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**Blaenau Gwent**

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

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

16th June 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

### **GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE**

A meeting of the Governance & Audit Committee will be held in Hybrid Meeting to be held virtually via MS Teams or in The Sir Williams Firth Room, General Offices, Steelworks Road, Ebbw Vale on Wednesday, 21st June, 2023 at 11.00 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. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR 2023/2024**  
To appoint Chair of the Governance & Audit Committee 2023/2024.
5. **GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE** 5 - 8  
To receive the decisions of the Governance & Audit Committee held on 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2023.  
  
(Please note the decisions are submitted for points of accuracy only).
6. **ACTION SHEET** 9 - 12  
To receive the Action Sheet arising from the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2023.
7. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24** 13 - 18  
To agree.
8. **STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2021/22**  
Verbal update.
9. **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AUDIT AND RISK MANAGER 2022/23** 19 - 26  
To consider the report of the Audit and Risk Manager
10. **INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2023-2028** 27 - 38  
To consider the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

**11. CIVIC CENTRE INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IIA)**

39 - 70

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

**12. TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

To consider.

To: J. Absalom  
Councillor S. Behr (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor D. Bevan  
Councillor K. Chaplin  
Councillor W. Hodgins  
Councillor C. 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  
26<sup>TH</sup> APRIL, 2023**

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

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

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

**WITH:** Chief Officer Resources  
Audit & Risk Manager  
Senior Finance Business Partner  
Interim Director of Social Services  
Service Manager Performance & Democratic  
Strategic Education Improvement Manager  
Data Protection & Governance Officer

**AND:** Mike Jones, Audit Wales

**DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS**

<b><u>ITEM</u></b>	<b><u>SUBJECT</u></b>	<b><u>ACTION</u></b>
<b>No. 1</b>	<b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b>  It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
<b>No. 2</b>	<b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b>	

	<p>Apologies for absence were received from:-</p> <p>Mr Martin Veale Head of Democratic Services, Governance &amp; Partnerships</p>	
<b>No. 3</b>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interests reported.</p>	
<b>No. 4</b>	<p><b><u>GOVERNANCE &amp; AUDIT COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The decisions of the Governance &amp; Audit Committee held on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2023 were submitted.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the decisions be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<b>No. 5</b>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET – 8<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2023</u></b></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2023 was submitted.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the Action sheet be noted.</p>	
<b>No. 6</b>	<p><b><u>CODE OF GOVERNANCE</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Committee approve and adopt the revised Code of Governance (Option 1).</p>	
<b>No. 7</b>	<p><b><u>AUDIT PLAN OUTTURN 2022-23</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Committee noted the following:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the levels of audit coverage in each service area,</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the plan outturn for the financial year, and</li> <li>• the performance of the Internal Audit Service for the financial year 2022/23.</li> </ul>	
<b>No. 8</b>	<p><b><u>BLAENAU GWENT RESPONSE TO ESTYN LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION SERVICES (LGES) INSPECTION</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Committee was assured that the action plan in response to Estyn’s recommendations and the structure of the revised Self Evaluation Report would appropriately respond to the Estyn Recommendations (Option 1).</p>	
<b>No. 9</b>	<p><b><u>AUDIT WALES REVIEWS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSES</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Service Manager Performance and Democratic.</p> <p>Councillor Jules Gardner joined the meeting at this juncture.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Committee was assured that the actions outlined in Appendix 1 against each proposal for improvement would appropriately respond to the Audit Wales findings (Option 1).</p>	

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**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><u>Exempt 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>
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></p> <p>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 was included on the agenda of Governance and Audit Committee on 26th April 2023.</p> <p><b>Action complete: 26 April 2023</b></p>

Meeting Date	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
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></p> <p>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 includes alignment to the Audit Wales Work Programme.</p> <p><b>Action complete:</b> 30 May 2023</p>
8 <sup>th</sup> March 2023	<p><b><u>Item 14 – Audit Wales: ‘Together We Can’ Community Resilience And Self-Reliance</u></b></p> <p>Information i.e. Case studies to be provided to the Committee on the recently approved staff volunteer programme.</p>	Chief Officer Commercial & Customer	<p>Volunteering Opportunities Calendar has been developed in the Social Services directorate for residents with dementia or learning disability. Opportunities include craft sessions, gardening projects, music and sitting down and chatting sessions. Learning from this approach and a pilot in social services will be used to explore the development of an organisational calendar of volunteering opportunities.</p>

Meeting Date	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
			<p>CLT helped with the wrapping of BG Toy Appeal Christmas presents for over 500 children in Blaenau Gwent.</p> <p>CLT to volunteer for a session at a foodbank- currently liaising with partners to determine the best options for support.</p> <p>Directorates are promoting the policy with staff.</p> <p><b>Action complete:</b> 2 June 2023</p>

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# Agenda Item 7

*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: **21<sup>st</sup> June 2023**

Report Subject: **Forward Work Programme 2023-24**

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

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

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
		07.06.23	21.06.23					

1. **Purpose of the Report**
  - 1.1 To present the Forward Work Programme for 2023-24 (Appendix 1).
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 The Work Programmes are key aspects of the Council's planning and governance arrangements and support the requirements of the Constitution.
  - 2.2 The topics set out in the Forward Work Programme link to the strategic work of the Council as identified by the Council's Corporate Plan 2022-27, agreed by the Council in October 2022, corporate documents and supporting business plans.
  - 2.3 The Governance and Audit Committee Forward Work Programme is aligned to the Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Council Forward Work Programmes.
  - 2.4 The Work Programme is a fluid document and there is flexibility to allow for regular review between the Chair and the Committee.
3. **Options for Recommendation**
  - 3.1 **Option 1**  
To accept the Forward Work Programme.
  - 3.2 **Option 2**  
To suggest any amendments to the Forward Work Programme.

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## DRAFT Governance and Audit Forward Work Programme 2023/24

Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer
<b>Meeting Date: 21<sup>st</sup> June 2023</b>		
Forward Work Programme 2023/24	To agree the FWP for 2023/24	Scrutiny and Democratic Officer
Strategic Internal Audit Plan 2023-2028	To provide Members with the five-year strategic Audit Plan for the period 2023-2028.	Louise Rosser
Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Manager	To present the opinion of the Annual Opinion of the Audit & Risk Manager	Louise Rosser
Integrated Impact Assessment on the Civic Centre	To present the Integrated Impact Assessment the Civic Centre.	Ellie Fry / Bernadette Elias

<b>Meeting Date: 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023</b>		
BGCBC – Annual Audit Summary	To present the Audit Wales Annual Audit Summary.	Sarah King
Audit Wales 2023 Audit Plan for BGCBC	To present the Audit Wales 2023 Audit Plan.	Rhian Hayden
Audit Wales Planning Review	To present the Audit Wales report.	Steve Smith

<b>Meeting Date: 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023</b>		
Internal Audit Charter	To provide an updated copy of the Internal Audit Charter.	Louise Rosser
Audit Plan Progress Report (Qtr 1)	To update Members on the progress against the Internal Audit Plan.	Louise Rosser
Annual Report of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales 2021/22	To inform Members of the Council's performance regarding complaints to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.	Andrea Jones
Corporate Risk Register (Qtr1)	To update Members on the Corporate Risk Register	Louise Rosser

