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

THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND

Dydd Iau, 14 Mawrth 2024 Dydd Iau, 14 Mawrth 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

CYFARFOD CYFFREDINOL Y CYNGOR

A meeting of the Cyfarfod Cyffredinol y Cyngor will be held in O bell drwy Microsoft Teams on Dydd Iau, 21ain Mawrth, 2024 at 10.00 am.

Yours faithfully

Damien McCann
Interim Chief Executive

AGENDA

Pages

1. CYFIEITHU AR Y PRYD

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

2. YMDDIHEURIADAU

Derbyn ymddiheuriadau.

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

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

3. DATGANIADAU BUDDIANT A GODDEFEBAU

Ystyried unrhyw ddatganiadau buddiant a goddefebau a wnaed.

4. MARA MORUZ – MAER IEUENCTID AR ADAEL Y SWYDD

Derbyn trosolwg gan Mara Moruz, ar adael y swydd Maer Ieuenctid ar ei taith ddemocrataidd.

5. CYHOEDDIADAU'R CADEIRYDD

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Rheswm am y Brys
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To: Councillor C. Smith (Aelod Llywyddol)
P. Baldwin
S. Behr
D. Bevan
K. Chaplin
M. Cross
H. Cunningham
D. Davies
G. A. Davies
M. Day
S. Edmunds
J. Gardner
J. Hill
W. Hodgins
J. Holt
G. Humphreys
R. Leadbeater
J. Millard
E. Jones
J. Morgan, J.P.
J. C. Morgan
J. P. Morgan

L. Parsons
D. Rowberry
T. Smith
G. Thomas
J. Thomas
S. Thomas
H. Trollope
J. Wilkins
D. Wilkshire
L. Winnett
D. Woods

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

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO:	<u>THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL</u>
SUBJECT:	<u>ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL – 25TH JANUARY, 2024</u>
REPORT OF:	<u>DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER</u>

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR C. SMITH (PRESIDING MEMBER, CHAIRING)

- Councillors
- P. Baldwin
 - S. Behr
 - D. Bevan
 - K. Chaplin
 - M. Cross
 - H. Cunningham
 - M. Day
 - D. Davies
 - G. A. Davies
 - S. Edmunds
 - J. Gardner
 - J. Hill
 - W. Hodgins
 - J. Holt
 - G. Humphreys
 - E. Jones
 - R. Leadbeater
 - J. C. Morgan
 - J. P. Morgan
 - L. Parsons
 - D. Rowberry
 - T. Smith
 - G. Thomas
 - J. Thomas
 - S. Thomas
 - H. Trollope
 - J. Wilkins
 - D. Wilkshire
 - L. Winnett

D. Woods

AND: Interim Chief Executive
Chief Officer Resources
Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services
Interim Corporate Director of Social Services
Chief Officer Commercial & Customer
Interim Head of School Improvement & Inclusion
Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships
Head of Organisational Development
Service Manger Performance & Democratic
Press & Public Relations Officer
Dave Rees - Unison

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
1.	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
2.	<u>APOLOGIES</u> Apology for absence was received for Councillor J. Morgan, J.P.	
3.	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u> The following declarations of interest were reported: Councillor L. Winnett – Item No. 24 The Future of Silent Valley Waste Services Ltd following the Transfer of Services (and employees) back to the Council Councillor T. Smith - Item No. 24 The Future of Silent Valley Waste Services Ltd following the Transfer of Services (and employees) back to the Council	

	Councillor H. Cunningham – Item No. 25 Elected Member Maternity, Paternity, Newborn Adoption, Parental and Adoption Leave (Family Absence Policy)	
4.	<p><u>PRESIDING MEMBER’S ANNOUNCEMENTS</u></p> <p><u>Congratulations</u></p> <p>Congratulations was expressed to Charlie Caswell from Tredegar who recently gained his Welsh Schools FA 16’s cap.</p> <p><u>Condolences</u></p> <p>It was reported that the former long serving Blaenau Gwent County Borough Councillor Brian Thomas had sadly passed away. Members expressed condolences and paid their respects with a minute’s silence.</p>	
5. – 15.	<p><u>DECISION BOOK – OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2023</u></p> <p>The Decision Book for the period October – December, 2023 was submitted for consideration.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the decisions be approved and confirmed as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
16.	<p><u>MEMBERS QUESTIONS</u></p> <p>There were no questions submitted by Members.</p>	
17.	<p><u>PUBLIC QUESTIONS</u></p> <p>There were no questions submitted by members of the public.</p>	

18.	<p><u>COUNCIL MOTION – VIOLENCE AT WORK</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Motion submitted regarding violence at work.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the Motion be supported and the Council agreed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaffirm its commitment to Social Partnership and to consult and work collaboratively with trades unions. • Adopt Unison’s Violence at Work Charter. • Encourage all schools to adopt the Charter. • Encourage, Aneurin Leisure Trust to adopt the Charter. 	
19.	<p><u>MEMBERSHIPS REPORT</u></p> <p><u>Advisory Panel for Local Authority Governors</u></p> <p>The following recommendations were made by the Panel on 17th January, 2024 to appoint in principle:</p> <p>Abertillery Learning Community – Michael Lyn Davies The River Centre 3-16 Learning Community – Julie Sambrook</p> <p>To ratify the following additional appointment made at the panel meeting held on 15th November, 2023:</p> <p>Glyncod Primary School – Ms. Vikki Curtis</p> <p>It was, thereupon, unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the above appointments be endorsed.</p> <p><u>People Scrutiny Committee – Co-opted Youth Forum Representative</u></p> <p>RESOLVED that the appointment of Miss Chloe Lines as the Co-opted Youth Forum Representative on the People</p>	

	Scrutiny Committee (appointment commenced on 21 st September, 2023) be ratified.	
20.	<p><u>TREASURY MANAGEMENT – QUARTER 1 2023/2024</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that Council accept the treasury management activity undertaken during the first 3 months of 2023/24 and do not make any amendments to the previously agreed Treasury strategies and performance indicators.</p>	
21.	<p><u>GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2022/2023</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Data Protection and Governance Officer submitted on behalf of the Governance and Audit Committee.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the information within the report which was given by the Governance & Audit Committee as assurance that appropriate oversight and monitoring was taking place and any shortfalls had appropriate controls in place to make the necessary improvements be accepted.</p>	
22.	<p><u>RECRUITMENT & SELECTION POLICY</u></p> <p>Members considered the report of the Head of Organisational Development.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p>	

	<p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that Council approve the Recruitment and Selection Policy for implementation.</p>	
<p>23.</p>	<p><u>PRESIDING MEMBER’S FUND – PROPOSALS FOR USE</u></p> <p>The report of the Presiding Member was submitted for consideration.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and a total of £6,594.23 from the Fund be allocated as follows:</p> <p>£1,200.00 Head for Arts / Llanhilleth Pumping Station Mural Project</p> <p>£540.84 St George’s Church, Tredegar / to support visit to Uganda to help children’s education</p> <p>£1,200.00 Deighton Primary School / Allotment Project</p> <p>£75.00 Local Places For Nature Project (Cwmcelyn) / to compliment Biodiversity works being undertaken</p> <p>£283.39 New Cwm Institute / Maintenance of Building</p> <p>£500.00 Tredegar Miners Memorial Group / Contribution for Memorial Gates</p> <p>£2,160.00 Community Interest Company Nantyglo* / establishment of garden / growing space around Attlee Road</p> <p>£75.00 Abertillery Branch of The Royal Welsh Regiment. – St David's Day Commemoration event</p> <p>£75.00 Llanhilleth Bowls Club - Widening participation initiative</p>	

	<p>£100.00 Zion Miners Chapel - Wildflower Garden Project</p> <p>£75.00 Aberbeeg Community Centre - Happi Cafe project</p> <p>£75.00 Swffryd Community Centre - Cost of living support</p> <p>£75.00 Brynithel Community Centre - Cost of living support</p> <p>£160.00 Briery Hill Allotments / General Maintenance</p> <p><i>*CIC not formally established currently, contribution to be released following formal incorporation</i></p>	
24.	<p><u>THE FUTURE OF SILENT VALLEY WASTE SERVICES LTD FOLLOWING THE TRANSFER OF SERVICES (AND EMPLOYEES) BACK TO THE COUNCIL</u></p> <p>Councillors L. Winnett and T. Smith declared an interest in this item.</p> <p>The report of the Chief Officer Resources was submitted for consideration.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Council endorse Option 1, namely that Silent Valley Waste Services Ltd be dissolved. This would result in the company being struck off the Companies Register.</p>	
25.	<p><u>ELECTED MEMBER MATERNITY, PATERNITY, NEWBORN ADOPTION, PARENTAL AND ADOPTION LEAVE (FAMILY ABSENCE POLICY)</u></p> <p>Councillor H. Cunningham declared an interest in this item.</p> <p>The report of the Service Manager Performance & Democratic was submitted for consideration.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p>	

	<p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Council endorse Option 1, namely to approve and publish the Elected Member Maternity, Paternity, Newborn Adoption, Parental and Adoption Leave (Family Absence Policy) as set out in Appendix 1.</p>	
26.	<p><u>APPLICATION TO LEASE CLUB AND PREMISES AT EUGENE CROSS PARK, EBBW VALE</u></p> <p>The report of the Team Manager Estates & Asset Management was submitted for consideration.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Council endorse Option 1, namely that the Council as Charitable Trustees decide that they are satisfied, having considered the surveyor's report, a copy of which is attached at Appendix 2, that the terms of the proposed disposition are the best that can reasonably be obtained for the Charity and agree the principle of the proposed lease of the area of land and buildings shown edged red on the plan attached at Appendix 1 for a term of thirty-five years subject to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. ECPSL paying a one-off premium of £1.00. ii. Successfully obtaining the consent of the Charity Commission to the lease, which must be obtained prior to the lease being legally completed. 	
----	<p><u>EXEMPT ITEMS</u></p> <p>To receive and consider the following report which in the opinion of the proper officer was an exempt item taking into account consideration of the public interest test and that the press and public should be excluded from the meeting (the reason for the decision for the exemption was available on a schedule maintained by the proper officer).</p>	

29.

**FUTURE OCCUPATION OF ANVIL COURT,
ABERTILLERY**

Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer regarding the public interest test, that on balance, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and that the report should be exempt.

RESOLVED that the public be excluded whilst this item of business is transacted as it is likely there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14, Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

The report of the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services was submitted for consideration.

A Member proposed an alternative Option 3, as detailed in the report submitted to the Corporate & Performance Scrutiny Committee held on the 18th January, 2024.

The proposal was seconded.

Option 3 - Notify the Landlord of the Councils intention to bring the lease to an end on lease expiry by 16th December 2025.

Upon a vote being taken, it was

RESOLVED that the report which contained information relating to the financial/business affairs of persons other than the Authority be accepted and the Council endorse Option 2, namely that Anvil Court be vacated from 1st April, 2024, and left vacant until the lease expires on 16th December, 2025; and the Landlord be notified of the Council's intension to bring the lease to an end on lease expiry by 16th December, 2025.

29.

SHORTLISTING – CHIEF EXECUTIVE JNC CE

Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer regarding the public interest test, that on balance, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and that the report should be exempt.

RESOLVED that the public be excluded whilst this item of business is transacted as it is likely there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 12 & 13, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

Consideration was given to the report of the meeting held on 28th November, 2023.

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED that the report which related to staffing matters be accepted and the decisions contained therein be noted.

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO:	<u>THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL</u>
SUBJECT:	<u>SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL – 27TH FEBRUARY, 2024</u>
REPORT OF:	<u>DEMOCRATIC OFFICER</u>

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR C. SMITH (PRESIDING MEMBER, CHAIRING)

- Councillors
- S. Behr
 - D. Bevan
 - K. Chaplin
 - M. Cross
 - G. A. Davies
 - M. Day
 - S. Edmunds
 - J. Gardner
 - J. Hill
 - W. Hodgins
 - J. Holt
 - G. Humphreys
 - E. Jones
 - R. Leadbeater
 - J. Morgan, J.P.
 - J. C. Morgan
 - J. P. Morgan
 - L. Parsons
 - D. Rowberry
 - T. Smith
 - G. Thomas
 - J. Thomas
 - S. Thomas
 - H. Trollope
 - J. Wilkins
 - D. Wilkshire
 - L. Winnett
 - D. Woods

AND:

- Interim Chief Executive
- Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services
- Interim Corporate Director of Social Services
- Interim Corporate Director of Education
- Chief Officer Resources
- Chief Officer Commercial & Customer
- Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
- Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships
- Head of Organisational Development
- Service Manager - Accountancy
- Service Manager Performance & Democratic
- Communications & Marketing Manager
- Press & Publicity Officer

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
1.	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
2.	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P. Baldwin, H. Cunningham, D. Davies and J. Millard.</p>	
3.	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	

4.

DISCRETIONARY FEES & CHARGES 2024/2025

Members considered the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

It was unanimously,

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 2 be endorsed, namely:

- The register of Fees & Charges for 2024/2025 be approved together with the following discretionary fees & charges:
 - a fee uplift of 5% in line with the assumption for inflation within the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS);
 - the alternative fees proposed as detailed in paragraphs 5.1.4 to 5.1.14 of the report; and
 - Planning Fees as attached at Appendix 2.
- Delegated power and responsibility be granted to the Interim Director of Social Services for setting the fees and charges for 2024/2025 relating to the provision of external social care as detailed in paragraph 5.1.6 of the report.
- The core price increases relating to Aneurin Leisure Trust attached at Appendix 3 be approved.

5.

REVENUE BUDGET 2024/2025

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

Bridging the Gap Business Cases

The Leader of the Council proposed that the following **be agreed**:

- CS01 – Members Allowances – To reduce the budget for Employers Superannuation Contributions - £12,000.
- CS03 – Resources Department – Review of staffing structures - £157,000.
- CS04 – Budget reductions to Inflationary Increases & Transformation Budgets, reduction to inflationary uplifts to supplies & services across all portfolio budgets and increase to grant income for Universal free school meals - £1,946,000.
- CS05 - CCTV - Budget Review and reduction to staffing budget & supplies and services to reflect expenditure - £40,173.
- CS07 - Corporate Services / Commercial and Customer – Departmental Review of staffing Structures - £347,100.
- CS09 - Corporate & Performance - Review and reduction of staffing budgets to reflect reduced contractual hours - £22,100.
- CS10 - Every service would be required to achieve budget reductions of 1% in addition to the other budget proposals - £1,000,000.
- CS11 - Increase Discretionary Fees & Charges by a minimum of 5% - £100,000.
- CS12 - Increase council tax by 4.95% - £361,000.
- CS14 – Co-opted Members Allowances - Reduce budget to reflect expenditure - £12,000.

- ECON02 - Economy / Business & Regeneration – maximisation of grant funding - £17,000.
- ECON03 - Review of Service Delivery / Alternative Service Delivery / Income Generation - £50,000.

- ED02 - 10% reduction in the contribution to the EAS - £34,000.
- ED04 - Cash flat Management Fee to Aneurin Leisure Trust - £135,670.
- ED05 - Schools Budget - Cash flat / Budget cut to Individual Schools Budget - (ISB) - £1,051,000. However, specific cost pressures totalling £864,000 (ALN provision, increase in pupil numbers and the new Welsh School) were agreed which would equate in effect to a 1.6% uplift to the ISB (Individual School's Budget) and would be funded by the Council.
- ED06 - Review of Staffing Budgets & maximisation of grant funding - £107,460.

- ENV01 - Public Protection - Review of Staffing Structures - £100,000.
- ENV09 - Trade Waste - Increase Trade Waste prices to Businesses by 5% - £2,220.
- ENV11 - Waste Services - Charging an Admin Fee related to delivering replacement Residual Bins and Recycling Bags – this proposal would be implemented on a **trial basis in order that its implementation could be monitored and evaluated** - £3,662.
- ENV12 - Household Waste Recycling Centres - Review of operating days /hours this proposal would be implemented on a **trial basis in order that its implementation could be monitored and evaluated** - £34,000.
- ENV15 - Review of Staffing Budget - Budget reduction relating to a deleted post - £45,000.

- SS01 - Adult Services - Newly created Social Care and Housing Support Commissioning Service - £57,000.
- SS02 - Adult Services - Rationalisation/Reduction of Staffing Levels- £113,000.

- SS04 - Adult Services - Reduction in domicillary care Packages through improved quality assurance measures - £250,000.
- SS05 - Provider Services - Reduction in Community Options and Day Centre Transport - £153,560.
- SS06 - Provider Services - Rationalisation/Reduction of Staffing Levels - £110,000.
- SS07 - Children's Services - Temporary Reduction of Staffing Levels in Placement Team - £56,000.
- SS08 - Children's Services - Rationalisation/Reduction of Staffing Levels in Early Years Team - £73,000.
- SS10 - Children's Services - Rationalisation/Reduction of Staffing Levels in Supporting Change Team - £110,000.
- SS11 - Children's Services - Rationalisation/Reduction of Staffing Levels in Safeguarding Team - £113,900.

The following proposal **be not agreed:**

- ECON01 - Estates - Review of Staffing Structures – this proposal would not currently be pursued.

In addition to the above proposals a draw from reserves of £1,494.000 was also agreed for 2024/2025.

The Leader of the Council concluded by advising that should the above proposals be agreed the **£8,336,000** budget savings target would be achieved.

The above proposals were seconded.

The Leader of the Independent Group commenced by confirming that the Group supported the majority of the proposals outlined above by the Leader of the Council and had only differed on three of the proposals.

The Group Leader continued by advising that due to concerns that had been raised at the recent Corporate & Performance Scrutiny Committee and in discussion with the Leader, it had been agreed that in order to provide a level

of reassurance that two of the business cases would be agreed subject to a trial basis, in order that the proposals could be monitored, evaluated and the findings reported back to Council in due course and these were:

- ENV11 - Waste Services - Charging an Admin Fee related to delivering replacement Residual Bins and Recycling Bags.
- ENV12 - Household Waste Recycling Centres - Review of operating days /hours.

However, the Independent Group did not agree with the **Council Tax increase proposal and proposed the following amendment:**

- A Council Tax increase of 4.75%.

This would increase the draw on reserves.

This proposal was seconded.

A recorded vote was, thereupon, requested.

In Favour of the amended proposal to increase Council Tax by 4.75% – Councillors G. A. Davies, M. Day, J. Hill, W. Hodgins, J. Holt, G. Humphreys, J. P. Morgan, L. Parsons, G. Thomas, J. Wilkins.

Against the amended proposal the proposal to increase Council Tax by 4.75% – Councillors S. Behr, D. Bevan, K. Chaplin, M. Cross, S. Edmunds, J. Gardner, R. Leadbeater, E. Jones, J. Morgan, J.P., J. C. Morgan, D. Rowberry, C. Smith, T. Smith, J. Thomas, S. Thomas, H. Trollope, D. Wilkshire, L. Winnett, D. Woods.

The vote on the amendment was not carried.

A further verbal vote was not required in respect of the original proposal to increase Council Tax by 4.95% but Members agreed that the result from the initial vote taken be reversed and included in the decisions for the record.

In Favour of the proposal to increase Council Tax by 4.95% – Councillors S. Behr, D. Bevan, K. Chaplin, M. Cross, S. Edmunds, J. Gardner, R. Leadbeater, E. Jones, J. Morgan, J.P., J. C. Morgan, D. Rowberry, C. Smith, T. Smith, J. Thomas, S. Thomas, H. Trollope, D. Wilkshire, L. Winnett, D. Woods.

Against the proposal the proposal to increase Council Tax by 4.95% – Councillors G. A. Davies, M. Day, J. Hill, W. Hodgins, J. Holt, G. Humphreys, J. P. Morgan, L. Parsons, G. Thomas, J. Wilkins.

RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely:

- The 2024/25 revenue budget as shown in table in paragraph 5.1.15 of the report be agreed.
- The outcomes within the overall provisional Revenue Support Grant (RSG) Settlement and the potential for further change in the Final RSG Settlement (paragraphs 2.6 – 2.17 of the report) be noted.
- The outcomes within the BGCBC provisional RSG Settlement and its impact upon the Medium Term Financial Strategy (paragraphs 2.18 – 2.26 of the report) be noted.
- The updated cost pressures and growth items (£2.8m in total) identified in Appendix 2 (paragraphs 5.1.10 – 5.1.16 of the report) for inclusion in the Council's budget be agreed.
- The Bridging the Gap proposals delivering financial efficiencies and budget cuts towards the budget gap (paragraphs 5.1.25 to 5.1.37 of the report) be approved **with the exception of:**

ECON01 - Estates - Review of Staffing Structures.

- A cash flat budget for the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) be agreed. However, cost pressures totalling

£864,000 (ALN provision, increase in pupil numbers and the new Welsh School) would be funded by the Council, equating to a 1.6% uplift.

- Grant/s transferring into the Final Settlement for 2024/2025 be passported to the relevant service/s.
- The use of reserves in the sum of £1.494m to balance the budget for 2024/2025 be approved.
- A Council tax increase of 4.95% for 2024/25 be agreed.
- The updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2024/2025 to 2028/2029 attached at Appendix 5 be approved.

