditors on a quarterly basis through the Finance and Performance Report. Each of the proposals is monitored through the relevant business plan. Periodically, a review of the open proposals is undertaken and presented to Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) to consider which proposals can close as they have been completed or have moved to business as usual.

At 31st March 2021 there were 19 'live' audit reports. Of those:

- 7 reports were still at the initial stages, either being newly received or due to be taken through the Democratic process; and
- 12 reports being monitored via business plans, totalling 62 proposals for improvement being implemented.

Reports received during 2020/21 include:

Local Reports -

- Audit Wales Audit of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's 2020-21 Improvement Plan
- Audit Wales Supporting Financial Resilience Follow-up Review
- Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Local Authority Performance Review

National Audit Wales Reports –

- WCCIS
- Test, Trace & Protect
- Emergency Response
- Commercialisation
- Cyber Resilience

In order to action the proposals within these final reports, the relevant business plans include activity that should address the areas for improvement identified by the Auditor.

Well-being Statement

As part of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 all Public Bodies have a duty, under section 7 of the legislation, to publish a Well-being Statement at the same time that they publish their Well-being Objectives. As part of the review of the Corporate Plan in July 2020, each Well-being Objective has been written to contribute to the Well-being Goals and observe the requirements as outlined by the Sustainable Development Principles. Both of which is also observed through our Council Business Planning process. This Assessment of Performance 2020/21 provides detail of activity undertaken by the Council in meeting the Well-being Objectives.

Council Governance

As part of our ongoing governance arrangements, we monitor the implementation of the Corporate Plan and Well-being Objectives using a well-structured performance management framework which includes business planning, reporting and self-evaluation. The Council operates a single performance management system which includes the majority of Council planning and holds information in one place in order to avoid duplication.

Everything we do should contribute to the Council's priorities (the 'golden thread') so that all our effort and resources are linked into the delivery of the Corporate Plan. The Council's business planning framework is strategically aligned from the Corporate Plan throughout the organisation so that all staff can understand their contribution to implementation.

The corporate requirement is for all business plans to be updated at least quarterly. Achievements, challenges, PIs and progress against any internal or external regulatory proposals for improvement are then included within our Finance and Performance Report which is reported to Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee.

Contact Information

This document is available electronically at <http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/council/performance/> and in hard copy by request.

Corporate Performance Team Corporate Services
Email: pps@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Providing Feedback

We welcome any feedback you might have about the Council's Assessment of Performance 2020/21. Your views are important to us and we want to know what information you would like to see and how you would like to see it reported. Please contact the team on the details above if you would like to give feedback on the Assessment, if there is any information you think could be considered for inclusion in the future, or if you require this document in a different format e.g. large print, Braille, audio version, etc.



Fersiwn Gymraeg

Yn unol â Chynllun Iaith Gymraeg y Cyngor, bydd fersiwn Gymraeg o'r Cynllun Gwella ar gael ar wefan y Cyngor.

This document acts as Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's Well-being Statement, prepared under section 7 of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and related guidance issued by the Welsh Government. This Assessment of Performance outlines the Council's responsibility to publish an assessment of performance for the financial year 2020/21 as outlined in section 15 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

The Council is satisfied that the information given in this plan is accurate based on the information available at the time of publication.

This Council's Assessment of Performance 2020/21 has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment screening.

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Agenda Item 11

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 13.09.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**

Report Subject: **Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy Review 2022 - 2023**

Portfolio Holder: **Education Portfolio – Cllr Joanne Collins**

Report Submitted by: **Corporate Director of Education – Lynn Phillips
Service Manager for Education Transformation and Business Change – Claire Gardner**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
23.8.21	26.8.21	07.09.21			14.9.21	22.9.21		

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek the views of Executive Committee, in relation to the review of Blaenau Gwent Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy for the 2022/23 academic session. The Council is required to adopt and publish the policy document by October 1st 2021.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 Councils have a duty to publish their home to school and post 16 transport policies in accordance with section 12(5) of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 (“the Measure”), and the Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009 (the “Regulations”). The Council’s policy must be made available by the 1st October proceeding the academic year to which the policy relates. Under the Regulations and the Welsh Government’s Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance 2014 (the “Guidance”) the information must be made available:
 - a. on the Council’s website;
 - b. to parents on request;
 - c. public libraries; and,
 - d. distributed to parents of pupils who are in the final year of school and may transfer to another school or educational establishment.
 - 2.2
 - 2.3 The current policy was published on 1st October 2020, for implementation from September 2021 for the 2021/22 academic session. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is more generous in respect of home to school transport entitlement than the Welsh Government statutory limits. The Council also offer a non-statutory travel grant for post 16 learners of £150.
 - 2.4 In December 2020, Welsh Government communicated with Councils throughout Wales, asking for them to participate in a review of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008. The purpose of the review is to ensure that it

continues to be fit for purpose. Welsh Government indicated that correspondence from members of the public and engagement with stakeholders (including the Children's Commissioner, the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Future Generations Commissioner), highlighted a number of issues with how the Measure currently enables home to school travel across Wales. These include:

- 2.5
- Concerns regarding child welfare relating to the 2 and 3 mile eligibility thresholds.
 - A lack of direct transport for Post 16 learners.
 - The socio-economic impact of learners having to pay for their transport which was linked to the distance policy contained within the current Measure.
 - The consideration of travel to Faith schools.
 - Ensuring home to school transport provision meets the requirements of learners with Additional Learning Needs.
 - Issues with travel to Welsh-medium schools for all ages within the Measure.
- 2.6 Council responses will be used to build an evidence base that will inform decisions on any recommendations to change the measure. The initial review process concluded in the early spring 2021. No decisions or changes - regulatory or otherwise, have been made by Welsh Government to date. However, should any changes to the Measure will be recommended or taken forward as a result of the review process, these will be subject to further scrutiny and detailed impact analysis before binding changes to the legislation can be made. Please refer to **Appendix 1** for a BGCBC response.
- 2.7 The Welsh Government review is yet to conclude, therefore, the revised policy has been prepared in line with the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008. Any changes – dependent on the associated timeframes, will be dealt with either via an addendum to the proposed policy, or as part of the annual policy review process.
- 2.8 The policy has been reviewed by the Education Transformation, Inclusion and Transport teams, along with Children's Services (please refer to **Appendix 2** for the revised draft document). The changes and additions are detailed in red within the appended policy document. A summary of the changes/additions is as follows:
- 2.9
- The date has been amended to reflect the academic year to which the policy applies (the academic year preceding the year within which the policy is published).
 - Section 4.0 'Additional Learning Needs' - has been updated in line with the latest ALN reform developments and learning from the current policy year.
 - Section 8.3 'Permanently Excluded and Managed Move Pupils', along with section 8.9. 'Pupil Attendance' – both have been updated, as per

learning from this policy year, and in order to improve the processing of transport requests.

- Section 9.1 'Transport Entitlement' – has been updated in line with the updates to section 4.0.
- Section 10.2 'Extreme Weather' – has been updated to include 'COVID-19 Emergency Response', and is reflective of the need to follow separate guidance in line with alert level specific changes.
- Section 10.4 'ALN Transport issues and Exclusions' – has been updated in line with the latest ALN reform developments, along with learning from the current policy year.
- Section 10.5 'Safeguarding' – has been strengthened in line with practice and learning from the current policy year.

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3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 This report will be considered by the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee on 14th September 2021, and any feedback will be provided verbally to the Executive Committee.

3.2 **Option 1:** The Executive Committee approves the Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy 2022/23 (**Appendix 2**).

3.3 **Option 2:** The Executive Committee considers the Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy 2022/23 (**Appendix 2**) and provides any recommendations for change.

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

4.1 Education is a strategic priority for the Council and key to achieving the outcomes within the Council's Corporate Plan. Home to School Post 16 Transport Policy is an essential component of Education, and seeks to ensuring equality of access to education settings throughout the borough. In addition, implementation of the policy will contribute to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

4.2 The revised policy is fully compliant with section 12(5) of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 ("the Measure"), and the Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009 (the "Regulations").

4.3 The Welsh Government's Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance 2014 (the "Guidance") requires that the Council's policy must be made available by the 1st October, the year proceeding the academic year to which the policy applies.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.0.1 The Council has a statutory responsibility to determine and publish the Blaenau Gwent Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy by 1st October 2021, for the 2022/23 academic session. Any changes made to the policy should take account of the following:

- 5.0.2
 - Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 (“the Measure”)
 - Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009 (the “Regulations”)
 - Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance 2014 (the “Guidance”)
 - Welsh Government School Admissions and Admissions Appeal Code’s (2013)
 - Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (2017-20)
 - School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act (2013)

5.0.3 Therefore, if the policy does not progress within the programmed timeframe, the Council will not be compliant with section 12(5) of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 (“the Measure”), and the Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009 (the “Regulations”). In addition, the Council would fail to take account of the most recent developments relating to key areas of dependency on a local, regional and national basis; i.e. developments aligned to the draft Welsh Government Additional Learning Needs Act, Code and associated regulations, along with the Blaenau Gwent admission policy developments. The results of which may negatively impact upon both service users in terms of service and satisfaction, and services in terms of operational issues and budgetary constraints.

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

5.1.1 The Home to School Transport budget is approximately £2.1m, and the Post 16 budget is approximately £133,290 per annum. Blaenau Gwent Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy was last reviewed in September 2020 and adopted in October 2020 for implementation in 2020/21 academic session.

5.1.2 The provisional out-turn for home to school transport in 2020/21 is £1.97m (inclusive of staff salaries) and £62,313 for home to college transport. The underspend primarily relates to transport contractors receiving only 75% of the contractual costs during periods of COVID-19 response and school closures. The policy seeks to ensure that there is an appropriate framework to aid delivery; therefore, reducing the risk of overspend relating to issue management etc.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

5.2.1 If the policy is not taken forward within the specified timeframe, there is a risk that the Council will not be compliant with their statutory duty in respect of home to school transport. Therefore, the policy has been reviewed and is being taken via the Council’s political processes within the required timeframe, to ensure that the publication date of 1.10.21 can be met.

5.3 ***Legal***

5.3.1 The Council have a statutory duty to comply with Welsh Government legislation in line with the administration and review of statutory home to school transport policy arrangements.

5.3.2 Following approval, the policy will be translated into Welsh to meet the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards from the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

5.4 **Human Resources**

5.4.1 The policy document and associated procedures have been developed by the Education and Environment Directorates, in partnership with the Social Services. The Service Manager for Education Transformation and Business Change and Transport Officer monitor implementation of the policy, and undertake annual reviews in order to inform future policy development.

5.4.2 Transport service operations are undertaken by a dedicated team who sit within Community Services - Highways and Development. The team work closely with Education who hold budgetary responsibility for the service and manage policy development and review processes, along with Social Services who review and determine transport arrangements for their clients and families – particularly Children Looked After (CLA) in consultation with the aforementioned Directorates.

5.4.3 The Education Directorate Management Team along with Wider Corporate Leadership Team, have a key role to play in ensuring that the policy is effectively implemented and reviewed in accordance with relevant strategy, policy and regulatory frameworks.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

6.1.1 The Council currently provide free Home to School Transport for approximately 1,330 mainstream pupils each day, via more than 30 established routes. Transport is also provided for approximately 160 pupils via season tickets for public service vehicles. The Council also provides transport for approximately 250 Additional Learning Needs (ALN) pupils on a daily basis. In addition, Council also provides approximately 800 students (Post 16) with assisted transport in the form of a travel grant.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

6.2.1 The policy has been reviewed in order to ensure that there is service user clarity in relation to roles, responsibilities, expectations and awareness. The review process also takes account of key local, regional and national policy and legislative developments. It is therefore anticipated that the existing high levels of client and customer satisfaction will continue, along with improved operational delivery.

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

6.3.1 The policy underwent extensive consultation throughout the summer period 2018, the outcome of which has aided the annual review process in subsequent years, with the distance limits set to remain for the period of the current political administration

- 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
- 6.4.1 The policy will cover home to school and post 16 transport provision for the 2022/23 academic session. The document takes account of key policy and legislative requirements, and annual reviews will continue to be programmed for the foreseeable future taking on learning from previous years.
- 6.5 ***Preventative focus***
- 6.5.1 The policy will support the Council to carry out effective home to school and post 16 transport arrangements; whilst mitigating the risk of service and service user conflict, along with complaints and appeals relating to policy gaps and issues.
- 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
- 6.6.1 Key management and operational staff across the Council are involved in a detailed review of the document on an annual basis i.e. Education, Social Services and Procurement, along with Community Services - Highways and Development. The review process seeks to ensure compliance with Welsh Government legislation, and ensure that key local, regional, and national policy developments are accounted for, whilst also taking on board learning from the previous academic session.
- 6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***
- 6.7.1 The policy is cross-cutting in the sense that it impacts upon Education, Community Services - Highways and Development, Procurement and Children's Services; therefore, service area involvement is key to effective policy implementation.
- 6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***
- 6.8.1 Home to school and post 16 transport will be considered in line with the readiness assessment process, in order to inform development and delivery of the BGCBC Decarbonisation Plan 2020 – 2030.
- 6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***
- 6.9.1 Please refer to **Appendix 3** for the completed impact assessment. The policy aims to secure equality of access based upon distance, and need in respect of pupils and students with ALN. Therefore, the impact overall is neutral.
- 6.9b. ***Equality Impact Assessment***
- 6.9.2 A full EqIA was undertaken and presented in line with the statutory consultation in 2018. Subsequently, annual screening assessments are carried out, which determine that there is no adverse impact upon any of the protected characteristics, and a positive impact upon disability, with specialist and bespoke transport arrangements in place for learners whose needs warrant it. In addition, EqIA screening is undertaken on a case by case basis as required. The policy seeks to ensure equality of access to education for Blaenau Gwent learners.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The Blaenau Gwent Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy is reviewed on an annual basis in line with lessons learned, key policy, strategy and legislative reviews/developments.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- **Appendix 1 – Learner Travel Measure Review – BG Response**
- **Appendix 2 – Revised Policy 2022/23**
- **Appendix 3 – Socio-economic Duty Impact Assessment**

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The Welsh Government is reviewing the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose. Correspondence from members of the public and engagement with stakeholders (including the Children’s’ Commissioner, the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Future Generations Commissioner) have highlighted a number of issues with how the Measure currently enables home to school travel across Wales. These are:

- Concerns regarding child welfare relating to the 2 and 3 mile eligibility thresholds.
- The lack of direct Transport for Post 16 learners;
- The socio-economic impact of learners having to pay for their transport which was linked to the distance policy contained within the current Measure
- The consideration of travel to Faith schools
- Ensuring home to school transport provision meets the requirements of learners with Additional Learning Needs.
- Issues with travel to Welsh medium schools for all ages within the Measure.

In addition to reviewing these issues, due to the success of our [support for parents returning to work](#), learners about to enter statutory education will also fall within the scope of the review.

We are writing to you to gather your views and any data you hold in relation to the options for changes under consideration in the review of the Learner Travel (Wales) 2008 Measure. Your responses will be instrumental in informing the outcome of this review. Possible changes to the Measure may include:

- A. Mandating provision of free school transport for learners aged between 16 and 19
- B. Reducing the mileage thresholds for some or all learners
- C. Redefining nearest school to include nearest Welsh-medium school
- D. Redefining nearest school to include nearest faith school.
- E. Changes to National Guidance to introduce consistency of delivery across Local Authorities
- F. Requiring provision of school transport for pre-school-age learners

Questions for Local Authorities

Questions relating to costs and practical feasibility of potential changes A, B and F

1. Assuming that all age groups are eligible for free travel, what would be the **predicted** numbers of learners which would be eligible for free school transport under the following potential changes to the mileage threshold? Assume no other changes to the measure.

- Nursery (eligible from 4 years)

Year	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	47	114	497
2021 - 2022	47	114	497
2022 – 2023	47	114	497

- Primary School

Year	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	349	815	3178
2021 - 2022	335	822	3214
2022 – 2023	291	698	2766

- Secondary School (eligible from 11 – 16)

Year	3 mile	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	1467	337	359	868
2021 - 2022	1341	352	407	1166
2022 – 2023	1172	321	465	1430

- Secondary School (eligible from 16 – 19)

Year	3 mile	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	NA	NA	NA	NA
2021 - 2022	NA	NA	NA	NA
2022 – 2023	NA	NA	NA	NA

- Further Education settings (eligible from 16 – 19)

Year	3 mile	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	800	800	870	940
2021 - 2022	800	800	870	940
2022 – 2023	800	800	870	940

***NB: This is difficult to ascertain as Coleg Gwent who provide Post 16 education within Blaenau Gwent do not have the software capabilities to undertake the required level of analysis. Learners choose their preferred campus based on courses as opposed to distance.**

2. What would be the likely **additional** costs, excluding costs associated with free travel which is already provided, associated with mandating free travel for learners in the 16-19 age group in your LA area in the following categories:

Answer:

If the pass is being issued to a Blaenau Gwent (BG) learner the split is:
Per term - £50 LEA; £30 College; £10 Learner – contribution passed to Stagecoach is £90, shortfall to £196.86 made up via the £1 per journey income

If the BG learner qualifies for additional financial support via the college Financial Contingency Fund, the split is:
Per term: £50 LEA; £30 College; £10 Learner; £106.86 FCF fund – learner travels free on the bus. Anticipated additional costs = **£460k**

- Secondary school (16-19 only)
 - Further education settings
3. What would be the likely practical feasibility (including driver, operator and vehicle availability and availability of parking at school etc.) of delivering free travel for learners in the 16-19 age group?

Answer:

Given the scale and scope (geographical spread) of the required transport service, along with the differential in course start and finish times, the number of operators which could deliver this service is likely to be restricted. Therefore, it is highly likely that the provision would be accommodated by public transport providers. In addition, the number of students with special and specific needs/requirements vary significantly year on year, and may require bespoke arrangements i.e. wheelchair accessible transport, which is in short supply.

4. What would be the likely **additional** costs associated with mandating free travel to nurseries for learners aged 4 and above.

Answer:

At present we provide free home to school transport for nursery age pupils to access Welsh-medium education. Presently, there is no demand for nursery transport within the English-medium and faith schools at present. However, the broad cost estimate based upon the (497) figure detailed above would be: £500,000. It is important to note that these figures are likely to fluctuate in line with in-year transfer requests and delayed/late nursery applications.

5. What would be the likely practical feasibility (including driver, operator and vehicle availability and availability of parking at school etc) of delivering free travel to nurseries for learners aged 4 and above.

Answer:

The number of home to school transport providers within the local and surrounding areas is very limited, as evidenced by recent tendering exercises. This provision would require either larger vehicles and/or additional vehicles. Consideration would also need to be given to the suitability of transport and age groups accessing provision alongside nursery-aged pupils. The availability of vehicles would be further restricted due to the requirement for lap belts to accommodate those pupils aged 4 years. It is highly unlikely that the authority would be able to procure the required number of vehicles to facilitate this provision.

6. What would be the likely **additional** costs, excluding costs associated with free travel for learners within the 2 and 3 mile thresholds which is already provided, of reducing the mileage thresholds for the below age groups in line with the below scenarios:

- Nursery (eligible from 4 years of age)

Year	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	£400,000	£700,000
2021 - 2022	£400,000	£700,000
2022 – 2023	£400,000	£700,000

- Primary School

Year	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	£1,400,000	£1,400,000
2021 - 2022	£1,400,000	£1,400,000
2022 – 2023	£1,400,000	£1,400,000

- Secondary School (eligible from 11 – 16)

Year	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	£900,000	£1,500,000	£2,000,000
2021 - 2022	£900,000	£1,500,000	£2,000,000
2022 – 2023	£900,000	£1,500,000	£2,000,000

- Secondary School (eligible from 16 – 19)

Year	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	N/A	N/A	N/A
2021 - 2022	N/A	N/A	N/A
2022 – 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A

- Further Education settings (eligible from 16 – 19)

Year	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	£500,000	£560,000	£610,000
2021 - 2022	£500,000	£560,000	£610,000
2022 – 2023	£500,000	£560,000	£610,000

***NB: Learners choose their preferred campus based on courses as opposed to distance.**

7. What would be the likely practical feasibility (including driver, operator and

Answer:

Nursery/Primary:

The number of home to school transport providers within the local and surrounding areas is very limited, as evidenced by recent tendering exercises. This provision would require either larger vehicles and/or additional vehicles. Consideration would also need to be given to the suitability of transport and age groups accessing provision alongside nursery-aged pupils. The availability of vehicles would be further restricted due to the requirement for lap belts to accommodate those pupils aged 4 years. It is highly unlikely that the authority would be able to procure the required number of vehicles to facilitate this provision.

Secondary:

The number of home to school transport providers within the local and surrounding areas is very limited, as evidenced by recent tendering exercises. This provision would require either larger vehicles and/or additional vehicles. Consideration would also need to be given to the suitability of transport in line with the learners needs.

Post 16:

Given the scale and scope (geographical spread) of the required transport service, along with the differential in course start and finish times, the number of operators which could deliver this service is likely to be restricted. Therefore, it is highly likely that the provision would be accommodated by public transport providers. In addition, the number of students with special and specific needs/requirements vary significantly year on year, and may require bespoke arrangements i.e. wheelchair accessible transport, which is in short supply.

*Increased competition between neighboring authorities is likely to further reduce the pool of operators on which the LA's are able to draw. It could also impact upon the cost of the provision in line with the competitive tendering process.

vehicle availability and availability of parking at school etc) of reducing the mileage thresholds in line with each of scenarios above (e.g. reducing to 2, 1.5 or 1 mile for 11-19 and reducing to 1.5 or 1 mile for nursery and primary)?

Questions relating to travel for learners in the 16-19 age group

8. What are your Authority's current arrangements for providing transport for learners in 16-19 age group? For example, is free travel provided or is there a cost levied per term or academic year per learner?

Answer:

If the pass is being issued to a forward Blaenau Gwent (BG) learner the split is:

Per term - £50 LEA; £30 College; £10 Learner – contribution passed to Stagecoach is £90, shortfall to £196.86 made up via the £1 per journey income

If the BG learner qualifies for additional financial support via the college Financial Contingency Fund, the split is:

Per-term: £50 LEA; £30 College; £10 Learner; £106.86 FCF fund – learner travels free on the bus.

9. If learners are expected to contribute towards the cost, what is the annual cost for each learner?

Answer:

Annual cost per learner is £30 + £1 each way if they are NOT eligible for FCF support (Financial Contingency Fund). If they are eligible they pay only the £30.

10. What is the attendance rate (as a percentage of eligible learners) at further education for learners in the 16-19 age bracket in your LA area?

Answer:

We are presently awaiting this information from Coleg Gwent and Torfaen CBC for WM 16-19 provision.

11. Do you hold information on the impact of your 16-19 learner travel policy on education attendance for 16-19 year olds in your LA area?

Answer:

We are presently awaiting this information.

Questions relating to mileage thresholds

12. Do you provide any free travel for learners which live within the current 2 and 3 mile thresholds?

a. If so, on what basis (e.g. unsafe walking route, advanced learning needs, medical need, historic non statutory arrangements etc.) do you provide this travel and how is this assessed? **Please provide detail on assessment methodologies for each basis.**

b. Please provide a breakdown of numbers of learners for whom travel within the mileage thresholds is provided against the reason for providing travel as per tables below:

- Primary school

Basis for free travel within 2 mile threshold	Numbers of learners for whom free travel is provided within current mileage threshold
ALN	63
Unsafe walking route	70

- Secondary school (11-16)

Basis for free travel within 3 mile threshold	Numbers of learners for whom free travel is provided within current mileage threshold
ALN	44

- Secondary school (16-19)

Basis for free travel within 3 mile threshold	Numbers of learners for whom free travel is provided within current mileage threshold
N/A	N/A

- Further education (16-19)

Basis for free travel within 3 mile threshold	Numbers of learners for whom free travel is provided within current mileage threshold
ALN	18

- c. What is the current cost of providing free travel for learners within the current 2 and 3 mile thresholds?

Answer: £150,000 for primary and £120,000 for secondary

- d. In your view, are there any instances where you believe that travel should be provided but where the authority is unable to provide this? If so, why is this?

Answer: No

- e. Do you have an appeals process following results of assessment to determine whether or not free travel is provided within the current mileage thresholds? (E.g. appeals process following risk assessment for an unsafe route). **Where an appeals process exists, please provide a description of this process**

Answer:

Yes, the process is detailed within the LA policy which can be found via the following link: https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/fileadmin/documents/Resident/Schools_and_Learning/Admissions_20_21/HTSPSTP_FV_Eng.pdf

- f. Can you provide any data on the number of successful and unsuccessful appeals?

Answer:

1 appeal was submitted in the last academic session – the appeal was upheld in favor of the appellant.

- g. What are your criteria for 'home' designation?

Answer:

The child or young person's permanent address/place of residence associated with the parent/parents with responsibility. This must not be of a family member of another adult who looks after the child.

13. Do you hold data on the number of non-statutory learners using dedicated statutory service or local bus services on a concessionary basis? If possible, please provide a summary of this as an average % across all services in your authority's network.

Answer:
N/A

14. Are there any privately operated contracts or commercial services operated in your area solely for the purpose of carrying non-statutory learners? If so, how many? And can you provide an estimate of the numbers of learners carried.

Answer:
This information is not requested nor is it held by the LA.

Questions relating to travel to Faith schools

15. What are your Authority's current arrangements for providing transport to faith schools? For example is any free travel provided?

Answer:
Transport is provided to all Faith Schools free of charge in line with the LA's current policy.

16. Assuming that the definition of 'nearest school' is amended to include the nearest relevant faith school, and assuming that all age groups are eligible, based on the below potential changes to the mileage thresholds what would be the **additional likely costs** of providing free travel to faith schools for learners living in your LA area. Please use current attendance at faith schools and student travel distances to develop these figures (i.e. we do not expect you to predict behavioural change as a result of changes to the measure).

- Primary School (eligible from 4 years of age)

Year	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	£110,000	£140,000	£160,000

- Secondary School (eligible from 11 – 16)

Year	3 mile	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	£120,000	£120,000	£120,000	£120,000

- Secondary School (eligible from 16 – 19)

Year	3 mile	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

17. What would be the likely practical feasibility (including driver, operator and vehicle availability and availability of parking at school etc) of providing free travel to faith schools in line with each of the mileage thresholds given above?

Answer:

The number of home to school transport providers within the local and surrounding areas is very limited, as evidenced by recent tendering exercises. This provision would require either larger vehicles and/or additional vehicles. Consideration would also need to be given to the suitability of transport in line with the learners needs.

18. Do you hold any data on the number of learners that were unable to attend a faith school due to issues with transport? Please provide examples.

Answer:

N/A

19. In your view, what changes to the measure might better facilitate access to faith schools?

Answer:

N/A – we currently facilitate access to faith education based upon preference in line with the specified mileage criteria.

20. In your view, how will the potential changes outlined at the very start of the questionnaire (points A-F) impact access to faith school education (positive or negative)?

Answer:

No impact, as our policy currently provides the required access as specified above.

Questions relating to travel to Welsh medium schools

21. What are you Authority's current arrangements for providing transport to Welsh-medium schools? For example is any free travel provided?

Answer:

Transport is provided to all Welsh-medium free of charge in line with the LA's current policy.

22. How do you define Welsh-medium school in your LA area?

Answer:

A school which educates solely via the medium of Welsh.

23. Assuming that definition of 'nearest school' is amended to include the nearest relevant Welsh medium school, based on the following scenarios and mileage thresholds, what would be the **additional costs** of providing free travel to Welsh medium schools for learners living in your LA area. Please use current attendance at Welsh medium schools and student travel distances to develop

these figures (i.e. we do not expect you to predict behavioural change as a result of changes to the measure).

- Primary School (eligible from 4 years of age)

Year	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	N/A	N/A	£290,000

- Secondary School (eligible from 11 – 16)

Year	3 mile	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

- Secondary School (eligible from 16 – 19)

Year	3 mile	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

- Further Education settings (eligible from 16 – 19)

Year	3 mile	2 mile	1.5 mile	1 mile
2020 – 2021	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

24. What would be the likely practical feasibility (including driver, operator and vehicle availability and availability of parking at school etc) of providing free travel to Welsh medium schools in line with each of the mileage thresholds given above?

Answer:
 Currently, we only have one Welsh-medium Primary School which services the whole of Blaenau Gwent, with secondary pupils accessing places and transport to Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw – situated within Torfaen.

25. Do you hold any data on the number of learners that were unable to attend a Welsh-medium school due to issues with transport? Please provide examples.

Answer:
 N/A

26. How is transport provision being considered within your Authorities' Welsh in Education Strategic Plan?

Answer:

We view transport aligned to improved access on an annual basis, hence the decision to offer free nursery transport. In addition, all statutory proposals consider associated transport costs and requirements.

27. In your view, what changes to the measure might better facilitate access to Welsh medium education?

Answer:

Free nursery transport – which we already implement locally.

28. In your view, how will the other potential changes outlined at the very start of this questionnaire (points A-F) impact access to Welsh medium education (positive or negative)?

Answer:

Consistency in approach is vital to ensure that choice is based upon preference in line with equality of access, as opposed to be focused on transport and access only.

Questions relating to accessibility

29. What proportion of vehicles used for dedicated home to school transport comply with PSVAR 2000 regulations?

Answer:

The LA procures this provision in line with the pupil's needs. Therefore, all transport required to facilitate children and young people with specific needs are compliant.

Other additional questions

30. What would be the likely practical feasibility of implementing multiple changes outlined above (For example, reducing mileage thresholds **and** providing free travel to post 16 learners **and** providing free travel to welsh medium and faith schools).

Answer:

The number of home to school transport providers within the local and surrounding areas is very limited, as evidenced by recent tendering exercises. This provision would require either larger vehicles and/or additional vehicles. Consideration would also need to be given to the suitability of transport in line with the learners needs. Consistency in approach is required to ensure equality of access for all learners in line with their preference.

31. Do you utilise and integrate local bus services in your area when providing school transport? What do you perceive to be the opportunities, benefits, barriers or risks associated with this practice?

Answer:

The LA utilises local bus services as and when required in line with both suitability and availability. There are, however, issues associated with timing of the journey's and vehicle capacity.

32. How many FTE staff work on learner travel within your LA. What would be the implications of applying potential changes to the measure, outlined in the opening paragraphs of this questionnaire, on LA resource required to deliver learner travel?

Answer:

There is 1 one FTE and 1 part-time Officer who oversee planning and delivery aspects of home to school and post 16 transport provision. Along with 2 managers overseeing the delivery of this function in line with the policy and associated budget. There would be a requirement for additional staffing to assist the already stretched implementation team. The Council would need to appraise the situation should the changes be agreed, however, as a minimum requirement another FTE Officer would be required.

33. In your view, are there any issues that exist with the current Learner Travel Wales) Measure 2008 which require review?

Answer:

- Exploration and development of a dedicated appeals policy to ensure clarity and consistency in approach, whilst managing the expectations of parents.
- A review of the behavior code
- A more consistent approach and framework to support home to school and post 16 transport policy development throughout Wales
-

34. Is there anything else that is relevant you would like to add or comment in relation to the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure or the review that is not already captured within your response to the questions asked?

Answer:

Many students reliant on public transport note that there are extremely limited direct transport links to college. As a result, students often have a longer commute with multiple changes. This can affect arrival times and departure should lessons etc. run over. The College runs courses into the evening and students often rely on service buses for their journeys. A more coordinated approach in relation to public transport bus and college timetables would be beneficial to students needing to use public transport to get to college.

Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire. Information received will be collated and made available on the Welsh Government website as part of supporting information to inform any recommendations made to Ministers.

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Home to School & Post 16 Transport Policy **2022/23**

Reviewed: **August 2021**
Adopted:

Should you have any queries relating to this policy please contact:

Education Transformation Team
Anvil Court
Abertillery
NP13 1DB

Email: 21stcenturyschools@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Telephone Number: 01495 357704 / 01495 35470

Should you have any queries relating to the provision of your child's transport or require support in making an application please contact:

Transport Team
Civic Centre
Ebbw Vale
NP23 6XB

Email: hometoschooltransport@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Telephone Number: 01495 311556

Blaenau Gwent has introduced an on-line application system for parents to apply for Home to School or Post 16 transport for their child(ren). Please visit the link below via the webpage:

<http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/resident/schools-learning/school-transport/>

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1.0 Introduction

This policy document has been produced by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council in compliance with the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure, 2008.

The purpose of the policy is to ensure that relevant information around home-to-school and post 16 transport arrangements is available to parents/ carers, pupils and partners. The Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The Council has developed a code of practice, to support safe travel arrangements. The code of practice forms part of the application process and ensures that both learners and operators are aware of the expectations upon them, whilst accessing/ providing transport.

2.0 Background

The Council has a duty to provide transport in accordance with Learner Travel (Wales) Measure, 2008.

The distance by which entitlement to transport is calculated is defined as the walking distance of the shortest available route, that is deemed to be safe. Route designation is carried out in accordance with the risk assessment procedure as detailed in the Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance (2014).

Under section 32 of the Education Act 2002 (which was amended by section 21 of the Measure), Councils have the power to change school session times, **if the change is considered necessary or expedient to promote the use of sustainable modes of travel, or to make travel arrangements more effective or efficient.**

3.0 Who Qualifies: The Main Criteria

Blaenau Gwent Council will provide free transport for children attending their nearest suitable school, where the distance from home to school is over the specified walking distance detailed below:

- more than 1.5 miles from home for children aged under 8 years but of statutory school age; and,
- more than 2 miles from home for children aged 8 years and over.

Distances are measured by using the Council's Digital Information Mapping System, to determine the shortest available safe walking route between the home address and the main gate of the school to be attended.

Parents are able to choose an English-medium, Welsh-medium or a denominational school for their child. The child will qualify for home to school transport to the appropriate catchment area of the school. When the catchment area school is full and unable to admit a pupil, free transport will be provided to the next nearest available school that has room to take the child, as long as the home is 1.5 miles or

more away from the school for pupils under the age of 8 years, or 2 miles for pupils aged 8 and over.

The provision of free school transport will be arranged to coincide with the start and end of the normal school day and shall be provided during the school term time. Home to School transport is not provided for breakfast clubs, after school clubs or summer schools.

Transport will be provided from pick-up points at approved bus stops on the nearest public transport route to the learner's home, where possible.

*All awarded transport will be reviewed periodically in line with changes to circumstances relating to the pupil(s) transport requirements.

4.0 Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

The Council believes and promotes independence for all learners. This encourages independent living as well as health and well-being.

The Council will provide transport assistance for pupils with ALN in line with the following eligibility criteria:

- if the pupil qualifies on distance grounds;
- if transport is identified by the ALN team as being a requirement irrespective of distance, due to the nature of the pupil's medical need, additional learning need and/or disability; or,
- if it is determined by ALN team that there is no suitable education provision within the Borough which meets the needs of the pupil. In such circumstances, the Council would seek to source a suitable out of county placement.

*The above arrangements will be subject to review in line with any changes to the pupil's circumstances which may affect their transport entitlement or requirement.

If parents choose a school other than the school named by the Council's ALN team, it is the parent/carers responsibility to secure transport arrangements for their child and cover the associated costs.

4.1 Requests for Transport: ALN Provision

Pupils requiring ALN transport who live more than 1.5 miles (for those under 8 years of age) or more than 2 miles (for those aged between 8-16 years of age) from their nearest agreed ALN provision, will automatically qualify for free home to school transport.

*Please note - in instances where the school is a parental choice and not the provision determined by the ALN Panel, **no transport will be provided**.

The Council has established a process in order to assess the travel needs of children who may require ALN transport, as follows:

- All requests to ALN Panel for consideration of change of placement will firstly be considered by the Transport team to determine their eligibility for transport on distance grounds.
- The Council's ALN Panel will then consider the request for change of placement, and if agreed, determine the appropriate placement and identify if transport is required to access the agreed placement.
- If it is identified that transport is required, a Pupil Transport Application Form will be completed and assessed by the ALN team in collaboration with the school and/or relevant partners, in line with the eligibility criteria set out in section 4.0 above. The form will be returned to the Transport Officer within 5 working days of a decision being made. The Transport Officer will then make the necessary arrangements and complete a journey risk assessment.
- Individual pupil risk assessment forms will only be completed if requested by a parent/carer, or if the pupil has needs that warrant completion of this form, e.g. profound and multiple learning difficulties. The ALN team will coordinate completion of the form. The form will identify the pupil's transportation needs, along with the type of transport required.
- The Transport Team require 15 school days upon receipt of the Pupil Transport Request Form, in order to arrange transport. Where the transportation needs of the pupil requires the Council to tender and/or source specialist training, the timeline will be in excess of 15 days and determined on a case by case basis.

Where transport has been agreed, the Transport Officer will contact the parent and inform them of the arrangements. In cases where transport requests are refused, parents/carers will receive notification from the ALN team, also indicating their right of appeal.

4.2 Residential School Placements not in the County Borough

Pupils with complex additional learning needs may require residential school placements. Residential placements are determined by the Social Services Complex Case Panel, with associated requirements considered on a case by case basis. When considering placement, the cost of transport will be taken into account.

Transport can be provided for residential placements as follows:

- Weekly or fortnightly boarding – transport for the pupil to return home weekly or fortnightly during term time.
- 38-week termly boarding – transport at the beginning and end of each half term and one additional return journey per half term.
- 51/52 week residential placements – one return journey per term.

5.0 Transportation of Children Looked After (CLA)

Children's Services will determine if it is considered appropriate for a child looked after (CLA) to attend a school other than the nearest suitable school to their residence, due to:

- the need to maintain continuity in education; and,
- or maintain contact with siblings and friends.

Transport for children who are looked after will be funded and coordinated by Children's Services with the exception of those cases, whereby placement is agreed by Education with a clear rationale, based on the educational needs of the pupil.

Requests for transport for CLA with ALN will be co-ordinated by the CLA Education Coordinator; however, where placement requests are agreed by the ALN Panel based on meeting the pupils needs, these requests will be funded by Education and administered by the Transport Officer in accordance with the Belongings Regulations. The transport application will be made by the CLA Education Coordinator along with a completed pro-forma, which will be submitted to the Transport Officer and copied to the ALN team, detailing the associated requirements.

In cases where children looked after reside and are educated outside of Blaenau Gwent; transport arrangements will be the responsibility of the Local Authority within which the pupil resides.

Transport is not routinely provided in circumstances where a child or children looked after are in respite accommodation. If it is possible for existing school transport to accommodate the pupil(s) to and from the respite provision without delay or deviation from the route, this can be considered, subject to regular review. Requests must be made to the Transport Officer in advance (where appropriate) and not drivers/escorts/operators directly.

6.0 How to Apply for Home to School Transport

Application forms for transport assistance can be obtained via the following one of two methods:

- You can apply online by accessing the Blaenau Gwent Website: www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk and selecting "My Services" register, Schools and Learning and completing the Home to School or Post 16 transport application form.
- If you do not have internet access, then you can still apply by contacting the Councils Contact Centre on 01495 311556 who will complete an application form on your behalf over the telephone.

The Council aims to process all applications received within 10 school days, unless specialist provision is required which may exceed the 10 days' dependent on the pupil's need.

7.0 Discretionary Welsh- medium Nursery Transport

In line with the Council's desire to promote access to Welsh-medium education, provided that there is capacity within the current transport arrangements, the Council will offer free transport for nursery pupils who reside over 1.5 miles from their home address to Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg.

This discretionary nursery provision may be withdrawn on the basis that it reduces availability of transport places for statutory aged learners.

8.0 Transport Considerations

8.1 Change of Address - Transport Arrangements

Pupils studying for their GCSE exams in years 10 or 11 who change address after the autumn half-term in year 10 will be entitled to free school transport - **usually a bus pass, the Council does not have a duty to provide a separate taxi**; providing that the new address is **over 2 miles walking distance** from their current school. Transport can also be provided on an existing contract. The entitlement to free transport is provided in this instance, if the pupil attended their catchment area school prior to the move. It is the responsibility of the parent to ensure that the pupil is able to access the designated pickup and drop off points if using existing transport, and the pupil is able to access designated bus stops for season ticket holders.

8.2 Schools with Multiple Campuses/Sites

For multi-site/campus schools, if the campus nearest to the pupil's home is unable to offer a place and an alternative campus or site is offered which is over the distance criteria, then free home to school transport will be provided.

8.3 Permanently Excluded & Managed Move Pupils

If a secondary age pupil has been permanently excluded from school, the Council will provide a bus pass to support change of placement as agreed / necessary. If a primary age child has been permanently excluded from school, the Council will provide appropriate transport as agreed/ necessary. Transport and/or bus passes will only be provided for pupils that enrol at an alternative mainstream setting within Blaenau Gwent.

Where a secondary aged pupil has moved schools as agreed via the managed move process, bus passes will be provided to enable the pupil to attend the newly agreed setting. However, where a primary age pupil has moved schools as agreed via the managed move process, the Council will provide appropriate transport as agreed/ necessary.

*The above will not be applicable in instances whereby parents have elected for their child to change schools.

8.4 Before & After School Activities

If a pupil attends breakfast club or after school activity/club, then it becomes the responsibility of the parent/carer to transport their children to and from activities outside of the normal the school day.

8.5 School Trips

On occasions when school trips fall outside the normal school day, pupils in receipt of free home to school transport will need to be collected from the school as per the arrangements in 8.4 above.

8.6 Escorts

All drivers of home to school transport provision and accompanying escorts are required to have enhanced Disclosure Barring Scheme (DBS) checks. The Council may provide more than one escort on transport should the need arise to do so. All arrangements will be reviewed on a regular basis.

The transport provider may change throughout the time a pupil receives Council transport – meaning that drivers and escorts may change; however, where possible, continuity of drivers and escorts will be provided by contracted providers of transport.

8.7 Travel Assistance Reimbursement

Fuel expenses can be claimed in circumstances where appropriate transport cannot be provided, and the need of the pupil is such that the parent/carer may be required to transport their child. This will be assessed via the ALN team in partnership with the Transport Officer and agreed in writing in advance of finalising arrangements.

8.8 Pupils on Exchange Visits

The Council does not provide transport assistance to pupils on exchange visits.

8.9 Pupil Attendance

In circumstances where a pupil is in receipt of free home to school transport and is not attending school regularly, the Council can withdraw the travel offer. This will be determined on a case by case basis. Parents/carers of those found to be in breach of the travel offer due to attendance issues; will resume responsibility for ensuring the travel arrangements of pupils to and from school. This process will be overseen by the Education Welfare Service.

At the end of each term, the transport team will provide the Education Welfare Service with a list of pupils that fall into the above category and attendance will be reviewed against the pupil's records. Where pupils are identified the following process will be followed:

- Contact made with parents to discuss transport issues
- Warning issued to parents of the intention to withdraw transport if no improvement
- Attendance reviewed at the end of the following half term.

- If there has been improvement transport continues but if not transport offer withdrawn

8.10 Preferred Schools/Parental Choice

Parents/carers who choose a school other than the nearest suitable catchment school are responsible for getting their child to and from the school throughout the time that their child attends the school. This is also applicable for pupils with additional learning needs; please refer to section 4.3 for more information.

8.11 Pupils Under 16 years Attending Vocational Training Provision

Blaenau Gwent Council does not provide transport for pupils of compulsory school age attending training provision.

8.12 Dual Residency

Where parents have shared responsibility for a child and the child is permanently resident at more than one address, the Council will provide transport from both addresses, as long as they are both in the catchment area for the school concerned and are located over the required qualifying walking distance.

8.13 Rural Areas/Transport Links

Where appropriate, the Council will use its discretion in determining whether or not a taxi link will need to be provided to an existing bus service for those pupils living in rural locations.

8.14 Temporary Medical Conditions

The Council understands that in some circumstances the health of a mainstream pupil may restrict use of mainstream transport, due to a temporary medical condition. In these instances, individual assessments will be undertaken to determine associated transportation need and risk.

If an ALN pupil has a temporary medical condition, transport may be provided on request from either the ALN team or the Education Welfare team. Transport arrangements provided on medical grounds will be reviewed regularly.

Requests for long-term transport due to a medical condition must be made to the Council's ALN team and accompanied by a letter from the pupil's consultant. The request must outline the pupil's medical condition and health risks encountered should they be required to walk to and from school.

The Council will not accept requests directly from GPs.

8.15 School Organisation Proposals

The Council will provide free home to school transport for learners of compulsory school age, where the closure of a school results in a learner being transferred to another school. Learners already on the register of the closed school will be provided with free transport to the new catchment school or the nearest school, subject to

meeting the policy's distance criteria - until the learner finishes education at that school. If the learner leaves this school, entitlement to this discretionary provision will end.

9.0 Post 16 Travel

9.1 Transport Entitlement

All students living in Blaenau Gwent will be provided with a discounted bus ticket or travel grant to the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone, Ebbw Vale Campus as their designated Post 16 provider; or, the nearest institution where their course is available depending on the following criteria:

- students must be between the ages of 16 to 19 (under 19 prior to the 1st September of the commencement of their course) to qualify;
- students shall reside in the County Borough of Blaenau Gwent;
- students must reside 2 miles or over (nearest walking distance) from their nearest college campus; and, the students should attend a full time course which requires attendance of 16 or more hours per week or a minimum 4 days' attendance per week at the institution.

Students and pupils aged 19 or over at the commencement of the course are not eligible for travel assistance from the Council and in these circumstances, they are advised to contact their respective college for details of any available transport provision.

All transport for Post 16 pupils including those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), is agreed on a case by case basis by the ALN team in consultation with the Transport Officer. The Council may provide transport up to a maximum of three years.

The criteria for Post 16 ALN transport is as follows:

- if the student qualifies on distance grounds;
- if transport is identified by the ALN team as being a requirement irrespective of distance, due to the nature of the student's medical need, additional learning need and/or disability; or,
- if it is determined by ALN team that there is no suitable college provision within the Borough which meets the needs of the pupil. In such circumstances, the Council would seek to source a suitable out of county placement.

*The above arrangements will be subject to review in line with any changes to the student(s) circumstances which may affect their transport entitlement or requirement.

9.2 Travel Grant

The Council's present policy is to provide travel assistance to those who meet the criteria up to a maximum of £150 per academic session. This will be paid termly as follows: £50 autumn, £50 spring and £50 summer.

9.3 Welsh Medium/Faith Education

Pupils who wish to undertake their Post 16 studies via the medium of Welsh or attend a Faith school are required to travel further distances for their education, with no direct public service bus routes. These students have the opportunity to utilise the existing contracted bus provision in lieu of the Travel Grant, if appropriate.

9.4 How to Apply

Applications for transport assistance are available on Blaenau Gwent's website. Parents/Students can submit an application for transport assistance at any time, however, there is always an increase in demand prior to the start of an academic year and parents are advised to allow additional time. The Council sets a target to process all applications received within 10 school/college days, unless specialised provision is required.

Further information can be found on the following website www.coleggwent.gov.uk and <http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/resident/schools-learning/school-transport/>

10.0 Procedures

10.1 Safe Routes to School/Learner Travel Arrangements

Safe Routes to school are assessed individually by the Transport Division in line with the Welsh Government Learner Travel Measure (2014). A route is considered to be available if it is safe for a child/young person to walk alone or with an accompanying adult, where appropriate. It is recognised that occasions may arise when routes may become hazardous. In these circumstances, the Council reserves the right to provide free home to school transport for distances below the discretionary limits in the interests of the safety of the relevant learners. The Council will assess route safety through using clear Council criteria and a determination will be made on a risk assessment basis, where necessary.

10.2 Extreme Weather and COVID-19 Emergency Response

Severe weather may impact on Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's ability to provide Home to School Transport safely. In such circumstances, the safety and wellbeing of the children and transport providers remains our key priority. Where severe weather results in the requirement to cancel transportation, the school will always notify parents at the earliest point to avoid unnecessary disruption.

Up to date weather information is posted on the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's website during periods of severe weather conditions.

If the Home to School Transport provision is cancelled, the Education Transformation team and Transport Officer will advise schools, as best they can, when transport services are likely to resume. During these periods, the school will aim to keep parents/carers informed of developments.

If transport is cancelled due to extreme weather, the following is applicable:

- where a route is cancelled and a parent/carer takes the decision to transport the child themselves, the parent/carer remains responsible for the return journey or any subsequent costs should a return journey not be possible;
- if a child is unable to attend school due to severe weather, the parent/carer remains responsible for their child; and,
- out of hours' emergency contact can be made with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council through the main contact centre – 01495 311556

In line with the COVID-19 Pandemic, any changes to the provision of home to school and post 16 transport will be communicated with schools, colleges and families of pupils/students accessing transport provision. Changes will be reflective of the latest Welsh Government Guidance.

10.3 Exclusions from Home to School Transport

The Council has an approved travel behaviour code that covers all home to school transport provision. All parties will be required to sign the Blaenau Gwent Transport Behaviour Contract prior to approval of transport provision.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council reserves the right to refuse travel assistance where a child/young person's behaviour is such that, it is unacceptable in line with the travel code and/or presents a significant health and safety risk, or whereby excessive and purposeful damage to vehicles has been identified. In these instances, the Transport team will issue warning letters and parents will receive no more than four letters. The behaviour management process is as follows:

- **Stage 1** - Initially raising the concerns/issues
- **Stage 2** - Informal warning indicating the remedial steps taken and the potential of transport removal
- **Stage 3** - Final warning indicating that transport will be removed.
- **Stage 4** - The school jointly with the Transport team will issue the final letter confirming the removal of transport, citing the reasons for the removal, the date of the proposed removal and the parental route of appeal.

If a pupil is refused/ excluded from transport due to behavioural issues, parents/carers then become responsible for their child's attendance at school and any transport required.

Any wilful damage that incurs cost to the transport provider for either repair or cleaning remains the responsibility of the parent/carer of the pupil concerned. Continued or repeat behaviour that result in wilful damage can result in exclusion from home to school transport.

Please note should a situation arise in during transportation, which constitutes a health and safety hazard, pupils can be removed from the vehicle with a police presence, and further transport provision withdrawn with immediate effect pending investigation.

10.4 ALN Transport Issues & Exclusions

The Transport team will monitor and review issues and incidents relating to ALN transport, and determine with relevant professionals i.e. the school and ALN team, any reasonable adjustments required to accommodate the pupil(s).

In cases whereby there are recurrent issues behavioural or other, which mean that:

- the planned transport arrangements no longer meet the needs of the pupil; and/or,
- there are health and safety risks to both the pupil and contractor

The Transport team will look to work with the school in first instance. Where there are behavioural issues which present health and safety concerns, letters will be issued parents informing them of the issues concerns and Council's intention regarding the management or removal of transport, and/or employing suitable alternative solutions. No more than four letters will be issued prior to the removal/refusal of transport. The behaviour management process is as follows:

- **Stage 1** - Initially raising the concerns/issues
- **Stage 2** - Informal warning indicating the remedial steps taken and the potential of transport review/removal
- **Stage 3** - Final warning indicating that transport will be removed.
- **Stage 4** - Transport will be suspended and parents notified in writing, pending detailed assessment of the risks and transportation needs of the pupil. A Review Group will then be coordinated by the Transport Officer, with representation from relevant services and professionals, in order to determine a suitable solution.

If a pupil is refused or excluded from transport due to behavioural and/or other issues, parents/carers then become responsible for their child's home to school transport requirements, until a suitable solution has been found.

Any wilful damage that incurs cost to the transport provider for either repair or cleaning remains the responsibility of the parent/carer of the pupil concerned. Continued or repeat behaviour that result in wilful damage can result in exclusion from home to school transport.

10.5 Safeguarding

The safety of children and young people on home to school and/or post 16 transport is Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's first priority. In particular, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council will ensure that:

- all providers are contracted for the provision and must ensure to comply with the terms and conditions set out within their contract
- should the Council identify any safeguarding concerns relating to a particular provider or associated member of staff, the process will be managed in accordance with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures;
- all drivers and escorts have been checked and cleared by the DBS;

- all drivers and escorts will have access to safeguarding training and **must** report any concerns that they may identify to the Transport team, the school and where appropriate, the Police and/ or Social Services **without delay**;
- all drivers and escorts carry a form of identity;
- lap and diagonal seat belts are provided on all contract vehicles;
- car seats/booster seats are provided in accordance with current Government legislation - **this is the responsibility of the parent/carer**;
- **the Council will provide specialist equipment only when pre-agreed upon or as identified as part of a review**;
- **parents/carers of primary pupils are responsible for ensuring that there is a responsible adult to collect their child/children upon drop-off each day**;
- **parents/carers of pupils in receipt of ALN transport, are responsible for ensuring that there is a responsible adult within the home at pick-up and upon drop-off each day**;
- drivers and escorts receive appropriate training and are familiar with safety and emergency equipment;
- drivers, escorts and operators are aware of their duties, particularly in emergency situations; and,
- wheelchair occupants must be correctly restrained. Wheelchairs will need to meet specific authorised crash test requirements (this specification can be confirmed directly by the user in conjunction with our Transport team).

10.6 Home to School/College Transport - Code of Good Practice

Across all of home to school transport provision and post 16 learning, the Council operates a **Code of Practice** for pupils, students, parents, schools and transport operators. The code of practice can be found on the link below;

http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/fileadmin/documents/Resident/Schools_and_Learning/SchoolTransport_CodeofGoodPractice.pdf

10.7 Free Transport - Right to Withdraw

The Council reserve the right to withdraw awarded transport, if an error is made or where legislation has changed which affects the entitlement of a pupil or pupils using school transport. The Council will honour the transport provision for that pupil(s) for the remainder of the academic half-term, during which the awarding error was identified, or that legislation became effective.

All awarded transport is reviewed periodically.

10.8 Appeals Procedure

Where the one of the following circumstances apply:

- a child or young person is not eligible for travel assistance;
- a change in transport arrangements has been made and the parent/carer notified; and,
- transport has not been agreed.

Parents/carers may ask for the decision to be reconsidered whereby an appeals form will then be issued. Parents/carers may then highlight exceptional circumstances they wish to be considered in relation to their entitlement.

Appeals should be made in writing to the Education Transformation team, and wherever possible forwarded by recorded post to ensure delivery/tracking. All appeal related correspondence should be addressed to:

Education Transformation Manager
Anvil Court
Abertillery
Blaenau Gwent
NP13 1DB

Appeals will then be considered by the Appeals Panel, who look to determine the level of prejudice to the child should they not be granted transport. The prejudice will be considered in relation to the impact in terms of:

- distance
- disability; and/ or,
- medical considerations on the advice of a consultant.

Parents will have 10 working days to submit an appeal from the date that the refusal letter was issued. Their appeal will then be heard within 30 working days from the specific closing date indicated within the refusal letter.

10.9 Monitoring Procedure

All vehicles will be made available for random checks by Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) and/ or another appropriate body, when required. Any complaints received by the Council concerning services or vehicles will be investigated in line with the Council's complaints policy. In the event of the complaint being upheld, the necessary and appropriate steps will be taken in accordance with the contract or as a matter of urgency and will be reported in a timely manner to the Education Directorate's Management Team (DMT).

The Council will undertake random checks to contracts, to ensure that they are being operated in accordance with the Council's terms and conditions. As part of this monitoring exercise, the following checks will also be made:

- punctuality;
- adherence to route;
- size of vehicle;
- licences; and,
- staff DBS checks are in place.

All of the above are designed to ensure safe and stress free travel.

11.0 Glossary of Terms

Additional Learning Needs (ALN)	A pupil who has an identified additional learning need
Catchment Area	A marked out geographical area made up of the streets around a school.
Catchment Area School	A school within the catchment area
Children Looked After	Children who are in the care of, or 'accommodated by', a Local Authority.
Child Protection	Child protection is a part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. This refers to the activity which is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering or are at risk of suffering significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect.
Designated Area	A geographical area, which is usually made up of Parishes served by a voluntary aided school (see section 2.2 for Faith/voluntary aided schools).
Nearest Suitable School	For transport purposes, the nearest suitable school may not be the catchment area school.
Officer Review	The process of someone within the Council looking again at an application for transport assistance.
Parent/Carer	Anyone who is responsible for the care of a child. We use the same definition as stated in the Education Act 1996.
Preferred School	Parents have a right to say they prefer a school other than the catchment area school. This is known as 'a preferred school'. This school will remain a preferred school when parents apply for help with transport, throughout the pupil's attendance.
Pupil	A young person who is of compulsory school age, which is the term after the child's fifth birth day and before the last Friday in June in Year 11. For transport purposes the term pupil will also include those in Foundation Stage 2.
Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children	Protecting children from abuse and neglect, preventing impairment of their health or development and ensuring that they receive safe and effective care to enable them to have optimum life chances.
Shortest Walking Distance	The shortest safe walkable route between the main access to and from your private property, such as your front gate or the top of your drive and the nearest school gate.
Special Transport Needs	Some pupils may have special transport needs that come from a disability or a special educational need.
Statutory Walking Distance	As set out in section 2, in accordance with the definition provided in the Education Act 1996.
Student	A young person who attends a sixth form or college beyond the statutory school age, which is the last Friday in June in Year 11.
Suitable Walkable Route	A route where a child can walk to and from school safe from traffic – with the parent or another 'responsible adult' if the parent decides this is needed. If a parent cannot do this, the Council is not responsible for escorting your child to school.

11.1 Blaenau Gwent Schools

Blaenau Gwent has the following schools and provision for pupils:

- **Community Maintained Schools** – schools managed by the headteacher and governors, in partnership with the Council. The Council arranges admissions.
- **Voluntary-aided Schools** – schools supported by the relevant Religious Board and the Council jointly. The governors will normally employ all staff and manage admissions. These schools are sometimes called ‘faith’ or ‘denominational’ schools.
- **Foundation Schools** – schools maintained by the Council but the governors are responsible for admissions. For transport assistance purposes, all pupils attending Foundation schools are treated in the same way as pupils attending community schools.
- **Resource Bases** – some mainstream schools have Resource Bases which are Council funded provisions that meet the additional learning needs of pupils whose needs cannot be met in mainstream classes. Resource Bases have a higher level of staffing providing more specialist support to meet pupil need. Pupils access mainstream classes where appropriate and placement into a Resource Base is determined by the Council’s ALN Panel
- **Special School** – a school which caters for pupils with additional learning needs whose needs cannot be appropriately met in a mainstream or Resource Base setting. Special schools receive pupils with a degree of disability and placement is agreed through the Council’s ALN Panel. The Council arranges admissions for all special schools.
- **Pupil Referral Units** - cater for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural Difficulties and provides short term, as well as longer term placements. The Council arranges admission through the Council’s ALN Panel.
- **All Through School 3-16 model** – where there are more than one campus or site associated with the school. The school is responsible for admissions for all site allocation.
- **Welsh Medium School** – caters for children who are being taught through the medium of Welsh as their first language.

For more information on Blaenau Gwent Schools, please refer to the Blaenau Gwent Starting Schools Booklet, which can be found on the Council’s website, via School Admissions.

Socio-economic Duty (Strategic Decisions Only)

Welsh Government's [Socio-economic Duty](#) provides a framework to ensure tackling inequality of outcome is at the forefront of decision making.

Please consider how your proposal could affect the following groups:

- Single parents and vulnerable families
- People with low literacy/numeracy
- Pensioners
- Looked after children
- Homeless people
- Carers
- Armed Forces Community
- Students
- Single adult households
- People who have experienced the asylum system
- People of all ages leaving a care setting
- People living in the most deprived areas in Wales (WIMD)
- People involved in the criminal justice system
- People misusing substances

Socio Economic Disadvantages	Will the proposal have a positive, negative, or neutral impact?	How could you mitigate the negative impacts outlined?	Please highlight any evidence that has been considered (quantitative or qualitative)
Low Income / Income Poverty <i>(cannot afford to maintain regular payments such as bills, food, clothing, transport etc.)</i>	Neutral	N/A	
Low and/or No Wealth <i>(enough money to meet basic living costs and pay bills but have no savings to deal with any unexpected spends and no provisions for the future)</i>	Neutral	N/A	
Material Deprivation <i>(unable to access basic goods and services i.e., financial products like life insurance, repair/replace broken electrical goods, warm home, hobbies etc.)</i>	Neutral	N/A	
Area Deprivation <i>(where you live (rural areas), where you work (accessibility of public transport) Impact on the environment?</i>	Neutral	N/A	
Socio-economic Background <i>(social class i.e., parents' education, employment and income)</i>	Neutral	N/A	

Socio-economic Disadvantage <i>(What cumulative impact will the proposal have on people or groups because of their protected characteristic(s) or vulnerability or because they are already disadvantaged)</i>	Neutral	N/A	
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Agenda Item 12

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 13.09.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**

Report Subject: **Education Accessibility Strategy and Action Plan Review**

Portfolio Holder: **Education and Learning Portfolio – Cllr Joanne Collins**

Report Submitted by: **Corporate Director of Education – Lynn Phillips
Service Manager for Education Transformation and Business Change – Claire Gardner**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
23.8.21	26.8.21	07.09.21			7.9.21	22.9.21		

1. **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of the report is to provide the Executive Committee with an overview Education Accessibility Strategy Review process and associated timeline. The revised Strategy will be implemented from September 2022.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 **Background and Context**

The Blaenau Education Accessibility Strategy aims to ensure that appropriate educational provision and support services are available to meet the diverse needs of children, young people, parents and carers.
 - 2.2 Welsh Government issued the following updated Guidance in March 2018 ‘Planning to Increase Access to Schools for Disabled Pupils’. The purpose of the updated guidance being to support local authorities to meet their statutory duties under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, which provides that: *‘A local authority must, in relation to a school for which it is a responsible authority, prepare, implement, review and update written accessibility strategies’.*
 - 2.3 The Blaenau Gwent Education Accessibility Strategy (please refer to **Appendix 1**), was last published in 2017, for the period 2017-20. Local authorities are required to prepare, implement review and update their Accessibility Strategy documents every three years.
 - 2.4 In 2017 upon publication of the updated Strategy, the Education Transformation team established an Accessibility Forum. The purpose of the Forum was to monitor implementation of and work towards a detailed Strategy review plan, whilst overseeing delivery of the action plan and ensuring effective education accessibility issue identification/management processes are in place.

2.5 Strong progress was made against the Strategy and associated action between 2017 and 2021, as follows:

- Blaenau Gwent Council was recognised by the Children's Commissioner for Wales in 2018, as being one of the only Councils in Wales to have a published Accessibility Strategy and action plan.
- The Forum was established to oversee implementation of key strategic priorities, along with delivery and monitoring of the action plan, whilst also ensuring due regard was given to related policy and legislative developments.
- A facilities review process has been established and completed with all Blaenau Gwent schools, in order to facilitate development, publication and action planning processes on a school-by-school basis. This is also being rolled out to wider education, alternative and informal learning settings/facilities. The facilities management aspect of the Education Transformation team work closely with Technical Services, who have and continue to embed accessibility into the facilities review, maintenance, condition and suitability processes.
- All Blaenau Gwent School have Accessibility Plans in place, which were last reviewed during the 2019/20 academic session.
- Pupil accessibility needs are identified pre-admission, monitored, managed and resourced as required. There have been three cases over the course of the 2020/21 academic year, whereby physical works have been undertaken and schools supported to meet the needs of the pupils in question.
- The Blaenau Gwent school maintenance strategy and 21st Century Schools programme have and continue to address accessibility issues to the greatest degree possible throughout the school estate. There are two school settings within Blaenau Gwent which are not fully accessible. However, depending on the needs of the child or young person additional adaptations, work and provision may be required within those setting that are considered to be accessible.
- Staff training programmes have been developed and delivered, with learning incorporated into future programmes to increase awareness, knowledge, experience, understanding and management of accessibility issues.
- A Complex and Medical Needs group has been established with representation from Health, Education, Community Services, Health and Safety and Social Services (along with other relevant partners as determined in line with each case), to address individual cases whereby complex needs prevent pupils from attending their chosen/preferred school. Thus far five cases have been resolved, one of which was subject to an independent equality impact assessment.
- An early identification process is in development, to ensure that the Council is able to manage accessibility issues technically, financially and educationally, prior to pupils reaching statutory school age.

Current Context

2.6 The Forum was active between 2017 and early 2020, when the frequency of meetings declined, due to resource-based pressures associated with the

COVID-19 pandemic. However, the action plan (please refer to **Appendix 2** for further information), has been continually monitored by Education throughout the course of the pandemic. In addition, accessibility issues have and continue to be identified, managed and monitored on a case by case basis.

2.7 The current Blaenau Gwent strategy was due for review and consultation in 2020, however, due to the pandemic both review and consultation processes were delayed. Since the initial review in 2019/20, there have been a number of strategic and other significant developments: Additional Learning Needs Reform, the new Curriculum for Wales, changes to the operation of education and childcare settings in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Welsh Government are also currently in the process of reviewing the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008, and the School Admissions Code (2013). In addition, there has been significant capital investment, and as a result, physical changes within education settings throughout Blaenau Gwent over the course of the last 4 years. These changes are a result of minor and planned work schemes, the Councils facilities review and maintenance processes/plans, the 21st Century Schools Programme, Section 106 developer contributions and other Welsh Government capital funded projects, including:

- The Childcare Grant
- Welsh Medium Grant
- Education Maintenance Grant
- Rural Schools Grant
- Class Size Capital Grant

2.8 Therefore, a fundamental review of the school estate and associated accessibility plans is required. In order to undertake this review, Education plan to develop a 3 to 5-year programme of detailed accessibility audits, starting with the oldest settings and those with the lowest condition and suitability ratings. In conjunction with this, Education will work with key partners and professionals including the Forum, to fundamentally review the Accessibility Strategy over the course of the 2021/22 academic session, for adoption in the summer 2022, and implementation from September 2022. For a detailed overview of the associated plans, actions and timeline, please refer to **Appendix 2**. In the interim, the action plan will be developed and monitored on a monthly basis, with continued identification and case management processes in place to address accessibility issues and needs as they arise.

2.9 Education also plan to work with the Forum to develop an accessibility needs identification protocol. The aim of the protocol is to ensure that children, young people and parents have the right support in place to make informed choices in relation to their education options, and that the school estate is able to cater for the accessibility needs of the pupil population. This in turn will assist more pupils with disabilities to attend the education setting or provision of their choice, and ensure equality of access to education linked to the child/ young person's social, emotional and educational development and wellbeing.

2.10 The Accessibility Strategy review will be subject to an informal consultation process, which will commence in the spring-term 2022. Via the consultation exercise, Education will seek to engage with a series of key consultees and stakeholders including but not limited to:

- Special schools
- Resource bases
- The Disability Forum
- The Schools Grand Council
- The Youth Forum
- The Youth Service
- Young people accessing alternative learning settings (EOTAS and off site activity)
- Pupils and Students
- Parents
- School Governors
- School Staff
- Council Services
- Aneurin Leisure Trust
- Blaenau Gwent Access for All Forum
- Partner Organisations i.e. Banardo's, SNAP Cymru, Disability Wales
- Transport Providers

2.11 **Alignment with the Administration of Medicines and Medical Needs**

Welsh Government produced new guidance during the 2018/19 academic session around "Supporting Learners with Healthcare Needs". This placed new expectations on all Councils, schools and pupil referral units to produce a 'Supporting Learners – Healthcare Policy'. The SEWC ALN Group took a regional approach to the writing and production of the Policy, along with a template to assist schools in developing their own individual policy. This approach was agreed by Welsh Government and work commenced with colleagues in the Health Sector in developing and producing the aforementioned documents. Subsequently, SEWC Directors approved the regional policy along with the template for schools. The policy and associated documents were shared with schools in 2019, followed by implementation of a training and engagement programme led by Inclusion.

2.12 The Education plan to develop a Healthcare Needs Sub-group of the Accessibility Forum, to work on the development of localised operational guidance in line with the aforementioned policy, including early identification and management processes. The guidance will cover both the administration of medicines and medical needs.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 This report will be considered by the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee on 14th September 2021, and any feedback will be provided verbally to the Executive Committee.

3.2 **Option 1:** Executive Committee considers and accepts the report.

3.3 **Option 2:** Executive Committee considers the report and provides comments relating to improvements that can be made.

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

4.1 Education is a strategic priority for the Council and key to achieving the outcomes within the Council's Corporate Plan. Accessibility is an essential component of and key priority for Education and key to ensuring equality of access to education for all pupils. The Council a statutory duties and responsibilities in line with:

- Equality Act 2010
- Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011
- Part IV of the Education Act 1996 (as amended by sections 1-8 of the Education (Wales) Measure 2009)
- Education (Special Educational Needs) (Information) (Wales) Regulations 1999
- Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales Regulations 2012
- The Well Being of Future Generations Act 2015
- Welsh Government Planning to Increase Access to Schools for Disabled Pupils Guidance (2018)

4.2 The Accessibility Strategy seeks to respond to the Council's wellbeing goals for all learners.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

There are no direct budget implications associated with this report. However, depending on the needs of the child or young person additional adaptations, work and provision may be required within those setting that are considered to be accessible and these will be funded through existing revenue and capital resources e.g. Education Capital Maintenance Grants.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The Council have a statutory duty to comply with Welsh Government legislation and policy as detailed above. The primary risk and mitigating action is ensuring compliance with statutory duties and legislative obligations aligned to education-based accessibility requirements. The risks are largely mitigated by the Accessibility Action Plan and associated monitoring, identification and management processes. The review process is key to securing compliance.

- 5.3 **Legal**
The Council are legally required to prepare, implement and update accessibility strategies for all schools for which they are the responsible body.
- 5.4 **Human Resources**
The strategy document and associated plan have been developed by the Education Transformation team, who oversee and monitor the progress of the actions highlighted in the action plan, along with review and publication of the Education Accessibility Strategy. The Corporate Director, supported by Wider Corporate Leadership Team, will have key roles in ensuring the effective implementation and resourcing of the strategy.
6. **Supporting Evidence**
- 6.1 **Performance Information and Data**
Blaenau Gwent Council have an existing Education Accessibility Strategy and up to date action plan. All Blaenau Gwent Schools have Accessibility Plans in place, with annual monitoring activities undertaken by the Council; as a result, the Education Directorate currently has a detailed appreciation of both school and pupil accessibility needs/requirements.
- 6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**
The Education Accessibility Strategy and associated action plan seek to secure appropriate education provision and support services to meet the diverse needs of children, young people, parents and carers.
- 6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**
Stakeholders and end-user needs and engagement are of paramount importance to the Education Accessibility Strategy and associated action plan. An Education Accessibility Forum has been developed to secure inter-departmental working across the Council, aligned to effective delivery of both the strategy and plan. In addition, all relevant stakeholders will be consulted in line with the review process.
- 6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**
The Strategy is aligned to the Corporate Plan and covers the period 2017 to 2020, with a review programmed for this academic year, followed by publication of the new strategy in 2022 for a period of three years.
- 6.5 **Preventative focus**
The strategy and action plan will support the Council to better understand, plan for, manage and monitor accessibility issues and needs for all learners throughout the school estate and other education settings.
- 6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**
Key management and operational staff across the Council and school estate are and will be involved in the Forum, annual reviews, production of and consultation upon the Education Accessibility Strategy. Education will consult with a cross-section of services, providers, users and partners in

line with the preparation, review and production of the Blaenau Gwent Education Accessibility Strategy.

6.7 *Integration (across service areas)*

The review process, strategy and action plan are cross-cutting in the sense that they impact upon Education, schools, Health and Safety, Policy and Performance, Planning and Building Control, Community Services, Social Services etc.; therefore, service area involvement is key to effective implementation.

6.8 *Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions*

Any physical works planned and undertaken within education settings are planned in order to take account of decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions.

6.9a *Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment*

The existing strategy was created prior to the socio-economic duty commencing. However, it is a strategic decision, which will require the assessment during the review process.

6.9b. *Equality Impact Assessment*

EqlA screening and impact assessments are carried out on a case by case basis, however, during the strategy review a full EqlA will be carried out and presented to consultees and stakeholders as part of the consultation process.

7. *Monitoring Arrangements*

7.1 Education review and monitor the Accessibility Action Plan consistently throughout the year, incorporating learning from the previous year. The Strategy will undergo review over the course of the next academic session, and once produced, will be taken via the Council's political processes for approval prior to publication.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – BGCBC Education Accessibility Strategy
- Appendix 2 – Education Accessibility Action Plan

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Education Accessibility Strategy (2017-2020)

Date: Approved: 2017

Review Date: 2020



Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol

Blaenau Gwent

County Borough Council

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EDUCATION DIRECTORATE

IMPROVING ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

Introduction

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council values all persons equally and aims to ensure that appropriate educational provision and support services are available to meet the diverse needs of children, young people, parents and carers.

These principles were first formally set out in the “Schools and Learning Centres Accessibility Strategy 2004-2007”. This revised document reflects changes to organisational structures and National and local policy objectives.

The key aim of this strategy is to provide a framework for the Council and schools to work within compliance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and other legislation and guidance.

It is important that the Council and schools work in partnership to provide the right kind of support in all aspects of school life for children and young people. We also recognise schools as a community asset and workplace and the legitimate needs of staff and the public must be addressed as part of this strategy.

In recent years, there has been considerable expansion in the support services provided for parents and carers and we need to ensure equality of opportunity in accessing these services.

This guidance is designed to assist schools and governing bodies to develop their own school accessibility plan

Any comments on this document can be sent to the Corporate Director of Education, Education Directorate, Anvil Court, Abertillery, NP13 1DB or e-mail education.department@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Lynette Jones
Corporate Director of Education

THE DRAFT ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY 2017-20

Equality legislation places responsibilities on Councils and responsible bodies of schools to improve access to their schools.

Requirements for Councils to put in place an accessibility strategy are specified in schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

This schedule provides for accessibility arrangements for pupils.

An accessibility strategy aims to do the following;

- a) increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the schools' curriculums;
- b) improve the physical environment of the schools for the purpose of increasing the extent to which disabled pupils are able to take advantage of education and benefits, facilities or services provided or offered by the schools; and,
- c) improve the delivery to disabled pupils of information which is readily accessible to pupils who are not disabled.

The delivery must be: -

- a) within a reasonable time;
- b) in ways which are determined after taking account of the pupils' disabilities and any preferences expressed by them or their parents.

In keeping with the legislation, this Accessibility Strategy sets out the ways in which Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council will continue its strategic approach to planning for increased access to its schools, for which it is responsible.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination, victimisation and harassment on the basis of the following characteristics:

- Age;
- Disability;
- Gender Reassignment;
- Marriage and Civil Partnership (protection against direct discrimination only);
- Pregnancy and Maternity;
- Race;
- Religion or (non-belief);
- Sex; and
- Sexual Orientation.

The Act was developed to strengthen, harmonise and streamline 40 years and 116 pieces of equalities legislation, improving its effectiveness and providing the same level of protection from discrimination for all protected characteristics. The Act replaces all the existing equality law, including:

- The Equal Pay Act 1970;
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975;

- The Race Relations Act 1976;
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Under the new legislation the protection against discrimination, victimisation and harassment already in place continues, with the new Act ensuring that certain protected characteristics now have equal protection to those already in place.

The Equality Act has introduced a single Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (sometimes also referred to as the 'general duty') that applies to public bodies, including maintained and which extends to all protected characteristics – race, disability, sex, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment. This combined equality duty came into effect in April 2011. The duty has three main elements. In carrying out their functions, public bodies are required to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- foster good relations across all characteristics – between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Children with Statements of Special Educational Needs are expected to be educated in a mainstream school unless this is against their parents' wishes or is incompatible with the efficient education of other children. It is reasonable to expect that planning to increase access for disabled pupils will support the inclusion of children and young people with Statements of Special Educational Needs.

From 1996, schools and Councils had already held statutory responsibilities under the DDA and, since September 2002, it had been unlawful for schools and Councils to discriminate against disabled pupils in their arrangements for admissions and exclusions and for the provision for education and associated services.

Under these duties, schools and Councils had to:

- ensure that disabled pupils were not treated less favourably than other pupils; and,
- take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage (The 'Reasonable Adjustment' Duty).

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, place a duty on Councils to prepare an accessibility strategy and a duty of responsible bodies of schools to prepare an accessibility plan. It also places a duty on Councils/Governing Bodies to plan to increase the accessibility of their schools.

The Act stipulates that the purpose of an accessibility strategy is to:

1. increase the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the school's curriculum;
2. improve the physical environment of the school to increase the extent to which disabled pupils can make best use of the opportunities available at the school; and
3. improve delivery of accessible information.

Similarly, individual schools' accessibility plans should be designed to further these three objectives and should take account of the disabilities of the pupils attending the school and the preferences expressed by them and their parents. Both strategies and plans have to be

regularly reviewed and, if necessary, revised and the Council or school must consider the need to allocate adequate resources for their implementation.

Alongside these accessibility requirements, any new building work must comply with Building Regulations, including Part M, which covers access to and use of buildings and the ACOP BS8300:200. It contains specific requirements on providing accessible entrances and suitable sanitary facilities. BS8300 covers every physical disability issues in buildings and part of the part M approved document.

Definitions

Children and young people falling within the definition of 'disability' will have a wide range of needs and requirements, including restricted mobility, visual or hearing impairment, learning difficulties, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, mental health conditions, and health problems such as epilepsy or asthma, and progressive degenerative conditions such as cystic fibrosis. Children and young people with a disability should not automatically be considered to have a special educational need.

The Equality Act defines a disabled pupil as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

The Education Act 1996 states that children have a special educational need if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them.

Children and young people have a learning difficulty if they:

- have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children or young people of the same age;
- have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children and young people of the same age in schools within the area of the Council; and,
- are under compulsory school age and fall within the above definitions, or would do so if special education provision was not made for them.

Children and young people who are subject to a Statement of Special Educational Need may be eligible for additional support in school but this does not automatically mean they are disabled pupils.

The Inclusion Context

Welsh Government has published statutory guidance for schools and Councils on Inclusive Education. The guidance contains practical advice on the statutory framework for pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), which includes pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and pupils with disabilities. This inclusion framework provides checklists for schools, Councils and other providers to help them evaluate the nature and quality of their current provision.

The guidance suggests the following principles for an inclusive education service:

- inclusion is a process by which schools, Councils and others develop their cultures, policies and practices to include pupils;
- all children and young people should have access to an appropriate education that affords them the opportunity to achieve their personal potential;

- with the right training, strategies and support nearly all children and young people with additional learning needs can be successfully included in mainstream education;
- an inclusive education service offers excellence and choice and seeks and responds to the views of parents, carers and children and young people;
- the interests of all children and young people must be safeguarded;
- schools, the Council and others should actively seek to remove barriers to learning and participation;
- all pupils should have access to an appropriate education that affords them the opportunity to achieve their personal potential;
- mainstream education will not always be right for every child or young person all of the time but if mainstream education is not right at a particular stage this should not prevent the child or young person from being included successfully at a later stage; and,
- those pupils not in mainstream education should have links to their peers in mainstream schools.

The Accessibility Strategy 2017-20

This strategy describes how over the next 3 years the Council intends to continue to:

1. improve access to the physical environment of schools;
2. improve access to curriculum; and
3. improve access to written information provided by schools.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's Corporate Improvement Plan acts as the Council's Business Plan and is directly linked to the priorities identified in the 20 year Community Strategy and the 4 year Single Integrated Plan.

Improving Access to the Physical Environment of Schools.

Councils and schools have a responsibility to ensure accessibility to the physical environment of schools will be improved to ensure that accessibility is not a barrier to learning and other opportunities for pupils.

The planning duty under this heading includes improvements to the physical environment of a school and the provision of physical aids to education.

Improvements to physical access include a wide variety of adaptations from the very simple to major refurbishments and alterations.

Physical aids to education would include specialist furniture or equipment, information and Communication Technology equipment or mobility aids. Improved access to the physical environment can also be achieved by re-arranging room space, removing obstructions from walkways, changing the layout of classrooms or re-allocating rooms to particular subject specialism and improving the acoustic and visual environment.

One of the key aims of the Council has been and will be, the replacement of older primary school buildings which are considered unsuitable to meet future needs, including those related to disabled access. These proposals are included in the Council's 21st Century School Plan.

The Council will:

- Work with schools to promote positive whole school approaches and to support individual pupils in order to avoid exclusion. In particular they should offer advice and send clear messages on policy on the following:
 - Identification of additional behavioural needs.
 - The use of PSP's for all pupils in danger of disengagement and exclusion.
 - The unacceptability of 'voluntary withdrawals' where pressure is put on parents to remove their children from school to avoid exclusion.
- ensure that any new school buildings will take account of the needs of children and young people with disabilities and, where appropriate, staff and other members of the school community and other site users;
- review on an on-going basis, through the Schools Asset Management Plan, physical access and suitability audits of all schools,
- continue to prioritise schemes.

- on a phased basis, continue to progressively increase the number of accessible mainstream schools both at primary and secondary level so that children and young people can access education in their local schools;
- continue to provide specialist aids/equipment to meet the needs of individuals via its specialist Gwent Hearing Impaired / Visual Impairment Service, and in liaison with the Local Health Board;
- provide further advice to governors, headteachers and associated groups regarding duties and regulations within the Act; and,
- maintain up to date information about the number of children and young people with disabilities of different types through the Council's existing information gathering systems.

Schools will be expected to:

- ensure that any new building work planned, via consultation with officers from Inclusion and Technical Services Section, takes account of the needs of pupils with disabilities;
- on a planned, strategic basis, continue to progressively embed good practice within the school developing the inclusive ethos;
- continue to provide specialist aids/equipment and to make reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of the individuals;
- access training and advice for governors, teaching staff and non-teaching staff;
- continue to maintain up to date information about the number of pupils with disabilities in the school,
- anticipate the types of issues / barriers that could arise; and,
- review school organisation and accommodation usage to maximise accessibility and opportunities.

Improving Access to the Curriculum

The aim is to ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged, through disability alone, in terms of access or entitlement to an appropriate curriculum, within the National Curriculum Framework.

Guidance from Welsh Government indicates that the term 'curriculum' covers not only teaching and learning but also the wider curriculum of the school such as participation in after school clubs, leisure, sporting and cultural activities. Where there is a potential barrier to access to a school visit the Head Teacher needs to undertake an assessment to identify reasonable adjustment to enable access. The guidance goes on to suggest that curriculum access should be seen at a 'whole school' level, the rationale being that many barriers of access to the curriculum will be similar for many groups of pupils and therefore a strategic approach should be adopted to removing those barriers.

As an important element of its strategy in increasing the accessibility of the curriculum to disabled pupils, the Council would wish to secure appropriate training for governors, teaching and non-teaching staff and encourage the sharing of good practice and also to ensure that all schools are aware of support services which can provide advice to teachers on teaching techniques and strategies, classroom management, and curriculum materials. Specialist support services can also provide support for curriculum differentiation, direct teaching or practical advice for school staff. The Authority must remove obstacles to accessibility to the curriculum.

The Council will continue to:

- provide a mechanism, as appropriate, for Pen y Cwm Special School to perform an outreach service function to mainstream schools to support the individual planning of curriculum provision for pupils with disabilities;
- include detailed information in the Council's 'Policy' document for pupils with special educational needs, of appropriate external specialist agencies and support contacts, who can offer advice on supporting pupils with disabilities;
- continue to provide specialist educational services which can offer advice and support to schools on meeting the needs of pupils with disabilities and additional learning needs;
- take account of decisions made by the SEN Tribunal Wales (SENTW) on issues of access to the curriculum and discrimination;
- ensure access to appropriate curriculum advice on disability access issues through collaborative arrangements across Councils within the region;
- encourage schools to work together to share good practice, particularly via a cluster based approach.

The School will:

- have in place a School Accessibility Plan that will demonstrate its commitment to promote Disability Equality and to ensure that this commitment is reflected in school organisation and development planning;
- provide an annual report to the School Governing Body on progress made and evidence of good practice;
- ensure that parents and other visitors to the school with disabilities, can engage effectively in activities, such as participating in parent meetings, careers talks, etc;
- seek professional advice and in-service training on issues relating to the delivery of an accessible curriculum;
- include details of good practice in the school's ALN policy;
- include curriculum planning and accessibility within the school development plan and report annually (Governors Report to Parents) on the developments in this plan on disability access issues;
- link with specialist advisory services that can offer advice and support to the school;

- take account of decisions made by the SENTW on issues of access to the curriculum and discrimination;
- consider providing reasonable alternative methods to ensure access;
- promote an inclusive ethos to learning needs;
- review differentiation with a focus on teaching and learning styles;
- ensure, within the guidance offered, that pupils with disabilities can participate in the full range of activities provided for all pupils;
- continue to provide access when required to information in Braille and large print formats for children and young people via the Gwent Visually Impaired Service;
- continue to provide children and young people with access when required to British Sign Language (BSL) support for school information and communication via the Gwent Hearing Impaired Service;
- review behaviour policy so that all involved are aware of content;
- link with appropriate Council services regarding fixed term and permanent exclusion procedures;
- link with other schools to share good practice.

Improving the Delivery of Information for Pupils with Disabilities

The aim is to increase awareness within schools of the importance of accessible information for pupils with disabilities through the provision of appropriate advice, guidance and resource facilities.

The planning duty requires written information normally provided by a school to be made available to disabled pupils. The information should take account of their disabilities; the pupil's preferred formats to be made available within a reasonable time frame. The guidance to be offered to schools with regard to access to information will be commensurate with the Council's corporate strategy for delivering quality customer services and information. Although the planning duty refers primarily to written information, schools will be advised to give some thought to the provision of spoken information for pupils and parents who have visual and hearing impairments.

The Council will:

- liaise with statutory and voluntary agencies and national organisations which may be able to assist in the provision of information in alternative formats;
- ensure the Family Information Service and other service areas make appropriate provision of information for children, young people, parents and carers with additional needs;
- continue to provide access to information in Braille and large print formats for children and young people via the Educational Service for the Visually Impaired;

- make all staff aware of the requirements of Special Educational; Needs Disability Act (SENDA and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA));
- review all existing and new policies and documentation made publicly available to ensure they meet the requirements of Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA), Equalities Act and Education Acts;
- consult with, and seek the advice of children and young people, parents and parent support groups, including SNAP Cymru;
- ensure that good practice is shared across schools and Council departments with regard to accessible information;
- continue to provide children and young people with access to BSL (British Sign Language) support for school information and communication via the Gwent Hearing Impaired Service; and,
- provide schools and Council departments with information and advice through the Council's Intranet site.

Schools will be expected to:

- ensure all pupils are treated equally;
- consider changing certain school practices, policies and procedures so as not to discriminate against and to include pupils with disabilities;
- review the range of centrally provided services and other resources;
- liaise with statutory and voluntary agencies and national organisations, which may be able to assist in the provision of information in alternative formats;
- make all staff aware of the requirements of SENDA & DDA;
- review all existing and new policies and documentation made publicly available to ensure they meet the requirements of SENDA & DDA;
- seek opportunities to consult with, and seek the advice of parent and associated support groups;
- review Annual Report to parents/carers and the school prospectus;
- ensure that good practice is shared across the school; and
- provide an Annual Report to the Governing Body regarding the Schools Accessibility Plan and review.

Monitoring Arrangements

The Act provides for ESTYN inspections of the Council to cover the discharge of the Council's responsibilities to prepare, revise, review and implement their Accessibility Strategy. The School Accessibility Plan will also be subject to ESTYN inspections.

The Council will need to monitor progress of the Accessibility Plan through:

- analysis of take-up of in-service training on ALN and disability issues
- the Asset Management Plan process;
- evaluation of the Accessibility Strategy by the Senior Leadership Group in accordance with the Action Plan set out in appendix 2;
- review claims, appeals and appeal decisions by parents or carers to SENTW (Special educational needs and or to the admissions and exclusions appeals panels on disability discrimination grounds);
- reports to key groups (such as the Executive, Scrutiny Committee, Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership);
- review of related plans and policies;
- annual report from headteachers and school governors on accessibility plans; and
- EAS challenge advisors to evaluate and monitor progress during regular school visits;

Schools will need to monitor progress of the Accessibility Plan through:

- annual review of the School Accessibility Plan;
- review of related plans and policies by the School Governing Body
- review of claims by parents or carers to SENTW or to the admissions and exclusions appeal panels;
- through established school self-evaluation and monitoring procedures; and
- review of claims and appeals by parents and carers to SENTW or to the admissions and exclusions appeal panels on disability discrimination grounds.