<b>Meeting Date: 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023</b>		
Annual Self-Assessment of Council Performance 2022/23 To be published by 31 <sup>st</sup> October each year	To present the Annual Self-Assessment of Council performance.	Sarah King

## DRAFT Governance and Audit Forward Work Programme 2023/24

Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer
<b>Meeting Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023</b>		
Audit Plan Progress Report (Qtr 2)	To update Members on the progress against the Internal Audit Plan.	Louise Rosser
RIPA Activity	To report on authorised RIPA activity as per the Council's policy.	Andrea Jones
Complaints Report (Qtr1 & Qtr2)	To present the bi-annual report on Complaints as required by the Ombudsman	Andrea Jones
Draft Statement of Accounts 2022/23	To present for consideration the 2022/23 Draft Statement of Accounts and to consider the Authority's financial standing as at 31 March 2023.	Rhian Hayden
Draft Annual Governance Statement	To present the draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS).	Gemma Wasley
Corporate Risk Register (Qtr 2)	To update Members on the Corporate Risk Register	Louise Rosser

<b>Meeting Date: 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023</b>		
Items to be identified		

<b>Meeting Date: 17<sup>th</sup> January 2024</b>		
Audit Plan Progress report (Qtr 3)	To update Members on the progress against the Internal Audit Plan.	Louise Rosser

<b>Meeting Date: 21<sup>st</sup> February 2024</b>		
Statement of Accounts 2022/23	To present for approval the 2022/23 Statement of Accounts and to consider the Authority's financial standing as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2023.	Rhian Hayden
Audit of Financial Statements	To consider the report from the Council's External Auditors Wales Audit Office.	Rhian Hayden
Annual Governance Statement	To present the final Annual Governance Statement (AGS).	Gemma Wasley
Corporate Risk Register (Qtr 3)	To update Members on the Corporate Risk Register	Louise Rosser



## DRAFT Governance and Audit Forward Work Programme 2023/24

Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer
<b>Meeting Date: 20<sup>th</sup> March 2024</b>		
Items to be identified		

Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer
<b>Meeting Date: 17<sup>th</sup> April 2024</b>		
Code of Governance	To present the revised Code of Governance for the Council.	Louise Rosser
Internal Audit Outturn 2023/24	To present the Internal Audit Outturn for 2023/24	Louise Rosser

## DRAFT Governance and Audit Forward Work Programme 2023/24

Dates for Items to be confirmed		
Review of Governance and oversight arrangements of companies of which the Council has an interest	Following the audit Wales review of Silent Valley and subsequent recommendation, the following companies will be included within this report: Gwent Crematorium Gwent Archives EAS ALT	Sarah King
Audit Wales – Digital Strategy	To present the National and Local Audit Wales report.	Bernadette Elias
Audit Wales – Performance Data Review	To present the National and Local Audit Wales report.	Sarah King
Statement of Accounts 2021/22	To present for approval the 2021/22 Statement of Accounts and to consider the Authority's financial standing as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2022.	Rhian Hayden
Audit Wales – Examination of the Setting of Well-being Objectives	To present the Local Audit Wales report.	Damien McCann / Sarah King
Audit Wales – Unscheduled Care Project	To present the National Audit Wales report.	Tanya Evans / Alyson Hoskins
Risk Management Strategy and Risk Management Handbook	To present the updated Risk Management Strategy and Risk Management Handbook	Louise Rosser

# Agenda Item 9

*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: **21 June 2023**  
Report Subject: **Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Manager 2022/23**  
Portfolio Holder: **Steve Thomas – Leader / Cabinet Member for Corporate Overview and Performance**  
Report Submitted by: **Louise Rosser – Audit and Risk Manager**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	01.06.23	07.06.23	21.06.23					

1. **Purpose of the Report**
  - 1.1 This report provides the Governance and Audit Committee with the Audit & Risk Manager's (A&RM) objective review of the Authority's system of internal control operating during the financial year 2022/23 and the annual audit opinion of the A&RM.
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 Background and Context
    - 2.1.1 The report highlights the work undertaken by the Internal Audit Service and complies with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and the Terms of Reference for the Governance and Audit Committee.
    - 2.1.2 In line with the PSIAS, the A&RM is required to produce an annual report for the Governance and Audit Committee. The report must include the following three items:
      - An annual opinion, including a summary of the audit work that supports that opinion;
      - A statement on conformance with the International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF), including the PSIAS; and
      - The results of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme.
    - 2.1.3 The A&RM must demonstrate organisational independence, and this is achieved through a series of measures to include: the Committee approving the Internal Audit Charter; the Committee agreeing the Internal Audit Plan; and the Committee receiving periodic reports on the work undertaken by the Internal Audit Service.
    - 2.1.4 In addition to this, the A&RM is able to report directly to the Chief Executive and / or the Governance and Audit Committee if the need arises.
    - 2.1.5 The Committee has received progress reports throughout 2022/23 and was provided with the outturn position for 2022/23 at its April meeting.

2.1.6 The A&RM line manages the Insurance and Risk Management Service in addition to the Internal Audit Service. Appropriate reviewing and reporting processes have been put in place for conducting audit work in this service area. Audit output in respect of the Insurance and Risk Management Service bypasses the A&RM and is subject to sign off by the Chief Officer Resources to ensure independence is maintained.

2.1.7 The appropriateness of this arrangement was challenged as part of the External Quality Assessment referred to in section 2.3 below, but both the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and this Committee agreed that the arrangement was satisfactory and that any risk associated with this was minimal and would be tolerated.

## 2.2 Annual Summary of Audit Activity for the Financial Year 2022/23

2.2.1 The annual opinion is formed having consideration to three aspects of the Authority's arrangements, namely: Governance, Risk Management and Internal Control.

2.2.2 The Governance and Audit Committee have met throughout the year with meetings held via Teams. The Committee currently has a lay member vacancy, and a recruitment exercise is ongoing to fill this position.

2.2.3 CLT have received and reviewed the Corporate Risk Register periodically throughout the year. Members of the Governance and Audit Committee undertook a training session on risk management and have been provided with the current Risk Management Handbook and Strategy. Work is underway to review and update these documents, with the revised versions to be brought to this Committee during 2022/23. A further training session for Members is also being arranged.

2.2.4 The audit of the Statement of Accounts for 2021/22 have not been concluded. Audit Wales have identified an issue relating to the Council's Asset Valuations (and asset lives) which has the potential to have a material impact on the net book value of assets. Given the uncertainty around the potential impact, Audit Wales have indicated their intention to issue a modified opinion on the accounts. The Council has identified the actions required to resolve this issue for 2022/23 and has commenced implementation.

2.2.5 As a consequence of this issue, Audit Wales have indicated their intention to issue a modified opinion on the accounts.

2.2.6 During the year the Authority have worked towards bringing the services delivered by Silent Valley Waste Services Ltd back in-house. The transfer was successfully completed 1 May 2023. For internal audit purposes, the services transferred will form part of the normal audit process going forward and will be included in audit samples.

