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Our Ref./Ein Cyf.  
Your Ref./Eich Cyf.  
Contact:/Cysylltwch â: Mrs Leeann Turner

**THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND**

21st April 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

### **GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE**

A meeting of the Governance & Audit Committee will be held via Microsoft Teams (if you would like to view this meeting please contact committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk) on Wednesday, 26th April, 2023 at 10.00 am.

Yours faithfully

Damien McCann  
Interim Chief Executive

### **AGENDA**

### **Pages**

#### **1. SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION**

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

#### **2. APOLOGIES**

To receive.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS**

To receive.

4. **GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE** 5 - 10

To receive the decisions of the Governance & Audit Committee held on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2023.

(Please note the decisions are submitted for points of accuracy only).

5. **ACTION SHEET** 11 - 14

To receive the Action Sheet arising from the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2023.

6. **CODE OF GOVERNANCE** 15 - 38

To consider the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

7. **AUDIT PLAN OUTTURN 2022-23** 39 - 50

To consider the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

8. **BLAENAU GWENT RESPONSE TO ESTYN LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION SERVICES (LGES) INSPECTION** 51 - 86

To consider the report of the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion.

9. **AUDIT WALES REVIEWS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSES** 87 - 98

To consider the report of the Service Manager Performance and Democratic.

To: J. Absalom (Chair)  
Councillor S. Behr (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor J. Gardner  
Councillor W. Hodgins  
Councillor C. Smith  
Councillor T. Smith  
Councillor J. Wilkins  
M. Veale

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

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**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT: GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE  
8<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2023**

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

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**PRESENT: MS JOANNE ABSALOM (CHAIR)**

Councillors S. Behr (Vice-Chair)  
J. Gardner  
W. Hodgins  
C. Smith  
T. Smith  
Mr M. Veale

**WITH:** Corporate Director of Education  
Interim Corporate Director of Social Services  
Chief Officer Resources  
Chief Officer Commercial & Customer  
Senior Finance Business Partner  
Audit & Risk Manager  
Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships  
Interim Head of Children's Services  
Service Manager Performance & Democratic  
Service Manager Customer Experience & Transformation  
Professional Lead – Internal Audit  
Chief Operating Officer (SRS)  
Deputy Chief Operating Officer (SRS)  
Data Protection & Governance Officer

**AND:** Mike Jones ) Audit Wales  
Charlotte Owen )

**DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS**

<b><u>ITEM</u></b>	<b><u>SUBJECT</u></b>	<b><u>ACTION</u></b>
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<p><b>No. 1</b></p>	<p><b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
<p><b>No. 2</b></p>	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>An apology for absence was received from Councillor J. Wilkins.</p>	
<p><b>No. 3</b></p>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>The following declaration of interest was reported:-</p> <p>Councillor W. Hodgins – Item No. 8 Shared Resource Services (SRS).</p>	
<p><b>No. 4</b></p>	<p><b><u>GOVERNANCE &amp; AUDIT COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The decisions of the Governance &amp; Audit Committee held on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2023 were submitted.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the decisions be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p><b>No. 5</b></p>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET – 30<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2023</u></b></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2023 was submitted and the following points were raised:-</p> <p><u>Item 8 - Forward Work Programme – mapping exercise</u> Members had received a briefing note and a verbal update from the Audit &amp; Risk Manager on the results of the mapping exercise.</p> <p><u>Item 6 – Forward Work Programme – current position on the Statement of Accounts 2021/22</u> Members had received a briefing note and verbal update from the Senior Finance Business Partner with regard to the Statement of Accounts 2021/22.</p>	

	RESOLVED that the Action sheet be accepted.	
<b>No. 6</b>	<p><b><u>GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2022-23</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Scrutiny &amp; Democratic Officer.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Forward Work Programme for the Governance and Audit Committee be accepted (Option 1).</p>	
<b>No. 7</b>	<p><b><u>BLAENAU GWENT ESTYN LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION SERVICES (LGES) INSPECTION OUTCOME</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Corporate Director of Education.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Governance &amp; Audit Committee approved Option 2; and that further assurances around the process for measuring success be provided to the Governance &amp; Audit Committee in future monitoring and reporting.</p>	
<b>No. 8</b>	<p><b><u>SHARED RESOURCE SERVICE (SRS)</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Commercial &amp; Customer.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Committee approved Option1, namely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) To support the position statement confirming Audit and Governance arrangements were in place against the objectives set out in the Business Case; and</li> <li>(b) To receive annual updates as part of the ongoing partnership with SRS.</li> </ul>	

<p><b>No. 9</b></p>	<p><b><u>AUDIT WALES: ASSURANCE AND RISK ASSESSMENT REVIEW – BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Resources and the Head of Democratic Services, Governance &amp; Partnerships.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Committee approved Option 2, namely:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provided 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 (Option 2); and</li> <li>• a report on the process for implementation of the Audit Wales recommendations be prepared to provide further reassurance to the Governance &amp; Audit Committee.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>No. 10</b></p>	<p><b><u>AUDIT WALES: CORPORATE SAFEGUARDING FOLLOW-UP – BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Interim Corporate Director of Social Services.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Committee approved Option 2, namely:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provided 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 (Option 2); and</li> <li>• a report on the process for implementation of the Audit Wales recommendations be prepared to provide further reassurance to the Governance &amp; Audit Committee.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>No. 11</b></p>	<p><b><u>AUDIT WALES: ‘A MISSED OPPORTUNITY’ – SOCIAL ENTERPRISES</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Corporate Director of</p>	



	<p>Regeneration &amp; Community Services and the Interim Corporate Director of Social Services.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Committee approved Option 2, namely:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provided 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 (Option 2); and</li> <li>• a report on the process for implementation of the Audit Wales recommendations be prepared to provide further reassurance to the Governance &amp; Audit Committee.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>No. 12</b></p>	<p><b><u>AUDIT WALES: SPRINGING FORWARD – BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources, the Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships, the Head of Organisation Development and the Director of Regeneration and Community Services.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Committee approved Option 2, namely:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provided 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 (Option 2); and</li> <li>• a report on the process for implementation of the Audit Wales recommendations be prepared to provide further reassurance to the Governance &amp; Audit Committee.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>No. 13</b></p>	<p><b><u>AUDIT WALES: ‘TIME FOR CHANGE’ – POVERTY IN WALES</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director of Social Services.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Committee</p>	

	<p>approved Option 2, namely:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provided 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 (Option 2); and</li> <li>• a report on the process for implementation of the Audit Wales recommendations be prepared to provide further reassurance to the Governance &amp; Audit Committee.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>No. 14</b></p>	<p><b><u>AUDIT WALES: 'TOGETHER WE CAN' COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND SELF-RELIANCE</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Commercial &amp; Customer and the Head of Governance, Partnerships &amp; Democratic Services.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Committee approved Option 2, namely:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provided 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 (Option 2); and</li> <li>• a report on the process for implementation of the Audit Wales recommendations be prepared to provide further reassurance to the Governance &amp; Audit Committee.</li> </ul>	

**Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**

**Action Sheet**

**Governance & Audit Committee**

<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Action to be Taken</b>	<b>By Whom</b>	<b>Action Taken</b>
30 <sup>th</sup> 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>	Information Security Officer / Data Protection & Governance Officer	<p>IT is included as part of the Forward Work Planning and Member Development Programme. For any future bespoke ICT training Members can contact the Democratic Services section.</p> <p><b>Action complete: 20 March 2023</b></p>
30 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2023	<p>Exempt <u>Appendix B4 – Internal Audit Progress Report</u></p> <p>The Service Manager Development &amp; Estates to refer Appendix B4 to the relevant Scrutiny Committee for consideration.</p>	Service Manager Development & Estates	<p>Report to be included on the Forward Work Programme of Places Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p><b>Action complete: In progress</b></p>

Meeting Date	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
8 <sup>th</sup> March 2023	<p><b><u>Item 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 &amp; 14</u></b>  <b><u>Audit Wales Reports</u></b>  A report encompassing all the Audit Wales reports (items 9-14) to be prepared on the process for implementation of the Audit Wales recommendations to provide further reassurance to the Governance &amp; Audit Committee.</p>	Service Manager Performance & Democratic	<p>A report is to be included on the next agenda of the Governance and Audit Committee.</p> <p><b>Action complete: In progress</b></p>
8 <sup>th</sup> March 2023	<p><b><u>Item 9 – Audit Wales: Assurance And Risk Assessment Review – Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council</u></b>  The Council’s Forward Work Programme to align with the Audit Wales Forward Work Programme to ensure reports are presented to the Committee in a timely manner.</p>	Service Manager Performance & Democratic	<p>The Forward Work Programme for the Governance and Audit Committee 2023/24 will include alignment to the Audit Wales Work Programme. This is to be agreed in the new committee cycle.</p> <p><b>Action complete: In progress</b></p>

Meeting Date	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
8 <sup>th</sup> March 2023	<p><b><u>Item 11 - Audit Wales: 'A missed opportunity' – Social Enterprises</u></b></p> <p>Audit Wales to provide the Committee with information on which third sector organisations were included in the review.</p> <p>Audit Wales to provide the list of the 38 social enterprises within Blaenau Gwent to the Committee.</p>	<p>Service Manager Performance &amp; Democratic Charlotte Owen – Audit Wales</p> <p>Service Manager Performance &amp; Democratic Charlotte Owen – Audit Wales</p>	<p>Appendix 1 sets out who Audit Wales spoke to as part of the review. This included representatives of Welsh and Scottish Social Enterprises and national representative bodies. These were mainly at a national level and Audit Wales can confirm that none were Blaenau Gwent specific.</p> <p><b>Action Complete: 20 March 2023</b></p> <p>The 38 social enterprises in Blaenau Gwent referred to in the table in appendix 4 of the report – unfortunately the Local Government Studies Team do not have a breakdown of who the 38 are.</p> <p><b>Action complete: 17 April 2023</b></p>

Meeting Date	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
8 <sup>th</sup> March 2023	<p><b><u>Item 14 – Audit Wales: ‘Together We Can’ Community Resilience And Self-Reliance</u></b>  Information i.e. Case studies to be provided to the Committee on the recently approved staff volunteer programme.</p>	Chief Officer Commercial & Customer	<p>A request for case studies from across the organisation has been made and when collated will be reported to a future meeting of the committee.</p> <p><b>Action complete: In progress</b></p>

# Agenda Item 6

*Cabinet and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**  
Date of meeting: **26<sup>th</sup> April 2023**  
Report Subject: **Code of Governance**  
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Steve Thomas – Leader / Cabinet Member  
Corporate & Performance**  
Report Submitted by: **Rhian Hayden – Chief Officer Resources**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	13.04.23		26.04.23					

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To present to the Governance & Audit Committee the revised Code of Governance (attached at Appendix A) for consideration and approval.

## 2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Authority has had a Code of Governance in place since 2010. The Code sets out the Governance Framework for the Authority and is produced in line with the CIPFA / SOLACE document “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (revised 2016)”.
- 2.2 The code is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it reflects the current governance arrangements of the Authority. The Code forms the basis against which the Annual Governance Statement is produced.
- 2.3 The Governance & Audit Committee are responsible for reviewing and approving the code.
- 2.4 The code incorporates the seven core principles of good governance against which the Authority measures its governance arrangements.