Appendices

Appendix 1	-	Audit of Current Council Activity
Appendix 2	-	Accessibility Strategy Action Plan 2017-20
Appendix 3	-	Glossary of Terms
Appendix 4	-	Related Documents
Appendix 5	-	Consultation Process

APPENDIX 1

AUDIT OF CURRENT LA ACTIVITY IN SUPPORT OF ACCESSIBILITY FOR DISABLED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Policies & Plans Information	Primary	Secondary	Comments
Local Service Board	✓	✓	All policies & plans refer to the removal of barriers to learning, providing opportunities for inclusion, raising achievement & equal opportunities in reference to ALN & Disability. Need for continued consultation, monitoring and evaluation of provision and quality assurance standards being reviewed to ensure needs are being fully met.
Early Years Development & Childcare Partnership	✓	✓	
Inclusion Strategy	✓	✓	
Council Central Support Services Plans (Gwent Hearing / Visually Impaired Service, Educational Psychology Service)	✓	✓	Need to ensure that future service plans link to Council's Accessibility Strategy Plans across respective Council areas
The Council supports its schools in making written information available to disabled pupils via its specialist services and to parents or governors via the Communication Unit and GEMS	✓	✓	The Council in most circumstances, can provide a wide range of information on request.
Information on a range of ALN issues is provided to schools on a regular basis	✓	✓	The Council needs to update the information annually, to ensure accurate information is provided to service users
Professional Development	Primary	Secondary	Comments
Education Directorate provide training for ALNCO, other teaching personnel, school governors, and the voluntary sector	✓	✓	The training framework will be monitored and developed on an on-going basis.
Council supports teaching personnel on specialised training courses when required	✓	✓	Monitoring and evaluation of training will continue as part of an established process.
Training is conducted with SNAP and the Parent Network	✓	✓	Links need to be developed further within the existing framework
Joint training with Trust and Local Health Board/SSD on low incidence disorders/disabilities (e.g ADHD)	✓	✓	There needs to be a continued programme of inter-agency training
Inter-agency working and training initiatives with CAMHS, EPS and PPP	✓	✓	Continued training and awareness raising across the Council

School Support	Primary	Secondary	Comments
Council supports schools via co-ordinated support services	✓	✓	Services liaise with the host Authority where issues exist over access and placements
Council has established working practices with YOS, Youth Access, and Youth Access Plus	✓	✓	Vocational programme and alternative awards are now established in all secondary schools, such as Bridge courses
Resource bases are located in certain primary and secondary schools across the Council. Some children and young people attend their local schools with support from the HI Services. Provision for Visual Impairment and ADHD pupils are not based around units but via mainstream or special school placements	✓	✓	Provision for certain groups of disabled pupils are based on best practice, pragmatic factors, economies of scale and actual use of provision. Provision needs to be kept under review within an inclusion agenda for all disabilities including the 'new wave' disabilities e.g autism, ADHD, central auditory processing problems. Review Currently being carried out.
Schools are expected to take account of the needs of disabled children and SEN pupils, other members of the school community and other site users in their building works	✓	✓	Schools need to be aware of accessibility issues to include all types of disability; this needs to be considered in their own building and maintenance programmes Advice is available from the Authority's Access Officer
Joint working initiative with SALT, GELP	✓	✓	Continued development of training of teachers and LSA in mainstream schools to provide effective teaching strategies.
ALN Inclusive Initiatives	✓	✓	Continued training to schools to raise the profile of SEN inclusion

EDUCATION DIRECTORATE ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY

ACTION PLAN 2017 – 2020

Action Area	Timescale	Responsible Persons	Progress
<p>1. <u>Action Plan Monitoring</u></p> <p>a. Monitoring of Action Plan progress and review of Action Plan by DMT and Service Teams.</p>	Annual	DMT / Service Heads	Next review April 2017
<p>2. <u>Training Requirements</u></p> <p>a. Rolling Programme of Disability Awareness Training for Departmental staff.</p> <p>b. Provision of Disability Awareness Training for School Governors (particularly Special Needs Governors)</p> <p>c. Extension of in-service training provision for school staff across key stages</p>	<p>2015 and ongoing</p> <p>2015-2018 academic session and ongoing</p> <p>2015-2018 academic session and ongoing</p>	<p>Inclusion Officer in liaison with Equalities Officer</p> <p>Head of Inclusion Service, in liaison with Equalities Officer and Access Officer</p> <p>Head of Inclusion Services/EAS</p>	<p>Programme developed and rolled-out Updates from summer term 2017</p> <p>Programmed in the EAS Governor Training Programme for 2017-18</p> <p>EAS in-service training programme in place.</p>
<p>3. <u>Communication</u></p> <p>a. All Departmental policy and information documents should state “available in Braille format, large print and in other formats on request”, and should fully comply with Disability legislation.</p>	2015 and ongoing	DMT / All Service Heads, in liaison with Equalities Officer and Access Officer	Complete.

Action Area	Timescale	Responsible Persons	Progress	
3. <u>Communication (continued)</u>				
b.	Prominent notices to be displayed in all public areas stating “we will be happy to provide any information available in Braille format, large print or other formats on request. We can also provide information through alternative formats for people with hearing impairment”.	2015 and ongoing	DMT/ All Service Heads	Completed and all new notices will comply
c.	Information to be provided on the Authority’s web-site on accessibility issues related to these service areas. .	2015 and ongoing	DMT	Accessibility Strategy and Action Plan on Council’s web-site.
d.	Improved information for schools on the range of support services which can be provided through the Local Authority and other providers. Task Group to be established by DMT.	2015 and ongoing	DMT	Education has reviewed the ALN model and appointed a Lead Officer for Inclusion. The ALN core group has established effective information sharing with schools
e.	Ensure that good practice is shared between Council Departments and with schools with regard to accessible information.	2015 and ongoing	DMT / Heads of Service	Access for All Forum established. Accessibility is managed under the corporate landlord model and Education liaise directly with Technical Services. Corporate Asset Management Working Group (CAMWG) will review the strategy in 2017-18

<p><u>School and Early Years Provision</u></p> <p>4.</p> <p>a. Review of current position in relation to requirement for schools to have Access Plans in place and to review these annually, relating this to School Development Planning. Further support and guidance to be provided, where required.</p> <p>b. Introduction of Access Plans to Children's Centre and related venues, and review of access provision with private providers</p> <p>c. Access issues to be integrated into new play and learning opportunities, including the external environment (as far as is reasonably practicable).</p>	<p>2015 and ongoing</p> <p>2015 and ongoing</p> <p>2015 and ongoing</p>	<p>21st Century Schools Officer</p> <p>Integrated Services Manager for Children and Families/Transformation Manager</p> <p>Integrated Services Manager for Children and Families/Transformation Manager</p>	<p>Secondary schools have access plans and are fully compliant. Primary?</p> <p>Education Transformation team have linked with Social Services. The Integrated Children's Centre is fully access compliant.</p> <p>New play provision is fully compliant with DDA requirements.</p>
<p><u>Buildings and Facilities</u></p> <p>a. Disability Access requirements identified in Schools Asset Management Plan based on independent assessment.</p> <p>b. Establish specific budget for a rolling programme of accessibility adaptations, having regard to highest levels of need and broader school development issues.</p>	<p>2015 and ongoing</p> <p>2015 and ongoing</p>	<p>Technical Services/Mike Price, Property Services Manager/Education Transformation Manager</p> <p>Education Transformation Manager/Property Services Manager</p>	<p>Ongoing. Health and Safety inspections also request adjustments where required Annual facilities Review in place.</p> <p>Council has a capital sum for DDA compliancyand accesswhich is accessed by Education when required eg. Deighton Primary School.</p>

c.	Continue programme of replacement of premises which cannot provide adequate access owing to building and site constraints	2015 and ongoing	Head of Education Transformation and ET Manager	Since 2011, approaching £100m invested into the school estate and all new builds are DDA compliant. This work is on-going and will continue with 21 st Century schools Band B funding from 2019 onwards. BG now has no schools in the 'poor' WG suitability/condition category
6.	<u>Specialist Services</u>			
a.	Continue to provide specialist services through collaborative arrangements with EAS.	2015 and ongoing	Director of Education / Head of Inclusion/Transformation Manager/EAS.	EAS involvement with the Facilities' Review planning process.

<p>b. Work with other partners across the region to develop access and provision in other areas of 'need'. (For example project work planned on ASD.)</p>	<p>2015 and ongoing</p>	<p>Director of Education / Head of Inclusion/Transformation Manager/EAS.</p>	<p>Delivery model to improve provision for pupils with SEBD and ASD has been agreed and by September 2017 the Council will establish a community maintained English medium 3-16 learning community for children and young people presenting SEBD.</p>
<p>7. Collaborative/Partnership Working</p> <p>a. Extend access and inclusion opportunities through Education Directorate. Collaboration (Children's Social Services, Education, Children's Entitlement, Leisure, Sport and Culture) (Specific actions to be identified)</p>	<p>2015 and ongoing</p>	<p>DMT / Service Heads</p>	<p>Early Years 'pilot' Participation Officer?</p>
<p>8. Pupil/Student Transport</p>			

a.	Accessibility issues to be considered in future school mainstream transport procurement, in collaboration with transport contractors.	January – March 2016	Transport Officer	Access issues are managed effectively, in line with the Home to School Transport Policy, including transport to Pen-y-Cwm Special School.
b.	Extend collaborative arrangements with Social Services and Leisure Trust to build on existing good practice.	2015 and ongoing	Transport Officer / Head of Inclusion / Social Services / Head of Leisure Trust	Leisure Trust created in 2015/16 and management agreement between the Trust and the Council ensures that accessibility issues are addressed in line with corporate landlord model..
9.	<u>“Access for All” Conference – Specific Issues</u>			
a.	Ongoing monitoring of progress in relation to issues identified via the Council’s Access for all Forum		DMT / CMT / Head of Service	Since, 2015-16 the work of the Access for All Forum is now mainstreamed into Council as business as usual.

APPENDIX 3

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Departments/Services

ALN	Additional Learning Needs
ALNCO	Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator
CAMHS	Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CCET	Community Consortium for Education and Training
CMT	Corporate Management Team
CYPP	Children's and Young Peoples Plan
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
EP	Education Psychology
EWO	Education Welfare Officer
GELP	Gwent Early Language Project
GHIS	Gwent Hearing Impaired Service
GVIS	Gwent Visual Impaired Service
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LA	Local Authority
LAC	Looked After Children
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
SALT	Speech and Language Therapy
SENTW	Special Educational Needs Tribunal Wales
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SNAP Cymru	Special Needs Advisory Project
SSD	Social Service Department
YA	Youth Access
YAP	Youth Access Plus
YOS	Youth Offending Service

Types of Disabilities

ADHD	Attention Deficit and Hypertension Disorder
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
BESD	Behavioural, Emotional and Social Disorder
HI	Hearing Impairment

MLD	Moderate Learning Difficulties
MSI	Multi Sensory Impairment
PD	Physical Disability
PMED	Physical and/or Medical Difficulties
PMLD	Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties
SLCD	Speech Language and Communications Difficulties
SLD	Severe Learning Difficulties
SPLD	Specific Learning Difficulties
VI	Visual Impairment

APPENDIX 4

RELATED DOCUMENTS

SEN Code of Practice for Wales 2002 - National Assembly for Wales

Planning to Increase Access to Schools for Disabled Pupils – National Assembly for Wales

Disability Rights Commission: DDA part 4 – Code of Practice for Schools

What the Disability Discrimination Act Means for Schools and LEAs – Welsh Office Circular 20/97

Pupil Support and Social Inclusion – National Assembly for Wales Circular 34/97

Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs – National Assembly for Wales Circular 34/97

Education Act 1996

Guidance on the Education of Looked After Children – National Assembly for Wales Circular 02/01

Shaping the Future for Special Educational Needs: An Action Programme for Wales 1999 – National Assembly for Wales

Building Excellent Schools Together : The BEST for Special Educational Needs 1997 – Welsh Office

Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education: Index for Inclusion 2000 – National Assembly for Wales

Inclusion and Pupil Support (November 2006) Welsh Assembly Government

Inclusion: Support for Pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Strategic Overview 2008-2012 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

The Learning Country: A Paving Document: A Comprehensive Education and Lifelong Learning Programme to 2010 in Wales – National Assembly for Wales

Planning to Increase Access to Schools for Disabled Pupils – National Assembly for Wales Circular 15/2004

The Schools Asset Management Plan

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BLAENAU GWENT ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN 2021/22

Action Area	Actions	Timescale	Action Owner(s)	Update	BRAG Rating/ Status
School Accessibility Audits, School Policy and LA Strategy Review	I. Plan accessibility audit priorities in line with school age, condition and suitability (over a 3-5-year period)	I. September 2021	CG/BE	<p>Work has been completed with Legacy in the Community, to develop an audit brief for education facilities and associated policies, along with the strategy. This will be used in order to plan and resource the required work from September 2021.</p> <p>Work has commenced on the fundamental review of the Accessibility Strategy, which is programmed for completion during spring-term 2022.</p>	
	II. Develop a brief in order to programme and inform a full review of education facilities and accessibility policies, along with the Council's strategy	II. September 2021			
	III. Secure sufficient resources in line with the brief to audit all education facilities and associated policies and strategy	III. Autumn-term 2021			
	IV. Establish an audit action plan	IV. Spring-term 2022			
	V. Undertake a fundamental	V. Autumn through to			

BLAENAU GWENT ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN 2021/22

	review of the Accessibility Strategy with relevant partners	the Spring-term 2022			
Consultation Processes	VI. Stakeholder management, engagement and consultation plan to be developed.	VI. Early spring-term 2022	BE/CG		
	VII. Draft strategy consultation document	VII. Early spring-term 2022	BE/CG		
	VIII. Initiate Consultation (4-6 weeks)	VIII. Spring through to the summer-term 2022			
	IX. Approval and publication	IX. Summer 2022			
	X. Implementation	X. September 2022			
Accessibility Action Plan Review Process	I. Review and monitoring	I. Monthly	BE	Updated August 2021	
Forum and Sub-groups	I. Forum meetings to be scheduled and a standard agenda agreed for the 2021/22 academic session.	I. September 2021 onwards	BE	Forum meetings have been programmed for the 2021/22 academic session, along with a meeting action plan.	

BLAENAU GWENT ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN 2021/22

	<p>Forum to meet bi-monthly and membership to be reviewed at each meeting.</p> <p>II. Strategy Review Sub-group to be established (Comprised of: Education, Health and Safety, Policy, Property Services). Monthly meetings to be established from October 2021</p>	<p>II. September 2021 onwards</p>	<p>BE</p>		
Training	<p>I. Training review to be undertaken</p> <p>II. 2021/22 Programme to be developed in consultation with the Forum</p> <p>III. Governor Information pack</p> <p>IV. Disability Awareness Training for Heads</p>	<p>I. Autumn-term 2021</p> <p>II. Autumn-term 2021</p> <p>III. Annually – (Spring-term 2022)</p> <p>IV. Annually (Spring-term 2022)</p>	<p>Coordinated by BE/CG in partnership with the Forum</p>		

BLAENAU GWENT ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN 2021/22

	V. ALNCo Training	V. Annually (Spring-term 2022)			
	VI. Member awareness and briefing session	VI. Annually (Autumn-term 2022)			
Communication	I. Establish a Communication Plan	I. Autumn-term 2021	LB/BE		
Young People and Young Adults	I. Review of facilities and services for young people (11-25)	I. Annually	BE/CG		
Early Years and Children	I. Review of facilities and services children (0-11)	I. Annually	CS/BE		
Buildings and Facilities	I. Review of all Education Buildings/Facilities	I. Monthly	EJ	Facilities Review / School Action Plans are all up to date as at the end of the summer-term 2021.	
Transport	I. Review of the transport policy and associated processes	I. Annually	CG/PB	Policy review complete August 2021. In addition, a significant number of contracts have	

BLAENAU GWENT ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN 2021/22

	II. Implementation of the policy and associated procedures	II. Ongoing	PB/CG	been reviewed and re-tendered e.g. Pen y Cwm.	
Wider Council Strategy	I. Ensure alignment with the Strategic Equality Plan	I. Ongoing	CG/BE/ES	Ongoing	

Key:

Status	Colour
Not started	
In development	
Ongoing	
Complete	

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Agenda Item 13

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 13.09.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**

Report Subject: **Inclusion Strategy and Review (2021-2022)**

Portfolio Holder: **Executive Member - Education, Councillor Joanne Collins**

Report Submitted by: **Lynn Phillips, Corporate Director of Education and Luisa Munro-Morris, Head of School Improvement and Inclusion**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
✓	26.09.21	07.09.21			14.09.21	22.09.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to outline plans to review the Inclusion Service during the period of September 2021 – August 2022, particularly in light of the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET) (referenced in this report as ALN Act). The Education Directorate's Inclusion Strategy will be subsequently reviewed in September 2022.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The ALN Act provides the legislative framework for the planning and delivery of additional learning provision. The ALN Act will be supported by regulations and a statutory ALN Code. The ALN Code and operational regulations were laid before the Senedd in March 2021 to support the commencement and phased roll out of the ALN Act from September 2021. However, due to the impact of the pandemic on ensuring the relevant processes and practices are in place, this roll out has been delayed until January 2022 for nearly all pupils, except pupils who are newly identified as having ALN (those pupils who have not already been identified as having a special educational need (SEN), or are not awaiting or undergoing a SEN assessment), who will still move to the new ALN system from 1st September 2021.
- 2.2 The Welsh Government has requested that the period between September and January is used to reflect on guidance, to begin preparatory work and to ensure that transition arrangements are in place for those pupils identified SEN (School Action or School Action Plus) to the new arrangements. To support with this work, the Welsh Government will publish technical and practitioner versions of the implementation guidance early in the Autumn term, to help navigate the processes and requirements for transition to the

new system. This time will be used to review and ensure the current inclusion and additional learning needs processes in the Council are fit for purpose.

2.3 The primary reason for this report is to outline the need for the Inclusion arrangements, policies and practices to be reviewed, specifically arrangements for supporting pupils with additional learning needs, in light of guidance from the Welsh Government (early Autumn term) and in light of the ALN Act, in order to ensure the Council is compliant and can meet the needs of all our school settings and learners. It is, therefore, proposed that the Education Directorate's Inclusion Strategy is subsequently updated in academic year 2021-22 and this will feature as a report to the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee later in the cycle of meetings for full implementation from September 2022. The Inclusion Strategy will, however, involve the following priorities:

- 2.4
- Strategic review of Inclusion services to ensure that all requirements of the ALN Act are met, including the existing ALN Panel arrangements;
 - Review the policies and practices for supporting pupils with ALN;
 - Ensuring that Inclusion resources are aligned and targeted to meet learners' needs;
 - Review of the ALN Service Level Agreement (SLA) to ensure that schools are supported to meet the needs of all their learners, particularly those with ALN;
 - Work closely with partners, including schools, in particular Tredegar Comprehensive School, and the EAS, to ensure that all schools are supported to implement all aspects of the ALN Act; and,
 - Introduce a Blaenau Gwent common approach to developing and reviewing Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for learners.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 This report will be considered by the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee on 14th September 2021, and any feedback will be provided verbally to the Executive Committee.

There are two options for consideration:

3.2 Option 1: to maintain the status quo

3.3 Option 2: to agree to the review of the Inclusion Service to ensure that the requirements of the ALN Act are met, this will include reviewing relevant resourcing, structures, job descriptions and ensuring that relevant arrangements are in place to fulfil the needs of the ALN Act.

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

One of the objectives in the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan aims for every child to have the best start in life. We seek to ensure that education provision is appropriate and able to meet the needs of all 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 Option 1: Under this option, the statutory requirements of the ACT cannot be fulfilled and whilst there are no direct financial implications in maintaining the current position, there may be indirect consequences as a result of failure to meet statutory requirements.

5.1.2 Option 2: (preferred option) – A review of current roles and job descriptions within the Inclusion Service for the purpose of ensuring that all requirements of the ALN Act are met. It is not anticipated there will be any additional cost pressures on the Council, specifically the Education Directorate. Full Council agreed to support a £100,000 revenue cost pressure as part of the budget setting process for financial year 2021-22 and this will be fully allocated to the new resourcing and structural requirements.

5.2 Risk including Mitigating Actions

5.2.1 There is a risk that without a review of the Inclusion Service, the Council will be unable to fulfil statutory duties under the ALN Act. The Inclusion service is also a key component of the Estyn LGES Inspection Framework and the service needs to be fit for purpose.

5.3 Legal

5.3.1 The ALN Act provides the legislative framework for the planning and delivery of additional learning provision. The ALN Act is supported by regulations and a statutory ALN Code. The ALN Code and operational regulations were laid before the Senedd in March 2021 to support the commencement and phased roll out of the ALN Act from September 2021.

5.4 Human Resources

5.4.1 The Education Directorate's senior management structure was agreed by Full Council in November 2020, including creating the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion role. This post has been filled on a secondment basis in academic year 2021, however, a permanent appointment has been made and will start on a full-time basis in September 2021. Therefore, the review of the Inclusion service is timely with the new Head of Service in place. From a HR perspective, the two options detailed in the report have the following implications;

5.4.2 Option 1 – Under this option, the statutory requirements for ALN will not be fully met.

5.4.3 Option 2 – A review of the Inclusion Service is needed to fulfil the requirements of the ALN Act.

5.4.4 Discussion has taken place with OD for advice and guidance on the review of the Inclusion Service. The vacant Service Manager – Inclusion post is currently going through the recruitment process, with a view to appointing early in the Autumn term.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 Performance Information and Data

6.1.1 The ALN Act will place additional responsibilities on members of the Inclusion team, including time needed to manage new IDP processes, gathering information, coordinating and running IDP meetings as well as the completion of statutory paperwork following IDP meetings and reviews. The initial IDP process involves a Person Centred Review meeting to confirm the child has ALN which requires additional learning provision. If agreed the Council has 12 weeks to gather necessary reports from all services involved, including the child and finalise an IDP.

6.1.2 All IDPs require an Annual Review, although those holding parental responsibility can call an early review if they wish. The Annual Review will need to take into consideration updating a Personal Education Plan, for pupils who are looked after (CLA pupils), and updating the IDP for all pupils. There can be significant planning required to identify suitable provision to meet the needs of pupils as identified in the IDP.

6.2 Expected outcome for the public

6.2.1 Pupils with additional learning needs are provided with high quality education, appropriate to their educational needs, to ensure they have the best chance of reaching their potential and improving their life chances.

6.3 Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

6.3.1 Welsh Government have carried out a full consultation on the ALN Act and Code.

6.4 Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)

6.4.1 The implementation date of the ALN Act and Code is from September 2021, although for most pupils this will now be from January 2022.

6.5 Preventative focus

6.5.1 Planning for the implementation of the ALN Act and Code will ensure that the statutory requirements for pupils with additional learning needs are met and that they have the best chance of fulfilling their potential.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

6.6.1 A review of the Inclusion Service will include collaboration and partnership working with Headteachers, ALNCOs, Pen y Cwm, in their capacity of managing the ALN SLA, Tredegar Comprehensive, in its capacity of supporting senior leaders to implement the requirements of the Act, the EAS and relevant partners across the region.

6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

6.7.1 The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion will take the strategic lead on relevant panels including the Complex Case Panel and Sensory and Communication Service to ensure appropriate information sharing. There will be monthly Inclusion team meetings, to ensure appropriate information sharing. All members of the inclusion team will be consulted and their opinions sought at all stages of the review process. The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion will work closely with the Service Manager-Education Transformation and Business Change and the Service Manager-Young People and Partnerships to ensure that the needs of all schools and learners are met.

6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

6.8.1 In all areas of review of provision for pupils with ALN, decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions will be a priority consideration. For example, grant funding has been applied for to create new provision in Pen y Cwm, or another site, with the aim of supporting with information gathering as part of the IDP process, consideration will be given to the creation of this room in terms of materials used.

6.9a **Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment** (complete an impact assessment to consider how the decision might help to reduce the inequalities of outcome associated with socio-economic disadvantage).

6.9b. **Equality Impact Assessment** (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)

Ensuring that the Council are able to meet their requirements under the Act will ensure that the needs of all learners are able to be met.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 This work will be monitored e.g. through both the professional and political reporting management arrangements, including;

- Implementation of OD review processes;
- Consultation meetings with key stakeholders;
- Council/Directorate performance management arrangements; and,
- Reports to Scrutiny and Executive Committees.

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Agenda Item 14

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 13.09.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**
Report Subject: **Investment in Micro-Hydro Development**
Portfolio Holder: **Councillor D. Davies, Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development & Deputy Leader**
Report Submitted by: **Amy Taylor, Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
23.08.21	26.08.21	07.09.21			15.09.21	22.09.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To provide members with an update on progress of the Micro-Hydro Feasibility Study for Cwm and Llanhilleth wards and seek approval for the next steps for this part of the Project.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 In October 2015, the Council's Executive Committee received a report on the proposed development of a Regeneration Energy Projects Programme and agreed to support the proposal for the Environment and Regeneration Directorate to continue the development of a series of Projects.

2.2 The series of Projects were to be designed in order to address a number of challenges including:

- Supply of lower cost energy (smarter selection of providers);
- Reducing energy losses (such improvements to building fabric);
- Reducing usage through behavioural change (using less); and
- Potentially through the generation (and movement) of energy.

2.3 Aligned to this, Regeneration has a commitment to managing a sustainable future energy delivery programme to allow a choice of affordable energy and to reduce fuel poverty for future generations, with the aim of:

- Improving the choice of supply;
- Developing models that enable community ownership of energy; and
- Meeting the energy needs of vulnerable households.

2.4 A range of measures are in place, as part of efforts to mitigate these key challenges and meet the aims set out within the Corporate Plan, including:

- Development of a local energy prospectus, as a tool to prompt and stimulate proactive engagement with the energy sector;
 - Managing a research and development programme, to support delivery of affordable renewable energy provision for business, commercial and communities; and
 - Exploring collaborative working opportunities to stimulate development including partnership working across the commercial, industrial, private and public sector.
- 2.5 As part of these measures, the Regeneration Opportunities Team have been exploring the potential to develop a range of renewable energy generation opportunities, including small scale hydro (micro-hydro) generation projects across the Borough.
- 2.6 Hydropower Generation is the term used for harnessing the energy stored in moving water and converting it into useful energy. The two main elements affecting the amount of energy that can be produced are the flow rate of the water and the height that the water will drop (the 'head'). Micro-hydro is generally defined as having an output of between 2 and 50kWp (power at full capacity).
- 2.7 In 2017, Carbon Trust reported on Hydro potential in Blaenau Gwent as part of a borough wider study of potential renewable energy generation including wind, solar and hydro schemes. Subsequently in 2018, researchers at Cardiff University were tasked with identifying sites worthy of further exploration for hydro generation. Through this work Cardiff University identified eleven sites for further identification.
- 2.8 The eleven sites identified by Cardiff University were further narrowed down by researchers at Bangor and Dublin Universities under the Dŵr Uisce project. Researchers used the estimated flows provided by Cardiff University to determine suitable turbines and the payback they would represent. Sites with high paybacks were ruled out leaving the below sites remaining:
- a) Anvil Court
 - b) Sirhowy Tributary
 - c) Cwmtillery Lake
 - d) Carno Reservoir
 - e) Silent Valley
- 2.9 The sites above were then identified as potential projects within the Blaenau Gwent Energy Prospectus which was approved by Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee in December 2019.
- 2.10 In September 2020 an application was submitted to the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme under the LEADER scheme for funding to undertake a Community Hydro Study of potential opportunities within the electoral wards of Llanhilleth and Cwm.

- 2.11 The funding was awarded in December 2020 and together with funding from within the Council we issued a Contract Notice for a supplier to undertake two work packages:
- A review of the sites previously identified through the work of Cardiff and Bangor Universities and develop full feasibility studies for up to two sites.
 - Review sites within the Cwm and Llanhilleth Wards to identify potential opportunities and select up to two sites to develop full feasibility studies.
- 2.12 As a result of the tendering process, a preferred supplier: Dulas Ltd were appointed to undertake the two work packages as detailed above. As a result of funding deadlines, Dulas started with analysis of the Cwm and Llanhilleth Wards and this report will cover the outcomes of this work package. A further report will be presented to cover the second work package and sites identified within the Energy Prospectus later this year.
- 2.13 Under the commission Dulas were asked to provide full feasibility studies for up to two sites worth further investigation and their objectives were to:
- a) Establish all sites with the potential for hydropower from an initial desk based assessment;
 - b) Site walkover visit and confirmation/revision of layout options;
 - c) Undertake catchment analysis and hydrological estimation of flow data;
 - d) Review technical options;
 - e) Estimate power output and energy generation for each site;
 - f) Carry out initial consultation with Natural Resources Eales, Western Power Distribution and the Local Planning Authority.
 - g) Estimate budget costs and revenue
- 2.14 Dulas have identified two schemes worth further investigation which are:
1. Cwm Cnyw
 2. Cwm Big
- Cwm Cynw
- 2.15 The Feasibility Study identified there is potential for a 15 – 25kW hydro scheme at Cwm Cynw with a power output of 17kW and average generation of 55MWh a year. This is the equivalent of powering 14 average homes for a year.
- 2.16 The scheme design is based on an intake 200m or so upstream from where the stream enters the culvert and a powerhouse next to the railway line in 'Granny's Wood'. The pipeline would be ~ 1,000m in length and run behind houses and across a brown-field site next to the Pit Head Baths, before crossing the B4471 via an existing underpass which is used to access

'Granny's Wood'. Please refer to **Appendix One** for site location plan and proposed site layout plan.

2.17 Dulas has provided estimate budget costs for the scheme based on quotes for equipment and grid connection costs from Western Power Distribution (WPD). The estimate cost of the scheme ranges from £120k to £240k based on a lower and upper estimate of costs based on the type of technology and equipment options available. The proposed scheme would have a design life of around 40 – 50 years. Please see **Appendix Two** for a breakdown of the costs.

2.18 Dulas has modelled the annual revenue based on a range of scenarios which includes:

- Export only at a rate of 5.5p/kWh - £3,025
- Sleeved Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) at 11p/kWh - £6,050
- Internal PPA at 13p/kWh - £7,150
- Internal PPA during a wet year at 13p/kWh - £7,930
- Internal PPA during a dry year at 13p/kWh - £6,110

Cwm Big

2.19 The Feasibility Study identified there is potential for a 20 – 30kW hydro scheme at Cwm Big with a power output of 28kW and average generation of 62mWh a year. This is the equivalent of powering 16 average homes for a year.

2.20 The scheme design is based on an intake just inside the Cwm ward boundary at Aberbeeg and a powerhouse near the A4046. The pipeline would follow an existing forestry track that services Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Cwm Big plantation. The Feasibility Study identified there is plenty of space for site compounds and construction access which would make the construction process straight forward. Please see **Appendix Three** for site location plan and proposed site layout plan.

2.21 Dulas has provided estimate budget costs for the scheme based on quotes for equipment and grid connection costs from WPD. The estimate cost of the scheme ranges from £150k to £350k based on a lower and upper estimate of costs based on the type of technology and equipment options available. The proposed scheme would have a design life of around 40 – 50 years. Please see **Appendix Four** for a breakdown of the costs.

2.22 Part of the reason for the difference between the lower and upper cost estimates for this scheme is due to the grid connection cost. Currently there is only a single phase supply to the nearby dwellings with a grid pole near the culvert entrance. This would need to be upgraded for the new grid connection which would consist of laying a new HV cable in the verge of the main road near the medical centre to a pole near the powerhouse plus installation of a 50kVA pole mounted transformer. The budget estimate received from WPD for this is £100k plus VAT.

2.23 Dulas has identified another option which could be considered for the grid connection which is a split phase connection. Dulas has indicated this option could reduce the cost of the grid connection. WPD have confirmed they will not carry out further assessments of the options without the Council commissioning a feasibility study.

2.24 Dulas has modelled the annual revenue based on a range of scenarios which includes:

- Export only at a rate of 5.5p/kWh - £3,410
- Sleeved PPA at 11p/kWh - £6,820
- Internal PPA at 13p/kWh - £8,060
- Internal PPA during a wet year at 13p/kWh - £9,490
- Internal PPA during a dry year at 13p/kWh - £6,500

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 This report will be considered by the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 15th September 2021, and any feedback will be provided verbally to the Executive Committee.

Option One – Do Nothing

3.2 The Council could choose not to take these schemes forward for further investigation and development. The projects would be closed from the current point and would only be revisited should costs significantly reduce or new technologies become available.

Option Two – Proceed with further investigation and development of one scheme

3.3 This option would consist of the Council moving forward to business stage with one of the two schemes identified. Due to the complexities of the grid connection issues at Cwm Big it would be easier to move forward with the Cwm Cynw scheme in the short term. The WPD Feasibility Study for the grid connection at Cwm Big could be commissioned at the same time to allow for full understanding of the scheme costs.

3.4 It would require the Council to secure some initial capital funds for the development of a detailed Micro-Hydro scheme to enable the preparation of a business case to proceed. This would include procurement of technical design services and surveys required with a view to developing a business case for installation and commissioning stage. As outlined in section 5 it is expected that between £15k to £30k would be required for the business case development.

3.5 Even with further work to develop the business case it is not likely that the system size would increase significantly beyond the current estimates of 17kW if at all.

Preferred Option – Option One

- 3.6 The preferred option based upon the findings of the feasibility study is Option One. Whilst the development of hydro generation would provide some renewable energy to support local energy demands the level of production is extremely low when compared to the level of investment required for its initial development and ongoing operations. The scheme at Cwm Cynw offers the best potential but even with this it is likely to only be able to accommodate a 17kW system. By way of comparison a general domestic shower would be around 10kW.
- 3.7 It is therefore recommended that Scrutiny endorse the preferred option to not proceed further with investigations into hydro generation within the Cwm and Llanhilleth wards.

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

Future Wales: The National Plan 2040

- 4.1 Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 was released in February 2021 and it is the framework for planning the change and development needed in Wales over the next 20 years. It will be used to guide planning decisions made in Wales across a range of areas including energy supplies.
- 4.2 Every house and workplace needs heat and energy. Future Wales aims to get them in a clean way. This means using ways that don't involve things that are running out and bad for the environment such as coal and oil.
- 4.3 Welsh Government has set the following targets for the generation of renewable energy:
- For 70% of electricity consumption to be generated from renewable energy by 2030
 - For one gigawatt of renewable energy capacity to be locally owned by 2030
 - For renewable energy projects to have at least an element of local ownership from 2020
- 4.4 One of the future Wales Outcomes is to create 'A Wales where people live in places which are decarbonised and climate-resilient'. Decarbonisation commitments and renewable energy targets will be treated as opportunities to build a more resilient and equitable low carbon economy, develop clean and efficient transport infrastructure, improve public health and generate skilled jobs in new sectors.
- Policy 17 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy and associated infrastructure.*

4.5 Welsh Government strongly supports the principle of developing renewable and low carbon energy from all technologies and at all scales to meet our future energy needs.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

4.6 Welsh Government 'Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – directly aligns with local renewable energy generation. Under The Act it states:

'A prosperous Wales' goal, striving towards creating an innovative, productive and low carbon society, which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work'.

4.7 There is also a direct link to the well-being goal for 'A globally responsible Wales' in tackling climate change. The Act encourages long term generation thinking by public bodies to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Corporate Plan Refresh 2020-2022

4.8 This topic supports the achievement of the Council's Corporate Plan Refresh 2020-2022 in the following areas:

- To create strong and environmentally smart communities we are taking a strategic approach to the management of our land in different ways;
- To be a carbon neutral Council by 2030;
- To develop a portfolio of potential energy opportunities to deliver economic, business and community benefits; and
- To develop a more commercial organisation to generate income and deliver cost reductions to make local services sustainable and raise money to re-invest in our priorities.

Energy Prospectus

4.9 The Energy Prospectus identified opportunities for energy projects across Blaenau Gwent including hydro powered energy generation, Wind Energy generation, EV charging infrastructure and district heating. The proposed Micro-Hydro scheme is one of these opportunities.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 Impact on Budget

The cost estimate breakdown for the schemes are contained in Appendices Two and Four. Final costings will not be known until a full detailed scheme design including identification of the technology to be purchased has been undertaken.

Option One – Do Nothing.

5.2 There would be no financial costs associated with Option One.

Option Two – Proceed with further investigation and development of one scheme

5.3 Financial costs associated with Option Two will depend upon the final size of the scheme, complexities of the scheme and who is appointed to undertake the work. For the purposes of this report we have assumed that the scheme would remain at 17kW.

5.4 The detailed design stage of the Project would cost between £15k to £30k. This would be used to support development of an overall business case for the implementation of the scheme.

5.5 As the focus is on providing the energy generated to the local community it has been considered that the energy generated from the Cwm Cynw scheme could be provided to either Llanhilleth Industrial Estate or Llanhilleth Institute. This would be based on the sleeved PPA scenario above. However, this would only generate approximately £6,000 p.a.

5.6 The table below provides a simple payback analysis of the project. It shows that the project would have payback of around 40 years.

Total Capital Cost	£240,000
Annual Revenues	£6,000 p.a.
Simple Payback	40 Years

5.7 The costs and payback period calculated above do not make provision for operational costs and lifetime replacement costs. Although the turbines could last up to 40 years within this lifetime there will be parts that will require replacement. This could include major replacements e.g. main turbine. The life and/or maintenance requirements of the pipework is currently unknown.

Risk including Mitigating Actions

5.8 There is a risk that once the detailed design stage has taken place that the Council decides not to take these scheme forward.

5.9 There is a risk that planning consent and abstraction consent is not be approved for the project. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council would be the planning authority for the project. If the planning consent is refused there would be no opportunity to appeal the decision.

5.10 There are risks around landownership for the project. The land that the pipework and infrastructure will need to cross is currently in mixed ownership therefore negotiation and agreement with landowners will be required in order for the project to proceed.

5.11 Although technology continually improves there is a risk that there would be noise pollution to nearby receptors. The turbine when operating may

generate noise that could present a slight disturbance to nearby properties. This may result in negative feedback from local residents in close proximity.

5.12 There is a risk that ongoing maintenance would likely be high and whilst the turbine would have an overall life of around 40 years it would need some significant replacements of parts during this period.

5.9 Risk will be managed throughout the project in line with the Council's risk management strategy and a risk register shall be established following approval of this report.

Legal

5.10 Procurement to appoint suitably qualified consultants was completed in line with the Council's Contract and Procurement Rules (CPRs) and Procurement regulations. The procurement was advertised on Sell2Wales and other required platforms.

Human Resources

5.11 Project management would be led within Regeneration with support from other departments including Finance, Procurement, Estates and Planning.

5.12 Technical and design support will be provided from within the Council's technical service team where possible and where parts of the technology are outside of their area of expertise support will be sought from Welsh Government Energy Service and/or external technical specialists in the area of hydro generation technology.

6. Supporting Evidence

Performance Information and Data

6.1 Welsh Government have set the following targets for the generation of renewable energy across Wales:

- For 70% of electricity consumption to be generated from renewable energy by 2030.
- For one gigawatt of renewable energy capacity to be locally owned by 2030.
- For renewable energy projects to have at least an element of local ownership from 2020.

6.2 Alongside installation of the Micro-Hydro scheme we would also look to monitor overall performance, energy generation, carbon savings and financial savings. Performance monitoring arrangements will be established during the development stage of the Project and would start being monitored once the installation has been commissioned.

Expected outcome for the public

6.3 Increasing the amount of renewable energy generated locally and providing this to the local community will help reduce fuel poverty for local businesses and allow them to benefit from access to local renewable energy sources.

6.4 By offering the community green bond shares in the Project through the CMI scheme will provide community ownership of renewables and raise awareness of the work the Council is undertaking with local residents.

6.5 Increasing local renewable energy will also help to reduce the amount of carbon the Council utilises and our impact upon the global environment.

Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

6.6 Council Officers have been providing support and background information of the ward areas to consultants Dulas and feedback on proposed schemes. Recommendation of sites from Elected Members were provided to Dulas to investigate.

6.7 Officers from within Technical Services have been consulted on this report and have confirmed that they support the preferred option of this report.

Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)

6.8 Targets around renewable energy have been set by Welsh Government and these will also be supported by Carbon Reduction targets. Development of locally owned renewable energy will help Blaenau Gwent meet these targets.

6.9 The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and in order to decarbonise for the future we need to look for a range of projects including renewable energy generation and energy efficiency.

Preventative focus

6.10 Climate change can be prevented by reducing our overall impact upon the Planet. Increasing locally generated renewable energy would help to reduce our overall impact and mitigate against climate change.

Collaboration / partnership working

6.11 Opportunities for collaboration with partnership working will be explored with a range of potential partners including Dwr Cymru and potential local energy users.

Integration (across service areas)

6.12 Officers from across several service areas have been involved in discussions on the project and kept up to date on progress. It is intended that officers will continue to be involved throughout the development of the designs and overall business case for the Project.

6.13 The Team Manager Natural Environment has participated in discussions with the consultants Dulas and given support for the Cwm Cynw Scheme which would link up with the active travel route at 'Granny's Wood'. Opportunities to utilise the energy generated by the scheme locally have been considered. The more energy that is used locally the more the financial case for the Project improves. This will be discussed further in the impact on budget section of this report.

Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions

6.14 Development of renewable energy generation will support the Council to meet its decarbonisation targets and support overall reduction of carbon emissions.

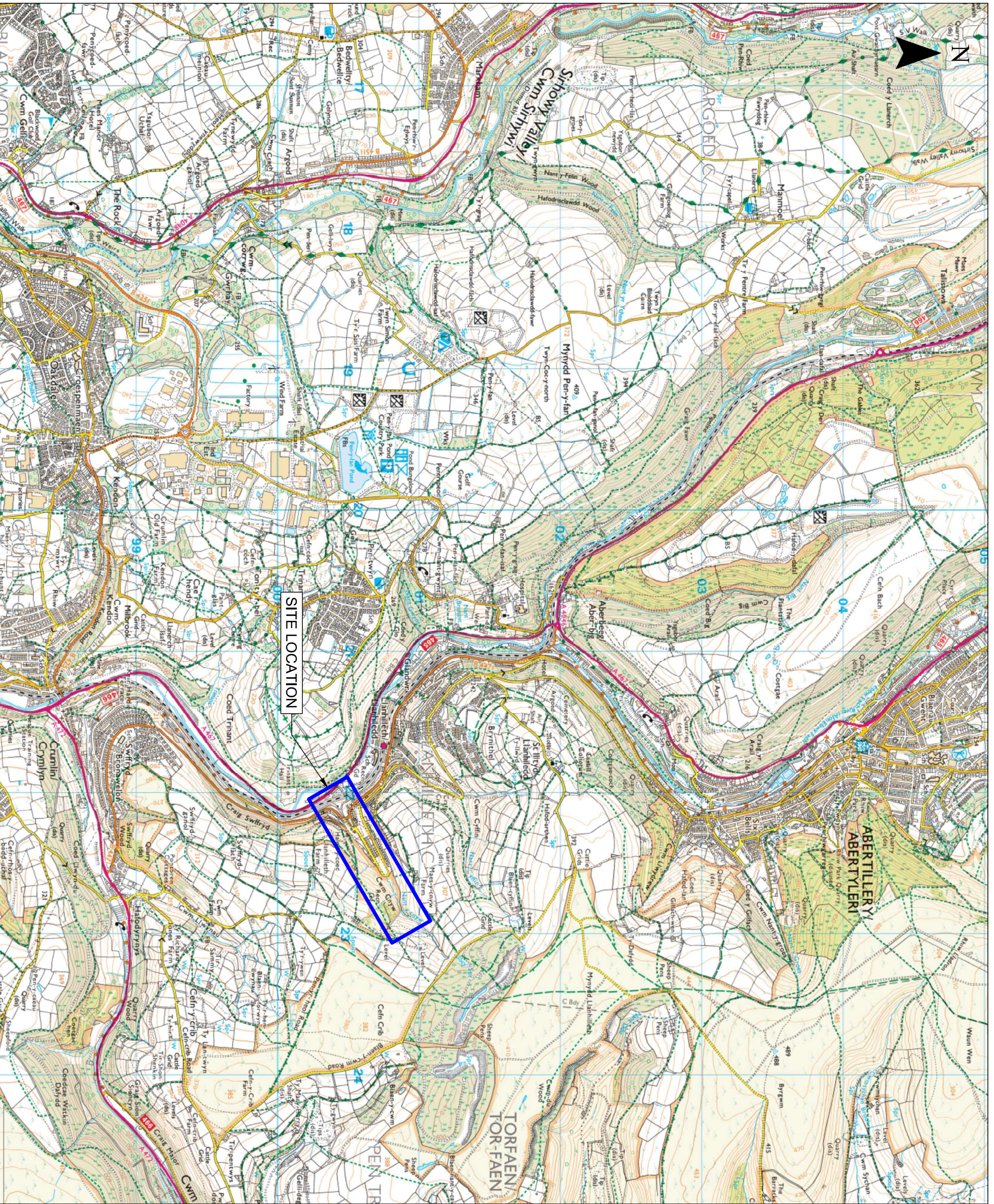
7. Monitoring Arrangements

7.1 Monitoring of the project will be done through the Council's business plan reporting process and by providing progress reports through the political process.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix One – Cwm Cynw Site Location Plan and Proposed Site Layout Plan*
- *Appendix Two – Cwm Cynw Cost Breakdown*
- *Appendix Three – Cwm Big Site Location Plan and Proposed Site Layout Plan*
- *Appendix Four – Cwm Big Cost Breakdown*

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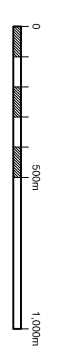


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LOCATION OF PROPOSED CWM CNYW HYDRO SCHEME

NOTES
FOR SITE LAYOUT SEE HD03136-MAP-15



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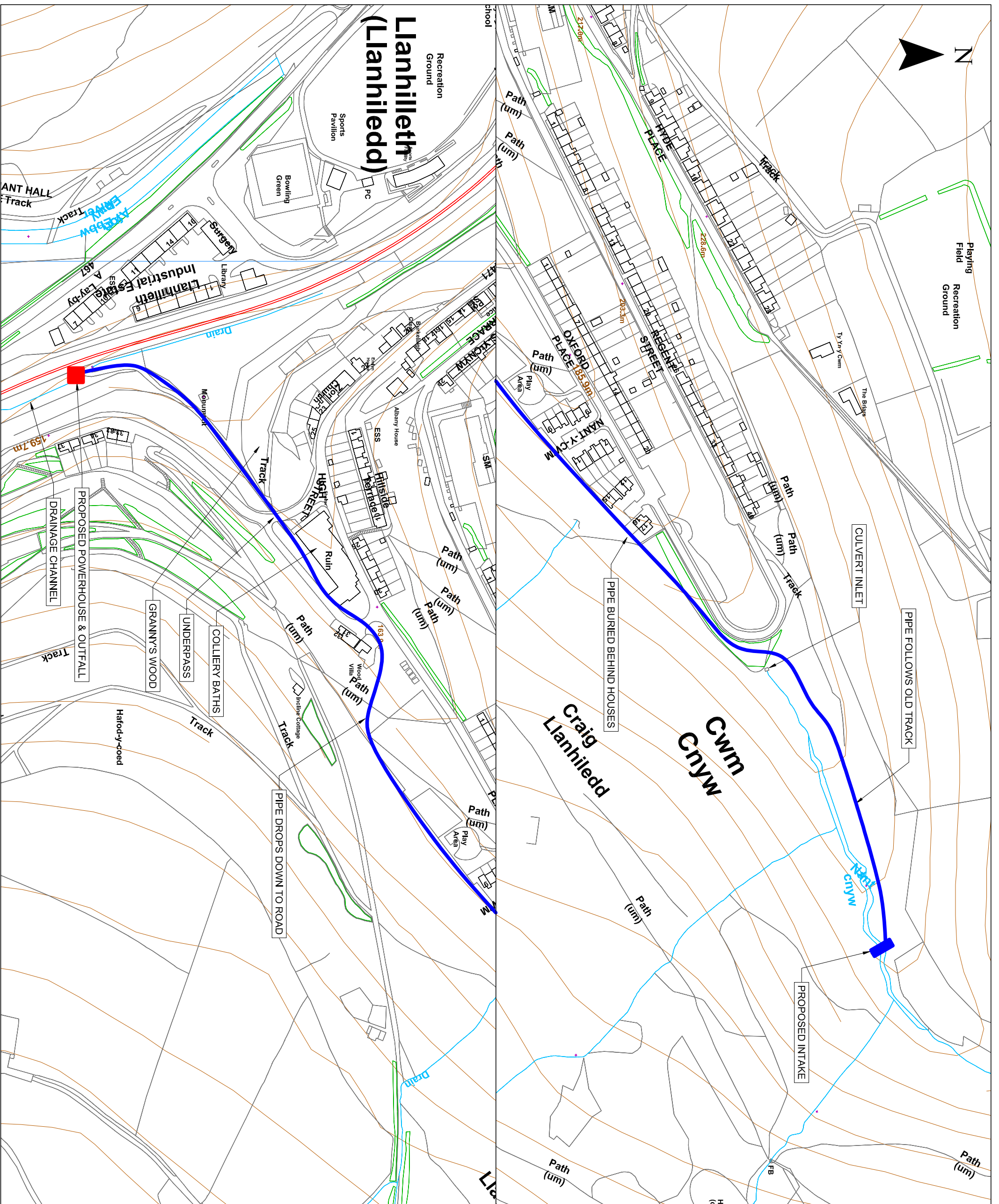
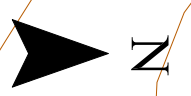
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CLIENT: BLAENAU GWENT CBC
PROJECT: HYDRO RESOURCE ASSESSMENT
LOCATION: BLAENAU GWENT, SOUTH WALES

DRAWING TITLE: CWM CNYW HYDRO SITE LOCATION
DRAWING NO: HD03136-MAP-14
SHEET: 1 of 1
REVISION: A



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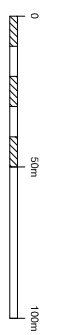
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PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT FOR CWM CNYW HYDRO SCHEME

NOTES

- INTAKE SO 22807 00867
- POWERHOUSE SO 22080 00342
- OUTFALL SO 22087 00335

PIPELINE



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 LOCATION: **BLAENAU GWENT, SOUTH WALES**

PROJECT No: **HD03136** SCALE: **1:2,500** at A3

DRAWING TITLE: **CWM CNYW HYDRO DETAILED SITE LAYOUT**
 DRAWING No: **HD03136-MAP-17** SHEET: **1 of 1** REVISION: **A**

Appendix Two – Cwm Cynw Cost Breakdown

Following receipt of budget quotes the budget costs for the Cwm Cynw scheme is as follows:

	Lower estimate	Upper estimate
Detailed design & tender pack	£15,000	£30,000
Project management & site supervision	£15,000	£25,000
Turbine, generator & control	£20,000	£30,000
Pipeline material	£15,000	£25,000
Civil works	£30,000	£100,000
Grid connection	£20,000	£25,000
Commissioning	£5,000	£5,000
Total budget cost (exc. VAT)	£120,000	£240,000

Operational Costs

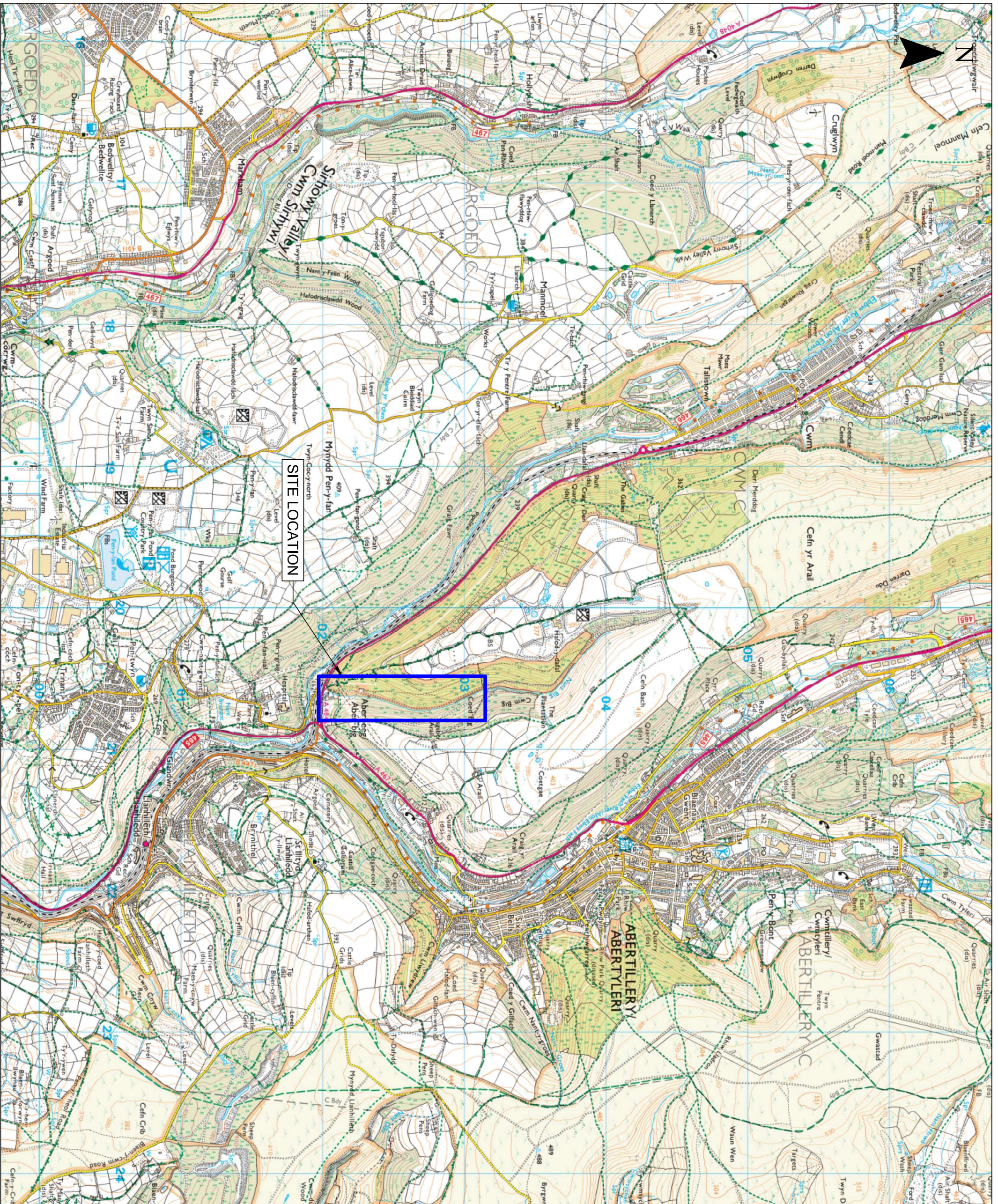
Operating costs have been taken as a nominal 20% of revenue – actual costs will vary depending on site specific variable as well as Council protocols for infrastructure management.

The proposed scheme would have a design life of around 40 – 50 years with electro-mechanical refurbishment every 15 – 20 years.

Grid Connection - WPD Budget Estimate

WPD Reference	3985873
Connection	25kVA 3-phase 400v connection
Description of works	WPD to install new pole, stay & overhead span with a LV underground service
Contestable works	£18,515
Non-contestable works	£1,223
VAT at 20%	£3,948
Total	£23,686

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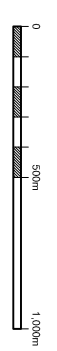
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LOCATION OF PROPOSED CWM BIG HYDRO SCHEME

NOTES

FOR SITE LAYOUT SEE HD03136-MAP-11



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PROJECT No: **HD03136** SCALE: **1:25,000 at A3**
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NOTES


Legend

-  Cwm Big Catchment
-  Cwm Big Pipeline
-  Cwm Big Structures
-  Site of Special Scientific Interest
-  Local Nature Reserve
-  Grade II Listed Building
-  Scheduled Monument

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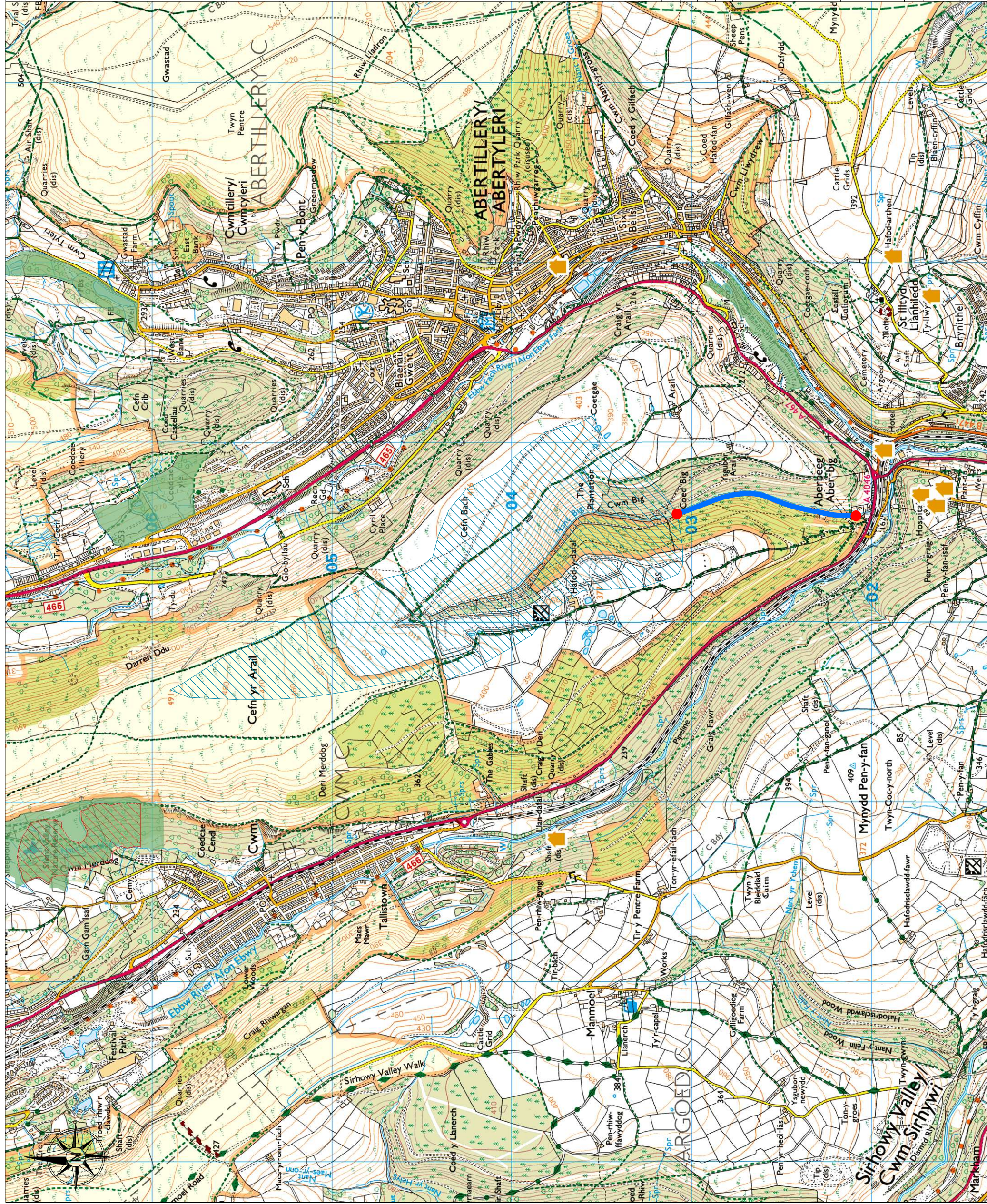


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PROJECT	HYDRO RESOURCE ASSESSMENT	
LOCATION	BLAENAU GWENT, SOUTH WALES	
PROJECT No.	SCALE 1:20,000 (A3)	
DRAWING TITLE	CWM BIG CONSTRAINTS MAP	
DRAWING No.	SHEET	REVISION
HD03136-MAP-12	0	A



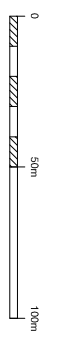
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PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT FOR CWM BIG HYDRO SCHEME

NOTES

- INTAKE SO 20615 03055
- POWERHOUSE SO 20590 02075
- OUTFALL SO 20595 02070

- PIPELINE
- BURIED ELECTRICITY CABLE



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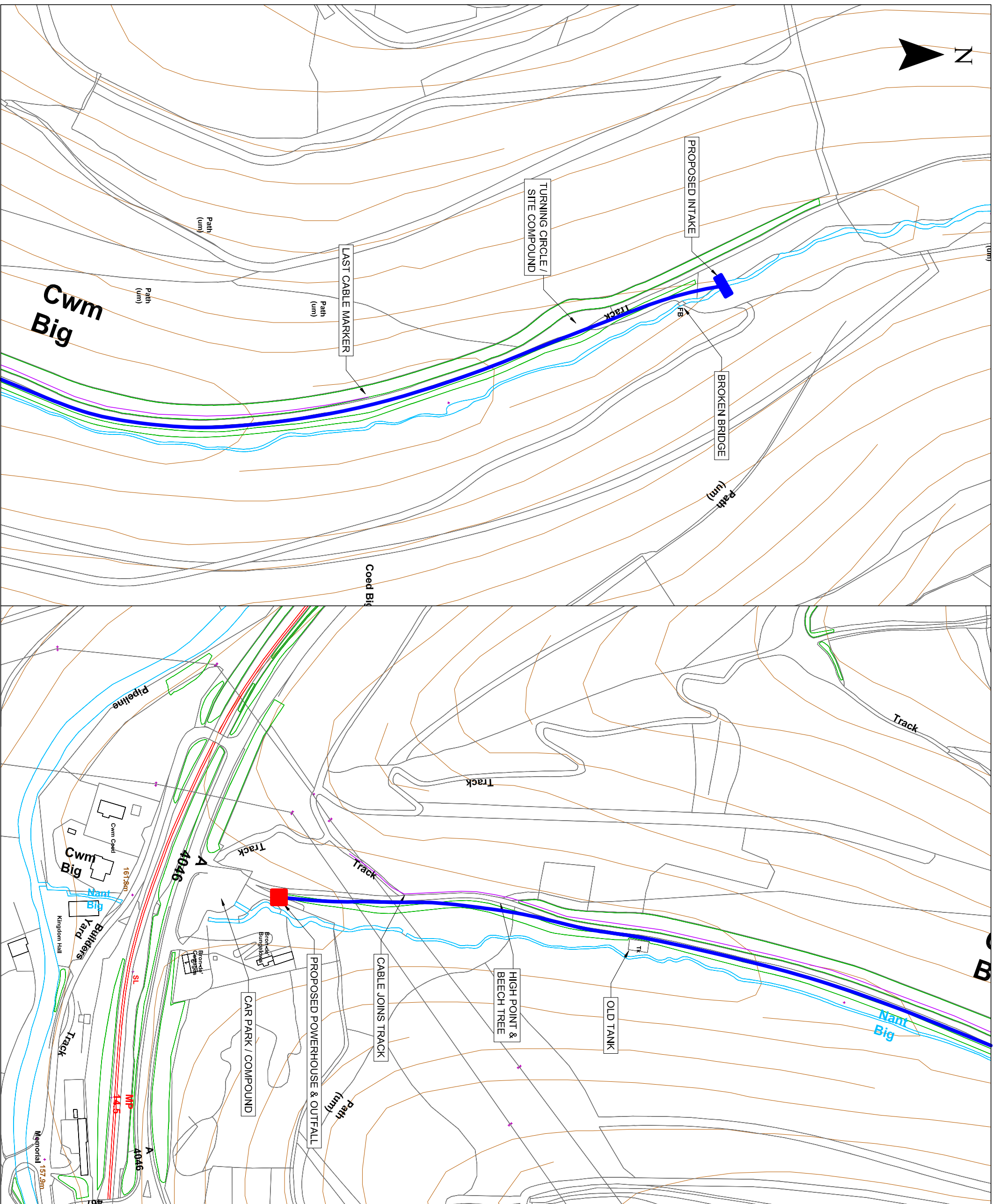


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CLIENT: BLAENAU GWENT CBC
PROJECT: HYDRO RESOURCE ASSESSMENT
LOCATION: BLAENAU GWENT, SOUTH WALES

PROJECT No: HD03136 SCALE: 1:2,500 at A3

DRAWING TITLE: CWM BIG HYDRO DETAILED SITE LAYOUT
DRAWING No: HD03136-MAP-13 SHEET: 1 of 1 REVISION: A



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Appendix Four – Cwm Big Cost Breakdown

Following receipt of budget quotes the budget costs for the Cwm Big scheme is as follows:

	Lower estimate	Upper estimate
Detailed design & tender pack	£15,000	£30,000
Project management & site supervision	£15,000	£25,000
Turbine, generator & control	£30,000	£50,000
Pipeline materials	£20,000	£40,000
Civil works	£40,000	£100,000
Grid connection	£20,000	£100,000
Commissioning	£5,000	£5,000
Total budget cost (exc. VAT)	£150,000	£350,000

Operational Costs

Operating costs have been taken as a nominal 20% of revenue – actual costs will vary depending on site specific variables as well as Council protocols for infrastructure management.

The proposed scheme would have a design life of around 40 – 50 years with electro-mechanical refurbishment every 15 – 20 years.

Grid Connection – WPD budget estimate

WPD reference	3985868	3985883
Connection	25kVA 3-phase 400V	30kW 3-phase 400V
Description of works	WPD to excavate & lay 11kV cable, establish PMT with connection for 25kVA	WPD to install a 11kV cable & PMT with a 30kW connection
Contestable works	£95,995	£95,995
Non-contestable works	£4,524	£4,524
VAT at 20%	£20,104	£20,104
Total	£120,623	£120,623

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Agenda Item 15

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**
Report Subject: **Partnership Delivery Approach – Town Centres**
Portfolio Holder: **Councillor D. Davies, Executive Member for
Regeneration and Economic Development & Deputy
Leader**
Report Submitted by: **Amy Taylor, Team Manager Regeneration
Opportunities**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
15.06.21	x	07.09.21			15.09.21	22.09.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. To seek approval for the formulation of Town Centre Advisory Boards across the Town Centres of Abertillery, Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale to support a partnership delivery approach for future project delivery.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1. In 2015, Members provided approval for the formulation of an Advisory Board to support delivery of the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) and Vibrant and Viable Places (VVP) Programmes within the Town of Tredegar.
- 2.2. The establishment of an Advisory Board was an obligation under the funding terms and conditions of both the THI and VVP programmes. It was intended that the Board would oversee the delivery of projects for both funding programmes and it would be a consultative body who would advise on the control and management of the THI and VVP initiatives in Tredegar.
- 2.3. Since 2015, the Advisory Board has worked alongside Council Officers and Elected Members to deliver projects in Tredegar and this approach has received positive feedback from all stakeholders involved.
- 2.4. A placemaking approach is being developed across the Towns within Blaenau Gwent. These will establish key visions and projects to deliver across each of the Towns but there are some challenges we face in order to deliver on these plans.
- 2.5. The Council only has limited financial and human resources in order to deliver projects. Therefore, we need to look at ways we can involve other key stakeholders and partners to achieve our vision.

- 2.6. The Tredegar Advisory Board has provided a platform for both discussion, development and delivery of projects. Adopting a similar approach across each of the other towns could help the Council to support projects across each of the Towns supported by a wide range of stakeholders.
- 2.7. Stakeholders could include potential funders, project delivery partners, Elected Members, business forms and any other key groups.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

This report will be considered by the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 15th September 2021, and any feedback will be provided verbally to the Executive Committee.

Option One

- 3.1. That the Executive Committee provide approval for the formation of a series of Advisory Boards for the Town Centres of Abertillery, Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale based upon the Tredegar Advisory Board approach and acknowledge the draft Terms of Reference (**Appendix One**). The Advisory Board shall act as a consultative body to oversee development and delivery of Town Centre Strategies and Plans.
- 3.2. Each shall start with a small membership identified by members of the Town Centres Task and Finish Group alongside Officers. The membership can then be expanded and developed further as discussions develop.

Option Two

- 3.3. No action is taken and delivery continues using existing approaches and mechanisms for engagement and consultation.

Preferred Option

- 3.4. Option one is the preferred option and we propose that the Advisory Board is initially established with members for a one-year term up until the Welsh Local Government Elections in 2022.
- 3.5. If the initial one-year term is successful, the boards would continue and board members would serve for up to a 3-year period.
- 3.6. The Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration will be invited to chair the first meeting of each of the Boards. In their first meeting each Board will then nominate and select a chairperson to oversee the term of the Board (initially one-year, three years thereafter).

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

- 4.1. The report supports the following Corporate Plan priorities:

- To protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities;
- To support a fairer sustainable economy and community; and
- An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities.

The Town Centre strategy will consider existing infrastructure within our town centres and explore ways that this can change to support regeneration activity.

4.2. It also supports delivery of the Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan:

- Safe and friendly communities;
- To look after and protect the environment;
- To forge new pathways to prosperity; and
- To encourage and enable people to make healthy lifestyle choices in the places that they live, learn, work and play

The Town Centre strategy will seek to ensure that our town centres are safe and friendly communities for our residents and visitors to shop within. This will include projects to maintain and enhance the local environment, increase business occupancy and create an environment in our town centres that encourages our residents to spend time there for work, learning and leisure.

4.3. In supporting our statutory responsibilities towards the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, the Town Centre Strategy will support in creating:

- A more prosperous Wales;
- A resilient Wales; and
- A Wales of cohesive communities

5. Implications Against Each Option

Cost

5.1. There are no direct cost implications associated with this report.

Risk including Mitigating Actions

5.2. There is a risk that new Advisory Boards are not as successful as the Board that has been operating in Tredegar. To mitigate this, we will adapt and refine the Advisory Board approach to ensure that it continues to support project delivery. Should the Advisory Board approach not be successful and cause barriers to project delivery we will review the approach and any further changes that may be required.

5.3. There is a risk that the Advisory Board does not support a proposed approach for a Town Centre. In these cases we will be able to utilise the feedback from

the Advisory Board to understand the issues/barriers and use this to adapt our approach to ensure a positive outcome.

- 5.4. There is a risk that we are unable to properly resource and support Advisory Board set up across all Towns identified in section 3.1. As a result of the placemaking work already carried out set up will start with the set-up of the Advisory Boards in Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale. Once these are fully set-up we will move onto Abertillery.

Legal

- 5.5. A terms of reference will be established for the members of the Advisory Board and these will be reviewed alongside the stakeholders and the Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development at each of the initial meetings of the Advisory Boards.

Human Resources

- 5.6. Overseeing projects approved by the Advisory Boards may have implications on existing staffing resources from Officers in Regeneration and where possible we will seek to perform a supporting role to the Advisory Boards. It will act as a key stakeholder for Projects in each of the respective areas.
- 5.7. Setting up advisory boards across all the Towns at the same time could have resourcing issues and so we are proposing to start with Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale followed by Abertillery.

6. Supporting Evidence

Performance Information and Data

- 6.1. Annual reports of the Advisory Boards will be prepared and reported to the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee. This will enable monitoring of performance of the Advisory Boards and areas for further development.

Expected outcome for the public

- 6.2. It is hoped that by bringing Advisory Boards together we will be able to deliver projects that encourage future use of our Town Centres. Changing the way our Town Centres operate and offering a diverse range of uses would improve the variety of services that residents have access to.

Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

- 6.3. Advisory Boards provide a mechanism for engagement with key stakeholders across each of the Towns. They can bring forward their own proposals / thoughts for projects for consultation with other Board Members and they can also provide their thoughts / feedback on proposals put forward by other Board Members or the Local Authority.

Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)

- 6.4. In the long term the Council needs to find ways to work with Stakeholders across Blaenau Gwent but with only limited resources we need to find ways of encouraging other stakeholders to develop and deliver projects. The Council can still support these projects but accountability and resourcing could be brought forward from other organisations. This could result in projects receiving greater local support and increase long term sustainability.

Preventative focus

- 6.5. By establishing Advisory Boards now, we hope to prevent further deterioration of our Town Centres. They all face significant challenges to survive but bringing groups of stakeholders who want to support and help could prevent them from facing even bigger challenges in the future.

Collaboration / partnership working

- 6.6. The Advisory Boards rely on collaboration / partnership working in order to be successful. By bringing local stakeholders together it is hoped that they can all work together to identify and support projects that will benefit their Towns.

Integration(across service areas)

- 6.7. The Advisory Boards will be utilised by the Regeneration Team and other service areas as a means of engaging with key stakeholders across the Town Centres. It will set up the means of contact for engagement about potential projects across the Towns.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

- 7.1. As advised in section 6.1 performance monitoring will be carried out annually and reported through the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme. It will also be reported on through the Regeneration Business Plan.

8. Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix One – Terms of Reference, Advisory Board*

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[insert town name] Town Advisory Board

Terms of Reference 2021

1. Statutory Authority

- 1.1 The Advisory Board (which shall now be named “The [insert town name] Town Advisory Board”) is not constituted as a formal Committee of the Council under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 and is not empowered to discharge any executive functions under the Local Government Act 2000.

2. Objectives

- 2.1 The [insert town name] Town Advisory Board will be responsible for overseeing the management of the Regeneration Programme and ensure the following key principles are applied to the methodology of the programme delivery:
- a. To assist in designing, programming and delivering events.
 - b. To assist the selection process.
 - c. To ensure the emergent interpretive and access proposals in accord with the underlying vision for the project.
 - d. To develop further the interpretive ideas and links with relevant audiences.
 - e. To develop further detailed briefs on:
 - Educational delivery
 - Community involvement
 - f. To advise on how the scheme might be best developed.
 - g. To have a long term advisory involvement in the planning, operation, and programming of the project.

3. Constituent Members

- 3.1 The [insert town name] Town Advisory Board shall consist of one representative of each of the following:
- Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development & Deputy Leader (BGCBC)
 - Ward Member
 - Town Council
 - Business Forum
 - Tai Calon
 - Coalfields Regeneration Trust
 - BGCBC Officers in an advisory capacity (as requested)
 - And any other local organisations that may be co-opted from time to time

4. Power of the Advisory Board

- 4.1 Subject to the overall policy and control of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's Executive and Scrutiny Committees (or any other appropriate Committee of the County Borough Council) the responsibility of the Advisory Board shall be advisory and consultative only and for the avoidance of doubt the Advisory Board shall not be empowered to do any anything which shall conflict with this role or with the Policy for the time being in force of the County Borough of Blaenau Gwent as applied to the act or matter under discussion.

5. Ownership

- 5.1 All properties deemed eligible for funding are will be a mix of public and private ownership. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council are responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the immediate public realm (including highway).

6. Membership of the Advisory Board

- 6.1 Membership of the Advisory Board shall be confined to members of the Organisations specified in Article 3.1 hereof. Each organisation shall in May of each year at their respective annual meetings appoint one representative to serve on the Advisory Board for the ensuing 12 months or during such time until they cease to be members of the appropriate organisation by reason of death, resignation, cease of membership, disqualification or otherwise.
- 6.2 Each organisation may nominate, under the hand of its proper officer, a deputy for any Member appointed by each organisation to attend and to vote at any meeting of the Advisory Board in place of the member so appointed.
- 6.3 If at any time any member of the Advisory Board shall cease to be a Member of the organisation by whom he was appointed to the Advisory Board, his membership of the Advisory Board shall forthwith determine provided that a representative member shall not be deemed to have ceased to be a member of the organisation by whom he was appointed if on or before the day on which he goes out of office, he has been re-elected a member of that organisation.
- 6.4 If by reason of death, resignation, loss of qualification disqualification, cessor of membership of the appointing organisation, failure to attend meetings or in any other manner there shall be a vacancy in the number of representatives of either of the organisations on the Advisory Board permitted under the terms of this Constitution, the organisation in whose representation the vacancy occurs may forthwith fill such vacancy, and the person so elected shall hold office as member of the Board until such time as the person whose place he fills would regularly retire and shall then retire.

7. Meetings

- 7.1 The Advisory Board shall hold 6 meetings at least in every year for the transaction of general business and may hold such other meetings at such intervals as they find necessary or convenient. The first meeting of the Advisory Board shall be held on a date to be determined by the Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development & Deputy Leader of Blaenau Gwent

county Borough Council, with subsequent meetings also being chaired by the elected chairperson.

8. Notice

- 8.1 Three clear days at least before a meeting of the Advisory Board, the Committee Clerk shall cause a summons to attend the meeting, specifying the business proposed to be transacted thereat and signed by him/her, to be left at, or sent by post to, the usual place of residence of every representative Member of the Advisory Board or such other place as may be requested by a representative member.

9. Chairman

- 9.1 The first business at the meeting shall be for the Executive Member to agree and confirm the terms of reference of the Advisory Board with its newly elected Board Members and to agree an elected Chairperson for the remaining duration of the programme.
- 9.2 If a representative member fails to attend three successive meetings of the Advisory Board, the organisation by whom he was appointed may forthwith declare his office to be vacant and his membership of the Advisory Board shall thereupon determine. Any such declaration of vacancy shall forthwith be signified in writing to the Management Board by the organisation concerned.

10. Special Meeting

- 10.1 The Chairman of the Advisory Board may call a Special Meeting at any time, and of the receipt by him of a requisition signed by at least three representative members of the Advisory Board, and setting forth the nature of the matter requiring consideration shall call a Special Meeting of the Board within seven days.
- 10.2 A notice summoning any special meeting shall have thereon the matter to be discussed at the said special meeting.

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Agenda Item 16

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 13.09.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**

Report Subject: **Communications Strategy Quarterly Performance Monitoring (April-June 2021)**

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

Report Submitted by: **Bernadette Elias, Chief Officer, Commercial and Customer**

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/c23/08/21	26/08/21	07.09.21			10/09/21	22/09/21		

1. **Purpose of the Report**
To present the quarter 1 update (April to June 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 communications response to the Covid-19 pandemic which started in March 2020 continued during the first quarter (April- June 21). Communication activity focused on the shifting pandemic conditions including a focus on communicating the timescale for easing of restrictions and mass vaccination programme.
 - 2.4 The Corporate Communications Team remains 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 phases of 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 move into the recovery phase of the pandemic meant that the Communications team was able to pick up other priorities within the strategy including building the council's reputation, making sure that residents are aware of council priorities and promotion of digital and self-service where appropriate.
- 2.6 The Senedd and PCC Elections in May required significant resource and meant that some work was put on hold during the pre-Election period. However, appendix 1 details the media coverage for the period covering a wide range of topics which ensured that more of the corporate communications strategy priorities were planned and delivered.

A communications strategy was developed to reflect the new operating model and a detailed delivery plan will follow as a priority.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 The report will be considered by the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee on 10th September 2021 and any feedback will be provided verbally to the Executive Committee.
- 3.2 **Option 1:** That the Executive considers and accepts the quarter 4 (January to March 2021) update against the Communication Strategy.

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)***

The communication activity is delivered within the existing budget whilst maximising material created by partners including Welsh Government and Public Health Wales and Individual marketing campaigns supported by external funded via partners (eg WRAP Cymru).

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 was a vacancy within the team from early May 2020 which reduced capacity. This role has been filled and the new post holder will focus on internal communications and delivery of the communications plan for new ways of working. This is a key priority within the Corporate Communications strategy and a dedicated resource is a key enabler to delivery.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

Key activity for the quarter is outlined in Appendix 2. This includes:

- 84,000 visitors to the Council website viewing around 5 pages per visit. This figure is down on the previous quarter reflecting the reduced visits for Covid related information as the national position improved. This quarter is comparable to the pre Covid trend.
- 3,200 social media posts – an average of 260 per week; this is down on the previous reporting period due to the Pre-Election period and reduced Covid related response information. The number of social media followers remains steady with Facebook followed by 15,000 residents.

Digital communication has a number of benefits for the Council as we can send out information regularly and reach key audiences in large numbers very quickly.

- Proactive media activity stepped up and we sent out 31 press releases compared to 19 in the previous quarter.
- Media coverage increased with 54 articles published covering a range of positive topics including reflecting Council priorities:
 - Funding for road improvements
 - Litter strategy launch
 - Aspire shortlisting for national award
 - Education including expanding the places available in Pen y Cwm and proposals for Welsh language learning provision
 - Ebbw Valley railway investment
 - Advanced engineering training facility approval

- **Senedd and PCC Elections**
Blaenau Gwent was responsible for both the constituency and regional returns. This involved co-ordinating communications activity on a regional and national level. We also had to support BBC, ITV, S4C and print media pre-Election and over 3 days of the count to deliver their coverage in a safe manner within Covid restrictions in place at the time.
- **Launch of the community hubs**
To support the new operating model a detailed communications plan was developed and delivered to support the launch of the new community hubs. This involved a mix of traditional print, digital and online media. The work was phased with a soft launch in June and an uplift in activity as the hubs opening hours were extended.
- **Climate Assembly**
The team supported the promotion of the climate assembly output report and recommendations. This included working with partners to ensure consistent messaging and raising awareness of the decarbonisation agenda.
- **Covid communications focused on restrictions easing, mobile testing and the mass vaccination campaign;**
- **Internal communication remains very important and regular messaging using the following channels continued - the MD message, briefings for Elected Members and regular staff information. An internal communication plan supporting the move to the new operating model continued to be developed and included new features such as a revised staff newsletter. Further updates will be provided in the quarter 2 update.**

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

The focus until 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 as the Covid pandemic shifted through a number of phases during the quarter.

During this quarter, there was more emphasis on delivering wider communications on council strategies and priorities, as the Covid situation eased.

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

Internal communication will be measured for impact through staff feedback and engagement activities.

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

The Communication Strategy supports the corporate plan objectives and strategies which look to the longer term.

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 that have been supported by the communications activity.

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 including in relation to integrated marketing.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

The Communications team supported the promotion of the climate assembly report and recommendations as an important element of the council's decarbonisation plan.

Promotion of the littering strategy was also undertaken in this quarter as part of the launch activity.

6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***

Not applicable.

6.9b. ***Equality Impact Assessment***

A screening exercise on the communications strategy was undertaken. Material is produced in different formats and content accessibility is reviewed. Requirements in relation to the Welsh Language are considered as part of the wider communications activity planning.

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 Media coverage*
- *Appendix 2 Communications Summary*

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Appendix 1 – Media Coverage

Date	Publication	Headline	Theme
1 April 2021	S W Argus	Engineering Centre Plans	Economy and Regeneration
1 April 2021	S W Argus	Plans to expand Pen y Cwm Special School	Education and learning
2 April 2021	Caerphilly Observer	£70 million investment in Ebbw Valley railway	Economy and Regeneration
7 April 2021	Wales Online	Remote working pods in Bryn Bach Park	Covid recovery
7 April 2021	S W Argus	Remote working pods in Bryn Bach Park	Covid recovery
9 April 2021	Wales Online	Schools return arrangements	Covid recovery
11 April 2021	Wales Online	Industrial Units rent increase	Economy and Regeneration
13 April 2021	S W Argus	Litter strategy approved	Community Services
13 April 2021	Nation Cymru	Litter strategy approved	Community Services
14 April 2021	S W Argus	Advanced engineering facility approved	Economy and Regeneration
15 April 2021	S W Argus	Covid rates improved in BG	Covid recovery
18 April 2021	BBC News	Litter strategy approved	Community Services
18 April 2021	InNews	Litter strategy approved	Community Services
19 April 2021	S W Argus	ND Care celebrates 10 years in Abertillery	Social Care
19 April 2021	Insider	Advanced engineering facility approved	Economy and Regeneration
21 April 2021	S W Argus	Plans for Welsh medium school in Tregedar	Education and learning
21 April 2021	S W Argus	Plans to expand Pen y Cwm Special School	Education and learning
23 April 2021	Let's Recycle	Repair directory launches	Community Services
23 April 2021	S W Argus	Covid outbreaks in Care homes	Covid recovery
23 April 2021	Wales Online	Plans for Welsh medium school in Tregedar	Education and learning
23 April 2021	Free Press	Covid outbreaks in Care homes	Covid recovery
27 April 2021	S W Argus	Senedd Election candidates	May 2021 Elections

28 April 2021	Nation Cymru	Gov Tech Challenge	Economy and Regeneration
29 April 2021	S W Argus	Gov Tech Challenge	Economy and Regeneration
29 April 2021	S W Argus	Agile working policy approved	Staff
5 May 2021	S W Argus	Care home fees in BG	Social Care
7 May 2021	S W Argus	Senedd Election results	May 2021 Elections
8 May 2021	BBC News	Senedd Election results	May 2021 Elections
21 May 2021	S W Argus	Brynmawr School literature festival	Education and learning
25 May 2021	Wales Online	Sheep issues in Brynmawr	Community Services
26 May 2021	S W Argus	Bank Holiday services	Public information
28 May 2021	S W Argus	Fflecsi bus launches	Economy and Regeneration
1 June 2021	S W Argus	Demand for housing drops in BG	Housing
2 June 2021	S W Argus	No Covid deaths in last 5 days	Covid recovery
3 June 2021	S W Argus	Covid death rates drop	Covid recovery
10 June 2021	Wales Online	Wind farm proposals	Decarbonisation
12 June 2021	S W Argus	Aspire shortlisted for award	Economy and Regeneration
14 June 2021	S W Argus	Dog found in Abertillery	Public information
15 June 2021	Wales Farmer	Off road biking issues in BG	Community Services
16 June 2021	S W Argus	Litter strategy approved	Community Services
18 June 2021	S W Argus	Community Hubs launch	Digital and Customer service
19 June 2021	S W Argus	Brynmawr School literature festival	Education and learning
19 June 2021	Insider	Yuassa Battery expansion plans	Economy and Regeneration
23 June 2021	S W Argus	£3 million to improve roads	Community Services
23 June 2021	S W Argus	Plans to expand Pen y Cwm Special School	Education and learning
24 June 2021	S W Argus	Wind farm proposals	Decarbonisation
24 June 2021	S W Argus	15 sheltered homes to be built	Social Care
25 June 2021	S W Argus	Hedgehog project in BG Schools	Education and learning
25 June 2021	S W Argus	Recycling rates in BG	Community Services

28 June 2021	Wales Online	School catering arrangements during Covid	Covid recovery
28 June 2021	Wales Online	Plans to expand Pen y Cwm Special School	Education and learning
28 June 2021	S W Argus	Investment to improve BG roads	Community Services
29 June 2021	Wales Online	End of furlough scheme	Covid recovery

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Appendix 2

Communications Summary

Facebook

2,492
POSTS



15,000

FACEBOOK
FOLLOWERS

3,200

INTERACTIONS

1.77
MILLION
REACH ON
FACEBOOK



Twitter

12,132

TWITTER
FOLLOWERS



14.4
MILLION
REACH ON
TWITTER

Website

84,000
VISITORS

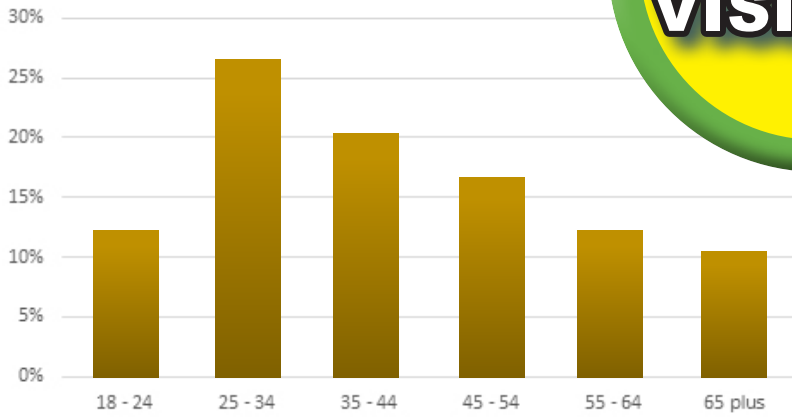
0.77M
PAGE VIEWS

VIEWING

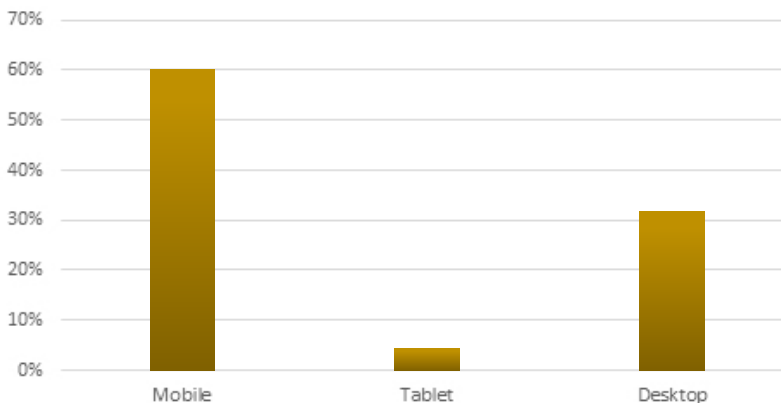
4.95 **PAGES**
PER
VISIT

70%
RETURNING
VISITORS

Age



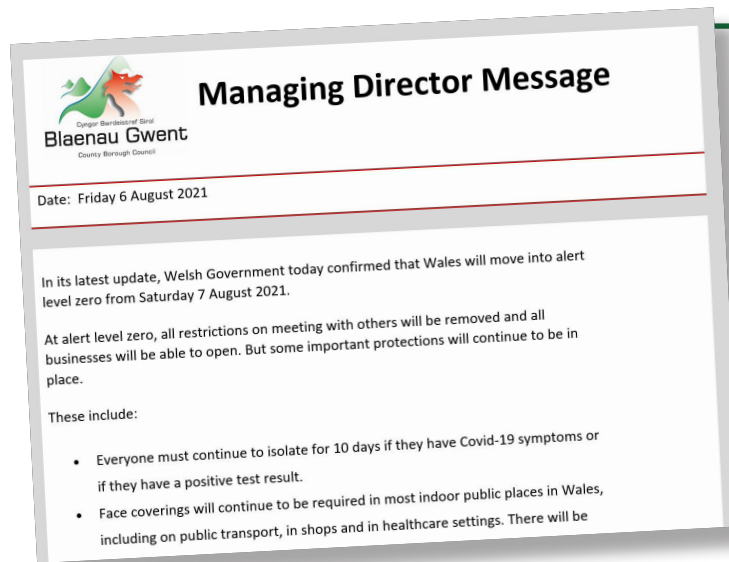
Access Site



Top 7 most popular pages

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

MD Message



Managing Director Message

Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

Date: Friday 6 August 2021

In its latest update, Welsh Government today confirmed that Wales will move into alert level zero from Saturday 7 August 2021.

At alert level zero, all restrictions on meeting with others will be removed and all businesses will be able to open. But some important protections will continue to be in place.

These include:

- Everyone must continue to isolate for 10 days if they have Covid-19 symptoms or if they have a positive test result.
- Face coverings will continue to be required in most indoor public places in Wales, including on public transport, in shops and in healthcare settings. There will be

Weekly staff Guidance



Planning for Retirement

Organisational Development have organised an online pre-retirement course to support employees who may be considering retirement or who will be retiring in the next 12 - 18 months or so.

The course is being delivered online by Affinity Connect on:

Wednesday 1 September 2021 from 1pm – 3pm

There is no charge for the online course and a wide range of topics relating to retirement and the future will be covered, including lifestyle volunteering; further employment; health; pensions; benefits; taxation investments; money management and legal issues.