- 2.2.7 During 2022/23 the Corporate Leadership Team has undergone a number of changes with the appointments of a new Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community and a new Head of Governance and Partnerships. It has continued to operate with an interim Chief Executive and interim Corporate Director of Social Services throughout the year, and latterly (2023/24) an interim Corporate Director of Education has also been in place to cover periods of absence by the substantive post holder.
- 2.2.8 The Authority is faced with significant financial challenges in meeting the funding gap of £23m over the next 5 years and will need to develop proposals to deliver budget cuts to address this funding gap. The pressures on the budget will impact on services going forward and Internal Audit work will need to factor in the impact this has on capacity within the services and any consequential impact on the internal control environment. The risks associated with these budget pressures and consequences have been included in the corporate risk register.
- 2.2.9 The Internal Audit Service has experienced a number of staffing changes during the year that have impacted on the plan percentage achieved. A new Audit Apprentice was appointed along with a new Senior Auditor, who was then called upon to support the budget setting process in Accountancy whilst the post they had vacated was being recruited to.
- 2.2.10 Follow-up audits during the year were deprioritised due to a combination of needing to train new staff, and the samples to audit not being available in departments for some of the Follow-Up audits that were due. For 2023/24 it is expected that the follow-up cycle will operate as normal.
- 2.2.11 In addition, there have been three large investigations commenced during the year and these remain ongoing into 2023/24. The Committee will receive reports on these matters as appropriate once they have concluded.
- 2.2.12 The Internal Audit Service issued 30 audit reports during the year including 9 Full Assurance, 14 Reasonable Assurance, 6 Limited Assurance and 1 No assurance. Whilst the total number of audits is reduced from previous years, the trend of the audit gradings is comparable and audits have been spread across directorates to ensure coverage enables an audit opinion on the whole control environment.
- 2.2.13 No Assurance and Limited Assurance gradings were spread across departments with no trends / patterns to the outcomes that caused particular concern. In addition, there were no individual findings of such significance to cause concern regarding the integrity of the financial statements.
- 2.2.14 As in previous years, the section does not have an IT auditor and continues to recognise this as a risk. The Authority is a partner in the SRS who are currently audited by Torfaen CBC. The results of the audit work undertaken by Torfaen CBC are fed back to all board members with

reliance being placed on this work as appropriate. Going forward, the outcomes of SRS audits will be reported to the Governance and Audit Committee.

### 2.3 International Standards of Professional Practice

2.3.1 The service works within the parameters of the International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF). This consists of three mandatory elements namely: a Definition of Internal Audit; a Code of Ethics; and the Professional Standards i.e. PSIAS.

2.3.2 As part of this report, the A&RM is required to make a statement on whether or not the service conforms to the PSIAS, and in addition must report on any instances of non-compliance with the Definition of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics and the Standards. Any significant instances of non-compliance should be included in the Annual Governance Statement.

2.3.3 The service underwent its second external assessment last year, with the report and action plan presented to this Committee in January 2023. The assessment found the service to conform with the standards in all significant areas and to operate independently and objectively.

2.3.4 I am able to confirm that the Internal Audit Service for Blaenau Gwent CBC conforms to the requirements of the PSIAS and the IPPF.

### 2.4 Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme

2.4.1 The A&RM is required to implement a programme of quality assurance and improvement. A report was presented to this Committee in September 2022 setting out what this programme consists of for Blaenau Gwent.

2.4.2 The committee receive performance information for the service throughout the year as part of the internal audit progress reports. The performance indicators for the year are referred to in section 6 below.

2.4.3 I am able to confirm that no areas of concern have been highlighted as part of the quality assurance and improvement programme.

## 3. **Annual Opinion of the Audit and Risk Manager**

3.1 The Governance and Audit Committee receive the annual audit opinion of the Audit and Risk Manager as detailed in paragraph 3.3 below.

3.2 The audit assignments conducted cover a range of activities and provide a reasonable indicator of the level of assurance for the Authority, however

they cannot provide complete coverage and it is acknowledged that assurance procedures alone do not guarantee that all significant risks are detected.

3.3 Based on the findings of the audit work undertaken during 2022/23, in my opinion, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's system of internal control during the financial year 2022/23 operates to a level which gives Reasonable Assurance on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's framework of governance, risk management and control.

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

4.1 The provision of assurance on the internal control environment supports the Corporate Plan objective of being an ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services at the right time and at the right place.

4.2 The Local Government Act (1972) and the Accounts and Audit Regulations (Wales) 2014 require the Council to maintain an effective Internal Audit Service in accordance with proper internal audit practices. The Authority's Internal Audit Service has adopted the PSIAS for this purpose.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget***

There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report. Poor financial controls could lead to fraud and misappropriation of council assets.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

Failure of the A&RM to provide an annual opinion would indicate that an adequate internal audit service has not been provided. In not complying with statutory legislation, the section 151 officer would not be able to discharge her statutory duties. This would be reflected in the opinion provided by the external auditor and could result in additional regulation and costs to the Authority.

5.2.1 The Governance and Audit Committee would not be informed as to the level of assurance provided by the systems of internal control preventing them from fulfilling their role as a Committee, as required by the Local Government (Wales) Measure. This is mitigated through the Committee receiving the annual opinion of the A&RM and periodic reports of audit activity relating to the adequacy of the control environment.

5.3 ***Legal***

Provision of an adequate audit service, demonstrated in part through the provision of an annual audit opinion, contributes to the Section 151 officer being able to fulfil her statutory duties under the Local Government Act (1972).

5.4 **Human Resources**

The Committee are kept abreast of staffing issues throughout the year as part of the audit plan progress reports. The internal audit service had no sickness absences during the year.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

The Committee received performance information for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 as part of the audit Plan Outturn report presented in April 2023.

6.1.1 The section maintains eight performance indicators of which seven achieved the target during the year. The indicator that was not achieved was the Audit Plan Completion Percentage, with 69.45% of the plan being completed against a target of 73%. The Committee is kept abreast of progress against these indicators throughout the year.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

An effective audit service will assist with the stewardship of public money providing assurance to communities of Blaenau Gwent on the robustness of the Authority's internal controls.

6.3 **Involvement**

There are no direct implications under involvement.

6.4 **Thinking for the Long term**

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**

A robust control environment reduces the risk of fraud and misappropriation and safeguards the assets of the Authority.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

Reliance is placed on the work of other regulators, partners and local authorities when forming an audit opinion on the control environment of the Council.

6.7 **Integration**

In providing an annual opinion, the A&RM has considered the Authority's whole control environment across all directorates.

6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

There are no direct implications under decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions.



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

The provision of the A&RM Annual Report and opinion has a neutral impact against people or groups from the nine protected characteristics.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Both CLT and the Governance and Audit Committee receive periodic updates throughout the year on progress made against the audit plan, and any other issues arising through the work of Internal Audit Services.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- Annual Governance Statement
- Audit Plan Outturn Report
- Internal Audit Plan
- Internal Audit Charter

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# Agenda Item 10

*Executive Committee and Council only*

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Governance & Audit Committee**  
Date of meeting: **21<sup>st</sup> June 2023**  
Report Subject: **Internal Audit Plan 2023-2028**  
Portfolio Holder: **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	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	01/06/2023	07.06.23	21/06/2023					

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Governance & Audit Committee with the five-year strategic Audit Plan for the period 2023-2028 (Appendix A).

