

T: 01495 355001

E: committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk



Our Ref./Ein Cyf.
Your Ref./Eich Cyf.
Contact:/Cysylltwch â: Democratic Services

THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND

16th September, 2022

Dear Sir/Madam

CORPORATE & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Corporate & Performance Scrutiny Committee will be held in via MS Teams (if you could like to view this meeting please contact michelle.hicks@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk) on Friday, 23rd September, 2022 at 10.00 am.

Yours faithfully

Damien McCann
Interim Chief Executive

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.

2. APOLOGIES

To receive.

Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg a byddwn yn cyfathrebu gyda chi yn eich dewis iaith, dim ond i chi rhoi gwybod i ni pa un sydd well gennych. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn creu unrhyw oedi.

The Council welcomes correspondence in Welsh and English and we will communicate with you in the language of your choice, as long as you let us know which you prefer. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to any delay.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND
DISPENSATIONS**

To receive.

4. **COST OF LIVING DISCRETIONARY SCHEME** 3 - 28

To consider the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

5. **SICKNESS ABSENCE PERFORMANCE 2021/22** 29 - 38

To consider the report of the Head of Organisational Development.

To: Councillor J. Wilkins (Chair)
Councillor J. Thomas (Vice-Chair)
Councillor C. Bainton
Councillor M. Day
Councillor G. Humphreys
Councillor E. Jones
Councillor R. Leadbeater
Councillor C. Smith
Councillor T. Smith

All other Members (for information)
Interim Chief Executive
Chief Officers

Agenda Item 4

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny**

Date of meeting: **23 September 2022**

Report Subject: **Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. S. Thomas – Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Corporate Overview & Performance**

Report Submitted by: **R Hayden – Chief Officer Resources**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	15/09/22	16/09/22			23/09/22		29/09/22	

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 To present the proposed Blaenau Gwent Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme (Appendix 1) for Members consideration.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 During 2022, the Welsh Government has provided funding to all local authorities to provide a £150 one-off cost of living payment to all those eligible households in council tax bands A to D and those qualifying under the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Main Scheme).
 - 2.2 Additional funding has also been provided to each Council's to enable them to provide support under a discretionary scheme, to help households considered to be in need of assistance with their living costs.
 - 2.3 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has received £746,000 to fund the Discretionary Scheme.
3. **Options for Recommendation**
 - 3.1 *To include Recommendation(s) / Endorsement by other groups, e.g. CMT/Committees/Other groups)*
 - 3.1.1 **Option 1 – to consider and recommend the Council adopt the proposed Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme**
 - 3.1.2 **Option 2 – to consider the proposed Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme and suggest amendments to Council prior to adoption of the scheme.**
 - 3.2 The proposed Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme will be considered by the Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 23 September 2022.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
- 4.1 The Cost of Living Support Scheme and Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme was announced as part of the Welsh Government's Supplementary Budget on 15 February 2022.
The schemes are intended to provide immediate support as Wales recovers from the pandemic and support households to deal with the impact of increasing energy and other costs.
- 4.2 The Discretionary Scheme fund can be used by each local authority to support it considers to be in need of assistance with their living costs. Each local authority will determine its use of discretionary support as it deems appropriate to address local needs.
5. **Implications Against Each Option**
- 5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***
- 5.1.1 WG have provided funding of approximately £746,000 to enable Blaenau Gwent to deliver a local Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme.
In the unlikely event of an overspend against the scheme the additional costs will need to be funded by the general reserve.
- 5.1.2 ***Option 1 - agree the proposed Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme***
It is estimated that the proposed scheme will be delivered within the available resources. The actual cost will be dependent upon actual take up / applications received.
- 5.1.3 ***Option 2 – suggest amendments prior to agreeing the Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme***
The impact of any suggested changes to the scheme will be assessed to ensure the costs remain within the funding available i.e. re-profiling of funding.
- 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***
- 5.2.1 There is a risk that eligible applicants will exceed the number estimated resulting in an overspend against budget.
This has been minimised by setting specific dates for eligibility (not open ended), assuming maximum take up of scheme at those dates and suggesting the proposing the payment levels.
- 5.2.2 There is a risk that a lower number of applicants than estimated register / apply for the payment resulting in an underspend against the available resources and eligible households not receiving the financial support they are entitled too.
This will be minimised by administering a direct payment for those household where we have current bank details and implementing a programme of communication to raise awareness of the scheme.
Any underspend can be carried forward and utilised in future years.
- 5.3 ***Legal***