Places are limited, but successful members of staff will be provided with instructions on how to access the course.

Please make your line manager aware if you intend booking a place.

For further information and to book your place, contact the Affinity Connect Bookings Team by emailing bookings@affinityconnect.org



Wellbeing

Wellbeing Wednesday

1 August 2021

This resource is intended to support you, whether you are working on the front line, at home, in the office or working in a School. Your wellbeing is of critical importance and this bulletin is intended to give you a snapshot of the resources available to you.

Managers help us promote Wellbeing Wednesday!
Please print copies of this bulletin to display in any staff welfare areas, especially where staff do not have access to emails. Include wellbeing on Team Meeting agendas to ensure all staff are aware of how they can access resources.

This resource is circulated every Wednesday.

Regular Members team briefings



Elected Member Update

10 FEBRUARY 2021

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 when 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.

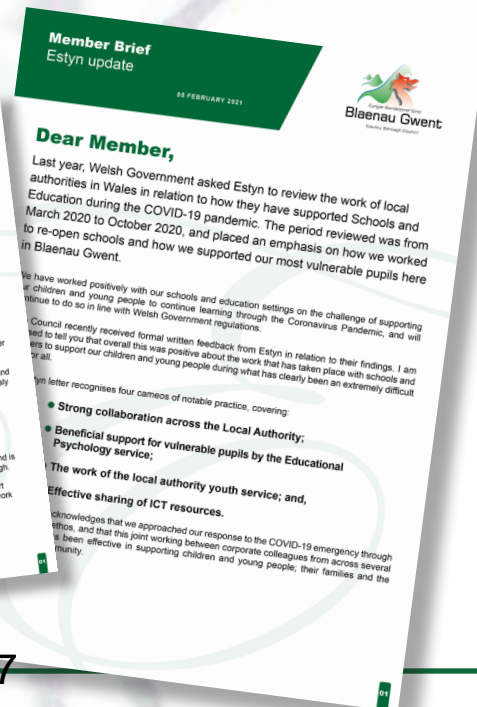
You will know that schools have developed robust home learning plans over the course of this year and, whilst sites will be physically closed, they will continue to provide high quality teaching and learning via the digital platforms which parents and carers will already be familiar with. Teaching staff 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

25 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 an 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 our children and young people to continue learning through the Coronavirus Pandemic, and will continue to do so in line with Welsh Government regulations.

Council 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 staff to support our children and young people during what has clearly been an extremely difficult year for all.

Our letter 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.**

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

Appendix 2

COVID-19 Response

A YEAR OF CONTACT TRACING IN GWENT

Today is the anniversary of the first COVID-19 contact tracing call in Gwent.

Since then we have contacted over 37 000 cases and 73 000 contacts

Gwent has successfully traced 99.9% of all COVID-19 cases

WE'RE HERE TO HELP TO KEEP GWENT SAFE

Gwent Test, Trace, Protect Service
Coordination Unit
Prifaf Gwent, Orlhairn, Gwasanaeth Amddiffy Ureud Cydlynus



IECHYD Y CYHOEDD Y CORONAFEIRWS

Gofyniad i leihau'r risg o ddod i gysylltiad â'r coronafeirws mewn:

PUBLIC HEALTH CORONAVIRUS
Requirement to minimise risk of exposure to coronavirus on premises:

DIOGELU CYMRU
KEEP WALES SAFE



Blaenau Gwent Temporary COVID-19 Test Facilities

4 - 5 August Blaina Car Park, Rear of High Street, NP13 3AF	6 - 7 August Ebbw Vale Car Park, Rear of Beaufort Theatre, Frost Road, NP23 5QQ	8 August Abertillery Sports Centre, Alma Street, NP13 1QD	9 - 10 August Tredegar Gwent Shopping Centre Car Park, Gwent Way, NP22 3EJ
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GIG NHS
Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

COVID-19 ENFORCEMENT ACTION

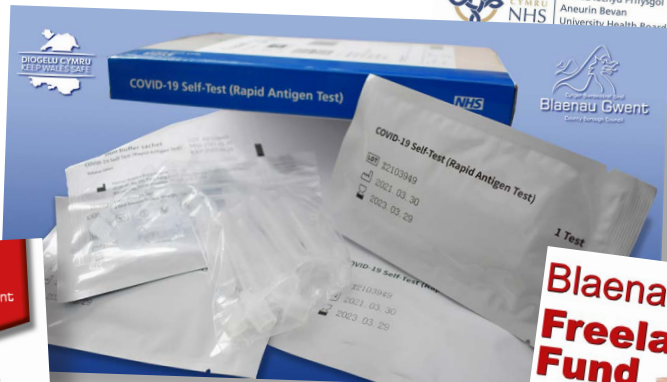
Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council



COVID-19 Self-Test (Rapid Antigen Test)

DIOGELU CYMRU
KEEP WALES SAFE

Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council



COVID-19 Tîm Profi
Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Aneurin Bevan
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
COVID-19 TESTING TEAM

Free COVID-19 Incident Response Webinar For Workplaces With Advice From Environmental Health

Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

Coronavirus has touched each and every business in Blaenau Gwent to varying degrees during the course of the pandemic. The Local Authorities Environmental Health team have been working in the background with businesses providing advice and support when needed in areas such as COVID-19 controls through to what to do when you have a case or cluster of cases in your work setting. We recognise that the COVID-19 challenges are still ever present and that there are still a lot of concerns in the business community particularly in light of the new COVID-19 variant that has been identified.

As a result of the above we want to take the opportunity to share some of the learning from our experiences to date and provide further guidance regarding incident response that can be applied to your work setting in order to effectively mitigate and manage the impact of COVID-19. We invite you to take part in a webinar with Environmental Health to be held on:

TUESDAY 23RD FEBRUARY AT 11:00AM

The anticipated areas that will be covered include the following:


- Test Trace Protect – how the system works and might interact with your business
- Lessons learnt from COVID-19 incident response and cluster management to-date
- Key steps for businesses to take to ensure an efficient and effective response to COVID-19 when you identify a case / cases in the workplace

There will be a short time period allocated for questions from attendees and we would appreciate you emailing these in advance if possible to: business@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

To book a place on this session please visit the Blaenau Gwent Business Hub or contact: business@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk or telephone 01495 355700

New Covid-19 restrictions are in place for the residents of Blaenau Gwent

Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council



Blaenau Gwent Freelancer Fund Phase 3

Supporting Documentation



Blaenau Gwent Temporary COVID-19 Test Centres

9/4 - 10/4/2021 & 13/4/2021 09:00 - 17:00 Car park, rear of High St, Blaina, NP13 3AF	7/4 - 8/4/2021 & 11/4 - 12/4/2021 09:00 - 17:00 Gwent shopping centre car park, Tredegar NP22 3EJ
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Booking required: 119 / gov.wales


GIG NHS
Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
DIOGELU CYMRU
KEEP WALES SAFE

Covid-19 Vaccination Clinic

- If you are 18 years and older and you have not received your 1st COVID-19 vaccine
- Please come along to the walk in clinic.
- No appointment necessary, bring ID.

Saturday 24th July, 8:30am-1:30pm
Blaenau Gwent General Offices,
Steel Works Rd, Ebbw Vale
NP23 6AA

GIG NHS
Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
DIOGELU CYMRU
KEEP WALES SAFE



Keep Wales Safe

April 26

- Outdoor cafés, pubs and restaurants can reopen
- Organised outdoor activities for up to 30 people
- Wedding receptions can take place outdoors, limited to 30 people
- Outdoor attractions including funfairs, theme parks and outdoor swimming pools can reopen

DIOGELU CYMRU
KEEP WALES SAFE

Agenda Item 17

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 13.09.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**

Report Subject: **Commercial Strategy Quarterly Performance Monitoring (April-June 2021)**

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

Report Submitted by: **Bernadette Elias, Chief Officer Commercial & Customer**

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 23/08/21	26/08/21	07.09.21			10/09/21	22/09/21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide the quarter 1 (April - June 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 approach is 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 The strategy delivery involves all Directorates of the Council. Although the impact of the pandemic continues to affect some elements, considerable progress has been made in quarter 1 (April-June). The key activity is summarised in Section 6.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The report will be considered by the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee on 10th September 2021 and any feedback will be presented verbally to the Executive Committee.

3.2 That the Executive Committee:

Option 1: That Executive accepts the performance of the Commercial Strategy during the period April – June 2021 as presented.

Option 2: That Executive Committee provides comments and challenges the performance of the Commercial Strategy.

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 supports the future sustainability of the organisation, 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, the Bridging the Gap programme and supports the Well Being Plan and 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 Q1 (April to June 2021) is set out under the relevant themes in the Commercial strategy.

6.1.1 **Excellence in Commissioning and Procurement**

Strategic Commissioning and Commercial Board (SCCB)

- Agreed terms of reference for the officer Strategic Commissioning and Commercial Board (SCCB) chaired by the Managing Director 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 has been finalised and is a standing agenda item for the Board. This process supports the reporting of the Bridging the Gap programme through the democratic arrangements.
- A process for 'check and challenge' of third party contracts and commercial opportunities has been established. The Board focus is on contracts above the tender threshold of £75k.
- A bespoke baseline financial assessment (profit & loss) to quantify and challenge trading operations has been developed by Resources colleagues for consideration. The aim is to support the Bridging the Gap reviews by providing a clear financial picture of commercial activity.

Transactional Procurement Officer Group

- The SCCB has approved the revised terms of reference for the officer Transactional Procurement officer group,
- The Transactional Procurement Group has been established to ensure the same degree of check and challenge is applied to the contracts under the 75k threshold. The group is chaired by the Service Manager Commercial and Procurement, and includes representatives from across the directorates.
- The terms of reference include the development of annual directorate procurement plans to provide organisational oversight and inform future procurement forward programmes.

Procurement Plans and Contract Management

- Following a positive response from all areas of the organisation, detailed 2021/22 directorate procurement plans have been collated to inform the annual corporate procurement forward work programme.

- The 2021/22 corporate procurement forward work programme has been presented to the SCCB with the check and challenge process being implemented against it.
- Proactive pre-procurement dialogue with client officers is taking place, to ensure that new sourcing requirements are aligned to Council priorities and that procurement documentation and contract terms are commercially favourable.
- Supplier/client contract management meetings are continuing to ensure contracts and performance remain fit for purpose and realise the intended social, environmental and economical outcomes.
- Quarter 1 progress against the 3rd party spend Bridging the Gap strategic business review will be reported through the normal process.

Procurement Strategy and Policy

- Initial planning to review the current Corporate Procurement Strategy has begun. This includes consideration of relevant key policy drivers including the Programme for Government, Social Value, Foundation/Circular Economy and Decarbonisation ambitions (Carbon Neutral by 2030). This work will continue in 2021/22 and progress will be reported in future updates.
- Procurement and Economic Regeneration officers are actively engaged in a collaborative procurement project which is sponsored by Welsh Government and facilitated by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES). The project outcome is to maximise procurement spend in Wales to support local wealth building and to creating a more resilient Welsh economy.

The focus is on the delivery of the following 5 policy areas:

- i. Decarbonisation
- ii. Social Value
- iii. Community Benefits
- iv. Foundational Economy
- v. Circular Economy

Each policy area is aligned to the Council's Procurement and Commercial ambitions and it is anticipated this work will inform the revised Procurement Strategy.

6.1.2 Customer Experience

Delivery of the Community Hubs Approach

- The community hubs delivery commenced at the end of quarter 1 on 21st June 2021 with a curtailed schedule in line with the national Pandemic guidance and restrictions.
- The full schedule of delivery commenced on 26th July 2021, in line with revised national restrictions. Further information will be provided in the quarter 2 update (July-September).

Abertillery – Tuesday to Friday (library closed Monday)
 Brynmawr – Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday (library closed Wednesday)
 Tredegar – Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday (library closed Thursday)
 Ebbw Vale – Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday (library closed Wednesday)

- Blaina, Cwm and Llanhilleth operated in quarter 1 under the restricted schedule, this was kept under review and following feedback a revised schedule is planned for quarter 2 onwards.
- The main requests for support to date are in relation to:

Main type of query/assistance	Main query categories
Benefit applications	Applications
Council Tax queries	Report it
Blue badge applications	Request for services Payment queries

- The qualitative information shows that there is very often additional support being offered over and above the initial request during the interaction with residents.
- A sample of case studies from the Community Hubs service delivery are included in appendix 1.

Customer Services

Key activity for the quarter includes:

- Following feedback, a review of the contact centre answerphone message which was felt to be overly long and protracted. A more concise message is now in place that includes a queuing system for callers.
- Community Services mapping sessions held focusing on the full end to end process to help better understand the customer journey.
- Following feedback, a review of the out of hours' service was undertaken which has resulted in a local provider being awarded the contract from July 2021.

Locality Response Team

- 65 residents have been supported throughout the quarter with a wide range of assistance given from food shopping to supporting residents to apply for grants
- 20 supported to enable self-isolation
- 40 supported who received financial benefit gains, i.e. Discretionary Assistance Fund applications
- 33 food vouchers allocated to residents

The Locality Response Service has clear links into the Community hubs model. Early planning on how the two areas align and complement each other moving forward has begun and will be reported in future quarter updates.

6.1.3 ***Using data insights and technology wisely***

Digital – external projects

- Working with the Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS) to deliver better public services for Wales, funding has been secured to explore more user focussed and efficient ways of service delivery.
- Participation in a collaborative Adult Social Care project with Neath Port Talbot and Torfaen local authorities, looking at unavoidable contact at the front door.
- Commencement of a Tech Valleys funded project on exploring the digital interaction with the customer using a service. This project also included the establishment of a Digital apprentice. There was a high level of interest in the role and the successful candidate has joined the digital team in Commercial Services.
- The Digital Democracy Project discovery work involving user research with 16-25 year olds has been completed and findings presented to various groups, including Members. Prioritisation of the findings has taken place and work is being undertaken to include areas within the Diverse Council Action Plan as many of the findings also support this work. The project is being externally supported by Perago, including presenting the findings to Welsh Government to highlight areas that may inform a national focus and approach.

Digital - Organisational programme

- A planned 12-month digital programme has been scoped. This includes (in addition to the externally supported digital projects) corporate activity aligned 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.
- Supporting the services that most need to develop in the digital space for both the customer and service perspective has been a focus in quarter 1. A multi-disciplinary team led by the digital team has been stood up to support the planning software project with the initial phase including gathering user experience of the current process to inform the specification. Progress will be provided in the quarter 2 update.
- The Council's new delegate system has been installed at the General Offices. The system enables hybrid meetings to take place so that attendees can either be present physically or remotely. Meetings are also recorded and then uploaded onto the website. Further updates will be provided in the quarter 2 update (July-September) which will include the test meetings and the Democratic Hub move to be fully operational.

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 and customer 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 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

The planned review of the corporate procurement strategy will include consideration of how it can better support the decarbonisation ambitions set out in the Council's plan.

The work with CLES outlined in the report also involves this key policy driver.

The community hub model brings access to services closer to the community residents live in. The democratic hub hybrid meetings enable remote access to committee meetings.

6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***

The CLES project outcome is to maximise procurement spend in Wales to support local wealth building and to creating a more resilient Welsh economy.

The community hub model includes support, advice and guidance for residents to access financial support they may be entitled to.

6.9b ***EqIA***

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

Appendix 1 - Community Hub case studies

Appendix 1 - Case Studies Community Hubs Delivery Model

Case Study

Gentleman visited Brynmawr Library to do a re-application for his blue badge. Re-application submitted and evidence sent to Blaenau Gwent Blue Badge Team. As it was a discretionary application I asked the customer whether he was in receipt of any disability benefit, he stated no. A referral was made to Refer.Net for a full benefit eligibility check for the customer with his permission.

Referral picked up by Citizens Advice Bureau to contact customer to discuss his eligibility for Attendance Allowance.

Case Study

Lady visited Community Hubs as she'd been told Housing would be present. Hubs organised customer to complete Housing Application over the phone with Housing Team as per agreement. Talked woman through process over telephone and received confirmation from Housing that they'd arranged for an appointment over the telephone. Good example of partnership working.

Case study

Customer came into Ebbw Vale library and said he was homeless after a relationship breakdown and was staying in a friend's garage and needed help with Housing as the Housing centre was closed and he could not claim any benefits as he had no bank account or ID as his partner had destroyed all his belongings. Housing were contacted and they provided a mobile contact number for customer to ring them from a friend's phone and said they would help him apply for housing. A referral was made to localities for floating support so they could help him to get a bank account and issue food vouchers if necessary. The customer said he was very grateful for help as he had been struggling for a week and all the services he needed to access were closed.

Outcome: Pobl confirmed she is now working with customer to open a bank account for his benefits and work with Housing for accommodation

Case study

Customer came into Ebbw Vale library as she had received Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction letters explaining an overpayment going back to 2018 and did not understand them. I explained the letters to her and noticed there had been a further change in circumstances which now meant she would receive full rent and council tax benefit.

Outcome: Customer was very happy and said how grateful she was that she could talk to an actual person to help

Case study

Customer came into Abertillery library asking for support with housing as he wanted to move and support for training to get back into work. He was provided with the telephone number for the Housing Option Team and Bridges into Work and Communities into Work.

Outcome: Customer returned to the library and confirmed that he had an appointment with Abertillery Job Centre Plus the following day and they were going to work with him to put the training in place that he needed and set up an appointment with Housing to complete an application.

Case Study

Customer came into the library in Abertillery querying a reminder that he had received from Council tax. BS has been paying £40.00 for the last 6 weeks and was going to continue to do this going forward. Looked on Northgate checked balance and calculated that if he continued to pay £40.00 per week would it clear by end of March.

Outcome: On Calculation it would take 33 weeks which is within the time for next financial year. Rang Housing who confirmed this and realigned the instalments to stop anymore reminders going out. BS happy with outcome.

Case Study

Customer came into Blaina Library wanted to apply for a nursery place for her child for September. Customer already self-served but didn't quite understand the form when she was trying to complete it herself as she only wants her child to attend Ystruth Primary. I completed the form for her on My Council Services. SM needed to show birth certificate for child so went home and emailed a photograph of the birth certificate to my works email which then I forwarded to Education.

Case Study

Customer came into Brynmawr library to renew her Blue Badge which had expired in March 2021 as she did not know how to renew it. I completed the application and noticed that customer was not receiving any disability benefits even though she was wheelchair bound and breathing on oxygen from a tank. I asked if there was a reason for this and she said she did not know how to apply. A referral was made to Citizens Advice through the Refer.net system for someone to complete an application for Attendance Allowance.

Case Study

Customer called into Tredegar Library to apply for a new Blue Badge. While completing the application customer advised that he had also been trying to apply Industrial Injury Disablement Benefit but was unable to get any information how to claim. He had tried contact the Department for Work and Pensions without success. I advised that it would be looked at and get back to him. I managed to locate contact

details to make a claim, customer asked if I could give them a call. I made contact and requested an application be sent to them.

Case Study

Customer came into the hub with her family who have recently moved from Hong Kong and bought a flat and a business in Blaenau Gwent. They wanted help amending the liability on the flat so I took their details and added the information to the Council tax system so a process will now take place to amend the liability. I also did this for the business rates which will be amended too. They asked me how to register their son for a local school so I gave them the telephone number for school admissions to ring and register. They also asked me how to register for a National insurance number so I checked the information on the Gov.uk website and showed them the application form online and wrote down the telephone number given if they need any help. They also asked how to register for a NHS number so again I looked at the information on the Gov.uk website and advised that they could register with a local GP surgery and would then be issued with a NHS number. The family were very happy that I had helped answer all their queries.

Case Study

Customer came into Blaina Library wanted a library card and help with getting a replacement bus pass due to his being stolen along with some of his money. Library staff set him up with a library card. Transport for Wales were contacted to see if we could get a replacement, the person I spoke to advised it was a £10 payment. I advised that customer didn't have the funds so they agreed to issue a new one free of charge due to circumstances but this would only be done once! I issued a Food bank voucher and due to customer not having a phone I made the arrangements with Food Bank for delivery and advised customer he needed to be at his property from 2:30 for the delivery. Also advised the Food Bank of the essentials that he needed. Applied for a Discretionary Assistance Fund, waiting confirmation that this will be granted.

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Agenda Item 18

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**

Report Subject: **Sickness Absence Performance 2020/21**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Daniels, Leader / Executive Member**

Report Submitted by: **Andrea J Prosser, Head of Organisational Development**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team DMT	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
25.08.21	26.08.21	07.09.21			10.09.21	22.09.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Elected Members the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge the sickness absence performance for 2020/21, the continued actions to support improvement in attendance and recognise the positive attendance of the majority of the workforce.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Staff attendance is critical in delivering Council priorities and is a key performance indicator reflected in the quarterly Finance and Performance report. Whilst sickness levels remain high, it is important to note that the majority of staff have little or no sickness absence and attend work regularly.
- 2.2 Improving attendance remains a key priority and is identified as a key risk for the Council as it is acknowledged that high levels of sickness absence will have a detrimental impact on the ability of the Council to deliver services.
- 2.3 During 2020/21 the Council like all workplaces had to rise to the enormous challenge of responding to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the dramatic impact it had on the way the Council had to work, prompting a transformation to working practices on an unprecedented scale to safeguard people's health, safety and wellbeing. This resulted in delivery of critical services only, with other available resources being redeployed to support the response.

2.4 Managing Sickness Absence

- 2.4.1 The Council has in place a range of measures to assist in the effective management of sickness absence which are outlined below:
- An Attendance Management Policy.
 - Training/briefing sessions for managers.
 - A policy and toolkit for managing stress.
 - An extensive range of flexible working arrangements.
 - Regular discussion and learning nationally and regionally.
 - Managers recognising good attendance and supporting wellbeing.

- Sickness absence targets set by the Corporate Leadership Team.
- Development of iTrent to provide sickness absence data to managers in real time and access to a dashboard of sickness absence data.
- Performance data provided to the Corporate Leadership Team, Heads of Service and Elected Members on a quarterly basis.
- Sickness performance on Directorate Management Teams, team meetings and an objective for managers as part of annual performance coaching.
- Reviews of 'hot spots', and top 20 long terms cases within services.
- Health, Safety and Welfare Corporate Group.

2.5 **Employee Wellbeing**

- 2.5.1 Employee wellbeing is intrinsically linked to levels of attendance. Wellbeing is more than an avoidance of becoming physically sick. It represents a broader concept that includes physical, mental and social health.
- 2.5.2 The Council has an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for employees which provides a range of services including counselling, advice and information. During the pandemic the Council has actively promoted well-being sessions and the opportunity to access the EAP.
- 2.5.3 The Occupational Health Service which supports managers with employee wellbeing and the management of sickness absence operated remotely during the pandemic. This new model of service delivery will continue as there has been no detrimental impact on outcomes and the service is more accessible for staff with attendance at clinics improved.
- 2.5.4 In addition, the Council has introduced a weekly wellbeing bulletin for staff branded 'Wellbeing Wednesday' which provides a range of wellbeing information and resources.
- 2.5.5 The Council working in partnership with the Trade Unions and other partners delivered Mental Health Awareness training to establish a base of knowledge that can be used on which to build greater development and resources. To date the following activities have been completed;
- Mental Health Awareness courses for employees (76 attendees)
 - Mental Health Awareness for Managers (49 attendees)
 - i-act Mental Health Awareness for Managers (47 attendees)
- 2.5.6 Awareness training for employees and managers will continue to be delivered and this will enable a cohort of employees able to understand and identify colleagues who may be at risk of, or are experiencing, mental health issues.

2.6 **Workforce Strategy 2021-26**

- 2.6.1 The Workforce Strategy 2021-26 aims to build on existing good practice and to promote the Council as a safe, healthy and supportive environment in which to work and will have a strategic focus on wellbeing which will play a significant role in supporting attendance at work.

2.6.2 The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we work with staff having worked away from the office during lockdown. The Workforce Strategy will support the workforce to transition from responding to the emergency situation and act as a key lever to facilitate transformational change and performance improvement.

2.7 Workforce Engagement

2.7.1 The Council recognises the critical need to communicate and engage staff, detailed below are a range of the mechanisms used to engage staff:

- Regular 121s / performance coaching / team meetings
- Weekly Managing Director newsletter and wellbeing bulletin
- Staff newsletter/Managers brief
- A dedicated engagement and consultation framework with trade unions
- Bi-annual staff surveys and pulse surveys
- Engagement and communication plan for agile working

2.8 Recovery following the Pandemic

2.8.1 Workforce is a key theme as part of the Council's Recovery Plan, it is acknowledged that COVID-19 will not disappear and a continuing priority will be to manage the capacity of the workforce to ensure that services are delivered.

2.8.2 A new Council Operating Model was agreed at Council in March 2021 to include moving to an Agile Working Policy which is a key enabler in delivering this new operating model. The Recovery Plan and the Workforce Strategy will link to the Council's vision for sustainable development including sustainable economic growth, de-carbonisation and the health and well-being of both staff and the community.

2.8.3 The health, safety and wellbeing of staff has remained a key priority as we move to more business as usual with the following in place:

- Workplace risk assessments to manage the risk of COVID-19.
- Staff to continue to work from home where possible.
- Encouraging and supporting staff to take up the COVID-19 vaccination
- Asymptomatic Lateral Flow Testing.
- Ongoing wellbeing support for staff impacted by the pandemic.
- Promotion and encouragement for staff to take up the flu jab.

2.8.4 It is also anticipated that the Council's workforce will be impacted by the NHS treatment waiting lists which could lead to an increase in sickness levels. Also anticipated is a surge in seasonal illnesses with increased prevalence of influenza, winter bugs etc.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 CLT in consideration of the performance information will continue to keep sickness under review, through Directorate Management Teams, ensuring the effective and timely management of cases.

- 3.2 The report will be considered by the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee on 10th September 2021, and any feedback will be provided verbally to the Executive Committee.
- 3.3 **Option 1**
That the Executive Committee having considered the sickness absence performance information and the ongoing actions to support improved attendance within the Council identify any further areas for improvement in order to drive forward performance improvement.
- 3.4 **Option 2**
That the Executive Committee endorse the report and the ongoing actions to support improvement in attendance.
4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
- 4.1 The management of attendance is a critical strand in managing the capacity of the workforce to deliver services to the community of Blaenau Gwent and achieve the priorities laid out in the Council's strategic planning documents.
- 5 **Implications Against Each Option**
- 5.1 **Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)**
There are direct and indirect costs of sickness absence which are a key driver in the Council's approach to effectively improve attendance at work.
- 5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**
The underperformance in relation to the high levels of sickness absence does present a significant risk in terms of the impact on front line service delivery and continuity through lost time and staffing changes. In addition, the financial implications associated with sickness absence directly impact on the Council's budget. Mitigating actions are detailed within the report.
- 5.3 **Legal**
There are no legal implications arising from this report.
- 5.4 **Human Resources**
The staffing implications are detailed within the content of the report.
6. **Supporting Evidence**
- 6.1 **Performance Information and Data**
- 6.1.1 The overall year end outturn figure for the Council of 11.67 days per full time equivalent (FTE) employee (9.98 days excluding COVID-19 sickness) sees a decrease from the previous year's outturn of 13.91 days (13.48 days excluding COVID-19 sickness) however exceeds the target set of 10.50 days. When comparing the overall outturn with the previous year, there has been a decrease of 2.24 days.
- 6.1.2

When excluding sickness absence related to COVID-19 which includes confirmed cases and those with symptoms the outturn figure reduces to 9.98 days an overall reduction of 3.93 days bringing the outturn figure below the corporate target.

- 6.1.3 The total days lost represents a loss in productivity equating to 115 extra employees being available to work for the full year. The calculation applied is based on 220 working days per year per FTE employee.
- 6.1.4 Over the last five years the Council has had sustained absence levels with three of the last five years exceeding 12 days sickness absence per FTE employee. Since 2017/18 the Council has experienced year on year increases in the levels of absence up to 13.91 days lost at its highest in 2019/20, with 2020/21 seeing a reduction of over 2 days per FTE employee. Table 1 appended sets out the trend over the current and previous years.
- 6.1.5 74% of all absence in the Council is more than 4 weeks and is classed as long term which has been the pattern over the last few years, with short term absence accounting for 26% of overall absence. Table 2 appended details the breakdown of short and long term absence by directorate.
- 6.1.6 Table 3 appended details the number of formal warnings, dismissals and ill health retirements during 2020/21 and the previous two years.
- 6.1.7 The top 5 cause of days lost in the Council equate to over 81% of all sickness absence with mental health (stress, anxiety and depression) being the top cause at 38%. Table 4 appended sets out the top five causes of absence which mirrors closely the previous year, however COVID-19 accounted for 14.4% of all sickness coming above cancer and gastro – intestinal conditions.
- 6.1.8 A breakdown of sickness absence by service area is appended at Table 5 the key headlines are detailed below:

- 14 services came within target - of which 10 saw a reduction from the previous year (9 of the 10 having more than a 25% reduction in sickness), 1 stayed the same with no sickness and 3 services had increasing levels of sickness in comparison to the previous year and are detailed below:

Services within target with increase in sickness	20/21	19/20	
Commercial Services - Benefits / Comm, Marketing & Customer/ICT/Procurement/Transformation.	4.33	3.98	↑
Governance & Partnerships	8.14	6.45	↑
Legal Services	4.75	4.07	↑

- 5 services exceeded the target and are detailed below. (2 services whilst exceeding the target saw a reduction in sickness from the previous year)

Services exceeding target	20/21	19/20	
Community Services	11.57	19.35	↓
Adults Services (excluding Provider Services)	12.84	N/A	
Provider Services	39.25	N/A	
Adult Services (Total for comparative purposes)*	29.64	22.12	↑
Children's Services	14.68	11.87	↑

School based staff excluding teachers	12.03	13.98	↓
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*Included to enable year on year comparison

6.1.9

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected sickness absence in a number of ways; while the virus may have led to sickness absence including 'Long COVID', measures such as the furloughing of staff, social distancing, shielding and increased homeworking appear to have helped to reduce other causes of absence, which has resulted in a general downtrend on sickness absence. However, the impact on those sick with longer term conditions which makes up over 74% of all sickness has been negatively affected where treatments may have stopped or been delayed.

6.1.10

Homeworking increased significantly during 2020/21 with the introduction of the lock down measures in March 2020 and which continued throughout 2020/21. This, together with the other measures introduced by the Government led to less exposure to germs and minimised some of the seasonal sickness such as winter bugs, cold and coughs and influenza. Homeworking also allows employees to work when they may be a little unwell, they might not travel to a workplace to work but feel well enough to work from home.

6.1.11

Occupational groups will have been affected differently by the pandemic, which might have an effect on their sickness absence rates, in addition the ability to work from home would be very different across these groups. Key workers within the Council continued to work on the front line delivering services to the community throughout the pandemic.

6.1.12

The all Wales comparative data for 2019/20 and 2020/21 is detailed in Appendix 2. This data has been anonymised as the 20/21 information has not been published. In 2020/21 the Council reports the highest days lost, with the best performing reporting 5.41 days.

6.1.13

Available data for 2021/22 indicates an increase in sickness absence in the first quarter (outturn 3.26 days) in comparison to the same period in 2020/21 (outturn 2.41 days).

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

Information included within the report will provide opportunity for the public to scrutinise the Council's performance and provide accountability across the Council.

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

The Trade Unions believe it is everyone's interest to reduce sickness absence levels to an acceptable level and will continue to work positively with the Council to achieve this.

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

Options detailed in this report contribute directly to enabling the workforce for the future.

6.5 **Preventative focus**

The Workforce Strategy 2021-2026 will focus on prevention.

6.6 Collaboration / partnership working

There are regular discussions with the national Human Resources Directors Network and regionally in terms of good practice or emerging practice in reducing sickness absence.

6.7 Integration (across service areas)

NA

6.8 Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions

The Workforce Strategy and the Council's Recovery plans will link to the Council's agenda for de-carbonisation.

6.9a Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment

The Council is the largest employer in Blaenau Gwent and the management of the well-being of the workforce will most certainly directly impact on communities.

6.9b Equality Impact Assessment

The Managing Attendance Policy is equally applied to the Council's workforce.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

7.1 Sickness absence statistics are reported to the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis and an annual performance report is presented to Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee. Biannual workforce profiles are discussed with Managers and Headteachers.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendices 1 and 2

Table 1 – Sickness Days Lost Per Full Time Equivalent Employee

Council - Days Lost per FTE							
2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 All sickness	2020/21 Excl. COVID		
12.49	11.23	12.66	13.91	11.67	9.98		
Directorate - Days Lost per FTE							
Directorate (Historical)	2016/17	2017/18	Directorate	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 All sickness	2020/21 Excl. COVID
Resources	5.46	7.38	Corporate Services	8.29	8.81	5.67	5.38 ↓
Corporate Services	11.08	6.65					
Education	8.19	6.11	Education	6.94	8.07	4.13	3.40 ↓
School based (Teachers)	11.82	9.07	School based (Teachers)	12.20	11.57	6.45	5.67 ↓
School based (excluding Teachers)	9.77	9.71	School based (excluding Teachers)	10.64	13.98	12.03	10.18 ↓
Environment	18.67	19.19	Regeneration & Community Services	11.21	16.15	10.20	8.74 ↓
Social Services	14.45	13.60	Social Services	18.19	17.81	22.98	19.23 ↑

Table 2 - Short and long term sickness absence by Directorate.

Directorate	Short Term %	Long Term %
Corporate Services	22.34	77.66
Regeneration & Community Services	31.36	68.64
Social Services	23.47	76.53
Education	58.29	41.71
Schools	26.26	73.72
BGCBC	26.03	73.97

Table 3 - Number of formal warnings, dismissals and ill health retirements

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Number of formal warnings issued	28	22	4
Dismissals	12	6	0
Number of ill health retirements	9	8	2

Table 4 – Sickness Absence Reasons – Top 5

Rank 2020/21	Category	% sickness	Rank 2019/20
1	Psychiatric / Mental Health	38.0%	1
2	Musculoskeletal & Injuries	16.9%	2
3	COVID-19 (confirmed / symptoms)	14.4%	-
4	Cancer	6.6%	3
5	Gastro-intestinal	5.47%	4

Table 5 – Sickness Absence breakdown by Service

Attendance Management - Number of days lost per full time equivalent employee											2019/20	
Service Area	FTE as at 31.03.21	Cumulative Qtr 1 Outturn	Cumulative Qtr 1 Outturn (excluding COVID19 ***)	Cumulative Qtr 2 Outturn	Cumulative Qtr 2 Outturn (excluding COVID19 ***)	Cumulative Qtr 3 Outturn	Cumulative Qtr 3 Outturn (excluding COVID19 ***)	Cumulative Qtr 4 Outturn	Cumulative Qtr 4 Outturn (excluding COVID19 ***)	Annual Target	Quarter 4	Quarter 4 (excluding COVID 19)
											Quarter 4	Quarter 4 (excluding COVID 19)
Corporate Services Directorate												
Commerical Services - OD / Social Care Workforce Development /Business Support	124.24	0.50	0.40	1.50	1.39	3.52	3.31	5.94	5.73	8.5	11.56	11.48
Commercial Services - Benefits / Communications, Marketing & Customer Access / ICT / Procurement / Strategy Transformation & Culture	44.83	1.59	1.15	2.10	1.63	3.14	2.67	4.33	3.65	8.5	3.98	3.67
Commercial Services Total	169.07	0.79	0.60	1.67	1.46	3.38	3.08	5.34	4.96	8.5	9.55	9.41
Resources	64.26	1.24	1.17	2.74	2.68	4.48	4.42	6.29	6.23		9.14	8.85
Governance & Partnerships	27.33	6.57	6.57	8.51	8.51	8.08	8.08	8.14	8.14		6.45	6.45
Legal & Corporate Compliance	10.42	0.29	0.00	1.34	1.06	2.84	1.92	4.75	3.82		4.07	3.06
Senior Management *	6.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		3.33	3.33
	277.08	1.41	1.26	2.50	2.35	3.95	3.70	5.67	5.38		8.81	8.62
Regeneration & Community Services Directorate												
Regeneration & Development	89.91	0.85	0.84	1.76	1.67	3.87	2.91	5.56	4.32		7.47	7.00
Community Services	329.46	2.49	2.09	4.24	3.71	7.73	6.32	11.57	9.89		19.35	18.37
Public Protection	42.30	4.21	4.21	7.49	7.41	8.29	8.04	9.11	8.87		11.33	10.91
Senior Management *	3.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		0.00	0.00
Regeneration & Community Services Total	464.67	2.33	2.04	4.05	3.65	7.02	5.81	10.20	8.74		16.15	15.32
Social Services Directorate												
Adult Services (excluding Provider Services)	95.63	3.85	3.33	7.22	6.66	10.15	9.44	12.84	11.91	11	22.12	21.64
Provider Services	174.48	6.84	6.47	14.94	14.36	27.98	23.36	39.25	32.19	22		
Children's Services	201.06	2.90	2.62	6.03	5.62	10.86	9.52	14.68	12.28	11	11.87	11.31
Senior Management *	3.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0	1.00	1.00
Social Services Total	474.17	4.50	4.14	9.43	8.93	16.78	14.40	22.98	19.23		17.81	17.30
Education Directorate												
School based staff (excluding Teachers)	401.29	2.36	2.19	4.19	3.85	8.48	6.77	12.03	10.18	8.5	13.98	13.70
Teachers	471.69	1.21	1.09	2.64	2.43	5.11	4.46	6.45	5.67	8.5	11.57	11.31
Schools Total	872.98	1.74	1.59	3.35	3.08	6.66	5.53	9.03	7.75	8.5	12.68	12.42
Education Transformation	34.59	0.37	0.36	0.47	0.46	1.65	1.30	4.45	3.52	6	9.42	9.41
School Improvement & Inclusion	14.62	1.09	1.09	1.44	1.44	2.69	2.69	3.87	3.54	6	5.87	4.86
Senior Management *	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6	2.50	2.50
Corporate Education Total	50.21	0.57	0.56	0.74	0.73	1.91	1.68	4.13	3.40	6	8.07	7.76
Education Totals	923.19	1.68	1.54	3.21	2.95	6.39	5.31	8.75	7.50		12.44	12.17
Corporate Totals	2139.11	2.41	2.18	4.67	4.34	8.42	7.15	11.67	9.98	10.50	13.91	13.48

* Senior Management includes all positions at JNC3 and above

** RAG status is set against service targets however where no targets have been provided the corporate target will be used. In the case of an Amber RAG this is taken as being within 0.5 of a day above the target

*** COVID19 sickness includes those employee who were unable to work from home and either tested positive for COVID19 or had symptoms

All Wales Comparative Data

Local Authority	2019/20 Published data	2020/21 Unpublished Data	Movement Year on Year
1	9.4	5.41	3.99↓
2	9.8	6.30	3.50↓
3	8.1	6.50	1.60 ↓
4	8.8	6.68	2.12 ↓
5	8.9	7.16	1.74 ↓
6	10.7	7.70	3.00 ↓
7	9.3	7.73	1.57 ↓
8	9.5	7.80	1.70↓
9	11.4	7.90	3.50 ↓
10	12	7.94	4.06 ↓
11	11	8.08	2.92 ↓
12	12.1	8.13	3.97 ↓
13	11.5	8.41	3.09 ↓
14	10.5	8.59	1.91 ↓
15	11.8	8.60	3.20 ↓
16	12.2	8.65	3.55 ↓
17	12.2	8.80	3.40↓
18	11.9	9.16	2.74↓
19	13.1	9.16	3.94 ↓
20	-	9.30	-
21	12	10.00	2.00↓
Blaenau Gwent	13.9	11.67	2.23↓

Agenda Item 19

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 13.09.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**
Report Subject: **Education Services - Main Self-Evaluation Report (SER)**
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)
✓	26.08.21	07.09.21			14.09.21	22.09.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to provide Members of the Executive Committee with an opportunity to consider the findings of ongoing self-evaluation processes undertaken within the Education Directorate, across the Council and with key partners, particularly for the Main Self-Evaluation Report (SER).

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 report provides a high-level narrative and the Education Directorate's Self-Evaluation Policy (appendix 1), which sets out the arrangements for effective self-evaluation. The findings from the Self-Evaluation Report (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 areas of work.
- 2.3 A comprehensive data set of 2018-19 school performance, coupled with evaluations of impact and effectiveness of Council based and partnership support feeds into the overall evaluation. It should be noted, however, that there has been a relaxation of reporting performance arrangements by Welsh Government. Therefore, the Education Directorate is unable to report on school performance data and categorisation has been suspended so any information presented in this report is to only be used for internal self-evaluation purposes. The report focusses on the Main SER updates, particularly the way that corporately the Council, Education Directorate and partners are supporting our schools/learners across the school estate. Self-

evaluation is an on-going process and the SER will need to be further updated to reflect the 2020-21 KS4 and Post 16 results during the Autumn term 2021.

- 2.4 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 are captured every Autumn and Spring time as well as via quarterly performance and finance reporting mechanisms. This report details the findings and these are shown in the main SER attached as appendix 2. The Main SER is structured in a way to be aligned to the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework as detailed below.
- 2.5 The three inspection areas of the LGES inspection framework are:
- Inspection Area 1 – Outcomes**
 - Standards and progress overall
 - Standards and progress of specific groups
 - Wellbeing and attitudes to learning
 - Inspection Area 2 – Education Services and Provision**
 - Support for school improvement
 - Support for vulnerable learners
 - Other education support services
 - Inspection Area 3 – Leadership and Management**
 - Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers
 - Self-evaluation and improvement planning
 - Professional learning
 - Safeguarding arrangements
 - Use of resources
- 2.6 WG has set a strategic approach to the accountability framework across the education sector in Wales. A comprehensive set of school performance data is used under normal circumstances, coupled with an evaluation of impact and effectiveness of Council/partnership support and this feeds into the overall SER. It should be noted, however, that self-evaluation is an on-going process and the SER will consider progress that is being made, where possible. However, since 2019-20 there needs to be acknowledgement of the national relaxation of performance reporting measures across the education system.
- 2.7 Moreover, it is the high-level points only, which are presented in the narrative in this report shown under Section 6, which is provided to contribute to Member's potential areas for scrutiny. It is also intended to update the Summary Self-Evaluation document for the next report to Members later in the academic year. Estyn's Thematic Review highlighted BG's effective support for schools during the pandemic and an improving relationship with the schools built on a culture of collaboration. Schools continue to respond well to the new ways of working e.g. curriculum reform and blended learning. The Education Recovery and Renewal Action Plan is now produced to provide support for all learners, including wellbeing considerations. There is a thorough impact assessment that covers all key stakeholder work and this will be used to inform the Recovery and Renewal programme of activity and business planning. The Council has also recently received Estyn's Summer letter, this correspondence

is positive overall and provides an update on the progress made against the inspectorate's national recommendations. The Blaenau Gwent Estyn Summer letter is attached as appendix 3 to inform self-evaluation and Member discussions.

3. Options for Recommendation

- 3.1 This report has been discussed by Education DMT and CLT.
- 3.2 This report will also be considered by the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee on 14th September 2021, and any feedback will be provided verbally to the Executive Committee.
- 3.3 **Option 1:** to accept the report as presented, whilst also acknowledging that effective self-evaluation is an on-going process.
- 3.4 **Option 2:** Members are requested to review the information detailed within the report and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate recommendations.
- 3.5 This report provides the Committee with important and statutory performance monitoring information, as well as opportunity to identify where progress has been made and where further improvement is required.

4. Evidence of how 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 £46.5 million (2021/22) 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 2021/22 was £6,980 which is the 2nd highest in Wales and £593 above the Welsh average of £6,387.
- 5.1.2 For 2021/22 the funding delegated to schools was 85.4% which is above the all Wales average and ranked 1st when compared to the family of Councils, (Local Authority Budgeted Expenditure on Schools 2021/22).
- 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 £352,000 and a 2% decrease on the previous financial year.

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 can be 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 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 (currently suspended); and,
- the progress schools make towards targets is also monitored on a termly basis (currently suspended apart from for Schools Causing Concern. School safeguarding processes are also closely monitored.

5.2.3 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.

5.3 Legal

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

5.4 Human Resources

There are no direct HR/OD implications associated with this report, however, it is intended to establish a corporate/partnership project group for project management purposes to create collective ownership as well as distributed leadership for self-evaluation across the board. The group will also play a key role in being Estyn inspection ready.

6. Performance Information

6.1 Performance

(NB. Some school performance information relates to 2018-2019 and/or 2019-20. Recent inspectorate activity has been used to inform the areas of progress outlined below).

6.1.1 **Areas where good progress has been made:**

- Progress has been made on assessing the impact of COVID-19 on pupil performance and school operations.
- Engagement with schools and school-to-school working has improved significantly.
- Recovery and Renewal processes e.g. impact assessments are well developed with key stakeholders, particularly the schools.
- Strong focus on wellbeing, as recognised in recent inspectorate activity.
- Sound progress has been made on ALN reform and curriculum reform readiness.
- 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;
- The Council and EAS are evidencing improving value for money.

Areas where further improvement is required:

- #### 6.1.2
- Re-establish baseline data processes to collect data/evidence on school performance via the Recovery and Renewal action planning process.
 - Re-evaluate previous areas for improvement to establish whether there has been progress in these areas, whether there needs to be further improvement or whether other areas for further improvement are identified:
 - Higher levels of language acquisition in our very young children in the early years;
 - Improved attainment of eFSM pupils and particularly our more-able pupils in the early years and throughout education;
 - Improving school attendance;
 - Progress between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, particularly in English, Maths and Science;
 - Further improve provision for pupils with additional learning needs;
 - Continuing the work with two schools in an Estyn category (ALC and BFS);
 - Continuing the work with the four Schools Causing Concern; and,
 - Reduce school exclusions and support parents/carers who opt to Elective Home Educate (EHE).

6.1.3

It is acknowledged that the Main SER document is a very lengthy working document, that covers all of the LGES framework. The document provides the context and data to evidence progress and inform self-evaluative commentary. However, it is intended to update the Summary SER document for future self-evaluation reports to enable Members to focus specifically on key priorities and this document is much more succinct. Therefore, it is proposed that Members consider the following areas as lines of enquiry for the scrutiny process, in line with the corporate impact assessment detailed in Appendix 4.

- Recovery and renewal linked to academic progress;
- Support for vulnerable learners;
- ALN reform/Curriculum reform;
- Learner wellbeing; and,
- Collaborative working to support learners, particularly with schools.

- 6.1.4 The Education Directorate will establish a corporate group to work with services 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 develop a modernised relationship with the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to support our school leaders to improve pupil outcomes and wellbeing.
- 6.2 **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 has been suspended in academic year 2020-21.
- 6.3 ***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. The Welsh Government will determine when schools will be required to resume reporting on performance data.
- 6.4 ***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.
- 6.5 ***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.
- 6.6 ***Integration (across service areas)***
Effective monitoring, support, evaluation and intervention are fundamental to the Council's wellbeing objectives.
- 6.7 ***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.
- 6.8 **Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment**
The self-evaluation update and report is drafted largely for monitoring purposes and whilst raising educational standards remains a corporate priority, this report does not include any 'strategic decisions' as defined by the

Socio-Economic Duty. Therefore, a Socio-Economic Duty Assessment was not required.

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 business plans are considerate of emerging findings for improvement.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Self-Evaluation Policy
- Appendix 2 – Main SER
- Appendix 3 – Estyn Summer Letter 2021
- Appendix 4 – Education - Corporate Impact Assessment

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Blaenau Gwent County Council

EDUCATION DIRECTORATE

SELF EVALUATION POLICY

September 2020

1. Introduction

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 standard 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).

Self-evaluation activities are undertaken throughout the year and the self-evaluation report (SER) for LGES is updated in October and March of every academic year. Updates are aligned to data release dates from Welsh Government and other time points when data and information becomes available.

At the heart of self-evaluation process are four key questions:

- How well are we doing?
- How do we know?
- What do we need to do to improve further?
- How are we going to do it?

The established self-evaluation processes allows both the Council and the Education Directorate to take a critical reflective look at practice, performance and effectiveness. In this way, the Council is corporately able to ensure that its work remains focused on those areas that require improvement and is aligned to the provisions set out in the LGES framework and is aligned to our statutory obligations. The Education Directorate endeavours to ensure that all our children and young people and our educational establishments are well supported to achieve and make good progress in all learning settings across the school estate and partners e.g. Coleg Gwent and the Post 16 Learning Zone.

2. Who should be involved?

All relevant stakeholders should be involved in evaluating the Council's Education Services to ensure its continued effectiveness. To achieve this, a range of approaches are used to ensure that any barriers to participation and engagement

are minimised and where possible removed. Moving forward, this will be verified on an annual basis with additional quality assurance processes undertaken to further secure the engagement of stakeholders in this key process. To support this process, a summary SER has been developed at the end of the self-evaluation cycle. The document will highlight the key areas of progress and areas for further improvement and can be used for elected members, schools and wider stakeholders.

The summary SER document is to be distributed to the key stakeholders to ensure that they understand the organisational context and are able to recognise their important contribution to facilitate further improvement. Going forward, this will be managed through core business activities that are aligned to business as usual activities, where officers will provide greater context e.g. breakfast meetings, member briefing sessions, open evenings, parents and other corporate road show events.

For consistency, the following grading question is used in order to assess the response to the question and is used to inform the judgement as to how well the Education Directorate takes account the view of stakeholders in its improvement planning and the services it offers.

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
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3. What should be involved?

Self-evaluation will involve:

- Asking deep and searching questions about outcomes and progress, quality of provision and effectiveness of leadership and management;
- Using a range of performance data to inform and guide reflections, including that of matched data to inform judgements about progress for specific groups of learners;
- Using other information such as the Corporate Improvement Plan and family benchmarking data relevant to the particular context;
- Using ongoing reflections and enquiry into practice;
- Considering the needs of children and young people (and the various groups) in context; and,
- Using evidence from a range of sources to inform and support self-evaluation, both qualitative and quantitative.

Officers and commissioned services use a FADE approach to support the collection of this information with individual FADE requirements being set out in a FADE Register. The FADE Register also acts as a deployment list for officers and stakeholders. Deployment of FADEs is kept under review by the Education Directorate's Management Team. The Corporate Director oversees the process and

the compilation of the final SER. To complement this policy a SE Toolkit has been devised comprising aides to support the SE processes.

The toolkit is updated on an annual basis in the summer term based upon the learning from the previous self-evaluation cycle.

4. Why have self-evaluation processes?

- To provide an evidence base upon which to arrive at judgements about pupil outcomes and progress, quality of provision and the effectiveness of leadership and management of Education Services and its future improvement journey;
- To reflect on what has been done to consistently deepen understanding;
- To recognise and celebrate good practice, and where appropriate, use this to support others in line with the Vision for Education and our agreed approach to a school-led, school to school methodology;
- To ensure that stakeholders understand the context of the organisation and the contribution that they can make to further facilitate improvement; and
- To improve the performance, impact and effectiveness of Education Services and its constituent parts, including commissioned services to further enable officers and schools to make informed decisions for our children and young people.

The SE process is a cyclical one and the high level activities are summarised below, however, it should be noted that the COVID-19 response will have an impact on some aspects of self-evaluation work in 2020-21 academic year, such as suspending school categorisation:

Date	What
April to August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provisional Teacher Assessment analysis • Performance analysis (school LA vulnerable learners and ALN) • Categorisation review • Self-evaluation toolkit updated • FADES completed in line with the register for last academic year • Improvement tracker for year ahead developed • Emerging findings are reflected as actions in Directorate's business plans
September to March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All business plans completed on a quarterly basis. • Heads of Service challenge sessions via Wider Corporate Leadership Team (WCLT). • Categorisation confirmed.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning from current self-evaluation process to inform next process.
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MER: Monitoring (gathering the evidence), Evaluation (arriving at judgments) and Review (making changes as a result) are fundamental components to the improvement process and hence self-evaluation (SE). Findings from SE underpin all business, service and team plans.

There are a range of approaches in place to support this which include:

- Regular reporting to Scrutiny and Executive Committee meetings and Full Council.
- Regular reporting to the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT).
- Termly Estyn monitoring meetings with the Local Authority Link Inspector (LALI) meetings.
- Regular reporting to Directorate Management Team (DMT) meetings.
- Individual – evaluation of the effectiveness and the performance of Heads of Service through peer challenge sessions and the quality assurance FADEs and the resultant business improvement plans.
- Departmental – through team meetings, processes to hold the EAS to account such as regular EAS/ other commissioned service quality assurance meetings, DMT, FADE approach, Directorate business plan
- Monitoring by specific officer groups e.g. ALN QA, School Admission Forum, Budget Forum, JCC, HT meetings etc.
- Headteachers – engagement with Headteachers occurs throughout the year and evaluated as part of the agreed approach to self-evaluation. This work is further supplemented by a two yearly questionnaire of the assessment of the quality of the services offered by education, which coupled with the level of buy back of SLA services offered to schools which are arranged on a 3 yearly basis provide an overview of the level of satisfaction. Engagement on the draft summary SER takes place at cluster level and is facilitated by Education DMT representatives in the latter part of the autumn term. This work is concluded with the final SER presented to Headteachers for final comment in the spring term.

5. Summary

The purpose of self-evaluation is to secure ongoing improvement across services, particularly to enhance wellbeing and progress in pupil outcomes. Self-evaluation is not done in isolation and will be influenced by stakeholders with a key interest and ability to support the implementation of any identified agreed action.

The provision of high quality and tailored education services, which both support and challenge learners is a complex process frequently requiring highly effective

partnership and collaborative working and the involvement of stakeholders being a fundamental aspect to the Council's now mature approach to SE. The Self-Evaluation Policy is considerate of these complex arrangements and seeks to simplify and share the understanding, process and purpose of effective self-evaluation so that ongoing improvement is secured.

This policy is under review in September 2020 and features in the Council's Scrutiny/Executive forward work programmes. The implementation of this policy will be monitored via regular DMT meetings, through performance coaching sessions with relevant officers and by elected members via the forward work programme.

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Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

EDUCATION DIRECTORATE SELF EVALUATION REPORT

September 2021 (Education Directorate)

CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION: LYNN PHILLIPS

(Report for the Education Directorate)



**Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Education Directorate**

Self-Evaluation Report (SER) for Local Government Education Services

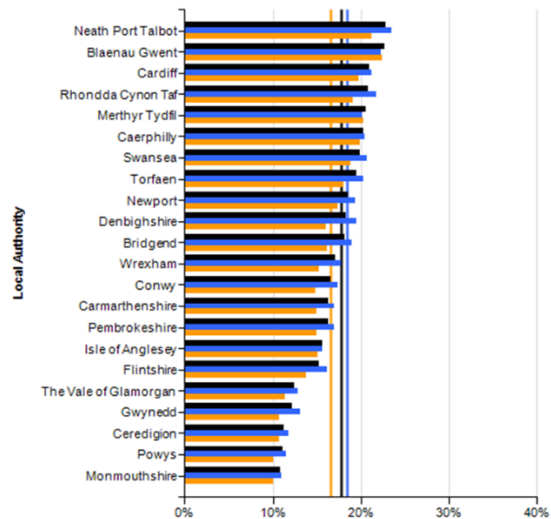
August 2021 update

Contextual information

Context

The levels of pupils eligible for free school meals in Blaenau Gwent were 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. Although eFSM data hasn't been recently produced nationally, eFSM rates have increased across the County Borough in line with the impact of COVID-19 and 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.

1.1 % pupils of statutory school age eligible for FSM 3-year average
LA comparison - 2018/19



The 2019 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) was published on 27th November 2019. It ranks small areas according to their relative deprivation levels, across 8 types of deprivation to produce an overall index. It orders areas from the most to least deprived. Scores are calculated for each type of deprivation and combined together in a weighted sum (education has the 4th highest weighting at 14%). This gives each Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) in Wales an overall score that allows them to be ranked. The 2019 (WIMD) recorded the following for Blaenau Gwent;

- **Almost 13% of LSOAs are in the most deprived 10% in Wales.**
- **Over 85% are in the top 50%- the highest proportion in the nation.**

The proportions of pupils on school action (SA) and with SEN statements were below the all-Wales means in 2018-19. This contrasts to the previous year when an above average of pupils at secondary level were categorised on school action plus (SAP) and the combined proportions of pupils on SAP and with SEN statements at secondary level was the highest in Wales. As in the previous year, the rate of pupils indicated as receiving education other than at school (EOTAS) was the lowest (<1%) in Wales during 2018-19 but the rate for those pupils electing for home education was much higher (>9 per 1000 pupils) – an increase of 3 from the previous year.

2.4% (86) primary school pupils and 1.1% (15) secondary school pupils were recorded as having English as an additional language (below being fluent) during 2018-19. Both figures were similar to the previous year and much lower than for Wales as a whole.

Secondary school attendance during 2018-19 was the same as in the previous year (92.9%). This was 0.9% below the all-Wales average.

Unauthorised absences in secondary schools during 2018-19 was 2.2%. This is a 0.4% increase compared to the previous year and 0.5% above the all-Wales average. **WG modelling for attendance vs eFSM during 2018-19 indicated that 3 of the 4 BG secondary schools had positive residuals i.e. had better than predicted attendance figures.**

Overall, the 2019 WIMD figures and high eFSM eligibility reflect very high levels of deprivation within the authority. They also indicate the significant challenge required to improve educational outcomes to levels within other similar (but less deprived) LAs and to consistently match the all-Wales averages. **However, 2018-19 performance figures show that Blaenau Gwent has achieved parity with the latter in a number of areas confirming the progress being made within its schools.**

This socio-economic context is provided as a backdrop to the SER and is not in any way a means to justify low-performance levels, indeed the Education Directorate/Council and key partners are ambitious for Blaenau Gwent's learners and the SER is increasingly demonstrating performance that is above expected levels across a number of areas of the LGES framework.

Inspection Area 1 – Outcomes LM-M Lead

1.1 Standards and progress overall

N.B.

- **There has been a relaxation of reporting performance arrangements by Welsh Government. Therefore, the Education Directorate are unable to report on school performance data for 2020-21.** Categorisation has also been suspended, so any information presented in this report is to only be used for internal self-evaluation purposes. A comprehensive data set of 2018-19 school performance is included, as the last available published data.
- The Statistics Department of the Welsh Government issued the following statement in the statistical bulletin for National Test results published on 22nd August 2018:
*'Following consultation on publication of teacher assessment data and National Reading and Numeracy Test data, the **Statistical Release will no longer publish data at a local authority level.** Analysis of the progress measure by local authority was presented in the Statistical Release in previous years. This is no longer published as a result of this change.'* Consequently, the SER does not refer to comparative outcomes for LAs as in previous years. However, there is reference to outcomes and progress for Blaenau Gwent and for its constituent schools.
- The WG statistical bulletin SFR64/2018 included the following statement:
*'The revised AoL were introduced on a statutory basis from September 2015. This means that the cohort of children that started Reception in September 2015 were the first children to be formally assessed against the revised outcomes at the end of the Foundation Phase in the summer of 2018. **Comparisons of Foundation Phase outcomes with previous years should, therefore, be avoided as they are not measured on a comparable basis.**'* The bulletin also confirmed that *'the decrease in the FPI between 2017 and 2018 is due to a change in policy and recalibration of the Foundation Phase outcomes.'*
- **All school and LA results should be viewed with due consideration of the fall in all of the main performance indicators at FP, KS2 and KS3 at national level in 2019.**

Foundation Phase

At LA level:

LO5+ outcomes fell for all performance indicators except LLCW in 2019 (the latter result only related to the single Welsh medium school in BG). The lowest fall was in PSD. These falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. Except for LLCW, the results were also below the 2019 national averages with the greatest difference for LLCE. While the Y2 cohorts were different in years 2017-19 and acknowledging the WG advice above, there is indication of a falling trend in LO5+ outcomes during the last 2 years.

LO6+ outcomes also fell for all performance indicators except LLCW in 2019. The pattern was similar to that at LO5+ but with smaller changes for each indicator. The pattern again reflects that observed within Wales as a whole. Except for LLCW, the results were also below the 2019 national averages with the greatest difference for PSD.

3-year performance trend:**At LO5+**

Except for Welsh, both BG and the national averages fell for all performance indicators during the last 2 years. However, the falls were greater for BG in 2019 and so increased the performance gap between the two.

At LO6+

With the exception of Welsh, both BG and national averages fell by a similar amount during the last 2 years and generally maintained the performance gap between the two.

At school level:

Just over one-half of schools had lower LO5+ results in 2019 than in the previous year. Except for PSD, a majority of schools also had lower LO5+ results than their 2019 targets (as in the previous year). The pattern for LO6+ outcomes is generally similar to those for LO5+ However, almost two-thirds of schools improved LLCE results in 2019 while a similar proportion of schools exceeded their targets in MD. This suggests target setting by teachers is more reliable at this level.

In summary, the WG ‘health warnings’ regarding 2018 FP results strongly indicate that comparative BG outcomes (at both school and LA level) should be viewed with caution. Given the changes predicted by the revised curriculum, revised assessment criteria and the decline in national results in 2019, the fall in school results (with the exception of Welsh) and at LA level might be expected. **However, the differences between BG and national figures are small and indicate that LA performance is generally good and particularly so when contextualised for deprivation factors.** School target setting procedures continue to be a concern with a majority of schools attaining lower than target results in 2019. If school results reflect the true ability levels of pupils, then (in these schools) targets have been set too high.

Key Stage 2**At LA level:**

L4+ outcomes fell for all the main performance indicators in 2019. The greatest fall was for Welsh (but based on the single Welsh medium primary school in the LA). Writing outcomes also fell noticeably in 2019. The differences were generally commensurate with the gains made in the previous year making 2019 outcomes similar to those of 2017. These falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. The results were also below the 2019 national averages with the greatest difference for Welsh and English.

L5+ outcomes also fell for all performance indicators except Welsh 2nd language in 2019. As for L4+, the greatest fall was in Welsh. The falls again reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. Except for Welsh 2nd language, outcomes were also below the 2019 national averages with again the greatest differences for Welsh 1st language and maths.

3-year performance trend:**At L4+**

Both BG and the national averages fell for all performance indicators in 2019. However, the falls were greater for BG in 2019 in the core subjects and so increased the performance gap between the two. 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.

At L5+

There was a similar pattern to that shown at L4+ for the main core subjects i.e. a decline in BG performance which was a little higher than that observed nationally.

At school level:

Just over one-half of schools had lower L4+ results in 2019 than in the previous year. However, a majority of schools had similar or higher L4+ results compared to their 2019 targets. Most schools had lower L5+ outcomes than in 2018 while about one-half of schools had L5+ results below their 2019 targets.

In summary, BG performance declined in all L4+ and L5+ indicators in 2019. As previously indicated, these falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole indicating that LA performance is generally good and particularly so when contextualised for deprivation factors. However, the decline in BG outcomes was greater than for Wales as a whole resulting in widening performance gaps in 2019. A majority of schools had similar or higher results compared to their 2019 targets indicating a better correlation between the two than for the FP. Graphs showing the relationship between English & maths performance vs eFSM generally identified the same underperforming schools as in previous years and these continue to be of concern with regard to the quality of learning and pupil standards.

FP-KS2 value-added performance (2015-19)**At LA level**

Using national data:

- FP-KS2 value-added progress in NC language fell to become a little negative and moved below the national figure.
- FP-KS2 value-added progress in NC maths fell a little but remained above the national figure.

Using aggregated pupil level data:

- FP-KS2 value-added progress in language & maths was a little higher than expected but declined a little in both areas with a falling trend for the last 2 years.
- FP-KS2 value-added progress in reading was better than expected and improved from the previous year. Progress in numeracy reasoning was also better than expected and similar to that for reading.

At school level

- All but 3 schools averaged 2+ NC levels progress in 2019 in both language & maths.
- Progress in reading was better than expected in about two-thirds of mainstream schools
- About one-half of schools improved progress in reading in 2019.
- Progress in numeracy reasoning was better than expected in a majority of schools.
- A minority of schools had inconsistencies between NC and national test progress scores.

In summary, with the exception of NC language, value-added performance was good using either NC levels or national test scores as performance indicators.

However, progress in NC language was a little lower than expected and below the national figures for 2015-19.

Key Stage 3

At LA level:

Core subjects & Welsh 2nd language.

L5+ outcomes fell for all the main performance indicators in 2019 and particularly for maths and science. These falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. The results were well below the 2019 national averages with the greatest differences for English and maths. However, writing outcomes noticeably improved.

L6+ outcomes improved for English and Welsh 2nd language in 2019 but fell for maths and science. The greatest improvement was in Welsh 2nd language and the highest fall in science. These falls again reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. However, all results were well below the 2019 national averages with the greatest differences for Welsh 2nd language and science. Literacy outcomes (oracy, reading & writing) all improved in 2019 – particularly for writing.

Welsh 1st language

- KS3 learners attended YGG Gwynllyw in neighbouring LA. Figures relate to performance of just BG pupils at Gwynllyw and not to the whole-school.
- L5+, 6+ and 7+ outcomes all improved in 2019 with the former two outcomes higher than the all-Wales means. 90.5% of the 2019 BG cohort also attained the CSI compared to 86.2% doing so nationally.

3-year performance trend:

At L5+

Both BG and the national averages fell for all performance indicators in 2019. However, except for Welsh 2nd language, the falls were greater for BG and so increased the performance gap between the two.

At L6+

There was a similar pattern to that shown at L4+ for maths & science i.e. a decline in BG performance which was a little higher than that observed nationally. However, L6+ English results improved in BG with a consequent narrowing of the performance gap. Welsh 2nd language results also improved in 2019 but also did at the national level.

Non-core subjects.

L5+ outcomes fell in all non-core subjects in 2019 and particularly for art, history and geography. These falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. As in previous years, MFL results were by far the lowest (as was the case nationally). All results were lower than the 2019 national means and particularly so for MFL and history.

L6+ outcomes also fell in a majority of non-core subjects in 2019 and particularly in art, D&T and music. As in previous years, ICT results were the highest and MFL by far the lowest. However, there were modest improvements for MFL & PE. Changes in performance were generally greater than at L5+. All results were lower than the 2018 national means and particularly so for MFL and history.

At school level:

Core subjects & Welsh 2nd language.

There were only 5 areas of improvement for the main L5+ performance indicators in 2019. Two out of the four secondary schools had improved L5+ English outcomes. One of these also improved Welsh 2nd language outcomes while another attained higher science results. Three schools also improved their L5+ oracy & writing results. However, one school had lower results in each performance indicator. Three of the four schools improved L6+ outcomes in English but with falls in maths and science.

The remaining school's results were the opposite with higher results in maths and science but lower outcomes for English. Three schools also improved their L6+ reading & writing results. A majority of schools had results below their 2019 targets at both levels and so questions the accuracy and reliability of internal assessment and target-setting procedures.

Non-core subjects.

L5+ outcomes fell in all non-core subjects at three of the four schools and in a majority of these at the remaining secondary school.

In summary, for core subjects & Welsh 2nd language, BG performance was adequate. Outcomes declined in all L5+ indicators in 2019 and in maths and science at L6+. However, L6+ outcomes improved for English and particularly for Welsh 2nd language. As previously indicated, these falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole but, as for KS2, the decline in BG outcomes were sometimes greater than for Wales as a whole resulting in widening performance gaps in 2019. All results except L5+ Welsh 2nd language were well below the national averages but this might be expected given the high level of deprivation factors within BG and their likely impact upon pupils' learning. At school level, there were some improved outcomes for core subjects but a majority of performance indicators declined with L5+ maths results falling in all 4 secondary schools. However, all but one school had improved L5+ oracy and writing results and all schools improved L6+ writing outcomes. There is a concern regarding assessment reliability at two of the four schools. Results also indicate target setting as generally unreliable in schools at KS3 (as in previous years).

For non-core subjects, performance fell in all at L5+ & in all but MFL and PE at L6+. As previously indicated, these falls generally reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. The differences between BG outcomes and national averages were generally large and particularly for MFL and at L6+.

KS2-3 value-added performance (2016-19)

At LA level

Using national data:

- KS2-3 value-added progress in NC English and in maths fell considerably and was well below the national figure in both subjects.

Using aggregated pupil level data:

- KS2-3 value-added progress in NC maths was barely adequate and was unsatisfactory in NC English.
- KS2-3 value-added progress in reading was better than expected and improved from the previous year.
- Progress in numeracy reasoning was also better than expected and twice that for reading.

At school level

- **3 of the 4 mainstream secondary schools maintained or improved progress for NC English** with 2 of the 4 schools having expected progress for this subject.
- 2 of the 4 schools maintained progress for NC maths and had expected progress for this subject.
- One specific school had the lowest progress in both NC English & maths.
- Progress in reading was better than expected in in all centres.
- 3 of the 4 mainstream secondary schools maintained or improved progress for reading.
- Progress in numeracy reasoning was better than expected in 3 of the 4 mainstream schools.

- A significant proportion of pupils regressed more than 10 SAS points in both reading and numeracy reasoning. An inordinate number of these pupils were from one centre.
- Some schools had inconsistencies between NC and national test progress scores.

In summary, 2016-19 value-added progress (as measured by NC levels) was barely adequate in maths and unsatisfactory in English. However, progress (as measured using national test results) was good in both reading and numeracy reasoning. A majority of secondary schools had better than expected progress for these test results. However, a disproportionate number of pupils at one centre were indicated as regressing in both these skill areas. As for KS2, some schools had inconsistencies between NC assessments and national test progress scores and so questions the accuracy & reliability of teacher assessments within these centres.

Key Stage 4 (narrative based on provisional SSSP data; however, for final KS4 information see page 13).

The following points should be noted with regard to the provisional KS4 results:

- The Welsh Government have stated that attainment across Wales in 2018 was negatively impacted by a change in early entry patterns, a change in type of cohort and the type of exams taken. Consequently, direct comparison between 2017 & 18 results may be unreliable. The same may apply in 2019.
- The 2018 GCSE cohort was smaller than previous years by 4.2% with GCSE exam entries 8.9% lower than in 2017.
- A record number of learners in Year 10 sat GCSEs early in 2017 which resulted in a reduction in the number of exam entries by Year 11 learners in some subjects in 2018. A significant number of Year 11 learners achieved their GCSEs in Summer or November 2017 and have not re-sat examinations in 2018. The reported results indicated the best results for 16 year-olds in 2018, who attained GCSE outcomes in either Y10 or Y11.
- There were 15 new or reformed GCSEs in Wales in 2018 including 6 new GCSE Science qualifications.
- Entries significantly increased for all these new GCSEs in 2018, influenced by changes to school performance measures. Consequently, was difficult to make meaningful comparisons with previous years' results due to these changes. The same may apply in 2019.
- The only changes to the 2018 performance measures related to the inclusion of GCSE science only as part of the Capped Points 9 score, and GCSE science results only reported in the A*-C science figures. In previous years, BTEC science results were included in these figures.
- The new National Measures were reported on for the first time in 2019 and so, with the exception of the *capped 9 points score*, there are no previous outcomes to compare with.

At LA level:

N.B Y11 cohort numbers in both schools and in the LA as a whole have fallen during the last 2 years. The smaller numbers make statistical comparisons increasingly unreliable.

- Of the indicators with previous available data, one-half improved in 2019.
- 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 proportions of learners gaining L2+ and 5 A*/A grades were below the LA targets.

- BG results for the new national measures were all lower than the national means. Most results were also lower than expected in relation to the LA's eFSM entitlement.
- However, the Welsh Bacc. result was higher than expected in relation to the LA's eFSM entitlement.
- Differences between actual and modelled outcomes for the five 2019 interim measures indicated BG had negative residuals for all indicators except for the Skills Challenge Certificate results. However, BG had higher than expected ranking in relation to eFSM except for numeracy & science. This was particularly so for the Skills Challenge Certificate result which ranked 7th out of the 22 Welsh LAs.
- The proportion of pupils achieving no qualifications doubled to 2.4% in 2019 and was over twice as high as the all-Wales average.

3-year performance trend:

- For the main performance indicators where previous years' data is available, all improved during 2017-19 in spite of a modest fall in the proportion of pupils attaining L2+ and 5 A*/A grades in 2019. In contrast, some of these indicators declined at national level during the same period.

Welsh 1st language

- KS4 learners attended YGG Gwynllyw in neighbouring LA. Figures relate to performance of just BG pupils at Gwynllyw and not to the whole-school.
- The proportion attaining A*-C grades increased in 2019 with an improving trend during the last 2 years. 17% of the 2019 BG cohort attained A*/A grades in Welsh 1st language and 48% attained L2+ compared with 43.3% of those learners in BG-based English medium schools.

(Awaiting KS3-4 progress data).

Welsh 2nd language

Full-course results

- The proportion of pupils attaining A*/A grades fell in 2019 (as was the case nationally) and was about half the all-Wales average.
- The proportion of pupils attaining A*-C grades also fell in 2019 (as was the case nationally) and was about 10% below the all-Wales average.
- The proportion of pupils attaining A*-G grades fell a little in 2019 but was similar to the all-Wales average.

Short-course results

- The proportion of pupils attaining A*/A grades increased in 2019 but was well below the all-Wales average.
- The proportion of pupils attaining A*-C grades also increased in 2019 but remained below the all-Wales average.
- The proportion of pupils attaining A*-G grades fell a little in 2019 but was similar to the all-Wales average.

Overall, the short-course results are no longer comparable with national figures due to the relatively low numbers entered across Wales as a whole. 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.

At school level:

There was considerable variation in outcomes between BG schools in 2019:

- Of the indicators with previous available data, over one-half improved in 2019.
- 2 of the 4 mainstream schools improved in at least one-half of these performance indicators in 2019.
- 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 A*/A grades, English & capped 9 points scores.
- Ebbw Fawr and Tredegar performed best for the new National Measures in 2019.
- L2 maths & 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 (pre-existing) performance indicators in 2019

Provisional data using modelled estimates for 2019 (prepared by EAS) indicated that:

- Most of the residuals indicate 'expected' outcomes for BG schools with residual values close to zero.
- Better than expected outcomes are indicated at Tredegar for Capped 9 points and at Ebbw Fawr for WB skills challenge.

In summary, BG outcomes improved in a number of important performance indicators in 2019-21. The improvement in the proportion of pupils attaining higher GCSE grades in English and maths is particularly encouraging and may allow pupils to pursue appropriately challenging post-16 courses and improve their life chances. In addition, outcomes for pre-existing performance indicators (with available data) all improved during 2017-19 in spite of a modest fall in the proportion of pupils attaining L2+ and 5 A*/A grades in 2019. In contrast, some of these indicators declined at national level during the same period. At school level, there were improvements for most schools and particularly so for Abertillery in 2019. The increase in the proportions of pupils attaining A*/A grades in English & maths is particularly encouraging. However, the fall L2 maths / numeracy outcomes in most schools is a concern as is the decline in Tredegar's outcomes in 2019.

KS3-4 value-added performance

At **LA level**, there was a significant difference in progress between English language and maths in 2019 (as in previous years). Progress in English was much higher than for maths (and also higher in each individual school). Overall progress in 2019 was lower than in the previous year for both subjects with falling trends during the last 2 years. The maths results indicated that, on average, little progress was achieved during KS4. The average grade for both English and maths was a D. Progress was improved in each area when 'best of' results were included but the rate for English / literature remained more than twice that for maths / numeracy.

At school level:

2017-19 KS3-4 value-added performance for English was barely adequate with only one of the 4 schools (Tredegar) averaging better than 1 'NC level' progress during the key stage. Outcomes improved when literature outcomes were included with 3 of the 4 mainstream schools achieving more than 1 NC level progress. Average grades also improved when literature results were included with 3 of the 4 mainstream schools achieving an average C grade for this combination. Tredegar achieved the best progress in 2019 while Brynmawr and Ebbw Fawr benefited most by including literature outcomes.

Of the 507 pupils who remained in the school throughout KS4:

- Almost two-thirds progressed 1 or more 'NC levels' in English.
- About 28% progressed 2 or more 'NC levels' (compared to about one-half in 2017 and one-third in 2018).
- About 4% progressed 3 or more 'NC levels' (compared with about 10% in 2017 & 5% in 2018).
- Almost one-third failed to progress at least 1 'NC level'(about one-quarter in 2018).
- About 12% actually regressed one or more levels during KS4.

2017-19 KS3-4 value-added performance for maths was unsatisfactory with all schools averaging less than one-half 'NC level' progress during the key stage and with Brynmawr and the River centre having average regression during this period. Progress rates improved when numeracy outcomes were included but, even so, no school achieved expected progress for this period. None of the centres achieved an average C grade for maths but one (Ebbw Fawr) did so when numeracy results were included.

Of the 507 pupils who remained in the school throughout KS4:

- About 43% progressed 1 or more 'NC levels' in maths.
- About 13% progressed 2 or more 'NC levels' (compared to about one-quarter in 2017 and one-fifth in 2018).
- Less than 2% progressed 3 or more 'NC levels' (compared with about 5% in 2018).
- About one-half failed to progress at least 1 'NC level'(about one-third in 2018).
- Nearly one-third actually regressed one or more level during KS4.

In summary,

- KS3-4 value-added progress declined for both English and maths during 2017-19 compared with previous years.
- KS3-4 value-added progress for maths was much weaker than for English.
- Progress improved notably when literature and numeracy outcomes were included in value-added calculations but, even so, progress for maths /numeracy remained unsatisfactory.
- Too many pupils failed to progress (or even regressed) in English and particularly in maths in KS4 during 2017-19.
- KS3-4 value-added progress declined for both English and maths in nearly all schools during 2017-19 compared with previous years.
- KS3-4 value-added progress for maths was much weaker than for English in all mainstream schools.
- Progress improved notably when literature and numeracy outcomes were included in value-added calculations but, even so, progress for maths / numeracy remained unsatisfactory.
- On average, pupils at the River Centre regressed in both English and maths during 2017-19.
- On average, pupils at Abertillery and Brynmawr made no progress or regressed in maths during 2017-19.

Performance against WG modelled estimates

WG residuals have been calculated from a regression line produced by plotting (National Measure) performance outcomes against % eFSM for all Welsh secondary schools and then aggregated at LA level. A positive value indicates better than expected performance in relation to eFSM while a negative value indicates lower than expected performance. For BG in 2018-19:

- All of the residuals are negative except for the Welsh Skills Challenge result.
- The maths / numeracy and science residuals are weaker than for language / literacy.
- The capped 9 points score for BG is very close to the modelled figure. This is mainly attributable to BG pupils having better outcomes in their 6 'optional' subjects. For BG pupils, 35% of the capped 9 points were attributable to non-compulsory qualifications compared with just 27% in Wales as a whole.

'Thirds' outcomes

For 2018-19, in each of the interim KS4 measures, the cohort for each school was divided into thirds based on attainment, showing the **average points score** for the upper third, middle third and lower third of the cohort. The proportions of learners in each national third was also been determined (and compared with family schools when data available). The figures for BG secondary schools indicated:

- 3 of the 4 schools have the highest proportion of pupils in the lower attainment third.
- Abertillery and Brynmawr have the highest proportion of pupils in the lower attainment third.
- All 4 schools have the lowest proportion of pupils in the higher attainment third.
- Abertillery and Brynmawr have the lowest proportions of pupils in the higher attainment third.

School outcomes were then compared against modelled outcomes for FSM eligibility levels and compared to averages for other schools in Wales. A positive value indicates better than expected performance in relation to eFSM while a negative value indicate lower than expected performance. The results for BG schools in 2018-19 were:

- About one-half of the residuals were positive.
- 3 of the 4 schools had relatively high positive residuals in the lower attainment third.
- 3 of the 4 schools had negative residuals in the higher attainment third (but all were relatively small).

The results reflect previous findings which indicated that the proportion of BG pupils attaining higher grades (and consequently point scores) was notable lower than the all-Wales average.

Summary of KS4 Performance in Blaenau Gwent – 2020-21 (For information only, not to be used for comparative purposes)

N.B. The information does not contain results relating to the River Centre or Pen-y-Cwm Special School

- The performance detailed results from the Centre Determined Grade (CDGs) model developed by Welsh Government, has been provided directly from schools. (**N.B.** APS is Average Points Score)
- **One school** - Performance declined in all indicators when compared to the 19-20 Academic Year, except for Best Science, which saw improved performance of +0.2 points.
- **One School** - Performance improved in all indicators, except for Numeracy, which saw a decline of -3.0 points.
- **One school** - Performance improved in all indicators except for Capped 9 and the Skills Challenge which saw declines of -7 points and -0.5 points accordingly.

- **One school** - Performance improved in all indicators except for 5A*-As and Best of Science which saw a slight decline of -0.2% and -0.2 points accordingly.
- While there is no longer a requirement to report on the L2 Including English/Welsh & Maths indicator, many schools calculate this as a legacy performance measure. Comparison with the 2019 results in this indicator (no results were collected in 2020), demonstrate that there has been significant improvement in performance - +8.9%, +15.9%, +5.1% and +4.7% at the four secondary settings.
- **Of the performance indicators detailed above, 20 of 31 (65%) demonstrated improved performance at KS4.**

Post-16 outcomes (provisional data)

A & AS level Outcomes

With the exception of Welsh-medium pupils attending YGG Gwynllyw in a neighbouring LA, most post-16 BG learners attend Coleg Gwent and, in particular, the Learning Zone for post-16 education.

For learners attending the **Learning Zone** during 2019-20:

- Completion rates for vocational courses were lower than for academic ones.
- Attainment rates (where learners completed courses) were similar for vocational and academic courses.
- Success rates (where learner did not complete courses) were higher for academic courses.

For learners following A & AS level courses across **all Coleg Gwent campuses** during 2019-20:

- At **AS level**, the proportions of learners attaining A*-C and A*-E grades were a little higher than the all-Wales means. However, the proportion attaining A*/A grades was noticeably lower than the national figure.
- Outcomes at **A level** were similar to those for AS level. The proportions of learners attaining A*-C and A*-E grades were a little higher than the all-Wales means. However, the proportion attaining A*/A grades was noticeably lower than the national figure.

N.B. The BG Learning Zone's provisional performance for 2020-21 will be updated during the Autumn term 2021, however, an initial view is that academic 'A' Level KS5 performance remains relatively strong overall as detailed below;

- A Level Pass Rate 99.1% in 2020-21, which is on the Wales mean average.
- A*-A grades 31% (29% previous year).
- A*-C grades 82% (88% year previous).

Learner Destinations (2019-20)

The **2019-20** Careers Wales surveys for Blaenau Gwent indicated the following destinations for **Y11 learners**:

- Many BG learners (86%) remained in full time education during 2019-20 an increase of 1% from the previous year. The 2019 figure was about 3% lower than the national average.

- Most BG learners opting for full time education returned to college but a few (4%) stayed on at school. These either continued in Pen-y-Cwm SEN school or moved to other LA sixth form schools.
- No BG learners were recorded as continuing in part-time education during the last few years.
- A small proportion of pupils (approx. 4%) undertook WBT during the last 3 years – slightly higher than the Welsh average of 3%.
- A small proportion (approx. 3%) entered employment - again slightly higher than the national average of 2%.
- Number of Year 11 leavers (17 year olds) - 9 individuals (%) were NEET at the time of the 2019-20 survey – 2 less than in the previous year and a lower proportion than for Wales as a whole (1.7%). All individuals are known and where needed supported individually via the Youth Service as part of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework in BG.
- A number of learners (13) failed to respond to the 2019-20 survey – a notable decrease from the previous year. However, this was in part due limited engagement at times due to the pandemic. Careers Wales shares all non-respondent data with the Youth Service, and all individuals are contacted through a visit, and where needed offer support or referral to another appropriate agency.
- Number of 18/19 year olds known to be NEET – No whole authority destination data for 2018 is currently available for years 12 & 13. Careers Wales only report on 18-year-old NEET figures for young people who are in sixth form. DWP and Statistical data provides information for 18 – 24 year olds. Therefore, as Blaenau Gwent has a tertiary model, the only data published by Careers Wales for 18 year olds in Blaenau Gwent specifically is for learners leaving Pen-y-Cwm, an SEN school. Therefore, a partnership approach is used to ensure that referrals are made between organisations when young people either 'wobble', leave provision or need support. Young people are identified through the NEET Practitioner Forum, a sub group of the Raising Aspirations Group, and support is provided. Data is shared between the college, training providers and the Local Authority.
- Work based Learning providers share their data annually and will be available later in the autumn 2020. Coleg Gwent provides more detailed information regarding learner outcomes during 2019-20 to offset the gap in the Careers Wales data.

School Categorisation: 2016 to 2019:

NB: All schools are categorised on an annual basis in accordance with the National Model for Categorisation. The process has taken place at a regional level and historic national moderation has confirmed that the regional process is robust. However, there has been no school categorisation process undertaken since 2019.

Due to national reporting arrangement Special Schools are not included in these figures. Special schools in Blaenau Gwent include Pen y Cwm (3-19), which is categorised as green and The River Centre (3-16) which is categorised as yellow.

Blaenau Gwent has a strong position overall on school categorisation and a relatively small number of Schools (4) Causing Concern, with progress being identified in 3 of the SCC schools.

The proportion of **primary schools** categorised as green (i.e. highly effective) has tripled during the last 3 years with 86% now categorised as either green or yellow (i.e. effective or highly effective schools). The number of amber schools (i.e. in need of improvement) and red schools (i.e. in need of urgent improvement) has fallen with just 2 amber and 1 red school in the last 3 years.

Of the 4 **secondary schools** within the authority, one was categorised as green during the last 3 years but 2 identified as red during the same period and 1 as yellow.

Overall, the 2018 /19 data confirms that over the last 3 years schools have improved their categorisation profile; many (83%) of schools are now either green or yellow with only two schools in amber and two schools red. This is a significant improvement when compared to the profile in 2014 when only two schools were green. This demonstrates that schools and clusters continue to build their capacity to self-improve and are becoming more resilient.

Historical School Categorisation

- **3 primary schools** were categorised as green for 2016, 2017 and 2018 (Beaufort Hill, Deighton & Georgetown) **with 3 primary schools** categorised as green for 2017 and 2018 (All Saints, Glanhowy and St Mary's CIW)
- **2 primary schools** were promoted to green in 2018 (Blaen-y-Cwm and Cwm) and 1 primary school promoted from amber to yellow (St Illtyd's Primary School) and 1 demoted to amber (Brynbach) but none demoted to red. It is anticipated that both amber schools will improve their categorisation status later this year.
- At **secondary level**, Tredegar was categorised as green during the last 3 years and Abertillery red during the same period. Ebbw Fawr was promoted to amber in 2017 and to yellow in 2018, but Brynmawr remains categorised as red. Overall, half of the schools are in need of improvement with 1 of these schools demonstrating significant progress and it is anticipated that this school will move to amber in the next categorisation round.

School Categorisation January 2019

Overall, National School Categorisation in January 2019 indicated further continued improvement when compared with the previous year in terms of the number of green and yellow schools:

- The number of Red schools remains the same **(2)**. Two schools remain categorised as Red (Abertillery Learning Community and Brynmawr Foundation School).
- 2 schools were categorised as Amber (one school Rhos-y-Fedwen Primary remained as Amber with Brynbach Primary School being categorised from yellow to amber due to the need to provide additional support. Overall this represented a reduction of 2 schools compared to the previous year.)
- **10** schools were categorised as yellow (Coed-y-Garn Primary, Glyncoed Primary, St Joseph's Primary, St Mary's RC Primary, Sofrydd Primary Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg, Ystruth Primary with a further 3 schools moving from Amber to Yellow, including River Centre, EFLC and St Illtyd's Primary)
- **11** schools were categorised as Green (All Saints RC Primary, Beaufort Hill Primary, Deighton Primary, Georgetown Primary, Glanhowy Primary, Pen-y-Cwm Special, St Mary's CIW Primary and Tredegar Comprehensive School with a further 3 schools moving from Yellow to Green Blaen-y-Cwm Primary, Cwm

Primary and Willowtown Primary). This is again an improvement on the previous year and over a three-year period represents a significant improvement in the percentage of schools categorised as either Yellow or Green and demonstrates the improved capacity and leadership within our schools.

School Categorisation January 2020

Overall, National School Categorisation in January 2020 indicated further sustained improvement over the period.

- The number of Red schools remains the same **(2)**. Two schools remain categorised as Red (Abertillery Learning Community and Brynmawr Foundation School), as both schools are in an Estyn category.
- **2** schools were categorised as Amber (Glyncoed Primary School and Sofyrdd Primary School.)
- **10** schools were categorised as Yellow (Coed-y-Garn Primary, Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, St Illtyd's Primary, St Joseph's Primary, St Mary's RC Primary, Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg, River Centre with a further 2 schools moving from Amber to Yellow (Brynbach Primary and Rhos-y-Fedwen Primary) and one Deighton Primary School moving from Green to yellow)
- **11** schools were categorised as Green (All Saints RC Primary, Blaen-y-Cwm Primary, Beaufort Hill Primary, Cwm Primary, Georgetown Primary, Glanhwy Primary, Pen-y-Cwm Special, St Mary's CiW Primary, Willowtown Primary, Ystruth Primary and Tredegar Comprehensive School. This is again an improvement and represents a significant improvement in the percentage of schools categorised as either Yellow or Green and further demonstrates the improved capacity and leadership within our schools.

Schools Causing Concern

Sofrydd Primary School was categorised as Amber in January 2020 as the school development plan was identified as unsatisfactory and became part of the regional schools causing concern arrangements. A review identified 12 key recommendations for securing improvement and now informs the work programme that is being progressed. Key to this improvement agenda has been the need to improve governance arrangements, which have continued to be strengthened through the successful recruitment of a new Chair of Governors and Vice Chair of Governors who has continued to work alongside the Acting Executive Headteacher, this relationship has continued to deliver satisfactory progress against the recommendations, however, there is a need for the school improvement service to verify judgements. At the start of the Summer term 2021 a new Acting Headteacher commenced in post.