## 3. Options for Recommendation

- 3.1 The Governance & Audit Committee review the Code of Governance and consider whether it:
- (1) Accurately reflects the current governance framework of the Authority; and
  - (2) It is fit for purpose as a basis against which to gather evidence for the production of the Annual Governance Statement
- 3.2 The Governance & Audit Committee may then choose to:
- Option 1  
Approve and adopt the revised Code of Governance
- Option 2  
Propose amendments / alterations to the revised Code of Governance

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
- 4.1 Production of the Code assists the Authority in achieving its Corporate Plan Priority of, '**An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place**'.
- 4.2 The Code of Governance will also be used as key evidence for the development of the Council's Self-Assessment, required as part of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
5. **Implications Against Each Option**
- 5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short- and long-term impact)***  
There are no direct financial implications arising from the production of the Code of Governance.
- 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***  
Failure to review / approve the Code of Governance would result in it being out of date and not reflecting the current governance framework of the Authority. This is mitigated by an annual review and update.
- 5.3 ***Legal***  
The Code of Governance sets out the Authority's Governance Framework as prescribed by the CIPFA / Solace Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016).
- 5.4 ***Human Resources***  
The review of the Code of Governance involves the investment of senior management time. The commitment is met from existing resources.
6. **Supporting Evidence**
- 6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***  
The Code has been amended / updated to reflect the changes to the governance framework of the Authority over the last year. The changes to the Code this year are minimal, mainly concerning the change from Executive Committee to Cabinet Committee and the formation of the Gwent Public Service Board.
- 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***  
The Code of Governance sets out how the council's governance framework is shaped to ensure engagement with stakeholders and to inform the citizens of Blaenau Gwent as to how the governance arrangements of the Authority operate.
- 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***  
The revision of the Code of Governance has had involvement of Officers from all directorates and has been considered by the Corporate Leadership Team.



- 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***  
The Code of Governance sets out the Governance Framework for the Authority against which the Annual Governance Statement will be produced and will include development activities for future years.
- 6.5 ***Preventative focus***  
The Code of Governance includes the risk management and internal control aspects of the Governance Framework.
- 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***  
The Code of Governance sets out the core governance principles for the Authority including its collaborative approach with the Gwent Public Service Board.
- 6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***  
Officers from all directorates have contributed to the review of the Code of Governance.
- 6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***  
The production of the Code of Governance has no direct impact on decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions.
- 6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IAA)***  
Production of the Code of Governance has a neutral impact against people or groups from the nine protected characteristics.
7. **Monitoring Arrangements**
- 7.1 An assessment of the Council's performance against the Code is undertaken and reported in the Annual Governance Statement. The Annual Governance Statement will be reported to the Governance & Audit Committee.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- Appendix A – Code of Governance

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# CODE OF GOVERNANCE

## BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Last Revised: April 2023**  
**Version 13**

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## **LOCAL CODE OF GOVERNANCE**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to the 13th edition of the Council's Local Code of Governance.

The Local Code of Governance has been developed using the framework created by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), but the content remains very much the Council's own. The framework sets out seven core principles of good governance designed to guide local authorities in ensuring their governance arrangements ultimately facilitate the transparent, efficient and accountable use of resources for their citizens. The Council illustrates how it complies with these principles in its Code of Governance. The seven core principles of good governance laid down are as follows: -

- Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.
- Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.
- Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.
- Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.
- Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.
- Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.
- Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.

These principles are not to be considered in isolation as they are all interconnected and overlap or merge with each other.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council operates through a Governance Framework which brings together an underlying set of legislative requirements, governance principles and management processes. This document aims to codify this framework and enable the Council to transparently demonstrate how it operates against the best standards of Governance and judge and measure any necessary improvements.

The Leader and Members of the Council along with the Chief Executive Officer and Corporate Leadership Team have endorsed and commended this Local Code as a framework to conduct business to deliver improvements for the people of Blaenau Gwent.

The Council has delegated the monitoring of compliance with the Code and monitoring its effectiveness to its Governance and Audit Committee. Following a review of the Code of Governance and how well or otherwise it is working, the resultant report – its Annual Governance Statement will be considered by the Governance and Audit Committee to test the level of assurance received.

Local authorities continue to be monitored by inspectors and regulators. Progress has been made against the recommendations of Regulators' reports which are helping to shape the Governance Framework of the Authority. A process is in place to monitor all of the proposals for improvement identified by Audit Wales. These are monitored using a 'report tracker' and it is maintained by the Corporate Performance Team. All 'open' proposals for improvement are included within the relevant business plans. A synopsis of the proposals for improvement are included within the Joint Finance and Performance Report.

## **2.0 ELEMENTS OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

To achieve the principles of good Corporate Governance, the Council supports and will apply the seven Core Principles, and their related supporting principles, as follows: -

### **2.1 Core Principle A**

#### **Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.**

The Council recognises that openness, integrity and accountability of individuals within an organisation form the cornerstone of effective corporate governance. The Council's credibility and reputation depends upon high standards of behaviour from its staff, Members and representatives and aims to have shared values across all these groups. The Council's Corporate Plan 2022/27 contains a set of shared values, namely:

- Respectful;
- Inclusive;
- Collaborative;
- Accountable; and
- Supportive.

Therefore, the Council aims to operate within a culture of behaviour based on shared values, ethical principles and good conduct and expects its senior members and management to exercise leadership in promoting these principles.

The Council's previous Corporate Plan came to an end in March 2022. Subsequent to the establishment of a new council, following the local government elections in May 2022, a new corporate plan has been developed which spans the full five year political cycle - 2022/2027.

The Corporate Plan 2022/27 sets out an ambitious programme of activity for the Council over the next five years and beyond. The priorities, also referred to as Well-being Objectives, have been

developed in order to support communities of Blaenau Gwent and to define modern and high quality services which support economic growth and well-being.

The Plan outlines four high level priorities, each of which is underpinned by solid and sustainable business plans, which describe the activity to be undertaken by each service area of the Council, ensuring the Council can be held to account for what it has promised to deliver.

The four high level priorities are:

- Maximise learning skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent.
- Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities
- An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place
- Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient

The Council has a responsibility to the people of Blaenau Gwent to help improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area. By setting a small number of strategic priorities within the Corporate Plan it will allow efforts to be concentrated on delivery in these areas and ultimately, help to improve the quality of the lives of residents.

The priorities have not been developed in isolation and alignment has also been made to the Marmot Principles (8 principles set out to tackle and reduce inequalities) and the priorities from the Draft Gwent Public Service Board (PSB) Well-being Plan.

The Council will achieve this by holding, communicating and keeping under review: -

- A Member Code of Conduct
- An Officer Code of Conduct
- Council Constitution
- Frameworks for Scrutiny and Cabinet
- Informal protocols re: Complaints – Members and Officers
- A Petitions Protocol
- Registers of Interest for Members and Officers
- Procedural rules for Members and Officers to declare an interest in the business under consideration at all Committees and Council
- Each Committee has an advisory officer to promote the appropriate conduct of meetings
- Contract Procedure Rules
- An Anti-Fraud, Anti-Corruption and Anti-Bribery Policy including a fraud hotline
- Defined Competency Framework for staff
- A Whistleblowing Policy
- The operation of an Ethics & Standards Committee including

independent external membership with defined terms of reference

- A delegated responsibility for key officers regarding fraud, codes of conduct, standards and whistleblowing
- An Internal Audit Service and a Governance and Audit Committee as part of the Council's assurance framework. The Committee has defined terms of reference and a third of its membership must be lay members
- The maintenance of an Annual Schedule of Member Remuneration, the holding of a register to record payments and annual publication in the local press
- Induction training for Officers and Members including standards of behaviour expected and ongoing Member Development Programme
- Member Competency Framework and Personal Development Reviews to inform individual Member development as well as the Member Development Strategy and Training Programme
- A Member Mentoring Framework
- A formal opportunity for all Members at the beginning of a meeting to declare their interests

The Council has set out minimum standards of behaviour and has provided guidelines to help maintain and improve standards. These include a Dignity at Work Policy in addition to its Codes of Conduct and Whistleblowing Policy.

The Council has adopted a Constitution which:

- Clearly defines those functions which will be reserved to the full Council for decision, those decisions which will be taken by the Cabinet or its individual members, and those which are delegated to senior officers. The full Council sets the strategic direction through the adoption of major policies and the budget, the Cabinet takes major decisions within the overall policy and budget framework, helping to develop new policies. Officers take day to day decisions within the policy and budget framework.
- Sets out the responsibilities and procedures for decision making. Decisions which can be taken by the Cabinet, the regulatory Committees and full Council are shown in sections 4-7 of the Constitution. In addition, the Council's policies and protocols set out the processes that must be followed in decision making e.g. Organisation Development Policies, Licensing and Planning Applications, Appeals, tabling motions at Committees.
- Establishes through the Overview and Scrutiny Committees a robust overview and scrutiny role. These Committees between them have powers to review and scrutinise decisions relating to any of the Council's activities, including considering policy proposals prior to adoption by the Council or the Cabinet.



- Sets out clearly the role of the Leader and Cabinet and in particular makes it clear that they are responsible for providing effective strategic leadership to ensure the Council successfully discharges its overall responsibilities for the activities of the organisation as a whole.
- Operates three Regulatory Committees – Planning Committee, General Licensing and Statutory Licensing Committees which have specific powers delegated to them by the Council.
- Makes clear the roles of all Councillors both in their formal decision making/policy development role and as local members.

The Constitution sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made, and the procedures followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people.

The Constitution contains comprehensive Financial Procedure Rules and Contract Procedure Rules (in sections 16 and 17), governing the process to be adopted in conducting the Council's business.

The Constitution and other formal documents set out clear protocols and codes of conduct to ensure that the requirements and boundaries of decision making are clear to Members:

- Members' Code of Conduct
- Standards Procedures
- Code of Conduct on Planning Matters
- Roles and responsibilities of Overview and Scrutiny Committees
- Local Member / Officer Protocol

In addition, there are a set of Employment Policies which clearly inform officers on expectations in the decision-making process.

The Council actively recognises the limits of lawful activity placed upon them whilst also striving to utilise powers to the full benefit of their communities through: -

- Legal and Financial advice in the preparation of Council, Committee and Cabinet reports
- The availability of the legal advice at the meetings of the Council, the Cabinet and Statutory Committees
- Professional development and training (including multi-agency training for Adult and Children's Services' Social Care staff in particular)
- The Council's policies and protocols setting out the processes
- Integrated Impact Assessment processes

## 2.2 Core Principle B

### **Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.**

The Council recognises its primary purpose in delivering services for the people of Blaenau Gwent and the specific need to engage with them and other stakeholders in planning services to be delivered and to be accountable to them for those services.

The Council aims to achieve this by: -

- Clear lines of communication with people and organisations to which the Council is accountable.
- Clear statements of the role of its members in their various offices.
- Clear statements of the roles and accountabilities of staff in their job descriptions.
- Terms of reference for the Council's committees and holding them open to the public.
- A clear statement of strategic priorities, activity and performance indicators as included within the Corporate Plan 2022/27.
- Operation of an effective complaints procedure.
- Staff consultation and engagement in decision making.
- Ensuring staff are clearly accessible to the public through meetings, telephone availability, email and where appropriate home visits.
- Ensuring partnership arrangements and procurement arrangements are similarly clear about accountabilities.

In September 2021, the five Public Service Boards in Gwent were dissolved so that one Regional Gwent Public Service Board could be established. The Gwent PSB brings public bodies together to work to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Gwent. They are responsible, under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, for overseeing the development and delivery of a new regional Gwent Well-being Plan 2023-28, which is a long-term vision for the well-being of the area. In order to develop this new Gwent PSB Plan, the Gwent PSB undertook a regional Wellbeing assessment, the evidence of which has been used to develop the Well-being Plan for Gwent. The final Well-being Plan must be published within 12 months of an election and is subject to a range of formal consultation and approval processes. The Draft Plan sets out two key objectives for the region:

1. We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent

for all

2. We want to create a more climate-aware Gwent, where our environment is valued and protected, ensuring our well-being now and for future generations.

