

DRAFT AGENDA

ID	2523
Committee	Pwyllgor Llywodraethiant ac Archwilio
Date	08/03/2023
Attendees	<p>Joanne Absalom (Cadeirydd)</p> <p>Councillor Sonia Behr (Is-gadeirydd)</p> <p>Councillor Jules Gardner (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr Wayne Hodgins (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Councillor Chris Smith (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr Tommy Smith (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorydd Joanna Wilkins (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Martin Veale (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Rhian Hayden (Swyddog)</p> <p>Louise Rosser (Swyddog)</p> <p>Bernadette Elias (Swyddog)</p> <p>Andrea Jones (Swyddog)</p> <p>Damien McCann (Swyddog)</p> <p>Tanya Evans (Swyddog)</p> <p>Andrea Owen (Swyddog)</p> <p>Steve Berry (Swyddog)</p> <p>Lynn Phillips (Swyddog)</p> <p>Sarah King (Swyddog)</p> <p>Gemma Wasley (Swyddog)</p> <p>Mike Jones (Public)</p> <p>Alice Rushby (Public)</p> <p>Charlotte Owen (Public)</p> <p>Leeann Turner (Secretary)</p> <p>Deborah Jones (Secretary)</p> <p>Gwasanaethau Democrataidd (Monitor)</p> <p>Pob Cynghorydd (Monitor)</p>

Item ID	7105
Item Title	Cyfieithu ar y Pryd
Summary	Mae croeso i chi ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg yn y cyfarfod, mae angen o leiaf 3 diwrnod gwaith o rybudd os dymunwch wneud hynny. Darperir gwasanaeth cyfieithu ar y pryd os gwneir cais am hynny

Item ID	7106
Item Title	Ymddiheuriadau
Summary	Derbyn ymddiheuriadau.

Item ID	7107
Item Title	Datganiadau Buddiant a Goddefebau
Summary	Derbyn datganiadau buddiant a goddefebau.

Item ID	7108
Item Title	Pwyllgor Llywodraethiant ac Archwilio
Summary	Derbyn penderfyniadau'r Pwyllgor Llywodraethiant ac Archwilio a gynhaliwyd ar 30 Ionawr 2023. (Dylid nodi y cyflwynir y penderfyniadau er mwyn cywirdeb yn unig).

Item ID	7109
Item Title	Dalen Weithredu
Summary	Derbyn y Ddalen Weithredu yn deillio o'r cyfarfod a gynhaliwyd ar 30 Ionawr 2023.

Item ID	7258
Item Title	Blaenraglen Gwaith 2022-23
Summary	Derbyn yr adroddiad.

Item ID	7259
Item Title	Gwasanaethau Addysg Llywodraeth Leol Blaenau Gwent: Canlyniad Arolwg Estyn
Summary	Ystyried adroddiad y Cyfarwyddwr Corfforaethol Addysg.

Item ID	7266
Item Title	Gwasanaeth Rhannu Adnoddau (SRS)
Summary	Ystyried adroddiad y Prif Swyddog Masnachol a Chwsmeriaid.

Item ID	7260
Item Title	Archwilio Cymru: Adolygiad Sicrwydd ac Asesu Risg – Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Blaenau Gwent
Summary	Ystyried adroddiad y Prif Swyddog Adnoddau.

Item ID	7261
Item Title	Archwilio Cymru: Dilyn ar Ddiogelu Corfforaethol – Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Blaenau Gwent
Summary	Ystyried adroddiad Cyfarwyddwr Corfforaethol Interim Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol.

Item ID	7262
Item Title	Archwilio Cymru: ‘Cyfle coll’ – Mentrau Cymdeithasol
Summary	Ystyried adroddiad y Cyfarwyddwr Corfforaethol Adfywio a Chymuned a Chyfarwyddwr Corfforaethol Interim Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol

Item ID	7263
Item Title	Archwilio Cymru: Naid Ymlaen – Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Blaenau Gwent
Summary	Ystyried adroddiad y swyddogion ar y cyd.

Item ID	7264
Item Title	Archwilio Cymru: ‘Amser i Newid’ – Tlodi yng Nghymru
Summary	Ystyried adroddiad y Cyfarwyddwr Corfforaethol Interim Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol.

Item ID	7265
Item Title	Archwilio Cymru: ‘Gyda’n gilydd gallwn’ Cydnerthedd Cymunedol a Hunandibyniaeth
Summary	Ystyried adroddiad Prif Swyddog Masnachol a Chwsmeriaid a Phennaeth Llywodraethiant a Phartneriaethau.

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: **THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE**

SUBJECT: **GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE**
30TH JANUARY, 2023

REPORT OF: **DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER**

PRESENT: MS JOANNE ABSALOM (CHAIR)

Councillors S. Behr (Vice-Chair)

W. Hodgins

C. Smith

Mr M. Veale

WITH: Chief Officer Resources
Audit & Risk Manager
Interim Corporate Director of Social Services
Corporate Director of Environment & Regeneration
Service Manager Development & Estates
Interim Head of Children’s Services
Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships
Professional Lead – Internal Audit
Finance Business Partner
Senior Auditor
Information Security Officer
Data Protection & Governance Officer

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.	
No. 2	<u>APOLOGIES</u>	

	<p>Apologies for absence were received from:-</p> <p>Councillor T. Smith Councillor J. Wilkins Charlotte Owen - Audit Wales</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no Declarations of interests and dispensations reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The decisions of the Governance & Audit Committee held on 16th November, 2022 were submitted.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the decisions be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>ACTION SHEET – 16TH NOVEMBER, 2022</u></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting held on 16th November, 2022 was submitted.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the Action sheet be noted.</p>	
No. 6	<p><u>GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE</u> <u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2022-23</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Scrutiny and Democratic Officer.</p> <p>The Chief Officer Resources informed Members that the Statement of Accounts 2021/22 would not be available for the next Committee meeting scheduled for 8th March, 2023. A briefing note outlining the current position would be forwarded to Members.</p> <p>A Special Governance & Audit Committee meeting be convened if the Statement of Accounts 2021/22 becomes available before the scheduled meeting on 26th April, 2023.</p>	

	<p>RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and the Forward Work Programme for the Governance and Audit Committee be approved.</p>	
No. 7	<p><u>INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Professional Lead Internal Audit.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Committee noted the findings within the attached Appendices and noted progress on activities for the period 1st October to 31st December 2022.</p>	
No. 8	<p><u>EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF BLAENAU GWENT INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICES</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Audit & Risk Manager.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Committee agreed that the report reflected their understanding of the Internal Audit Service, and that the proposed action plan be agreed and forwarded to Carmarthenshire to finalise the report.</p>	
No. 9	<p><u>BLAENAU GWENT COUNCIL'S POSITION IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONS IN AUDIT WALES' REPORT 'LEARNING FROM CYBER ATTACKS'</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 Paragraphs 14 and 18, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).</p>	

	<p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources & SIRO and the Chief Information Security Officer.</p> <p>A Member requested that further IT training be arranged for Members.</p> <p>RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and the Committee considered the information provided in the report and gained assurance that the Council had (or intended to put in place) appropriate measures to minimise the risk of cyber attacks.</p>	
	<p><u>APPENDIX B2 AND B4 – INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT</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 Paragraphs 13 and 14, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).</p> <p>A verbal update was received from the Service Manager Development & Estates regarding Appendix B2 and B4 deferred from the previous Governance & Audit Committee held on 16th November, 2022.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the verbal report be accepted and the Service Manager Development & Estates refer Appendix B4 to the relevant Scrutiny Committee for consideration.</p>	

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Action Sheet

Governance & Audit Committee

Meeting Date	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
21 st Sept 2022	<u>Item 8 - Forward Work Programme</u> A member requested that a mapping exercise be undertaken to ensure cross reference between the Terms of Reference and the Forward Work Programme.	Audit & Risk Manager	A mapping exercise has been undertaken the results of which have been forwarded to all committee members via a briefing note. Action complete: 28th February 2023
30 th Jan 2023	<u>Item 6 – Forward Work Programme</u> A briefing note outlining the current position on the Statement of Accounts 2021/22 to be forwarded to Members.	Chief Officer Resources	A briefing note will have been provided to the Committee Members prior to it's next meeting on 8th March 2023. Action complete: 8th March 2023

Meeting Date	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
30 th Jan 2023	<p>Exempt <u>Item 9 - Blaenau Gwent Council's Position In Response To The Questions In Audit Wales' Report 'Learning From Cyber Attacks'</u></p> <p>Members IT training to be arranged.</p>	<p>Information Security Officer / Data Protection & Governance Officer</p>	<p>Discussions underway with Democratic Services over when, how and what to provide training on.</p> <p>Action complete: In progress</p>
30 th Jan 2023	<p>Exempt <u>Appendix B4 - Internal Audit Progress Report</u></p> <p>The Service Manager Development & Estates to refer Appendix B4 to the relevant Scrutiny Committee for consideration.</p>	<p>Service Manager Development & Estates</p>	<p>Report being prepared for submission.</p> <p>Action complete: In progress</p>

Agenda Item 6

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**

Date of meeting: **8th March 2023**

Report Subject: **Forward Work Programme 2022-23**

Portfolio Holder: **Leader / Executive Member Corporate Overview and Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Scrutiny and Democratic Officer**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
			08.03.23					

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 To present the Forward Work Programme for 2022-23 (Appendix 1).

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Work Programmes are key aspects of the Council's planning and governance arrangements and support the requirements of the Constitution.
- 2.2 The topics set out in the Forward Work Programme link to the strategic work of the Council as identified by the Council's Corporate Plan, agreed by the Council in July 2020, corporate documents and supporting business plans.
- 2.3 The Governance and Audit Committee Forward Work Programme is aligned to the Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Council Forward Work Programmes.
- 2.4 The Work Programme is a fluid document and there is flexibility to allow for regular review between the Chair and the Committee.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 The work programme has previously been agreed by the Committee.

3.2 Option 1

To accept the Forward Work Programme.

Option 2

To suggest any amendments to the Forward Work Programme.

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Governance and Audit Forward Work Programme

Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer
Meeting Date: 11th July 2022		
Code of Governance	To present the revised Code of Governance for the Council.	Louise Rosser
Strategic Internal Audit Plan 2021-2026	To provide Members with the strategic five-year Audit Plan for the period 2021-2026.	Louise Rosser
Internal Audit Outturn 2021/2022	To present the Internal Audit Outturn for 2021/22	Louise Rosser
Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Manager	To present the opinion of the Annual Opinion of the Audit & Risk Manager	Louise Rosser

Special Meeting Date: 27th July 2022		
Forward Work Programme 2022/23	To agree the FWP for 2022/23	Chair
Internal Audit Charter	To provide an updated copy of the Internal Audit Charter.	Louise Rosser
Audit Plan Progress Report (Qtr 1)	To update Members on the progress against the Internal Audit Plan.	Louise Rosser
BGCBC – Annual Audit Summary	To present the Audit Wales Annual Audit Summary.	Sarah King
Audit Wales 2022 Audit Plan for BGCBC	To present the Audit Wales 2022 Audit Plan.	Rhian Hayden

Meeting Date: 21st September 2022		
Draft Annual Governance Statement	To present the draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS).	Louise Rosser
Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme	To present the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme for Internal Audit Services	Louise Rosser
Governance and Audit Committee Terms of Reference	To present the Governance and Audit Committee Terms of Reference	Steve Berry
Annual Report of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales 2020/21	To inform Members of the Council's performance with regard to complaints to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.	Andrea Jones

Special Meeting Date: 20th October 2022		
Annual Self-Assessment of Council Performance 2021/22 To be published by 31st October each year	To present the Annual Self-Assessment of Council performance.	Sarah King

Governance and Audit Forward Work Programme

Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer
Meeting Date: 16th November 2022		
Audit Plan Progress Report (Qtr 2)	To update Members on the progress against the Internal Audit Plan.	Louise Rosser
RIPA Activity	To report on authorised RIPA activity as per the Council's policy.	Andrea Jones
Complaints Report (Qtr1 & Qtr2)	To present the bi-annual report on Complaints as required by the Ombudsman	Andrea Jones
Draft Statement of Accounts 2021/22	To present for consideration the 2021/22 Draft Statement of Accounts and to consider the Authority's financial standing as at 31 March 2022.	Rhian Hayden

Meeting Date: 30th January 2023		
Audit Plan Progress report (Qtr 3)	To update Members on the progress against the Internal Audit Plan.	Louise Rosser
External Quality Assessment	To report on the outcomes of the external quality assessment of Internal Audit	Louise Rosser
Audit Wales - Learning from Cyber Attacks	To present the Audit Wales report.	Rhian Hayden

Governance and Audit Forward Work Programme

Meeting Date: 8th March 2023

Meeting Date: 8 th March 2023		
SRS Position Statement	To present a position statement on the partnership with the SRS	Bernadette Elias
National Audit Wales Study – Time for Change – Poverty in Wales	To present the Audit Wales report.	Tanya Evans
Audit Wales - Springing Forward	To present the Audit Wales report.	Bernadette Elias / Sarah King / Andrea Prosser /Ellie Fry
Audit Wales – Safeguarding Follow Up	To present the Audit Wales report	Tanya Evans
Audit Wales – Assurance and Risk Assessment Review	To present the Audit Wales report	Rhian Hayden / Sarah King
Audit Wales – Social Enterprises	To present the Audit Wales report	Ellie Fry / Tanya Evans
Audit Wales – ‘Together we can’ Community Resilience and Self-Reliance	To present the Audit Wales report	Bernadette Elias / Sarah King
Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) Inspection Outcome	To present the Estyn report	Lynn Phillips

Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer
Meeting Date: 26th April 2023		
Code of Governance	To present the revised Code of Governance for the Council.	Louise Rosser
Internal Audit Outturn 2022/2023	To present the Internal Audit Outturn for 2022/23	Louise Rosser
Annual Governance Statement	To present the final Annual Governance Statement (AGS).	Louise Rosser
Corporate Risk Register / Risk Update	To update Members on the current corporate risk register	Louise Rosser
Statement of Accounts 2021/22	To present for approval the 2021/22 Statement of Accounts and to consider the Authority’s financial standing as at 31 st March 2022.	Rhian Hayden
Audit of Financial Statements	To consider the report from the Council’s External Auditors Wales Audit Office.	Rhian Hayden

Governance and Audit Forward Work Programme

Meeting Date: Dates to be arranged as necessary		
Review of Governance and oversight arrangements of companies of which the Council has an interest	Following the audit Wales review of Silent Valley and subsequent recommendation, the following companies will be included within this report: Gwent Crematorium Gwent Archives EAS ALT	Sarah King
Audit Wales – Regenerating Town Centres	To present the Audit Wales report.	Ellie Fry
Audit Wales Reports		Various

Agenda Item 7

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**

Date of meeting: **8th March 2023**

Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) Inspection Outcome**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. Sue Edmunds, Cabinet Member People and Education**

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

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance and Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
✓	02.02.23	15.02.23	01.03.23		28.02.23	01.03.23		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present to Members the outcomes from the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) Inspection and the full report is attached as Appendix 1.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 It is a statutory responsibility of the Corporate Director of Education to assess the effectiveness of the delivery of Education and produce updates for Members that forms part of the Annual Council Reporting Framework. The provision of Education is regulated under the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework and this report will detail the outcomes from the inspection that took place during the Autumn term 2022.
- 2.2 In September 2022, Blaenau Gwent Council received a letter from Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, stating that the Local Authority will be subject to an Estyn inspection, in line with the Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework. The letter confirmed that the inspection would take place between 28th November to 2nd December 2022.
- 2.3 The Reporting Inspector and the LA's Link Inspector are attending the People Scrutiny Committee session when this report is discussed. The LGES Inspection guidance includes the following text to explain their involvement: 'Following the publication of the inspection report, we expect that a relevant Scrutiny Committee of the local council scrutinises the report and challenges senior leaders, including officers and elected members, about their plans for improvement. At least one inspector involved in the inspection will attend this meeting as an observer but will contribute to the session where it helps clarify any matters relating to the inspection and the report'.
- 2.4 The inspection was carried out in accordance with the inspection framework and the guidance 'for the inspection of Local Government Education Services'. 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

2.5 In the lead-up to the inspection, Estyn identified Blaenau Gwent's 4 Local Questions for the Inspection, including:

- 1) How well does the local authority challenge and support non-maintained settings and schools to improve?
- 2) How well does the local authority tackle inequalities in education experiences and outcomes for children living in poverty?
- 3) How well does the local authority support schools to promote respectful relationships and address negative behaviour effectively?
- 4) How well does the local authority ensure that the interests of learners are above all others in its planning for schools and other education provision?

2.6 Prior to the core inspection week, preliminary work involved surveying staff, learners, parents and other local/regional/national stakeholders with an interest in education services. There was also a preliminary visit held in early November before the core inspection week to interview key stakeholders.

2.7 The Council received preliminary feedback and findings from the Inspection team on 2nd December 2022. This was followed up by a draft and final report, which included the inspectorate findings and identified 3 recommendations for improvement. The full report also details the inspectorate's findings against the 4 local questions. This letter was published on the 9th. February 2023 and is attached to this report. The report provides a high-level summary of the main findings and some of the key considerations, including:

- The local authority has made good progress with its education services since it was last inspected around ten years ago as important areas for improvement have largely been addressed. Senior officers and elected members have a strong commitment to education, and this is reflected in the funding given to schools and education services.

- The local authority generally plans well to make sure that it has suitable education provision to meet the needs of every child and young person. Over the past decade, the local authority has successfully reduced surplus places in schools and improved the conditions of its school buildings. The local authority is suitably developing its Welsh-medium education provision. Whilst there have been some positive developments in provision for pupils with additional learning needs, the quality of planning for future provision is variable.
- There are many strengths in the local authority's work to reduce the impact of deprivation on education outcomes and its support for families in low-income households. There are also many strengths in the services to support children and young people's well-being and promote positive relationships.
- The authority has worked with its regional school improvement service to strengthen the challenge and support it provides to schools. This work has greater impact for children in non-maintained and primary age settings than for young people in secondary age settings. Provision for young people was too slow to improve in two schools placed in statutory categories.
- Despite strengths in education services, corporate leaders have not ensured that their vision and strategic aims for education are fully understood by other officers, elected members, school staff and external partners. Also, corporate leaders have not ensured that the corporate plan is supported by coherent delivery plans for education that include related actions and measurable success criteria. Overall, the quality of self-evaluation, planning for improvement, and performance management is not strong enough.

2.8 The inspectorate has identified 3 recommendations for improvement that the local authority will use to update its improvement plans. These areas for development take account of shortcomings identified through the inspection process. The local authority's plans are to be updated during the Spring term and the revised Education Improvement Plan (EIP) and Self-Evaluation Report (SER) will be brought back to the People Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet early in the Summer term for both scrutinisation and to seek approval. Importantly, developmental work has already begun on addressing the recommendations that are outlined below:

- R1.** Improve the corporate leadership of education services;
- R2.** Improve the quality of self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management; and,
- R3.** Accelerate improvements in provision for secondary age pupils in schools causing concern.

2.9 The outcome of the Inspection is positive overall, progress since the last inspection has been made and there is no requirement for follow-up activity. The 3 recommendations identified can be used to facilitate leverage at a corporate level to deliver continued incremental change. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the LA's areas for improvement are of paramount importance in supporting our children and young people to improve their education, skills and life chances. There will be regular update reporting on progress to Members and the Education Directorate will work with Estyn through the Local Authority Link Inspector (LALI) termly meetings to provide assurances to the inspectorate that improvements continue to be made both corporately and operationally across the range of LGES services.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The report has been considered by Education's DMT and the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT).

3.2 **Option 1**

That the Governance and Audit Committee considers and accepts the information within the report and is assured that the process for the monitoring of Estyn recommendations is robust.

3.3 **Option 2**

To seek further clarification on any areas within the report and/or to highlight any areas of interest or concern that need to be considered in future monitoring and reporting.

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

4.1 It is a statutory responsibility of the Corporate Director of Education to assess the effectiveness of the delivery of Education and regular monitoring reports will be produced, in line with the Scrutiny and Cabinet Forward Work Programmes.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

There are no direct financial considerations associated with this report, however, it is pleasing to note the findings from the Inspectorate on resource management. There was acknowledgement that the LA has a track record of spending within its education budget in recent years, with relatively small underspends for the past three years against the overall education budget. The financial outlook, however, for the public sector will be challenging over the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and close financial management will be essential to achieve value for money.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

There is one corporate risk for the Education service in the Corporate Risk Register relating to the 2 Schools Causing Concern. Education also maintains a Directorate Risk Register, which is aligned to both service level and corporate risks. The risk register is reviewed as part of the business

planning process and included within the performance reporting for the service. The inspection findings are to be included in the risk registers.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 The detailed inspection findings are included within Appendix 1. The Education Directorate is working together with key stakeholders to deliver 'Better Schools, Better Citizens and Better Communities – all through a child and young person-centred approach'. The Education Directorate are working with corporate colleagues and key partners to ensure that the vision and strategic aims for education are fully understood across the board.

6.2 Expected outcome for the public

The Estyn report was published early in February and the reporting of findings provides the public with the opportunity to view progress of the LA/ Education Directorate and partners to ensure public accountability for our citizens.

6.3 Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

The LA has shared the inspection findings with stakeholders, including Headteachers and partners. Pupil voice is a key area for the Education Directorate and examples of this are included within the inspection findings, it should also be noted that a member of the Youth Forum contributes to the work of the People Scrutiny Committee.

6.4 Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)

The report enables the Education Directorate to plan as resourcing, risk and performance is continuously reported. The Estyn findings provide a baseline of where the services are currently placed, and most importantly, where we need to be in the future.

6.5 Preventative focus

The work undertaken by the Education Directorate promotes a preventative approach to practice through early identification and intervention. The respective teams have an active rather than re-active approach to service planning can also help with planning resources and ensuring value for money services are delivered.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

7.1 The performance of the Education Directorate is monitored via through the democratic process via various reporting mechanisms including the Finance and Performance Report, the Assessment of Performance and various performance monitoring reports.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Estyn - A report on Education Services in Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.

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A report on education services in

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

**The General Offices
Steelworks Road
Ebbw Vale
Blaenau Gwent
NP23 6DN**

Date of inspection: November 2022

by

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Blaenau Gwent has a total population of around 67,000 people, and a school population of around 9,400 pupils. There are 25 schools in the local authority, including one that provides Welsh-medium education.

The local authority works in partnership with four other local authorities in South East Wales for some of its education services, including a regional school improvement services (the EAS), a regional ethnic minority support service (GEMS) and a regional support service for learners with sensory and communication needs (SENCOM).

The Council Leader and Executive Member People & Education were both elected to their roles in May 2022. The interim Chief Executive took up post in April 2022, and the Corporate Director for Education took up post in November 2020.

In 2022-2023, the local authority's education budget is around £66,637,000. The delegated school budget per pupil in 2022-2023 is £5,697, slightly higher than the Wales average of £5,032.

The local authority's last inspection was in January 2013. Inspectors take account of a wide range of information about the local population when evaluating outcomes and the quality of education services. They consider this information alongside information about the national population. Some of the most useful information about children and young people in Blaenau Gwent is noted below:

- Over a three-year average, 31.2% of pupils aged 5 to 15 are eligible for free school meals, higher than the Wales average of 23%
- 6.1% of pupils aged 5 to 15 are from ethnic minorities, lower than the Wales average of 13.3%
- 1.8% of pupils aged 5 to 15 have English as an additional language
- 1.1% of pupils aged 5 or over are fluent in Welsh, lower than the Wales average of 15.6%
- 15.5% of pupils aged 5 to 15 have additional learning or special educational needs

Summary

The local authority has made good progress with its education services since it was last inspected around ten years ago as important areas for improvement have largely been addressed. One of the local authority's four priorities in its current corporate plan for 2022-2027 is to 'maximise learning and skills for all learners to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent'. Senior officers and elected members have a strong commitment to education and this is reflected in the funding given to schools and education services.

The local authority generally plans well to make sure that it has suitable education provision to meet the needs of every child and young person. Over the past decade, the local authority has successfully reduced surplus places in schools and improved the conditions of its school buildings. The local authority is suitably developing its Welsh-medium education provision. Whilst there have been some positive developments in provision for pupils with additional learning needs, the quality of planning for future provision is variable.

There are many strengths in the local authority's work to reduce the impact of deprivation on education outcomes and its support for families in low-income households. There are also many strengths in the services to support children and young people's well-being and promote positive relationships.

The authority has worked with its regional school improvement service to strengthen the challenge and support it provides to schools. This work has greater impact for children in non-maintained and primary age settings than for young people in secondary age settings. Provision for young people was too slow to improve in two schools placed in statutory categories.

Despite strengths in education services, corporate leaders have not ensured that their vision and strategic aims for education are fully understood by other officers, elected members, school staff and external partners. Also, corporate leaders have not ensured that the corporate plan is supported by coherent delivery plans for education that include related actions and measurable success criteria. Overall, the quality of self-evaluation, planning for improvement, and performance management is not strong enough.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the corporate leadership of education services
- R2 Improve the quality of self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management
- R3 Accelerate improvements in provision for secondary age pupils in schools causing concern

What happens next

Following the publication of the inspection report, the local authority should update its plans to address the recommendations and to take account of shortcomings identified through the inspection process. The local authority should update its plans within three months of the publication of the inspection report.

Main findings

Outcomes

We are unable to provide a full evaluation of outcomes. This is due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused the suspension of inspections of schools and most other education providers between March 2020 and February 2022. It is also due to the lack of data about outcomes that can be compared over time as the pandemic caused changes to the way that qualifications were awarded and affected most other data that we consider when making evaluations, such as school attendance, school exclusions and post-16 learner destinations. Any evaluations that follow provide a context by reporting on outcomes before the pandemic or relate to more recent outcomes where the evidence base is valid and reliable.

Between September 2017 and March 2020, we inspected eight primary schools, one all-age school and one secondary school. Overall, inspection outcomes during this period were in line with the national average. We judged that standards were good in all but one of the primary schools. However, standards in the all-age school and the secondary school were judged to be adequate and unsatisfactory respectively, and both schools were placed in a statutory follow-up category. Although one of these schools has been removed from its category, both of these schools were slow to improve standards following their inspection. Since inspections resumed in February 2022, we have inspected two primary schools and a special school. We asked both primary schools to provide case studies of good practice, but the special school requires special measures.

In the three years before the start of the pandemic, the proportion of pupils who achieved five or more GCSEs at grade C or above including English or Welsh and mathematics varied considerably across the authority's schools. One school performed consistently well, one school performed consistently satisfactorily, one school had a worsening trend and one school performed consistently poorly.

In the school inspections between September 2017 and March 2020, pupils' well-being and attitudes to learning were judged to be good in many schools. For the three years from 2017 to 2019, overall school attendance was consistently lower than the national average. However, the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals was higher than that of their peers nationally and rates of persistent absenteeism and unauthorised absence were broadly in line with national averages, which are positive given the socio-economic context of the authority. The rate of fixed-term school exclusions of five days or less was well above the national average, although the rate of fixed-term exclusions of more than five days was broadly in line with the national average.

After Year 11, almost all young people progress to further education, employment or training. This is a particular strength given the historically high levels of young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) and given the challenging socio-economic context of the authority. Young people continue to benefit from support from dedicated officers beyond their initial destination after Year 11 that helps them to move to an alternative education, employment or training destination if their initial destination does not work out.

Children and young people currently benefit from a wide range of services to support their well-being. Children and young people aged 10 to 25 are well supported by the authority's counselling service in schools and communities which, on average, leads to considerable reductions in emotional distress. Young carers have identity cards that help to reduce barriers that can prevent them from participating fully in and benefiting from activities that their peers enjoy. Vulnerable children and young people benefit from free after school and holiday activities that develop their literacy and numeracy skills and support their personal and social development, physical health and well-being.

When given the opportunity, children and young people in the authority influence decisions that affect them. A young person is elected from the Youth Forum to be a member of the scrutiny committee that considers education matters. The voice of secondary age pupils has supported the development of helpful LGBTQ+ support groups in all their schools.

Education services

How well does the local authority challenge and support non-maintained settings and schools to improve?

Officers in Blaenau Gwent generally know their schools well and have developed a good understanding of the contexts of different schools. Following a review of the education service structure, the local authority created a dedicated senior leadership role for school improvement and inclusion. This has increased the capacity of the local authority to work more closely with schools and to link more effectively with the regional school improvement service, the Educational Achievement Service (EAS).

Officers have strengthened and improved their relationships with senior leaders in most schools. Most headteachers feel that officers listen to their views and take account of their opinions. For example, headteachers identified that pupils' reading skills are weaker following the pandemic and the local authority has commissioned the EAS to support schools to improve these skills.

The local authority and the EAS work well together to support schools. School improvement partners have a well-structured plan of work with school leaders across the academic year, starting with sessions that focus on school self-evaluation and professional discussions with key staff from the school, the local authority and the EAS. These sessions help to identify the level and nature of the support that schools will benefit from to enable them to address their improvement priorities successfully. A single plan for each school outlines the support that the school will receive, details of grant spending, school improvement priorities and termly evaluations of the progress against these. Officers implement a tiered approach to providing support to schools. When schools need additional support, officers implement the Team around the School approach to ensure a holistic approach that meets the bespoke needs of the school.

There are currently no primary schools or non-maintained settings requiring follow-up activity after inspection. Over the past two years officers have identified a few primary schools that require improvement. The local authority and the EAS have provided good support for these schools to help them to improve. This support includes

strengthening the governing body and commissioning curriculum support through the 'local network of schools' process. Where the local authority uses its statutory powers to appoint governors, it takes care to match governors' skills and expertise closely to the needs of the school.

The local authority early years team and the advisory teacher from the EAS provide the three non-maintained settings with effective advice and guidance. This includes support for evaluation and improvement planning as well as guidance on how to create a stimulating environment for young children. This support is helping the settings to deliver good quality provision for their children.

Two schools in the local authority require special measures currently, one secondary school and one special school, and one all-age school was removed from the category of needing significant improvement in February 2022. In two of these three schools, officers did not recognise important shortcomings or the need for school leaders to make significant improvements prior to these being identified by inspectors. The pace of improvement in these two schools has been too slow. Reviews of progress in these schools show that issues identified at the time of the inspections, particularly around the quality of teaching, are not being addressed quickly enough and impact on learners' progress for too long a period of time. Officers do not monitor progress closely enough or ensure that school improvement partners set sufficiently precise and focused success criteria against which progress can be measured. In a few instances where improvement partners lacked the relevant specialist knowledge and skills to be able to support and challenge schools, the local authority challenged the EAS and ensured that suitable improvement partners were put in place.

The EAS and the local authority provide a range of appropriate professional learning opportunities for staff at all levels in schools. These include national leadership programmes and training to support teaching and learning. In addition, the local authority delivers its own useful complementary programmes for aspiring and new headteachers, which helps to mitigate the challenge of recruiting experienced senior leaders to schools in the county. Recent changes to the programme to support governors means that they now access training matched better to their needs.

How well does the local authority tackle inequalities in education experiences and outcomes for children living in poverty?

The local authority has a clear commitment to reducing the impact of poverty on education outcomes. Officers know their communities well and use information they gather locally, national surveys and reports to identify needs and prioritise resources. Heads of service across the local authority have established an anti-poverty council and elected members have recently set up a cost-of-living crisis group. Elected members are committed to addressing this issue, and a new member 'poverty champion' brings knowledge and expertise to help support this aspect of their work. Members look beyond their authority to see what they can learn from others to help improve Blaenau Gwent for its citizens.

Officers collaborate well across directorates on issues relating to poverty to enable resources to be targeted towards those most in need. This is helping vulnerable families to access services where they can get suitable advice, support and practical

help. Officers work well with local charitable groups to provide support for families who are struggling financially, as well as ensuring that period poverty does not lead to educational disadvantage.

The local authority uses a wide range of approaches to help mitigate the effects of poverty in pre-school and children's early years in education. This begins before birth with support for mothers-to-be by, for example, encouraging healthy eating and developing budgeting skills. There are groups for new mothers to help with parenting, for example the 'Lap not App' programme that promotes the development of bonds and relationships. Flying Start hubs are largely within local communities to make them as accessible as possible. Within these hubs, there is holistic support for parents, including opportunities for education and training to access employment.

Officers ensure that schools spend their pupil development grants appropriately, supporting them to make well-considered decisions and challenging them on the impact of their spending. Headteachers value the support the authority provided during the pandemic. School holiday enrichment programmes provide structured childcare for children to have access to sport, craft and environmental activities. Children taking part in these programmes have a daily meal provided for them, learn to cook simple, healthy recipes and have opportunities to prepare meals for their families to dine together.

From September 2022, the local authority increased catering capacity to provide universal free school meals for all pupils up to Year 2, going beyond the Welsh Government's minimum requirements for the roll-out of free school meals at this stage. The authority works with a specialist dietician to ensure that meals are healthy and nutritious, and that they cater appropriately for an increasing number of pupils with special dietary requirements. Additionally, healthy schools co-ordinators work with schools and settings to promote healthy lifestyles, for example by promoting healthy snacks in the early years.

The authority identifies vulnerable children and young people of all ages using a range of suitable risk measures. The needs of the more vulnerable are considered by multi-agency panels. Professionals track, monitor and support vulnerable children and young people through a named support worker. These children and young people have support during important milestones, such as transition from primary to secondary schools and on to post-16 education, training or employment.

Families First funds four social workers to work with schools across clusters. This enables schools to access appropriate support quickly for pupils and families to reduce the risk of disengagement from school and learning. Recently, the authority has restarted its family engagement work following the pandemic, for example supporting pupils returning to school and those with examination anxiety.

The authority acknowledges the work of young carers in the authority and the challenges they can face. Local authority and health professionals proactively identify young carers so that can offer them suitable support. Over the past three years, young carers have been provided with a National Young Carers ID card, which gives access to a range of helpful benefits and incentives to help them and their families, such as free access to leisure facilities and permission to collect prescriptions for

those they care for. Elected members recognise and celebrate the contribution of young carers at an annual awards ceremony.

How well does the local authority support schools to promote respectful relationships and address negative behaviour effectively?

Through the education psychology service and an 'inclusive practice service', all schools have access to a range of suitable support to promote positive, respectful relationships and address negative behaviour effectively. These two services work closely together.

Officers in the education psychology service provide helpful training for school staff, including Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) training for teaching assistants. They provide valuable guidance for additional learning needs co-ordinators (ALNCos) that helps them to consider how to best meet pupils' additional learning needs.

The local authority commissions one of its special schools to provide the 'inclusive practice service' for other schools. This service provides beneficial support for staff to understand behaviours in schools and respond appropriately. It has recently modified its approach from directly supporting individual pupils to providing professional learning to school staff so that they can support pupils themselves.

The local authority has recently developed new 'positive relationships and behaviour' guidance and a 'relationships (anti-bullying)' policy, although there was limited involvement of schools and learners in developing these. The anti-bullying policy sets out the expectation that schools will record all alleged incidents of bullying, outlining the specific types of bullying, including bullying involving pupils with protected characteristics. Previously the local authority had not been collecting information about incidents from schools in a way that would enable it to identify potential issues and act upon them. The local authority has improved its work in this area by purchasing a safeguarding information management system for every school that is being used to record and report incidents and related pupil demographics at school level and collate this information centrally. It is too early to evaluate how well the local authority and its schools are using this system.

The local authority has developed an effective early identification tool, which identifies children and young people aged 7 to 25 years who may be at risk of exclusion or disengaging with education, employment or training, or becoming homeless. Through Families First and a multi-agency approach, the local authority provides helpful early support for these children and young people. Blaenau Gwent's youth service provides strong support for young people aged 11-25 who are at risk of being excluded or being not in education, employment or training (NEET). Working closely with other support services, youth workers support young people on a one-to-one basis and in groups, both in schools and in their communities. This co-ordinated approach has helped young people to remain engaged in their education and has supported a reduction in school exclusions. The proportion of young people who are NEET has reduced considerably over the last decade and young people are supported positively beyond their initial destination after Year 11.

The youth service co-ordinates a counselling service for children and young people from age 10 to age 25 that is provided in schools and community locations. This service provides helpful support for children's and young people's emotional well-being and mental health. A community psychologist provides young people with more specialist support, if necessary, where they are unable to access this through traditional routes. More recently, the local authority has established play therapy for children in Year 2 to Year 6. These services help children and young people to better understand behaviours and manage their relationships with others as well as reducing their emotional distress.

A dedicated detached youth team is used effectively to address anti-social behaviour in local communities. For example, following concerns about the behaviour of some young people in a car park outside of school hours, detached youth workers used their skills to divert young people to more suitable activities. Incidents of anti-social behaviour have reduced wherever this team has worked, and this work supports the work of schools in promoting good relationships.

The authority has very recently established a vulnerable learners panel, which involves senior leaders from secondary and all-age schools. It was established in collaboration with schools to improve the well-being of vulnerable pupils and help decrease exclusions. Early signs suggest that this panel is adding value to the existing range of services.

The range of useful support services to promote positive relationships in schools and communities means that exclusions are low in many schools, although a few schools still have high exclusion rates.

How well does the local authority ensure that the interests of learners are above all others in its planning for schools and other education provision?

Over the past ten years, or so, the local authority has been successful in both reducing surplus places in schools and improving the conditions of its school estate. The local authority has been prepared to make difficult decisions in relation to closing schools and replacing them with mergers and new builds. Where appropriate the local authority has modernised school buildings, for example through refurbishments and extensions.

The local authority has kept its school organisation policy under review and recently amended it to reflect recent developments, including the impact of the pandemic. The policy appropriately considers and incorporates national and local priorities such as its Welsh in Education strategic plan and information and communication technology (ICT) in schools. However, the engagement of headteachers in this strategy was variable and the strategy is generally not well understood. In addition, despite many appropriate actions to improve connectivity and developments in relation to ICT, there is no clear ICT strategy.

The south-east Wales regional sustainable communities for learning group was established by the local authority around five years ago and has recently been extended and includes local authorities from outside the region. The group's work currently focuses on sharing information on processes regarding the planning of

school places, standardising costs, and issues regarding sustainability and carbon neutral designs.

The key focus of the local authority's Welsh in education strategic plan (WESP) is to ensure that Welsh-medium provision is available and accessible in all three of the county's valleys. This is a sensible and pragmatic approach and is supported well by plans to increase access to pre-school and nursery Welsh-medium provision. The Welsh in education forum (WEF) comprises a broad range of partners and provides an effective steer for this work. Officers are aware of the risks in not being able to deliver the WESP's priorities and are considering appropriate steps to mitigate against these risks. The WESP's focus on improving Welsh skills of pupils in English-medium schools and expanding Welsh-medium provision in post-16 is underdeveloped. The local authority is considering working with Merthyr Tydfil and Powys local authorities to scope out the possibility of establishing a Welsh-medium secondary school to cater for the expected rise in demand during the next 10 years.

The local authority has a well-established Welsh-medium primary school in Blaina. An immersion provision is being developed at the school, which will provide additional opportunities for pupils to access Welsh-medium education. There are well-developed plans to open a seedling Welsh-medium primary school in Tredegar in September 2023. This school will also offer childcare provision and a resource base for pupils with autism.

Despite recent closer working between colleagues in education regarding the planning of provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), data is not always used effectively enough to inform long-term planning. This is illustrated by the recent decision to increase capacity at a special school by nearly 40%. The needs of children with complex special education and medical needs, including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, are generally known from a very young age, so the demand for additional capacity should have been foreseen and planned for in a more timely way.

The local authority has established useful resource bases in several mainstream schools for pupils with additional learning needs. In some cases, these resource bases helped to address surplus places in the mainstream schools, but as the number of pupils in mainstream classes in these schools has increased, a few schools are now struggling for space. In 2017, the local authority undertook a very useful review of resource base provisions. This identified strengths and areas for improvement across the provisions. However, the ongoing monitoring of these provisions is inconsistent. There are very few references to these provisions in notes of visit from school improvement partners. Where they are referenced, comments made are too limited to be of any value to the local authority and rarely evaluate the impact of provision on pupils' progress.

Senior leaders have a suitable vision for inclusion and pupils with ALN. However, this is not yet supported by a clear strategy. A range of very useful policy and guidance materials have recently been shared with schools.

The local authority makes provision for pupils in out-of-county settings. Half of the pupils currently placed in out-of-county provision have additional learning needs related to their social, emotional and behavioural needs. The local authority does not

analyse its use of out-of-county settings well enough in order to understand the implications for its capacity to meet the needs of pupils locally.

Leadership and management

Leaders in Blaenau Gwent place a high priority on improving outcomes for children and young people across the local authority. The local authority has high aspirations for regeneration and education to enable all children and young people in the local area to thrive and succeed. Lead elected members and senior officers are committed to improving conditions for their community so that deprivation is not a barrier to long term success. Elected members and officers demonstrate a strong commitment to 'maximise learning and skills for all learners to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent', one of the four priorities set out in the corporate plan 2022-2027. Corporate leaders and the education directorate are beginning to refine their approaches to ensure that this commitment is translated into specific and measurable actions.

Senior leaders in the education directorate have worked with elected members and other senior officers across the council to establish a suitable vision for education. This aims to create a 'school-led, self-improving system that develops 'better schools, better citizens and better communities'. However, this vision is not communicated clearly or consistently enough by the corporate leadership team. As a result, the strategic direction for education is not sufficiently understood by all elected members, officers, or staff in schools.

Corporate leaders have not ensured that the corporate priority and directorate vision for education are coherently reflected in education plans. The corporate plan sets out how the local authority will know how well it is doing in relation to its priority for education, but the range of broad indicators in the corporate plan are not developed sufficiently into specific success criteria against relevant actions in education plans. This disconnect between corporate and education plans tempers senior leaders' ability to hold officers to account for their work and ensure an appropriate pace of improvement in identified areas. Nevertheless, the executive board, which includes senior elected members and senior officers from across the local authority, is used appropriately to hold education officers to account for progress against planned actions. In the board meetings, members challenge officers suitably.

Despite the weakness in corporate leadership, the education senior management team has developed strong working relationships with officers across the directorate and places a high level of trust in staff at all levels to deliver high quality services. Senior education managers have good oversight of most education services covered by our local inspection questions. These services have strengthened over time to better meet the needs of children and young people, and are having a positive impact on their outcomes.

The education senior management team meetings provide suitable opportunities for education leaders to monitor progress against planned activity. However, the quality of improvement planning and evaluation within the education directorate is too variable. Plans do not always include suitable success criteria, and evaluations therefore focus too often on whether actions have been completed rather than the impact they have had on improving provision and outcomes for learners. In

mitigation, senior managers have a better understanding of strengths and weaknesses in their services areas than is reflected in planning and self-evaluation documentation.

Performance management processes in the local authority are suitably established and used to support officers and hold them to account. Officers have access to monthly support sessions and regularly review progress against targets set. Despite this, performance management targets are not consistently precise enough and do not always identify the specific aspects of practice that officers need to improve. As a result, performance management processes are not aligned consistently with evaluation and improvement work, and accountability does not always focus on the most important aspects of officers' work.

There are suitable examples of officers accessing useful professional learning to improve aspects of their work, such as managing staff and supporting their well-being. However, the local authority does not have a strategic enough approach to planning or evaluating the impact of professional learning across the directorate.

The local authority has strengthened working relationships with its regional school improvement service (EAS). As a result, officers in inclusion services are working more closely with school improvement partners to provide a holistic approach to supporting schools. The local authority has recently improved the way it holds EAS to account for operational aspects of their work, for example when considering the usefulness of notes from school visits by school improvement partners.

Leaders make appropriate decisions when they are concerned about the progress of schools. For example, the authority has issued warning notices to a few schools that were causing concern and used its powers to appoint additional governors. In a few cases, the progress that schools causing concern make is too slow and the local authority is not sufficiently challenging school leaders, the work of EAS or holding its own officers to account for the impact of actions in these schools.

Elected members, through scrutiny, carry out their duties diligently. They regularly challenge and scrutinise decisions and officers respond promptly to their requests. They have a good working knowledge of the local authority and the members briefings have provided them with suitable professional learning, which has improved the way in which they hold the local authority to account for its work. However, due to the weaknesses in evaluation across the directorate, members are not always provided with a clear enough picture of the strengths and areas for improvement across the directorate. This limits their ability to hold the local authority and the EAS to account for all aspects of their work.

Officers and elected members are committed to safeguarding young people in their local authority. There is an appropriate safeguarding culture within the local authority. All officers and elected members receive suitable safeguarding training. The way in which education and children's services work together has contributed well to improving multi-agency working and the support schools receive to manage the needs of pupils and their families more effectively. The advice and guidance provided to schools by officers is valued by school leaders and helps them to respond to safeguarding concerns appropriately. Elected members are beginning to develop

their understanding of safeguarding in education and challenge appropriately the content of reports they receive.

The authority's prioritisation of education is reflected in its allocation funding for education further above its Indicator Based Assessment than most local authorities in Wales. It also increased funding to schools this year by a higher percentage than the Welsh average. The authority also budgeted for the highest spend per pupil of all authorities in Wales this year. The authority delegates a higher percentage of its education budget to schools than many other Welsh local authorities. To support the improvement of school buildings, the authority has also allocated nearly £7million of its capital funding over 2019-2025 for Band B of its 21st Century Schools programme.

The authority has a track record of spending within its education budget in recent years, with relatively small underspends for the past three years against the overall education budget. The authority is projecting a small overspend this year and understands its key current and future budget pressures for education that include energy costs and home-to-school transport.

Overall, schools' balances increased in the three years prior to the pandemic. None of the authority's schools were in deficit at the end of last year. In common with other local authorities, total schools' balances have increased significantly during the pandemic due to additional grant funding but the authority anticipates that schools' balances will reduce by the end of this year, and in future years. The authority has applied its scheme for schools' financing where schools were in deficit prior to the pandemic. In previous years, deficit reduction plans were in place for a very few schools, although some actions were appropriately not taken during the pandemic.

The authority provides a comprehensive range of service level agreements (SLAs) for a range of services it provides for schools, such as catering and cleaning. Feedback from headteachers on some SLAs was mixed when the authority surveyed schools as part of a review of SLAs last year. SLAs were revised to take account of feedback and there is subsequently a high level of take-up for 2022-2025.

The School Budget Forum is generally well attended by headteachers and engaged in helpful activity such as reviewing the schools' funding formula and SLAs. The authority makes use of comparative data to inform reviews of its school funding formula, for example the re-allocation of some funding from primary to secondary schools. The funding formula was reviewed for each of the last two years.

Many headteachers agree that the authority provides good support for schools with their financial planning and nearly all agree that the authority provides schools with good human resources support.

The authority monitors appropriately the delivery of commissioned services, and key commissioned services, including the EAS and Aneurin Leisure Trust, have been discussed at scrutiny committee.