## 2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The report provides the strategic five-year Internal Audit Plan including the rationale for implementing a one-year operational plan.
- 2.2 Under the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) the Audit & Risk Manager is required to:
- Produce a risk-based Internal Audit Plan that prioritises internal audit activity in line with the organisation's goals and objectives.
  - Produce a plan that takes into account, the requirements to produce an annual audit opinion, and the assurance framework that exists within the Authority.
  - Confirm that the service will be delivered in accordance with the Internal Audit Charter.
  - Produce a plan based on a documented risk assessment that considers input from Senior Management.
  - Communicate any resource limitations to the Governance & Audit Committee.
  - Report the Internal Audit Plan to the Governance & Audit Committee for approval.
- 2.3 The audit plan is produced following an assessment of risk whereby each potential audit area (the audit population) is scored using a matrix against a set of criteria relating to the audit risks, the Authority's objectives, and the views of the Heads of Services/Service Managers. The scoring matrix reflects the current objectives / priorities of the Authority and also to allow flexibility.

- 2.4 An example of the scoring matrix is attached at Appendix B. The matrix also includes a miscellaneous category to enable the plan to be adjusted for audit timing and ad hoc circumstances.
- 2.5 The plan produced from the risk assessment scores show audits as high, medium or low risk (Red, Amber and Green) based on the score they achieve. Banding the audits into risk categories instead of a rank order, will allow for more flexibility in the audit plan. In addition to the risk assessed audits the plan will continue to contain standard audits (Blue), such as grants, and CRSA for schools, and ongoing audits (White) that were already commenced at year end.
- 2.6 The plan is constructed by taking the number of available audit days, based on the audit establishment, and apportioning across all directorates rather than allocating them to specific audits. This approach enables the Audit and Risk Manager to provide the Governance & Audit Committee with an annual audit opinion.

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 The Governance & Audit Committee consider the following options:

#### Option 1

The Committee note the basis for audit selection / prioritisation as described in section 2, and approve the audit plan attached at Appendix A, deeming it to provide sufficient coverage upon which the Audit and Risk Manager can provide an annual audit opinion, enabling the Governance & Audit Committee to fulfil its assurance role.

#### Option 2

The Committee note the basis for audit selection / prioritisation as described in section 2, and provide suggestions for amendment to the audit plan attached at Appendix A and subsequently approve it, deeming it to provide sufficient coverage upon which the Audit and Risk Manager can provide an annual audit opinion, enabling the Governance & Audit Committee to fulfil its assurance role.

#### Option 3

The Committee note the basis for audit selection / prioritisation as described in section 2, and reject the audit plan attached at Appendix A as a method of providing adequate assurance regarding the Authority's control environment. An alternative programme of work for the Internal Audit service would then need to be put forward.

### 4. **Evidence of how this topic supports 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 the quality services we know matter in the right place and at the right time 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 PSIASs, 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)

There are no direct financial implications arising from production of the internal audit plan.

### 5.2 Risk including Mitigating Actions

Options 1 and 2 will facilitate sufficient audit coverage for the Audit and Risk Manager to provide an annual audit opinion. Option 3 would result in non-compliance with legislation and the S151 Officer will be unable to discharge her statutory duty.

### 5.3 Legal

Provision of an adequate audit service, demonstrated in part through the production of a suitable audit plan, contributes to the Section 151 officer being able to fulfil her statutory duties under the Local Government Act (1972).

### 5.4 Human Resources

The section has a complement of six full time posts and the audit plan has been developed based on a full complement of staff.

5.4.1 Based on current audit resources, the whole audit population would be covered in a five-year period. This is based on maintaining the status quo with both audit areas and staffing numbers. Audits will continue to be prioritised based on high risk areas.

## 6. **Supporting Evidence**

### 6.1 Performance Information and Data

The Internal Audit Plan currently operates on a five-year audit cycle with a one-year operational plan.

6.1.1 The number of audit days available is set at 1182 days for 2023/24 based on the audit establishment of 6FTE audit posts. Progress against the plan will continue to be monitored and reported through the year to both CLT and the Governance and Audit Committee.

6.1.2 The audit plan percentage set at 73% for 2022/23 was not achieved in part due to staff changes throughout the year. However, the plan percentage will remain at 73% for 2023/24 as it is considered to be realistic and an achievable target if the complement of staff is consistent throughout the year.

- 6.1.3 The service currently maintains a set of eight performance indicators as part of a benchmarking exercise with other Welsh authorities.
- 6.2 Expected outcome for the public  
An effective Governance & Audit Committee will assist with the stewardship of public money providing assurance to communities of Blaenau Gwent on the robustness of the Authority's internal controls.
- 6.3 Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)  
There are no direct implications under involvement.
- 6.4 Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)  
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  
The provision of a five-year strategic audit plan sets out the Authority's intent to consider the adequacy of its control environment and receive assurance on the robustness of its systems.
- 6.6 Collaboration / partnership working  
A number of audit areas that are included within the audit population are led by other local authorities. In these instances, reports are shared between authorities to confirm the level of assurance provided. For example, reports from Torfaen Council on the SRS audits.
- 6.7 Integration(across service areas)  
The audit plan is developed with a view to providing assurance on the whole of the Authority's control environment. Some audits are undertaken with a cross departmental approach.
- 6.8 Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions  
There are no direct implications under Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions.
- 6.9 Integrated Impact Assessment (IAA)  
Not applicable
7. **Monitoring Arrangements**
- 7.1 Progress reports are provided to the Governance & Audit Committee throughout the year.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- *Appendix A – Audit Plan*
- *Appendix B – Example Risk Assessment Matrix*

<b>Audit Area</b>	<b>Audit Days 2023</b>	<b>Audit Days 2024</b>	<b>Audit Days 2025</b>	<b>Audit Days 2026</b>	<b>Audit Days 2027</b>
Resources	158	158	158	158	158
Commercial	113	113	113	113	113
Legal and Corporate Compliance	18	18	18	18	18
Governance and Partnerships	38	38	38	38	38
Regeneration and Community Services	158	158	158	158	158
Education	70	70	70	70	70
Social Services	75	75	75	75	75
General	552	558	558	558	558
<b>Total Audit Days</b>	1182	1188	1188	1188	1188

<b>Audit Plan</b>
Charity Accounts - Bedwellty House and Park
Charity Accounts - Ebbw Vale Recreation Ground
Pupil Development Grant
Regional Consortia School Improvement Grant
Enable Grant
Homelessness - No One Left Out Grant
Homelessness Grant
Rent Smart Wales
CRSA Schools (Annual Audit)
School Systems
Youth Support Grant (Annual Audit)
Supporting People Grant (RDC Post)
Supporting People Grant New Combined
Performance Management
Audit Plan
Performance Reviews
AGS
Ad Hoc/Contingency/Follow Ups
Office Duties (incl. Cont. Stat & Auth Sigs)
Meetings
Audit Committee
SWAG
Special Projects / Investigations
HR Policies
ICT Policies
Financial Procedure Rules
Contract Procedure Rules
Contract Audit
Stocktaking
Departmental Internet / Email Use
Anti Money Laundering Policy
Anti Bribery, Fraud & Corruption Policy
Departmental Use of Social Media
Departmental Flexi System Use
Cost of Living Grant
Leasing
Notification of Terminations/Exit Interviews Follow Up
Petty Cash
Winter Support Fund
Free School Meals
Business Support
River Centre
Asset Register
Property Charges
Social Services Debtors
Appointeeship / Deputyship Accounts
Council Tax CRSA
Creditors - Central CRSA
Debtors System CRSA
Risk Management
Budgetary Control - Monitoring
Capital Programme
Insurance
Medium Term Financial Plan