Five steps have also been established to achieve the two overarching objectives:

- Take action to reduce the Cost of Living crisis in the longer term
- Provide and enable the supply of good quality, affordable, appropriate homes
- Take action to reduce our carbon emissions, help Gwent adapt to climate change, and protect and restore our natural environment
- Take action to address inequalities, particularly in relation to health through the framework of the Marmot Principles
- Enable and support resilient, connected, thriving and safe communities

The Draft Plan has been considered by each Local Authority and will be seeking final approval in May 2023.

As part of the development of a Gwent Public Service Board, a Joint Public Service Board Scrutiny Committee has been established and is managed by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council on behalf of the Board.

A Corporate Communications Strategy (2020-25) is in place and is a key strategy as part of the overall governance framework. The strategy has six key drivers with the aim of delivering excellent, innovative and cost-effective two-way communications with key target audiences. Its overall aim is to build a positive reputation for the Council to create trust and confidence in Council services.

The Council's Commercial Strategy brings together themes that will contribute to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council being commercially minded. The overall commercial ambitions of the strategy are as follows:

- Commissioning and Procurement – Commissioning the right services in the right way to ensure value for money and delivering better outcomes
- Investment Portfolio – Shaping the investment options based on robust business cases, risk assessments and market intelligence
- Commercial Activities – Profit and Loss – Identification of truly commercial opportunities based on market intelligence, assessment of business opportunities and strong profit and loss accounting
- Commercial and Entrepreneurial Culture – Involvement of staff and partners in identifying opportunities alongside the ability to create robust business cases, seek investment and have capacity to scale operations

- Contract and Supplier Management - Improved contract management and negotiation skills working with our suppliers to control costs, achieve value for money and deliver innovative solutions

The Council's Procurement Strategy has been revised and approved by Cabinet Committee, further aligning it to the commercial approach and strategy adopted by the Council.

The Council continues to develop the way in which it engages with the community. The Citizen's Panel is in operation alongside various other groups such as the Youth Forum and 50+ Forum. In order to understand the engagement activity across the Council, an Engagement Calendar has been developed and is updated quarterly with all of the activity that is planned for the coming quarter.

The Council has been working on a number of digital and customer centred projects. To support this, a Digital Service Board has been established and Digital Champions identified in each service area. The board will establish a programme of service redesign reviews based around customer and user experience and to establish digital solutions.

Projects currently include:

- Waste and Recycling
- The Planning Service; and
- Insurance processes

By adopting a set of customer care standards supported by a complaints procedure the Council aims to: -

- Have a robust community planning process with its Public Service Board (PSB) partners.
- Understand the priorities of the local area through engagement mechanisms, consultation on specific projects and other public engagement mechanisms (as detailed above).
- Publish an Annual Scrutiny Report incorporating progress against the year's work programme.
- Set out the priorities for the Council in the Corporate Plan and provide a balanced view of performance against them on an annual basis as part of the statutory self-assessment process.

The Council is developing an approach where services are designed around the customer and this is informing both the corporate digital programme, and service re-design to maximise digital innovation. This approach recognises that offering effective digital solutions in relevant services benefits both the customer and the organisation, whilst

enabling capacity for the more complex interactions that require the human touch.

The Council continues to develop its use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook and to support the development of digital channels for future service delivery.

The Council will continue to ensure its users have the opportunity to influence and receive high quality of service, making the best use of resources to deliver excellent value for money.

## 2.3 Core Principle C

### **Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.**

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 established statutory Public Service Boards (PSBs). The purpose of the PSBs is to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being in its area by strengthening joint working across all public services in Wales.

Each PSB must prepare and publish a plan setting out its objectives and the steps it will take to meet them. This is called a Well-being Plan. It must say:

- Why the PSB feels their objectives will contribute to achieving the well-being goals
- How it has had regard to the assessment of Well-being in setting the objectives and steps to take.

Each PSB will carry out an annual review of their plan showing their progress. When producing their assessments of well-being and Well-being Plan, PSBs must consult widely.

The Statutory Members of each PSB are:

- The Local Authority
- The Local Health Authority
- The Local Health Board
- The Fire and Rescue Authority
- Natural Resources Wales

In addition to the statutory members each PSB will invite the following people to participate:

- Welsh Ministers
- Chief Constables
- The Police and Crime Commissioner

- Certain Probation Services
- At least one body representing relevant voluntary organisations

PSBs will also be able to invite other public service organisations to participate.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 places a duty on each public body to carry out sustainable development. Sustainable Development is defined as a process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. This needs to be done by taking action in accordance with the sustainable development principles so that the well-being goals are achieved.

The application of the five ways of working identified in the act is how public bodies are able to maximise their contribution to the National Well-being Goals.

In addition to the Codes of Conduct and protocols referred to under Core Principle A, the Council seeks to maintain high standards in the conduct of its business and avoid prejudice, bias and conflicts of interest. This is achieved through the development of a Strategic Equality Plan, a Welsh Language Promotion strategy, in line with the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards, and various engagement forums such as Youth Forum, and 50+ Forum.

The Equality Act 2010 (the Act from here on in) came into operation on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2011. The Act replaced the existing 116 different pieces of law relating to equality and put them all together in one piece of legislation. The Act strengthens the law in important ways, and in some respects extends current law to help tackle discrimination and inequality.

The Council's Strategic Equality Plan (2020-2024) contains Our Equality Objectives which are:

- We will be an organisation who ensures fairness and equality is in everything that we do
- We will be an equal opportunity employer with a workforce that values equality and diversity
- We will support children and young people, particularly those with protected characteristics, to achieve their learning ambitions
- We will promote and support safe, friendly and cohesive communities
- We will ensure there is meaningful involvement with the people who have protected characteristics and key stakeholders that represent their interests; and
- We will strive to tackle inequality caused by poverty for people who have protected characteristics

## 2.4 Core Principle D

**Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the**

## **achievement of the intended outcomes.**

Leadership is exercised by clearly communicating the Council's purpose and vision for Blaenau Gwent and its intended outcomes for its citizens and service users.

The Council exerts a wider influence within the community and also delivers services through a mixture of procurement, in-house provision and partnerships to help achieve these outcomes.

Following the introduction of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the Council is required to undertake a corporate self-assessment at least once on an annual basis. The Council has used its current business planning process to gather evidence as well as identifying a number of key documents to reference. This will be the first iteration of the new self-assessment process and it is expected that amendments to the process will be made following the first year of completion. The business planning process has also become more streamlined with the incorporation of Performance Indicators, Risk, Equalities, Welsh, the Environment Act, Decarbonisation and proposals for improvement from auditors into one monitoring form on a central system. The self-evaluation process directly links to the business planning process. The business planning process will undertake a review alongside the development of the Corporate Plan so that it reflects the needs of the Council from 2022 to 2027.

The Council prepares an Annual Budget to resource its service priorities. A Medium-Term Financial Strategy is reviewed and updated at least annually and a summarised version was endorsed by Council in December 2022, and includes projections up to 2027/28 to aid improved service planning. The MTFS is next due for review in Summer 2023.

## **2.5 Core Principle E**

### **Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.**

The Council strives to ensure continuous improvement in the delivery of its services through its improvement planning process and its Performance Management Framework, and has strengthened these arrangements to align them with risk management as well as identifying levels of accountability.

The remit of the Wider Corporate Leadership Team (WCLT) has been reviewed. Its broad purpose is to effectively support the Corporate Leadership Team in its role in providing strategic direction to the organisation. The WCLT is also a forum that takes a distributed leadership approach to disseminate information and communicate messages, network with colleagues and peers and provide personal

development opportunities.

Ensuring that Members and Officers have the necessary skills to operate a multi-million-pound business that provides a range of different services is one of the most important aspects of Governance. The training needs of Members is undertaken as part of the development of the Committee Forward Work Programmes as well as through the Member Competency Framework and Personal Development Reviews. The Council holds the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development (Level 1). Following the local elections in May 2022, the Council provided a Member Induction and Refresher Training Programme with sessions established into the following categories:

- Mandatory;
- Recommended;
- Beneficial; and
- Useful

The Council will ensure those responsible for Governance of the Council will have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience they need to perform well.

The Council will achieve this by:

- Continuing with its Member Training Programme and mandatory training programme, including within the Member Development Strategy.
- Member briefings on issues of importance to the Council.
- Induction training and professional advice for Members.
- Introduction of skills and experience requirements for special responsibility posts.
- Continuing to develop Information Communication Technology (ICT) support for Members to give a better understanding of modern administration and to improve communication.
- Operating hybrid meetings and broadcasting / recording these as part of the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021
- Operating a competency framework for Officers and Members.
- Mentoring programme for Elected Members.
- Arrangements for Members sitting on Outside Bodies
- A Recruitment Charter ensuring the Council employ staff with necessary qualifications and experience to carry out the role expected of them.



- Performance coaching in place for all staff and departmental monitoring.
- Competency Framework and Personal Development Review Process in place for all Elected Members receiving a Senior Salary Allowance and offered to all other members.
- The Head of Paid Service is responsible for ensuring that the Council's officer establishment is appropriately staffed to deliver the service priorities of the Council. In practice much of this responsibility is delegated to Directors, Chief Officers and Heads of Service.
- The Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer and Head of Democratic Services will determine the requirements to discharge their statutory roles.
- The MTFS looks forward over the next five years (2023/24 to 2027/28) to assess the spending pressures the Council is likely to face and the level of savings that will need to be made.
- The Council benefits from its membership of the Welsh Local Government Association which provides support and assistance over a range of Council functions and responsibilities. Similar support is available to members of different professional bodies across the Council.
- The Council remains committed to promoting health and well-being to its employees through periodic staff surveys and staff engagement.
- The Council will expect similar values of staff development and empowerment of its partners and agents in service delivery.

The Council recognises the need to have effective political and management structures and processes to govern decision making and the exercise of authority within the organisation. It believes it is important that all those involved in planning and delivering a service understand each other's roles and responsibilities and how together they can deliver the best possible outcomes.

To help achieve this, the Council's constitution clearly lays out its service portfolios and the role of and responsibility of all Members, along with those decisions retained by Council.

It specifically lays out, via job descriptions, the roles and responsibilities of the Cabinet Committee and its Cabinet Members, Scrutiny Committees and their Chairs, Scrutiny Members and Regulatory Committee Chairs and Members.

It identifies the Leader and Deputy Leader as having a specific role in

providing leadership. Alongside this, the Council has established a Presiding Member Role which includes:

- Chairing Council Meetings;
- Maintain order and to protect the rights of Members including ensuring that Council business is handled on the basis of equality and impartiality;
- Promote democratic engagement and leadership; and
- Acts as the ambassador for the Council, attending events in order to publicise and raise the profile of the Council.

Membership of all political posts is determined each year at the Council's Annual General Meeting (including representational roles). The Democratic Services Committee keeps the roles and responsibilities under review. Additionally, the Council provides induction training for all new Members along with professional advice and a training programme available for all Members' participation.

All meetings are recorded and included on the Council website. Alongside this, minutes are kept which include:

- Attendance;
- Apologies;
- Declarations of Interest; and
- Decisions / Recommendations

The minutes sit alongside the recording of the meeting available on the Council's website.

A Chairs and Vice Chairs meeting is held at least 3 times per year. There is also a series of planning meetings in place before a formal Committee meeting is held. Member Briefing and Training Sessions are organised for all Members on specific issues. Pre meetings are held with the whole committee before the formal committee takes place to discuss lines of enquiry.

Similarly, on the Officer side, the Constitution lays out the Scheme of Delegation to Directors, Chief Officers and Senior Officers.

In particular, four statutory appointments of Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive Officer), Monitoring Officer (Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance) Section 151 Officer (Chief Officer - Resources) and Head of Democratic Services (Head of Governance and Partnerships) are included along with their specific roles and responsibilities. This helps ensure Members receive appropriate professional financial, legal and other advice.

Similarly, the Council has the statutory roles of the Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Director of Social Services.