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- consult the local authority on the local inspection questions to be used during the inspection, based on the authority's self-evaluation, strategic plans and relevant data held by Estyn
- analyse the outcomes from open questionnaires, including the views of learners, parents, school staff and governors, local authority staff, regional consortium staff, elected members and general public
- carry out a preliminary visit to the local authority to meet with a range of relevant partners to education services, such as learner representatives, headteachers and governors, and leaders from statutory and third sector agencies working with children and young people

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet with the leader of the council, elected members responsible for education services, elected members responsible for the scrutiny of education services, the chief executive, the director of education, other leaders and managers in education services, other relevant staff in the local authority, the managing director of the regional consortium for school improvement and other relevant staff from the regional consortium
- look closely at the local authority's self-evaluation processes
- consider the local authority's strategic and operational plans for improvement
- scrutinise a variety of documents, including information on learner outcomes, information on the performance of schools and other education settings, including information from the regional consortium for school improvement, minutes from a range of meetings, reports presented to council or scrutiny, information relating to the safeguarding of learners and any other information relevant to the local authority's education services held by Estyn

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection
- provide a draft copy of the report for the local authority to note any concerns with factual accuracy, and made amendments where necessary

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the local authority and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 38 of the Education Act 1997, the Children Act 2004 and the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Agenda Item 8

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Governance & Audit Committee**

Date of meeting: **8th March 2023**

Report Subject: **Shared Resource Service (SRS)**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Steve Thomas, Leader of the Council /
Cabinet Member Corporate Overview and Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Bernadette Elias – Chief Officer Commercial and
Customer**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance and Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
WC 07/11/22	10/11/22		08/03/23		22/11/22	07/12/22		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a position statement against the objectives set out in the Business Case on the Shared Resource Service (SRS) Wales provision of ICT services for Blaenau Gwent.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 In May 2016 the Council approved the Business Case for Blaenau Gwent ICT services to become part of the SRS following a review of the internal provision.
- 2.2 The business case set out 3 main objectives over an initial 5-year period for delivery based on what was considered important for Blaenau Gwent.
- 2.3 The impact of the COVID19 pandemic has resulted in some work continuing into 2022.
- 2.4 The objectives were:
- 2.4.1 **Objective 1: People**
To integrate Blaenau Gwent ICT workforce into a collaborative business model to improve the quality of service through the creation of resilience and synergies.
- 2.4.2 **Objective 2: Organisational**
To meet and deliver existing and future service and organisational needs whilst addressing previously identified gaps.
- 2.4.3 **Objective 3: Infrastructure and systems**
To integrate Blaenau Gwent's ICT infrastructure and systems into shared services to ensure value for money through economies of scale.

2.4.4 A briefing session for elected members on the work of the SRS was delivered on 8th November 2022.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 Option One

The Governance & Audit Committee to:

- (a) Consider and support the position statement confirming Audit and Governance arrangements are in place against the objectives set out in the Business Case, and
- (b) Receive annual updates as part of the ongoing partnership with SRS.

3.2 Option Two

The Governance & Audit Committee to:

- (a) Consider the position statement confirming Audit & Governance arrangements are in place against the objectives set out in the Business Case and make recommendations on where improvements can be made to the current monitoring processes; and
- (b) Receive annual updates as part of the ongoing partnership with SRS.

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

4.1 The SRS as a strategic partner supports delivery of the Corporate Plan:

- An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place;
- Supports the council in its delivery of services against key policy directives such as the Digital Strategy for Wales.

5. Implications

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

5.1 The SRS agrees a budget with Blaenau Gwent each year through the Finance and Governance Board, which the Chief Officer Resources sits on. Over the 5 years of the Business Case there has been savings of around £633,000 against the original budget which has been returned to Blaenau Gwent or sits in the Blaenau Gwent surplus within the SRS.

5.1.2 Schools SLA in place, 3 year rolling programme which every school has signed up to, current SLA in place from April 2022 to March 2025

5.1.3 The Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council budget for 2022/23 is £2m which is 10% less than the target set by the Council in the 2016 business case

5.1.4 The review and management of contract requirements of the Council-controllable elements included within the SRS management fee has resulted in a saving of over 15% for the 2023/24 budget against the

2022/23 budget for the third party/contract spend elements when accounting for estimated inflationary increases.

5.1.5 The budget covers staff, accommodation costs and a number of contracts with third party suppliers (approximately £652,000) which the SRS manage on behalf of the Council.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

The SRS has a comprehensive risk register. The current key risks highlighted to the Strategic Board as those of concern with accompanying mitigations, are:

- global supply chain - Raised status level due to noncompliance with SLA and limited feedback from supplier on availability. Cisco kit is an issue with latest update to partners that this continues to be monitored.
- cyber security awareness – update due in full system audit planned for Q3 as per timetable below; and
- recruitment and retention of SRS staff.

Audits	Type of Audit	Status	Update
Change Management	Full System	Complete	Substantial Assurance
Cybersecurity SIEM/SOC	Full System	Planned Q4	
Firewall	Full System	In Progress	
Virtualisation	Full System	In Progress	Fieldwork in progress
O365	Full System	Complete	Full Assurance
Financial Regulations	Full System	Complete	Report received
Data Centre	Full System	Planned Q2	Moved to Q4 due to delay in Education move to Vantage
ISMS	Full System	Planned Q4	
IT Governance	Full System	Complete	Full Assurance
Mobile Computing	Full System	Complete	Full Assurance
Performance Management	Full System	Planned Q4	
IT Service Continuity	Full System	Complete	Full Assurance

Strategic board continue to receive updates on key risks and also audits undertaken as per table above.

5.3 **Legal**

5.3.1 The SRS is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that all partners agreed to when joining the SRS through a Deed of Adherence. The original MoU is being reviewed and updated to include all partners. Torfaen County Borough Council is leading this work.

5.3.2 There is also an SLA in place which is approved each year at Strategic Board, contents of which form part of Delivery group updates, i.e. Performance of SRS and Engagement Request analysis

5.3.3 Latest SLA in respect of delivery for 2022/23 has recently been approved at Strategic board and no significant changes were made, this document supports the delivery for each partner

5.3.4 It is anticipated that a more in-depth review of the SLA for 2024/25 onwards will be undertaken with partners in due course

5.4 **Human Resources**

There are no direct human resource implications associated with this report.

The governance arrangements supporting the SRS model includes representation on the following boards:

- Strategic Board Chief Executive and Councillor Jules Gardner as the nominated elected member
- Finance and Governance Board (Chief Officer Resources or delegated representative)
- Business and collaboration Board (Chief Officer Commercial and Customer, Service Manager Customer Experience & Transformation or delegated representative).

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

A summary of key activity against each objective is set out below:

6.1.1 **Improvement Objective 1: People**

All resources were integrated into a single operating model and this has been working successfully for a number of years.

6.1.2 **Improvement Objective 2: Organisational**

The identified gaps in provision have been addressed through the partnership with the SRS and this continues to plan and meet future organisational needs and ambitions, and key projects include:

- *Migration of all local authority Partners to the single instance of System Centre Configuration Manager (SCCM)*

SCCM is a tool for building laptop images and rolling out Windows devices. All local authority partners have been migrated to a single solution removing the need and complexities of having multiple instances per partner organisation and allows the SRS to utilise the same base build. Through doing so it has broken down barriers in terms of technological complexities when rolling out patches for software and now provides a central solution for builds packages and patching which is of benefit to the local authority partners.

- *Software Asset Management*

Discussions took place in 2021-22 around the implementation of Software Asset Management within the SRS. With agreement from all partners and the appointment of a Licence Officer, the SRS and partners have started the Licence Management journey, commenced the license management tools are available to drive efficiencies from the current Microsoft contract, as an example.

- *Microsoft 365 implementation & Always on VPN connection (AOVPN), enabling the Councils new operating model*

The use of the M365 apps and tools will support and sustain the future of the new operating model. This is an ongoing programme of work, however much of the planning and development has happened over the last year. The SRS has developed the AOVPN capability and has migrated approximately 90% of the workforce away from Pulse and onto AOVPN. The initiation of the development of OneDrive was completed, which will enable agile working by supporting data access across devices. The planning for OneNote being set to follow after OneDrive is implemented and there are projects in train around Sharepoint websites and Teams telephony.

- *Migrated to a new content management system for the website.*

This was an essential piece of work to support the Public Services Network (PSN) accreditation and ensure that BGCBC's website is updated and patched as part of the compliance programme. It also enables users to have a richer set of features from the Content Management System to improve the services that can be offered via the website.

6.1.3 **Improvement objective 3: Infrastructure and systems**

The entire Blaenau Gwent infrastructure has been removed and moved onto a shared infrastructure procured with three other local authorities. The following has been undertaken to support this objective:

- *Partner Infrastructure refresh plans*

After a prolonged period of running with older equipment, SRS engineers alongside Senior Management costed, planned, ordered, and began implementing an entire Network equipment refresh across all SRS Partners. As equipment is delivered, rollout plans will be continued on a rolling basis to ensure we keep up to date with the latest, supportable infrastructure moving forward.

- *Creation of the One Wales Structured Query Language (SQL) Database cluster at Vantage data and the ongoing successful migration of partner applications*

The implementation of the new One Wales SQL cluster at Vantage data, ties in with the ongoing migration work taking place to move partner organisations from their pre-existing data centres to the new provision in Newport. This will place all partners onto one database environment with the potential of reducing licensing costs.

- *Migration of TCBC/MCC and BGCBC to a OneWales platform*

The removal of 100+ physical servers from corporate infrastructures (physical and virtual machines) in both Blaenavon, Newport and Ebbw Vale datacentres. An implementation of a single platform providing access to multiple applications from a single supportable platform. Servers have been decommissioned which will reduce the footprint of servers required at the new Vantage Data Centre moving forward.

- *Education*

The SRS has rolled out over 5,500 devices across the four local authorities in the financial year 2021-22. The full breakdown is shown below for Blaenau Gwent specifically and this has been based on putting schools needs at the heart of the work.

	<u>BGCBC</u>
Laptop	172
Desktop	294
Monitors	4
Chromebooks	112
iPads	287
MacMini	28
Charging Trolley	38
	935

- *Planning for the decommission of the Civic Centre, Ebbw Vale*

The Ebbw Vale computer room facility was recognised as a high risk in the due diligence of the business case.

The move from the Civic Centre to the Vantage Data Centre was a complex, business critical project. With careful planning and strong partnership working the project was delivered successfully with minimal impact to the organisation. SRS re-prioritised Blaenau Gwent to move first, to support the decommissioning of the civic centre timeframe.

- *Relocation of Democratic Services Hub to the General Offices*

Work to support the move from the Civic Centre was undertaken in line with the move to hybrid working.

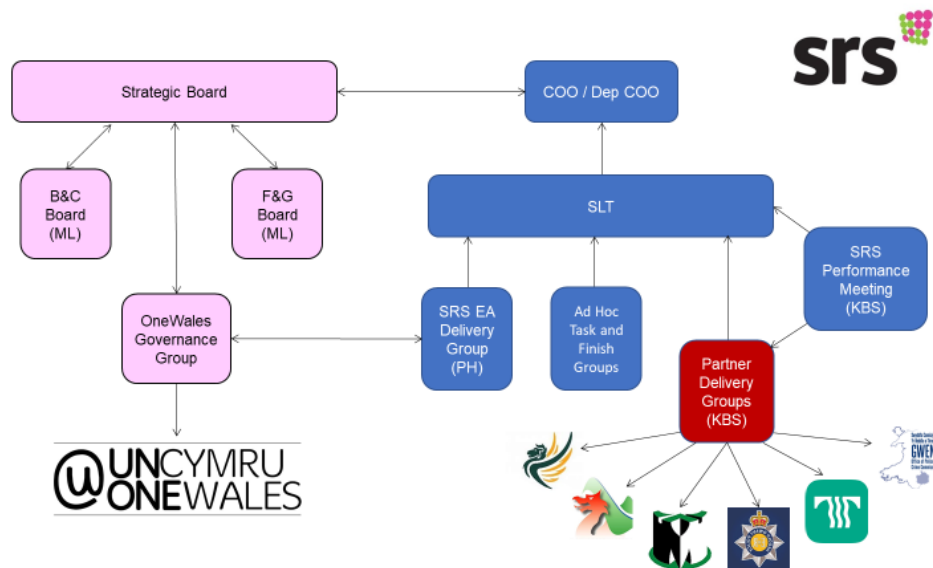
6.2 Expected outcome for the public

A number of the projects implemented with the SRS have improved effectiveness of service delivery to benefit residents.

6.3 Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

A variety of Blaenau Gwent staff are involved and regularly engage with the SRS on its activities. Projects also include involvement of users of the service so their views can shape the design and delivery.

This governance diagram shows the Boards and Blaenau Gwent has a place in all of these meetings.



6.4 Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)

Net zero is a key consideration at the SRS and supports the Council’s commitment. Examples include:

- Data Centre Footprint - the extensive work involved in moving from multiple provisions across all Local Government partners into one

footprint in the new Vantage data centre has reduced the environmental impact of four separate implementations into one single environment.

- Data Centre Energy - the four separate provisions all used energy in different ways. Even the well specified Blaenavon facility is less efficient than the new Vantage provision due to improvements in technology. When the migrations are complete towards the end of 2022, the SRS will be able to compare the previous energy usage to the total consumption in the new location and provide an estimate of the energy reduction impact. In addition to this, the Vantage data centre uses 100% certified renewable energy.
- Moving to Sharepoint Online - by moving large amounts of on premise Sharepoint functionality into Office 365, the SRS has been able to remove large amounts of infrastructure across the organisations. This reduces energy consumption and physical footprint.
- Disposals contract – embedded a new disposals policy which reduces the carbon footprint and saves money, devices are now recycled into the community instead of being destroyed and still meets all security requirements.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The work of the SRS supports service areas who are delivering preventative functions and explores the use of digital solutions to support preventative work.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The SRS is an entirely collaborative provision to multiple partners.

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

The SRS projects support services across the organisation.

6.8 **Monitoring Arrangements**

An annual monitoring report will be included on the forward work programme of the relevant scrutiny committee.

The Boards set out in the governance arrangements receive performance monitoring information and progress updates. Monthly meetings between SRS and officers review the programme progress.

The SRS is monitored by the Chief Operating Officer; additional assurance is provided from Torfaen internal audit as the chosen auditor of the partners for the SRS.

It is anticipated that a more in-depth review of the SLA for 2024/25 onwards will be undertaken with partners in due course

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Agenda Item 9

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**
Date of meeting: **8th March 2023**
Report Subject: **Audit Wales: Assurance and Risk Assessment Review – Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Steve Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate Overview and Performance**
Report Submitted by: **Rhian Hayden, Chief Officer Resources
Sarah King, Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance and Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	23.02.23		08.03.23					

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Governance and Audit Committee with the Audit Wales Report, '*Assurance and Risk Assessment Review*' (Appendix 1).
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 Audit Wales published their report, '*Assurance and Risk Assessment Review*' in November 2022 and covers the audit year 2021/22.
 - 2.2 The report was undertaken to identify the level of audit assurance and /or where further audit work may be required in future years, in relation to risks to the Council putting in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of resources. The report also considered how the extent to which the Council is applying the sustainable development principle in taking steps to meet its well-being objectives.
 - 2.3 The report focussed on the following areas:
 - Financial Position;
 - Implications of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021; and
 - Carbon reduction plan.
 - 2.4 The Audit Wales report identified the following recommendations:
R1 - The Council should ensure that the high level actions in its Decarbonisation Plan (Readiness Assessment) are:
 - Prioritised based on clear criteria, including carbon and financial impact;
 - Aligned with its Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Programme; and
 - Integrated into Business Plans.

R2 – The Council should develop a robust set of metrics to measure and report progress on its decarbonisation journey.

2.5 Next Steps

The recommendations identified within the Audit Wales Report, found at paragraph 2.4, relate to the Council’s Decarbonisation agenda. The actions will be undertaken by the Climate Group and will be included within the Council’s Decarbonisation Plan.

The recommendations will be included within the relevant business plan for monitoring and reporting, this will be the Tier 1 Policy and Partnership Business Plan, based in Corporate Services.

The Council also has an identified Member Champion for Climate Mitigation, Cllr Behr, who will have an active role in supporting the implementation of the Council’s Decarbonisation Plan.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 Prior to the final report being provided to the Council, CLT and relevant Officers provided comment back to Audit Wales on their findings.

3.2 Option 1

Governance and Audit Committee is assured that the Next Steps, identified in paragraph 2.5, will appropriately respond to the Audit Wales recommendations.

Option 2

Provide comment on the Audit Wales review and Next Steps, identified in paragraph 2.5, to address the recommendation for Officers to implement in order to provide continuous improvement.

4. Monitoring Arrangements

4.1 The recommendations from Audit Wales will be included within the business plan and updated on a quarterly basis.

The information will be reported within the Joint Finance and Performance Report to Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Regular meetings are held with Audit Wales to assess progress of reports.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Audit Wales Report ‘Assurance and Risk Assessment Review’

Assurance and Risk Assessment Review – Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Audit year: 2021-22

Date issued: November 2022

Document reference: 3256A2022

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

Contents

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Carbon reduction plan	11

What we reviewed and why

- 1 We undertook this project to identify the level of audit assurance and/or where further audit work may be required in future years, in relation to risks to the Council putting in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of resources. This project also helped us to assess the extent to which the Council is applying the sustainable development principle in taking steps to meet its well-being objectives.
- 2 This report summarises our findings in the areas where we have undertaken more detailed Assurance and Risk Assessment work. We will also produce an Annual Audit Summary in the autumn of 2022 that will summarise all of our audit work undertaken since our last Annual Audit Summary in January 2022.
- 3 We focused in particular on the following areas at the Council:
 - Financial position
 - Implications of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021
 - Carbon reduction plan
- 4 Our evidence base for this work included interviews with senior officers and review of relevant documents.
- 5 The Assurance and Risk Assessment project has been ongoing throughout the year. We held a workshop with Corporate Leadership Team in May 2022 at which we shared emerging findings in relation to some aspects of this work. We also used the workshop to gather the perspectives of senior managers on the key audit risks in relation to the Council and to inform our forward planning.

Recommendations

Exhibit 1: recommendations

The table below sets out the recommendations that we have identified following this review.

- | | |
|----|---|
| R1 | <p>The Council should ensure that the high-level actions in its Decarbonisation Plan (Readiness Assessment) are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• prioritised based on clear criteria, including carbon and financial impact;• aligned with its Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Programme; and• integrated into business plans. |
| R2 | <p>The Council should develop a robust set of metrics to measure and report progress on its decarbonisation journey.</p> |

Financial position

Additional Welsh Government funding and improved financial planning and management have strengthened the Council's position, but planning for financial resilience will be increasingly challenging during this period of significant economic uncertainty

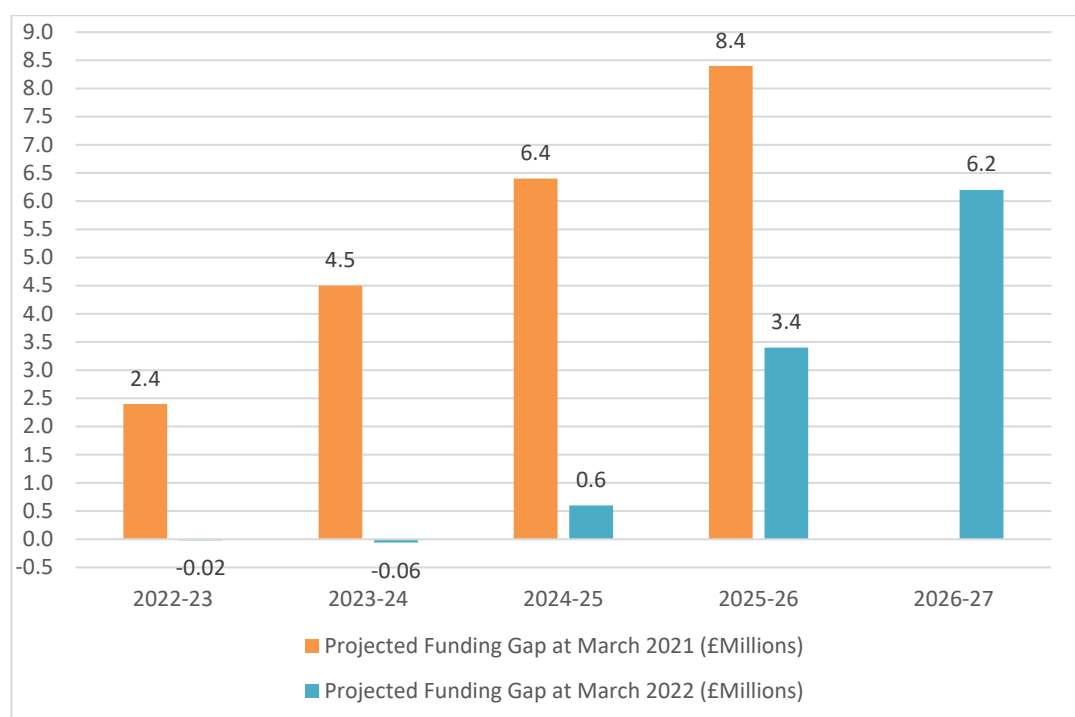
- 6 We reviewed the Council's financial position as at the end of March 2022. This included consideration of the Council's financial reserves position, the delivery of planned savings and performance against the planned budget for the year.
- 7 We also published a [Local Government Financial Sustainability Data tool](#) in February 2022 which includes a range of financial data for councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities in Wales.

Financial strategy

- 8 Our previous work on financial sustainability found that the Council was developing a more sustainable approach to financial planning but that there was scope to:
 - improve the accuracy of future cost pressure forecasts in the MTFS; and
 - further develop the Bridging the Gap programme to close the budget gap over the full period of the MTFS.
- 9 Since then, the Council has revised its future cost pressure estimates to reflect recent cost pressure trends more accurately. It also regularly reviews its Bridging the Gap programme so that forecast savings in the MTFS reflect the latest position. This has been particularly important over the last two years as the pandemic has affected the Council's ability to take forward some of its income generation initiatives.
- 10 Members approved an updated MTFS in November 2021. The strategy was also updated as part of the budget proposals to reflect Welsh Government settlement figures, the latest position on cost pressures and growth areas, and ongoing COVID-19-related costs which will no longer be covered by the Hardship Fund.
- 11 The Council's projected future budget gap reduced over the course of 2021-22. **Exhibit 1** shows the Council expects a budget surplus in the first two years of the current MTFS, but a combined deficit of £10.2 million in the last three years. This improved position reflects the indicative settlements due from the Welsh Government in future years of the Strategy and forecast Bridging the Gap savings of £6.7 million over the term of the MTFS.

Exhibit 1: the Council’s total projected medium-term funding gap is £10.2 million – £11.5 million lower than last year’s forecast

This graph shows the medium-term funding gap identified by the Council in March 2021¹ and March 2022². Negative figures denote a surplus, positive figures denote a funding gap.



- 12 The Welsh Government’s indicative funding settlements on an all-Wales average basis of 3.5% and 2.4% respectively for 2023-24 and 2024-25 provide a degree of funding certainty over the medium term. However, medium-term financial planning will continue to rely on a range of assumptions, and when coupled with the changing socio-economic landscape in this period of significant economic uncertainty, planning for financial resilience and future budget rounds will continue to be challenging for councils.
- 13 The next MTFS is therefore likely to forecast a larger medium-term funding gap, given the impact of higher than expected inflation and interest rates. We also found that some Council strategies are not fully costed at the time they are agreed and so the full cost of delivering them is not recognised in the MTFS. This means the

¹ Source: Revenue Budget report for 2021-22 presented to the Council in March 2021.

² Source: Revised MTFS forecast (internal document) dated March 2022 following the Council’s decision not to increase council tax as part of the 2022-23 budget.

resource requirements set out in the MTFS are understated. The Council should consider the benefits of calculating indicative costs when developing its strategies.

Usable reserves

- 14 The Council is continuing to increase its usable reserves and has maintained its MTFS commitment to allocate £200,000 per year to the general fund. This has led to a steadily improving position. **Exhibit 2** shows that when considered as a percentage of the net cost of services, the Council's levels of usable reserves have improved from lowest position in Wales to 15th over the last five years.

Exhibit 2: amount of reserves versus annual budget

This exhibit shows the amount of usable reserves the Council had at the end of 2021-22 and the previous five years as a proportion of the net cost of the services the Council delivers³.

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Total usable reserves in £ millions ⁴	12.9	10.6	12.7	14.7	28.3	45.3
Net cost of services ⁵	146.2	147.1	146.3	148.2	146.1	149.8
Total usable reserves as a percentage of the net cost of services	8.8%	7.2%	8.7%	9.9%	19.4%	30.2%
Comparison with the other councils of Wales	22nd	22nd	21st	17th	15th	Not yet available

- 15 Usable reserves increased by a further £16.9 million at the end of 2021-22, including new reserves to support financial resilience and help address the impact of inflationary and service cost pressures. This increase resulted from an £8.5 million underspend against budget and additional unhyphenated grants received from the Welsh Government.
- 16 Members receive regular updates on the reserves position and approve decisions on how to use or add to reserves.

³ Source: 2016-17–2020-21: Audit Wales [financial sustainability data tool](#); 2021-22: Council's draft statement of accounts (unaudited figures).

⁴ By usable reserves we mean the total general fund balance, together with earmarked reserves that councils are not legally prevented from redirecting to use for another purpose.

⁵ Value used is the net cost of services charged to the general fund from the Expenditure Funding Analysis, less any Housing Revenue Account cost of services, plus precepts, levies and debt interest.

Savings delivery

- 17 We previously found that the Council had a good track record of delivering planned savings and it has been shifting its approach to identify more sustainable long-term savings and budget reductions through its Bridging the Gap programme.
- 18 Between 2017-18 and 2019-20, the Council achieved between 91% and 98% of its planned savings. In 2020-21, this fell to 80% due to COVID as several income generation initiatives could not be taken forward.
- 19 For 2021-22, the Council estimated its Bridging the Gap programme would generate savings of £755,000. Actual savings were £948,000. The increase was due to higher than expected rental income on industrial units and a rates rebate following an appeal of rateable values of the Council's property and assets.

Performance against budget

- 20 We have previously reported that the Council's overall performance against budget is improving. Strengthened financial management arrangements have helped reduce overspends, although areas of overspends and uncontained cost pressures still occur.
- 21 There are examples of the Council successfully taking steps to address some of these overspends. For example, a significant overspend in recent years relates to external legal fees for looked after children because of difficulties recruiting and retaining specialist in-house legal staff. Since April 2022, Caerphilly Council has been providing this legal service. The collaborative arrangement provides a more cost-effective solution and is expected to prevent the overspends seen in recent years.
- 22 Other areas with ongoing overspends in 2021-22 include out of county placements for pupils with special educational needs and waste services.
- 23 For 2021-22, the Council reported a year-end surplus of £8.5 million against budget. Most directorates came in under budget, due in part to additional grant funding and unfilled vacancies caused by recruitment and retention challenges. The Education and Leisure directorate overspent by £0.07 million, largely due to out of county placement costs and temporary staffing arrangements to cover COVID and maternity absences in schools.
- 24 In recent years, the Council has used year-end underspends to increase its reserves levels and strengthen its financial sustainability. As part of the 2021-22 budget setting process, the Council again agreed to transfer any year-end surplus to an earmarked reserve to support medium-term financial planning.

Implications of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

The Council is putting in place arrangements in response to the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 but recognises the need to further develop its approach to self-assessment and public engagement

- 25 We undertook our assessment of the Council's progress in responding to key requirements in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 between November 2021 and July 2022. The evidence was gathered through interviews and document reviews and also drew on relevant findings from our other ongoing work at the Council. Our work looked at the arrangements the Council is putting in place in responding to the Local Government and Elections and (Wales) Act 2021.
- 26 The Council understands what it needs to do to meet the requirements of the Act and has developed an action plan in response.
- 27 The Act requires councils to keep performance under review, and consult and report on performance through a self-assessment. Councils must publish a self-assessment of their performance for each financial year.
- 28 The Council intends to report the output from its self-assessment to the Council in October 2022. The Council is reviewing its self-assessment arrangements and drafting a broader approach to ensure that it meets the requirements of the Act. This process has been informed by WLGA workshops. The Council expects to continue to revise and refine its self-assessment process. It recognises that more work is required, in particular to meet the requirements of the consultation duty and aims to build on existing engagement arrangements to do so including use of its Citizen's Panel.
- 29 The Council is in the early stages of developing its participation strategy. The strategy will cover both internal and external engagement and participation, ie with staff and members as well as the public and stakeholders. The Council has arrangements in place for engaging with staff and trades unions. The Council recognises the need to ensure all key stakeholders have the opportunity to be involved and understands that further work is needed to effectively engage with the business sector. Recent engagement with businesses by the Council's Regeneration department provides a platform to build on and the Council has several channels for engaging with local businesses.
- 30 The Council has established a Governance and Audit Committee as required by the Act and has run induction sessions for committee members. It is also reviewing the role descriptions and work programmes of committees to ensure they align with the requirements of the Act. The Council has made some further minor changes to its Constitution and plans to consider any further changes through its constitutional

working group following the production of a model constitution template by the WLGA.

Carbon reduction plan

Context

- 31 In July 2022, the Auditor General published [Public Sector Readiness for Net Zero Carbon by 2030](#), which looked at decarbonisation actions in 48 public bodies, including all councils. This report found uncertainty that the collective ambition for a net zero public sector by 2030 will be met. Our work identified significant, common barriers to progress that public bodies must collectively address to meet the collective ambition. We found that while public bodies are demonstrating commitment to carbon reduction, they must now significantly ramp up their activities, increase collaboration and place decarbonisation at the heart of their day-to-day operations and decisions.
- 32 In the report, the Auditor General makes the following five calls for action from public bodies:
- strengthen your leadership and demonstrate your collective responsibility through effective collaboration;
 - clarify your strategic direction and increase your pace of implementation;
 - get to grips with the finances you need;
 - know your skills gaps and increase your capacity; and
 - improve data quality and monitoring to support your decision making.
- 33 We undertook an assessment of the Council's arrangements to develop and deliver its Decarbonisation Plan between June and August 2022. Our work included a focus on the clarity of the Council's vision, partnership working and prevention as well as monitoring and reviewing progress. We gathered evidence through interviews, document reviews and the Council's returned Call for Evidence for the Decarbonisation Baseline Review.
- 34 The following paragraphs set out the findings of our local audit work on the Council's decarbonisation action plan. These findings sit within the wider context of the Auditor General's July 2022 report that calls for increased pace and stronger leadership across Wales in reducing carbon emissions.

The Council has mapped its carbon footprint and has a clear vision and set of actions for its decarbonisation ambition, but does not fully understand the carbon impacts of these actions and how they will be funded

- 35 Decarbonisation has a strategic profile within the Council and in September 2020 it unanimously resolved to declare a climate emergency. The Council set a clear ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030 in its Decarbonisation Plan 2020-2030. It also has a carbon neutral ambition as one of the key outcome priorities within its current Corporate Plan. The Council has also recently committed to consider its approach to developing its plan for net zero 2050 and is currently considering the most appropriate methodologies to support this.
- 36 The Council has a well-developed understanding of its carbon footprint supported by some early work with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) through the Carbon Positive Project. The Council has also undertaken five Readiness Assessments, adapting the Place-based Climate Action Network assessments developed for the Leeds Climate Commission, in transition areas such as transportation, nature-based solutions and buildings. Whilst it is recognised that the Readiness Assessments only represent part of the journey to net zero, they contain granular emissions data and provide an overview of both challenges and opportunities for decarbonisation. Each Readiness Assessment concludes with several High-Level Actions which have formed the basis for the Council's decarbonisation journey. In some transition areas such as nature-based solution and procurement, information and data need to be further improved. Further work is also needed to ensure that the High-Level Actions are brought together under one comprehensive plan and prioritised based on criteria such as their carbon and financial impact.
- 37 The Council has several governance structures that provide oversight of its decarbonisation journey, such as the former Decarbonisation Board. This Board will shortly be replaced by a new Core Climate Group with senior officer and councillor representation. The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) has an oversight role and has challenged the five Readiness Assessments and approved the High-level Action Plans contained within them. The Council's Regeneration Scrutiny committee provided oversight of the Decarbonisation Plan prior to May 2022. Under the current committee structure, this role falls to the Places Scrutiny Committee. Updates to the Plan have also been discussed at Council and the Executive Committee. Monitoring of progress around decarbonisation and in particular the High Level Actions is being integrated into Service Business Plans and will then be monitored through the existing performance management arrangements. Other than what has been reported in the Council's Decarbonisation Plan, there appears to be little public reporting of progress around decarbonisation. The Council plans to develop a decarbonisation performance dashboard – this

provides an opportunity to develop a set of metrics that can be used to measure and demonstrate progress.

- 38 The Council is working collaboratively to support the delivery of its decarbonisation targets, with a particular focus on developing a county-borough-wide response to climate change through local partnership arrangements tied to the Gwent Public Service Board (PSB). These arrangements established a Climate Change Mitigation Steering Group to consider territorial emission issues for the Blaenau Gwent area. Examples of this collaborative approach include work with PSB partners to hold the Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly, the first climate assembly in Wales, which took place online in March 2021. This included 44 demographically representative Blaenau Gwent residents and produced five official recommendations. Further work to maintain progress on these five recommendations is currently underway. Other examples of collaborative working include pilot Local Area Energy Plan work with the Welsh Government Energy Service. Whilst this pilot is at an early stage of development, the work has the potential to make a significant contribution to the development of the wider regional decarbonisation plan for Gwent.
- 39 The Council has identified its investments in decarbonisation initiatives, for example £4 million invested in lighting, heating, controls and building integrated renewables across 20 of its properties. However, achieving its net zero ambition will have implications for its budget in the short and longer term. The Council has yet to identify and allocate sufficient resources to deliver the projects/initiatives within its High Level Actions plans. The proposed requirement for all future reports for decision to include a carbon and cost impact should provide better information for decision making. However, whilst the readiness assessment process should enable the Council to have a better understanding of the financial impact of its actions, work on defining these costs is still at an early stage and still need to be built into its Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Programme. We understand the challenges of assessing the financial cost and carbon impact of decarbonisation actions, but this data will be key to prioritising actions that deliver the greatest returns and understanding funding requirements.



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Agenda Item 10

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**
Date of meeting: **8th March 2023**
Report Subject: **Audit Wales: Corporate Safeguarding Follow-up –
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Haydn Trollope, Cabinet Member People and
Social Services**
Report Submitted by: **Tanya Evans, Interim Corporate Director of Social
Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance and Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	23.02.23		08.03.23					

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Governance and Audit Committee with the Audit Wales Report, '*Corporate Safeguarding Follow-up*' (Appendix 1).

Attached at appendix 2 is the Council's current Safeguarding Policy for information.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Audit Wales published their report, '*Corporate Safeguarding Follow-up*' in November 2022 and covers the audit year 2021/22.

- 2.2 In October 2019 Audit Wales published the '*Follow-up Review of Corporate Arrangements for the Safeguarding of Children*'. The report found that the Council had made limited progress in addressing Audit Wales recommendations and proposals for improvement around safeguarding.

- 2.3 This report looked at what progress the Council had made to address the outstanding recommendations and proposals for improvement.

In addition to the outstanding recommendations and proposals for improvement Audit Wales identified further recommendations:

- 2.4 **R1 – The Council needs to take further action to fully comply with the recommendations in the October 2019 follow-up report on corporate arrangements for safeguarding of children.**

R2 – The Council needs to strengthen its monitoring arrangements of third parties so it can assure itself that they comply with the Council's safeguarding policies. It should consider whether a self-assessment tool like that recently used by Council directorates can be used with third parties to better understand compliance.

Appendix 1 details the Council's progress against the outstanding recommendations and proposals for improvement identified in the October 2019 report.

Next Steps

- 2.5 The Council has in place a strategic lead for Safeguarding, Tanya Evans, Interim Director Social Services. This role is supported by the Interim Head of Children's Services, Alison Ramshaw.
- 2.5.1 The Council has in place a Strategic Safeguarding Leads Group. This is chaired by the Interim Head of Children's Services, with representation from each directorate across the Council. Each Officer on the group has been appointed as a designated safeguarding person for their directorate. This group will undertake implementation of the recommendations identified by Audit Wales.
- 2.5.2 The recommendations will be included within the relevant business plan for monitoring and reporting, these will link to the Officers identified on the Strategic Safeguarding Leads Group.
- 2.5.3 The Council has a Safeguarding Policy which is included on the front page of the Council's internet. This Policy will be updated, if required, to address any recommendations from Audit Wales.
- 2.5.4 The Council has an identified Member Lead for Safeguarding, Cllr Trollope, who will have an active role in supporting the implementation of the Council's Safeguarding Policy.
- 2.5.5 An Estyn Inspection of Local Authority Education Services was carried out during November / December 2022. The report was published in February 2023 and is also included on the agenda for this committee meeting. The report was positive regarding safeguarding procedures within the Council, and stated:

"The Officers and elected members are committed to safeguarding young people in their local authority. There is an appropriate safeguarding culture within the local authority. All officers and elected members receive suitable safeguarding training. The way in which education and children's services work together has contributed well to improving multi-agency working and the support schools receive to manage the needs of pupils and their families more effectively. The advice and guidance provided to schools by officers is valued by school leaders and helps them to respond to safeguarding concerns appropriately. Elected members are beginning to develop their understanding of safeguarding in education and challenge appropriately the content of reports they receive".

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 Prior to the final report being provided to the Council, CLT and relevant Officers provided comment back to Audit Wales on their findings.

3.2 **Option 1**

Governance and Audit Committee is assured that the Next Steps, identified in paragraph 2.5, will appropriately respond to the Audit Wales recommendations.

Option 2

Provide comment on the Audit Wales review and Next Steps, identified in paragraph 2.5, to address the recommendation for Officers to implement in order to provide continuous improvement.

4. **Monitoring Arrangements**

4.1 The recommendations from Audit Wales will be included within the business plan and updated on a quarterly basis.

The Strategic Safeguarding Leads Group will have responsibility for monitoring implementation of the recommendations.

The information will be reported within the Joint Finance and Performance Report to Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Regular meetings are held with Audit Wales to assess progress of reports.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Audit Wales Report ‘*Corporate Safeguarding Follow-up*’

Appendix 2 – Council Safeguarding Policy

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Corporate Safeguarding Follow-up – Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Audit year: 2021-22

Date issued: November 2022

Document reference: 3214A2022

This document has been prepared for the internal use of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council as part of work performed/to be performed in accordance with Section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004, and Section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015].

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This document is also available in Welsh.

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Summary report

Summary

What we reviewed and why

- 1 In October 2019 we published a report called 'Follow-up Review of Corporate Arrangements for the Safeguarding of Children'. That report found that the Council had made limited progress in addressing our earlier recommendations and proposals for improvement around safeguarding. We found that eight of the ten national recommendations and local proposals for improvement had not been fully addressed.
- 2 In this review we looked at what progress the Council has made to address these outstanding recommendations and proposals for improvement since October 2019.
- 3 We undertook this review between May and August 2022.

What we found

- 4 We include a summary of our findings at **Exhibit 2**. Overall, we found that the pandemic further delayed the Council's response to our 2019 report. Although it has taken recent action to strengthen its corporate safeguarding arrangements, the Council has not yet fully addressed our previous recommendations.
- 5 The Council recognises the need to strengthen corporate safeguarding arrangements beyond the Social Services and Education directorates. The Council developed an action plan to address the outstanding recommendations but, due to the pandemic, most of the planned work did not begin until early 2022. As such, it was difficult for us to assess the impact of these actions as many were still underway. For example, the safeguarding self-assessments being completed by each directorate should give the Council improved understanding and oversight and enable it to target improvement actions where needed.

Proposals for improvement

Exhibit 1: further recommendations issued

In addition to the outstanding recommendations and proposals for improvement from our earlier report (October 2019), the table below sets out further recommendations that we have identified following this review.

Further recommendations

R1 The Council needs to take further action to fully comply with the recommendations in our October 2019 follow up report on corporate arrangements for safeguarding of children.

R2 The Council needs to strengthen its monitoring arrangements of third parties so it can assure itself that they comply with the Council's safeguarding policies. It should consider whether a self-assessment tool like that recently used by Council directorates can be used with third parties to better understand compliance.

Detailed report

Assessment of the Council's progress against the outstanding recommendations and proposals for improvement in our report 'Follow-up Review of Corporate Arrangements for the Safeguarding of Children' (October 2019)

Exhibit 2: outstanding recommendations and proposals for improvement from our October 2019 report and our assessment of the Council's progress against them, and further actions identified as needed

Proposals for Improvement / recommendations outstanding in our October 2019 report	Audit Wales's assessment of the Council's progress against the recommendations (as of September 2022)	Further actions needed
R1 Improve corporate leadership and comply with Welsh Government policy on safeguarding through regularly disseminating and updating information on senior lead officer and lead member for	Recommendation partially met The current version of the Corporate Safeguarding Policy sets out the job titles, but not the names, of lead officers and members responsible for corporate safeguarding. This could make it more difficult for someone to contact the right person. At the time of	Original recommendation partially met, but further action is needed to fully address:

Proposals for Improvement / recommendations outstanding in our October 2019 report	Audit Wales's assessment of the Council's progress against the recommendations (as of September 2022)	Further actions needed
<p>safeguarding appointments to all staff and stakeholders.</p> <p>Our 2019 report suggests that in addressing this recommendation, the Council should also look to:</p> <p>a) Ensure that it communicates the names and roles of lead officers and members for corporate safeguarding to all staff, volunteers, agency workers and contractors when the Corporate Safeguarding policy is revised to reflect the new senior management restructure.</p> <p>b) ensure the new designated strategic safeguarding leads and the deputy leads are fully briefed on their safeguarding roles and responsibilities.</p>	<p>our fieldwork, the Council was identifying designated safeguarding persons for each directorate. Once completed, the Council planned to update the corporate safeguarding policy accordingly and communicate the changes through team meetings and the Chief Executive's staff bulletins.</p> <p>The Corporate Safeguarding Policy is available on the Council's website and intranet. Contractors now receive the Policy as part of the tendering process, but it is not clear whether contractors and other external stakeholders are routinely notified of updates to the Policy. Responsibility for communicating changes lies with commissioning service managers and we saw no evidence of checks to ensure that this takes place.</p> <p>The Corporate Safeguarding Policy and Training Framework sets out the roles and responsibilities of those responsible for safeguarding, including safeguarding leads and the newly created 'designated safeguarding person' role. Designated safeguarding persons in each directorate will receive training on their role.</p>	<p>The Council should update the Corporate Safeguarding Policy to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the recently appointed designated safeguarding persons in each directorate. • the names and contact details of key safeguarding contacts. (This could be included in an appendix to the Policy to make updates easier.) • recent changes to job titles, eg change from Managing Director to Chief Executive. <p>The Council should seek assurance that services routinely communicate changes to the Corporate Safeguarding Policy – including key contacts – to contractors, volunteers and other stakeholders not directly employed by the Council.</p>

Proposals for Improvement / recommendations outstanding in our October 2019 report	Audit Wales's assessment of the Council's progress against the recommendations (as of September 2022)	Further actions needed
<p>c) strengthen the governance arrangements supporting the deputy designated strategic safeguarding leads' network</p> <p>d) ensure that the Corporate Safeguarding Policy is easily accessible from the main Council website</p> <p>e) ensure that contractors receive the corporate safeguarding policy prior to commencing work at the Council to fully understand the corporate safeguarding</p>	<p>The Corporate Safeguarding Policy now includes a structure map setting out how the Strategic Safeguarding Leads Group fits into the wider governance arrangements for safeguarding. As noted above, the Policy includes roles and responsibilities for safeguarding within the Council.</p> <p>The Strategic Safeguarding Leads Group has reviewed its terms of reference to ensure its purpose and objectives are clear. The pandemic interrupted some of the Group's meetings, but it continued to meet regularly and has a designated Chair and Vice Chair.</p> <p>The Corporate Safeguarding Policy, along with other safeguarding information, is now easily accessible on the Council's website. A link on the homepage takes users directly to information on safeguarding.</p> <p>The Council has updated its procurement process so that contractors receive a copy of the Corporate Safeguarding Policy when tendering. They must agree to comply with the policy or show that their own</p>	<p>The Council should also consider whether it needs to do more work to understand if staff are sufficiently aware of and confident using the Corporate Safeguarding Policy.</p>

Proposals for Improvement / recommendations outstanding in our October 2019 report	Audit Wales's assessment of the Council's progress against the recommendations (as of September 2022)	Further actions needed
<p>roles and responsibilities and procedures</p> <p>f) test employees' awareness of the safeguarding policy and procedures, and confidence to use the policy (for example, through a staff survey).</p>	<p>policy is aligned to the Council's in order to progress through the tendering process.</p> <p>The Council is not actively assessing employees' awareness of safeguarding policy and procedures. It places reliance on staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attending mandated safeguarding training; • receiving updates through corporate bulletins and management channels; and • accessing information and support through safeguarding leads, designated safeguarding persons and a safeguarding app installed on all Council mobile phones. <p>Whilst this gives assurance that staff have access to information on safeguarding policy and procedures, it does not assess their awareness and confidence.</p> <p>At the time of our fieldwork, all directorates were completing a corporate safeguarding self-assessment tool. The completed assessments will provide the Corporate Safeguarding Lead Group with greater oversight and identify areas which need to improve. The Council hopes the self-assessment process will</p>	

Proposals for Improvement / recommendations outstanding in our October 2019 report	Audit Wales's assessment of the Council's progress against the recommendations (as of September 2022)	Further actions needed
	also provide assurance around employee awareness of safeguarding processes but will consider using staff surveys if necessary.	
<p>R3 Strengthen safe recruitment of staff and volunteers by requiring safe recruitment practices amongst partners in the third sector and for volunteers who provide services commissioned and/or used by the council which are underpinned by a contract or service level agreement. Our 2019 report suggests that in addressing this recommendation, the Council should also look to:</p> <p>a) Ensure that its monitoring systems enable tracking of safe recruitment and DBS renewal process for agency staff, volunteers and contractors</p>	<p>Recommendation not met</p> <p>Organisational Development oversees robust arrangements for the safe recruitment and DBS renewals of staff employed directly by the Council. But information on recruitment of volunteers and staff employed by third parties is not collated or monitored centrally which hinders corporate oversight.</p> <p>Contractors are responsible for complying with the Corporate Safeguarding Policy. This includes partners in the third sector and commissioned services. The Council makes these safeguarding responsibilities clear during the procurement process and services should monitor compliance as part of ongoing contract management. But we saw no evidence of routine checks to ensure that third parties comply with safe recruitment practices.</p>	<p>The Council needs to undertake further work to gain assurance that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • third parties comply with its safe recruitment policies; and • all volunteers are subject to DBS checks where necessary. <p>Centralised records would help provide greater oversight.</p>

Proposals for Improvement / recommendations outstanding in our October 2019 report	Audit Wales's assessment of the Council's progress against the recommendations (as of September 2022)	Further actions needed
<p>b) Strengthen arrangements for monitoring that services commissioned by the Council undertake safe recruitment practices</p>	<p>The completed corporate safeguarding self-assessment tool should provide further insight as directorates must show that 'commissioned services deliver a safeguarding standard consistent with internal services.' Going forward, a similar self-assessment tool aimed at third parties may give further assurance and evidence.</p> <p>The Council sets out guidance on volunteer recruitment and management in its 'Volunteers in the Workplace' policy. But we saw no evidence of how compliance with the policy is centrally monitored or assurance gained.</p>	
<p>R4 Ensure all relevant staff, members and partners understand their safeguarding responsibilities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ensuring safeguarding training is mandated and coverage extended to all relevant council service areas, and is included as 	<p>Recommendation partially met</p> <p>Safeguarding is included in the Council's induction programme. The Council's corporate safeguarding training framework, approved by Executive Committee in March 2022, mandates safeguarding training for all staff and members. It requires everyone to complete tier 1 training and for those with relevant job roles to complete tiers 2 and 3 also. Services must identify which roles require tier 2 and 3</p>	<p>Original recommendation partially met but the Council does not yet have a corporate-wide system to identify, track and monitor compliance with safeguarding training. This makes oversight of compliance challenging. This applies to staff directly employed by the Council, as well as</p>

Proposals for Improvement / recommendations outstanding in our October 2019 report	Audit Wales's assessment of the Council's progress against the recommendations (as of September 2022)	Further actions needed
<p>standard on induction programmes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - creating a corporate-wide system to identify, track and monitor compliance on attending safeguarding training in all council departments, elected members, schools, governors and volunteers - requiring relevant staff in partner organisations who are commissioned to work for the council in delivering services to children and 	<p>training. Guidance on this is available in the training framework and from safeguarding managers in Social Services, and officers we spoke to understand the criteria.</p> <p>There is no central corporate-wide system to identify, track and monitor compliance with safeguarding training. Staff access tier 1 safeguarding training electronically on the all-Wales online platform. The system records attendance and issues automated reminders for follow-up training. Tier 2 and 3 training takes place face to face. Attendance is recorded manually, and services are responsible for maintaining their own records and ensuring compliance. The lack of a corporate-wide system makes it difficult to gain oversight of compliance. It is also unclear if services are routinely monitoring whether contractors and volunteers are complying with training requirements.</p> <p>Prospective providers of commissioned services receive details of the Council's safeguarding policy and training requirements during the procurement</p>	<p>volunteers and those employed by third parties.</p>

Proposals for Improvement / recommendations outstanding in our October 2019 report	Audit Wales's assessment of the Council's progress against the recommendations (as of September 2022)	Further actions needed
<p>young people to undertake safeguarding training.</p> <p>Our 2019 report suggests that in addressing this recommendation, the Council should also look to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) include the Corporate Safeguarding Policy, safeguarding roles and responsibilities and safeguarding training in the corporate induction programme b) ensure consistent recording of all staff safeguarding training to enable refresher training to be undertaken in a timely manner c) agree a minimum timescale within which staff, volunteers and contractors undertake basic initial training upon appointment 	<p>process. They must agree to meet the Council's requirements to continue through the tender process.</p> <p>The corporate induction programme includes the Corporate Safeguarding Policy, which sets out safeguarding roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Tier 1 training takes place electronically and the All-Wales Portal records attendance and issues reminders when refresher training is due. The Council keeps manual records for higher levels of safeguarding training. Designated Safeguarding Persons are now responsible for keeping records and ensuring that staff attend training when due.</p> <p>The Council's safeguarding training framework clearly sets out expected timescales for undertaking training:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tier 1 training to be completed as part of the induction with refresher training every 3 years. 	