- 5.3.1 The Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme will be administered in accordance with WG grant terms & conditions.
- 5.4 **Human Resources**
- 5.4.1 Staff across Corporate Services will be involved in delivery of the scheme.
6. **Supporting Evidence**
- 6.1 **Performance Information and Data**
See proposed scheme.
- 6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**
- 6.2.1 Agreement and adoption of a Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme will provide direct financial support to eligible households within Blaenau Gwent and indirect support for those households needing to utilise Food banks and / or seek advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- 6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**
- 6.3.1 CLT have considered the proposed policy. A communication programme will be implemented to raise awareness of the scheme and encourage eligible households to register / apply for the payment.
- 6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**
- 6.4.1 n/a – the proposed scheme will help eligible households with an ‘immediate’ financial contribution to help them with the Cost of Living pressures currently being faced.
- 6.5 **Preventative focus**
- 6.5.1 The financial contribution to eligible households, food banks and Citizens Advice Bureau will help support families facing significant hardship.
- 6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**
- 6.6.1 Financial contributions will be made to the Blaenau Gwent Food Bank and Citizens Advice Bureau to increase resources available to support the families in Blaenau Gwent.
- 6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**
n/a
- 6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**
n/a
- 6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment** *(the screening template should be completed for any decisions to identify if a full integrated impact assessment (IIA) is needed. A full IIA will need to be completed if the decision is part of the socio-economic duty to consider how the decision might help to reduce the inequalities of outcome associated with socio-economic disadvantage).*
- 6.9.1 The integrated Impact Assessment undertaken in relation to this proposed policy is attached at Appendix 2.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 *State how the work will be monitored e.g. through scrutiny or directorate performance management arrangements*

Delivery of the Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme will be monitored by the Resources Service as part of the performance management arrangements in place.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

-

BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cost of Living Payment – Discretionary Scheme

Overview:

During 2022, the Welsh Government has provided funding to all local authorities to provide a £150 one-off cost of living payment to all those eligible households in council tax bands A to D and those qualifying under the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Main Scheme).

Additional funding has also been provided to each Council to enable them to provide support under a discretionary scheme, to help households considered to be in need of assistance with their living costs.

Discretionary Scheme Eligibility:

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has received £746,000 and the discretionary scheme will be used to support households that meet the following criteria:-

A payment of **£150** will be made to eligible households in Council Tax Band E to H, where on the 15 February 2022, the person liable to pay council tax lives in the property as their sole or main residence and were not in receipt of support through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

A payment of **£150** will be made to households where on the 15 February 2022, the person liable for council tax lives in the property as their sole or main residence, is not eligible for a payment under the main scheme AND is in receipt of one of the following exemptions or reliefs:

- **Exemption Class N** – All residents are students
- **Exemption Class S** – All residents are under the age of 18 years
- **Exemption Class U** – All residents are severely mentally impaired
- **Exemption Class W** – Annexe or self-contained part of a property occupied by an elderly or disabled relative of the residents living in the rest of it
- **Exemption Class X** – All residents are care leavers who are 18 or over but have not yet reached the age of 25, or where every resident is either a care leaver or falls under the definition of a student or a severely mentally impaired person

- **Exemption Class E** – Unoccupied because the only usual occupier left to receive personal care as a resident of a hospital, nursing or residential care home
- **Exemption Class I** – Unoccupied because the only usual occupier has left the property to receive care elsewhere (other than a place mentioned in Class E)
- **Exemption Class J** – Unoccupied because, the only usual occupier lives elsewhere, for the purpose of providing care to another person
- **Exemption Class K** – The liable person last occupied the dwelling as their main residence and is a student studying elsewhere

A payment of **£150** will be made to households who would have been eligible under the main scheme but did not register for or receive payment before the 30 September 2022.

Where it is deemed reasonable, a payment of up to **£150** will be made to households who were not eligible under the main scheme and do not fall into any of the above categories of eligibility. The award of this payment will be at the discretion of the Council (Leader / Leader of the Opposition / S151 Officer).

Any decision is final and there are no grounds for appeal.

A payment of **£100** will be made to households who have their sole or main residence in Blaenau Gwent and were in receipt of a Free School Meal payment in August 2022. The payment will be made directly into the bank account in which you received the Free School Meal payment.

As part of this scheme, the Council will also make a contribution of £100,000 to the Blaenau Gwent Foodbank for the support of residents of Blaenau Gwent and a further £50,000 to Citizens Advice Bureau to enable additional resources to be deployed to support individuals across Blaenau Gwent with financial / debt advice.

The scheme will be open to applications until 31 March 2023.

How will payments be made:

Eligible households in Council Tax Bands E to H (& those who were eligible under the main scheme) - where we hold current direct debit details on council tax accounts we will look to make payment directly into bank accounts. Where we do not hold current direct debit details we will send a letter inviting you to apply for the above payment.

If you do not receive a letter of invitation you cannot register for this payment.

Households in receipt of any of the eligible exemptions - we will send a letter inviting you to apply for the above payment.