Schools in Receipt of a Statutory Warning Notice

Abertillery Learning Community (Red)

The school is currently subject to a LA warning notice to improve and a programme of intervention. However, it is important to note that for 2020 as a result of the pandemic there are no comparative performance measurements that can be relied upon. A school leadership review was undertaken in the Autumn term of 2017, which resulted in LA intervention and when the school was inspected in February 2018 it was then placed in the statutory category of requiring significant improvement. A follow-up visit was held in July 2019 and Inspectors noted the progress that had been made in respect of many of the recommendations for action from the

inspection, although noted that many of the improvements are at an early stage of development and as such confirmed that the school will remain within an Estyn category. Following a successful period of leadership continuity by two established Headteachers, the Governing Body successfully recruited a suitably experienced Headteacher to the permanent position of Headteacher and also appointed a new Chair of Governors. Both have been in place now for in excess of 2 years. The ALC revenue budget provisional out-turn is a significantly improved position with a deficit circa £324,000 against the projected deficit of over £1m+.

The Headteacher presented reports in each of the SCC meetings. In the October 2020, December 2020, February 2021 and March 2021 SCC meetings, the Headteacher reported on actions taken against each of the recommendations in the current term, with limitations on making school judgements due to the circumstances of the pandemic. It was acknowledged, however, by the SCC Panel that satisfactory progress is being made, based on the evidence seen and presented and that the Learning Community is in a more stable position, especially from a governance perspective. A broad range of actions were taken in all priority areas and each were reported on in detail in the meetings, including outlining the provision developed in distance and blended learning across the community, with a focus on both learning and wellbeing of pupils, staff and the wider school community. It is expected that Estyn will return to the school in the near future to undertake a monitoring visit.

Brynmawr Foundation (Amber to Yellow and to Red)

In December 2013 Brynmawr Foundation School was inspected by Estyn and placed in Estyn monitoring; with an adequate judgement for its current performance and prospects for improvement. The school was categorised as Amber in 2014 and 2015. The school was issued with a statutory Warning Notice in 2015 to improve standards, particularly in Maths. Support was put in place and Key Stage 4 outcomes improved significantly in 2016. The Warning Notice was subsequently lifted.

Due to the improvement secured, in 2016 the school was classified as Yellow, having made strong progress against Estyn's recommendations and with improved performance at the end of KS4. However, following an unexpected decline in KS4 performance in 2017, particularly in Maths and the outcome of an EAS review of the effectiveness of leadership and management at the school, the school was categorised as Red in the 2017-18 in the national school's categorisation process and invoked the LA powers of intervention. The school continues to be subject to a LA statutory warning notice to improve and after a period of support, intervention is now in place.

In the autumn term 2019, the school was inspected by Estyn and was placed in a category of Significant Measures. Since that time, governance has significantly improved. However, it is important to note that for 2020 as a result of the pandemic there are no comparative performance measurements that can be relied upon. The school's engagement in regional Professional Learning Opportunities and professional networks has been strong. The school has had several changes in senior leadership since the core inspection.

River Centre (Amber to Yellow)

In the Spring term of 2021, the Council acted promptly and issued a pre-warning letter to the Chair of Governors of the River Centre. The pre-warning notice clearly set out the Council's areas of concern, which were predicated around the school's pupil capacity and admission arrangements for learners. There are also other concerns that have emerged, such as the quality of the School Development Plan that will be covered through the SCC protocols. Following the issuing of the pre-warning notice a number of governors resigned from the governing body, which included both the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors. These vacancies have now been filled and a new Chair of Governors appointed as well as three strong LA Governors being appointed. The Council are considering the next steps in supporting the River Centre who are part of the Learning Network Schools partnership arrangements, in line with regional protocols.

2016 – 2019 School Inspections:

NB: Estyn Inspections have been suspended since the start of the pandemic.

Standards

For KQ1, a majority (67%) of centres were judged as good and none as unsatisfactory during 2016-19. No judgements were awarded in the inspection of the non-maintained settings as the cohort was too small to be representative

Wellbeing

For KQ2, many (83%) centres were judged as good and none as unsatisfactory during 2016-19.

Teaching and Learning experience

For KQ 3, many (75%) educational establishments were judged as good and none as unsatisfactory during 2016-19.

Care support and Guidance

For KQ 4 many (75%) of educational establishments were judged as good with 1 school judged as Excellent and none as unsatisfactory during 2016-19.

Leadership and Management

For KQ 5 many (75%) educational establishments were judged as good with 1 establishment judged as Unsatisfactory.

During the period excellent practice was identified at Blaen-y-Cwm against KQ 4 (care support and guidance) and at Tredegar Comprehensive for the quality indicators of Wellbeing, Learning Environments and Partnership working and at Sofrydd for partnership working.

7 Estyn re inspection monitoring visits/activities took place during the period 2016-19 with a few remaining in a category (1 middle school (14%). This is an improvement on the same time last year where 2 establishments were subject to follow up activity.

The proportion of educational establishments attaining good judgements has continued to increase during 2016-19 and the proportion receiving adequate or worse judgements has continued to decrease over the same period. This generally reflects improved standards, teaching and leadership in Blaenau Gwent educational settings. The case study requested from Blaen-y-Cwm identified excellent practice further evidences the improving standard of outcome / provision.

The school now subject to SI (ALC) continues to receive tailored bespoke support from the LA and EAS. The most recent Estyn monitoring visit noted that progress has been made against some of the recommendations and a further revisit was anticipated in 2021, but this did not happen as a consequence of Estyn inspection formal visits being suspended. Progress through recommendations forms the core of the Improvement Plan that is in place and the LA appropriately discharges its statutory function for a school causing a concern through the use of powers of intervention through the statutory Schools Causing Concern framework. A forensic approach to progress through the Intervention Panel is taken which encompasses a Council wide support programme at all levels of the organisation to ensure

progress continues to be made at an appropriate pace. **The school in Special Measures (BFS) is now part of the WG initiative of Multi-Agency Support for Schools in Special Measures and a 'one plan' approach has been adopted.** This will replace the SCC arrangements for BFS.

2019-20 Youth Service Outcomes:

The Youth Service data demonstrates the 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.

In 2019/20, 18% (2054 individual young people) of 11-25 year olds voluntarily registered with the Youth Service, a 1% increase since the previous year (increase of 44 young people), placing 10th across Wales and above the Welsh national average (15%), with an additional 15,089 anonymous contacts made with young people (not registered, 8000 more than previous year) through the 11-18 Counselling Service, increased Detached youth work and street based support. 17% places Blaenau Gwent 2nd best across the region (Caerphilly 17%, Monmouthshire 22%, Newport 4% and Torfaen 13%) and 4th across the family mean (Caerphilly 17%, Merthyr 29%, Neath Port Talbot 28% and RCT 26%), same ranking as the previous year.

Out of the 2054 individuals, 41% (847 young people) gained 851 nationally recognised accreditations. The number of young people gaining a qualification significantly increased this year (16% increase), which was not expected as this is not the focus of the work, but is welcome. The outcomes for each programme are now measured on improved wellbeing as well as improvement in either attendance and behaviour, rather than accreditations. It is worth noting that achievements are made voluntarily and during the young people's spare time. However, 41% is the best performing across Wales and significantly higher than the Welsh national average of 10%.

Numbers of individual young people gaining nationally recognised accreditations

	Level achieved at 31 August							Total 2017-18
	Entry Level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Duke of Edinburgh Award	Any other National Accreditation	Total 2018- 19	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Gender								
Male	4	144	18	0	21	22	209	144
Female	95	255	210	1	15	62	638	157
Total	99	399	228	1	36	84	847	301

Numbers of nationally recognised accreditations gained by young people

	Level achieved at 31 August							
	Entry Level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Duke of Edinburgh Award	Any other National Accreditation	Total 2018-19	Total 2017-18
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Gender								
Male	4	144	18	0	21	22	209	234
Female	99	255	210	1	15	62	642	222
Total	103	399	228	1	36	84	851	456

Out of the 847 young people gaining accreditations, 209 males gained 209 accreditations and 638 females gained 642 accreditations. This is a significant increase on last year's figures and reflects some of the work with the wellbeing groups established in the school year groups at the beginning of the school year.

Of those supported by the Youth Service, 79% (1704 young people) were aged 11-16 and 13% (350 young people) were aged 17-25 years old. This reflects the funding focus on school age young people and transition support for year 11 young people. These figures are recorded through the work with young people in the following projects: Inspire 2 Achieve, Inspire 2 Work, Health and Wellbeing, Duke of Edinburgh, Positive Futures, Young Ambassadors, the BYG Editorial Group, Youth Clubs and Young Reps Volunteering programme. The numbers of 17-25 year olds increased this year due to the support accessed and provided during the pandemic.

In addition, in 2018/19 the Youth Service recorded supporting young people *anonymously* (not registered) through the 11-18 Counselling Service, C Card, detached youth work, outreach and out of school activities and events. The Youth Service had 15089 anonymous contacts with young people (one contact is between 1-3 hours).

The Youth Service also facilitates the strategic Raising Aspirations Group (RAG) and two practitioner forums: the NEET Practitioner Forum and the Vulnerable Learners Transition subgroup, which are operational multi-agency partnerships, sub groups of the RAG, which co-ordinates the Early Identification process, allocation of lead worker role, and robust tracking and monitoring of transition from year 11 to post 16 provision.

As a result of this co-ordinated approach with partners, there has been a steady reduction of numbers of young people becoming NEET, reaching 1.5% (9 young people) in 2019-20. This was a decrease of 2 young people from the previous year, and is in line with the lowest record to date. 1.5% is lower than the Welsh average of 1.7%, ranking BG as joint 10th with Swansea, 3rd across our family mean and 2nd across the region.

Welsh Language in the Early Years in Blaenau Gwent

Cylch Meithrin Gwdihw (Brynithel) have recently extended their services to become an early year's education provider. The transition rate to Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg via Gwdihw has been low over the last few years, due in part to parental concern in relation to children accessing home to school transport at age 3. However, the aforementioned development has the potential to positively impact upon transition, as the children will be able to access their early year's education at Cylch Meithrin Gwdihw (Brynithel) in the short-term, prior to transitioning into Welsh-medium primary school.

As part of their national programme 'Set Up and Succeed' (SAS) programme, Mudiad Meithrin have established a Ti a Fi in Tredegar which is seeing growing numbers of families accessing this provision. They are also planning to open in new Cylch Meithrin in the Tredegar area in the autumn 2021. In addition, Buds to Blossoms in Beaufort are piloting Cylch Meithrin sessions (through the medium of Welsh) on a daily basis, with the support via Welsh Language programme Croesi'r Bont, which seeks to introduce Welsh language immersion and secure linguistic continuity via effective transition into Welsh-medium primary provision.

Mudiad Meithrin and Cymraeg y Blant have also established effective parent engagement programmes within Blaenau Gwent, details of which can be found in the table below:

	Number of Group Sessions	Number of Parents Attending	Session Details
2018-2019	65	332	In person - Welsh rhyme time & sign, baby massage and baby yoga (Ebbw Vale, Tredegar, Aberbeeg, Blaina)
2019-2020	124	750	In person - Welsh rhyme time & sign, baby massage and baby yoga (Ebbw Vale, Tredegar, Aberbeeg, Blaina)
June 2020	214	296	Via online engagement Me and my baby, Cuppa & Chat Cymraeg, Baby Massage, Welsh rhyme time & Sign

In line with the Welsh Government Childcare Grant, Welsh Medium Grant and Band B 21st Century Schools Projects, the Council plan to open 2 new Welsh-medium childcare settings in the autumn-term 2023, as follows:

- A full day care provision in the Ebbw Fawr Valley, which is programmed for development on the new build Glyncoed Primary School site.
- A full day care provision in the Tredegar/Sirhowy Valley, which will be co-located with the new Welsh Medium Seedling School on the Chartist Way site.

Numbers of pupils on roll, along with those applying for a place at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg continues to increase, with a positive trend noted over the last 4 years in relation to both nursery and reception uptake. Transition rates in Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg via Helyg Buchan continue to be high, with between 60 and 70% of children progressing into Welsh-medium primary education. Work is ongoing to support a further increase via the Welsh Education Forum and associated promotion strategy.

2019 Welsh Language Youth Service Outcomes. The Youth Service works in partnership with the Urdd to provide welsh language opportunities to young people. Over the last year, 80 young people accessed support and activities through the medium of welsh. A Welsh language youth worker (funded by the Youth Service, employed by the Urdd) delivered issue based workshops, accredited programmes and opportunities through the Urdd, through the medium of Welsh. Activity included:

1 x weekly after school transition club from year 6 welsh medium provision into year 7 welsh medium provision (20 young people)

2 x lunch time clubs within welsh medium secondary provision (Gwynllyw)

3 x weekly after school welsh clubs across secondary schools (30 young people)

Additionally, stronger links were developed with Coleg Gwent campus, Blaenau Gwent young people from the Welsh Language Youth Forum within Gwynllyw was supported to feed into Blaenau Gwent wider youth forum, 10 young people were provided with volunteering opportunities for young leaders at Urdd residential and Youth Service staff were given training in Welsh language and culture.

1.1 Standards and progress overall - Areas where good progress has been made:

N.B. All school and LA results should be viewed with due consideration of the fall in all of the main performance indicators at FP, KS2 and KS3 at national level in 2019.

Foundation Phase

Given the WG guidance that *comparisons of Foundation Phase outcomes with previous years should be avoided as they are not measured on a comparable basis*, it would be unwise to interpret and compare 2018 & 19 results in relation to earlier years. However, good features identified from the 2019 results include:

- 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.
- LA-level FP-KS2 value-added progress in language & maths was a little higher than expected in 2019.
- LA-level FP-KS2 value-added progress in reading & numeracy reasoning was better than expected and improved from the previous year.
- All but 3 schools averaged 2+ NC levels progress in 2019 in both language & maths.
- Progress in reading was better than expected in about two-thirds of mainstream schools & about one-half of schools improved progress in reading in 2019.
- Progress in numeracy reasoning was better than expected in a majority of schools.
- A 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

- L5+ writing outcomes improved noticeably in 2019.
- L6+ outcomes improved for English and Welsh 2nd language during 2017-19 and particularly for 2019.
- LA-level literacy outcomes (oracy, reading & writing) all improved in 2019.
- At LA-level there were modest improvements for MFL & PE in 2019
- Two out of the four schools had improved L5+ English outcomes & three schools improved their L5+oracy & writing results.
- Three of the four schools improved L6+ outcomes in English & three schools improved their L6+ reading & writing results.
- LA-level KS2-3 value-added progress in reading was better than expected and improved from the previous year.
- LA-level progress in numeracy reasoning was also better than expected and twice that for reading.
- 3 of the 4 mainstream secondary schools maintained or improved progress for NC English
- Progress in reading was better than expected in in all centres while 3 of the 4 maintained or improved progress for reading.
- Progress in numeracy reasoning was better than expected in 3 of the 4 mainstream schools.

Key Stage 4

- Of the indicators with previous available data, one-half improved in 2019.
- 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.
- BG had higher than expected ranking in relation to eFSM except for numeracy & 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.
- 2 of the 4 mainstream schools improved in at least one-half of the pre-existing performance indicators in 2019.
- 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 A*/A grades in English & capped 9 points scores.
- Most residuals indicate 'expected' outcomes for BG schools.
- There were better than expected outcomes at Tredegar for Capped 9 points and at Ebbw Fawr for WB skills challenge.
- For WG modelled estimates, the capped 9 points score for BG is very close to the modelled figure.
- For WG modelled estimates for 'thirds' outcomes, about one-half of the residuals were positive and 3 of the 4 schools had relatively high positive residuals in the lower attainment third.

Post-16

- At AS level, the proportions of learners attaining A*-C and A*-E grades were a little higher than the all-Wales means in 2019.

- At A level, the proportions of learners attaining A*-C and A*-E grades were 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.
- Coleg Gwent provided more detailed information regarding learner outcomes during 2018-19.
- Coleg Gwent now provides monthly updates on retention rates and specific learner withdrawals (initiated October 2019).

Current Youth Service outcomes / achievements include:

- In 2018/19, 2010 (17%) of 11-25 year olds were registered as Reach and supported by the Youth Service. This is higher than the all-Wales mean (16%).
- Out of the 2010 individuals, 301 (15%) gained 456 nationally recognised accreditations. The outcomes for each programme are now measured on improved wellbeing as well as improvement in either attendance and behaviour, rather than just accreditation.
- In addition, the Youth Service recorded 7298 anonymous contacts with young people during 2018-19 through the 11-18 Counselling Service, C Card, detached youth work, outreach and out of school activities and events. (1000 more than previous year)
- The Youth Service also facilitates the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) through a strategic multi-agency partnership called the Raising Aspirations Group (RAG) and two practitioner forums: the NEET Practitioner Forum and the Vulnerable Learners Transition subgroup, which are operational multi-agency partnerships. The RAG oversees the YEP Framework, co-ordinates the Early Identification Tool and through the practitioner forums brokers support and the lead worker role, providing robust tracking and monitoring of young people from year 2 to year 11 and transition from year 11 to post 16 provision.
- Current data indicates 1.5% of BG learners being NEET. The all Wales figure has not yet been published.
- Coleg Gwent provides monthly data which indicate withdrawals from college courses
- Careers Wales provides monthly data against the 5 tiered system including all those in WBL for 16 – 18 year olds.

1.1 Standards and Progress overall: Areas requiring improvement:

- **N.B. All school and LA results should be viewed with due consideration of the fall in all of the main performance indicators at FP, KS2 and KS3 at national level in 2019.**
- **Foundation Phase**
- Given the WG guidance that *comparisons of Foundation Phase outcomes with previous years should be avoided as they are not measured on a comparable basis*, it would be unwise to interpret and compare 2018 & 19 results in relation to earlier years. However, areas requiring improvement identified from the 2019 results include:
 - Except for LLCW, both BG and the national averages at LO5+ fell for all performance indicators during the last 2 years. However, the falls were greater for BG in 2019 and so increased the performance gap between the two.
 - 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**

- L4+ & L5+ outcomes fell for all the main performance indicators in 2019. The differences were generally commensurate with the gains made in the previous year making 2019 outcomes similar to those of 2017. However, the falls in outcomes were generally greater for BG than for Wales in 2019 and so increased the performance gap between the two.
- 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) in 2019 were identified as 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 fell to become a little negative and 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 for all the main performance indicators in 2019 and particularly for maths and science. These falls reflect those observed within Wales as a whole. However, the falls were greater for BG and so increased the performance gap between the two.
- L5+ outcomes fell in all non-core subjects in 2019 and particularly for art, history and geography. All results were lower than the 2019 national means and particularly so for MFL and history.
- 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 in 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**

- **N.B. the new National Measures were reported on for the first time in 2019 and so, with the exception of the capped 9 points score, there are no previous outcomes for these measures to compare with.**
- BG results for the new National measures were all lower than the national means. Most results were also lower than expected in relation to the LA's eFSM entitlement.
- The proportion of learners gaining L2+ and 5 A*/A grades in 2019 was below the LA targets.
- L2 maths & L2 maths (numeracy) outcomes fell in 3 out of the 4 mainstream schools in 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 during 2017-19 compared with previous years.
- KS3-4 value-added progress for maths was much weaker than for English.
- Too many pupils failed to progress (or even regressed) in English and particularly in maths in KS4 during 2017-19.
- KS3-4 value-added progress declined for both English and maths in nearly all schools during 2017-19 compared with previous years.
- KS3-4 value-added progress for maths was much weaker than for English in all mainstream schools.
- 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 remain relatively strong.
- Embed process initiated in October 2019 where Coleg Gwent provides monthly updates on retention rates and specific learner withdrawals.

1.2 Standards and progress of specific groups

Gender Differences 2019

Foundation Phase

- Girls' LO5+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in every performance indicator.
- LO5+ gender differences increased for LLCE and PSD in 2019 but fell for LLCW. Gender gaps for MD and the FPI were similar to the previous year.
- Except for LLCW, 2019 LO5+ gender differences were higher than the all-Wales means but only noticeably so for LLCE.
- Girls' LO6+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in every performance indicator except MD.
- LO6+ gender differences were all lower than in the previous year. This was attributable to some improvement in boys' outcomes but mainly to lower girls' results.
- All LO6+ gender differences were lower than the all-Wales means and particularly so for LLCE.

Key Stage 2

- Girls' L4+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in every performance indicator and particularly in Welsh 2nd language.
- Except for Welsh 1st language, L4+ gender differences were generally similar to the previous year.
- L4+ gender differences varied between indicators but all were lower than the all-Wales means.

- Girls' L5+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in every performance indicator.
- Except for Welsh 1st language, L5+ gender differences were lower than in the previous year. This was mainly attributable to lower girls' outcomes in 2019.
- However, all L5+ gender differences were higher than the 2019 all-Wales means.

FP-KS2 Progress

744 pupils remained in BG mainstream schools throughout KS2 during 2015-19 (726 with NT data) and are included in the following data. 52% were boys (about 5% higher than in the previous year).

- Girls had a higher mean NC level in both language & maths and particularly in language.
- **Progress scores for both boys & girls (as NC levels) were higher than expected i.e. greater than 2 NC levels progress during KS2.**
- **There was little difference in the mean NC progress scores between boys & girls indicating that, on average, boys had lower FP outcomes in 2015 but made similar NC progress to girls during KS2.**
- **Girls had a higher mean SAS in reading but lower in numeracy reasoning.**
- Mean progress scores in reading & numeracy reasoning varied but were as expected for boys & girls in both skill areas.
- **Boys made greater progress in both reading and numeracy reasoning within KS2.**

Key Stage 3

Core subjects & CSI

- Girls' L5+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in each core subject and for the CSI.
- **L5+ gender differences were lower than for the previous year in each of the main performance indicators. This was mainly attributable to lower girls' outcomes in 2019.**
- L5+ gender differences varied. The difference was similar to all-Wales mean for science but higher than this for the other indicators and particularly in maths.
- **Girls' L6+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in every performance indicator and particularly for English.**
- L6+ gender differences were lower than for the previous year in all core subjects. This was mainly attributable to lower girls' outcomes for maths & science in 2019.
- **L6+ gender differences varied but were lower than the all-Wales means in each core subject.**

Non-core subjects

- Girls' L5+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in each non-core subject and particularly for art, MFL and Welsh 2nd language.
- L5+ gender differences varied but were higher than in the previous year for about one-half of subjects.
- L5+ gender differences were higher than the all-Wales means in a majority of subjects and particularly in art, ICT and MFL.
- Girls' L6+ outcomes were higher than for the boys in every subject except PE in 2019 and particularly for art and D&T (as in the previous year).
- L6+ gender differences varied but were lower than in the previous year for a majority of subjects
- L6+ gender differences were higher than the all-Wales means in a majority of subjects but lower for ICT, MFL and Welsh 2nd language.

KS2-3 Progress

524 pupils remained in BG mainstream schools throughout KS3 during 2016-19 (505 with NT data) and are included in the following data. 50.4% were boys (similar to the previous year).

- Girls had a higher mean NC level in both English & maths.
- **Mean progress scores (as NC levels) were lower than expected except for girls' maths i.e. below 1.5 NC levels progress during KS3.**
- Boys' mean NC progress scores were lower than for the girls in both English & maths.
- **On average, boys made less NC progress than girls in both subjects during KS3 and so widened the gender gap.**
- Girls had a higher mean SAS in reading but lower in numeracy reasoning.
- **Mean progress scores in reading & numeracy reasoning were better than expected for both boys & girls.**
- **Girls made greater progress in reading but less progress in numeracy reasoning.**
- **On average, boys had considerably lower reading scores in 2016, made less progress than girls during KS3 and so widened the gender gap.**
- **On average, boys made greater progress in numeracy reasoning than girls during KS3 and reversed the gender gap.**

Key Stage 4

- **Girls had higher outcomes in each of the reported main performance indicators in 2019 (and in previous years for pre-existing indicators).**
- Gender differences in BG were higher than the national means for most performance indicators in 2019.
- **Overall, there was little change in boys' outcomes in any of the pre-existing main performance indicators. 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.**

KS3-4 Progress

For **English language**:

- Average progress rates for boys and girls were similar during 2017-19 years but a little below expected.
- The average progress made by boys was consistent during the last 3 years.
- **The average progress made by girls fell during the last 2 years and so contributed to a decline in the overall LA figures.**
- **Progress rates and average GCSE grades for both boys and girls improved when literature outcomes were included.**

For **maths**,

- Average progress rates for boys and girls were similar during 2017-19 years but well below expected.
- **Both boys' and girls' average progress rates fell during the last 2 years and so contributed to a decline in the overall LA figures.**
- Progress rates for both boys and girls improved when literature outcomes were included but not enough to improve average GCSE grades.

Overall, the indicated progress rates for boys and girls in English language / literacy 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.

Performance and Progress of eFSM pupils 2019

Foundation Phase

- eFSM pupils had lower outcomes than non-eFSM pupils in nearly all performance indicators in 2019 but the differences were lower than the national means. However, the differences generally increased during 2017-19.
- Given the WG advice that *'comparisons of Foundation Phase outcomes with previous years should ... be avoided as they are not measured on a comparable basis'*, it would be unwise to attempt to determine any definite trend or pattern from the data or make conclusions based on these. However, eFSM outcomes still (proportionately) trail those of non-eFSM pupils in all FP main performance indicators and improving eFSM outcomes remains a priority for both schools and the LA.

Key Stage 2

- 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 the differences increased during 2017-19.**

FP-KS2 Progress

744 pupils remained in BG mainstream schools throughout KS2 during 2015-19 (726 with NT data) and are included in the following data. 21% were eFSM pupils.

- Non-eFSM pupils had a higher mean NC level than eFSM pupils in language & maths.
- **Mean progress scores (as NC levels) for eFSM & non eFSM pupils were similar to or higher than expected i.e. 2 NC levels progress during KS2.**
- **Mean progress scores (as NC levels) were only a little higher for non-eFSM pupils.**
- **On average, eFSM pupils had lower FP outcomes in 2015 and made a little less NC progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS2.**
- Non-eFSM pupils had a higher mean SAS in numeracy reasoning and particularly in reading.
- Mean progress scores varied but were lower and a little below expected for eFSM pupils in both reading & numeracy reasoning.
- **Non-eFSM pupils made greater progress in reading and in numeracy reasoning.**
- **On average, eFSM pupils had considerably lower reading & numeracy reasoning scores in 2015, made less progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS2 and so widened the performance gap.**

Key Stage 3

- 2019 non-eFSM L5+ and L6+ outcomes were higher than for eFSM in each performance indicator.
- 2019 L5+ gender differences varied compared with those in the previous years. The gaps narrowed for English and the CSI, was similar for maths but widened for science. However, all differences were below the 2018 national means.
- 2019 L6+ differences were similar to or higher than in the previous year in each core subject. However, all differences were below the 2018 national means.

KS2-3 Progress

524 pupils remained in BG mainstream schools throughout KS3 during 2016-19 (505 with NT data) and are included in the following data. 23% were eFSM pupils.

- Non-eFSM pupils had a higher mean NC level in both skill areas.
- **Mean progress scores (as NC levels) were lower than expected for eFSM & non-eFSM pupils i.e. 1.5 NC levels progress during KS3.**
- eFSM pupils' mean progress scores were a little lower than for non-eFSM pupils in both English & maths.

- **On average, non-eFSM pupils had lower KS2 outcomes in 2016 and made a little less progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS3.**
- Non-eFSM pupils had a higher mean SAS in both reading and numeracy reasoning.
- Mean progress scores **were better than expected for both eFSM and non-eFSM pupils.**
- Non-eFSM pupils made greater progress in reading but less progress in numeracy reasoning.
- **On average, eFSM pupils had considerably lower reading scores in 2016 and made less progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS3 and so widened the performance gap.**
- **On average, eFSM pupils had considerably lower numeracy reasoning scores in 2016 but made greater progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS3 and so narrowed the performance gap.**

Key Stage 4

- Differences between eFSM and non-eFSM outcomes for BG pupils in 2019 were lower than the national means in each reported main performance indicators i.e. the performance gaps were consistently smaller. This was the case in previous years for pre-existing indicators.
- **Given the high levels of deprivation and disadvantage within the authority, eFSM pupils achieved good outcomes for most KS4 performance indicators in 2019.**

KS3-4 Progress

For English language:

- Average progress rates for eFSM and non-eFSM pupils were similar during 2017-19 years but a little below expected.
- **The average progress made by eFSM pupils improved during the last 2 years.**
- **The average progress made by non-eFSM pupils fell during the last 2 years and so contributed to a decline in the overall LA figures.**
- **Progress rates and average GCSE grades for both boys and girls improved when literature outcomes were included.**

For maths,

- The average progress rate for eFSM pupils was higher than that for non-eFSM pupils during 2017-19 years but well below expected.
- **The average progress made by eFSM pupils improved during the last 2 years while that for non-eFSM pupils declined and so contributed to a decline in the overall LA figures.**
- Progress rates for both eFSM and non-eFSM pupils improved when numeracy outcomes were included but not enough to improve average GCSE grades.

Overall, the indicated progress rates for eFSM and non-eFSM pupils in English language / literacy are just about adequate while those for maths / numeracy are unsatisfactory. Progress for eFSM pupils during 2017-19 was similar to or better than that for non-eFSM pupils. The weak progress in maths is a main contributing factor to low school and LA performance at GCSE.

Performance and Progress of More-Able Pupils 2019

N.B. BG results should be viewed with due consideration of a fall in all main performance indicators at FP & KS2 at national level in 2019.

In addition, the DoE have stated that ‘the decrease in the FPI between 2017 and 2018 is due to a change in policy and recalibration of the Foundation Phase outcomes.’ This statement is applicable to school, LA and national results and so lower FP performance for BG during 2018 & 19 was to be expected.

At FP

- 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
- Except for LLCW, the falls in BG and national averages were similar and so generally maintaining the performance gap between the two during the last 3 years.
- About 4% fewer BG pupils attained LO6+ in LLCE and about 3% fewer in MD compared to Wales in 2019.
- About 5% fewer Y2 pupils attained SAS >115 in reading and about 7% fewer in numeracy reasoning compared to Wales in 2019.

At KS2

- Both BG and the national averages fell for all performance indicators in 2019. However, except for Welsh (attributable to just one Welsh medium school in BG) & Welsh 2nd language, the falls were greater for BG and so increased the performance gap between the two.
- 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.

FP-KS2 Progress

- **Mean progress in NC English and in NC maths was higher than expected for MAT pupils i.e. >2 NC levels during KS2.**
- **Mean progress in NC English and in NC maths was higher for MAT (L5+) pupils than for those attaining L4 or lower.**
- **Mean progress in reading and in numeracy reasoning was better than expected for MAT (SAS >115) pupils.**
- **Mean progress in reading and in numeracy reasoning was much higher for MAT (SAS >115) pupils than for those attaining lower SAS scores.**

At KS3

- L6+ outcomes in maths & particularly science fell during the last 3 years and decreased a little more than that observed nationally. However, L6+ English results improved in BG for 2019 with a consequent narrowing of the performance gap.
- Welsh 2nd language results also improved in 2019 but they also did at national level.
- 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.
- About 3% fewer BG pupils attained SAS >115 in reading and about 5% fewer in numeracy reasoning compared to Wales in 2019.

KS2-3 Progress

- **Mean progress in NC English and in NC maths was higher for MAT (L6 & L7+) pupils i.e. >1.5 NC levels.**
- **Mean progress in NC English and in NC maths was higher for MAT (L6 & L7+) pupils than for those attaining L5 or lower.**
- **Mean progress in reading and in numeracy reasoning was better than expected for MAT (SAS >115) pupils.**
- **Mean progress in reading and in numeracy reasoning was much higher for MAT (SAS >115) pupils than for those attaining lower SAS scores.**

Overall, MAT pupils not only attain higher NC levels and national test scores, they also progress at a faster rate than those with lower outcomes at the previous key stage. This indicates that differences in outcomes between low and high attaining pupils increase as they progress through the key stages and that attainment at both FP and KS2 are significant determinants of future progress.

At KS4

The proportion of pupils attaining 5 A*/A grades fell by about 2% in 2019 and was well below the national mean (which fell by a similar amount in 2019 – see previous comments).

Overall, except for a few indicators at KS3, higher level outcomes fell for in most indicators at each key stage in 2019 and the proportions of pupils attaining higher level outcomes / grades were consistently lower than the all-Wales averages. However, progress in both NC assessments and National test results was, on average, better or much better than expected at both KS2 & 3. The differences in these findings may be explained in that improvements at each key stage are essentially determined by pupil outcomes at the previous NC level. The generally low ability levels of BG pupils on entry to schools and the relatively small proportions of pupils with higher ability levels has effectively determined higher level outcomes at subsequent key stages. Consequently, the LA needs to be a focus on raising standards within early years.

KS3-4 Progress

For **English language:**

- **The average progress rate MAT pupils was much higher than for the Y11 cohort as a whole and well above expected progress.**
- **Adding literature outcomes improved the overall progress rate to a greater extent than for just MAT pupils**

For **Maths,**

- **The average progress rate MAT pupils was much higher than for the Y11 cohort as a whole and well above expected progress.**
- **Adding numeracy outcomes improved the overall progress rates of both MAT pupils and the whole cohort to similar extents.**

Overall, 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. Overall maths progress at KS4 has been consistently weak in Blaenau Gwent but this particular group of pupils has progressed at a much higher level and so contradicts this trend. This may suggest that the quality of teaching and learning in maths is better for MAT pupils and that other pupils might benefit from a revised deployment of more effective teachers.

The number of pupils achieving A*/A grades was fairly evenly distributed across mainstream schools. Tredegar had most (13) and Brynmawr least (5).

In summary:

The Mean NC progress in English and in maths from F Phase to end of KS 2 was higher for MAT (L5+) pupils than for those attaining L4 or lower i.e. 2.4 as opposed to 1.9

The Mean progress in NT reading and in numeracy reasoning from F Phase to end of KS 2 was much higher for MAT (SAS >115) pupils than for those attaining lower SAS scores

In KS3 L6+ English results improved in pupils BG for 2019 (against a national backdrop of decline) with a consequent narrowing of the performance gap.

The Mean progress in English and in maths between KS 2 and KS 3 was higher for MAT (L6 & L7+) pupils than for those attaining L5 or lower i.e. 1.7 and 1.8 as opposed to 0.9 for lower levels

The Mean progress between KS 2 and KS 3 in reading and in numeracy reasoning was much higher for MAT (SAS >115) pupils than for those attaining lower SAS scores

Overall, MAT pupils not only attain higher NC levels and national test scores, **they also progress at a faster rate than those with lower outcomes at the previous key stage**. This indicates that differences in outcomes between low and high attaining **pupils increase as they progress through the key stages** and that **attainment at both FP and KS2 are significant determinants of future progress**. The quality of support to ensure good progress is of reasonable quality and effectiveness, **however, the quality of support to improve early outcomes in the Foundation Phase needs to improve**.

Consequently, a key priority is to ensure that support is effective at maximising attainment in the Early Years and on **improving pupils' attainment at the earliest stage possible** i.e. within the FP or prior to this. Work with schools and the EAS is underway to start to address this but this remains a key area for improvement.

Performance and Progress of Pupils with SEN 2019

Foundation Phase

There were 148 pupils with SEN recorded in the 2019 Y2 cohort (87 SA, 52 SA+ & 7 with SEN statements. This comprised about **one-fifth of the whole 2019 cohort**.

- About one-half of **pupils on SA** attained LO5+ in LLCE and MD with a higher proportion reaching this level in PSD. All results were lower than the 2018 national means.
- About one-third of **pupils on SA+** attained LO5+ in LLCE with just under one-half doing so in MD & PSD. All results were lower than the 2018 national means.
- Almost one-third of **statemented pupils** attained LO5+ in LLCE and MD but with a lower proportion reaching this level in PSD. The former results were higher than the 2018 national means but that for PSD a little below this figure.

Overall, BG pupils on SA and SA+ had lower outcomes than their national peers (in 2018) whereas statemented pupils had better than average results in both LLCE and MD.

Key Stage 2

744 pupils remained in BG mainstream schools throughout KS2 (726 with NT data) and are included in the following data. About 10% were on SA, 10% on SA+ and 3% statemented.

- 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.
- The proportions of pupils attaining L4 or better in maths also fell for all SEN groups in 2018 and were below the 2018 national means except for statemented pupil outcomes.
- All SEN groups had a lower mean NC level than non-SEN pupils in language and in maths. The means for SA and SA+ pupils were similar but it was lower for statemented pupils.
All SEN groups had a lower mean SAS than non-SEN pupils in reading & numeracy reasoning. The means for SA & SA+ pupils were similar but higher for those with statements.

FP-KS2 Progress**NC progress**

- **NC results for language and for maths indicate that, on average, SEN pupils had lower FP outcomes in 2015 and, except for SA pupils, made less progress than non-SEN pupils during KS2.**

National Test progress

- **NT results indicate that, on average, SA and SA+ pupils had considerably lower reading scores than non-SEN pupils in 2015 and made much less progress during KS2.**
- **The results also indicate that statemented pupils also had lower reading scores in 2015 but made, on average, very good progress during KS2.**
- **NT results indicate that, on average, SA pupils had considerably lower numeracy reasoning scores than non-SEN pupils in 2015 and regressed in in this skill area during KS2.**
- **The results also indicate that statemented pupils also had lower reading scores in 2015 but made slight progress during KS2.**

Key Stage 3

523 pupils remained in BG mainstream schools throughout KS3 (505 with NT data) and are included in the following data. About 9% were on SA, 8% on SA+ and 5% statemented.

- The proportions of pupils attaining L5 or better in language in 2019 was similar to the previous year for SA and SAP pupils but increased for those with statements. Except for statemented pupils, the results were lower than the 2018 national means.
- The proportions of pupils attaining L5 or better in maths in 2019 varied. It was similar to the previous year for SA pupils, fell for SAP pupils but increased for statemented pupils. Except for statemented pupils, the results were lower than the 2018 national means.
- All SEN groups had a lower mean NC level than non-SEN pupils in English and in maths. SA pupils had the highest score and statemented pupils the lowest.
- All SEN groups had a lower mean SAS than non-SEN pupils in reading and in numeracy reasoning.
- The reading means for SA & SA+ pupils were similar but higher for those with statements. The numeracy reasoning means for SA & statemented pupils were similar but lower for SA+ pupils.

KS2-3 Progress**NC progress**

- **NC results for English & for maths indicate that, on average, SEN pupils had lower KS2 outcomes in 2016 and made less progress than non-SEN pupils during KS3 and particularly so for SA+ pupils in maths.**

National Test Progress

- **The results indicate that, on average, SA and SA+ pupils had considerably lower reading scores in 2016 and made much less progress than non-SEN pupils during KS3.**

- The results also indicate that statemented pupils also had lower reading scores in 2015 but made, on average, very good progress during KS3. The pattern is similar to that seen for reading during KS2.
- The results indicate that, on average, SA and SA+ pupils had lower scores in 2016 and made less progress than non-SEN pupils during KS2 and particularly so for SA+ pupils.
- The results also indicate that statemented pupils also had lower reading and numeracy reasoning scores in 2016 but made, on average, very good progress during KS3.

Key Stage 4

The proportions of pupils attaining A*-G grades improved for all SEN categories in maths and in all except SA+ in English language in 2019.

The proportions of pupils attaining A*-C grades improved substantially for all SEN categories in both English language and maths in 2019. Overall SEN results were only a little below those for mainstream pupils.

KS3-4 progress

There were 507 pupils in the 2017-19 cohort (28 / 5.5% on SA; 70; 13.8% on SA+; 34; 6.7% with SEN statements). Only those pupils with recorded outcomes at both KS3 and 4 were included in calculations.

For **English language**:

- The average progress rate for statemented pupils was similar to non-SEN pupils during 2017-19 years but lower for SA pupils. All were below expected values.
- The average progress rate for SA+ pupils was higher than for non-SEN pupils during 2017-19 and a little higher than expected.
- The average progress made by SA+ and statemented pupils improved compared to the previous year but was similar to this for SA pupils.
- Progress rates and average GCSE grades improved when literature outcomes were included.

For **Maths**,

- The average progress rate for SA pupils was similar to that for non-SEN pupils during 2017-19 years but well below expected.
- On average, both SA+ and statemented pupils made no progress in Maths during the KS3.
- However, all SEN groups improved their average progression rates compared to 2016-18
- Progress rates for all SEN groups improved noticeably when numeracy outcomes were included but not enough to improve average GCSE grades except for SA+ pupils.

Overall, the proportions of SEN pupils attaining A*-C and A*-G grades were relatively high, much improved compared to previous years and generally similar to those for non-SEN pupils. Progress rates for SEN pupils were also generally similar to non-SEN pupils. These were adequate in English / literature but unsatisfactory for maths / numeracy. The improved progress in both subject areas during 2017-19 is encouraging and particularly for the large group (70) of SA+ pupils in English and suggests that support for these pupils has been effective.

Performance and Progress of Pupils at the River Centre School 2019

N.B. It is important to be aware that standardised tests only provide a snapshot of pupils' skills and that individual results can vary from day to day. In addition, the very small numbers of pupil results for the River Centre makes performance comparisons e.g. with BG mainstream pupils statistically invalid. Consequently, pupil results should be viewed at an individual pupil level and with due regard to any contextual factors likely to have impacted on outcomes.

Key Stage 2

There was only 1 pupil in the Y6 cohort recorded as attending the River Centre (RC) during 2018-19. This pupil had no matched data for FP & KS2 outcomes.

Key Stage 3

There were 11 River Centre pupils recorded with NC, national test results or both in the 2018-19 Y9 cohort. Matched national test data was only available for 6 of the 11 pupils. 4 pupils had SEN statements and 7 were on SA+. 3 were LAC and a majority were recorded with the Youth Offending Team.

- Only 2 pupils in the Y9 cohort attained L5 or better in English and in maths.
- The mean NC levels for RC pupils were much lower than those for the whole BG Y6 cohort in 2019.
- The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were also much lower than for the mainstream cohort and with below average results for most pupils.

NC progress

- About one-half of RC pupils progressed at least 1 NC level for English during KS3 but only 3 did so for maths.
- One pupil progressed 2 NC levels in English.
- The mean NC progress rates for RC pupils were much lower than for the whole BG cohort in both areas

National Test progress

The progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning were better than expected and higher than the BG means - particularly for reading. However, the small numbers of RC pupils undertaking the national tests and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons statistically unreliable.

Overall, NC and national test scores were much lower than mainstream averages. NC progress rates were also lower than for mainstream pupils but progress in national test outcomes was better than expected.

KS3-4 outcomes & progress

Of the 10 pupils who attended the River Centre throughout 2017-19:

- Just 1 pupil attained a B grade in English language but none gained a C grade or better in maths.
- The average grade in English language (E) was lower than that for the whole Y11 cohort (D). The average grade in maths (F) was also lower than that for the whole cohort (D).
- 5 pupils progressed 1 or more NC levels in English but only 3 did so in maths.

- 4 pupil regressed in English and in maths (one had very poor attendance).
- The mean progress rate for River Centre pupils in English and in maths was much lower than that of the whole BG cohort and indicated overall regression.
- Including literature had little impact on average progression but did improve the average GCSE grade.
- Including numeracy improved average progression considerably and also improved the average GCSE grade.

N.B. The very small numbers of pupils attending the River Centre and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons with national outcomes statistically unsound.

Overall, River Centre pupils as expected had lower outcomes and average progress rates in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy compared to the whole Y11 cohort. There was a noticeable improvement to overall maths / numeracy outcomes when numeracy results were included but little change to language / literature outcomes when literature results were included. This suggests that support for numeracy was more effective than that for language.

Analysis of Outcomes & Value-added Performance for Resource Base Pupils 2019

NC outcomes, national test and value-added performance of pupils attending resource bases at BG schools are considered in this report.

Key Stage 2

There were 9 pupils RB pupils recorded with NC, national test results or both in the 2019 Y6 cohort. Matched national test data was only available for 2 of the 9 pupils. 5 pupils had SEN statements, 3 were on SA+ and the remaining pupil on SA.

Only 1 pupil in the Y6 cohort attained L4 or better in English and just 2 did so in maths. The mean NC levels for RB pupils were about one-half that for the whole BG Y6 cohort in 2019. The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were a little below the mainstream cohort (but comparing just 2 pupils' results).

All but 1 RB pupil progressed at least 1 NC level for language and all did so for maths during KS2. About one-half of pupils progressed 2 NC levels in both language in maths. However, the mean NC progress rates for RB pupils were lower than for the whole BG cohort in both areas. The progress rates for the 2 pupils with national test results were much higher than the BG mean for reading but similar to this for numeracy reasoning.

N.B. The very small numbers of RB pupils and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons statistically unreliable.

Key Stage 3

There were 14 pupils RB pupils recorded with NC, national test results or both in the 2019 Y9 cohort. Matched national test data was only available for 10 of the 14 pupils.

6 pupils had SEN statements, 6 were on SA+ and 1 on SA.

Only 1 pupil in the Y9 cohort attained L5 or better in English and in maths. The mean NC levels for RB pupils were less than one-half that for the whole BG Y9 cohort in 2019. The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were much lower than for the mainstream cohort and with below average results for most pupils.

About one-half of RB pupils progressed at least 1 NC level for language and for maths during KS3. One pupil progressed 3 NC levels in both languages in maths while 2 others progressed 2 NC levels in maths only. The mean NC progress rates for RB pupils were much lower than for the whole BG cohort in both areas with some pupils indicated as regressing during KS3. **The progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning were generally as expected but lower than the BG means - particularly for reading.**

N.B. The small numbers of RB pupils and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons statistically unreliable.

Overall, except for national test scores in Y6, NC and national test scores were much lower than mainstream averages. Progress rates were also lower than for mainstream pupils but the differences were greater at KS3 than at KS2 with some pupils indicated as regressing in NC assessments.

Key Stage 4

7 pupils attended the SNRB during 2017-19.

Of the 7 pupils in the cohort:

- 1 was eFSM.
- 1 was on SA+ and 6 statemented.
- None were low attenders.

- 5 pupils attained a C grade or better in English language but only 3 did so in maths.
- The average grade in English (C) was higher than that for the whole Y11 cohort (D). The average grade in maths was the same (D) as that for the whole cohort.
- 5 RB pupils progressed 1 or more NC levels in English language but only 2 did so in maths.
- 2 pupils failed to progress at all in English and maths while 3 pupils regressed in the latter.
- The mean progress rate for RB pupils in English language was higher than that of the whole BG cohort and better than expected. However, the mean progress rate for maths indicated no progression overall.
- Including literature and numeracy outcomes improved average progression but not average GCSE grades.

N.B. The very small numbers of RB pupils and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons with national outcomes statistically unsound.

Overall, SNRB pupils had similar or better outcomes and average progress rates in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy compared to the whole Y11 cohort. This suggests that support for language and maths / numeracy development within the SNRB is generally effective for language at KS4 but, and for the main cohort, is less effective for maths/ numeracy.

Performance and Progress of Pupils in Ethnic Minority Groups & with EAL in 2019

Key Stage 2

There were 25 pupils from different EM groups in the 2019 Y6 cohort.

- All but 4 of the 25 EM pupils in the Y6 cohort attained L4 or better in English and all but 3 did so in maths.
- Over one-half of EM pupils attained L5 in both English and maths.
- All but one of the pupils not attaining L4 had SEN and some had additional contextual factors which may have impacted on their progress.
- **The mean NC levels for EM pupils were higher than for the whole BG Y6 cohort in 2019.**
- **The mean national test scores in both reading and numeracy reasoning were also higher for EM pupils.**

NC Progress

- All but 4 EM pupils progressed at least 2 NC levels for language during KS2 and all but 2 did so in maths. All of these identified pupils had SEN and some had additional contextual factors which may have impacted on their progress.
- Over one-fifth of EM pupils progressed 3 NC levels in language and almost a third did so in maths.
- **The mean NC progress rates for EM pupils were higher than for the whole BG cohort in both areas**

National Test progress

- The mean progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning were much higher for EM pupils.

Key Stage 3

There were 21 pupils from different EM groups in the 2019 Y9 cohort. Only 16 had matched KS2 & 3 NC results.

- **All but 2 of the 16 EM pupils with matched NC results attained L5 or better in English and maths in 2019. Both of these pupils had SEN and one had very poor attendance.**
- **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 NC levels for EM pupils were a little higher than for the whole BG Y6 cohort in 2019.**
- **The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning for EM pupils was similar to that for the whole BG cohort.**

NC progress

- About one-third of EM pupils progressed 2 or more NC levels in English and maths during KS3
- Two pupils failed to progress at all and one regressed in English. However, 2 of these pupils had SEN categorised and one had very poor attendance.

National Test progress

- The mean progress rate for EM pupils in reading **was a little higher than the whole BG cohort** but the mean progress rate for numeracy reasoning indicated on average progression

Overall, except for KS2-3 progress in maths, EM pupils had similar to or better outcomes and higher average progress rates than pupils in the 2019 mainstream cohort.

KS3-4 outcomes & progress

Of the 17 EM pupils in the 2017-19 cohort:

- 10 pupils attained a C grade or better in English language but only 7 did so in maths.
- The average grade in English (C) was higher than that for the whole Y11 cohort (D). The average grade in maths was the same (D) but lower in terms of mean NC level.
- About two-thirds of EM pupils progressed 1 or more NC levels in English language but only about one-half did so in maths.
- 6 pupils failed to progress at all in English. However, all of these had EAL or SEN or both.
- 4 pupils failed to progress at all in maths while 5 actually regressed. However, all but one of these had EAL or SEN or both.
- The mean progress rate for EM pupils in English language was similar to that of the whole BG cohort but the mean progress rate for maths was lower and indicated on average regression.
- Including literature and numeracy outcomes improved average progression and particularly so in the latter,

N.B. The very small numbers of specific EM groups and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons with national outcomes statistically unsound.

Overall, in KS4 EM pupils had similar outcomes and average progress rates to non-EM pupils in English language / literature but lower in maths / numeracy. 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.

Performance and Progress of Children Who Offend 2019**Key Stage 2**

There were 3 YOs recorded with NC, national test results or both in the 2019 Y6 cohort. 1 pupil was on SA+ and one on SA.

- 1 pupil in the Y6 cohort attained L5 in English and Maths and another attained L4 in maths.
- The mean NC levels for YOs were lower than that for the whole BG Y6 cohort in language and in maths.
- The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were well below the mainstream cohort (but comparing just 3 pupils' results).

NC progress

- One YO progressed 3 NC levels in both language and maths during KS2.

- One progressed 2 NC levels in maths only and the remaining YO progressed just 1 NC level in both.
- The NC progress rates for individual YOs indicated expected or below expected progress.

National Test progress

- The progress rates for national test results also varied between YOs.

Key Stage 3

There were 12 pupils YOs recorded with NC, national test results or both in the 2019 Y9 cohort. Matched national test data was only available for 8 of the 12 pupils. 4 pupils had SEN statements, 4 were on SA+ and 1 on SA.

- 3 YOs in the Y9 cohort attained L5 or better in English and 6 did so in maths.
- The mean NC levels for YOs were lower than that for the whole BG Y9 cohort in 2019 and particularly so in English.
- The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were also lower than for the mainstream cohort and with below average results for most pupils.

NC progress

- About one-half of YOs progressed at least 1 NC level for language and for maths during KS3.
- One pupil progressed 2 NC levels in English while 2 did so in maths.
- About one-half failed to progress at all in English and in maths.
- The mean NC progress rates for YOs were much lower than for the whole BG cohort in both areas.

National Test progress

- The mean progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning were generally as expected but lower than the BG means - particularly for numeracy reasoning.

Overall, NC and national test scores of YOs 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.

KS3-4 outcomes & progress

Of the 26 YOs in the 2017-19 cohort:

- 13 YOs attained a C grade or better in both English language and in maths.
- The average grade in English language (C) was higher than that for the whole Y11 cohort (D). The average grade in maths (D) was the same as that for the whole cohort.
- About two-thirds of YOs progressed 1 or more NC levels in English but only one-half did so in maths.
- About one-third failed to progress all in English while about one-half failed to do so or even regressed in maths. However, most of these pupils had SEN
- The mean progress rate for YOs in English was higher than that of the whole BG cohort and indicated expected regression.
- The mean progress rate for YOs in maths was a little higher than that of the whole BG cohort but indicated much lower than expected progression.
- Including literature improved average progression but not the average GCSE grade.
- Including numeracy improved average progression, a little but not the average GCSE grade.

N.B. The relatively small numbers of YOs attending KS4 and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons with national outcomes statistically unsound.

Overall, YOS had higher outcomes and average progress rates in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy compared to the whole Y11 cohort. Outcomes improved a little when literature & numeracy results were included. The findings suggest that support for young offenders within BG has effectively allowed them to generally achieve the same outcomes as mainstream peers.

Performance and Progress of Children Looked After (CLA) 2019

Key Stage 2

There were 8 CLA pupils in the 2019 Y6 cohort. 3 were on SA, one on SA+ and one statemented.

- All but 2 of the 8 CLA in the Y6 cohort attained L4 or better in English and in maths.
- LAC pupils attained L5 in English and one did so in maths. Of the 2 pupils not attaining L4, one had an SEN statement and the other was on SA+.
- The mean NC levels for CLA was similar to that of the whole BG Y6 cohort in language **but lower in maths.**
- **The mean national test scores in both reading and numeracy reasoning were noticeably lower for CLA.**

NC progress

- All but one CLA progressed at least 2 NC levels for language during KS2 and all but 2 did so in maths. All of the latter pupils had SEN.
- One CLA progressed 3 NC levels in language and almost a half did so in maths.
- The mean NC progress rates for CLA were similar to those for the whole BG cohort in both subject areas.

National test progress

- The progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning were lower than expected and indicated some degree of regression, particularly in the former.

Key Stage 3

There were 14 CLA pupils in the 2019 Y9 cohort (only 12 had matched reading & numeracy reasoning results). 2 were on SA, four on SA+ and two statemented.

- 9 of the 14 CLA with matched NC results attained L5 or better in English and maths in 2019. Of the CLA who failed to attain this level, all had SEN and three had very poor attendance.
- One CLA attained L6 in English & maths and two attained L7 in maths.
- The mean NC levels for CLA were much lower than for the whole BG Y6 cohort in 2019.
- The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were also lower for CLA than for the whole BG cohort – particularly for the former.

NC progress

- Most CLA progressed 1 or more NC levels in English and maths during KS3 with progress rates similar to that of the whole BG cohort.
- Two CLA failed to progress at all in English and 3 failed to do so in maths. All of these pupils had SEN and two had very poor attendance.

National Test progress

The mean progress rates for CLA in reading and numeracy reasoning were notably higher than for the whole BG cohort.

Overall, in KS2 and KS3 both NC and national test outcomes were, on average, lower for CLA than for other mainstream pupils. This was more evident at KS3 than at KS2 for NC outcomes. NC progress for CLA was generally similar to the mainstream cohort in both English & maths. Progress rates in reading and numeracy reasoning were noticeably different for KS2 & 3. At KS2, both reading and numeracy reasoning progress rates indicated some regression but both were noticeably higher than for mainstream pupils at KS3.

KS3-4 Outcomes & Progress

Of the 10 CLA in the 2017-19 cohort:

- 4 CLA attained a C grade or better in English language and the same number did so in maths.
- The average grade in English (C) was the same as that for the whole Y11 cohort. The average grade in maths (D) was also the same as that for the whole Y11 cohort.
- Over one-half progressed 1 or more NC levels in English language and in maths.
- 2 CLA failed to progress at all in English while a further 2 actually regressed. However, the former 2 were statemented.
- 3 CLA regressed in maths. However, all of these had EAL or SEN.
- The mean progress rate for CLA in English and in maths was similar to that of the whole BG cohort but below expected values - particularly for maths
- Including literature and numeracy outcomes improved average progression but not average GCSE grades.

N.B. The very small numbers of CLA in the cohort and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons with national outcomes statistically unsound.

Overall, in KS4 CLA had similar outcomes and average progress rates to mainstream the main cohort in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy. This suggest that CLA support for language and maths development is generally effective at KS4.

Performance and Progress of Low Attenders 2019

Low attenders are defined in the WG core data sets as those pupils '*absent for at least 20% of half-day sessions*'.

Key Stage 3

There were 13 low attenders recorded with NC, national test results or both in the 2019 Y9 cohort. Matched national test data was only available for 7 of the 13 pupils. 1 pupil had 1 SEN statement, 3 were on SA+ and 3 on SA. 3 pupils were LAC, 1 on EAL category B (Early Acquisition) and 2 were registered as young offenders.

- 4 pupils in the Y9 cohort attained L5 or better in English and 8 did so in maths.
- The mean NC levels for RB pupils were lower than those for the whole BG Y9 cohort in 2019.
- The mean national test scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were also much lower than for the mainstream cohort and with below average results for most pupils.

NC Progress

- About one-third of low attenders progressed at least 1 NC level for language during KS3 while about two-thirds did so in maths.
- One pupil progressed 3 NC levels in language 5 in maths.
- The mean NC progress rates for low attenders were lower than for the whole BG cohort in both areas.

National Test progress

- The progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning were generally as expected but lower than the BG means.

KS3-4 outcomes & progress***Of the 38 low attenders in the 2017-19 cohort:***

- About one-half of low attenders attained a C grade or better in both English language and in maths.
- The average grade in English language(C) was higher than that for the whole Y11 cohort (D). The average grade in maths (D) was the same as that for the whole Y11 cohort.
- Over two-thirds progressed 1 or more NC levels in English language – similar to the overall LA figure.
- About one-half progressed 1 or more NC levels in maths – higher than the overall LA figure.
- 3 low attenders failed to progress at all in English while a further 8 actually regressed.
- The mean progress rate for low attenders in English language and in maths was a little higher than that of the whole BG cohort but below expected values - particularly for maths
- Including literature and numeracy outcomes improved average progression and the average GCSE grade in maths.

N.B. The relatively small numbers of low attenders in the cohort and the varying contextual factors related to individual pupils makes comparisons with national outcomes statistically unsound.

Overall, and in KS4, low attenders had similar or higher outcomes and average progress rates to the mainstream cohort in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy. This suggests that support in language and maths development for low attenders is generally effective at KS4 and / or a significant proportion of low attendance (of able pupils) was attributable to illness / injury rather than truancy.

Performance and progress of Gypsy travellers

In 2018/19 there were only 2 pupils in the Year 11 cohort and both completed statutory schooling and are going on to further education. Average attendance in 2018/19 was 81.24%, an increase of 1.75% compared to 2017/18 (79.5%).

In Foundation Phase, in 2018/2019 1 out of the 5 in the cohort (20%) achieved the FPI. This is compared to last year when 1 out of the 3 (33%) in the cohort achieved FPI.

In 2018/2019 one out of five pupils **(20%) achieved the outcome 5+ or above LLCE. 4/5 (80%) achieved outcome 5+ for their PSD.** All pupils achieved or exceeded their target in MDT, **1/5 (20%) got an outcome 5+ or above.** This is compared to last year's where in 2017/2018 (3/3) pupils (100%) achieved outcome 5+ for LCE, and 1/3 achieved their FPI, 3/3 achieved their PSD and 2/3 achieved their MDT (66%)

In KS2, in 2018/2019 five out of five pupils (100%) achieved their CSI. This compared to last year where four out of five pupils achieved the CSI. In 2018/2019, five out of five pupils achieved their L4 in all core subjects. Compared to 2017/2018 when four out of five pupils achieved L4 in all subjects.

In KS3, in 2018/2019, two out of five pupils (20%) achieved their CSI. This is compared to last year where one out of one pupils achieved their CSI. Two out of five achieved their level 5 or above in Maths, English and Science, where one 1/1 pupil achieved this last year.

There have been two exclusions in 18/19, compared to 9 exclusions in 2017/18.

In 2018/19 overall, 100% completed their required 200 sessions before going travelling. Attendance at FP was 80.8%, at KS2 81.2%, at KS3 78.5% and at KS4 82.9%.

Overall, the quality of support provided for pupils in the Foundation Phase and KS3 is weaker than that provided in KS2 where all of the pupils achieved the CSI at L4+.

1.2 Standards and Progress of Specific Groups: Areas where good progress has been made:

N.B. All school and LA results should be viewed with due consideration of the fall in all of the main performance indicators at FP, KS2 and KS3 at national level in 2019.

Foundation Phase

Given the WG guidance that *comparisons of Foundation Phase outcomes with previous years should be avoided as they are not measured on a comparable basis*, it would be unwise to interpret and compare 2018 results in relation to previous years. However, good features identified from the 2019 results include:

- All LO6+ gender differences were lower than the all-Wales means and particularly so for LLCE.
- Almost one-third of stated 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.
- There was little difference in the mean NC progress scores between boys & girls.
- 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 for ethnic minority pupils were higher than for the whole BG Y6 cohort in 2019.
- The mean national test scores in both reading and numeracy reasoning were also higher for ethnic minority pupils.
- The mean progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning in 2019 were much higher for EM pupils.
- 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 BG cohort in both subject areas.

Key Stage 3

- L6+ gender differences were lower than the all-Wales means in each core subject.
- L6+ gender differences were lower than in the previous year for a majority of non-core subjects
- L6+ gender differences were lower than the national means for about one-half of non-core subjects.
- Mean progress scores in reading & numeracy reasoning were better than expected for both boys & girls.
- On average, boys made greater progress in numeracy reasoning than girls during KS3 and so reversed the gender gap.
- 2019 eFSM & non-eFSM differences were lower than the national averages at both L5+ and L6+.
- Mean progress scores in reading and numeracy reasoning were better than expected for eFSM pupils.
- eFSM pupils made greater progress than non-eFSM pupils during KS3 and so narrowed the performance gap.
- L6+ English results improved in BG for 2019 with a consequent narrowing of the performance gap compared when with national outcomes.
- Statemented pupils made, on average, very good progress in reading & numeracy reasoning at KS3 during 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 BG cohort.

Key Stage 4

- Differences between eFSM and non-eFSM outcomes for BG pupils in 2019 were lower than the national means in each reported main performance indicator.
- The proportion of learners gaining A*/A grades improved in both English and maths in 2019.
- 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 in maths was relatively high, much improved compared to previous years and generally similar to those for non-SEN pupils.
- Progress rates for SEN pupils were also generally similar to non-SEN pupils and suggests that support for these pupils has been effective.
- Ethnic minority pupils had similar outcomes and average progress rates to non-EM pupils in English language. This suggest that support for language development is generally effective at KS4.

- Young offenders generally had higher outcomes and average progress rates in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy compared to the whole Y11 cohort. This suggests that support for young offenders within BG has effectively allowed them to generally achieve the same outcomes as mainstream peers.
- LAC had similar outcomes and average progress rates to mainstream the main cohort in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy. This suggests that LAC support for language and maths development is generally effective at KS4.
- Low attenders had similar or higher outcomes and average progress rates to the mainstream cohort in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy. This suggests that support in language and maths development for low attenders is generally effective at KS4 and / or a significant proportion of low attendance (of able pupils) was attributable to illness / injury rather than truancy.

1.2 Standards and Progress of Specific Groups: Areas Requiring Improvement:

N.B. All school and LA results should be viewed with due consideration of the fall in all of the main performance indicators at FP, KS2 and KS3 at national level in 2019.

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 & 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 statemented 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.
- EM 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.

1.3 Wellbeing and attitudes to learning**Pupil and Parent responses to Estyn Questionnaires regarding aspects of pupil wellbeing: for schools inspected during 2017-2019**

Pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning are predominantly good in mainstream settings. This is evidenced by recent inspection reports. 16 primary schools, 3 secondary schools, one 5-16 school, 1 special school and 1 PRU have been inspected during the last 3 years. 14 primary schools were judged as good and 2 as adequate for this area. Of the 3 secondary schools, 1 was judged as excellent, 1 as adequate and 1 as unsatisfactory. The 3-16 school was also judged as adequate

although this was specific to behaviour in the secondary phase The special school was judged as good. With the exception of the 3-16 school (Abertillery LC), none of the above are currently subject to Estyn monitoring. This indicates that BG schools have responded swiftly and positively in improving this important area.

A review of pupil and parent responses to Estyn questionnaires was conducted during December 2017. This related to the most recent inspections at that time (14 primaries, 3 secondary, 1 special school and 1 PRU). The high proportion of positive responses given **by primary school pupils** was encouraging. This generally reflected a high level of wellbeing contributed to by effective provision and leadership. However, some issues were apparent and, in some cases, consistent across schools. Staff responses to bullying, effectiveness of homework and opportunities for exercise were indicated as requiring address in specific schools while pupil behaviour was an issue common to most schools. The need to improve pupil wellbeing was identified as a significant issue within the secondary phase of Ebbw Fawr LC. This has been addressed by the school and its actions recognised by ESTYN by noting it had made strong progress in this area and subsequently removed from follow up.

Primary parents also had very positive views of most aspects and, importantly, nearly all felt that their children were safe at school. However, some issues were evident in a minority of schools. These concerned weak transition arrangements, ineffective school reporting, insufficient support for SEN and a lack of extracurricular activities. Concerns about pupil behaviour were more common across the schools and reflected pupils' own views.

Responses given by **secondary pupils and parents** were of greater concern because of higher levels of disagreement recorded against the Estyn questions. At the time responses at Tredegar were much more positive than for Brynmawr and Ebbw Fawr and most concerns related to the latter two schools. Pupil wellbeing at EFLC was also identified by ESTYN as an area requiring significant improvement. However, a subsequent Estyn visit / report noted that strong progress had been made and the school is no longer subject to Estyn monitoring. Parents' responses generally reflected those of pupils for most questions and were much less positive than those at primary level particularly for Brynmawr and Ebbw Fawr schools. However, parental views have now greatly improved in both schools; two new HTs and new Chairs of Governors are in place as well as a significant number in each school of new staff. The Council has intervened in both these schools over the last two years and improvements have been secured. Concerns about 'transition', school reporting and extracurricular activities paralleled those of parents in primary schools notably in same two clusters as aforementioned which have now been addressed.

Three additional BG schools were inspected during 2018 and 2019. Detailed responses from pupils and parents are no longer included in inspection reports. However, the reports make reference to the contribution and impact of pupil and parent input e.g. at Blaen-Y-Cwm, staff provided an additional outside stage for role play and drama opportunities in key stage 2 as a response to pupil feedback and at St. Joseph's, *listening to learners* formed an important part of the school's self-evaluation process. However, at Abertillery LC, the use of pupils' views was underdeveloped in the secondary phase, there was too little regard for parents' feedback and the governing body had insufficient pupil representation. The school is currently addressing these concerns as part of their PIAP and monitoring progress.

Healthy Schools Outcomes

The Healthy Schools and pre-schools programmes operating in BG are effective. All schools and pre-schools participate in these. School co-ordinator and pre-school officers ensure the effectiveness of implementation. The regional SEWC network providing support and a coordinated approach to the Healthy Schools agenda while good school to school support is taking place. An SRE group maps SRE provision against the 'What Matter' statements and the new curriculum in Wales in order to provide a toolkit for schools which operates from reception to KS4. This is a collaboration in Caerphilly LA. The partnership working between Pioneer school and regional Healthy Schools Group has been given exemplar recognition. Evidence shows that training has been effective and well received by schools and pre-schools.

The WNHSS and HSPSS are robust schemes, recognised by Welsh Government and provide a platform to ensure good health and wellbeing are at the core of school life. Significant progress has taken place during the last few years, currently:

- 6 schools are working towards NQA status.
- All 20 pre-school settings have achieved accreditation to the next phase.
- 5 additional schools have achieved Phase 5
- 3 additional schools have achieved phase 4
- Training has been carried out for a range of appropriate areas e.g. Relationships and sex Education, ACE awareness for pre-schools with all setting staff, cooking projects, emotional health & wellbeing and physical literacy.
- The development of a RSE toolkit has also encompassed a large element of work in preparation for the new Curriculum.
- The use of pupil voice as an integral part of progression when implementing actions within school, particularly around healthy eating and making necessary changes to attitudes.

All 4 secondary Schools completed the 2019 School Health Research Network survey, this will mean as well as schools having an individual report the LA will obtain a report also. This is expected to be publish at the beginning of April 2020.

Key findings will be disseminated to key partners across the Authority in order to discuss and address findings (where appropriate) collaboratively.

A working party with partners such as Aneurin Health, Aneurin Leisure and Police has been set up to support the schools with training and action planning.

Healthy Schools Co-ordinator continues to work closely with the Pioneering School Co-ordinator, who also attends the Gwent Healthy Schools Group. Such practice has been considered exemplar and is being adopted across Wales.

Sport and Physical Activity

The Aneurin Leisure Sports Development team create and develop bespoke interventions to ensure everyone in our communities can benefit from Sport and Physical Activity to help improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing. The team supports the Vision for Sport in Wales that states 'Everyone can have a lifetime enjoyment of sport. We want Wales to be an active nation with as many people as possible inspired to be active through sport.'

Aneurin Leisure's Sports Development team deliver a wide range of sport, physical activity, community engagement and swimming opportunities across Blaenau Gwent which contributes to the new 'Vision for sport' and their mission statement, 'An active nation where everyone can have a lifelong enjoyment of sport.' Sports Wales and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 underpin and embrace the new Vision for Sport in Wales via their new Sports Wales Strategy.

Blaenau Gwent has a real passion for sport and physical activity and the Sports Development team provides participation opportunities for young people of all ages and abilities. Sports Development endeavour to support individuals, groups, families and local and national partners to promote a healthier Blaenau Gwent. To ensure the wider community have the opportunity to become more physically activity there are a number of programmes to cater for every one of all ages. Those programmes include an array of Leadership and volunteer opportunities, Physical Literacy, Secondary School extra-curricular, Primary School interventions, Club Development and funding support, Disability and Community Sport engagement. The Community Sport model has created a gateway to local 'hard to engage' communities in Blaenau Gwent, and has provided a platform for young people living in the area. Community Sport aims to encourage local young people to become more physically active in a safe and fun environment. Sessions are volunteer-led and participant centred, with an emphasis on engaging the 'right' target group into a more physically active and sporting lifestyle.

Community Sport offers an abundance of opportunities to local young people. Specific opportunities include; Fit and Fed, Street Games, SERVES and Us Girls. The team are able to use these activities as a tool to impact on some of the wider social issues such as reducing barriers to participation such as increasing community safety, reducing anti-social behaviour and social isolation. Via Healthy and Active funding, the Sports Development team have created a bespoke programme to support families who are inactive. The programme is designed to explore the reasons behind that and to create a plan unique to that family to help them become more active. Support includes free access to sport centres, free sport club membership, employability training, financial support, housing support and nutritional advice. The families are referred into the programme via schools and social services.

All the current interventions are tools not only increase physical activity but to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, their families and the wider communities.

Sport Wales currently uses the School Sport Survey to evaluate the performance of school sport within individual local authorities. Headline measures from the latest 2018 School Sport Survey include:

- 96% of pupils would like to do more sport and this equals the national average.
- 38% of pupils are “Hooked on Sport” and this has declined in line with LAs across the Greater Gwent area.
- 55% of pupils feel PE and Sport contribute towards a healthy lifestyle.
- 51% of pupils are members of a sport club.
- BG provides 92 minutes of curricular PE per week.

There are currently 2329 children that take part in school swimming years 3 – 6, with a pass rate of 75% which is 4% higher than the national average: -

- Total No. of Primary School Pupils Swimming: 2,329
- Number of Girls Swimming: 1,174
- Numbers of Boys Swimming: 1,155
- Total No. of Year 6 Pupils Achieving KS 2: 405, 75%
- Total No. of Year 6 Swimming: 538
- Number of Year 6 Girls Swimming: 272
- Number of Year 6 Boys Swimming: 266
- Number of Year 6 Girls Achieving KS 2: 202, 74%
- Number of Year 6 Boys Achieving KS 2: 203, 76%
- Number of Year 6 Achieving KS 2, Abertillery: 91, 60%
- Number of Year 6 Achieving KS 2, Ebbw Vale: 196, 79%
- Number of Year 6 Achieving KS 2, Tredegar: 118, 84%

Swim school provisions are currently 1477 out of a possible 1903 (maximum occupancy) children taking part in these lessons.

- Ebbw Vale – 634/713 – Occupancy 89%
- Abertillery – 510/630 – Occupancy 81%
- Tredegar – 419/560 – Occupancy 75%

Non swimmers from KS2 are now catered for through the sports development AYP swimming, those who don't pass the criteria at

KS2 are invited to year 7 swimming classes. The current rate is 57 non swimmers invited with 35 undertaking the lessons, which equates to a 65% uptake. The new measurement for Every Child a swimmer by the end of KS 2 (year 6) will now be measured against the Nofio Ysgol framework which mirrors the Swim Wales learn to swim model.

The partnership between the Council, swimming clubs and Aneurin Leisure make the transition from swimming lessons more focused to swimming length following FINA rules and regulations. Invitations to swimmers from wave 5 – 8 are invited to trial sessions at the swimming clubs in Blaenau Gwent with the aim of retaining them in aquatic activities.

The swim data collection will now include:

- Swimming Clubs – Average number of people per lane (6) x number of lanes x number of hours
- Other aquatic clubs (water polo, canoeing, synchro, octopush, parties) – Average of 20 people per hour x number of hours
- School numbers to be recorded by numbers of children attending x number of sessions.

A summary of the main strengths for Sport and Swimming include:

1. Data from the 2018 School Sport Survey shows 96% of pupils would like to do more sport and 55% of pupils feel PE and Sport contribute towards a healthy lifestyle. There is clear latent demand for physical activity opportunities that is targeted.
2. There is a very high number of children in both our school swimming programme and learn to swim programme. A great deal of work has been put into the development of the swimming programme through the help of Swim Wales; therefore, a robust pathway exists from fundamentals to competitive swimming.
3. There are 2329 children in our 'school swimming' programme and 1477 in our 'learn to swim' programme, which gives an occupancy of 63%. This is the Council's highest participation achieved to date.
4. School swimming is rolling programme all year around during terms times, this gives more opportunities to all levels and ages of swimmers.

A summary of the main areas for development include:

1. The decline in "Hooked on Sport" figure from 43% in 2015 to 38% in 2018. The Sport Development team has streamlined its programmes, created new partnerships while developing existing ones to ensure that figure increase. Emphasis has been placed on Primary School support to create greater preventative measures. Community hubs are being established to allow sport to be at the heart of our most venerable communities.
2. The swimming programme is under review i.e. the amount of time we offer in our swimming pools, as there needs to be a balanced between public, schools and structured activities.
3. Advertising 'learn to swim' sessions frequently during the year. Targeting the marketing campaign to coincide with new term times for greater uptake while raising the occupancy of 'School Swimming' to our 'Learn to Swim' programme.

All schools have access to an annual whole-school survey - PASS (Pupil Attitude to School and Self) the cost of which is covered by the LA. This provides high quality, comprehensive and comparative data on aspects of pupil wellbeing. Approximately half of the schools currently employ the PASS. There are excellent examples of where PASS has been used very effectively to identify, support and show sustained improvements for pupil well-being. The LA is currently promoting increased use of PASS in non-participating schools.

The Wellbeing Data Set provides Challenge Advisors with useful data for further investigation into aspects of inclusion and wellbeing. However, effective use of the data sets is at an early stage and requires further development through better joint working between Challenge Advisers and LA Officers to ensure consistency when challenging schools and promoting evidence based practice.

2019 Outcomes from the Youth Counselling Service:

Involving young people is a core principle of youth work. A bi-annual consultation takes place with young people across the borough to understand what they need. In addition, the Youth Service's Advisory Group (YAMS) help decide on how priorities are set and what gaps need meeting. Each project works with young people, both in groups or as individuals to ensure they influence the delivery and design of their particular project. Additionally, young people have been directly involved in the recruitment of all key staff for the past 7 years.

The Youth Service also works collaboratively with a range of partners, both external and internal to the Council. This partnership approach is essential to ensure that young people are well supported and to meet the needs of both external funders and Council priorities.

The Counselling Service is facilitated by the Youth Service. Having access to an independent Counselling Service for 11-18 years became a statutory duty in April 2013. In addition, the Youth Service provides counselling for young people in the community for young people aged 18-25. There were 5 independent counsellors working across Blaenau Gwent schools and young people's settings on a part time basis. There was access to a male and female counsellor in all secondary schools and were generally available term time only. During the pandemic we extended counselling to also be available, should young people need/want it to cover school breaks. Counsellors had to quickly adapt their work from March 2020 to enable them to provide therapeutic support using various digital platforms and in line with which young people preferred, or had access to. For some young people, they felt that would prefer to put their sessions 'on hold' whilst not being able to be seen in their settings. It was also found that for young aged young people (Years 6 and 7 particularly) they did not want to engage digitally at all with support often provided by the counsellors via parents.

A total of 268 (318 previous year) young people aged 11-18 accessed a counsellor across 12 settings during 2019-20. Of these 153 were female and 114 were male.

Referrals to counselling can be made by any person or organisation working with a young person, who feel it may be beneficial to them. The young person should be made aware of the referral and wish to engage in the therapeutic process for it to be a successful relationship. Young people can also self-refer and Welsh Government have been keen to see that self-referrals make up a high percentage of total, 15% of self-referrals were made in BG, with the highest referrer coming through the schools at 64%. Referrals were derived a range of pupils, some with specific characteristics e.g. LAC, pupils with SEN and differing ethnicities. This is the ninth academic session where family has been in the top 3 highest predominant issue for both boys and girls. This academic year anxiety was the highest for girls with family second followed by self-worth. For boy's family was the highest predominant issue with anxiety second and self-worth also being third. This is the 6th academic session that anxiety and self-worth were also in the top 3 predominant issues.

The Youth Service has now also extended the counselling service to 18 to 25 year olds. (one day per week for Inspire 2 Work young people and one day per week for other post 18 young people). For the last year, 23 young people aged 16-25 years accessed support from the Counsellor providing a service for post 16 young people. 19 (82.6%) were female and 4 (17.4%) were male. The predominant issues in counselling for post 16 young people were anxiety, depression and domestic abuse.

Responses to counselling have been very positive. Anonymous questionnaires completed at the end of the sessions indicated the following impact:

(During times when Counsellors were working online we suspended the use of evaluations due to counselling not taking place in its usual format.)

- 100% of young people completing a questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed that counselling helped them understand their situation or feelings
- 74% agreed or strongly agreed that their relationships with others had improved since attending counselling. 26% didn't know.
- 90% agreed or strongly agreed that their problems had got easier since attending counselling. 10% didn't know
- 93.5% agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to get to their sessions. 6.5% didn't know.
- 93.5% agreed or strongly agreed that they had a good relationship with their counsellor. 6.5% didn't know

YP Core uses a series of 10 questions which are scored and calculated on a scale. The higher the number, the higher the level of emotional distress. In the last academic year, for those attending counselling and completing a YP Core questionnaire at the beginning and end of counselling Blaenau Gwent were 1st out of 22 LAs in the highest improvement of emotional wellbeing.

When asked what were the 'best things about counselling', the majority of young people expressed that being able to talk about their thoughts, feelings, problems were the best things about counselling. Another thread was being listened to and helped.

Some young people that attend counselling in Blaenau Gwent are experiencing high levels of emotional/mental health issues such as significant depression and/or anxiety disorders, self-harm and suicide ideation. There were/are a few young people that are being 'held' by Counsellors as they were not meeting the high thresholds for assessment with PCMHS or CAMHS or not attending appointments when offered for a number of reasons. This is particularly true for post 18 young people. This is not a unique situation for young people within Blaenau Gwent however the implementation of the Space Wellbeing Panel in April 2019 has improved this. Referrals into panel can be made by anyone with the consent of parents and with young people's consent to engage in services. The main objective of the Panel is to ensure that children and young people (aged 0-18 years) are able to access the appropriate level of service to meet their emotional and mental health needs.

Future developments for the Youth Counselling Service include:

- Ensuring all school staff understand that the counselling process impacts on pupils' wellbeing and ability to learn.
- Ensuring referrals are appropriate in order to target those genuinely in need and avoid inappropriate referrals misappropriating limited counselling time.
- Providing appropriate and confidential accommodation for counselling sessions in schools
- Further develop the play therapy service established this year
- Ensuring effective transition of support from children to adult services in relation to emotional & mental health and overall wellbeing.

Exclusions:

Exclusions

The last data published by Welsh Government in October 2020, reported on 2018/19 exclusions. At that time, Blaenau Gwent was 21/22 for rates of 5 day exclusions or less, 5/5 in our family of LAs and 5/5 in SEWC. The rate of exclusions per 1,000 pupils was 66 which is well above the Welsh national average of 39.1 (NB 1/22 would be least excluding).

For rate of 6 days or more BG were 13/22, 2/5 in our family of LAs and 4/5 in SEWC. The rate of exclusions per 1,000 pupils was 1.7 which is equivalent to the Welsh national average (NB 1/22 would be least excluding). At the last point that comparative Council data was available (17/18), Blaenau Gwent was 13/22 for rates of 5-day exclusions or less, 4/5 in our family of LAs and 2/5 in South East Wales Consortia (SEWC). For rate of 6 days or more we were joint 6/22, 2/5 in our family of LAs and 2/5 in SEWC.

The table overleaf sets out Blaenau Gwent exclusion data for the last five years.

Number of Exclusions:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
KS3 & KS4	443	564	474	306	160
5 days or less	439	546	460	295	155
6 days or more	4	18	14	11	5
FP & KS2	80	61	133	67	33
5 days or less	74	61	132	63	33
6 days or more	6	0	1	4	0
Total	523	625	607	373	193

Number of Days:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
KS3 & KS4	742.5	872	762	544	259.5
5 days or less	705.5	766.5	628	430.5	225.5
6 days or more	37	105.5	134	113.5	34
FP & KS2	188.5	84.5	225	137	47.5
5 days or less	139.5	84.5	211.5	111.5	47.5
6 days or more	49	0	14	25.5	0
Total	931	956.5	987	681	307

There has been a decrease in both number of/ and days lost to exclusions in 2020/21 compared to the previous year, particularly in KS3/4. However, the data over the last two years is not really comparable to previous years due to school closures, periods of isolation and an increase in blended learning.

KS3/4 data shows a 48% reduction in the number of exclusions in 2020/21 compared to the previous year and a 52.5% reduction in the number of days lost. Foundation Phase (FP)/KS2 data shows a 50% reduction in the number of exclusions in 2020/21 compared to the previous year and an almost 66% reduction in the number of days lost. Data at FP/KS2 shows that one school in particular accounted for nearly 50% of the exclusions.

The main reasons for exclusion follow national trends and remain largely unchanged and in line with national trends:

- persistent disruptive behaviour
- verbal abuse/threatening behaviour against an adult
- physical assault on a pupil

Exclusions are higher in the Summer term, followed by the Autumn term and then the Spring. This would be reflective of the situation with Covid as there were more pupils in school in the summer term, the autumn term had seen a number of families not sending the pupils back initially and schools were closed for the majority of the Spring Term.

In 2021 more pupils were excluded in year 9 than any other year group.

There were a total of six permanent exclusions in 20/21 (however one was later overturned at independent appeal) compared to nine in 2019/20. The 6 permanent exclusions were generated by 2 schools.

Primary and Secondary School Attendance

Primary school attendance has declined between 2016/17 and 2018/19 from 94.5% to 94.3%. At the end of 2018/19, there was a slight decrease in the number of schools placed in Q1 and Q2. This places BG 3rd in the family of LAs and 5th in SEWC.

All Wales mean for Primary attendance stands at 94.6% in 18/19. BG Primary attendance is therefore 0.3pp below the all-Wales means. Unauthorised absence at the end of 2018/19 remained the same as in 2017/18 at 1.4% but still placed BG primary schools 2nd in its family of LAs and in line with the Welsh mean (1.4%).

Persistent absenteeism in the primary sector has remained at 1.6% since 2015/16. The all-Wales means stands at 1.7% BG remains 0.1% below this and ranks joint 1st in our family of LAs and joint 2nd in SEWC.

Secondary attendance, declined from 93.7% (16/17) to 92.9% (18/19). Based on the trend data over the 3-year period Blaenau Gwent is placed joint 3rd in our family of local authorities and 5th across the SEWC region. All-Wales means for secondary attendance is 93.8% which places BG 0.9pp lower than the all-Wales figures.

Unauthorised absence has increased from 1.5% (16/17) to 2.2% (18/19) and BG remains above national averages (1.7%).

Persistent absenteeism in the secondary sector has increased from 3.4% to 4.1% since 2015/16, which place places BG 1st in our family of local authorities and 2nd across the SEWC region. Despite the slight increase in persistent absenteeism, it is in line with the Welsh average of 4.1%.

There has been a marginal reduction in pupils with below 80% attendance at the end of July 2019 compared to the end of July 2018. (747 in 2018/19 compared to 772 in 2017/18).

Primary attendance: 3rd in family
 Unauthorised: 2nd in family
 PA joint: 1st in family

3 of the 4 Secondary schools exceeded WG modelled estimates for attendance.
 PA ranked 1st in family

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the only comparative data available is for the whole school estate and that fluctuates on a weekly basis. However, Blaenau Gwent has performed well in the last few weeks of the Summer 2021 term, regularly featuring in the top 5 of LAs across Wales.

1.3 Wellbeing and Attitudes to Learning: Areas where good progress has been made:

- 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 / their children's wellbeing in schools.
- All pre-schools and schools participate in effective Healthy School programmes with exemplar work being recognised nationally and there are effective 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. There has been an excellent number and range of events to engage and seek the views of children and young people.
- An effective 11-18 counselling service in place for with very positive feedback from attendees, with an extended service for 18-25 year olds.
- BG is one of only a very few Councils to have a fully compliant 3rd School Sport Survey to provide an evidence base to inform more targeted work.
- 3 out of 4 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.
- An improving trend of increased opportunities for *pupil voice* in BG schools and greater learner participation in decision-making.
- Outcomes for registered young people are excellent.

1.3 Wellbeing and Attitudes to Learning: Areas requiring improvement:

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 reduce primary unauthorised absence in BG from 1.4% to below 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%

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 PA in the secondary sector in BG from 5.0% to below that of the all-Wales means (also currently 4.6%)

To continue to reduce the numbers of pupils excluded in primary and secondary sectors.

To continue to improve pupil behaviour in schools and staff response to pupil concerns

To further enhance pupil voice activities to inform self-evaluation planning activities

Inspection Area 2 – Education Services Leads CG/JS/MJ/ Inclusion/HD-E (EAS)

2.1 Support for school improvement

The local authority knows its schools very well and acts swiftly and uses its full statutory powers to support and improve standards within them. The level of challenge provided is graduated with the identified needs within each school setting. This has resulted in significant improvements during recent years e.g. improved outcomes in targeted areas, fewer schools with amber & red categorisation and improved inspection outcomes. In addition, examples of excellent practice have been identified in BG schools more frequently than in past years. A range of established and improved procedures and protocols have contributed to these better outcomes e.g. improved training / mentoring for governing bodies, regionally agreed protocols, more effective intervention panels, forensic at-risk registers and expert HR advice. Throughout the pandemic the Council has continued with its support to schools identified as a cause for concern through holding regular check-in and catch up meetings.

The LA understands the importance of close consultation with relevant stakeholders in addressing school improvement e.g. all Headteachers and School Governors were engaged in the consultation process when developing the revised Partnership Agreement, which was implemented during Summer 2018. As a consequence, the PA is now better understood and aligned to our Vision for Education in Blaenau Gwent.

LA and EAS officers are effective in coordinating support and interventions within schools and so avoid unnecessary duplication of provision. The LA robustly monitors EAS support and the impact of Challenge Adviser work and curriculum support. In particular, the LA ensures that support work focuses on its priorities and in targeting those schools in greatest need. Evaluations of Challenge Adviser notes and EAS reports have generally been good. The introduction of FADE reports as part of the LA's self-evaluation procedures has contributed to this and ensured consistency of approach. The impact of these actions are becoming evident e.g. the school's single plan/SDP more clearly reflect LA priorities and school self-evaluation processes have improved particularly for primary schools.

A major contributing factor to school improvement is the wide range of data and information made available to schools, LA, EAS and Council officers. Performance data is shared with all head teachers through Hwb the EAS School Profile and in HT meetings. This has helped schools to improve their own analyses and evaluations and helped them better identify priorities for improvement. While this has undoubtedly helped schools to better inform their own improvement planning, target setting

procedures have not always benefitted e.g. about one-half of schools had substantial discrepancies between outcomes and targets at each key stage in 2019 and in previous years. The accuracy and reliability of assessment procedures within a minority of schools was also questioned by differences between 2019 NC and National Test results. These shortcomings are linked and so the LA and support services need to further develop teachers' assessment skills particularly as schools move to develop formative assessment procedures aligned with forthcoming curriculum changes.

Data and information is also made available to and used effectively by a wide range of support services e.g. LA inclusion officers and educational psychologists. This allows individual support to be identified and provided for individual learners particularly those in vulnerable groups and most at risk of underachievement. Some vulnerable groups have clearly benefitted from support e.g. BG pupils from differing ethnic groups and statemented pupils have achieved good or very good outcomes in recent years. However, other groups have not achieved as well e.g. eFSM pupils & SEN pupils within KS3 & 4. Consequently, the LA needs to direct greater support to these groups and in particular to the teaching and learning approaches currently provided for them and also the more recent approach to quality assuring PDG spend plans will further support improved targeting of support for specific groups.

The proportion of educational settings attaining good judgements has continued to increase during 2016-19 and the proportion receiving adequate or lower judgements has continued to decrease over the same period. This generally reflects improved standards, teaching and leadership in Blaenau Gwent educational settings. The case studies requested from Blaen-y-Cwm, St Marys RC and Cwm Primary as well as Pen y Cwm and Tredegar evidence excellent practice across a larger range of settings.