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for all aspects of operational management and in practice operates this through a scheme of delegation.

The Chief Officer – Resources is responsible to the Council for ensuring that appropriate advice is given on all financial matters for keeping proper financial records and accounts, and for maintaining an effective system of internal control.

The Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance is responsible for ensuring that agreed procedures are followed and that all applicable statutes, regulations and other relevant statements of good practice are complied with.

To help clarify their respective roles the Council follows a Member/Officer protocol which is included in the Constitution.

The Council ensures effective management arrangements are in place and operates a Corporate Leadership Team of Chief Executive Officer, Corporate Directors and Chief Officers, supported by a Wider Leadership Team; together these ensure effective communication across all of the services of the Council.

## **2.6 Core Principle F**

### **Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.**

The Council will consider regularly its performance in achieving its key objectives through: -

- Development of Business Plans at all levels.
- The setting of performance targets against all measures both national and local.
- The understanding and analysis of comparative and trend data to develop targets.
- Development, at all service and directorate levels, of both national and local data of priorities linked to the strategic outcomes.
- Keeping value for money under review.
- Reviews of service provision and priorities.
- Preparation of externally audited accounts.
- Annual approval of budgets and regular consideration of budget reports.
- An effective member scrutiny function for all services to include performance and finance as part of their terms of reference.
- Arrangements to deal with service failure.
- Monitoring of partnership arrangements.
- Testing customer satisfaction.
- Operating effective internal controls.
- Monitoring complaints.
- Ensuring competition in relevant service provision and proper contract management.
- Service and Directorate Risk Registers which will be effective and proactively used and reported.

- External audit scrutiny by Audit Wales and other regulators, through their regulatory plan.
- Maintaining an effective Internal Audit Service and Governance and Audit Committee.

The Council has a Governance and Audit Committee which is politically balanced. It meets on a regular basis and is advised by the Council's Audit and Risk Manager and is normally attended by representatives of the Council's External Auditors. Members receive training on the special role of the Governance and Audit Committee.

Under the requirements of the Local Government Measure 2011 the role and purpose of Governance and Audit Committee and its membership have been revised ensure that it is set up to improve strategic planning and facilitate both scrutiny and challenge within the structures of the Council. The Governance and Audit Committee has the following functions:

- Review, scrutinise and issue reports and recommendations in relation to the Authority's financial affairs.
- Review, scrutinise and issue reports and recommendations on the appropriateness of the Authority's risk management, internal control and corporate governance arrangements.
- Oversee the Authority's risk management, internal control and corporate governance arrangements.
- Oversee the Authority's audit arrangements and review its financial statements.
- Oversee the Authority's complaints performance.

The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 specified a number of changes that became effective from May 2022, namely

- Recruitment and selection exercise for all lay members.
- One third of the committee members must be lay persons
- Chairperson must be a lay member
- Deputy Chair must not be a member of the Cabinet

The Council has adopted a Risk Management Strategy with the ultimate aim of embedding a consistent and effective approach to Risk Management throughout the whole Council. The strategy is supported by a Risk Management Handbook (guidance)

The Risk Management Framework identifies the roles and responsibilities of Members and Officers, guidance on how to describe risk, and guidance on how to evaluate and assess risk. The framework requires that risk registers be maintained at Service / Department / Project levels and that these will support and feed the Corporate Risk Register which holds the most significant risks faced by the Council.

Regulatory Committees will take decisions based upon detailed reports

with any late information being referred to in the minutes. Overview and Scrutiny Committees when undertaking work requested by Council, or the Cabinet, or when undertaking their own investigations, will agree reports containing the evidence which was considered to be material.

Education services are inspected in Wales by Estyn. The Estyn framework for inspecting local authority education services is known as the Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework. The inspection of local authority education services covers the statutory and corporate functions of the local authority, including the local authority youth service. In addition, it includes inspection of the partnership arrangements for Youth Support Services (YSS).

## **2.7 Core Principle G**

### **Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability.**

The Council has an effective Internal Audit Service that works to an approved, risk assessed audit plan. The results of the audit work undertaken inform the annual opinion of the Audit and Risk Manager with regard to level of assurance provided by the Council's internal control environment.

Cabinet and Council reports will contain all the information, evidence and comments needed to take decisions. The decisions of the Committees are formally recorded by video, in minutes and within the decision sheet for Cabinet Committee decisions.

The Corporate Report Template has been designed so that it captures the required information in order to support discussion and decision making.

The Monitoring Officer is available to give advice to Members and staff on conflicts of interest and determine the public interest on Council agendas.

The performance management function works under the Head of Governance and Partnerships in the Corporate Services Directorate. The Council's Corporate Performance Framework includes the reporting of the Joint Report to Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee (and Cabinet Committee as well as service area reports being presented to the relevant Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet. Reporting includes progress updates against strategic priorities, the Councils most significant risks, regulatory update, financial position and core performance indicators. Service area reporting is also reported to each Scrutiny Committee.

The Council recognises the importance of partnership working and

takes a lead role in the development of governance arrangements of the key strategic partnerships. When working in partnership the Council aims to have clear governance arrangements in place providing clarity about legal status, roles and responsibilities of partners.

### **3.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW**

The Council has recognised that it needs to clearly evidence its governance arrangements.

This is the latest version of a formal Code of Governance for Blaenau Gwent, and the Council is committed to keeping the Code under review and importantly to learn from its adoption to improve Governance arrangements “on the ground” for the benefit of the people of Blaenau Gwent.

The product of this review and other work will be included in the publication of the Annual Governance Statement.

It is intended that the review will provide an evidence base for the conclusions reached and importantly an action plan to be followed to ensure continuous improvement in the Council’s Governance arrangements.

The Annual Governance Statement is to be considered by the Council’s Governance and Audit Committee, to whom Council will delegate the role of seeking assurance of the effectiveness of the various arrangements described in this Code.

This will include a review of the evidence framework prepared to support the Governance Statement including the policy documents, standard operating procedures and guidance used along with consideration of their effectiveness.

# Agenda Item 7

*Cabinet and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**  
Date of meeting: **26<sup>th</sup> April 2023**  
Report Subject: **Audit Plan Outturn 2022-23**  
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr S Thomas, Leader of the Council (Cabinet Member – Corporate Overview & Performance)**  
Report Submitted by: **Rhian Hayden – Chief Officer Resources**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance & Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	13/04/23		26/04/23					

1. **Purpose of the Report**
  - 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform the Governance & Audit Committee of the overall achievement against the Audit Plan for the financial year 2022-23.
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 The report highlights the work undertaken by the Internal Audit Service and complies with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS).
  - 2.2 The Internal Audit Plan is based on a risk assessment using a set of criteria relating to audit risks, Authority objectives and management views. The Audit Plan for the period 2022-2023 was considered and agreed by the Governance & Audit Committee in July 2022.
  - 2.3 Progress against the Audit Plan has been reported to the Governance & Audit Committee throughout the financial year, with this report providing a summary of the overall achievement for the year.
3. **Options for Recommendation**
  - 3.1 The Governance & Audit Committee consider this report and the Appendices attached, and note the following:
    - the levels of audit coverage in each service area,
    - the plan outturn for the financial year, and
    - the performance of the Internal Audit Service for the financial year 2022/23.
4. **Evidence of how does this topic support the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
  - 4.1 The report supports the Authority in achieving its Corporate Plan Priority of an ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place through demonstrating that adequate measures

are in place for the prevention and detection of fraud, thereby protecting the Authority's assets.

- 4.2 The Governance & Audit Committee, in their role as those responsible for governance, and in compliance with the PSIAs, have a responsibility to oversee the performance of the Internal Audit function including receiving a summary of the work upon which the Audit & Risk Manager will base her annual audit opinion.

## 5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

- 5.1.1 There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report.

### 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

- 5.2.1 The audit plan outturn demonstrates the breadth of audit coverage achieved to provide assurance that key areas of concern and areas deemed to have the highest risk priority have been examined during the financial year.
- 5.2.2 Failure to cover sufficient audit areas exposes the Authority to the risk that weaknesses within specific systems within the Authority's control environment are not being identified, increasing the risk of fraud and error.

### 5.3 ***Legal***

- 5.3.1 The Section 151 Officer has a statutory duty under the Local Government Act (1972) to ensure the provision of an adequate Internal Audit Service. This is achieved in part by ensuring the audit service provides sufficient coverage of the Authority's internal control environment, as demonstrated in the audit plan outturn.

### 5.4 ***Human Resources***

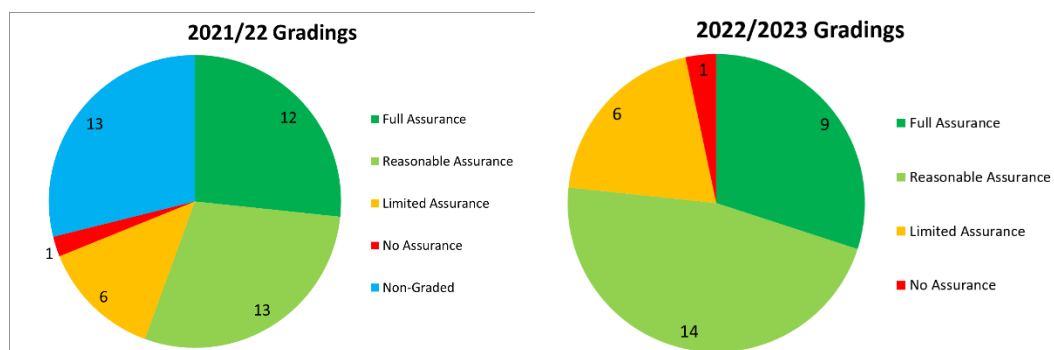
- 5.4.1 The section currently has a complement of six full time posts. This includes two staff that were appointed during the financial year, a Senior Auditor (appointed September 2022) and an Audit Apprentice (appointed October 2022).
- 5.4.2 Further to their appointment in September 2022, the Senior Auditor was called upon to assist the Accountancy Service in completing tasks relating to their previous role in order to assist with the budget setting process. This work was undertaken for a short period of time whilst the post in Accountancy was being backfilled.
- 5.4.3 There was no sickness absence experienced by the service throughout the year however there have been periods of absence as a result of Jury Service.



## 6. Supporting Evidence

### 6.1 Performance Information and Data

- 6.1.1 Appendix A shows all audits undertaken during the financial year and their status as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 including their actual or provisional grading (where applicable). Where a provisional grading has been issued the report has not been cleared by the service area and could be subject to change.
- 6.1.2 Performance data for the Section for the year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 is presented at Appendix B. Appendix C illustrates the spread of audit gradings issued during the year compared to the previous year. Appendix D shows the actual audit coverage compared to planned audit coverage by department, based on completed jobs in the year. The figures shown are the fully completed audits and do not include audits that are currently at draft stage.
- 6.1.3 30 audit reports were issued during the year split between the following audit gradings: 9 Full Assurance; 14 Reasonable Assurance; 6 Limited Assurance; and 1 No Assurance. The pie charts shown below show the comparison with the previous year.



- 6.1.4 No grade is given for some of the audits undertaken, however, there were no non-graded reports issued during the year. These audits are typically in respect of Follow Up Audits, Grant certification and ad hoc pieces of work such as investigations and advice. Work in these areas was either reduced / delayed due to the need to train new members of staff, or has not been concluded. Whilst these audits do not lend themselves to the standard audit gradings, any points of note or concerns identified would be reflected in the annual report of the Audit and Risk Manager.
- 6.15 The Internal Audit Service completed 69.45% of the audit plan against a target of 73%.
- 6.1.6 Productivity for the service remained consistent with previous years, with 90% of audits completed within the time allocated. In addition, 100% of Weaknesses identified were accepted by Service Managers, reflecting the accuracy and relevance of audit findings.