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO:	<u>THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL</u>
SUBJECT:	<u>SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL – 6TH MARCH, 2024</u>
REPORT OF:	<u>DEMOCRATIC OFFICER</u>

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR C. SMITH (PRESIDING MEMBER, CHAIRING)

- Councillors
- P. Baldwin
 - S. Behr
 - D. Bevan
 - K. Chaplin
 - M. Cross
 - D. Davies
 - G. A. Davies
 - M. Day
 - S. Edmunds
 - J. Hill
 - W. Hodgins
 - J. Holt
 - G. Humphreys
 - E. Jones
 - R. Leadbeater
 - J. Millard
 - J. Morgan, J.P.
 - J. C. Morgan
 - L. Parsons
 - D. Rowberry
 - T. Smith
 - G. Thomas
 - S. Thomas
 - H. Trollope
 - J. Wilkins
 - D. Wilkshire
 - L. Winnett

AND: Interim Chief Executive
 Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services
 Interim Corporate Director of Social Services
 Chief Officer Resources
 Chief Officer Commercial & Customer
 Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
 Press & Publicity Officer

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>
1.	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>
2.	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from:</p> <p>Councillors H. Cunningham, J. P. Morgan, J. Thomas and D. Woods.</p>
3.	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>The following declarations of interest were reported:</p> <p>Item No. 5: The Renting Homes (Fees etc.) (Wales) Act 2019; authorisation of Rent Smart Wales to undertake enforcement action in Blaenau Gwent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Councillors M. Cross and J. C. Morgan <p>The Monitoring Officer advised that the above-named Members could remain in the meeting whilst this item was considered and were able to take part in any debate that may ensue and any subsequent vote (if required) in respect of this item of business.</p>

4. REVENUE BUDGET 2024/2025

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

It was, thereupon unanimously,

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the:

- Council Tax Resolution detailed below, be approved.
- Statutory budget requirement of £184,942,156 be approved.
- Use of the specific reserves identified totalling £1.5m (paragraph 5.1.16 of the report) be approved.

5.1.2 The Council agreed at its meeting on 27th February, 2024, a Council Tax increase of 4.95% for the 2024/2025 financial year. As a result, the Blaenau Gwent Council element of the full council tax charge would be:-

Valuation Bands (£)								
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1,279.94	1,493.26	1,706.59	1,919.91	2,346.56	2,773.20	3,199.85	3,839.82	4,479.79

5.1.3 At its meeting in December 2023 the Council agreed the Council Tax base for tax setting purposes be 20,936.36 for 2024/25, this being the total number of chargeable dwellings in each area adjusted for a number of items e.g., discounts payable, multiplied by the assumed collection rate of 95.5%.

5.1.4 In addition, in accordance with Regulation 6 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, the amount of its Council Tax base for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate were:

4,619.14	Abertillery & Llanhilleth
1,712.68	Brynmawr
2,711.88	Nantyglo & Blaina
4,761.60	Tredegar

5.1.5 The above representing the number of chargeable dwellings to which the Town & Community Council's precept would apply.

5.1.7 That the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2024/2025 in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and sections 47 and 49 of the Local Government Act 1988 (as amended):

a	£184,734,156	Being the aggregate of the amounts the Council estimates for the items set out in section 32(2) (a) to (d) of the Act less the aggregate of the amounts the Council estimates for the items set out in section 32 (3) (a) and (c) of the Act calculates by the Council, in accordance with section 32(4) of the Act, as its budget requirement for the year.
b	£208,000	Being the amount the Authority estimates in relation to Sections 47 and 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 as amended by Schedule 1 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, for discretionary non-domestic rate relief.
c	£144,044,000	Being the aggregate of the sums which the Council estimates would be payable for the year into its Council fund in respect of redistributed non-domestic rates, revenue support grant and additional grant.
d	£1,953.45	Being the amount at (a) above plus the amount at (b) above and less the amount at (c) above, all divided by the amount at 5.1.3 above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 33(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.
e	£702,229	Being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act (Town and Community Precepts).
f	£1,919.91	Being the amount at (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (e) above by the amount at 5.1.3 above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year

for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no special item relates.

5.1.8 The amounts given by adding to the amount at (f) above the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council's area mentioned above divided in each case by the amount at 5.1.3 above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate were:

g	2,002.42	Abertillery & Llanhilleth
	1,946.18	Brynmawr
	1,958.63	Nantyglo & Blaina
	1,955.84	Tredegar

5.1.9 The amounts given by multiplying the amounts at (f) and (g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in section 5(1) of the Act, was applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation Band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands were:

The County Borough Tax including Community Precepts									
Valuation Bands									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Abertillery & Llanhilleth	1,334.95	1,557.43	1,779.93	2,002.42	2,447.41	2,892.38	3,337.37	4,004.84	4,672.31
Brynmawr	1,297.45	1,513.69	1,729.94	1,946.18	2,378.67	2,811.15	3,243.63	3,892.36	4,541.09
Nantyglo & Blaina	1,305.75	1,523.38	1,741.01	1,958.63	2,393.88	2,829.13	3,264.38	3,917.26	4,570.14
Tredegar	1,303.89	1,521.21	1,738.53	1,955.84	2,390.47	2,825.10	3,259.73	3,911.68	4,563.63
Ebbw Vale	1,279.94	1,493.26	1,706.59	1,919.91	2,346.56	2,773.20	3,199.85	3,839.82	4,479.79

5.1.10 That it be noted that for the year 2024/2025 the Gwent Office of Police and Crime Commissioner had stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the Council (totalling £7,317,677), in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Act 1992, for each of the categories of dwellings shown:

Gwent Office of Police and Crime Commissioner								
Valuation Bands (£)								
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
233.01	271.85	310.68	349.52	427.19	504.86	582.53	699.04	815.55

5.1.11 That, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at (g) and 5.1.9 above, the Council, in accordance with section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the following amounts as the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2024/25 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

	The Full Tax of the County Borough Tax including Police and Community Precepts								
	Valuation Bands								
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Abertillery & Llanhilleth	1,567.96	1,829.28	2,090.61	2,351.94	2,874.60	3,397.24	3,919.90	4,703.88	5,487.86
Brynawr	1,530.46	1,785.54	2,040.62	2,295.70	2,805.86	3,316.01	3,826.16	4,591.40	5,356.64
Nantyglo & Blaina	1,538.76	1,795.23	2,051.69	2,308.15	2,821.07	3,333.99	3,846.91	4,616.30	5,385.69
Tredegar	1,536.90	1,793.06	2,049.21	2,305.36	2,817.66	3,329.96	3,842.26	4,610.72	5,379.18
Ebbw Vale	1,512.95	1,765.11	2,017.27	2,269.43	2,773.75	3,278.06	3,782.38	4,538.86	5,295.34

5. THE RENTING HOMES (FEES ETC.) (WALES) ACT 2019; AUTHORISATION OF RENT SMART WALES TO UNDERTAKE ENFORCEMENT ACTION IN BLAENAU GWENT

Councillor M. Cross and J. C. Morgan declared an interest in this item and remained in the meeting whilst it was considered.

The report of the Service Manager – Public Protection was submitted for consideration.

It was unanimously,

	<p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that Cardiff Council, as the Single Licensing Authority for Wales (Rent Smart Wales) be authorised to exercise the functions of an enforcement authority, in relation to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's area, for the purposes of the Renting homes (Fees etc) (Wales) Act 2019, including, without limitation, taking enforcement activity and bringing criminal proceedings pursuant to section 19 of that Act.</p>
<p>----</p>	<p><u>EXEMPT ITEM</u></p> <p>To receive and consider the following report which in the opinion of the proper officer was an exempt item taking into account consideration of the public interest test and that the press and public should be excluded from the meeting (the reason for the decision for the exemption was available on a schedule maintained by the proper officer).</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p><u>COMMERCIAL BUSINESS CASE</u></p> <p>Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer regarding the public interest test, that on balance, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and that the report should be exempt.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the public be excluded whilst this item of business is transacted as it is likely there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14, Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).</p> <p>The report of the Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services was submitted for consideration.</p> <p>Councillor J. Millard joined the meeting at this juncture.</p> <p>The Chair of the Corporate & Performance Scrutiny Committee advised that the report had been considered at a Special Committee the previous day and Members in recognising the short timescale in which to progress the proposal had endorsed Option 2, subject to the following additional recommendation:</p>

- That delegated power be granted to officers to negotiate up to an agreed maximum value.

RESOLVED accordingly.

Upon a vote being taken, it was unanimously,

FURTHER RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report which contained information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) be accepted and Option 2 be endorsed, namely:

- The opportunity highlighted in the business case be progressed; and
- delegated power be granted to officers to negotiate up to an agreed maximum value.

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE – 30TH JANUARY 2024

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR LISA WINNETT (CHAIR)

Councillors P. Baldwin (Vice-Chair)
 S. Behr
 M. Cross
 G.A. Davies
 J. Gardner
 J. Hill
 G. Humphreys
 D. Rowberry

**WITH: Team Manager – Trading Standards and Licensing
 Senior Licensing Officer
 Licensing Enforcement Officer
 Solicitor**

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Thomas and Dean Woods.</p>	

<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest and dispensations reported.</p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>NON-STATUTORY LICENCE FEES 2024/25, 25/26 AND 26/27</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Team Manager - Trading Standards & Licensing.</p> <p>The Chair requested that Officers prepare a report on the potential for discounted fees for Electric Vehicles and ECO fuelled vehicles during the year to be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.</p> <p>RESOLVED accordingly.</p> <p>Upon a vote being taken, it was unanimously</p> <p>FURTHER RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed namely; to support an inflationary increase in line with MTFS assumptions or full-cost recovery calculations (whichever is the lowest) on all locally set fees covered in this report, as shown in Appendix 1 for 24/25, 25/26 and 26/27. Responses received to the consultation with the trade would be considered by the Corporate Director who would determine final decisions in accordance with the Constitution.</p>	
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>VERBAL UPDATE ON REVIEW OF HACKNEY CARRIAGE/PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE DRIVER'S LICENCE</u></p> <p>Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer regarding the public interest test, that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and that the report should be exempt.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the public be excluded whilst this item of business is transacted as it is likely there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs</p>	

<p>12 & 17, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).</p>	
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Consideration was given to the verbal update by the Solicitor.

RESOLVED that the verbal update which contained information relating to a particular individual be accepted and the information be noted.

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT STATUTORY LICENSING COMMITTEE – 30TH JANUARY, 2024

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR LISA WINNETT (CHAIR)

Councillors P. Baldwin (Vice-Chair)

S. Behr

M. Cross

G.A. Davies

J. Gardner

J. Hill

G. Humphreys

D. Rowberry

**WITH: Team Manager – Trading Standards and Licensing
Senior Licensing Officer
Solicitor**

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Thomas and Dean Woods.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest and dispensations reported.</p>	

No. 4

STATUTORY LICENCE FEES 2024/25, 25/26 AND 26/27

Consideration was given to the report of the Team Manager - Trading Standards & Licensing.

Upon a vote being taken, it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed namely; to revise the statutory licence fees with increases of 33% in each of the next 3 financial years for Gambling Licence Fees (Appendix 2 - Table 1) and all others (shown in Tables 2 and 3) based upon MTFS assumptions or, the full-cost recovery calculated fee - whichever is the lower.

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT PLANNING COMMITTEE – 8TH FEBRUARY, 2024

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR LISA WINNETT (Chair)

Councillors P. Baldwin (Vice-Chair)

- E. Jones
- L. Parsons
- D. Rowberry
- C. Smith
- W. Hodgins
- G. Humphreys
- J. Thomas
- D. Wilkshire

WITH: Service Manager Development & Estates
 Team Leader Development Management
 Team Leader Built Environment
 Planning Officer (x 2)
 Ecology Officer
 Corporate Communications - Marketing & Customer Access Manager

AND: **Public Speaker**
 Matthew Gray (Agent) Application No. C/2023/0232

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

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

<p>No. 2</p>	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from:-</p> <p>Councillors Malcolm Day and Julie Holt Team Manager Development Management Solicitor</p>
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest and dispensations reported.</p>
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>PLANNING APPLICATIONS REPORT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Team Manager Development Management, whereupon:-</p> <p><u>Application No. C/2023/0232</u> <u>Land adjacent to KFC, Waun-Y-Pound Road, Ebbw Vale, NP23 6LE</u> <u>Erection of a drive thru bakery/coffee shop (Class A1/A3 use) and associated development</u></p> <p>Upon a vote being taken, it was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that Planning permission be <u>GRANTED</u> subject to the conditions detailed in the report.</p>
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>APPEALS, CONSULTATIONS AND DNS UPDATE: FEBRUARY 2024</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager – Development & Estates.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.</p>
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>LOCAL IMPACT REPORT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Local Impact Report.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.</p>

<p>No. 7</p>	<p><u>QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE INFORMATION</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager Development & Estates.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.</p>
<p>No. 8</p>	<p><u>LIST OF APPLICATIONS DECIDED UNDER DELEGATED POWERS BETWEEN 18TH DECEMBER 2023 AND 28TH JANUARY 2024</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Business Support Officer.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.</p>
<p>No. 9</p>	<p><u>AREAS FOR MEMBER BRIEFINGS AND TRAINING</u></p> <p>It was reported that new and refresher training for existing and new Members of the Planning Committee would be arranged following the Council's AGM.</p>

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT PLANNING COMMITTEE – 7TH MARCH, 2024

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR LISA WINNETT (CHAIR)

Councillors W. Hodgins
J. Holt
G. Humphreys
E. Jones
J. Millard
L. Parsons
C. Smith

WITH: Service Manager Development & Estates
Team Manager Development Management
Team Leader Development Management (x 2)
Team Leader Built Environment
Planning Officer
Enforcement Officer (x 2)
Solicitor
Corporate Communications - Marketing & Customer
Access Manager

AND: Public Speaker
Ella & Simon Cleary (Supporters) Application
No. C/2023/0087

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

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

<p>No. 2</p>	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from:-</p> <p>Councillor P. Baldwin (Vice Chair) Councillor M. Day Councillor J. Morgan Councillor D. Rowberry Councillor J. Thomas Councillor D. Wilkshire</p>
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest and dispensations reported.</p>
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>PLANNING APPLICATIONS REPORT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Team Manager Development Management, whereupon:-</p> <p><u>Application No. C/2023/0087</u> <u>Celtic Rose, Commercial Road, Llanhilleth, Abertillery NP13 2AE</u> <u>9 New dwellings and access road</u></p> <p>Upon a vote being taken, it was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that Planning permission be <u>GRANTED</u> subject to the conditions detailed in the report.</p> <p>Councillor L. Parsons did not take part in the vote.</p>
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>APPEALS, CONSULTATIONS AND DNS UPDATE: MARCH 2024</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager – Development & Estates.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.</p>
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>PLANNING APPEAL UPDATE: ADVERTISING BOARD ON THE HABLE END OF 27 CWM ROAD, WAUNLWYD, EBBW VALE, NP23 6TR</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Planning Officer.</p>

	RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the appeal decision for planning application C/2023/0144 as attached at Appendix A be noted.
No. 7	<p><u>QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE INFORMATION</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager Development & Estates.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.</p>
No. 8	<p><u>LIST OF APPLICATIONS DECIDED UNDER DELEGATED POWERS BETWEEN 29TH JANUARY 2024 AND 21ST FEBRUARY 2024</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Business Support Officer.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.</p>
No. 9	<p><u>COURT PROSECUTION: 44 BRYN COCH, EBBW VALE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Enforcement Officer.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.</p>
No. 10	<p><u>AREAS FOR MEMBER BRIEFINGS AND TRAINING</u></p> <p>The Chair reported that the following Members Briefing and Training Sessions would be arranged following the Council's AGM:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforcement Training • Section 106 • Material Planning Considerations • Advertisement Policy • Local Development Plan (LDP)
No. 11	<p><u>ENFORCEMENT CLOSED CASES BETWEEN 15TH DECEMBER 2023 AND 22ND FEBRUARY 2024</u></p> <p>Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer regarding the public interest test, that on balance the public interest in</p>

maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and that the report should be exempt.

RESOLVED that the public be excluded whilst this item of business is transacted as it is likely there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 12, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager Development & Estates.

RESOLVED that the report which contained information relating to a particular individual be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: **THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

SUBJECT: **CABINET – 21ST FEBRUARY, 2024**

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

PRESENT: **Leader/**
Cabinet Member - Corporate Overview & Performance
Councillor S. Thomas

Deputy Leader/
Cabinet Member – Place & Environment
Councillor H. Cunningham

Cabinet Member – Place and Regeneration
Councillor J.C. Morgan

Cabinet Member – People & Social Services
Councillor H. Trollope

Cabinet Member – People & Education
Councillor S. Edmunds

WITH: Interim Chief Executive
Chief Officer Resources
Chief Officer Customer & Commercial
Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services
Interim Corporate Director Social Services
Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships
Head of Organisational Development
Service Manager – Accountancy
Senior Business Partner – Finance
Service Manager – Policy & Partnerships
Service Manager Education Transformation
Press & Public Relations Officer

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>No apologies for absence were received.</p>
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.</p>
	<p><u>DECISIONS</u></p>
No. 4	<p><u>CABINET</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the decisions of the Cabinet Meeting held on 10th January, 2024.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the decisions be received as a true record of proceedings.</p>

	<u>GENERAL MATTERS</u>
No. 5	<p><u>CONFERENCES, COURSES AND EVENTS</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the following:-</p> <p><u>2024 Royal Garden Party</u> <u>Royal Garden Parties – London</u> <u>8th May, 2024 and 21st May, 2024</u></p> <p>RESOLVED that one nominee plus guest be approved to attend on either the 8th or 21st May, 2024.</p>
	<u>CORPORATE AND PERFORMANCE PORTFOLIO</u>
No. 6	<p><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 10TH APRIL, 2024</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Scrutiny & Democratic Officer.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.</p>
No. 7	<p><u>GRANTS TO ORGANISATIONS</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>The following grants were received following the publication of the report.</p> <p><u>ABERTILLERY</u></p> <p><u>Llanhilleth Ward - Councillor N. Parsons</u></p>

1.	Beaufort Hill Ponds and Woodlands	£125
<u>BRYNMAWR</u>		
<u>Brynmawr Ward - Councillor J. Hill</u>		
1.	Brynmawr & District Museum Society	£88
<u>Brynmawr Ward - Councillor W. Hodgins</u>		
1.	Abertillery Piranhas	£100
2.	Nantyglo Under 10's Football	£100
3.	Brynmawr Musical Theatre Company	£200
4.	Nantyglo Mini Rugby	£100
5.	Brynmawr FC	£100
6.	Brynmawr RFC	£150
7.	North Ebbw Fach Interact	£100
8.	Brynmawr & District Museum Society	£200
<u>EBBW VALE</u>		
<u>Beaufort Ward - Councillor C. Smith</u>		
1.	Glyncoed Community Group	£100
2.	Beaufort Christmas Lights	£100
3.	Ebbw Vale Works Museum	£100
4.	1158 Ebbw Vale Squadron RAF Air Cadets	£110
<u>Beaufort Ward - Councillor D. Woods</u>		
1.	Beaufort Ladies Craft Class	£100
2.	Beaufort RFC	£100
3.	Royal British Legion Rassau & Beaufort Branch	£100
4.	Beaufort Christmas Lights	£200
5.	One Life Autism	£100
6.	Beaufort Hill Ponds & Woodlands	£100
7.	Beaufort Male Choir	£100
8.	2 nd Beaufort & Rassau Scout Group	£100

	<p>9. Ffin Dance £100</p> <p>10. Beaufort Hearts £100</p> <p>11. Willowtown Primary School PTA £100</p> <p>12. Glyncoed Community Group £200</p> <p>13. Beaufort Hill Primary School £260</p> <p><u>Ebbw Vale North Ward - Councillor J. Morgan</u></p> <p>1. RTB Ebbw Vale FC £160</p> <p>2. One Life Autism £200</p> <p><u>NANYGLO & BLAINA</u></p> <p><u>Blaina Ward - Councillor J.P. Morgan</u></p> <p>1. Blaina Cricket Club £960</p> <p>RESOLVED accordingly.</p> <p>FURTHER RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.</p>
No. 8	<p><u>WORKFORCE STRATEGY 2021-2026</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted, Cabinet reviewed and noted the progress against the 2022/23 delivery plan and endorsed the 2023/25 delivery plan (Option 1).</p>

<p>No. 9</p>	<p><u>CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING, FORECAST FOR 2023/2024 FINANCIAL YEAR (AS AT 31ST DECEMBER, 2023)</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Members provided the appropriate challenge to the financial outcomes in the report, continued to support appropriate financial control procedures agreed by Council and noted the budgetary control and monitoring procedures in place within the Capital Team, to safeguard Authority funding (Option 1).</p>
<p>No. 10</p>	<p><u>REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2023/2024 FORECAST OUTTURN TO 31ST MARCH 2024 (AS AT 31ST DECEMBER, 2023)</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Members provided the appropriate challenge to the financial outcomes in the report, noted the application of reserves and challenged the Action Plans as detailed in Appendix 2 (Option 1).</p>
<p>No. 11</p>	<p><u>DISCRETIONARY FEES & CHARGES 2024/2025</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Cabinet recommended Option 2 to Council, as follows:-</p> <p>(1) approved the register of Fees & Charges for 2024/2025 detailed at Appendix 1 and for discretionary fees & charges, as follows:-</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(a) a fee uplift of 5% in line with the proposed business case as detailed in Appendix 4;</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(b) the alternative fee proposed as detailed in paragraphs 5.1.4 to 5.1.14. of the report; and</p>

	<p>(c) Planning Fees attached at Appendix 2.</p> <p>(2) approved delegated power and responsibility to the Interim Director of Social Services for setting the fees and charges for 2024/2025 relating to the provision of external social care as detailed in paragraph 5.1.6 of the report; and</p> <p>(3) approved the core price increases related to Aneurin Leisure Trust as detailed in Appendix 3.</p>
<p>No. 12</p>	<p><u>REVENUE BUDGET 2024/2025</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and agreed Option 1, as follows:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Subject to the decisions on the following recommendations, Members considered and recommended to Council the 2024/25 revenue budget as shown in the table in paragraph 5.1.15 of the report. 2) Members provided comment on the outcomes within the overall provisional RSG Settlement and noted the potential for further change in the Final RSG Settlement (paragraphs 2.6 – 2.17 of the report). 3) Members provided comment on the outcomes within the BGCBC provisional RSG Settlement and its impact upon the Medium Term Financial Strategy (paragraphs 2.18 – 2.26 of the report). 4) Members considered and recommend to Council the updated cost pressures and growth items (£2.8m in total) detailed in Appendix 2 (paragraphs 5.1.10 – 5.1.16 of the report) for inclusion in the Council’s budget.