Proposals for Improvement / recommendations outstanding in our October 2019 report	Audit Wales's assessment of the Council's progress against the recommendations (as of September 2022)	Further actions needed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tier 2 and 3 training should be completed within 6 months of starting employment and completion of the tier 1 training and repeated every 3 years. 	
<p>R6¹ Improve accountability for corporate safeguarding by regularly reporting safeguarding issues and assurances to scrutiny committee(s) against a balanced and council-wide set of performance information covering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - benchmarking and comparisons with others; - service-based performance data; - key personnel data such as safeguarding training, and DBS recruitment checks; and 	<p>Recommendation partially met</p> <p>The People Scrutiny committee is responsible for scrutinising safeguarding performance, reviewing quarterly Organisation Development reports and the Performance and Safeguarding reports.</p> <p>The Council has broadened the scope of its safeguarding performance reporting and the most recent report (April – September 2021) includes some information on corporate safeguarding. The Council recognises it needs to do more and work is underway to address some of the gaps. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The latest safeguarding performance report does not include benchmarking or comparisons with 	<p>The Council needs to take further action to fully address this recommendation. The Council should further develop its corporate safeguarding reporting by including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • benchmarking and comparisons with others, using the regional performance measures currently being developed; • data on attendance at mandated safeguarding training; and

¹ Also covers Proposal for Improvement 2: Strengthen performance and risk management by regularly reporting conclusions from all department safeguarding activity to relevant forums to strengthen oversight and scrutiny.

Proposals for Improvement / recommendations outstanding in our October 2019 report	Audit Wales's assessment of the Council's progress against the recommendations (as of September 2022)	Further actions needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the performance of contractors and commissioned services on compliance with council safeguarding responsibilities. <p>Our 2019 report suggests that in addressing this recommendation the Council should also look to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) ensure safeguarding reports include performance information, DBS compliance and attendance levels at safeguarding training b) ensure the reporting of safeguarding issues and risks across all Council directorates, partners, volunteers and third parties delivering services on behalf of the Council 	<p>others. Gwent councils are currently working together to develop a standard set of corporate safeguarding performance measures. When finished, this will help the Council benchmark its performance against other councils in the Gwent region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is limited service-based performance data outside of Education and Social Services. The safeguarding self-assessment underway at the time of our fieldwork will provide baseline data for other services on which to base future performance reporting. The regional work on performance measures will also contribute to this. • The latest safeguarding performance report includes information on DBS compliance and attendance at Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence training. But reports lack data on attendance levels for the level 1 safeguarding training that all staff should attend. • The report has no information on how contractors and commissioned services perform against safeguarding responsibilities. The Council needs to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • safeguarding performance data for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – all directorates; – volunteers; and – staff employed by third parties.

Proposals for Improvement / recommendations outstanding in our October 2019 report	Audit Wales's assessment of the Council's progress against the recommendations (as of September 2022)	Further actions needed
	<p>collect performance data from third parties to assure itself that they comply with its safeguarding policies.</p>	
<p>R7² Establish a rolling programme of internal audit reviews to undertake systems testing and compliance reviews on the council's safeguarding practices.</p> <p>Our 2019 report suggests that in addressing this recommendation the Council should also look to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) clarify the role of Internal Audit and Audit Committee in relation to assuring the effective operation and governance of Corporate Safeguarding arrangements, including 	<p>Recommendation partially met</p> <p>Internal Audit takes a risk-based approach to its audit planning. It has a five-year strategic plan which it updates annually by risk assessing each potential audit area, including safeguarding, using a risk matrix. This process led to internal audit including corporate safeguarding in its 2021-22 programme of work.</p> <p>The updated Corporate Safeguarding Policy includes a diagram setting out the Council's governance structure for corporate safeguarding. This includes the Governance and Audit Committee but there is no narrative to explain the role of the committee. Nor does the Policy clarify the role of Internal Audit in relation to safeguarding.</p>	<p>To fully address this recommendation the Council should update its Corporate Safeguarding Policy to explain the roles of Internal Audit and the Governance and Audit Committee in relation to corporate safeguarding.</p>

² Also covers Proposal for Improvement 3: Include safeguarding within the internal audit programme to strengthen accountability and challenge.

Proposals for Improvement / recommendations outstanding in our October 2019 report	Audit Wales's assessment of the Council's progress against the recommendations (as of September 2022)	Further actions needed
<p>within the Corporate Safeguarding Policy</p> <p>b) ensure that relevant information and insight from Internal Audit's programme of work are shared and feed into the Council's oversight and assurance framework for safeguarding including with the Corporate Safeguarding Board</p>	<p>Internal audit issued a draft report on corporate safeguarding in March 2022. The audit considered 'the effectiveness of the internal controls operating in respect of safeguarding, with specific regard to the response made to the recommendations of Audit Wales.' The report provided limited assurance and will be considered by the Corporate Safeguarding Leads Group at their September meeting. At the time of our fieldwork, the Governance and Audit committee had not yet received the report.</p>	
<p>R8 Ensure the risks associated with safeguarding are considered at both a corporate and service level in developing and agreeing risk management plans across the council.</p> <p>Our 2019 report suggests that in addressing this recommendation the Council should also look to:</p>	<p>Recommendation partially met</p> <p>Safeguarding features on the Council's corporate risk register and on the Social Services and Education Directorate risk registers.</p> <p>At the time of our fieldwork, all services were completing a safeguarding self-assessment which</p>	<p>To fully address this recommendation the Council should continue with its plans to collate the safeguarding risks identified during the self-assessment process and use these to inform service risk registers.</p>

Proposals for Improvement / recommendations outstanding in our October 2019 report	Audit Wales's assessment of the Council's progress against the recommendations (as of September 2022)	Further actions needed
a) consider safeguarding risks in services other than Social Services and Education	involves assessing risks in relation to safeguarding. The results of the self-assessment will be collated and considered corporately and will provide improved overview of safeguarding risks across all areas of the Council. Identified risks will also be incorporated into service risk registers.	



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**Blaenau Gwent County
Borough Council**

**Safeguarding Children
and
Vulnerable Adults**

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1. Corporate Policy Statement:

- 1.1 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is committed to ensuring that everyone living within the Borough is safe and protected and that our statutory responsibilities to safeguard and protect children, young people and vulnerable adults are effectively met.
- 1.2 Safeguarding children and adults from abuse is everybody's business. We all share a responsibility, both corporately and individually, to ensure that all children and adults are treated with respect and protected from others who may abuse them. All Council employees, Elected Members, volunteers and contractors who come into contact with children or vulnerable adults in the course of their duties are expected to understand their responsibility and wherever necessary, to take action to safeguard and promote their welfare.
- 1.3 As part of the Council's commitment to safeguarding, we work proactively with our partners under the auspices of the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB) and the Gwent Wide Adult Safeguarding Board (GWASB) to ensure that statutory guidance is followed, awareness and good practice is promoted and the children and adult's workforce practices safely and effectively. Helpful guidance on professional conduct and safe working practice can be found in Appendix 2.
- 1.4 This policy covers all Council employees, Elected Members, volunteers and contractors. Individual Departments or Educational Establishment may have their own supplementary structured guidance to inform their staff.
- 1.5 While employees, Elected Members, volunteers and contractors are likely to have varied levels of contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults as part of their duties, everyone should be aware of the potential indicators of abuse and neglect and be clear about what to do if they have concerns. Responsibilities are limited and it is important to remember that:

IT IS NOT the responsibility of any Council employee, Elected Member, volunteer or provider of services to investigate and determine whether abuse or neglect is actually taking place.

HOWEVER,

IT IS the responsibility of the employee, Elected Member, volunteer or contractor to take the actions set out in this policy if they are concerned that abuse or neglect may be taking place.

2. What is safeguarding?

2.1 Safeguarding means protecting individual's health, well-being and human rights and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect.

2.2 The Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014 defines abuse and neglect as:

'Abuse' means physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or financial abuse and includes abuse taking place in any setting, whether in a private dwelling, an institution or any other place. 'Financial abuse' includes:

- Having money or other property stolen;
- Being defrauded;
- Being put under pressure in relation to money or property;
- Having money or other property misused.

'Neglect' means a failure to meet a person's basic physical, emotional, social or psychological needs which is likely to result in an impairment of the person's well-being for example, impairment of the person's health or, in the case of a child, an impairment of the child's development.

Safeguarding Children and Young People

2.3 For the purposes of this policy, a child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their eighteenth birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout this document. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody in the secure estate does not change his or her status or entitlement to services or protection under current legislation.

Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults at Risk

2.4 For the purposes of this policy, an adult is defined as being over eighteen years of age. A vulnerable adult becomes an adult at risk when they:

- a) are experiencing or are at risk of abuse or neglect;
- b) have the need for care and support (whether or not the authority is meeting any of those needs); and
- c) as a result of those needs is unable to protect him/herself against the abuse or neglect or the risk of it.

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDA&SV)

- 2.5 The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 aims to improve arrangements for the prevention of gender based violence, abuse and sexual violence. The protection of victims and support for people affected is underpinned by the 'Ask and Act' duty placed on public service staff to ask potential victims about the possibility that they may be experiencing VAWDASV and act so as to reduce suffering and harm.

Counter-terrorism and risk of radicalisation

- 2.6 Local authorities have a duty to identify vulnerable individuals and families at risk of radicalisation from all forms of extremism. The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and its guidance, identifies that children and adults may be vulnerable to ideologies that place them, their families and the general public in danger should they be enticed to act upon extremist beliefs. Identifying individuals at risk and determining what action is necessary to support them is complemented by the 'Channel' multi-agency intervention process which deters continued involvement.

Modern Day Slavery

- 2.7 Modern day slavery encompasses slavery, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and forced labour and domestic servitude. Traffickers and slave masters use whatever means they have at their disposal to coerce, deceive and force individual's into a life of abuse, servitude and inhumane treatment. In March 2015, the Modern Day Slavery Bill consolidated and simplified existing offences into a single Act ensuring that perpetrators can receive suitably severe punishments. The Bill also introduces new powers for the courts to place restrictions on individuals to protect people from the harm caused by modern day slavery.
- 2.8 Modern day slavery is a hidden, pervasive crime targeted towards those individuals most vulnerable. The Council and BAWSO are first responding organisations to cases of slavery. Contact details for BAWSO are included in Appendix 6.

Recognition of abuse or concerns

- 2.9 Guidance in respect of possible signs and symptoms of each form of abuse can be found at Appendix 3. This Appendix details generic factors and those factors as they relate to Children and Adults for each category of abuse.

3. Responsibilities for Safeguarding:

- 3.1 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and adults who may be at risk of harm.
- 3.2 The Council ensures that everyone working with or on behalf of children and vulnerable adults are competent to do so.
- 3.3 The Council promotes safer recruitment policy and practice and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are undertaken for employees in accordance with statutory and regulatory requirements and provisions contained within the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975. Checks are also undertaken to ensure that staff are registered with relevant professional and other bodies wherever appropriate e.g. Social workers and Teachers.
- 3.4 Safeguarding responsibilities for all employees are emphasised from the point of recruitment and throughout their employment. There are clear lines of accountability, responsibility and support regarding safeguarding throughout the authority and these are achieved via relevant staff guidance, code of conduct (including disciplinary procedures) and specific policies and procedures which all staff must adhere to.
- 3.5 The Council has a range of policies and procedures available to promote and support staff to raise concerns about the safety and welfare of children and adults. These include the Whistle Blowing Policy which provides guidance for staff to report concerns or suspicions about other employees or contractors.
- 3.6 The Council also hosts safeguarding information pages on the Council website in order to provide information to the general public. The Council intranet site has direct links to the regional Children's and Adults Safeguarding Boards (SEWSCB and GWASB).
- 3.7 All employees will be made aware of their safeguarding responsibilities as part of their induction to their employment. More specialist single agency and multi-agency training opportunities are available for employees who routinely work with children or vulnerable adults at levels appropriate to their role and responsibilities.
- 3.8 Elected Members have a responsibility to be aware of and support the Council's safeguarding responsibilities and to scrutinise how these are carried out in the planning and delivery of services.
- 3.9 The Council undertakes to ensure that through procurement processes, services commissioned and contracted on its behalf have safeguarding responsibilities built into contracts and that appropriate policies and staff

training are in place. This includes an expectation that any person or organisation using Council resources or premises adhere to the Council's safeguarding standards.

- 3.10 The Council expects all employees to take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of any child or adult involved in any activity or interaction for which they are responsible. Guidance on professional conduct and safe working practice can be found in Appendix 2. Helpful guidance on possible signs and symptoms of abuse can be found in Appendix 3.
- 3.11 Any person responsible for, or working with, children or vulnerable adults in any capacity, whether paid or unpaid, is considered both legally and morally, to owe them a duty of care. This includes a duty to behave in a manner that does not threaten, harm or put people at risk of harm from others.
- 3.12 All employees have a responsibility to conduct themselves in their private lives in a manner that does not compromise their position in the workplace or call into question their suitability to work with children or vulnerable adults.
- 3.13 All employees should:
- Be alert to the possibility of harm, abuse and neglect
 - Participate in relevant safeguarding training and multi-agency working to safeguard children and vulnerable adults
 - Be familiar with local procedures and protocols for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and follow the Council's Code of Conduct and any other Professional Codes
 - Report any concerns about the safety or welfare of a child or vulnerable adult. Please refer to Appendix 5; 'How to make a referral'
- 3.14 All employees working for or on behalf of the Council have a duty to report any concerns they may have for the welfare and/or protection of children and vulnerable adults. The duty to report is a legal requirement and may have serious consequences for the employee who fails to report appropriately. The process to follow to make referrals is contained in Appendix 5.
- 3.15 Each department has a Designated Safeguarding Lead responsible for safeguarding. The Lead provides advice and guidance and is responsible for ensuring procedures are followed regarding safeguarding concerns about a child or vulnerable adult including allegations against members of staff. The Leads responsibilities are detailed in Appendix 1.
- 3.16 Professional advice can also be sought from and referrals made to the Social Services Information, Advice and Assistance Service.

4. Governance Arrangements for Safeguarding with the Authority

- 4.1 The Local Authority is required to provide a clear governance structure and clarity on roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding.
- 4.2 The Managing Director is ultimately accountable for ensuring safeguarding across the Authority is effective.
- 4.3 Ensuring the Local Authority has proper safeguards in place to protect children and 'adults at risk' is one of the core responsibilities of the Director of Social Services.
- 4.4 The lead member for safeguarding who is currently the Executive Member responsible for Social Services is responsible for providing political scrutiny to the local authority to ensure it fulfils its legal responsibilities for safeguarding.
- 4.5 Each Directorate is responsible for nominating a Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead plus a Deputy Safeguarding Lead. The roles and responsibilities of the Managing Director, Lead Member for Safeguarding, Directors and their Strategic Safeguarding Leads are clarified under Appendix 1.
- 4.6 The South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board was set up in April 2013. The aim of the Board is "All Children and Young People in South East Wales are protected from abuse and neglect live in safe homes and communities and are supported to achieve their full potential".
- 4.7 The Gwent-wide Adult Safeguarding Board (GWASB) was established in January 2011, and as of the 6th April 2016, GWASB became a statutory Board as set out in Part 7 of the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014. The Board's purpose is twofold; to protect adults in Gwent becoming "adults at risk" and to protect adults who have been abused or neglected or are at risk of it.
- 4.8 The Board's vision is to ensure that all adults in Gwent are safeguarded effectively through partnership working and community engagement. The Board provides strong leadership, governance and accountability and promotes the rights of adults at risk to live in safety and actively works to prevent, identify and investigate alleged abuse. The Boards objectives and functions can be viewed in its Partnership Agreement
- 4.9 Each Authority in the South East Wales Region is required to have a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Network Group which sits under both Boards. The purpose of the Group is to ensure the Local Safeguarding Agenda within each Authority is progressed. The Service Manager with responsibility for Safeguarding Chairs this Local Group and representatives from the Education Department, Schools, Health, the Youth Service, Probation, Families First, Police, Youth Offending Service, Adult Services and the voluntary sector sit

on this Group. There are a number of other joint sub groups that sit under and report to both boards

- 4.10 Social Services are inspected by the CSSIW. Their Inspection criteria includes Safeguarding of Children. Social Services have mechanisms in place to evidence the work undertaken in relation to this area of work which is presented to the CSSIW in the Directors Annual Report to them.
- 4.11 The Education Department are inspected by Estyn. Part of their inspection criteria includes Safeguarding. This includes practice relating to safeguarding within schools and other education settings plus how Safeguarding is managed corporately.
- 4.12 Everyone shares responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of Children and Adults irrespective of their individual role within the Council.
- 4.13 Our priority is for all staff to be responsible for implementing this Policy and reporting concerns if they become aware of the following situations:
 - Any allegation, or a concern about actual, or suspected situations of abuse involving a Child or 'Adult at risk'.
 - Any allegation or a concern about actual or suspected staff misconduct, and/or criminal activity involving the abuse of a Child or 'Adult at risk'.

5. Appendices:

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Governance Arrangements for Safeguarding within the Authority

Managing Director

Roles & Responsibilities	How this will be done
Ensure safeguarding of children and adults is effective across the Local Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All serious Safeguarding concerns will be reported to the Director of Social Services via email with the Managing Director cc'd in. • The Director of Social Services will in consultation with the Managing Director agree an appropriate response to serious Safeguarding concerns raised. • The Managing Director will have monthly one to one meetings with all Directors who can raise general Safeguarding issues specific to their Directorate if necessary. • Safeguarding is a standing item on the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) agenda • The Managing Director sits on the Local Service Board, where strategic partnership work takes place. • The Risk Register of the Council which includes Safeguarding is reviewed regularly at CLT meetings which are chaired by the Managing Director. • The Managing Director can meet with the Lead Member for Safeguarding at any time to discuss immediate or general concerns. • The Managing Director can raise safeguarding issues with the Leader of the Council at their 1-1 meetings. • The Managing Director has access to any papers produced by the Director of Social Services, including reports submitted to the South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board, Gwent wide Adult Safeguarding Board and Social Services Scrutiny Committee. • The Managing Director receives six monthly updates on the activity of the South East Wales safeguarding Children's Board and Gwent wide Adult safeguarding Board at G7 meetings. These meetings consist of the five Chief Executives and Leaders of the South East Wales Region, the Chair of the ABHB, the Police

	<p>Commissioner and the CEO of the Fire Service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Managing Director will have sight of the quarterly Safeguarding Reports presented to Social Services and Education Joint Scrutiny Committee.
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Lead Member for Safeguarding

Roles & Responsibilities	How this will be done
<p>The Lead Member for Safeguarding is responsible for providing political scrutiny to the local authority to ensure it fulfils its legal responsibilities for safeguarding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Lead Member will scrutinise the quarterly performance information provided by Social Services and provide any necessary challenge.• The Lead Member will receive fortnightly briefings from the Director of Social Services on all aspects of Social Services including safeguarding.• The Director will inform the Lead Member of any sensitive cases that may be considered for a Child Practice Review or may become a matter of public interest.• The Lead Member will raise safeguarding issues within Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee when necessary.• The Lead Member will attend the Local Safeguarding Network Group as a 'participant observer'.• The Lead Member will periodically meet with children within the Authority.• Where urgent Safeguarding issues arise across the Directorate these will be shared immediately with the Lead Member by the Director of Social Services.

Director of Social Services

Roles & Responsibilities	How this will be done
<p>Oversee and report to Councillors and the Managing Director on the operation, monitoring and improvement of safeguarding systems across the Local Authority.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Director will be the point of contact within the Authority for all other Directors to report serious Safeguarding concerns which develop within their own Service Areas. • The Director of Social Services will take responsibility for reporting these concerns immediately to the Managing Director and agreeing an appropriate response. • The Director will take responsibility for reporting serious Safeguarding concerns as necessary to the Lead Member for safeguarding and the Lead Member for Directorate involved as appropriate. • The Director will meet monthly on a one to one with the Managing Director where general Safeguarding concerns can be raised. • The Director will review Social Services Risk Log on a quarterly basis and inform the Managing Director and Lead member for Safeguarding of any changes. • The Director will brief the Lead Member for Safeguarding on safeguarding activity within Social Services during formal briefing sessions. • Social Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be provided with termly performance management information which will include Safeguarding information. Scrutiny will also receive a termly report on Safeguarding which will include information from across the Local Authority. • The Director will inform the Managing Director and Lead Member of significant Safeguarding matters arising from the Annual Framework put in place by CSSIW. • The Director has a seat on the South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board and the Gwent wide Adult Safeguarding Board which meet bi-monthly and receive updates and exception reports from the four sub groups and the five Local Safeguarding Networks which drive the work of the Boards.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Director will designate the Head of Service for Children’s Services as Strategic Safeguarding Lead.• The Director will have monthly one to one sessions with the Head of Children’s Service with Safeguarding as a standing agenda item.• The Director will from time to time visit staff teams and resources.• The Director is responsible for providing an Annual Report to CSSIW and the Council on the progress and performance of Social Services which includes safeguarding.
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Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead in Social Services

Roles & Responsibilities	How this will be done
<p>To support the Director to monitor and improve Safeguarding systems across the Local Authority.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Strategic Safeguarding Lead (SSL) will in their monthly one to one meetings with the Director raise relevant Safeguarding issues. • The SSL Lead will bring to the Directors immediate attention serious Safeguarding concerns as they arise. • The SSL will ensure the Director receives copies of the minutes of the Local Safeguarding Network which sits under the South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board. • The SSL has a seat on the South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board and is responsible for ensuring Blaenau Gwent is represented on the sub groups of this Board. • The SSL is responsible for ensuring Policies and Procedures are in place and accessible to staff in relation to managing Safeguarding issues. • The SSL is responsible for scrutinizing performance information relating to Safeguarding and putting corrective measures in place to improve performance when necessary. • The SSL will brief the Director on progress of action plans resulting from Child Practice Reviews within Blaenau Gwent. • The SSL will keep a Deputy Safeguarding Lead Officer briefed to deputise in their absence.

Director of Education

Roles & Responsibilities	How this will be done
<p>The Director is responsible for ensuring systems are in place to ensure children and adults are safeguarded, staff are appropriately trained and monitoring information is gathered and used to analyse safeguarding issue and prompt action when required within the Directorate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Director will report any serious safeguarding concerns immediately to the Director of Social Services via email and cc the Managing Director. The Director of Social Services with the Managing Director will agree an appropriate response.• The Director will keep briefed their Lead member for Education on general performance issues relating to Safeguarding within their service area.• The Director will present a termly Safeguarding report jointly with the Director of Social Services to Scrutiny Committee.• The Director will in Corporate Management Team meetings review the Corporate risk log which includes Safeguarding.• The Director will nominate a Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead (SSL).• The Director will have monthly one to one sessions with the Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead to ensure they meet their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding as defined in this document.

Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead for Education

Roles & Responsibilities	How this will be done
<p>To support the Director in ensuring systems are in place to Safeguard children and adults. Staff are appropriately trained and monitoring information is gathered and used to analyse Safeguarding issues to prompt action when required across the Directorate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead (SSL) will be trained to an appropriate level in Safeguarding/'Safeguarding for Designated Leads' and have awareness of the All Wales Child Protection Procedures and Adult procedures. • The SSL will sit on the Local Safeguarding Network which sits under the two Safeguarding Boards. • The SSL will immediately alert the Director to serious Safeguarding concerns, who will in turn report them to the Director of Social Services via email copying in the Managing Director. • The SSL will in their monthly meetings with the Director raise any general Safeguarding issues. • The SSL will monitor Safeguarding performance information via their one to one meetings with the Education Safeguarding Manager, whose role is to work directly with Head Teachers and Governing Bodies to implement the Welsh Assembly Government's circular 158/2015 "Keeping Learners Safe". • The Safeguarding performance information to be monitored will include; training of staff across the Directorate, safe recruitment of staff, ensuring Policies and Procedures are in place and accessible to staff. • The SSL will ensure Safeguarding performance information is regularly presented to the Senior Leadership Team. • The SSL will keep briefed a Deputy Safeguarding Lead who will deputise in their absence.

Education Safeguarding Manager

Roles & Responsibilities	How this will be done
<p>To support the Director, the Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead in Education, Head Teachers and Governing Bodies to ensure systems are in place to safeguard Children. That staff are appropriately trained, and monitoring information is gathered and used to analyse Safeguarding issues to prompt action when required.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Education Safeguarding Manager will receive their one to one supervision from the Deputy Safeguarding Lead in Social Services. • The Education Safeguarding Manager will also meet the Designated Strategic Lead in Education on a one to one basis to discuss relevant Safeguarding issues across the Directorate. • The Education Safeguarding Manager will report Safeguarding information to the Education Senior Leadership Team and contribute to the termly Safeguarding Report to be presented to Scrutiny Committee. • The Education Safeguarding Manager will sit on the Local Safeguarding Network and other relevant Sub Groups of the two Boards. • The Education Safeguarding Manager is responsible for supporting schools and Local Authority to put systems in place to ensure the Welsh Assembly Government circular 158/2015 “Keeping Learners Safe” is adhered to. • The Local Authority Designated Officer is the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager in Social Services. The Education Safeguarding Manager, covers the responsibilities of the LADO laid out in WG circular no 009/2014, “Safeguarding children in Education: - Handling allegations of abuse against teachers and other staff”. • The Education Officer will be the day to day support for Schools to discuss any Safeguarding issues and will be the first point of contact with schools and education directorate staff in relation to advice regarding safeguarding and child protection issues arising in schools.

Chief Finance Officer

Roles & Responsibilities	How this will be done
To ensure systems are in place to safeguard children and adults within their Directorate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Chief Finance Officer will report any serious Safeguarding concerns immediately to the Director of Social Services via email and cc in the Managing Director. The Director of Social Services with the Managing Director agree an appropriate response.• The Chief Finance Officer will in Corporate Management Team Meetings review the Corporate Risk Log which includes Safeguarding.• The Chief Finance Officer will nominate a Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead (SSL).• The Chief Finance Officer will have one to one sessions with the Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead to ensure they meet their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding as defined in this document.

Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead for the Chief Finance Officer

Roles & Responsibilities	How this will be done
<p>To support the Director to ensure systems are in place to safeguard children and adults within their Directorate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Designated Strategic Lead (SSL) will be trained to an appropriate level in Safeguarding/'Safeguarding for Designated Leads'. • The Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead will ensure all staff members have been briefed and are aware of the Corporate Safeguarding Policy. • The SSL will ensure all new staff as part of their induction are made aware of their Safeguarding responsibilities in line with the Corporate Safeguarding Policy. • The SSL will ensure those staff who have an interface with Children and Families are trained in Safeguarding/'Safeguarding for Practitioners'. • The SSL will keep briefed a Deputy Safeguarding Lead to deputise in their absence. • The SSL will report serious Safeguarding concerns immediately to the Chief Finance Officer who will in turn email the Director of Social Services and cc the Managing Director. • The SSL will in their one to one sessions with the Chief Finance Officer discuss general Safeguarding issues relevant to the Directorate. • The SSL will respond to requests for information to contribute to the termly Safeguarding reports which will be presented to Scrutiny Committee. • The SSL can and should contact the Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead for Social Services if they need advice/support in relation to Safeguarding matters.

Director of Strategy Transformation & Culture

Roles & Responsibilities	How this will be done
<p>To ensure systems are in place to safeguard children and adults within their Directorate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Director of Strategy Transformation & Culture will report any serious Safeguarding concerns immediately to the Director of Social Services via email and cc in the Managing Director. The Director of Social Services with the Managing Director will agree an appropriate response. • The Director of Strategy Transformation & Culture will in Corporate Management Team Meetings review the Corporate Risk Log which includes Safeguarding. • The Director of Strategy Transformation & Culture will nominate a Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead (SSL). • The Director of Strategy Transformation & Culture will have one to one sessions with the Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead to ensure they meet their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding as defined in this document.

Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead for the Director of Strategy Transformation & Culture

Roles & Responsibilities	How this will be done
<p>To support the Director to ensure systems are in place to safeguard children and adults within their Directorate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Designated Strategic Lead (SSL) will be trained to an appropriate level in Safeguarding/'Safeguarding for Designated Leads'. • The Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead will ensure all staff members have been briefed and are aware of the Corporate Safeguarding Policy. • The SSL will ensure all new staff as part of their induction are made aware of their Safeguarding responsibilities in line with the Corporate Safeguarding Policy. • The SSL will ensure those staff who have an interface with Children and Families are trained in Safeguarding/'Safeguarding for Practitioners'.. • The SSL will keep briefed a Deputy Safeguarding Lead to deputise in their absence. • The SSL will report serious Safeguarding concerns immediately to the Director of Strategy Transformation & Culture who will in turn email the Director of Social Services and cc the Managing Director. • The SSL will in their one to one sessions with the Director of Strategy Transformation & Culture discuss general Safeguarding issues relevant to the Directorate. • The SSL will respond to requests for information to contribute to the termly Safeguarding reports which will be presented to Scrutiny Committee. • The SSL can and should contact the Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead for Social Services if they need advice/support in relation to Safeguarding matters.

Director of Environment & Regeneration

Roles & Responsibilities	How this will be done
To ensure systems are in place to safeguard children and adults within their Directorate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Director of Environment & Regeneration will report any serious Safeguarding concerns immediately to the Director of Social Services via email and cc in the Managing Director. The Director of Social Services with the Managing Director will agree an appropriate response.• The Director of Environment & Regeneration will in Corporate Management Team Meetings review the Corporate Risk Log which includes Safeguarding.• The Director of Environment & Regeneration will nominate a Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead (SSL).• The Director of Environment & Regeneration will have one to one sessions with the Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead to ensure they meet their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding as defined in this document.

Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead for the Director of Environment & Regeneration

Roles & Responsibilities	How this will be done
<p>To support the Director to ensure systems are in place to safeguard children and adults within their Directorate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Designated Strategic Lead (SSL) will be trained to an appropriate level in Safeguarding/'Safeguarding for Designated Leads'... • The Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead will ensure all staff members have been briefed and are aware of the Corporate Safeguarding Policy. • The SSL will ensure all new staff as part of their induction are made aware of their Safeguarding responsibilities in line with the Corporate Safeguarding Policy. • The SSL will ensure those staff who have an interface with Children and Families are trained in Safeguarding/'Safeguarding for Practitioners'. • The SSL will keep briefed a Deputy Safeguarding Lead to deputise in their absence. • The SSL will report serious Safeguarding concerns immediately to the Director of Environment & Regeneration who will in turn email the Director of Social Services and cc the Managing Director. • The SSL will in their one to one sessions with the Director of Environment & Regeneration general Safeguarding issues relevant to the Directorate. • The SSL will respond to requests for information to contribute to the termly Safeguarding reports which will be presented to Scrutiny Committee. • The SSL can and should contact the Designated Strategic Safeguarding Lead for Social Services if they need advice/support in relation to Safeguarding matters.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Corporate Safeguarding Policy
Professional Conduct and Safe Working Practice

This document provides a description of the professional standards of practice that are required from all Council staff, Elected Members, volunteers and contractors when undertaking their day to day duties. For Elected Members and officers, it must be read in conjunction with the Council's 'Code of Conduct for Employees' and the 'Social Media Policy'.

Any breach of the following conditions will result in an investigation and possible disciplinary action which could, if serious, result in dismissal and the possibility of criminal investigation if there is evidence of illegal activity.

Exceptions: Staff employed in identified roles within Education, the Youth Service, Customer Care, Housing and Social Care will be required to meet with individuals alone as part of the role and function. In such cases, due regard must be given to all information available in relation to the individual to ensure adequate risk assessments can be completed.

You MUST:

Set a good example in terms of behaviour to ensure that children and adults are safeguarded and protected.

Keep yourself safe through adherence to any agreed plan of intervention/care plan where applicable, through relevant risk assessments including Health & Safety and checking the Employee Protection Register database and through compliance with the Council's Policy for Lone Working.

Be open and transparent when meeting and/or working with children and vulnerable adults and where not required to do so as part of your role and function, you should try to avoid any situation where you may be alone with a child or vulnerable adult out of sight or sound of another officer or colleague.

Respect an individual's rights to privacy, equality and dignity and a safe and positive environment.

Prioritise the welfare and safety of the child or vulnerable adult before concerns about performance and service delivery.

Ensure you are familiar with the Corporate Safeguarding Policy.

Take responsibility to identify the Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) for your respective Service area.

Ensure you access the appropriate safeguarding training relevant to your role and responsibility.

Respond in an appropriate and timely manner to any concerns you may have in respect of a child or vulnerable adult.

Follow the required process for reporting incidents and concerns.

If the vulnerable child or adult does not want a member of staff to disclose, nevertheless staff have an overriding duty to report to their manager but must also tell the vulnerable person that they are doing so.

Vulnerable adults have the right to give or withhold their consent to a referral to adult protection being made. Unless the vulnerable adult has been assessed not to have the mental capacity to make this decision, their decision must be respected unless there are reasons for it being overridden.

The reasons for overriding the decision of a vulnerable adult include when a crime has been committed and when there are risks to other vulnerable people, including children. In these circumstances the referral should proceed, although the vulnerable adult has the right to participate in the process.

If a vulnerable adult does not have the mental capacity to make this decision, a Best Interest Decision must be made that reflects the best interests of the person and the wider public interest.

You MUST NOT:

Use force, threats or inappropriate language.

Make suggestive sexual comments or behave in a sexualised manner.

Touch inappropriately or allow inappropriate touching in any way.

Use any behaviour control methods that are not authorised by Council policy and procedure.

Ignore allegations made by a child or adult. All allegations must be reported to Social Services or the Police.

Undertake tasks of a personal nature for a child or adult which they could do for themselves.

Invite a child or vulnerable adult to be alone with you where this is not part of your role and function.

Enter areas that have been specifically designated for use by another sex/gender.

Use the internet, electronic devices or phones to access inappropriate sites including inappropriate use of social media.

Breach confidentiality or share sensitive information relating to an individual inappropriately.

NB: this is by no means an exhaustive list and all actions must be determined by application of professional judgement and decision making.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Corporate Safeguarding Policy
Possible Signs and Symptoms

Please Note: the following lists are not exhaustive and one sign or symptom in isolation does not automatically signify a safeguarding concern. Any concerns you may have must be discussed with your Designated Safeguarding Officer as a matter of priority. You can also seek advice from Social Services.

NEGLECT	
GENERIC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of personal care • General deterioration of health • Excessive dirt or other health hazards in the living environment • Poor standard of living accommodation eg cold, dirty, beds, bedding • Unsuitable clothing for weather conditions • Dishevelled / unkempt / dirty appearance • Untreated medical condition • Poor personal hygiene • Rashes, sores, lice • Loss of weight • Malnutrition • Dehydration • Lack of supervision, either at home or during activities which hold danger for them 	
CHILDREN	ADULTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant hunger • Constant tiredness • Frequent lateness / non attendance at school • Low self esteem • Inappropriate care • No social relationships • Running away • Compulsive stealing or scavenging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of management of continence • Misuse of medication • Failure to obtain/ facilitate use of necessary prosthetic devices dentures, glasses, hearing aids, or durable surgical equipment • Pressure sores

PHYSICAL ABUSE	
GENERIC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Injury incompatible with explanation • Accounts of injury by carer varying over time or inconsistent with the nature of the injury • Injury which has not been properly cared for (injuries are sometimes hidden on areas of the body normally covered by clothes) • Refusal to discuss injuries • Cuts / scratches / lacerations • Bruising / wounds (particularly on parts of the body which do not normally sustain such injuries) • Sprains and bruises • Weal marks • Bite marks, fingertip and pinching marks • Burns and scalds, including friction burns and carpet burns • Signs of hair pulling / bald patches • Poor skin condition / hygiene / discolouration • Flinches at physical contact • Fearfulness • Low self esteem 	
CHILDREN	ADULTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unexplained recurrent injuries • Admission of punishment which appears excessive • Withdrawal from physical contact • Arms and legs covered in hot weather • Fear of returning home • Fear of medical help • Self harming tendencies • Aggression towards others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Untreated pressure sores, ulcers, bedsores, and being left in wet clothing • Dehydration and/or malnutrition without illness related cause, and when not living alone • Significant weight loss • Hypothermia • Uncharacteristic behaviour • Confusion / insomnia • Asks not <i>"to be hurt"</i> • Unexplained paranoia • Excessive repeated prescriptions /under use /over use of medication • Excessive drowsiness • Mobile person not being able to get up from bed or chair for various reasons eg. being tied in • Use of furniture or special chairs to prevent movement, removal of walking aid or specialist equipment • Global or specific deterioration in health without obvious cause • Increasing immobility

SEXUAL ABUSE	
GENERIC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional distress • Difficulty in walking or sitting • Pain or itching in genital area • Recurring urinary tract infections • Over-affectionate displays • Incestuous relationships • Love bites • Fear of medical examinations • Carer unreasonably refuses examination. • Withdrawal from social situations • Depression and isolation • Sleep disturbances or nightmares • Phobias and panic attacks • Unexplained pregnancy 	
CHILDREN	ADULTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sudden changes in behaviour or school performance • Displays of affection in a sexual way inappropriate to age • Tendency to cling or need constant reassurance • Tendency to cry easily • Regression to younger behaviour • Distrust of familiar adults • Anxiety about being left with carer • Unexplained gifts or money • Apparent secrecy • Wetting, day or night • Fear of undressing eg for PE • Also refer to CSE below 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Torn, stained or bloody underclothing • Bruises or bleeding in external genitalia, vagina or anal area • Bruising on the inner thighs • Semen staining on clothing • Torn penile fraenum • Tissue tearing • Mood changes • Change in usual behaviour • Feeling of guilt or shame • Untypical changes, ie, bedwetting, aggressiveness, self injury • Overt sexual behaviour/language by the person

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (CSE)

Key facts about CSE:

Sexual exploitation often starts around the age of 10 years old. Girls are usually targeted from age 10 and boys from age 8.

It affects both girls and boys and can happen in all communities.

Any person can be targeted but there are some particularly vulnerable groups: Looked After Children, young people Leaving Care and disabled children.

Victims of CSE may also be trafficked (locally, nationally and internationally).

Over 70% of adults involved in prostitution were sexually exploited as children or teenagers.

Sexual violence or abuse against children affects approximately 16% of children under the age of 16 years.

Possible signs:

- going missing for periods of time or regularly returning home late
- skipping school or being disruptive in class
- appearing with unexplained gifts or possessions that can't be accounted for
- experiencing health problems that may indicate a sexually transmitted infection
- having mood swings and changes in temperament
- using drugs and alcohol
- displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviours, such as over familiarity with strangers, dressing in a sexualised manner or sending sexualised images by mobile phone ("sexting")
- they may also show signs of unexplained physical harm such as bruising and cigarette burns

EMOTIONAL / PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE	
GENERIC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High levels of anxiety/stress especially in response to certain individuals or circumstances • Extremes of passivity or aggression • Fear • Inappropriate emotional responses to situations • Self harming behaviour • Recoiling from the physical approach of carers • Excessive and inappropriate craving for affection • Running away or not wanting to return to carers • Overly overtly subservient or anxious to please • Feelings of worthlessness 	
CHILDREN	ADULTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical and emotional developmental delay • Admission of punishment which appears excessive • Over reaction to simple mistakes • Continual self deprecation • Sudden speech disorders • Fear of new situations • Neurotic behaviour eg rocking, hair twisting, thumb sucking • Fear of parents being contacted • Substance misuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion • Resignation • Signs of depression, such as suicidal ideation • Sleep disturbances • Changes in appetite • Loss of interest in pursuing social contact • An air of silence in the home when the alleged abuser is present • Cowering • Helplessness • Isolation in a room in a house • Inappropriately or improperly dressed • Denial

DOMESTIC ABUSE

GENERIC

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 years and over who are, or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

This can be observed as signs and symptoms of the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

FINANCIAL ABUSE

ADULTS

- Unexplained withdrawals / unusual activity in the bank accounts
- Unpaid bills
- Unexplained shortage of money
- Withholding or reluctance on the part of the person with responsibility for the funds to provide basic food and clothes etc.
- Fraud
- Theft
- Basic needs not being met.
- Unexplained sudden inability to pay bills or maintain lifestyle
- Lasting Power of Attorney or Enduring Power of Attorney obtained when vulnerable adult is unable to comprehend and give consent
- Recent change of deeds or title of property
- Unusual interest shown by family or others in the vulnerable adult's assets
- Person managing financial affairs is evasive or not co-operative.
- Creation of a Will when the person is incapable of making such decisions
- The individual requires residential/nursing care but is prevented by relatives from entering a residential/nursing home because the client owns their own property and there are concerns about the inevitable depletion of their estate
- Deliberate isolation by carer (informal/formal of a vulnerable adult) from friends or family resulting in carers having total control
- Unexplained disappearance of financial documents, e.g. building society books, and bank statements, payments or order books.
- Signatures on cheques which do not resemble the vulnerable adult's signature or signed when this person cannot write
- Unusual concern by carer that an excessive amount of money is being expended on the care of the vulnerable adult
- Lack of amenities such as TV, appropriate clothing, personal grooming items that the vulnerable adult can well afford
- Missing personal belongings such as silverware, jewellery, or other valuable items
- Lacks financial recording/monitoring in a care setting.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Corporate Safeguarding Policy
How to make a referral
LISTEN, SHARE, RECORD

LISTEN

If you are concerned because of something a child or vulnerable adult is saying, you should not attempt to take any action directly but **you should**:

- Stay calm
- Listen carefully, do not directly question him or her, instead use open questions; what, where, when, who?
- Never stop them talking if they are freely recalling significant events
- Tell them what you will do next and who you will inform (see below)
- Never promise to keep what you have been told secret or confidential
- Make a note of the discussion, taking care to record what was said, when and where it happened and who else was present

SHARE

Any safeguarding concerns should be discussed with the Designated Safeguarding Lead in the respective service area. With the support of the Designated Safeguarding Lead the decision to refer a concern to Social Services will be made and responsibility for referring will be agreed i.e. the staff member or the Designated Safeguarding Lead will make the referral.

Should the concerns relate to a professional, the same procedure will apply.

Referrals in relation to a concern about a child, young person or adult should be made to Social Services as soon as possible and certainly **within 24 hours**.

Social Services Information, Advice and Assistance Service can be contacted on:

Concerns about a child or young person: **01495 315700**

Concerns about an adult: **01495 315700**

Outside office hours, referrals should be made to the South East Wales Emergency Duty Team or if there is immediate risk, to the Police.

The Emergency Duty Team can be contacted on: **0800 328 4432**

Elected Members, employees, volunteers and providers should be aware that they **cannot remain anonymous** when making a referral.

The Duty Worker taking the referral should be given as much information as possible if it is available to the referrer. This will include the following:

- Full name of the subject of the concern
- Their date of birth or age
- Their address
- The nature of the concern
- Who may be responsible
- Their name and relationship (if any)
- What happened
- When and where
- What has been done in response
- Whether or not the Police have been informed
- The names and relationship of those with caring responsibility
- The names and ages of any other adults living in the household
- The names of any professionals known to be involved eg school, GP
- Any information affecting the potential safety of staff
- The allocated social worker or team if known/if applicable

RECORD

All telephone referrals should be confirmed in writing within two working days. For Children, a Multi Agency Referral Form (MARF) should be used and for an Adult referral a POVA Advice/Adult Protection Referral Form (APRF) should be used. Both referral forms can be found on the Intranet.

LISTEN, SHARE, RECORD

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Corporate Safeguarding Policy
Support and Resources:

Social Services Information, Advice and Assistance Service:

For a concern in relation to a child or young person:

Tel: **0808 100 1727**

For a concern in relation to an adult:

Tel: **0808 100 2500**

All Wales Procedures:

- [All Wales Child Protection Procedures](#)
- [All Wales Adult Protection Procedures](#)
- [SS&WB \(Wales\) Act 2014](#)

Regional Safeguarding Boards:

Children:

- [SEWSCB](#)

Adults:

- [GWASB](#)

Services for people from Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) backgrounds:

- [BAWSO](#)

Domestic Abuse:

- info@phoenixdas.co.uk

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Policies and Statutory Guidance:

***PLEASE REFER TO THE CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING ON THE INTRANET
FOR THE MOST ACCURATE AND UP TO DATE INFORMATION.***

Agenda Item 11

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**
Date of meeting: **8th March 2023**
Report Subject: **Audit Wales: 'A missed opportunity' – Social Enterprises**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr John C Morgan, Cabinet Member Place and Regeneration**
Report Submitted by: **Ellie Fry, Director Regeneration and Community Services**
Tanya Evans, Interim Director Social Services

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance and Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	23.02.23		08.03.23					

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Governance and Audit Committee with the Audit Wales Report, '*A missed opportunity*' – *Social Enterprises* (Appendix 1).
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 Audit Wales published their report, '*A missed opportunity*' – *Social Enterprises* in December 2022. The report is a national report covering the 2021-22 period.
 - 2.2 Social Enterprises are becoming increasingly common vehicles for delivery services that are often not statutory but are considered essential by local communities. With public bodies in Wales experiencing the repercussions of over a decade of austerity and the challenge of recovering from COVID-19, it will be vital to maximise the possibilities of Social Enterprises.
 - 2.3 Overall Audit Wales concluded that local authorities are not effectively working with Social Enterprises to maximise their impact, make better use of resources and improve services for people and communities:
 - Social Enterprises can provide important services, but most local authorities lack a coherent strategy and are not working collaboratively to help support their growth and development
 - Local authorities do not have the right mechanisms in place to maximise value for money from their work with Social Enterprises
 - Local authorities are not delivering their responsibilities under the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act and weaknesses in data and evaluation limits their ability to promote Social Enterprises
 - 2.4 Audit Wales identified 3 recommendations which are detailed below:

R1 - To get the best from their work with and funding of Social Enterprises, local authorities need to ensure they have the right arrangements and systems in place. We recommend that local authority officers use the checklist in Appendix 2 to:

- self-evaluate current Social Enterprise engagement, management, performance and practice;
- identify opportunities to improve joint working; and
- jointly draft and implement an action plan with timeframes and responsibilities clearly set out to address the gaps and weaknesses identified through the self-evaluation.