6.1.7 The average number of days to issue final reports exceeded the target for the second year running and reduced further from 5.17 days to 4.38 days.

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

6.2.1 Provision of sufficient audit coverage supports the Governance & Audit Committee in fulfilling its assurance role to the citizens of Blaenau Gwent.

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

6.3.1 There are no direct implications under involvement.

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

6.4.1 The work of Internal Audit is intended to provide advice and guidance on system improvements resulting in an improved control environment for the future of the Authority.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

6.5.1 Not applicable

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

6.6.1 The Welsh Chief Auditors Group set up a framework to facilitate peer review of self-assessments to satisfy the requirement for an external quality assessment in line with the PSIAS. The service was subject to a review in 2022/23 that confirmed compliance with the standards.

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

6.7.1 Not applicable

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

6.8.1 Not applicable

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IAA)***

6.9.1 Not applicable

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The levels of audit coverage and the gradings of individual audits will inform the annual opinion of the Audit & Risk Manager to be presented to the Governance & Audit Committee.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- Appendix A – Audit Plan Outturn 2022-23
- Appendix B – Performance Indicators 2022-23
- Appendix C – Audit Gradings 2022-23
- Appendix D – Audit Coverage by Department 2022-23

AUDIT PLAN 2022/232 - RESOURCES		
AUDIT AREA	AUDIT OPINION	COMMENTS
<b>Financial Services</b>		
Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant	Reasonable Assurance	Completed
Pupil Development Grant	Reasonable Assurance	Completed
Leasing	Not applicable	Ongoing
Bedwellty House and Park Charity Accounts	Full Assurance	Completed
Ebbw Vale Recreation Ground Charity Accounts	Full Assurance	Completed
<b>Revenue Services</b>		
Cost of Living Grant	Not applicable	Ongoing
Debtors System (CRSA)	Reasonable Assurance	Completed
AUDIT PLAN 2022/23- COMMERCIAL		
AUDIT AREA	AUDIT OPINION	COMMENTS
<b>Customer Services</b>		
Free School Meals	Not applicable	Ongoing
Self Isolation Payments (C/F)	Reasonable	Completed
Winter Support Fund	Not applicable	Ongoing
<b>Procurement</b>		
Purchase Card Scheme	Limited	Draft (Provisional)
<b>Workforce Management</b>		
Recruitment and Retention - Notifications of Termination Follow Up	Not applicable	Ongoing
Payroll Overtime	Reasonable	Completed
<b>Business Support</b>		
Petty Cash	Not applicable	Ongoing
AUDIT PLAN 2022/23 - LEGAL AND CORPORATE COMPLIANCE		
AUDIT AREA	AUDIT OPINION	COMMENTS
<b>Commercial, Property and Information Governance</b>		
Information Management	Reasonable	Draft (Provisional)
<b>Corporate Services and Registration</b>		
Registrars	Reasonable	Completed
AUDIT PLAN 2022/23 - GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIPS		
AUDIT AREA	AUDIT OPINION	COMMENTS
<b>Partnership and Policy</b>		
Local Government & Election Act	Reasonable	Completed
Decarbonisation	Not applicable	Ongoing
AUDIT PLAN 2022/23 - REGENERATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES		
AUDIT AREA	AUDIT OPINION	COMMENTS
<b>Frontline Integrated services</b>		
School Catering	Limited	Completed
<b>Infrastructure</b>		
Home to school / College Transport	Reasonable	Completed
<b>Public Protection</b>		
Enable Grant	Full Assurance	Completed
Phase 2 Homeless Grant	Limited	Completed
Temporary Accommodation	Not applicable	Ongoing
Housing Options	Not applicable	Ongoing
Disabled Facilities Grants	Reasonable	Draft (Provisional)
Trading Standards - Inspection, Enforcement and Advice	Full Assurance	Completed
<b>Development Control</b>		
Building Control	Limited	Completed
Dangerous Structures	No Assurance	Completed
<b>Regeneration and Thriving Communities</b>		
Support to Businesses - ERF Grant	Full Assurance	Completed
AUDIT PLAN 2022/23 - EDUCATION		
AUDIT AREA	AUDIT OPINION	COMMENTS
<b>Education Transformation</b>		
Schools CRSA	Reasonable	Completed
School System (Governing Bodies)	Reasonable	Completed
School System (ICT)	Limited	Completed
St Illtyds - School Audit	Not applicable	Ongoing
River Centre	Not applicable	Ongoing
<b>Youth Services</b>		
Youth Support Grant	Full Assurance	Completed
AUDIT PLAN 2022/23 - SOCIAL SERVICES		
AUDIT AREA	AUDIT OPINION	COMMENTS
<b>Development and Commissioning</b>		
Housing Support Grant	Full Assurance	Completed
Supporting People RDC Post	Full Assurance	Completed
Commissioning Follow up	Not applicable	Deferred
<b>Provider Services</b>		
Cwrt Myton	Not applicable	Ongoing
Community Care Follow Up	Not applicable	Deferred
<b>Families First and Placement</b>		
External Fostering	Limited	Draft (Provisional)
<b>Safeguarding and 14+</b>		
Social Services Safeguarding	Reasonable	Completed
AUDIT PLAN 2022/23 - CORPORATE		
AUDIT AREA	AUDIT OPINION	COMMENTS
Thematic Review - Social Services & Debtors	Not applicable	Deferred
Contract Audit < £75k	Full Assurance	Completed
Contract Audit > £75k	Reasonable	Completed
Special Investigation	Not applicable	Ongoing

Grading
Full Assurance
Reasonable Assurance
Limited Assurance
No Assurance
Non-Graded

Follow ups
Recruitment and Retention - Notifications of Termination Follow Up

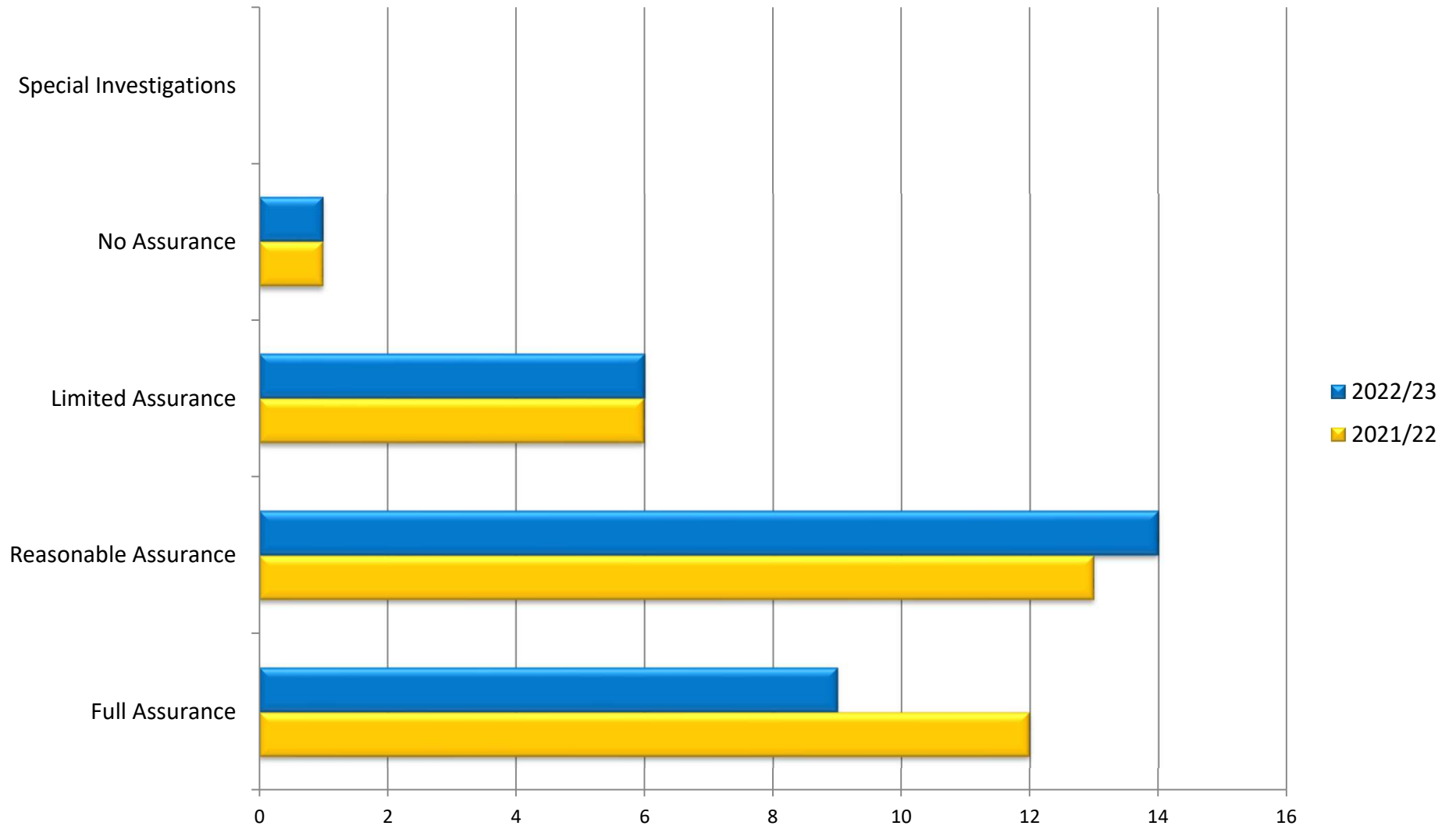
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INTERNAL AUDIT SECTIONPERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2022/23

	Performance Indicator	2020/21 Target	2020/21 Actual	2021/22 Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Target	2022/23 Actual	RAG Rating
Local PI	Audit Plan Completion %	N/A	N/A	70%	70.74%	73%	69.45%	Amber
Local PI	% of Agreed Actions for Weaknesses Identified	90%	99%	90%	100%	90%	100%	Green
Local PI	% of Agreed Actions completed after 6 months	80%	91%	80%	90%	80%	100%	Green
Local PI	% of Audit Clients at least "satisfied" with the service	95%	100%	95%	100%	95%	100%	Green
Local PI	Average number of days taken to issue Final Reports	5 days	2.42 days	5 days	5.17 days	5 days	4.38 days	Green
Local PI	% of Audits completed within time allocated	75%	87%	75%	90%	75%	90%	Green
Local PI	% of Performance Reviews undertaken within previous 12 months	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	Green
Local PI	Average number of sick days per person (cumulative average)	6 days	6.67 days	8 days	0.83 days	7 days	0 days	Green