	<p>5) Members considered and recommended to Council the Bridging the Gap proposals (a summary of which is detailed at Appendix 3 and Business Cases are outlined in Appendix 4) delivering a minimum of £6.27m of financial efficiencies and budget cuts towards the budget gap (paragraphs 5.1.32 to 5.1.37 of the report).</p> <p>6) Members considered and recommended to Council the level of funding provided to schools (paragraph 5.1.19-5.1.27 of the report).</p> <p>7) Members recommended that any grant/s transferring into the Final Settlement for 2024/2025 be passported to the relevant service/s.</p> <p>8) Members considered and recommended to Council the use of reserves up to £2.1m to balance the budget for 2024/2025 (paragraphs 5.1.38 to 5.1.42 of the report). The level would be subject to the recommendations in paragraph 3.1.5 and 3.1.6 above.</p> <p>9) Members considered and recommended to Council, a Council Tax increase of a minimum of 5% for 2024/25 (paragraph 5.1.10 of the report) as per the Business Case CS12 (detailed in Appendix 3 and 4).</p> <p>10) Approved the updated MTFs for 2024/2025 to 2028/2029 as detailed in Appendix 5.</p>
	<p><u>PLACE AND ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO</u></p>
<p>No. 13</p>	<p><u>OVERVIEW POSITION OF BLAENAU GWENT TOWN CENTRE CCTV ZONES 2023/24</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager Policy & Partnerships.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Cabinet endorsed the updated Codes of Practice for 2023/24 (Option 1):-</p> <p>Recommendation 2: Cabinet considered the current operating practices and arrangements with Caerphilly Council and IDS; and</p>

	<p>Recommendation 3: Agreed to consider the Annual Report 2023/24 as part of the committee’s forward work programme for 2024/25.</p>
	<p><u>PEOPLE AND EDUCATION PORTFOLIO</u></p>
No. 14	<p><u>CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION SERVICES 6-MONTH PROGRESS PERFORMANCE REPORT APRIL 2023 – SEPTEMBER 2023</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 2).</p>
No. 15	<p><u>SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING ROLLING PROGRAMME</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and approved, and the Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling Programme proposals to be submitted to Welsh Government in March 24 (Option 1).</p>
No. 16	<p><u>KEY STAGE 4 OUTCOMES 2023</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 1).</p>

	<p><u>PEOPLE AND SOCIAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO</u></p>
No. 17	<p><u>ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES 2023/2024 (QUARTERS 1 AND 2)</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director Social Services.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 2).</p>
	<p><u>PEOPLE AND SOCIAL SERVICES/ PEOPLE AND EDUCATION JOINT PORTFOLIO</u></p>
No. 18	<p><u>SAFEGUARDING PERFORMANCE INFORMATION FOR SOCIAL SERVICES - 1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER AND EDUCATION SUMMER TERM – 2023</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the joint report of the Interim Corporate Director Social Services and Interim Corporate Director Education.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and provided comments on where improvement can be made to the current monitoring processes (Option 2).</p>
	<p><u>PLACE AND ENVIRONMENT/PLACE AND REGENERATION JOINT PORTFOLIO</u></p>
No. 19	<p><u>COMMUNITY SERVICES AND REGENERATION DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE – QUARTERS 1 AND 2 - 2023/24</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 2).</p>

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE – 13TH JULY, 2023

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J. HILL (CHAIR)

Councillors C. Bainton
D. Bevan
G. Davies
E. Jones
J.C. Morgan
L. Parsons
C. Smith
L. Winnett

ALSO: Scrutiny Chairs & Vice-Chairs

Vice-Chair of Corporate & Performance Scrutiny Committee

Councillor J. Thomas

Chair of Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

Councillor W. Hodgins

Chair of People Scrutiny Committee

Councillor T. Smith

Vice-Chair of Places Scrutiny Committee

Councillor & R. Leadbeater

**AND: Chief Officer Resources
Service Manager Performance & Democratic
Service Manager Policy & Partnerships
Policy Officer**

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from:-</p> <p>Councillors J. Wilkins and M. Cross Chief Officer Customer & Commercial Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships Head of Organisational Development Organisational Development Manager</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Minutes of the meeting held on 27th March, 2023.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be received as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>PROPOSED COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2023/2024</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the proposed Forward Work Programme 2023/2024.</p>	

	<p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the Forward Work Programme 2023/2024 be agreed.</p>	
No. 6	<p><u>SCHEDULE OF MEMBERS REMUNERATION 2023/2024</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the Schedule of Members Remuneration 2023/2024 be agreed and published.</p>	
No. 7	<p><u>BLAENAU GWENT ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION STRATEGY</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and Option 1 be endorsed, namely that the planning and consultation process for a new Engagement & Participation Strategy be noted and a joint Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny and Democratic Services Committees Workshop on 26th July, 2023 be agreed to shape development of the initial Strategy.</p>	
No. 8	<p><u>TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS</u></p> <p>Members considered the time of future Democratic Services Committee meetings.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that all future Democratic Services Committees commence at 10.00 a.m.</p>	

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: **THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

SUBJECT: **GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE**
17TH JANUARY, 2024

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

PRESENT: MS JOANNE ABSALOM (CHAIR)

Councillors S. Behr (Vice-Chair)

C. Smith

J. Wilkins

Mr M. Veale

Ms C. Hucker

WITH: Interim Chief Executive
Chief Officer Resources
Chief Officer Commercial & Customer
Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships
Audit & Risk Manager
Professional Lead – Internal Audit
Service Manager - Customer Experience and Transformation
Data Protection & Governance Officer
Corporate Communications - Marketing & Customer
Access Manager

AND: **Audit Wales Representatives**

Mike Jones

Deborah Woods

ALSO: **SRS Representatives**

Chief Operating Officer

Deputy Chief Operating Officer

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES & WELCOME</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. Bevan, W. Hodgins and K. Chaplin.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed Cheryl Hucker, Lay Member to her first meeting of the Governance & Audit Committee.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest and dispensations reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The decisions of the Governance & Audit Committee held on 1st December, 2023 were submitted.</p> <p>It was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that the decisions be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>ACTION SHEET – 1st DECEMBER, 2023</u></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting held on 1st December, 2023 was submitted, whereupon;-</p> <p><u>Item 9 – Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Manager 2022/2023</u></p> <p>A Member requested an update in relation to the ongoing investigations. The Audit & Risk Manager responded that she would seek clarification from the Legal Section regarding constraints and report back appropriately to the Committee in</p>	

	<p>due course.</p> <p>It was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that the Action sheet be noted.</p>	
No. 6	<p><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Scrutiny and Democratic Officer.</p> <p>It was proposed that the Statement of Accounts 2022/23, Audit of Financial Statements and the Final Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 be presented to a future meeting of the Committee (March if possible) and the items for February's Committee be reviewed.</p> <p>It was unanimously,</p> <p>RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and the Forward Work Programme for the Governance and Audit Committee be accepted.</p>	
No. 7	<p><u>AUDIT WALES – BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL ANNUAL AUDIT SUMMARY 2022</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships.</p> <p>It was unanimously</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Annual Audit Summary published in November 2023 be noted.</p>	
No. 8	<p><u>AUDIT WALES: CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEES – COMMENTARY ON THEIR PROGRESS</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Chief Executive.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the content of the Audit Wales Report, 'Corporate Joint Committees –</p>	

	<p>commentary on their progress' be noted and the Governance & Audit Committee receive any future reports from Audit Wales on the progress of the CJsCs.</p>	
No. 9	<p><u>ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships.</p> <p>The Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships reported a typing error on page 81 and confirmed this would be corrected and responded to points raised by Members for clarification and amendment in the final Governance Statement.</p> <p>It was unanimously;</p> <p>RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and Option 2 be endorsed, namely that the Committee considered and challenged the content, and deemed it to be consistent with their knowledge and understanding of the wider issues affecting the Council, subject to the proposed amendments.</p>	
No. 10	<p><u>EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSESSMENT ACTION PLAN</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Audit and Risk Manager.</p> <p>It was unanimously;</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Governance & Audit Committee considered the action plan developed in response to the findings from the EQA, attached at Appendix A & B, and noted the progress made.</p>	
No. 11	<p><u>SRS IT AUDIT PLAN</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.</p> <p>It was unanimously;</p>	

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the Shared Resource Service Summary of Audit Activity 23/24 provided by Torfaen CBC, containing the SRS IT plan and progress made against it (Appendix A) be noted.	
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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT: CORPORATE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18TH JANUARY 2024

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J. WILKINS (CHAIR)

Councillors J. Thomas (Vice-Chair)

- J. Holt
- J. Hill
- R. Leadbeater
- C. Smith
- T. Smith

WITH: Interim Chief Executive
 Interim Corporate Director Social Services
 Chief Officer Resources
 Chief Officer Customer and Commercial
 Head of Organisational Development
 Service Manager Development and Estates
 Team Manager – Estates and Strategic Asset Management
 Service Manager – Policy and Partnerships
 Professional Lead Strategic Partnerships
 Professional Lead Engagement, Equality & Welsh Language
 Head of Governance, Partnerships & Democratic Services
 Press and Communications Officer
 Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

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

	An apology for absence was received from Councillor E. Jones.
No. 3	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</u> No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.
No. 4	<u>CORPORATE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u> Consideration was given to the decisions of the meeting held on 6 th December, 2023. The Committee AGREED that the decisions be accepted as a true record of proceedings.
No. 5	<u>ACTION SHEET</u> Consideration was given to the Action Sheet. The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and the information therein be noted.
No. 6	<u>ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION STRATEGY</u> Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager – Partnerships and Policy. The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and supported the draft Engagement and Participation Strategy at Appendix 1 and to progress to the wider consultation phase (Option 1).
No. 7	<u>RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION POLICY</u> Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development. The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and Members of the Committee to considered the amendments to the Policy and recommended approval to Council (Option 1).
No. 8	<u>WORKFORCE STRATEGY 2021-2026</u>

	<p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and noted the progress against the 2022/23 delivery plan and endorsed the 2023/25 delivery plan (Option 1).</p>
<p>No. 9</p>	<p><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME –</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Scrutiny and Democratic Officer</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and Committee agreed the Forward Programme for the meeting 14th March, 204, as presented (Option 1).</p>
<p>No. 10</p>	<p><u>FUTURE OCCUPATION OF ANVIL COURT, ABERTILLERY</u></p> <p>Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer regarding the public interest test, that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and that the report should be exempt.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the public be excluded whilst this item of business is transacted as it is likely there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).</p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.</p> <p>A Member proposed an Option 4, that the report be deferred in order to undertake further consultation with Ward Members, the wider Council Members and the Cabinet to ensure this matter has been fully considered.</p> <p>This proposed was seconded.</p> <p>Another Member proposed Option 2, this proposal was seconded.</p> <p>Upon a vote being taken</p>

The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and Option 2 which contained details relating to the business/financial affairs of persons other than the Authority be agreed.

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT: PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 30TH JANUARY, 2024 (10.00 AM)

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: Councillor T. Smith (Chair)

Councillors J. Morgan, J.P.
 J. Gardner
 G. Thomas
 G. Humphreys
 J.P. Morgan
 D. Wilkshire

WITH: Interim Corporate Director of Social Services
 Interim Head of School Improvement and Inclusion
 Head of Adult Services
 Service Manager Children’s Services
 Service Manager Education Transformation
 Policy Officer Engagement & Equalities
 Press & Public Relations Officer
 Scrutiny & Democratic Officer

AND: Ed Pryce, Assistant Director (Policy and Strategy) EAS

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

<p>No. 2</p>	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u> Apologies for absence were received for Councillor D. Bevan, the Interim Corporate Director Education; and the Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships.</p>	
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u> No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.</p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>SAFEGUARDING PERFORMANCE INFORMATION FOR SOCIAL SERVICES 1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER AND EDUCATION SUMMER TERM–2023</u> Consideration was given to the joint report of the Interim Corporate Director Social Services and the Interim Corporate Director Education. The Committee AGREED to recommend that the approach and information detailed in the report be accepted as provided (Option 1).</p>	
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>KEY STAGE 4 OUTCOMES 2023</u> Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director Education. The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be received (Option 1)</p>	
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING ROLLING PROGRAMME</u> Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager Education Transformation. The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling Programme proposals to be submitted to Welsh Government in March 24 (Appendix 2) and recommended to Cabinet for approval. (Option 1)</p>	

No. 7

FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 19TH MARCH 2024

It was agreed that this report be considered at the later meeting at 12.15pm.

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT: PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 30TH JANUARY, 2024 (12.15 PM)

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: Councillor T. Smith (Chair)

Councillors D. Bevan
 J. Gardner
 G. Humphreys
 J.P. Morgan
 D. Wilkshire

WITH: Interim Corporate Director of Education
 Interim Corporate Director of Social Services
 Head of Adult Services
 Service Manager Education Transformation
 Policy Officer Engagement & Equalities
 Press & Public Relations Officer
 Scrutiny & Democratic Officer

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence was received for the Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p>	

	No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.	
No. 4	<p><u>PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The decisions of the People Scrutiny Committee held on the 13th November, 2023 were submitted for points of accuracy.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the decisions be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>ACTION SHEET – 13TH NOVEMBER, 2023</u></p> <p>The actions sheet arising from the meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee held on 14th November, 2023 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
No. 6	<p><u>ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES 2023/2024 (QUARTERS 1 AND 2)</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director Social Services.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted as provided (Option 2).</p>	
No. 7	<p><u>CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION SERVICES 6-MONTH PROGRESS PERFORMANCE REPORT APR 23- SEPT 23</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director Social Services.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted as presented (Option 2).</p>	
No. 8	<p><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 19TH MARCH, 2024</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Scrutiny and Democratic Officer.</p>	

It was agreed that the following be added to the Forward Work Programme for the People Scrutiny Committee:

- A report providing further data on Schools.
- Update report on The River Centre.
- Members Briefing on the work of the Youth Service.
- Members Briefing on the Welsh Government Review of the Middle Sector.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the FWP for the meeting on the 19th March, 2024 be accepted as presented. (Option 2)

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT: SPECIAL CORPORATE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 19TH FEBRUARY, 2024

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J. WILKINS (CHAIR)

Councillors J. Thomas (Vice-Chair)

E. Jones

J. Holt

J. Hill

R. Leadbeater

C. Smith

T. Smith

Members without Voting Rights

Councillors S. Behr

D. Bevan

M. Cross

K. Chaplin

H. Cunningham

D. Davies

G. Davies

M. Day

S. Edmunds

G. Humphreys

J. Gardner

W. Hodgins

J. Millard

Jen Morgan

L. Parsons

S. Thomas

H. Trollope

D. Wilkshire

L. Winnett

WITH: Interim Chief Executive

Interim Corporate Director Social Services
 Chief Officer Resources
 Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services
 Corporate Director Education
 Service Manager – Accountancy
 Head of Organisational Development
 Head of Governance, Partnerships & Democratic Services
 Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
 Chief Officer Commercial & Customer
 Service Manager – Performance & Democratic
 Press and Communications Officer
 Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>An apology for absence was received from Councillor G. Thomas.</p>
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>The following declarations of interest and dispensations were raised:-</p> <p>Councillor W. Hodgins - Item No. 5 (Revenue Budget 2024/2025)</p> <p>Councillor G. Davies - Item No. 5 (Revenue Budget 2024/2025)</p> <p>Councillor D. Wilkshire - Item No. 5 (Revenue Budget 2024/2025)</p> <p>Councillor J. Millard – Item No. 5 (Revenue Budget 2024/2025)</p>
No. 4	<u>DISCRETIONARY FEES & CHARGES 2024/2025</u>

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

The Service Manager – Accountancy advised that the fees and charges for the Blaina ICC Room (Social Services) have been updated since the publication of the report. It was confirmed that the changes are as follows:-

- the large Meeting Room recommendation of £4.50 should read £5.77;
- the Caterpillar Room recommendation of £2.00 should read £3.59;
- the Ladybird Room recommendation of £1.50 should read £3.65;
- the Butterfly Room recommendation of £1.50 should read £3.70.

The Service Manager agreed to circulate an updated page following the meeting.

The Committee AGREED the report, subject to the foregoing and recommended to Cabinet and Council Option 2 as follows:-

- (1) the register of Fees & Charges for 2024/2025 attached at Appendix 1 and for discretionary fees & charges approved:-
 - (a) a fee uplift of 5% in line with the proposed business case as detailed in Appendix 4;
 - (b) the alternative fee proposed as detailed in paragraphs 5.1.4 to 5.1.14. of the report; and
 - (c) Planning Fees attached at Appendix 2.
- (2) approved delegated power and responsibility to the Interim Director of Social Services for setting the fees and charges for 2024/2025 relating to the provision of external social care as detailed in paragraph 5.1.6 of the report; and
- (3) approved the core price increases related to Aneurin Leisure Trust as detailed in Appendix 3.

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

The Committee AGREED and considered and recommended to Cabinet and Council Option 1 as follows:-

- 1) the 2024/25 revenue budget as shown in the table in paragraph 5.1.15 of the report;
- 2) provided comments on the outcomes within the overall provisional RSG Settlement and noted the potential for further change in the Final RSG Settlement (paragraphs 2.6 – 2.17);
- 3) provided comment on the outcomes within the BGCBC provisional RSG Settlement and its impact upon the Medium Term Financial Strategy (paragraphs 2.18 – 2.26);
- 4) recommended to Cabinet and Council the updated cost pressures and growth items (£2.8m in total) identified in Appendix 2 for inclusion in the Council's budget;
- 5) recommended to Cabinet and Council the Bridging the Gap proposals (a summary of which was attached at Appendix 3 and detailed Business Cases are attached at Appendix 4) delivering a minimum of £6.27m of financial efficiencies and budget cuts towards the budget gap (paragraphs 5.1.32 to 5.1.37);
- 6) recommended to Cabinet and Council the level of funding provided to schools (paragraph 5.1.19-5.1.27);
- 7) recommended to Cabinet and Council that any grant/s transferring into the Final Settlement for 2024/2025 be passported to the relevant service/s;
- 8) recommended to Cabinet and Council the use of reserves up to £2.1m to balance the budget for 2024/2025 (paragraphs 5.1.38 to 5.1.42). The level would be subject to the recommendations in paragraph 3.1.5 and 3.1.6 above;
- 9) recommended to Council, a Council Tax increase of a minimum of 5% for 2024/25 (paragraph 5.1.10) as per the Business Case CS12 (included in Appendix 3 and 4); and

10)	Approved the updated MTFS for 2024/2025 to 2028/2029 attached at Appendix 5.
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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT: PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 22ND FEBRUARY, 2024

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: Councillor W. Hodgins (CHAIR)

Councillors D. Bevan
 P. Baldwin
 D. Davies
 M. Day
 E Jones
 C. Smith
 L. Winnett

WITH: Interim Corporate Director of Education
 Service Manager Policy & Partnerships
 Professional Lead for Strategic Partnerships, Policy & Engagement
 Scrutiny and Democratic Officer

AND: Phillip Sykes, Aneurin Leisure Trust

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>An apology for absence was reported for Sarah King, Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships.</p>

No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.</p>
No. 4	<p><u>PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The decisions of the Special Partnerships Scrutiny Committee held on 16th November, 2023 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the decisions be accepted as a true recording of proceedings.</p>
No. 5	<p><u>ACTION SHEET</u></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the Special meeting held on 16th November, 2023 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the action sheet be noted.</p>
No. 6	<p><u>BLAENAU GWENT LOCAL WELL-BEING PARTNERSHIP</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee note and accept the report and appendices as provided. (Option 1)</p>
No. 7	<p><u>WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS (WPLS) ANNUAL RETURN 2022/23</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Service Manager, Young People & Partnerships.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the information contained in the report be accepted. (Option 1)</p>
No. 8	<p><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 9th MAY, 2024</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Scrutiny & Democratic Officer.</p>

<p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and the FWP for the meeting on 9th May, 2024 be accepted (Option 2).</p>

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE PRESIDING MEMBER AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT: SPECIAL CORPORATE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5TH MARCH 2024

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR J. WILKINS (CHAIR)

Councillors J. Thomas (Vice-Chair)

J. Holt

J. Hill

R. Leadbeater

C. Smith

T. Smith

AND: Cabinet Member – Place and Regeneration

Councillor J.C. Morgan

WITH: Interim Chief Executive
 Interim Corporate Director Education
 Interim Corporate Director Social Services
 Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services
 Chief Officer Resources
 Service Manager - Accountancy
 Service Manager Development and Estates
 Team Manager – Estates and Strategic Asset Management
 Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

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

	<p>The following apologies for absence were received:-</p> <p>Chief Officer Customer & Commercial; and Head of Organisational Development.</p>
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.</p>
No. 4	<p><u>COMMERCIAL BUSINESS CASE</u></p> <p>Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer regarding the public interest test, that on balance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and that the report should be exempt.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the public be excluded whilst this item of business is transacted as it is likely there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14, Part 1 Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).</p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services.</p> <p>A Member proposed Option 2, subject to an upper limit. This proposal was seconded and</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing that the report, with the aforementioned proposed limit, be accepted and Option 2 which contained details relating to the business/financial affairs of persons other than the Authority be agreed. The Chair of the Corporate and Performance Scrutiny Committee would verbally advise Council of the recommendation proposed by Scrutiny.</p>

Agenda Item 24

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 08.03.2024

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 07.03.2024

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **21st March, 2024**

Report Subject: **Treasury Management Mid-Year Review – September 2023 & Quarter 3 Update**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Stephen Thomas, Leader/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)
	07/03/2024				14/03/2024		21/03/24	

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with the mid year review and quarter three update of Treasury Management activities during 2023/2024 and the Council's performance against approved Prudential and Treasury Indicators.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 The CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) Code of Practice for Treasury Management 2021 recommends that members be updated on treasury management activities at least quarterly. The Mid year review is attached as Appendix 1 with the quarter 3 update provided at Appendix 2.