R2 - To drive improvement we recommend that the local authority:

- formally approve the completed Action Plan;
- regularly report, monitor and evaluate performance at relevant scrutiny committees; and
- revise actions and targets in light of the authority's evaluation and assessment of its performance.

R3 - To ensure the local authority delivers its S.16 responsibilities to promote Social Enterprises we recommend that it reports on current activity and future priorities following the evaluation of its Action Plan including the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services.

2.5 Full details of the report can be found in Appendix 1.

3. **Next Steps**

3.1 The recommendations will be included within the relevant business plan for monitoring and reporting, this will be the Tier 3 Director Regeneration and Community Services.

3.2 To respond to recommendation 3 the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services will ensure reference is made regarding delivery of its S.16 responsibilities to promote Social Enterprises and that reports on current activity and future priorities following an evaluation of the Action Plan.

4. **Options for Recommendation**

4.1 Prior to the final report being provided to the Council, CLT and relevant Officers provided comment back to Audit Wales on their findings.

4.2 **Option 1**

Governance and Audit Committee is assured that the Next Steps, identified in paragraph 2.4, will appropriately respond to the Audit Wales recommendations.

Option 2

Provide comment on the Audit Wales review and Next Steps, identified in paragraph 2.4, to address the recommendation for Officers to implement in order to provide continuous improvement.

5. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 5.1 The recommendations from Audit Wales will be included within the business plan and updated on a quarterly basis.
- 5.2 The information will be reported within the Joint Finance and Performance Report to Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.
- 5.3 Recommendation 3 will be reflected in the reporting of the Annual Report of Director of Social Services to the People Scrutiny Committee and Council.
- 5.4 Regular meetings are held with Audit Wales to assess progress of reports.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

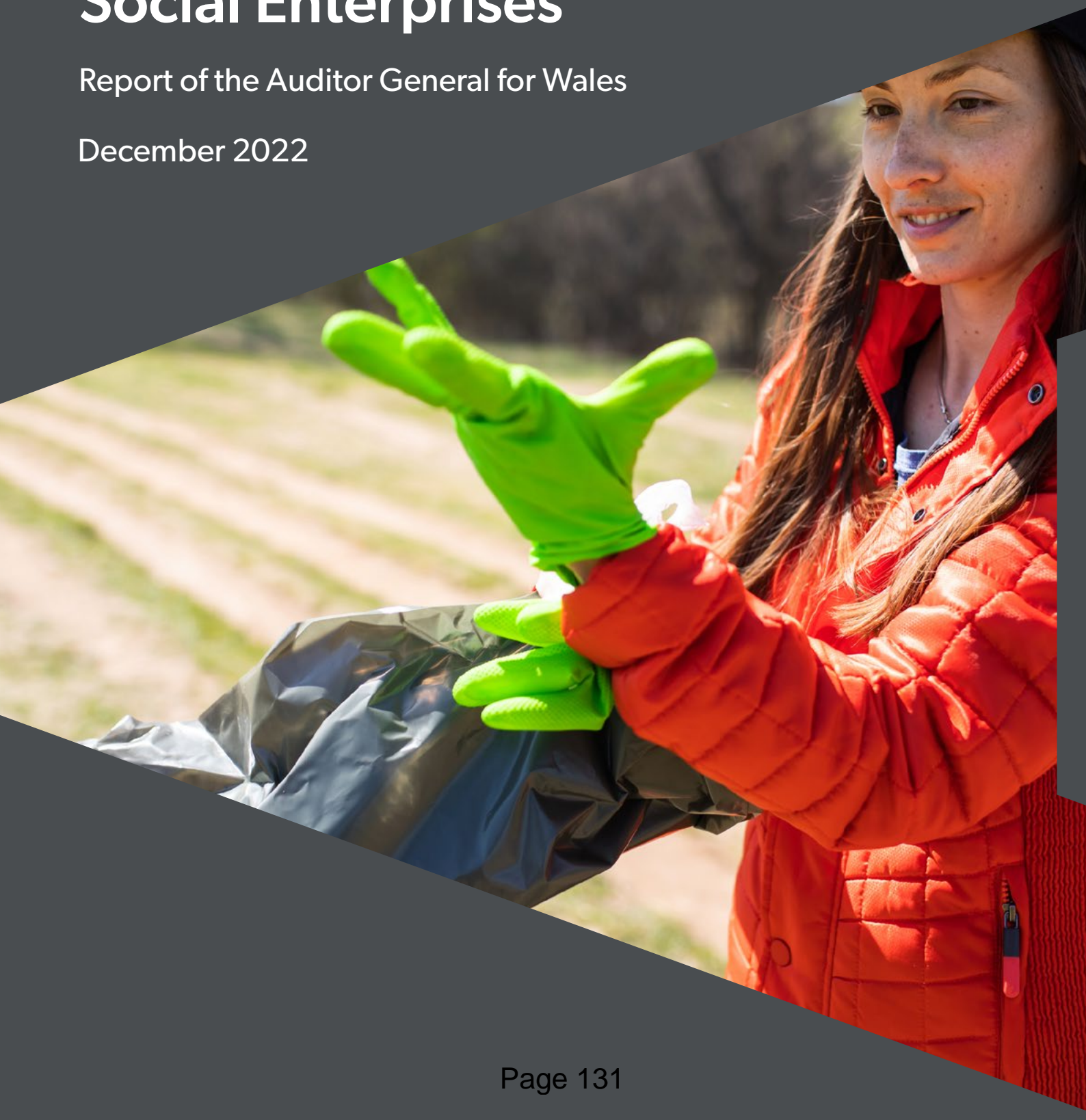
Appendix 1 – Audit Wales Report ‘ A missed opportunity’ – Social Enterprises.

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'A missed opportunity' – Social Enterprises

Report of the Auditor General for Wales

December 2022



This report has been prepared for presentation to the Senedd under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004.

The Auditor General is independent of the Senedd and government. He examines and certifies the accounts of the Welsh Government and its sponsored and related public bodies, including NHS bodies. He also has the power to report to the Senedd on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which those organisations have used, and may improve the use of, their resources in discharging their functions.

The Auditor General also audits local government bodies in Wales, conducts local government value for money studies and inspects for compliance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

The Auditor General undertakes his work using staff and other resources provided by the Wales Audit Office, which is a statutory board established for that purpose and to monitor and advise the Auditor General.

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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Context

- 1 As organisations, Social Enterprises sit between the public and private sectors. They apply commercial strategies to maximise improvements in financial, social and environmental well-being, often for individual groups in society, defined communities or geographical areas. In particular, Social Enterprises can benefit disadvantaged communities; create wealth where money is scarce; and help to tackle poverty and need. The structure of Social Enterprises vary and include partnerships for-profit or non-profit, co-operatives, mutual organisations, social businesses, community interest companies and charities.
- 2 Social enterprise can therefore work in every sector of the Welsh economy and in all parts of the country and are increasingly prominent in Welsh Parliament legislation. Section 16 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 places a duty on local authorities to 'promote development of Social Enterprises to provide care and support and preventative services'. Likewise, the ethos and approach of Social Enterprises fits well with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015. Social enterprises can make a significant contribution to delivering the seven national wellbeing goals by helping to create a fairer and more equal country.
- 3 Importantly, because Social Enterprises focus on keeping wealth within communities, they can assist people who are in poverty by:
 - directly helping people in disadvantaged communities by providing services that would otherwise not be available;
 - supplying basic public benefits such as social, educational, health and general economic interest services to local communities, including to people who are unable to pay;
 - creating new employment opportunities as a result of the services they supply;
 - contributing to the economic development of deprived communities; and
 - targeting their work to help disadvantaged people, including vulnerable women, people with disabilities and ethnic minority groups.
- 4 This report therefore looks at how local authorities are working to grow and make the most of Social Enterprises ensuring social value and social capital stay in communities and help people who are struggling. This is also the second report of our three reviews on the challenge of alleviating and tackling poverty in Wales. **Appendix 1** sets out our audit approach and methods and includes more information on our poverty themed work.

Key findings

- 5 Our overall conclusion is that local authorities are not effectively working with Social Enterprises to maximise their impact, make better use of resources and improve services for people and communities.
- 6 In **Part 1** of the report, we consider the strategic approach of local authorities to working with Social Enterprises. While they claim they value Social Enterprises, few local authorities have mapped their activity. Less than a third of local authorities consider themselves to have a proactive and supportive relationship with Social Enterprises and none have a dedicated strategy or policy that charts how they intend to promote and grow the sector.
- 7 We also found that most local authorities have adopted a passive leadership role, often responding to Social Enterprises that approach them but not proactively seeking to work with Social Enterprises or help stimulate new ones. This leadership vacuum has resulted in Social Enterprises often being at the fringes of local authority business. An overly reactive approach and variable support arrangements also means that local authorities are missing out on the potential for Social Enterprises to help deliver services that can improve people's quality of life.
- 8 In **Part 2** we consider the mechanisms local authorities have in place to ensure they maximise the potential value for money of Social Enterprises. While most local authorities provide grants for businesses and the third sector, they are not using them to specifically support Social Enterprises. Current procurement and commissioning arrangements often unintentionally discourage Social Enterprises to engage. Overly bureaucratic approaches and a lack of capacity and resources within local government also limits the potential to grow the role of Social Enterprises in delivering services. Social value – the added value that commissioning processes can deliver – does not feature as a key driver for many local authorities.

- 9 Finally, in **Part 3** we examine evaluation and impact arrangements. We found that most local authorities are not delivering their responsibilities under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and effectively promoting Social Enterprises. No Director of Social Services Annual Report sets out how their authority is delivering the Section 16 duty and the majority of reports make little reference to Social Enterprises. Positively, a number of authorities are working to develop micro social enterprise businesses and Regional Partnership Boards have a growing role to drive positive change. Taken together, these represent good opportunities for the future. Despite this, over three-quarters of local authorities do not have robust performance management, reporting and evaluation systems in place to be able to judge the impact and value of the work of Social Enterprises.



Social Enterprises play an important role in meeting needs and helping people in communities across Wales. Local authorities could do more to maximise the impact of Social Enterprises, get better value for money from their work, and improve services for people and communities.

Adrian Crompton
Auditor General for Wales



Key facts

The Value of Social Enterprises

- In 2021 the UK had over **100,000 Social Enterprises**, worth a combined **£60 billion** to the UK economy employing 2 million people.
- The Social Enterprise sector in Wales in 2020 – up to **2,309** businesses employing **56,000** people and generating **£3.1 – £3.8 billion** in value.
- In Scotland in 2019 there were estimated to be **6,025** Social Enterprise businesses, with **88,318** staff and a net worth of **£6.1 billion**.
- Between 2018 and 2020 the Social Enterprise sector in Wales increased by **12%** rising from **1,601** organisations in 2016 to **2,247** in 2020.
- In Scotland Social Enterprises increased by **15.9%** between 2015 and 2019 rising from **5,199** to **6,025** in this period.



The size and turnover of the sector in Wales

- **5%** of Welsh Social Enterprises are medium sized to large (i.e. have at least 50 employees), far above the equivalent for all businesses within the Welsh economy (only **1%**).
- **32%** of Social Enterprises surveyed had no paid staff at all, whilst a further **9%** only had one.
- In 2020 the mean average turnover level was **£1.25 million**, of which:
 - **43%** have a turnover of between **£0** and **£50,000**;
 - **34%** turnover between **£50,001** and **£250,000**;
 - **14%** turnover of between **£250,001** and **£1 million**;
 - **6%** turnover of between **£1.01 million** and **£5 million**; and
 - **4%** over **£5 million**.

Source: [Social Business Wales, Mapping the Social Business Sector in Wales / 2020 Census](#), June 2021; [Social Enterprise UK, No Going Back – State of the Social Enterprise Survey 2021](#); and [CEIS, Social Enterprise in Scotland – Census 2019](#).

Recommendations

- 10 Our recommendations are set out below. We expect each council to consider the findings of this review and our recommendations, and that its governance and audit committee receives this report and monitors its response to our recommendations in a timely way.

Recommendations

- R1 To get the best from their work with and funding of Social Enterprises, local authorities need to ensure they have the right arrangements and systems in place. We recommend that local authority officers use the checklist in **Appendix 2** to:
- self-evaluate current Social Enterprise engagement, management, performance and practice;
 - identify opportunities to improve joint working; and
 - jointly draft and implement an action plan with timeframes and responsibilities clearly set out to address the gaps and weaknesses identified through the self-evaluation.
- R2 To drive improvement we recommend that the local authority:
- formally approve the completed Action Plan;
 - regularly report, monitor and evaluate performance at relevant scrutiny committees; and
 - revise actions and targets in light of the authority's evaluation and assessment of its performance.

Recommendations

- R3 To ensure the local authority delivers its S.16 responsibilities to promote Social Enterprises we recommend that it reports on current activity and future priorities following the evaluation of its Action Plan including the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services.



Social Enterprises can provide important services, but most local authorities lack a coherent strategy and are not working collaboratively to help support their growth and development

- 1.1 In this section of the report, we consider the strategic approach of local authorities to working with Social Enterprises. We review local authority plans, the range of information used to identify and prioritise action and arrangements to support the development of Social Enterprises. We also consider how well local authorities and Social Enterprises work together.

While they claim they value Social Enterprises, few local authorities have mapped their activity or planned how they will collaborate with them to maximise their impact

Local authorities have not mapped out the social enterprise sector in their area

- 1.2 In order to maximise impact, it is essential that local authorities have a full and detailed knowledge of the services Social Enterprises provide. Unless you know who works in your area, what services they provide and what opportunities they offer, it is difficult to develop a coherent strategic response. In this context, mapping is critical for local authorities to understand the contribution that Social Enterprises are making and the barriers they face to growing their role and enhancing their value in communities.
- 1.3 We found that very few local authorities have completed any formal mapping exercise to either understand the current role and contribution of Social Enterprises in their area or to identify opportunities for the future. While some noted that they have databases of Social Enterprises, these are out of date, mostly as a result of the pandemic.
- 1.4 Generally, those local authorities that have dedicated staff with a responsibility for working with the social enterprise sector, or business support staff in economic development, had a better understanding of the local situation and could describe relative strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. However, even in these circumstances, officers acknowledged that there were still gaps in their understanding and their intelligence was not sufficient to drive future strategic choices and priorities.

1.5 **Exhibit 1** below shows that the social enterprise sector in Wales is primarily community-based with most organisations operating in only one local authority area. This is markedly different to England where Social Enterprises are more likely to work across several local authority areas and often operate regionally, nationally and internationally. For instance, in 2021 only 23% of Social Enterprises in England¹ work in one local authority.

Exhibit 1 – number of Welsh local authorities Social Enterprises operate in

Just over 60% of Welsh Social Enterprises work in one local authority area and less than a quarter in six or more local authorities

Number of local authorities	2016	2018	2020
One	62%	59%	61%
Two	7%	7%	7%
Three	8%	7%	7%
Four	3%	3%	2%
Five	2%	3%	2%
Six to fifteen	6%	4%	4%
Sixteen to twenty-two	12%	15%	18%

Source: Social Business Wales, Mapping the Social Business Sector in Wales / 2020 Census, June 2021

1.6 Given that Social Enterprises in Wales are primarily community based, often concentrated in areas of deprivation², it is important that local authorities undertake a wider mapping exercise to better understand the sector and the opportunities they present and use this information to inform their future plans. If authorities do not have a good understanding of the sector then it will be difficult for them identify opportunities to work collaboratively and agree actions to promote and grow Social Enterprises.

1 Social Enterprises UK, No Going Back: State of Social Enterprise Report 2021

2 Research by [Social Business Wales](#) found that 45% of social businesses operate in the top 40% most deprived areas in Wales, and only 30% operate in the 40% least deprived areas.

Local authorities speak about the value of Social Enterprises but are not always translating this into action

- 1.7 A strategic approach to working with Social Enterprises will ensure the local authority as a whole understands what Social Enterprises offer and will set out how the local authority is seeking to maximise the benefits of working with Social Enterprises. Moreover, given Social Enterprises contribute to the enhancement of social cohesion, to the accumulation of social capital, and to a more equitable economic development at the community level, they are bodies with a strong poverty reduction focus. A small number of local authorities recognise that Social Enterprises could therefore be an inherently more sustainable method of delivering services given their deep-rooted work in communities and often strong preventive focus.
- 1.8 Research by Social Business Wales shows that Social Enterprises are particularly strong in areas that either complement the work of local government or where the role and work of local authorities has diminished in recent years. For instance, **Exhibit 2** shows a strong presence in community-based arts, leisure, recreation and youth work and important contributions in social care, health and education.

Exhibit 2 – proportion of Social Enterprises working in different sectors

Social Enterprises cut across a wide range of operational sectors but are primarily based in arts and recreation, community centres/groups, education, and health and care

Sector	Proportion 2018	Proportion 2020 ³
Arts, entertainment, recreation & other services	22%	26%
Community Centre / Social Space / Youth Club	8%	20%
Education	14%	10%
Health & Care	19%	9%
Business administration & support services	4%	6%
Other	9%	6%
Accommodation & food services	3%	6%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	0%	3%
Information & communication	2%	3%
Retail	5%	3%
Property	6%	3%
Transport & storage	1%	2%
Professional, scientific & technical	6%	2%

Source: Social Business Wales, Mapping the Social Business Sector in Wales / 2020 Census, June 2021

3 The report suggests that due to the method of data collection (surveys), organisations which were more likely to close their doors (such as community spaces) are easier to contact and more likely to respond than healthcare organisations who are under heavy strain due to COVID-19.

- 1.9 Local authorities told us that they appreciate the good qualities of Social Enterprises and their potential, whether they provide services commissioned from the local authority or are merely active at a community level in the local area. However, we found that no local authority has a dedicated Social Enterprise strategy. And, while 10 of the 21 local authorities responding to our survey⁴ stated that they have a wider policy, strategy and/or plan that identifies the contribution of Social Enterprises, our review of these plans found that they are mostly limited, lacking detail on future priorities and opportunities for both local authorities and the sector.
- 1.10 For instance, none of the documents we reviewed set out a vision for Social Enterprises nor the potential outcomes that Social Enterprises can deliver for local authorities, residents and communities. A robust analysis of need was mostly missing from the Plans we reviewed and Social Enterprises did not receive more than a passing mention in any local authority's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy. As a consequence, priorities and actions for improvement are unambitious and limited, often overlooking added social value and social capital outcomes that Social Enterprises can secure. Our survey of local authority officers also found that only seven of the 21 authorities responding proactively engage with Social Enterprises in developing future plans and activity. Consequently, the significant benefits of working with Social Enterprises are less pronounced and often not shaping local authorities' priorities.

4 We surveyed all local authorities and received responses from 21 of the 22. Newport City Council did not respond to our survey.

Local authorities are not harnessing the potential of Social Enterprises to help deliver improved services, and a better quality of life for people

1.11 Successful Social Enterprises can have a good grasp of local need, work within strong local networks and have legitimacy as a voice for the community. They are, therefore, well placed to deliver services efficiently and innovatively. It is important therefore that local authorities help communities to identify needs, opportunities and proactively work with the sector to deliver the services people want. The growth and sustainability of Social Enterprises is therefore increasingly dependent on the opportunity and capacity for collaboration.

Effective local authority leadership on Social Enterprises is mostly absent

- 1.12 Leadership of the social enterprise agenda often rests with a handful of individuals in economic development or social care, but too often those managing these relationships are service managers and often not senior enough to direct resources, policies and decisions. For example, our survey of local authority officers found that only three of the 21 local authorities responding to our survey have a lead member for Social Enterprises and only six a lead officer.
- 1.13 We also found that most local authorities have adopted a passive leadership role, often responding to Social Enterprises that approach them rather than proactively seeking to work with existing Social Enterprises and help stimulate new ones. This is partly a reflection of some seeing Social Enterprises as 'risky,' citing issues with governance, handling of money, and legitimacy as areas of concern. Irrespective, this leadership vacuum is not helping to bring Social Enterprises from the fringes of local authority business to play a more central role.
- 1.14 More than half of the local authority officers we interviewed acknowledged that there was much more they could and should do to lead on this agenda, recognising that without an investment in senior leaders time, the local authority is unlikely to be successful in attracting new businesses and entrepreneurs to commit resources. Because leadership is generally poor, local authorities do not have a common understanding of how they want to work with Social Enterprises, which means that Social Enterprises cannot play a more active role in tackling poverty and disadvantage.

- 1.15 A number of local authorities in England⁵ have sought to create a more cohesive leadership approach by raising awareness to improve understanding. For instance:
- a hosting a social enterprise day within the local authority;
 - b putting on workshops for councillors and senior managers;
 - c ensuring senior management teams take responsibility for communicating their vision for Social Enterprises;
 - d setting targets for growth of the social enterprise sector; and
 - e developing activities to celebrate and promote social enterprise.
- 1.16 Good and effective leadership is therefore critical to support the Social Enterprise agenda's movement to the mainstream. Particularly as there is significant 'churn' in the Social Enterprise market which is mostly happening outside of any engagement with or support from local authorities. Research shows that the social business sector in Wales is very dynamic, comprising a core group of well-established organisations but also a growing group of start-ups.
- 1.17 For instance, in 2020 just under a fifth of Social Enterprises (17%) started trading within the last two years⁶ and double the number of start-ups in 2016. Start-up activity is particularly concentrated in Northeast Wales — Denbighshire and Wrexham account for 15% of all start-ups. With such a vibrant and ever-changing sector, it is important that local authorities take a more proactive and less passive approach in working with Social Enterprises if they are to maximise their potential and help support businesses that are struggling.

5 For example, Northumberland County Council raised awareness of the work conducted by social enterprises through information stalls aimed at staff, a social enterprise day and senior manager workshops to enhance understanding of the role and vision for the social enterprise sector. The local authority is also looking to create a cross-party member task group to consider how the local authority can support social enterprise. The task group will also champion social enterprise as a concept and promote a joint vision.

6 [Social Business Wales, Mapping the Social Business Sector in Wales / 2020 Census](#), June 2021

While there are good examples of how some local authorities effectively collaborate with Social Enterprise, most authorities are not effectively promoting opportunities to widen their role and maximise their impact

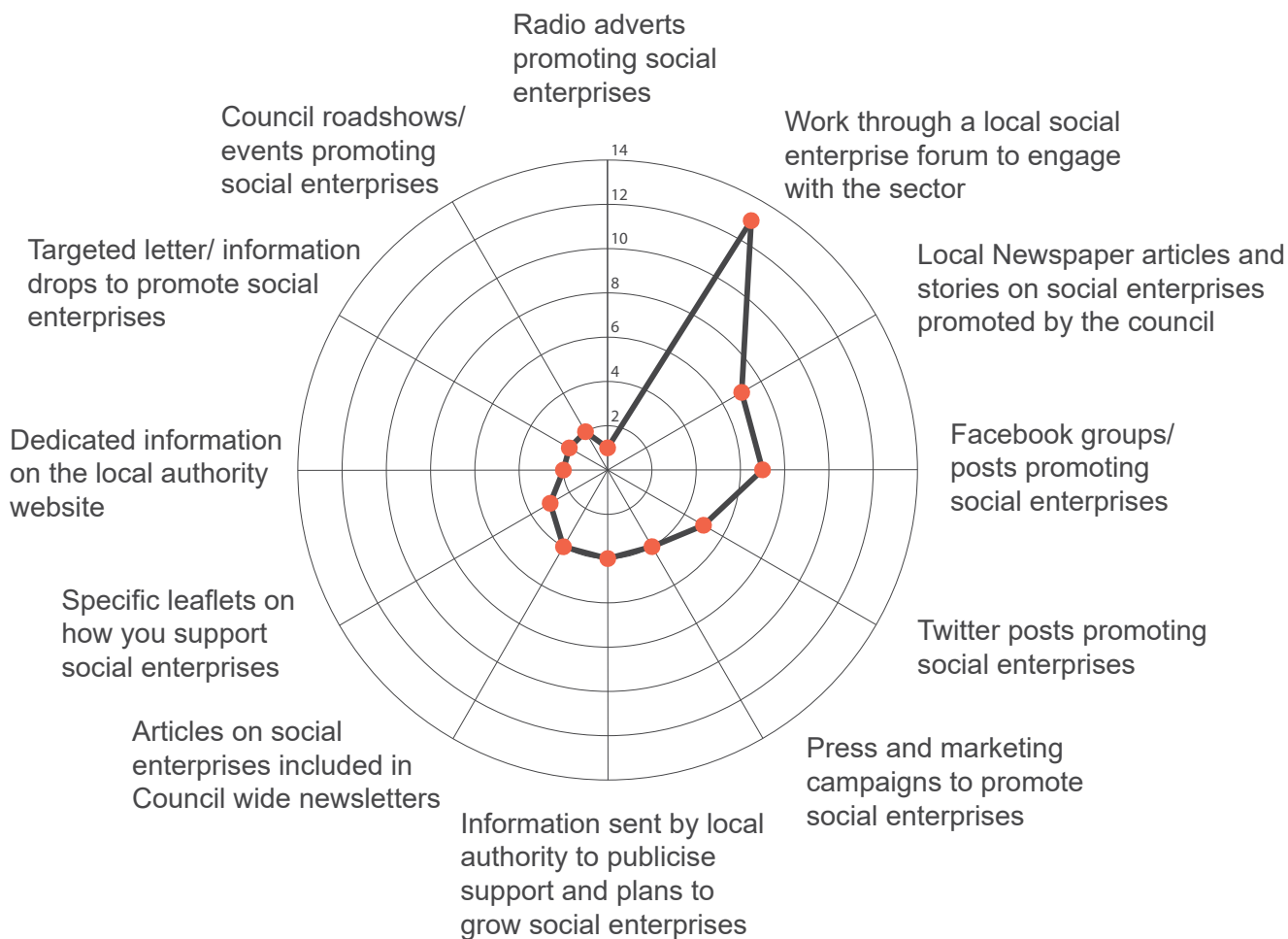
- 1.18 Collaboration between local authorities and the Social Enterprise sector can provide greater opportunities for all parties. It can also increase understanding by sharing knowledge. Just over half of local authorities have partnership boards or forums, usually with the third sector, which involve Social Enterprises, and a smaller number the presence of a sector led local Social Enterprise network. For example, the Blaenau Gwent 'voluntary sector group' brings together many partners, including Social Enterprises, and works with Transport for Wales, Jobcentre Plus, and others to prioritise future work, including opportunities to work with Social Enterprises, in the county.
- 1.19 In addition, a small number of local authorities have officers with specific responsibility for engaging with and developing relationships with Social Enterprises. For instance, the Business Enterprise Officer in Wrexham is the local authority's key contact with the local Social Enterprise Network. Generally, authorities with a better understanding of the barriers facing Social Enterprises are in a better place to work with the sector going forward.
- 1.20 The ways in which local authorities in Wales work with Social Enterprises to deliver services vary considerably. A small number of authorities have created and funded their own Social Enterprises. For example, in Torfaen, [Circulate](#) operates a recycling centre, providing recycling and waste disposal services which in turn help achieve the local authority's environmental sustainability goals. In the Vale of Glamorgan, the [Big Fresh Catering Company](#) is a social enterprise which provides food services to schools, businesses and private events, investing all profits into local schools. Other local authorities have externalised local authority services such as leisure services and libraries and transferred delivery responsibility to Social Enterprises with a proven record in delivering these activities.
- 1.21 In addition, officers we interviewed flagged the important role of Social Enterprises and the third sector more generally during the pandemic. Social Enterprises 'stepped up' to fill gaps in provision following the closure of frontline offices. One officer noted that 'Social Enterprises did amazing work during COVID-19, giving out food and making PPE. They deserve recognition. They stepped up to the plate at a time when some charities had to furlough all their staff!'

- 1.22 A number of local authority officers however, reflected that the pandemic had limited opportunities for involving Social Enterprises in the work of the local authority. While others noted that Social Enterprises 'value their independence' and do not respond well to local authority involvement. National organisations like CWMPAS and Social Business Wales are seen by some local authority officers as being better placed to work with the sector and determine future growth strategies. In addition, County Voluntary Councils also play an important support and development role linking between local authorities and Social Enterprises.
- 1.23 While almost all local authorities signpost to information on Social Enterprises on their website, only six local authorities had a dedicated page for Social Enterprises, and a small number had no information on Social Enterprises at all. Overall, we judge the quality and level of website information on Social Enterprises as limited. Too often information is not easy to find and is more than '3 clicks' away⁷. Local authorities are mostly not actively promoting opportunities to work with existing Social Enterprises nor effectively encouraging the creation of new ones.
- 1.24 The best local authority websites include:
- a a clear definition of what a Social Enterprise is;
 - b have links to a wide variety of organisations to access further and more detailed information, particularly on legal issues, such as Social Business Wales, CWMPAS, Social Enterprise UK or the WCVA; and
 - c provide contact details and information on local support programmes and grants administered by the local authority.
- 1.25 The findings of our officer survey set out in Exhibit 3 show that beyond working with forums or networks which include Social Enterprises as members, local authorities are not using all the available avenues to deliver their responsibilities to promote Social Enterprises.

⁷ The three-click rule is an unofficial web design rule concerning the design of website navigation. It suggests that a user of a website should be able to find any information with no more than three mouse clicks. It is based on the belief that users of a site will become frustrated and often leave if they cannot find the information within the three clicks.

Exhibit 3 – local authority officer survey - Options used by local authorities to promote the growth of Social Enterprises

Local authorities are not effectively promoting opportunities to enhance the Social Enterprise sector which weakens their ability to deliver their statutory responsibilities



Source: Audit Wales, Survey of Local authority Officers, January – May 2022

- 1.26 A small number of local authority officers identified raising awareness as an area for improvement. For example, one noted that 'It should be [part of our role], but we don't do much of that, due to not having a formal strategy. We don't really report our impact either.' And some local authorities have sought to encourage Social Enterprises to work collectively in order to bid for larger contracts or encourage them to move into areas of activity that better align with local authority grants and funding programmes.
- 1.27 However, other local authorities noted that while they would support emerging Social Enterprises, they would not necessarily 'push' them as a preferred option. One officer noted that they were 'a bit cautious about foisting a specific model or approach on people.' This passive approach to engagement and involvement with Social Enterprises is not supporting local authorities to make best use of the sector and we conclude that there is much more to do.



Local authorities do not have the right mechanisms in place to maximise value for money from their work with Social Enterprises

2.1 In this section of the report, we consider how local authorities are working to exploit the potential value of Social Enterprises. We consider the effectiveness of procurement and commissioning approaches and whether they are delivering value for money and adding social value for people.

Procurement and commissioning arrangements do not encourage Social Enterprises to pursue public funding. Local authorities do not have sufficient capacity and resources to grow the sector

2.2 **Exhibit 4** shows that roughly two-thirds of Social Enterprises generate income through trade with the general public and just under half from public sector grants. These are predominantly from Welsh Government and/or grant-making trusts rather than local authorities and in 2020 mostly related to the financial support made available to help businesses through the pandemic. With regards to bidding for and delivering commissioned services the data highlights that there has been a slight drop in trade with the public sector between 2018 and 2020, indicating the significant untapped potential of Social Enterprises for local authorities.

Exhibit 4 – where Social Enterprises in Wales get their money from in 2016, 2018 and 2020

Trading with the general public remains the main source of income for Social Enterprises although public sector grants are growing in importance

Sources of income	2016	2018	2020
Trading with the general public	57%	63%	64%
Public sector Grants	39%	49%	49%
Other grants	39%	44%	42%
Trading with the public sector	23%	40%	32%
Donations	24%	33%	33%
Trading with third sector organisations	15%	32%	25%
Trading with the private sector	17%	29%	25%
Trading with other Social Enterprises	8%	22%	17%

Source: Social Business Wales, [Mapping the Social Business Sector in Wales / 2020 Census](#), June 2021

- 2.3 Analysis by Social Business Wales highlights that while 32% of Social Enterprises currently trade with the public sector, most businesses (61%) do not tender for public sector work and just under a third (31%) consider their inability to access funding from local authorities and other public sector bodies as a barrier to their sustainability and growth⁸. This research also noted more generally that local authority funding of Social Enterprises has significantly reduced since 2014, in part because of a greater reliance on trade with the general public but also because of difficulties in working under public bodies commissioning and procurement rules⁹. In addition, the findings of the CWMPAS 'Buy Social Buy Local project' – which was set up to identify public sector spend that Social Enterprises could secure – found that too often the sector in Wales is not geared up to work with public bodies.
- 2.4 Local authorities are under continuous pressure to deliver public services with limited budgets and resources. Combined with rising expectations from service users and growing demand for many statutory services, local authorities need to ensure they make every £1 count through their procurement and commissioning processes.
- 2.5 Local authorities have a strong record in local economic development work, promoting growth and, in particular, providing help for small and medium size businesses. Over half of the local authority officers we interviewed however, did not differentiate between their wider economic development work and the specific opportunities Social Enterprises present, seeing Social Enterprises as one option among many locally. And, while most local authorities provide financial assistance to businesses and the third sector, these grants are for businesses in general, with no specific focus on growing Social Enterprises. Some local authorities noted that their procurement and commissioning approaches sought to create a 'level playing field' and did not favour one group of organisations over others.

8 [Social Business Wales, Mapping the Social Business Sector in Wales / 2020 Census, June 2021](#)

9 <https://wales.coop/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SBW-Full-Mapping-Report-English.pdf>

- 2.6 Notwithstanding, authority officers responding to our survey also identified various barriers to Social Enterprises benefitting from local authority procurement and commissioning opportunities. These include:
- a 'onerous' and 'not proportionate' procurement rules that discourage smaller businesses;
 - b processes focusing too much on profit and savings and not enough on social value, community resilience and well-being, all areas where Social Enterprises can add value;
 - c Social Enterprises not operating in the appropriate sector, or not offering all the services required;
 - d a preference for local authorities to go to existing providers and 'work with what we know' rather than pushing the boundaries and actively seeking to develop new opportunities; and
 - e limited capacity, skills and resources in local authorities which reduces opportunity to broaden the contractor base and specifically target Social Enterprises.
- 2.7 However, despite these weaknesses we also found that most local authorities are not resourcing work to promote Social Enterprises. For example, our survey of local authorities found that only two of the 21 responding to us have a dedicated budget to support the growth of Social Enterprises. Social Enterprise UK recognise four of the seven local authorities – Conwy, Flintshire, Gwynedd and Wrexham – as 'Social Enterprise Places' – areas where social business activity is thriving and there is commitment to invest in and work with the sector.¹⁰
- 2.8 A number of interviewees also noted the impact of the loss of the EU funded Southeast Wales Community Economic Development (SEWCED) program, a £13.5 million programme delivered in six authorities (Bridgend, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Torfaen) that funded work on developing Social Enterprises. The SEWCED program ended in 2015 and, despite its success, has ended. Officers from the six authorities who delivered the SEWCED initiative felt the loss of EU funding stopped them from working collaboratively to grow the social business sector. **Appendix 5** provides further information on this project.

10 There are 33 recognised social enterprise places in the UK of which four are in Wales.

Social value does not feature as a key driver in local authority commissioning

- 2.9 There is no single definition of social value, however Social Enterprise UK has defined social value in the context of procurement as ‘the additional benefit to the community of a commissioning/procurement process over and above the direct purchasing of goods, services and outcomes.’ For local authorities who are commissioning services it is important to consider and measure this social value from the perspective of those affected by the organisation’s work. By capturing in a monetised form the value of a wide range of outcomes, commissioners are then able to broadly identify how much social value they can get for every £1 of investment. The social value model of delivery is therefore a framework that supports a collaborative re-design of services in every area of activity.¹¹
- 2.10 Our local authority officer survey found that of the 21 who responded, nine authorities specifically consider social value when scoring tenders for services, nine do not and three did not know. Of the nine local authorities who do consider social value, five said the level of weighting varies across tenders but four did not know.
- 2.11 Recent research published by Welsh Government echoes these conclusions noting that because local authorities are under resourced, procurement and commissioning teams often lack the skills and capacity to realise the benefits of social value¹². Current approaches, which focus too much on cost, are leading to less sustainable models of delivery because too often the only area where organisations can reduce price is by squeezing pay and/or staff terms and conditions.
- 2.12 Notwithstanding, our review of local authorities’ procurement strategies identified some good approaches to widening impact and enhancing social value. For example, Caerphilly’s Procurement Strategy includes an option to use ‘Social/Community Benefit Clauses’ in contracts. Flintshire has also introduced a ‘Dynamic Purchasing System,’ allowing smaller businesses to fulfil small parts of larger orders, rather than going to a single large supplier. This can also encourage existing businesses to establish social enterprise arms. Flintshire and Rhondda Cynon Taf, have also created ‘Social Value Development Officer’ (or similar), a dedicated role that specialises in scrutinising tenders and budgets and identifies and promotes opportunities to maximise social value.

11 cwmpas.coop/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/3.2.9.-supporting-care-commissioners-and-procurers-to-promote-social-value-models-of-delivery-2020-ENG.pdf

12 CWMPAS, [For economic and social change: Welsh Government Social value review - Summary Report](#), June 2022.

- 2.13 A number of authorities use the Welsh Local Government Associations (WLGA) Themes, Outcomes and Measures¹³ (TOMS) metrics which provide a social value weighting for analysing and scoring tenders. For example, Flintshire told us 'We will likely lean on our TOMS, to measure success, as these are pre-made and standard across the social enterprise sector and the local authority.' Flintshire's TOMs, which relate to their corporate priorities and well-being objectives, allow the Council to use its commissioning procurement activities to generate strategic place-based outcomes in line with local community needs. Similarly, Rhondda Cynon Taf similarly noted that 'we use the TOMS system as they are national and include an underlying social value element. It's considered when we look at their business plan.' However, several local authorities noted that from their experience TOMS did not provide a helpful or workable solution for social care commissioning.
- 2.14 The majority of local authorities would also consider it their responsibility to 'step in' to support a struggling Social Enterprise if they had commissioned services from the organisation. However, given the limited amount of commissioning taking place and a natural reluctance to bail out organisations that are struggling, most would not seek to support them financially or otherwise, considering this too risky and uncertain.
- 2.15 Given limitations in how authorities are promoting social value in commissioning and procurement, Welsh Government have recently reappointed CWMPAS to support the needed transformation of services within the social care sector, by pushing forward the development of social value models for care. CWMPAS has announced its intention to 'help strengthen regional arrangements for rebalancing the social care market by introducing more co-operatives, Social Enterprises and social value delivery models in the Welsh social care sector'¹⁴. In addition, a sub-group of the National Commissioning Board is also producing a guide for social value in social care commissioning. While still in draft, it notes that to make procurement work more effectively commissioners need to think differently with a greater focus on place, people and use of assets.

¹³ Published in November 2020, Themes, Outcomes and Measures guidance is in three parts with [Part 1](#) providing an overview of the approach.

¹⁴www.wales247.co.uk/welsh-government-appoints-cwmpas-to-transform-social-care-delivery-across-wales



Local authorities are not delivering their responsibilities under the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act and weaknesses in data and evaluation limits their ability to promote Social Enterprises

3.1 In this final section of the report, we examine how local authorities are delivering their responsibilities under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. We also assess the strength of oversight arrangements and whether they allow authorities to fully evaluate the work of Social Enterprises, their impact and identify opportunities for the future.

The majority of local authorities are not delivering their responsibilities under the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act to promote Social Enterprises

3.2 Section 16 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (the 'Act') places a duty on local authorities to 'promote development of Social Enterprises to provide care and support and preventative services'. Social enterprises themselves are well-placed to collaborate with local authorities to deliver social care services. Research by Social Business Wales¹⁵ found that:

- a 54% of Social Enterprises are aware of the 'Act';
- b 21% reported that the 'Act' is central to the work that they undertake;
- c 19% incorporated the requirements of the 'Act' into their governance and policy documents;
- d 9% of Social Enterprises are legally obliged to adhere to the 'Act';
- e 9% explained that the 'Act' formed part of their safeguarding policies;
- f 8% reported that the 'Act' informed their staff-training programme; and
- g 7% use the 'Act' for lobbying and marketing purposes.

3.3 We found that relatively few local authority officers we spoke to were aware of their legal duty to champion the use of Social Enterprises and very few could set out how they are working to grow the sector and deliver their Section 16 responsibilities. The imprecise language in the Act is unhelpful in this context; specifically, the word 'promote.' In practice local authorities interpret their responsibilities to 'promote' very widely. A number of authorities simply focus their efforts on working with existing Social Enterprises with little active promotion to encourage others and help create new ones. Few authorities are investing time and resources in refreshing policies and procurement procedures to build capacity and provide more opportunities to existing Social Enterprises, as well as helping to stimulate new ones.

15 Social Business Wales, *Mapping the Social Business Sector in Wales / 2020 Census*, June 2021.

- 3.4 Recent research echo these findings noting that there has not been a major shift by local authorities commissioning to provide more social care services through Social Enterprises, and the private sector is still the dominant partner¹⁶. Third sector partners we interviewed and surveyed likewise noted that since the Act went live in 2016, there has been little change in how local authorities work with and encourage Social Enterprises. Consequently, Welsh Government legislative ambitions are not being delivered.
- 3.5 One opportunity to deliver this change is through the new Social Value Forums created under each Regional Partnership Board¹⁷ which are intended to support the growth of the social value sector within the health and social care market. While these forums have varying degrees of support from statutory partners and commissioners, they do provide a good opportunity to engage with the sector, County Voluntary Councils and others within a region to identify opportunities for investment and growth. The 20% allocation of the Regional Integration Fund¹⁸ for the social value sector, managed via Regional Partnership Boards provides a real opportunity for working with Social Enterprises to invest in new ways of delivering services.
- 3.6 In addition, there is an expectation from Welsh Government that each Regional Partnership Board creates a Social Value Forum to explicitly deliver the S.16 responsibilities. For instance, the North Wales Social Care and Well-being Improvement Collaborative¹⁹ have created a Social Value Forum to explore how to promote social value in public services in the region. The Regional Market Stability Reports²⁰ – recently completed by local authorities through the Regional Partnership Boards – also provide a wealth of information on the scale and stability of the social value market within health and social care and will support the work of Social Value Forums.

16 gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-07/social-value-review-summary-report.pdf

17 In April 2016, seven statutory regional partnerships came into being. Their purpose is to drive the strategic regional delivery of social services in close collaboration with health.

18 The Health and Social Care Regional Integration Fund is a 5-year fund from April 2022 to March 2027.

19 The North Wales Social Care and Well-being Improvement Collaborative includes the six local authorities in North Wales, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and other partners. The aim is to improve services, make the most of the resources available, reduce duplication and make services more consistent across North Wales.

20 Market Stability Reports review the sufficiency of care and support in an area to provide a snapshot of the sector to help plan and shape services, including care for the future.

- 3.7 A number of local authorities such as Rhondda Cynon Taf and Pembrokeshire are already using (or are in the process of creating) micro-enterprises. Micro-enterprises are small business delivering independent care or support services which employ fewer than 10 people. They are an alternative to often expensive day care services. Due to the current staffing pressures in social services, Micro-Enterprises offer a more sustainable solution as well as delivering better outcomes.
- 3.8 The Act also introduced a requirement for each Director of Social Services to produce an annual report that sets out the local authority's improvement journey in providing services to people in its area ²¹. Guidance for the annual reports requires local authorities to report their performance against six quality standards. Standard one – 'Working with people to define and co-produce personal well-being outcomes that people wish to achieve' – specifically covers the promotion of Social Enterprises.
- 3.9 Our review of all Reports of the Director of Social Services found that only eight reports referenced the use of micro-enterprises and a further three mentioned Social Enterprises in some capacity, whether highlighting the work of a specific social enterprise in the area or a service commissioned from a social business. The other 11 reports did not mention Social Enterprises and only expressed in general terms the value of working with the third sector. We also found that no report specifically named the Section 16 duty, though several did include statements acknowledging that the 'Act' requires co-production or partnership working with the third sector. Overall, we conclude that there is more for local authorities to do in their public reporting on how they are promoting Social Enterprises.

21 Welsh Government and ADDS Cymru, [The Local Authority Annual Social Services Reports Guidance](#)

There is minimal oversight and evaluation of Social Enterprises by local authorities

3.10 Social Enterprises play an important role in meeting need and helping people in communities across Wales. For instance, the findings of Social Business Wales Census in 2020, set out in **Exhibit 5**, show that improving local communities and improving the wellbeing of the people are key objectives for over half of all Social Enterprises.

Exhibit 5 – the priority areas for the work of Social Enterprises in Wales

Social Enterprises are widening out the focus of their work and increasingly delivering activity to benefit the most vulnerable people in communities across Wales

Social Enterprises social and/or environmental objectives	2016	2018	2020
Improving a particular community	64%	57%	66%
Improving health and well-being	39%	45%	52%
Supporting vulnerable people	35%	46%	48%
Addressing financial exclusion	26%	28%	44%
Encourage people to participate in the arts, sports & recreation	-	32%	42%
Supporting vulnerable children and young people	20%	29%	34%
Creating employment opportunities	21%	24%	31%
Promoting education and literacy	32%	29%	29%
Protecting the environment	16%	26%	29%
Providing access to services	-	22%	27%
Supporting other Social Enterprises / organisations	9%	16%	25%
Promotes and protect culture, heritage & the Welsh language	-	21%	24%
Addressing social exclusion	7%	9%	21%
Providing affordable housing	5%	4%	3%

Source: [Social Business Wales, Mapping the Social Business Sector in Wales / 2020 Census, June 2021.](#)

- 3.11 Despite Social Enterprises providing services that help public bodies deliver their wellbeing objectives and other statutory responsibilities, local authorities are mostly not monitoring or evaluating their activities nor their impact. Five local authorities responding to our survey noted that they have agreed measures to judge the impact of Social Enterprises in their local area and report against these. Over half (13) have no arrangements to evaluate activity, and the remainder responding did not know.
- 3.12 Because of weaknesses in performance management, reporting and evaluation, it is difficult for local authorities to judge how well they are currently performing and identify how they can support a growth and expansion in the role of Social Enterprises in the future. While a few local authorities included broad input/output measures in core documents on the work of partners, these are often limited to capturing the 'number of Social Enterprises we work with.' A minority of local authorities stated that they considered obtaining 'qualitative' information on the impact of Social Enterprises, drawing on service users experience, but we found little evidence of local authorities following this through in practice.
- 3.13 Local authorities are mostly not reporting to elected members on Social Enterprises. Consequently, those officers responsible for delivering services are not held to account and the ability to challenge and identify development opportunities are lost. Several officers we interviewed acknowledge that the lack of performance reporting to members restricts chances to encourage elected members to take ownership of this agenda and actively promote Social Enterprises.
- 3.14 Local authorities who commission services from Social Enterprises generally have a Service-Level Agreement (SLA) in place underpinned by a range of agreed performance measures to evaluate commissioned services. However, we found that performance reporting of SLAs focus heavily on 'inputs' and 'outputs' – for instance, number of service users dealt with – rather than assessing the wider social benefit of the work of Social Enterprises and the impact they have on people who receive their services.



Appendices

- 1 Audit approach and methods**
- 2 Checklist for local authorities effectively engaging and working with Social Enterprises**
- 3 Differences in legislative, policy and funding for Social Enterprises across the three countries of Great Britain**
- 4 Number of Social Enterprises by Welsh local authority and percentage change between 2016 - 2020**
- 5 Southeast Wales Community Economic Development programme**
- 6 Summary of Good Practice identified in this review**

1 Audit approach and methods

Approach

This report is the second of our themed work for 2022 looking at poverty. This report sits alongside [our earlier report on poverty in Wales](#) and our forthcoming review examining how local authorities empower people to be more self-reliant and resilient.

For this work our approach has been to understand how well local authorities are working with, promoting and developing Social Enterprises. In particular we have looked at the robustness of needs information, strategies, plans and policies for Social Enterprises and how local authorities are ensuring they deliver their commitments under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014 to promote Social Enterprises.