Eligible Households in HMO's / temporary accommodation – you can make an application for this payment and will be required to provide evidence that you are responsible for energy bills directly or pay a service charge for energy costs

Households eligible for free school meals – payment will be made directly into the bank account that your August free school meal payments have been made to.

In all other instances households will need to register for their eligibility to be assessed.

This page is intentionally left blank

Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)

The Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) has been designed to help support the Council in making informed and effective decisions whilst ensuring compliance with a range of statutory legislation, such as the Equality Act 2010. It consists of 10 main sections as outlined below:

- Section 1 - Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011
- Section 2 - Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and Welsh Language Standards
- Section 3 - Socio-economic Duty
- Section 4 - Children’s Rights Approach – The Right Way
- Section 5 - Data
- Section 6 - Consultation
- Section 7 - Decision

Lead Officer	Head of Service	Service Area & Department	Date
Service Manager Revenues & Charging Assessments	Chief Officer Resources	Resources, Corporate Services	16/09/22

Briefly outline the proposal indicating what change or decision is to be made, also provide any documentation that may be used to support this. **What is the proposal that needs to be assessed?**

Introduction of a Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme - The scheme is intended to provide support as Wales recovers from the pandemic and support households to deal with the impact of increasing energy and other costs.

The scheme proposes: -

- Payments of £150 to eligible households – eligibility criteria, applicants cannot have received a payment under the main Cost of Living Scheme
- Payment of £100 to households where households were receiving free school meal payments in August 2022 (this is likely to be an additional payment to households who would have received a payment from the Main scheme or who would be eligible for the £150 payment from the Discretionary Scheme)
- Grant of £100,000 to BG Food Bank to provide support to individuals & families in BG.
- Grant of £50,000 to BG Citizens Advice Bureau to provide additional resources to support to individuals & families with financial / debt advice.

Options are 1) to agree the proposed scheme or 2) suggest amendments to the scheme

Section 1 – Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011

Briefly outline below if there will be any positive or negative impacts, on any groups of people with protected characteristics, who are covered by the Equality Act 2010, as a result of the proposal being considered.

Protected characteristics	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on those with a protected characteristics?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on those with a protected characteristics?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
Age <i>(people of all ages)</i>	Eligible adult households (both individuals & families) within BG will be entitled to a direct payment. All households will be eligible to access support from the Food Bank & CAB		
Disability <i>(people with disabilities/ long term conditions)</i>	People with disabilities and those with none will be eligible for the direct payments & to access support from the Food		

	Bank and Citizens Advice Bureau		
Gender Reassignment <i>(anybody who's gender identity or gender expression is different to the sex they were assigned at birth)</i>	All BG households regardless of gender will be eligible for the direct payments & to access support from the Food Bank and Citizens Advice Bureau		

Protected characteristics	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on those with a protected characteristics?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on those with a protected characteristics?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
Marriage or Civil Partnership <i>(people who are married or in a civil partnership)</i>	All BG households (regardless of whether or not they are) in a marriage and / or Civil Partnership will be eligible for the direct payments & to access support from the Food Bank and Citizens Advice Bureau		
Pregnancy and Maternity <i>(women who are pregnant and/or on maternity leave)</i>	Women who are pregnant and / or on maternity leave will be eligible for the direct payments & to access support from the Food Bank and Citizens Advice Bureau		
Race <i>(people from black, Asian and minority)</i>	People of all racial backgrounds will be eligible for the direct		

<i>ethnic communities and different racial backgrounds)</i>	payments & to access support from the Food Bank and Citizens Advice Bureau		
Religion or Belief <i>(people with different religions and beliefs including people with no beliefs)</i>	All BG households regardless of religion and belief will be eligible for the direct payments & to access support from the Food Bank and Citizens Advice Bureau		
Protected characteristics	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on those with a protected characteristics?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on those with a protected characteristics?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
Sex <i>(women and men, girls and boys and those who self-identify their gender)</i>	All BG households regardless of sexual orientation will be eligible for the direct payments & to access support from the Food Bank and Citizens Advice Bureau		

<p>Sexual Orientation <i>(lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, other)</i></p>	<p>All BG households regardless of sexual orientation will be eligible for the direct payments & to access support from the Food Bank and Citizens Advice Bureau</p>		
--	--	--	--

Section 2 - Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and Welsh Language Standards

The Welsh Language Measure 2011 and the [Welsh Language Standards](#) require the Council to have 'due regard' for any positive or negative impacts that proposal may have on opportunities to use the Welsh language.