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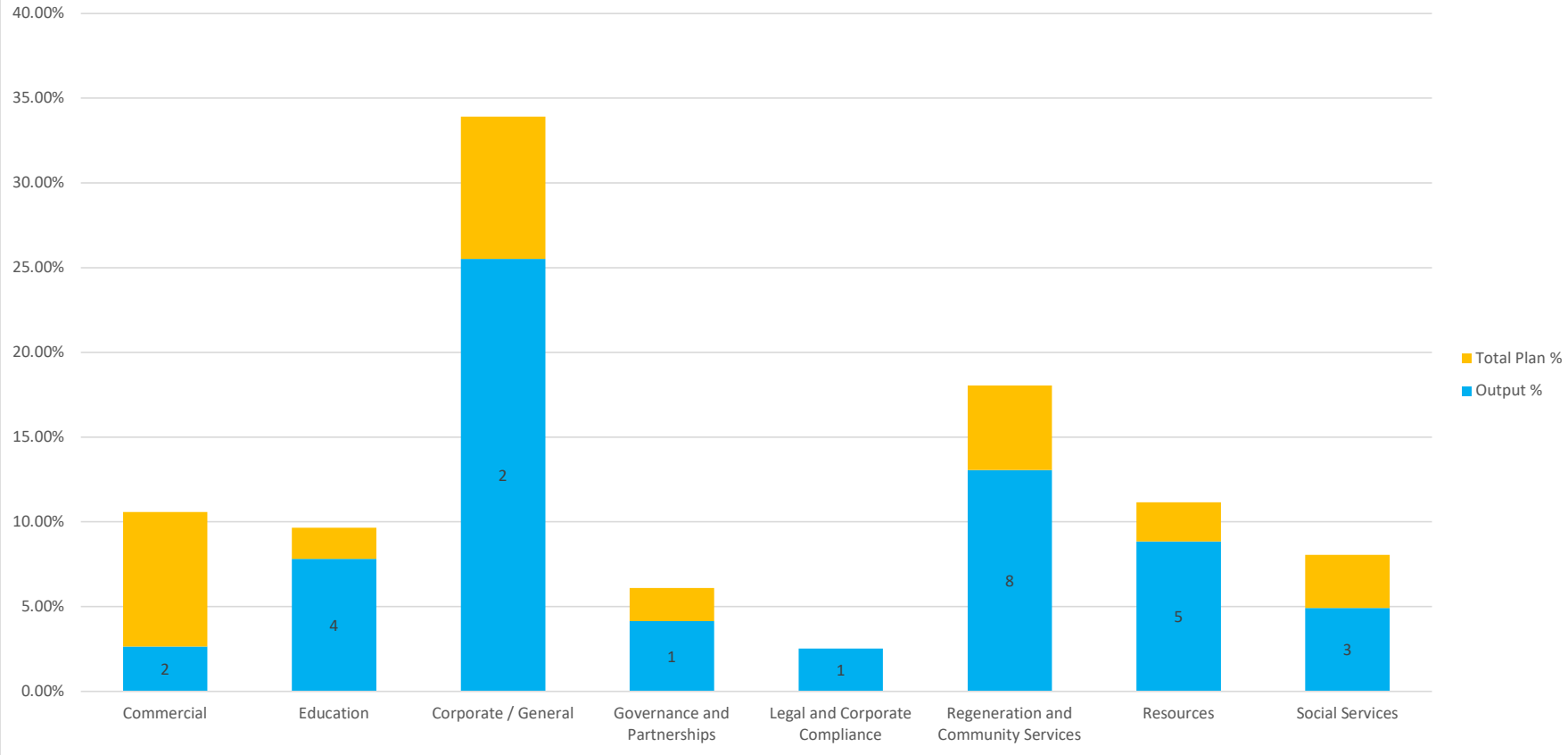
# Audit Gradings 2021/22 & 2022/23



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### Audit Coverage by Department 2022/23



Department	Total Department %	Output %	Completed Audit Areas
Commercial	10.57%	2.64%	2
Education	9.66%	7.82%	4
Corporate / General	33.91%	25.52%	2
Governance and Partnerships	6.09%	4.14%	1
Legal and Corporate Compliance	2.53%	2.53%	1
Regeneration and Community Services	18.05%	13.05%	8
Resources	11.15%	8.85%	5
Social Services	8.05%	4.91%	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>69.45%</b>	<b>26</b>

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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 and Audit Committee**  
Date of meeting: **26<sup>th</sup> April 2023**  
Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Response to Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) Inspection**  
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. Sue Edmunds, Cabinet Member People and Education**  
Report Submitted by: **Luisa Munro-Morris, Head of School Improvement and Inclusion**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
05.04.23	06/04/23			26/04/23	28/04/23	03.05.23		

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 For Governance and Audit Committee to be assured that the Education Directorate's response to the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) Inspection responds appropriately to the recommendations and is in line with Council's Governance arrangements.

The full report is attached as Appendix 1.

## 2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The provision of Education is regulated under the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework. The Local Authority was inspected between 28<sup>th</sup> November and 2<sup>nd</sup> December and the report was published February 2023. 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 inspectorate identified 3 recommendations for improvement, and the local authority will use these recommendations to update its improvement plans.

- 2.2 The recommendations are:

- 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.

- 2.3 In addition to the three recommendations, key areas for improvement have been identified within the body of the Estyn Report. These will be addressed alongside the 3 recommendations.

- 2.4 This report is the first update reporting on progress against the 3 recommendations to Members.

- 2.5 **Local Authority Link Inspection Visits**  
Estyn have confirmed that there is no requirement for the LA to prepare a Post Inspection Action plan following the inspection. Instead, as part of the termly Local Authority Link Inspection Visits (LALI), the LA will be required to provide evidence to the inspectorate that shows improvements are being made both corporately and operationally in relation to the 3 recommendations.
- 2.6 The first LALI visit post inspection took place on 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2023. A range of evidence was presented to demonstrate progress towards the 3 recommendations.
- 2.7 **Business Planning**  
The Education Directorate has revised its business plan (improvement plan) to incorporate the 3 recommendations at both a strategic and an operational level. Progress on relevant actions within the business plan will be reviewed on a quarterly basis, in line with other actions.
- 2.8 **Self-evaluation Report**  
Estyn identified in their report that overall the quality of self-evaluation is not strong enough. In response to this, the Education Directorate have revised the format of the self-evaluation report. The report is now structured so that it reports directly on each of the 5 corporate school improvement priorities. There is a clear focus on progress against the priority, impact and next steps. There is also a section to identify and evidence progress against the 3 recommendations (Appendix 2). Progress has been made on identifying suitable data to use as evidence and this will be reported on in the next update.
- 2.9 **Action Plans**  
Half-termly action planning sessions, which commenced in the Spring term, are in place with key stakeholders from across the LA. The aim of these sessions is to create action plans to address the recommendations and the key areas for improvement from within the report. An initial action plan has been created, which includes measurable success criteria and identifies responsible persons for each action (Appendix 3). The next step is to identify timeframes for each of the actions.
3. **Options for Recommendation**
- 3.1 The report has been considered by Education's DMT and CLT.
- 3.2 **Option 1**  
Governance and Audit Committee is assured that the action plan in response to Estyn's recommendations and the structure of the revised Self-evaluation Report will appropriately respond to the Estyn Recommendations.
- 3.3 **Option 2**  
Governance and Audit Committee provide amendment on the action plan and or Self-evaluation report for consideration by the Education Directorate.

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. One of the Estyn recommendations relates to the slow pace of change in one of these schools causing concern. 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.
- 5.3 **Legal**

There are no legal requirements as part of this report, however, there is a requirement to respond to the Estyn recommendations within three months of receiving the letter.
- 5.4 **Human Resources**

There are no direct implications for staff relating to this report.
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 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 and can also help with planning resources and ensuring value for money services are delivered.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

Work will be undertaken across the Education Directorate alongside working with the EAS and schools.

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

The whole Education Directorate as well as other key service areas, such as Governance and Partnerships, and the Regeneration and Community Services Directorate will be involved in supporting education across the borough.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

There are no direct implications in relation to decarbonisation as part of this report, however, school buildings and adaptations consider how to reduce carbon emissions.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IAA)***

As this is not a decision-making report an IAA is not required, however, Education work to support all those with protected characteristics.

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 – Blaenau Gwent LGES Inspection](#)
- [Appendix 2 – Draft revised SER](#)
- [Appendix 3 – Action plan](#)

**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](http://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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Publication date: 10/02/2023



Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol  
**Blaenau Gwent**  
County Borough Council

# Education Directorate Self-Evaluation Report

End of year review	October 2023
Mid-term review	April 2024

**Contents:**

**Context**

Blaenau Gwent School and Local Authority – Context

Executive Summary

**Estyn Recommendations February 2023**

	Progress	Impact	Next Steps
Recommendation 1 - Improve the corporate leadership of education services			
Recommendation 2 - Improve the quality of self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management			
Recommendation 3 - Accelerate improvements in provision for secondary age pupils in schools causing concern			



**Priority 1: Improving educational standards and wellbeing for pupils, particularly at KS4**

Why this is a priority within the education business plan

Overview of progress

Impact

Next steps - new actions included in business plan

**Priority 2: Securing quality ALN/Inclusion provision, particularly to support vulnerable groups of learners and those who are eFSM**

Why this is a priority within the education business plan

Overview of progress

Impact

Next steps - new actions included in business plan

**Priority 3: Transforming education in line with responsive school support services and a school estate that is fit for the 21st Century**

Why this is a priority within the education business plan

Overview of progress

Impact

Next steps - new actions included in business plan

**Priority 4: Delivering effective young people and partnership provision, with a focus on lifelong learning and leisure/recreation provision to meet community need**

Why this is a priority within the education business plan
Overview of progress
Impact
Next steps - new actions included in business plan

**Priority 5: Enhancing the performance culture for Education and Leisure that delivers better educational outcomes and improved value for money**

Why this is a priority within the education business plan
Overview of progress
Impact
Next steps - new actions included in business plan



# Recommendations following the Estyn Inspection November 2022

<b>R1 Improve the corporate leadership of education services</b>			
<b>Estyn Comments</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Success Criteria</b>
1.1 Whilst there have been some positive developments in provision for pupils with additional learning needs, the quality of planning for future provision is variable.	<b>Inclusion and ALN</b>	LMM - Visioning sessions LMM - Inclusion working group set up LMM/JS/LJ - and Vision revisited LMM/JS/LJ -Inclusion strategy created, based on the vision LMM/JS/JW - Planning for additional resource bases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear vision for inclusion which drives all planning</li> <li>• Key stakeholders drive inclusion planning</li> <li>• Inclusion strategy in place – short/mid- and long-term goals</li> <li>• Additional resource bases ensure no capacity issues in resource bases</li> </ul>
1.2 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.	<b>Education vision</b>	DMT/key LA officers - Revisit vision DMT/key LA officers - Visioning sessions DMT - Ensure vision underpins self-evaluation and improvement planning DMT - Increase visibility of vision e.g. email signatures, letter heads DMT - Ensure vision is shared with and understood by all key stakeholders e.g. Joint HT meetings, members briefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear vision for education underpinned but clear purposes</li> <li>• Vision understood by all key stakeholders</li> <li>• Vision drives all improvement planning</li> </ul>
1.3 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%.	<b>ALN</b>	LMM/JW/JS - Closer working between Inclusion and Transformation LMM/JS/JSi/CS - Closer working with Youth service, early years, ALN officer for EY, Health and Service Manager for Inclusion to inform future planning to inform decision making JS – Training on ALN Act for Health LMM/JS/LJ - Strategy for Inclusion developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement planning for inclusion is based on sharing of key data across service areas and wider stakeholders</li> <li>• Health colleagues have a clearer understanding of ALN Act to support their work with schools</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategy for inclusion in place</li> </ul>
1.4 Senior leaders have a suitable vision for inclusion and pupils with ALN. However, this is not yet supported by a clear strategy.	<b>Inclusion and ALN</b>	See 1.3	See 1.3
1.5 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.	<b>Education vision</b>	See 1.2	See 1.2

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<b>R2 Improve the quality of self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management</b>			
<b>Estyn Comments</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Success Criteria</b>
2.1 The corporate plan is not supported by coherent delivery plans for education that include related actions and measurable success criteria.	<b>Business Planning</b>	DMT - Revisit Business Plans, ensure actions relate to the vision, have clear timelines and measurable success criteria	The corporate plan is supported by Coherent business plans for education that include clear timelines, related actions and measurable success criteria
2.2 Overall, the quality of self-evaluation, planning for improvement, and performance management is not strong enough.	<b>Self-Evaluation Business Planning</b>	DMT - Self-evaluation joint working group half-termly DMT - Performance management – clear focus on accountability to Business Plan, and professional development opportunities JS – Training for Inclusion team on Fades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality of self-evaluation is improved and uses relevant data effectively to enable informed improvement planning</li> <li>Performance management is based on a performance coaching model, strong focus on accountability to business plan priorities and relevant professional development opportunities</li> </ul>
2.3 The corporate priority and directorate vision for education are not coherently reflected in education plans.	<b>Business Planning</b>	See 2.1	See 2.1
2.4 The range of broad indicators in the corporate plan are not developed sufficiently into specific success criteria against relevant actions in education plans.	<b>Performance Indicators</b>	See 2.1	See 2.1
2.5 Disconnect between corporate and education plans tempers senior leaders' ability to hold officers to account for their work and	<b>Business Planning</b>	See 2.1 and 2.2	See 2.1 and 2.2

ensure an appropriate pace of improvement in identified areas.			
2.6 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.	<b>Self-Evaluation Reporting Impact</b>	See 2.1	See 2.1
2.7 Senior managers have a better understanding of strengths and weaknesses in their services areas than is reflected in planning and self-evaluation documentation.	<b>Business planning Self-Evaluation</b>	See 2.1	See 2.1
2.8 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.	<b>Performance Indicators Targets</b>	See 2.2	See 2.2
2.9 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.	<b>Self-Evaluation</b>	LP - Ensure developments in self-evaluation and business plans are clearly delivered to members through relevant reports/member briefings. LMM/MJ – Develop clearer processes for holding EAS to account for all aspects of their work. Information from these processes to be shared with members.	Members are provided with clear information on strengths and areas for improvement across the directorate. Members use the information to challenge and hold the education directorate and the EAS to account.