<b>Key</b>
Standard Items
High Risk Areas
Medium Risk Areas
Low Risk Areas
Ongoing Audits



<b>Audit Plan</b>
Payment Methods
Register of Business Interest
Absence Management
Discretionary Housing Payments
Flexi
Job Evaluation
Performance Appraisal Reviews Staff
Corporate Communications Strategy
Recruitment Safeguarding (DBS)
Purchase Card Scheme
Community Hubs
Contact Centre
ICT Collaboration
Elections
Monitoring Officer Role
Registrars System
GDPR
Information Management
Business Planning and Improvement
CCTV
Community Safety
Re-settlement
Strategic Policy - Equalities
Decarbonisation
Strategic Policy - Welsh Language
School Catering
Asbestos Management Plans
Planning Policy (incl. LDP)
Green Infrastructure
Refuse & Recycling - Commercial
Support to Businesses
CATs
Commercial Lettings
Winter Maintenance
Cwmcrachen
Highways Development and Control
Housing Strategy
Industrial Units
Property Rentals
Trading Standards - Food Standards
Education Welfare
Elected Home Education
Out of County Placements for Education
Pen Y Cwm
Community Care (East)
Community Care (West)
Domiciliary Care - Internal
Locality Team (4)
Social Services Safeguarding
Cwrt Mytton
Childrens' External Placements/Fostering (Residential)
Community Meals
Direct Payments (Administration)
Domiciliary Care - External

<b>Audit Plan</b>
External Residential / Nursing Placements
Fostering Internal
CIS Scheme
Creditors - Reconciliation
Debtors Reconciliation
Direct Payments - Payment and Audit
NNDR CRSA
Reserves and Balances Protocol
School Funding / LMS
Treasury Management - Bank Reconciliation
VAT
Write Off System
Bravo CMS
Cardiff City Deal
Council Tax Fraud
Housing Benefits/Council Tax Reduction Scheme inc. Overpayments
HR Policies
iTrent Projects
Purchasing
Workforce Development
Performance Management
Service Transformation
Settlement Agreements
Universal Credit
User Access
Back Up and Retention
Clothing Grants
Cost of Living / Discretionary Scheme
Payroll
Recruitment and Retention
Redundancies
Code of Conduct for Members
Corporate Complaints
Electoral Registration
Prosecution Process
Whistle Blowing Policy
Local Land Charges
RIPA
National Performance Indicators
Corporate Engagement, Strategy and Approach
Democratic Function of the Council
Future Generation Act - Individual Duty
Geographical Information Systems (GIS)
Local Government and Elections Act
Local Performance Indicators
Asset Management
Cemeteries
Corporate Landlord - Carbon Reduction Commitment
Corporate Landlord - Energy Centre
Corporate Landlord - Property Maintenance
Food Safety
Health and Safety - Private Sector
Home to School / College Transport
Planning Applications

<b>Audit Plan</b>
Planning Enforcement
Refuse & Recycling - Domestic
Town Centre Regeneration
Traffic Management & Road Safety
Waste Regulation
Building Control
Dangerous Structures
General Offices
Licensing
Road & Street Works Act
Street Lighting
Waste Disposal
Waste Enforcement
Aspire
Breakfast Clubs
Building Cleaning
Civil Parking Enforcement
Corporate Landlord - DLO
Disabled Facilities Grants
Highway Development Control - Highways Infrastructure
Homelessness
Housing Allocations
Housing Maintenance (incl. Empty Homes, Enforcement Action, Loans)
Professional Services - Income
Street Cleansing
Temporary Accommodation
Trading Standards - Inspection, Enforcement and Advice
Managing the School Estate - Forward Planning
21st Century Schools
Additional Learning Need
Education School Estate - Properties (including Health and Safety)
Gypsy Traveller Services
Inspire (Work / Achieve)
Emergency Planning
School Admissions
14+ Team (incl. Leaving Care)
Adult Mental Health
Childcare Early Years & Play
Commissioning
0-25 Disability Team children
Families First Programme
Family Time Team/Contact Team
Information Advice and Assistance (Adults)
Special Guardianship Team
Substance Misuse
Grants to Voluntary Organisations
Third Party Contributions
Appeals Process
Car Loans
Communications
Corporate Marketing
Corporate Printing
Corporate Website
Health & Safety

<b>Audit Plan</b>
Internal Communications
IR35
Self Isolation Payments
Social Media Accounts
Staff Expenses
Stand By Payments
Tenancy Hardship Grant
Tusker Car Benefit Scheme
Unpaid Carers Grant
Resilience
Committee Forward Work Programmes
External Regulation & Monitoring
Future Generation Act - Collective Duties (PSB)
ICT System & Data Systems
Interaction with Town and Community Councils
Member Support and Guidance
Members Allowances & Expenses
Research and Intelligence
Scrutiny Function
Social Services and Well-being Act Performance Framework
Socio Economic Duty and Decision Making
20 Church Street
Control of Pollution
Destination Management
Disposal of Surplus Land
Estates Licensing
Grounds Maintenance
Heritage
Markets
Part One Claims
Pest Control
Transport & Plant Hire (incl. Transport Stores)
Duke of Edinburgh
Facilities Management
Healthy Schools
NEETS Reduction
Psychology Service
Youth Clubs
Augusta
Bert Denning
Community Options - Lake View
Flying Start
Information Advice and Assistance (Children)
Occupational Therapy
Outreach Service
Supported Living (Ty Celyn, Ty Lelog, Ty Pabi, Ty Rhosyn)
Supporting Change

**Appendix B**  
**Example Risk Matrix**

		1	2	3	4	5	Assessed Score
BUDGET	Consider budget amount; Is it over or under spent; what's being done about it; Is it income generated						21
CORPORATE OBJECTIVES	Where does the service sit with corporate priorities; is it politically sensitive; is it socially sensitive; is it subject to a service review or bridging the gap project						7
AUDIT HISTORY	What was the last audit grading; when was the area audited last; auditors opinion; are actions taken						14
REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS	Have the regulators made adverse recommendations; Are there statutory duties; are there changes to legislation						7
FRAUD	Have there been previous frauds, errors, thefts, etc.; are there fraud markers being hit e.g. no leave taken, change in patterns, behaviour; Is staff turnover high, inexperienced staff;						7
RISK	At what level do the risks sit; can they be easily mitigated; what is the impact of the risk being realised; what are the emerging risks; service changes						7
MISCELLANEOUS	Should the audit be deferred; Is the area a priority for audit; is there overlap with other regulators; manager concerns;						14
							<b>77</b>

Risk Score Key	
Standard	No Score
High	>70
Medium	50 -70
Low	0-50

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# Agenda Item 11

*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: **21<sup>st</sup> June 2023**  
Report Subject: **Civic Centre Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)**  
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Helen Cunningham, Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member Place and Environment**  
Report Submitted by: **Ellie Fry, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance and Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	x	07.06.23	21.06.23				20.07.23	Audit Wales