Requirements	Does the proposal have any positive, negative, or neutral impacts with regards to the below?	What can be done to mitigate any negative impacts?	Please demonstrate any evidence used to form this opinion.
Compliance with the Welsh Language Standards. <i>For example, Standards 88 - 93 – policy development and review of existing policies)</i>	Neutral impact		
What opportunities are there to promote the Welsh Language? <i>For example, status, use of Welsh language services, use of Welsh in everyday life in work / community</i>	Positive Impact - Policy & registration / application forms will be available in Welsh & English		
What opportunities are there for a person to use the Welsh Language? <i>For example, staff, residents and visitors</i>	Positive Impact - Policy & registration / application forms will be available in Welsh & English		
Is the Welsh language being treated no less favourably than the English language?	YES		

Section 3 - Socio-economic Duty (Strategic Decisions Only – Please refer to our Corporate Reporting Guidance)

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)
<p>Low Income / Income Poverty (<i>cannot afford to maintain regular payments such as bills, food, clothing, transport etc.</i>)</p>	<p>Positive: All eligible households in BG will receive a payment to help with cost of living pressures</p> <p>Financial contributions will also be made to the BG Food Bank and CAB to support residents of Blaenau Gwent</p>		
<p>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>)</p>	<p>See above</p>		
<p>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>)</p>	<p>See above</p>		
<p>Area Deprivation <i>(where you live (rural areas), where you work (accessibility of public transport) Impact on the environment?</i></p>	<p>Neutral impact</p>		
<p>Socio-economic Background <i>(social class i.e., parents' education, employment and income)</i></p>	<p>Neutral impact</p>		

<p>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></p>	Neutral		

Section 4 – Children’s Rights Approach - [The Right Way](#)

The Children’s Rights Approach – The Right Way is a framework for working with children, grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It places the UNCRC at the core of planning and service delivery and integrates children’s rights into every aspect of decision-making, policy and practice. The Right Way focuses on three main them Participation, Provision and Protection.

Protected characteristics	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on the Children’s Rights Approach?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on the Children’s Rights Approach?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
<p>Participation (child or young person as someone who actively contributes to society as a citizen)</p>	No	No	

<p>Provision (the basic rights of children and young people to survive and develop)</p>	<p>Yes – families with children entitled to free school meals will be eligible for an additional payment</p>		
<p>Protection (children and young people are protected against exploitation, abuse or discrimination)</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>No</p>	

<p>Section 5– Community Safety</p> <p>Duty to Consider Crime and Disorder Implications</p> <p>Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a duty on the local authority to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder, anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment, the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances, re-offending and serious violence.</p>			
<p>Impacts</p>	<p>Will the proposal have any positive impacts on children & people’s</p>	<p>Will the proposal have any negative impacts on children & people’s participation, provision or protection?</p>	<p>Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.</p>

	participation, provision or protection?		
Crime (consider impact on each: victims, offenders and neighbourhoods)	No	No	
Anti-Social Behaviour and behaviour adversely affecting the local environment (consider impact on each: victims, offenders, neighbourhoods and green spaces)	No	No	
Misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances (Think vulnerable children, adults, families and communities)	No	All eligible households in BG will receive a payment to help with cost of living pressures however individuals could use this money to fund drugs, alcohol & other substances	
Re-offending (Think young people and adults, victims, families, communities)	No	No	

Serious Violence (Think vulnerable young people, vulnerable adults, victims, families, communities)	No	No	
Counter Terrorism (People and places that are vulnerable to terrorism or violent extremism)	No	No	
Community Cohesion (Asylum seekers, Migrants, Victims or Hate Crime, Community tensions)	No	No	

Section 6 - Data

Please outline any data or evidence that has been used to develop the proposal. For example, this can be previous consultations, national/regional/local data, pilot projects, reports, feedback from clients etc.

What data/evidence was used? - provide any links.	What were the key findings?	How has the data/evidence informed this proposal?
<p>WG Cost of Living Scheme</p> <p>WG Grant terms & conditions to implement Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme</p> <p>Economic data relating to inflation increases, fuel and energy cost.</p> <p>Data re free school meals eligibility</p> <p>CAB performance data</p>	<p>Eligibility criteria for Cost of Living Main scheme</p> <p>Funding has been made available to deliver Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme</p> <p>WG have requested scheme to be established asap to provide financial assistance to households in BG</p> <p>Approx 1800 families eligible for free school meals</p> <p>CAB caseload relating to BG residents is significantly increasing and additional support required</p>	<p>Identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> households not eligible under main scheme households eligible but not claimed under main scheme vulnerable families / households (via eligibility for free schools meals) <p>Highlighted increasing support being sought by BG households via CAB for finance / debt advice</p>

Are there any data or information gaps and if so what are they and how do you intend to address them?

Section 7 - Consultation.

Using the questions below please provide details of any planned consultations or consultations that have been undertaken to support the proposal, referring to the Gunning Principles as appropriate:

Principle 1: Consultation must take place when the proposals are still at a formative stage. You must not have already made up your mind.