<b>R3 Accelerate improvements in provision for secondary age pupils in schools causing concern</b>			
<b>Estyn Comments</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Success Criteria</b>
3.1 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.	<b>Schools Causing Concern – pace of change</b>	LP - Re-issue of SWN to BFS, clear targets with measurable outcomes and time specific i.e. 2 terms	BFS are removed from a category
3.2 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.	<b>Schools Causing Concern – pace of change</b>	See 3.1	See 3.1
3.3 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.	<b>Schools Causing Concern – early identification</b>	LP/LMM/MJ - Early identification through Professional Discussions, CSSR, Supported Self-evaluation, Wider group meetings, Partnership meetings, weekly directorate meetings with EAS Implementation of Team Around the School approach when issues identified	Important shortcomings in SCC schools are recognised early and appropriate support and challenge is put in place quickly. Clear monitoring systems of progress are put in place.



<p>3.4 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.</p>	<p><b>Schools Causing Concern – early identification</b></p>	<p>See 3.3</p>	<p>See 3.3</p>
<p>3.5 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.</p>	<p><b>Schools Causing Concern – early identification</b></p>	<p>LMM/MJ – Develop clearer processes for holding EAS to account for all aspects of their work. LMM/MJ – Work with EAS to review and remodel SIP working</p>	<p>Important shortcomings in schools are recognised early and appropriate support and challenge is put in place quickly. Clear monitoring systems of progress are put in place.</p>
<p>3.6 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.</p>	<p><b>Schools Causing Concern – pace of change</b></p>	<p>LP/LMM – Overview of Performance Management of HTs LMM/MJ – Develop clearer processes for holding EAS to account for all aspects of their work. DMT - Performance management of LA officers</p>	<p>Pace of change in all schools is timely.</p>

Other			
Estyn Comments	Theme	Actions	Success Criteria
For the three years from 2017 to 2019, overall school attendance was consistently lower than the national average.	<b>Attendance</b>	DMT - Scrutiny of attendance data at DMT – identification of key themes, areas of good practice DMT - Performance management of relevant officers LA - Reinstate fines and CALICO, consistent approach JS/LA - Joint working with SEWC – sharing of good practice, implement strategies in schools JSi/LA - Joint termly meetings with secondary schools to discuss strategies to improve attendance etc.	School attendance is in line with or above national average. BG is in the second quartile or higher for attendance.
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.	<b>Exclusions</b>	DMT - Scrutiny of exclusions data at DMT – identification of key themes, areas of good practice LMM/JS – Introduction of additional nurture provision in schools with high levels of exclusions DMT - Performance management of relevant officers LA - Joint working with SEWC – sharing of good practice, implement strategies in schools JS – Vulnerable learner Panel to support reduction of pupils at risk of permanent exclusion. Review of managed move protocol. JSi/LA - Joint termly meetings with secondary schools to discuss strategies to improve attendance etc.	The rate of fixed term exclusions is in line with or better than the national average. Fixed term exclusions continue to improve in line with the national average or better.
When given the opportunity, children and young people in the authority influence decisions that affect them.	<b>Pupil voice</b>	LMM/LF/ES - Continue to develop the work of Pupil Voice forums which impact on decision making e.g. Youth Forum. Ensure feedback from Pupil Voice Forums informs self-evaluation and improvement planning	Children and young people are provided with increased opportunities to influence decisions that affect them.
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.	<b>Inclusion</b>	LMM/JS/MJ - Inclusion Working Group to review all Inclusion Policies Inclusion Policies to be reshared with schools/governing bodies	Key stakeholders shape revised inclusion policies.

<p>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.</p>	<p><b>Safeguarding</b></p>	<p>MJ - DMT progress report. Monthly officer meeting to progress My Concern matters. My Concern School / officer working group established. Project plan revised for next stages of implementation</p>	<p>My Concern is used by all schools to effectively record and report incidents, including safeguarding, bullying and RPIs. The LA uses My Concern reports to effectively monitor data, and to inform improvement planning.</p>
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<p>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.</p>	<p><b>Safeguarding</b></p>	<p>JS - Evaluate the impact of additional funding for schools with high exclusion rates to provide additional Nurture provision MJ/SD - Safeguarding Performance report to comment upon the impact that additional funding has upon school exclusion rates</p>	<p>The rate of fixed term exclusions is line with or better than the national average. Fixed term exclusions continue to improve in line with the national average or better.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p><b>ICT</b></p>	<p>JW - Bring together range of ICT initiatives into one clear strategy Ensure HT representation in relevant ICT meetings Feedback to HTs in Joint Headteacher meeting on ICT strategy MJ - The implementation of My Concern</p>	<p>Clear ICT strategy in place which is co-constructed with key stakeholders, including headteachers. ICT strategy is understood by all key stakeholders.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p><b>Transformation</b></p>	<p>LMM./JW/JS - Review of resource bases JW - Review of school capacity</p>	<p>The LA has appropriate Resource Bases in place that meet the needs of BG learners, including in Welsh medium. School capacity issues are resolved.</p>
<p>However, the ongoing monitoring of these Resource Base 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.</p>	<p><b>Inclusion and school improvement</b></p>	<p>JS/MJ - EAS to undertake review of Resource Base provision through SIP work Autumn 2022. Supported Self-evaluation activities undertaken by the EAS in schools with resource bases to be undertaken by Inclusion LA officer and SIP JS – review entry and exit criteria for Resource Bases</p>	<p>Review of resource bases completed and used to effectively inform improvement planning. Revised entrance and exit criteria for Resource Bases in school.</p>

<p>The local authority does not analyse its use of out-of-county settings well enough to understand the implications for its capacity to meet the needs of pupils locally.</p>	<p><b>Inclusion and ALN</b></p>	<p>JS - Analysis of out of county settings undertaken, spreadsheet created where all relevant data can be analysed.</p>	<p>Analysis of out of county placements enables clear planning for placements, and reduces potential risks linked to finance.</p>
<p>However, the local authority does not have a strategic enough approach to planning or evaluating the impact of professional learning across the directorate.</p>	<p><b>Professional Learning</b></p>	<p>DMT - Professional Learning a core part of Professional Coaching meetings. Professional Learning opportunities link to Business planning and or LA officer's portfolio</p>	<p>The LA plans and evaluates the impact of professional learning across the directorate effectively.</p>

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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: **26<sup>th</sup> April 2023**  
Report Subject: **Audit Wales Reviews and Management Responses**  
Portfolio Holder: **All Cabinet Members**  
Report Submitted by: **Gemma Wasley, Service Manager Performance and Democratic**

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)
	13/04/23		26/04/23					

1. **Purpose of the Report**
  - 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Governance and Audit Committee with assurance that proposals for improvement, identified by Audit Wales via various reports, are being responded to in line with Council Governance arrangements.
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 On 8<sup>th</sup> March 2023, Governance and Audit Committee received a number of Audit Wales reports which included how and where the proposals for improvement would be managed and monitored.
  - 2.2 During that meeting the Governance and Audit Committee asked for more detail to be provided on what action would be taken against each Audit Wales report.
  - 2.3 Appendix 1 provides detail on each of the audit reports and the actions to be taken.
  - 2.4 Appendix 1 also includes whether the report is identified as local or national:
    - **Local Report** – a review undertaken on a Blaenau Gwent Council service, with proposals specifically for the Council to complete.
    - **National Report** – a review taken across many or all Local Authorities in Wales. These proposals for improvement are suggestions following the findings across Wales and may not be suitable for all areas to undertake.

2.5 The reports included in Appendix 1 are:

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Local / National</b>	<b>No. Recommendations</b>
Assurance and Risk Assessment Review	Local	2
Corporate Safeguarding Follow-up	Local	2
A missed opportunity' – Social Enterprises	National	3
Springing Forward	Local	6
Time for Change' – Poverty in Wales	National	1
Together we can' Community Resilience and Self-Reliance	National	2

2.6 As reported at the last meeting, all actions identified at appendix 1 to respond to the proposals for improvement will also be included within the relevant business plan for monitoring and reporting.

2.7 To provide further assurance to Committee, there is a governance process in place in order to provide a consistency for the managing and monitoring all proposals for improvement and recommendations from both internal and external auditors including:

- Sign off of all proposals at CLT and or lead officers;
- Lead officers or group identified to manage and monitor implementation;
- The relevant business plan to include the proposals for improvement, where they are then updated and monitored on a quarterly basis;
- The Annual Governance Statement includes detail of all proposals for improvement which are outstanding; and
- CLT to agree when proposals have been completed and can be closed.

#### 4. **Options for Recommendation**

4.1 The report has been considered by CLT at their meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

##### 4.2 **Option 1**

Governance and Audit Committee is assured that the actions outlined in appendix 1 against each proposal for improvement will appropriately respond to the Audit Wales findings.

##### **Option 2**

Governance and Audit Committee provide amendments to the actions outlined in appendix 1 for consideration by the lead officer.