2.2 This report and attached appendices will provide information on the Council's Borrowing and Investment activity, Economic updates, Interest Rate forecasts, as well as the Council's performance against approved performance indicators.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1 (Preferred Option)**

Members consider the treasury management activity undertaken during the first nine months of 2023/24 and do not consider any amendments to the previously agreed Treasury strategies and performance indicators.

Option 2

3.2 Members consider the treasury management activity undertaken during the first nine months of 2023/24 and consider amendments to the previously agreed Treasury strategies and performance indicators.

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

4.1 The report is written under legislation (the Local Government Act 2003), Welsh Government guidance and CIPFA codes of practice.

4.2 This topic also supports the Corporate Plan Priority of being an ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services at the right time and in the right place.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

5.1.1 The Authority has complied with the CIPFA Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice 2021, and in doing so has strived for effective risk management and control, whilst at the same time pursuing best value as far as possible.

5.1.2 The Authority has effectively managed credit risk throughout the period, so ensuring that it has not been subjected to any financial loss.

5.1.3 The Authority has maximised investment returns as far as is possible whilst managing the associated risk and minimised borrowing costs throughout the period.

5.1.4 **Mid Year Position**

Investment returns of £1.17m have been achieved with an average interest rate of 4.49%. This is lower than the benchmark rate of 4.64% but reflects that the Authority no longer invest in counterparties that pay a higher rate, due to credit rating reductions. Of this return, £470,714 relates to investments made from the receipt of the £70million Rail Infrastructure Loan. There is a condition of the funding approval that states any interest earned from holding the loan must be added to the works programme. Therefore, this income will be placed in a reserve until such time it is used to fund works or can be transferred to the Authority. The remaining return of £702,600 relates to interest from the investment of the Authority's own funds. The annual

budgeted investment interest for the full year is £320,500, which reflects the interest rates forecast at that time and the extraordinary increases in bank base rate which continued during 2023/24.

- 5.1.5 An average interest rate of 2.43% has been paid on temporary borrowings against a benchmark of 4.5%, amounting to £520,717 for the six-month period. The budget for interest paid on short term borrowing is £1.9m for a full year - the full year interest payable is forecast to be £1.5m

5.1.7 **Quarter 3 Position**

Investment returns of £1.5m have been achieved with an average interest rate of 4.78%, remaining lower than the benchmark rate of 4.96%. Returns relating to the railway loan have increased to £651,544 whilst the returns due from investment of the Council's own funds have increased to £847,399.

- 5.1.8 An average interest rate of 3.24% has been paid on temporary borrowings against a benchmark of 4.5%, amounting to £903,980 for the nine-month period.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

- 5.2.1 The main risk in relation to Treasury Management is that of credit risk and protecting the Authority's cash. This is effectively managed through the Authority's risk averse Treasury Management policy that seeks to protect the capital sum rather than maximise investment returns.

- 5.2.2 Following the increases in the Bank of England base rate beginning in December 2021, the base rate has risen from 4.25% to 5.25% in the first nine months of the year. The Authority has benefitted from only entering into short-term borrowing and taking advantage of lower interest rates in the first half of the year. However, the increase in market rates will have a significant impact on borrowing costs during the remainder of 2023/24 and into 2024/25.

5.3 **Legal**

- 5.3.1 The report is written under legislation (the Local Government Act 2003), Welsh Government guidance and CIPFA codes of practice.

5.4 **Human Resources**

- 5.4.1 There are no direct staffing implications to report. Staff directly involved with Treasury Management activities will continue to monitor the credit situation on a daily basis and will notify the Chief Officer Resources accordingly. Any consequential changes required to be made to the borrowings or investment strategy as a result will be reported to the Council.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

6.1.1 The Performance information is contained within the Appendices to the report.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

6.2.1 The Council's Treasury Management activities support delivery of services to the public.

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

6.3.1 Members of the Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee and full Council are involved in developing and monitoring compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Strategy.

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

6.4.1 The Treasury Management Strategy Statement sets out policies to ensure that any decisions in relation to Treasury Management Activity are affordable and proportionate, and risk is managed as much as possible, over both the short and long-term.

6.5 **Preventative focus**

6.5.1 The Authority's Treasury Management policy prioritises protecting the capital sum rather than achieving higher interest returns.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

6.6.1 N/A

6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

6.7.1 N/A.

6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

6.8.1 The Council is committed to the Decarbonisation Plan to achieve a carbon neutral public sector by 2030. The Capital Programme currently contains schemes which promote the reduction of carbon emissions such as ReFIT, Electric Vehicle Charge Points and Carbon reduction schemes. New Council buildings should be designed to the latest energy efficiency standards.

6.8.2 The Authority also considers Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) factors when setting up any investment arrangements.

6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment**

See above

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny and Council will receive the following reports in every annual cycle: -

- A Treasury Management Policy report prior to the start of every financial year
- A quarterly report on performance against set Prudential Indicators
- A mid-year progress report on Treasury Management activity
- An end of year out turn report on Treasury Management activity.

8. **Background Documents / Electronic Links**

- Appendix 1 – Half Yearly Update
- Appendix 1b – Quarter 3 Update
- Appendix 2 – Prudential Indicators (Q2 & Q3)
- Appendix A1 – Temporary Investments – Q2
- Appendix A2 – Temporary Investments – Q3
- Appendix B1 – Temporary Loans – Q2
- Appendix B2 – Temporary Loans – Q3

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Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2023/24

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Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2023/24

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Code of Practice on Treasury Management 2009 was adopted by this Council in February 2010 and this Council fully complies with its requirements. The Code was revised in 2011 and further revised in 2017.

The primary requirements of the Code are as follows:

1. Creation and maintenance of a Treasury Management Policy Statement which sets out the policies and objectives of the Council's treasury management activities.
2. Creation and maintenance of Treasury Management Practices which set out the manner in which the Council will seek to achieve those policies and objectives.
3. Receipt by the Council of an annual treasury management strategy report (including the annual investment strategy and minimum revenue provision report) for the year ahead, a mid-year review and an annual review report of the previous year.
4. Delegation by the Council of responsibilities for implementing and monitoring treasury management policies and practices and for the execution and administration of treasury management decisions, which in this Council is the Chief Officer Resources.
5. Delegation by the Council of the role of scrutiny of treasury management strategy and policies to a specified named body which in this Council is the Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny Committee.

Treasury management in this context is defined as:

"The management of the local authority's cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks."

The purpose of this report is to meet one of the above requirements of the CIPFA Code, namely the mid-year review report of treasury management activities, for the financial year 2023/24

This Treasury Management Mid-Year Review Report Covers

- ❖ Economic Background during the period
- ❖ Interest Rate Forecast
- ❖ Treasury Advisors
- ❖ The Council's treasury position as of 30 September 2023;
- ❖ Borrowing and investment rates for the first half of 2023/24;
- ❖ Mid-year review of the borrowing strategy 2023/24;
- ❖ Borrowing outturn for the first half of 2023/24;
- ❖ Debt rescheduling for the first half of 2023/24;
- ❖ Compliance with treasury limits and Prudential Indicators for the first half of 2023/24;
- ❖ Mid-year review of the investment strategy for 2023/24;
- ❖ Investment outturn for the first half of 2023/24;
- ❖ Other treasury management issues.

Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2023/24

2. ECONOMICS UPDATE

The following information has been received from our Treasury Management advisors.

- The first half of 2023/24 saw:
 - CPI inflation falling from 8.7% in April to 6.7% in August, its lowest rate since February 2022, but still the highest in the G7.
 - Core CPI inflation declining to 6.2% in August from 7.1% in April and May, a then 31 years high.
 - Interest rates rise by a further 100 basis points (bps), taking Bank Rate from 4.25% to 5.25% and, possibly, the peak in the tightening cycle.
- As the growing drag from higher interest rates intensifies over the next six months, it seems likely that the economy will continue to lose momentum and soon fall into a mild recession.
- Strong labour demand, fast wage growth and government handouts have all supported household incomes over the past year. With CPI inflation past its peak and expected to decline further, the economy has got through the cost-of-living crisis without recession.
- Even though the worst of the falls in real household disposable incomes are behind us, the phasing out of financial support packages provided by the government during the energy crisis means real incomes are unlikely to grow strongly. Higher interest rates will soon bite harder too.
- The tightness of the labour market began to ease, with employment in the three months to July falling by 207,000. The further decline in the number of job vacancies from 1.017m in July to 0.989m in August suggests that the labour market has loosened a bit further since July.
- Currently the central assumption is that inflation will drop to the 2.0% target only if the Bank of England (the Bank) keeps interest rates at the probable peak of 5.25% until the second half of 2024.

3. INTEREST RATES FORECAST

The Council has appointed Link Group as its treasury advisors and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. The Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) rate forecasts below are based on the Certainty Rate (the standard rate minus 20 bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1st November 2012.

The latest forecast (25th September 2023) sets out a view that short, medium, and long-dated interest rates will be elevated until Summer 2024, as the Bank of England seeks to squeeze inflation out of the economy.

Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2023/24

The forecasts have levelled out during the quarter, the weak August CPI inflation release, the recent loosening in the labour market and the downbeat activity surveys appear to have convinced the Bank of England that it has already raised rates far enough.

Link Group Interest Rate View	25.09.23												
	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26
BANK RATE	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.50	3.00	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75
3 month ave earnings	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.50	3.00	2.80	2.80	2.80	2.80	2.80
6 month ave earnings	5.60	5.50	5.40	5.10	4.60	4.10	3.60	3.10	2.90	2.90	2.90	2.90	2.90
12 month ave earnings	5.80	5.70	5.50	5.20	4.70	4.20	3.70	3.20	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
5 yr PWLB	5.10	5.00	4.90	4.70	4.40	4.20	4.00	3.90	3.70	3.70	3.60	3.60	3.50
10 yr PWLB	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.60	4.40	4.20	4.00	3.80	3.70	3.60	3.60	3.50	3.50
25 yr PWLB	5.40	5.20	5.10	4.90	4.70	4.40	4.30	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.80	3.80	3.80
50 yr PWLB	5.20	5.00	4.90	4.70	4.50	4.20	4.10	3.90	3.80	3.70	3.60	3.60	3.60

- LIBOR and LIBID rates ceased at the end of 2021. In a continuation of previous views, money market yield forecasts are based on expected average earnings by local authorities for 3 to 12 months.
- The forecast for earnings are averages, actual rates offered by individual banks may differ significantly from these averages, reflecting their different needs for borrowing short-term cash at any one point in time.

An Overview of the Future Path of Bank Rate

- The central forecast for interest rates reflected a view that the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) wants the markets to believe in the higher for longer narrative. The statement did not say that rates have peaked and once again said if there was evidence of more persistent inflation pressures “further tightening in policy would be required”. Governor Bailey stated, “we’ll be watching closely to see if further increases are needed”. The Bank also retained the hawkish guidance that rates will stay “sufficiently restrictive for sufficiently long”.
- This narrative makes sense as the Bank of England does not want the markets to decide that a peak in rates will be soon followed by rate cuts, which would loosen financial conditions and undermine its attempts to quash inflation. The language also gives the Bank of England the flexibility to respond to new developments. A rebound in services inflation, another surge in wage growth and/or a further leap in oil prices could conceivably force it to raise rates at the next meeting on 2nd November, or even pause in November and raise rates in December.
- Moreover, it is still anticipated that the Bank of England will be keen to loosen monetary policy when the worst of the inflationary pressures are behind us – but timing on this will remain one of fine judgment: cut too soon, and inflationary pressures may well build up further; cut too late and any downturn or recession may be prolonged. Link’s current judgment is that rates will have to stay at their peak until the second quarter of 2024 as a minimum.
- In the upcoming months, the forecasts will be guided not only by economic data releases and clarifications from the MPC over its monetary policies and the Government over its fiscal policies, but also international factors such as policy development in the US and Europe, the provision of fresh support packages to support the faltering recovery in China as well as the on-going conflict in Israel.

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- On the positive side, consumers are still estimated to be sitting on excess savings left over from the pandemic, which could cushion some of the impact of the above challenges and may be the reason why the economy is performing somewhat better at this stage of the economic cycle than may have been expected. However, most of those excess savings are held by more affluent people whereas lower income families already spend nearly all their income on essentials such as food, energy, and rent/mortgage payments.

PWLB Rates

- The yield on 10-year Gilts fell from a peak of 4.74% on 17th August to 4.44% on 29th September, mainly on the back of investors revising down their interest rate expectations.
- PWLB 5 to 50 years Certainty Rates are, generally, in the range of 5.10% to 5.30%.
- Looking forward, once inflation falls back, Gilt yields are set to reduce further. A (mild) recession over the next couple of quarters will support this outlook if it helps to loosen the labour market (higher unemployment/lower wage increases).

The balance of risks to the UK economy: -

- The overall balance of risks to economic growth in the UK is to the downside.

Downside risks to current forecasts for UK gilt yields and PWLB rates include:

- Labour and supply shortages prove more enduring and disruptive and depress economic activity (accepting that in the near-term this is also an upside risk to inflation and, thus, the rising gilt yields we have seen of late).
- The Bank of England increases Bank Rate too fast and too far over the coming months, and subsequently brings about a deeper and longer UK recession than we currently anticipate.
- UK / EU trade arrangements – if there was a major impact on trade flows and financial services due to complications or lack of co-operation in sorting out significant remaining issues.
- Geopolitical risks, for example in Ukraine/Russia, Israel, China/Taiwan/US, Iran, North Korea, and Middle Eastern countries, which could lead to increasing safe-haven flows.
- A broadening of banking sector fragilities, which have been successfully addressed in the near-term by central banks and the market generally, but which may require further intervention if short-term interest rates stay elevated for longer than is anticipated.

Upside risks to current forecasts for UK gilt yields and PWLB rates:

- Despite the recent tightening by 1%, the Bank of England proves too timid in its pace and strength of increases in Bank Rate and, therefore, allows inflationary pressures

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to remain elevated for a longer period within the UK economy, which then necessitates Bank Rate staying higher for longer than we currently project.

- The pound weakens because of a lack of confidence in the UK Government's fiscal policies, resulting in investors pricing in a risk premium for holding UK sovereign debt.
- Longer-term US treasury yields rise strongly if inflation remains more stubborn than the market currently anticipates, pulling gilt yields up higher consequently.
- Projected gilt issuance, inclusive of natural maturities and Quantitative Tightening (QT), could be too much for the markets to comfortably digest without higher yields compensating.

4. TREASURY ADVISORS

The Council uses external treasury management advisors. The Council recognizes that responsibility for Treasury Management decisions always remains with the Authority and will ensure that undue reliance is not placed upon our external service providers.

It also recognizes that there is value in employing external providers of treasury management services to acquire access to specialist skills and resources. The Council will ensure that the terms of their appointment and the methods by which their value will be assessed are properly agreed and documented and subjected to regular review.

The Council retendered for the provision of Treasury Management advisory services during 2022. This resulted in the appointment of Link Asset Services for a period of two years from 1st May 2022 until 30th April 2024, with an option to extend for a further two years at 12-month intervals.

5. TREASURY POSITION AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2023

The Council's debt and investment position at the beginning of the year and the end of the half year was as follows:

The table illustrates that the total debt outstanding as of 30 September 2023 was £193.8 million, comprising of long-term debt of £162.4 million and short-term debt of £31.4 million.

	31March 2023 Principal	Average Rate/ Return	30Sept 2023 Principal	Average Rate/ Return	Increase/ (Decrease) in Borrowing
	<u>£000</u>		<u>£000</u>		<u>£000</u>
Fixed Rate Funding:					
- PWLB	71,147	4.02%	70,388	4.02%	(759)
- Market Loans	18,000	1.26%	12,000	1.26%	(6,000)
Variable Rate Funding:					

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- Market (LOBO *)	4,000	4.50%	4,000	4.50%	0
Interest Free Loans:					
Welsh Government	75,970	0.00%	75,970	0.00%	0
Total Long-Term Debt	169,117	3.53%	162,358	3.53%	(6,759)
Short Term Loans (<365 days)	48,365	1.67%	31,400	2.96%	(16,965)
Total Debt	217,482	2.42%	193,758	3.69%	(23,724)
Investments:					
- Short Term	66,000	1.22%	38,000	4.49%	(28,000)
Total Investments	66,000		38,000		(28,000)

* LOBO – Lenders Option Borrowers Option. This loan has a fixed rate for the first two years of 3.85%. The remaining period of the loan (which we are now in) has a rate of 4.5%, but the lender can increase this rate at six-month intervals.

The Rail and Town Centre Loans have not been included in the average interest rate calculation as they are interest free loans from the Welsh Government.

6. BORROWING AND INVESTMENT RATES IN 2023/24

The following table displays a selection of interest rates prevailing as 1 April 2023 and 30 September 2023.

	01/04/2023	30/09/2023
Bank Base Rate	4.25%	5.25%
1 Month SONIA	4.17%	5.20%
PWLB 10-year Maturity	4.50%	5.45%
PWLB 15-year maturity	4.74%	5.70%
PWLB 25-year maturity	4.86%	5.86%

7. MID YEAR REVIEW OF THE BORROWING STRATEGY FOR 2023/24

The Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2023/24 was approved by Council in March 2023. The Borrowing Strategy adopted as part of this was as follows:

To utilise the Authority's overdraft facility:

To fund unexpected daily cash deficits;

To fund temporary cash shortfalls where there are no other sources of funding available within the marketplace.

To borrow over the short term:

To fund temporary cash shortfalls;

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To maintain a suitably balanced maturity profile; to make short term savings required in order to meet budgetary constraints;
In anticipation of securing longer term loans at more attractive rates.

To borrow over the long term:

To reduce the Authority's average cost of borrowing;
To maintain a stable, longer-term portfolio;
To maximise the potential for future debt rescheduling.

If appropriate to avoid all new external borrowing:

To maximise savings in the short term;
To run down temporary investment levels;
To minimise exposure to interest rate and credit risk.

Borrowings undertaken during the period (see section 7 below) have been done so in accordance with this strategy and has focused on short term borrowings to minimize borrowing costs. Current short-term borrowing rates continue to be very low, however are likely to increase following the forecast increases to the Bank of England Base Rate. The Authority is therefore taking advantage of such rates and is predominantly borrowing short term where necessary to fund the remainder of its capital expenditure and maturing debt until such time the market indicates that long term rates are more advantageous. In March 2021 the Welsh Government awarded the Authority an interest free specific loan in relation to the Rail Track project, whilst this has resulted in an increase to the level of the Council's longer-term debt this resource has reduced the need to borrow externally in the first half of the 2023/24 financial year.

In the current economic climate, it is considered that the approved strategy is still fit for purpose and therefore no revisions are proposed.

8. BORROWING OUTFURN FOR THE FIRST HALF OF 2023/24

Long Term Borrowing

Definition

Long term borrowing relates to debt taken out for a period of greater than one year. It is taken out for periods of 1 year up to 50 years. This borrowing is required to finance capital expenditure undertaken in the year that is funded through:

- Borrowing approvals from Welsh Government, known as un-hypothecated supported borrowing (USB), for which revenue support for the borrowing costs is provided through the revenue support grant.
- Prudential borrowing, for which borrowing costs are funded through revenue savings.

Total outstanding as of 30th September 2023

The total long-term debt outstanding as of 30th September 2023 was £162.4 million. This is made up of debt taken from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), from other local authorities (through the marketplace), Specific Welsh Government Loans and from the market (LOBO). This debt is due to be repaid within the following years:

Maturing Within	£000s
1YR	2,909
1-2YRS	8,764
2-3YRS	15,451
3-4YRS	15,277
4-5YRS	12,609

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5-6YRS	6,037
6-10YRS	19,980
10-15YRS	9,570
15+ YRS	78,854
Total	162,358

New borrowings for the First Half of 2023/24

No new long-term borrowing has been undertaken during this financial year. The Authority has repaid £6m of market loans during the first half year, however these have not been replaced with long term borrowing.

Due to the current elevated level of interest rates, the Council is not planning to undertake any long-term borrowing but will instead borrow in the short-term for re-financing of long-term debt or for cash flow purposes, due to the expectation that interest rates will begin to fall during 2024.

This situation will be monitored closely by the Treasury Management section, who will plan the future borrowing requirement of the Council in line with forecast interest rates.