1. **Purpose of the Report**
  - 1.1 To supply an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) to accompany the process of closure of the Civic Centre and the move to the Hubs model for public access to services.
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 In 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic the Civic Centre was vacated as part of the lockdown instructions from Government. At that point, the Council was looking at five years or less of the useful life of a large proportion of the infrastructure of the Civic Centre building. At the same time, as the pandemic was affecting communities an initiative to move services closer to communities was rolled out.
  - 2.2 During the next few years the Council was one of the first to formally move to an agile working arrangement. It made sense from an operational perspective, following the pandemic shutdown of the building, to then formerly close the civic centre as the timeline had moved closer to the end of the five-year deadline. At this point the maintenance required to fix the problems in the building was disproportionate to the benefits.
  - 2.3 Reports were written and taken through the Council process on the new operating model and working arrangements for the Council and this report included the recommendation for the closure of the civic centre and the development of the hubs model. The report for the new Council Operating Model was taken to Council on 25th March 2021 whereby Council agreed for the new Operating Model based on Agile Working, Democratic Hub and Community Hubs, and confirmed work could proceed to decommission the Civic Centre. [CO2103D7 Council Report TOM 25032021 Final 003.pdf](#)
  - 2.4 One of the key aims around the development of the Community Hubs model located in libraries brought access to council services closer to the heart of the communities.

- 2.5 As part of their 'Springing Forward' Review, covering the 2021/22 year, Audit Wales found that the Council made significant changes to its assets and the way that its workforce operates, but identified that further work is needed for the Council to understand its future asset and workforce needs and to ensure that future Council decisions are appropriately informed by Equality Impact Assessments and the sustainable development principle.
- 2.6 As part of this the Council received the following recommendation for implementation: *'Ensure that all decisions are informed by a timely equality impact assessment where required'*.
- 2.7 The attached IIA sets out the benefits and dis-benefits of the two schemes that were undertaken in parallel. There are a number of services that have benefited by being delivered closer to the customer at the BG Hubs although the civic centre was a well know centre and it has taken some time for communities to use the hubs as their main contact points as opposed to the civic building. Overall the changes have resulted in a positive approach to Customer Service delivery, with services moving closer to more customers from the six hubs.
- 2.8 Transport is limited in Blaenau Gwent but as the Hubs are closer to the communities and are based in the local towns, it is felt from the IIA evidence that overall it is generally easier to travel to access services from Hubs than just from the civic centre. Lastly, the services being offered from the Hubs have encouraged other activities like children doing homework from the Hubs which wouldn't have happened if they had been delivered from the civic centre.
- 2.9 In terms of the civic centre building itself, there was significant concern about the integrity of the existing structure. The steel reinforcement framework that would have been embedded within the concrete construction was aging and failing. This would not have been included within the findings of the Condition Survey undertaken in 2018. Recently a piece of the external concrete fell away from the steel reinforcement.

### 3. **Recommendation**

- 3.1 That the Governance and Audit Committee are assured that an Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed in line with legislation to be formally agreed at Council.

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

The report subject matter supports both:

- 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

### 5. **Implications Against Recommendation**



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

There are no further implications on the budget further to those identified in the reports already taken through Council process on the demolition of the Civic Centre and the development of the Community Hubs reports.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The risks around this project have been set out in the previous reports. The residual risk is that the site remains empty following demolition of the building for a longer period than is acceptable.

5.3 ***Legal***

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

There are no HR implications associated with this report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

The supporting evidence is provided in the Appendices.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- *Appendices 1 - 8*

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June								
July								
August								
September								
October								
November								
December								

## **Case Study – Financial, Housing, Fuel and Food bank, Partnership working**

An individual visited the Community Hub relating to Housing issues. The person stated that they were a recovering alcoholic with anxiety and depression. The individual was frank and honest and was transparent in sharing the issues and barriers that had been created to maintaining their tenancy. The individual shared that they hadn't been paying rent for some time whilst struggling with addiction and now found themselves in large debt.

In order to help the customer I liaised with the landlord over the telephone and a Housing Sustainability Officer. We agreed to put together a plan so the client could continue the tenancy and not be evicted. A Discretionary Housing Payment application was made to help the client with paying the rent going forward. Usually the Discretionary Housing Payments applications are looked at in date order, this would have meant the customer continued to not pay the full amount of rent. Due to the risk of homelessness if this situation wasn't resolved I contacted the Council's Benefits Managers to request the Discretionary Housing Payment be prioritised, this was agreed and the application was looked at quickly and awarded. I also contacted Universal Credit to arrange for the client's rent to be paid directly to the landlord to avoid lack of payment. This multi-agency approach supported the client to remain in their home and promoted their independence by keeping them involved in the process.

The customer was pleased that they could speak to someone face to face and receive help, as they felt unable to deal with the whole situation alone. They were very self-aware and knew that they needed to resolve the situation which made the interaction a really positive one. I logged the outcome of the interaction on the My Council Services system so my colleagues were aware of what was agreed and they could further support if they saw the customer again. To further support the customer a fuel voucher of £49 was issued along with the organisation of a food parcel via the Trussel Trust food bank.

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## **Case study – DAF**

Customer visited library with Bridges into work support worker asking for help with white goods. A DAF was completed for a new fridge and it was established the customer was struggling with a rental shortfall so we gave the support worker an income and expenditure form which she took with her to complete with the client and helped them to complete a DHP application online and we gave her the links to use the BG online application system. The support worker returned to the library and provided bank statements for the customer which was photographed and sent to the benefits email address.

Outcome 06/07/2021: The client was awarded and received a new Fridge Freezer and the DHP has been processed and awarded. Support worker has been informed.

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### **Case Study 1**

Customer came into Library wanted a library card and help with getting a replacement bus pass due to theirs being stolen, along with some money. Library staff set them up with a library card. Transport for Wales were contacted to see if we could get a replacement, the person I spoke to advised it was a £10 payment. I advised that the customer didn't have the funds so they agreed to issue a new one free of charge due to circumstances but this would only be done once! I issued a Food bank voucher and due to customer not having a phone I made the arrangements with Food Bank for delivery and advised customer they needed to be at their property for the delivery. Also advised the Food Bank of the essentials that the client needed. Applied for a DAF, awaiting confirmation that this will be granted.

### **Case study 2**

A young person came in with their parent as they had received a Notice seeking possession from the landlord and a court summons for over £2,000 rent arrears and both were very distraught and did not know what to do. I spoke to one of the Housing options team and sent copies of all the paperwork the client had brought in. The officer in the Housing Options Team said they would make a small payment to the landlord from the Tenancy hardship grant fund so it would be enough to stop the eviction and then set up a repayment plan with the landlord to suspend the court summons. The officer also made an appointment to complete a Housing application to get the client more affordable accommodation. I spoke to Council Tax as there were large arrears on the account and they agreed to hold any further action and set up a repayment plan which the client said they could afford. I have also arranged for the client to come back with some more information and we will apply for a DHP to help with the shortfall on the rent. I also completed a CTR app for them to get some help with their current council tax liability. When they left they both said how they felt a weight had been lifted off their shoulders as they did not know where to go for help.