Principle 2: Sufficient reasons must be put forward to allow for intelligent consideration and response. Have people been given the information and opportunity to influence?

Principle 3: Adequate time must be given for consideration and response. Is the consultation long enough bearing in mind the circumstances?

Principle 4: The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account when finalising the decision

Please consider the following questions:

1. Who did you consult?

CLT, Leader of the Council, CAB provided information on increased uptake of their services by people in Blaenau Gwent.

2. When did the consultation take place and was adequate time given for a response?

September 2022

3. Was there enough information provided to respond effectively?

4. What were the findings?

5. Have the findings been considered with regards to the decision?

Section 8 - Decision

Using the information you have gathered from sections 1-9 please state in the table below whether you are able to proceed with the proposal.

Continue with the proposal in its current form

Yes

No

Continue with proposal but take into account reasonable steps to mitigate any negative impacts of the proposal

Yes

No

Please contact Policy & Partnerships should you require any further advice or guidance on completing your assessment via lissa.friel@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk or emma.scherptong@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk.

This page is intentionally left blank

Agenda Item 5

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Corporate and Performance Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **23rd September 2022**
Report Subject: **Sickness Absence Performance 2021/22**
Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Steve Thomas, Leader / Executive Member**
Report Submitted by: **Andrea J Prosser, Head of Organisational Development**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance & Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
07.09.22	08.09.22	13.09.22			23.09.22	26.10.22		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Elected Members with the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge sickness absence performance for 2021/22, recognise the positive attendance of the majority of the workforce and the continued actions to support improvement in attendance.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Staff health and wellbeing is critical in delivering Council priorities and sickness absence is a key performance indicator reflected in the quarterly Finance and Performance report. Improving attendance remains a key priority and is identified as a corporate risk for the Council acknowledging that high levels of sickness absence have a detrimental impact on the ability of the Council to deliver services.
- 2.2 During 2021/22 sickness levels remained high increasing from the previous year as the Council continued to respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and return to business as usual. Whilst sickness levels increased it is important to recognise the commitment of staff during this period with a large majority of the workforce having little or no sickness absence.
- 2.3 The Council has in place a range of wellbeing support for staff and strategies to manage attendance in the workplace which include:
- Health and wellbeing initiatives
 - Extensive range of flexible working and leave arrangements.
 - Stress management policy and toolkit
 - Health, Safety and Welfare Corporate Group
 - Attendance Management Policy, with support and training for managers.
 - Regular discussion and learning nationally and regionally
 - Dashboard of sickness absence data for managers
 - Performance data provided to the Corporate Leadership Team, Heads of Service and Elected Members on a quarterly basis.
 - Sickness performance considered on management teams, team meetings and as part of manager's annual performance coaching.

2.4 **Employee Health and Wellbeing**

- 2.4.1 Employee wellbeing is intrinsically linked to levels of attendance. Wellbeing is more than an avoidance of becoming physically sick it includes physical, mental, and social health.
- 2.4.2 The Council has an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which provides a range of services including counselling, advice, and information. The Council actively promotes the services on offer for employees and managers. During 2021/22 the overall usage was up by almost 3% on the previous annual reporting period, with 40% of the contacts to the 24/7 telephone line, 48% individual counselling, 11% information specialists and 1% online counselling.
- 2.4.3 Advice and support to managers and employees from the Occupational Health Service is also integral in the management of sickness and employee health and wellbeing. The service assists with early interventions particularly in cases of stress and anxiety, supports the management of absence including the more complex or serious cases and provides advice to support employee's returning to work. During 2021/22 there were 477 management referrals to the service.
- 2.4.4 A weekly wellbeing bulletin for staff 'Wellbeing Wednesday' is published which provides a range of wellbeing information and resources including special editions to address key issues and topics such as the cost-of-living crisis.
- 2.4.5 Working in partnership with the Trade Unions the Council offers mental health awareness training which supports staff understand and identify colleagues who may be at risk of, or are experiencing, mental health issues.
- 2.4.6 The Council has recently introduced an employer supported volunteering policy which supports and encourages employees to volunteer in the community to improve skills, personal development, health, and wellbeing and also have a positive effect on the Council's ability to recruit and retain employees.

2.5 **Employee Engagement**

- 2.5.1 The Council recognises the critical need to communicate and engage staff through a range of mechanisms:
- Regular 121s / performance coaching / team meetings
 - Newsletters / wellbeing bulletin / managers brief
 - A dedicated engagement and consultation framework with trade unions
 - Staff surveys
 - Dedicated engagement sessions to support transformational change including Transitional leadership and managing an agile workforce

2.6 **Workforce Strategy 2021-26**

- 2.6.1 The Workforce Strategy 2021-26 has a focus on wellbeing which will play a significant role in supporting attendance at work. The year one action plan of the Strategy focused on the transition from responding to the pandemic to a future working model which became operational in September 2021. Agile working offers a modern model of working across the Council providing greater flexibility and work-life balance for employees positively impacting health and wellbeing and attendance at work.