We examined all 22 principal local authorities in Wales at a high-level, managing delivery to be mindful of the pressures local authority officers are under during both the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. We ensured coverage was sufficient to draw a view on the whole sector but not to significantly detract from officers' service delivery responsibilities. Our approach was flexible to fit around officers when agreeing and delivering our fieldwork.

Methods

We completed our review between August 2021 and September 2022 and used a range of methods in delivering our work:

- **document review:** we reviewed documentation from the Welsh Government, local authorities, PSBs and other relevant public bodies. This included, relevant committee minutes, corporate strategies, economic, business, regeneration and procurement strategies; COVID-19 recovery plans; and the Director of Social Services Annual reports. We also reviewed information published by Social Business Wales, Social Enterprise UK and Social Enterprise Scotland.

- **interviews** – we undertook a range of different interviews:
 - officer interviews – we interviewed officers nominated by all Welsh principal local authorities, generally those with responsibility for Social Enterprises, social care or economic development. These took place between January and May 2022.
 - national interviews – we interviewed representatives of Welsh and Scottish Social Enterprises, national representative bodies such as CWMPAS, charities, think tanks, academic institutions and research bodies. These took place between March and June 2022.
- **focus groups** – in line with our approach, some local authorities felt it was more appropriate for us to speak to a range of officers in focus groups to reduce our impact on service delivery.
- **survey** – we undertook a survey with local authority officers. The survey was open between January and May 2022, and we received responses from all local authorities except Newport City Council.
- **websites** – local authority and external resources, eg DEWIS.
- **data analysis** – we analysed a range of data collated and published by Social Business Wales, Social Enterprise UK and Social Enterprise Scotland.

2 Checklist for local authorities for effectively engaging and working with Social Enterprises

Action	Completed	Started	Not Started
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1 Strategic Arrangements

Vision

We have an agreed vision on how we will work with Social Enterprises.			
The vision has been shared with, and is understood by, all relevant staff in the local authority.			
The vision has been shared with, endorsed by and is understood by elected members.			
The vision has been developed in discussion with the local County Voluntary Council.			
The vision has been disseminated to Social Enterprises we work with.			
<p>The vision clearly sets out how we intend to deliver our Section 16 responsibilities for promoting Social Enterprises including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our work to promote social value through the Regional Partnership Board; and • Use of the Regional Integrated Fund to promote and develop Social Enterprises. 			

Action	Completed	Started	Not Started
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Corporate Approach

We have a corporate led approach for working with Social Enterprises that covers all departments and services.			
The corporate approach translates our vision into practical actions.			
We have designated a corporate lead for Social Enterprises who is responsible for overseeing and coordinating our work with the sector.			

Understanding the local Social Enterprise sector

<p>We have mapped out the Social Enterprise sector in our local authority area and know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of organisations working locally; • The services they provide; • The communities the services are provided in; • The people the service is provided for; • How the services are funded; • The operating hours/days for services; • The eligibility criteria for the service (if any); • How the service fits with our Section 16 responsibilities for promoting Social Enterprises in delivering social care services; and • Who to contact for more information. 			
We have a record of all our Social Enterprise funding.			

Action	Completed	Started	Not Started
<p>We collate financial information and report at least annually on the totality of our Social Enterprise funding covering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • which organisations we fund; • the contract value; • the length of the contract; • which department/service has contracted; • the measures of success established for the work; and • what the intended benefits of the work are. 			
<p>We raise awareness on the benefits presented by Social Enterprises to ensure all staff identify opportunities to collaborate with them by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hosting a social enterprise day within the local authority; • putting on workshops for councillors and senior managers; and • developing activities to celebrate and promote social enterprise. 			

Collaboration and partnership arrangements

<p>We have identified and agreed how the work of Social Enterprises will be managed and scrutinised at a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • corporate level – in the work of strategic partnerships and corporate scrutiny committees; • department level – in specific partnership arrangements to support wider policy agendas within defined areas; and • service level – on local partnerships and specific service-led initiatives. 			
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Action	Completed	Started	Not Started
We effectively raise awareness of the work of social enterprises and involve local people and communities in developing new Social Enterprises.			
We have a clear and effective relationship with our County Voluntary Council as a key strategic and delivery partner			
We have a nominated lead senior official to promote and lead work through the regional Social Value Forum.			

Strategy

Our approach to Social Enterprises is integrated with our key strategies and plan – eg Wellbeing Plan, corporate priorities and other community and regional strategies.			
We have set SMART objectives and actions on how we will support and promote the growth of Social Enterprises.			
We are clear on the benefits and risks of Social Enterprises for citizens, local communities and the local authority.			

Delivering the strategy

We have enough staff and resources to promote and grow Social Enterprises.			
We have staff in the right services and with the required seniority to deliver our vision for Social Enterprises.			
We have a can-do culture mindset within the council to make the best use of Social Enterprises.			
We give staff the opportunity to take well-managed risks and explore innovative practices			

Action **Completed** **Started** **Not Started**

2 Commissioning and Procurement

Designing services

We draw on the expertise and knowledge of Social Enterprises in designing new services.			
Our commissioners make good use of the Market Stability Report process to inform commissioning and market shaping activity for the social care sector.			
In designing services, we clearly set out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what demand the service will meet; • how we have decided on the type of service that we require; and • how we will engage with current and potential providers to develop the service. 			
We ensure that our tender process is accessible for all potential collaborators.			
We can demonstrate we have the capacity and skills to undertake the strategic commissioning process.			
We actively look for ways to invite collaboration			

Action	Completed	Started	Not Started
Effective award systems			
<p>We have created a single centralised and corporate funding system for the management and award of all funding to Social Enterprises.</p>			
<p>We have effective systems to award funding to organisations that sets out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a clear funding timetable that is available to all potential bidders so that they can prepare for opportunities; • the process that will be used to decide (for example, seeking quotations or using a tender or proposal process); • the value and risk associated with the various funding routes; • clear and published criteria that are understood by all organisations seeking funding, including community benefit and social value clauses; • the cost and resources to oversee and administer the process; and • the length of time that funding will be provided. 			
Efficient award systems			
<p>We have efficient corporate systems to award funding based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concise and clear application processes; • use of online and electronic systems to distribute and collate information and bids; • short end-to-end decision-making arrangements; • the minimum number of stages and processes required to decide; and • decisions being delegated to the lowest level. 			

Action	Completed	Started	Not Started
Our contract terms and conditions are proportionate to the level of funding being made and are specific to the work that is being funded.			
We review our funding processes to ensure we are not excluding Social Enterprises from securing work.			

Training and information sharing

<p>We provide training to support Social Enterprises covering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to apply for funding – the do's and don'ts; • complying with our commissioning and procurement systems; • data collection processes; • performance management and scrutiny arrangements; • payment cycles and performance targets; and • contract termination/continuation requirements. 			
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Action	Completed	Started	Not Started
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3 Managing performance

Information collection

We have specified the information required to monitor and evaluate the performance of the Social Enterprises we fund.			
The information only measures relevant activity.			
The systems to collect information are streamlined and efficient, and Social Enterprises only submit information once and electronically on agreed timescales.			

Performance review

<p>We regularly report on our Social Enterprise funding to scrutiny committee(s) against a balanced set of performance information that covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the service standards we set for the Social Enterprise we fund to perform against; • improvements in people's wellbeing and social outcomes; and • relevant service-based performance data; and • conclusions of external audit/inspection reviews. 			
<p>Our scrutiny and evaluation processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are proportionate for the value of the funding we provide; and • provide us with assurance that our funding is achieving the expected outcomes. 			
<p>Annually we report publicly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on the work of Social Enterprises; • on the current performance of Social Enterprises we fund; • how we will promote further opportunities for the sector in the future; and • how well we are performing in delivering our S.16 responsibilities for Social Enterprises. 			

Action	Completed	Started	Not Started
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Risk management

We regularly review risks associated with our Social Enterprise funding.			
We agree risk management plans if risks are not being managed and mitigated.			
We have a rolling programme of internal audit systems testing and compliance reviews to ensure the robustness, efficiency and effectiveness of our funding of Social Enterprise services.			

3 Differences in legislative, policy and funding for Social Enterprises across the three countries of Great Britain

Issues	England	Scotland	Wales
Legislation on Social Enterprises	Mainly focussed on making better use of Social Value contracts under the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012	Mainly through land/ asset usage and requirement for public bodies to have at least one Social Enterprise contract	Yes, S.16 of the SSWBA 2015 requires Local Authorities to “Promote Social Enterprises, co-operatives, user led services and the third sector”. This could also be widened out in the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Bill
National Strategy for growing Social Enterprises	Social Enterprises UK have published a futures report – Social Value 2032 .	Scotland’s Social Enterprise Strategy 2016-2026	Welsh Government had strategy in 2005 but this has ended. The current strategy – Transforming Wales Through Social Enterprises – was developed by the sector and is supported by Welsh Government
Government funding for Social Enterprises	Government backed Start Up Loan of £500 to £25,000 and Levelling Up monies	Just Enterprise, Developing Markets, Social Growth, Business Gateway, etc	Business Wales Economic Resilience Fund and Development Bank of Wales
Government support for Social Enterprises	Mainly provided via the UK Government’s Business Support Helpline and 38 local ‘ growth hubs ’	Mainly coordinated via Business Support Scotland	Welsh Government’s Social Business Wales
Minister with responsibility for Social Enterprises	Junior Minister for Civil Society and Youth	Cabinet Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise	Cabinet Minister for Economy

Source: Audit Wales.

4 Number of Social Enterprises by Welsh local authority and percentage change between 2018 - 2020

Local Authority	2018	2020	Difference	% increase
Vale of Glamorgan ²²	41	217	176	429%
Cardiff	228	265	37	16%
Newport	51	76	25	49%
Swansea	135	158	23	17%
Wrexham	62	78	16	26%
Ceredigion	71	79	8	11%
Flintshire	65	70	5	8%
Monmouthshire	29	34	5	17%
Isle of Anglesey	56	60	4	7%
Conwy	76	78	2	3%
Denbighshire	71	72	1	1%
Bridgend	83	85	2	2%
Gwynedd	127	128	1	1%
Caerphilly	99	98	-1	-1%
Merthyr Tydfil	67	64	-3	-4%
Pembrokeshire	121	115	-6	-5%
NPT	79	73	-6	-8%
RCT	162	155	-7	-4%
Carmarthenshire	174	164	-10	-6%
Blaenau Gwent	45	38	-7	-16%
Powys	110	100	-10	-9%
Torfaen	51	40	-11	-22%
Total identified	2,003	2,247	244	12%

Source: Social Business Wales, Mapping the Social Business Sector in Wales / 2020 Census, June 2021.

²² Per the report by CWMPAS, the figure for the Vale of Glamorgan is an outlier, due to the inclusion of an additional source provided by the Vale of Glamorgan Voluntary Service. It is not known if this approach was adopted elsewhere in Wales.

5 Southeast Wales Community Economic Development programme

Six local authorities (Bridgend, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Torfaen) funded dedicated Social Enterprise programs using £13.5m of EU monies under the Southeast Wales Community Economic Development (SEWCED) program. An evaluation of the SEWCED program commissioned by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council found that the project had exceeded expectations in terms of generating new jobs, and all aspects of the project were rated highly in surveys with social enterprise beneficiaries. For instance, SEWCED supported:

- the creation of 30 new jobs and 3 new Social Enterprises;
- the provision of financial assistance to 28 local organisations;
- 15 organisations to adopt and implement Environmental Action Plans; and
- 13 to adopt Equality Strategies and improve how their systems for monitoring and evaluating delivery.

The SEWCED program ended in 2015 and, despite the success of the project and the evaluation findings, the activity has not been continued or replaced in the majority of cases. Only two local authorities received transitional funding to keep on the staff they employed to work with Social Enterprises under SEWCED.

The evaluation determined that 'without the support of the SEWCED, the social enterprise sector in Southeast Wales would not have achieved the same outcomes as it did. Furthermore, without similar support in the future, these results would suggest that the social enterprise sector will not produce the same benefits as it has done as a result of the SEWCED programme.' The interviews with local authorities where SEWCED were mentioned have borne this out, as there is no equivalent funded and organised effort to promote Social Enterprises active in Wales at this time.

6 Summary of Good Practice identified in this review

Good practice – how we determine it

These are the parameters we use to judge whether to include a case study as good practice:

- a programme, activity or strategy that has proven effectiveness, supported by a comprehensive evaluation.
- a programme, activity or strategy that has been shown to produce successful outcomes and is supported to some degree by subjective and objective data sources.
- a programme, activity or strategy that has worked within one organisation and shows promise during its early stages for becoming practice with long-term sustainable impact.
- a programme, activity or strategy that has the potential for replication among other organisations.
- a programme, activity or strategy that is delivering value for money. Value for money is defined as the optimal use of resources to deliver the intended benefits.
- a programme, activity or strategy that is delivering savings/reductions in expenditure with no or low impact on performance.

Within the body of the report, we have identified the following areas of good practice:

- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council – the work of the Voluntary Sector Group that leads on engaging with Social Enterprises – paragraph 1.18.
- Wrexham County Borough Council – the work of the Business Enterprise Officer to support and promote Social Enterprises – paragraph 1.19.
- Torfaen County Borough Council and the Vale of Glamorgan Council – the creation of Social Enterprises to deliver local services – paragraph 1.20.

- Caerphilly County Borough Council – the use of Social and Community Benefit Clauses in contracts – paragraph 2.12.
- Flintshire County Council – Dynamic Purchasing System which allows smaller businesses to fulfil small parts of larger orders – paragraph 2.12.
- Flintshire County Council and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council – creation of officers with specific responsibilities to identify and promote opportunities to maximise social value in tendering processes – paragraph 2.12.
- Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and Pembrokeshire County Council – promotion of and work with Micro-Enterprises – paragraph 3.7.



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Agenda Item 12

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**
Date of meeting: **8th March 2023**
Report Subject: **Audit Wales: Springing Forward – Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Steve Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate Overview and Performance**
Report Submitted by: **Rhian Hayden, Chief Officer Resources**
Sarah King, Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships
Andrea Prosser, Head of Organisation Development
Ellie Fry, Director of Community Services and Regeneration

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance and Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	23.02.23		08.03.23					

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Governance and Audit Committee with the Audit Wales Report, '*Springing Forward*' (Appendix 1).
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 Audit Wales published their report, '*Springing Forward*' in November 2022 and covers the audit year 2021/22.
 - 2.2 Following the global pandemic, Audit Wales looked at how the Council is strengthening its ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services, including those delivered in partnership with key stakeholders and communities.
 - 2.3 Audit Wales reviewed the Council's arrangements for managing its assets and workforce:
 - (a) For assets, the primary focus was on office accommodation and buildings from which the Council delivers services to its residents; and
 - (b) For workforce, the focus was on the challenges highlighted during the pandemic that have exacerbated some long-standing workforce issues.
 - 2.4 Overall, Audit Wales found that during the pandemic the Council made significant changes to its assets and the way that its workforce operates. Further work is needed for Council to understand its future asset and workforce needs to ensure that future decisions are appropriately informed by Equality Impact Assessments and the sustainable development principle.

2.5 Audit Wales identified recommendations covering the following areas:

- **Equality impact assessments**
 - Ensure that all decisions are informed by a timely equality impact assessment where required.

- **Develop a longer-term asset strategy**
 - In developing its new strategic asset management strategy, the Council should apply the sustainable development principle and specifically ensure that it:
 - builds on learning from its experience of the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - takes account of longer-term trends that may affect service provision and the efficient use of assets;
 - aligns with other strategic documents, including decarbonisation, commercial, workforce and digital strategies;
 - sets out the Council's intended outcomes over the short, medium and longer term;
 - takes account of the needs of staff, service users and partners; and
 - sets out SMART performance measures and appropriate monitoring and reporting arrangements.

- **Further develop workforce strategy and planning**
 - In delivering its workforce strategy, the Council should ensure that it:
 - incorporates learning from the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - takes a sufficiently long-term view, for example, taking into account upcoming reviews of service delivery and longer-term trends which may affect workforce planning;
 - provides service managers with the necessary skills and capacity to develop their workforce plans;
 - collates service workforce plans to understand what actions it needs to take at a corporate level to strengthen its workforce;
 - expands workforce information to include detail on:
 - i. current skills and current and future skills gaps;
 - ii. talent and succession planning; and
 - iii. critical posts and the risks associated with them becoming vacant;
 - strengthens the underlying action plans by developing SMART objectives so progress can be monitored and scrutinised; and
 - aligns with other strategic documents, including decarbonisation, commercial, asset management and digital strategies.

- **Engagement**
 - As part of the review of the new operating model, seek the views of residents on the community hubs to provide assurance around

the Council's decision and to inform the future development of hubs.

- Consider how the Council might adapt its public engagement methods so it can continue to engage with the public in the event of future lockdowns or other restrictions.
- Work with local businesses to monitor and understand the impact of the closure of the Civic Centre and how the Council can support those businesses whilst the site remains vacant.

- **Resources**

- Identify the costs of delivering the assets and workforce strategies and incorporate these into the medium-term financial strategy.
- Collaborate with public sector partners across Gwent to evaluate the potential benefits of developing a strategic long-term approach to a single public estate.
- Build on existing examples of collaborative working by developing a more systematic approach to collaboration.

- **Sustainable development principle**

- The Council should seek to fully embed the sustainable development principle in its decision making.

Full detail of these recommendations can be found in Appendix 1.

2.6 **Next Steps**

The recommendations identified within the Audit Wales Report, found at paragraph 2.5, relate to a number of Council areas, therefore the actions will be undertaken by the lead officers who submitted the report.

The recommendations will be included within all of the relevant business plans for monitoring and reporting including:

- Tier 1 and 2 Governance and Partnership Business Plans to include: Impact Assessments; Engagement; and the Sustainable Development Principle.
- Tier 2 Organisational Development Business Plan to include workforce strategy and planning
- Tier 1 Resources business plan to include Resources
- Tier 2 Regeneration business plan to include Asset Management Strategy

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 Prior to the final report being provided to the Council, CLT and relevant Officers provided comment back to Audit Wales on their findings.

3.2 **Option 1**

Governance and Audit Committee is assured that the Next Steps, identified in paragraph 2.6, will appropriately respond to the Audit Wales recommendations.

Option 2

Provide comment on the Audit Wales review and Next Steps, identified in paragraph 2.6, to address the recommendation for Officers to implement in order to provide continuous improvement.

4. Monitoring Arrangements

- 4.1 The recommendations from Audit Wales will be included within the business plans and updated on a quarterly basis.

The information will be reported within the Joint Finance and Performance Report and Directorate Reports provided to Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Regular meetings are held with Audit Wales to assess progress of reports.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Audit Wales Report – Springing Forward

Springing Forward – Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Audit year: 2021-22

Date issued: November 2022

Document reference: 2949A2022

This document has been prepared for the internal use of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council as part of work performed/to be performed in accordance with Section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004, and Section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015].

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We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

This document is also available in Welsh.

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During the pandemic, the Council made significant changes to its assets and the way that its workforce operates, but further work is needed for it to understand its future asset and workforce needs and to ensure that future Council decisions are appropriately informed by Equality Impact Assessments and the sustainable development principle

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Detailed report

Summary

What we reviewed and why

- 1 As the world moves forward, learning from the global pandemic, this review has looked at how the Council is strengthening its ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services, including those delivered in partnership with key stakeholders and communities.
- 2 We reviewed the Council's arrangements for managing its assets and workforce:
 - a. for assets, our primary focus was on office accommodation and buildings from which the Council delivers services to its residents; and
 - b. for workforce, our focus has been on the challenges highlighted during the pandemic that have exacerbated some long-standing workforce issues.We looked at how the Council strategically plans to use its assets and workforce, how it monitors their use and how it reviews and evaluates the effectiveness of its arrangements.
- 3 When we began our audit work under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 we recognised that it would take time for public bodies to embed the sustainable development principle, but we also set out our expectation that over the medium term we would expect public bodies to be able to demonstrate how the Act is shaping what they do. It is now approaching seven years since the Well-being of Future Generations Act was passed and we are now into the second reporting period for the Act. Therefore, we would now expect public bodies to be able to demonstrate that the Act is integral to their thinking and genuinely shaping what they do.
- 4 This project had three main aims:
 - to gain assurance that the Council is putting in place arrangements to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services;
 - to explain the actions that the Council is taking both individually and in partnership to strengthen its arrangements as well as further embed the sustainable development principle; and
 - to inspire the Council and other organisations to further strengthen their arrangements through capturing and sharing notable practice examples and learning and making appropriate recommendations.
- 5 This is important because the Council invests considerable sums in its building assets and workforce. Some key information from 2020-21 is show in **Exhibit 1**.

Exhibit 1: key facts and figures relating to building assets and workforce

The table below shows some key facts and figures relating to the Council's building assets and workforce in 2020-21.

Number of Council buildings owned in 2020-21 ¹	323 ²
Value of property, as at 31 March 2021 ¹	£122.5m
Number of staff ³	2,852
Spending on workforce ⁴	£103m
Percentage of staff who are male/female ⁵	24%/76%
Percentage of staff who work part time/full time ⁵	49%/51%
Percentage of staff aged over 50 years ⁵	40%
Percentage of staff who left the Council ⁵	17%

¹ Source: Provided by the Council

² The Council's Asset Register for 2020-21 included 323 operational buildings, of which around 120 were individual business units. The register includes any asset that has been constructed on a piece of land which does not fall into another specific classification, such as infrastructure (roads).

³ Source: InfoBaseCymru

⁴ Source: 2020-21 Statement of Accounts (note 7.2)

⁵ Source: InfoBaseCymru

- 6 The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on demand for buildings and the way that staff work. This report examines some of these impacts and the way that the Council benefits from the positives and mitigates risks from the negatives when planning future service delivery.
- 7 We undertook the review during the period November 2021 to April 2022.

What we found

- 8 Our review sought to answer the question: Is the Council's strategic approach strengthening its ability to transform? In doing this work we have identified some of the direct impact of the pandemic as well as some operational and governance issues exacerbated by the pandemic.
- 9 Overall, we found that during the pandemic the Council made significant changes to its assets and the way that its workforce operates, but further work is needed for it to understand its future asset and workforce needs and to ensure that future Council decisions are appropriately informed by Equality Impact Assessments and the sustainable development principle.
- 10 We reached this conclusion because:
 - the Council is actively reviewing its assets and looking to rationalise its office buildings, but in taking the decision to decommission and demolish the civic centre it did not complete an Equality Impact Assessment, as required by the Equality Act 2010, nor did it fully consider the sustainable development principle;
 - the Council has appropriate arrangements to manage its assets but its understanding of how changes to service delivery will impact on its long-term asset needs is limited;
 - senior managers and elected members receive regular information on specific asset-related projects, but the Council lacks a reporting mechanism for its Strategic Asset Management Plan;
 - the Council has implemented a flexible, agile working model but its workforce planning arrangements are underdeveloped;
 - the Council is supporting staff to adjust to agile working but does not yet fully understand its future workforce needs, although work is underway to develop service workforce plans; and
 - the Council is making arrangements to review its new operating model but does not yet have a clear set of criteria to assess progress against its Workforce Strategy.

Recommendations

Exhibit 2: recommendations

The table below sets out the recommendations that we have identified following this review.

Recommendations	
Equality impact assessments	
R1	Ensure that all decisions are informed by a timely equality impact assessment where required.
Develop a longer-term asset strategy	
R2	<p>In developing its new strategic asset management strategy, the Council should apply the sustainable development principle and specifically ensure that it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• builds on learning from its experience of the COVID-19 pandemic;• takes account of longer-term trends that may affect service provision and the efficient use of assets;• aligns with other strategic documents, including decarbonisation, commercial, workforce and digital strategies;• sets out the Council's intended outcomes over the short, medium and longer term;• takes account of the needs of staff, service users and partners; and• sets out SMART performance measures and appropriate monitoring and reporting arrangements.

Recommendations

Further develop workforce strategy and planning

R3 In delivering its workforce strategy, the Council should ensure that it:

- incorporates learning from the COVID-19 pandemic;
- takes a sufficiently long-term view, for example, taking into account upcoming reviews of service delivery and longer-term trends which may affect workforce planning;
- provides service managers with the necessary skills and capacity to develop their workforce plans;
- collates service workforce plans to understand what actions it needs to take at a corporate level to strengthen its workforce;
- expands workforce information to include detail on:
 - i. current skills and current and future skills gaps;
 - ii. talent and succession planning; and
 - iii. critical posts and the risks associated with them becoming vacant;
- strengthens the underlying action plans by developing SMART objectives so progress can be monitored and scrutinised; and
- aligns with other strategic documents, including decarbonisation, commercial, asset management and digital strategies.

Engagement

R4 As part of the review of the new operating model, seek the views of residents on the community hubs to provide assurance around the Council's decision and to inform the future development of hubs.

R5 Consider how the Council might adapt its public engagement methods so it can continue to engage with the public in the event of future lockdowns or other restrictions.

R6 Work with local businesses to monitor and understand the impact of the closure of the Civic Centre and how the Council can support those businesses whilst the site remains vacant.

Resources

R7 Identify the costs of delivering the assets and workforce strategies and incorporate these into the medium-term financial strategy.

R8 Collaborate with public sector partners across Gwent to evaluate the potential benefits of developing a strategic long-term approach to a single public estate.

R9 Build on existing examples of collaborative working by developing a more systematic approach to collaboration.

Recommendations

Sustainable development principle

R10 The Council should seek to fully embed the sustainable development principle in its decision making.

Detailed report

Assets

The Council is actively reviewing its assets and looking to rationalise its office buildings. However, in taking the decision to decommission and demolish the civic centre it did not complete an Equality Impact Assessment as required by the Equality Act 2010, nor did it fully consider the sustainable development principle

11 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- in October 2020, full Council approved the decommissioning of the Civic Centre in Ebbw Vale – one of two main office buildings in use prior to the pandemic. The proposals included the development of a democratic hub at the General Offices in Ebbw Vale and the creation of community hubs where the public would access services previously located in the Civic Centre. Initially, this was based on proposals to buy the Festival Park site in Ebbw Vale and repurpose it for business, housing, and a replacement office for the Council and interested public sector partners. However, this option fell through, and in November 2020, Council agreed to leave the Festival Park site to interested private investors but to take forward the agreed plans for the Civic Centre, democratic hub and community hubs.
- then, in March 2021, Council considered and agreed a new operating model and approved the decommissioning of the Civic Centre. The new operating model, developed by a member working group along with officers and trade union representatives, is based on agile working and draws on the changes to working practices brought about by the pandemic.
- the Council's current Strategic Asset Management Plan 2017-2022 already included plans to review its long-term office requirements and establish the future of the Civic Centre. The pandemic accelerated this process, enforcing a different way of working which the Council took the opportunity to adapt and take forward into a long-term operating model rather than returning to previous ways of working.
- to support this new operating model, the Council classified all non-school-based job roles as either home, agile or service/community-based. Using the assumption that agile workers will be office-based for two to three days a week, it then calculated the amount of office space it would need to accommodate this new way of working. Based on these calculations, the Council assessed it had sufficient office space across existing Council offices and buildings without the need for the Civic Centre or a replacement building. The Council also determined there is sufficient capacity to accommodate additional staff in offices if needed in future.

- the Council is updating some of its remaining buildings to better suit the new operating model. It has already developed a new democratic hub and flexible working environment in the General Offices and is taking forward plans to remodel Anvil Court in Abertillery, its main office building since the closure of the Civic Centre. This will provide a better mix of confidential and collaborative spaces, improve ventilation, and create a more pleasant working environment.
- the community hub model shifts counter services and surgery style appointments between public and officers away from the Civic Centre and into library buildings around the county. The Council cites many benefits to this approach, including:
 - residents being able to access services locally, leading to reduced travel and a lower carbon impact.
 - encouraging increased footfall in town centres.
 - encouraging non-library users into libraries.
 - supporting residents to access services digitally through library computers.
 - signposting residents to other services delivered by the Council and partners, including those co-located in libraries such as credit unions, Careers Wales, etc. This approach was piloted by locality hubs during the pandemic and the Council reports positive impact and feedback.
- the Council did not fully consider the sustainable development principle and five ways of working when taking the decision to decommission the Civic Centre and move services to community hubs.
- no public engagement took place because of the challenges of doing so during the pandemic. So, although the hub model appears to have several benefits for residents, the Council lacks evidence to demonstrate that service users supported the changes. Engagement with residents would have provided the Council with useful information to shape the hub model, including:
 - public demand for services to be decentralised from the Civic Centre and into community hubs.
 - information on the types of services that users want to be able to access in the hubs (both Council and partner services).
 - preferred locations for hubs.
- the Council should consider how it can now seek the views of residents, both to provide assurance around its decision and to inform the future development of hubs. There is opportunity to incorporate this into the Council's upcoming review of its customer service offer, experience, and access points. The views of residents, in addition to the data the Council is capturing on hub use, will provide a strong evidence base on which to review the first year of the community hubs and assess the need for future refinements. The Council should also think about how it might adapt its

public engagement methods so it can continue to involve the public in the event of future lockdowns or other restrictions.

- we also saw limited consideration of the impact of decommissioning the Civic Centre on the local economy. The site will be used for housing, forming part of the Place Plan proposals for Ebbw Vale, which includes new housing and community facilities and improved access to the town centre. Whilst these plans appear to mitigate the impact of losing the Civic Centre on local businesses over the medium to longer term, we did not see evidence of modelling to compare the economic impact of closing the Civic Centre and proposed housing development. As part of the business case to acquire the Festival Park site, members received figures estimating the potential impact of new housing on the Civic Centre site on the local economy⁶ and council tax receipts. But no indication was given of the contribution of the Civic Centre to the local economy, either from staff or residents coming into Ebbw Vale to access services.
- in order to mitigate against the impact of decommissioning the Civic Centre, the Council should work with local businesses to monitor and understand the effect of the closure and what it can do to support them whilst the site remains vacant.
- the Council did, however, effectively engage with and involve staff whilst developing the new operating model and there was meaningful input from the trade union. The community hubs also demonstrate collaborative working with Aneurin Leisure Trust, in whose library buildings the hubs are based.
- members did not receive an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) to inform their decision to decommission the Civic Centre and move customer-facing services into community hubs. As a result, the decision was not compliant with the Equality Act 2010. The Council recognises its omission and plans to complete a retrospective EIA to understand the potential impact of its decision on people with protected characteristics. It is also using Audit Wales's recent report, Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise?, to strengthen its EIA arrangements and develop training for staff.
- it is not yet clear what further changes the Council will make to the way it uses its buildings in the future. The Council's Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) runs from 2017-2022. It focuses on reducing the size and cost of the Council's property portfolio by:
 - reviewing the suitability of the current estate;
 - disposing of excess properties;
 - making better use of retained properties; and
 - ensuring buildings are as efficient as possible.

⁶ The Council cites Welsh Government statistics that weekly household spending on food, housing, fuel, transport, and recreation in the community averages around £458 per week in Wales. It uses this to estimate the annual impact of new housing on the local economy.

- the timing of our review in early 2022, when the SAMP expired, means the Council's future vision for its assets is not currently articulated in a long-term, forward-looking strategy. The Council's corporate asset management working group will oversee development of the new plan, ensuring input from across service areas. Officers are currently in discussion with neighbouring authorities to share best practice to inform the plan's development and the Council expects to involve the Executive in the process during the Autumn.
- discussions with officers suggest the new SAMP will:
 - reflect changes and learning from the pandemic.
 - place more emphasis on the decarbonisation and commercialisation agendas.
 - be more user-focussed, taking into account views from across service areas and partners to explore how spaces can be used differently.

however, the Council has not yet considered how it could use the sustainable development principle to develop its new SAMP.

- the Council intends to continue monitoring the amount of office space it needs and how staff are using spaces to inform ongoing decisions and adaptations. The Council will formally review the new operating model once it has had sufficient time to embed and will use this information to help shape further changes to the way it uses its buildings.
- the Council told us that decarbonisation will be a key driver for future changes. The current SAMP, which pre-dates the Council's 2020-2030 Decarbonisation Plan, makes several references to reducing carbon emissions and energy use and investigating renewable energy sources. The Decarbonisation Plan includes several 'transition pathways' relating to the Council's buildings and how they are used, including: construction and maintenance of buildings, electricity and heating of buildings, and staff travel to and within work, which will feed into the new SAMP. The Council is currently assessing the impact of the new operating model on decarbonisation and adapting its main office sites to meet staff demand for active travel. Officers are also investigating how Anvil Court (leased office building) could be made carbon neutral by 2030 and this will inform potential lease renewal in 2025.
- the Council's Bridging the Gap programme is also driving changes to the way the Council considers and uses assets. Strategic reviews are considering how to maximise use and value of current assets, identifying potential disposals and potential investments in property. This work has taken forward some elements of the SAMP, such as successfully developing a more commercial approach to the Council's industrial portfolio.
- the new operating model also aligns to the Council's Corporate Plan priority to be 'an efficient organisation and to operate using modern working practices in a way which supports the workforce, effective service delivery and improves access to Council business for our residents'.

- we saw some examples of the Council considering the impact of its use of assets on what other organisations are trying to achieve. For example, the new operating model aligns with Welsh Government’s long-term ambition for 30% of Welsh workers to work from home or near home. In addition to housing, the Council’s new democratic hub and council chamber, the General Offices in Ebbw Vale provide space for local business and communities to rent, houses the Gwent Archives on behalf of the five Gwent councils, and has been used by both the health board and Coleg Gwent. The Council is exploring how its 5G interactive classroom can be used as a regional asset that benefits communities and organisations across the region. We also saw evidence of the Council discussing how some of the properties it rents helps support the sustainability of community buildings and considering how this should inform decision-making. The Council should seek to expand upon these examples and continue to develop an ‘integrated’ approach to its use of assets so that they can help it meet a broader range of objectives.

The Council has appropriate arrangements to manage its assets but its understanding of how changes to service delivery will impact its long-term asset needs is limited

12 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council operates a corporate landlord model and asset management is centralised within the Estates and Property departments, part of the Community Services and Regeneration directorate. These arrangements bring specialist skills and knowledge to the management of buildings. However, some officers highlighted that capacity is an issue, impacting on the Council’s ability to make progress in some areas of asset management.
- under the corporate landlord model, all the Council’s buildings and maintenance budgets are held centrally rather than by individual services (although schools hold some maintenance budgets). This provides greater understanding of the overall portfolio, helping to support decision-making around assets. Close links with services are maintained through regular meetings between officers from Property Services and key contacts in each service. These key contacts also sit on the Council’s corporate asset management working group, which meets quarterly, bringing together relevant officers to review and discuss the strategic role of property at a corporate and service level. This includes consideration of:
 - Bridging the Gap property reviews
 - New operating model
 - Commercialisation of property assets
 - Decarbonisation
 - Individual service property business

- Links to partner organisations, eg PSB
- the Council has been proactively reviewing and reducing its property portfolio for several years. A workplace transformation project pre-dating the current SAMP reduced the number of offices from 11 to 2 key sites. The Council has also been reducing its property stock through disposal and community asset transfers (CAT), as well as the transfer of specific properties to the Aneurin Leisure Trust. A CAT Policy, and an Acquisitions and Disposals Policy support this process. As noted above, the Bridging the Gap programme is also reviewing the Council's assets to maximise their use and value.
- the Council has already changed the way it uses its buildings as a result of the pandemic, with agile working patterns for non-front-line staff reducing the amount of office space needed. There are also examples of changes to front-line services during the pandemic which may reduce need for buildings if adopted long term, eg social services providing support at home instead of in day care centres. As the Council gains a better understanding of how services will be delivered post-COVID-19, it should continue to review its building assets to make sure they meet changing needs.
- the SAMP includes a range of data on the Council's assets, including size, value, running costs, condition, repair backlog costs, and income. The Council has also established the carbon footprint of the buildings it uses (both owned and leased) and updates this annually to inform its decarbonisation work.
- this data is held on several systems. The main database holds all data on buildings, including condition surveys and cost of maintenance. Additional systems are used for energy use, reactive repairs and planned maintenance. Officers told us they have the information they need to make decisions on assets.
- the Council undertakes building condition surveys on a rolling five-year basis. It holds accurate data on around 70% of the portfolio but the remaining 30% is based on desktop survey work, using officer knowledge to determine an estimated position. Prior to decisions on the future of an asset – the Civic Centre, for example – the Council commissions an independent condition survey to inform members' decision-making.
- the Council installed carbon dioxide monitors early in the pandemic. These show where there are areas of good and bad air quality, and the Council will use this information to direct resources to improve air quality.
- there are several examples of co-location with other public sector organisations, which pre-date the pandemic, eg health and social services staff. The Council, working with Health partners, also set up COVID testing and vaccination centres in the county during the pandemic. The Council is aware that its decision to reduce its office space means potentially fewer opportunities to share its buildings with other organisations. However, the new model provides flexibility to adapt, and the Council is discussing

potential options with public sector organisations in the region, for example, in connection with its new depot facility. The Estates team also works closely with community groups in relation to CAT and Place Making plans and a third-sector group meets quarterly.

- in 2020, public sector organisations in Gwent agreed to collaborate to identify strategic approaches to a One Public Estate. However, progress has been limited due to the operational demands of responding to the pandemic.
- although members and officers we spoke to had an awareness of some of the long-term factors which will influence future need for and use of assets, other than decarbonisation these are not yet formally articulated. For example, several people we spoke to cited new technology and a shift to more digital services in future in response to demand from increasingly tech-savvy service users. The Council is currently developing an organisational approach to service redesign, which will link to its commercial strategy ambitions, digital programme and work it is undertaking on customer experience. Where appropriate, this will include a move to digital service offerings. When developing its new SAMP, the Council should ensure it gives sufficient consideration to the long term, including:
 - the work being undertaken around service redesign and how this might impact asset needs over the medium to long term.
 - long-term challenges and opportunities, such as decarbonisation and digital service delivery.
 - how it can draw on the above and plan over an appropriate time horizon.
- the Council has identified the capital and revenue costs of implementing and operating the new operating model over the next five years and this is reflected in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). In line with the Council's other strategies, the SAMP is not fully costed and incorporated into the MTFS. Instead, the costs are incorporated when individual aspects of the strategy are developed and approved to be taken forward. The Council should consider changing this approach so that indicative costs for implementing the new SAMP are built into the MTFS at an earlier stage, providing a more realistic forecast of future costs.

Senior managers and elected members receive regular information on specific asset-related projects, but the Council lacks a reporting mechanism for its Strategic Asset Management Plan

13 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- governance arrangements were affected by the pandemic, particularly in the earlier stages but these were restored with the use of remote technology to facilitate virtual, and later hybrid, meetings. COVID-19 has also impacted on

performance reporting more widely across the Council as key staff were redeployed to respond to the pandemic.

- although the SAMP refers to annual action plans and progress reports, there have been no recent reports on strategic asset management to elected members or the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). Members and senior officers receive regular updates on the Bridging the Gap property-related reviews and a brief summary of asset-related activity in the finance and performance quarterly updates and Commercial Strategy progress reports.
- a Programme Board, made up of CLT, also oversees the implementation and ongoing monitoring of the new operating system, including the decommissioning of the Civic Centre and repurposing of other buildings. The Council expects to review the new system in Autumn 2022 and will share its findings with elected members.
- the Council recently reviewed the focus of its corporate asset management working group. With additional groups and boards tasked with overseeing specific asset projects, such as Bridging the Gap reviews and the new operating model, the role of the group within that wider context had become unclear. Officers told us that, although it is early days, there is now greater clarity on their priorities and that the group is more focussed and attendance has improved.
- current arrangements mean both senior managers and elected members are sighted of the main asset-related activities. But the Council no longer draws together all asset-related actions and progress in a single report to provide strategic oversight and assurance. In developing its new SAMP, the Council should consider its monitoring and reporting structures to ensure better integration between specific assets projects and the broader asset management plan.
- some feedback on the community hubs has already been shared with scrutiny members. This included detail on footfall during the first three months of opening, a summary of the main requests for help and some case studies of the experiences of some hub users. However, the Council has not yet formally sought the views of residents on the community hubs, so the report did not contain any data on service user satisfaction levels. It is also not clear what the Council's measure of success is for the community hubs, both in the short and long term.
- in May 2022, the Council introduced a new committee structure. This includes a new Partnerships Scrutiny Committee which will consider the Council's strategic local, regional and national partnerships, including those related to assets.
- members of the property team meet regularly with colleagues across Wales through the Consortium of Local Authorities in Wales. This provides a useful platform to share ideas and views and learn from others. It is officer led but governed by a board of political leaders.

- performance data is shared with the Welsh Government but the Council does not undertake its own benchmarking against other local authorities.

Workforce

The Council has implemented a flexible, agile working model but its workforce planning arrangements are underdeveloped

14 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- as noted above, during the pandemic the Council developed a new operating model, based on agile working. The model categorises job roles into three classifications:
 - home worker (approx. 22% of roles);
 - agile worker (approx. 23%); or
 - service/community worker (approx. 55%).
- agile workers split their time between working from home and from hot desks in Council offices, using an online booking system to reserve a desk space.
- the Council involved all staff in the categorisation of their job roles. The categorisation refers to job roles, rather than the staff currently undertaking the roles. This means that staff whose job role is classed as home-working but who, for personal reasons, need to work partly from the office can do so. But when that job role is advertised in future, it will state the role's classification.
- a new Agile Working Policy supports the operating model. Under the policy, home and agile workers do not have fixed hours (unless a particular role dictates this) and can work flexibly within the flexible working hours scheme to suit their circumstances. The policy sets out corporate, management and employee responsibilities in relation to agile working and emphasises staff well-being and work-life balance.
- it is not clear yet what further changes the Council will make to the way it uses its workforce in future. A review of the new model, scheduled for Autumn 2022, will provide some direction, as will the Council's Bridging the Gap programme, particularly the review looking at service redesign, referred to in the assets section above. But the ongoing impact of the pandemic and Brexit on working models and workforce requirements is not yet fully understood.
- officers and members referred to several drivers for change which are likely to influence the future workforce, demonstrating consideration of long-term trends. As with assets, decarbonisation and digital delivery of services are considered key factors. Another was the Council's ageing staff profile (50% of staff are 45 years and over) and the challenge of making local

government an attractive career option to younger people. The Council recognises that flexible working and diverse opportunities are going to be increasingly important to attract new staff and that this will require a shift from current practices. There are also wider issues around recruitment and retention which would benefit from being addressed on a national level before effective action can be taken at a regional and local level. The Council should ensure its workforce planning processes actively consider and help address these potential long-term workforce trends as well as addressing current issues. As the Council gains a better understanding of how services will be delivered post-COVID-19, it will need to review its workforce plans to ensure they reflect changing needs.

- in July 2021, the Council agreed a new five-year Workforce Strategy. The Strategy contains high-level aspirational statements setting out the type of employer it wishes to be and what the Council needs to look like in the future. Although the Strategy includes a section setting out how the Council will achieve their workforce ambitions, this lacks tangible detail. The Strategy has an annual action plan, but this is also high level and lacks baseline data and measurable targets.
- the Workforce Strategy contains some data and analysis of the current workforce, such as age profile, length of service, and employment status, but certain aspects are missing such as:
 - current skills and any current or future skills gaps.
 - talent and succession planning.
 - critical posts to the Council and risks attached to those posts if they become vacant.

this information is currently being gathered through directorate workforce plans. Useful workforce data and analysis also sits outside of the Strategy, for example, workforce profiling and analysis of staff turnover and vacancies.

- the Strategy does not set out how it is embedded into service plans, but as part of the new Strategy, all directorates must complete a new workforce plan template developed by the Organisational Development (OD) section. Responsibility for developing and implementing the plan sits with each directorate and the Council should ensure that service managers have sufficient capacity and support to undertake this task properly. OD will also support services to develop and drive implementation of the plans where necessary. This is important, as while service-based managers might have service/industry-specific knowledge to inform the plans, they may benefit from the input of HR professionals to direct and challenge their thinking, provide guidance on more general workforce planning issues, and bring oversight from an all-Council perspective.
- there was some consideration of the sustainable development principle in developing the Strategy. For example, the Council engaged with the trade unions and used staff survey responses to inform its Strategy. But further

work is needed to ensure the sustainable development principle is fully embedded and helping shape future strategies.

- the Council has given some consideration to how its agile working policy helps contribute to other things it is trying to achieve, eg decarbonisation. But it could do more to consider how the policy, its workforce strategy and planning can help it meet other objectives and achieve wider benefits.

The Council is supporting staff to adjust to agile working but does not yet fully understand its future workforce needs, although work is underway to develop service workforce plans

15 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council has engaged well with staff and the trade union during the pandemic and in developing its new operating model. Trade union representatives were included in discussions from the outset and have helped inform the model and the Agile Working Policy.
- the Council produced a staff engagement plan to introduce the new operating model and concept of agile working to staff. This included focus groups, sessions with SLT, and training for managers on how to manage an agile workforce.
- the Council is part of the Gwent-based Shared Resource Service, a collaborative information technology service between five public sector partners. This arrangement helped the Council to quickly enable staff and members to work remotely.
- the Agile Working Policy provides some protocols to help manage some of the practical challenges of staff working flexible hours and remotely. For example, staff are expected to keep electronic diaries up to date, switch off laptops and phones when not working, not hold face-to-face work meetings at home, and not share details of their home address or phone number to clients or third parties.
- front-line staff who were unable to work from home and whose services operated throughout the pandemic faced a different set of challenges. The Council undertook risk-assessments and provided PPE and changed working practices to keep staff and the public safe. Redeployment of staff also helped the Council to continue to deliver critical front-line services.
- some front-line services benefitted during the pandemic from a resilient integrated workforce model that was adopted prior to COVID-19. For example, staff from across waste and recycling, highways, and green spaces are trained to work across the different departments to provide cover when needed. This flexibility to adapt meant the Council was well placed to continue delivering essential services such as waste collections during the pandemic. The Council should consider how it can continue to build

transferable skills in its workforce and how it can record in its workforce data the transferable skills staff already have so that these skills are recognised and can be utilised effectively.

- there are several examples of the Council working with others to deliver services, although these were not specifically prompted by the pandemic. Some, such as the recent agreement for Caerphilly County Borough Council to deliver legal services for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's Children's Services, help address challenges recruiting into professional roles. Others, such as the Council's Property Services' Technical Team undertaking work for other local authorities, provide an income and strengthen resilience by enabling the Council to maintain a larger team. There is, however, scope to take a more systematic approach to collaborative working and the Council should consider this as it reviews how services are delivered.
- the Council produced an equality impact assessment for its Agile Working Policy, but members did not receive an impact assessment to inform decision making on the wider operating model.
- the Council has estimated the revenue costs of its new agile working model, including initial set-up costs and an ongoing home/agile working allowance for around 750 staff. The Council will fund these costs through repurposing budgets for mileage, and savings on Civic Centre operating costs. Savings from the new operating model will be reflected in the Bridging the Gap programme's transformation project and reported to members.
- the Council has not identified any indicative costs of delivering the Workforce Strategy. This is in line with the Council's other strategies, where costs are not calculated or incorporated into the MTFS until individual aspects of the strategy are developed and approved to be taken forward. As suggested above in relation to the SAMP, the Council should consider estimating the indicative costs of implementing the whole Strategy, so it understands the resource implications.
- sickness rates have been affected by the pandemic and the Council's recovery plan includes an aim to reduce absence rates. Initially, sickness absence fell – in 2020-21 the Council had an average rate of 11.67 days per employee, down 2.24 days on the previous year. But rates have risen in 2021-22 and the Council's benchmarking suggests that Blaenau Gwent has the worst performance in Wales on sickness. The Council reports that sickness absence with COVID-19 is not a significant problem, but its OD team is seeking to understand to what extent the pandemic is indirectly affecting absence rates, eg long NHS waiting times, mental health issues etc.
- staff recruitment challenges have continued through the pandemic. Competition for social workers and domiciliary care workers is recognised as a regional and national concern and the Council is experiencing staffing pressures in social services. The Council is working hard to address these

gaps and a two-year staff vacancy action plan has been developed by Children's Services to help address the issue. University social work student placements help provide additional capacity and the Council has a good track record of recruiting these students once they qualify. It also encourages existing non-qualified staff to train as social workers and has a joint Social Worker Development Strategy with Caerphilly Council.