Short Term Borrowing

Definition

Short term borrowing relates to debt taken out for a period of less than one year i.e. it will all be fully repaid within a year. These short-term loans are taken out to manage the Authority's short term cash flow i.e. to fund deficits in daily cash flow, pending receipt of income from grants or other sources, or pending the taking out of longer-term debt to fund capital expenditure whilst we wait for advantageous longer term borrowing opportunities. Current short-term borrowing rates are very low and are forecast to stay at these levels for the short term. The Authority is therefore taking advantage of such rates and is borrowing short term to fund its capital expenditure and maturing debt until such time the market indicates that long term rates are more advantageous.

Total outstanding as of 30th September 2023

The total short-term debt outstanding as of 30th September 2023 was £31.4 million. This is made up of debt taken from other local authorities through the marketplace.

New borrowings for the First Half Year of 2023/24

Appendix B lists the short-term loan activity during the year and shows that over the period a total of £48.365 million loans were brought forward from the previous year and £24 million of new short-term loans were raised. A total of £41 million of these loans have been repaid during the year (including the brought forward loans), leaving a balance outstanding as of 30 September 2023 of £31.4 million. The increase in short-term loans can be attributed to the repayment of a longer-term loan in July, subsequently re-financed with a short-term loan.

The following table gives a summary which shows that the average rate of interest paid was well within the benchmark. However, this is due to the Council entering into short-term borrowing when interest rates were low. With the current high level of interest rates, further borrowing will exceed the benchmark rate. This is still seen as the preferred option of borrowing, instead of entering long-term borrowing now when rates are expected to fall during 2024.

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	Total Value of Loans during the period	Average Loan	Interest due during the period	Average Interest Rate	Benchmark Interest Rate *
Short Term borrowing	£208.5m	£4m	£520,717	2.43%	4.50%

* Benchmark = budgeted interest rate for new borrowings 4.50%

As shown in section 12, the Council has exceeded its investment returns target for the financial year. It is anticipated that any additional investment interest received will offset the increased cost of borrowing anticipated throughout the remainder of the financial year, due to the current and forecast interest rates above the benchmark rate.

9. DEBT RESCHEDULLING

Debt rescheduling opportunities have increased significantly in the first half year where gilt yields, which underpin PWLB rates and market loans, have risen materially. Members will be advised if there is value to be had by rescheduling or repaying a part of the debt portfolio.

No debt rescheduling has been undertaken during the financial year.

10. COMPLIANCE WITH TREASURY LIMITS

During the financial year the Council operates within the treasury limits and Prudential Indicators set out in the Treasury Strategy Statement 2023/24, approved by Council in March 2023.

Operational Boundary for external debt

The Council resolved that this limit be set at £225.8 million for 2023/24. The average level of borrowings to the 30th of September 2022 was £183.1 million, this is well below the limit.

The operational boundary can be exceeded on an occasional basis, and this is to be expected due to cash flow fluctuations. Sustained breaches, however, would indicate that either the limit has been set too low, or that the Authority is breaching its prudential boundaries, and that corrective action needs to be taken.

Monitoring of the operational boundary is undertaken daily, and any such continual breaches would be investigated, and a recommended course of action reported to Council.

Authorised Limit for external Debt

The Council resolved that this limit be set at £248.4million for 2023/24. The Authorised Limit is set having regard to the operational boundary above.

The average level of borrowings for the first half year to the 30th of September 2023 was £183.1 million, so well within the limit set.

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The Authorised Limit must not be breached.

Maturity Structure of Fixed Rate Borrowing

The Council resolved the following limits for the maturity structure of fixed rate borrowings for 2022/23;

	Upper Limit	Lower Limit	Actual as at 30/09/2023
under 12 months	20%	0%	5.18%
12 months and within 24 months	20%	0%	9.14%
24 months and within 5 years	50%	0%	20.06%
5 years and within 10 years	75%	0%	14.16%
10 years and above	95%	25%	51.46%

The actual debt maturity profile as of 30th September 2023 is well within the limits set.

Upper Limit on Variable Interest Exposure

Council resolved the upper limit on variable rate exposures for 2023/24 should be set at 30% of outstanding long-term debt. This strategy limits the proportion of interest which is subject to variable rate terms and hence protects the Council against increased costs in times of rising interest rates.

The actual level of variable borrowings is £4 million (LOBO) which equates to 2.4% of the outstanding long-term debt as of 30th September 2023, so is well within the limit set.

The prudential and treasury Indicators are shown in Appendix 2.

It is a statutory duty for the Council to determine and keep under review the affordable borrowing limits. During the first half year, the Council has operated within the treasury and prudential indicators set out in the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2023/24. The Chief Officer Resources reports that no difficulties are envisaged for the current or future years in complying with these indicators.

All treasury management operations have also been conducted in full compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Practices

11. MID YEAR REVIEW OF INVESTMENT STRATEGY FOR 2023/24

The Annual Investment Strategy for 2023/24 adopted by Council in March 2023 was to maintain only temporary, short-term investments and to make those investments in accordance with anticipated cash flow requirements (including the investing of sums borrowed at prevailing low interest rates in anticipation of capital spending). The Council's investment priorities are:

- a. the security of capital;
- b. The liquidity of its investments.

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The Council also aims to achieve the optimum return on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity. The risk appetite of this Council is low to give priority to the security of its investments.

To ensure that the Authority's investments are secure, and that risk is minimised an investment matrix is used to determine investment counterparties, which factors in Fitch and Moody's credit ratings, credit default swap (CDS) spread data, and credit rating agency comments.

Currently, the approved investment counterparties available to the Authority are Barclays, the Authority's bank, Lloyds Bank, the Debt Management Account Deposit Facility (DMADF) other Local Authorities and the Public Sector Deposit Fund. To diversify its investment portfolio, the Authority has undertaken fixed term deposits with other banks in line with the counterparty list. Whilst interest rates receivable on these counterparties is low the security of the capital sum is high and there is no cost associated with placing cash there.

This strategy has been adhered to in determining the investments for the first half of 2023/24 outlined in section 12 below.

12. INVESTMENT OUTTURN FOR THE FIRST HALF OF 2023/24

Appendix A gives details of the investments made during the first half of the year, and the following table gives a summary, which shows the Authority's average rate of return was below the benchmark.

Investment balances

The Council has been able to invest a total of £208.5m during the first half of 2023/24, with an average investment value of £3.9m. These funds were available on a temporary basis, and the level of funds available was mainly dependent on the timing of the Council's payments, receipt of grants and progress on the capital programme.

Appendix A gives details of the investments made during the year, and the following table gives a summary, which shows the Council's average rate of return was below the benchmark. This is in line with the Authority's risk averse policy whereby the security of the capital sum is the number one priority at the expense of more competitive investment returns.

	Total Value of Investments	Average Investment	Investment Returns	Average Rate of Return	Benchmark Return *
Internally Managed	£208.5m	£3.93m	£1.17m	4.49%	4.64%

* Benchmark = 1 month SONIA uncompounded 4.64%

The above investment returns include £470,714 of interest received in relation to the ongoing investment of the funds received from the Welsh Government in respect of the Rail Infrastructure Loan. There is a condition of the funding approval that states any interest earned from holding the loan must be added to the works programme. Therefore, this

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income will be placed into a reserve until such time it is used to fund works or can be transferred to the Authority. The remaining £702,600 investment returns relates to interest due from the investment of the Council's own funds.

As illustrated, the Council underperformed the benchmark by 15 basis points. The Council's budgeted investment return for 2023/24 is £320,500. Due to the availability of funds to invest and the continued increases in bank rates above previous forecasts, the Council has exceeded this estimate.

Approved limits

Officers can confirm that the approved limits within the Annual Investment Strategy were not breached during the period ended 30th September 2023.

13. OTHER TREASURY MANAGEMENT ISSUES

None to report

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TREASURY MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Quarter Ended 31st December 2023

The CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) Code of Practice for Treasury Management 2021 recommends that members be updated on treasury management activities at least quarterly. This report, therefore, ensures this Council is implementing best practice in accordance with the Code

1. ECONOMIC UPDATE

The following information has been received from our Treasury Management advisors.

- The third quarter of 2023/24 saw:
 - A 0.3% m/m decline in real GDP in October, potentially partly due to unseasonably wet weather, but also due to the ongoing drag from higher interest rates. Growth for the second quarter, ending 30th September, was revised downwards to -0.1% and growth on an annual basis was also revised downwards, to 0.3%
 - A sharp fall in wage growth, with the headline 3myy rate declining from 8.0% in September to 7.2% in October, although the ONS “experimental” rate of unemployment has remained low at 4.2%
 - CPI inflation continuing on its downward trajectory, from 8.7% in April to 4.6% in October, then again to 3.9% in November
 - Core CPI inflation decreasing from April and May’s 31 years’ high of 7.1% to 5.1% in November, the lowest rate since January 2022
 - The Bank of England holding rates at 5.25% in November and December
 - A steady fall in 10-year gilt yields as investors revised their interest rate expectations lower.
- Overall, we expect real GDP growth to remain subdued throughout 2024 as the drag from higher interest rates is protracted but a fading of the cost-of-living crisis and interest rate cuts in the second half of 2024 will support a recovery in GDP growth in 2025.
- The labour market remains tight by historical standards, but the sharp fall in wage growth seen in October will reinforce the growing belief in markets that interest rates will be cut mid-2024. Wage growth eased in October much faster than the consensus expected. Total earnings fell by 1.6% m/m, which meant the headline 3myy rate eased from 8.0% in September to 7.2% in October. This news will be welcomed by the Bank of England.

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- CPI inflation fell from 6.7% in September to 4.6% in October, and then again to 3.9% in November. Both these falls were bigger than expected and there are clear signs of easing in domestic inflationary pressures. The fall in core CPI inflation from 5.7% to 5.1% in November was bigger than expected. That's the lowest rate since January 2022. Some of the decline in core inflation was due to the global influence of core goods inflation, which slowed from 4.3% to 3.3%. But some of it was due to services inflation falling from 6.6% to 6.3%. The Bank views the latter as a key barometer of the persistence of inflation and it came in further below the Bank's forecast of 6.9% in its November Monetary Policy Report. This will give the Bank more confidence that services inflation is now on a firmly downward path
- Our Treasury Management advisor's central assumption is that inflation will drop to the 2.0% target only if the Bank of England (the Bank) keeps interest rates at the probable peak of 5.25% until the second half of 2024.
- Moreover, it is still anticipated that the Bank of England will be keen to loosen monetary policy when the worst of the inflationary pressures are behind us – but timing on this will remain one of fine judgment: cut too soon, and inflationary pressures may well build up further; cut too late and any downturn or recession may be prolonged. Our advisors current judgment is that rates will have to stay at their peak until the second quarter of 2024 as a minimum.
- In the upcoming months, the forecasts will be guided not only by economic data releases and clarifications from the MPC over its monetary policies and the Government over its fiscal policies, but also international factors such as policy development in the US and Europe, the provision of fresh support packages to support the faltering recovery in China as well as the on-going conflict in Israel.
- On the positive side, consumers are still estimated to be sitting on excess savings left over from the pandemic, which could cushion some of the impact of the above challenges and may be the reason why the economy is performing somewhat better at this stage of the economic cycle than may have been expected. However, most of those excess savings are held by more affluent people whereas lower income families already spend nearly all their income on essentials such as food, energy, and rent/mortgage payments.

MPC meetings 2nd November and 14th December 2023

- On 2nd November, the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) voted to keep Bank Rate on hold at 5.25%, and on 14th December reiterated that view as concerns about "sticky" inflation remained in place.

Nonetheless, with UK CPI inflation now at 3.9%, and core inflating beginning to moderate (5.1%), markets are voicing a view that rate cuts should begin in Q1 2024/25, some way ahead of the indications from MPC members.

- In addition, what happens outside of the UK is also critical to movement in gilt yields. The US has kept short-term rates in the range of 5.25%-5.50%, whilst the European Central Bank has moved its Deposit rate to a probable peak of 4%. Markets currently expect both central banks to start cutting rates in 2024.

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2. INTEREST RATES FORECAST

The Council has appointed Link Group as its treasury advisors and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. The Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) rate forecasts below are based on the Certainty Rate (the standard rate minus 20 bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1st November 2012.

The latest forecast on 8th January sets out a view that short, medium, and long-dated interest rates will be elevated until Summer 2024, as the Bank of England seeks to squeeze inflation out of the economy.

Link Group Interest Rate View 08.01.24													
	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26	Mar-27
BANK RATE	5.25	5.25	4.75	4.25	3.75	3.25	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
3 month ave earnings	5.30	5.30	4.80	4.30	3.80	3.30	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
6 month ave earnings	5.20	5.10	4.60	4.10	3.70	3.30	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10
12 month ave earnings	5.00	4.90	4.40	3.90	3.60	3.20	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.20	3.20
5 yr PWLB	4.50	4.40	4.30	4.20	4.10	4.00	3.80	3.70	3.60	3.60	3.50	3.50	3.50
10 yr PWLB	4.70	4.50	4.40	4.30	4.20	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.80	3.70	3.70	3.70	3.70
25 yr PWLB	5.20	5.10	4.90	4.80	4.60	4.40	4.30	4.20	4.20	4.10	4.10	4.10	4.10
50 yr PWLB	5.00	4.90	4.70	4.60	4.40	4.20	4.10	4.00	4.00	3.90	3.90	3.90	3.90

- LIBOR and LIBID rates ceased at the end of 2021. In a continuation of previous views, money market yield forecasts are based on expected average earnings by local authorities for 3 to 12 months.
- The forecast for earnings are averages, actual rates offered by individual banks may differ significantly from these averages, reflecting their different needs for borrowing short-term cash at any one point in time.

An Overview of the Future Path of Bank Rate

Link's central forecast for interest rates was updated on 8th January 2024 and reflects a view that the MPC would be keen to underpin its anti-inflation credentials by keeping Bank Rate at 5.25% until at least the Summer of 2024. Rate cuts are expected to start when both the CPI inflation and wage/employment data are unequivocally supportive of such a move, and that there is a strong likelihood of the overall economy enduring tepid growth (at best) or a mild recession (at worst) over the coming months.

The balance of risks to the UK economy: -

- The overall balance of risks to economic growth in the UK is to the downside.

Downside risks to current forecasts for UK gilt yields and PWLB rates include:

- Labour and supply shortages prove more enduring and disruptive and depress economic activity (accepting that in the near-term this is also an upside risk to inflation and, thus, could keep gilt yields high for longer).

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- The Bank of England has increased Bank Rate too fast and too far over recent months, and subsequently brings about a deeper and longer UK recession than we currently anticipate.
- UK / EU trade arrangements – if there was a major impact on trade flows and financial services due to complications or lack of co-operation in sorting out significant remaining issues.
- Geopolitical risks, for example in Ukraine/Russia, the Middle East, China/Taiwan/US, Iran and North Korea, which could lead to increasing safe-haven flows.

Upside risks to current forecasts for UK gilt yields and PWLB rates:

- Despite the tightening to 5.25%, the Bank of England proves too timid in its pace and strength of increases in Bank Rate and, therefore, allows inflationary pressures to remain elevated for a longer period within the UK economy, which then necessitates Bank Rate staying higher for longer than currently projected.
- The pound weakens because of a lack of confidence in the UK Government's pre-election fiscal policies, resulting in investors pricing in a risk premium for holding UK sovereign debt.
- Longer-term US treasury yields rise strongly if inflation remains more stubborn there than the market currently anticipates, consequently pulling gilt yields up higher.
- Projected gilt issuance, inclusive of natural maturities and Quantitative Tightening (QT), could be too much for the markets to comfortably digest without higher yields compensating.

3. ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) for 2023/24, which includes the Annual Investment Strategy, was approved by the Council on 30 March 2023. In accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice, it sets out the Council's investment priorities as being:

- Security of capital
- Liquidity
- Yield

The Council will aim to achieve the optimum return (yield) on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity, aligned with the Council's risk appetite. In the current economic climate, over and above keeping investments short-term to cover cash flow needs, there is a benefit to seek out value available in periods up to 12 months with high credit rated financial institutions, using the Link suggested creditworthiness approach, including a minimum sovereign credit rating and Credit Default Swap (CDS) overlay information.

Treasury Management Update | Quarter 3 2023/24

As shown by the charts below and the interest rate forecasts in section 2, investment rates have remained elevated during 2023/24 but are now expected to have peaked.

The following table displays a selection of interest rates prevailing as of 1 April 2023 and 31 December 2023.

	01/04/2023	31/12/2023
Bank Base Rate	4.25%	5.25%
1 Month SONIA	4.17%	4.96%
PWLB 10-year Maturity	4.50%	4.57%
PWLB 15-year maturity	4.74%	4.92%
PWLB 25-year maturity	4.86%	5.13%

Creditworthiness

There have been few changes to credit ratings over the quarter under review. However, officers continue to closely monitor these, and other measures of creditworthiness to ensure that only appropriate counterparties are considered for investment purposes.

Investment counterparty criteria

The current investment counterparty criteria selection approved in the TMSS is meeting the requirement of the treasury management function.

CDS prices

For UK banks, there are no underlying negative themes. Prices are not misaligned with other creditworthiness indicators, such as credit ratings. Nevertheless, it remains important to undertake continual monitoring of all aspects of risk and return in the current circumstances.

Investment balances

The Council has been able to invest a total of £296.5m during the first three quarters of 2023/24, with an average investment value of £3.9m. These funds were available on a temporary basis, and the level of funds available was mainly dependent on the timing of the Council's payments, receipt of grants and progress on the capital programme.

Appendix A gives details of the investments made during the year, and the following table gives a summary, which shows the Council's average rate of return was below the benchmark. This is in line with the Authority's risk averse policy whereby the security of the capital sum is the number one priority at the expense of more competitive investment returns.

	Total Value of Investments	Average Investment	Investment Returns	Average Rate of Return	Benchmark Return *
Internally Managed	£296.5m	£3.9m	£1.5m	4.78%	4.96%

* Benchmark = 1 month SONIA uncompounded

4.96%

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The above investment returns include £651,544 of interest received in relation to the ongoing investment of the funds received from the Welsh Government in respect of the Rail Infrastructure Loan. There is a condition of the funding approval that states any interest earned from holding the loan must be added to the works programme. Therefore, this income will be placed into a reserve until such time it is used to fund works or can be transferred to the Authority. The remaining £847,399 investment returns relates to interest due from the investment of the Council's own funds.

As illustrated, the Council underperformed the benchmark by 18 bps, however the Council's budgeted investment return for 2023/24 is £320,500 and due to the availability of funds to invest and the continued increases in bank rates above previous forecasts, the Council has significantly exceeded this estimate.

Approved limits

Officers can confirm that the approved limits within the Annual Investment Strategy were not breached during the quarter ended 31st December 2023.

4. BORROWING

In mid-December the Lender of a Market (LOBO) loan gave notice of proposed rate increase from 4.50% to 5.94%. The Authority has opted to repay £4m of Market (LOBO) loans during the first week of quarter four.

Due to the current elevated level of interest rates, the Council is not planning to undertake long-term borrowing but will instead borrow in the short-term for re-financing of long-term debt or for cash flow purposes, due to the expectation that interest rates will begin to fall during 2024.

This situation will be monitored closely by the Treasury Management team, who will plan the future borrowing requirement of the Council in line with forecast interest rates.

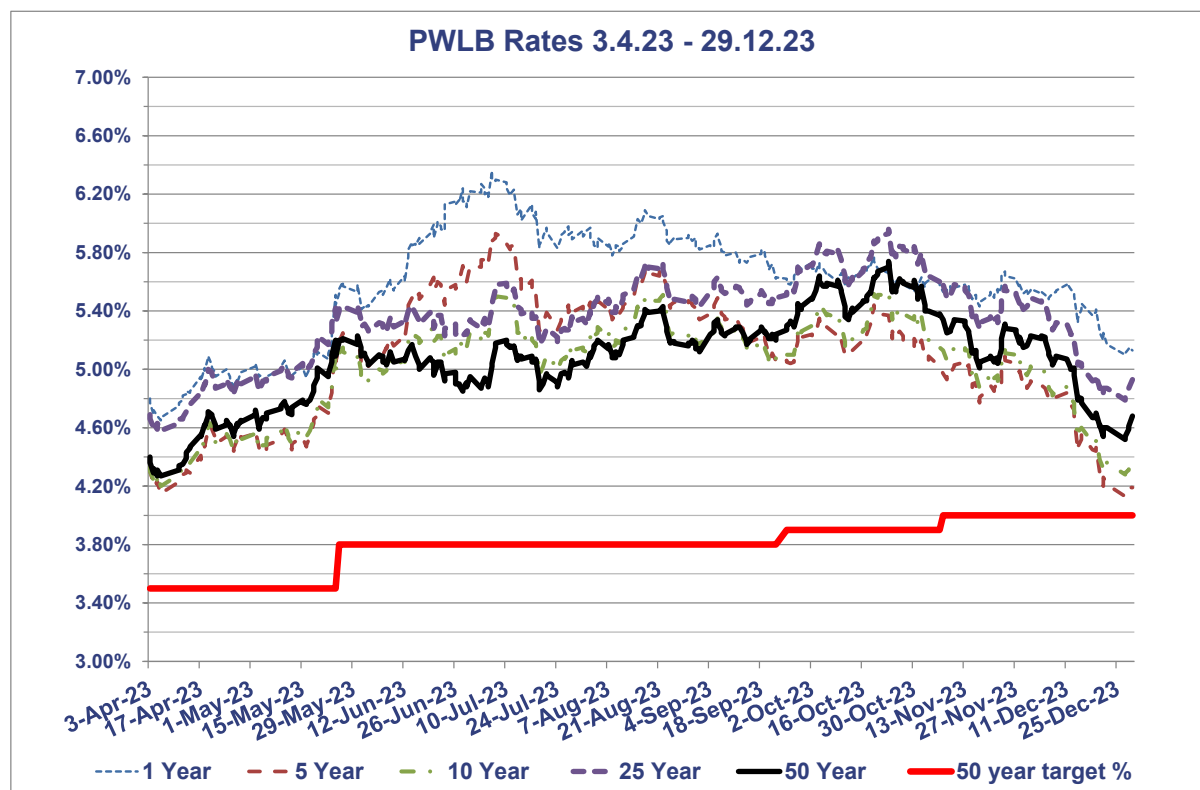
PWLB maturity Certainty Rates 1st April to 31st December 2023

Gilt yields and PWLB rates were on a rising trend from April through to October but dropped back significantly in November and December.