The school subject to Estyn Significant Improvement (ALC) continues to receive tailored bespoke support from the LA and EAS. The recent Estyn monitoring visit noted that progress has been made against some of the recommendations and a further revisit is anticipated in the spring term 2020. Progress through recommendations forms the core of the PIAP that is in place and the LA appropriately discharges its statutory function for a school causing a concern through the use of powers of intervention through the statutory Schools Causing Concern framework. BFS was placed in Special Measures in December 2019, the PIAP and LA Statement are being implemented. A full package of support is in place in line with the WG's Multi-Agency Support for Schools in Special Measures initiative, including a 'one plan' approach.

A forensic approach to progress through the Intervention Panel is taken which encompasses a Council wide support programme at all levels of the organisation to ensure progress continues to be made at an appropriate pace. **Overall, school categorisation at primary level remains good.** Just 2 primary schools are indicated as in need of improvement (Sofrydd and Glyncoed) and one all-through and one secondary setting in need of urgent improvement (Abertillery and Brynmawr Foundation School); there is strong evidence of cultural change occurring in both settings due to new HTs and senior teams in place in both schools.

The LA has made good progress in improving its work to support, challenge and intervene in underperforming schools. Specific schools are identified according to the National Model and resources are targeted appropriately on those with the greatest need. There is a good track record of schools improving following post-inspection intervention. However, 2019 results indicated the same few underperforming schools as in previous years and these continue to be of concern with regard to the quality of learning and pupil standards.

Earlier target setting, provisional categorisation and greater challenge is currently being employed to hasten support for these centres. In addition, good practice is effectively shared across schools for example, the ACE agenda in Ebbw Fawr Learning Community which is also learning network school, Tredegar is offering support

across a range of subject specialisms as well as a professional learning pioneer school. Glanhowy Primary is a learning network schools and Welsh Hwb school, Beaufort Primary is a lead partner school working with Cardiff Metropolitan University on ITT, Willowtown Primary is a learning network school for Maths and STEM and also a regional professional learning pioneer school, St Illtyd's Primary is a quality improvement school and Deighton is a learning network schools for DCF.

The Corporate Director of Education, Executive Member for Education, EAS Principal Advisor and Strategic Education Improvement Manager devise an agreed approach for schools causing concern, holding them to account for progress and keeping support plans under review.

Improving literacy, numeracy and reducing the performance gap due to disadvantage are key priorities for the LA and these are reflected within key LA Business Plans as well as the EAS Business Plan. The LA's schools have achieved considerable success in these areas during the last few years e.g. 2019 results indicated improved literacy standards in the Foundation Phase, good value-added progress in reading & maths / numeracy at KS2 and improved writing outcomes at KS3. However, L4+ writing outcomes fell at KS2 in 2019, value-added progress in English was weak in KS3, and the differences between eFSM and non-eFSM outcomes have generally increased.

Another key priority is to increase the number / proportion of learners achieving higher NC levels and GCSE grades. There have been some improvements in relation to this e.g. L6+ outcomes improved for English and Welsh 2nd language during 2017-19 and particularly for 2019 and the proportion of learners gaining GCSE A*/A grades improved in both English and maths in 2019. However, the proportion of learners gaining GCSE 5 A*/A grades in 2019 was below the LA target and, at post-16, the proportion of learners attaining higher level grades (A*/A) was lower than the all-Wales means at both A and AS level.

The below-average outcomes at higher levels is mainly attributable to the low literacy & numeracy skills possessed by pupils on entry to school. Value-added progress is generally good for both language & maths within KS2 and at least adequate for reading and numeracy (reasoning) within KS3. However, the low starting points limit what learners may achieve at each key stage – particularly at higher levels. **Consequently, the LA intends to have greater focus on pre-school and early years' development in order to achieve higher starting points for learners and so higher outcomes at each subsequent NC stage.** In tandem with this, the LA intends to develop individual, school and whole-authority value-added measures for the Foundation Phase in order to monitor the effectiveness of its actions.

The LA has made very strong progress in line with its strategy for improving standards in ICT during the last 2 academic sessions. This has involved continued effective implementation of the Infrastructure and Connectivity Project, along with of Waves 1-4 of the WG HWB EdTech Programme. In addition, Education have made good progress towards the development of a strategy and associated sustainability plan for both infrastructure and devices in BG. As a result, the LA and SRS now have in-depth appreciation of the BG position in relation ICT infrastructure, connectivity, device status, management, ratios etc. It is understood that BG schools are well placed to effectively facilitate implementation of the Digital Competency Framework. Blaenau Gwent's Infrastructure and Connectivity Project (ICP) has reached completion, addressing the following:

- the quality, quantity and location of wireless access points in classrooms and schools;
- migration to the Schools SRS Edu system; and,
- the speed and capacity of wireless access, along with improves support to schools.

As a direct result of the aforementioned projects, the LA and its schools are compliant with the Hwb Education Digital Standards. **The status of the ICP project placed Blaenau Gwent in a very strong position to further enhance the infrastructure in line with the first 3 waves of Hwb EdTech funding.**

Hwb EdTech funding (waves 1-3) has permitted additional infrastructure priorities to be addressed that the ICP did not cover, further enhancing provision throughout the school estate. The LA has made very good progress despite the emergency situation, successfully signing off the first 3 waves in the autumn-term 2020, and having made very strong progress towards the completion of Wave 4. Up to January 2021 2,051 end of life devices had been replaced in schools, since then an additional 1,071 Chromebooks have been allocated to the schools, along with the replacement of an additional 1,072 end of life devices throughout the school estate. We currently have 3,347 devices across the school estate that are in need of replacement. Our long-term plan is to replace 20-25 % of end of life devices per on year as a rolling programme to ensure technology refresh is able to effectively facilitate the delivery of teaching and learning. The LA are working with the schools re: affordability, desired ratios and aspirations for ICT within the schools, and are in the process of establishing a 5-year sustainability plan to ensure that the schools have a high level of suitable, usable devices at all times. This method seeks to avoid significant cost pressures for schools, whereby all devices require replacement at once. We are working with WG to look to replace an additional 1,500 end of life devices over the course of next academic year, which would enable us to effectively progress onto Wave 5 (audio visual). In support of blended learning, to date the LA has used a mixture of its own and Welsh Govt. funding to support digitally disadvantaged learners, by repurposing 1,359 end of life devices, which have distributed to learners over the course of the last academic session. In addition, 161 Mi-Fi devices have been allocated to digitally disadvantaged learners requiring connectivity support. Ongoing support in planned for the forthcoming academic session.

The EAS provides schools with good quality curriculum support for literacy, numeracy, Welsh language, the Foundation Phase and IT. The provision of frameworks to support curriculum development, monitoring and quality assurance is particularly valued by schools. School understand the differentiated support and challenge policy and the need for targeting support in identified schools. As previously indicated, greater emphasis needs to be given to supporting schools to improve English / literacy and particularly within early years.

The LA has increased its focus on improving the outcomes of vulnerable groups. This is supported by the Wellbeing Data Pack and by establishing closer working arrangements between LA inclusion services and the EAS. In particular, the LA aims to improve performance of eFSM pupils in KS3 & 4 and those learners with a record of underachievement in previous years. There has been some success in this with eFSM pupils achieving better than expected progress in reading and numeracy reasoning within KS3 during 2016-19, a narrowing of the performance gap in numeracy reasoning for the 2019 Y9 cohort and by eFSM pupils achieving good outcomes for most KS4 performance indicators in 2019.

However, eFSM outcomes trail those of non-eFSM learners at all key stages and progress rates for the 2019 cohorts were lower than those of non- eFSM pupils for most performance indicators. The LA has used individual pupil tracking for value-added progress to good effect. Individual pupil, class and whole school profiles have helped to determine precisely the effectiveness of teaching & learning within centres. The introduction of the LA Virtual School (VS) approach to collating and using 'matched data' to better understand and evaluate measures of progress, along with greater use of contextual value added measures has helped in this. However, the move to restrict National Test outcomes to schools will limit the LA's ability to conduct such analyses and prevent value-added progress to be determined.

Partnership working between schools, Coleg Gwent and WBTPs is developing; 2020 vocational outcomes at Coleg Gwent were good. A level and A/S level 2020/21 Centre Determined Grades results were also good and comparable to the national averages except for a lower proportion of learners attaining A* / A grades.

- A Level Pass Rate 99.1% in 2020-21, which is in line with the national mean average.
- A*-A grades 31% (29% previous year).
- A*-C grades 82% (88% year previous).

A Level Results

	A* - E	A* - C	A* - A
2021	99.1	81.9	31.1
2020	100.0	88.0	29.1
2019	100.0	75.9	15.3
2018	98.7	74.4	15.6

A/S Level Results

	A* - E	A* - C	A* - A
	94.1	70.2	19.4
	92.7	68.9	17.4
	90.9	63.5	14.8
	89.9	58.2	10.3

Improved partnership working between the LA and Coleg Gwent who now provide the following:

- Annual summary reports for Blaenau Gwent learners attending all college campuses which could be amended / extended to correspond with current WG performance indicators and so allow comparisons to be made with other LAs within Wales.
- Destination data for Blaenau Gwent learners to both the LA and Careers Wales.
- Regular updates of learner withdrawals and learner circumstances in order that the LA Youth Service might provide further support to identified individuals.

As a consequence, Coleg Gwent has provided more detailed information regarding learner outcomes during 2019-20 and now provides monthly updates on retention rates and specific learner withdrawals (initiated October 2019); this has further enabled the Youth Service to provide improved, targeted support at an earlier stage, along with information provided by Careers Wales.

Transition arrangements between childcare practitioners and foundation phase settings is good. All childcare practitioners are trained to deliver good quality practice and engage in effective visit programmes between settings. Flying Start provision and practice (where it is available) is very good and provide a useful model for the development of effective transition practice. However, transition information needs to be simplified for receiving classroom staff.

The LA ensures that there is a range of support strategies and professional development opportunities available for school staff at all level e.g. the Excellence in Teaching and Learning Framework (ETF), ILM and PGCE in Education Leadership and Management. In addition, the EAS provides leadership programmes and schools organise their own development programmes such as Olevi. Schools also work together in a number of ways e.g. school-to-school support strategies and wider CPD and networking activities. These have proved effective in disseminating good practice.

The LA has implemented a supportive induction programme for Headteachers and aspiring school senior leadership involving collaboration between LA officers, EAS colleagues and head teachers. The LA and National HT Mentors are aligned.

School leaders are playing an increasingly active and effective role in the co-production and implementation of LA and SEWC regional strategy as evidenced through the EAS Education HT Steering Group, the ICT strategy group as well as the Strategic HT group for OD issues, also the school's Budget Forum and JCC Trade Union meetings.

For schools causing concern, there is effective use of high quality mentor Headteachers to support leadership, together with support from schools, which demonstrate high quality provision and outcomes for example Cardiff High School for BFS. The identification of high quality leaders and schools by the EAS has been key to the success of this approach, which builds on the regional school-to-school support strategy. Support and intervention plans ensure coordinated approaches to supporting leaders and governors in schools causing concern. Specialist HR support offered through the EAS to support Headteachers and governors in developing approaches to tackling underperformance of leaders and teachers is effective, with quality training provided on Regional Pay Policy and Performance Management. This compliments the support available from the LA when dealing with individual cases.

The LA ensures that there is a good range of support strategies for improving the quality of school governance e.g. governor training programmes, supported self-evaluation arrangements, governor networking meetings and an Annual Regional Conference ensures effective communication with governors and updates on national strategies, priorities, and school / LA performance. However, attendance at these events can be weak and improving governor engagement is a priority for the LA for example a cluster based approach is being rolled out in the summer term 2020.

There are established processes for the selection and appointment of LA governors to schools but the robustness of monitoring arrangements to ensure sufficiency of governors needs to be improved. A number of high quality governors have been identified who serve temporarily on governing bodies in schools causing concern as a part of the LA's formal powers of intervention. They provide effective models of good governance and contribute to improving procedures and general governance in schools.

The LA has increasing awareness of the management needs of governors and senior middle leaders. Current support for school leaders and governors is both universal and bespoke but demonstrating a positive impact on outcomes e.g. by improving school categorisation, school inspection findings and good or better progress through the school's single plan.

Schools causing concern processes are proving to be effective mechanisms to provide targeted support and challenge to Head teachers and Chairs of Governors to improve the capacity of the setting to improve. Formal powers of intervention have been used to secure the necessary changes in governance, leadership and consequently the capacity of the school to improve. There is a good track record of schools increasing their capacity to improve and sustaining improvement following Council intervention, for example Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, Bro Helyg, Willoughton and Glyncoed with new senior leaders, teams and Governors in ALC and BFS. The Hwb system is used by schools to facilitate school planning, monitoring and evaluation of impact of all grant spend for example, EIG, PDG, PL, LAC and PDG LAC against funding plans. This provides a transparent approach to grant funding and enables schools to more effectively evaluate outcomes/impact against spend.

2.1 Support for school improvement:

2.1 Areas where good progress has been made and where support for school improvement has been effective:

- **The LA has appointed 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.
- Post 16 arrangements are strengthened and the pathways for learning are improving.
- Strong progress on ICT infrastructure and connectivity developments.
- 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 Areas requiring improvement:

- 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 e.g. Joint Headteachers' meetings.
- 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 The quality of support for vulnerable learners

It should be noted that COVID-19 has increased the level of eFSM across the school estate. Evaluations of the quality and effectiveness of provision is illustrated by pupil progress and achievement, which in turn informs the content of the evaluative narrative below:

For Pupils Eligible for Free School Meals:

The quality of support for eFSM pupils in all phases and at all key stages needs to be improved so that performance matches that of non-FSM pupils. This is particularly the case for more-able pupils where differences in outcomes are greater. Where performance gaps are lower than national figures, this is usually due to the performance of non-FSM being lower than their national peers and indicates that the quality of support to improve performance of non-FSM pupils also needs to be improved. Progress of both eFSM and non-eFSM pupils during **KS3** was higher than expected in both reading and numeracy reasoning with eFSM pupils making the greater progress in the latter. This indicates that the quality of support for these skills was generally good. However, eFSM pupils made less progress than non-eFSM pupils in reading and confirms that enhanced support is required for this area. Both groups made less than expected progress in NC levels highlighting the need to improve the quality of curriculum support for all learners (including non-FSM) within KS3.

At **KS4**, differences between eFSM and non-eFSM GCSE outcomes were lower than the national means but mainly attributable to weaker outcomes for the latter group. The average progress made by eFSM pupils in English and in maths improved during the last 2 years but fell for non-eFSM pupils. However, for both groups, progress was only just about adequate in English and unsatisfactory in maths / numeracy. This emphasises the need to improve the quality of teaching and learning in these areas and for all pupils at KS4.

LA and EAS process in this regard has been developed more recently: for example, all schools' PDG plans are double checked for appropriateness by the EAS and signed off by the LA to help ensure that support is appropriately targeted. During these meetings the Headteacher is requested to set out how they intend to secure effective use of the PDG and expected outcomes and impact. This practice is fairly new but will continue to develop and become more refined going forward.

For Pupils Presenting with Special Educational Needs:

In preparation and in readiness for the ALN ACT and also for 2019 PLASC all schools reviewed their SEN registers. This activity was based on the findings of a pilot group of 5 schools which resulted in all schools undertaking moderation activity on their SEN Registers to establish improved consistency across all learners in Blaenau Gwent. This evaluation is based on matched data for pupils present throughout each key stage. In general, pupils with **statements within the FP, KS2 & 3 have achieved well in recent years indicating that the quality and effectiveness of support is good. In particular, statemented pupils generally made good progress within KS2 & 3 and particularly for reading and numeracy skills. This confirms that the quality of provision for these pupils has been effective.**

Conversely, pupils recorded as on **SA & SA+ made relatively lower progress in these areas during KS2 & 3.** This clearly indicates the need for greater improvement in the quality of provision and an increased focus on attainment and progress of these groups within these key stages.

At KS4, the proportions of SEN pupils attaining A*-C and A*-G grades were relatively high, much improved compared to previous years and **generally similar to those for non-SEN pupils.** The proportions of pupils attaining A*-C grades improved substantially **for all SEN categories** in both English language and maths in 2019. Progress rates for SEN pupils were also generally similar to non-SEN pupils. (However, as for mainstream pupils, these were just adequate in English / literature but weaker for maths / numeracy)

The improved progress for SEN groups in both subject areas during 2017-19 is encouraging and particularly for the large group (70) of SA+ pupils in English and indicates that the quality of support for these pupils has generally been effective. However, the relatively weak progress made by pupils (particularly in maths) **clearly indicates that more tailored and targeted support is needed for pupils with SEN throughout KS4.**

For Pupils Attending Resource Bases (RB):

KS2

Of the 9 pupils in the 2019 cohort (5 with SEN statements), all but 1 progressed at least 1 NC level for language and all did so for maths during KS2. About one-half of pupils progressed 2 NC levels in both languages in maths. This indicates that in KS 2 the quality and effectiveness of support for pupils registered for NC assessments was at least adequate. However, there is a need to continue to improve the quality of support in order to ensure all pupils attending the RB achieve expected progress.

KS3

There were 14 pupils in the 2019 cohort (6 with SEN statements). 10 of these had matched test data available. Of these, about one-half progressed at least 1 NC level for language and for maths during KS3. One pupil progressed 3 NC levels in both languages in maths while 2 others progressed 2 NC levels in maths only. This indicates that the quality and effectiveness of support was at least adequate.

However, the mean progress rates for **RB pupils were generally lower than for the whole BG cohort and particularly for reading**. Consequently, there is a need to continue to improve the quality of support in order to **ensure all pupils attending the RB achieve expected progress particularly in the latter area**.

KS4

There were 7 pupils in the 2019 cohort (6 with SEN statements). Of these, 5 pupils attained a C grade or better in English language but only 3 did so in maths. 5 pupils progressed 1 or more NC levels in English language but only 2 did so in maths. 2 pupils failed to progress at all in English and maths while 3 pupils regressed in the latter.

The mean progress rate for RB pupils in English language was higher than that of the whole BG cohort and better than expected. However, the mean progress rate for maths indicated no progression overall. The outcomes indicate that the quality of support in KS 4 was generally good for English particularly when taking into account the educational needs of the cohort. However, the weaker outcomes in maths / numeracy indicate that the quality of support in this subject and in KS4 needs to be improved.

For Pupils Attending the River Centre 3-16 Special SEBD School.

KS3

There were 11 pupils in 2019 cohort. 4 had SEN statements, 3 were LAC, 7 were at SA+ and the majority were known to YOT. Of these, about one-half of the cohort progressed at least 1 NC level in English while fewer did so in maths. The progress rates for reading and numeracy reasoning were better than expected and higher than the BG means - particularly for reading. **These outcomes indicate that, given the potential challenges to learning encountered by these pupils, the quality and effectiveness of support within KS3 was effective.**

KS4

There were 10 pupils in the 2019 cohort. A minority had contributing contextual factors. 6 pupils achieved a GCSE in English while 7 did so in maths. **Only one pupil gained a C grade or better in either subject.** 5 progressed at least 1 NC level in English but only 3 did so in maths. 4 pupils regressed in both subjects.

These results **indicate comparatively weak outcomes and progress for SEBD pupils at KS4 and that the quality and effectiveness of support needs to be improved in both English and maths / numeracy but particularly in Maths.**

Support for Excluded pupils:

Over the last 4 years Headteacher turnover at both secondary and primary has been significant i.e. all new Headteachers and senior staff at secondary level and approximately 60% turnover at Primary level; this turnover at senior leadership level has been welcomed and supported by the local authority. This has brought a fresh approach to expectations regarding pupil behaviour, pupil/teacher interactions and relationships. New senior leaders have gone on to develop new and more inclusive provision in line with the development of a continuum of provision provided by the local Authority. Overall, exclusion figures reflect this developmental journey which is also reflected in the much improved provision evidenced in school categorisation, for example the number of green schools increasing from 2 in 2014 to 13 in 2020.

Monitoring of pupil level exclusion data has improved by all Inclusion teams and is now regarded as being effective, informing the quality of Officer work and dialogue with individual schools. The establishment of the Safer Schools Partnership approach is beginning to support improved partnership work which will further support work to reduce exclusions. Work to progress the Respect and Resilience action plan is well underway. Reducing exclusions is a key area requiring improvement.

All schools have access to the educational psychology service which provides advice and support to schools regarding pupils at risk of exclusion. The service also provides training to schools to build capacity in terms of their behaviour management as well as supporting the work of ELSAs within schools.

All pupils who are permanently excluded receive tuition from the 16th day. Alternative placements are sought either via school admissions into a mainstream school or via the ALN Panel to more specialist provision. The ALN Service has been established which includes a teacher with responsibility for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The River Centre provides provision for those pupils for whom mainstream no longer is appropriate.

Youth Service Support for Excluded Pupils

The Youth Service utilises the highly effective Early Identification Tool (as part of the YEP Framework) to work with schools to identify young people most at risk of becoming NEET in the future, including being excluded, and support is provided through the Inspire 2 Achieve project. Additionally, young people at risk of exclusion or those excluded are also supported through the Youth Service's Positive Futures project.

The Positive Futures School group, supports young people on the cusp of permanent exclusion, to remain in or return to school. Youth Workers support the young people to develop positive relationships with other young people and adults, developing an understanding of the barriers they face in mainstream school, and supporting the young person and work with the school to help them stay in or return to school. The project works intensively with identified young people outside of school and one evening a week, supported by a small team of 3. The project delivers the Princes Trust Award and a variety of opportunities such as martial arts, boxing, gang and violence workshops, substance misuse workshops, anger management and self-esteem. An SLA is in place with the Community Psychology Team, where the Community Psychologist supports the team one hour a week to offer support, advice and a reflective practise session each week. The outcomes from this project are good, with the risk of permanent exclusion significantly reduced.

Inspire 2 Achieve supports young people well within the school who are identified through the Early Identification Tool as being at risk of becoming NEET.

There are 12 members of staff in the Inspire 2 Achieve (I2A) team. This includes 1 x team leader, 5 x school based youth workers, 4 x transition youth workers (2 x Yr 6/7, 2 x Yr 11 including year 11 Electively Home Educated young people) and 1 x Emotional and Mental Health youth worker. Usual support includes one to one support and group programmes depending on the needs of the individual in an out of school. Young people develop individual action plans base on their need, and support is provided on both a one to one and group basis. Staff link with Careers Wales, Counsellors and pastoral staff within the schools. Support is also offered to young people during school holidays. Ultimately, the aim of the project is to support young people to remain in school and to reduce their risk of becoming NEET. The impact of the project is good, with over half supported significantly reducing their risk of becoming NEET and 85% improving soft skills such as confidence, self-esteem and managing their emotions.

Since 2016 (when team was established): 752 young people have been supported, 115 above target at this stage (372 males, 379 females), with one young person identifying as Non-Binary. Due to COVID, we have not closed any young people to the service this year. This is being reviewed over the summer. Therefore, the outcomes recorded are those captured up to March 2020. 431 closed, and the following outcomes are recorded:

- 24% have gained qualifications,
- 76% have entered further learning
- 52% have reduced their risk of becoming NEET.
- 93% have improved their soft skills.

For the period of January to December 2020, 140 new young people were supported (81 males, 59 female). All school based youth workers supported school leavers this year, rather than just the two transition workers. This was due to the concerns that COVID could have on transition and has contributed to the numbers of young people transitioning successfully.

Emotional and Physical Wellbeing became the dominant theme for 2020. Ninety wellbeing packs were delivered, qualifications were delivered, support was provided to ensure young people had appropriate equipment and wi-fi access. Staff liaised with schools, arranged community walks and virtual activities. All to keep young people engaged in various ways and offer support.

In June 2020, the Youth Service won a national Youth Work in Wales Excellence Award and the Inspire programmes were key to that prestigious award.

For More-Able pupils:

The quality of support for our more-able pupils is indicated by their progress and outcomes as follows:

The Mean NC progress in English and in maths from FP to end of KS2 was higher for MAT (L5+) pupils than for those attaining L4 or lower i.e. 2.4 as opposed to 1.9. The Mean progress in NT reading and in numeracy reasoning from F Phase to end of KS 2 was much higher for MAT (SAS >115) pupils than for those attaining lower SAS scores

In KS3 L6+ English results improved in pupils BG for 2019 (against a national backdrop of decline) with a consequent narrowing of the performance gap. The Mean progress in English and in maths between KS 2 and KS 3 was higher for MAT (L6 & L7+) pupils than for those attaining L5 or lower i.e. 1.7 and 1.8 as opposed to 0.9 for lower levels

The Mean progress between KS 2 and KS 3 in reading and in numeracy reasoning was much higher for MAT (SAS >115) pupils than for those attaining lower SAS scores

Overall, MAT pupils not only attain higher NC levels and national test scores, they also progress at a faster rate than those with lower outcomes at the previous key stage. This indicates that differences in outcomes between low and high attaining pupils increase as they progress through the key stages and that **attainment at both FP and KS2 are significant determinants of future progress.** The quality of support to ensure good progress is of reasonable quality and effectiveness, however, the quality of support to improve early outcomes in the Foundation Phase needs to improve.

Consequently, a key priority is to ensure that support is effective at maximising attainment in the Early Years and on **improving pupils' attainment at the earliest stage possible** i.e. within the FP or prior to this. Work with schools and the EAS is underway to start to address this but this remains a key area for improvement.

For Pupils Who Present as Low Attenders:

KS3

There were 13 low attenders in the 2019 cohort (1 stated, 3 on SA+, 3 on SA, 3 were LAC, 1 EAL and 2 were YOT). Only 7 had matching data for KS2 & 3. 4 pupils attained NC L5 in English and 8 did so in Maths. **However, all NC and NT results were lower than for the whole BG Y9 cohort.**

One-third of low attenders progressed by at least 1 NC level in English during KS 3 and about two-thirds did so in Maths. **Given the poor attendance and the range of contextual factors related to some pupils, low attenders made reasonable progress during KS3. This suggests that the quality of support was at least adequate. However, the quality and effectiveness of support needs to improve so that outcomes and progress of these at-risk pupils matches those of pupils with average attendance levels.**

KS4

There were 38 low attenders in the 2019 cohort. About one-quarter were identified as having SEN. About one-half of them attained grade C or better in English and maths. Two-thirds progressed more than 1 NC level in English and one-third did so in Maths. **However, a significant proportion failed to progress or even regressed in both subjects and particularly so in Maths.**

Overall, low attenders within KS4 had similar or higher outcomes and average progress rates to the mainstream cohort in English language / literature and in maths / numeracy. This indicates that support in language and maths development for low attenders is generally effective for a majority of low attenders at KS4 and / or a significant proportion of low attendance (of able pupils) was attributable to illness / injury rather than truancy. **Significant additional support will undoubtedly be required to address the lack of progress or regression demonstrated by a minority of these pupils.**

2019 Pregnant School Girls:

In July 2019 there were one pregnant school girl and one young mum both of whom have now left statutory education. Pupil A's attendance at the end of 2019 was 45% but prior to starting maternity leave in January 2019 her attendance was 98%. This pupil had no SEN. This pupil is currently being supported by Social Services. Pupil B's attendance at the end of 2019 was 85% but prior to study leave starting in June 2019 her attendance was 95%. This pupil also had no SEN. KS3 attainment for both pupils at KS 3 was good and at L5 for all core subjects including the CSI. At KS4, one of the two pupils achieved 5+ GCSEs grade A-G including English but not maths.

The Policy for Pregnant School Girls and Young Parents has now been formally adopted by schools who implement the support set out therein.

For pupils of Ethnic Minority:

25 pupils in KS 2 in 2019 with EAL attained higher NC levels and NT scores than the Y6 BG cohort as a whole. All but 4 progressed at least 2 NC levels in English and all but 2 did so in Maths. **Over 1/5th progressed 3 NC levels in English and about 1/3 did so in Maths. The mean NC progress rates were higher than the BG Y6 cohort as a whole.**

There were 21 pupils (16 matched) in KS 3 and all but 2 attained L5 in English and Maths. 2/3rds attained L6 in English and Maths. **NC and NT results were similar or higher than BG Y9 cohort as a whole. 1/3rd progressed by greater than 2 NC levels in English and Maths.**

There were 17 pupils in KS 4 10 attained GCSE grade C in English but only 5 did so in Maths. 5 did not make progress but also had SEN and other presenting need.

Overall, in KS4 EM pupils had similar outcomes and average progress rates to non-EM pupils in English language / literature but lower in maths / numeracy. 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.

Outcomes and progress indicate that the quality of support for ethnic minority pupils in all phases and key stages is good, with more improvement in effectiveness of support required in Maths at KS 4.

Children and Young People Who are Looked After (CLA):

KS2

There were 8 CLA in the 2019 cohort (3 on SA, 3 on SA+ & 1 with a statement). 6 attained L4 or better in English and in maths. The mean NC level for CLA was similar to that of the whole BG Y6 cohort in language but lower in maths. Mean national test scores for CLA were lower for both reading and numeracy reasoning. 7 pupils progressed 2 or more NC levels and the mean progress rates were similar to that of the BG Y6 cohort as a whole. **Overall, these outcomes indicate that support for CLA within KS2 is good but that further support is required for reading and numeracy reasoning in order to improve outcomes in national tests.**

KS3

There were 14 CLA in the 2019 cohort (2 on SA, 4 on SA+ & 2 with statements). 9 pupils with matched NC results attained L5 or better in English and in maths. A majority of CLA progressed at least 1 NC level in English and maths during KS3 while the mean progress rates for CLA in reading and numeracy reasoning were notably higher than for the whole BG cohort. **However, the mean NC scores and national test results were lower than the BG Y9 cohort as a whole and particularly so for reading. Overall, these outcomes indicate that support for CLA within KS3 is good but that further support is required to further raise NC outcomes and national test results.**

KS4

There were 10 CLA in the 2019 cohort. Of these, 4 attained a GCSE grade C or better in English and in maths. **The average grades for CLA were the same as the KS 4 cohort as a whole in BG.** Over one-half of pupils progressed at least 1 NC level in English and maths which was again similar to that of the whole Y11 cohort although both were below expected values. **These outcomes indicate that the quality and effectiveness of pupil support for CLA in English and maths within KS4 is generally good.**

The LA fulfils statutory duties for children looked after well overall. There are effective links between CLA and Inclusion Officers and arrangements to monitor the educational achievement of CLA placed within the LA have improved to include reporting to Corporate Parenting and ALN QA monitoring group.

Monitoring arrangements for CLA with statements of SEN and those placed out of county are robust through annual reviews and regular half-termly monitoring meetings. Links across the SEWC are developing to support the sharing of best practice in ensuring that the needs of all CLA pupils, including their educational needs, are fully met, including the appointment of a regional CLA coordinator, although the impact of this has yet to be realised.

Elective Home Educated (EHE):

At the time of PLASC 2021, there were 89 known EHE pupils in Nursery to Year 11 compared to 70 at the same point in 2020. This is below the mean average for Wales which stands at 180 EHE pupils per local authority. The rate in Blaenau Gwent equates to 10.4 EHE pupils per 1,000 pupils in Reception to Year 11, compared to 8.3 in 2020. This is above the Welsh average rate of 9.5 per 1,000 pupils (7.0 in 2020). Whilst the rate across Wales increased by 2.5% whilst the rate in Blaenau Gwent increased by only 2.1%, which is slightly below the rate of increase for Wales. **Blaenau Gwent has the 8th highest rate of children per 1,000 that are EHE.**

With regards to the numbers of EHE pupils in SEWC we have the 2nd lowest number of EHE pupils. When compared to our family of local authorities we also have the 2nd lowest number of EHE pupils. 90% (93% in 2020) of the EHE cohort had previously been enrolled in schools compared to 87% in Wales (88% in 2020). Blaenau Gwent saw a 3% decrease in this figure whilst the average decrease in Wales was 1.0%.

Of the children that had been previously enrolled at a school, in Blaenau Gwent 90% had been enrolled at a LA-maintained school, 0% were from an independent school within the LA, and 10% had been educated outside of the LA area.

14.8% of pupils became EHE in BG compared to an 11.0% average in Wales. Whilst the trend is the same in BG the figures are still above the Welsh average

When looking at pupils that became EHE across key stages, again Blaenau Gwent's data was not a similar picture to the Wales average. Blaenau Gwent had a significantly higher proportion of children in KS3 (BG 55% compared to Wales 33%).

Moreover, on reviewing the Blaenau Gwent EHE pupils by year group at the time of PLASC the highest proportion of children were in year 10 - with 21.3% of pupils in year 11 compared to the Welsh Average of 13.3%. The gender data BG had nearly an equal proportion of girls and boys that were EHE. In BG 53% were boys compared to 52% across Wales and 47% were girls compared to 48% in Wales.

In Blaenau Gwent 75% of families had received a visit in the last 12 months compared to the Wales average of 53%. This indicates that officers in Blaenau Gwent are taking a pro-active approach to supporting families of EHE. There was a distinctive pattern this year with regards to pupils being withdrawn from schools, which correlated to schools reopening for all pupils.

The number of pupils that became EHE in 19/20 are mainly secondary age pupils (52.1%). Abertillery Learning Community account for the largest number of EHE pupils (13), whilst children moving into the area and Brynmawr Foundation School accounted for the next highest numbers of pupils becoming EHE this year (7 per school). When looking at special educational needs 14 of the 69 pupils had additional learning needs.

Monitoring processes are in line with WG requirements when EHE become known to the Directorate. There are good arrangements in place to support EHE families and good work has been done in this area. Fewer pupils have become home schooled during the current academic year. A high percentage of EHE pupils have previously been enrolled in school indicating that EHE is not their first choice.

Children who are Children Missing Education:

In 2020/21 there were 37 CME referrals for pupils in Blaenau Gwent that left without a destination school. All of these pupils (except 3) have been located and the CTF has been sent to the receiving school. Of the 3 children not located, 2 have only recently moved and the Education Welfare Service (EWS) are chasing up with the new local authority and the other one has been referred to HMRC – who confirmed that they had a new address for the family.

In 2020/21 there were 22 CME referrals for children that had moved into Blaenau Gwent without a forwarding school. 6 of those children were EHE when they moved into the LA. 4 of the 6 are travellers and visits have been undertaken, whilst the other 2 are due to apply for school. 3 children are still waiting to be admitted into school, as parents delayed completing the in-year transfer form, despite numerous visits. 9 children were placed into school and the referring agency notified. 3 children were in Blaenau Gwent for only a short period of time and were tracked into a new local authority. Legal procedures have commenced for one family as they are not engaging with the admission process.

In June 2021 there were also 170 year-6 pupils that had not applied for secondary school places. Work was done to support these families and ensure applications etc. were completed. There are still 9 children that we are still waiting for confirmation from other local authorities or still supporting with applications.

In June 2021 there were 15 nursery pupils that had not applied to reception. Numerous visits were made and all these children have now completed applications for reception or confirmation has been received from other local authorities to say they have school places. In addition to this there were 137 pupils on the live birth data that had not applied for reception places. All except 31 have now been located. Investigations are currently ongoing for these 31 with other local authorities and then the EWS team will liaise with health and HMRC to see what further information they have.

Children Missing Education: the completed audit revealed the following:

- There are good tracking processes of CME children in place when the local authority.
- There have been some delays in referrals being received and children being removed without a forwarding destination.
- When CME referrals are made by schools, schools keep the pupils on roll until a new school is identified – this helps the LA in their tracking and hence safeguarding processes.
- Unfortunately, other Councils are currently not making the appropriate referrals into the education service – this hampers our effectiveness and needs to be addressed
- Senior management in the Directorate and Council and the relevant safeguarding boards are now in receipt of CME information.
- The lost pupil database is not used by schools as well as it might be but training was delivered to clerks in July 2019.
- There are improved processes in place with HMRC.
- The last 2 years has seen a steady increase in the number of children missing education. This is partly due to COVID and schools being closed for periods and partly due to Brexit and the Right to Remain scheme.

Children and Young People that Offend:

In 2020/21, there were 71 statutory school age children (compared to 44 in 2019/20) referred to the Youth Offending Service for either preventative or statutory intervention. 6 of these children were referred twice meaning that there were referrals for 65 individuals (compared to 38 in 2019/20). When looking at the different types of placements for children from Blaenau Gwent 20% of the children (13 children) were attending an alternative provision compared to 36.8% (5 children) in 2019/20.

The most common school was Ebbw Fawr Learning Community and there were 13 children attending the school. Ebbw Fawr Learning Community also had the highest cohort in 2019/20. There were 65 referrals for children in Blaenau Gwent receiving intervention from YOS in the period covered by this report. Of those

- 52.3% (34 children) were offered full time opportunities at the start of their intervention (25 hours) compared to 71% in 2019/20
- 16.9% (11 children) was offered part time opportunities compared to 23.7% in 2019/20
- 3.1% (2 children) had no provision in place as they were electively home educated (EHE)
- 27.7% (18 children) had no hours recorded as schools were closed due to COVID at the start of intervention

The recommended hours for school age children are 25 hours. When looking at the referrals for 65 children for Blaenau Gwent there were 34 children who were offered the full 25 hours of education at the start of YOS intervention compared to 27 in 2019/20. This equates to 52.3%. There were 11 children who were offered less than the recommended hours. 1 was in an alternative provision, 7 were on partial time-tables and 3 children were on tuition. There were 2 children with no provision in place due to being EHE.

When working out the average number of hours offered for the 65 referrals within Blaenau Gwent it equals 22.6 hours, 2.4 hours less than the recommended 25 hours and 1.5 hours more than last year. The average attendance at the start of intervention for the 65 referrals within Blaenau Gwent equals 13 hours, 12 hours less than the recommended 25 hours and 3.3 hours less than in 2019/20. However, it is important to note that attendance across the board is down this year due to school closures as a result of COVID. However, due to Covid-19 the usual performance information is not available.

The average ranges for children who offend are;

	literacy	numeracy	reasoning
primary	82.3 (94.5 in 2019/20)	82 (100 in 2019/20)	81 (113.5 in 2019/20)
secondary	87.1 (94 in 2019/20)	90.4 (107 in 2019/20)	94.9 (104 in 2019/20)

Performance levels are generally higher in secondary aged children, which would be expected. Reasoning data is no longer collected and usual assessments have not been completed as usual so the data is based on the last available data and may not be as current as in previous years. Of the 65 children involved with the Youth Offending Service, 36 had no additional learning needs, 4 were school action, 15 were school action plus and 10 had statements.

There are good working relationships between the local authority and the Youth Offending Service. Improvements need to be made regarding the number of hours achieved by children and children of school age despite the YOS working closely with partners in both education authorities to enable each child to receive their entitlement of 25+ hours education per week in an appropriate education setting. We need to ensure that all these children have access to 25 hours. The hours attended has decreased and this needs to improve.

Links with dedicated members of staff in both local authorities have helped to manage issues before they are allowed to develop, thus ensuring more positive outcomes for children.

ACES

In January 2018, YOS completed a piece of work on 22 Blaenau Gwent children, who were open to them at the time to look at ACES. Of the 22 children that were open to YOS on the day of the survey 19 had been known to EWS prior to that date (86%). Of the 22 children that were open to YOS on the day of the survey 15 had been known to EWS prior to their first intervention with YOS (68%), 1 came to the attention of the EWS in the same year (4.5%) and six were not known to EWS prior to their first intervention with YOS (27%)

It is important to note that on the date of the survey it was not the first offence for all of the children. 20 of the 22 children had attendance issues at some point in their school career (90%). The average attendance for this cohort in 2017/18 was 73.8%. 19 of the 22 children had been excluded at some point in their school career (86%). 13 of the 22 children had received exclusions during 2017/18 amounting to 108 days. This equates to an average of 4.9 days' exclusion for each young person.

21 of the 22 children were known to SS prior to offending (95.4%). The average number of referrals was 11.4. Where data is available most pupils made progress and the mean KS3 level has improved when compared to the KS2 level. The GCSE data is not yet available for this cohort or to make comparisons with all LA pupils.

Average attendance is 79% for this cohort of children which is well below the average attendance for the local authority. There are good working relationships between the local authority and the Youth Offending Service.

Improvements continue to be realised in the number of hours achieved by children and children of school age. The YOS works closely with partners in both education authorities to enable each child to receive their entitlement of 25+ hour's education per week in an appropriate education setting. However, we need to ensure that all these children have access to 25 hours. However, despite the hours being increased the attendance of this cohort is well below the average for the local authority. This is a key area for improvement. Links with dedicated members of staff in both local authorities have helped to manage issues before they are allowed to develop, thus ensuring more positive outcomes for children.

Work is underway in the following areas to improve the quality of the support provided:

- **ETE hours – all children involved with YOS are to have access to 25 hours, not just statutory interventions. This also includes all PEX pupils.**
- **At KS2, teachers and schools will continue current levels of support for identified pupils**
- **At KS3 & 4, teachers and schools need to improve levels of support for pupils in line with required improvements for mainstream pupils.**
- **Schools / 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 commensurate with their ability a particular emphasis on improving progress and outcomes of pupils in GCSE Maths.**
- **Over the next 12 months the YOS has committed to developing and implementing a Literacy & Numeracy Strategy to support this cohort of pupils.**
- **Ensure that the recommendations made by ESTYN are implemented.**

EPS supporting ALNCoS to Build Capacity for ALN

The EPS has maintained performance in providing high quality support and challenge to schools, with all settings confirming that this had improved their capacity to provide for vulnerable learners. 100% of ALNCoS reported that the strategies and interventions provided by the EPS had led to improvements in provision, and subsequent outcomes, for vulnerable learners.

100% of the ALNCoS confirmed that the EPS had helped them to develop their skills and knowledge and, consequently, manage their roles more effectively.

ELSA

Specifically regarding the ELSA programme, 92% of schools now have at least one trained ELSA. All the ALNCoS in these schools state that, where their ELSAs are operating, the programme is making a positive difference to practice and pupil outcomes. Half termly supervision of ELSAs by EPs is rated highly with 100% of ALNCoS stating that their ELSAs find it helpful. This is corroborated by mean evaluations from the ELSAs.

Bespoke training

The EPS has maintained high quality delivery of bespoke training to settings. 100% of ALNCoS that had taken advantage of the offer were able to confirm that they can evidence improved provision for learners with ALN, based on the training received on, e.g., Lego club, precision teaching, practicing relational experiences and understanding anxiety. Staff valuations of school-based professional learning for teachers and TAs show that all training events continue to be highly rated. Of a possible maximum rating of 5.0, overall mean ratings of 4.7 for 'appropriate level', 4.7 for 'degree of detail' and 4.9 for 'quality of presentation' were recorded.

Group consultation

Group consultation has been introduced at ALNCo Forums to train ALNCoS in the skill of conducting solution-focused conversations where emphasis is placed on the identification of both barriers and enablers to enhance pupil learning. This was continued during 2019/20 through less frequently as the Forum focus has been on preparation for the ALN reforms. Feedback from participants was positive.

Further research and training by EPS

ALNCoS identified areas in which they would welcome further research by the EPS, illustrated in this word cloud thematic analysis. However, in summary: EPS input was judged to have improved the capacity of staff in all schools. Advice and guidance provided by the EPS is consistently judged to be of high quality by all ALNCoS. Outcomes of ALN learners were judged to have improved in all schools following EPS involvement. All schools that received bespoke input from the EPS to develop leadership for ALN, and to provide support for vulnerable learners, reported that the input provided was highly effective. ALNCoS identified areas in which they would welcome further research and training – including several areas (SEBD, SpLD, ASD) that have received extensive coverage in recent years, which may be indicative of changes in personnel and / or a shifting landscape of priorities in schools. The ELSA project was rated highly on all criteria by both ALNCoS and ELSAs. Some concern was expressed at the lower level of EP provision, due to reduced staffing, but this is further indication of the value attached to the EPS by schools.

The LA Well-being in Education Strategy and a complementary Good Practice Guide for Schools shows that this has successfully impacted on improving school practice. Schools are now developing school to school approaches to disseminate and model good practice and have showcased these at Headteacher meetings.

All schools have access to PASS (Pupil Attitude to School and Self) This provides high quality, comprehensive and comparative data on aspects of pupil wellbeing. Approximately half of the schools use PASS. There are excellent examples of where PASS has been used very effectively to identify, support and show

sustained improvements for pupil well-being. An area for development is to increase the number of schools using PASS. A behaviour strategy and toolkit with good practice guide is in place. The LA has provided high quality evidence based advice, however, practice in schools is variable. Improving consistency of approach is an identified LA priority for further development.

Robust processes are effective in monitoring and challenging schools to support pupils with behavioural problems to reduce and avoid exclusions. However, reducing exclusions remains a key priority in identified schools. Valuable work is being undertaken to develop a regional approach to reducing exclusions, however, this is in the early stages of development.

Effective referral procedures are in place for EOTAS which are understood by schools. All pupils that have been permanently excluded receive suitable education within 15 days of the exclusion. Most pupils receiving EOTAS have a broad and balanced curriculum.

All pupils with difficulties in physical or mental health which require access to community tuition receive as much education as their medical conditions allow. Tailored programmes cater for individual need. Strong links are maintained between pupils and their schools.

Joint working arrangements between the LA and EAS have continued to improve through Wider Group meetings. The LA is increasingly effective at identifying underperformance of vulnerable pupils and works well with the EAS to challenge schools to improve. However, joint working between Challenge Advisers and LA officers continues to be an area for development. The Wellbeing data set provides Challenge Advisors with useful data. However, effective use of the data sets is at an early stage and requires further development through better joint working between Challenge Advisers and LA Officers so that there is consistency in challenging schools and promoting evidence based practice.

Gwent Ethnic Minority Service works very effectively with schools to raise attainment and progress over time; this is evidenced in the outcomes and progress achieved as set out in IA1. The quality of support and impact evidences that this service is good.

Effective provision mapping of interventions is variable this is supported by the outcome and progress profile for those pupils in KS 3 at SA and SA+ which needs to improve. This is an important area for further improvement. The needs of very vulnerable pupils are well supported through embedded practice of the Complex Needs Panel which includes representation from Inclusion, Social Service and Health. Valuable strategic leadership is provided by the multi-agency, multi-disciplinary Corporate Parenting Group.

Through ALN QA, Headteachers are working more effectively with LA officers to monitor provision and plan for building capacity in schools.

The LA monitors and provides support to schools to help prevent incidents of bullying and a policy is in place but practice in schools is variable. Robust processes are effective in monitoring and challenging schools to support pupils with behavioural problems to reduce and avoid exclusions. However, reducing exclusions remains a key priority in identified schools. Valuable work is being undertaken to develop a regional approach to reducing exclusions, however, this is in the early stages of development. More positive impact is emerging from the work of the EWS with the Police to provide targeted support and additional challenge to schools regarding how they record race-led incidents.

The LA meets its statutory duties and provides good quality support for our pupils who are Looked After Children, promoting race equality, combating racism, preventing and tackling bullying, child protection and safeguarding. The attainment and progress demonstrated of children and young people looked after supports this judgement.

Systematic support to improve school attendance and coordination with other teams has maintained good attendance in most Primary and Secondary. Reducing persistent absentees remains a key priority for the County Borough.

Effective arrangements are in place through the strategic Well-being for Learning Partnership between the LA, other agencies and wider partners to improve provision and outcomes for social and emotional well-being. The local authority effectively co-ordinates open access and targeted support for vulnerable children and young people. Demonstrable impact has been made through **the Raising Aspirations Group and NEET Practitioner Forum** subgroup to implement the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework. This progressive partnership approach, linking with a key range of providers and partners, has been highly effective in steadily reducing the numbers of young people becoming NEET from 8.7% in 2009 to 1.5% in 2019-20.

The Youth Service provides a number of high quality projects providing young people with a variety of opportunities in and out of school, day, night and weekends and ranging from group and social activities to personal support, advice, guidance, advocacy and school based counselling services. The ESF Inspire 2 Achieve and Inspire 2 Work programmes are highly effective in supporting young people. The projects demonstrably impact on young people improving their attendance, attainment or behaviour, as well as overcoming personal barriers.

There is good use of data through the Early Identification Tool (part of the YEP Framework in BG) and through tracking of progression in collaboration with Schools, Careers Wales and wider partners which has ensured that young people are enabled to access support to take advantage of opportunities available. The Raising Aspirations Group partnership and practitioner sub groups are effective; helping avoid duplication, identify and address gaps through an annual audit and an online directory and allocating and using resources in the most sustainable way. An enhanced wide range of youth support services and personal support is provided in and out of school based on identified need, through regular mapping of services. Facilitated by the Youth Service, key partners include Families First, Social Services, Communities 4 Work, Tai Calon, Llamau, Employability programmes, Regeneration, Careers Wales, Youth Offending Service, Voluntary Sector partners, Coleg Gwent, WBL providers and other ESF projects.

The Education Welfare Service is continuing to work with partners to improve outcomes for vulnerable learners. There are strong links with Social Services and Youth Justice Services, but there is limited progress with working with health services. All pupils with ALN have access to impartial information, advice and guidance on educational training and employment opportunities through SNAP Cymru, Careers Wales.

Analysis of EPS work conducted in Early Years settings shows that this is an area requiring further development. The EPS is currently involved in a 'gate-keeping' role only with the sole purpose of gaining additional funding on transfer from early years' settings to school-based nurseries. This is at odds with the philosophy of the service which promotes a collaborative, person centred, problem-solving approach to supporting the needs of learners. The Education and Social Services Directorates are working together and have identified potential solutions.

All pupils with ALN have access to impartial information, advice and guidance on educational training and employment opportunities through SNAP Cymru, Careers Wales, and informal advice is also provided through Youth Service settings and school and Gwent College liaison.

There has been strong progress over the last three years with regards to improving attendance and reducing persistent absenteeism. To enhance this, a vulnerable pupil database has been implemented to track vulnerable learners on a monthly basis. The Education Welfare Service has effective working relationships with Youth Justice Services, Community Safety and the Police to address criminal and anti-social behaviour both in school and in the community.

The Inclusion Service has significantly improved the monitoring of exclusions and this has been partially effective in reducing the levels of exclusions. For pupils where there are significant difficulties that need to be discussed at ALN panel or Managed Move Panel, the pastoral plans are scrutinised. To improve the quality and effectiveness of Pastoral Support Plans new guidance has been issued to schools. Effective systems are in place to monitor the use of exclusions, challenge schools where appropriate and to refer pupils to support services. Whilst the monitoring has improved, there is room for further progress in reducing the level of exclusions. Effective processes are in place for monitoring and managing managed moves between schools via the ALN Panel. Blaenau Gwent is fully compliant with legislation ensuring that all excluded pupils are in receipt of appropriate education from day 16.

Support for Pupils Presenting with Special Education Needs:

Panel arrangements ensure that timely and appropriate support is provided to enable effective transition from EY to nursery settings. Guidance and criteria for access to resource bases and special school placements are clear, effective and consistently applied. Processes are supported by effective Panels and annual review arrangements. There is good identification for EY pupils with ALN through robust multi-agency and wider partners' collaboration. 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.

Effective support is provided to pupils presenting with difficult behaviour and those reluctant to attend school. The River Centre provides this support. However, further developments are needed to develop capacity within mainstream settings to enable pupils to remain in and return back to their host schools.

A comprehensive range of specialist provision ensures that the needs of pupils with ALN are appropriately met in these settings. Evidence shows that nearly all pupils make good or better than expected progress in their learning in nearly all resource bases and the quality of provision in nearly all resource bases is good or better. However, there is variability of practice which is being addressed through an LA specialist resource base action plan through the Resource Base Leads' Professional Learning Network.

Pen-y-Cwm Special School provides very high quality learning experiences for learners with severe, complex and profound needs, this is evidenced via the school's most recent ESTYN inspection where excellent practice was recognised; nearly all pupils made good progress from their original starting points. The use of highly effective assessment has continued to improve over the last three years and there are now very refined and sophisticated measures in place to assess pupil needs. Small steps progress is excellently captured through the bespoke PLAT (Pen-y-Cwm learning and assessment tracker). Over time the quality and consistency of teaching and learning has continued to improve as evidenced by MER documentation.

The CLA Coordinator works very successfully with schools to ensure the ALN needs of CLA pupils are identified and addressed. There are very good links between CLA and Inclusion Officers to ensure that pupils with ALN are supported appropriately. Monitoring arrangements for CLA with statements of SEN and those placed out of county are robust through regular reviews. Links across the SEWC are developing well to ensure the sharing of best practice.

The quality of transition between settings has been variable. New arrangements have been introduced to reduce variability and at present it is too early to judge the effectiveness of these developments. The sharing of information for pre-school children is good although effective planning for transition between settings is

inconsistent and variable. Pupil Centred Practice is being piloted in ten schools to develop practice and improve learner engagement to ensure pupils have a say in key decisions that affect them. All pupils with Statements are consulted on how best to support their needs and in specialist provision, pupils are involved in senior staff appointments.

Work to support parents and carers of children and young people in Blaenau Gwent with ALN continues to improve. The SEN team ensures that an appropriate level of support to parents and carers through attendance at school reviews, meetings and telephone consultations has maintained a trend of low trend of SENTW appeals. Parents are effectively supported during statutory assessment processes via a range of media; booklets and the Council's website provide clear information as well as face to face interaction with a named contact at each stage. Annual Reviews are completed. Parental Contribution Forms ensure parents and carers' views and concerns are shared. Parents and carers are signposted effectively to other support services, such as Parent Partnership. The EPS effectively provides advice and support to parents and carers. Families First in Blaenau Gwent is fully aware of the priorities for Welsh Government in terms of Supporting Young People and the importance of supporting their education thus preventing young people from becoming NEET's and thereby working towards their overall wellbeing. The current programme is fully compliant with the delivery specifications as set out by Welsh Government and it measures its outcomes its data monitoring and quarterly reporting recommendations.

There is variable school practice regarding the provision of a graduated response to meeting the needs of pupils with ALN, particularly in KS3 for those pupils at SA and SA+. Excellent practice has been identified in a few schools and the mechanisms for sharing this good practice through school to school work is developing. A few schools use assessment data exceptionally well which is then used very effectively to inform teaching and learning for pupils with ALN. However, practice is variable with a few schools needing more intensive support to improve.

Leadership for ALN is excellent in some schools. However, practice is variable and the mechanisms for sharing good practice through school to school mechanisms requires further development. Wider Group minutes and previously Wider SIILT minutes show that provision and leadership for ALN has been improved over time in schools where targeted support has been provided. However, the LA and EAS need 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; analyse the quality of targeted interventions and jointly promote those that are evidence-based in terms of effectiveness and value for money; and to improve distributed leadership for ALN in schools.

SEBD provision for FP and KS2 is improving with the development of FP/KS2 provision. The River Centre has supported resource base provisions with Team Teach training and bespoke support. Provision for SEBD pupils at Key stages 3 and 4 is developing but more work is needed to secure good progress and higher attainment, particularly at the end of KS 4. Provision for EOTAS pupils has improved through enhanced community tuition provision.

The ALN service has been developed so that it can support building capacity across the authority. Target setting arrangements at individual pupil level are firmly established and continuing to improve through Challenge Adviser work in schools. ALN services are also beginning to develop their use of pupil data to target interventions and challenge schools. Monitoring and tracking of school interventions through an electronic provision mapping tool is currently being implemented, though this is at too early a stage to impact on practice across all schools.

Arrangements for identification, planning and support for pre-school children with complex needs are robust and effective. Good transition planning ensures that information is available to schools upon transition and appropriate support is in place in the vast majority of cases.

Guidance and criteria for access to resource bases and the special schools is clear and effective, developed in partnership with Heads. Processes are supported by effective Panels and annual review arrangements. The LA has effective arrangements to ensure that pupils can access support and specialist resource base provision without the need for a Statement of SEN. Schools have clear understanding of procedures for accessing support from LA and consortium services. Commissioned services have clear and agreed criteria for access.

Allocation of funding to schools by formula has provided flexibility for Headteachers and senior school leaders to maximise the benefit of funding for individual pupils.

All pupils with difficulties in physical or mental health, (and therefore requiring access to community tuition) receive as much education as possible in the River Centre. Tailored programmes are provided to cater for individual need. The quality of provision is improving significantly from a low base and there are strong links maintained between pupils and their schools

There is effective transition support to help pupils with ALN move between settings and stages of learning, supported by clear and improving processes and communications. Good transition planning for pre-school children ensures that information is available to schools upon transition and appropriate support is in place.

Most pupils with ALN receive impartial information, advice and guidance on educational training and employment opportunities through careers Wales, and informal advice is also provided through Youth Service settings and school and Gwent College liaison. Effective support is provided to pupils presenting with difficult behaviour and those reluctant to attend school in key stages 3 and 4. The quality of provision and support for these pupils has improved significantly from a low base.

At KS2, support for pupils requiring specialist SEBD provision was identified as an area requiring further development. Improved SEBD provision has been established for FP and KS2 which provides for short term and long term pupil needs.

2.2 Support for vulnerable learners: - Areas where good progress has been made:

- **Progress has been made through the comprehensive ALN provision, but the Inclusion review is on-going;**
- **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.**
- **A report to consider Pen-y-Cwm capacity was approved by the Executive Committee in the Spring 2021;**
- **Readiness for the implementation of the ALN reform to support learners presenting ALN is strong;**
- **ASD provision is in place;**

The Inclusion service review is well underway 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 largely 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;
- increase 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 where further improvement is required:

- 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.
- 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 for those on the cusp of EHE needs to be more targeted. The Action Plan needs to be fully implemented.
- CME: The local authority needs to continue to monitor CME practices and address any gaps as they arise and embed the agreed processes and ensure that regular reporting continues.
- 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 better blended working with Children's Services to explore how the EPS can work more effectively within Early Years settings. 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 ALNCos' 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 re-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.

- Implement the Pen-y-Cwm capacity plans to meet the increasing demand for places.

2.3 Other Education Support Services

BG Youth Services provide effective information, support and learning opportunities for young people aged 11-25 and also supports young people through earlier transitions from 9 years old, based on a voluntary relationship between the young person and youth worker. In addition, the Youth Service co-ordinates the 11-18 Counselling Service (statutory), the extended 18-25 Counselling Service and the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF), which aims to reduce the numbers of young people who become NEET (not in Education, Employment or Training) up to the age of 25 through a partnership approach. The partnership now includes a focus on Youth Homelessness and Wellbeing.

Open Access Youth Services include D of E (Duke of Edinburgh), Detached and Outreach, Youth Information Service and Youth Info Champs, Young Reps Volunteering programme, Youth Ambassadors (YAMs), Health and Wellbeing workshops and training, Youth Clubs, Open for Youth Nights, school holiday programmes and the 11-25 Counselling Service.

Targeted Youth Services include Inspire to Achieve 11-16, Inspire to Work 16-24, Youth and Community Team (Youth Homelessness and Mental Health) and the Positive Futures anti-social behaviour programme.

All the work of the Youth Service is preventative in nature. At a very basic level, the support and opportunities can help young people to meet with each other and with trusted adults, feel part of their community which can prevent low levels of mental health, prevent incidents of anti-social behaviour and help young people become active citizens. Both Inspire programmes are preventative in their approach. Inspire 2 Achieve exist to help 'prevent' young people from becoming NEET by focusing on their wellbeing, attendance, behaviour and attainment. Inspire 2 Work exists to 'prevent' young people from developing ingrained negative behaviours and lifestyles into their future.

Since March 2020, the Youth Service has supported the response to COVID-19 effectively. Although school based youth workers and counsellors returned to buildings in September, initially, the service refocussed to identify and support the most vulnerable young people known to the Youth Service, Education and schools. Since March 2020, the service supported 600 11-16 year olds and 250 16-25 year olds and from March to July made weekly contact. Initially the focus was supporting young people around the challenges they faced linked to the pandemic, including delivering essentials such as food, toiletries, wellbeing packs, supporting issues around lack of money, losing employment and facing eviction. Youth workers supported young people to find accommodation and the local authority placed some young people who would not usually be eligible to access support in bed and breakfast accommodation to try to ensure that they had a safe place to live. Youth workers also helped young people to apply for financial support.

Over time, the emergency response changed to support young people around their wellbeing. Online activities were developed such as music, cooking and art club, and face to face activities included wellbeing walks, supporting attendance at college and job interviews. The Counselling Service has continued throughout, providing online sessions, meeting young people outside, in school and the youth centre. A full summer programme was provided including a mixture of online and face to face activities. Throughout, youth club staff have been redeployed to provide outreach and the detached team have continued to work in the evenings, responding at times to requests from the Police and community members. This has been an opportunity to keep young people informed about the restrictions, any changes and what that means for them. Between April 2020 and December 2020, 24 referrals (MARFS) were made to Social Services.

Youth Engagement and Progression Framework:

The Youth Service co-ordinates the Welsh Government's 'Youth Engagement and Progression Framework' through a strategic multi-agency partnership the Raising Aspirations Group (RAG). The partnership is mature and effective and continues to address all 6 key areas of the framework. This includes using the Early Identification Tool (7th year), updating the provision map (7th year), updating the online directory of support (7th year), further developing the 'lead worker' role and further refining the tracking and support of young people. All areas of the Blaenau Gwent action plan are developing well and either met or are on track.

The Youth Service also facilitates two practitioner forums: the NEET Practitioner Forum and the Vulnerable Learners Transition subgroup, which are operational multi-agency partnerships, sub groups of the RAG, which co-ordinates the Early Identification process, allocation of lead worker role, and robust tracking and monitoring of transition from year 11 to post 16 provision.

As a result of this co-ordinated approach with partners, there has been a steady reduction of numbers of young people becoming NEET when they leave school, reaching 1.5% (9 young people) in 2019. This was a decrease of 2 young people from the previous year, and is in line with the lowest figure ever achieved and below the Welsh average of 1.7%. Considering the context of the past year, it is extremely positive that so many young people transitioned successfully and maintained their post 16 placement.

The Youth Service reports to a number of external funders and provides an annual audit return to Welsh Government. The Raising Aspirations Group monitors the progress of the local delivery of the two Inspire programmes. A performance monitoring report is presented annually to Education Scrutiny to scrutinise the Youth Service performance. Annual reports and evaluation reports are also provided to Education DMT. Feedback is provided to young people on a regular basis.

The Education Transformation (ET) team is responsible for the following areas with the aim of improving the delivery of and access to education throughout Blaenau Gwent; ultimately, securing higher standards of success and achievement among the pupil and emerging adult population:

- School Admissions and Appeals
- The Planning of School Places
- Education Facilities Management
- 21st Century Schools Programme Delivery along with Education Projects and Programmes
- School Organisation and Associated Project Implementation/ Delivery
- The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
- The ICT Infrastructure and Connectivity Project
- Accessibility and Medical Needs Strategy, Policy Development, Procedures and Forums
- Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy, Procedures and Appeal

School Admissions – 2020/21 Admissions Round Analysis (Implementation during the 2019/20 academic session)

The Admissions team have successfully implemented the School Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education 2020/21, which is evidenced by the following self-assessment:

100% of applications were processed within 48 hours and 100% of standard in-year transfer requests were processed within 15 days of receipt in accordance with the WG School Admissions Code (2013) and Blaenau Gwent's School Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education.

The primary reason for in-year transfer has been inward migration of families into the Blaenau Gwent area, with an upward trend in inward migration seen between 2016 and 2019. The transfer rate decreased slightly due to the COVID-19 pandemic to **229 in 2019/20 (151 primary transfers, 78 secondary transfers)**, The primary reason for in-year transfer has been inward migration of families into the Blaenau Gwent area.

There were 3 appeals held for the reception year group during the summer period 2020, which is less than the number of appeals held in 2019. All 3 appeals were upheld in favour of the Council. The numbers of in-time applications received for pupils who applied for a school place during the 2020/21 admission round, increased slightly for nursery and reception but decreased for secondary when compared to 2019/20, this was due to the birth rate for the year 7 cohort being lower. Please refer to Figure 1 for the in-time percentage comparisons:

Figure 1: In-time Application (%) for each admission round

Percentage of In-time Applications 2018/19	Percentage of In-time Applications 2019/20	Percentage of In-time Applications 2020/21
Nursery – 58%	Nursery – 51%	Nursery – 60%
Reception – 79%	Reception – 74%	Reception – 75%
Secondary – 71%	Secondary – 89%	Secondary – 79%

The Council have been able to sustain 100% of parental first preferences for a 4-year period in respect of both nursery and secondary place allocation, and 99% of first preferences were met for the reception year group (please refer to Figure 2 below for more information). This is attributable to the effective monitoring and management of school capacities and pupil places, along with the continued surplus place reduction. First preferences met for late applications are also extremely high due to effective pupil place management processes

Figure 2: First Preferences Met %

% of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2017/18	% of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2018/19	% of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2019/20	% of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2020/21
Nursery – 100%	Nursery – 100%	Nursery – 100%	Nursery – 100%
Reception – 99%	Reception – 99%	Reception – 99%	Reception – 99%

Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%
% of First Preferences Met for Late Applications 2017/18	% of First Preferences Met for Late Applications 2018/19	% of First Preferences Met for Late Applications 2019/20	% of First Preferences Met for Late Applications 2020/21
Nursery – 100%	Nursery – 100%	Nursery – 99%	Nursery – 100%
Reception – 97%	Reception – 96%	Reception – 99%	Reception – 100%
Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%

The pilot phase of on-line admission arrangements was launched on September 1st 2016. Online applications have increased overall over the course of the last 4 academic sessions, as detailed below:

2017/18

- 158 out of a possible 976 applications received online for nursery;
- 6 out of a possible 796 applications received online for reception; and,
- 16 out of a possible 685 application received online for secondary.

2018/19

- 94 out of a possible 705 applications received online for nursery;
- 93 out of a possible 586 applications received online for reception; and,
- 58 out of a possible 770 application received online for secondary.

2019/20

- 205 out of a possible 659 applications received online for nursery;
- 186 out of a possible 676 applications received online for reception; and,
- 161 out of a possible 654 application received online for secondary.

2020/21

- 248 out of a possible 519 applications received online for nursery;
- 216 out of a possible 559 applications received online for reception; and,
- 185 out of a possible 426 applications received online for secondary.

The Admissions Policy for 2021/22 was also consulted upon and published in line with the Welsh Government's deadline (15th April 2020 – the year preceding the academic session to which the policy applies).

The Admissions Forum met 3 times over the last year. The Forum has sustained a good level of attendance at each meeting, working closely with the Education Transformation team in order to:

- improve school and Council awareness and partnership approaches in respect of the implementation and monitoring of the admissions round;
- improve tracking processes from live birth to secondary education (whilst ensuring alignment with Inclusion);
- address issues i.e. ensure that when in-year transfers are allocated a place a start date is offered within 10 days;
- explore a wider ranging data set i.e. Flying Start, placement outside of the chronological year group, home tuition and attendance data etc. Ensuring that there is a holistic approach to the management of pupil places; and,
- monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon admissions
- work towards implementation of the new Capita One Online system.

Planning of School Places

Councils have a duty to manage, monitor, review and plan pupil places on an annual basis in line with:

- Welsh Government's Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales Guidance (2011)
- Welsh Government School Admission and Admission Appeals Code's (2013)
- Welsh Government School Organisation Code (2013)

Capacity calculations were determined for each of the schools in October 2018, which informed the final admission numbers for the Blaenau Gwent School Admissions Policy 2020/21. Projections are calculated for a 5-year period for primary and for a 7-year period for secondary schools. Pupil projection accuracy has improved considerably over the last 3 years, with 100 % of primary and 98% of secondary projections confirmed to be accurate during the 2019/20, 2018/19 and 2017/18 academic sessions; in comparison to 97% for primary 94% for secondary during the 2016/17 academic session.

Between January 2019 and January 2020 the percentage of surplus places within primary has seen a slight increase from 11% in Jan 2019 to 12% in January 2020 due to in-year transfers out of borough; however, the 19% surplus for secondary in January 2019 has decreased to 16%. 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 11%, by the 2023/24 academic year – with the overall combined projected status at 10%.

The School Organisation Policy (2017) set a target of reducing surplus places to 15% by 2020 across the County Borough; by which time the primary sector is projected to have 10% and the secondary sector 15% surplus places. The Education Transformation team targeted the following schools whereby the percentage was 15% or over, in line with the delivery of surplus place reduction action plans during the 2019/2020 academic session:

- Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg – Admission number reduced from 258 to 241 resulting in the surplus % reducing from 17% in 18/19 to 13% in 2019/20
- Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, Primary Phase - Admission number reduced from 360 to 324 the surplus % reducing remained at 25%, with further reduction required for 20/21

The Education Transformation team's strategy for the 2019/20 academic session is to work on the development of surplus places reduction action plans with the following schools who are projected (as at January 2020) to have over 15% surplus between 2020 and 2023:

- St Illtyd's Primary School currently have 12% surplus in 2019/20 but projected to rise to 19% in 2023/24
- St Marys Roman Catholic Primary School currently have 18% surplus in 2019/20 but projected to rise to 19% in 2023/24
- Cwm Primary School currently have 22% surplus in 2019/20 but projected to rise to 32% in 2024/25

Glyncoed Primary School are projected to have sufficiency issues between 2022 and 2023 this will be addressed via the 21st Century Schools Programme, whereby sufficient capacity will be built in to accommodate pupil projections and demand. There is also a projected sufficiency issue in 2023 (- % of the pupil population or 3 pupils) for Coed y Garn Primary School, which can be addressed by increasing the capacity of the school, which has been reduced in previous years. In addition, Abertillery Learning Community Secondary Campus, is projected to have sufficiency issues in 2025/26 (- 3% of the pupil population or 21 pupils), which can also be addressed via the annual assessment of school capacity as above.

Over the last academic session, the team have submitted the following Section 106 requests for developer contributions, in-line with securing increased capacity in schools within the development area:

- Ebbw Fawr Valley – 1 for primary provision
- Ebbw Fach valley – 1 for secondary provision
- Tredegar Sirhowy Valley – 1 for primary and 1 for secondary provision

During the last 4 years there has been a considerable reduction in surplus places within the primary sector. The secondary sector has fluctuated in line with transfers out of borough in particular. The secondary sector has remained below 20% surplus places for the last 4 years (Please refer to Figure 4).

Figure 4– Blaenau Gwent Surplus Place Percentage Comparisons

Year	% Surplus Places -Primary Sector	% Surplus Places Secondary Sector
2011/12	28.7	19
2012/13	28.1	19.7
2013/14	25.9	20.2
2014/15	17.5	18.3
2015/16	18	20
2016/17	16	17
2017/18	14	19
2018/19	11	19
2019/20	12	16

Figure 5 (below) sets out the comparative percentages of surplus places across the family of Local Authorities, with the last data set being 2018/19. **Blaenau Gwent has joint second lowest number of surplus places within secondary, and the second lowest within primary in 2018/19.**

The Council are presently awaiting the Family of Local Authority and All Wales comparative data sets for the 2019/20 academic sessions, which are scheduled for release in autumn 2021.

Figure 5 – Family of LA Status (based on percentage)

Local Authority Family	Primary	Secondary
Blaenau Gwent	13.7%	18.50%
Caerphilly	14.8%	20.60%
Merthyr Tydfil	9.4%	14.90%
Neath Port Talbot	17.9%	18.50%
Rhondda Cynon Taff	16.20%	23.90%

All Wales Position

The January 2018/19 surplus places comparative data for Wales Blaenau Gwent's position was:

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

Education Facilities Management Maintenance, Repair and Planned Works

The Red Book Guidance associated with the repair and maintenance of Blaenau Gwent schools has been in existence since October 1999, in response to the funding provisions of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and Local Authority Financial Scheme Regulations 1998. Education Transformation and Technical Services undertook a review of the Division of Responsibilities Guidance and TE100 procedure in the spring-term of 2019, with the updated version circulated among schools for implementation from September 2019.

442 TE100's were received between September 2019 and August 2020, 100% of which were acknowledged and received a response within the specified timeframe. 94% (415) of the 629 TE100 requests have been completed with remaining 6% scheduled for completion within the summer and autumn terms 2019. Delays to resolution have been due to the following factors:

- budgetary issues in line with identified costs;
- securing contractors to undertake the work;
- the capacity of Technical Services to assess the extent of repair/ maintenance work and associated costs;
- works to be undertaken outside of school operation; and
- forms submitted at the end of term, when schools are scheduled to be closed.

Facilities Review

The facilities review process and pro-forma were updated in line with lessons learned from 2018/19 and implemented alongside surplus place, capacity and school plan/treadmill reviews in the autumn-term 2019. In addition, bi-monthly monitoring meetings have taken place in order to actively monitor school facilities action plans. Half termly meetings took with all schools where all outstanding TE100's, H&S and FRA actions were discussed, and a timeline agreed for resolution agreed.

Health and Safety and Fire Risk Assessment

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005; places a duty on the Council to monitor compliance and management of health and safety and fire risk assessment related matters in school's/education buildings. The Education Transformation team monitor accidents and incidents, action plans and delivery timeframes with both schools and Technical Services. The team also work with Corporate Health and Safety Colleagues to address policy and guidance issues in schools i.e. adverse weather.

School Trips and Visits – Evolve

All schools within Blaenau Gwent are now using EVOLVE and have a full appreciation in terms of what is expected of them with regards to trips, visits and activities. The benefits of EVOLVE and its continued use are as follows:

- Best practice – the system is used by the majority of Welsh Council's, schools and academy groups throughout the U.K.
- Consistent approach - all schools are following the same procedures.
- Regular monitoring - EVOLVE provides access to all planning documentation which is tracked and monitored.
- Council oversight - providing the opportunity for regular reports, monitoring etc. by Councils to ensure compliance and provide a level of assurance.
- Ensures compliance – the system offers monthly and termly statistical reports, with schools being monitored and advised of any concerns.
- There is a clear audit trail in the event of an incident/accident.
- All visit information is retained in the medium to long-term on an independent server.
- Training and professional support is provided and can be accessed via a specialist Outdoor Adviser, who liaises with the Council.
- The Council and schools have continued access to Welsh and U.K. National guidance and support via Outdoor Education Advisers Panel

The establishment visit data demonstrates that all schools have used EVOLVE over the last year, with 13 being the minimum number of visits recorded. As is the case throughout Wales, there are considerable variations in the number of visits added by schools. Even those schools with a poor track record of use are now increasingly utilising the system, adding a greater number of visits.

Educational Visits Coordinator (EVC) training courses are held annually and ad hoc training is offered to schools as requested. Figures 5 and 6 contain a summary of the educational visits data for 2019/20:

Figure 6: 2019/20 Statistical Summary

Summary of Approved and Processed Visits During the 2019/20 Academic Session	Statistical Summary
Total number of visits	2315
Total number of students	46164
Total number of days	2381
Total number of participant days	48575

Figure 7: 2019/20 Breakdown by Visit Type

	Abroad	Residential	Adventurous (External)	Adventurous (Own staff)	Other	Onsite
Total no. of visits	4	29	67	16	2232	5
Total no. of establishments	4	15	16	2	29	3
Total no. of students	207	897	1977	755	43786	61
Total no. of days	25	95	114	17	2232	5

School Building Condition and Suitability

Welsh Government has requested that Council's use Faithful+Gould to undertake school building condition assessments. F+G utilise the AMP methodology to determine an overall school condition grade. **The 2019/20 position for school building condition and suitability continues to improve in line with figure 8 data overleaf:**

Figure 8 – Overall Building Condition and Suitability Ratings

	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	0	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

The Council are reviewing the criteria and methodology linked to suitability assessments. **There is only one school building categorised as a 'D' (Glyncoed Primary School) within the school estate, which is programmed for replacement in 2023.**

Emergency Planning

The ET team have secure emergency planning procedures in place, including a Severe Weather Policy and associated procedures. The ET team dealt with school closure and facilities management in line with the Emergency Response Team (ERT) throughout 2019/20. 0 closure day took place in the 2019/20 due to severe weather, however all schools closed at the end of March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. **Education has secure emergency planning procedures in place, which have been tested extensively during COVID and are deemed to be effective.**

Schools Repurposing and COVID-19 Emergency Response

In mid-March 2020, the Local Authority successfully developed and led on the emergency planning arrangements and repurposing of schools aligned to the COVID-19 pandemic. The LA in partnership with its schools successfully established 7 re-purposed childcare hubs to support childcare for the children of key workers and vulnerable pupils. Throughout the emergency response period, the LA has provided childcare for over 500 critical workers via school childcare hubs and/or private childcare provision. 377 children accessed a key worker childcare place at a school hub between March and early July 2020. Effective management and monitoring processes were established via a dedicated Schools Repurposing Planning Group, childcare hub guidance was developed, issued and monitored along with emergent issues and planning aligned to the reopening of schools in the summer-term 2020. The Youth Service have supported over 500 young people

Free School Meals

The LA quickly and effectively responded in order to fulfil their duty in establishing provision for free school meal eligible pupils during the school closures from March 2020. In the first instance, a packed lunch collection/delivery process was established. This then progressed to a weekly meal box delivery scheme managed by the catering department. It was then determined that the Council would implement a direct payment method and associated application process, which was run alongside the meal box delivery until September 2020 when the meal box provision ended. The FSM direct payments were administered directly to eligible families to support them during any school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, any self-isolation periods for the pupils and the school holiday periods. The FSM direct payments continue to be active during self-isolation periods and school holiday periods, families can apply via the online application form which is regularly reviewed and re-opened for newly eligible families. Applications are subjected to an eligibility and quality checks, once the eligibility has been confirmed the applicant is set up as a Blaenau Gwent creditor, the payments are then sent made via the weekly BACS schedule. The number of pupils entitled to and claiming the FSM direct payments has grown significantly over the last 12 months from approx. 1,847 pupils to the current 2,550 pupils, this equates to 89% of the total eligible pupils within the authority. The Education Transformation team pick up all queries relating to the payments, relevant departments are then consulted as required. Queries can range from a change of bank details for a claimant, to a change in pupil's residency.

School Reopening 2020/21

Pupil and Family Engagement

An initial parent survey was undertaken on behalf of all BG schools. Responses were received for 4,221 (out of a possible 8,134) children, out of which the parents of 2,219 or (53%) stated that they intended to send their child/children back to school during the summer term. However, the remaining 2,002 or (47%) parents indicated that they did not intend on sending their child/children back to school during the summer term. A follow up survey was undertaken by each school based upon further communications provided to parents, in which schools requested that parents confirm their intentions based upon updated information on school operation etc. In order to oversee the reopening of schools in Blaenau Gwent, Education established two Executive School Planning Groups - one for the secondary sector inclusive of special schools, along with one for primary sector inclusive of Welsh-medium provision. The aim of these groups was and continues to be the development of a common framework and key principles within which the reopening of schools could take place. In addition, a Local Authority Transition Group was established with representation from key services including Education, Organisational Development, Health and Safety, Property Services, Insurance, Environmental Health, Social Services etc. The purpose of this group was to develop and oversee a transition plan which met the key support service requirements associated with the reopening of schools.

Facilities, Health & Safety

Technical facilities assessments were undertaken in preparation for reopening to assess physical works and adaptations i.e. maintenance and ventilation requirements etc. Work was then programmed accordingly. In addition, a comprehensive water testing, management and mitigation programme was established and monitored by

Education, Property Services, Health & Safety and Environmental Health. Effective monitoring and control measures were employed, meaning that 25 out of 29 school sites were able to reopen in week 1, with all 29 school sites operational by the 3rd week of the summer-term.

Capacity assessments and facilities planning sessions were programmed and facilitated by Education in partnership with headteachers and relevant school staff, on an individual basis. This process was used in order to inform the operational plans for each school including: maximum pupil numbers and grouping; operational layout, set-up and systems i.e. one way; room usage; decant and resource management requirements. Guidance was provided to schools regarding the use of PPE in general, for first aid, medical, intimate care and other purposes. PPE and other resource requirements i.e. signage, spill kits etc. were audited on a school by school basis. Plans were established and schools were provisioned for accordingly.

A cleaning service specification and associated guidance were produced and shared with schools. Individual cleaning plans were then established for each school, which are being monitored and will be used in order to inform future resource planning. It was agreed that catering would not be provided within school settings from week commencing 29th June 2020 and for the remainder of the summer-term. Catering staff were then redeployed into the cleaning service to increase capacity and resilience. A reopening risk assessment template, guidance and example were produced and shared with headteachers. These documents were then completed by school leaders and validated by the Local Authority. All risk assessments were deemed to be suitable and sufficient.

School Improvement

Throughout each phase of the pandemic the range of support to schools has flexed in order to respond to emerging needs. The LA has effectively engaged the EAS, our commissioned school improvement service throughout this time has worked closely with the LA, school leaders, staff and governors to support these needs. Indeed, the Principal Challenge Adviser of the EAS is now a key member of the Executive groups that oversee the planning for the reopening of schools.

Moving forward and as we move to the next phase of the recovery of education, schools have and will continue to be supported through a range of strategies and key to this is the one stop shop playlist known as “supporting our schools”. This playlist has been and will continue to be a key mechanism of communication. However, as the return progresses support will continue to be tailored to meet the emerging needs.

Below is a high-level summary of the extensive work that is ongoing:

- Providing timely communication and access to virtual networks for school settings and governors
- Supporting adaptive and innovative leadership to manage change
- Providing bespoke leadership support to schools and settings with a focus on self-evaluation, quality assuring current provision and planning for return
- Providing wellbeing resources and guidance materials
- To continue to provide a range of professional learning that meets the needs of the entire workforce (and governors) over the next academic year
- Access to advice support and guidance to support curriculum for Wales
- Ensuring that the commissioned improvement services work is continually aligned to the meet the needs of schools

Home to School Transport

Education determined that transport provision would be sought and agreed, in consideration of availability and safe operation. However, the primary message to parents was that, where possible, parents should transport/walk their child to school. In addition, it was determined that transport would not be provided for school childcare hub children and young people, in order to maximise the offer and safety of provision for those who need it most. It was expected that parents will continue to facilitate this as has been the case throughout the repurposing process.

Pupils from 15 schools within Blaenau Gwent are currently eligible for transport in line with the BG policy, along with pupils from 12 schools/specialist education facilities outside of the County Borough. The Council was able to fully address the transport requirements identified by schools within and outside of the borough.

Outcomes

26 out of 29 school sites were operational in the first week of the summer-term, with all 29 operational by the 3rd week of the summer-term. The preparatory work undertaken by schools in close working partnership with the Local Authority, resulted in 42% of the pupil population or 3,393 pupil's returning to the 26 operational school sites within the first week. All 29 school sites were fully operational as of Monday 13th July 2020, with 48% of 3,941 pupils returning to school in the final week of the summer-term. School childcare hub provision was consistently delivered between March and July 2020 with approximately 600 attendees per/week during the summer-term, and approximately 300 vulnerable learners in attendance at both school and hub provision during the summer-term.

Accessibility and Medical Needs

The Blaenau Gwent Accessibility Strategy 2017-2020 and associated action plan are scheduled for review and consultation over the next year. An Accessibility Forum was developed in 2018, in order to coordinate a review of both the strategy and action plan, whilst also ensuring that there are effective accessibility identification and management processes in place aligned to delivery. The Forum was active between 2017 and early 2020, when the frequency of meetings declined, due to resource-based pressures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the action plan has been continually monitored by Education throughout the course of the pandemic. In addition, accessibility issues have and continue to be identified, managed and monitored on a case by case basis.

Strong progress was made against the Strategy and associated action between 2017 and 2021, as follows:

- Blaenau Gwent Council were recognised by the Children's Commissioner for Wales in 2018, as being one of the only Councils in Wales to have a published Accessibility Strategy and action plan.
- The Forum was established to oversee implementation of key strategic priorities, along with delivery and monitoring of the action plan, whilst also ensuring due regard was given to related policy and legislative developments.
- A facilities review process has been established and completed with all Blaenau Gwent schools, in order to facilitate development, publication and action planning processes on a school-by-school basis. This is also being rolled out to wider education, alternative and informal learning settings/facilities. The facilities management aspect of the Education Transformation team work closely with Technical Services, who have and continue to embed accessibility into the facilities review, maintenance, condition and suitability processes.
- All Blaenau Gwent School have Accessibility Plans in place, which were last reviewed during the 2019/20 academic session.
- Pupil accessibility needs are identified pre-admission, monitored, managed and resourced as required. There have been three cases over the course of the 2020/21 academic year, whereby physical works have been undertaken and schools supported to meet the needs of the pupils in question.
- The Blaenau Gwent school maintenance strategy and 21st Century Schools programme have and continue to address accessibility issues to the greatest degree possible throughout the school estate. There are two school settings within Blaenau Gwent which are not fully accessible. However, depending on the needs of the child or young person additional adaptations, work and provision may be required within those setting that are considered to be accessible.
- Staff training programmes have been developed and delivered, with learning incorporated into future programmes to increase awareness, knowledge, experience, understanding and management of accessibility issues.
- A Complex and Medical Needs group has been established with representation from Health, Education, Community Services, Health and Safety and Social Services (along with other relevant partners as determined in line with each case), to address individual cases whereby complex needs prevent pupils from attending their chosen/preferred school. Thus far five cases have been resolved, one of which was subject to an independent equality impact assessment.

- An early identification process is in development, to ensure that the Council is able to manage accessibility issues technically, financially and educationally, prior to pupils reaching statutory school age.

A fundamental review of the school estate and associated accessibility plans is required. In order to undertake this review, Education plan to develop a 3 to 5-year programme of detailed accessibility audits, starting with the oldest settings and those with the lowest condition and suitability ratings. In conjunction with this, Education will work with key partners and professionals including the Forum, to fundamentally review the Accessibility Strategy over the course of the 2021/22 academic session, for adoption in the summer 2022, and implementation from September 2022. The Education plan to develop a Healthcare Needs Sub-group of the Accessibility Forum, to work on the development of localised operational guidance in line with the aforementioned policy, including early identification and management processes. The guidance will cover both the administration of medicines and medical needs.

Home to School and Post 16 Transport

Local Authorities have a duty to publish their home to school and post 16 transport policies in accordance with section 12(5) of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 (“the Measure”), and the Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009 (the “Regulations”). The current policy was published on 1st October 2019 for implementation in the 2020 academic year, post approval by Executive Committee in September. The Council are more generous in respect of home to school transport entitlement, than the Welsh Government statutory limits. The Council offer a non-statutory travel grant for post 16 learners of £150.

Blaenau Gwent 21st Century Schools Programme

SEWC 21st Century Schools Regional Group

Since 2016/17, the Education Transformation team led on the creation and administration of the South East Wales Consortia (SEWC) 21st Century Schools Regional Group, based on a strategic need to share good practice and learn from other Councils who are engaged in the 21st Century schools and All-Through Schooling (ATS) agendas. Blaenau Gwent’s lead role on the SEWC 21st Century Schools Regional Group has enhanced the profile of the Council on a regional and national basis. The establishment of the group demonstrates an outward looking approach and will contribute to Blaenau Gwent taking forward the review and implementation of the School Organisation Policy (2017) in the 2019/20 academic session.

Blaenau Gwent 21st Century Schools Programme

The Education Transformation team manages the programme and all associated 21st Century School's projects. 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 in the autumn-term of 2019, with the delivery of the final project, Six Bells Campus.

The Band A Programme realised an investment of £20.25m in school estate between 2014-19 (50/50 WG and Council funded) as follows:

- **Tredegear Comprehensive School Remodelling Project £2.3m:**

The project concluded in 2017. A project closure/ evaluation workshop session with Construction Excellence Wales (CEW) deemed the project to be an example of best practice in terms of:

- value for money;
- partnership working;
- project management arrangements; and,
- effective delivery on a live site.

The project closure report has now been submitted to Welsh Government.

- **Abertillery Learning Community (Tillery Street Campus) New Build Primary School - £9.8m:** The new school was occupied by staff and pupils June 2016. Phase 4 of the project, which involved demolition of the former school and external works, concluded in November 2016. The Welsh Government Minister for Education officially opened the Tillery Street Campus in January 2017. The closure report has been finalised and submitted to Welsh Government.
- **Ystruth Primary School Remodelling Project - £635,900:** The focus of the project was to remodel key areas of the school to meet the changing needs of the pupil population. The project had a specific focus on the transformation of provision for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The project commenced in October 2017 and concluded in August 2018 on programme and profile.
- **Abertillery Learning Community (Six Bells Campus) New Build Primary School - £8.8m (inclusive of an additional £150,000 of funding secured from Welsh Government in January 2019):** The project involved the development of a 360 place new build primary school along with a 60 place nursery and a 9 place resource base, to accommodate pupils from Queen Street and Bryngwyn Primary Campuses. Sewer diversion works concluded in July 2018, and the formal school build process commenced. Education was successful in securing an additional £150,000 to increase community parking on the site. This falls outside of the project and is planned for delivery between 2021 and 2022. The Minister for Education opened the Six Bells Campus in September 2019.

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.

Blaenau Gwent 21st Century Schools Programme has an established programme management structure, delivered in line with the Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) methodology. The Programme Board who oversee it, is comprised of key Council Officers, along with external partners, and is accountable to Corporate Leadership Team, who act as Programme Sponsor. Projects are managed in accordance with Blaenau Gwent's Corporate Project Management Framework and PRINCE 2, and each has a dedicated project management team.

Welsh Government encourages and expects Councils to participate in a Gateway Review process. The Gateway Review is a form of peer review, which tests the Council's readiness and capacity to successfully deliver projects and programmes. 4 reviews have taken place to date within Blaenau Gwent, with the latest having taken place in 2019.