- other Council services have also experienced recruitment difficulties, particularly to professional and technical posts. There are examples of these services also seeking to develop existing staff or apprentices to train and qualify to address hard-to-fill posts. It is not clear, however, how widespread or consistent this approach is as there is no Council-wide workforce plan. Once services have completed their individual workforce plans, the Council should consider how it can best bring that information together to gain an overview of the Council-wide position and understand what actions it needs to take at a corporate level to strengthen its workforce over the long term. This information should also feed into the Council's workforce recovery plan, which is currently being developed and includes a focus on recruitment and retention.

The Council is making arrangements to review its new operating model but does not yet have a clear set of criteria to assess progress against its Workforce Strategy

16 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- a Programme Board, chaired by the Managing Director oversees delivery of the new operating model. As noted in the assets section above, the Council plans to formally review the new operating system in Autumn 2022. The findings will be used to refine and adapt the model and will be shared with elected members.
- CLT have received regular updates throughout the pandemic on workforce capacity (including sickness absence and the impact of COVID-19) and the Council's ability to deliver critical services (responding to COVID-19 and business as usual).
- following some disruptions and delays to performance reporting during the height of the pandemic, elected members are once again receiving reports on workforce issues. Recent reports relating to or including workforce issues include sickness absence, recovery planning and quarterly finance and performance reports.
- some workforce-related issues, such as sickness absence, have clear targets against which performance can be measured and challenged. However, the Workforce Strategy lacks robust monitoring arrangements and measurable targets. An annual delivery plan for the Strategy will be monitored each year by the Corporate Leadership Team and Corporate Overview Scrutiny. But without specific and measurable targets, it is not

clear how progress against these plans will be measured or effectively scrutinised. The Council intends to use the directorate workforce plans currently being developed to inform the Workforce Strategy's year 2 action plan. In doing so, the Council should include SMART performance targets.

- officers have continued to meet with peers through national HR networks during the pandemic and the Head of OD is part of an WLGA working group looking at pay spines in local government.
- the Council's OD team benchmarks national workforce data to understand where the Council is an outlier. For sickness absence, where the Council performs poorly, representatives met with a well-performing neighbouring authority to learn from their approach.
- the Council has engaged with staff regularly throughout the pandemic. An employee survey ran in Autumn 2020 to gain feedback on homeworking to help inform the new operating model. Also, all staff were met with individually to discuss the new model. In Spring 2022, the Council will consult with staff on the behaviours that make agile working a success, based on their experiences so far. The process will also consider behaviours for home-based and service/community-based staff.



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We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English.
Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.

Agenda Item 13

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**
Date of meeting: **8th March 2023**
Report Subject: **Audit Wales: 'Time for Change' – Poverty in Wales**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Steve Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate Overview and Performance**
Report Submitted by: **Tanya Evans, Interim Director Social Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance and Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	23.02.23		08.03.23					

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Governance and Audit Committee with the Audit Wales Report, '*Time for Change - Poverty in Wales*' (Appendix 1).

2. Scope and Background

2.1 Audit Wales published their report, '*Time for Change – Poverty in Wales*' in November 2022 and covers the audit year 2021/22.

2.2 The Audit Wales report looks at the challenge of poverty in Wales and how government is responding. It is acknowledged that effectively tackling poverty is not easy and is exceedingly difficult for both Welsh and local government.

2.3 This is the first of three reviews on the challenge of alleviating and tackling poverty.

2.4 This report identified 8 recommendations, 2 for Welsh Government to implement and 6 for Local Authorities. Audit Wales expect councils to consider the findings of this review and the recommendations, and that its governance and audit committee receives this report and monitors its response to the recommendations in a timely way.

2.5 Audit Wales identified the following recommendations for Council's to implement:

- **Local strategies, targets and performance reporting for tackling and alleviating poverty** - We recommend that the councils use their Wellbeing Plans to provide a comprehensive focus on tackling poverty to co-ordinate
- their efforts, meet local needs and support the revised national plan targets and actions.
- **Leadership on the poverty agenda** - We recommend that each council designate a cabinet member as the council's poverty champion and

designate a senior officer to lead and be accountable for the anti-poverty agenda.

- **Experience mapping to create inclusive services for people in poverty** - We recommend that councils improve their understanding of their residents' 'lived experience' through meaningful involvement in decision-making using 'experience mapping' and/or 'Poverty Truth Commissions' to review and improve accessibility to and use of council services.
- **Single web landing page for people seeking help** - We recommend that councils optimise their digital services by creating a single landing page on their website
- **Streamlining and improving application and information services for people in poverty** - no council has created a single gateway into services, data needs to be shared to ensure citizens receive efficient and effective services.
- **Complying with the socio-economic duty** - We recommend that councils review their integrated impact assessments or equivalent

The full recommendations can be found in Appendix 1.

2.6 Next Steps

- 2.6.1 The Council has in place a strategic lead for Poverty, Tanya Evans, Interim Corporate Director Social Services.
- 2.6.2 The Council has in place an Operational Cost of Living Group. This is chaired by the Interim Corporate Director Social Services, with representation from each directorate across the Council. This group will take undertake implementation of the recommendations identified by Audit Wales. The Operational Cost of Living Groups supports the work of the Cost of Living Crisis Cross Party Working Group
- 2.6.3 The recommendations will be included within the relevant business plans for monitoring and reporting, these will link to the Officers identified on the Operational Cost of Living Group.
- 2.6.4 The Council has an identified Member Lead for Poverty, Cllr Carl Bainton, who will have an active role in supporting the implementation of the poverty agenda within the Council and is represented on the Cost of Living Crisis Cross Party Working Group
- 2.6.5 An Estyn Inspection of Local Authority Education Services was carried out during November / December 2022. The report was published in February 2023 and is also included on the agenda for this committee meeting. The report stated that the local authority has a clear commitment to reducing the impact of poverty on education outcomes and a summary of comments is highlighted below:
 - The local authority has a clear commitment to reducing the impact of poverty on education outcomes. Officers know their communities well

and use information they gather locally, national surveys and reports to identify needs and prioritise resources.

- Officers collaborate well across directorates on issues relating to poverty to enable resources to be targeted towards those most in need.

Options for Recommendation

3.1 Prior to the final report being provided to the Council, CLT and relevant Officers provided comment back to Audit Wales on their findings.

3.2 Option 1

Governance and Audit Committee is assured that the Next Steps, identified in paragraph 2.6, will appropriately respond to the Audit Wales recommendations.

Option 2

Provide comment on the Audit Wales review and Next Steps, identified in paragraph 2.6, to address the recommendation for Officers to implement in order to provide continuous improvement.

4. Monitoring Arrangements

4.1 The recommendations from Audit Wales will be included within the business plan and updated on a quarterly basis.

The Operational Cost of Living Group will have responsibility for monitoring implementation of the recommendations.

The information will be reported within the Joint Finance and Performance Report to Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Regular meetings are held with Audit Wales to assess progress of reports.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Audit Wales Report – ‘Time for Change’ Poverty in Wales

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'Time for Change' – Poverty in Wales

Report of the Auditor General for Wales

November 2022



This report has been prepared for presentation to the Senedd under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004.

The Auditor General is independent of the Senedd and government. He examines and certifies the accounts of the Welsh Government and its sponsored and related public bodies, including NHS bodies. He also has the power to report to the Senedd on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which those organisations have used, and may improve the use of, their resources in discharging their functions.

The Auditor General also audits local government bodies in Wales, conducts local government value for money studies and inspects for compliance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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Context

- 1 Poverty shapes the lives of many people in Wales, with hundreds of thousands of families struggling to make ends meet. This is not a new phenomenon and tackling poverty, particularly child poverty, has been a longstanding priority for both the Welsh Government and councils in Wales.
- 2 We know that the impact of poverty can be far reaching with many damaging effects. The longer someone is in poverty, the harder it is to break out. And those who live in poverty can find it extremely difficult to play a full role in society and benefit from education and life opportunities that most of us take for granted.
- 3 Often people in crisis are unable to manage and cope. And it is in these times that they look to government – the UK Government, the Welsh Government and the 22 councils – for help and assistance to deal with their difficulties.
- 4 However, the current cost-of-living crisis, with food, fuel and energy costs all rising sharply, is hitting the pockets of many more people and placing families who have managed to live comfortably into poverty for the first time. The consequence of this is creating expectations, and a need, for government to do much more to help people who are struggling to survive.
- 5 This report looks at the challenge of poverty in Wales and how government is responding. We acknowledge that effectively tackling poverty is not easy and is exceedingly difficult for both Welsh and local government. **Appendix 1** sets out our audit approach and methods.
- 6 This is also the first of three reviews on the challenge of alleviating and tackling poverty. In our other work we focus on two potential solutions. Firstly, how councils are working to grow and expand social enterprises to help local government deliver more services and reduce demand – in essence are we making the most of social enterprises and ensuring social value and social capital stay in communities and help people who are struggling. And secondly, given the priority placed on community resilience and self-reliance in council plans, how well are councils equipping people to be less reliant on the state and reduce demand for often overstretched services.

Key findings

- 7 Our overall conclusion is that **the scale of the challenge and weaknesses in current work make it difficult for Welsh and local government to deliver the systemic change required to tackle and alleviate poverty.**
- 8 In **Part 1** of this report we highlight that poverty is multidimensional, complex, growing and impacting more people in Wales. The impact of poverty is far reaching and increasingly more difficult for people to deal with. People in all parts of Wales continue to live in poverty and the number is estimated to be rising, with the cost-of-living crisis pushing more people into poverty. Our analysis shows that poverty is the single major challenge facing all tiers of government.
- 9 In **Part 2** we consider how the different tiers of government are prioritising action on alleviating poverty. Tackling poverty remains a priority but many of the levers to alleviate poverty are outside of Wales's control. The Welsh Government adopted a Child Poverty Strategy in 2011, which was also revised in 2015, but this is out of date in the context of the current cost-of-living crisis, and the target to eliminate child poverty by 2020 was dropped. Despite this, councils and partners have prioritised work on poverty, but the mix of approaches and a complicated partnership landscape mean that ambitions, focus, actions and prioritisation vary widely. In particular, understanding need and drawing on a wide range of data to shape responses remain an area for improvement. Because the agenda is so broad, it is understandable that no council has a comprehensive anti-poverty team, and activity cuts across a range of services which can reinforce silo working.
- 10 The Welsh Government makes significant revenue funding available to councils to alleviate the impact of poverty but due to the complexity and nature of the issues, the total level of spending is unknown, and no council knows the full extent of its spending on alleviating and tackling poverty. All councils are dependent on grants but the short-term nature of grant programmes, overly complex administration, weaknesses in guidance and grant restrictions, and difficulties spending monies mean that funding is not making the impact it could. Lastly, councils find it hard to deliver preventative work because of the sheer scale of demand from people in crisis.

- 11 Finally, in **Part 3** we consider how public bodies deliver services to help people in poverty. We found that only one council is formally undertaking experience mapping with service users to shape how they provide all services to help people in poverty. Despite this, councils are changing how they deliver services as a result of the pandemic and ongoing budget pressures. But the new models of delivery are not always helping people in poverty and those struggling with the cost-of-living crisis.
- 12 Digital exclusion remains a major challenge and data shows that people in poverty can find it difficult to access online services. Community hubs offer an opportunity for councils to help people at the point of crisis. Comprehensive and integrated publicity, advice and information services can significantly help people who are struggling but the picture across Wales is mixed. All councils undertake some form of assessment to determine the likely socio-economic impact of policy choices and decisions, but the approach varies and is not always effective. With a few exceptions, most councils struggle to demonstrate the value of their work in alleviating and tackling poverty.



I acknowledge that scale of challenge that poverty presents. It is essential therefore that Welsh Government and councils maximise their efforts and address the weaknesses identified in my review. We need to ensure all tiers of government work together to help people in need and my recommendations are targeted at supporting improvement.

Adrian Crompton
Auditor General for Wales



Recommendations

- 13 Our recommendations are set out below. We expect each council to consider the findings of this review and our recommendations, and that its governance and audit committee receives this report and monitors its response to our recommendations in a timely way.

Recommendations

National strategy and targets for tackling and alleviating poverty

R1 In **Paragraphs 2.8 – 2.12** we note that there is currently no specific target for reducing poverty in Wales and the current Child Poverty strategy needs to be refreshed. We recommend that in updating its strategy the Welsh Government:

- set SMART national actions;
- establish a suite of performance measures to judge delivery and impact;
- sets target for alleviating and tackling poverty; and
- undertake regular evaluation of performance and public reporting.

Recommendations

Local strategies, targets and performance reporting for tackling and alleviating poverty

- R2 In **Paragraphs 2.13 – 2.23** and **Paragraphs 3.33 – 3.35** we highlight that councils and partners have prioritised work on poverty, but the mix of approaches and a complicated delivery landscape mean that ambitions, focus, actions and prioritisation vary widely. We highlight that evaluating activity and reporting performance are also variable with many gaps. We recommend that the councils use their Wellbeing Plans to provide a comprehensive focus on tackling poverty to co-ordinate their efforts, meet local needs and support the revised national plan targets and actions. This should:
- include SMART local actions with a greater emphasis on prevention;
 - include a detailed resourcing plan for the length of the strategy;
 - be developed with involvement from other public sector partners, the third sector, and those with experience of poverty;
 - include a robust set of consistent outcome indicators and measures to increase understanding of poverty locally; and
 - be subject to annual public reporting to enable a whole system view of poverty locally to help improve delivery and support.

Recommendations

Leadership on the poverty agenda

R3 In **Paragraph 2.23** we note that just over a third of councils have lead members and lead officers for addressing poverty. Given the importance of effective leadership in driving the poverty agenda forward and breaking silos within councils and between public bodies, we recommend that each council designate a cabinet member as the council's poverty champion and designate a senior officer to lead and be accountable for the anti-poverty agenda.

Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of grant-funded programmes

R4 In **Paragraphs 2.31 – 2.38** we note that all councils are dependent on grants but weaknesses in programmes mean that funding is not making the impact it could. To ensure councils are able to maximise the impact of funding and tackle the more difficult and longstanding problems, we recommend that the Welsh Government:

- provide longer timescales for announcing and receiving bids to enable better resource planning;
- move away from annual bidding cycles to multi-year allocations;
- enable funding to be more flexibly spent to avoid an emphasis on quicker projects, rather than more impactful interventions that take longer to establish;
- allow councils to consolidate funding to reduce bureaucracy;
- streamline and simplify processes and grant conditions to reduce the administrative burden; and
- keep requests for information and supporting materials from councils to a minimum.

Recommendations

Experience mapping to create inclusive services for people in poverty

R5 In **Paragraphs 3.2 – 3.6** we highlight that people in poverty are often in crisis, dealing with extremely personal and stressful issues, but they often find it difficult to access help from councils because of the way services are designed and delivered. We recommend that councils improve their understanding of their residents' 'lived experience' through meaningful involvement in decision-making using 'experience mapping' and/or 'Poverty Truth Commissions' to review and improve accessibility to and use of council services.

Single web landing page for people seeking help

R6 In **Paragraph 3.14** we highlight the difficulties people in poverty face accessing online and digital services. To ensure people are able to get the information and advice they need, we recommend that councils optimise their digital services by creating a single landing page on their website that:

- is directly accessible on the home page;
- provides links to all services provided by the council that relate to poverty; and
- provides information on the work of partners that can assist people in poverty.

Recommendations

Streamlining and improving application and information services for people in poverty

R7 In **Paragraphs 3.15 and 3.16** we note that no council has created a single gateway into services. As a result, people have to complete multiple application forms that often record the same information when applying for similar services. We highlight that whilst it is important that councils comply with relevant data protection legislation, they also need to share data to ensure citizens receive efficient and effective services. We recommend that councils:

- establish corporate data standards and coding that all services use for their core data;
- undertake an audit to determine what data is held by services and identify any duplicated records and information requests;
- create a central integrated customer account as a gateway to services;
- undertake a data audit to provide refresher training to service managers to ensure they know when and what data they can and cannot share; and
- review and update data sharing protocols to ensure they support services to deliver their data sharing responsibilities.

Recommendations

Complying with the socio-economic duty

R8 In **Paragraphs 3.27 to 3.32** we set out that while all councils undertake some form of assessment to determine the likely socio-economic impact of policy choices and decisions, approaches vary and are not always effective. We recommend that councils review their integrated impact assessments or equivalent to:

- ensure that they draw on relevant, comprehensive and current data (nothing over 12 months old) to support analysis;
- ensure integrated impact assessments capture information on:
 - involvement activity setting out those the service has engaged with in determining its strategic policy such as partners, service users and those it is co-producing with;
 - the cumulative impact/mitigation to ensure the assessment considers issues in the round and how it links across services provided across the council;
 - how the council will monitor and evaluate impact and will take corrective action; and
 - an action plan setting out the activities the Council will take as a result of the Integrated Impact Assessment.



**Poverty is
multidimensional,
complex, growing
and impacting more
people in Wales**

01

- 1.1 In this part of the report we provide a brief overview of how poverty is defined, setting out the complexities of poverty showing its day-to-day impact on people in Wales. We outline how poverty is measured, highlighting the differences between the countries of the UK and show that poverty in Wales is growing. Finally, we consider the current cost-of-living crisis and how this is pushing more people into poverty for the first time, making poverty the single biggest challenge facing people and public services across Wales.

Defining poverty

- 1.2 Poverty may be described in different ways and there is no single, universally accepted definition. In 1995, the United Nations adopted two relative definitions of poverty, framing the issue in terms of minimum acceptable standards of living within the society in which a particular person lives. These are:
 - a **absolute poverty** is defined as a condition characterised by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income, but also on access to services.
 - b **overall poverty** takes various forms, including a lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited, or lack of access to, education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments and social discrimination and exclusion.
- 1.3 Poverty therefore occurs in all countries and even the most developed places will have pockets of poverty amid wealth. For instance, the loss of livelihoods as a result of economic recession, sudden poverty as a result of disaster or conflict, the poverty of low-wage workers, and those who struggle to cope outside family support systems, social institutions and safety nets.
- 1.4 The causes of poverty can also be structural, derived and enhanced by the way society and the economy are framed and work, which helps create a cycle that makes it more difficult for some people to provide for their families and keeps them trapped in hardship. These structures drive disparities in access to transportation, education, childcare, health care, high-quality jobs, and affordable housing. For example, people who are not able to easily access training or education can struggle to land a secure job, making it harder to escape poverty. Likewise, the operation, or inflexibility, of welfare systems can make it difficult for those struggling and trap them in poverty.

- 1.5 Consequently, poverty needs to be seen as multi-dimensional incorporating aspects of, for example, deprivation, and psychological wellbeing, such as mental health and shame. Looking at deprivation allows a wide range of aspects of living standards to be included. Here, deprivation should not be seen only in terms of material deprivation but also in the social exclusion from 'the ordinary patterns, customs and activities' of society¹.

The impact of poverty is far reaching and increasingly more difficult for people to deal with

- 1.6 Poverty is not just therefore the absence of the money people require to meet their needs. It is also the consequences of this lack of resources and how this impacts them in ways that those not in poverty often find hard to comprehend. Some of these consequences – for instance social isolation, exclusion, powerlessness, physical and emotional wellbeing – can extend and perpetuate poverty, making it difficult, if not impossible, for people to escape its impact. And often the way policies and services are set and delivered can make the situation far more challenging.
- 1.7 Through our fieldwork, in particular speaking to people in poverty, we have sought to define its characteristics or dimensions on a human level – what does it feel and look like to live in poverty. From our work, there are some common issues that re-occur for people who live in poverty. We have set these out under seven broad headings in **Exhibit 1**. Not everyone will encounter all of these, and people can experience different problems at different times. Taken as a whole, however, they demonstrate how multidimensional poverty can be and provide a sense of what it means to live in poverty and, at the extreme end, destitution.

1 Lansley, S. and Mack, J., Breadline Britain – the rise of mass poverty, London, Oneworld, (2015).

Exhibit 1 – The 'Dimensions' or 'Characteristics' of living in poverty in Wales

Housing issues

- I have experience of being homeless, street sleeping and/or sofa surfing
- My home is insecure, and I fear losing it
- I am unable to afford to pay my rent or mortgage
- I live in poor quality/substandard housing
- People in my home share bedrooms and have inadequate space
- I cannot afford furniture or white goods in my home



Clothing and footwear issues

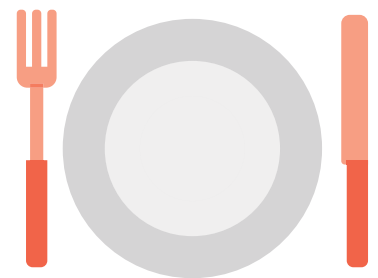
- I do not have warm clothing in winter
- I depend on handouts and charity for clothes
- I only have two pairs of shoes
- I do not have clothes for work or job interviews

Fuel and Energy issues

- My home has poor energy efficiency
- I have to use prepayment meters and/or have to use high-cost tariffs
- I have high energy usage due to my and/or my family's ill health
- I have high energy use due to the size of my family
- I am regularly unable to afford to use electricity or gas
- I depend on an off-grid, more expensive energy supply – oil

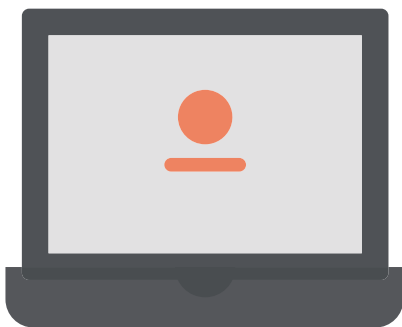
Food and water issues

- I cannot guarantee a regular and sufficient supply of food and water
- I am unable to purchase sufficient food and water to meet me and my family's needs
- I am unable to eat healthily
- I periodically have no food available
- I regularly miss meals
- I am unable to afford to wash myself and/or my clothes



Financial issues

- I have insufficient income to afford to meet my living costs
- My income is unstable, and I do not know how much money I have week to week
- I am unable to access credit
- I have no savings
- I am in debt
- I depend on welfare benefits and/or charity

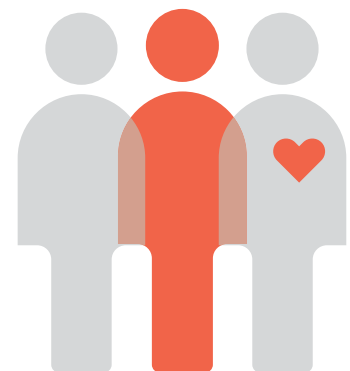


Exclusion from services issues

- I am unable to register for health, dental and care services
- Transport is unreliable and I find it difficult to access and/or afford transport
- I do not have a computer, a SMART phone and/or tablet
- I do not have access to the internet at home
- I find it difficult to access the essential public services I need
- I find it difficult to participate in or influence decisions that affect me – eg not registered to, or do not, vote
- I find it difficult to get the advice and information I need to help me
- I feel marginalised by the services I seek help from

Emotional and relationship issues

- I lack confidence and self esteem
- I find it difficult to deal with problems
- I find it difficult communicating with people and services
- I have poor literacy and numeracy skills
- I find it difficult to build and/or maintain relationships
- I experience feelings of shame and stigma because of my circumstances



People in all parts of Wales continue to live in poverty and the number is estimated to be rising

- 1.8 There is no single source of evidence that is universally drawn on to determine levels of poverty in Wales. Consequently, we have based our analysis on three key data sets. These are the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation; the Department of Work and Pensions' (DWP) households-below-average-income data; and persistent poverty information, again published by the DWP.
- 1.9 Taken together, this information shows us that a significant number of people are living in poverty in Wales and deprivation reaches all part of the country. Importantly, the levels of poverty remain stubbornly high and are impacting all parts of the population – children, working-aged people and pensioners. Significantly, many people also continue to experience poverty on an ongoing basis.

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation

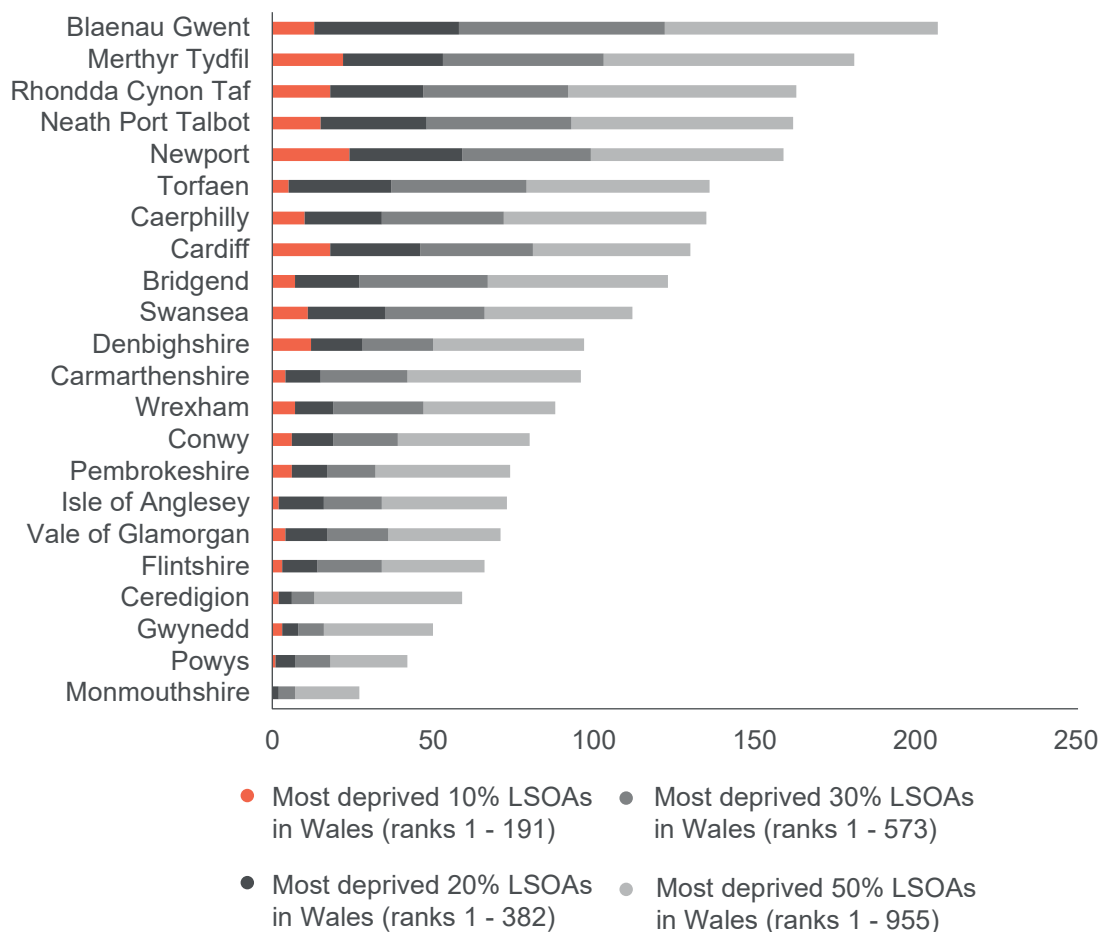
- 1.10 The Welsh Government uses the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) to measure relative deprivation of small areas of Wales and then ranks them from the most to the least deprived. The WIMD uses 47 indicators split into eight domains – income, employment, health, education, access to services, housing, community safety, and the physical environment. WIMD is a measure of multiple deprivation that is both an area-based measure and a measure of relative deprivation.
- 1.11 WIMD ranks all small areas in Wales from 1 (most deprived) to 1,909 (least deprived). Using this information it is therefore possible to say that one area is more or less deprived than another². The full WIMD is revised every four to five years and was last updated in 2019, before the pandemic and the impact of the current cost-of-living crisis. Nonetheless, the WIMD remains the best available data for comparing levels of poverty by council.
- 1.12 Using the WIMD data, we set out in **Exhibit 2** the comparative levels of deprivation by council based on this small-areas analysis. In broad terms, the WIMD shows us that all areas of Wales have pockets of deprivation, but the urban areas of south-east Wales are where people are persistently experiencing poverty and are struggling the most.

2 The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) is the Welsh Government's official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in Wales. It identifies areas with the highest concentrations of several different types of deprivation. WIMD ranks all small areas in Wales from 1 (most deprived) to 1,909 (least deprived). Small areas are Census geographies called Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs).

- 1.13 Tackling and alleviating poverty is at the heart of providing for the wellbeing of citizens, and government at all levels in Wales clearly operates many programmes to support this. This includes the NHS, education, welfare payments, infrastructure, and utilities. The broad nature of poverty and the wide range of areas that it touches on mean that it inherently crosses over the different constitutional boundaries of the UK.
- 2.14 Wales has had stubbornly high levels of poverty for many years (**Exhibit 2**) and as a result poverty remains a longstanding priority of the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government recognises that due to the nature of poverty, it cannot be tackled alone and must be tackled collaboratively between all levels of government. Notwithstanding, the Welsh Government exercises considerable autonomy when it comes to tackling poverty. For instance, major areas of economic development, education, health and housing policy are its responsibility, and it can decide where it allocates its budgets.

Exhibit 2 – Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation – Council Analysis by Lower-layer Super Output Areas

People in all parts of Wales are experiencing poverty, but it is most acutely felt in the urban and valley areas of South Wales.



Source: Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, Welsh Government, November 2019

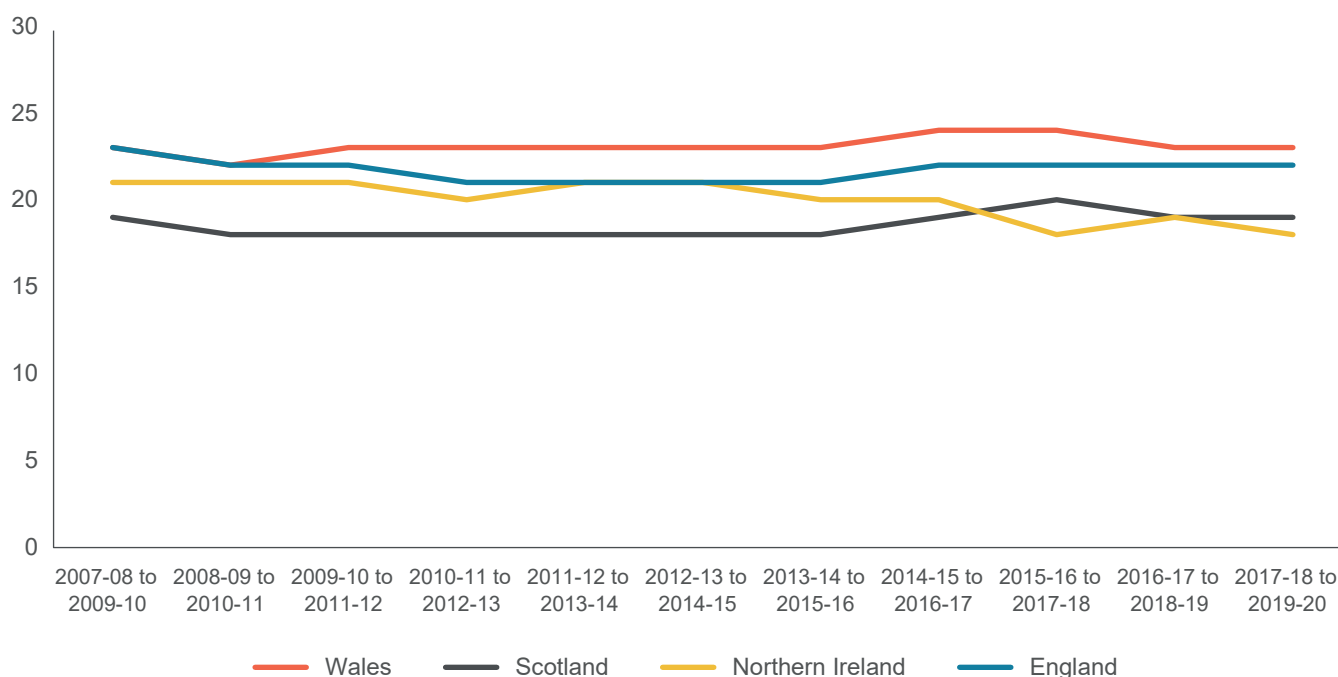
Households Below Average Income

1.15 Most official measures of poverty use relative income to assess who is in poverty; an income threshold is set and those who fall below it are seen to be 'in poverty'. The current benchmark for judging relative levels of poverty is the number of households who get less than 60% of the average wage. Using this measure³, and drawing on data published by the DWP, 23% of people in Wales live in poverty and Wales continues to have the highest levels of poverty in the United Kingdom – **Exhibit 3**.

3 Relative income is the sum of money after housing costs such as mortgage interest payments/rent, water rates and structural house insurance have been paid.

Exhibit 3 – Percentage of people living in relative income poverty by UK countries between 2007-08 to 2009-10 and 2017-18 to 2019-20 (three-year averages of financial years)

Wales has consistently had the highest levels of relative income poverty in the UK in the last decade.



Source: Households Below Average Income, Family Resources Survey, Department for Work and Pensions, reported on StatsWales (Indicator [SIEQ0031](#)), March 2021

1.16 Digging below the surface of the headline figures allows us to identify some important trends on poverty in Wales, and the differences between Wales and the other countries of the UK. While the number of children living in relative income poverty in Wales fell from 32% in 2010-11 to 28% in 2018-19, the numbers rose sharply in 2019-20 to 31%. The most recent data published by the DWP⁴ in March 2022 (as analysed by the Welsh Government⁵) suggests that this trend is continuing with 34% of children in Wales predicted to be living in poverty in March 2021⁶. Across the four countries of the UK, Wales has the highest number of children in relative income poverty.

4 [Households Below Average Income](#), Department for Work and Pensions, March 2022

5 [Measures of poverty: April 2020 to March 2021](#), Welsh Government, March 2022

6 It should be noted that the most recent data for Wales is based on the Family Resources Survey which samples around 900 households in Wales every year. This is why data is presented as three-to-five year rolling averages, to reduce (but not eliminate) unreliability.

- 1.17 Pensioners have the lowest levels of poverty in Wales, with numbers remaining consistent at 18% in the last decade, although the most recent Welsh Government analysis for March 2021 suggests this has marginally risen to 19%. Again, when comparing numbers across the UK, Wales has more pensioners in poverty than the other three nations. Finally, with regard to working-age adults, the data has remained stable at 22%, but Wales again has the highest numbers classed as in relative income poverty across the four countries of the UK.
- 1.18 One growing problem facing many working-age adults is 'in-work poverty' – poverty faced by anyone living in a household where someone is in work but whose income (including welfare benefits) has and is not keeping up with the cost of day-to-day living. In-work poverty is not new and is an issue that has been growing since the mid-1990s. It has, however, become a more acute problem in the last 12 months. This growing trend highlights that while work reduces the risk of poverty, incomes are often not sufficient to allow someone to escape from poverty. Research suggests that in-work poverty increased across the UK in 2021 but rose most sharply in London (22% of households), Wales and the North of England (both – 18% of households)⁷.

Persistent Poverty

- 1.19 The DWP also produces an incomes dynamics report on changes in income over time highlighting rates of persistent low income for different groups. This is often referred to as 'persistent poverty.' Individuals are classed as living in persistent poverty if they are in relatively low income for at least three out of four consecutive years.

⁷ Institute for Public Policy Research, NO LONGER 'MANAGING', May 2021

- 1.20 Persistent poverty is a major concern. Evidence from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that the negative consequences of poverty are worse for families the longer they spend, and the deeper they are, in poverty⁸. The most recent DWP data published in March 2022 found that:
- a an individual in England and Wales had a 12% chance of being in persistent poverty between 2016 and 2020 (after housing costs were paid). This is more than in Scotland (10%), and in Northern Ireland (9%);
 - b a child in Wales had a 13% likelihood of being in persistent poverty, which is less than for England (19%) but higher than for Northern Ireland (12%) and Scotland (10%);
 - c a working-age adult in Wales had a 13% likelihood of being in persistent poverty, which is higher than England (11%), Scotland and Northern Ireland (10%); and
 - d a pensioner living in Wales had a 10% likelihood of being in persistent poverty, which is lower than in England and Scotland, both at 11%. The likelihood in Northern Ireland is 5%.

The cost-of-living crisis is pushing more people into poverty

- 1.21 The 'cost-of-living crisis' refers to the fall in 'real' disposable incomes (adjusted for inflation and after taxes and benefits) that the UK has experienced since late 2021. It is predominantly caused by high inflation outstripping wage and benefit increases and has been further exacerbated by recent tax increases. The price of goods, especially of essentials, is increasing at a faster rate than most people's income and is squeezing household finances, especially those on low wages. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates that inflation is now higher than at any time since 1982⁹, affecting the affordability of goods and services for millions of households.

8 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, [UK Poverty 2022](#), January 2022

9 Office for National Statistics, [CPIH Annual Rate](#), May 2022

- 1.22 In January 2022, the Institute for Fiscal Studies reported that the lowest-income tenth of households will face around 1.5 percentage points more inflation than the highest-income tenth over the year¹⁰. Similarly, research by the Resolution Foundation concluded that the poorest quarter of households are set to see their real incomes drop by 6% in 2022-23¹¹. Because energy prices are rising particularly quickly, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates that low-income families will now need to spend 19% of their income on energy costs alone in 2022-23, compared to middle-income families who will need to spend 7% of their take-home pay¹² (although these figures may be lower following the UK Government's recent announcement to provide help with¹³ energy bills until April 2023). Finally, the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts household incomes when adjusted for inflation will fall in 2022-23 by the largest amount (-2.2%) since records began in the mid-1950s¹⁴.
- 1.23 **Exhibit 4** draws together a range of data to show the rapid changes taking place in energy and food costs and the impact this is having. This research shows that greater numbers of people are now experiencing energy and food insecurity, and the poorer you are, the greater the impact of the cost-of-living crisis is having on you. Importantly, because it is difficult to record and report poverty data in real time, the number of people impacted by the cost-of-living crisis and living in poverty is absent from current data.

10 Institute for Fiscal Studies, The cost-of-living Crunch, January 2022

11 Resolution Foundation, The Living Standards Audit 2022, July 2022

12 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Energy Price Analysis, March 2022

13 <https://www.itv.com/news/2022-10-17/jeremy-hunt-to-outline-mini-budget-tax-spending-and-plan-today>

14 Office for Budget Responsibility, [Economic and fiscal outlook](#), March 2022

Exhibit 4 – Changes in energy and food costs and the predicted impact

Energy and food cost changes in 2021 and 2022

From April 2021 to April 2022, domestic gas prices increased by 95% and domestic electricity prices by 54%.

On 1 April 2022, the new price cap came into force. The regulator Ofgem announced the cap would increase from its current equivalent annual level of £1,277 per year to £1,971; a 54% increase.

The Chief Executive of Ofgem said on 24 May that he expected the price cap to increase to around £2,800 in October 2022, a 40% increase. Recent research suggests that this will rise again to £4,200 by January 2023. Ofgem estimates that the increase in the price cap will affect around 22 million customers.

In September 2022, the UK Government announced that it will freeze energy bills at an average of £2,500 a year for two years from 1 October 2022.

Between August 2021 and August 2022 unleaded petrol has risen by 48.6 pence per litre and diesel by 56.2 pence.

Impact on people

YouGov reported that 87% of adults in the UK reported an increase in their cost of living in March 2022 and 83% cited an increase in gas and energy as a significant contributor.

In August 2022, YouGov noted that 78% of people in Great Britain are worried about the current price of their household's energy bills – including a third (37%) who are 'very' worried about the cost. Of those with the lowest household incomes (£19,999 a year or less), 83% say they are concerned about how much they spend on energy.

Households in the lowest income group spent 7.1% of their overall spending on electricity and gas, compared to 2.5% for households in the highest income group.

A January 2022 YouGov poll found 49% of people from households with an income of less than £15,000 a year say they cannot afford to heat their home when it is very cold outside.

According to Welsh Government research 14% of Welsh households now live in 'fuel poverty' and 11% are at risk of 'fuel poverty'.



Energy and food cost changes in 2021 and 2022

Food and non-alcoholic drink prices were 6.7% higher in the year to April 2022. This is up from 5.9% and the highest rate of increase since June 2011.

An index of world food prices compiled by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation hit a record high in March 2022. It fell slightly in April but remains 29.8% higher than in April 2021.

Impact on people

YouGov reported that 80% of adults in the UK had seen an increase in their cost of living in March 2022 and 85% of these cited increased price of food as the reason. 54% of those responding to the survey who reported a rise in the cost of living in March 2022 say they are spending less on non-essentials as a result and 33% report spending less on food and essentials. The most recent analysis from YouGov in September 2022 notes that 21% of UK citizens now say they have found themselves forced to make cutbacks to their essential food-item spending.

The Food Foundation's Insecurity Tracker reported that 13.8% of UK households (7.3 million adults) experienced food insecurity in April 2022. Amongst those on Universal Credit, the figure rose to 47.7%.



Sources: ONS, [Energy prices and their effect on households](#), February 2022; Ofgem, [Default Tariff Cap Level](#), February 2022; [Fuel poverty modelled estimates for Wales \(headline results\): as at October 2021 \(gov.wales\)](#); The Food Foundation, [Food Insecurity Tracking](#), April 2022; Cornwall Insights, [Price Cap Forecasts](#), August 2022; YouGov, [Eurotrack Survey Results](#), March 2022; YouGov, [Finances Survey Results](#), March 2022; and YouGov Results, [Energy Bills](#), August 2022; and YouGov, [Essential Spending Results](#), September 2022

1.24 In conclusion, and considering the information in this section as a whole, poverty is a long-term problem facing all parts of Wales, but areas in the south in particular. Comparatively, data suggests that Wales has the highest levels of poverty across the four countries of the UK, and this is growing. There remain significant numbers who persistently live in poverty and find it difficult to escape its impact. And the effect of the current 'cost-of-living crisis' is pushing more people into poverty. Given this situation, in the proceeding sections we look at how government in Wales is responding.



The challenge of alleviating and tackling poverty in Wales

02

2.1 In this part of the report we set out how government is currently alleviating and tackling poverty in Wales. We highlight the limitations that Welsh and local government have in responding to poverty and also review current plans and strategies. We set out how alleviating and tackling poverty are resourced and how weaknesses in current arrangements limit the potential positive impact of this funding.

Tackling poverty remains a priority for all tiers of government but many of the levers to alleviate poverty are outside of Wales's control

Exhibit 5 – The purpose of 'Government'

Western democratic governments, in general, have the same key purposes, although vary in their delivery of them. They are:



To establish laws

Government has the legitimate authority to set law that everyone is required to follow.



Maintain law and order

Government, through the courts or police, can enforce law and punish those who do not follow it to regulate and protect others from harm.



Protect from external threats

Government can use military, diplomatic actions, or international agreements to protect citizens from threats.



Provide for the general wellbeing of citizens

Government attempts to ensure the health, happiness, and prosperity of citizens through healthcare, education, and other programmes.

2.2 However, in other respects the Welsh Government is significantly constrained, most obviously its inability to control key areas which are reserved by the UK Government. This includes welfare benefits, wider social security, taxation and employment law, such as the minimum wage. The Welsh Government is unable to influence the UK Government's policy or the powers they reserve, but often has divergent views on the role of the state in tackling and alleviating poverty. This leaves the Welsh Government without the key levers to act on this priority area.

UK and Scottish Governments' strategies

- 2.3 UK Governments led by both major parties had, until 2016, a longstanding target to end child poverty by 2020 that was enshrined in the Child Poverty Act 2010. This was repealed in 2016 and since then there have been no targets at a UK level.
- 2.4 In response, the Scottish Government set its own targets to reduce child poverty by 2030 through the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 (the Act). The Act requires the Scottish Government to publish a national delivery plan and annual reports, to be supported by joint annual reports from councils and health boards to demonstrate how the strategy is being implemented. The Act also establishes a Poverty and Inequality Commission to monitor progress and to hold the Scottish Government to account.
- 2.5 Progress on poverty in Scotland is aided by greater powers being devolved from Westminster. The Scottish Government has additional powers over finance and welfare that are not devolved to Wales which enables it to invest and develop policy that helps alleviate and tackle poverty directly. This includes the Scottish Child Payment. The Scottish Government estimates that this alone could result in a 5% reduction in child poverty in 2023-24¹⁵.

There is no national target for reducing child poverty and the current Child Poverty Strategy needs to be refreshed

2.6 In 2011, the Welsh Government set a national target to eradicate child poverty by 2020 under the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales. This was subsequently repeated in 2015 but the target was dropped during the Fifth Senedd. While the strategy remains relevant and provides the focus for work on poverty, it does not reflect the current challenges facing people in Wales and has no targets to focus work and effort.

15 Scottish Child Payment – estimating the effect on child poverty (gov.scot)

- 2.7 The Welsh Government also produced a [Child Poverty: Income Maximisation Action Plan](#) in November 2020. This set out a series of practical actions to help increase the incomes of families living in poverty, reduce essential living costs and provide support to build their financial resilience. It does however fall short of a refreshed and up-to-date strategy.
- 2.8 From our fieldwork we conclude that a revised national strategy would enable the Welsh Government to articulate an up-to-date vision, direct delivery to support objectives and put in place appropriate measures to judge impact. A refreshed national strategy would help set a strategic vision with expectations and ambitions for the whole public sector to achieve collectively. And the need to update and refresh the strategy has been recognised by the Minister for Social Justice, who has committed to introduce a revised Child Poverty strategy¹⁶. In addition, under the [Child Poverty Strategy \(Corporate Joint Committees\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2021](#) the four recently established [Corporate Joint Committees \(CJCs\)](#) will also be required to review local child poverty strategies and produce a report. This provides an opportunity for councils to reconsider their local plans and collaborate with neighbours. Finally, the Welsh Government has also recently consulted on new national milestones which include measures related to improving household income per head and income poverty¹⁷.
- 2.9 Despite this, as the sections below outline, the Welsh Government and other public bodies continue to invest in a wide range of initiatives to tackle and alleviate poverty. The Welsh Government, via specific cost-of-living grants, supports public bodies to deliver programmes that help those in poverty, and much money is being invested in this way. Within councils this includes Families First and Flying Start programmes, as well as targeted grants, such as those for food or period poverty. These elements could be better co-ordinated and measured through a national strategy and indicators.
- 2.10 To enhance this at a time of acute need, some have called for the Welsh Government to do more following the Scottish Government's lead. For example, the Bevan Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have called for the Welsh Government to implement a 'Welsh Benefits System', which would take existing programmes of financial and other support for families and integrate them into a single welfare system. This would mean the myriad of current funding programmes, many of which are administered by councils, would be amalgamated into a single fund, which would help streamline and improve efficiency.