2.6.2 Whilst it is acknowledged that COVID-19 will not disappear, the long-term impacts of the pandemic will continue to impact these include Long Covid, NHS treatment waiting times which could lead to prolonged periods of sickness absence and increasing levels of diagnosis where employees may not have accessed treatment during the period of the pandemic. Currently there are 20 employees on long term sickness absence that are awaiting treatment on the NHS. It has also become clear that individual personal and career aspirations have changed during this time and a continuing priority will be to manage the capacity of the workforce to ensure that services are delivered.

2.7 Ongoing Measures to support improvements in attendance

2.7.1 Strategies to address the impact of Covid and sickness absence

- Each directorate is developing a workforce plan that will sit under the Council's Workforce Strategy which will consider the future workforce needs of services to meet changing demand and deliver on priorities.
- Work nationally and regionally through the relevant networks to raise issues impacting Local Government and to consider and develop strategies to address for the future.
- Review of Agile Working commencing September 2022.
- Staff engagement through a staff survey and workshops.

2.7.2 Understanding the data

- Continue to measure the impact of Covid on sickness absence to manage the ongoing impacts.
- Performance targets set for 2022/23 (Council 10 days per fte).
- Further development of ITrent to improve sickness recording and reporting.
- Workforce profiles providing service workforce data and management information to help managers to plan and lead service performance and improvement issued annually to directorates and schools.

2.7.3 Management of sickness absence

- Recognition of good attendance through one to one and team meetings.
- Continued management and support by managers in managing sickness absence in line with Council Policy.
- Directorates with the support of Organisational Development to review the top 20 long term sickness absence cases and hotspots.
- Communication with the workforce on the impact of sickness and the support available for employees.
- Signposting of employees to self-access the Covid and flu immunisations.

2.7.4 Attendance Management Policy

- The policy remains a key aspect of the Council's approach to the management of attendance at work and is reviewed periodically to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and takes account of any learning. It is in the final stages of being updated following a recent review. This approach is replicated across Wales; however, one local authority has taken the decision to move away from this approach and adopt a focus primarily on wellbeing. The impact of this approach on attendance rates will be reviewed to understand if it is an approach that the Council could consider in managing attendance in the future.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 Option 1

That the Scrutiny Committee having scrutinised the sickness absence performance information and the ongoing actions to support improved attendance within the Council and identify any further areas for improvement in order to drive forward performance improvement.

3.2 Option 2

That the Scrutiny Committee endorse the report and the ongoing actions to support improvement in attendance.

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

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 high levels of sickness absence do present a 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 44% of staff within the Council had no sickness absence during 2021/22. Table 1 appended provides a breakdown by directorate.

6.1.2 The overall outturn figure for the Council is 16.74 days (per full time equivalent (FTE) employee) (14.20 days excluding Covid) which is an increase from the previous year and exceeds the 10-day target. When comparing the overall outturn with the previous year, there has been an increase of 5.07 days from 11.67 days. (4.22 days increase from 9.98 days when excluding COVID-19 sickness).

- 6.1.3 Covid-19 continued to have an impact during 2021/22, with the most significant impact on short term sickness absence occurring in the last quarter of the year. COVID-19 accounted for 2.54 days of the Council’s overall absence rate and has likely affected a large number of employees. In some cases, staff who tested positive were able to continue to work from home which has had a positive impact on absence levels.
- 6.1.4 Over the last five years the Council has had sustained levels of absence of over 11 days per employee. Since 2017/18 the Council has experienced increasing levels of absence up to 16.74 days at its highest in 2021/22, with the only exception being 2020/21 which saw a reduction in levels to 11.67 days. Table 2 details the outturn and trend for the Council and directorates.
- 6.1.5 68% of all absence in the Council is classed as long term (over 4 weeks), with short term absence accounting for 32%. There has been a slight shift from previous years with a 6% increase in the level of short-term absence. Table 3 details the breakdown by directorate.
- 6.1.6 The top 5 reasons for long term absence in the Council equate to over 76% of all long-term absences with mental health (stress, anxiety, and depression) being the top cause at 38%. Covid-19 accounted for over 30% of all short-term absence. Table 4 sets out the top five causes of long and short term absences.
- 6.1.7 Table 5 appended details the number of formal warnings, dismissals, and ill health retirements during 2021/22 and demonstrates a return to pre-pandemic figures.
- 6.1.8 A breakdown of sickness absence by service area is appended at Table 6 the key headlines are detailed below:

- 3 services have come within in target, of which 2 have seen a reduction from the previous year and 1 has had more sickness.