The Education Transformation team agreed with the review team that, due to the programme status, the delivery confidence assessment should be split as follows, one for Band A and one for Band B respectively. For Band A, based upon a Gateway 5, the review team considered that the delivery confidence assessment as Green. For Band B, based upon a Gateway 0, the review team considered that the delivery confidence assessment as Amber, due to early stage of the programme. The outcome report, highlighted that the 21st Century Schools programme management arrangements are to be commended, as follows:

'...all of the projects within the Portfolio have been successfully completed... ongoing monitoring and realisation of benefits is well-evidenced. The positive impact of these projects on education and wider societal outcomes in the Blaenau Gwent area is also clearly evidenced... the very high quality of programme management in evidence is impressive'.

An audit of the 21st Century Schools Band A Programme was undertaken during the 2019/20 academic year, the outcome of which was a grading of 'reasonable assurance'. Only 2 weaknesses were found which pre-date the existing programme team. The weaknesses found were pertaining to the Band A SOP (submitted in 2010), along with business case submissions pre-2014. Both of these weaknesses have subsequently been addressed by the current Programme team.

The Band B Programme commenced in April 2019 and is set to conclude in 2025. The Programme will realise an investment of £19.6million throughout the Blaenau Gwent school estate. The Welsh Government intervention rate for Band B is a 65/35 split, in favour of Local Authorities. The Band B Programme seeks to deliver the following key projects in line with the investment objectives:

- Continued secondary school re-modelling within the following priority schools:
 - Abertillery Learning Community Secondary Campus
 - Brynmawr Foundation School
 - River Centre Learning Community
 - Tredegar Comprehensive School

This project will be a continued focus due to the level of investment required, in line with future bandings of the 21st Century Schools Programme – **Business case submission is programmed throughout 2021.**

- The development of a new 360 primary school to replace Glyncoed Primary, which is the only category 'D' building in terms of condition within county borough – **All business cases have been submitted and approved by Welsh Government**
- Primary School remodelling within the Ebbw Fawr Valley consisting of Beaufort Hill, Cwm and Rhos y Fedwen Primary Schools – **All business cases have been submitted and approved by Welsh Government.**
- Remodelling of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg to address ongoing condition and suitability issues – **The business case for which has been submitted and approved by Welsh Government.**

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance announced on 16th January 2018 that £30 million (100% funding, with no match requirement from Councils), would be allocated to support capital projects dedicated to and growing Welsh language in education (the grant was to be administered in addition to the capital allocations confirmed in Band B). In addition to the Band B funding envelope, Blaenau Gwent Council received confirmation in October 2018, that they were successful in securing £6 million from 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 consultation, which is scheduled to conclude on the 29th January 2021. The delivery programme/timeline has and continues to be subject to regular review throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic.

School Organisation/ Transformation Project Implementation and Delivery- the Education Transformation team manage wider Education project development and delivery, ensuring that there is clear alignment with all relevant fields and areas of work, including the 21st Century Schools Programme. Over the last academic year, the following projects have been managed by the team, in close working partnership with other relevant service areas.

Brynmawr School 3G Pitch Project – Two business cases were developed and both prudential borrowing and external funding were approved for the project. The Education Transformation team secured £200,000 from the Artificial Surfaces Collaboration Programme – the largest donation made by the programme, towards the development of a 3G pitch. The project is currently within the implementation phase and scheduled to conclude in the autumn of 2021.

Class Size Grant Revenue and Capital Funding – The Education Transformation team secured £338,108.10 of revenue funding which is to be reviewed annually in terms of allocation, in reducing class sizes. The team also bid for capital funding and successfully secured £199,600 and effectively delivered 2 projects on programme and profile in Willowtown and Georgetown Primary Schools.

Welsh Government Class Size Revenue Grant - criteria was to reduce the number of classes in schools of 29 and over in the foundation phase, along with one or more of the following:

- significant levels of pupils who are eFSM;
- significant levels of pupils with ALN/SEN;
- significant levels of pupils who are EAL/WAL;
- schools with below average outcomes which categorised as red or amber under the School Categorisation System.

The grant allocation of the last 2 years is as follows:

- 2019/20 - £105,659.25 was split between Blaen y Cwm Primary School and Abertillery Learning Community
- 2020/21 - £198,664 was split between Brynbach Primary School, Abertillery Learning Community, Deighton Primary School, Ebbw Fawr learning Community and Coed y Garn Primary School

In January 2021 Welsh Government decided to extend this for another round of funding:

- 2021/22 - £130,938 has been split between Brynbach Primary School, Abertillery Learning Community, Deighton Primary School and Ebbw Fawr learning Community

Rural Schools - The Council has been successful in securing Welsh Government 'Small and Rural' Schools Grants in order to support schools with low pupil populations and categorisation to:

1. **Encourage innovation**
2. **Support greater school to school working**
3. **Provide additional administrative support**
4. **Increase the community use of school buildings**

The recipients and grants within Blaenau Gwent over the last 3 years are as follows:

- 2019/20 - £35,873 **Sofrydd Primary School**
- 2020/21 - £35,904 **Rhos y Fedwen Primary School**
- 2021/22 - £35,944 **St Mary's R.C Primary School**

Tredegar 3G Pitch - In December 2019, the Education Transformation team secured funding to deliver a new 3G pitch, to replace the existing Astroturf at Tredegar Comprehensive School, this successfully concluded in February 2020, and became operational in August 2020.

St Mary's CIW MUGA - The Education Transformation team completed a business case on behalf of St Mary's CIW School, to secure funding for a Multi-Use Games area. The project was successfully concluded in September 2019.

Period Equity Project

The Period Equity Project in Blaenau Gwent has been hailed as an example of best practice by both Welsh Govt. and the UK Period Poverty Task Force. The project case study was presented at both the UK Task Force and the Period Dignity Round Table with the Deputy Minister Jane Hut in February 2020. BG employed a project methodology in order to deliver against the Period Dignity Grant, which commenced in 2018. A project group was established with representation from relevant Council services, health, private and third sector groups and organisations, along with Trade Unions.

A School and Community Engagement plan was established and baselines assessments was carried out with children, young people and the wider community, in order to establish the level of access and wider issues relating to period poverty. Questions were tailored to the target audience. A Neighbourhood Community Network with a period poverty focus was established by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, to compliment the project group, broaden its reach and scope. The project was also aligned to the work of the Healthy Schools Coordinator, via the delivery of and training around the Growing up Resource and School Health Research Network. The purpose of this was to assess the status of delivery in terms of education, raise awareness of the project, explore and address gaps.

School Councils and the BG Youth Forum have been actively engaged in promoting awareness and understanding around access to products, peer support and to inform education and training requirements. Working in partnership with PHS, the Council has sourced and is committed to providing eco/environmentally friendly products from 2020 onwards. The project reach is significant and includes: schools co-located sporting and leisure facilities, youth centres childcare and early years' settings and community centres. In addition, alternative funding has been sourced by groups and services in order to compliment delivery i.e. the Rotary Club.

Over the course of the last year, our priority has been to ensure sanitary provision continued to be made readily available to all pupils - particularly pupils. This has been achieved via effective working with school's partner organisations i.e. Tredegar Comprehensive School hand delivered supply of products to females during lockdown. The Council ensured that products were made available to pupils either via schools, community settings or as part of the delivery of free school meals throughout the pandemic. In addition, childcare hubs were run via BG schools where free products were readily made available. During the past year Education have continued to monitor stock and replenish schools and community settings as and when required.

The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan

Section 84 of the Schools Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, requires each Council to prepare a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). The purpose of the WESP is to set out the Council's strategic approach and direction in the development and delivery of Welsh-medium provision and Welsh education. The plan was approved by the Executive Committee and signed by the Corporate Director in 2016. The WESP is underpinned and informed by Welsh Government's current Welsh-medium Education Strategy (April 2010), along with the policy statement for 2015-16.

The Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2017-20 is directly aligned to both the Welsh Government's and the Council's Welsh Language frameworks and strategies. The strategic priorities highlighted within the BG WESP document can be summarised as follows:

- Raise the profile and levels of participation for Welsh-medium education across the County Borough by 2020, to contribute to the vision for one million speakers by 2050.
- Increase the early year's provision offer to stimulate parental demand to enable growth across the County Borough.
- Increase transition rates from Welsh-medium nursery provision to Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg by 50% in 2020.
- Work regionally with South East Wales Local Authorities to secure places for Blaenau Gwent learners in Welsh-medium secondary provision between 2017-2020 and beyond.
- Improving Welsh medium learner outcomes by 2020 so that learners raise aspirations and improve their life chances.

The Blaenau Gwent WESP was formally approved by Welsh Government in March 2018. Blaenau Gwent was the first and only Council within the SEWC region at the time to have the plan approved with no further amendments. Alongside a review of the WESP, the Blaenau Gwent Welsh Education Forum (WEF) structure, membership and associated documentation are reviewed and strengthened annually. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, 3 out of 4 WEF meetings took place throughout the course of the academic year 2019/20 with membership, attendance and engagement sustained to a high standard throughout. Partners have commented on the effectiveness of the Forum, which has in turn had a positive impact upon membership, attendance and outcomes.

The Council has worked with neighbouring authorities via the regional POSP forum, to develop a booklet promoting the benefits of being bilingual. The document is reviewed annually and shared with the families of prospective pupils. The booklet is also linked to the admissions process and is shared via health professionals, early year's settings, schools and other relevant partners/professionals, in order to promote Welsh language opportunities and education locally. A copy of the booklet is also available via the Council's website.

It has been a difficult year to sustain the strong progress made in relation to the delivery of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan since 2019. However, the LA and its partners have remained committed to the delivery of the WESP, whilst also supporting the development of resources and engagement throughout the LA during the emergency response period and subsequent reopening of schools.

Blaenau Gwent 2019/20 WESP self-assessment is based upon key progress in line with each priority area. The self-assessment has been sustained at an 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.**

Blaenau Gwent 10 Year Plan

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 current BG WESP will remain in force until that date. Education has already begun working with the BG WEF in order to establish a draft 10-year plan for consultation and approval by 31st January 2022. Following ministerial approval, the plan will come into effect on 1 September 2022. A workshop has been programmed with relevant services and partners in December 2020, to begin working on the priorities and associated consultation process.

The Education Transformation Service is delivering effectively against its statutory duties, is fully compliant with legislation and the associated policy in doing so. The Service has not only worked within its regulatory framework, but strived to identify and develop additional resources and tools to add value to its work. For example, the TE100 and Facilities Review Processes. Timeframes are often challenging due to the nature of the statutory processes and high workload of the

service area; however, the service area has to date delivered on all relevant policy, strategy, programme and project targets. The ET team aim to increase non-statutory related performance also i.e. increase TE100 maintenance and repair resolution rates and decrease associated timeframes. Performance assessments for each of the areas within the ET service are completed via the FADE process.

Early Years

Partnership work with Early Years

The Early Years Childcare and Play Manager and the Service Manager – Education and Business Change meet termly to discuss and monitor:

- Childcare and admissions data, planning, development and management
- The development of childcare aligned to education settings
- Transition planning from early years to foundation phase
- Non-maintained settings uptake/ admission, progression and development
- Facilities based developments such as after and pre-school provision
- Demand for childcare and education places etc.

There is an effective communication process in places and both teams are working in partnership to ensure a synergy between the two services areas.

The Early Years, Childcare and Play (EYCP) team within the Social Services Directorate meets the statutory requirements placed on the Council to ensure a sufficiency of childcare (under the Childcare Act 2006), to provide a Family Information Service (under the same Act) and the sufficiency of play opportunities (Children and Families Measure 2010). A Childcare Sufficiency Assessment is conducted every five years, with annual action plans and progress reports being reported to both Council and Welsh Government in the intervening years.

Childcare

The 2020/21 CSA progress report and action plan noted that progress against last year's actions have been impacted significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic and many will be taken forward as priorities for 2021/22. The main focus of our work as a Local Authority team during the last year has been on supporting the childcare sector to stay open and remain sustainable and supporting families requiring/using childcare.

The picture for settings in the early days of the pandemic was changing rapidly with providers making decisions about whether opening was a viable option for them, whilst the Local Authority team was striving to put in place arrangements to ensure a service could be provided to key worker and vulnerable children. The Flying Start team re-purposed one of their settings within a week to specifically support vulnerable children, completing a variation for Care Inspectorate Wales to enable them to offer extended provision to a greater age range to accommodate sibling groups. The Flying Start team also worked closely with Social Services Children's teams and the Family Information Service to help place children who couldn't access the repurposed hub. The EYCP team set up the Welsh Governments C-CAS scheme within a very short time-frame at the beginning of the pandemic to ensure that places were found for children and funding was delivered quickly to providers delivering these necessary services. The level of commitment and flexibility within the sector was further tested in response to Summer holiday arrangements for vulnerable children and the sector responded magnificently, with excellent examples of providers going above and beyond, including setting up new settings and systems to ensure they could offer services to children who needed it.

Several schemes to support settings financially have emerged during the year including the Economic Resilience Development Fund, Childcare Provider Grant, Childcare Offer Small COVID Grant and the Cwtch grant, in addition to other forms of government support. Whilst there have been challenges in setting up administrative systems quickly to deliver these grants, they were successfully delivered in partnership with other Local Authority colleagues, Umbrella Organisation support and with the childcare providers themselves. Over £250,000 has been distributed to settings during the second half of the year. Additionally, it has been

necessary for the team to share guidance and updates in respect of other schemes impacting on the sector including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, Protective Measures in Childcare, the Self Employed Income Scheme along with other grant programmes and sources of support.

The closure of childcare to children other than keyworker and vulnerable children demanded that we review our support for children with ALN and children attending childcare through our Assisted Places schemes, who were unable to access their childcare place. Plans were put in place to offer alternative services with resource packs being delivered to children's homes and regular contact maintained with professionals within the EYCP team to support families to continue with play, learning and development at home.

After a period of suspension during Summer Term, the Childcare Offer was restarted during August and presented a huge challenge for the Local Authority team and providers, due to the shortened time-frame for dealing with double the amount of applications, but also with changes to the eligibility guidance which needed to be understood and implemented. A huge effort on both the Local Authority and provider parts meant the scheme was back up and running from September 2020. The level of challenge there has been for childcare providers and the teams supporting providers, both within the Local Authority and in other organisations, during 2020-21 cannot be overstated.

In terms of supply and demand the report notes;

Despite challenging circumstances, the service has had some new providers open during the year including a new Day Nursery in Aberbeeg, a new Full Day Care provision on a school site in Tredegar, as a sister setting to an existing successful Day Nursery in Tredegar and one new childminder.

There has been a loss of two providers during the year with the closure of an After School Club in Brynmawr and a Full Day Care facility in Tredegar. Whilst the pandemic had some impact on the latter provider, there were ongoing sustainability issues with both that could not be overcome despite support being provided through our team.

During the pandemic a significant number of providers in Blaenau Gwent remained open to provide a service to keyworker and vulnerable children. During the first lockdown period, only 33.9% of services closed completely representing 42.8% of childcare places. Providers that had closed, have re-opened from late June 2020 and remained open, with the exception of most after-school provision that have been impacted by concerns around use of school buildings, the mixing of bubbles and school closures.

In terms of overall childcare numbers there has been again been a further modest year on year increase in the number childcare places in Blaenau Gwent over the last year, from 1403 places to 1476 places. There has been an increase in the number of Day Nursery places, from 314 places to 352 places. A new provider offering sessional care was registered for 19 places during the year. One new childminder registered during the year offering 8 new places.

Play

A Play Sufficiency Assessment is conducted every three years, the last full assessment being completed in 2019, with progress reports and updated action plans being submitted to Welsh Government in the intervening years. The team has secured good progress since the last full assessment with action plans being kept under regular review with partners. As with the CSA, progress against the PSA Action was hindered by the pandemic during 2020/21, but there was some significant progress which includes; after-school play provision for children with disabilities was established at Blaina ICC, progress at improving play areas in line with the corporate strategic play area review was achieved, play provision for vulnerable children offered during school holidays and Wild Camps project launched.

The team has an active group of play volunteers who have become qualified and experienced through support given and opportunities to practice and this has allowed us to expand opportunities being offered for Play across the Borough. We now have a well-established Wild Tots group, an outdoor parent and toddler group providing rich opportunities to play, with plans to extend the provision to two additional locations in Blaenau Gwent. We have also in 2021 been able to use our own volunteer team led by a Play Leader to deliver open access play sessions across six locations in Blaenau Gwent.

Non-maintained Foundation Phase Nursery

The EYCP team provides support and monitoring for those childcare providers registered to provide Foundation Phase Nursery places. There are currently three providers in Blaenau Gwent, with a new Welsh medium provider registering from Summer term 2021. They offer 28 am and pm places, but also offer Flying Start, Childcare Offer and fee paying provision. In recent years non-maintained providers have delivered FPN Education to between 1 and 9 children in any one term. The team supported Welsh Government, via the Education Achievement Service, to test the new early year's curriculum for non-maintained providers. The team worked closely with selected childminders to support them in testing the new curriculum and reporting back to Welsh Government and worked in partnership with PACEY Cymru to provide weekly support sessions from May – July 2021. The team co-ordinated the distribution of the 'Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards: Accelerating Learning' grant to the sector in March 2021.

Family Information Service

The Family Information Service continues to act as an information resource for parents/carers, childcare and play providers, for the team and other professionals, needing to access sector data and information on wider services of interest for children and families. The service has a very active social media presence, has a recently developed website (to be launched shortly) and continues to deal with enquiries via telephone, social media and email. The service supports the Information, Advice and Assistance function of the Council as established in line with the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014.

Key facts and figures;

- Social media followers – 3852
- 2,657 enquiries handled via telephone calls, social media questions/comments and email

Childcare Offer

The team have been delivering the Welsh Government Childcare Offer since 2017, firstly as a pilot authority and subsequently as a delivery' authority for both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen County Borough Councils. Key facts and figures;

- Processed over 1000 applications from Blaenau Gwent families
- Processed over 1500 applications from Torfaen families
- £3.8 million has been drawn down in childcare funding
- £4.1 million capital investment programme secured

The team secured the £4.1M capital investment under the Childcare Offer Capital Programme and worked closely with colleagues in Education Transformation to identify opportunities for childcare developments to align to 21st Century Programme plans under Band B. The Council were successful in securing Welsh Government Childcare Capital Grant during the 2018/19 academic session. A business case was submitted by Social Services at the end of September 2018, for the £60m Grant. Blaenau Gwent were successful in their submission, resulting in an award of £4.7m, to deliver the following schemes:

- A full day care facility in Six Bells (since abandoned due to siting issues with funding being redirected to the other schemes)

- A day care facility in the Glyncoed area
- An extension of Flying Start's provision in Swfrydd
- Remodelling work at Blaina ICC
- A small grant scheme for childcare providers

The above projects are being reported via 21st Century Schools Programme Board and the Early Years Development Childcare and Play Partnership.

Additional Learning Needs – Early Years

The EYCP team and Flying Start programme supports children with Additional Learning Needs accessing pre-school provision between the ages of 2-3 years. Work to prepare for the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill 2018, has continued and the team has built up stronger relationships with the Education Inclusion Service, particularly the Early Years ALN Lead Officer. Training had to be revamped to allow for virtual delivery and the team has been delivering the Gwent approved modular ALN training to the sector. Person Centred Planning is starting to be embedded into practice and settings are becoming more confident in the use of new paperwork. It has been agreed as part of a team restructure that we would seek to appoint an ALN support worker to complement the work of the Early Years ALN Lead Officer and the job description and person specification for this post is currently under construction. The work of the ALN sub group, which is a multi-disciplinary group of professionals that decide on support to be offered to pre-school children, has been reviewed and streamlined and a further review in the light of developments is underway currently (August 2021).

Speech, Language and Communication

Through 2019 /20 the team has been a member of the Gwent Regional Early Years Speech, Language and Communication Needs group (SLCN) which has been coordinated by ComIT – Communication Intervention Team covering the 5 Gwent areas. Some BG schools and settings have had draft copies of the 3-3;11 booklets and all other booklets have been finalised. A meeting to agree rollout plans has been organised for September 2021.

Welsh Medium Support

The Council has been committed to increasing the numbers of Welsh language settings and has worked in partnership with Mudiad Meithrin and Education colleagues in recent years to raise the profile of Welsh medium childcare and education. The EYCP Manager sits on the Welsh in Education Forum and also the Communications sub-group of the Forum to contribute to the work of raising the profile of Welsh medium education and childcare and thereby stimulating demand. Unfortunately, the pandemic has hindered plans to have promotional events in the last year, but plans will be revisited when it is deemed safe to do so. The team has supported the Mudiad Meithrin SAS programme and a new Cylch Meithrin in Tredegar has been established and further Welsh medium sessions are being run at a local English medium session, widening language choice in the Ebbw Vale area. Plans to develop a Welsh medium Day Nursery at Glyncoed are progressing well, with the final design being agreed and plans submitted to Planning. The team has also recently secured new Ti a Fi provision to be delivered from the Integrated Children's Centre in Blaina, starting in September 2021.

Transition

The EYCP team, alongside the Flying Start Advisory Teacher work closely with childcare settings and school nurseries to implement the transition policy which includes the expectation that all schools and settings engage in termly area cluster meetings to share information about children transitioning to Nursery and good practice. This process continued throughout covid-19 via phone calls and TEAMS meetings. Paperwork was completed and sent electronically to the nursery teachers. Paperwork was updated in-line with the new ALN bill and now takes the format of the One Page Profile. This has supported discussions with nursery teachers as this

format is common between childcare and schools. The ALN Lead Officer and Flying Start Advisory Teacher supports enhanced transition arrangements for those children with AN identified through the AN Sub Group. A PCP transition meeting is held for all children who receive support through the EY AN Sub Group.

The compliance with this policy is monitored and the attendance of schools and settings is logged with follow-up undertaken if needed. Previously, there have been concerns regarding transition processes where schools do not always release staff to attend transition events. However, virtual meetings led to an improvement in engagement levels. Teachers who attended the virtual transition meetings report that they find them useful and it supports children to settle in the nursery.

The need for closer working remains and a pilot project was proposed for Spring Term 2020, however this was postponed. As COVID guidance is changed and relaxed and face to face meetings are resumed there are plans to introduce an Early Years network in Tredegar to strengthen joint working and sharing of practice between schools and settings. Tredegar has been chosen for the pilot as the schools and settings consistently engage well with each other and professionals. The proposed format for the network is for schools and settings to alternate quarterly hosting a short meeting after the working day. The agenda will be decided by the members of the network and facilitated by the FSAT. This will then be rolled out across the LA and will take place in clusters

Pandemic Response

The team responded quickly in March 2020 to ensure that a range of childcare settings were supported to remain open to allow keyworkers and vulnerable children to access childcare, later then in April 2020 setting up and delivering the Welsh Government Childcare Coronavirus Assistance Scheme in a matter of weeks, to support those keyworkers and vulnerable families with funded childcare. That scheme supported 276 children. At the same time the Childcare Offer was suspended to new entrants, then later reopened to all new application in August 2020 with revised guidance to take account of changes in employment status for some parents, caused by the pandemic. The team maintained weekly contact with all childcare providers from April to June 2020 to share emerging guidance, give advice and monitor the number of places open and filled. Guidance was pulled together in a local encompassing document to assist providers and support has been offered and taken up by settings in accessing a range of grants. The team have co-ordinated and supported different grant schemes introduced by Welsh Government to support the sector (Childcare Provider Grant, additional Children and Communities Cwtch Grant, additional Childcare Offer capital small grant scheme, Playworks).

2.3 Support for Other Services :Areas where good progress has been made:

- **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 99.1% and is in line with 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 implementation stage (Summer 2021).

2.3 Support for Other Services: Areas requiring improvement:

- The delivery of the WESP targets is dependent upon the Welsh medium seedling proposal. The new 10 year WESP is under development.
- 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 underway 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.
- There are risks associated with the revenue implications associated with the Youth Services Inspire initiative, which is currently funded through European (ESF) funding.
- Review progress against the Childcare Sufficiency Audit (CSA).
- Responding to the COVID-19 emergency to ensure that learner progression is maintained in safe and blended learning settings.

Inspection Area 3 – Leadership and management Lead LP

3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers

The Education Directorate has a new and vibrant leadership team with a permanent Corporate Director of Education and Head of School Improvement appointed during academic year 2020-21. This restructure has also created new roles for Service Manager Education Transformation and Business Change and Young People and Partnerships and this has created additional capacity, especially for the school improvement agenda.

The Council has approved its Corporate Plan which acts as the Council’s business plan and covered the four-year period 2018/22. In order to comply with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the priority areas act as both the Council’s Well-being and Improvement Objectives. As part of the Council’s annual assessment of performance, the Council has identified that our ambitious programme of activity was in the early stages of development and implementation. As part of this we were honest in that we may need to make some changes to the Corporate Plan moving forward. This resulted in some amendments being made to the Outcome Statements in order to better demonstrate the contribution different areas across the Council will contribute to achieving them, enhancing our ‘One Council’ approach. The overall emphasis of each Outcome Statement has not changed, but involves cross-cutting activity.

From these considerations, the Corporate Plan 2020/22 Outcome Statements 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 Outcome Statements have been written to be cross-cutting in nature and shows how education makes a key contribution to all of priority areas within the Corporate Plan. The global pandemic also provided the opportunity to consider priorities, particularly for the Education Directorate and this has manifested itself in our Recovery and Renewal Plan. The Executive (July 2021) has received the plan and was agreed to monitor the progress within the 4 corporate priorities of Education/learners, Community, Economic/Business and the new operating model. This will consider approach will consider the impact of the pandemic and ensure the focus of business planning up to 2022 and delivering on the outcomes needed to support the community and local economy. Education has completed an impact assessment and is well-placed to make further progress against the backdrop of COVID-19. Indeed, Estyn produced a positive overall letter for BG in line with the national Thematic Review and this was followed-up by a further constructive letter in the Summer of 2021.

CLT and the Members had an active leadership role in undertaking the refresh of the Corporate Plan. Consequently, the Education Directorate business plans have been aligned to the Corporate Plan to ensure that progress against the outcomes can be clearly demonstrated. This will be reported periodically through the Finance and Performance Report, presented to CLT, Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee. Regular reporting through the Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee also takes place as identified through the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme. This ensures a level of accountability to the work being undertaken by the Directorate with Scrutiny Committee able to challenge the work undertaken, particularly establishing robust self-evaluation arrangements. Clear areas for further improvement are well defined and based on a thoroughly forensic approach to data analysis and an embedded culture of robust self- evaluation. Improvement processes are well embedded into routine work. On-going evaluation is an area of strength and is an embedded feature of the work of the Education Directorate and the Council.

On a regular basis, as part of the Council's Corporate Performance Framework, the Director of Education and the Executive Member meet to discuss work being undertaken in the directorate including areas of good progress and where further improvement is required. The Chair and Vice Chair of Scrutiny are also invited to attend these meetings on a less frequent basis. This is to align the work of Scrutiny and the Executive.

The PSB is working towards five well-being objectives as outlined in their Well-being Plan 2018/23:

- The best start in life for everyone
- Safe and friendly communities
- Look after and protect the natural environment
- Forge new pathways to prosperity
- Encourage healthy lifestyles

The Council's refreshed Corporate Plan is clearly aligned to the Well-being Plan and its five objectives.

The PSB has developed a Strategic Work Programme which was signed off in January 2020. This Work Programme has identified five High Level Actions to be taken forward:

- First 1,000 days and Early Years Pathfinder;
- Building a healthier Gwent / Integrated Well-being Networks;
- Climate Change;
- Blaenau Gwent Sustainable Food Programme; and
- Foundational Economy.

Each of the high level actions has an identified PSB Sponsor. The Education Department is clearly aligned to a number of these actions and will be involved in their delivery moving forward and progress will be evidenced through the Directorate business plans.

The Improving Schools report (Summer 2021) that discusses school categorisation and the school inspection profile over the last 3 years demonstrates the effectiveness of leaders and managers in Local Government Education Services. The Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP) provides an effective strategic framework to support improvement in Education. These are interpreted further in the underpinning 4 strategic improvement objectives in the Education Directorate's Education Improvement Plan (EIP). The priorities in the EIP have been reviewed and the on-going and cyclical self-evaluation processes evaluate progress against our key priorities, identify where good progress has been made and where further improvement is needed. These processes are embedded and well led.

Effective leadership across the Council has been demonstrated via the Transforming Blaenau Gwent Programme of change; service delivery has changed as a result and efficiency savings have been made. Citizen voice is visible in Council plans and has underpinned cultural change across the board. Financial Efficiency Projects (FEPs) and more recently the Bridging the Gap initiatives have established balanced revenue budgets. The schools' Individual School Budget (ISB) has been protected (uplift of 3.6% 2021-22). The new political administration has taken difficult decisions against the backdrop of continuing austerity measures and prioritised school improvement accordingly.

The Vision for Education based on a school-led self-improving system is under review alongside the much improved school categorisation and school inspection profile over the last 3 years demonstrates that schools are taking a school-led approach, are working with other schools in a school-to-school way and beginning to improve outcomes and wellbeing for children and young people. Schools are embodying the vision and supporting the approach to school improvement locally, regionally and nationally, particularly through effective cluster working arrangements.

Effective strategic collaboration through working closely with the EAS is demonstrated in the LA/EAS Business Plan, which are well understood by school leaders and members; termly monitoring of progress against targets provide useful information to CLT, Scrutiny and Executive Committee as well as annually to all schools and school Governors. Scrutiny has improved, with challenging questions from Members now illustrating their improved understanding. Many Members of the new administration were previously members of scrutiny committee/executive and as such their understanding has continued to develop over the last 3 years. However, changes to reporting of school performance in line with the national reform agenda will need to be worked through in 2021. It is anticipated that school performance reporting will focus more on progress measures using matched-data and it will be important to develop members understanding further in this regard.

Additionally, the Service Manager for Inclusion has worked with HTs to redesign the ALN Service operating out of Pen y Cwm Special School and the operating model for the River Centre. Similarly, effective leadership is demonstrated by the Service Manager for Education Transformation and Business Change in the implementation of the 21st Century Schools Programme, for example, Band A is now fully complete with the opening of the new Six Bells Primary Campus in September 2019 (part of the Abertillery Learning Community), and the agreement of Band B plans. The Band A programme was delivered on time and within budget. Leaders in the Directorate work well with officers across the Council this is illustrated by the fact that plans are informed by audit, data analysis and self-evaluation is evident in the quarterly joint performance and finance report. The findings from internal audit informs the next round of school audit plans, sufficiency of childcare places audit informs placement planning, parental questionnaires inform development programmes in Flying Start settings. Corporate join-up between leaders across the Council is clear.

The quality and effectiveness of senior officers in the Education Directorate is evaluated regularly, for example, through the Corporate Performance Management processes comprising Interim and Annual evaluations throughout the academic year. 360 degree evaluations comprise part of this process. The Managing Director of the Council leads the review panel for CLT officers, which includes annual reviews for both the Corporate Director and Head of School Improvement and Inclusion. The Executive Member for Education is the Chair of the regional Joint Executive Committee, which is well led.

The impact of leadership at officer and member level is demonstrated via the improving performance profile of schools via their categorisation, school inspection outcomes, the pace of school improvement and the robustness of their use of full statutory powers of intervention. Full powers of intervention are currently in place in two underperforming secondary schools and both have demonstrated improved results in KS4 in 2020-21, although it is acknowledged through CDGs.

The Service Manager-Education Transformation and Business Change is a highly effective manager who leads the regional 21st Century planning group and the Service Manager for Inclusion leads the regional Inclusion Group. Similarly, the Service Manager for the Young People and Partnerships (previous Chair of the National Youth Service Board) also contributes to the National Youth Work Group and sits on the national Youth Work Board.

Leadership of the Youth Service is strong, enhanced by an effective annual training programme for all youth workers, prepared each year using feedback from a workforce development survey. The local authority effectively co-ordinates open access and targeted support for vulnerable children and young people.

Demonstrable impact has been made through the Raising Aspirations Group and NEET Practitioner Forum subgroup to implement the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework. This progressive partnership approach, strategically and operationally linking with a key range of providers and partners, has been highly effective in steadily reducing the numbers of young people becoming NEET from 8.7% in 2009 to 1.5% in 2020.

Similarly, the work of the intervention panel for Schools Causing Concern has progressed well under the Chair of the Executive Member for Education.

This work is challenging and effective leadership at both political, officer and EAS level has been clearly demonstrated. The statutory warning notice in EFLC has been lifted and ESTYN has removed the school from significant improvement follow up. The ALC Corporate Group has been re-established to oversee both the work of the Learning Community in raising educational standards and securing sustainability in reducing their net revenue budget deficit. The SWN at BFS will be reviewed in the Autumn term 2021 and ESTYN have convened an improvement conference as part of the WG's Support for Schools in Special Measures initiative. There is a 'One Plan' approach in place for BFS and the Council are leading on subsequent meetings. Both ALC and BFS have improved governance arrangements. The River Centre has been issued with a pre-warning notice letter and is formally recognised as a School Causing Concern. There are stringent monitoring arrangements in place. Sofrydd Primary School is likely to be removed from the SCC protocols, once a permanent Headteacher is appointed in the Autumn term 2021.

Good leadership through clear communication of performance priorities has been a key feature of the work of the Directorate; with DMT, CLT, School Improvement and Inclusion Leadership Teams, Wider Group, DMT meetings with the Executive member for Education, meetings, during Headteachers, with the EAS Challenge Advisers, with the PSB, with the Governors Association and with team leaders of LGES services e.g. the corporate self-evaluation group.

During recent years, **Members have made difficult decisions such as protecting school budgets, prioritising the allocation of significant capital funding to Blaenau Gwent's 21st Century Schools investment programme, reducing financial inefficiencies in certain parts of ALN provision whilst prioritising growth in this area going forward, in line with ALN reform. Difficult decisions have also been made regarding the need to undertake a series of service review for example, the Home to School Transport and Post 16 Transport Policy, School Crossing Patrols, and Welsh medium provision to name but a few.**

Moreover, capital budget decisions regarding affordability of the agreed proposals set out in the Band B 21st Century Schools programme are now confirmed. Members are well informed and keen to ensure that reviews are scheduled in a timely way thus avoiding any unintended consequences.

Members are taking responsibility for the quality of their work, this is evidenced by Members undertaking self-evaluation; an evaluation of each Scrutiny meeting is taken with both officers and members and evidence from this is used throughout the year to make minor amendments and to feed the evidence used for the annual evaluation. All work undertaken throughout the year is captured in a Scrutiny Forward Work Programme, which is updated quarterly and reported into the Executive Committee for decision-making and finally to Full Council

3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers: Areas where good progress has been made:

- **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 2020 to 2026 period.**

- Regional leadership is being exercised well by senior officers e.g. regional Welsh medium POSP group.
- Member understanding and engagement in LGES activity, particularly the Exec Member and Scrutiny arrangements.
- Appointment of a permanent 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 appointing an additional post for school improvement capacity.

3.1 Quality and effectiveness of leaders and managers Areas requiring improvement:

- 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.
- There are risks associated ALN Reform and with securing appointment to the Service Manager-Inclusion role for the Education Directorate, with recruitment initiated in the Autumn term 2021.

3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning

The Self-Evaluation Policy (reviewed September 2020) and SE Toolkit clearly sets out the cycle for self-evaluation processes and reporting. The FADE approach to evaluations is now embedded into routine practice. Processes are ongoing, cyclical in nature and totally aligned with corporate framework and 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.

LGES services that are working well and those requiring improvement are clearly set out in the main Self-Evaluation Report (SER), last updated in September/October 2021. Progress against our key priorities are also evaluated and reported to Scrutiny and Executive Committees.

Arrangements to share and consult with others regarding the draft SER are well established: the draft SER document is shared with Scrutiny annually to seek their views as part of the agreed Scrutiny Forward Work Programme. A high-level evaluation Summary SER sets out where good progress has been made and where further work is needed. This information is further distilled down to draw through key items of information which are then reflected as actions for improvement in Business Plans. This process works well for the Directorate and helps to sustain improvement in pupil outcomes and wellbeing.

The Council provides effective corporate support for self-evaluation and improvement planning; the Corporate Performance Framework provides the strategic guide to align our work with the corporate model. The SER underpins the quarterly Finance and Performance report.

Corporate support for self-evaluation directly informs and aligns to the business planning and improvement processes which are also aligned to the Risk Management Framework. The higher level risks are escalated to the Corporate Risk Register and kept under quarterly review. Risks from the Directorate are escalated to CLT as appropriate and equally when reviewed, risks from CLT may be de-escalated to the Directorate level.

The Council's Performance Management framework effectively integrates people, service and financial planning. The Joint Performance and Finance Report Reporting arrangements have been improved by the continued development of outcome focussed measures. The Finance and Performance report is presented to CLT, Executive Committee and corporate overview scrutiny committee on a quarterly basis and the Director provides a commentary update on progress made within the Directorate for the Executive and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committees. The Joint Performance and Finance report is a key part of the governance and accountability arrangement

Blaenau Gwent is committed to partnership working to raise standards, through its active participation with the SEWC/EAS regional school improvement service, through the regional GEMs service for pupils with EAL, through the regional VI/HI or SENCom provision etc.

The PSB is working towards five well-being objectives as outlined in their [Well-being Plan 2018/23](#):

- The best start in life for everyone
- Safe and friendly communities
- Look after and protect the natural environment
- Forge new pathways to prosperity
- Encourage healthy lifestyles

The Council's refreshed Corporate Plan is clearly aligned to the Well-being Plan and its five objectives.

The PSB has developed a Strategic Work Programme which was signed off in January 2020. This Work Programme has identified five High Level Actions to be taken forward:

- First 1,000 days and Early Years Pathfinder;
- Building a healthier Gwent / Integrated Well-being Networks;
- Climate Change;
- Blaenau Gwent Sustainable Food Programme; and
- Foundational Economy.

Each of the high level actions has an identified PSB Sponsor. The Education Department is clearly aligned to a number of these actions and will be involved in their delivery moving forward and progress will be evidenced through the Directorate business plans. The Council has led on the establishment of a Post 16 Partnership Board. The Board's terms of reference are agreed, the body has met and the partnership will involve the Council, Coleg Gwent, secondary/special schools and work based learning providers.

Partnership working between the Council and the EAS is strong and is subject to significant joint working and quality assurance.

Blaenau Gwent is a key partner in the 5 Counties Adult and Community Learning (ACL) Partnership. Blaenau Gwent's most recent Estyn inspection was a joint inspection across the partnership and a joint action plan was developed. The inspection of the Adult and Community Learning Partnership in confirmed that outcomes were Good and Prospects for Improvement were Excellent.

On-going evaluations of progress through the business plan form a fundamental part of the monthly performance coaching sessions with all managers. Six monthly and annual PDR processes are underpinned by evaluations of progress against business plans which are robustly challenged by elected members who comprise the PDR panel.

3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning: Areas where good progress has been made:

- **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 Bryn Bach Primary, Glyncoed Primary School. Sofrydd Primary School in ALC (ESTYN monitoring visit likely in Autumn term 2021). Progress in ALC will continue to be monitored.**

3.2 Self-evaluation and improvement planning: areas requiring improvement

- **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**
- **To continue to ensure that regional SCC protocols deliver improvements in ALC, BFS, River Centre and Sofrydd Primary School.**

3.3 Professional learning

Professional learning is part of everyday business and staff keep up to date with knowledge about their own areas of responsibility via their professional associations, the EAS professional development events, via DMT meetings and through pan-Council participation in projects and task and finish groups as well as sharing practice across SEWC and all Wales professional groups for example, the SEWC sub groups of 21st Century Schools (Chaired by BG), the SEWC Inclusion Group (Chaired by BG), national ALN and School Improvement reform via the ADEW/ALN and School Improvement group with representation from the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion. The Youth Service Manager is Chair of the all Wales Youth Services Manager Group.

Regular contact with Welsh Government officials and groups also support the CPD of staff for example, the 21st Century Schools team, Gateway Review activity, membership of ESTYN working groups (new LGES), EOTAS group and ALN Bill Reform group for EPs. Professional development opportunities for key staff have been provided via the national (ADEW) Aspiring Directors Programme, MSP and PRINCE 2 training, WG Programme Delivery CPD event, to name but a few.

Headteachers, school leaders and Governors have access to the EAS Professional Learning Offer: impact is evaluated and demonstrable in improved outcomes, improved school inspection judgements, improved school categorisation profile. Greater impact needs to be secured for our vulnerable learners in KS3 and KS4 as well as eFSM learners and these are key priorities for the Directorate going forward.

The Headteacher induction programme for new heads and aspiring deputies, was organised by an experienced Headteacher, which is in line with the Vision for education. There were 9 participants who engaged in 3 day HT induction that took place in the early part of the Autumn term. Participants decided which modules they wished to access. The modules that were offered were: Safeguarding, Managing allegations against staff, Audit and Finance, Organisational Development and Health and Safety. Many participants confirmed that the most popular sessions were managing allegations against staff and health and safety to which many participants attended. Whilst, all participants confirmed that the course objectives were met in full and many (80%) participants confirmed that the delivery of the courses were very good with a few confirming that it was good. Some participants made helpful suggestions as to how future courses could be further improved and

The Council jointly plans with a number of agencies: the Education Achievement Service (EAS), Partners in the Learning Themed Group, Safeguarding with the Social Services Directorate, Coleg Gwent via the Post 16 Partnership Board, Schools via the agreed Partnership Agreement, 21st Century Schools team via the regional programme, services for VI/HI and EMAS via the SLA and the Youth Service with a number of key partners, such as Families First, Communities First, Careers Wales, Youth Offending Service, Social Services and Voluntary Sector partners. These all provide officers with opportunity to learn from elsewhere and is considered an important aspect of CPD.

Effective collaborations are well established through the Youth Service, for example through the partnerships established within the YEP Framework, through programmes such as the Independent Counselling Service, the ESF funded Inspire programmes via partners in the Raising Aspiration Group (RAG) and Practitioner forums. The Raising Aspirations Group is led by the LA and has taken part in many WG trials to further development the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework. Levels of coordination and collaborative activity are high as evidenced by improved outcomes and reductions in the level of NEETs.

The Directorate makes a significant contribution to the work of the EAS via participation in regional SEWC Directors' meetings on a fortnightly basis, planning meetings with the EAS MD on a fortnightly basis, fortnightly and monthly progress meetings between the Council's School Improvement function and Principal Challenge Adviser facing BG, joint planning arrangements for schools causing concern, a timetable of Intervention Meetings between senior Directorate Officers, EAS Headteachers and Chairs of Governors for schools causing concern. These opportunities are again viewed and highly valued as CPD opportunities for BG officers.

3.3 Professional learning: Areas where progress has been made

- **Senior Officers now hold Chair positions across a number of all Wales groups; this supports their ongoing professional development.**
- **Monthly 121 performance coaching sessions are embedded as routine practice.**
- **Performance Coaching is 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 School Improvement and Inclusion.**
- **New Headteacher and aspiring deputy induction learning offer is in place and led by an experienced Headteacher.**

3.3 Professional learning: Areas requiring further improvement

- 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.

3.4 Safeguarding Arrangements

The Local Authority's systems, practice and policy demonstrate that safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements as detailed in Keeping Learners Safe. The Managing Director has overall strategic accountability for securing effective safeguarding arrangements across the Council. The Corporate Safeguarding Policy identifies key personnel and their deputies (including elected members) across all Council services with responsibility and accountability for safeguarding. The Council has a well-established Joint Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee in place that scrutinises safeguarding performance across the Council's services and also involves key partners. CLT monitors arrangements closely, including Professional Strategy Meeting (PSM) progress. The strategic leads group keeps safeguarding arrangements under close scrutiny and is key in implementing the WAO action plan on safeguarding arrangements. Within this audit no key areas for the education service were identified as requiring improvement.

Clear lines of accountability and reporting are in place. Named officers with clear responsibilities and accountabilities are in place. At Directorate level the Strategic Safeguarding in Education lead (SSL) is Michelle Jones and the Deputy is Claire Gardner. The Safeguarding in Education Manager is Sarah Dixon with responsibility for the operational management and oversight of child protection and safeguarding issues in education, particularly for schools. This post is located within the Social Services Directorate and is line Manager by the Children's Services Manager with responsibility for Safeguarding.

The Designated Senior Person for Youth Service is Claire Madden and for Early Years and Play, Claire Smith. The matrix evidences that all schools have a designated senior person DSP, a deputy DSP and a designated governor for safeguarding. All of the above ensure that there are clear reporting structures in place for each of the settings aligned to the Safeguarding in Education policy. All schools have a designated Lead for Children Looked After (CLA) who work closely with the CLA Education Coordinator and Mentors. The contact information is reviewed every September to ensure appropriate structures are in place in each setting.

Monthly meetings between the Strategic Safeguarding in Education Lead and the Safeguarding in Education Manager provides the mechanism for supporting a coherence in approach and consistency of practice. The Professional Lead for Community Safety, who is the Council's Community safety and Preventing Violent Extremism lead, joins for part of these meeting to ensure that any broader community safety issues are shared and a joint multi-agency approach implemented. Regular meetings with corporate officers supports a coherence of approach, for example, the Safeguarding in Education Manager meets termly with the early years and play, youth service, home to school transport, and school DSP's.

The Education Safeguarding Policy is updated annually and most recently during the Summer term 2021 and covers all education settings. The effectiveness and impact of policies is monitored through regular review of the findings captured in the safeguarding matrix. Similarly, this information is contained in the quarterly reports for Safeguarding presented to the Education and Social Services Joint Scrutiny Committee. Findings feed the ongoing work programme for the Safeguarding in Education Manager.

Monitoring of safeguarding procedures have been enhanced by the development of a Quality Assurance protocol for validating processes across education services and a reporting timeframe into DMT. Learning from these visits informs future policy and practice. The Safeguarding in Education Manager visits schools and other

settings throughout the year, currently taking place on a virtual basis. **The statutory Partnership Agreement makes clear schools' obligations regarding safeguarding.** Adoption is monitored via close scrutiny of the Matrix. The annual return from commissioned services demonstrated that all services have appropriate safeguarding policies and practice in place. (EAS, GEMS, Youth Offending, SRS, and Gwent Music). Evaluation of the joint quarterly report identifies any emerging trends which are used by the Safeguarding in Education Manager to directly inform her work in schools.

Schools are supported in their early intervention and prevention work through the provision of the Families First social worker in school model. From September 2020, Families First have increased their provision from two to four social workers designated to support pupils, teaching staff and families. The service is provided on a weekly basis to each school and from 1st April to 30th June 2021, carried out 124 school consultations.

The role of the social workers in schools has evolved to meet the needs and demands of each school and its pupils and includes signposting families to a range of services including: Ar Trac – Cyfannol Women's Aid; New Pathways; GP; Sparkles; SNAP Cymru; Flying Start; NYAS; Supporting People; ELSA support; transition support to college; School Health Nurse; Family Matters Mediation; Bereavement services; REACH; PlatFform; and Umbrella Cymru; The role has also supported the establishment of support groups for LGBTQ+ and bereavement.

Initial evaluations confirm that school staff have felt more upskilled in dealing with the difficulties and challenges families are experiencing. The Children Missing in Education Policy has been implemented in all schools. In 2020/21 there were 37 CME referrals for pupils in Blaenau Gwent that left without a destination school. All of these pupils (except 3) have been located and the CTF has been sent to the receiving school. Of the 3 children not located, 2 have only recently moved and we are chasing up with the new local authority and the other one has been referred to HMRC – who confirmed that they had a new address for the family.

In 2020/21 there were 22 CME referrals for children that had moved into Blaenau Gwent without a forwarding school. 6 of those children were EHE when they moved into the LA. 4 of the 6 are travellers and visits have been undertaken, whilst the other 2 are due to apply for school. 3 children are still waiting to be admitted into school, as parents delayed completing the in-year transfer form, despite numerous visits. 9 children were placed into school and the referring agency notified. 3 children were in Blaenau Gwent for only a short period of time and were tracked into a new local authority. Legal procedures have commenced for one family as they are not engaging with the admission process.

In June 2021 there were also 170 year-6 pupils that had not applied for secondary school places. Work was done to support these families and ensure applications etc. were completed. There are still 9 children that we are still waiting for confirmation from other local authorities or still supporting with applications. In June 2021 there were 15 nursery pupils that had not applied to reception. Numerous visits were made and all these children have now completed applications for reception or confirmation has been received from other local authorities to say they have school places. In addition to this there were 137 pupils on the live birth data that had not applied for reception places. All except 31 have now been located. Investigations are currently ongoing for these 31 with other local authorities and then we will liaise with health and HMRC to see what further information they have.

Annual visits by LA Officers to EHE pupils provide valuable information regarding the efficiency of the education provided. This is in line with the EHE policy that was reviewed and adopted by the Executive Committee in 2017/18. Support is offered to reintegrate or to signpost. However, EHE numbers have increased following COVID-19 in line with national trends. Home visits are offered, parents who refuse are few. Neutral venues are offered and School Attendance Orders are considered.

Information about pupils who are subject to or witness to police attended incidents of domestic abuse is shared through Operation Encompass in addition to the usual reporting mechanism. Headteachers report that Operation Encompass is helpful to them in their daily work supporting pupils at risk. From 1.1.20 to 31.8.20, there were 454 occurrences involving 553 children. 17% of these children were involved in more than one incident. Seven of these occurrences were categorised as high risk and involved 9 children. From 1.9.20 to 31.3.21, there were 383 occurrences involving 454 children. 18% of these children were involved in more than one incident and 13 children were linked to high risk occurrences.

Information about pupils who experience / or who are affected by high risk domestic abuse is shared via representation by Education Welfare Service on MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference).

During 2020 21, Education were represented at most case conferences, with attendance being 94%, compared to 83% the previous year. Conferences have been held on a virtual platform for the whole academic year which has helped facilitate greater attendance. Any non-attendance is discussed on an individual basis with each setting. There has also been an increase in the number of education reports provided for conference with the majority (60%) of settings providing a report. Individual discussions with settings continues in order to improve compliance in the provision of conference reports from education.

Legislation (the Children (Performances and Activities) (Wales) Regulations 2015) regarding child performances came into force in Wales. Whilst Blaenau Gwent was compliant with legislation for those pupils that performed for larger companies, the data clearly demonstrates a growing awareness of the legislative requirements under these regulations and the associated work undertaken to identify the range of amateur dramatic groups. Consequently, as training has been implemented, there has been an increase in the number of licences issued and notification of appearances of children performing under BOPA. This work is kept under review.

Blaenau Gwent's anti-bullying strategy and toolkit provides support to schools when tackling alleged bullying in Blaenau Gwent schools. The local authority has a clear Behaviour Strategy, based on inclusive principles which underpin process and procedure, written within the context of a range of policies, provided by Welsh Government. Monitoring and reporting arrangements are in place to ensure the local authority is able to respond appropriately to incidents of bullying in schools.

Monitoring of racist incidents is carried out on a termly basis, monitored by the Inclusion team. Further wider partnership engagement with organisations such as Show Racism the Red Card and the Ethnic Minority Youth Support Team in Wales (EYST) takes place to support schools and individuals affected. The local authority has provided all schools with Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) and reduced timetable guidance. All reported incidents of RPI are scrutinised and recorded by the appropriate Officer and follow up actions carried out. Such incidents are recorded within the Inclusion data and are also reported to joint scrutiny. The local authority also monitors reduced timetables, ensuring appropriate support and planning takes place.

Processes dealing with allegations against professionals are managed by the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit in Social Services in accordance with Wales Safeguarding Procedures (WSP). The systems are embedded and WSP, Welsh Government guidance and Gwent Safeguarding Board guidance underpins this work. The Safeguarding in Education Manager reports the current position to DMT, which is then shared by the Corporate Director with CLT.

The Recruitment and Selection Policy, Safer Recruitment for Schools is considerate of safe recruitment principles for supply staff. This policy has been adopted by school Governing Bodies. The process for managing DBS compliance is embedded across education services and schools. DBS compliance is managed by Organisational Development and any non-compliance is escalated and managed by Directors and senior managers in all departments. CLT receive quarterly DBS position statement and this is also shared with Corporate Safeguarding Leads.

Early years have an established safeguarding quality assurance processes. Analysis of this is a feature of safeguarding meetings with this service and joint visits have been implemented with the Safeguarding in Education Manager. In addition, early year's childcare and play staff have systems in place to monitor the uptake of relevant safeguarding training with all DSPs in these settings being trained.

Evaluation of the Matrix reveals that all schools have updated their whole school safeguarding training within the last 3 years. The matrix reveals that all DSPs have had training and nearly all have refreshed their training in the past 3 years.. DSP training is also supplemented through regular updates provided during termly DSP meetings.

PREVENT training continues to be offered to schools and settings and in the governor training offer. Training for governors is offered through the BG specific EAS training programme and upon direct request from schools. Group 1 Training for VAWDASV was rolled out to educational settings in early 2018. Specific Blaenau Gwent education sessions for Group 2 Ask and Act training have taken place during March 2021.

Keeping Safe Online: By the end of the academic year 2020-21, all schools had registered with the 360 degree safe Cymru tool, with 68% of these having completed all aspects of the tool. Work needs to continue to promote the ongoing use of the tool.

The Council are currently in the process of the roll-out the MyConcern safeguarding system across all of the schools in 2020-21. Over 90% of BG's schools are engaged in the roll-out and the team are working towards 100% implementation.

Youth Workers and Counsellors promote the social, personal and emotional development of young people in a safe space; this proves highly effective in promoting the improved wellbeing of young people. Safeguarding processes are established in the Youth Service. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place, with records kept on all safeguarding matters including Multi-Agency Referrals to Social Services, feedback and staff training.

Termly meetings are held between the Youth Service and the Safeguarding in Education Officer; emerging trends are highlighted to inform practice. All Youth Service staff have received training in Prevent.

The Local Authority has a comprehensive range of Health and Safety policies, procedures and guidance in place, which clearly sets out the management of Health and Safety, both at a Corporate, Directorate/school management level.

All schools have competent persons such as first aiders and educational visits co-ordinators to manage any risks. The Local Authority and schools meet the standards set out in HSE and WG guidance for Educational Visits.

Exemplar policies are provided for Drug and Substance Misuse and Sex and Relationships Education. Monitoring of policy through to practice is undertaken with training and resources are provided to deliver health topics.

In addition, following an increase in violence and aggression and more extreme incidents a threat to staff protocol has been developed and shared with schools which has been supported through presentations by partners at Headteacher meeting on matters such as knife crime.

Arrangements for educational visits are effective and improving because: the revised Educational Visits Policy (2017) is in line with the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel National Guidance (OEAPNG); the Outdoor Advisers monitors all trips and visits and reports to Head of Service, indicating the level of authorised school visits on a monthly basis; and, all schools are complying with the EVOLVE system. School visits to high footfall areas now include the terrorist threat risk assessment as part of the EVOLVE process.

Evaluations of approaches to prevent CYP from being drawn into terrorism activities indicates that all DSP's in schools had received WRAP training. In addition, the Education Safeguarding policy contains a policy statement on community cohesion and a further policy briefing has been developed for schools Respect and Resilience (Preventing Extremism).

Following the step change in terrorist tactics following the attack in Manchester and the attacks in London led to a review that saw Terrorist Threats considered as part of the school's risk assessment for visits to 'high footfall' areas. A Respect and Resilience Action Plan has been devised and implemented; the plan identifies the key areas from an Education Directorate perspective, including the Youth Service.

3.4 Safeguarding Arrangements: Areas where progress has been made

- **The Safeguarding Matrix approach to capturing information is helpful and supports the ongoing improvement in practice in this area.**
- **The close working arrangements between Education and Social Services have developed well, further supporting a coherence of approach regarding safeguarding in schools and settings. The Safeguarding Policy is regularly reviewed and understood by key stakeholders.**
- **Recent work to respond to community safety issues, counter potential terrorism and extremist behaviours has progressed well, for example, the Safer School Partnership, the Respect and Resilience Action Plan.**
- **The Operation Encompass work has progressed very well and supports schools in this regard.**
- **Quality assurance processes to test the robustness of safeguarding processes have been implemented and inform ongoing work in this area.**
- **The Safeguarding Policy and 360-degree Safe Cymru Policy has been agreed by the Executive and implemented in all schools, work needs to continue to promote the ongoing use of the toolkit.**
- **The new Council Policy requiring all school Governors to be DBS cleared is being implemented.**

3.4 Safeguarding Arrangements: Areas requiring further improvement

- **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.**
- **Full implementation of VAWDASV (Group 1) training needs to be achieved at school level, as well as the implementation of Group 2 training across all LGES settings.**
- **Digitalisation of the safeguarding matrix to be developed and streamlined to enable greater readability.**

- Provide greater flexibility in the training offer to increase the uptake of safeguarding training by school governors.
- Roll-out of the MyConcern software across all of BG's schools, since revenue funding was secured in early 2020.
- Review the Safeguarding self-evaluation report and areas for development, presented the Scrutiny Committee in the Summer 2021.

3.5 Use of resources

The Council is of the view that this investment is fundamental to securing improvements in educational outcomes and wellbeing. Sound financial planning underpins recent financial management and increasingly evidences better value for money. The Education Directorate has a new and vibrant leadership team with a permanent Corporate Director of Education and Head of School Improvement appointed during academic year 2020-21. This restructure has also created new roles for Service Manager Education Transformation and Business Change and Young People and Partnerships and this has created additional capacity, especially for the school improvement agenda. The new leadership has a progressive working relationship with the Resources/Finance team.

The Education Portfolio Budget for 2021/22 is £59.7m. Education is a priority in the Corporate Improvement Plan and the Council agreed a 3.3% increase to the ISB for this financial year and in addition, the ISB was increased due to an increase in pupil numbers.

The provisional revenue out-turn for 2020/21 reported a favourable variance of £351,000 against a budget of £57.7m and this was due to a number of reasons: the impact of Covid-19 on services was the primary driver for lower than normal spend. This manifested itself through reduced costs in for example, Home to School/Home to College Transport and additional grants from Welsh Government, totalling £3.2m for both revenue and capital.

The Council to date have successfully drawn down £20.25m from the 21st Century Schools Band A programme and secured appropriate match funding for the immediate projects under Band B; the Directorate will propose further match funding amounts annually thereafter.

This programme is a priority in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Education's capital budget out-turn position for 2020-21 was balanced and an additional £1.3m was secured for the Six Bells new school build project. WG has also recently given their 'in-principle' support for a Band B programme that would result in an additional investment of £19.6m into the school estate. The 65/35 intervention rate is helpful. WG has recently awarded the Council £825,000 for the Education Maintenance Capital Grant for 20-21.

The Council's Executive approved an ICT business case for a new delivery model, which will address existing gaps and ensure future sustainability of the ICT infrastructure and connectivity across the Blaenau Gwent school estate. The proposal has been created in line with Welsh Government's strategic perspectives for digital competency across Wales. The capital elements of the project circa £600,000 are jointly funded by the schools and central education budget via prudential borrowing. A new schools' SLA with the Shared Resources Services (SRS) and the additional revenue costs have been agreed with schools. This project will ensure that all schools and their learners have consistency of access to ICT provision that meets the requirements of WG's Digital Competency Framework (DCF). The implementation of the project has been now completed following an implementation plan and delivery programme over an 18-month period.

Additionally, WG has awarded £2m to complement the aforementioned ICT infrastructure project with £900,000 confirmed for FY19/20 and a further £1m over the next 2 years. This funding has also been used to upgrade school devices and the Directorate continue to work with schools to secure their device replacement sustainability plans.

Regular finance meetings between the Resources Accountant, the Corporate Director and relevant budget holders provide opportunity to discuss financial matters, budget forecasts, schools causing concern, cost pressures etc. and quarterly budget monitoring reports are presented to Corporate Leadership, Joint budget Scrutiny, Executive Committee for scrutiny, monitoring and challenge. For cost pressures, action plans are developed and monitored monthly via the Corporate Cost pressure sub-group.

The Individual Schools Budget (ISB) for 2021/22 is £46.5m. Overall surplus balances increased in 20/21 primarily due to the impact of Covid-19 on schools spend and additional WG grant allocations; as shown in the table below:

2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 (provisional out turn)
£1.05 m Surplus	£1.32 m surplus	£3.68m surplus as at 05.08.21

Pupil Numbers:

sector	Sept 2016	Sept 2017	Sept 2018	Sept 2019	Sept 2020
secondary	1,351	1,361	1,335	1,394	1,343
middle	2,806	2,782	2,773	2,791	2,811
primary	4,450	4,454	4,523	4,470	4,417
special	105	139	153	165	168
total	8,712	8,736	8,784	8,820	8,739

The growth in pupil numbers is reflected in the growth trend in the ISB in recent years from £41.5m in 2017/2018 to £46.5m in 2021/2022

P104 (P108)– Surplus/(Deficit) Summary as at 05.08.21

Sector	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021
Secondary	£336,432	£810,014
Middle	(£829,421)	(£259,758)
Primary	£1,532,120	£2,744,327
Special	£286,016	£387,088
Total	£1,054,512	£3,681,671

During the 2020/21 financial year a review of school funding was undertaken which suggested that the funding should be moved between the sectors in the 2020/21 financial year. This was agreed on a phased basis. The movement in funding for 21/22 is shown overleaf:

Sector	Funding Change
Secondary	+£67,000
Middle	+£46,000
Primary	-£115,000
Special	+£2,000
Total	£0

Schools forecasting a deficit budget are required to develop a medium term deficit reduction plan, which is approved by the Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Corporate Director of Education and Chief Officer Resources. These plans are monitored and regular meetings are held between the School Support Officer and the Headteacher. School Balances report is presented to Education DMT and CLT on a termly basis. Schools with balances in excess of the prescribed amounts, are required to submit spending plans in accordance with delivering school improvement.

The School Budget Forum is effective in championing the resource management matters for schools and the Forum has the opportunity to feedback to the Council on strategic resource considerations that are facing schools. All schools have bought into the Council's SLA for financial support, with each school having a dedicated support officer providing:

- Forecast financial information for a number of years
- Budget modelling & Planning
- Support with SIMS
- Provision of financial information to present to Governor
- Grant monitoring
- Financial Support
- Finance Training

The Council's total gross budgeted expenditure per pupil for 2021/22 is £6,980 which is the 2nd highest in Wales and £593 above the Welsh average of £6,387. This is made up of delegated gross expenditure of £5,962 across all sectors (1st in Wales), which is £637 above the Wales average of £5,325 and central expenditure of £1,017 per pupil and £45 above the Welsh average. When compared to the family of similar local authorities, delegated gross expenditure is ranked highest, with central funding ranking lowest.

For 2021/22 the funding delegated to schools was 85.4% which is above the all Wales average and ranked 1st when compared to the family of schools. (Local Authority Budgeted Expenditure on Schools 2021/22).

The ALN provision expansion model amounting to approximately £6M revenue is a programme clearly prioritised at need. Blaenau Gwent accommodates some of the highest level of SEN need in Wales. Outcomes and progress for pupils presenting with statements of SEN are good and more variable for pupils at SA and SA+ (A1.1).

Out of County Placements (OOC): In line with the revised model for ALN provision, the process for approving out of county placements has been strengthened. Blaenau Gwent ALN students are appropriately placed and there have been no tribunals in recent years. This budget is monitored closely and offset by income from recoupment for pupils placed in settings in Blaenau Gwent. The 20/21 provisional out turn is an overspend of £34,000.

The School Budget Forum has been effective in carrying out focussed pieces of work such as: debating the funding formula for schools, which central budgets can be delegated to schools; providing feedback on the budget setting process and service level agreements, the process for the clawback of funding and the establishment of a Premature Redundancy/Retirement budget (PRC Budget)

The Council has been very successful in accessing external funding. Council's Youth Service is ranked 12th in Wales for core funded expenditure per head for youth population but raises to 2nd when including external grant expenditure. The Youth Service has accessed European Social Fund (ESF) financial support for the Inspire 2 Achieve and Inspire 2 Work initiatives.

The LA compares its performance across a range of indicators with its Family of LAs; namely RCT, MT, CCBC and NPT. Pupil outcomes and LA Rank is used to compare performance in BG and help support value for money judgements. However, the availability of LA aggregated data going forward will present as a challenge due to changes in the publication of data associated with the removal of high stakes accountability systems and in line with the National Reform agenda.

The adoption of a pupil-led formula for placement in ALN resource bases has reduced the number of surplus staffed places and has introduced a flexible model which responds to changing needs. Through the review of resource bases, provision for ASD and SEBD is secured in line with emerging demand within existing budget revenues. Close working with Headteachers has ensured collective commitment and ownership of these significant changes.

The FADE evaluation illustrates that there are robust Corporate and Directorate resource management arrangements in place that is contributing to an improving value for money assessment. This evaluative judgement is evidenced through the following;

- **A balanced 2021-22 capital budget and relatively minor revenue underspend out-turn position;**
- **Education is a corporate priority in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and revenue and capital budgets have been largely protected during the difficult financial climate;**
- **There are effective leadership and management arrangements in place to monitor and plan for resource management across the Council, and indeed, within the Education Directorate;**
- **The ISB and schools' financial position is clearly understood and schools that are in surplus/deficit situations are challenged and supported well; and,**
- **Overall value for money is improving, linked to improvements in school categorisation and performance overall.**

In 2020/21 the Youth Service was funded partly through a core budget of £372,000 and external grants of £1,158,000 (from ESF - European Social Fund, Positive Futures and Welsh Government Youth Support Grant). Therefore, the total income for the Youth Service in 2020/21 was £1,530,000. All grants have been secured for the next financial year, with the ESF funding secured up until 2022 and additional funding sourced from Welsh Government to enhance the youth work offer to young people around youth homelessness and mental health.

The reliance on external funding is identified as a risk. Securing ESF monies until 2022 provides some stability for targeted services. However, the majority of grants are funded on an annual basis, with annual action plans, which does not allow long term financial planning. This has been flagged up as a concern and needs to be considered in future planning.

The Youth Service's core revenue budget is effectively used to employ a small core team to access and administer external grants to meet identified need. These grants include European Social Funding, Welsh Government Youth Support Grant, Positive Futures and Children in Need. The grants enable the service to provide support to the most vulnerable young people in the community through providing individual tailored support as needed.

Other areas:

SLAs with schools; the Council will be working with schools to renew the 3 year SLA arrangements with schools from the Summer 2021 for implementation from April 2022. This is circa £3m worth of buy-back business from schools to the Council across 16 SLAs.

EAS: The Council commissions the EAS to deliver the statutory functions of school improvement. The annual financial costs being £351,000 which has reduced over the last 3 years. Schools categorisation profile has improved over the last 5 years against a backdrop of decreasing contributions to the EAS: this effectively represents good value for money.

SENCOM: the financial contribution had been renegotiated last year via a review conducted by WLGA. The Council currently contributes the reviewed amount of £247,000 (previously £252,000). This again represents good value for money as progress of our statemented pupils is generally good.

GEMS: WG grant for £32,000 (MEAG) is transferred to GEMS: pupil outcomes and progress is very good; hence, the service provides very good value for money.

CAPITA: The existing contract with CAPITA was £92,000 for the CAPITA ONE programme; however, following negotiations with CAPITA the new contract from 21/22 will now reduce to £75,000 (a reduction of £17,000 per annum or £85,000 over 5 years) and has additional modules such as on-line admission arrangements as well as the safeguarding module MyConcern. This agreement was signed off at the end of January 2020. This represents another example of how the Directorate secures good value for money and a new focus on commercial activity.

3.5 Use of Resources: Areas where progress has been made

- **The school's Individual Schools Budget (ISB) has been prioritised. Schools have been given a 3.3% uplift for 21/22. Capital has been secured to match fund the 21st Century Schools Programme. Overall, schools have healthy balances across the school estate.**
- **Effective Education leadership team in place, which has also generated revenue savings.**
- **Financial Efficiency Savings: devised, approved and budget agreed for 2020/21. No additional savings are required for FY 21/22.**
- **SENCom Review on-going – BG contributed extensively to the review and support 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 e.g. termly Exec/CLT briefings.
- 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 and is in implementation phase.
- 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 up to 2022.

3.5 Use of Resources: areas requiring improvement

- The corporate 'Bridging the Gap' programme implementation 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 e.g. SENCom review.
- Schools balances in the secondary/primary sectors have increased in one school, but needs to be kept under close review going forward; timely support to be provided by the Council 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 and home to school transport revenue budgets 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.
- SLA renewal with schools by April 2022, which is circa £3m+ income to the Council.

19.07.21

Dear Michelle Morris,

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with an overview of the progress you have made in relation to recommendations from the overarching thematic report we published in January. The narrative reflects the information and views you shared with our link inspectors during their engagements with you throughout the term,

The thematic identified five recommendations for the Welsh Government and recognised that a whole system approach was needed to address these. The first three recommendations were more immediate and urgent in nature, whilst the last two recommendations will take longer to address. From our discussions with you, feedback from learners and our engagement work with schools, it is clear that, through collaboration, progress was made across Wales in equipping schools and learners to provide better remote learning experiences during the second lockdown.

In line with our new approach for thematic reports, we will be writing to the Welsh Government in early 2022 to seek feedback on the work they have done to address the recommendations we made to them.

We hope you will find this summary a helpful affirmation of the work that you have done to support your learners and learning communities during the last six months.

R1 Urgently address barriers to learning at home, particularly where this is due to a lack of access to suitable computers or adequate connectivity

The local authority has appointed a designated officer to oversee securing devices for pupils in need. This officer works closely with school leaders to carry out weekly assessments of the provision needed for individual pupils. The officer also attends a monthly monitoring meeting to consider the local authority's overall digital support for schools and families. The local authority commissions the Shared Resource Service (SRS) who acquire, build and distributes devices and Mi-Fi units to digitally disadvantaged learners within seven days of a need being identified. Feedback from head teachers is that this arrangement has worked very well, and in most cases the local authority has provided a device within 48 hours. The local authority has planned to continue with these arrangements until at least the end of the summer term 2021, with pupils able to retain devices at home during this period.

As of May 2021, the local authority has loaned 1,359 devices and 161 Mi-Fi units to pupils. During the first lockdown, the local authority was aware that a minority of pupils had to share devices with siblings. However, in more recent months, officers have ensured that nearly all pupils have access to a suitable individual device.

Officers are carrying out a review of the 'Digitally Disadvantaged Device' project plan future provision to allow all families continued digital access. Officers feel that they reacted responsively at the start of the pandemic but have now had time to reflect and look at the digital learner journey more strategically. Officers are mindful of the sustainability of their ICT support programme and are looking at how they will continue to provide support for home learning in the years ahead.

The local authority has recognised that many parents have a lack of pedagogical understanding and that their children have become disadvantaged as parents 'do it differently' to their teachers. The local authority recognise that in the future, they need to provide more learning opportunities for parents on how to support their children's literacy and numeracy at home, should there be a third wave of the pandemic.

R2 Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs

Local authority officers are very positive about the work of Blaenau Gwent schools in developing and improving regional blended learning approaches. The Celebrate, Support, Share and Refine (CSSR) pilot involved 13 out of 25 local authority schools and will be extended in the summer term to include all schools. Officers feel that this project will help identify and share good practice in individual schools to help strengthen practice across the local authority. Local authority officers have monitored each school's provision using a blended learning survey. This has helped them identify areas that schools need to improve and to celebrate and share successful practice.

All schools in the local authority have access to the extensive EAS blended learning offer, resources and training. School leaders have reported that they find the EAS distance learning website helpful in supporting them to develop and improve distance and blended learning approaches, including improving teaching. Schools have appreciated that, through this offer, they have had access to external consultants and a range of influential speakers for training sessions.

The local authority's recovery and renewal plan outlines how they aim to build on the responses to their pupil survey to further strengthen distance learning should there be another wave of the pandemic. In the coming months, the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion will be meeting with various groups of pupils to gain more information on the impact of blended learning experiences on their education. She intends to use the findings to work on a plan to further improve blended learning provision across all schools in the future.

R3 Develop a coherent approach to improve progress in literacy, numeracy and the personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils disproportionately affected by the pandemic, for example pupils eligible for free school meals

The local authority's Head of School Improvement and Inclusion is taking lead responsibility for the 'Education Recovery and Renewal' working group. This group's membership includes headteachers and other key partners. One purpose of the group is to support the progress of all learners, with a strong focus on supporting vulnerable pupils who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The work of this group will be complemented by a local authority review of their Inclusion Services to enable support to be targeted effectively at vulnerable pupils.

The EAS has provided useful guidance for schools within the local authority on how to effectively use their recovery grant with a focus on catch up skills in literacy and numeracy and support for pupils' wellbeing. In addition, head teachers and other school staff have the opportunity to attend sessions on effective approaches that could be funded through the grant. Headteachers appreciate the proportionate approach that the local authority has taken to evaluating their use of additional funding.

Officers have used the findings from a school survey to identify groups of pupils with particular concerns. They are concerned with the lack of engagement of many Gypsy, Roma or Traveller families and the impact that this has had on pupils' progress. To help overcome this, the local authority has used a Welsh Government grant to appoint an additional member of staff to their Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupil support team. The team are now visiting schools to work individually with pupils on face-to-face catch-up interventions and provide additional support to families.

Across the local authority, there has been an increase in demand for counselling services. As a result, the local authority has increased their counselling team. Until recently, direct contact has been difficult,

but counsellors are now fully back in schools and youth centres providing face-to-face support for pupils in need.

Since the start of the pandemic, the local authority has seen an increase in demand for elective home education (EHE). This has mainly been due to anxiety issues and officers are hopeful that many of these pupils will return to school in the future. Educational Welfare Officers have been keeping in touch with these families and has been linking them with schools so they can have support from professionals with home learning. Officers realise the importance of maintaining strong links between the families and schools to support pupils' return to school in the future.

R4 Establish strategies to monitor and address the long-term impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of pupils

The local authority's 'Education Recovery and Renewal' working group has a strong focus on supporting the physical and mental health of pupils. Officers feel that, over the last year, supporting pupils' wellbeing has been a strength in all schools. This was recognised in pupil surveys and from schools' engagement with parents.

The long term impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of pupils is one of the local authority's strategic level corporate recommendations. The Head of School Improvement has considered a range of evidence on the physical and mental health of pupils to help the local authority plan their support for pupils. She will also be engaging with a wide range of stakeholders during the summer term to obtain first-hand evidence of the impact of the pandemic on pupils' mental and physical health. The local authority's current recovery and renewal action plan for Summer 2021 to Summer 2022 will then inform a three-year plan to support the long-term actions needed to improve the physical and mental health of pupils.

Breakfast provision has now resumed in schools and from September 2021, the local authority plans to resume the 'normal' arrangements for breakfast clubs and after school clubs to help support pupils' health and wellbeing.

Members of the Aneurin Leisure Trust have recently undertaken an analysis of the quality of provision of school sport and swimming in Blaenau Gwent, recognising the impact of the pandemic on their ability to deliver physical activity programmes. The local authority is committed to continue to deliver a wide range of sport, physical activity, community engagement and swimming opportunities across Blaenau Gwent. The Trust intends to build on their current 'Family Engagement' project to inspire the most vulnerable families across Blaenau Gwent to be active, healthy and to participate in activities as a family. They will identify those most in need of support and will then provide a programme of free activities and access to free leisure centre membership. They will undertake regular health checks throughout the programme to monitor its success.

Following very positive feedback from last year's project, the local authority has secured funding to pay for the six schools with the highest number of eFSM pupils to run the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP). This is a school-based education programme that provides food and nutrition education, physical activity, enrichment sessions and healthy meals to children in areas of social deprivation during the school summer holidays.

The local authority's Youth Service are continuing to offer support to young people in schools and across communities. They are continuing to work closely with organisations, such as the Rotary Club, to help fund essential items such as food hampers. Officers are also engaging with schools to address the

period dignity agenda, including working with third party organisations to help with the distribution of products for all family members.

R5 Create opportunities to take stock and evaluate the impact of policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and curriculum design

Education officers present regular reports to the Education and Learning Scrutiny and Executive Committees to reflect upon and to evaluate the effectiveness of the local authority's response to the pandemic. The top priority for education officers and the EAS business planning for 2021/22 is to maximise pupil progression and minimise the impact of the pandemic on learners.

The local authority has developed local policies, guidance, risk assessments and operational plans for and with schools. Officers ensure that they regularly review their plans, and they discuss progress at their fortnightly Executive School Planning meetings. These group meetings have been operational throughout the 2020/21 school year, to support effective communication and engagement between education officers and headteachers.

Officers feel that they have clear processes to monitor this work and are mindful of the need to plan strategically. This includes supporting schools who have large school balances to ensure that leaders are aware of the need to plan for the medium and not just the short term.

The local authority has established a head teacher curriculum reform group with representation from all sectors. In this group, schools are invited to share their progress with curriculum reform. Representatives then highlight which schools have good practice to share and which schools need additional support in implementing the new curriculum. There is a representative on the group from each school cluster and they then liaise with other cluster schools to ensure that information is shared, and support is provided when needed. Officers feel that the EAS has provided very good curriculum training sessions for all schools and the uptake from Blaenau Gwent schools has been high. They feel in a good position to build on the positives from their blended learning approach to enhance curriculum reform. This includes enhancing opportunities for pupils to work independently using blended learning approaches.

In the summer term, the school improvement officer will be visiting each school to discuss curriculum reform with each head teacher and to determine support that each school needs. In conjunction with the EAS, the local authority will organise bespoke training packages to avoid duplication. Officers feel that the local authority are in a good position for schools to support each other on their journey.

Thank you for your work and for your ongoing professional dialogue with our inspectors.

Regards,



Jassa Scott
Strategic Director

Education Impact Assessment (Working Document)

Impact Area	*RAG	Key Impacts	Identified Needs / Actions	Responsible	Success Criteria (indication we have recovered)	Measure - separate meeting to be held with AP / GW / ME	2019/20 Outturn	2020/21 Outturn	Tolerance
Priority Areas									
1. Learner Wellbeing	Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental health (short and long-term) Emotional and physical health Engagement with school and peers Social skills and language acquisition 	As detailed within the learner theme below.	As detailed within the learner theme below.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved learner wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative wellbeing surveys Attendance and exclusion rates SEN data (ELSA) Access to counselling services Schools baseline data (emotional and skills upon entry) Speech and language support data Early years and pre-school uptake 			

*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nursery uptake 			
2. Vulnerable Learners	Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased vulnerability Neglect Domestic violence and family issues Social exclusion and isolation Poverty Unidentified needs (short and long-term) Hard to access specialist provision resulting in provision needing to be increased. 	As detailed within the vulnerable learner theme below.	As detailed within the vulnerable learner theme below.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vulnerable learners are identified and supported 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free school meals data SEN and ALN Data Admissions data Attendance and exclusion data Referral data (i.e. Social Services) RPI data Digitally Disadvantage data 			
3. Academic progress	Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners not achieving expected progress/levels Pupils that did not engage with blended learning Impact upon transition (both entry into statutory education and 	As detailed within the learner theme below.	As detailed within the learner theme below.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners make expected progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School data (upon re-introduction) 			

*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

		<p>school leaver transition)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased numbers of electively home educated pupils • Resources to support progression 							
4. School operations	Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools ability to fulfil the statutory obligations associated with curriculum and ALN reform • Reduced options and increased control measures within each school setting • Staffing considerations (wellbeing, resource availability, skillsets) • Reduced capacity and availability within support services. 	As detailed within themes 3,6,7 and 8 below.	As detailed within themes 3,6,7 and 8 below.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased school operations to facilitate effectively delivery • Effective implementation of ALN and Curriculum reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational plans – increased operations within school settings • Progression data aligned to the implementation of curriculum and ALN reform • Staff wellbeing survey • School workforce position statements • EAS staff training 			

*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

						records/engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support service data 			
Key Themes									
1. Learners	Amber	Impact of missed time in school – education, social, emotional, physical and mental health implications (short and long-term).	<p>Develop a recovery and renewal plan with a focus on education and wellbeing.</p> <p>Link with national and regional priorities.</p> <p>Undertake stakeholder engagement to facilitate learning from experience, and renewal of practice.</p> <p>Partnership work with the EAS to broker support in line with the EAS Business Plan.</p>	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion		<p>PIs for consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational attainment Surveys CAMHS referrals EOTAS 			
2. Vulnerable learners	Red	Impact of missed time in school – education, social, emotional, physical and mental health.	Develop recovery and renewal plan with a focus on provision for vulnerable learners.	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion		<p>PIs for consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational attainment Surveys 			

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		<p>For those with disabilities and additional needs, provision and processes have been restricted.</p>	<p>Link with national and regional priorities.</p> <p>Undertake stakeholder engagement to facilitate learning from experience, and renewal of practice.</p> <p>Partnership work with Social Services, Health and Safety and the EAS to broker support.</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAMHS referrals 			
3. School staff	Amber	<p>Impact of missed time in school – professional development, social, emotional, physical/mental health and general wellbeing in line with the need to adapt to blended learning.</p> <p>Staff childcare implications relating to school closure.</p> <p>LA's and schools have been required</p>	<p>Develop recovery and renewal plan</p> <p>Link with national and regional priorities.</p> <p>Undertake stakeholder engagement to facilitate learning from experience, and renewal of practice.</p> <p>Partnership work with OD, Health &</p>	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion					

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		<p>to establish and implement control and safety measures to support clinically vulnerable staff. This has impacted upon both staff and school operations.</p> <p>For those with disabilities and additional needs, provision and processes have been restricted.</p>	Safety and the EAS to broker support.						
4. Childcare	Red	After school and pre-school provision which has been reduced and/or is not available due to COVID restrictions	Childcare operational plans and risk assessments to be reviewed and monitored by the Childcare Sub-group.	Service Manager -ET and BC		PIs for Consideration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakfast clubs • After school clubs 			
5. Staff training	Red	Staff training needs aligned to operations are not all currently adapted to be delivered online i.e. first aid and RPI	Training plan review in partnership with Health and Safety and OD colleagues.	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion/ Service Manager -ET and BC		PIs for Consideration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training uptake • DBS compliance 			
6. Education assets and site management	Amber	Statutory functions, testing and inspection (Health and Safety, Fire Risk Assessment, maintenance and site management,	Review school operational plans and WG guidance to inform priorities and changes to local guidance and operations.	Service Manager - ET and BC		PIs for Consideration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance within the schools • Fire risk assessments 			

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		ventilation), operations are regularly reviewed in line with the latest guidance and governed by risk assessments	Review guidance and associated policy, risk assessment and operational plan bi-monthly, in partnership with Health and Safety and the Technical Working Group.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21st Century Schools 			
7. School operations	Red/Amber	Catering, cleaning, access to school sites, movement in and around the school, trips and visits, visitors, refuse, PPE and resources are all under continual review. These areas are subject to risk assessment and reduced operation in line with the COVID alert level implementation. Changes to the school day have been implemented throughout the school estate to support staggered start and finish times.	<p>Operational plan to be monitored, provision, guidance and policy to be adapted accordingly.</p> <p>Regular monitoring required as above</p> <p>ICT Plan and associated strategy to be developed in partnership with SRS and the ICT Strategy Group.</p> <p>Monthly review in line with the latest regulations. Procurement and operations review</p>	Service Manager ET and BC		<p>PIs for Consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT provision • Grants • training 			

*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

		<p>Changes to statutory functions and regulations which affect school operation e.g. school admissions.</p> <p>ICT infrastructure, devices, access to resources, systems and software for both pupils and staff in line with digital exclusion and blended learning are continually reviewed to support inclusion.</p> <p>Home to school and post 16 transport operations, have been restricted, reconfigured and subject to detailed risk assessment.</p>						
8. School support services	Red	<p>School support service operation i.e. Educational Psychology, ALN, Social Services etc. has been prohibited due to lack of access, which has affected pupil and family</p>	<p>Inclusion Service review to be undertaken.</p> <p>Transition to be developed.</p>	<p>Head of School Improvement and Inclusion/ Service Manager ET and BC</p>		<p>PIs to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitions • Educational Psychology referrals • Safeguarding referrals 		

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		<p>engagement and progress.</p> <p>Transition at all phases has been affected by key support services having restricted/no access to schools.</p> <p>Human Resource management processes and engagement via OD are now online focused, but will require review to support effective school operations that were paused due to COVID. Wellbeing support services require monitoring in terms of access and uptake.</p> <p>Additional insurance and financial implications for schools as a result of the pandemic. EAS support for schools has transitioned to</p>	<p>Work with OD to undertake an impact associated and establish an operational plan around schools.</p> <p>Working with Finance and Insurance colleagues to undertake an impact assessment, in order to inform future planning.</p>						
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		online with a deficit to levels of engagement and to the brokerage of relevant support at all levels e.g. LNS Schools.							
9. School accountability services	Red	<p>EAS Challenge Advisors have not been able to hold schools to account and school's data monitoring has been suspended.</p> <p>Esytn has suspended inspection resulting in risks to school – particularly those in a category, who are in for longer than planned.</p>	<p>Review EAS Business Plan in line with WG regulations and guidance.</p> <p>Multi-agency partnership working with Estyn in order to support schools causing concern.</p>	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion		<p>PIs for Consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools causing concern 			
10. School leadership	Amber	School governance has been adapted online, therefore, the evidence base is largely restricted to Headteacher report and narrative.	Work with the EAS to review current practice for governance and school leadership.	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion					

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		Support for current and new school leaders has been limited to online, and school to school working opportunities have mainly focused on wellbeing and operational issues.							
11. Poverty	Red	Family entitlement to benefits has increased across Blaenau Gwent and the region, including free school meals. Additional funding has been allocated to support these families, however, many schemes are not sustainable and so the ongoing impact will need to be assessed.	Working with Finance and Benefits colleagues to undertake an impact assessment, in order to inform future planning.	Service Manager ET and BC/ Head of School Improvement and Inclusion		PIs to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FSM • Impact assessment of benefit uptake 			
12. School community	Red	Limited face to face contact and the shift to online engagement has challenged communication and relationships.	Provide support for individual schools to address barriers to parent engagement in partnership with the EAS.	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion					
13. School development	Amber	School development plans have had to be largely adapted in	Provide support for individual schools in	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion					

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		order to react to COVID-19.	partnership with the EAS.						
14. Safeguarding - children	Red	School closure has meant that children and young people are at greater risk of harm e.g. adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Service support intelligence and capability has been restricted.	Supporting Schools to ensure that they are able to effectively identify and manage risks, via structure an effective multi-agency approach.	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion/ Service Manager ET and BC		PIs to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding • ACEs 			
15. Safeguarding - adults	Red	Vulnerable adults are more exposed to risk factors with limited access to support services.	Supporting Schools to ensure that they are able to effectively identify and manage risks, via structure an effective multi-agency approach.	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion/ Service Manager ET and BC		PIs to consider: Referrals to safeguarding			
16. Voluntary/ Third Sector/ Charities work and engagement	Red	Opportunities to engage partners have been restricted significantly due to operational implications associated with COVID-19.	Establish a stakeholder re-engagement and support plan for Education and schools.	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion/ Service Manager ET and BC					
17. Preventative health measures	Red	School-based preventative strategies to support healthcare needs of pupils have either been stopped or	Work closely with ABUHB, Public Health Wales and associated partners to review and	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion/Service Manager ET and BC					

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		largely disrupted by COVID-19 i.e. vaccinations, growth and development checks, dental health, period equity etc.	develop a school health plan .						
18. COVID control measures	Amber	LA's and schools have implemented a series of control measures in order to manage community health i.e. vaccinations, Lateral flow tests, use of PPE, positive case management and risk assessment.	Review and evaluate existing control measures in line with the latest guidance, regulations and associated operational plans, in order to inform business continuity planning.	Service Manager ET and BC/Health and Safety		PIs to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID cases • LFT 			
Recovery Review - Areas that have worked well									
Relationships and Engagement with headteachers	Green	Throughout the course of the pandemic relationships, communication and engagement with school leaders has improved significantly. School leaders have had the opportunity to work	Continue with the current engagement format to aid recover and ensure effective engagement and participation opportunities are in place for/with school leaders	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion/ Service Manager ET and BC					

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		together with the Council, shaping provision and informing key developments throughout the response period. In addition, they have been empowered to share and seek solutions to issues which have emerged, whilst working closely with the Council to achieve consistency in delivery methods etc.			
Digital inclusion	Amber	Throughout the course of the pandemic both Welsh Government and the Council have worked to secure and invest in devices and connectivity to address digital disadvantage. As a result, there is now an improved understanding of the level of digital disadvantage throughout the school estate. In	Ensure a full review of provision and requirements takes place, to aid device/provision sustainability plans in line with the Education ICT Strategy and blended learning developments.	Service Manager ET and BC/ Head of School Improvement and Inclusion	

*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

		addition, there are established methods and solutions by which the impact of digital disadvantage can be addressed.			
Business continuity – service design and delivery	Amber	Both schools and associated Council services have established effective service design and delivery models, along with business continuity arrangements, ensuring effective response to the pandemic.	Continue to review operational and business continuity plans, to ensure that alert level response and associated delivery can be managed effectively.	Service Manager ET and BC	
Learners	Amber	Many pupils have developed skills through engaging with distance learning e.g. resilience and time management.	Continue to build on these skills in a face-to-face setting, ensure schools provide catch up support for pupils who have not developed such skills/not engaged well with distance learning	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion	
Teaching staff	Amber	Many teachers and teaching assistants have developed their use of ICT to deliver learning, many schools have used	Continue to build on these skills in a face-to-face setting. Work with the EAS to ensure blended learning continues to	Head of School Improvement and Inclusion	

*R – significant impact; A – moderate impact; G – no or limited impact

		ICT in creative and engaging ways to encourage, motivate and support learning.	be a key priority in school development planning		
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DRAFT

Agenda Item 20

Date Signed off by Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date Signed off by Section 151 Officer: 13.09.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**
Report Subject: **Safeguarding Self-evaluation Outcomes**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr J Collins Executive Member for Education**
Report Submitted by: **Lynn Philips, Corporate Director Education**
Michelle Jones, Strategic Education Improvement Manager

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
24.06.21		07.09.21			14.07.21	22.9.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an opportunity to consider 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).
- 2.2 This report looks at the emerging findings against the Safeguarding section (3.4) of the Estyn Framework for Local Government Education Services (LGES) requires inspectors to evaluate how well the authority fulfils its statutory responsibilities relating to safeguarding.
- 2.3 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 6.1 with the full report included as Appendix 1.
- 2.4 The self-evaluation period that this report covers is for the academic year 2019/20 and has informed the business planning priorities for 2021/22. It is important that the data within this report is understood in the context of a global pandemic and caution must be taken when drawing comparisons to previous academic years.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The Joint Education and Learning and Social Services (Safeguarding) Scrutiny Committee accepted the report at its meeting on 14th July 2021.