16 [Welsh Parliament, Plenary Record, 13 July 2022](#)

17 [Shaping Wales' Future: Using National Indicators and Milestones to measure our Nation's progress \(gov.wales\)](#)

Councils and partners have prioritised work on poverty, but the mix of approaches and a complicated delivery landscape mean that ambitions, focus, actions and prioritisation vary widely

- 2.11 The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 placed a duty on councils to produce a child poverty strategy to support the national strategy. Since 2015, this has been discharged through local well-being plans from councils or Public Service Boards (PSB). Overall, our review found a complicated picture of how public bodies are working to address poverty across Wales.
- 2.12 While all councils have well-being objectives that would support those living in poverty, only 12 have specific objectives addressing poverty. We found that five councils also have dedicated anti-poverty strategies that are council-wide and draw on their corporate and well-being objectives. Other councils target individual dimensions of poverty, such as energy or food poverty. Some also include poverty as a PSB objective or theme to be addressed alongside other partners. Nine also reference poverty within their Strategic Equality Plans.
- 2.13 The strongest strategies provide clear definitions of poverty and link to wider corporate objectives. Swansea's Tackling Poverty Framework is an example of this, setting out a vision with themes and outcomes, linked to other plans. Bridgend also effectively links its plan by using consistent objectives with other strategies. This enables a focus on poverty to exist alongside wider corporate objectives.
- 2.14 A common theme across many councils is, however, a lack of ambition to address the causes of poverty over a longer period. While the key drivers of poverty, primarily decisions on welfare spending and entitlements, are outside the control of councils, there are local changes that can be made to support people. Most councils are reactive only and focus on delivering the Welsh Government's grants and programmes. This leads to an inward focus on what the council can achieve for people in crisis who are already known to them and within the public service delivery system. Those on the margins of poverty, and those being pushed into poverty by the cost-of-living crisis, are often overlooked.
- 2.15 Worryingly, some officers we interviewed stated that poverty strategies are not needed because they see all their councils' work as inherently about tackling poverty. Having a strategy was seen as resulting in poverty being 'lost' in the overall corporate plan. Whilst this view recognises the holistic nature of poverty, it can also result in a lack of co-ordination and silo working, with each service focusing on delivering the programmes they are responsible for rather than how they collectively contribute to the bigger picture.

- 2.16 Employment remains a dominant theme for councils, both as a cause of poverty but also its solution. However, as noted above, this often overlooks the large and growing numbers of people who experience in-work poverty. The dominant narrative concerning those on welfare benefits in poverty, results in an overly significant focus on employability programmes over other actions. Whilst minimum income levels are not set in Wales, employability should be seen in the context of the wider issues that those living in poverty experience.
- 2.17 Due to the broad nature of the poverty agenda, there are a wide range of potential partners for councils to engage with. This includes PSBs, CJs, Regional Partnership Boards and other local forums. We found that councils have adopted widely different approaches to working in partnership to tackle and alleviate poverty. And, because of the limitations in the national strategy and a lack of targets, the inconsistency between councils is adding an unnecessary level of complexity to partnership working, especially with public bodies that operate regionally.
- 2.18 To enable the greatest impact from services, councils need to plan specifically to tackle and alleviate poverty, drawing on a range of evidence and meaningful collaboration with partners. However, we found that planning is often focused on the contribution of the council alone, rather than the contribution of all partners. Councils deliver a large range of services that help and support people living in poverty, but few look to build on this with meaningful links with other partners. The lack of co-ordination often means councils are reliant on individual service areas forming their own links, despite lacking the spare capacity to do this.
- 2.19 Collaboration in some councils takes place within existing forums that overlap with the poverty agenda, both internally and externally, but other councils have gone further. Swansea formed a council-wide co-ordination group that brings senior officers together within their Tackling Poverty Framework. Similarly, Wrexham has recently created a cost of living working group to support local residents in relation to benefit maximisation, reducing costs on energy, fuel poverty and winter pressures. Others, such as Monmouthshire and Flintshire, have drawn together external reference groups to involve other partners, such as food banks or Citizens Advice. The PSB has played a similar role in Ceredigion.
- 2.20 The best councils have prioritised their work with third-sector partners to invest and deliver advice and information activity to specifically help those in poverty. For example, Cardiff funds the local Citizens Advice and the Cardiff and Vale Credit Union to provide bespoke advice to individuals who present themselves to the council's Money Advice Team. To ease their partners' administrative burden, Bridgend has a central grants team to streamline grants provided.

- 2.21 Effective leadership is also required to drive the poverty agenda forward. Strong and coherent leadership can offer the impetus for councillors and officers to break silos to work collaboratively to deliver shared objectives and provide a focus for partnership working. We found that only eight councils have a cabinet member responsible for poverty and eight councils a senior officer with corporate responsibility for leading on tackling poverty.
- 2.22 One growing concern is the difficulty in attracting sufficient talent to deliver what are often very demanding and challenging services. A significant proportion of council officers we interviewed noted a growing problem of recruiting and retaining essential staff, both within their organisation but also key third-sector partners. Issues of growing workloads, reductions in capacity, increasing burn-out from frontline work during the pandemic, less competitive salaries and the impact of inflation on wages were all flagged as major risks.
- 2.23 In 2022, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) established a Poverty Group bringing council officers together to share approaches, identify opportunities for joint working and lobby for change. Whilst at an early stage in development, this group offers a potential forum for good practice exchange and collaboration. The roles of officers that attend are wide reaching, reflecting the broad poverty agenda, but also the absence of a central anti-poverty team in most councils. This will make it more difficult for the group to co-ordinate and agree concerted action because the responsibilities and influence of individual officers vary from council to council. This is something the WLGA is planning to address.

Large sums of money are being invested in tackling and alleviating poverty, but no one knows how much, and the way money is allocated and managed limits its positive impact

The Welsh Government makes significant revenue funding available to councils to alleviate the impact of poverty but the total level of spending is unknown

- 2.24 The Welsh Government funds a wide range of programmes that support people in poverty. This includes wide-ranging awards, such as the Children and Communities Grant, and more targeted funding, such as digital inclusion. Collectively, we estimate that this revenue funding is worth over £1 billion in 2021-22¹⁸.

2.25 In response to the cost-of-living crisis, the Welsh Government has allocated additional funding in both 2021-22 and 2022-23. £152 million was provided in 2021-22 to fund £150 support payments for households living in properties within council tax bands A to D. A further £25 million was also made available for a discretionary council tax scheme, with payment criteria to be set by councils according to local need. This has included:

- a payments to those who are exempt from council tax;
- b payments to people living in homes in bands E and F;
- c payments to those receiving free school meals;
- d supporting homelessness prevention support; and
- e top-ups for discretionary housing payments.

Additional budgeted support for 2022-23 totalled £162 million and includes a winter fuel support fund, holiday hunger support, and vulnerable family support.

2.26 Because the poverty agenda is so broad and poverty-related activity is captured within the broader Welsh Government base budgets, it is difficult to identify and quantify the specific level of spending that is being provided to tackle and alleviate poverty in Wales. This, in turn, makes assessing the impact, or the value for money, of this funding difficult to measure.

No council knows the full extent of its spending on alleviating and tackling poverty

2.27 No council has a dedicated budget or can identify the total amount of revenue spending used to tackle and alleviate poverty. As with the Welsh Government, this is largely due to the wide definition of programmes that support those in poverty, limitations in budget designations and a lack of understanding on how money is allocated and used.

2.28 Some councils, such as Swansea and Carmarthenshire, do know the total Welsh Government grant funding provided to them and committed on poverty initiatives. But no council officer we interviewed was able to quantify the proportion of spend or how many staff in frontline services are helping to alleviate and tackle poverty. Given the significant amount of activity related to poverty, this would be a significant task that councils do not have the capacity to undertake.

All councils are dependent on grants but weaknesses in programmes mean that funding is not making the impact it could

2.29 The vast majority of officers we interviewed acknowledged that the funding provided by the Welsh Government is essential to helping councils tackle and alleviate the impact of poverty. Without this funding it is clear the situation would be much worse than at present. Despite this, during our interviews, some common weaknesses were identified.

- 2.30 Poverty-related Welsh Government grants are often linked to defined programmes for councils to deliver, such as Families First. These are often seen as separate to council-initiated programmes within corporate plans. As a result, often when the Welsh Government funding stops the programme stops, leading to short-term, limited interventions.
- 2.31 Funding is generally allocated to initiatives that are tightly focussed and/or have a high administrative burden to process and deliver. Often grants have short timescales which can make it challenging to submit comprehensive, impactful bids or to fully spend funding prior to the financial year-end. Many we interviewed and surveyed noted that the annual cycle of bidding does not support councils to tackle the more difficult and longer standing problems. This promotes spending on easy to deliver initiatives, rather than on activity which can make a greater impact. It also means that officers are under significant pressure to deliver existing work and to respond to grants due to a lack of resources after cuts during years of austerity.
- 2.32 Weaknesses in guidance and grant restrictions can also limit the impact of funding. Some grant restrictions mean that groups that experience poverty, such as residents in Houses of Multiple Occupancy or members of the travelling community, are unable to receive funding. Digitally excluded residents can also be prevented where schemes are administered and resourced online.
- 2.33 This increases the importance of having knowledgeable customer-facing staff in order to navigate the complex range of funding streams and the different programme conditions. Some councils reported finding it particularly challenging to recruit to grant-funded roles in recent years due to the short-term nature of project working and uncertainty of whether grant funding will continue. Multiple application processes, programme eligibility restrictions, and difficulties in applying have all led to lower levels of take-up under some programmes, which has required councils to invest additional resources to increase their coverage. These each function as barriers to people receiving the intended support and limit the impact of programmes and interventions.

- 2.34 Unsurprisingly, some councils have sought to address this by streamlining activity to reduce bureaucracy and duplication. For example, Rhondda Cynon Taf brought together separate funding programmes into a single service to help target action on the most vulnerable and to avoid people slipping through the net. The Council acknowledges that there is more to be done, but this new single gateway approach is supporting the council to shift to focus on early intervention and prevention. Likewise, Bridgend brought together five different employment funding streams under Employability Bridgend to create a single gateway to services. Caerphilly also recently created a £3 million cost of living hardship fund to undertake a series of initiatives aimed at providing support to those most in need¹⁹.
- 2.35 Grant funding to support people in poverty has also historically been provided by EU Structural Funds (ESF). Between 2014 and 2020, Wales spent £595.12 million of ESF on a range of skills, youth employment and attainment, and employability programmes. The UK Government has replaced ESF with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) and the Levelling Up Fund (LUF). The SPF monies are calculated using a formula and are allocated directly to councils rather than managed by the Welsh Government. The LUF is allocated by the UK Government according to bids against assessment criteria.
- 2.36 Overall, the Welsh Government has calculated that Wales will receive substantially less funding through the SPF than ESF, a shortfall of £772 million between 2021-22 and 2024-25²⁰. And with LUF based on bids, some areas of the country are likely to miss this funding in its entirety. Consequently, Wales is predicted to have less money available to tackle and alleviate poverty going forward²¹.

19 <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/23019836>

20 Welsh Government, [Written Statement: Loss of funding to Wales as a result of the UK Government's arrangements for replacement EU funding](#), May 2022

21 Welsh Parliament, [The Shared Prosperity and Levelling Up funds: what's the latest?](#), May 2022



Delivering local government services to help people in poverty

03

- 3.1 In this final section of our report, we consider how councils are shaping their services to consider the needs of people living in poverty, looking at the importance of experience mapping and the work of poverty truth commissions. We look at how councils are changing and modernising service delivery and how they need to shape these responses to consider people in poverty. Finally, we consider how councils evaluate past work to help determine future policy choices and consider the robustness of socio-economic impact assessments.

The lived experience of poverty is mostly not shaping council service delivery

- 3.2 Because people often only seek help at the point of crisis, it is crucial that councils create person-centred services. This is especially important in respect of poverty which carries a stigma of embarrassment and shame. People we spoke to noted that by the time they seek help, they are often dealing with extremely personal and seemingly impossible problems, which creates considerable stress and anxiety. If councils are to fully understand the nature of living with poverty, and how the decisions they take and the services they deliver improve or worsen this experience, then they need to understand what it is like to navigate your way through what can often be complex and daunting council processes.
- 3.3 Working to understand these experiences at scale is best done through experience mapping – **Exhibit 6**.

Exhibit 6 – Experience mapping

Experience mapping can help a council understand the overall experience a customer has with its services, physical and digital. It then allows councils to make better-informed decisions when setting policy and agreeing budgets to ensure they are doing all they can to help people in poverty. Identifying barriers that are common to people seeking support from councils can prompt changes to services making it a less daunting and more inclusive experience for people.

Elements of a successful experience would include:

- focusing on poverty from the user's lived experience to determine whether services are geared and structured to help tackle poverty;
- judging how well councils are targeting resources where they can have the most effect;
- collaborating with people to understand the causes behind their experiences of poverty;
- ensuring consistent face-to-face contact is the norm to offer a personal service and to talk through the process and act as an advocate to help them navigate through services;
- working to understand 'what matters' to that person;
- understanding the barriers to that person accessing services –where the pinch points are, and whether services are sufficiently co-ordinated and integrated; and
- involving the individual in creating an action plan that helps lift them out of poverty.



- 3.4 One approach to gathering 'lived experience' views to help inform policy and budget choices is through the use of 'Poverty Truth Commissions.' Poverty Truth Commissions are models of direct citizen engagement in decision-making, usually hosted by councils but independent of them. They bring together people with lived experiences of poverty, decision-makers, public and private-sector leaders and wider civil society. A nationally recognised model of practice, Poverty Truth Commissions enable residents to directly inform and shape the policies and programmes of councils and partners to ensure those experiencing poverty offer challenge and feedback.

- 3.5 An additional benefit of the Commissions is the relationships that are forged between the community – both sets of Commissioners will gain valuable insight from the other, who can then feed this intelligence back to their social and professional networks. They have proved successful in enabling councils like Glasgow and Leeds to design services that better meet the needs of people in poverty.
- 3.6 The Swansea Poverty Truth Commission²² brings together those living at the sharp end of poverty with key decision makers to work together towards tackling and overcoming poverty in Swansea. It is placing those affected by poverty at the heart of decision-making about poverty by creating safe spaces for people with lived experience of poverty to tell their stories, build relationships with each other, and with influential decision makers in the local area. The Swansea commission has just been established and is in the early stages of organising its programme of work. However, other councils have not adopted this model and people we interviewed noted that service users are not consistently shaping policies, service delivery choices and budgets for tackling and alleviating poverty.

The experience of commissioners in Swansea...

'Going to the services is like continually hitting a brick wall. Not just having to repeat the story all the time, it's being unable to reach a person who is not a jobsworth.'

'There needs to be recognition that services cavuse a lot of people's trauma. Whether that is social care, education or health. A lot of the services cause trauma. Not even just about communication. The system has processes to work through that are damaging.'

'It's like the underground with the train coming into the platform and it's 'mind the gap.' This gap has just got wider and wider over the years.'



Source: Audit Wales interview with the Swansea Poverty Truth Commission, April 2022

22 [Swansea Poverty Truth Commission's website](#)

Councils are changing how they deliver services as a result of the pandemic and ongoing budget pressures, but the new models of delivery are not always helping people in poverty

- 3.7 The pandemic created many challenges for councils. Offices, schools and workplaces closed, and face-to-face interactions between many staff and people requiring services stopped. Consequently, councils had to respond creatively to ensure that the services people needed and depended on were available and accessible. In the wake of the pandemic, these innovative solutions, strategies, and technologies have helped to create a new service delivery landscape.
- 3.8 Councils and citizens alike are now living in a challenging and transformative climate where 'brick-and-mortar' provision is less prevalent and relevant, and digital is becoming the default options for many services. For some councils, this is part of a journey that they embarked on pre-pandemic. For others, it is just the beginning. For all councils, however, it is important they continue to connect with and work to help those who most need their assistance, in particular people in poverty. This should be central to the decisions and choices they make.

Shifting services online continues to grow in importance but digital exclusion remains a major challenge, especially for people in poverty

- 3.9 There are clear benefits to shifting to digital services, for both service users and councils. Encouraging those who are at most risk of poverty to access services online helps people to be more self-reliant, gives them access to up-to-date advice and can help users who are unable to travel long distances access the services they need. For councils, they are able to reduce administration costs, and with a well-designed system, can ensure services are better integrated.
- 3.10 However, digitising services can cause difficulties. Data published by the Office for National Statistics²³ (ONS) shows that the number of people who have never used the internet remains stubbornly high in Wales – 8% of the population. This is higher than Scotland and England but lower than Northern Ireland. The areas in Wales with the poorest levels of connectivity are Powys (20.3%); Central South Wales Valleys (15.4%); and Gwent Valleys (14%). The areas with the best connectivity and internet usage are Monmouthshire and Newport (4.2%); Swansea (5.3%); and Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan (5.4%).

- 3.11 In terms of economic activity status, at a UK level those with the poorest levels of internet usage are retired people (28.9% of whom never or rarely use the internet) and people who are economically inactive (9.5% of the total). Research published by Lloyds²⁴ also found that Wales has the highest number of people who have not used the internet in the last three months – 13% of the population – and those earning under £20,000 are more likely to be offline and less able to use digital services.
- 3.12 Ensuring the growing shift to digital does not leave anyone behind or, if people struggle to access services digitally, support is put in place to help them is therefore critical. We found that most councils recognise the problem of digital exclusion, with 14 of the 22 Welsh councils having adopted a digital strategy and many of these focus on tackling digital exclusion. For example, Cardiff Council's digital strategy makes a commitment to reduce potential exclusion from digital services by:
- a employing officers with specific responsibilities for digital inclusion;
 - b providing 4G devices to those who are unable to afford to purchase equipment;
 - c offering digital surgeries across the city;
 - d introducing free weekly drop-in sessions to provide help assistance to people who are less IT confident; and
 - e creating a dedicated public phone line for digital queries.
- 3.13 However, the range and comprehensiveness of support in Cardiff is not always replicated elsewhere. While 15 of the 22 councils specifically reference the negative impact of digital exclusion as an area for action in a corporate plan or strategy, only 12 councils are providing people with access to a digital skills inclusion programmes and only five provide devices to help people access online services. In addition, no council has a single landing page or dedicated web resources focussed on poverty that bring together all the councils work in one easy-to-find area which proactively promotes in a single place what people need to do get the help they require.
- 3.14 One priority of the Welsh Government's Child Poverty: Income Maximisation Action Plan is to ensure families in Wales are supported to claim all the financial support they are entitled to through the development of a 'tell us once' approach. Having a 'single entry point' to services helps to reduce complexity in the system and places the citizen at the heart of service delivery by requiring councils to make the links and provide services rather than someone having to write, telephone or even attend each service individually to ask for help.

3.15 The findings from our review highlight that councils still administer, manage and provide services in a wide variety of ways and no council has created a single gateway into services. For example, people have to complete multiple application forms that often record the same information when applying for similar services. Having to tell and re-tell your story in order to access related services, as information is not shared between organisations, can discourage people from seeking help. For instance, links with other types of support provided by other organisations such as managing debt, food banks and wider advice vary widely. There is also an enduring resistance to sharing information across systems, between council departments and with partners because of concerns over data protection and a fear of being penalised.

Comprehensive and integrated publicity, advice and information services can significantly help people who are struggling but the picture across Wales is mixed, and councils find it hard to prioritise preventative work because of the high numbers of people in crisis

- 3.16 The public service landscape is wide, varied and complex with a mix of organisations from different sectors delivering a huge range of services which are rarely co-ordinated with one another. People can find it difficult to navigate the system and access the support they need, particularly when they are struggling to make ends meet.
- 3.17 We found some positive examples of how council and third-sector services are integrating and collaborating to provide a comprehensive response focused on helping people in need. For instance, in Cardiff, the local Citizens Advice Bureau, the Cardiff and Vale Credit Union and Cardiff Council advice services operate from community Hubs across the city. Through this collaborative work the council and its partners are providing a one-stop advice service which is helping people to access more money and support.
- 3.18 Similarly, Denbighshire County Borough Council are working through the Rhyl Community Development Board to target those in the most need and provide support and assistance. Some councils also regularly run advertising campaigns to ensure people are aware of what is available and to what they are entitled. Flintshire's [Holiday Hunger](#) campaign which supported the distribution of thousands of meals during school holidays and Neath Port Talbot and Swansea councils' joint communication campaign to increase take-up of pension credit.

- 3.19 However, these approaches are not always replicated, and some councils operate independently of partners, which can create difficulties for people in poverty. Those we spoke to noted that they often find it hard to find information, do not know where to start, or who to go to, particularly when multiple organisations offer similar services. Feedback from people who use advice services noted that when they are able to access services quickly and can get in-depth advice and support, this is often sufficient to prevent smaller problems turning into an unmanageable crisis.
- 3.20 Citizens Advice Cymru and Swansea Council both noted that people are often reluctant to engage with a council and seek help if they also owe money to them, fearing that the council will pursue them for non-payment of debt. To address this, Swansea Council is developing a Corporate Personal Debt Recovery Policy which will set out the principles for supporting people that have overdue personal debt with the council.
- 3.21 During interviews, most officers felt that council activity is mostly focused on dealing with people in crisis rather than preventing people getting into poverty in the first place. This is mostly a reflection of the high levels of demand for services from people who are struggling day to day and are unable to manage without support. For example, Citizens Advice recently reported that demand for their services has increased by 200% in the last two years²⁵. We also found that the main focus of prevention work is the provision of timely advice, especially ensuring people access the benefits they are entitled to, and supporting people into employment. These services can be provided directly by councils but also by third-sector bodies, in particular, organisations like Citizens Advice.

Community hubs offer an opportunity for councils to help people at the point of crisis

- 3.22 Shifting services to communities, particularly through the development of community hubs, allowed councils to co-ordinate responses and ensure services remained available during the pandemic. These hubs strengthened the visibility of council services in the community during the pandemic and were often the first port of call for vulnerable people. With poverty in mind they can also act as the first port of call to ensure people get help.
- 3.23 Some provided services directly while others offered a triage service, assessing need and making referrals to other council or partner services. During the pandemic, they helped distribute fuel poverty funding and fast-tracked self-isolation payments. For example, Cardiff created 22 community hubs, Ceredigion has five community hubs, Newport four community hubs, and under the North Wales Economic Ambition Board there are five Covid Support Hubs.

25 <https://www.itv.com/news/wales/2022-10-03/its-a-scary-time-citizens-advice-sees-200-jump-in-people-needing-help>

3.24 Hubs are also often multi-purpose, providing and hosting a range of activities and services that are used by lots of different people. The range of services reflects local need and may be delivered by local people, other organisations or public agencies. They also support better joint working and more integrated services. They can transform existing, unused buildings and provide a focus for community-led regeneration. Their core strength is that they provide a stronger presence in communities and are able to respond more quickly to people who are struggling. Community hubs can therefore help build more cohesive and resilient communities.

Understanding the potential impact of policy decisions and knowing what works vary widely

3.25 Understanding the impact of policy and budget decisions, both at the point you agree action but also when you evaluate the impact and success of your decisions, is essential if councils are to maximise their efforts in tackling and alleviating poverty. A thorough and informed impact assessment will help public services to avoid making bad decisions and support them to deliver their legal responsibilities. And having comprehensive, good quality and relevant data that is evaluated, scrutinised and challenged will strengthen accountability and enable corrective action to be taken quickly.

All councils undertake some form of assessment to determine the likely socio-economic impact of policy choices and decisions, but the approach varies and is not always effective

3.26 The Socio-economic Duty came into force in Wales on 31 March 2021. It aims to improve decision making and help those who are socio-economically disadvantaged. Councils now have to think about how their strategic decisions, such as setting objectives and developing public services, can improve equality of outcome for people who suffer socio-economic disadvantage. In particular, when making strategic decisions on tackling poverty, councils must demonstrate how they are effectively considering the views of those affected by those decisions. This can only be achieved by involving people through effective engagement and consultation, considering their views carefully and ensuring that policy reflects the views of citizens.

3.27 We found that all councils undertake some form of assessment to determine the likely socio-economic impact of decisions. Many use an integrated impact assessment that brings together all statutory and key corporate policy considerations in one place, focussing on the implications in relation to, most usually, corporate plan priorities; well-being objectives; the Welsh language; equalities; wider council legal, people and finance issues; and the new socio-economic duty. Some also consider the Human Rights Act and the UN convention of human rights for children.

- 3.28 Swansea Council has a comprehensive integrated impact assessment that not only considers in detail the likely impact of a policy decision on the various statutory responsibilities but also includes sections covering:
- a involvement activity setting out those the service has engaged with in determining its strategic policy such as partners, service users and those it is co-producing with;
 - b an assessment of the cumulative impact/mitigation to ensure the policy is considered in the round showing how it links across services provided across the council;
 - c how the council service will monitor and evaluate impact to be able to make changes swiftly; and
 - d an action plan setting out the activities the Council will take as a result of the Integrated Impact Assessment.
- 3.29 Caerphilly also includes six detailed socio-economic assessments rather than a single catch-all consideration. These cover specific assessments looking at low income/income poverty; low and/or no wealth; material deprivation; area deprivation; socio-economic background; and socio-economic disadvantage. This enables the Council to consider socio-economic issues in significant depth to better target action.
- 3.30 We also found weaknesses in other councils' socio-economic impact assessments. Several impact assessments we reviewed concluded that there is no need to conduct a thorough assessment even when the policy has clear socio-economic implication. For example, reductions in services and cuts in budgets. In others we found that some completed assessments were very brief, skirting over the potential socio-economic impact of a policy and lacked detail on critical socio-economic implications in relation to COVID Recovery plans, changes to criteria for grants and other assistance. And this was despite several councils framing the policy presented for decision in helping it to address poverty.
- 3.31 The evidence drawn on and used to complete assessments also varies in terms of depth and quality and not all use the rigour adopted in Swansea and Caerphilly. For instance, we found consultation and involvement information was often out of date drawing on pre-pandemic data or insufficient to provide meaningful feedback to help shape conclusions in the impact assessment.

Understanding need and drawing on a wide range of data to shape responses remain an area for improvement and most councils struggle to demonstrate the value of their work in alleviating and tackling poverty

- 3.32 Good understanding of local and national data is needed to develop specific, timely actions that can make the most impact. It also enables councils to identify effective programmes with positive outcomes, which is essential to creating effective oversight and scrutiny of activity. Most councils draw on WIMD data to identify local areas of deprivation. Whilst this is a useful foundation, this data is mostly historic and out of date. It is now particularly weak as it was last updated prior to both the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis²⁶.
- 3.33 We found, however, that councils are not making full use of the significant amounts of data they collect and hold. At present, councils focus more on recording delivery of specific projects capturing numbers assisted and not enough on impact, wellbeing and the wider benefits of investment. These weaknesses and limitations in coverage and focus do not allow for a comprehensive evaluation of performance, especially as councils often report information in silos and do not collate data to enable a comprehensive picture of activity and impact across the council to be drawn. Similarly, we found that there is little comparison or benchmarking of performance with other councils to help identify opportunities for improvement. This is not helped by the lack of national indicators and targets. As a result, while councils can identify the actions they are taking, these weaknesses make it difficult to truly know how well they are performing and whether the resources they are spending are making the best impact they can and represent value for money.
- 3.34 Efforts to improve data gathering and analysis to better target actions and impact are therefore an area for improvement. The Isle of Anglesey and Ceredigion councils have developed dashboards of publicly available data to help prioritise future action. The Isle of Anglesey worked in collaboration with Data Cymru to develop such a dashboard.
- 3.35 Going further, Neath Port Talbot uses a low-income tracker that combines council and publicly available data to improve how and where they target support for those who are known to the council and already receive services. In addition, Data Cymru has recently published a [data tool](#) that collates publicly available key data in one place.
- 3.36 Cardiff collects good data to demonstrate the impact of its interventions. In 2020-21, the Council assisted roughly 17,000 people through its advice centre and through the Adviceline, and claimed an additional £14 million in welfare benefits for people. Similarly, the 'Caerphilly Cares' programme in 2020-21 secured an additional £5 million of income for council-house tenants in the county borough and prevented any evictions from council housing.

26 The [Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation](#) was last updated in 2019.



Appendices

1 Audit approach and methods

1 Audit approach and methods

Approach

Our approach was to understand councils' strategic planning and delivery of actions to support those who live in poverty. We examined the ability to alleviate the immediate impact of poverty on people, as well as councils' ability to tackle it as an issue in the long term.

This report sits alongside other forthcoming reviews examining how councils empower the resilience of communities and the role of social enterprises in delivering public services. Combined they serve to examine how councils empower citizens to tackle and prevent issues developing into a crisis that requires statutory intervention.

We examined all 22 principal councils in Wales at a high level, managing delivery to be mindful of the pressures council officers are under during both the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. We ensured coverage was sufficient to draw a view on the whole sector but not to significantly detract from officers' delivery. Our approach was flexible to fit around officers when agreeing and delivering our fieldwork.

Methods

We completed our review between April 2021 and September 2022 and used a range of methods in delivering our review:

- **document review:** we reviewed documentation from the Welsh Government, councils, Public Service Boards and other relevant public bodies. We also reviewed a range of publications from charities, representative groups, other public bodies in other UK countries, and publications by the UK Government.
- **interviews** – we undertook a range of different interview types:
 - officer interviews – we interviewed officers nominated by all Welsh principal councils, generally those with responsibility for poverty or an associated service area, such as employability, benefits, or Welsh Government programmes. These took place between January and May 2022.
 - national interviews – we interviewed representatives of Welsh charities, food banks, third-sector groups, and civil servants. We also interviewed representatives of UK charities, organisations, and officers of councils in other UK countries. These took place between March and July 2022.
 - academic interviews – we interviewed academics focused on poverty and destitution from three UK universities. These took place between March and April 2022.
- **focus groups** – we undertook two types of focus groups:
 - officer focus groups – in line with our approach, some councils felt it was more appropriate for us to speak to a range of officers in focus groups to reduce our impact on service delivery.
 - lived experience focus group – we held a focus group in April 2022 with representatives of Swansea Poverty Truth Commission to understand and listen to their experiences.
- **survey** – we surveyed 16 clients of Rhondda Cynon Taf Citizens Advice for their experiences of poverty in June 2022.
- **data analysis** – we collected and analysed a range of publicly available datasets from the Welsh Government, the UK Government, the Office for National Statistics, and third-sector organisations.



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Agenda Item 14

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**
Date of meeting: **8th March 2023**
Report Subject: **Audit Wales: 'Together we can' Community Resilience and Self-Reliance**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Steve Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate Overview and Performance**
Report Submitted by: **Bernadette Elias, Chief Officer Commercial and Customer**
Sarah King, Head of Governance, Partnerships and Democratic Services

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance and Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	23.02.23		08.03.23					

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Governance and Audit Committee with the Audit Wales Report, '*Together we can' Community resilience and self-reliance* (Appendix 1).

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Audit Wales published their report, '*Together we can' Community resilience and self-reliance*' in January 2023.
- 2.2 This study is the final report of three under a themed programme of work undertaken by Audit Wales to look at how local government is alleviating and tackling poverty.
- 2.3 This final review focusses on understanding how local authorities are creating the conditions needed to transform ways of working and empower communities to thrive as independently as possible. Specifically Audit Wales looked at the priority placed on community resilience and self-reliance in local authority plans, and how local authorities are equipping people to be less reliant on often over stretched local authority services.
- 2.4 Overall Audit Wales concluded that local authorities face a challenging and uncertain financial future but find it difficult to empower people and communities to be more self-reliant and less dependent on services.
- 2.5 Audit Wales identified 2 recommendations which are detailed below:
- R1 - To strengthen community resilience and support people to be more self-reliant, local authorities need to ensure they have the right arrangements and systems in place. We recommend that local authorities use the evaluation tool in Appendix 2 to:

- self-evaluate current engagement, management, performance and practice;
- identify where improvement is needed; and
- draft and implement an action plan with timeframes and responsibilities clearly set out to address the gaps and weaknesses identified in completing the evaluation tool.

R2 - To help local authorities address the gaps they identify following their self-evaluation, we recommend that they:

- formally approve the completed Action Plan arising from the evaluation exercise;
- regularly report, monitor and evaluate performance at relevant scrutiny committees; and
- revise actions and targets in light of the authority's evaluation and assessment of its performance.

2.6 Full details of the report can be found in Appendix 1.

3. **Next Steps**

3.1 The recommendations will be included within the relevant business plan for monitoring and reporting, this will be the Tier 3 Chief Officer Commercial and Customer and Tier 2 Head of Governance, Partnerships and Democratic Services.

4. **Options for Recommendation**

4.1 Prior to the final report being provided to the Council, CLT and relevant Officers provided comment back to Audit Wales on their findings.

4.1.1 **Option 1**

Governance and Audit Committee is assured that the Next Steps, identified in paragraph 2.5 will appropriately respond to the Audit Wales recommendations.

Option 2

4.1.2 Provide comment on the Audit Wales review and Next Steps, identified in paragraph 2.5 to address the recommendations for Officers to implement in order to provide continuous improvement.

5. **Monitoring Arrangements**

5.1 The recommendations from Audit Wales will be included within the business plan and updated on a quarterly basis.

5.2 The information will be reported within the Joint Finance and Performance Report to Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

5.3 Regular meetings are held with Audit Wales to assess progress of reports.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Audit Wales Report ‘*Together we can’ Community resilience and self-reliance*’

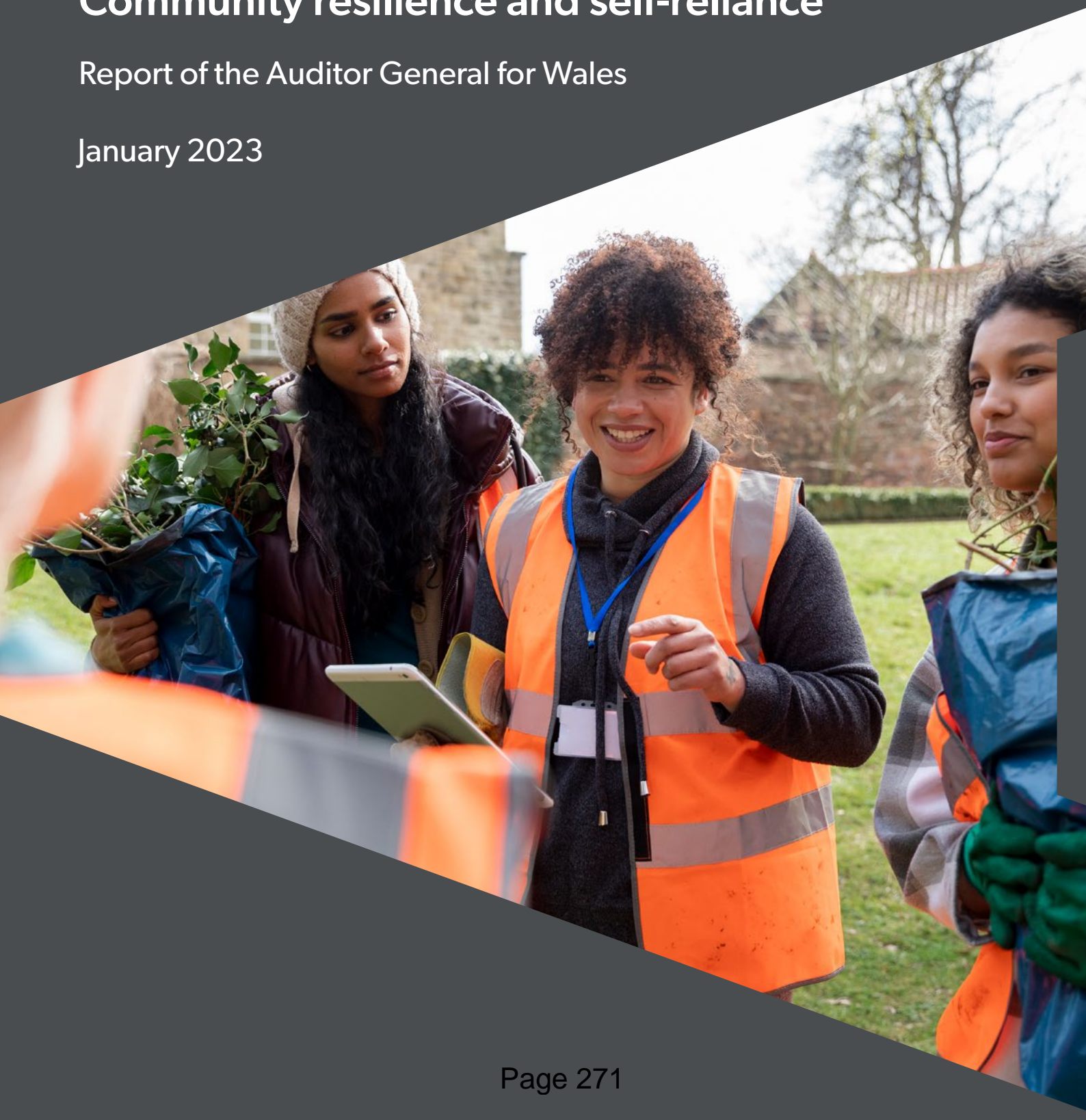
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'Together we can'

Community resilience and self-reliance

Report of the Auditor General for Wales

January 2023



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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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Context

- 1 This study is the final report of three under our themed programme of work looking at how local government is alleviating and tackling poverty. Through our work we have sought to:
 - **Assure** people on how public money is being spent on tackling and alleviating poverty and provide evidence on where change is needed.
 - **Explain** the scale of the poverty challenge facing people in Wales and set out how all tiers of government are working to address this. We highlight good practice but also identify areas where improvement is needed.
 - **Inspire** a change in how money and services can be delivered in the future identifying new ways of doing things to help address poverty.
- 2 Our first report provided a baseline showing that poverty is the major challenge facing all tiers of government, and Wales has the greatest and deepest levels of poverty in Great Britain. With this context in mind, our second report looked at how local authorities are working to grow and expand social enterprises to help local government deliver more services and reduce demand.
- 3 This final review focuses on understanding how local authorities are creating the conditions needed to transform ways of working and empower communities to thrive as independently as possible. We specifically look at the priority placed on community resilience and self-reliance in local authority plans, and how local authorities are equipping people to be less reliant on often over stretched local authority services.

Local authorities face a daunting challenge

- 4 In the last 15 years, local government in Wales has faced significant pressures, dealing with crisis after crisis, which has changed the way services are provided. Austerity tested local government's ability to change and react. Local authorities adapted well in responding to this challenge, devising and implementing a range of efficiency measures that reduced the cost of services, but also finding innovative ways of working. Similarly, local authorities were flexible when responding to COVID-19, finding new ways of delivering services that protected people while overcoming the many challenges the pandemic presented.

- 5 Local authorities are now facing more significant challenges as a result of the current cost-of-living crisis, and it is clear that they are again being challenged to support people where demand for services is likely to increase. But, because capacity within local authorities has been eroded and opportunities to deliver further efficiency savings are exhausted, local authorities will have to find other ways of maintaining services and continuing to support the wider community and in particular those most in need. This is also set against the current situation of public spending not keeping pace with inflation. While the Welsh Government revenue settlement for local authorities in 2023-24 will increase by 7.9% on a like-for-like basis compared to the current year¹, this is below the rate of inflation which was estimated to be 9.3% at the end of November².
- 6 Against this challenging situation, local authorities are showing an increasing interest in encouraging and growing community resilience; equipping people to do more for themselves and be less reliant on the state. Resilience is not a new concept and has been central to how local authorities have traditionally responded to local emergencies such as flooding, natural disasters and, indeed, the pandemic. In this context, resilient communities are defined by their ability to deal with a sudden calamity but are also able to quickly bounce back to their pre-crisis state.
- 7 But at a time of reductions in budgets and uncertainty in public finances, the idea of equipping people to do more for themselves on a more sustained basis, is increasingly appealing. It responds to the pressure of where to prioritise local authority activity and ensure there is an adequate safety net in place for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Consequently, community and self-resilience has begun to appear as a priority in more local authority corporate plans and strategy documents, not merely as a response to a natural disaster but as means of equipping people to be able to adapt and directly manage the problems they face.
- 8 The application of resilience thinking is not, however, without its risks and challenges. While promoting resilience can be seen as a pragmatic response by local authorities faced with difficult decisions about how to use their reducing resources, it is important to recognise the limits of what might be achieved; resilience might serve as a strategy for helping communities to cope with adversity, but it cannot overturn structural inequalities and deliver solutions to generational issues like poverty alone.

1 [Written Statement: Provisional Local Government Settlement 2023-24](#)

2 www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/timeseries/l55o/mm23

Key findings

- 9 Overall, we conclude that local authorities face a challenging and uncertain financial future but find it difficult to empower people and communities to be more self-reliant and less dependent on services.
- 10 In **Part 1**, we consider why community resilience and self-reliance are important for local authorities. We found that much of the current narrative on community resilience is framed by the need to respond to emergencies and civil contingency requirements. This narrow focus can lead to local authorities missing opportunities to make a broader impact and, in some cases, even unintentionally encouraging dependency.
- 11 Importantly, recent Welsh Parliament legislation such as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is mapping a new direction for public service delivery. However, we found that this has not translated into the fundamental shift with people being encouraged to do more for themselves and being less reliant on local authority services. While 19 of the 22 local authorities are prioritising community resilience, too often the work is poorly defined and the actions that underpin plans are narrowly focussed.
- 12 In **Part 2**, we outline how local authorities are currently working to engender more self-reliance and greater resilience in communities. We summarise current activity highlighting how local authorities are framing their changing relationship with communities. In this section, we also consider the effectiveness of approaches, noting areas of strength and good practice but also the barriers to making positive change.
- 13 The growth in volunteering, community asset transfers, community hubs, emerging work on community empowerment and the work of community navigators shows the commitment of local authorities to transform how they operate. However, given the societal, financial and demographic challenges facing Wales, there is a need to scale and speed up activity. We acknowledge that the shift in emphasis from local authorities doing less and requiring others to do more is not easy to achieve.
- 14 There are also significant barriers to overcome, both within local authorities but also communities. Capacity, resources and skills are scarce, people are facing tougher choices and struggling to cope with the cost-of-living crisis. Communities and local authorities themselves also have different abilities and are starting from different places with their own unique challenges to overcome.

- 15 Positively, as a result of COVID-19, there is a huge amount of goodwill and commitment within communities that local authorities can build on and use. However, the view of partners and stakeholders we spoke to suggests that some local authority services are returning to their pre-pandemic ways of working and the opportunity to shift to being an 'influencer' and 'enabler' rather than 'direct provider' is potentially being wasted.
- 16 In **Part 3**, we look to the future, setting out approaches and learning from elsewhere. We highlight positive practice and examples of how others are seeking to address the challenge of enabling people to be less reliant on local authority services and how they are supporting and enabling this transition. We frame this around the following:
- creating a clear vision of how things will work in the future;
 - holding a two-way dialogue and communicating what change will 'look' and 'feel' like;
 - revitalising the role of local authority members as community champions;
 - refocussing the work of local authority staff;
 - recognising that recasting community relationships will require different solutions in different places; and
 - ensuring wealth stays local and works for all the community.



The pandemic showed communities can play a more active role and become less dependent on public services but sustaining this requires local authorities to change how they work. I recognise how difficult this is in the current climate but also believe that change is necessary. Our report makes the case for change and provides helpful recommendations to help authorities make the transition.

Adrian Crompton
Auditor General for Wales



Recommendations

- 17 Our recommendations are set out below. We expect each local authority to consider the findings of this review and our recommendations, and that its governance and audit committee receives this report and monitors its response to our recommendations in a timely way.

Recommendations

- R1 To strengthen community resilience and support people to be more self-reliant, local authorities need to ensure they have the right arrangements and systems in place. We recommend that local authorities use the evaluation tool in **Appendix 2** to:
- self-evaluate current engagement, management, performance and practice;
 - identify where improvement is needed; and
 - draft and implement an action plan with timeframes and responsibilities clearly set out to address the gaps and weaknesses identified in completing the evaluation tool.
- R2 To help local authorities address the gaps they identify following their self-evaluation, we recommend that they:
- formally approve the completed Action Plan arising from the evaluation exercise;
 - regularly report, monitor and evaluate performance at relevant scrutiny committees; and
 - revise actions and targets in light of the authority's evaluation and assessment of its performance.



Defining community resilience and self-reliance

01

The policy shift from 'doing' to 'enabling' and 'influencing'

- 1.1 Nurturing resilience is not an exact science. Neither is it a traditional service or a neatly defined activity in its own right. An understanding of the evolving role of government and the changing relationship between citizen and state provides the foundations; from this evolving position, local authorities can develop their approach to community resilience, embedding consistent and sustained ways of working that ultimately empower people and communities.
- 1.2 This fundamental shift – from 'providers' to 'enablers' – is not insignificant or easy to achieve. Austerity drove local authorities to reflect on their role and in many ways necessitated a shift towards adopting a more enabling approach. At the same time, however, the budgetary constraints that demanded this shift in the first place, also significantly reduced the capacity and expertise needed to navigate this tricky transformation. However, with a challenging and uncertain future for public finances³, increasing demand for statutory services through an aging population⁴, and Wales already facing some of the worst poverty levels in the UK⁵, local authorities have little option but to focus their efforts on equipping communities to become more resilient and self-reliant.
- 1.3 Broadly, the terms resilience and self-reliance should encapsulate both community preparedness for adverse situations; the support to promote individuals' independence, and everything else in between. From those we reviewed, we found Public Health Wales's⁶ definition of resilience to be the most rounded; 'an ability to draw on strengths and assets to cope or thrive in adversity – be that a severe or acute life event or the chronic stresses of everyday life'. The 2019 Public Health Wales report on community resilience sets out a number of key contributors to community resilience, highlighting its importance as a means of tackling complex societal issues such as poverty. These are set out in **Exhibit 1**.

3 Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), ['Autumn Statement is a missed opportunity to help our communities'](#), November 2022

4 Welsh Government, [Population and household estimates for Wales \(Census 2021\)](#), June 2022

5 Auditor General for Wales, [Time for change – Poverty in Wales](#), November 2022

6 Public Health Wales, [Resilience: Understanding the interdependence between individuals and communities](#), 2019

Exhibit 1: Public Health Wales' 'Building blocks of resilience'



Human capital

the innate and acquired personal attributes including skills and education, capacity and local knowledge



Social capital (community level)

the extent of social networks and connections within a community, effectiveness of local community and voluntary organisations (support, participation), and resources of public, private and third sector organisations that are available to support a community



Physical/built capital

the physical infrastructure including homes and roads, access to amenities



Natural/environmental capital

access to green and blue space, availability and use of natural resources



Financial or economic

capital: income, wealth, access to resources, civic and social enterprises

Source: Public Health Wales, [Resilience: Understanding the interdependence between individuals and communities](#), Public Health Wales, 2019

- 1.4 Defining social resilience and community self-reliance is not helped by different interpretations and meanings in the contexts of key legislation and various functions of local authorities. For example, as a core principle of the [Social Services and Well-being Act \(Wales\) 2014](#), local authorities have long focused on supporting people to live independently by providing information, advice and assistance to prevent the escalation of their needs. This shifts the emphasis for local authorities to playing a more 'enabling' role, albeit in the context of supporting those needing care and support. This has not been without its challenges and there is still more to do to fully embed the principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and to ensure organisational cultures support its implementation⁷.

7 Audit Wales, [The 'front door' to adult social care](#), Audit Wales, 2019

- 1.5 At the other end of the spectrum, under the [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#), Local Resilience Forums are responsible for co-ordinating local responses to threats and emergencies. Community resilience is a well-known term in this context but relates specifically to ensuring community preparedness for and adequate response to events such as pandemics, flooding, or terrorist incidents. The inherent focus and emphasis on emergency planning clearly relates to events or situations which threaten serious damage to human welfare, the environment or to the security of the UK⁸. Beyond the scope of emergency planning, resilience in this sense has little to do with promoting self-reliance in daily life and equipping people to be less dependent on the state.
- 1.6 A further interpretation is set out in the context of the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) – specifically, the focus on climate change and air quality in the national wellbeing goal of 'A resilient Wales'. Although clearly relevant in a broader sense, this has little to do with creating the social and human conditions that help communities thrive without calling on local authorities. Developing resilient communities and self-reliant citizens, therefore, requires local authorities to 'let go' of control and involve and empower people. Despite 'involvement' being one of the five ways of working under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, public bodies are often not creating opportunities for citizens to be involved from the early stages of design through to evaluation and must do more to include the full diversity of the population⁹.