Service	21/22	20/21	
Governance & Partnerships	6.67	8.14	↓
Legal & Corporate Compliance	7.64	3.82	↑
Public Protection	4.44	9.11	↓

- 12 services have exceeded the target, 8 of which have seen an increase in sickness levels from the previous year, 2 have seen a reduction and there is no comparative data for 2 service areas due to changes in structure.

Service	21/22	20/21	
Commercial Services	8.22	5.34	↑
Resources	8.28	6.29	↑
Regeneration & Development	12.41	5.56	↑
Community Services	19.73	11.57	↑
Adult Services (Excluding Provider Servs)	22.63	12.84	↑
Provider Services	39.14	39.25	↓
Children’s Services	14.16	14.68	↓
School Based Staff (excluding Teachers)	21.31	12.03	↑
Teachers	12.42	6.45	↑
Education Transformation	9.80	No	
School Improvement & Inclusion	6.15	3.87	↑
Young People & Partnerships	7.58	No	

- 6.1.9 The All-Wales comparative data for 2020/21 and 2021/22 is appended at Table 7. This data has been anonymised as the 21/22 information has not been published. In 2021/22 of those Councils that have provided their data the Council reports the highest days lost. It is important to recognise when making comparisons that some Councils have retained services in-house while others who have outsourced which when considering certain front-line services would have a direct impact on sickness levels.
- 6.1.10 Available data for 2022/23 indicates an increase in sickness absence in the first quarter (outturn 4.27 days) in comparison to the same period in 2021/22 (outturn 3.23 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 continues to work positively with the Council to achieve this. The trade unions are keen for the Council to review the position of the Council in 2022/23 that has moved away from attendance management to focus on wellbeing.
- 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 and Council's policies and practice focus on prevention.
- 6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**
There are regular discussions with the All-Wales Human Resources Directors Network and regionally in terms of good practice or emerging practice in reducing sickness absence.
- 6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**
N/A
- 6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**
N/A
- 6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment**
N/A
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. Annual workforce profiles are provided and discussed with Managers and Headteachers.
- Background Documents /Electronic Links**
Appendix 1 - performance data

Table 1 - Attendance at Work

Directorate	% Staff by directorate with no sickness	% Staff by directorate with sickness
Corporate Services	58	42
Education	54	46
Schools	38	62
Regeneration & Community Services	50	50
Social Services	39	61
BGCBC	44	56

Table 2 – Sickness Days Lost Per Full Time Equivalent Employee

Council - Days Lost per FTE					
2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22 All Sickness	2021/22 Excluding Covid
11.23	12.66	13.91	11.67	16.74	14.20

Directorate - Days Lost per FTE							
Directorate (Historical)	2017/18	Directorate	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2021/22 Excluding Covid
Resources	7.38	Corporate Services	8.29	8.81	5.67	7.95	7.23 ↑
Corporate Services	6.65						
Education	6.11	Education	6.94	8.07	4.13	7.10	5.36 ↑
School based (Teachers)	9.07	School based (Teachers)	12.20	11.57	6.45	12.42	9.74 ↑
School based (excluding Teachers)	9.71	School based (excluding Teachers)	10.64	13.98	12.03	21.31	16.93 ↑
Environment	19.19	Regeneration & Community Services	11.21	16.15	10.20	17.04	14.54 ↑
Social Services	13.60	Social Services	18.19	17.81	22.98	24.32	22.05 ↑

Table 3 - Short / long term sickness absence by Directorate.

Directorate	2021/22 Short Term %	2021/22 Long Term %
Corporate Services	38	62
Education	48	52
School based Teachers	38	62
School based (excluding Teachers)	42	58
Regeneration & Community Services	32	68
Social Services	20	80
BGCBC	32	68

Table 4 – Sickness Absence Reasons – Top 5**Long term**

Rank 2021/22	Category	% of long term sickness
1	Psychiatric / Mental Health	38.17%
2	Musculoskeletal & Injuries	24.59%
4	Gastro-intestinal	5.50%
5	Cancer	4.40%
3	Neurological	4.22%

Short Term

Rank 2021/22	Category	% of short term sickness
1	Covid 19	30.86%
2	Gastro-intestinal	17.35%
3	Infectious disease	13.39%
4	Musculoskeletal & Injuries	7.52%
5	Neurological	6.19%

Table 5 - Number of formal warnings, dismissals, and ill health retirements

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of formal warnings issued	22	4	20
Dismissals	6	0	7
Number of ill health retirements	8	2	6