3.2 **Option 1**

To accept the report as presented.

3.3 **Option 2**

To suggest any areas for improvement prior to accepting the report.

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

4.1 **Corporate Plan**

Outcome Statement 2020/22	Corporate Plan activity
Support a fairer sustainable economy and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support all learners to achieve improved outcomes• To improve pupil outcomes, progress and wellbeing
To enable people to maximise their independence, develop solutions and take an active role in their communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater• To put effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 The safeguarding in education self-evaluation outcome statement and associated business process are cognisant of the ongoing austerity measures and its implementation is managed through existing resources.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The Directorate Risk register identifies safeguarding risks for the Directorate and is informed by the findings from this and other processes. Such risks are monitored as part of the routine Directorate risk management business activity and the Directorate's quality assurance processes seek to test the robustness of safeguarding activities and inform the corporate risk register.

5.3 ***Legal***

Safeguarding arrangements comply with relevant legislation and guidance which includes the Welsh Government Keeping Learners Safe Guidance.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

The self-evaluation and safeguarding business arrangements are managed through existing resources.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

6.1.1 **Areas where Good Progress has been made**

- The Safeguarding Matrix approach to capturing information is helpful and supports the ongoing improvement in practice in this area.
- The close working arrangements between Education and Social Services have developed well, further supporting a coherence of approach regarding safeguarding in schools and settings. The Safeguarding Policy is regularly reviewed and understood by key stakeholders.
- Recent work to respond to community safety issues, counter potential terrorism and extremist behaviours has progressed well, for example, the Safer School Partnership, and the Respect and Resilience Action Plan.
- The Operation Encompass work has progressed very well and supports schools in this regard.
- Quality assurance processes to test the robustness of safeguarding processes have been implemented and inform ongoing work in this area.
- The new Council Policy requiring all school Governors to be DBS cleared is being implemented.
- Most schools are now using MyConcern as a means of recording safeguarding incidents

6.1.2. **Areas requiring further improvement**

- 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.
- Full implementation of VAWDASV (Group 1) training needs to be achieved, as well as the implementation of Group 2 training across all LGES settings.
- The 360-degree safe Cymru Policy needs to be implemented in all schools.
- Digitalisation of the safeguarding matrix to be developed and streamlined to enable greater readability, including the roll-out of MyConcern to the few schools that are not currently using it, 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

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

The Directorate's self-evaluation processes are aligned with LGES framework. Established quality assurance processes inform the work of the Safeguarding in Education Manager who shares the high level learning at termly meetings which take place with the Safeguarding Leads from LGES representatives. More detailed information is shared with the individual establishment, at monthly meetings between the safeguarding team and lead education staff and on a regular basis with Education DMT

and on a quarterly basis with CLT and Members of the Joint Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee through the Performance Report.

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

The Annual Council Reporting Framework (ACRF) and self-evaluation process enables the Education Directorate to plan for the future as spend, risk and performance is continuously reported on and provides a baseline of where the directorate is currently and where it needs to be in the future.

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 coupled with the sharing of key areas across LGES settings.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The Council collaborates with a range of services to discharge its Local Government Education Service (LGES) functions. The Safeguarding in Education Manager participates in the local, regional and national safeguarding groups and shares learning with Safeguarding Leads from LGES settings.

The South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board and its sub groups ensure a multi-agency collaborative approach to safeguarding. Blaenau Gwent fully participates in the Children's and Adults Safeguarding Boards.

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

All local authorities and partner agencies work together on safeguarding through the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board.

6.8 ***EqIA***

Not required for this report.

7. ***Monitoring Arrangements***

7.1 Monitoring of the emerging findings of self-evaluation is an important mechanism for ensuring that Members of the Joint Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee and the Executive are sufficiently informed to enable them to make informed decisions regarding the safeguarding arrangements across LGES settings.

There are well-established processes in place to ensure that self-evaluation is used to inform business plans to secure further improvement and in doing so continue to keep learner safe through systems, processes and procedures responding to emerging concerns, risks and patterns of behaviours.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Safeguarding Arrangements

3.4 Safeguarding Arrangements

The Local Authority's systems, practice and policy demonstrate that safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements as detailed in the revised Keeping Learners Safe guidance. The Managing Director has overall strategic accountability for securing effective safeguarding arrangements across the Council. The Corporate Safeguarding Policy identifies key personnel and their deputies (including elected members) across all Council services with responsibility and accountability for safeguarding. The Council has a well-established Joint Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee in place that scrutinises safeguarding performance across the Council's services and also involves key partners. CLT monitors arrangements closely. The strategic leads group keeps safeguarding arrangements under close scrutiny and is responsible for the implementation of the action plan arising from the WAO report regarding safeguarding.

Clear lines of accountability and reporting are in place. Named officers with clear responsibilities and accountabilities are in place. At Directorate level the Strategic Safeguarding in Education lead (SSL) is Michelle Jones and the Deputy is Claire Gardner. The Safeguarding in Education Manager (SEM) is Sarah Dixon with responsibility for the operational management and oversight of child protection and safeguarding issues in education. This post is located within the Social Services Directorate and is line Manager by the Children Services Manager.

The Designated Senior Person for Youth Service is Claire Madden, for Early Years and Play Claire Smith. The matrix evidences that all schools have a designated senior person DSP, a deputy DSP and a designated governor for safeguarding. All of the above ensure that there are clear reporting structures in place for each of the settings aligned to the Safeguarding in Education policy. All schools have a designated Lead for Children Looked After (CLA) who work closely with the CLA Education Coordinator and Mentors. The contact information is reviewed every September to ensure appropriate structures are in place in each setting.

Monthly meetings between the Strategic Safeguarding in Education Lead and the Safeguarding in Education Manager provides the mechanism for support, a coherence in approach and consistency of practice. The Professional Lead for Community Safety, who is the Council's Community safety and Preventing Violent Extremism lead, joins for part of these meeting to ensure that any broader community safety issues are shared and a joint multi-agency approach implemented. Regular meetings with corporate officers supports a coherence of approach, for example, the Safeguarding in Education Manager meets regularly with the early years and play, youth service, home to school transport, and school DSP's.

The Education Safeguarding Policy is updated annually and most recently during the Autumn Term 2020 and includes a section on Covid. The Policy has been extended to cover all education settings. The most recent version is being adopted by all school governing bodies; the safeguarding matrix confirms this. The effectiveness and impact of policies is monitored through regular review of the findings captured in the safeguarding matrix. Since the pandemic the routine sharing of information presented to the Education and Social Services Joint Scrutiny Committee has been suspended as schools were not in routine operation at this time. Following the return to face to face learning in April 21 this work stream is being progressed with an expectation that the routine data collection recommences.

Monitoring of safeguarding procedures have been enhanced by the development of a Quality Assurance protocol for validating processes across education services and a reporting timeframe into DMT. Learning from these visits informs future policy and practice. This QA process has had to flex during the year in response to the pandemic and this information was reported to the Education and Social Service Scrutiny Committee in October 2020.

The statutory Partnership Agreement makes clear schools' obligations regarding safeguarding. Adoption is monitored via close scrutiny of the Matrix. The annual return from commissioned services demonstrated that all services have appropriate safeguarding policies and practice in place. (EAS, GEMS, Youth Offending, SRS, and Gwent Music).

Historically, evaluation of the joint quarterly report identifies any emerging trends which are used by the Safeguarding in Education Manager (SEM) to inform her work in schools. Evaluation of this has informed the ongoing work programme of the SEM. However, the arrangements for the collation of performance information were improving following the implementation of the WCCIS system and is changing to a more contextual nature, however, the school information reported to Safeguarding Scrutiny has been temporarily halted as a result of the Pandemic.

During the year the LA began the implementation of the MyConcern model across all school settings. Take up has been varied and has been impacted by the pandemic but despite this it is pleasing to note that the majority of schools are now using the system. There is however a need to ensure all schools are using it moving forwards, so that there is a consistent approach which will enable the LA to use the overarching dashboard facilities.

The safeguarding needs of the Gypsy Traveller population is undertaken by the GT Coordinator. This academic year many gypsy traveller pupils (82.4%) are educated in schools, with very few (17.6%) being electively home educated. During 2019/2020, many of the gypsy traveller population eligible to transition to KS3, didn't transfer (3 out of a possible 8 pupils (37.5%), as opposed to (2 out of a possible 3 pupils (66.7% the previous year)). COVID had a huge impact on this year's figure. School closures, restrictions and limited attendance have affected opportunities for transition work to be carried out, this has in turn affected their transition to secondary school. Initially the GT pupils was not engaging with on line learning due to poor digital and literacy skills levels from parents. A lot of work had to be done to engage and give parents the confidence to support their children with online learning. Covid has had a negative impact on our year 11 GT pupils with regards to their aspirations. Pupils who wanted to go on to college no longer want to, due to fear of another lockdown, and confidence in their own ability with learning.

Attendance was a concern for some, due to fear over Covid. Majority of GT pupils are now back in school. Motivation and lack of concentration is poor in many cases, this in turn is leading to poor behaviour. Restrictions in school i.e. bubbles in school means that GT pupils cannot interact at play times with their normal friendship groups. Support that is currently being provided, baseline testing of literacy levels are being carried out, to prioritise which pupils to work with. Additional funding has been secured at Blaen-y-Cwm primary school, where 13% of their population are GT pupils. This will provide additional support to our GT pupils.

A Children Missing in Education Policy has been implemented in all schools; with training being delivered to school clerks - monitoring and managing this area of work remains an important area. This work is undertaken by the Education Welfare Service who undertakes monitoring activity on a weekly basis. For those children who cannot be located processes are in place with HMRC etc. During the 2019/20 academic year there has been an increase in the number of children missing from education (88 compared to 44 the previous year). However, all pupils were located with 100% CTF being sent. To date this year there has been a decrease in the normal CME referrals being made (29 moving out and 12 moving in). However, as a result of the pandemic there has needed to be a large amount of work around reception admissions and transfer into secondary schools. The reason for this is two-fold, in that a transfer form had not been submitted or the pupil had moved out of the local authority since the live birth data had been received (102 reception and 34 secondary pupils).

The 2019/20 data shows that there has been a decrease in the number of pupils being EHE (10 less at the end of the 19/20 academic year) and also a further reduction in the number of pupils being withdrawn (13 less than the end of the 19/20 academic year). The EHE fade captures the detailed analysis of this and identifies the following trends:

- A high percentage have previously been enrolled in school
- The number of pupils becoming EHE is above the Welsh average. The rate in Blaenau Gwent equates to 8.3 EHE pupils per 1,000 pupils in reception to year 11, compared to 8.5 in 2019. This is above the Welsh average rate of 7.0 per 1,000 pupils (6.5 in 2019). Whilst the rate across Wales increased by 0.5% it is pleasing to see that the rate in Blaenau Gwent decreased by 0.2%
- In KS3 there were 10 pupils that were withdrawn in KS3 during 2019/20. 15 girls and 13 boys became EHE during 19/20
- The month which saw the highest number of withdrawal for EHE is at the start of the academic year
- There were more girls than boys EHE.

PLASC 2020, 79% of families in Blaenau Gwent had received a visit in the last 12 months compared to the Wales average of 45%. Systems to monitor EHE are described as good and a number of planned actions were implemented during the year.

In 2019/20 there were 44 statutory school age children (compared to 30 in 2018/19) referred to the Youth Offending Service for either preventative or statutory intervention. 6 of these children were referred twice meaning that there were referrals for 38 individuals (compared to 34 in 2018/19).

The types of educational establishments and provisions for these children include alternate provision, OOC, Special school, EHE or mainstream provision. However, there is an increase within year of the number of children accessing alternative provision 36.8% in 2019/20 from 16.6% in the previous year.

When looking at the different types of placements for children from Blaenau Gwent, 36.8% of children (5 children) were attending an alternative provision compared to 16.6% in 2018/19. There were 38 referrals for children in Blaenau Gwent receiving intervention from YOS in the period covered by this report. Of those:

- 71% (27 children) were offered full time opportunities (25 hours) compared to 79.4% in 2018/19
- 23.7% (9 children) were offered part time opportunities compared to 14.7% in 2018/19
- 5.3% (2 children) had no provision in place as they were electively home educated (EHE)

Information about pupils who are subject to, or are witness to police attended incidents of domestic abuse, continues to be shared through Operation Encompass, in addition to the usual reporting mechanism. Information about pupils who experience / or who are affected by high risk domestic abuse is shared via representation by Education Welfare Service on MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference). From the data for the academic year September 2019 to August 2020 there were 518 occurrences involving 544 children and young people. The data suggests a greater incidence to children aged 4,5,6,7,10 and 17 being subject to such incidents. Accuracy of reporting requirements by the Police has been improved since implementation 71.3% of all details being recorded to enable Op encompass reports. Despite media coverage of increased domestic incidents during the pandemic and lock down, the data per month when compared to the previous year does not demonstrate consistency with the national trend that has been reported. Further work is needed to better understand how schools utilise this information to inform daily practice in supporting children affected by such incidents

Education officers attend most case conferences (83%). This represents a slight decrease from 90% last year. This will continue to be monitored by the Safeguarding in Education Manager on a termly basis. Any non-attendance is addressed immediately with the school concerned and has been followed up within DSP meetings. Any identifiable actions are implemented to support attendance.

There was a reduction in the number of reports being provided with only a minority being provided. A new case conference report template has been provided to education and this features in the safeguarding refresher training for DSPs.

In late 2015 new legislation (the Children (Performances and Activities) (Wales) Regulations 2015) regarding child performances came into force in Wales. Whilst Blaenau Gwent was compliant with legislation for those pupils that performed for larger companies, more work needed to be done, particularly with local amateur dramatics groups etc. A lot of this work has now been completed and companies contact the local authority for training and licenses. The data indicates through the increase in number of licences being issued that there appears to be a growing awareness of the legislative requirements under these regulations and the associated work undertaken to identify the range of amateur dramatic groups.

In 2019/2020 0 work permits were issued but that was mainly due to lockdown. There was however one refusal due to poor school attendance. There was no child employment campaign during COVID 19 as all schools and many businesses were closed. There were 2 investigations undertaken as a result of illegal child

employment and both were unaware of the legislation. Both premises were informed that the children were unable to work until the correct paperwork was in place. A site inspection was done on one of the companies that employ children and all appropriate safeguarding and health and safety measures were in place.

In the academic year 2019-20, Estyn judged KQ 4 (Care support and Guidance) as good in the two schools and adequate in one school that was inspected. A further detailed review of school inspections for the last three years demonstrated that for KQ 4 the majority (55%) of educational establishments were judged as good, 1 (9%) school judged as Excellent and none as unsatisfactory during 2017-20 and therefore the arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirement and give no cause for concern.

A quality assurance or system test protocol has been developed and the information from this is included in the Performance report to the joint Safeguarding Committee. However, there is a need to re-establish the routine reporting of information to this committee as we recover from the pandemic and move back to business as usual.

During 2019/2020, 15 visits were planned, six of these for the Autumn term. 5 of these 6 visits took place during the Autumn term. From the visits during the Autumn term, evidence has been gathered which has provided reassurance that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place in schools and other education services. Learning from these visits informs future policy and practice and is included in the Directorates self- evaluation process. In line with the agreed protocol the outcome of these visits are reported to DMT on an exception basis in the form of a FADE. The onset of COVID impacted directly on this process and no visits took place in either the Spring or Summer term. This protocol has been reviewed in light of COVID to enable visits to recommence from the Autumn term 2020.

At the onset of COVID, there was direct communication with schools regarding mechanisms for maintaining contact with vulnerable learners. A communication protocol was established. A safeguarding in education bulletin was developed to provide regular safeguarding information to schools and education staff. Referral pathways are regularly reinforced and relevant contact information shared.

Blaenau Gwent's anti-bullying strategy and toolkit provides support to schools when tackling alleged bullying in Blaenau Gwent schools. The local authority has a clear Behaviour Strategy, based on inclusive principles which underpin process and procedure, written within the context of a range of policies, provided by Welsh Government. Monitoring and reporting arrangements are in place to ensure the local authority is able to respond appropriately to incidents of bullying in schools. Bullying incident data is incomplete for 2019/20 due to COVID. Data from the Autumn term indicates that the number of incidents was of a similar level to the same period in the previous year. As in 2018/19, the majority of the incidents related to verbal/emotional bullying. In 2019/20 there was one exclusion as a result of bullying but again this figure should be understood in the context of COVID school closures.

During 2019/20, there were 56 occurrences of the use of RPI reported to the LA. The majority of those were from the two special schools, which accounted for 89% of occurrences. The remaining 6 occurrences were reported by two mainstream schools. This is a decrease on the number of incidents reported for the comparable period of the academic year 2018/19 where there were 114 occurrences reported to the LA from September 2018 to 20th March 2019, where nearly all were reported by the two special schools with two mainstream schools reporting a very small number of occurrences. Reported incidents of RPI are considered

in the first instance by the Safeguarding in Education Manager. Any concerns with the content of the report are then discussed with the school involved. On a half termly basis the Safeguarding in Education Manager and the Service Manager – Inclusion meet to review referrals and consider any specific trends that need responding to. The RPI policy was updated in February 2021 and circulated to schools. The policy contains a model school policy which includes the appropriate processes and procedures for all schools to follow.

Processes dealing with allegations against professionals are managed by the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit in Social Services in accordance with All Wales Child Protection Procedures. The systems are embedded and AWCPP, Welsh Government guidance. The work of the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board guidance underpins this work. The Safeguarding in Education Manager reports the current position to DMT which is then shared by the Corporate Director with CLT. In BG there were 16 cases involving 16 professionals between September 2019 and August 2020 56% of cases resulted in no further action with 25% resulting in an investigation and, 19% leading to disciplinary action. During the year a tender exercise was successfully completed to secure competent investigating officers to undertake any disciplinary investigations. This process has secured the appointment of 2 companies who have confirmed their professional status and GDPR compliance in handling data.

The Recruitment and Selection Policy, Safer Recruitment for Schools is cognisant of safe recruitment principles for supply staff. This policy has been adopted by school Governing Bodies. The process for managing DBS compliance is embedded across education services and schools. DBS compliance is managed by Organisational Development and any non-compliance is escalated and managed by Directors and senior managers in all departments. In 2019/20 DBS checks were processed for school and education staff. Of these, very few (60, 15%) were for new employees and most (336, 85%) were part of the rolling programme for renewing applications. Escalation processes implemented by managers are effective at dealing with any non-compliance. CLT receive quarterly DBS position statement and this is also shared with Corporate Safeguarding Leads.

At the end of the 2018/19 academic year a policy was developed that proposed that all governors undergo a DBS check on a four year rolling programme in line with their date of appointment. This policy is in place and referred to in the safeguarding policy which has been shared with schools for adoption. The implementation of this policy has been impacted by Covid but arrangements are in hand to resurrect the implementation of this policy.

Early years, Childcare and Play have established a safeguarding quality assurance tool which all centres are required to complete. This is a feature of the regular safeguarding meetings with this service which confirms that safeguarding arrangements are appropriate in these settings.

Safeguarding processes are well established in the Youth Service and fit for purpose. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place, with robust records kept on all safeguarding matters including Multi-Agency Referrals to Social Services, feedback and staff training. Regular meetings are held between the Youth Service and the Safeguarding in Education Officer, and any areas of concern outside of child protection are escalated through this process.

During the 2019-2020 academic year the Youth Service submitted 44 safeguarding referrals for 37 young people to Children's Services, and 4 referrals to adult services for 4 young people. There was one referral to children's services and one to POVA for the same young person as they turned 19 during the reporting period.

A training programme has been implemented ensuring that all contractors have timely access to training, however, this year, the training programme has been interrupted by COVID. There are 12 operators that needs to fully complete the training which will account for 27 staff. Mop up training was arranged but implementation was delayed due to COVID. In addition, when the Council procures transport, potential operators are provided with the home to school transport policy which has a safeguarding statement contained within it. A QA visit was completed during the Autumn term following the return to face to face learning which confirmed safeguarding arrangements were fit for purpose.

The Corporate Safeguarding Leads group has been developing a Corporate training framework to ensure clarity and consistency in safeguarding training across the Council.

Regular evaluation of the Matrix reveals that all schools have updated their whole school safeguarding training within the last 3 years. Safeguarding training is now offered on a virtual platform to ensure continued compliance. The matrix reveals that at the end of the academic year 2019/2020, 3 DSPs required refresher training. A DSP training session will take place on 6th October 2020. DSP training is also supplemented through regular updates provided during termly DSP meetings. In addition, all other education settings have updated their safeguarding training with all DSPs in these settings being trained.

There are 227 childcare staff across the maintained & non-maintained settings, 201 have received the safeguarding training for practitioners. 104 Childcare Providers have Safeguarding Level 2. COVID meant that the Prevent Training is on hold, however all Schools have received details on how to access free online training modules relating to Prevent. These are HO approved. Details are shared via the Safeguarding in Education Briefing and a special school's Prevent Briefing.

Training for governors is offered through the BG specific EAS training programme and upon direct request from schools. COVID has impacted on the availability of this training during 2019/20. Plans are now in place to provide this training through virtual platforms.

Group 1 Training for VAWDASV was rolled out to educational settings in early 2018. The position at the end of August 2020 evidenced that the majority of Local Authority staff employed in schools, youth services and central education had undertaken the training (73% schools and 78% education central staff). Two dates were agreed for the Group 2 Ask and Act training specifically for Blaenau Gwent education staff. These were impacted by COVID. Dates have now been agreed to deliver these through a virtual platform.

Community Safety matters continue to be raised from time to time. However, COVID has restricted the ways we engage with the schools. As a result, the development of Safer School Partnership approach has been somewhat limited. Nevertheless, community safety advice, guidance and support on two cases during the reporting period led to an effective school-led mainstreamed response.

All DSPs have previously received WRAP training with an ongoing training online training modules communicated through the Safeguarding in Education Briefing. This specific focus and positive joint work between the education directorate and the community safety officer has resulted in the development of a Respect and Resilience action plan which further supports a multi-agency approach to tackling aspects of community safety impacting adversely on school life and is actively being progressed through business as usual activities.

The latest data available identifies that nearly all of the schools (96%) have registered, with many (71%) of these having completed all aspects. There is one school that is not registered There is further work to be done to promote the ongoing use of the tool. During the year the Council agreed that the 360-degree safe policy template is to be the agreed by the Executive and implemented in Blaenau Gwent schools. At the end of the year 2019 20, 72% of Blaenau Gwent schools had used the Welsh government funded Hafan Cymru Spectrum project to support their approach to healthy relationships. The Spectrum project had delivered 80 sessions to 947 pupils across seven settings. There were 79 members of staff in these pupil sessions.

The Local Authority has a comprehensive range of Health and Safety policies, procedures and guidance in place, which clearly sets out the management of Health and Safety, both at a Corporate, Directorate and school management level.

All schools have competent persons such as first aiders and educational visits coordinators to manage any risks. The Local Authority and schools meet the standards set out in HSE and WG guidance for Educational Visits. Arrangements for educational visits are effective and improving because: the revised Educational Visits Policy (2017) is in line with the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel National Guidance (OEAPNG); the Outdoor Advisers monitor all trips and visits and reports to Head of Service, indicating the level of authorised school visits on a monthly basis; and, all schools are complying with the EVOLVE system. School visits to high footfall areas now include the terrorist threat risk assessment as part of the EVOLVE process. Due to COVID, during the year very few visits took place.

3.4 Safeguarding Arrangements: Areas where progress has been made

- The Safeguarding Matrix approach to capturing information is helpful and supports the ongoing improvement in practice in this area.
- The close working arrangements between Education and Social Services have developed well, further supporting a coherence of approach regarding safeguarding in schools and settings. The Safeguarding Policy is regularly reviewed and understood by key stakeholders.
- Recent work to respond to community safety issues, counter potential terrorism and extremist behaviours has progressed well, for example, the Safer School Partnership, and the Respect and Resilience Action Plan.
- The Operation Encompass work has progressed well and supports schools in this regard.
- Quality assurance processes to test the robustness of safeguarding processes have been implemented and inform ongoing work in this area.
- The new Council Policy requiring all school Governors to be DBS cleared is being implemented. Presently, very few are compliant.

3.4 Safeguarding Arrangements: Areas requiring further improvement

- 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.
- Full implementation of VAWDASV (Group 1) training needs to be achieved at school level, as well as the implementation of Group 2 training across all LGES settings.
- The 360-degree safe Cymru Policy needs to be agreed by the Executive and implemented in all schools.
- Digitalisation of the safeguarding matrix to be developed and streamlined to enable greater readability, including the roll-out of My Concern 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

Risk Considerations

- There is a risk that the roll-out of the safeguarding package MyConcern is not implemented fully across the school estate.

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Agenda Item 21

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**
Report Subject: **Regeneration & Development Performance Report**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr D Davies, Executive Member Regeneration and Economic Development**
Report Submitted by: **Richard Crook, Corporate Director Regeneration & Community 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)
	26.08.21	07.09.21			15.09.21	22.09.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To present the annual service activity from April 2020 to July 2021 and highlight how the Department is contributing to four of the Council's Corporate aims of delivering a:
- Prosperous Wales
 - Resilient Wales
 - Healthier Wales
 - More equal Wales
 - Globally responsible Wales, and
 - A Wales of more cohesive communities.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1. The Regeneration and Development Department has gone through a year of changes and temporary restructuring to manage Covid-19 work, whilst still delivering some of the main priorities for BG. The teams continue to focus on delivering a more structured program of work based around the priority areas identified in the Council's Corporate Plan 2018/22.
- Housing
 - Employment and Skills
 - Destination Management and Tourism
 - Energy and Digital
 - Town centres
- 2.2. The performance report makes reference to the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which not only underpins the Council's aims, but also guides the ways in which sustainable development can be delivered through:
- Collaboration
 - Integration
 - Involvement
 - Long term
 - Prevention

- 2.3. From the report the achievements Housing continues to show a marked improvement in numbers of affordable and private homes delivered and delivery of new sites for housing; with high numbers of homes accessing funding for making them more energy efficient. Alongside this the early intervention for homelessness means 73% of potentially homeless households were prevented from becoming homeless. Planning enquiry responses were down due to IT issues that are being addressed.
- 2.4. Employment and Skills showcases the Aspire shared apprenticeship scheme with success being demonstrated through businesses taking on a second apprentice following a productive first experience. The Council's industrial portfolio is at 85% occupancy rate, supporting 615.5 jobs and newly developed units coming to market offering an additional 26,000 sq ft. Start-ups in BG higher than this time last year by 6.7% and community benefits to a number of communities delivered through physical projects. STEM delivery in schools is increasing through a successful bid to Tech Valleys for more resource and the future skills academy being progressed further for the former Monwell building. Covid-19 related support grants to businesses amounted to £1.9M (894 grants) delivered alongside other priorities.
- 2.5. The 2020-25 collaborative Destination Management Plan has been completed plus Covid-19 response through grants and support has continued for Tourism across BG. Work with individual businesses to help them maximise their tourism potential and working across the Head of the Valleys on events and festivals has also been undertaken.
- 2.6. The Energy Prospectus has been completed 'Energy Generation Opportunities' is now in the market place. Funding for electric charging points in BG has been successful enabling 73 charge points across 35 sites for the community and visitors in addition to workplace, taxi and bus points. Work on the Refit program of works continues – 6000 non-LED street lights have been replaced with LEDs and will generate energy savings for the Council. Hydro and wind generation projects are being investigated in detail. The GovTech Catalyst project is in the last stages of development and final reporting will enable BG to assess the suitable tech for us. £20million National Digital Exploitation Centre (NDEC) is running and has started to assist SMEs and micro businesses with cyber security and digital design – the first R&D facility of its kind in Wales.
- 2.7. Placemaking plans for all towns are now in train. Footfall has been increasing in towns over the last 3 months with a total of 864,612 people. Grants and loans for privately owned property continue to be successful with around £2M in total being approved. Heritage Lottery Funding in Tredegar Town Centre continues with NCB Town Hall and ongoing funding discussions with HLF continue. Rail improvements are gathering pace for both Ebbw Vale and Abertillery as funds from WG have been secured and funds from UK Govt are awaited. Key, are complex buildings and structures like Big Arch, Trinity Chapel and Truck Shop have all been progressed during this period.

2.8 A series of case studies are included to highlight some of the work that has been outlined in the performance report.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 This report will be considered by the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 15th September 2021, and any feedback will be provided verbally to the Executive Committee.

3.2 Option 1:
That Members consider and suggest areas for improvement.

Option 2:
That Members accept the report as provided.

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

4.1. This proposal supports the amendments made to the Outcome Statements within the Corporate Plan in its review in October 2019.

Corporate Plan 2020/22 Outcome Statements:

- 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

5. Implications Against Each Option

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

There are no short term budget implications associated with the report.

5.2. *Risk including Mitigating Actions*

There are no risks directly associated with this report

5.3. *Legal*

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

5.4. *Human Resources*

There are no additional implications for human resources.

6. Supporting Evidence

- 6.1. **Performance Information and Data**
The Six Month Performance report is attached as Appendix 1.
- 6.2. **Expected outcome for the public**
Improved economy and community benefits from the work undertaken in the last 6 months
- 6.3. **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**
The strategy and action plan is designed to be a method to organise support to target areas of need identified through business and take account of changing and future business needs of Blaenau Gwent.
- 6.4. **Collaboration / partnership working**
The areas of collaboration are outlined in the performance report.
- 6.5. **Integration (across service areas)**
Integration is outlined in the performance report
7. **Monitoring Arrangements**
Monitoring will be done through the Council's Corporate Plan and Service business plan

Background Documents /Electronic Links

*Appendix 1 – Economic Development & Regeneration Q1 and 2
Performance Report*

Economic Development and Regeneration

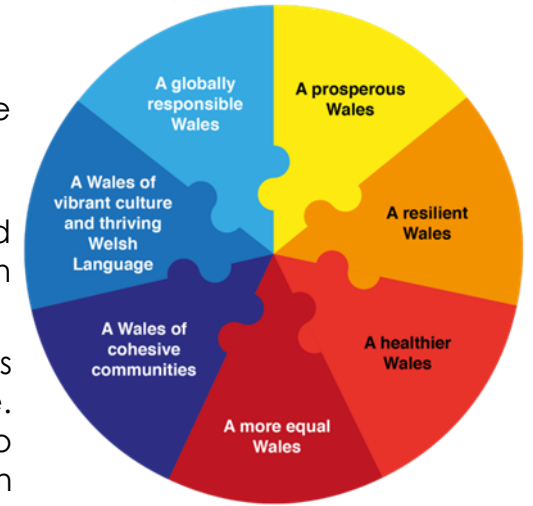
Performance Report



Foreword

The purpose of this report is to present service activity which highlights how we are contributing to the Council's overall aim of delivering all seven national well-being goals.

The following overview pages set out our performance for the period along with some associated achievements and challenges aligned to the priority areas identified in the Corporate Plan 2020/22, which are:



- ▶ To build a collaborative culture between services, partners and communities working together and with people directly to shape and deliver services. i.e. (Community Asset Transfers),
- ▶ To develop a partnership approach to maximising income reducing the impacts of Poverty,
- ▶ To actively participate in partnerships such as Tech Valleys and CCRCDD to attract investment,
- ▶ To work with partners to provide a variety of homes,
- ▶ To work with partners to provide effective employment support and access to skills development (Apprenticeships),
- ▶ To increase the start-up business rate, retention and growth of local businesses and attract new inward investment,
- ▶ To develop excellent digital including internet and mobile network connectivity that can support the needs of the whole community,
- ▶ To develop a portfolio of potential energy opportunities to deliver economic, business and community benefits, and
- ▶ To work with partners to develop a new vision for our town centres ensuring their long term future.

This report is broken down into the themes below which have been identified for the Regeneration and Economic Development Service area and support delivery of the priority areas above:

- Housing;
- Employment and Skills;
- Destination Management and Tourism;
- Energy and Digital; and
- Town Centres.

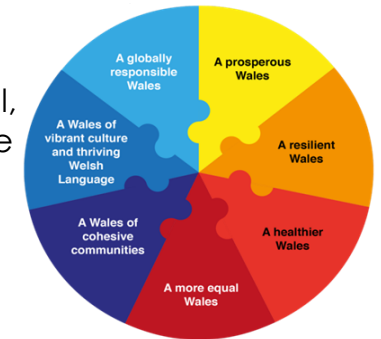
We will continue to invest in our neighbourhoods so that they are places where people are proud to live. We have prioritised economic development and regeneration in order to bring jobs, growth and opportunity to local people and businesses.

Increasing employability makes a fundamental contribution to reducing and tackling poverty and the economic status of the area. Supporting people to obtain and retain employment reduces reliance upon support services aligned to social well-being and poverty.



Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

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



The Act also puts a duty on public bodies to apply the sustainable development principle which states they 'must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

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The sustainable development principle is made up of the following five ways of working, pictured below:



Collaboration



Integration



Involvement



Long Term



Prevention

Throughout this report some areas of performance that meet these ways of working are demonstrated by the above images.

Housing

The **Social Housing Grant Programme** supports delivery of affordable housing provision. In 2021/22 an increased Social Housing Grant award of **£5.5m** has been allocated to Blaenau Gwent to support delivery of social housing.



Greenacres, Tredegar
completion
Sept 2021

Golwg Y Bryn, Ebbw Vale
completion
August 2021

Ebbw Vale School Site

- The development has been named **Cefn Y Garn**
- Groundbreaking event scheduled for the period July to September 2021.
- Show home complete and open within the Autumn period 2021
 - first homes occupied April to June 2022

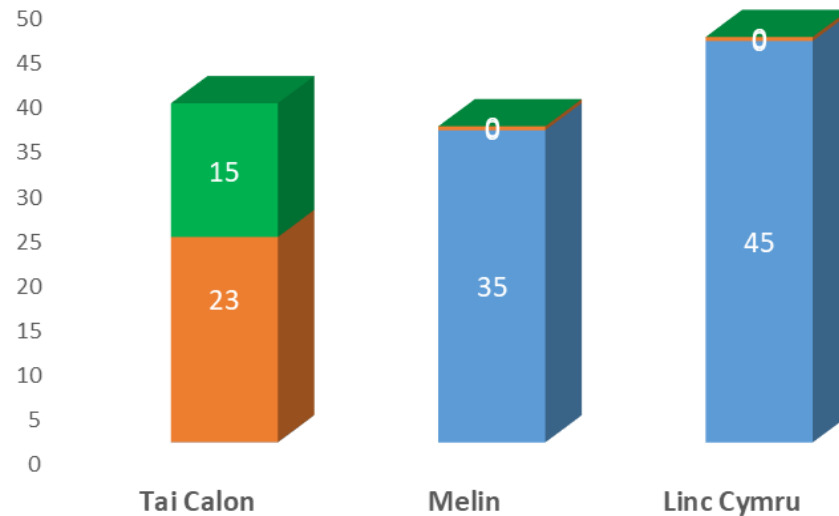
The following three social housing grant funded projects are on site and will deliver

107 Social Rent properties; and **292 Open Market** properties

Blaenau Gwent continue to work in partnership with housing partners Tai Calon, Linc Cymru, and Melin Homes to provide people with affordable homes within the Borough.



Number of social rent housing units being delivered with partners



- on site and progressing
- pre-app consultation stage
- Acquisition & Development stage



Housing

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



The following scheme targets improvements to homes where households are more likely to be living in severe fuel poverty. The scheme also provides a range of advice to help householders reduce their energy usage and utility bills:

► The Arbed 3 scheme was completed in 2021, following an investment of

£2,736,358 to improve the energy efficiency of **577 properties**

within the Lower Ebbw Fach area. The scheme also included a community benefit investment of £7,500 that resulted in a Poly Tunnel being installed at Tillery Campus, Abertillery.

Officers are currently working with Arbed Scheme Managers to identify a further scheme to implement.



Local Development Plan (LDP)

A Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) is currently being developed which will be used to guide development within the Borough until 2033.

The LDP identifies where new developments such as housing, employment, community facilities and roads, will go.



Development of a new plan is underway, however, delays to the consultation on the 2nd call for candidate sites due to Covid restrictions has delayed the overall timetable for the plan.

Covid-19 and restrictions meant that the consultation process was put on hold and then had to be re-started.



During the quarter 1 period (April - June)

16%

of planning consultations and enquiries were responded to within deadlines (21 days and 10)



Housing

HOMELESSNESS - During quarter 1, 30 households met the threshold for being threatened with homelessness. Of these, 22 were successfully prevented from losing their accommodation - 73%.

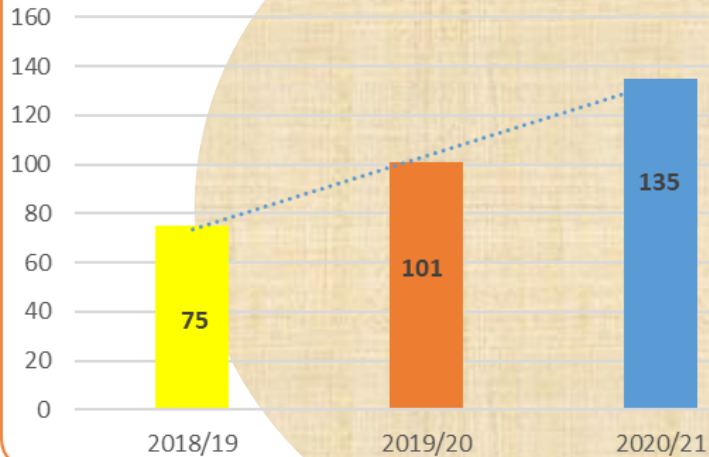


This high prevention rate has been achieved by targeting early intervention initiatives to prevent homelessness at a very early stage.



LONG TERM - Development of a Blaenau Gwent Prospectus to support social housing delivery is underway and will be produced in Quarter 2.

House building completions



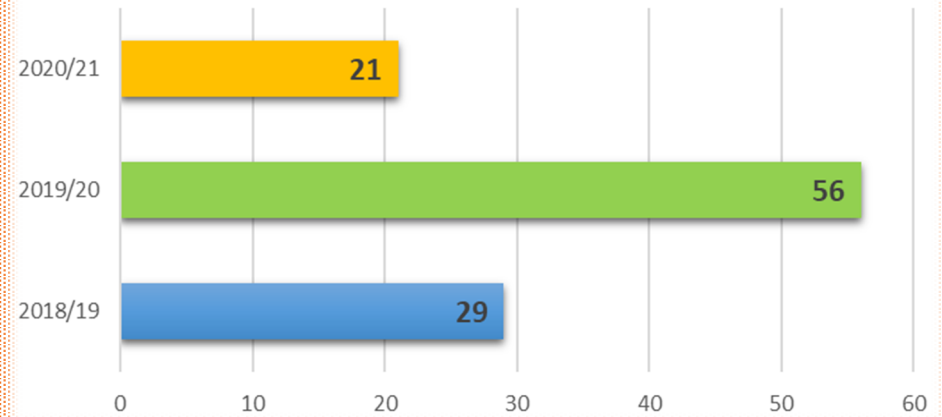
The 2020/21 figure remains below the Local Development Plan target of 233 but is the highest figure since 2016.



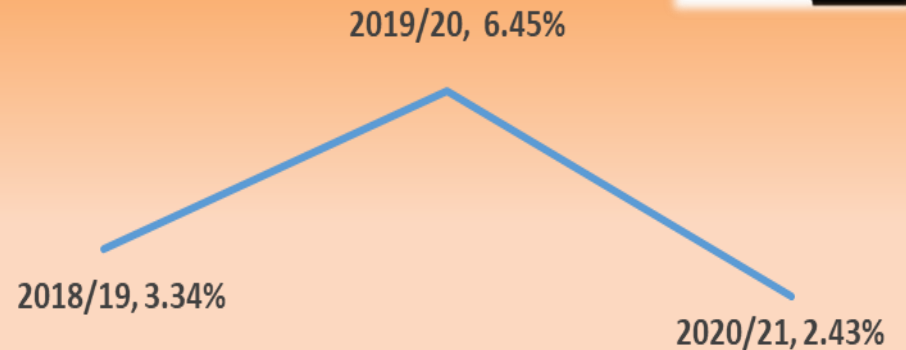
Empty properties lead to social, economic and environmental concerns. Our aim is to alleviate these concerns and in turn increase the housing supply by reducing the number of empty homes....

There is on average **867** long term empty properties yearly.

Number of empty homes brought back into use via action by local authority



The percentage of private sector dwellings that had been vacant for more than 6 months at 1 April that were returned to occupation during the year through direct action by the local authority.



Employment and Skills

The former **Abertillery** library is to be turned into a **Training Centre** especially for young people, providing them with skills to start businesses and obtain jobs in the local economy.

The Training Centre will also incorporate a jobs and training advice service. It will also house a Community Shop and Café, doubling up as a training facility and promoting healthy foods and nutrition.

Upskilling our future

Children and parent engagement sessions have been held in relation to apprenticeships and careers in engineering.



Supported work place visits for all Blaenau Gwent Schools delivering Engineering BTEC's.

LONG TERM / PREVENTION / INVOLVEMENT - The use of the Former Library building is aligned to the Council's priorities in promoting health and well-being and building fairer sustainable communities by working with local people to address poverty and unemployment.

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3 of the 7 original apprentices have successfully completed their **qualification** level



An apprentice has been shortlisted for the **Finance Awards Wales** (Accounting Technician)



An apprentice within our Transport section has won a **silver award** at the prestigious Skills Competition Wales

Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme -

Recruitment and induction of apprentices continues to be successful. 4/5 new companies have joined already, and some of the first companies in 2015 are now recruiting 2nd apprentices off the back of the initial success.

1 new apprentice and company PMB

2 Multi-skilled engineers at continental Teves

1 new apprentice and company Central fire and Security

1 new apprentice within Community Services,

1 on a full traineeship for with the internal parks department

1 completed work experience - now seeking full time employment

2 on work experience with Aneurin Leisure

Discussions with Welsh Government to expand the Aspire offering and demonstrate demand for digital apprenticeships have taken place during this quarter.

Employment and Skills

Refurbishment of the Monwell Building into an Advanced Engineering Centre

The Tech Valleys programme has a vision;

"In 2027 the South Wales Valleys and Blaenau Gwent in particular, will be a globally recognised centre for the development of new technologies, to support cutting edge industry"

In support of this vision BGCBC and Coleg Gwent have proposed to develop an Advanced Engineering Centre which will create an environment that will attract hi-tech inward investors within the Advanced Manufacturing sector.



- The proposed date for the centre to be operational and welcoming its first students is September 22.
- Work on the preparatory phase continues.
- Business case submitted to Welsh Government for the funding associated with the development phase, including the associated purchase of the equipment needed.

INVOLVEMENT - Blaenau Gwent CBC were represented and invited to speak at a Be the Spark 5-9 Club Celebration where a local Blaenau Gwent based business won Social Enterprise Start-up of the year – (Lundby Juniors) – **over 90 attendees**



Kick Start Plus is aimed at supporting new businesses from 6 months up to 3 years old, to help them develop and expand. The implementation of the programme continues, and the work undertaken by the team in their role as a gateway provider has proven successful with a number of businesses supported, **offering in excess of 80 placements.**

Industrial units, office accommodation and commercial land property portfolio is currently operating at

85% unit occupancy rate

With
615.5 jobs supported

Employment and Skills

Links with local community groups continue to be established to understand and record local need. This allows opportunities in the area to be effectively matched with known local need when contracts are awarded.

A number of benefits have been achieved during the first quarter some of which are shown later in the document.

8

Effect Funded case studies have been publicised on Social media to raise profile of funding available or business start-ups in Blaenau Gwent



The Box Works project is now nearing completion with only the final snagging stages outstanding.



The 23 custom-designed containers have been built to a high specification and include sustainable wood panelling and a special insulation layer to ensure they are warm in the winter and naturally cool in the summer. A super-fast high capacity internet connection comes as standard in all units. Tenants will also be able to enjoy the business lounge, café and chance to work with academics from the adjacent Ebbw Vale Learning Zone, in addition to

occupying office/meeting provision at the General Offices. The units will act as a hub for businesses to develop and then graduate into the higher value office provision.

- ⇒ **There is active interest in the Box units, with 8 companies showing interest to date.**
- ⇒ **An open day will shortly be arranged to show perspective tenants around the facility.**



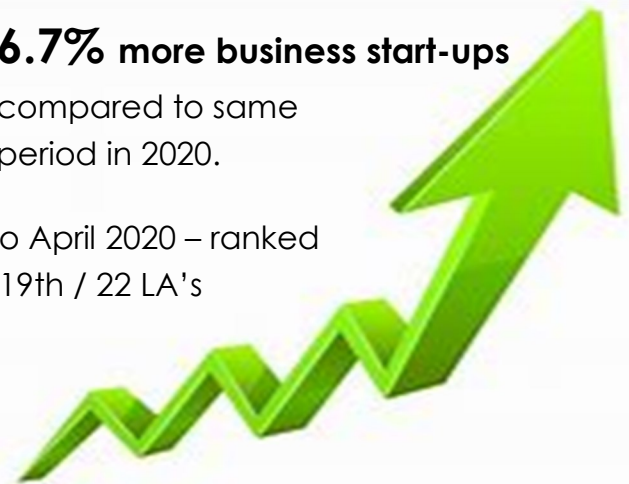
INVOLVEMENT - Women's Business Network held - attendees included 3 local business start-ups and stakeholders



COLLABORATION - The **Employment and Skills Strategy** has been produced and agreed; The plan will provide opportunities to raise aspirations and support economic growth through partnership working. It outlines a range of priorities to ensure individuals and businesses have access to the right support in terms of skills and employment.

6.7% more business start-ups compared to same period in 2020.

o April 2020 – ranked 19th / 22 LA's

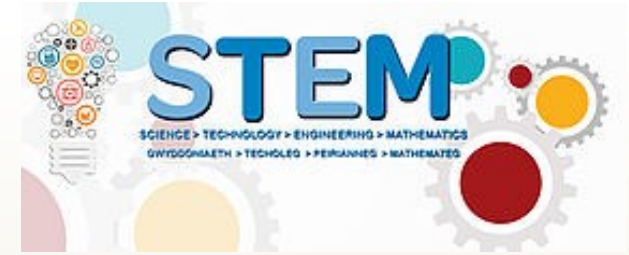


o April 2021 – ranked 9th / 22 LA's

Employment and Skills

The STEM Facilitation project continues within our schools preparing pupils for the modern work environment.

Key skills such as problem solving, digital literacy, critical analysis, communication and independent thinking are among the new skills being delivered to create a competitive workforce capable of adapting to the changing workplace.



- **Mapping of external STEM providers has been completed.**
- **Over 20 businesses consulted so far and 11 firm commitments have been made to work with schools.**
- **Discussions are in progress for a 5G project with BT and to pilot the 5G classroom.**
- **9 STEM audits have been completed.**
- **Plans have been drafted for 7 schools and include a range of business links and use of external providers, along with plans for the Enthuse programme (schools wishing to work together).**



The Lime Avenue Business Unit development is now nearing completion with only the final snagging stages outstanding.

The development comprises of 8 modern and high quality hybrid style business units to support the development of small and medium enterprise (SMEs). The units provide an open workspace arrangement on the ground floor with a mezzanine floor providing associated office provision.

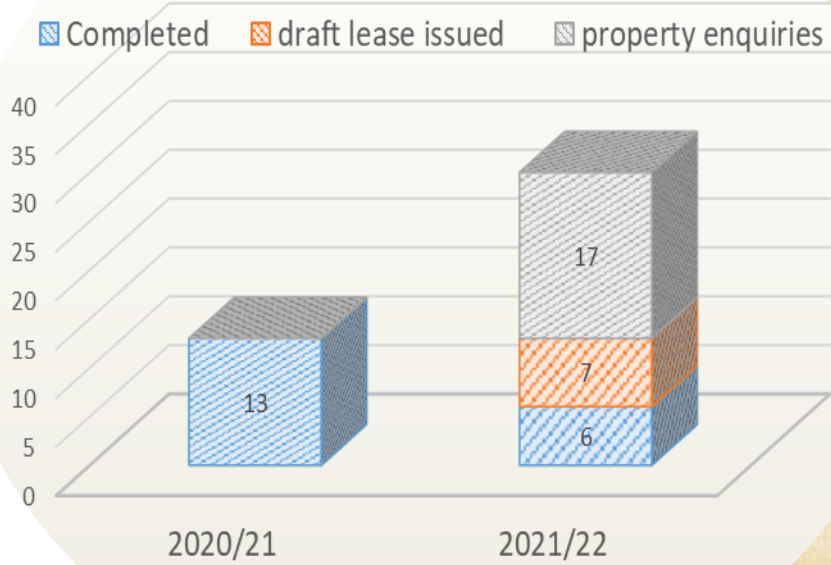
⇒ **Thales has expressed interest in taking occupation of two buildings on the development site to form part of a Thales 'campus'.**



Employment and Skills

An **additional 26,000 sq. ft.** has been added to our industrial property portfolio with the **introduction of hybrids (23,000) and 3k box hub (3k)**

BUSINESS LETTINGS



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£1.9 million Grants administered by Business and Innovation Team

Grant scheme	No of Grants Awarded	Total Value of Grants	Status
Self-Employment Bursary	30	£75,000.00	Closed
Freelancer & Cultural	74	£185,000.00	Closed
Freelancer & Cultural 'Top Up'	56	£140,000.00	Closed
Lockdown Discretionary	213	£420,500.00	Closed
Restrictions Discretionary (Round 1)	226	£452,000.00	Closed
Restrictions Discretionary (Round 2)	222	£444,000.00	Closed (10th March)
Freelancer & Cultural	43	£107,500.00	Closed
Economic Resilience Fund	30	£80,000.00	Closed (30th June 2021)



3000+ enquiries received and dealt with since start of pandemic to date - **financial support, start up and property.**



894 grants provided

Destination Management & Tourism

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

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

Work has continued with local developers to grow tourism and deliver new hospitality and retail businesses

Bunk house at Parc Bryn Bach redeveloped, also new play area and mini golf.

Worked with hospitality sector on safe operations post Covid.

4 new self-serviced accommodation businesses developed.

Blaenau Gwent has been awarded over **£500,000** from Welsh Government to improve & create active travel routes.

Active Travel is walking, running or cycling on everyday journeys – better for health & the environment.

The **heritage and culture** of the area is one reason for visitors coming to the area. We have a special and proud history, a landscape that tells of the earliest settlers in the area and a wealth of historical sites, museums and archives that draw in visitors on a daily basis.



Promotion and encouragement has been carried out to businesses to adopt **Barod Amdani/ Good to Go.**

The 'We're Good To Go' scheme has been developed to ensure a standard-led approach to tourism across the UK with input from more than 40 industry bodies including UK Hospitality, the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, British Holiday & Holiday Parks Association, the British Beer and Pub Association and the National Caravan Council as well as destination management organisations across the UK.



PREVENTION - Without a Destination Management Plan for Blaenau Gwent there will be no focus and monitoring of tourism delivery in the area. Regular business and community engagement addresses issues at an early stage or prevents them occurring in the first place.

Destination Management & Tourism

The Southern Wales consortium has put together a film highlighting places to stay and visit across the region. Guardian in Six Bells represents Blaenau Gwent.

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLg9E8ui64f_SmAywFxfQ15VC1Vi14fHDK

This quarter has been a busy time in the film industry. We are one of several areas across the UK who are working with a major producer on relocating their series production to a new site.

Extinction TV fantasy thriller series (2022) spent a weekend filming locally; Trapper Keeper a Disney fantasy series used locations in Trefil and Abertillery; BBC natural history department filmed at Trefil; Weatherman walking filmed a Brynmawr to Abergavenny walk using several local experts that met Derek along the way and visiting Parc Nant Y Waun and Brynmawr Museum.

Hosted author of the next Rough Guide for Wales

The Rough Guide to Wales is being updated and the author and his family came to cover Southern Wales in June. They stayed for a week spending the first part of their stay in Vale of Glamorgan and the second half at the new holiday lets at Roundhouse Farm. They visited the Guardian, Brynmawr Museum and Festival Park Owl Sanctuary. They requested vegan options and ate out at The Railway Trefegar and Top House, Trefil. The guided walk was the 'In the Footsteps of Nye' to Chartist Cave. The author is going to return later in the year to write a piece on 'Home of the NHS'



Photography of new product took place in April focusing on walking, accommodation and hospitality. On this occasion and older couple were used as models and sites covered were Roundhouse Farm holiday lets, The Railway and the Top House.



INVOLVEMENT - Attendance at Travel Trade showcase.—The webinar took place on 1 July with 42 travel trade and group organisers registered. We were one of 36 businesses and organisations that took part. In advance of the on line event, each group organiser received a "tastes of Southern Wales" hamper. None of the Blaenau Gwent Product took up the offer to take part so a Top 10 destination guide was presented instead.

Destination Management & Tourism

Summer Story Safaris are being set up to run in all of our town centres. Hidden in 10 shop windows in each town will be a popular children's book. The first safari has an animal theme and includes Judith Kerr's, *The Tiger who came to tea* and David Walliams *The slightly annoying elephant*.

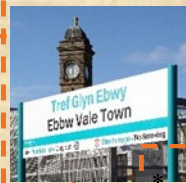
Executive member for Regeneration, Cllr Dai Davies said:

"Our town centre businesses have had a tough time with lock downs and on line shopping. We hope that our Summer Story Safaris will encourage families to explore our town centres again and while they are there find out what is available on the doorstep. You can't get an ice cream in the post or get that instant lift that a bag of pick and mix gives but our towns have lots of new shops and fun activities for children."

Ongoing **connectivity improvement work** is

positive, with works to increase rail services and complete the Heads of the Valleys dualling.

Work to link these to walking and cycling trails continues.



Work is ongoing with Costain to secure continued pedestrian access around the dualled route.



* Work with Cwm a Mynydd Local Action Group to develop trails that link to Halls Tramroad with Bryn Oer Tramroad are currently on hold.



Partnership work -



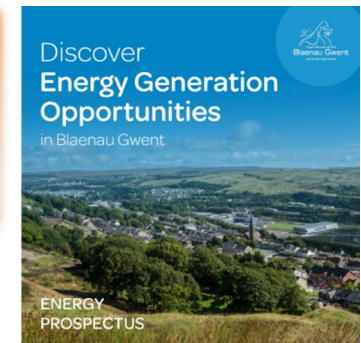
Collaborative work has taken place, with 3 Southern Wales businesses, on stills photography, destination film, hosting author and a Showcase event where 21 tourism products were promoted.

Working with Aneurin Leisure Trust on town centre Placemaking project.

Work is ongoing with Town Centre Business Development Officer on Increasing Footfall.

Energy and Digital

The **Energy Prospectus** outlines a commitment to supporting Blaenau Gwent to become a local low carbon borough through enhancing energy and carbon efficiency, reducing fuel poverty, improving the resilience of the local distribution network and maximising revenue generation potential.



Despite ongoing challenges to secure investment needed to carry out development of the energy opportunities within the prospectus, the following progress has been made so far.....

Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure – Initial regional project completed with all EV charging points having been installed across Gwent. In total **73 charge points across 35 sites** in Gwent have been installed.

As an addition to the initial project **additional residential, workplace, taxi and bus charging points** will be **installed** across Blaenau Gwent.



Hydro Generation - Initial investigation and feasibility studies are being carried out for small scale hydro generation opportunities within the borough.

Two potential sites within the wards of Cwm and Llanhilleth have been identified and up to two further sites from across the borough are to be identified for a feasibility analysis.

Where suitable opportunities exist this work could provide us with a small **portfolio of hydro generation projects that can be considered further for investment and delivery.**



Low Emission Fleet - work is ongoing to develop a plan for the transition of our current fleet to low carbon emission vehicles and the energy infrastructure that will be required to support this transition. This will include fleet and employee charge points in key locations that link with the Councils future working model.



Wind Generation projects are ongoing – Silent Valley investment approach has been agreed, the planning application will be submitted later this year.

PREVENTION - Direct Transport emissions are the first of the nine energy transitions being considered within the Decarbonisation Plan which targets us becoming Carbon Neutral by 2030. A readiness assessment has been carried out and will be used to form key actions to reduce the impact of the Councils direct transport emissions .



Energy and Digital



LONG TERM - We aim to support the development of power infrastructure for business investment readiness and to support this, discussions are ongoing with Western Power Distribution regarding the power infrastructure across Blaenau Gwent.

Opportunities to utilise Community Municipal Bonds as a way of funding **green energy related investment projects** within Blaenau Gwent will be explored going forward.



Development of Business Energy Model to enable Business Parks to achieve Net Zero Outcomes

BGCBC has become a challenge owner in the Whole System Business Research Innovation for Decarbonisation (WBRID) pilot seeking to identify innovative solutions which will support energy supply, demand and storage and to work towards creating zero energy parks as a Unique Selling Point (USP) for Blaenau Gwent.

In total 11 submissions were received from suppliers wishing to work with Blaenau Gwent in Stage 1 and following a detailed evaluation **four companies were selected** to proceed. Between February and April 2021 they worked with the Council and Welsh Government on the development of solutions that will support delivery of our challenge.

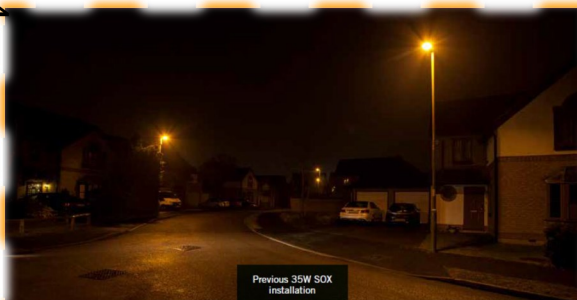
Results of Stage 1 are currently being considered in conjunction with Welsh Government, Smart Living Team with a view towards securing funding for Phase Two and selecting the preferred suppliers.

The **Refit** programme continues, installing energy efficiency measures throughout the borough.

Street Lighting replacement is now also completed. In total

6000 non-LED street lights have been replaced with LED lights.

INTEGRATION - Discussions taking place with Community Services to look at options for further phases of the Refit project.



Energy and Digital

GovTech Catalyst is a £20 million fund from Government Digital Service, UK Government to work with suppliers to solve public problems using innovative digital technology.

Working together with Durham County Council and Government Digital Service we are looking at how we can use our assets to collect information about what is going in the streets and relay that information to help deliver public services more efficiently.

'Eyes on the Street': enabling Blaenau Gwent Borough Council's vehicle fleets to collect and report data as they travel around the borough concerning recycling participation, deterioration of the highways as well as monitoring and identifying highways violations.

- Phase One confirmed that detection of pot holes, road markings and road defects was possible.
- Phase Two has focused upon deployment of the technology across the two areas of Blaenau Gwent and Durham. Technology has been installed on two vehicles used by frontline services including highways and refuse.

Phase two will continue until the summer of 2021, and once this is complete we will be able to assess whether the technology is suitable for wider scale deployment across a greater number of vehicles and coverage across the borough.



LONG TERM - We aim to develop digital infrastructure and improve connectivity within the borough by promoting digital participation.

The Blaenau Gwent Energy Catalyst Project

seeks to consider how we can generate local energy, distribute it locally and how we can use it to benefit Blaenau Gwent businesses and residents



A Regional Energy Strategy has been developed by Cardiff Capital Region City Deal with additional support from regional stakeholders, including Local Authority Officers. Work will now commence on next steps.

INTEGRATION - If the 'Eyes on the street' project is successful, it is hoped that with machine learning and further development it may be possible to also support the service area to consider the business case of short term patching versus long term investment in repairing road surfaces.



Town Centres



PREVENTION - The Town Centre Strategy seeks to ensure that town centres are safe and friendly communities for our residents and visitors to shop within.

This includes projects to maintain and enhance the local environment, increase business occupancy and create an environment in our town centres that encourages our residents to spend time there for work, learning and leisure. The strategy establishes a long term plan for the future of our town centres.



Trinity Chapel, Abertillery

Following the exterior of Trinity Chapel, Abertillery being originally refurbished, Blaenau Gwent Council will now work with the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Aneurin Leisure Trust and the Welsh Government to bring the Chapel back into community use .



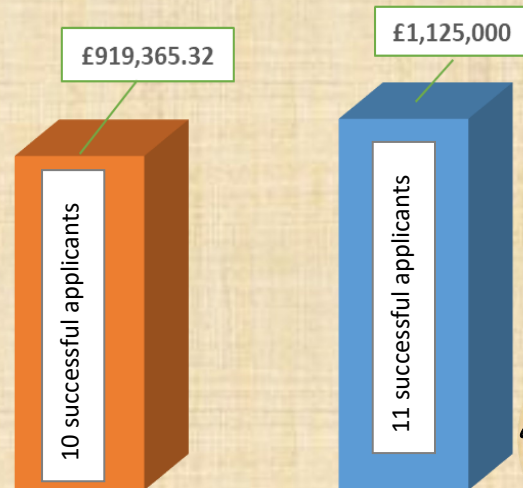
Funding from the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns Programme will be used for an internal refit of the landmark building, turning it into a new home for the **town's Library and Adult Education Courses; an art gallery and a support hub offering employment and health advice.**

In addition, SmartMoneyCymru Credit Union will provide a new weekly financial loans and savings service from the Hub. There is also a plan to locate an ATM cash machine within the building.



Work is ongoing to engage with potential town centre properties across Blaenau Gwent to participate in the town centre loans and grants scheme.

Successful applications to date (funds approved)



Grants

Loans

Number of grant applications are up compared with the same period 6 months ago.

Town Centres

Work on **Ebbw Vale Placemaking Plan** continues with the first round of stakeholder engagement completed with Officers, Elected Members, Land/ Building Owners, Welsh Government, Transport for Wales, Coleg Gwent, Tech Valleys Board and Design Commission for Wales.

A draft Placemaking vision document has been circulated amongst stakeholders for their review and feedback.

Work on **Tredegar Placemaking Plan** continues. Some initial stakeholder engagement has taken place including Officers, Elected Members, Land/Building Owners, Welsh Government. The Tredegar Advisory Group have also been part of the engagement process.

Initial discussions with stakeholders are taking place regarding **placemaking** work to be undertaken in **Abertillery**. An application for funding is to be prepared.

The development of a **rail link to Abertillery** from the existing Ebbw Vale Railway (EVR) has been proposed.

The existing EVR has opened up a range of options for local residents in terms of employment opportunities and access to services and facilities, both within area and in the wider region.

The link to Abertillery, alongside increased frequency, will help improve the economic prosperity for the area and have a transformative impact for residents, businesses and the town centre through increased footfall.



LONG TERM - Tredegar Townscape Heritage Initiative - works to the NCB Town Hall (Grade 2 listed) have been delayed and a new contractor is being sought to complete the works.

Discussions regarding Heritage Lottery Funding are ongoing with Heritage Lottery Fund.

Big Arch, Ebbw Vale

- Remedial works have been completed and **CADW approval received due to its listed building status.**

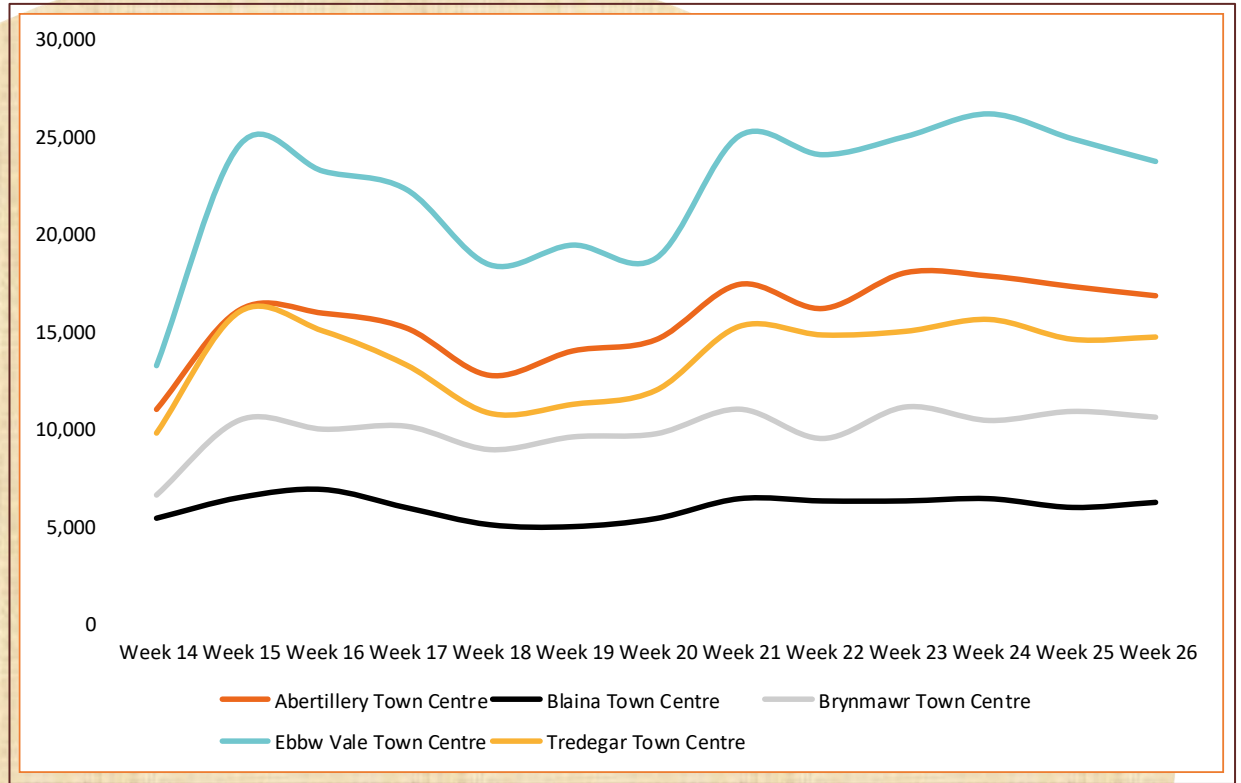
Liaison with the specialist contractor about the works is now in progress and work on site is intended to commence later this year,



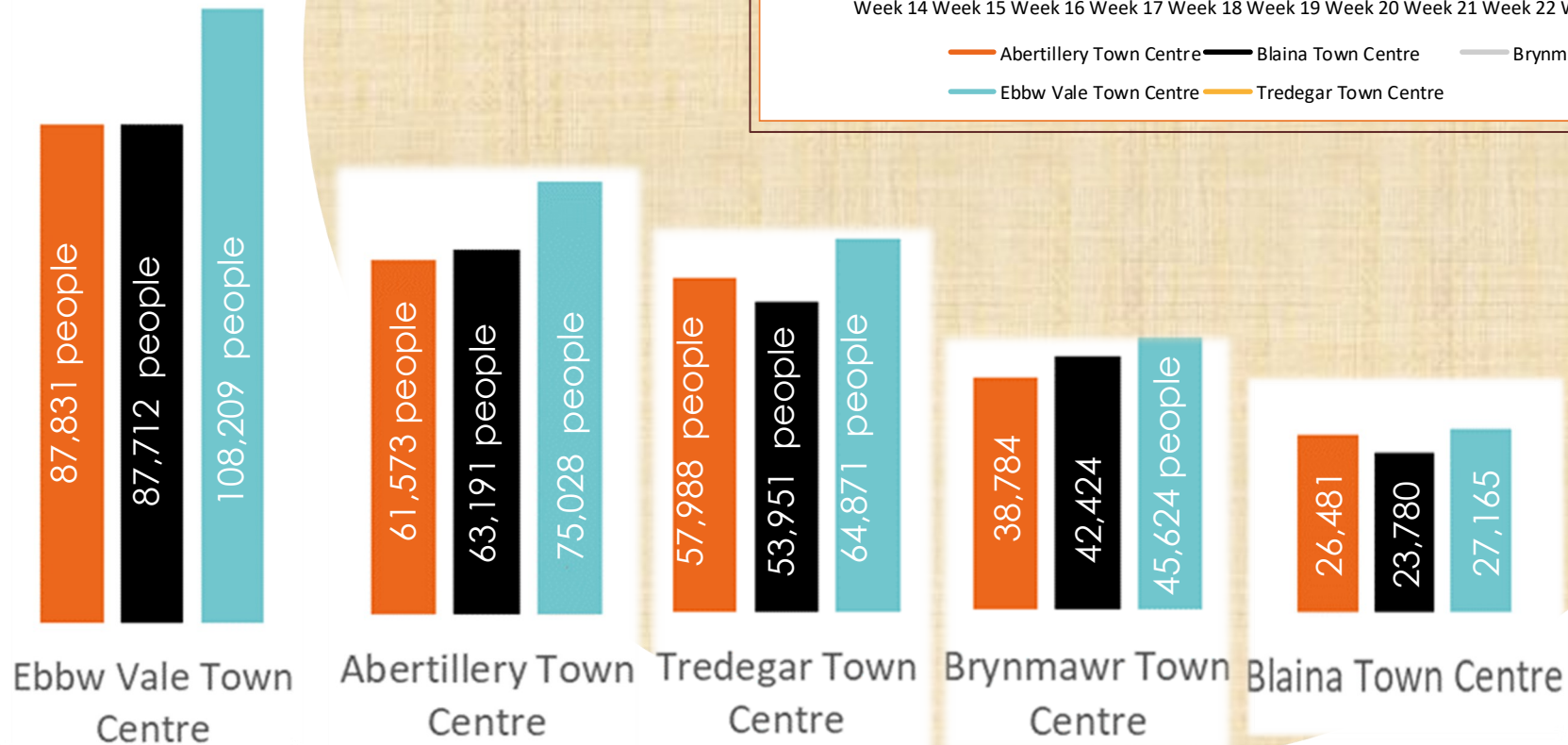
Town Centres

Footfall is an important factor influencing our town centre vitality and viability. Sensors count the number of shoppers visiting our town centres and provide analytical data on how individual town centres are performing and how shoppers are using them.

The data from footfall monitoring allows the Council to be better equipped to make evidenced based decisions on the popularity and effectiveness of current and future projects in Town Centres.



■ April ■ May ■ June



During the quarter 1 period footfall has increased each month within every town with a **total Blaenau Gwent town centre footfall of 864,612 people** over the 3 month period

Case Study - Housing Development Sites

We are committed to the regeneration and economic future of Blaenau Gwent and to working with partners to bring disused sites in the county borough back into use.



Pithead Baths, Llanhilleth - A consultation process has started and an initial consultation with residents undertaken in early 2021 to obtain their views on a residential-led development. The survey was sent to approximately 262 households. 58 responses were received with 73% rejecting the proposal on the basis of concerns around anti-social behaviour and parking. Further consultation will be undertaken with residents responding to their initial feedback on the proposal, looking at how the proposal can be designed to address the concerns raised. This will be an ongoing process with the aim of identifying an appropriate and deliverable proposal for the Pit Head Baths site.



Six Bells Colliery - Public consultation was undertaken tail end of 20/21; responses varied and will be considered in plans moving forward .



Ashvale - Work to discharge conditions associated with the funding opportunity progressing.

Civic Centre Site - The Urbanists have been commissioned to undertake an options appraisal and development framework to support the progression on the site for future development, following the Civic Centre Closure and de-cant. Commission will be concluded during Quarter 2 to inform next steps.



Sofrydd Garage - Sold to a private developer, with aspiration to develop retail and possible residential development. Council involvement going forward will be dependent on the owners aspiration.

Abertillery Leisure Centre - Surveys to determine compliant access undertaken. Registered Social Landlord engaged to consider access design options and associated traffic management to facilitate a compliant access to the site.



Case Study - Blaenau Gwent Community Benefits

Wild Flower and tree planting with Earth Science Partnership at Georgetown Primary School

esp

ENGINEERS
GEOLOGISTS
SCIENTISTS



Page 460

A donation has been made to the Community Investment Fund of £625.00 to support community activity


GRIFFITHS



Case Study - Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme celebrates National Award

The success of a pioneering Apprenticeship Programme that is breathing new life into the advanced manufacturing sector across two South Wales local authority areas has been recognised with a prestigious national award. Aspire Blaenau Gwent & Merthyr Tydfil's Shared Apprenticeship Programme won the Large Employer of the Year award at the virtual Apprenticeship Awards Cymru 2021 ceremony in June.



The Shared Apprenticeship Programme was created six years ago to tackle high unemployment and relatively low skill levels within the manufacturing industry .

The programme has directly benefited 123 apprentices as well as companies that have adopted its innovative approach. Learners are rotated around host employers to plug skills gaps by training on-the-job and working to achieve units towards their apprenticeship.

Celebrating outstanding achievement in training and apprenticeships, the Apprenticeship Awards Cymru 2021 saw 35 finalists compete in 12 categories.

Highlight of the work-based learning calendar, the awards showcased businesses and individuals who have excelled on the Welsh Government's Apprenticeship and Traineeship Programmes and gone the extra mile to achieve success during these unprecedented times.

Jointly organised by the Welsh Government and the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW), the awards had Openreach, the UK's digital network business and passionate supporter of apprenticeships, as the headline sponsor.

The Apprenticeship Programme in Wales is funded by the Welsh Government with support from the European Social Fund. Welsh Government apprenticeship programmes have benefitted 50,360 people across South East Wales since May 2016.

Aspire's Shared Apprenticeship Programme was first established in 2015 when Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone Board identified a significant lack of employees with skills at Level 3 and above in Blaenau Gwent. Two years later, Merthyr Tydfil joined to develop its business growth and enhance skills whilst tackling unemployment.

Aspire is now working with both Coleg y Cymoedd, who link with Coleg Gwent, and Coleg Merthyr Tydfil to foster the next generation of skilled workers through apprenticeships covering Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, ICT, Applied Science, Quality Engineering as well as Business/Commercial Administration and Finance.

With a target to recruit 20 new apprentices every year, Aspire has achieved a 100% success rate through a team facilitating their employment with hosts and then dealing with any issues as they occur. More than 30 employers have engaged with the programme.

Case Study - Electric vehicle charge points



Work is now complete on 8 new dual electric vehicle charging points in Blaenau Gwent, and they are available for use.

In partnership with its fellow local authorities in Gwent, the Council was awarded a share of £465,000 funding from the UK Government's Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV) to start to develop the infrastructure for the vehicles of the future.

A joint bid was put together by the authorities, supported by the Energy Saving Trust and submitted by Blaenau Gwent Council. The project has also been supported by the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales.

In Blaenau Gwent there are now charge points installed in car parks in:



**Colliers Row, Ebbw Vale,
NP23 6ES**



**Abertillery Sports Centre,
NP13 1QD**



**King St/Worcester Street,
Brynmaur, NP23 4FD**



**High Street, Blaina,
NP13 3AF**

Blaenau Gwent Council's Executive Member for Regeneration & Economic Development, Councillor Dai Davies, said:

"Our commitment as a Council to protecting our environment and helping to address the climate emergency remains strong, and we continue to support renewable energy and the move towards becoming a carbon neutral organisation in the future. The use of electric vehicles is very important in this vision and we're delighted to have worked with partners across the region on this exciting project, which is a milestone in establishing an infrastructure across Gwent that will provide our residents with the opportunity to drive electric vehicles."

The Council will also shortly be consulting over the introduction of Control of Use Orders for the bays in order to ensure they are used for the intended purpose of charging vehicles.

Agenda Item 22

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 13.09.21

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**

Report Subject: **Progress update on Decarbonisation Plan**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor David Davies, Deputy Leader /
Executive Member Regeneration and Economic
Development**

Report Submitted by: **Michelle Morris, Managing Director**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
26.08.21	26.08.21	07.09.21			15.09.21	22.09.21		Decarb Programme Board 8 Sept

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To outline progress made since the adoption of the Council's Decarbonisation Plan and the declaration of a Climate Emergency on 24 September 2020.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The [Decarbonisation Plan](#) set out how we would deliver our commitment to the ambition of the Welsh Public Sector to achieve net Zero by 2030. It outlined how we could reduce our organisational emissions across nine transitions, see Appendices A and B.
- 2.2 Since the plan was adopted a Decarbonisation Board (the Board hereafter) has been established chaired by the Managing Director consisting of a range of experienced officers from across the Council, for Terms of Reference, see Appendix C.
- 2.3 The Board agreed to carry out readiness assessments for each of the nine transitions to understand what was already being done, and to identify the key actions we need to take to progress. This process is being based on good practice from the Place-based Climate Action Network (PCAN) at Leeds University. The transition areas are:
- Transport Direct
 - Transport Commissioned
 - Sequestration
 - Procurement Goods
 - Procurement Services
 - Procurement Works
 - Electricity
 - Heat
 - Waste

2.4 Making Good Progress

The Board agreed that the first readiness assessment to be examined would be 'Transport Direct' making up 8% of our gross carbon emissions. Key stakeholders from a range of service areas were involved in the process held in May and June 2021 via online workshops, bringing valuable knowledge on progress and insight on how challenges can be overcome. It is of note that staff energy and engagement in giving time to the readiness assessment was high. The initial approach has provided a very good start and something that can be used to build on developing and shaping the process using feedback and learning as we move forward.

2.5 The products from these workshops have been carefully considered by the Board and CLT in July 2021 with a number of high level actions agreed. These are outlined below with organisational leads identified:

2.5.1 Fleet

- Develop a fleet plan and resource its implementation by building costs into Corporate Medium Term Financial Plan. **(Lead: Community Services)**
- Develop and resource a low carbon depot. **(Lead: Community Services)**
- Ensure procurement arrangements are in place to support the plan. This needs to recognise the inter-dependant work on the new depot and collaborative opportunities at a regional and national level. **(Lead: Commercial Services)**
- Replace small fleet ULEV in phased way in line with available space, grid capacity and infrastructure. **(Lead: Community Services)**

2.5.2 Travel

- Embed the new operating model and assess its impact in terms of decarbonisation. **(Lead: Commercial Services)**
- Consider how to further reduce commute / travel impact in wider areas of the business e.g. Schools and Social Services. **(Lead: Commercial Services)**
- Investigate and identify staff demand to travel more actively and consider business case to meet this demand e.g. showers at main sites, secure shower facilities, safe storage and e-charging for cycles. **(Lead: Community Services – Active Travel)**
- Develop a plan for non-depot charging infrastructure for fleet and personal ULEV vehicles at key staff sites in the new operating model. **(Lead: Regeneration and Development)**
- Explore how staff can be encouraged to switch to ULEV. **(Lead: Commercial Services)**

The paper informing CLT decision making is attached at Appendix D.

2.6 In terms of next steps, further readiness assessments on the remaining transitions will follow. Work is already underway during August 2021 in undertaking assessments on transitions related to buildings: Electricity, Heating and Procurement (Works). These collectively make up 22% of our gross carbon emissions. Once again engagement and energy levels from the staff involved has been high with a real commitment to share their knowledge

and insight in informing corporate decision making. It is equally important to note however, that challenges are being identified and in terms of expectations the staff involved in identifying these rightly expect their observations to be given carefully consideration.

- 2.7 It is anticipated that all of the transitions will have been subject to a readiness assessment with high level actions identified for each during this financial year 21/22. Progress on agreed actions will be monitored via the Council's existing business planning process on an ongoing basis with updates provided by the identified leads on a quarterly basis.
- 2.8 **Welsh Government Net Zero Reporting Guidance**
In May 2021 the Welsh Government produced its guidance on its expectation in terms of content and reporting requirements for Net Zero Reporting for Local Authorities in Wales.
- 2.9 The Council is well placed to respond to this requirement and has been proactive in using the best advice and guidance available to develop accurate calculations of its carbon footprints for 2018/19 and 2019/20 which were instrumental in shaping an evidence based approach to our [Decarbonisation Plan](#). Furthermore, Officers representing the Council have provided insight into the calculations at a number of regional events during 2019 and 2020 having been identified as good practice by peer organisations such as Natural Resources Wales.
- 2.10 As a consequence of this, the Council is in a strong position to be able to respond to the Welsh Government reporting expectation. The Board in the July meeting agreed to set up a sub group of relevant officers to ensure work is undertaken to consider the minor recalculations required for our 2019/20 carbon footprint in-line with the guidance (now confirmed as the "base line" year), and to make arrangements for calculation for our 20/21 carbon footprint (and subsequent years which will follow).
- 2.11 The deadline set for this work (19/20 and 20/21) is 31 October 2021. On completion we will then need to calculate our 21/22 footprint by the end of June 2022 (and for every subsequent year). This updated position will be reported to Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.12 **National Policy Context**
The Council through its representation on the WLGA Decarbonisation Strategy Panel is kept up to date on emerging policy frameworks from Welsh Government. These include a number of proposed Local Government decarbonisation commitments which will form the Local Government contribution to the Public Sector Chapter of the Welsh Governments second delivery plan Net Zero Wales (NZW) 2021-2025 which is due to be published in October 2021. It is of note the proposed actions are being developed from the Decarbonisation Strategy Panel deep dives. It is worthy to note that insight gleaned from these deep dives has also being built into the readiness assessments being considered by the Board and CLT, which should place us in a stronger position by ensuring we are focussing our efforts on those things that will accelerate decarbonisation.

- 2.13 Members will be aware that the UK is hosting the 26th Climate Change Conference in Glasgow from 31 October 2021. COP 26, short for Conference of Parties, has published a number of goals for this summit and these and other information on what is planned can be found on its website: www.ukcop26.org
- 2.14 **Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly**
The Blaenau Gwent Climate Change Citizens Assembly was the very first of its kind in Wales. In March 2021, it brought together residents from the Blaenau Gwent area to consider the question: *'What should we do in Blaenau Gwent to tackle the climate crisis in a way that is fair and improves living standards for everyone?'*
- 2.15 44 participants from the area attended the Assembly meeting for a total of 23 hours to hear evidence from over 20 different experts, discuss the issues, and produce recommendations for what local public service organisations, communities and individuals could do to address the climate crisis and improve lives for people in Blaenau Gwent.
- 2.17 Following deliberation, the assembly members made a number of recommendations which are provided at Appendix E
- 2.18 An "all members" briefing session on the Climate Assembly was held earlier this year and a commitment was given to publish a Council Response to the findings and this work is underway and will be reported to Scrutiny Committee in due course.
- 2.19 The Council is also taking a lead role in developing the response provided to the Climate Assembly on behalf of the Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board and this work is also underway and will be completed this Autumn.
3. **Options for Recommendation**
- 3.1 This report will be considered by the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 15th September 2021, and any feedback will be presented verbally to the Executive Committee.
- 3.2 Option One
That the Committee considers and accepts the progress made as presented.
- Option Two
That the Committee considers the progress made and provides specific comments.
4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
- 4.1 Welsh Government published a delivery plan 'Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales' that calls for public sector leadership, including the ambition for the Welsh public sector to be carbon neutral by 2030. In September 2020, Council has approved an evidence based Decarbonisation Plan for the organisation.
- 4.2 The Decarbonisation Plan is an important element of the Council providing public leadership on climate change. The long-term implications of climate

change mean that is also central to the PSB's responsibilities under the Well-being of Future Generations Act. In particular, that in accordance with the Sustainable Development Principle.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

At this moment in time the Council has taken a business as usual approach to resourcing the Decarbonisation Plan. That said, as each transition is progressed and high level action agreed, costs will be identified to make this work happen and will, moving forward, form separate reports from business leads for consideration of any investment required. It is anticipated that investment decisions will need to be taken by the Council, Welsh Government and wider partners to enable local action.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

Having declared a climate emergency, reputational damage is a risk if we do not respond to the challenges facing us as we implement our agreed Decarbonisation Plan. The systematic way in which we are approaching the transition work should enable us to arrive at well informed proposals on the actions we need to take to move towards Net Zero. These actions will though need to be fully integrated into our business planning processes and closely monitored to ensure progress is maintained.

5.3 ***Legal***

The legislative context around climate change is evolving with both UK and Welsh Government announcing new, more ambitious emissions reductions targets.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

The full human resources implications in implementing the plan are not yet fully known. These will become clearer as leads take forward actions that emerge from the readiness assessments. These might include the need for officers with specialist skills and knowledge to deliver key elements. It is also highly likely that staff engagement will be a key enabler in what is really a programme of transformational change.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

See supporting appendices:

Appendix A: All Transitions Infographic from Decarbonisation Plan

Appendix B: BGCBC Carbon Footprint by Transition Breakdown

Appendix C Decarbonisation Board Terms of Reference

Appendix D: Transport Direct Summary Paper and Data Appendices

Appendix E: Climate Assembly Report

<https://cynnalcyrmru.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Blaenau-Gwent-Climate-Assembly-Report-ENG.pdf>

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

The Decarbonisation Plan helps to reduce the risks from climate change to service delivery, as well as identifying opportunities to develop a more resilient council for the public.

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

The development of the readiness assessments has at its core the involvement of key stakeholders from the relevant service areas. The Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly built on our existing public engagement with environmental issues, including recycling, nature areas and eco councils in schools.

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

The Decarbonisation Plan and the readiness assessment approach fully recognises the long term nature of some of the high level actions that will emerge from this process.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

Addressing increasing revenue costs from rising energy prices and a reliance on fossil fuels. It is important that decarbonisation and whole life cycle costs (both financial and carbon) are considered in all capital spending decisions, so that the Council is not locked into new carbon intensive infrastructure with high long-term running costs.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working.***

We are working with partners on climate change in Blaenau Gwent through the PSB Climate Mitigation Steering Group and Well-being Plan and at the regional level through Climate Ready Gwent. Work on regional projects is already underway, where public bodies in Gwent face similar challenges and can pool resources, such as EV charging and Fleet Review. Procurement is a major element of our carbon impact and many of our suppliers also supply other local public sector organisations, so collaboration will be key to engaging them with cutting their carbon emissions.

More immediately we are currently working with Aneurin Leisure Trust to identify those emissions we will need to include within carbon footprint in line with recent Welsh Government Guidance.

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

Integration remains a key element of the Decarbonisation Plan and our plans in tracking agreed actions through service area business plans demonstrates this.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

The Decarbonisation Plan is central to the Council's contribution to the Welsh Government ambition of a carbon neutral public sector by 2030.

6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***

Not required as this is a progress report and does not relate to strategic decisions.

6.9b. ***Equality Impact Assessment***

An EQIA was carried out for the Decarbonisation Plan and separate EQIA's will be carried out for major decarbonisation actions by relevant business leads as part of usual reporting arrangements.

7. ***Monitoring Arrangements***

7.1 The Board will oversee progress against the transitions, and reporting accordingly through the Managing Director to CLT.

Key actions agreed by the Board will be built into the service area business plans. This will ensure Decarbonisation actions are integrated into the Council usual performance management arrangements. This has already been carried out for Transport Direct action noted above.

Furthermore, progress updates will be made through the forward work programmes of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Executive Committees.

The Council will report appropriately to Welsh Government in-line with their Net Zero Reporting arrangements.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

Appendix A: All Transitions Infographic from Decarbonisation Plan

Appendix B: BGCBC Carbon Footprint by Transition Breakdown

Appendix C Decarbonisation Board Terms of Reference

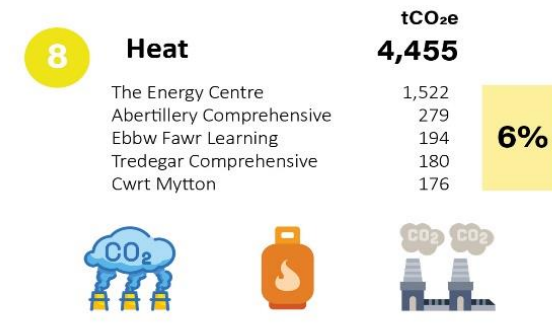
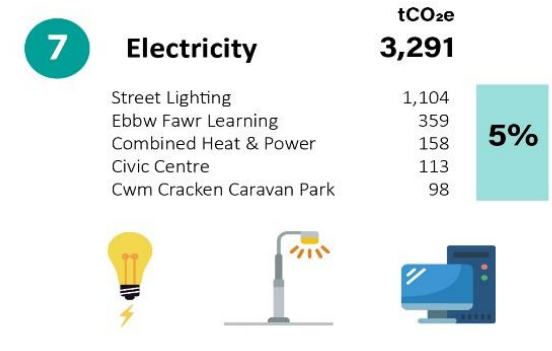
Appendix D: Transport Direct Summary Paper and Data Appendices

Appendix E: Climate Assembly Report

<https://cynnalcyrmru.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Blaenau-Gwent-Climate-Assembly-Report-ENG.pdf>

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Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council: Transitions Summary 2019/20



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Appendix B: BGCBC Carbon Footprint by Transition Breakdown

Transitions Breakdown	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20
Transition 1 - Transport Direct				
Fleet Fuel Use	1,057	1,105	1,039	987
Employee Commute			2,200	2,005
Employee Business Travel			294	279
Vehicle Expenditure			2,697	2,329
Transition 1 Total			6,230	5,600
Transition 2 - Transport Comissioned				
Onward Waste			215	212
Home to School Transport			164	162
Bus Service Subsidy			105	
Transition 2 Total			484	374
Transition 3 - Sequestration				
Trees - Local Nature Reserves			-763	-763
Transition 3 Total			-763	-763
Transition 4 - Procurement Goods				
IT & Office Machinery			1,317	2,430
Food and Drink			1,276	1,335
Equipment and Furniture			945	1,000
Machinery			465	554
Paper and Printing			220	188
Water Supply			128	140
Glass and Metal Products			57	28
Soap and Cleaning Materials			40	39
Clothing			4	7
Transition 4 Total			4,452	5,721
Transition 5 - Procurement Services				
Social Care and Health			12,546	13,161
Education			11,983	13,064
Pensions/Investments			8,100	6,018
Public Administration			4,530	4,653
Legal and Consultancy Services			2,505	2,331
Computer Services			309	289
Post and Telecommunications			261	276
Miscellaneous			287	201
Transition 5 Total			40,521	39,993
Transition 6 - Procurement Works				
Construction and Maintenance			6,816	7,236
Transition 6 Total			6,816	7,236
Transition 7 - Electricity				
Street Lighting	1,720	1,517	1,101	1,104
Metered	3,472	2,657	2,011	1,944
Energy Centre	174	329	247	243
Transition 7 Total	5,366	4,503	3,359	3,291
Transition 8 - Heating				
Heating	3,974	4,463	4,423	4,455
Transition 8 Total	3,974	4,463	4,423	4,455
Transition 9 - Waste				
Recycled/Composted	-9,527	-10,216	-11,475	-11,828
Incinerated	5,450	5,369	4,053	3,611
Landfill	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.4
Transition 9 Total	-4,077	-4,847	-7,422	-8,216

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Appendix C: Decarbonisation Board Terms of Reference

Purpose

To oversee the implementation of the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Decarbonisation Plan.