The 50-year PWLB Certainty Rate target for new long-term borrowing started 2023/24 at 3.50% (the lowest forecast rate within a two-year time horizon), increasing to a peak of 4.00% in November. With rates elevated across the whole of the curve, it is advised to not borrow long-term unless the Authority wants certainty of rate and judges the cost to be affordable.

PWLB RATES 3.4.23 - 29.12.23

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Temporary Loans

Appendix B lists the short-term loan activity during the year and shows that over the period a total of £48.4 million loans were brought forward from the previous year and £49.3 million of new short-term loans were raised. A total of £61.3 million of these loans have been repaid during the year (including the brought forward loans), leaving a balance outstanding as of 31 December 2023 of £36.5 million. The decrease in short-term loans can be attributed to the running down of our own investments in order to reduce the requirement of the need to borrow to fund short term cash flow deficits.

The following table gives a summary which shows that the average rate of interest paid was well within the benchmark. However, this is due to the Council entering into short-term borrowing when interest rates were low. With the current high level of interest rates, further borrowing will exceed the benchmark rate. This is still seen as the preferred option of borrowing, instead of entering into long-term borrowing now when rates are expected to fall during 2024.

	Total Value of Loans during the period	Average Loan	Interest paid during the period	Average Interest Rate	Benchmark Interest Rate *
Short Term borrowing	£97.72m	£4.29m	£0.9m	3.24%	4.50%

* Benchmark = budgeted interest rate for new borrowings 4.50%

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The Council's budgeted interest on temporary borrowing for 2023/24 is £1.98m. The Treasury Management team forecast that temporary borrowing interest will not exceed £1.5m for the financial year.

As shown in section 3, the Council has exceeded its investment returns target for the financial year. Should the interest on temporary borrowing exceed the in year budget, it is anticipated that any additional investment interest received will offset the increased cost of borrowing.

5. DEBT RESCHEDULLING

Debt rescheduling opportunities have increased significantly in the current quarter where gilt yields, which underpin PWLB rates and market loans, have risen materially. Members will be advised if there is value to be had by rescheduling or repaying a part of the debt portfolio.

No debt rescheduling has been undertaken during the financial year.

6. COMPLIANCE WITH TREASURY AND PRUDENTIAL LIMITS

The prudential and treasury Indicators are shown in Appendix 2.

It is a statutory duty for the Council to determine and keep under review the affordable borrowing limits. During the quarter ended 31st December 2023, the Council has operated within the treasury and prudential indicators set out in the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2023/24. The Chief Officer Resources reports that no difficulties are envisaged for the current or future years in complying with these indicators.

All treasury management operations have also been conducted in full compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Practices.

Please note that the outturn figures for 2022/23 are unaudited at this stage, so may be subject to change.

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Treasury and Prudential Indicators – Quarterly Report 31 December 2023

Treasury Indicators	2023/24 Budget £'000	Quarter 2 Actual £'000	Quarter 3 Actual £'000
Authorised limit for external debt	248,383	248,383	248,383
Operational boundary for external debt	225,803	225,803	225,803
Gross external debt	217,884	193,758	195,794
Investments	2,000	38,000	24,447
Net borrowing	219,884	155,758	171,347

Maturity structure of fixed rate borrowing - upper and lower limits			
Under 12 months	Upper Limit 20% Lower Limit 0%	5.18%	5.18%
12 months to 2 years	Upper Limit 20% Lower Limit 0%	9.14%	9.14%
2 years to 5 years	Upper Limit 50% Lower Limit 0%	20.06%	20.06%
5 years to 10 years	Upper Limit 75% Lower Limit 0%	14.16%	14.16%
10 years and above	Upper Limit 95% Lower Limit 25%	51.46%	51.46%

Prudential Indicators	2023/24 Budget £'000	31.03.23 Actual £'000
Capital expenditure	74,300	47,849
Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)	208,824	172,058
Annual change in CFR	34,892	2,136
In year borrowing requirement	36,230	3,880
Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream	4.06%	3.44%

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INVESTMENTS 2023/2024 (as at 30 September 2023)

APPENDIX A

DATE	BORROWER	VALUE	RATE	REPAYMENT DATE	DURATION OF INVESTMENT	INTEREST DUE	INVESTMENTS REPAID	PRINCIPAL O/S
			%		DAYS IN 2023/24	TO 30/09/2023		AS AT 30/06/2023
B/FWD	01/04/2023							
06/10/2022	NATIONAL BANK OF KUWAIT	2,000,000	4.100	06/07/2023	96	21,567.12	2,000,000	0
01/12/2022	AL RAYAN BANK PLC	5,000,000	4.200	01/06/2023	61	35,095.89	5,000,000	0
30/01/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA, LONDON	4,000,000	4.200	30/06/2023	90	41,424.66	4,000,000	0
15/03/2023	LLOYDS CALL ACCOUNT	4,000,000	Variable	-	182	67,840.51	0	4,000,000
14/04/2022	NATIONAL BANK OF KUWAIT (INTERNATIONAL)	4,000,000	2.030	13/04/2023	12	2,669.59	4,000,000	0
01/07/2022	THURROCK BOROUGH COUNCIL	4,000,000	1.800	03/04/2023	2	394.52	4,000,000	0
08/09/2022	UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL - ROLL OF TI2193	5,000,000	3.000	07/09/2023	159	65,342.47	0	5,000,000
05/12/2022	RUSHMOOR BOROUGH COUNCIL	5,000,000	3.350	05/05/2023	34	15,602.74	5,000,000	0
05/12/2022	CORNWALL COUNCIL - ROLL OF TI2196	5,000,000	3.250	05/04/2023	4	1,780.82	5,000,000	0
19/12/2022	NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL - MOTHERWELL	5,000,000	3.400	19/07/2023	109	50,767.12	5,000,000	0
30/03/2023	POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR HERTFORDSHIRE	3,000,000	4.550	06/04/2023	5	1,869.86	3,000,000	0
31/03/2023	WEST MERCIA POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER	5,000,000	4.450	10/05/2023	39	23,773.97	5,000,000	0
31/03/2023	CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL	5,000,000	4.300	28/04/2023	27	15,904.11	5,000,000	0
11/01/2023	PUBLIC SECTOR DEPOSIT FUND	5,000,000	Variable	28/06/2023	88	52,567.96	5,000,000	0
06/03/2023	PUBLIC SECTOR DEPOSIT FUND	5,000,000	Variable	30/06/2023	90	53,876.28	5,000,000	0
	B/F Raised in previous years still outstanding	66,000,000				450,477.63	57,000,000	9,000,000
	NEW INVESTMENTS 2023/24							
05/04/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA, LONDON	2,000,000	4.300	05/06/2023	61	14,372.60	2,000,000	0
13/04/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF KUWAIT	4,000,000	5.100	11/04/2024	170	95,572.60		4,000,000
04/05/2023	AL RAYAN BANK	1,000,000	4.850	06/11/2023	149	19,931.51		1,000,000
15/05/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	3,000,000	4.380	26/05/2023	11	3,960.00	3,000,000	0
18/05/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	2,500,000	4.380	26/05/2023	8	2,400.00	2,500,000	0
05/07/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	10,000,000	4.880	12/07/2023	7	9,358.90	10,000,000	0
05/07/2023	LANDESBANK HESSEN THURINGEN GIROZENTRALE	5,000,000	4.950	01/08/2023	27	18,308.22	5,000,000	0
06/07/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF KUWAIT - ROLL of TI2201	2,000,000	6.200	05/04/2024	86	29,556.16		2,000,000
01/08/2023	LANDESBANK HESSEN THURINGEN GIROZENTRALE	3,000,000	5.150	01/09/2023	31	13,121.92	3,000,000	0
03/08/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	3,000,000	5.130	07/08/2023	4	1,686.58	3,000,000	0
07/08/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA, LONDON	2,000,000	5.150	14/08/2023	7	1,975.34	2,000,000	0
14/08/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA, LONDON	2,000,000	5.500	14/11/2023	47	14,465.75		2,000,000
31/08/2023	WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL	4,000,000	5.250	29/09/2023	29	16,684.93	4,000,000	0
01/09/2023	LANDESBANK HESSEN THURINGEN GIROZENTRALE	3,000,000	5.220	02/10/2023	29	12,871.23		3,000,000
19/09/2023	CHELTENHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL	2,000,000	5.300	19/10/2023	11	3,484.93		2,000,000

INVESTMENTS 2023/2024

APPENDIX A

<u>DATE</u>	<u>BORROWER</u>	<u>VALUE</u>	<u>RATE</u>		<u>REPAYMENT DATE</u>	<u>DURATION OF INVESTMENT</u>	<u>INTEREST DUE</u>	<u>INVESTMENTS REPAID</u>	<u>PRINCIPAL O/S</u>
			%			<u>DAYS IN 2023/24</u>	<u>TO 31/12/2023</u>		<u>AS AT 31/12/2023</u>
B/FWD	01/04/2023								
06/10/2022	NATIONAL BANK OF KUWAIT	2,000,000	4.100		06/07/2023	96	21,567.12	2,000,000	0
01/12/2022	AL RAYAN BANK PLC	5,000,000	4.200		01/06/2023	61	35,095.89	5,000,000	0
30/01/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA, LONDON	4,000,000	4.200		30/06/2023	90	41,424.66	4,000,000	0
14/04/2022	NATIONAL BANK OF KUWAIT (INTERNATIONAL)	4,000,000	2.030		13/04/2023	12	2,669.59	4,000,000	0
01/07/2022	THURROCK BOROUGH COUNCIL	4,000,000	1.800		03/04/2023	2	394.52	4,000,000	0
08/09/2022	UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL - ROLL OF T12193	5,000,000	3.000		07/09/2023	159	65,342.47	5,000,000	0
05/12/2022	RUSHMOOR BOROUGH COUNCIL	5,000,000	3.350		05/05/2023	34	15,602.74	5,000,000	0
05/12/2022	CORNWALL COUNCIL - ROLL OF T12196	5,000,000	3.250		05/04/2023	4	1,780.82	5,000,000	0
19/12/2022	NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL - MOTHERWELL	5,000,000	3.400		19/07/2023	109	50,767.12	5,000,000	0
30/03/2023	POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR HERTFORDSHIRE	3,000,000	4.550		06/04/2023	5	1,869.86	3,000,000	0
17/03/2023	WEST MERCIA POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER	5,000,000	4.450		10/05/2023	39	23,773.97	5,000,000	0
17/03/2023	CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL	5,000,000	4.300		28/04/2023	27	15,904.11	5,000,000	0
	Variable Investmetns								
10/04/2023	LLOYDS CALL ACCOUNT	4,000,000	Variable		28/07/2023	118	65,778.32	4,000,000	0
09/04/2023	PUBLIC SECTOR DEPOSIT FUND	10,000,000	Variable		27/06/2023	87	105,135.92	10,000,000	0
	B/F Raised in previous years still outstanding	66,000,000					447,107.12	66,000,000	0
NEW INVESTMENTS 2023/24									
05/04/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA, LONDON	2,000,000	4.300		05/06/2023	61	14,372.60	2,000,000	0
13/04/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF KUWAIT	4,000,000	5.100		11/04/2024	262	146,991.78		4,000,000
04/05/2023	AL RAYAN BANK	1,000,000	4.850		06/11/2023	186	24,715.07	1,000,000	0
15/05/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	3,000,000	4.380		26/05/2023	11	3,960.00	3,000,000	0
18/05/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	2,500,000	4.380		26/05/2023	8	2,400.00	2,500,000	0
05/07/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	10,000,000	4.880		12/07/2023	7	9,358.90	10,000,000	0
05/07/2023	LANDESBANK HESSEN THURINGEN GIROZENTRALE	5,000,000	4.950		01/08/2023	27	18,308.22	5,000,000	0
06/07/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF KUWAIT - ROLL of T12201	2,000,000	6.200		05/04/2024	178	60,810.96		2,000,000
01/08/2023	LANDESBANK HESSEN THURINGEN GIROZENTRALE	3,000,000	5.150		01/09/2023	31	13,121.92	3,000,000	0
03/08/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	3,000,000	5.130		07/08/2023	4	1,686.58	3,000,000	0
07/08/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA, LONDON	2,000,000	5.150		14/08/2023	7	1,975.34	2,000,000	0
14/08/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA, LONDON	2,000,000	5.500		14/11/2023	92	27,726.03	2,000,000	0
31/08/2023	WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL	4,000,000	5.250		29/09/2023	29	16,684.93	4,000,000	0
01/09/2023	LANDESBANK HESSEN THURINGEN GIROZENTRALE	3,000,000	5.220		02/10/2023	31	13,300.27	3,000,000	0

19/09/2023	CHELTENHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL	2,000,000	5.300		19/10/2023	30	8,712.33	2,000,000	0
02/10/2023	LANDESBANK HESSEN THURINGEN GIROZENTRALE	3,000,000	5.220		27/10/2023	25	10,726.03	3,000,000	0
14/11/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA	2,000,000	5.200		28/12/2023	44	12,536.99	2,000,000	0
05/04/2023	CORNWALL COUCIL - ROLLOVER RI0160	5,000,000	4.100		05/05/2023	30	16,849.32	5,000,000	0
14/04/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	3,000,000	4.060		21/04/2023	7	2,335.89	3,000,000	0
17/04/2023	EASTLEIGH BOROUGH COUNCIL	2,000,000	4.150		17/05/2023	30	6,821.92	2,000,000	0
04/05/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	9,000,000	4.210		22/05/2023	18	18,685.48	9,000,000	0
04/05/2023	HELEBA	6,000,000	4.350		05/06/2023	32	22,882.19	6,000,000	0
05/05/2023	CORNWALL COUNCIL - ROLLOVER OF RI0167	5,000,000	4.320		05/07/2023	61	36,098.63	5,000,000	0
17/05/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	2,000,000	4.380		26/05/2023	9	2,160.00	2,000,000	0
05/06/2023	HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL	5,000,000	4.600		05/07/2023	30	18,904.11	5,000,000	0
05/06/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA - ROLL OF TI2226	2,000,000	4.650		07/08/2023	63	16,052.05	2,000,000	0
05/06/2023	HELEBA - ROLL OF RI0171	5,000,000	4.560		05/07/2023	30	18,739.73	5,000,000	0
									0
05/07/2023	CORNWALL COUNCIL - ROLLOVER OF RI0172	5,000,000	5.180		05/10/2023	92	65,282.19	5,000,000	0
17/07/2023	HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL	5,000,000	5.000		17/08/2023	31	21,232.88	5,000,000	0
31/07/2023	CORNWALL COUNCIL	4,000,000	5.150		31/08/2023	31	17,495.89	4,000,000	0
07/08/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA - ROLL OF RI0175	2,000,000	5.250		09/10/2023	63	18,123.29	2,000,000	0
17/08/2023	MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL	2,000,000	5.350		17/11/2023	92	26,969.86	2,000,000	0
23/08/2023	WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL	2,000,000	5.330		23/10/2023	61	17,815.34	2,000,000	0
31/08/2023	CORNWALL COUNCIL	4,000,000	5.200		29/09/2023	29	16,526.03	4,000,000	0
09/09/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	4,000,000	5.130		11/09/2023	6	3,373.15	4,000,000	0
09/09/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	4,000,000	5.130		13/09/2023	6	3,373.15	4,000,000	0
09/09/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	4,000,000	5.155		22/09/2023	9	5,084.38	4,000,000	0
09/09/2023	CORNWALL COUNCIL	4,000,000	5.300		31/10/2023	32	18,586.30	4,000,000	0
04/10/2023	HELEBA	3,000,000	5.190		27/10/2023	23	9,811.23	3,000,000	0
09/10/2023	CORNWALL COUNCIL	5,000,000	5.250		27/10/2023	22	15,821.92	5,000,000	0
09/10/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA	2,000,000	5.150		13/10/2023	4	1,128.77	2,000,000	0
13/10/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA	2,000,000	5.210		13/11/2023	31	8,849.86	2,000,000	0
27/10/2023	HELABA - ROLL OF RI0188	3,000,000	5.210		01/12/2023	35	14,987.67	3,000,000	0
06/11/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA	2,000,000	5.200		06/12/2023	30	8,547.95	2,000,000	0
13/11/2023	NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA	2,000,000	5.200		28/12/2023	45	12,821.92	2,000,000	0
15/11/2023	DEBT MMANAGEMENT OFFICE	4,000,000	5.170		24/11/2023	9	5,099.18	4,000,000	0
07/12/2023	LONDON BOROUGH OF HAVERING	2,000,000	5.350		22/01/2024	24	7,328.77		2,000,000
15/12/2023	MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL	2,000,000	5.500		12/01/2024	16	5,123.29		2,000,000
20/12/2023	BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL	4,000,000	5.450		22/01/2024	11	7,167.12		4,000,000
20/12/2023	DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL	1,000,000	5.550		12/01/2024	11	1,824.66		1,000,000
22/12/2023	LEEDS CITY COUNCIL	1,000,000	5.600		22/01/2024	9	1,534.25		1,000,000
	Variable Investmetns								
11/09/2023	LLOYDS CALL ACCOUNT	4,000,000	Variable		27/09/2023	16	9,586.21	4,000,000	0
28/06/2023	PUBLIC SECTOR DEPOSIT FUND	5,000,000	Variable		29/06/2023	2	1,308.32	5,000,000	0
11/07/2023	PUBLIC SECTOR DEPOSIT FUND	5,000,000	Variable		18/07/2023	7	5,346.25	5,000,000	0
19/07/2023	PUBLIC SECTOR DEPOSIT FUND	10,000,000	Variable		22/08/2023	34	48,266.13	10,000,000	0
23/08/2023	PUBLIC SECTOR DEPOSIT FUND	6,000,000	Variable		30/08/2023	7	6,718.00	6,000,000	0
31/08/2023	PUBLIC SECTOR DEPOSIT FUND	2,000,000	Variable		02/11/2023	63	18,191.87	2,000,000	0
05/10/2023	LLOYDS CALL ACCOUNT	4,000,000	Variable		27/11/2023	53	30,529.42	4,000,000	0
05/12/2023	LLOYDS CALL ACCOUNT	4,000,000	Variable		18/12/2023	13	7,751.95	4,000,000	0
03/11/2023	PUBLIC SECTOR DEPOSIT FUND	9,000,000	Variable		29/11/2023	26	35,035.11	9,000,000	0

30/11/2023	PUBLIC SECTOR DEPOSIT FUND	8,000,000	Variable		19/12/2023	19	23,055.87	8,000,000	0
20/12/2023	PUBLIC SECTOR DEPOSIT FUND	3,000,000	Variable		31/12/2023	11	5,219.55		3,000,000
	Total Raised During the Period	230,500,000					1,051,834.98	211,500,000	19,000,000
	Total Value of Investments	296,500,000					1,498,942.10	277,500,000	19,000,000
	Average Investments	3,901,316							
	Interest Received	1,498,942							
	Average Interest Rate %	4.78%							

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List of Temporary Lenders 2023/2024

As at 30 September 2023

APPENDIX A

DATE	LENDER	NEW LOAN VALUE	RATE	REPAY DATE	DURATION OF LOAN	INTEREST DUE TO 30/09/2023	PRINCIPAL REPAYED 2023/24	PRINCIPAL OUTSTANDING AS AT 30/09/2023
			%		DAYS IN 2023/24			
B/F	01/04/2023							
03/11/2021	BG & CAERPHILLYCARE AND REPAIR	400,000		CALL	182	2,347.50		400,000
27/05/2022	WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY	6,000,000	0.10	26/05/2023	55	904.11	6,000,000	-
27/05/2022	CRAWLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL	3,000,000	0.28	26/05/2023	55	1,265.75	3,000,000	-
27/05/2022	BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL	2,000,000	0.28	26/05/2023	55	843.84	2,000,000	-
08/04/2022	SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	3,000,000	0.28	06/04/2023	5	115.07	3,000,000	-
08/04/2022	CRAWLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL	2,000,000	0.28	06/04/2023	5	76.71	2,000,000	-
27/06/2022	SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	5,000,000	0.50	26/06/2023	86	5,890.41	5,000,000	-
13/07/2022	POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER OF WEST YORKSHIRE	5,000,000	0.80	12/07/2023	102	11,178.08	5,000,000	-
26/08/2022	CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL	5,000,000	1.30	26/05/2023	55	9,794.52	5,000,000	-
01/12/2022	BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL	5,000,000	2.20	01/06/2023	61	18,383.56	5,000,000	-
30/12/2022	WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY	5,000,000	2.35	30/06/2023	90	28,972.60	5,000,000	-
27/01/2023	TYNE AND WEAR PASSENGER TRANSPORT EX	5,000,000	3.80	27/10/2023	182	94,739.73		5,000,000
13/02/2023	HYNDBURN BOROUGH COUNCIL	2,000,000	3.95	12/02/2024	182	39,391.78		2,000,000
	B/F Raised in previous years still outstanding	48,400,000				213,903.66	41,000,000	7,400,000
	NEW LOANS 2023/24							
26/05/2023	WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY	6,000,000	4.00	05/01/2024	127	83,506.85		6,000,000
26/05/2023	CRAWLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL	5,000,000	4.30	27/11/2023	127	74,808.22		5,000,000
26/06/2023	BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN BOROUGH COUNCIL	5,000,000	4.48	26/10/2023	96	58,915.07		5,000,000
06/07/2023	PCC NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	3,000,000	5.60	05/06/2024	86	39,583.56		3,000,000
19/07/2023	SOUTH DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	5,000,000	5.00	28/03/2024	73	50,000.00		5,000,000
	Total Raised During the Period	24,000,000				306,813.70	0	24,000,000
	Total Value of Loans	72,400,000				520,717.36	41,000,000	31,400,000
	Average Loan	4,022,222						
	Interest Paid	520,717						
	Average Interest Rate	2.43%						