Table 6 – Sickness Absence breakdown by Service

Attendance Management - Number of days lost per full time equivalent employee											
Service Area	Qtr 1 Outturn	Qtr 1 Outturn (excl. COVID19)	Qtr 2 Outturn	Qtr 2 Outturn (excl. COVID19)	Qtr 3 Outturn	Qtr 3 Outturn (excl. COVID19)	Qtr 4 Outturn	Qtr 4 Outturn (excl. COVID19)	Annual Target	Outturn 2020/21	Outturn 2020/21 (excl. COVID19)
Corporate Services Directorate											
Commercial Services - Organisational Development / Social Care Workforce Development /Business Support	1.20	1.20	3.64	3.56	6.46	6.26	8.27	7.67	8	5.94	5.73
Commercial Services - Benefits / Communications, Marketing & Customer Access /Procurement / Strategy Transformation & Culture	0.71	0.71	2.22	1.97	4.54	3.89	8.17	7.01	8	4.33	3.65
Commercial Services Total	0.98	0.98	3.01	2.85	5.58	5.18	8.22	7.37	8	5.34	4.96
Resources	1.57	1.57	2.96	2.96	6.90	6.82	8.28	7.94	8	6.29	6.23
Governance & Partnerships	0.19	0.19	2.65	2.65	4.78	4.78	6.67	6.35	8	8.14	8.24
Legal & Corporate Compliance	0.63	0.63	1.17	0.63	7.17	6.54	7.64	6.58	8	3.82	3.82
Senior Management	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	8	0.00	0.00
Corporate Services Total	1.00	1.00	2.87	2.74	5.73	5.41	7.95	7.23	8	5.67	5.38
Regeneration & Community Services Directorate											
Regeneration & Development	3.99	3.99	8.47	8.27	10.48	10.04	12.41	11.65	6.5	5.56	4.32
Community Services	3.78	3.75	8.00	7.52	13.48	11.88	19.73	16.55	11	11.57	9.89
Public Protection	1.40	1.40	3.31	3.26	4.12	3.89	4.44	4.02	9	9.11	8.87
Senior Management	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0	0.00	0.00
Regeneration & Community Services Total	3.60	3.58	7.64	7.25	12.09	10.82	17.04	14.54		10.20	8.74
Social Services Directorate											
Adult Services (excluding Provider Services)	3.99	3.99	9.56	9.56	15.99	15.66	22.63	21.41	11	12.84	11.91
Provider Services	7.70	7.50	16.56	15.94	27.76	26.40	39.14	35.82	22	39.25	32.19
Children's Services	3.21	2.94	6.74	6.33	9.90	9.30	14.16	12.22	11	14.68	12.28
Senior Management	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0	0.00	0.00
Social Services Total	4.93	4.73	10.66	10.26	17.17	16.36	24.32	22.05		22.98	19.23
Education Directorate											
School based staff (excluding Teachers)	3.96	3.90	7.77	7.09	14.47	12.27	21.31	16.93	8.5	12.03	10.18
Teachers	2.40	2.40	3.98	3.68	7.81	6.56	12.42	9.74	8.5	6.45	5.67
Schools Total	3.13	3.10	5.72	5.24	10.88	9.19	16.55	13.08	8.5	9.03	7.75
Education Transformation & Business Change	0.00	0.00	3.80	0.00	9.00	0.00	9.80	0.00	6		
School Improvement & Inclusion	0.00	0.00	4.29	4.29	6.04	6.04	6.15	5.87	6	3.87	3.54
Young People & Partnerships	1.19	1.19	1.19	1.19	4.64	3.96	7.58	6.22	6		
Senior Management	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6	0.00	0.00
Corporate Education Total	0.69	0.69	3.30	2.73	5.30	4.10	7.10	5.36	6	4.13	3.40
Education Totals	2.99	2.96	5.58	5.10	10.55	8.89	15.98	12.61		8.75	7.50
Corporate Totals	3.23	3.17	6.67	6.28	11.53	10.34	16.74	14.20	10.00	11.67	9.98

Table 7 - All Wales Comparative Data

Local Authority	2020/21* Published Data	2021/22* Unpublished Data	Movement Year on Year
1	6.8	N/A	
2	7.7	N/A	
3	7.7	N/A	
4	8.8	N/A	
5	9.6	N/A	
6	11.0	N/A	
7	8.4	7.92	0.48↓
8	8.6	9.84	1.24↑
9	6.5	9.90	3.40↑
10	7.1	9.96	2.86↑
11	6.3	10.07	3.77↑
12	7.9	10.50	2.60↑
13	8.0	11.05	3.05↑
14	8.6	11.34	2.74↑
15	7.7	11.41	3.71↑
16	9.3	11.74	2.44↑
17	9.2	12.36	3.16↑
18	8.1	13.28	5.18↑
19	10.0	14.12	4.12↑
Blaenau Gwent	11.67	16.74	5.07↑

*2 Authorities did not report

This page is intentionally left blank