Responsibilities

Responsibilities will include:

- Coordination
- Performance management
- Communication
- Delivery

Coordination

Board members will use their leadership positions to help direct and support their teams in the development of delivery projects aligned to the Decarbonisation Transition

This will include:

- supporting the development and completion of readiness assessments for each of the transitions and developing initiatives to respond to any development areas identified
- prioritising those projects and activities that will have the greatest beneficial impact on decarbonisation for BGCBC
- agreeing what existing and new initiatives that contribute to the BGCBC Decarbonisation Plan will be monitored by the Board e.g. assessing the contribution of existing programmes of work to the Net Zero Target
- ensuring complimentary programmes of work e.g. Active Travel and BGCBC work in supporting the Gwent Travel Charter are aligned to avoid confusion and or duplication of effort
- ensuring and supporting the development of robust programme management and governance arrangements are in place for the implementation of the plan
- ensuring appropriate systems are in place to achieve improvements and that staff and teams across the Council work effectively together
- ensuring all policy and service reviews align to the Net Zero Ambition. This will include the identification of contradictions and the development of mitigation plans to align them at a future date
- considering the impact of existing collaborative programmes of work and how they impact on / align with the Council's Decarbonisation Plan

Performance Management

Board members will:

- ensure transitional delivery plans are clear with measurable performance targets
- support the development of a performance dashboard to track progress towards Net Zero
- consider risks and barriers to progress and support cross organisational problem solving
- support the development and consider the findings of readiness assessments for work plans in transitions. This might include the need for capacity building for particular specialist skills
- monitor the delivery and progress of the Board's agreed programmes of work and ensure the reporting of progress as required e.g. by Welsh Government
- agree how Scrutiny is updated on progress and commit their teams to providing any requested reports as required by the Board in a timely fashion

Communication & Engagement

Board members will actively contribute to the development of a communications and engagement plan / strategy that supports the implementation of the Decarbonisation Plan.

Membership

Membership of the Decarbonisation Programme Board will be determined by CLT.

Meetings

Meetings will take place in the first instance on a bi monthly basis.

Decisions will be agreed by consensus. Where consensus cannot be reached a decision will be made on the basis of the views of the majority of those members.

Support Arrangements

Administrative support, action notes (not minutes), agendas and meeting appointments to be provided by Governance and Partnerships.

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Appendix D: Transport Direct Summary Paper and Data Appendices

From: Paul Symes, Daniel Wheelock Policy & Partnerships

To: Corporate Leadership Team

Date: 8 July 2021

Subject: CLT “check and challenge” Transition 1 Transport Direct,

BGCBC Decarbonisation Plan

1.Purpose of this report

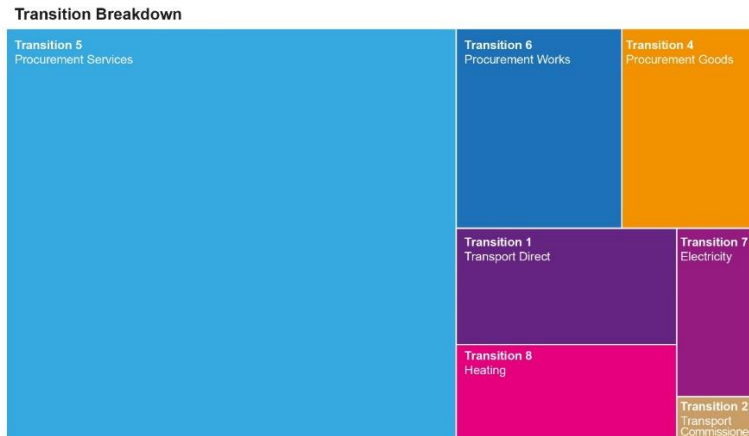
The purpose of this report is to update CLT on the progress on the readiness assessment work relating to the Transport Direct transition overseen by the Decarbonisation Board and to provide CLT with a “check and challenge” opportunity on the proposed high level actions agreed by the Board at its meeting on 1 July 2021.

2.The Assessment Process

The readiness assessment on Transport Direct was collaboratively produced in accordance with a methodology agreed by the Decarbonisation Board. Its aim is to identify the main steps BGCBC needs to take to achieve Net Zero in this transition and how ready the organisation is to take these actions. Transport Direct is one of nine transitions identified in our Decarbonisation Plan 2020-2030 and makes up 8% of our gross carbon emissions.

Transport Direct includes all emissions associated with our fleet (energy use and manufacture), and all energy use from other journeys undertaken by BGCBC staff in their own vehicles, both as part of their job role and travelling to work. It does not include travel by other organisations delivering services on our behalf, travel associated with deliveries to or from us, or transport services we commission others to provide on our behalf, e.g. buses.

The below schematic shows the relative carbon emissions produced by each transition (the other two transitions, Transition 3 Sequestration and Transition 9 Waste produce negative emissions).



Further assessments on the remaining transitions will follow. Planning is already underway to undertake assessments on transitions related to buildings: Electricity, Heating and Procurement (Works). These collectively make up approximately 22% of our gross carbon emissions. Subject to availability of stakeholders, it is hoped we will be able to report the findings of this work in September 2021.

3. Involvement

Key stakeholders from a range of Directorates were requested to be involved in the creation of this readiness assessment through online workshops facilitated by the Policy and Partnership Team. Without their involvement this assessment would not have been possible and they have brought valuable knowledge on what is currently happening and planned and important insight into how certain challenges might be overcome.

4. Findings

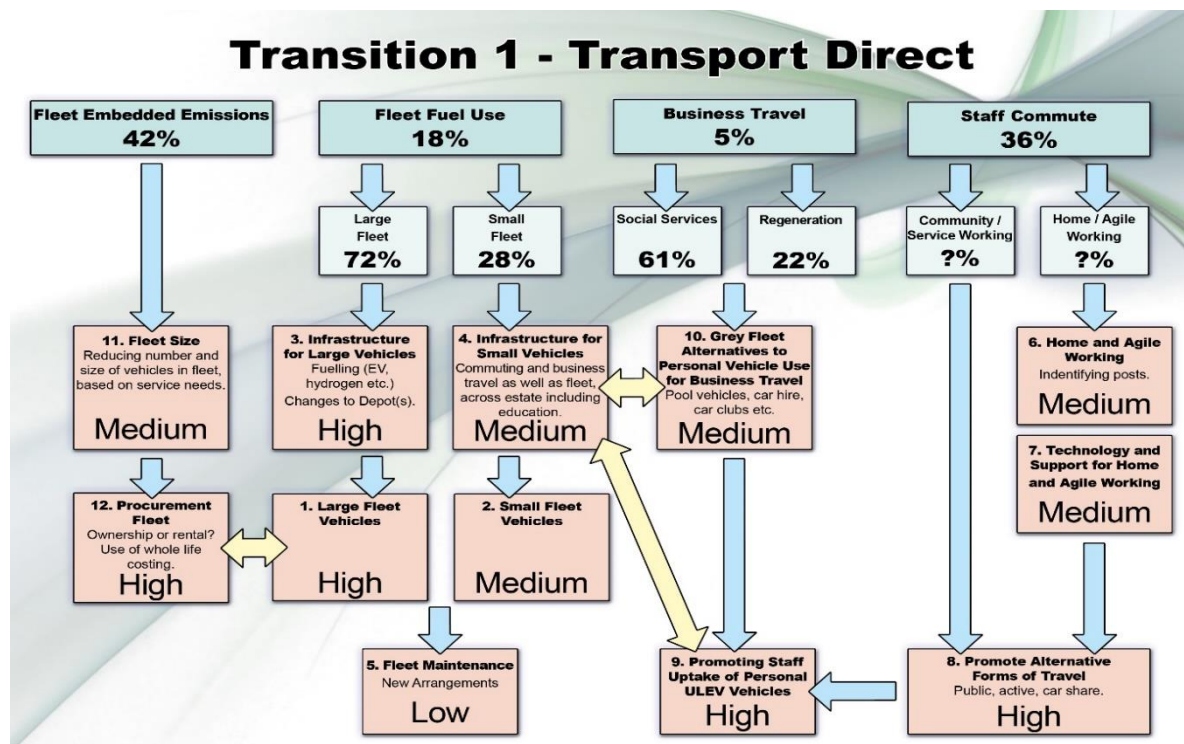
Participants in the workshops were provided with data about the main emissions sources within the Transport Direct transition (See Appendix 1). The assessment identified 12 key long-term transition actions that we will need to take to reach Net Zero. The difficulty level of each of these actions was assessed as one of the three following difficulty levels:

Low Difficulty	Actions that are technically feasible and could be undertaken using existing, or limited additional, resources.
Medium Difficulty	Actions that are technically feasible but will require significant additional resources.
High Difficulty	Actions where best alternative is not yet known and/or not yet technically possible.

These difficulty levels were based on discussions of our organisational readiness across five categories: (i) technical, (ii) policy, (iii) financial, (iv) workforce and (v) delivery readiness. (See Appendix 2 for full details).

The diagram below summarises the findings of the Readiness Assessment. The blue boxes on the top line show the proportion of emissions that come from each of the four main emission sources in the transition. For most of these emission sources the next line shows a secondary breakdown of where these emissions come from. For example, 5% of the emissions in the transition come from business travel, of those business travel emissions 61% come from travel by social services staff. (The break down for staff commute should be available shortly)

The 12 key transition actions that we will need to take to achieve Net Zero are in the pink boxes, which also include the difficulty level identified for each action. The blue arrows indicate which emissions source the action addresses and the order in which the actions reduce these emissions. Yellow arrows show interrelationships between actions. Continuing the previous example, the first action to reduce emissions from business travel is grey fleet alternatives to the use of personal vehicles, where this is not a suitable solution, then promoting staff uptake of personal ULEV vehicles is the next action. Both of these actions will also rely on charging infrastructure for small vehicles being provided.



These actions provide a long-term view of what we need to do to reach Net Zero, the readiness assessment workshops also considered what actions we could take now to continue and accelerate this transition. The next section details these actions.

5. Refined high level actions

These recommended “high level actions” have been drawn from detailed work initiated and considered by the Board. Further more detailed information on this work is available from the policy and performance team and will be of value to leads expected to develop the detailed work plans that will sit under the below high level actions.

5.1 Fleet

- Develop a fleet plan and resource its implementation by building costs into Corporate Medium Term Financial Plan. (Lead: Community Services)
- Develop and resource a low carbon depot. (Lead: Community Services)
- Ensure procurement arrangements are in place to support the plan. This needs to recognise the inter-dependant work on the new depot and collaborative opportunities at a regional and national level. (Lead: Commercial Services)
- Replace small fleet ULEV in phased way in line with available space, grid capacity and infrastructure. (Lead: Community Services)

5.2 Travel

- Embed the new operating model and assess its impact in terms of decarbonisation. (Lead: Commercial Services)
- Consider how to further reduce commute / travel impact in wider areas of the business e.g. Schools and Social Services. (Lead: Commercial Services)
- Investigate and identify staff demand to travel more actively and consider business case to meet this demand e.g. showers at main sites, secure shower facilities, safe storage and e-charging for cycles. (Lead: Community Services – Active Travel)
- Develop a plan for non-depot charging infrastructure for fleet and personal ULEV vehicles at key staff sites in the new operating model. (Lead: Regeneration)
- Explore how staff can be encouraged to switch to ULEV. (Lead: Commercial Services)

6. Recommendations

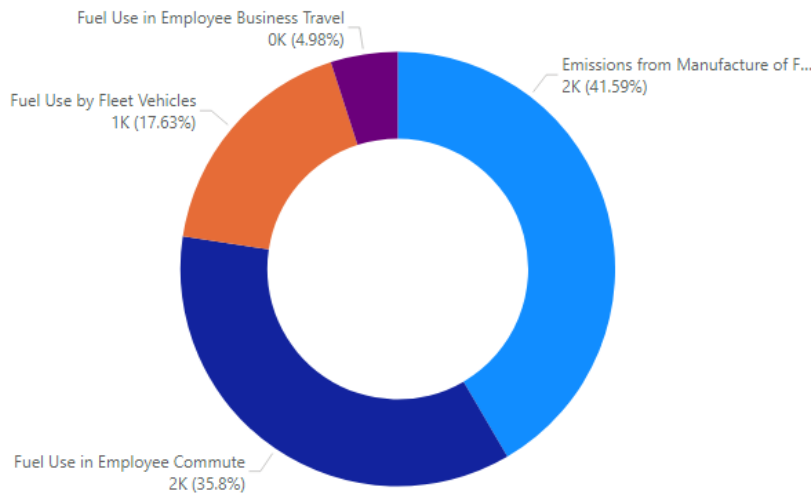
1. Consider Check/Challenge the high level actions;
2. Confirm Lead Services and ensure actions are embedded into Business Plans and work programmes;

Appendix 1: Transition 1 – Transport Direct Data

There are four main sources of emissions in this transition identified in the plan:

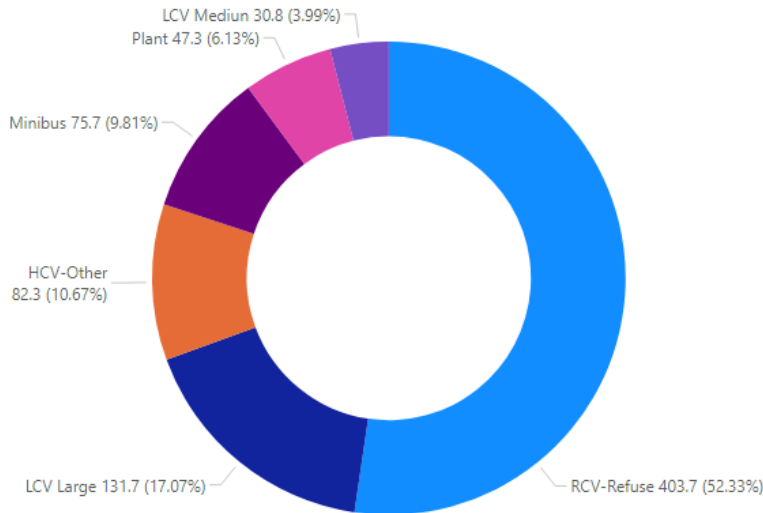
Transitions Breakdown	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20
Transition 1 - Transport Direct				
1. Fuel Use by Fleet Vehicles	1,057	1,105	1,039	987
2. Fuel Use in Employee Commute			2,200	2,005
3. Fuel Use in Employee Business Travel			294	279
4. Emissions from Manufacture of Fleet Vehicles			2,697	2,329
Transition 1 Total			6,230	5,600

19-20 by Transition 1 - Transport Direct



1. Fuel Use by Fleet Vehicles

Refuse vehicles make up over half of fleet fuel emissions, and large fleet vehicles contribute 72% of these emissions.



Fleet	Fleet Size	Annual Mileage	CO ₂ e footprint (tonnes)	Total energy kWh (gross)
RCV – Refuse	26	219,809	403.7	1,630,100
HCV – Other	15	63,617	82.3	332,200
Minibus	12	105,300	75.7	305,800
LCV Large	38	194,381	131.7	531,900
LCV Medium	12	77,198	30.8	124,400
Plant	5	27,442	47.3	191,100
Grey Fleet	959	1,202,402	319.1	1,324,600
Total	1,067	1,890,148	1,091	4,440,100

2. Fuel Use in Employee Commute

Nearly half of commuting mileage is associated with travel to education buildings, the potential for home working for education staff may well be lower.

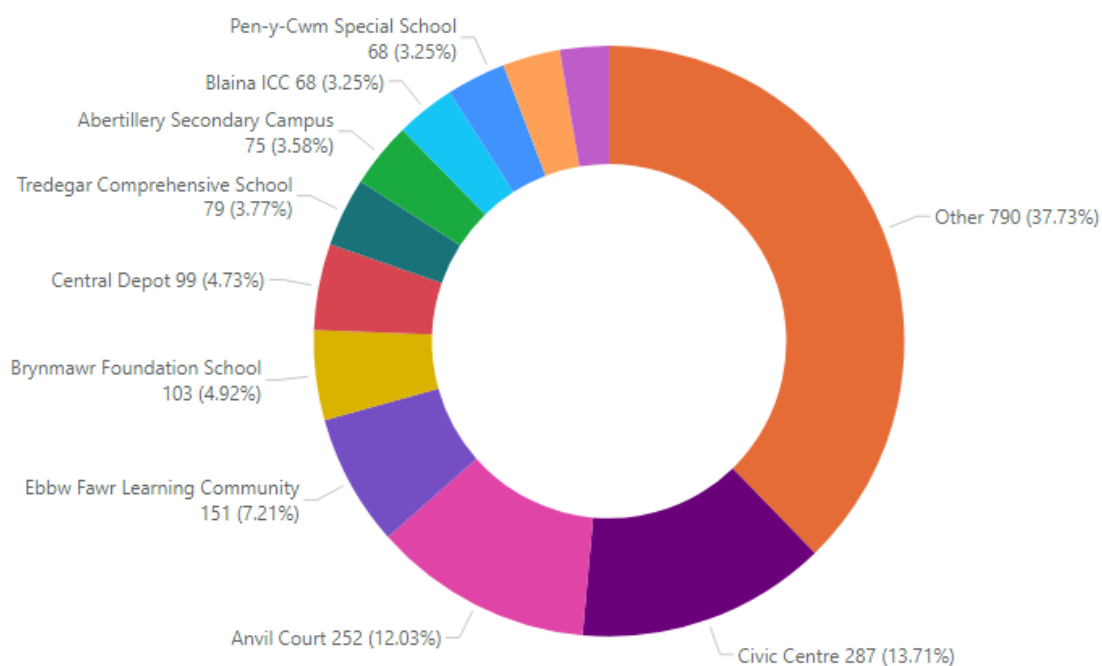
Work Base (2019/20)	Estimate distance travelled per year - round trip to work miles	Yearly Carbon Footprint - metric tons of CO ₂ e
Non Educational	4,631,868	1,050
Educational	4,605,510	1,044

Travel to 11 work bases accounted for 62% of all commuting miles pre-Covid. These buildings may be priorities for EV and other transport infrastructure improvements. Closing the Civic Centre will have a large impact on these calculations. With this closure four of the top six commuting locations are secondary schools.

Work Base (2019/20)	Estimate distance travelled per year - round trip to work miles	Yearly Carbon Footprint - metric tons of CO ₂ e
Civic Centre	1,263,564	287
Anvil Court	1,110,802	252

Work Base (2019/20)	Estimate distance travelled per year - round trip to work miles	Yearly Carbon Footprint - metric tons of CO2e
Ebbw Fawr Learning Community	665,929	151
Brynmawr Foundation School	452,088	103
Central Depot	435,792	99
Tredegarr Comprehensive School	348,907	79
Abertillery Secondary Campus	328,720	75
Pen-y-Cwm Special School	301,781	68
Blaina ICC	299,632	68
The River Centre 3-16 Learning Community	291,195	66
Ebbw Vale Family Resource Centre	247,642	56

Yearly Carbon Footprint - metric tons of CO2e by Work Base (2019/20)



3. Fuel Use in Employee Business Travel

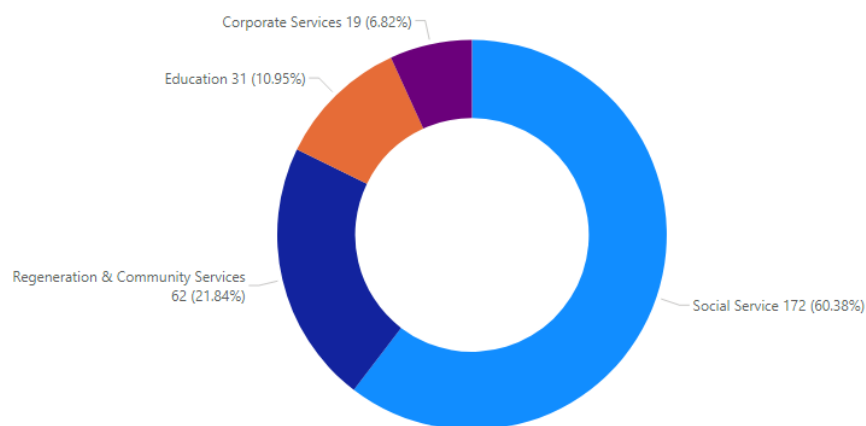


Table 6-1: Departmental grey fleet mileage claims

Department	Mileage	%	Cost
Social Services	725,974	60.4%	£326,688
Regeneration & Community Services	262,571	21.8%	£117,568
Education	131,714	11.0%	£59,271
Corporate Services	82,012	6.8%	£36,905
Unknown	131	0.0%	£59
Total	1,202,402		£540,492

As is often the case in local authorities the department that is responsible for most of the mileage claimed is Social Services.

The three largest work bases account for 55% of all business miles claimed. These figures will also inform calculation of EV infrastructure demand. Again the closure of the Civic Centre will have a significant effect.

Table 6-3: Mileage at the top three sites by department (mileage in thousands)

Location	Social Services	Regeneration & Community Service	Education	Corporate Services	Site total
Anvil Court	266.2		25.2	15.8	307.2
Civic Centre		204.9		50.7	255.6
EVFRC	104.9				104.9
Department Total	371.1	204.9	25.27	66.5	667.7






4. Emissions from Manufacture of Fleet Vehicles

These figures are calculated on the basis of annual spend on vehicle purchase and hire. No further breakdown of these figures is currently available. In addition, information about the embodied emissions of specific types of vehicle is not widely available at the moment, so these figures have a wider margin for error than the other emissions sources. We also have less control over these types of procurement emissions.

Note on data. The data used in this section is drawn from a number of different sources and is for several recent years. For this reason, not all figures across different graphs match. It is the best available data, and is sufficient for assessing the relative importance of different elements of the transition.

Appendix 2 Transition 1 – Transport Direct Readiness

Readiness Categories

 <p>Technical Readiness</p>	<p>Are the technologies/behaviours needed to reduce carbon emissions/energy use available and ready to deploy now?</p>
 <p>Policy Readiness</p>	<p>Are the policies/plans needed to support delivery in place now? Both within Blaenau Gwent Council and in the wider regional and national policy context?</p>
 <p>Financial Readiness</p>	<p>Are the funds available, are there investable options with business models ready to be deployed? How do these fit with existing budgets and financial processes?</p>
 <p>Workforce Readiness</p>	<p>Do we have the support and buy-in of the workforce? Will they require support or skills development?</p>
 <p>Delivery Readiness</p>	<p>Do we have the capacity, organisational structure and supply chains we need to deliver? How well do we understand where our emissions come from and can we measure reductions? Will changes be needed in how community uses our services?</p>

Assessment of 12 Key Actions

1 Large Fleet Vehicles.

Difficulty Level: High

<p>Technical Readiness</p>	<p>In many cases the low carbon alternatives are not available for many of the large vehicle types that we use to deliver services at moment. Even when vehicles are on the market there are issues about practical performance against actual performance; particularly in relation to (i) the use of auxiliary equipment that draws on power such as lifting and heating and (ii) the topography of BG, hill starts and climbs are a major power drain. There are examples of Local Authorities procuring vehicles that not been able to deliver service.</p> <p>Also need to consider when vehicles may become available. Some of the large fleet may need to be replaced before low carbon alternatives are on the market, or when costs are greater than available budget. Also rapid pace of change in market may mean that want to avoid being tied into purchasing fleet, when significantly better alternatives may be available within the vehicles working life time.</p>
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Financial Readiness	Large fleet models that are available are typically at least double the upfront costs. Even as ULEV prices drop, budgets will need to reflect that savings will come from lower running costs for fuel. Typically we have leased vehicles but WG funding has required purchase, leading to further up-front costs. Need to develop financial model for low carbon fleet.
Policy Readiness	Important to remember that vehicles only low carbon if power source is low carbon. This requires that charging infrastructure is supplied with green electricity, either generated by ourselves or via procurement. Will need to be changes to procurement policies to reflect new decarbonisation requirements (see 12 Procurement Fleet)
Delivery Readiness	ULEV vehicles will still need to provide departments with best vehicles to deliver services. Supporting infrastructure needs to be in place so new vehicles can deliver services. We need to learn from experience of other LAs who adopting ULEV large fleet. Need to understand vehicle charging needs and times so fleet can deliver services.
Workforce Readiness	Staff training required for use of alternative fuel vehicles.

2 Small Vehicles.

Difficulty Level: Medium

Technical Readiness	Greater availability of alternatives for small ULEV. Just begun with initial replacement of four small vans for highways inspections.
Financial Readiness	Welsh Government funding for initial vehicles only allow purchase which required departments to find additional budget. Even if purchase not always required and cost differentials not as great for larger vehicles, need to ensure that lower running costs are reflected in how set budgets and the balance between capital and revenue. Need to consider cradle to grave costs of vehicles, particularly if will be purchasing more vehicles and their potential resale value.
Policy Readiness	Decarbonisation need to be considered within tender process
Delivery Readiness	All LAs will have the same issues around fleet and work has been done at a Gwent level so we should work together to make the case for investment. Users need to understand the technology
Workforce Readiness	Training on vehicles for garage mechanics

3 Infrastructure for Large Vehicles. Fuelling (EV, hydrogen etc.) and other changes needed to Depot(s).

Difficulty Level: Medium (for BGCBC costs are high but technology exists), but High (for Grid Capacity that will be needed to supply energy which outside of our control)

Technical Readiness	<p>Current Depot is restrictive, limited space, double parking etc. Will need to be space for all vehicles to park by charging points. New Depot would allow us to accommodate transition to fleet of EV's.</p> <p>New Depot will need to be a carbon neutral facility. In order to ensure that fleet running off renewable electricity will need both solar and storage battery capacity</p> <p>There is a wider issue of grid infrastructure that is needed - costs for installing could be an issue, also grid capacity is a significant issue. Heads of Valleys already running near capacity. This is larger issue than just BG, Western Power operates at larger scale covering number of other areas through same grid. Green Recovery Investment being explored for SE Wales including Rassau to address, available funding is £20million, but total costs could be £40-50 million.</p> <p>The space and cost implications of Hydrogen are even greater than electric. Hydrogen storage, production is difficult, costly and would need a lot of investment. Could BG achieve economically viable scale? Some investigation taking place for Hydrogen pipeline for Heads of Valleys.</p>
Financial Readiness	New Depot is significant investment, additional upfront cost to ULEV fleet.
Policy Readiness	
Delivery Readiness	Current work ongoing to replace existing depot with new future proofed facility for all plant and equipment.
Workforce Readiness	

4. Infrastructure for Small Vehicles. Including for commuting and business travel as well as fleet, across all council estate including education.

Difficulty Level: Medium

Technical Readiness	<p>There will be strain on local grid capacity from EV infrastructure at other council buildings. The local electric grid will need updating for all the demand, not just from BGCBC.</p> <p>Need to ensure that use of infrastructure is optimised, right type of connections, in right place, digital system/booking to ensure that charging points available when needed by users.</p>
Financial Readiness	
Policy Readiness	Need to develop frameworks for procuring from companies who will be installing and running charging infrastructure.

	Where drawing on grid supply need to make sure that this is renewable electricity. This issue of additionality important link to Transition 7- Electricity
Delivery Readiness	<p>Site-based assessments will need to be undertaken to consider potential demand (number of points required) and the implications of charging point installation upon access, parking availability etc. Parking on schools' sites is already limited.</p> <p>Unlike at Depot schools will not be able to generate all energy requirements via solar so more issues around ensuring that using renewable electricity. Accessible EV points around borough rather than at depot. Need to consider where and when vehicles will need to charge.</p> <p>EV Charge points have been installed throughout Gwent and Cardiff Capital Region are in the process of installing more charge points</p> <p>Large number of public bodies and other organisations in BG will be doing same transition. This will put additional strain on grid, but also opportunity to collaborate on procurement and share charging infrastructure.</p>
Workforce Readiness	

5. Fleet Maintenance. New arrangements required for low carbon fleet.

Difficulty Level: Low

Technical Readiness	Adaptations needed to current workshop
Financial Readiness	
Policy Readiness	
Delivery Readiness	
Workforce Readiness	Upskill and train existing mechanics to maintain ULEV Fleet Collaboration with Coleg Gwent

6. Home and Agile Working. Identifying posts where possible and supporting.

Difficulty Level: Medium

Technical Readiness	Specialist skills and technology at community hubs to enable public access to services. Could have more video phone capacity with public facing services, including public accessing technology at community hub.
Financial Readiness	

Policy Readiness	<p>Work currently on going in relation to role designations (Home / Agile / Service) further consultation required. Awaiting Approval of the Agile Working Policy due end of May. There are still a lot of unresolved questions about how different patterns of work in new model will work in practise, e.g. community roles.</p> <p>Reasonable adjustment is an important principle in considering the different forms of support and changes that may have to take place for individual staff members.</p>
Delivery Readiness	<p>The ability to work from home or agilely varies significantly. The scoring of this action is based on realising home and agile working for those who this is identified as being a possibility for. A significant number of staff will not be able to save carbon in this way.</p> <p>The scale of emissions reduction from shift to home and agile working will not be clear until posts identified, and there will also still be variation from individual circumstances within role delegations.</p> <p>There are a large number of elements to this change.</p> <p>There may be other elements of service delivery that potentially conflict with these changes, e.g. Education Recovery Plan.</p> <p>Paper based systems in some areas like planning require office presence (Social services example of digital already being in place)</p>
Workforce Readiness	<p>There are substantial issues around wellbeing and health and safety that need to be worked through</p> <p>Not all people have the right equipment, chairs, tables, space reliable internet, extra heating and electric costs etc, and will be impacted differently by changes.</p>

7. Technology Support for Home and Agile Working. Network capacity, hosting virtual meetings, support for specialist software and other service requirements.

Difficulty Level: Medium

Technical Readiness	<p>Digital storage, switching to cloud instead of physical server. One system for council, could enhance file sharing.</p> <p>Key theme identified has been limitations of Pulse, looking to shift towards a VPN that will be more stable, secure and allow greater access.</p>
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	<p>Looking at software and hardware needed at home for areas such as GIS, looking at this over all service areas. Currently a report going to DMT identifying where there are pinch points for users of specialist systems.</p> <p>Teams telephony to replace land lines, or corporate mobiles, headsets, use of personal device securely. Contact Centre to work with Teams telephony.</p> <p>Bring your own device policy. Could have significant carbon savings, but also issues around device performance and working hours.</p> <p>Mobile worker functionality, stop repeat visits to office, reduce printed instructions. Use of Always on VPN to improve accessibility of server on move. Could all reduce number of journeys into work base.</p>
Financial Readiness	
Policy Readiness	Integrate carbon performance data into existing management/performance systems e.g. itrent.
Delivery Readiness	<p>Home working will be extremely challenging for school staff. However, we can consider options as part of our Education recovery plan.</p> <p>What will be impact of community workbases? Can technology be used to provide greater digital access to range of services at community hubs? I.e. Members of public without digital access/skills at home can talk to range of services via tech at community hubs.</p> <p>The technology and infrastructure needed for home/agile working vary significantly with service needs. Is there programme to identify needs? Service and individual level?</p>
Workforce Readiness	<p>Need to recognise that there has been a significant element of making do in a crisis in the rapid transition to new digital arrangement for home working. Important that take time to make sure best arrangement are in place and upskill workforce. For example, Office 365 been rolled out largely during this period. Need to make sure that make full use of potential.</p>

8. Promote Alternative forms of Travel. Encouraging shift to car sharing, public and active transport for commuting and business travel.

Difficulty Level: High

Technical Readiness	<p>There has been significant shift in commute and work travel patterns, this reduced demand will effect availability of car shares and public transport more permanently.</p> <p>The specific topography of BG is relevant, especially to active travel, also issues around viability of public transport compared to other urban areas.</p>
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Financial Readiness	Cost associated with promotion of these alternatives are not part of current budgets
Policy Readiness	<p>Need to consider incentives for staff who do choose active travel. For example, if want to cycle to work then should some of their changing time be part of paid work hours or rewarded in some other way?</p> <p>When providing facilities need to do assessments understand where demand is/will be. Educations/schools may be important given limited ability to homework.</p> <p>Currently very limited information about who this promotion might be targeted at, and how.</p>
Delivery Readiness	<p>The cycle to work scheme could assist here, however, we will need to be recognition of importance of infrastructure for active travel, such as security of bikes, most importantly showering facilities if going to travel into work this way. New Depot taking this into account for example.</p> <p>From a schools perspective, have traffic and travel assessments which we undertake when developing new sites to support engagement with staff around active travel, car sharing, parking and access requirements. These could be reviewed and adapted to capture the current context - but we will need to consider the timing of this, as currently, staff are discouraged from car sharing due to COVID-19</p> <p>Public transport could be a challenge for frontline staff that have specific start / end time of work. would need significantly improved public transport infrastructure.</p>
Workforce Readiness	COVID has a significant impact on this transition. Not clear when and how be possible to make full use of public transport and lift shares.

9. Promoting Staff uptake of Personal ULEV vehicles.

Difficulty Level: High

Technical Readiness	<p>Relatively short travel distances for BG staff mean that less issues with vehicle range limits, but also less potential for cost savings on energy use over time to offset initial purchase costs.</p> <p>Booking system optimisation to make charging available. Flags up availability, provide link to wider networks.</p> <p>Aware that housing stock in BG means that home charging may be more limited. We have started to see residential charging points installed, renewing charging points at Works, City Deal playing role. At early stage in terms of low total capacity, but are seeing good usage. However, charging costs will be higher than home charging.</p>
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	Also issue of additionality, i.e. whether staff using green energy to charge vehicle.
Financial Readiness	Electric vehicles are much more expensive to purchase than conventional, and limited second hand market at moment. Provide incentive scheme for staff to purchase EV, but any loans must not be too expensive to pay back.
Policy Readiness	Need to consider financial arrangements around staff charging. Commonly estimates of cost savings for running costs are often based on home charging price of electricity. Can BG offer similar rates at work for those without potential for home charging? This would be very different from current situations where don't provide petrol to staff, a completely new policy area. Trial rides/try before you buy something that might be offered to staff, as has been done elsewhere and for BG Taxi drivers.
Delivery Readiness	Infrastructure plans will need to be in place to support staff take up. Major sites where many staff travel to will be important, New Depot considering, also Anvil Court. Schools, particularly secondary schools have large numbers of potential users, but also have limited parking/charging capacity Many staff work out in the community so need access to charging points at home and in accessible public place as well as at work base.
Workforce Readiness	Cost will be a major factor for staff Need to support staff by providing infrastructure in workplace car parks

10. Grey Fleet Alternatives to Personal Vehicle Use for Business Travel. Pool vehicles, car hire, car clubs etc.

Difficulty Level: Low

Technical Readiness	Availability of Newer electric vehicles in this area should not be an issue
Financial Readiness	Car pool / vehicles – would need to be resourced i.e. staffing / vehicle costs – is this needed now with the new ways of working?
Policy Readiness	For larger schemes such as pool vehicles it is achievable, the bigger question is whether there is sufficient demand to make viable both financially and in terms of saving carbon. This would require further investigation. Social Care most likely area might be beneficial. Car hire is down historically, but still has place for long distance travel, would be relatively simple to ensure that using ULEV vehicles for this.

Delivery Readiness	<p>Range of technical options that can reduce business travel: Mobile worker functionality, stop repeat visits to office, reduce printed instructions. Use of Always on VPN to improve accessibility of server on move</p> <p>Gwent are doing work around Grey Fleet - this is being supported by Welsh Government Energy Service this will help make the case to WG for funding to take things forward</p> <p>Will business use require charging points away from main workbase? Especially if vehicles in use throughout day</p> <p>Most crucial element in making work is the Digital booking system, route management system so meets service needs while not using vehicles inefficiently. Could route optimisation be used for grey fleet? Not area that been applied to yet</p>
Workforce Readiness	

11. Fleet Size. Reducing number and size of vehicles in fleet, based on service needs.

Difficulty Level: Low (Medium corporate level)

Technical Readiness	Route Optimisation. Including live updates with road closures and not miss addresses
Financial Readiness	
Policy Readiness	<p>Sharing vehicles across services, with system to manage.</p> <p>The number of minibuses have been reduced, historically was the case that some were underused, but most fleet reductions have been driven by austerity</p> <p>Where we have reduced the fleet within Community Options, potentially there is an increase in private cars on the road. as service users were accessing services via alternative means of transport in line with the Assisted Transport policy</p> <p>In some areas fleet is shared across several authorities with one serving as host hub.</p> <p>Schools do appear to be procuring more minibuses, these not hosted at council in same way as rest of fleet.</p> <p>More deliberate carbon led reduction of fleet size is more difficult, decisions have tended to be made on service by service, and case by case basis. More corporate oversight of service needs and fleet use would be needed to make this type of carbon led reduction.</p>

Delivery Readiness	<p>Fleet requirements are service dependant and rely on each service area to determine what their needs are.</p> <p>Route Optimisation. Including live updates with road closures and not miss addresses</p> <p>Expand route optimisation to smaller vehicles.</p> <p>Improved use of mycouncil services, mobile worker technology. Visit frequencies/service demand info inform fleet size. E.g. Green waste collection seasonal demand.</p>
Workforce Readiness	

12. Procurement Fleet. Ownership or Rental? Use of Whole Life Costing

Difficulty Level: High

Technical Readiness	<p>Market forever changing, not just vehicles but associated infrastructure requirements.</p> <p>There are real supply shortages of suitable vehicles in some areas as large number of organisations looking to purchase.</p>
Financial Readiness	<p>Corporate Investment needed</p> <p>Term of ownership of vehicles need to be considered including cost analysis between purchase / lease and Contract Hire. If vehicles are leased, then the cost of the vehicle can be spread over its useful life reducing the initial cost impact on the Revenue budgets. If owned/bought outright, potential for a Capital Receipt at the end of its useful life if sold on.</p> <p>Ability to procure vehicles in most financially effective way constrained in number of ways, including grant funding conditions, also the shift in balance of revenue and capital costs of vehicles not being reflected in budgets.</p> <p>Grant funding may become available at a point in time, but it is not guaranteed to be available when the fleet needs to be replaced</p> <p>Even when Funding is available can have Impacts on Revenue budgets of services as may not cover whole cost.</p> <p>Capital grants - recent grant didn't allow us to lease / contract hire, therefore spread the capital cost over a number of years.</p> <p>How long before there are better and more efficient vehicles are produced so leasing may be the best option to renew the fleet to better vehicles every few years?</p>
Policy Readiness	<p>Will need to be significant and ongoing change to existing procurement frameworks and specifications as market evolves.</p>

	<p>This also relevant to consideration of issues such as whole life cycle carbon impacts. Availability of information about scope 3 impacts of vehicles, whole life costs may be limited. If/when available need to be considered in procurement decisions.</p> <p>May also include need to consider replacement batteries in decision making in future? Including their use as power storage solutions</p>
Delivery Readiness	
Workforce Readiness	

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Cynulliad Hinsawdd
Climate Assembly

Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly



Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly Report

This report was drafted by [Cynnal Cymru](#) and the [Electoral Reform Society Cymru](#), two of the organising partners of the Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly.



Ebbw Vale



Abertillery



Tredegar



Brynmawr

1. Introduction

The Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly was held from 6 - 28 March 2021.

The Assembly took place online via Zoom. 50 residents of Blaenau Gwent were selected by sortition to address the question:

“What should we do in Blaenau Gwent to tackle the climate crisis in a way that is fair and improves living standards for everyone?”

44 participants attended the first assembly session and 43 participants were present at the final session for voting on recommendations. Attendance was stable throughout all sessions with 43 being the lowest attendance.

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

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

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

The agenda, videos of sessions and additional questions for speakers can be found [on the website](#).

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

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

* Themes democratically selected by assembly members

2. Recommendations

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

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

A full list of recommendations voted on, ranked in order of support, is available in Appendix 1.

3. Why a climate assembly in Blaenau Gwent?

The Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly was commissioned by a consortium of civil society organisations and housing associations.

The organising partners were:

- [Cynnal Cymru - Sustain Wales](#)
- [Electoral Reform Society Cymru](#)
- [Linc Housing Cymru](#)
- [Melin Homes](#)
- [Tai Calon Community Housing Association](#)
- [United Welsh Housing Association](#)



In early 2020, in the context of other existing and future decarbonisation initiatives in the housing sector¹, Cynnal Cymru, ERS Cymru and United Welsh Housing met to discuss how housing tenants and wider communities might be more involved in decarbonisation plans of Housing Associations, public bodies and other anchor organisations.

The idea for the Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly was a result of these discussions between organising partners. It was funded through Welsh Government's Innovative Housing Programme – Optimised Retrofit Programme.

We also worked closely with [Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council](#) (BGCBC) and [Blaenau Gwent Public Service Board](#) (PSB) from the early stages of the project.

Why Blaenau Gwent?

The four commissioning Housing Associations share 24% of the housing stock in Blaenau Gwent and were already collaborating on an initiative to strengthen and support local suppliers in Blaenau Gwent through the Welsh Government's [Foundational Economy Challenge Fund 2020](#).

In 2020, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council declared a climate emergency. The PSB agreed to establish a Climate Mitigation Steering Group to develop a long term plan to reduce carbon emissions in Blaenau Gwent.

Blaenau Gwent therefore had a framework in place under which an action plan was being developed and key local stakeholders who were looking at how to involve the community.

¹ [Carbon Literacy Cartrefi Cymru](#), [Welsh Government's Optimised Retrofit Programme](#)

4. Organisation of the Assembly

Confirmation of funding for the Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly was received in November 2020.

A Steering Group was formed shortly after to (i) decide on the overall question and core themes for the Assembly (Housing, Transport, Nature and Green space) and (ii) ensure the impartiality and fairness of the process. In the early stages, the theme of food was also included, however, it was later excluded as a core theme due to time constraints.

The Steering Group met eight times prior to the start of the Assembly, once at an interim review and once at a final review.

Members of the Steering Group are at **Appendix 2**.

In addition to the organising partners, Steering Group members and experts, the following groups and organisations also played key roles in the Assembly process:

- [Sortition Foundation](#) - sortition
- [Mutual Gain](#) – support with agenda development and lead facilitation
- [Involve](#) - advisory capacity, providing training for facilitators and scribes
- [Wales Co-operative Centre](#) - Zoom training
- Volunteer facilitators, scribes and tech support drawn from the organising partners and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council



5. Who are the Assembly members and how were they selected?

Assembly members were selected at random from the general public through sortition.

Sortition allows the selection of members to be stratified by local demographics, in this case: gender, age, ethnicity, geographic location, residence status, attitude to climate change and [Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation](#). This random selection combined with representative sampling meant that the wider community could be confident that assembly members were fellow citizens and were not representing special interests.

January 2021

Bilingual invitations sent to 10,000 households across Blaenau Gwent (living in 1 in 3 homes in the borough) providing information about the Assembly process and compensation (£250 in cash or vouchers).

February 2021

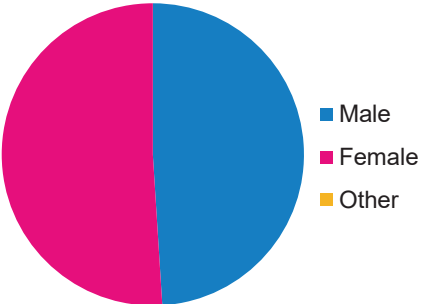
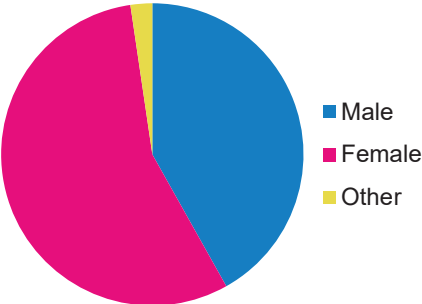
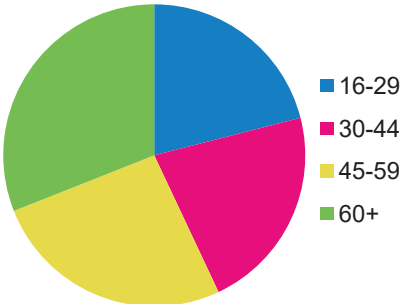
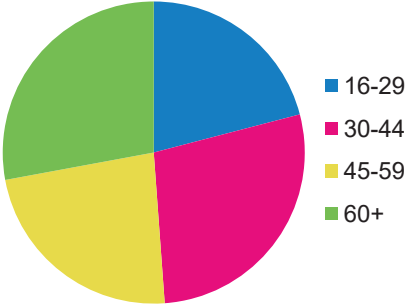
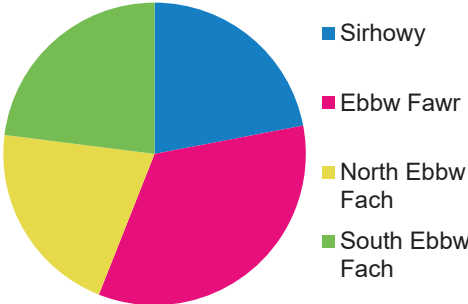
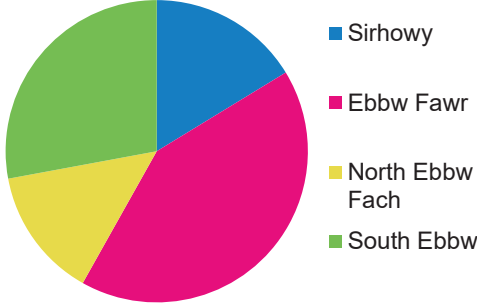
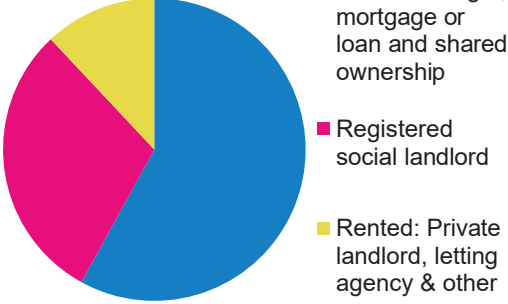
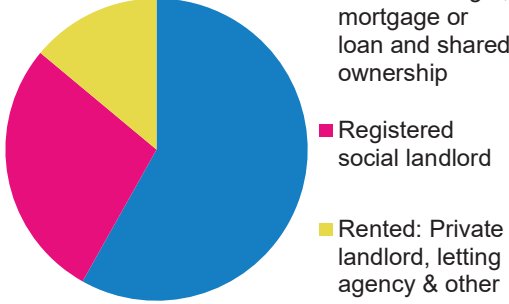
From 264 interested respondents, 50 participants were selected who were representative of the demographics mentioned above.

Sortition Foundation provided a breakdown of information and contact details of those selected and the remaining interested persons to the organisers.

From the final selection, several people told us they could no longer participate due to family and work commitments. These places were offered to others on the reserve list corresponding to the same demographic criteria, where possible.

The final number of participants at the first session of the Assembly was 44. Throughout sessions, the number of participants varied between 43 to 44 with 43 being present at the final vote.

The demographics of the 43 members are shown in the following pie charts.

	Target Demographics of BG	Selected (Final Confirmed)
Gender	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Male Female Other 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Male Female Other
Age	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16-29 30-44 45-59 60+ 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16-29 30-44 45-59 60+
Locale	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sirhowy Ebbw Fawr North Ebbw Fach South Ebbw Fach 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sirhowy Ebbw Fawr North Ebbw Fach South Ebbw Fach
Tenure	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Owner: outright, mortgage or loan and shared ownership Registered social landlord Rented: Private landlord, letting agency & other 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Owner: outright, mortgage or loan and shared ownership Registered social landlord Rented: Private landlord, letting agency & other

	Target Demographics of BG	Selected (Final Confirmed)
Attitude to climate change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very concerned Fairly concerned Not very concerned/Not at all/other/don't know 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very concerned Fairly concerned Not very concerned/Not at all/other/don't know
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> White Ethnically diverse communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> White Ethnically diverse communities
WIMD Decile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "1" "2" "3" "4-5" "6-10" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "1" "2" "3" "4-5" "6-10"

Data on target demographics, selection and final participants can be found [here](#).

A range of support was provided prior to and during the Assembly to ensure it was accessible. This included providing assembly members with tablets in the absence of owning hardware, establishing an internet connection via Wifi dongles and three hours of tech drop-in sessions to ensure members were able to fully access Zoom.

6. Engaging the wider community

It was important that the wider community was engaged in the process to (i) inform the Assembly's discussions, and (ii) as a means of ensuring accountability for implementation of the recommendations.

Engagement with the wider community was undertaken through the following methods:

i The BG Assembly website had the option to register via email to receive bilingual updates on the Assembly via Mailchimp. Interested respondents to the invitation were also invited to sign up to receive these updates. In total, 66 people signed up to receive updates.

ii Anyone living or working in Blaenau Gwent was able to respond to the question for consideration by the Assembly via Pol.is

Pol.is is an interactive surveying tool which invites users to agree/disagree with statements relating to an overall question. It also allows users to add their own statements for others to vote on.

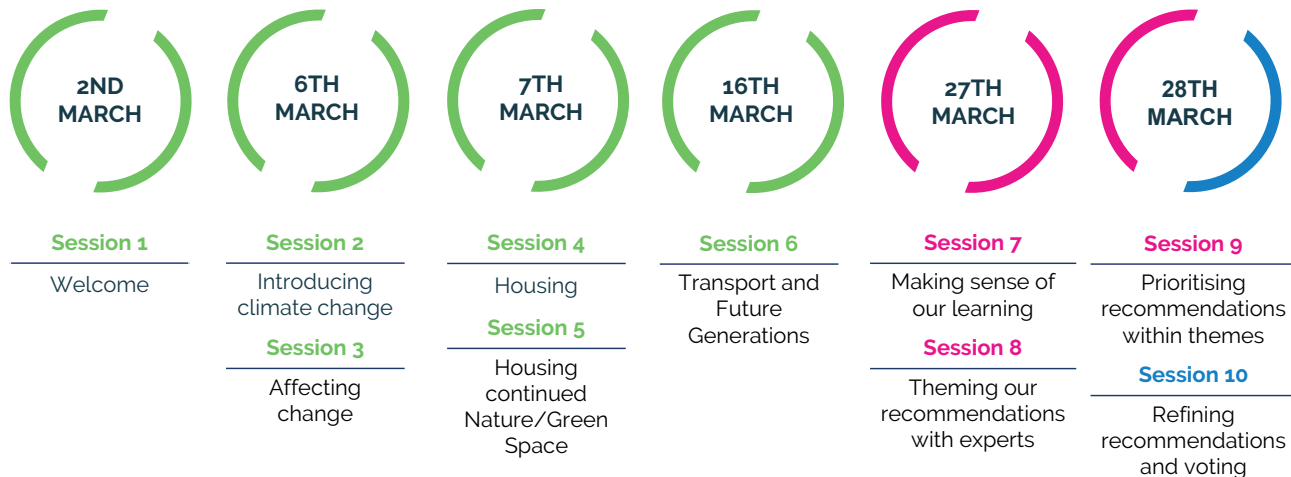
The interactive survey ran for three weeks and closed on 22 March 2021. 135 people voted. 5,594 votes were cast and 132 statements were submitted to respond to the assembly question. The [results of the survey](#) were presented to the Assembly during the deliberation phase.

iii Social media accounts of the organising partners and BGCBC were used to communicate about the climate assembly.



7. Assembly Process

The Assembly process was in three phases; learning, deliberation and voting.



The learning phase consisted of:

- Introduction to critical thinking.
- Speakers giving evidence and their expertise on the themes of the assembly.
- Assembly members asking questions of speakers and engaging in discussion with them.

Learning was supplemented by [‘speaker templates’](#) (additional information on the speaker and their topic) and any questions not answered in session were answered via email. At the end of the learning phase, assembly members voted on the speakers that they thought could help them answer the question the best. These speakers were brought back for more in depth discussions with small groups of assembly members.

In the deliberation phase:

- Assembly members voted on four additional themes to develop recommendations around.
- Members chose which theme they’d like to draft recommendations for. In groups, three recommendations per theme were drafted.
- Each group visited the seven other themes to ask questions and comment on the draft recommendations.
- Using these questions and comments, the original groups refined and amended their recommendations to be put forward for voting.

In the voting phase final recommendations were voted on by assembly members. 43 out of 44 Assembly members voted - with one member not attending the final sessions to vote because of health issues. Five recommendations received over 80% of the votes and were officially passed by the Assembly.

Throughout the process, facilitation was used to create conversations which were inclusive, respectful, to the point, honest and constructive.

8. Next Steps

The Assembly's recommendations were presented to the chief executives of the 4 commissioning Housing Associations on Tuesday 13 April 2021.

Assembly members presented the recommendations and took part in the discussions. The Housing Associations have committed to providing written responses to the five main recommendations setting out how they will incorporate or support them.

A further selected group of volunteer from the Assembly presented the recommendations to the PSB Climate Mitigation Group on 26 April 2021. The PSB Climate Mitigation Group will provide written responses to the five main recommendations setting out if and how they will support their implementation. These written recommendations will be presented to the wider PSB.

A number of members are staying in contact with each other via a Facebook group. Assembly members are also being kept informed about further participatory processes in Blaenau Gwent, including a participatory budgeting initiative led by Mutual Gain.

The organising partners will be tracking progress of implementation of the recommendations, particularly around the time of the election in 2022. We will also look to secure resources to maintain momentum around the recommendations and continued inclusion of assembly members in progress of implementation.

*This is our
Blaenau Gwent*

*We all have a
part to play*

*Get involved,
this is your
COMMUNITY*

*Help us make a
change*

*IF you are in
charge - do your
job, get off your
a** and do it!*

*Citizen
assemblies
are the way
forward*

Final messages from some Assembly members

9. Learnings

The following key learnings are a summary of those identified by project partners and through feedback provided by others involved, including facilitators, observers and members.

i Funding

The funding for this Climate Assembly came from a pot of engagement funding from Welsh Government's Innovative Housing Programme. The total funding for this assembly was £50,000. We know from work on other assemblies and discussions with other practitioners that this is a very low budget to try to deliver a deliberative project to this scale.

As a result of this limited budget organising partners made certain concessions including:

- A lower payment to assembly members- assembly members were paid at over living wage, above £10 per hour. However, we know from other assemblies that a higher rate of remuneration is often offered which might have been more likely to result in a higher sign up rate from the 10,000 letters sent to residents in Blaenau Gwent.
- A reliance on volunteers - The Assembly relied on volunteers for nearly all roles including facilitators and scribes, tech support and speakers. Ideally, we would have remunerated all of these roles in recognition of the time and effort given to this project.
- Limiting payment to the organising partners - only a small proportion of organisers' time has been remunerated for this 6 month long project.

It is also worth emphasising the difficulty in securing funding for a climate assembly might limit the potential for other such assemblies unless commissioned by local or national government.

ii Time vs. topics covered

The Assembly process had to strike a balance between time constraints due to funding, the amount of funding available, the number of participants and adequate time for learning and deliberation. The total time for the Assembly was two weekends (10 hours per weekend) and two evening sessions (3 hours).

It is clear from the evaluation responses that participants felt rushed at times during the three phases (learning, deliberation and recommendation) of the Assembly. In particular, the evening session on Transport on Tuesday 16 March was felt to be too much information from 4 speakers in such a short space of time. In contrast, the session during the learning phase with only three speakers in one afternoon (7 March) with more time to go into detail, received positive feedback.

“More time for the speakers to say what they needed to and information about the speakers given to us before they came to speak with us would have been helpful. It may have allowed us to prepare questions relevant to what they were telling us.”

“I thought it went fab not enough time granted but everybody was helpful.”

Facilitators and scribes also fed back to us that the time with assembly members was limited on some occasions.

“We covered a lot in a short period of time which although did feel a little rushed at times, I feel was the right thing to do. The range of topics engaged more people.”

(Quote from facilitator)

The [Involve guidance](#) suggests at least 30 hours for a citizens’ assembly and it is acknowledged by the organisers that more time would have been preferable to allow the Assembly to explore themes in more detail and to have more time for discussion. In retrospect, alternative formats such as exploring one main theme (e.g. Housing) and leaving additional time for the Assembly to invite speakers on topics suggested by them may have helped the Assembly feel less rushed in the time available.

In addition to the time spent online, the Assembly was also provided with [speaker templates and written responses](#) to questions that speakers had not been able to answer in the time available. It is recognised that not all members would have had the capacity to review these between sessions and therefore time spent on additional reading was not compulsory.



Administrative capacity and other roles

The Assembly administration needed was extensive.

ERS Cymru, Cynnal Cymru and United Welsh led on the administration which included:

- Communication with third party consultants
- Organisation of facilitators, observers and speakers
- Organisation and provision of tech support
- Communication with local and Welsh Government
- Communication with Assembly participants
- Liaising with lead facilitators (Mutual Gain)
- Coordination of Steering Group meetings
- Communications - including website, social media
- Engagement with commissioning organisations

Support for video editing and tech support during sessions was provided by consultants through Mutual Gain.

A key learning is to have a designated admin team in addition to project managers to ensure timely and efficient administration.

iv Involvement of local organisations

As national organisations, the organising partners engaged local stakeholders at an early stage in the process.

The most important of these was BGCBC and the PSB Climate Mitigation Steering Group. Organising partners met with both BGCBC and the Climate Mitigation Group early on to explain the context and their hope that the Assembly process and recommendations would inform decarbonisation plans of public bodies in Blaenau Gwent, as well as those of the housing associations.

BGCBC and the PSB Climate Mitigation Steering Group became collaborative partners in the Assembly process, with representatives sitting on the Assembly Steering Group and volunteering as scribes and facilitators.

The speakers whom the Assembly found particularly engaging were those with local knowledge and/or experience that they could see as relevant to issues needing addressed in Blaenau Gwent.

v Opportunity for engagement

A recurring theme raised by members was their need for more effective communication and engagement by local organisations in relation to the big changes required to decarbonise. For example, plans for local transport, electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure and retrofitting homes.

The presence of representatives from local organisations at the Assembly provided an opportunity for a two way process of listening and learning with a view to constructive discussion leading to the creation of recommendations.

This process helped to build trust which could be built on further with continued engagement and communication about implementation and progress of the recommendations.

vi Importance of facilitation

Due to budgetary constraints, we relied on volunteers to facilitate and scribe the sessions. All volunteers were provided with specific training via Involve, which took place over two half day sessions.

Feedback from the evaluation underlines the excellent job done by facilitators and scribes with 97% of respondents feeling included in small group discussions and 100% feeling respected by the facilitators. Assembly members also noted the important role of facilitators in ensuring discussions between members were conducted with respect.

“The facilitators were great and really helped get people to share their thoughts in a comfortable way”

However, none were experienced in facilitating citizens’ assemblies and required additional support in advance and following sessions. One member had felt a facilitator had not been bold enough in ensuring their voice was heard.

24% of respondents to the evaluation also felt that the facilitators tried to influence their group with their own ideas. This is likely due to inexperience and the need for more support and training, rather than any deliberate attempt to influence.

Feedback from facilitators also highlights the need for more information about the format and expectations of sessions.

“I think as facilitators it would have been useful to have the full rundown of the day a little sooner rather than later”

“There was a lot of confusion about the briefing notes not matching the detailed plan that was a bit confusing”

In the recommendations phase of any citizens’ assembly, facilitators have a key role in ensuring recommendations are clear. Further support for facilitators to ensure recommendation criteria were understood and facilitators felt confident in drafting recommendations would have been beneficial.

“I believe some of the very good recommendations failed due to their wording. Therefore much more time needed to refine and refine final proposals.”

vii Transparency of process

The lead facilitators provided an overview of the format and purpose of each stage of the Assembly to provide certainty to the members and ensure transparency of the process.

At the voting stage, there were two issues that led to confusion potentially undermining the transparency of the process for some of the Members. Both instances highlight the need to ensure assembly members fully understand the voting process (e.g. through Q&A, practice votes) before voting commences.

i) Confusion as to whether ‘neutral’ was counted as a vote for or against a recommendation

During the voting stage, assembly members were asked to vote on the recommendations by Zoom poll using ‘Strongly Agree’ - ‘Agree’ - ‘Neutral’ - ‘Disagree’ - ‘Strongly Disagree’.

Shortly after the first few votes, an assembly member raised concerns that it was not clear that a ‘neutral’ vote did not count towards support for the recommendation. As such, the voting process was restarted.

ii) Suggestion to lower the voting threshold from 80%

Of 24 recommendations formed by the Assembly, five received the 80% vote to pass as official recommendations (80% being the normal threshold for citizens’ assemblies’ recommendations). Approximately three quarters of the way through the voting process, a suggestion was made by the lead facilitator for assembly members to vote on whether the threshold should be lowered. A vote was held on whether to reduce the threshold, which secured 70% support and therefore did not pass.

The voting process should have been explained more clearly before members’ started to vote, in particular the threshold required for a recommendation to pass and that there is precedent for this being lowered if an 80% majority of Members voted to do so.

“I felt very frustrated at the end with the voting as felt that so much time had been spent working through the recommendations for them not to get the 80 percent”

The evaluation clearly shows members’ frustration at the voting process and the number of recommendations passed by the Assembly. On the latter point, it could be interesting in future assemblies to build in a mechanism for understanding why members voted in a certain way.

viii Other learning points

Summarised below are some additional learnings that we wanted to highlight:

- The Assembly process can inspire individual action as well as collective recommendations.
- The learning phase is a two way process between speakers and assembly members - through asking questions and challenging speakers, the Assembly bring theories and policy back to reality.
- Assembly members of local citizens’ assemblies bring their local knowledge, interests and lived experience to the consideration of issues. The expertise of local people is of real value and underlines the need for local assemblies.
- Local climate assemblies are not a replacement for a national climate assembly - If we are to tackle climate change at the scale required, we need both local assemblies and national assemblies to engage people of Wales in the processes that happen at different levels.
- This model of deliberative democracy should be used beyond climate- there are a number of significant issues facing Wales. Citizens’ assemblies should be used as part of a toolkit of policy process to address these issues.

“I feel worried for our future if we continue living as we are. I have already started making changes to my own lifestyle and have been encouraging others to do the same.”

“Heartening to see a cross-section of fellow BG people commit to taking part fully, to getting stuck in to such a crucial issue.”

10. Evaluation Responses

The members of the Assembly were invited to complete a short evaluation survey on 29 March (following final recommendations on 28 March).

37 Assembly members completed the evaluation which had a total of 12 questions designed to gauge the members' emotional and practical experience of the Assembly.

Responses to the evaluation have been used throughout the report to highlight learnings.

In terms of process:

- Over 65% of participants felt that the Assembly increased their confidence with using technology
- 70% of respondents felt that there was sufficient time to learn about the issues before making recommendations
- 35% of respondents felt that there was enough time for discussion and deliberation
- 86% of respondents felt that information was presented in a fair and balanced way
- 95% of respondents rated their overall enjoyment of the Assembly a 4 or 5 on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'very much')

The full evaluation survey results are available [here](#).

Recommendation theme: TRANSPORT

- 1 Establish an affordable, integrated road & rail transport system, accessible throughout BG
A one ticket system that links to bus, rail & cycle schemes – industry for purchasing of tickets (digital or paper).
Accessibility for all hours with safety via lighting, CCTV and to keep maintained.
- 2 Create an incentivised community based electric car sharing scheme (24/7), where you either hire a vehicle for yourself or share (Uber system) a vehicle - with safety in mind.
- 3 Establish & improve a safe, easily maintainable infrastructure for walkers & cyclists, for either recreational or work purposes, with access to the integrated public transport network. Including lighting & CCTV & storage for bikes.

Impacts

- transport accessible all hours for shift workers.

Do we become prosperous first - or do we act now? eg would there be a voluntary shift to invest in Climate crisis if transport infrastructure lead to prosperity.

Considerations

- car share - would be useful for workers, concert goers etc.
- a 1 ticket system for all travel - Bus, train, cycle hire, car share, taxi.
- Safer travel late at night with integrated bus, train, lit pathways

Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly votes on final recommendations

4 weeks ago | More

More from Cynnal Cymru

Autoplay next video

Blaenau Gwent C...
Cynnal Cymru

11. Carbon emissions of a virtual assembly

Throughout the process, we were mindful of the carbon footprint of the Assembly. For example, we chose not to print and send any materials to participants save for reasons of accessibility.



We calculated an approximate carbon footprint of the online assembly to be 55.193 Kg CO₂e. You can read more about how we calculated this and how this might compare to an in person assembly [here](#).



Appendix 1

Recommendations

The table below shows the recommendations as drafted by the Assembly.

Theme	Recommendation	% Support
Housing Retrofit	Train local trades people, create qualifications and upskill local businesses, involve FE colleges and local Universities, future proof it and provide the right courses to enable them to do the work in all green construction.	86
	Blaenau Gwent must create an accessible, practical, well publicised information platform for all (an upgraded website, an app, information lines and local one stop 'retrofitted shops/hubs' for advice and demonstrations on all things green throughout the area.	70
	Every home below EPC 'c' must have a retrofitting survey by 2023, with a view to implementing the actions that are recommended and starting the work within 12 months where funding options are in place.	67
Housing Newbuild	Ensure that all new build properties are built using the latest sustainable technologies (E.g. Glanffrwd development as a template), employing local builders and providing a variety of accommodation types appropriate for all inc. homeless/single occupancy up to large families.	81
	Prioritize brown field sites over green belt for new builds and ensure green space created within new developments	79
	Provide green energy grants to assist all new build purchases to all people and provide green incentives for all energy efficient properties. T's + C's stipulate 5 yr occupancy otherwise grant to be repaid.	56
Nature and Green Space	Implement a programme of woodland preservation and reforestation of BG, using the right tree in the right place for the right reason, increasing opportunities for jobs, biodiversity and connecting woodlands. Making sure the skills are available so we can create green jobs, e.g saw milling and timber framed housing.	86
	Create roles for coordination, cultivation and support of the use of green spaces (allotments, woodlands and urban green spaces) by the community to benefit all generations and create a sense of community ownership. Supporting communities in activities including food growing, recreation, bio-diversity, green prescribing, green space planning and aesthetics (e.g Blaenau Gwent in Bloom).	77

Theme	Recommendation	% Support
Nature and Green Space	Develop a community owned/part-owned green energy programme e.g. solar farms, wind farms, or hydro electric. Supported by community green bonds. Making sure bonds are accessible and provide beneficial return.	74
Transport	Establish an affordable, integrated road & rail transport system accessible throughout BG. A one ticket system that links to bus, rail & cycle schemes - inclusivity for purchasing of tickets (digital or paper). Accessible all hours with safety via lighting, CCTV and to keep maintained.	91
	Establish & improve a safe, easily maintainable infrastructure for walkers & cyclists, for either recreational or work purposes, with access to the public transport network. Including lighting & CCTV & storage for bikes.	88
	Incentivise a community based electric car sharing scheme (24/7) where you either hire a vehicle for self or share (Uber system) a vehicle with safety in mind.	33
Education	Set a goal and support schools to source Welsh/British, sustainable produce and increase the use of these products over time, to include more vegetarian options.	74
	Make climate change and its impacts mandatory, interactive (e.g. competitions, prizes, rewards), relevant to the local area in the school curriculum. The council should assist schools with projects relevant to the age and practical involvement by the young people with the wider community.	62
	Offer short courses on climate change to individuals, local businesses, tradespeople, and decision-makers through educational institutions or by children in schools.	57
Waste and Recycling	Establish local Repair hubs to Re-use/re-purpose/upcycle items.	79
	Reinstate community skips - to robustly address fly-tipping & litter - siting of more litter bins that are emptied more often. Install & monitor more CCTV/enhanced measures at known fly-tipping spots. Re-direct fly-tipping & CCTV costs to community skips and in time it would pay for itself.	65
	Set up an enhanced information website, newsletter & community boards to promote transparency and sharing of information about recycling and how to access these services - this would improve awareness for future consultation on these issues.	63
Communication	Develop a local Climate Change Communications Strategy for promoting climate change action within the community at all levels by 2022 to be reviewed annually.	67

Theme	Recommendation	% Support
Communication	Set up a Climate Change Communications Network that oversee the evolving Strategy (to be cross sector including citizens and youth representatives) sharing best practice, information and knowledge.	63
	Employ dedicated local Communication Officer(s) to lead on the Climate Change Communication Strategy.	53
Poverty	Providing infrastructure, training and funding to businesses (new, growing and existing) within the local economy – e.g apprenticeships, employment and volunteering opportunities.	72
	Providing centralised grants to improve energy performance of all homes and reduce fuel poverty and energy usage by 2027.	70
	Providing advice, space and funding for communities to create their own local hub with a network of Outreach Officers.	58

Please note that % support for some recommendations have been updated due to review of raw data.

Appendix 2

Steering Group Members

- Ben Saltmarsh (NEA Cymru)
- Bethan Proctor (CHC Cymru)
- Bev Jones (Melin Homes)
- Chris Blake (The Green Valleys CIC)
- Daniel Wheelock (Blaenau Gwent CBC)
- Darcey Howell (Blaenau Gwent Youth Forum)
- Jess Blair (ERS Cymru)
- Joe Frampton (United Welsh)
- Judy Phipps (Blaenau Gwent over 50s forum)
- Professor Julie Froud (University of Manchester)
- Justine Scorrer (Linc Cymru)
- Lorraine Whitmarsh (Director, Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformation)
- Luke Penny (Cynnal Cymru)
- Mara Moruz (Blaenau Gwent Youth Forum)
- Matthew Matthias (ERS Cymru)
- Nia Thomas (ERS Cymru)
- Owain Israel (Linc Cymru)
- Richard Thomas (United Welsh Housing)
- Sarah Freeman (NRW)
- Sarah Hopkins (Cynnal Cymru)
- Steve Cranston (United Welsh Housing)
- Tim Daley (Digital Public Services Wales)
- Trisha Hoddinot (Melin Homes)



Cynnal Cymru - Sustain Wales

Cambrian Buildings
Mount Stuart Square
Cardiff Bay
CF10 5FL

02920 192021

Agenda Item 23

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 03.09.21

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Executive Committee**

Date of meeting: **22nd September 2021**

Report Subject: **Update on Strategy to Safely reduce the numbers of children looked after**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor John Mason, Executive Member Social Services**

Report Submitted by: **Tanya Evans, Head of Children’s 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)
8.7.21		07.09.21			22/07/21	22/09/21		

1. Purpose of the Report

The Purpose of this report is to update the Executive Committee on the progress made in relation to the implementation of the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy 2020 – 2025.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 The end of 2015 saw a significant increase in the numbers of children looked after. The numbers continued to increase at a steady rate peaking at an all-time high of 237 in July 2018.

2.2 Blaenau Gwent recognised the need to develop a “Safe Reduction in Children Looked After (CLA) Strategy” which was implemented in 2017.

2.3 The Strategy has three clear objectives which are: -

1. To support families to stay together;
2. To manage risk confidently and provide support at the edge of care;
3. To provide affordable high quality placements.

2.4 Each of the objectives has a number of actions aligned to them and these actions are embedded in our business planning process which is reported on quarterly basis.

2.5 The initial 3year strategy came to an end in 2020 and was replaced with another updated 5-year strategy with the same 3 objectives highlighted above.

2.6 Since the implementation of the strategy the local authority has seen a very slow but steady decrease in the numbers of children becoming looked after. More detailed analysis of this can be found under the performance section 6.1 of this report.

2.7 Welsh Government has also recognised the need to safely reduce the number of children coming into care and has identified this as a priority area. In light of this Integrated Care Fund (ICF) grant money was allocated to each local authority in Wales via the Regional Partnership Boards in April 2019 to invest in, and develop services to safely reduce the numbers of children coming into care.

2.8 The following services were developed in March 2019 as a result of this ICF grant funding

- Family Group Conference / Meeting service
- Support to Special Guardians
- Enhance resources in our Supporting Change Team
- Enhance the Young Person's Mediation Service

2.9 These additional services alongside the existing teams have contributed to the slow but steady progress made in reducing the numbers of children looked after within Blaenau Gwent.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 Option 1

- Consider the information contained within the report and accept the report

Option 2

- Consider the information contained within the report and provide comment on any amendment or recommendations

3.2 The Social Services Scrutiny Committee on the 22nd July 2021 supported Option 1 of the report.

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

4.1 The implementation of the Safe Reduction of Children looked After strategy supports the following priorities for social services under the corporate plan:

- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater;
- To work with our partners including Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and neighbouring authorities to deliver integrated responsive care and support;
- To promote and facilitate new ways of delivering health and social care involving key partners and our communities.

4.2 The Safe Reduction of CLA Strategy provides evidence that the Local Authority is delivering the requirements under the Social Service and Wellbeing Act in relation to the following areas

- ***Voice and control*** – *putting the individual and their needs, at the centre of their care, and giving them a voice in, and control over reaching the outcomes that help them achieve well-being.*

- **Prevention and early intervention** – increasing preventative services within the community to minimise the escalation of critical need.
- **Well-being** – supporting people to achieve their own well-being and measuring the success of care and support.
- **Co-production** – encouraging individuals to become more involved in the design and delivery of services.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 Impact on Budget

Figure 1

	Budget 20/21	Outturn 20/21	Favourable/ (adverse)
Children’s residential placements	2,592,186	2,041,704	550,482
Foster Parent Payments In house	1,622,690	1,681,623	(58,942)
Independent Fostering Agencies	1,714,930	1,719,750	(4,820)

5.2 Figure 1 shows a significant underspend in our children residential budget at the end of 20/21. This is a result of the hard work of the 14 plus Team and the My Support Team in reducing the numbers of children in residential care and working to prevent children entering residential care.

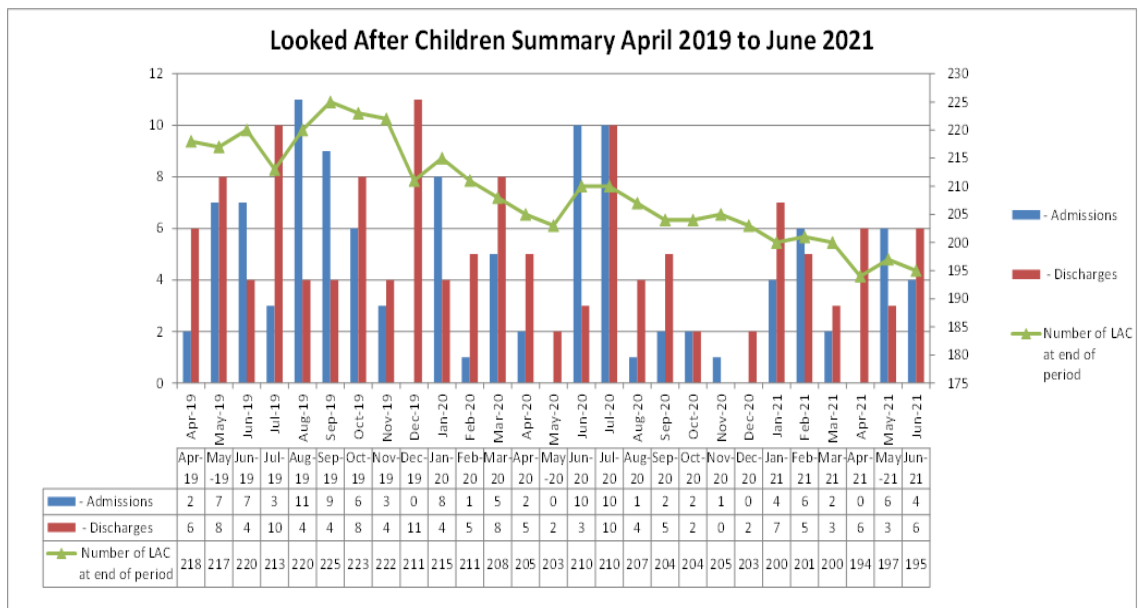
5.3 Human Resources

Maintaining a stable workforce is key to achieving the objectives of the Safe Reduction of CLA Strategy. Just prior to COVID 19 Children’s Services had 10 social work vacancies across the various teams. This had a significant impact on the workload on the Teams. A combination of Blaenau Gwent staff finishing their secondments on the Degree in Social Work Course and appointing 3rd year Social Work degree students who had their final year placement in Blaenau Gwent, has resulted in nearly all these vacancies being filled.

However, we have a number of vacancies again across the 4 locality Social Work Teams in particular which is causing pressure points.

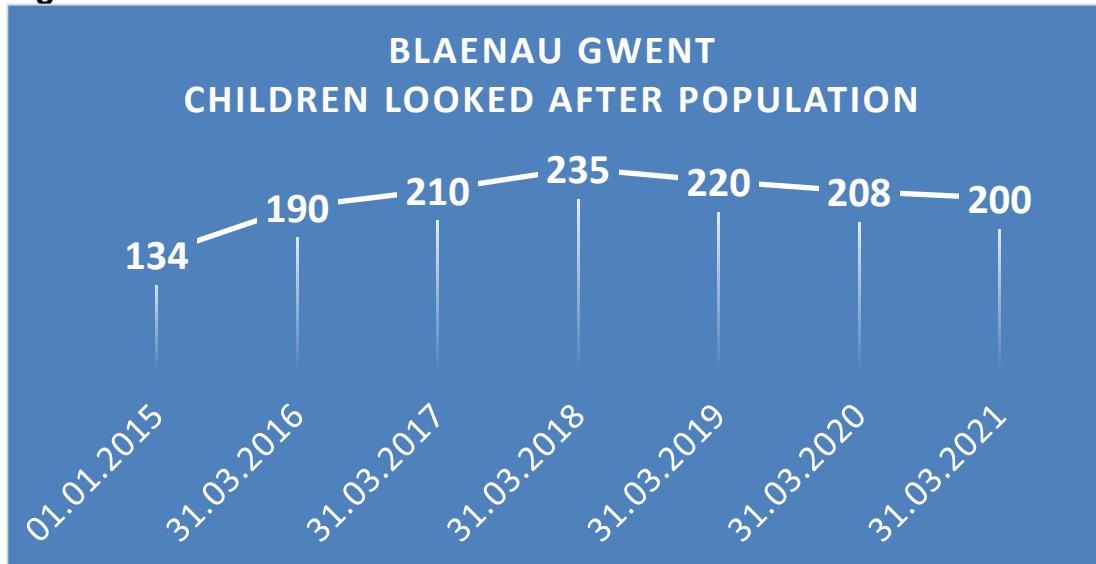
6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 **Figure 2**



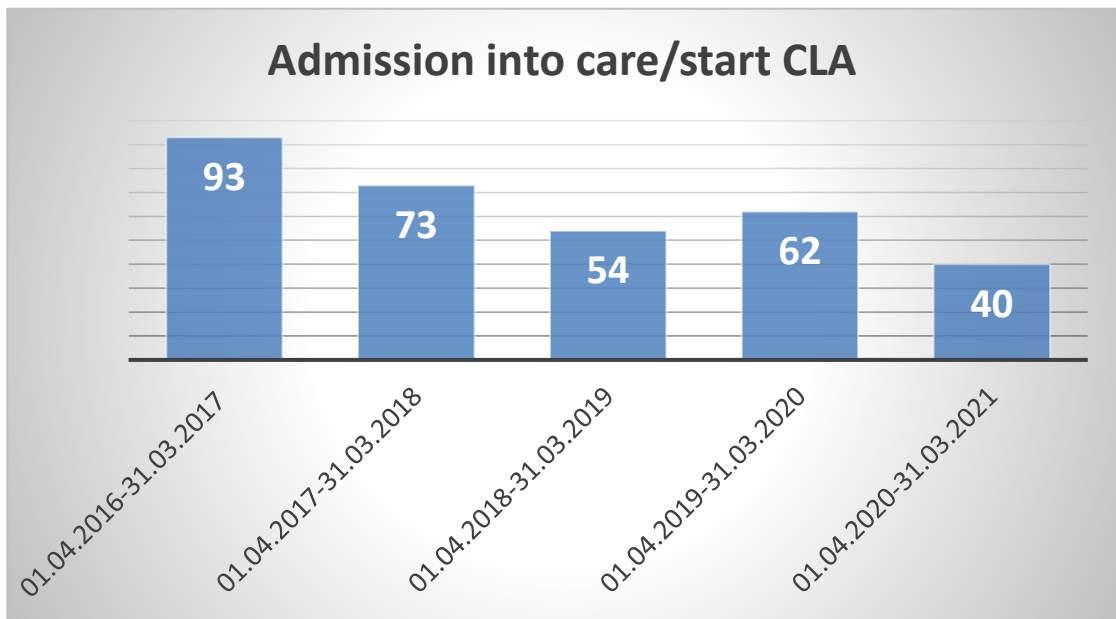
6.2 Figure 2 demonstrates the continued slow but steady decline in the numbers of children looked after in Blaenau Gwent

6.3 **Figure 3**



6.4 Figure 3 shows the total numbers of children looked after each year from 2015 – 2021. The first Safe Reduction of CLA Strategy was implemented in 2017 and took approximately 12 months before the positive effects were seen by the numbers of children looked after beginning to decrease.

6.5 **Figure 4**



6.6 Figure 4 shows the numbers of children entering care from 2017 to 2021. We would always want to see a decrease year on year of the children coming into care. This has happened over the past 5 years except 19/20 when we saw a slight increase in numbers compared to the previous year.

6.7 **Figure 5**

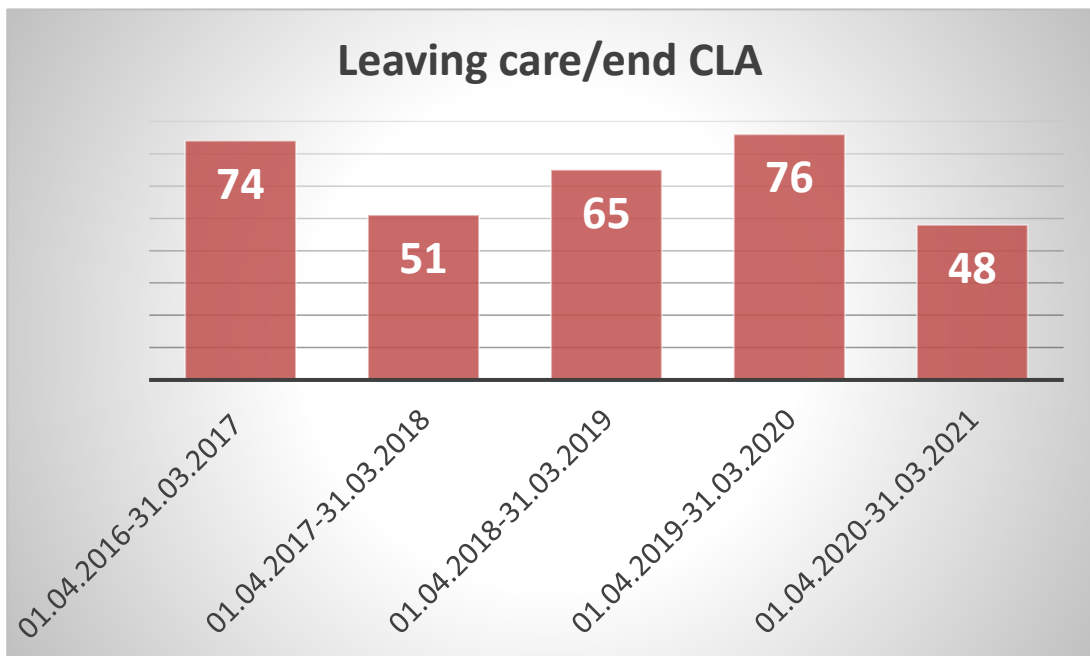
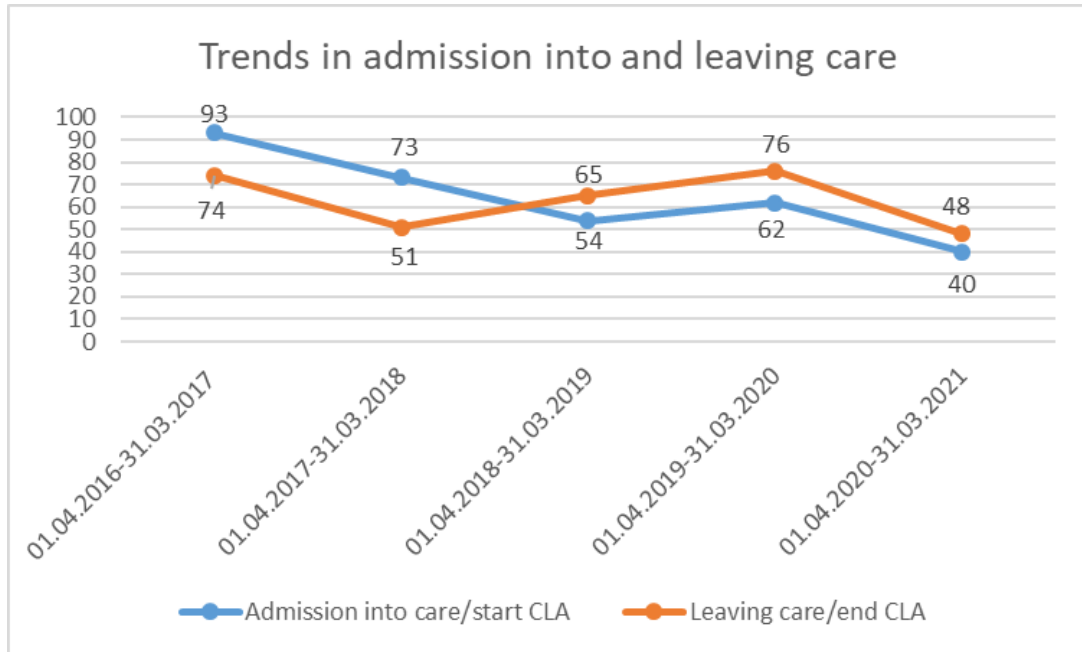


Figure 5 shows the number of children leaving care. Ideally we would want to see the numbers of children leaving care increase each year. This was the trend from 2017–2020, however the numbers leaving care reduced during the pandemic. This could have been for a number of reasons including staff having to prioritise RED rated cases during the pandemic and so they would not have

been focused on returning cases to court to revoke care orders, plus plans to rehabilitate children home to parents would have slowed down due to the periods of lockdown and government restrictions.

6.8 **Figure 6**



6.9 Figure 6 clearly shows the correlation between admissions into and discharges out of care. The positive tipping point came in 2018 /19 which was the second year into the initial 3 year Safe Reduction of CLA Strategy. This saw the change in more children leaving care than entering care. This is a trend that we will strive to maintain over the next 5 years.

6.10 It is important to recognise that the success of the Safe Reduction of CLA Strategy is dependent on a whole service approach. The robust preventative interventions delivered by Families First and Flying start prevent needs from escalating into statutory services. The Information, Advice and Assistance Team provides robust screening and initial assessment of all referrals ensuring the appropriate action is taken to meet needs. All of the Social Work Teams work exceptionally hard to keep families together and work with families using a strengths based approach.

6.12 **Expected outcome for the public**

The successful implementation of the Safe Reduction of CLA Strategy will lead to more positive outcomes for children on a number of levels. It will prevent children coming into care in the first place due to the work under the strategy. For those children who do come into care they will have more local placement choices enabling them to maintain attendance at their local school and contact with family and friends

- 6.13 ***Involvement*** (*consultation, engagement, participation*)
There is extensive involvement with the children and families we work with and individual feed-back was offered.
- 6.14 ***Thinking for the Long term*** (*forward planning*)
The refreshed 5 yr strategy is longer than the initial 3 yr strategy in recognition of the significant work required to continue and maintain the downward trend in numbers of children looked after.
- 6.15 ***Preventative focus***
A large part of the Safe Reduction of CLA Strategy has a preventative focus
- 6.16 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
A number of the actions under the Safe Reduction of CLA Strategy rely on partnership working. Senior managers and staff have good working relationships with our partners which will support us in achieving the actions. The refreshed 5 yr strategy focuses heavily on improving our partners understanding of the 3 objectives that sit under this strategy and the part they need to play to achieves its success.
- 6.17 ***EqIA***.
The safe reduction of children becoming looked after involves supporting and engaging with children and families covered by protected characteristics from the Equality Act 2010. It has not been identified that this strategy will have a negative impact on those with protected characteristics.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The actions aligned to the 3 objectives under the strategy are incorporated under the Children's Services business plans. Progress on actions is reported quarterly and contributes to the Director's Annual report

Background Documents /Electronic Links

N/A

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