5. **Monitoring Arrangements**

5.1 As outlined in paragraph 2.7.

5.2 The information will be reported within the relevant Directorate report as well as the Joint Finance and Performance Report presented 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 Reviews and Management Responses

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**Report title:** Assurance and Risk Assessment Review

**Local or National Report:** Local

**Completion date:** Published November 2022 (audit year 2021/22)

Ref	Recommendation	Organisational response Please set out here relevant commentary on the planned actions in response to the recommendations	Completion date Please set out by when the planned actions will be complete	Responsible officer / group
R1	<p>The Council should ensure that the high level actions in its Decarbonisation Plan (Readiness Assessment) are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prioritised based on clear criteria, including carbon and financial impact;</li> <li>2. Aligned with its Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Programme; and</li> <li>3. • Integrated into Business Plans.</li> </ol>	<p>Criteria and MTFS / Capital Programme - The readiness assessments include evidence in order to establish prioritisation of actions. Financial impact is considered as part of this.</p> <p>Actions identified from the Council's Climate Change Group readiness assessments are included into the relevant business plan for continued monitoring.</p>	<p>In line with the readiness assessments and prioritisation of actions.</p> <p>Complete</p>	<p>Council's Climate Group</p> <p>Professional Lead Climate Change / Service Manager Performance and Democratic</p>
R2	<p>The Council should develop a robust set of metrics to measure and report progress on its decarbonisation journey.</p>	<p>The Council responds to the national and statutory performance indicator requirements as part of the Carbon Footprint Annual Report which includes the calculating and reporting of emissions.</p> <p>Work to be undertaken to develop new reporting elements for the next annual report.</p>	<p>On going as required</p> <p>In line with Welsh Government reporting deadlines</p>	<p>Council's Climate Change Group</p>

Report title: Corporate Safeguarding Follow-up

Local or National Report: Local

Completion date: Published November 2022 (audit year 2021/22)

Ref	Recommendation	<b>Organisational response</b> Please set out here relevant commentary on the planned actions in response to the recommendations	<b>Completion date</b> Please set out by when the planned actions will be complete	<b>Responsible officer / group</b>
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.	The Strategic Safeguarding Leads Group has identified the actions where further improvement is needed. A self-assessment process has been implemented across the council. The first of which took place in November 2022. The findings of the self-assessment are reported back to the strategic leadership group and actions are set against these findings. It has been further agreed that a corporate safeguarding report is produced annually, and this report will be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee and will include self assessment findings. The corporate self-assessment will take place annually with the second due to commence late summer 2023.	Self assessment – late summer 2023 Implementing actions from self assessment - ongoing	Strategic Safeguarding Leads Group
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.	<p>Monitoring of safeguarding arrangements for third parties will be tested by Internal Audit in line with the risk assessed Audit Plan. This will evidence how well the monitoring arrangements work and provide an opportunity for the CSL Group to further strengthen these arrangements. The plan will contain the following audit areas, split between Corporate Procurement and Schools and each of these areas will be considered for audit as part of the annual risk review.</p> <p>Corporate Procurement - A systems audit will be conducted in Qtr. 2/3 of 2023/4, testing the arrangements in place that require third parties to meet minimum safeguarding standards as part of the procurement process. Further, more targeted testing, will be undertaken for services where enhanced safeguarding measures are required. The audit report will be issued to the CSL group for any weaknesses identified through the audit to be rectified.</p> <p>Schools - Schools are required to complete an annual Control Risk Self-Assessment (CRSA) explaining the measures they have in place to mitigate risks. The CRSA questionnaire will be updated to include specific questions on safeguarding in relation to third parties, either through procurement or volunteering. The answers provided will be assessed and if required a systems audit of third party safeguarding in schools will be conducted. The CRSA questionnaire will be issued to schools in April.</p>	Audit Quarter 2/3 2023/24	Strategic Safeguarding Leads Group

**Report title:** 'A missed opportunity' – Social Enterprises

**Local or National Report:** National

**Completion date:** Published December 2022 (audit year 2021/22)

Ref	Recommendation	Organisational response Please set out here relevant commentary on the planned actions in response to the recommendations	Completion date Please set out by when the planned actions will be complete	Responsible officer / group
R1	<p>We recommend that local authority officers use the checklist in Appendix 2 to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-evaluate current Social Enterprise engagement, management, performance and practice;</li> <li>• identify opportunities to improve joint working; and</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>	<p>Owing to few resources in this area, the Council prioritises working with, engaging and supporting businesses to survive. Support is provided to social enterprises through the Community Asset Transfer process when requested.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Estates and Business and Innovation</p>
R2	<p>To drive improvement we recommend that the local authority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formally approve the completed Action Plan;</li> <li>• regularly report, monitor and evaluate performance at relevant scrutiny committees; and</li> <li>• revise actions and targets in light of the authority's evaluation and assessment of its performance.</li> </ul>	<p>Information on social enterprises to be included in directorate reports and annual self evaluation processes where the information is available.</p>	<p>In line with reporting</p>	<p>Corporate Performance Team</p>
R3	<p>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.</p>	<p>The Annual Report of the Director of Social Services make reference to the delivery of its S.16 responsibilities to promote Social Enterprises.</p>	<p>July 2023 (in line with statutory reporting)</p>	<p>Tanya Evans, Interim Director Social Services</p> <p>Corporate Performance Team</p>

Report title: Springing Forward

Local or National Report: Local

Completion date: Published November 2022 (audit year 2021/22)

Ref	Recommendation	Organisational response Please set out here relevant commentary on the planned actions in response to the recommendations	Completion date Please set out by when the planned actions will be complete	Responsible officer (title)
R1	<p><b>Equality impact assessments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Ensure that all decisions are informed by a timely equality impact assessment where required.</li> </ul>	<p>A full review of the integrated impact assessment process and criteria has been undertaken (including socio-economic duty). Guidance and development of research library also developed, the assessments states that all decisions, policy reviews or policy implementation will require a completed Integrated Impact Assessment.</p> <p>The corporate report template includes a section on impact assessments so that decisions can be informed by relevant information.</p> <p>On-going work to scope a Corporate Equality Training Programme for Managers, Staff and Members.</p>	<p>Complete</p> <p>Ongoing in line with Council decisions.</p> <p>Within the 2023/24 cycle</p>	<p>Development, training and review sits within the Governance and Partnership Section.</p> <p>Implementation of the process is for everyone to embed.</p>
R2	<p><b>Develop a longer-term asset strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o In developing its new strategic asset management strategy, the Council should apply the sustainable development principle and specifically ensure that it: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o builds on learning from its experience of the COVID-19 pandemic;</li> <li>o takes account of longer-term trends that may affect service provision and the efficient use of assets;</li> <li>o aligns with other strategic documents, including decarbonisation, commercial, workforce and digital strategies;</li> <li>o sets out the Council's intended outcomes over the short, medium and longer term;</li> <li>o takes account of the needs of staff, service users and partners; and</li> <li>o sets out SMART performance measures and appropriate monitoring and reporting arrangements.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>A new SAMP will be developed which will consider the areas identified from Audit Wales. The CAMWG will lead on this work as it includes staff from across departments.</p>	<p>To be agreed in consultation with CLT</p>	<p>CAMWG</p>

Report title: Springing Forward

Local or National Report: Local

Completion date: Published November 2022 (audit year 2021/22)

Ref	Recommendation	Organisational response Please set out here relevant commentary on the planned actions in response to the recommendations	Completion date Please set out by when the planned actions will be complete	Responsible officer (title)
R3	<p><b>Further develop workforce strategy and planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o In delivering its workforce strategy, the Council should ensure that it:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♣ incorporates learning from the COVID-19 pandemic;</li> <li>♣ 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;</li> <li>♣ provides service managers with the necessary skills and capacity to develop their workforce plans;</li> <li>♣ collates service workforce plans to understand what actions it needs to take at a corporate level to strengthen its workforce;</li> <li>♣ expands workforce information to include detail on:                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• i. current skills and current and future skills gaps;</li> <li>• ii. talent and succession planning; and</li> <li>• iii. critical posts and the risks associated with them becoming vacant;</li> </ul> </li> <li>♣ strengthens the underlying action plans by developing SMART objectives so progress can be monitored and scrutinised; and</li> <li>♣ aligns with other strategic documents, including decarbonisation, commercial, asset management and digital strategies.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>The Council's Workforce Strategy 2021-26 was approved by Council on 29th July 2021. The Strategy is a key enabler in delivering the Council's ambition, the New Council Operating Model, and key priorities. It has a focus on the future, integrating the Council's vision, objectives and financial planning arrangements.</p> <p>The five-year Strategy is underpinned by an annual delivery plan that supports its implementation.</p> <p>The Council has an annual workforce planning process which supports delivery of the Workforce Strategy and some of the recommendations stated will be built into that process from May 2023.</p>	<p>In line with the with the next review of the strategy.</p>	<p>Head of Organisational Development</p>

Report title: Springing Forward

Local or National Report: Local

Completion date: Published November 2022 (audit year 2021/22)

R4	<p><b>Engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o 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.</li><li>o 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.</li><li>o 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.</li></ul>	<p>Development of an engagement strategy which will be informed by residents, businesses, staff, user groups and members. This will include consideration of engagement methods.</p> <p>Work with existing forums and groups to engage on Council activity moving forward.</p>	<p>Strategy to be approved late 2023.</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Governance and Partnership Section to lead on the development of the strategy and engagement activity.</p> <p>Engaging with groups will be a Council wide responsibility.</p>
R5	<p><b>Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Identify the costs of delivering the assets and workforce strategies and incorporate these into the medium-term financial strategy.</li><li>o Collaborate with public sector partners across Gwent to evaluate the potential benefits of developing a strategic long-term approach to a single public estate.</li><li>o Build on existing examples of collaborative working by developing a more systematic approach to collaboration.</li></ul>	<p>When developing business cases Officers to consider the areas as outlined by Audit Wales including assets, workforce, and collaboration</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>All Senior Managers</p>
R6	<p><b>Sustainable development principle</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o The Council should seek to fully embed the sustainable development principle in its decision making.</li></ul>	<p>The report format includes sustainable development and it is a requirement for all reports to consider these and include detail in reports.</p> <p>Members and officers need to consider sustainable development when considering reports and making decisions. Member training to be held on this.</p>	<p>Report format completed. Reporting ongoing.</p> <p>To be held as part of the member development programme in the new 2023/24 cycle</p>	<p>All report authors</p> <p>Governance and Partnership Section</p>



Report title: 'Time for Change' – Poverty in Wales

Local or National Report: National

Completion date: Published November 2022 (audit year 2021/22)

Ref	Recommendation	Organisational response Please set out here relevant commentary on the planned actions in response to the recommendations	Completion date Please set out by when the planned actions will be complete	Responsible officer (title)
R1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>Council's 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.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>Councils optimise their digital services by creating a single landing page on their website</li> <li>Creation of a single gateway into services</li> <li>Councils review their integrated impact assessments or equivalent</li> </ul>	<p>The Well-being Plan is to be agreed in July. The draft includes the poverty agenda.</p> <p>The interim Director of Social Services is the lead officer for Poverty and chairs the Cost of Living Officer Groups and sits on the Cost of Living Member Group.</p> <p>The Council has identified a Member Poverty Champion.</p> <p>The Cost of Living Group includes action to consider how best to inform residents of what's available to them and this includes the Council website and contacting services.</p> <p>Listening Commissions (also known as Truth Commissions) are being actioned as part of the Cost of Living Group. The arrangements are currently being scoped.</p> <p>The Council has undertaken a full review of its integrated impact assessment which is linked to reporting and decision making.</p>	<p>July 2023</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>Complete</p> <p>In line with the action plan</p> <p>In line with the action plan</p> <p>Complete</p>	<p>Interim Director of Social Services and Cost of Living Group</p>

**Report title:** Together we can' Community Resilience and Self-Reliance

**Local or National Report:** National

**Completion date:** Published January 2023

Ref	Recommendation	Organisational response Please set out here relevant commentary on the planned actions in response to the recommendations	Completion date Please set out by when the planned actions will be complete	Responsible officer (title)
R1	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-evaluate current engagement, management, performance and practice;</li> <li>• identify where improvement is needed; and</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>	<p>Work to be undertaken by the Cost of Living Group to complete the self assessment tool as described at appendix 2 of the Audit Wales report.</p> <p>Work undertaken and analysis to be completed on understanding digital exclusion issues, including external review of customer service experience, work to support residents to be more digitally included, transactional cost shift to understand why residents contact us and data insight work done within the Cost of Living Group in Social Services and working with businesses.</p> <p>Building on the work undertaken with partners to support community resilience such as the BT engagement exploring the smart borough approach</p> <p>The Council is reviewing its Engagement Strategy which will include working with the community.</p>	In line with the action plan of the Cost of Living Group	Cost of Living Group
R2	<p>To help local authorities address the gaps they identify following their self-evaluation, we recommend that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formally approve the completed Action Plan arising from the evaluation exercise;</li> <li>• regularly report, monitor and evaluate performance at relevant scrutiny committees; and</li> <li>• revise actions and targets in light of the authority's evaluation and assessment of its performance</li> </ul>	Information on social enterprises to be included in directorate reports and annual self evaluation processes where the information is available.	In line with reporting	Corporate Performance Team