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List of Temporary Lenders 2023/2024

APPENDIX A

DATE	LENDER	NEW LOAN VALUE	RATE	REPAY DATE	DURATION OF LOAN	INTEREST DUE TO 31/12/2023	PRINCIPAL REPAYED 2023/24	PRINCIPAL OUTSTANDING AS AT 30/09/2023
			%		DAYS IN 2023/24			
B/F	01/04/2023							
03/11/2021	BG & CAERPHILLYCARE AND REPAIR	450,000		CALL	274	14,882.53		450,000
27/05/2022	WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY	6,000,000	0.10	26/05/2023	55	904.11	6,000,000	-
27/05/2022	CRAWLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL	3,000,000	0.28	26/05/2023	55	1,265.75	3,000,000	-
27/05/2022	BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL	2,000,000	0.28	26/05/2023	55	843.84	2,000,000	-
08/04/2022	SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	3,000,000	0.28	06/04/2023	5	115.07	3,000,000	-
08/04/2022	CRAWLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL	2,000,000	0.28	06/04/2023	5	76.71	2,000,000	-
27/06/2022	SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	5,000,000	0.50	26/06/2023	86	5,890.41	5,000,000	-
13/07/2022	POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER OF WEST YORKS	5,000,000	0.80	12/07/2023	102	11,178.08	5,000,000	-
26/08/2022	CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL	5,000,000	1.30	26/05/2023	55	9,794.52	5,000,000	-
01/12/2022	BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL	5,000,000	2.20	01/06/2023	61	18,383.56	5,000,000	-
30/12/2022	WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY	5,000,000	2.35	30/06/2023	90	28,972.60	5,000,000	-
27/01/2023	TYNE AND WEAR PASSENGER TRANSPORT EX	5,000,000	3.80	27/10/2023	209	108,794.52	5,000,000	-
13/02/2023	HYNDBURN BOROUGH COUNCIL	2,000,000	3.95	12/02/2024	274	59,304.11		2,000,000
	B/F Raised in previous years still outstanding	48,450,000				260,405.81	46,000,000	2,450,000
	NEW LOANS 2023/24							
26/05/2023	WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY	6,000,000	4.00	05/01/2024	219	144,000.00		6,000,000
26/05/2023	CRAWLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL	5,000,000	4.30	27/11/2023	185	108,972.60	5,000,000	-
26/06/2023	BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN BOROUGH COUNCIL	5,000,000	4.48	26/10/2023	122	74,871.23	5,000,000	-
06/07/2023	PCC NOTTINGHAMSHIRE	3,000,000	5.60	05/06/2024	178	81,928.77		3,000,000
19/07/2023	SOUTH DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	5,000,000	5.00	28/03/2024	165	113,013.70		5,000,000
26/10/2023	BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN BOROUGH COUNCIL	5,000,000	5.50	26/04/2024	66	49,726.03		5,000,000
26/10/2023	BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL	5,000,000	5.63	26/07/2024	66	50,901.37		5,000,000
28/11/2023	MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL	270,000	5.70	01/12/2023	3	126.49	270,000	-
22/12/2023	SPELTHORNE BOROUGH COUNCIL	5,000,000	5.55	22/01/2024	9	6,842.47	5,000,000	-
22/12/2023	MIDDLESBROUGH TEESIDE PENSION FUND	10,000,000	5.35	CALL	9	13,191.78		10,000,000
	Total Raised During the Period	49,270,000				643,574.44	15,270,000	34,000,000
	Total Value of Loans	97,720,000				903,980.25	61,270,000	36,450,000
	Average Loan	4,248,696						
	Interest Paid	903,980						
	Average Interest Rate	3.24%						

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Agenda Item 25

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 08.03.2024

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 07.03.2024

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **21st March, 2024**

Report Subject: **Treasury Management – Treasury Strategy Statement, Investment Strategy & MRP Policy Statement 2024/2025 (including Prudential Indicators)**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Stephen Thomas, Leader/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)
	07/03/2024				14/03/2024		21/03/2024	

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is for Council to consider and agree the Treasury Strategy, Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy (including prudential indicators) to be adopted for the 2024/2025 financial year.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 The report is prepared in accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management that requires an annual Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) to be approved in advance of the relevant financial year..

2.2 In accordance with the Code, the Treasury Strategy Statement includes the Annual Investment Strategy. It is important to note that although it is called the Annual Investment Strategy, it is kept under review throughout the year and any changes required are reported to Council at that time.

2.3 The Code also recommends that Council creates and maintains a Treasury Management Policy Statement (TMPS), stating the policies and objectives of its treasury management activities. Although the Code does not require authorities to seek approval of the TMPS, it is attached as Appendix B for information.

2.4 Local Authorities are required to prepare, before the start of each financial year, a statement of their policy on making revenue provision to cover debt repayments (known as MRP or Minimum Revenue Provision) in respect of that financial year and submit it to full Council for approval. The MRP statement for 2024/25 is therefore also included as part of the Treasury Strategy Statement (last page of Appendix A).

2.5 In addition to the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, local authorities are required to prepare a Capital Strategy report, which is intended to provide: -

- a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services
- an overview of how the associated risk is managed
- the implications for future financial sustainability

The Capital Strategy for Blaenau Gwent CBC is updated annually and is subject to a separate report on today's agenda.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

To include Recommendation(s) / Endorsement by other groups, e.g. CMT/Committees/Other groups)

3.1 Option 1

Members consider the Annual Treasury Strategy Statement & Annual Investment Strategy & MRP Policy Statement for the 2024/2025 financial year and the Treasury Management Prudential Indicators contained therein (Appendix A) and determine whether any amendments are required prior to approval.

3.2 Option 2 (preferred option)

Members consider and approve the Annual Treasury Strategy Statement & Annual Investment Strategy & MRP Policy Statement for 2024/2025 financial year and the Treasury Management Prudential Indicators contained therein (Appendix A).

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

4.1 The report is written under legislation (the Local Government Act 2003), Welsh Government guidance and CIPFA codes of practice.

4.2 This report also supports the Corporate Plan Priority of being 'An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services at the right time and the right place', by ensuring effective forward financial planning arrangements are in place to support the Council's financial resilience.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

5.1.1 The Authority will comply with the CIPFA Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice 2021 and in doing so will strive for effective risk management and control, whilst at the same time pursuing best value.

5.1.2 The Treasury Strategy Statement & Annual Investment Strategy and MRP Policy Statement for 2024/2025 financial year will be adhered to at all times with the prime objectives being firstly the security and secondly the liquidity of investments. It will seek to minimise the revenue costs of debt whilst maintaining a prudent level of debt redemption. The annual investment strategy has been developed to provide additional opportunities for the higher levels of investment currently forecast into the medium term.

5.1.3 The revenue cost of debt arises through the Minimum Revenue Provision (or MRP) set aside for debt repayment. The current MRP Policy was agreed by Council in December 2021 and remains appropriate. Budget forecasts for MRP have been factored into the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

5.2.1 The main risk in relation to Treasury Management is that of credit risk and protecting the Authority's cash. This is effectively managed through the Authority's risk averse Treasury Management policy that seeks to protect the capital sum rather than maximise investment returns.

5.3 ***Legal***

N/A

5.4 ***Human Resources***

5.4.1 There are no direct staffing implications to report. Staff directly involved with Treasury Management activities will continue to receive consultancy advice, training and professional/technical updates during the year.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

6.1.1 This report sets out the Authority's prudential indicators for the 2024/2025 financial year, against which performance can be monitored throughout the year. It also sets out the borrowing and investment strategy and MRP policy that will be adhered to for the year.

- 6.1.2 The Prudential Code was developed by CIPFA, as a professional Code of Practice to support local authorities in taking their decisions on capital investment.
- 6.1.3 The key objectives of the Prudential Code are to ensure, within a clear framework, that the capital investment plans of local authorities are affordable, prudent, and sustainable. A further key objective is to ensure that treasury management decisions are taken in accordance with good professional practice and in a manner that supports prudence, affordability, and sustainability.
- 6.1.4 To demonstrate that local authorities have fulfilled these objectives, the Prudential Code sets out the indicators that must be used, and the factors that must be taken into account. The Code does not include suggested indicative limits or ratios.
- 6.1.5 The Treasury Strategy Statement attached as Appendix A includes the prudential indicators that are required to be established & monitored for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and that are recommended for approval by Council.
- 6.1.6 The Treasury Management Code requires that the Council nominate a Committee to be responsible for the effective scrutiny of Treasury Management Strategy and policies. For Blaenau Gwent CBC this role is undertaken by the Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee, the recommendation from Scrutiny will be provided verbally at Council.
- 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***
The Council's Treasury Management activities support delivery of services to the public.
- 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***
Members of the Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee and Council are involved in the development and monitoring compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Strategy.
- 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
The current MRP Policy was agreed by Council in December 2021 and has been applied from 2021/22. Budget forecasts for MRP for 2024/2025 have been factored into the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and longer-term financial planning.
- 6.5 ***Preventative focus***
The Authority's Treasury Management policy prioritises protecting the capital sum rather than achieving higher rates of interest.
- 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
N/A

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

N/A

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

The Authority will consider Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) factors when setting up any investment arrangements.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment***

See above

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee and Council will receive three reports in every annual cycle: -

- A Treasury Management Policy report prior to the start of every financial year
- A mid-year progress report on Treasury Management activity
- An end of year outturn report on Treasury Management activity

7.2 In addition, Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny Committee will receive quarterly monitoring reports on the Authority's performance against its Treasury Management Prudential Indicators.

8. **Background Documents / Electronic Links**

- Appendix A
- Appendix B

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BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Treasury Management Strategy Statement Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement

2024/25

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Council is required to operate a balanced budget, which broadly means that cash raised during the year will meet cash expenditure. Part of the treasury management operation is to ensure that this cash flow is adequately planned, with cash being available when it is needed. Surplus monies are invested in low-risk counterparties or instruments commensurate with the Council's low risk appetite, providing adequate liquidity initially before considering investment return.

The second main function of the treasury management service is the funding of the Council's capital plans. These capital plans provide a guide to the borrowing need of the Council, essentially the longer-term cash flow planning, to ensure that the Council can meet its capital spending obligations. This management of longer-term cash may involve arranging long or short-term loans or using longer-term cash flow surpluses. On occasion, when it is prudent and economic, any debt previously drawn may be restructured to meet Council risk or cost objectives.

The contribution the treasury management function makes to the authority is critical, as the balance of debt and investment operations ensure liquidity and / or the ability to meet spending commitments as they fall due, either on day-to-day revenue or for larger capital projects. The treasury operations will see a balance of the interest costs of debt and the investment income arising from cash deposits affecting the available budget. Since cash balances generally result from reserves and balances, it is paramount to ensure adequate security of the sums invested, as a loss of principal will in effect result in a loss to the Council's Council Fund Balance.

CIPFA defines Treasury Management as:

“The management of the local authority's investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks.”

Whilst any commercial initiatives or loans to third parties will impact on the treasury function, these activities are generally classed as non-treasury activities, (arising usually from capital expenditure), and are separate from the day-to-day treasury management activities. Loans to third parties will be subject to the same creditworthiness checks as any other investments, outlined in section 4.3.

To date the Authority has not engaged in any commercial investments and has no non-treasury investments but will consider proposals as they arise.

1.2 Statutory requirements

The Local Government Act 2003 (the Act) and supporting regulations requires the Council to 'have regard to' the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice to set Prudential and Treasury Indicators for the next three years to ensure that the Council's capital investment plans are affordable, prudent and sustainable.

The Act therefore requires the Council to set out its Treasury Strategy for borrowing and to prepare an Annual Investment Strategy. The Treasury Strategy details the expected activities of the Treasury function in the forthcoming financial year (2024/25). The Investment Strategy sets out the Council's policies for managing its investments and for giving priority to the security and liquidity of those investments.

Statutory Instrument WSI 2008 no. 588 section 3 lays down that:
"A local authority must calculate for the current financial year an amount of minimum revenue provision which it considers to be prudent."

Along with the above duty, the Welsh Government issued guidance in March 2008 (and further updated in November 2018) which requires that a Statement on the Authority's policy for its annual MRP should be submitted to the full Council for approval before the start of the financial year to which the provision will relate. The current MRP policy was agreed by Council in 2021 and remains appropriate, the Annual MRP Policy Statement is included at section 5.

1.3 Reporting requirements

1.3.1 Capital Strategy

The CIPFA 2021 Prudential and Treasury Management Codes require all local authorities to prepare a Capital Strategy, which will provide the following:

- a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services
- an overview of how the associated risk is managed
- the implications for future financial sustainability

The aim of this capital strategy is to ensure that all elected members of the full council fully understand the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting capital strategy requirements, governance procedures and risk appetite.

The Capital Strategy will include capital expenditure, investments and liabilities and treasury management in sufficient detail to allow all members to understand how stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability will be secured.

1.3.2 Treasury Management Code

The primary requirements of the Treasury Management Code are:

1. Creation and maintenance of a Treasury Management Policy Statement which sets out the policies and objectives of the Council's treasury management activities.
2. Creation and maintenance of Treasury Management Practices which set out the manner in which the Council will seek to achieve those policies and objectives.
3. Receipt by the full council of an annual Treasury Management Strategy Statement - including the Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy - for the year ahead, a Mid-Year Review Report and an Annual Report covering activities during the previous year.
4. Delegation by the Council of responsibilities for implementing and monitoring treasury management policies and practices and for the execution and administration of treasury management decisions, which in this Council is the Chief Officer Resources.
5. Delegation by the Council of the role of scrutiny of treasury management strategy and policies to a specific named body. For this Council the delegated body is the Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

1.4 Reporting Arrangements

The Council is currently required to receive and approve, as a minimum, three main reports each year, which incorporate a variety of policies, estimates and actuals.

- a. **The Treasury Management Strategy Statement** (this report) - The first, and most important report covers:
 - The capital plans (including prudential indicators)
 - a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy (how residual capital expenditure is charged to revenue over time);
 - the Treasury Management Strategy (how the investments and borrowings are to be organised), including treasury indicators; and
 - an Annual Investment Strategy (the parameters on how investments are to be managed).

- b. A mid year treasury management report** – This will update members with the progress of the capital position, amending prudential indicators as necessary, and an assessment of whether the treasury strategy is being met or whether any policies require revision.
- c. An annual treasury report** – This is a backward-looking review document and provides details of a selection of actual prudential and treasury indicators and actual treasury operations compared to the estimates within the strategy.

Scrutiny

The reports are required to be adequately scrutinised before being recommended to and accepted by the Full Council. This role is undertaken by the Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

Quarterly reports – In addition to the three major reports detailed above, from 2023/24 quarterly reporting (end of June/end of December) is also required. However, these additional reports do not have to be reported to Full Council but do require to be adequately scrutinised. This role is undertaken by the Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

The table below sets out the frequency of the reporting requirements:

Area of Responsibility	Frequency
Treasury Management Strategy / Investment Strategy / MRP policy	Annually before the start of the financial year
Treasury Management Strategy / Investment Strategy / MRP policy – midyear outturn report	Mid-year
Treasury Management Strategy/Performance against approved Prudential Indicators	Quarterly
Treasury Management Strategy / Investment Strategy / MRP policy – updates or revisions at other times	Ad hoc
Annual Treasury Outturn Report	Annually by 30 September after the year end.

1.5 Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25

The strategy for 2024/25 covers two main areas:

Capital issues

- the capital expenditure plans and the associated prudential indicators
- the minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy

Treasury management issues

- the current treasury position
- treasury indicators which limit the treasury risk and activities of the Council
- prospects for interest rates
- the borrowing strategy
- policy on borrowing in advance of need
- debt rescheduling
- the investment strategy
- creditworthiness policy; and
- the policy on use of external service providers.

These elements incorporate the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003, Welsh Government Investment Guidance and MRP Guidance, the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

1.6 Training

The CIPFA Treasury Management Code requires the responsible officer to ensure that members with responsibility for treasury management receive adequate training in treasury management. This especially applies to members responsible for scrutiny.

Furthermore, pages 47 and 48 of the Code state that they expect “all organisations to have a formal and comprehensive knowledge and skills or training policy for the effective acquisition and retention of treasury management knowledge and skills for those responsible for management, delivery, governance, and decision making.

The scale and nature of this will depend on the size and complexity of the organisation’s treasury management needs. Organisations should consider how to assess whether treasury management staff and board/ council members have the required knowledge and skills to undertake their roles and whether they have been able to maintain those skills and keep them up to date.

As a minimum, authorities should carry out the following to monitor and review knowledge and skills:

- Record attendance at training and ensure action is taken where poor attendance is identified.
- Prepare tailored learning plans for treasury management officers and council members.
- Require treasury management officers and council members to undertake self-assessment against the required competencies
- Have regular communication with officers and council members, encouraging them to highlight training needs on an ongoing basis.”

Members were invited to attend a training session in November 2023, provided by the Authority’s Chief Officer Resources. Further training will be arranged as required.

The training needs of treasury management officers are periodically reviewed.

A formal record of the training received by officers central to the Treasury function will be maintained by the Capital and Corporate Accounting Team. Similarly, a formal record of the treasury management/capital finance training received by members will also be maintained by the Democratic Services Department.

1.7 Treasury Consultants

The Council uses external treasury management advisors, Link Treasury Services to support its Treasury Management function, however the Council recognises that responsibility for treasury management decisions remains with the organisation at all times and will ensure that undue reliance is not placed upon the services of our external service providers. All decisions will be undertaken with regards to all available information, including, but not solely, our treasury advisers.

It also recognises that there is value in employing external providers of treasury management services to acquire access to specialist skills and resources. The Council will ensure that the terms of their appointment and the methods by which their value will be assessed are properly agreed and documented and subjected to regular review.

The Council’s current advisors are Link Group and have been appointed from May 2022.

1.8 The role of the S151 Officer

The role of the S151 Officer in relation to Treasury management has been embodied in the CIPFA Code of Practice for many years. The 2017 revised Code, further enhanced this role in relation to the following areas:

- preparation of a capital strategy to include capital expenditure, capital financing, non-financial investments and treasury management, with a long-term timeframe ensuring that the capital strategy is prudent, sustainable, affordable and prudent in the long term and provides value for money
- ensuring that due diligence has been carried out on all treasury and non-financial investments and is in accordance with the risk appetite of the authority
- ensure that the authority has appropriate legal powers to undertake expenditure on non-financial assets and their financing
- ensuring the proportionality of all investments so that the authority does not undertake a level of investing which exposes the authority to an excessive level of risk compared to its financial resources
- ensuring that an adequate governance process is in place for the approval, monitoring and ongoing risk management of all non-financial investments and long-term liabilities
- provision to members of a schedule of all non-treasury investments including material investments in subsidiaries, joint ventures, loans and financial guarantees
- ensuring that members are adequately informed and understand the risk exposures taken on by the authority
- ensuring that the authority has adequate expertise, either in house or externally provided, to carry out the above
- creation of Treasury Management Practices which specifically deal with how non treasury investments will be carried out and managed.

2. The Capital Prudential Indicators 2024/2025 – 2026/2027

The Council's capital expenditure plans are the key driver of treasury management activity. The output of the capital expenditure plans is reflected in prudential indicators, which are designed to assist members overview and confirm capital expenditure plans.

2.1 Capital Expenditure and Financing

This prudential indicator is a summary of the Council's capital expenditure plans, both those agreed previously, and those forming part of this budget cycle. The actual capital expenditure that was incurred in 2022/2023 and the estimates of capital expenditure to be incurred for the current and future years that are recommended for approval are:

Capital Expenditure £000's					
	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Total	47,849	73,233	28,145	13,998	6,305

Note

Actual figures for 2022/23 & estimated figures for 2023/2024 represent total gross capital expenditure (i.e. include all expenditure including that financed from grant).

*Estimated figures for 2024/25, 2025/26 & 2026/27 are based on the Authority's approved capital programme plus external funding approvals received at this stage and estimated spend
The higher estimate for 2023/24 relates mainly to the railway works and associated loan from WG*

The table below summarises the above capital expenditure plans and how these plans are being financed by capital or revenue resources. Any shortfall of resources results in a funding borrowing need.