8 Cabinet Office, [The role of Local Resilience Forums](#), Cabinet Office, 2013

9 Auditor General for Wales, [So, what's different? Findings from the Auditor General's Sustainable Development Principle Examinations](#), May 2020

Most local authorities recognise the need to create more resilient and self-reliant communities, but very few have clearly defined what this means or entails

- 1.7 Given the current policy and legislative drivers, it is not surprising to find that local authorities' interpretations of resilience and self-reliance are rooted in either emergency planning or social care, and/or linked to their corporate efforts to reduce carbon emissions and boost biodiversity. Whilst these approaches clearly make an invaluable contribution to people's well-being and safety, their narrower focus can mean local authorities risk missing opportunities to make a broader impact and, in some cases, even risk encouraging dependency.
- 1.8 At the time of our review, we found that most local authorities have no clear definition of resilience or self-reliant communities, despite 19 having well-being objectives specifically aimed at promoting community resilience. In a survey of local authority lead officers, fewer than half could define what is meant by a resilient community and only three could define characteristics of a self-reliant individual.
- 1.9 All local authorities reference the national well-being goals, including a more resilient Wales, in their plans, but there is little development from these into local objectives or actions. The lack of definition for the terms 'community resilience' and 'self-reliance' means they are nebulous and often little more than catch-all statements. Between different local authorities, and between different services within local authorities, it can mean various things.
- 1.10 During interviews, we asked local authority officers to define community resilience and self-reliance (**Exhibit 2**). Some believed these are not possible to define, or that definitions are not a priority, or their meaning varies significantly between different services. While this recognises the holistic nature of resilience to the individual and the need to consider it in all service areas, it also illustrates the importance of a clear definition for different parts of the local authority to work towards.

Exhibit 2: example of local authority officers' definitions of community resilience and self-reliance



'A resilient community is one that reacts to a challenge.'



'Cannot be defined.'



'Looking at opportunities to make people in their communities feel more engaged.'



'The local authority working with communities and individuals to find the things that matter in life without the local authority being the first port of call.'



'Can be defined differently wherever you go. Different areas need different support.'



'Working with residents and the community to share responsibility, helping communities to do more for themselves and give them more control over what they can do to support local people in their communities.'



'The process and outcome of engaging with the third sector and investing in their knowledge of their communities.'

Source: Audit Wales interviews with local authority officers.

“ A resilient community is one that reacts to a challenge ”

- 1.11 Other officers placed more emphasis on the need to engage with communities and the third sector to develop resilience – both as an outcome and a process. The end outcome would be that citizens work as a community to address issues rather than going straight to the local authority. There was also recognition of the need for resilience to empower communities to cope both with crises, but also grasp opportunities. Having a clear definition, therefore, enables impactful actions to be devised that embody these key features. Many officers we interviewed also view their role as helping to network community groups and involve them in creating infrastructure and systems to support their development. Others see the role of the local authority as a co-producer alongside partners continuing to deliver services rather than the end goal of passing all delivery onto partners.
- 1.12 Despite this, we found some promising approaches. Bridgend's Corporate Plan¹⁰ includes a well-being objective to help 'people and communities to be more healthy and resilient'. This is framed around reducing or preventing an escalation of need in response from the local authority and to enable community-based solutions. Newport's refreshed Corporate Plan for 2022-27 includes a well-being objective to make Newport 'a supportive city where communities and care are at the heart of what we do'¹¹. The plan describes how the ambition is for communities to support each other in a more co-operative approach.
- 1.13 Successful transformation requires local authority leaders, both officers and elected members, to clearly articulate the benefits of the new ways of working and successful outcomes. This, in turn, allows officers in each service area to take actions to the greatest benefit locally, such as commissioning investment in social enterprises to keep funding within the local economy. Consequently, third sector and social business organisations that support groups that promote community resilience felt that local authority leadership was paramount both externally in creating the needed dialogue within communities but also within local authorities to stimulate culture change.
- 1.14 In addition, many local authorities continue to frame their activities around continuing to be a service delivery body and have further work to do to help create a change in mindset and culture. Self-reliance is clearly influenced by the things that local authorities do. But it is also shaped by the things they do not do – it follows that, by supporting communities to do more for themselves, local authorities will ultimately change or limit what they do.

10 Bridgend County Borough Council, [Corporate Plan 2018-23](#)

11 Newport City Council, [Corporate Plan 2022-27](#)

1.15 Through our interviews, we found that local authorities are comfortable in discussing direct provision of activities – for example, activities to support vulnerable people – but are less clear on their role in moving towards supporting communities to do more for themselves. Getting the balance between helping those who need support and enabling others to do more is a key challenge facing local authorities in creating greater levels of self-reliance.



The current approach of local authorities to creating more resilient communities and self-reliant people

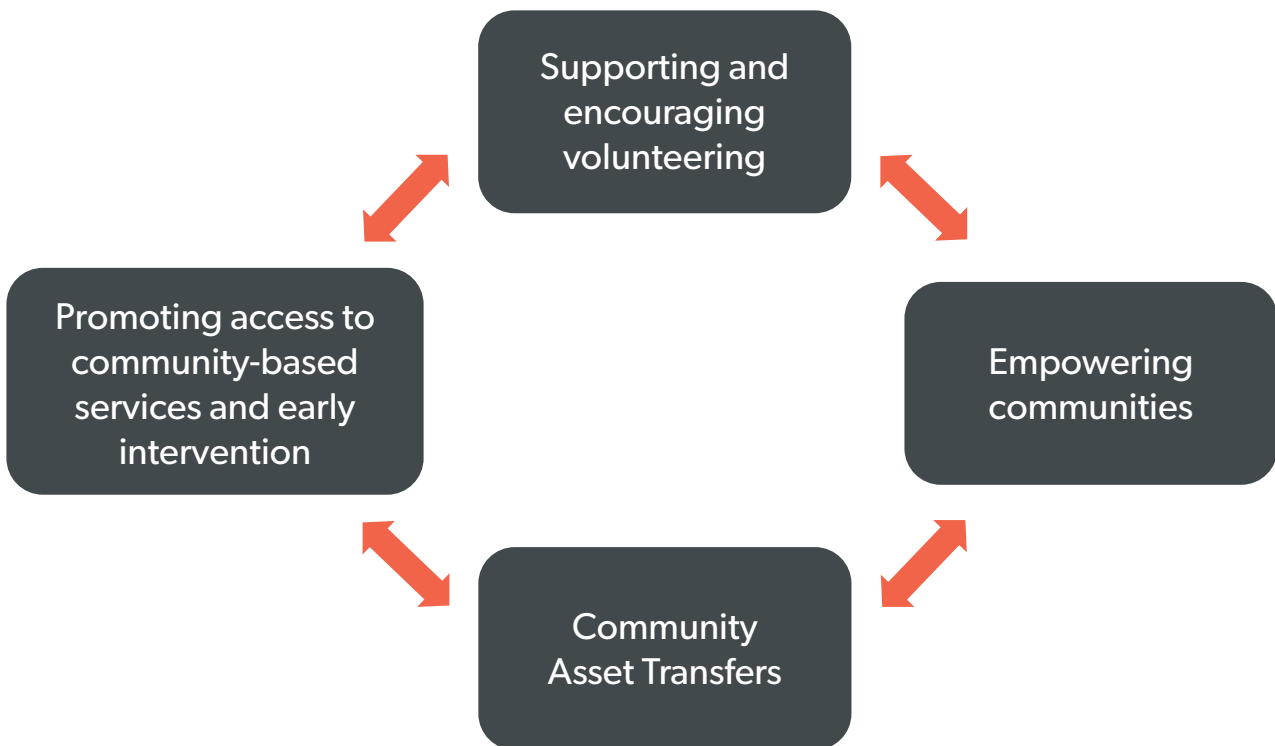
02

2.1 In **Part 2** of the report, we outline how local authorities are currently working to engender more self-reliance and greater resilience in communities. We summarise current activity highlighting how local authorities are framing their changing relationship with communities. We consider the effectiveness of approaches, noting areas of strength and good practice but also the barriers to making positive change.

Local authorities have a mixed track record in helping to build community resilience and strengthen self-reliance

2.2 In terms of where local authorities have traditionally pitched their efforts in helping to build stronger and more self-reliant individuals and communities, their work in recent years has broadly fallen into one or more of the following areas – **Exhibit 3**.

Exhibit 3: how local authorities are helping to create resilient and self-reliant communities



Source: Audit Wales

Supporting and encouraging volunteering

- 2.3 Local authorities value the additional support provided by volunteers to a range of services, and volunteers bring new skills, new ideas and a fresh perspective. There are many examples of volunteer programmes within local government, and volunteering has evolved in line with the changing policy and operational context of local authority services. As local authorities increasingly focus on community engagement and participation, they have also begun to take a more strategic approach to volunteer involvement in service delivery.
- 2.4 Through our interviews with local authorities, we found that volunteering initiatives often work best when the local authority has a close working relationship with their local County Voluntary Council (CVC)¹². We also found some positive examples of how local authorities are building upon these local relationships to boost volunteering. For example, [Caerphilly's Employee Volunteering Scheme](#), and the Isle of Anglesey 'good turn schemes' in defined communities on the island.
- 2.5 There are nonetheless some challenges around volunteering. Not all communities have a strong volunteering demographic and communities themselves have different capabilities and capacity. For instance, we found good work taking place within Pembrokeshire, with the creation of an effective volunteer network undertaking a range of activities including good neighbour schemes, a 50+ network and a pharmacy delivery service. However, it is clear that Pembrokeshire has a strong local community with a good range of volunteers with the skills and abilities to thrive independently that the local authority and its partners can draw on. This is not the same everywhere in Wales, and it is clearly more challenging to encourage volunteers in the more deprived areas.
- 2.6 There is also a growing worry of burnout in the volunteering sector and a danger that while volunteers can play an important role, they are often 'papering over the cracks' of a system under stress. Volunteering has its place, but it needs to be managed and nurtured carefully and requires a shift in culture and policy within local authorities to be successful¹³.

12 Every county in Wales has a voluntary sector infrastructure body, generically called a County Voluntary Council or CVC. The key role of a CVC is to provide advice and information to local voluntary and community groups on volunteering, funding sources and a wide range of other issues.

13 Nesta, [Making the shift to people powered services: a cross-Government agenda](#), gov.uk

Empowering communities

- 2.7 A number of local authorities are similarly focusing their efforts on mobilising community capacity and empowering communities to identify their own needs and priorities and produce workable solutions. A good example of this is the work of Isle of Anglesey Council with Medrwn Môn, an independent agency providing support and advice to voluntary organisations and community groups. Under the 'network of alliances' initiative, Medrwn Môn is helping to create a system of local coalitions across the island which are empowered to identify the problems in their area, the assets that are available to help tackle these problems and the solutions needed to address them¹⁴. An evaluation of the success of this initiative was not available at the time of our audit.
- 2.8 Caerphilly has established a Community Empowerment Fund to support its Transformation Strategy. The first round of funding was shared between 18 community projects totalling over £40,000. The local authority has established criteria for applications to help focus efforts on improving resilience across the County Borough. While the criteria prioritise initiatives to support the establishment of new community groups, projects to support greater community cohesion, and projects aimed at tackling isolation and loneliness, although no update on the success of this work was provided at the time of our audit.
- 2.9 Despite the above, there is more that local authorities can do. Our analysis of responses to our survey of officers highlights that local authorities are not shifting efforts to empower communities to do more for themselves. From our survey of local authority officers, the activities where communities are more directly involved in delivery without local authority involvement are things like community litter picks, food banks and recycling and repurposing furniture, goods and clothing. While clearly important, these fall short of activities that help to encourage people to be more self-reliant and less dependent. In addition, procurement and grants processes are often not streamlined or agile enough to either encourage local groups to apply for funding or to get money to community organisations in a timely manner¹⁵.

14 Medrwn Môn, 'What is an Alliance?' Event, July 2022

15 South Wales Argus, 'Caerphilly Council still has budget for grants to charities', November 2022

Community Asset Transfers

- 2.10 A Community Asset Transfer (CAT) happens when a local authority transfers the management and/or ownership of a property asset to a town and community council, third-sector body or community group. This will sometimes include the delivery of any associated services. Transferring assets enables the retention of key local facilities and services that might otherwise be closed. Overall, we found that local authorities are not using CATs to help stimulate and build community resilience, and are mostly focussing on opportunities to reduce expenditure and divest themselves of assets that can no longer be subsidised.
- 2.11 Our survey of town and community local authorities highlights mixed performance in their experience of local authorities transferring assets. A common complaint from town and community councils is that transfers of community assets are unequitable and unfair. They often take far too long, with some reporting that the process took multiple years, resulting in the loss of potential funding opportunities, spiralling costs, and sudden changes in contract agreements. Local authorities were categorised as being excessively risk averse and poor at communicating.
- 2.12 Some respondents to our survey also flagged that they had no option but to take on the asset because of the threat that the service would otherwise be stopped. Several we interviewed reflected that local authorities were not transferring assets but liability with conditions placed on transfers that made success unachievable. Suggestions for improvement included providing an easily-accessible register of available transfers, more flexibility in transfer agreements, recognising the importance of cross-subsidisation and guaranteed ongoing support from local authorities.

Promoting access to community-based services and early intervention

2.13 Local authorities are recognising the need to reset their presence in communities and have focussed primarily on two approaches:

- **Community Hubs** – Several local authorities including Cardiff Council have developed 'community hubs,' providing a space for people to access key services. The Hubs also function as a place for people to meet and interact and are helping to reduce isolation and loneliness. In Gwynedd, the community hub in Maesgeirchen, Bangor has been instrumental in strengthening the local authority's presence on the estate, creating a more easily accessible and suitable space where services and the community can come together to work in partnership.

Likewise, the positive work of the Pembrokeshire Community Hub. This started life as a COVID-19 response for the county and was based in county hall in Haverfordwest. During the pandemic, the Hub took over 10,000 calls providing help and assistance so that citizens could access the food, prescriptions and the community services they needed. Following its success and in-depth engagement with communities and partners at a Community Activity and Wellbeing Day in June 2022, the Hub has recently been re-launched with a broader role¹⁶.

- **Community Navigators or Connectors** – Most local authorities are recognising the importance of the community navigator role to co-ordinate access to community-based services and to support the development of alternative non-local-authority provision. The job titles vary across Wales. Some are referred to as local area co-ordinators, others community navigators. Irrespective, local authorities recognise the value of these roles in helping to support resilience in communities. They often draw their roots from work in social care, and are focused on developing the provision of community-based services and activities, identifying potentially vulnerable people before their needs escalate and promoting access to alternative services¹⁷.

For example, Bridgend County Borough Council through its 'Local Community Coordination and Connecting Communities' programme which supports people whose needs would not usually meet the eligibility criteria for care and support. The local authority, working with Swansea University, has quantified and evaluated the impact of this programme, highlighting that every £1 spent delivers a return of £4. In addition, and more importantly, only 4% of people referred by the Local Co-ordinators to third-sector services subsequently needed to access statutory help from the local authority.

16 The Hub partnership includes Pembrokeshire Alliance of Voluntary Services (PAVS), Hywel Dda Health Board, Pembrokeshire County Council, Public Health Wales, PLANED, Volunteering Matters and West Wales Action for Mental Health.

17 The roles are rooted in the principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and are focused on prevention, helping to ensure people's well-being is maintained to avoid them requiring statutory care and support.

There are significant cultural, resource and capacity barriers to overcome in helping to create more resilient and self-reliant communities

2.14 While it is clear local authorities have a strong track record in some key areas that can help create more self-reliant individuals and resilient communities, our survey of senior local authority officers highlights that significant challenges remain – **Exhibit 4**.

Exhibit 4: barriers to creating more self-reliant and resilient individuals and communities identified by local authority officers



Lack of resources, limited skills and weak capacity to be able to drive this agenda.



Inability to redirect resources from service delivery to supporting communities to be more self-reliant.



A lack of trust between the council and residents and a perceived inability and appetite within communities to be more self-reliant.



The prevailing service delivery culture within the council of needing to be 'direct providers' rather than 'influencers' and 'enablers'



Limitations in joined up working with partners on the ground to foster stronger community involvement and influence.



Lack of a strategic vision and limited understanding of community needs and abilities

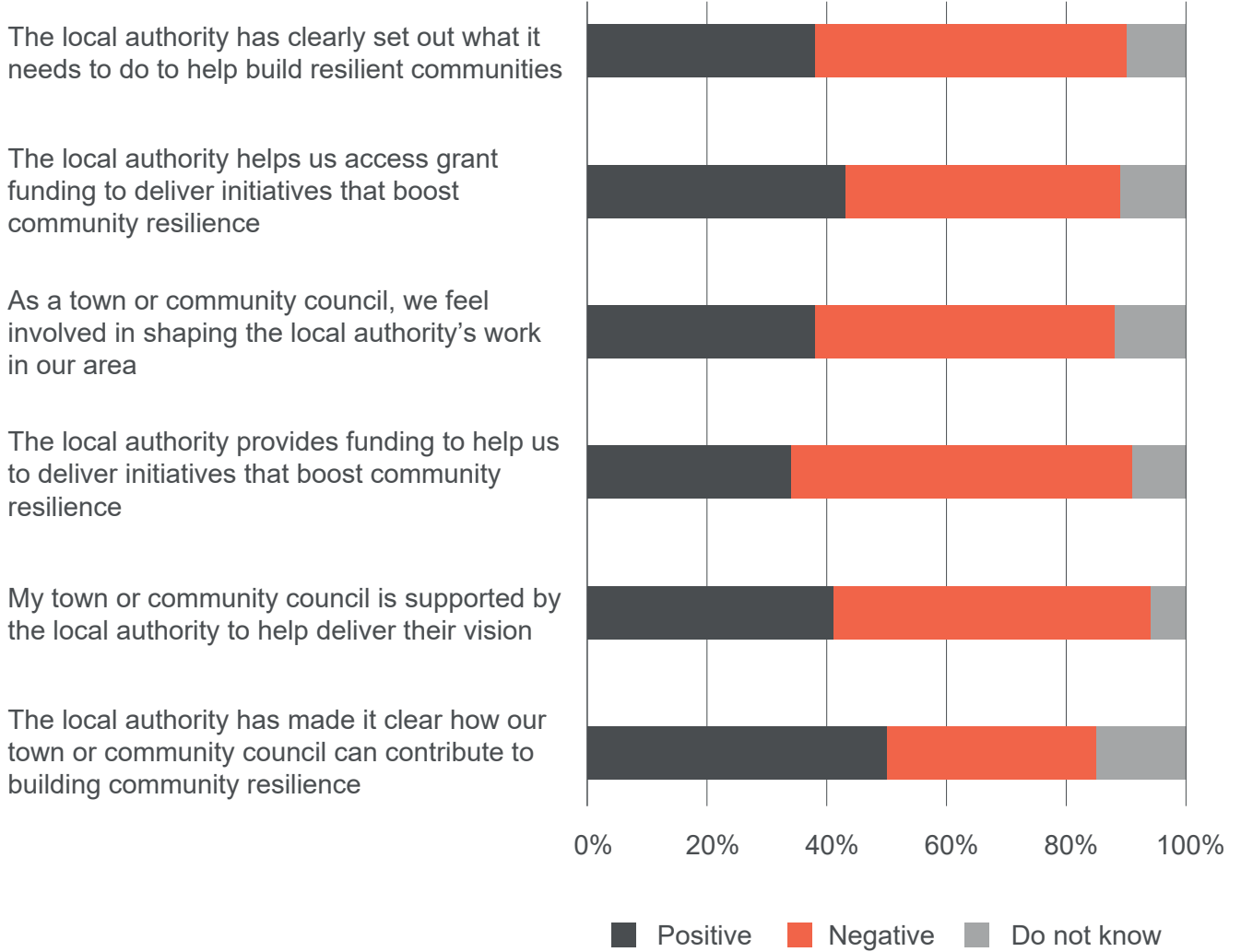


Ongoing challenges in helping connect and re-connect communities due to challenges of poverty, rurality, transportation and digital exclusion.

Source: Local Authority Officer Survey, Audit Wales analysis

- 2.15 A strong message from our interviews and survey work is that local authorities are not using resources to effectively stimulate community resilience. This is unsurprising. In the current fiscal climate, with an uncertain future, switching resources from often over stretched services is no easy thing. However, without some investment on the ground targeted at building capacity and encouraging resilience, it is clear some communities will not be able to respond, and responses where they happen, may not be sustainable.
- 2.16 Town and community councils are a key stakeholder in creating resilient and self-reliant communities. They are often well placed in local networks and hold significant community assets that can be used by groups. Collaborating with town and community councils opens the opportunity to involve communities more actively, which should increase public buy-in, and, in turn, help stimulate community resilience.
- 2.17 Town and community council survey comments had an overwhelmingly negative tone. While local authorities were felt to be effective at planning and creating a vision, they are overwhelmingly seen as ineffective at putting these into action. Poor communication, as well as delays caused by 'red tape,' were cited as the reasons initiatives failed. One respondent recorded that due to delays, 'the enthusiasm tends to tail off.' Survey responses on specific questions identify lots of opportunity for improvement. For example, while half of town and community council respondents felt that their local authority had set out what was needed to help build resilient communities, only 41% felt involved in shaping the approach and just over a third were clear on what they could and should be doing – **Exhibit 5**.

Exhibit 5: town and community council views on how well they collaborate with their local authority



Source: Town and Community Council Survey, Audit Wales analysis

- 2.18 Another strong line of feedback from town and community councils is the lack of funding and resources. Respondents noted that local authority budgets have shrunk, resulting in the local authorities 'not having enough experienced staff to cover statutory functions' let alone engage in community development activity. In addition, services that could often be in the frontline in engendering community resilience, are often absent on the ground. For instance, the lack of focus on the role of economic development to keep funding within local communities and prevent wealth extraction is seen as a missed opportunity.
- 2.19 Others highlight an enduring 'command and control' culture in some local authorities, strengthening the power imbalance between the local authority and its communities, framing the relationship as 'them' and 'us.' This limits local authorities' ability to fully engage with, involve and understand the community, and in turn creates difficulties for a community to fully trust the local authority. One respondent noted that their local authority continues to identify its own priorities and only then goes to local communities for validation of their work.
- 2.20 This is not helped by local authorities' performance monitoring and evaluation arrangements. Most local authorities reflect on their previous performance towards all well-being objectives and against key performance indicators as part of regular performance monitoring arrangements. However, we found that, because of weaknesses in how local authorities have articulated their vision around community resilience, performance monitoring is often limited to focusing on specific projects or initiatives and does not consider what these mean collectively in terms of community resilience.
- 2.21 There are no national measures collected that formally determine how resilient people and communities are in Wales. However, a number of publicly available datasets can be used as proxy measures to identify the key challenges facing local government in nurturing more resilient and self-reliant communities:
- active citizenship, measured through people's participation in democratic processes and decision-making drawing on data by [The Electoral Commission](#) showing the proportion of eligible voters who participated in local authority elections. Ceredigion had the highest turnout of voters in the most recent election in 2022, with 48.6% of eligible voters voting. This compares with a turnout of 31.3% in Torfaen during the same election. And across Wales, turnout on average was almost 4% lower in 2022 compared with the 2017 election. The data shows that turnout in local authority areas across some of the South Wales Valleys is consistently lower¹⁸.

18 [Views and Research, The Electoral Commission](#)

- the National Survey for Wales measures emotional and social loneliness over time, and these are key issues to address in promoting social capital. The data shows that almost a third of the Wales population reported feeling socially lonely in 2019-20. Data by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) breaks a similar measure down by local authority area. It shows that, by 2020-21, almost 40% of the Welsh population reported feeling lonely. Local authority areas in the South Wales Valleys, including Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen, are amongst those with the highest proportions of people having reported feeling lonely¹⁹.
- Data Cymru publishes data showing people's sense of belonging to an area and levels of community cohesion. It measures the number of people agreeing that they belong to the area; that people from different backgrounds get on well together; and that people treat each other with respect. It shows an increase in recent years – from an average of 51% agreement across Wales in 2016-17 to 70% agreement in 2020-21²⁰.

2.22 Through our review we found no local authority in Wales using these proxy measures to help evaluate or monitor resilience.

19 [National Survey for Wales](#)

20 [Well-being of Wales, Data Cymru](#)

The pandemic showed communities can play a more active role and become less dependent, but sustaining this requires local authorities to change how they work

- 2.23 Local authorities in Wales responded to COVID-19 with effective leadership and extraordinary sacrifices from frontline workers, elected members and senior leaders. The pandemic made people more aware of the role of local authorities in their lives. As such there is a window of opportunity to reset the relationship between local authorities and their citizens and to use the experience of collaborating with communities as genuine partners to reset relationships and expectations.
- 2.24 People we interviewed in particular noted that the pandemic had sparked a resurgence in 'community activism' with individuals, groups, and organisations working together to bring about change. Several people we spoke to also highlighted that the crisis encouraged local authorities to be more open, with officers and elected members showing a new willingness to involve and collaborate with people to find solutions to problems, often on a daily basis.
- 2.25 Our town and community council survey asked recipients how the pandemic had impacted on resilience and self-reliance in their local areas. Positively, a number of respondents stated that COVID-19 had supported communities to 'pull together' and support vulnerable people in the community by providing meals and medication to vulnerable people shielding, undertaking home deliveries and community activities like litter picking. Some also noted that having to operate with less support from their local authority also helped increase resilience, demonstrating that individuals and communities could do more for themselves.

- 2.26 We also found some good examples of local authorities taking learning from the pandemic to help improve community resilience. For instance, Gwynedd County Council are learning from the shift to prevention required by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 to influence its work and approach elsewhere in the organisation. By rolling out training on the 'What Matters'²¹ principles more widely to staff in other services, the local authority is seeking to redefine its work moving away from responding to need to identifying personal and local strengths and solutions as a way of supporting resilience. Similarly, Flintshire County Council is drawing on the positive response from communities during the pandemic to help address staff shortages in social care. Building on the success of people volunteering during COVID-19, the local authority is prioritising work to engage with its residents to encourage people to begin a career in care.
- 2.27 However, others we spoke to noted that much of the good work of reframing relationships and changing how people access and use services created by the pandemic have not been embedded and maintained. Despite local authorities having the experience of the pandemic to draw on how to do things differently, many are not grasping the opportunities to recast their relationship with people and communities. Through our interviews with officers, we found that a growing number acknowledge that a culture shift is required but are yet to articulate and set out what they will do differently to reduce dependency. As a result, there is a growing concern that local authorities are reverting to their traditional ways of working and not building on the enthusiasm and buy-in created by the pandemic.
- 2.28 This is echoed in the evidence of our local 'Springing Forward' review delivered in 2022. Our audit work focussed on how local authorities are taking learning from the pandemic to transform both their workforce and use of assets. We found that local authorities are increasingly seeing flexibility and agility in their human and physical assets as critical in the models of service delivery they will need to apply in the future. However, we found little focus on the need to create more resilient communities and self-reliant citizens, nor a prioritisation of the steps needed to reduce demand on services.

21 A 'What Matters' assessment is an outcomes-focused, strengths-based conversation between a social care practitioner and an individual to determine whether they have eligible care and support needs.



Looking to the future and learning from elsewhere

03

- 3.1 In this final part of the report we look to the future, setting out approaches and opportunities from other parts of Great Britain. We acknowledge that different parts of Wales will have different challenges to overcome, and no local authority is starting from exactly the same place. However, from our research there are opportunities to learn from elsewhere that can help local authorities make this transition.

With an uncertain future and growing complexity in service delivery, local authorities must change how they work and use resources differently to empower communities and individuals to build resilience and become more self-reliant

- 3.2 The scale of the current challenges facing communities across Wales is threatening to overwhelm local authority services. Entrenched poverty, longstanding inequalities, uncertain public finances and growing demand from people with a range of complex problems are creating a tough operating environment²².
- 3.3 It is clear that local authorities are going to face significant problems in the next few years with capacity continuing to be stretched, services increasingly becoming more targeted and potentially oversubscribed. There are likely to be fewer services delivered directly by local authorities, to fewer people, and local authority services as we know them will look hugely different by the end of the next decade.
- 3.4 As a consequence, a key focus for local authorities will need to be on steering people away from their services and replacing this with a co-operative approach, collaborating with communities and doing things differently. To achieve this, local authorities need to think and act differently, building capacity and social capital and encouraging communities and citizens to do more for themselves.
- 3.5 Positively, we are not starting from zero. As noted in Part 2, local authorities are already doing much and during COVID-19, we witnessed a community response on a scale and diversity that were previously unthinkable highlighting that many communities have significant depths of resilience. There is also much work already happening across Wales and the other nations of the United Kingdom from which we can learn. **Exhibit 6** sets these out.

²² For instance, see the conclusions of the [Future Trends Report Wales 2021](#) produced by the Welsh Government, which brings together a range of information to assist Welsh citizens and policy makers in understanding the big trends and drivers that are likely to shape Wales' future. The most recent report of December 2021 set out a series of significant challenges facing local authorities in the next decade and beyond.

Exhibit 6: key approaches in how local authorities are seeking to strengthen community resilience and self-reliance to reduce demand on services



Creating a clear vision of how things will work in the future.



Holding a two-way dialogue and communicating what change will 'look' and 'feel' like.



Revitalising the role of council members as community champions.



Refocussing the work of council staff.



Recognising that recasting community relationships will require different solutions in different places.



Ensuring wealth stays local and works for all the community.

Source: Audit Wales

Creating a clear vision of how things will work in the future

- 3.6 When embarking on a new direction, it is important for local authorities to articulate what their vision for the future is. Setting a vision helps to describe the local authority's purpose, what it is striving for, and what it wants to achieve. The vision should be derived from the local authority's core values and should function as a guiding principle to support long-term decision making.
- 3.7 Bristol City Council in its [Resilience Strategy 2016](#) set out a long-term direction of travel, reflecting the need for change at all levels: starting with individual citizens, through local communities and neighbourhoods, to the city as a whole and its place in the wider world. With the overall ambition of creating a flourishing resilient city the Council and its partners are focussing on:
- **Fair** – Every person living in Bristol has the assets and opportunities to enjoy a good quality of life.
 - **Liveable** – The city centre and neighbourhoods are great places for people of all ages to live, work, learn and play.
 - **Sustainable** – The city and region prosper within environmental limits through adopting new behaviours and technology.
 - **Agile** – Bristol citizens and leaders make effective decisions based on shared priorities and real-time information.
 - **Connected** – A strong network of local communities and organisations promotes trust, co-operation and shared action across the city.
- 3.8 Similarly, Oldham Council has embarked on a bold programme centred on becoming a co-operative borough with everybody doing their bit and everybody benefitting. The Council's [Corporate Plan](#) sets out an ambition of 'working with communities to reduce need by taking a community-centred, preventative approach to public services'. The starting point for the local authority was to recognise that everybody in Oldham has shared problems and ambitions and only by working together and looking at what the local authority, partners, community groups and individual citizens can do, are you be able to deliver change.

- 3.9 For Oldham, a whole system approach is required, engaging with communities to design and deliver things in partnership and emphasising self-help and responsibility by supporting communities to be more resilient. The driving ethos is to collaborate with communities to reduce need by focussing on four key areas of work:
- supporting local leaders and empowering people because the local authority is often not well placed to deal with issues at a community level;
 - encouraging staff to constantly look for ways to improve services or solve problems, supporting them to take responsibility and act boldly;
 - putting Oldham and its people first and doing what's best for communities; and
 - creating a high-performance culture which focuses on knowledge and using data to maximise the impact of spending and service delivery choices.

Holding a two-way dialogue and communicating what change will 'look' and 'feel' like

- 3.10 Setting a vision is one thing. Making this a reality requires local authorities to enable a cultural shift within their communities, away from seeing them as the first point of contact when seeking help to a shared understanding of the future role of the local authority. This will require local authorities to clearly articulate a strong message on what they can and will do in the future but also how they will support and encourage communities to do more for themselves. In driving this shift, local authorities will need to ask some fundamental questions, for instance:
- What do we need to do differently to develop and improve the resilience in each of our communities?
 - What support and assistance do we need to provide and maintain to ensure the resilience capability and capacity in each of our communities is retained?
 - How can we maintain community resilience beyond the voluntary sector?
 - What partnership approach and support are needed to truly enable community resilience?

- 3.11 As a starting point, local authorities will need to have an honest conversation with the public about the reality of future service provision and the potential role of the local community going forward. Within this conversation, local authorities will need to engage with communities to determine what they might be able to do without help, and how they can collaborate better with local people, local groups and local community assets.
- 3.12 Asset mapping is essential to highlight what already takes place and what others are doing, both for the local authority (elected members in their role as community champions and local authority staff) and local people. Likewise, local authorities will need to promote opportunities to apply for funding, directly to the local authority but also from other organisations, locally and nationally, and set out how they will support this activity.
- 3.13 An example highlighted in Scotland of intense involvement of communities in designing and planning new approaches is the use of Community 'Charrettes'. Supported with funding by the Scottish Government²³, the Charette model brings together stakeholders and decision makers to collaborate with experts to co-develop solutions to address problem issues in the physical environment of an area. Examples of recent successful Charrettes include Crieff and Glenrothes West. As such, Charrettes have the power to provoke transformation; but without careful preparation they can backfire, creating distrust within communities. Although traditionally applied to regeneration and planning work, the Charette approach is also being used in policy and organisational planning and change efforts.

Revitalising the role of local authority members as community champions

- 3.14 Elected members, as community leaders, can play a critical role in recasting the future relationship between the local authority and local communities. They often lead local partnerships, sit on the boards and management committees of voluntary groups, represent their communities with other organisations, such as the Police or Local Health Board, and regularly promote local services within the community.
- 3.15 Going forward, elected members will now have to deliver a different community leadership role, one which focuses on encouraging people to take more responsibility for their neighbourhoods and inspiring people to do more to help out in their local community. The role of elected members in developing stronger and more resilient communities cannot be underestimated. They will have key roles to play in:
- managing the expectations of communities, by setting out why things are changing and explaining why things will be different going forward;
 - identifying and collaborating with local community activists and leaders to ensure they are encouraged, supported and assisted to play a more prominent role in the future;
 - enabling the flow of two-way information and intelligence between local communities and the local authority, to identify the issues on the ground and provide the information local communities need to ensure they can get involved; and
 - acting as the channel between local community groups and the local authority to help develop local community-led solutions that strengthen resilience and meet local need.
- 3.16 A number of Welsh local authorities we interviewed highlighted the important role of elected members in developing community resilience and a rejuvenated role is central to strengthening self-reliance and community resilience. For example, in Cardiff, officers emphasised that members often 'approach life from the bottom up' and bring a deep understanding of community issues and the role the Council can play in helping communities to thrive.

3.17 In Oldham, the local authority has taken this approach a step further introducing in 2011 a [Local Leaders Programme](#). This has been vital in equipping elected members with the skills, knowledge, competencies and attitudes necessary for engaging with and driving a new relationship with communities. The course included a mix of elected member-led discussions, seminars offering useful tools and models, expert facilitators and speakers, and a range of formats for discussions and activities. The six modules covered:

- the local leadership role in communities;
- personal leadership skills and understanding;
- working inside the organisation and the politics;
- a deeper look at community leadership in Oldham;
- issues and challenges; and
- neighbourhoods, partnerships and outward communication.



Refocussing the work of local authority staff

3.18 As with the revitalised role for elected members, local authorities will also need to ensure their workforce has the skills to deliver a new way of working. Local authority staff are trained and experienced in delivering services to people, but the move towards community development and community resilience work will entail a quite different way of thinking and doing for some.

3.19 At present, the model for many local authority services is predicated on meeting need, with responses concentrating on delivering actions to address short-term acute issues. But with less emphasis on direct provision and more focus on influencing others to do more, the local authority worker of the future will need to be able to foster positive working relationships with networks and groups in communities.

3.20 To do this well will require staff to be good communicators who are able to encourage and motivate people, facilitating change and encouraging communities and individuals to step up and do more. Critically, staff will also need to be effective problem solvers and active agents for change, being less concerned with process and more driven by delivering solutions on the ground.

3.21 Local authorities will therefore need to develop their workforce to be able to respond to this new set of challenges. This will mean redefining roles and responsibilities for those both on the frontline, but also managers. Support and training will be required to help engender a new culture and ethos for service delivery, focussing on prevention rather than intervention.

Recognising that recasting community relationship will require different solutions in different places

3.22 Communities themselves are not uniform. They will have different capacities, skills and assets and each will come from a different starting point. It is clear that there are communities in Wales which are still coming to terms with their post-industrial past, where levels of poverty remain stubbornly high, and the socio-economic challenges are vast. The response to engendering community resilience in these areas will therefore be quite different to areas with high levels of affluence and an active history of doing many things for themselves with little intervention or support from local authorities.

3.23 Irrespective, it is important that local authorities recalibrate their relationship with their communities and find solutions that are specific to the differing needs of Wales. To be successful in achieving this shift of emphasis – from concentrating on need and service provision to focusing on mobilising the energies and strengths within communities – requires local authorities to create a new relationship with citizens, helping to build capacity and improve a community's potential to do more. For instance, by working with:

- **individuals**, including volunteers, to build capacity to do things that local authorities traditionally have done;
- **groups**, including faith and community groups, who offer a wealth of experience in helping support people and have established and successful links on the ground;
- **organisations**, including town and community councils, local businesses and anchor institutions, which are active in supporting local interests but now need to be encouraged to do more; and
- **networks**, including associations such as county voluntary councils and local partnerships which are better placed to influence others to do what is needed.

- 3.24 Research highlights that for communities to have the capacity to act, three things are generally required: the motivation and commitment to act; the resources required to support action; and the skills, confidence and understanding to act²⁴. Often the starting point for local authorities is to understand current capacity within a community, focussing on things such as local needs and issues and the relative strengths and weaknesses of a community. Key to this is to identify the community players and leaders and to establish forums, systems, and structures that encourage participation, engagement and involvement.
- 3.25 Scotland's Urban Regeneration Forum (SURF) has a track record in highlighting positive examples of community-led regeneration work and awarded Campbeltown in Argyll and Bute the most improved place award in 2020. In response to socio-economic challenge, the local authority initiated a wide-ranging programme of activities in Campbeltown that secured the participation of public, private, community and third-sector organisations²⁵.
- 3.26 A shared vision based on trust and perseverance helped to transfer ownership from the local authority into the community which is now empowered to shape and deliver projects that respond to local circumstances to the extent that Campbeltown is once again a thriving town centre, and an increasingly attractive place to live, work and invest in. Importantly, less reliance is placed on the local authority with the community doing far more for itself.
- 3.27 The work in Argyll and Bute has also been helped greatly by the policy framework adopted by the Scottish Government under the umbrella of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 – **Exhibit 7**.

24 Building Community Capacity – Resources for Community Learning and Development Practice: A Guide, Scottish Government, 2007.

25 Argyll and Bute Council, Campbeltown Regeneration.

Exhibit 7: Community Empowerment in Scotland

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 was introduced to help empower community bodies through the ownership or control of land and buildings, and by strengthening their voices in decisions about public services. To support implementation of the Act, the Scottish Government has sought to empower communities to do more for themselves through the provision of, for example:

- funding for community-led regeneration through the Empowering Communities Fund;
- funding participatory budgeting through the £1.5 million Community Choices Fund, giving people more power to make decisions on spending in their local areas; and
- making it easier for communities to take over land and buildings in public ownership through asset transfer and extending the community right to buy to all of Scotland;
- supporting community local authorities to represent communities' opinions and needs to public bodies; and
- giving communities the ability to request to participate in decisions and processes which are aimed at improving outcomes through participation requests.

Taken together, it is clear that national policy in Scotland has developed to encourage and support the ownership of assets by communities and for communities themselves to have more say in how services should both be provided to them and how public services should collaborate with them. Scottish communities now have legal rights to participate in policy development and buy assets from public bodies. They can shape services on the ground and play a greater role in deciding where resources are committed.

Ensuring wealth stays local and works for all the community

- 3.28 Community wealth building is a people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people. It is an especially helpful model for delivering services in a time of restrictions on public funding, austerity and growing economic uncertainty because it seeks to stop, or at least limit, the flow of money out of those communities that most need investment and financial stimulation, by reshaping the local economy and using an organisation's assets in vastly different ways.
- 3.29 To do this, community wealth building uses the economic power of large, locally-rooted organisations, commonly referred to as 'Anchor Institutions' – **Exhibit 8**. The way in which these institutions spend their money, employ people and use their land, property and financial assets can make a huge difference to a local area. The role of 'Anchor Institutions' cannot be underestimated, and they can play a defining role in creating and reinforcing local economic ties.

Exhibit 8: the role and value of Anchor Institutions

The term '**Anchor institutions**' is used to refer to organisations which:



Have an important presence in a place, usually through a combination of being largescale employers, the largest purchasers of goods and services in the locality, controlling large areas of land and/or having relatively fixed assets.

Are tied to a particular place by their mission, histories, physical assets and local relationships. Examples include local authorities, NHS services, universities, trade unions, large local businesses, the combined activities of the community and voluntary sector and housing associations.



Source: [Community business and anchor institutions](#), CLES, February 2019

3.30 The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) has been at the forefront of developing approaches to community wealth building. Through their work with public sector bodies, CLES have identified five key principles that are critical to delivering successful community wealth building. These are:

- plural ownership of the economy;
- making financial power work for local places;
- fair employment and just labour markets;
- progressive procurement of goods and services; and
- socially productive use of land and property.

3.31 Preston City Council have been long-term exponents of Community Wealth Building and are a positive example of an organisation that are using the CLES method, focussing on providing value for communities within the city directly and indirectly through their policy choices and spending power. The City Council's approach, often referred to as the 'Preston Model', is centred around tackling inequality by collaborating and building locally controlled economies, which put communities first²⁶. Practical examples of how the local authority has sought to deliver this vision on the ground include:

- using local authority procurement of services as a means of investing in the local economy and urging other local public sector partners to do the same. New procurement practices are providing opportunities for local SMEs, worker co-operatives, social enterprises and businesses to bid for contracts.
- encouraging suppliers to enhance the social value aspects of their contracts through the inclusion of training and employment opportunities in agreements.
- being an early adopter of the 'real living wage' locally and using the local authorities' profile and soft power to influence other employers to do the same.
- supporting and encouraging greater diversity of ownership in the local economy by investing directly in key assets in the centre of the city, bringing services back in-house and promoting worker cooperatives and community businesses;

- enabling more financial wealth to be retained locally by contributing to the establishment of a regional development bank – the North West Mutual – with Liverpool City Council and the Wirral. The new bank is tasked with improving access to financial services for local people and businesses, and has a specific aim to retain banking profits in the North West and recycle regional savings into business loans and mortgages.
- encouraging the Lancashire County Pension Fund to invest in Preston.



Appendices

- 1 **Audit approach and methods**
- 2 **Community resilience and self-reliance evaluation tool**

1 Audit approach and methods

Approach

Our approach was to understand local authorities' definitions and approaches to building social resilience and community self-reliance and how town and community local authorities are supported to promote resilience.

This report sits alongside other reviews examining how local authorities are addressing poverty, and another review considering the role of social enterprises in delivering public services. Combined, they serve to examine how local authorities empower citizens to tackle and prevent issues developing into a crisis that requires statutory intervention.

We examined all 22 principal local authorities in Wales at a high level, managing delivery to be mindful of the pressures local authority officers are under during both the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. We ensured coverage was sufficient to draw a view on the whole sector but not to significantly detract from officers' delivery. Our approach was flexible to fit around officers when agreeing and delivering our fieldwork.

Methods

We completed our review between September 2021 and August 2022 and used a range of methods in delivering our review:

- **document review** – we reviewed published research and documentation from the Welsh Government, local authorities and other relevant public bodies. We also reviewed a range of publications from representative groups, research organisations and public bodies in other UK countries.
- **interviews and focus groups** – we undertook a range of different interviews and focus groups:
 - officer interviews – we interviewed officers nominated by all Welsh principal local authorities, generally those with responsibility for leading on social resilience and community self-reliance. These took place between January and May 2022.

- officer focus groups – in line with our flexible approach, some local authorities felt it was more appropriate for us to speak to a range of officers in focus groups to provide more rounded information and reduce our impact on service delivery.
- national interviews – we interviewed representatives from national bodies, UK-wide think tanks, research organisations and representative bodies. These took place between March and July 2022.
- **surveys** – we undertook two surveys to inform our work:
 - a national survey of town and community councils – we invited all 732 town or community councils in Wales to share their views on social resilience and community self-reliance through an online survey. We received a total of 336 responses, including 195 fully completed submissions and a further 141 partially completed responses. The completed responses represent roughly one in every four town or community council in Wales, and we received responses from all 22 local authority areas.
 - survey of senior local authority officers. We invited all 22 local authorities to participate and received 21 responses. Despite being invited to take part, Pembrokeshire County Council elected not to respond.
- **data analysis** – we collected and analysed a range of publicly available datasets from the Welsh Government, the UK Government, the Office for National Statistics, and third-sector organisations.

2 Community resilience and self-reliance evaluation tool

Action	Yes	No	Do not know
Understanding the challenge and articulating your role			
We have clearly defined and agreed what community resilience and self-reliance means to us.			
Our vision makes clear what we need to do and what others are best placed to do.			
We have identified by service the activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that the authority must continue to provide; • those that can be delivered in partnership with others; and • those that the community can lead on. 			
We have communicated our definitions widely to ensure all key stakeholders understand what we want to achieve through our work on community resilience and self-reliance.			
Our key partners have identified how they will collaborate with us to strengthen community resilience and self-reliance.			
We have completed a place-based asset mapping exercise to assess community resilience and capacity for increased self-reliance.			
We know the number and types of organisations working locally that can help us improve community resilience and self-reliance.			
We know where there are gaps that we need to address.			

Action	Yes	No	Do not know
We have agreed the actions required to help improve community resilience and self-reliance in our area.			
We have set SMART objectives and actions on how we will improve community resilience and self-reliance.			
We are clear on the benefits and risks of our work on community resilience and self-reliance for citizens, local communities and the local authority.			

Knowing your communities

We know who our key community activists and leaders are.			
We have good working relationships and work effectively with our key community activists and leaders.			
We provide help, support and training to ensure our key community activists and leaders are as effective as they can be.			
We effectively encourage local community activists and levaders to improve community resilience and self-reliance.			

Skills and knowledge to build community resilience

We are good at encouraging people to help out and do more in their community.			
We have the right staff in the right place to help improve community resilience and self-reliance.			
We have revised job descriptions and person specifications to strengthen their focus on involvement, to help improve community resilience and self-reliance.			

Action	Yes	No	Do not know
We give staff the opportunity to take well-managed risks and explore innovative practices with communities.			
Our staff are good at influencing people to do more for themselves where they can.			
Elected members support the authority's work on strengthening community resilience and self-reliance.			
We have put in place the right support to help Elected Members strengthen community resilience and self-reliance in their wards.			
We have a can-do culture and mindset within the local authority to improve community resilience and self-reliance.			
We are good at encouraging communities to find their own solutions to problems and not rely on us.			

Making a difference

We have reviewed ways of working across the Council and are changing services to help improve community resilience and self-reliance.			
We have identified how these changes will impact on people.			
We are communicating to citizens how our services are changing.			
We have specified the information required to evaluate how our work is improving community resilience and self-reliance.			
We use our resources, money and assets to build and retain wealth in our local communities.			

Action	Yes	No	Do not know
We use our procurement of services as a means of investing in the local economy.			
We work with our local anchor institutions to ensure they support community wealth building through their provision of services, use of resources, procurement and assets.			
We encourage suppliers to enhance the social value aspects of their contracts through the inclusion of training and employment opportunities in agreements.			
<p>We regularly report on our community resilience and self-reliance work to scrutiny committee(s) against a balanced set of performance information that covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demand for local authority services; • alternative provision within communities and by partners; and • impact of our work on people's wellbeing. 			
Our scrutiny and evaluation processes provide us with assurance that our work is delivering anticipated outcomes.			



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