### **Case study 3**

Customer struggling to manage their electric bill. After a conversation it was clear the customer had budgeting issues/an issue with buying online games. Customer advised that they struggled to trust people/accept help but feels safe and supported in the libraries with AL and BG staff. Referral made to NEA and Citizens Advice for specialist debt advice.

### **Case Study 4**

Hub received a telephone call from a Pobl support worker. Their customer had recently been released from jail and was struggling to claim Universal Credit due to no ID or bank account and homeless. We told the support worker if she sent us the customers details and authorisation we would make the referral on Refer.net. Referral was made for Help to claim Universal credit and debt management for large rent arrears on a previous property.

Outcome: Customer has now been placed in a Hostel and has applied for HB/CTR based on nil income and support worker is helping get a bank account, ID and Universal credit

### **Case study 5**

Individual emailed info@ in regards to applying for a IAP DAF. They were unable to find the application on my council services. After speaking to them and advising how to apply I requested a copy of their tenancy agreement which they were able to email to me. I then asked questions about their circumstances at present which were not good. They had little food, no gas, no talk time on phone and their next payment from us was in 2 weeks' time.

I completed the IAP and requested a washer/dryer and a cooker which they were unable to purchase when they moved into the property. I explained how the food bank worked and requested a fuel voucher. I also requested a SIM card for their phone so at least they would be able to make calls for the next 6 months. The person wasn't aware of the service we provide, however, now they are aware and can attend for support from the hubs.

## **Case Study – Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)**

Customer moved to the area in February 2018. They took on a private rental and immediately started to struggle paying the shortfall because they were not aware that the LHA rates differed from borough to borough. The one bedroom rate in their previous property was £36.82 per week higher than Blaenau Gwent (2022/23).

In September 2018 the customer applied for DHP for help paying the shortfall. Customer has limited capability for work and has been claiming basic ESA since 2017 (Work Related Activity Group). They had also tried to get back into work to boost their income through permitted work. A DHP was awarded and paid continuously up to September 2022 apart from a three month period where applications were unsuccessful during periods of higher earnings.

In September 2022 customer applied for help with moving costs. The house they were renting was being sold and they were issued with a Section 21. The client was directed to us for financial help by Housing Options. The rent for property the client was looking to move into appeared to not be affordable as the client was already claiming a DHP and I had concerns there was a shortfall in affording the property. I contacted Housing to discuss. I put forward my concerns around the affordability of the rent based on the customer's income but was advised that there is a shortage of rental properties available and based on the current market it would be extremely rare to find somewhere cheaper. Due to the circumstances surrounding the move and the fact the client was supporting in this move by Housing Options, I agreed to pay a one off DHP to cover rent in advance and a second one off payment to cover a removal van.

Six weeks into the tenancy a new DHP application was made for help with the shortfall and the customer was advised the following:

- Look for alternate accommodation and see if they could exit the 12 month tenancy early as it was not sustainable.
- Ensure their name was on the housing register and update Housing of current circumstances around shortfall and uncertainty of DHP award moving forward.
- Contact DWP regarding PIP application and if possible speed up assessment due to urgency of circumstances. PIP would boost weekly income with ESA too (addition of SDP)

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Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) referrals made

2021 (July-Dec)	18
2022 (Jan-Dec)	116
2023 (Jan onwards)	12

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Reception
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Month	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Totals
Caller				
Building Control	5	13	0	18
Bus Pass	18	18	4	40
C2BG	320	280	25	625
CAB	51	43	0	94
Cemeteries	2	1	0	3
Council Tax	176	127	27	330
Dog/Food Bags	97	235	33	365
Electoral Registration	7	5	0	12
Environmental Health	21	27	0	48
Estates	27	21	3	51
Fast Track	664	0	0	664
Homelessness	4	7	0	11
Housing	28	26	0	54
IT	0	69	9	78
Licencing	17	52	3	72
Mail	40	124	16	180
Miscellaneous	69	51	12	132
NNDR	0	1	1	2
Planning	27	34	1	62
Recovery	21	32	0	53
Regeneration	0	6	0	6
Registrars	0	0	0	0
Social Services	32	29	0	61
Sundry Accounts	38	37	0	75
Sundry Accounts Paypoint Card	0	2	0	2
Toilet	26	65	1	92
<b>Total</b>	<b>1690</b>	<b>1305</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>3130</b>

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## Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)

The Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) has been designed to help support the Council in making informed and effective decisions whilst ensuring compliance with a range of statutory legislation, such as the Equality Act 2010. It consists of 7 main sections as outlined below:

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

Lead Officer	Head of Service	Service Area & Department	Date
Ellie Fry	Clive Rogers Bernadette Elias (Sarah King)		

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

**The Civic Centre was vacated in March 2020 due to the pandemic lockdown arrangements. At this point in time it was on a less than five years’ trajectory to being vacated due to the age and condition of the building. The building was over 50 years old – the expected life-span of a building of that nature is probably 50-60 years depending on condition. An alternative provision of community facing services based in ‘hubs’ was being developed and during the pandemic this was rolled out quickly across the towns in Blaenau Gwent. Following the roll out of the ‘Hubs’ service the Civic Centre was formally closed to be demolished as soon as was practicably possible.**

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

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

Protected characteristics	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on those with a protected characteristics?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on those with a protected characteristics?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
<p><b>Age</b> <i>(people of all ages)</i></p>	<p>All Ages</p>	<p>Negative (Civic closure) Positive (Hub openings)</p>	<p>By moving the services offered from the Civic Centre into individual towns the services moved closer to those individuals who would have had difficulty travelling to the Civic Centre. More buses go to town centres then to outskirts of towns.</p>
<p><b>Disability</b> <i>(people with disabilities/ long term conditions)</i></p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Negative (Civic closure) Positive (Hub openings) Negative – parking near to a Community hub may be restricted due to the library locations Positive – more buses go to/through town centres, although are infrequent</p>	<p>By moving the services offered from the Civic Centre into individual towns the services moved closer to those individuals who would have had difficulty travelling to the Civic Centre. Also, each venue has toilets and full wheelchair access to the hub office if/when required.</p>

<b>Gender Reassignment</b> <i>(anybody who's gender identity or gender expression is different to the sex they were assigned at birth)</i>	N/A		
<b>Protected characteristics</b>	<b>Will the proposal have any positive impacts on those with a protected characteristic?</b>	<b>Will the proposal have any negative impacts on those with a protected characteristics?</b>	<b>Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.</b>
<b>Marriage or Civil Partnership</b> <i>(people who are married or in a civil partnership)</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Pregnancy and Maternity</b> <i>(women who are pregnant and/or on maternity leave)</i>	Yes	Negative (Civic closure) Positive (Hub openings) Positive (locality/accessibility) Negative (parking near to a Community hub may be restricted due to the library locations)	By moving the services offered from the Civic Centre into individual areas, the services have moved closer to those individuals who may have found travelling to the Civic Centre more challenging. They are based in towns which means that multiple tasks can be achieved e.g. shopping, Hub visit, library, benefits in one trip.

		Positive – more buses go to/through town centres although are infrequent	
<b>Race</b> <i>(people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and different racial backgrounds)</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Religion or Belief</b> <i>(people with different religions and beliefs including people with no beliefs)</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Protected characteristics</b>	<b>Will the proposal have any positive impacts on those with a protected characteristics?</b>	<b>Will the proposal have any negative impacts on those with a protected characteristics?</b>	<b>Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.</b>
<b>Sex</b> <i>(women and men, girls and boys and those who self-identify their gender)</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A

<b>Sexual Orientation</b> <i>(lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, other)</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A
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**Section 2 - Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and Welsh Language Standards**

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

Requirements	Does the proposal have any positive, negative, or neutral impacts with regards to the below?	What can be done to mitigate any negative impacts?	Please demonstrate any evidence used to form this opinion.
<p><b>Compliance with the Welsh Language Standards.</b> <i>For example, Standards 88 - 93 – policy development and review of existing policies)</i></p>	<p>Neutral impact as same application of WLS as in Civic Centre</p>	<p>No negative impacts in this area as far as compliance.</p>	<p>Our Community Hubs will offer the same Welsh language services as the former arrangements in the Civic Centre.</p>
<p><b>What opportunities are there to promote the Welsh Language?</b> <i>For example, status, use of Welsh language services, use of Welsh in everyday life in work / community</i></p>	<p>Neutral impact as same situation as in Civic Centre</p>	<p>No negative impacts in this area as far as compliance is concerned.</p>	<p>Any posters/leaflets displayed in the Community Hubs are bilingual. Promotion of and information displayed on the Community Hubs is shown in both Welsh and English languages</p>
<p><b>What opportunities are there for a person to use the Welsh Language?</b></p>	<p>Neutral impact. Community Hub officers will offer the same Welsh language service as in</p>	<p>(Negative) We need to inform residents if there is no</p>	<p>Any posters/leaflets displayed in the Community Hubs are bilingual. Promotion</p>

<p><i>For example, staff, residents and visitors</i></p>	<p>the Civic Centre where required.</p>	<p>immediate Welsh language service available        (Positive) Community Hub staff will be carrying out basic Welsh language training.</p>	<p>of and information displayed on the Community Hubs is shown in both Welsh and English languages</p>
<p><b>Is the Welsh language being treated no less favourably than the English language?</b></p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Some Community Hub staff have a basic understanding of the Welsh language and further training will be carried out.</p>	<p>Any posters/leaflets displayed in the Community Hubs are bilingual. Promotion of and information displayed on the Community Hubs is shown in both Welsh and English languages</p>

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

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

**Please consider how your proposal could affect the following groups:**

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

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Socio Economic Disadvantages	Will the proposal have a positive, negative, or neutral impact?	How could you mitigate the negative impacts outlined?	Please highlight any evidence that has been considered (quantitative or qualitative)
<p><b>Low Income / Income Poverty</b> <i>(cannot afford to maintain regular payments such as bills, food, clothing, transport etc.)</i></p>	<p>Positive</p>	<p>Hub officers provide help and support.</p>	<p>Case studies can evidence this e.g. links into Benefits, foodbank and FSM.</p>



<p><b>Low and/or No Wealth</b> (<i>enough money to meet basic living costs and pay bills but have no savings to deal with any unexpected spends and no provisions for the future</i>)</p>	Positive	Hub officers provide help and support.	Case studies can evidence this e.g. Budgetary advice and Debt management support
<p><b>Material Deprivation</b> (<i>unable to access basic goods and services i.e., financial products like life insurance, repair/replace broken electrical goods, are located in warm home, hobbies etc.</i>)</p>	Positive	Hub officers provide help and support.	Case studies can evidence this e.g. applications made to Discretionary Assistance Fund
<p><b>Area Deprivation</b> (<i>where you live (rural areas), where you work (accessibility of public transport) Impact on the environment?</i>)</p>	Positive (Community Hubs located in town centres) Negative (Bus services into town centres not frequent enough)	Community Hubs opening times are advertised widely and on our website.	Footfall is monitored in each Community Hub.
<p><b>Socio-economic Background</b> (<i>social class i.e., parents' education, employment and income</i>)</p>	Neutral	Anyone of any social class can visit a Community Hub as they could the Civic Centre.	N/A
<p><b>Socio-economic Disadvantage</b> (<i>What cumulative impact will the proposal have on people or groups because of their protected characteristic(s) or vulnerability or because they are already disadvantaged</i>)</p>	Positive	Community Hubs present in all town centres makes it easier for people or groups to access support.	The footfall and diversity of queries being presented to the Community Hubs.

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

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

Protected characteristics	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on the Children’s Rights Approach?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on the Children’s Rights Approach?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
<b>Participation</b> (child or young person as someone who actively contributes to society as a citizen)	N/A		
<b>Provision</b> (the basic rights of children and young people to survive and develop)	N/A		
<b>Protection</b> (children and young people are protected against exploitation, abuse or discrimination)	N/A		

**Section 5 - Data**

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

What data/evidence was used? - provide any links.	What were the key findings?	How has the data/evidence informed this proposal?
<p><b>An Independent Condition Survey was carried out in 2018 by 'Property Data Solutions'. This Survey analyses the buildings condition and advises on what measures are required to return it to an acceptable standard.</b></p>	<p>Backlog Maintenance in the region of £1.5 Million was required in order to return the building to an acceptable standard after which an annual planned maintenance budget would need to be ring fenced in order to maintain the integrity of the investment or the building would fall back into disrepair.</p>	<p>Due to the significant financial investment required for this proposal, the business case for retaining the building is not a viable option for the Council given the ongoing difficult financial situation.</p>

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

The original building was erected in 1964 with additional elements added in the mid 1970's. The life span of a building of this time/type is between 30 to 60 years (best case 2024). Maintenance on the building was undertaken as and when budget was available, repaired as and when necessary and remodelled inside, required to improve the office environment. These works would have had no impact on the overall lifespan of the building.

More recently, there was significant concern about the integrity of the existing structure, a steel reinforcement framework that would have been embedded within the concrete construction. This would not have been included within the findings of the Condition Survey undertaken in 2018. Recently a piece of the external concrete fell away from the steel reinforcement.

It would not be prudent to invest a significant sum of money into a building with a limited lifespan, this building had almost achieved its best case lifespan by the time it was vacated as a result of the pandemic in 2020/21.

In addition, the fabric of the building was not energy efficient and would have required a significant financial outlay in addition to the Condition Survey findings to begin to 'decarbonise' the building. Without this additional investment the building would also be extremely expensive to heat due to heat loss and would have been a significant issue for the Welsh Governments objectives to decarbonise the public sector estate by 2050.

Finally, there would have been very limited opportunity to improve the Carbon Footprint for this building - as one of our key Corporate Buildings, and given the evidence above, this was a major concern for the Council moving forward.

#### Section 6 - Consultation.

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

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

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

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

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

**Please consider the following questions:**

1. Who did you consult?
2. When did the consultation take place and was adequate time given for a response?
3. Was there enough information provided to respond effectively?
4. What were the findings?
5. Have the findings been considered with regards to the decision?

<b>Section 7 - Decision</b>		
<i>Using the information you have gathered from sections 1-9 please state in the table below whether you are able to proceed with the proposal.</i>		
Continue with the proposal in its current form	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Continue with proposal but take into account reasonable steps to mitigate any negative impacts of the proposal	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

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