Capital Expenditure £000's	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Total	47,849	73,233	28,145	13,998	6,305
Financed by:					
Grants, Capital Receipts, revenue and other sources	43,969	40,629	15,924	10,102	2,264
Net financing need for the year from USB** and PB***, & Other Borrowing	3,880	32,604	12,221	3,896	4,041

** USB – Unhypotheated Supported Borrowing – borrowing that is supported through the Revenue Support Grant.

***PB – Prudential Borrowing – borrowing that is not supported through the Revenue Support Grant.

2.2 The Council's borrowing need (the Capital Financing Requirement)

The second prudential indicator is the Council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). The CFR is simply the total historic outstanding capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for from either revenue or capital resources. It is essentially a measure of the Council's indebtedness and so its underlying borrowing need. Any capital expenditure, which has not immediately been paid for (i.e. is borrowed for), will increase the CFR.

The CFR does not increase indefinitely, as the minimum revenue provision (MRP) is a statutory annual revenue charge which broadly reduces the indebtedness in line with each asset's life, and so charges the economic consumption of capital assets as they are used.

The CFR includes any other long term liabilities (e.g. finance leases). Whilst these increase the CFR, and therefore the Council's borrowing requirement, these types of scheme include a borrowing facility and so the Council is not required to separately borrow for these schemes. The Council currently has £0.673m of such schemes within the CFR.

The CFR projections recommended for approval are shown in the table below:

Capital Financing Requirement					
	<u>2022/23</u> <u>Actual</u> <u>£000</u>	<u>2023/24</u> <u>Estimate</u> <u>£000</u>	<u>2024/25</u> <u>Estimate</u> <u>£000</u>	<u>2025/26</u> <u>Estimate</u> <u>£000</u>	<u>2026/27</u> <u>Estimate</u> <u>£001</u>
CFR at start of financial year	170,399	174,597	205,863	216,650	219,013
CFR at end of financial year	174,597	205,863	216,650	219,013	220,833
Movement in CFR	4,198	31,266	10,787	2,363	1,820
<i>Movement in CFR represented by:</i>					
Net Financing need for the year (above)	5,785	32,604	12,221	3,896	4,041
New Finance Leases	157	500	500	500	500
less MRP	-1,744	-1,838	-1,934	-2,033	-2,721
	4,198	31,266	10,787	2,363	1,820

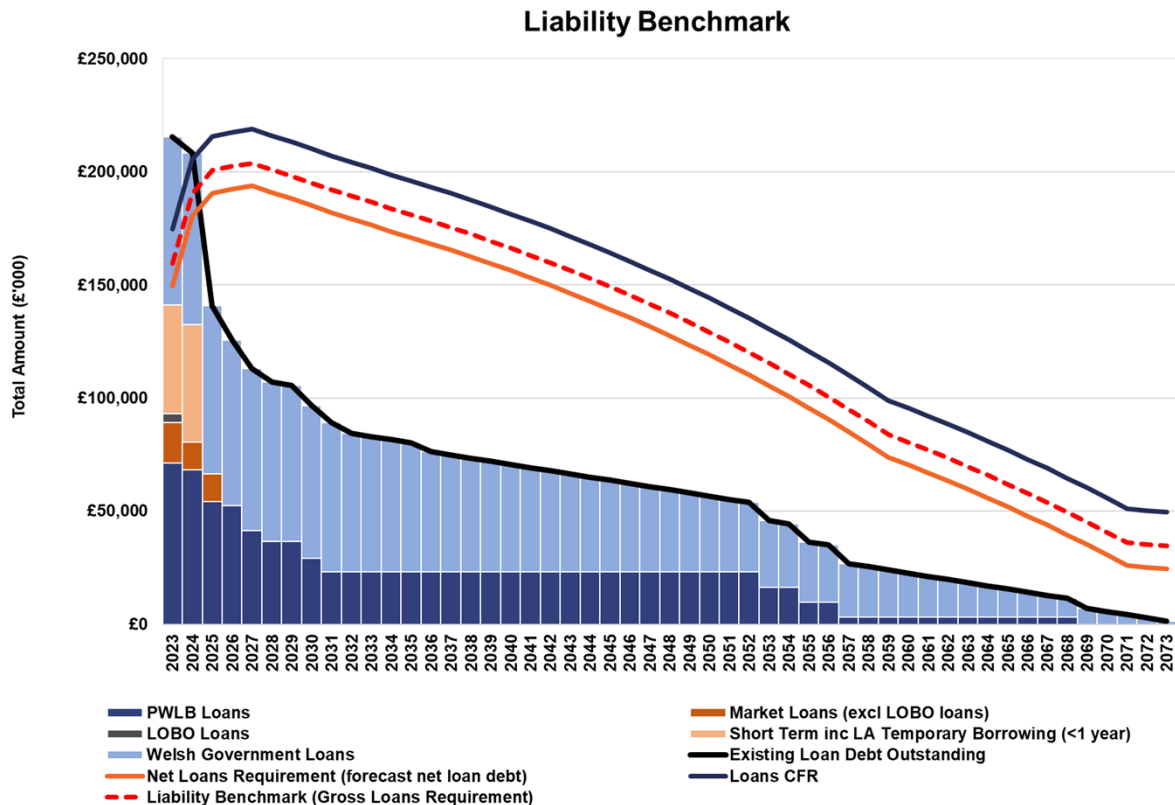
2.3 Liability Benchmark

A third prudential indicator for 2024/25 is the Liability Benchmark (LB). The Authority is required to estimate and measure the LB for the forthcoming financial year and the following two financial years, as a minimum.

There are four components to the LB: -

1. Existing loan debt outstanding: the Authority’s existing loans that are still outstanding in future years.
2. Loans CFR: this is calculated in accordance with the loans CFR definition in the Prudential Code and projected into the future based on approved prudential borrowing and planned MRP.
3. Net loans requirement: this will show the Authority’s gross loan debt less treasury management investments at the last financial year-end, projected into the future and based on its approved prudential borrowing, planned MRP and any other major cash flows forecast.
4. Liability benchmark (or gross loans requirement): this equals net loans requirement plus short-term liquidity allowance.

The chart below shows the Authority’s Liability Benchmark (dotted line) for the maturity profile of the outstanding debt.



Liability Benchmark					
	<u>2022/23</u>	<u>2023/24</u>	<u>2024/25</u>	<u>2025/26</u>	<u>2026/27</u>

APPENDIX A**Treasury Strategy Statement, Annual Investment Strategy & MRP Statement** 2024/25

	<u>Actual</u> <u>£000</u>	<u>Estimate</u> <u>£000</u>	<u>Estimate</u> <u>£000</u>	<u>Estimate</u> <u>£000</u>	<u>Estimate</u> <u>£000</u>
Liability Benchmark	161,117	190,308	200,596	202,459	203,779
Existing Loan Debt Outstanding	217,117	208,353	140,901	125,624	113,016
(Over)/Under Liability Benchmark	(56,000)	(18,044)	59,694	76,834	90,764

The liability benchmark, or the Gross Loans requirement, is the forecast of the level of debt the Council requires in accordance with its budget plans.

Where the liability benchmark is greater than the existing loan debt, it suggests that there is a borrowing requirement, and the Authority is in an under-borrowed position. Where the existing loans debt is greater than the liability benchmark, it suggests that the Authority is over-borrowed and has surplus cash requiring to be invested.

The above chart above shows that the Authority was in an over-borrowed position as at 31st March 2023, which is due to the receipt of the £70m rail loan from the Welsh Government in March 2021. As expenditure is incurred in relation to the rail scheme, this over-borrowed position will reduce as the Capital Financing Requirement begins to increase. Excess cash balances from the receipt of the loan were invested in line with the Council's Investment Strategy.

The chart also shows that as the existing loan debt outstanding decreases due to maturing debt being repaid, the Authority will have a borrowing requirement. This borrowing requirement is built into the annual Treasury Management estimates included within the Medium Term Financial Strategy and will be met via the Borrowing Strategy outlined in section 3.4 below.

2.4 Affordability prudential indicators

The previous sections cover the overall capital and control of borrowing prudential indicators, but within this framework prudential indicators are required to assess the affordability of the capital investment plans. These provide an indication of the impact of the capital investment plans on the Council's overall finances. The Council is asked to approve the following indicators:

2.5 Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream.

This indicator identifies the trend in the cost of capital (borrowing and other long term obligation costs net of investment income) against the net revenue stream.

Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream					
	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
	%	%	%	%	%
General Fund	2.41%	4.05%	3.67%	3.79%	4.16%

Note:

The estimates of financing costs for 2024/2025 include current commitments and the proposals in the budget report presented to Council in February/March

The net revenue stream for 2025/2026 & 2026/2027 are based on the following assumptions, which have been used as the basis for the Authority's medium term financial strategy (MTFS).

- *RSG & NNDR – per MTFS assumption to increase by 02.8% for 2025/26 and remains at that level for 2026/27*
- *Council Tax -assumes 4% increase per annum.*
- *Council Tax Base – increase of 0.6% from 2023/2024 level*

3.0 Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/2025

The capital expenditure plans set out in Section 2 provide details of the capital activity of the Council. The treasury management function ensures that the Council's cash is organised in accordance with the relevant professional codes, so that sufficient cash is available to meet this capital activity and the Council's Capital Strategy. This will involve both the organisation of the cash flow and, where capital plans require, the organisation of appropriate borrowing facilities. The strategy covers the relevant treasury / prudential indicators, the current and projected debt positions and the annual investment strategy.

The suggested strategy for 2024/2025 in respect of the following aspects of the treasury management function is based upon the treasury officers' views on interest rates, supplemented with leading market forecasts provided by the Council's treasury advisor, Link Treasury Services.

The Strategy covers:

- 3.1 *the current treasury portfolio position*
- 3.2 *Treasury management prudential Indicators for 2024/2025 to 2026/2027*
- 3.3 *prospects for interest rates*
- 3.4 *the borrowing strategy*
- 3.5 *policy on borrowing in advance of need*
- 3.6 *debt rescheduling*
- 3.7 *strategy on the use of usable capital receipts*

3.1 Current Treasury Portfolio Position

The Council's treasury portfolio position at 31 March 2023, with forward projections are summarised below. The table shows the actual external debt (the treasury management operations), against the underlying capital borrowing need (the Capital Financing Requirement - CFR), highlighting any over or under borrowing.

Treasury Portfolio Position					
	2022/23 Actual £000	2023/24 estimate £000	2024/25 estimate £000	2025/26 estimate £001	2026/27 estimate £002
<i>External Debt:</i>					
Debt	217,482	208,353	213,614	212,580	214,359
Other Long-Term Liabilities	264	524	685	747	810
Gross Debt as at 31 March	217,746	208,877	214,299	213,327	215,169
The Capital Financing Requirement	174,597	205,863	216,650	219,013	220,833
Under / (Over) Borrowing	-43,149	-3,014	2,351	5,686	5,664

The Council is currently in an over borrowed position. This means its actual debt is higher than its capital financing requirement in the current year, this is as a result of Welsh Government providing the Authority with a specific loan in relation to the Rail Track in March 2021. However, the table indicates that as expenditure is incurred in relation to this capital scheme, the Authority will revert to its under borrowed position over time.

Within the range of prudential indicators there are a number of key indicators to ensure that the Council operates its activities within well-defined limits. One of these is that the Council needs to ensure that its gross debt does not, except in the short term, exceed the total of the CFR in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional CFR for 2024/25 and the following two financial years. This allows some flexibility for limited early borrowing for future years but ensures that borrowing is not undertaken for revenue or speculative purposes.

The Chief Officer Resources reports that the Council complied with this prudential indicator in the current year and does not envisage difficulties for the future. This view takes account of current commitments, existing plans, and the proposals in the budget report.

3.2 Treasury Management Prudential Indicators for 2024/25 – 2026/27

The following section sets out the Treasury Management Prudential Indicators that are recommended for approval.

3.2.1 Adoption of CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management

In December 2021, CIPFA issued a revised CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management in the Public Services, the Council will continue to comply with this.

3.2.2 Treasury management limits on activity

There are four debt related treasury activity limits. The purpose of these are to restrain the activity of the treasury function within certain limits, thereby managing risk and reducing the impact of any adverse movement in interest rates. However, if these are too restrictive they will impair the opportunities to reduce costs / improve performance. The indicators are:

- **Upper Limit on Fixed Interest exposure**

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has always adopted a risk averse strategy in relation to variable rate debt and should interest rates rise the Authority would wish to continue with its strategy of maintaining a stable long-term portfolio by drawing longer term fixed rate funding. In order to be consistent with this strategy, the upper limit on fixed rate exposures for 2024/2025, 2025/2026 & 2026/2027 should be set at 100% of its net outstanding sums.

- **Upper Limit on Variable Interest Exposure**

In order to give the flexibility to enable debt rescheduling opportunities to be undertaken, the upper limit on variable rate exposures for 2025/2026, 2026/2027 & 2027/2028 should be set at 30% of its net outstanding sums.

- **Range of Exposures**

This means that the Chief Officer Resources will manage fixed interest exposures within the range 70% to 100% and variable rate exposures within the range 0% to 30%. This is a continuation of current practice.

- **Maturity Structure of Fixed Rate Borrowing**

It is recommended that the Council sets upper and lower limits for the maturity structure of its borrowings as follows:

The amount of projected borrowing that is fixed rate and maturing in each period, as a percentage of total projected borrowing that is fixed rate, is illustrated in the table below. This is a continuation of the current practice.

	Upper Limit	Lower Limit
Under 12 months	20%	0%
12 months & within 24 months	20%	0%
24 months and within 5 years	50%	0%
5 years and within 10 years	75%	0%
10 years and above	95%	5%

3.2.3 Authorised Limit for External Debt

This is a key Prudential Indicator that represents a control on the maximum level of borrowing. This represents a legal limit beyond which external debt is prohibited, and this limit needs to be set or revised by the full Council. It reflects the level of external debt which, while not desired, could be afforded in the short term, but is not sustainable in the longer term.

This is the statutory limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003. The Government retains an option to control either the total of all councils' plans, or those of a specific council, although this power has not yet been exercised.

It is recommended that the Council approves the following Authorised Limits for its Total External Debt Gross of Investments for the next three financial years.

Authorised limit for external debt				
	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000
Borrowing	247,580	250,433	249,103	243,724
Other long-term liabilities	803	576	754	822
Total	248,383	251,009	249,856	244,545

3.2.4 Operational Boundary

This is the limit beyond which external debt is not normally expected to exceed. In most cases, this would be a similar figure to the CFR, but may be lower or higher depending on the levels of actual debt and the ability to fund under-borrowing by other cash resources.

The proposed Operational Boundary for external debt is based on the same estimates as the Authorised Limit but directly reflects the Chief Officer Resources' prudent estimate of the most likely but not worst-case scenario. It excludes the contingency included within the Authorised Limit (to allow for example for unusual cash movements) and equates to the maximum of external debt projected by this estimate. The Operational Boundary represents a key management tool for in year monitoring by the Chief Officer Resources.

It is recommended that the Council approves the following Operational Boundary Limits for the next three financial years.

Operational Boundary for external debt				
	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000
Borrowing	225,073	227,666	226,457	221,567
Other long term liabilities	730	524	685	747
Total	225,803	228,190	227,142	222,314

3.2.5 Actual External Debt

The Council's actual external debt as at 31 March 2023 was £217.5 million (including temporary borrowing), comprising 99.9% borrowing and 0.1% other long term liabilities. It should be noted that actual external debt is not directly comparable to the Authorised Limit and Operational Boundary since the actual debt reflects the position at one point in time.

3.3 Prospects for Interest Rates

As part of their service, the Council's treasury advisor Link Group, assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. The following table illustrates expected rates to March 2027:

Link Group Interest Rate View 08.01.24													
	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26	Mar-27
BANK RATE	5.25	5.25	4.75	4.25	3.75	3.25	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
3 month ave earnings	5.30	5.30	4.80	4.30	3.80	3.30	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
6 month ave earnings	5.20	5.10	4.60	4.10	3.70	3.30	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10
12 month ave earnings	5.00	4.90	4.40	3.90	3.60	3.20	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.20	3.20
5 yr PWLB	4.50	4.40	4.30	4.20	4.10	4.00	3.80	3.70	3.60	3.60	3.50	3.50	3.50
10 yr PWLB	4.70	4.50	4.40	4.30	4.20	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.80	3.70	3.70	3.70	3.70
25 yr PWLB	5.20	5.10	4.90	4.80	4.60	4.40	4.30	4.20	4.20	4.10	4.10	4.10	4.10
50 yr PWLB	5.00	4.90	4.70	4.60	4.40	4.20	4.10	4.00	4.00	3.90	3.90	3.90	3.90

Additional notes by Link on this forecast table: -

- *Forecast for interest rates reflect a view that the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) would be keen to further demonstrate its anti-inflation credentials by keeping Bank Rate at 5.25% until at least the second half of 2024. Rate cuts are expected to start when both the CPI inflation and wage/employment data are supportive of such a move, and when there is a likelihood of the overall economy enduring at least a slowdown or mild recession over the coming months (although most recent GDP releases have surprised with their on-going robustness).*
- *Naturally, timing on this matter will remain one of fine judgment: cut too soon, and inflationary pressures may well build up further; cut too late and any downturn or recession may be prolonged.*
- *In the upcoming months, forecasts will be guided not only by economic data releases and clarifications from the MPC over its monetary policies and the Government over its fiscal policies, but also international factors such as policy development in the US and Europe, the provision of fresh support packages to support the faltering recovery in China as well as the on-going conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and Gaza and Israel.*

Forecasts for Bank Rate

- As shown in the forecast table above, the forecast for Bank Rate now indicates we are currently at the peak of 5.25%. The forecast now expects the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to begin cutting rates by September 2024, with a steady decline down to 3.00% in the mid-term.

Gilt yields / PWLB rates

The overall longer-run trend is for gilt yields and PWLB rates to fall back over the timeline of our forecasts, as inflation continues to fall through 2024.

Link's target borrowing rates are set two years forward (as we expect rates to fall back) and the current PWLB (certainty) borrowing rates are set out below: -

PWLB debt	Current borrowing rate as at 08.01.24 p.m.	Target borrowing rate now (end of Q4 2025)	Target borrowing rate previous (end of Q3 2025)
5 years	4.53%	3.70%	3.80%
10 years	4.67%	3.90%	3.80%
25 years	5.19%	4.20%	4.20%
50 years	4.97%	4.00%	4.00%

Investment and borrowing rates

Investment returns are expected to fall during the later half of 2024/25 in line with the markets expectations of rate cuts made by the Bank of England. However, while rates are forecast to decrease, actual economic circumstances may see the MPC fall short of these expectations and keep rates higher for longer.

Borrowing interest rates fell to historically very low rates as a result of the COVID crisis and the quantitative easing operations of the Bank of England. The Bank of England has since increased the base rate, now to its current rate of 5.25%. The policy of avoiding new borrowing by running down spare cash balances has served local authorities well over the last few years.

On 25 November 2020, the Chancellor announced the conclusion to the review of margins over gilt yields for PWLB rates which had been increased by 100 bps in October 2019. The standard and certainty margins were reduced by 100 bps but a prohibition was introduced to deny access to borrowing from the PWLB for any local authority which had purchase of assets for yield in its three-year capital programme. The current margins over gilt yields are as follows: -.

- **PWLB Standard Rate** is gilt plus 100 basis points (G+100bps)
- **PWLB Certainty Rate** is gilt plus 80 basis points (G+80bps)
- **PWLB HRA Standard Rate** is gilt plus 100 basis points (G+100bps)
- **PWLB HRA Certainty Rate** is gilt plus 80bps (G+80bps)
- **Local Infrastructure Rate** is gilt plus 60bps (G+60bps)

Borrowing for capital expenditure. The long-term (beyond 10 years) forecast for Bank Rate remains at 3% and reflects Capital Economics' research that suggests AI and general improvements in productivity will be supportive of a higher neutral interest rate. As all PWLB certainty rates are currently significantly above this level, borrowing strategies will need to be reviewed in that context. Overall, better value can be obtained at the shorter end of the curve and short-dated fixed LA to LA monies should be considered. Temporary borrowing rates will remain elevated for some time to come but may prove the best option whilst the market continues to factor in Bank Rate reductions for 2024 and later.

While this authority will not be able to avoid borrowing to finance new capital expenditure and to replace maturing debt the cost of carry will be minimised, (the difference between higher borrowing costs and lower investment returns).

3.4 The Borrowing Strategy

The Council is currently in an over borrowed position. This means its actual debt is higher than its capital financing requirement in the current year, this is as a result of Welsh Government providing the Authority with a specific interest free loan in relation to the Rail Track project. However, as expenditure is incurred in relation to the scheme, the Authority will revert to its under borrowed position.

The Authority's borrowing strategy continues to address the key issue of affordability without compromising the longer-term stability of the debt portfolio. With short term interest rates currently lower than long term rates, it is likely to be more cost effective in the short term to either use internal resources, or to borrow short term loans instead.

By doing so, the Authority is able to reduce borrowing costs and reduce overall treasury risk. This results in the Council having a low liquidity ratio, however the risk associated with this is minimal and is continually monitored. The benefits of short-term borrowing will be monitored regularly against the potential for incurring additional costs by deferring borrowing into future years when long-term borrowing rates are forecast to decrease. The Council's Treasury Advisors will assist the Authority with this cost of carry and breakeven analysis.

In addition, the Authority will borrow short term loans to cover cash flow shortages.

The borrowing strategy to be adopted will therefore be:

(Each strand of the strategy will be considered together, and decisions made based on the most advantageous position for the Authority at that time).

To utilise the Authority's overdraft facility:

to fund unexpected daily cash deficits;
to fund temporary cash shortfalls where there are no other sources of funding available within the marketplace.

To borrow over the short term:

to fund temporary cash shortfalls;
to maintain a suitably balanced maturity profile;
to make short term savings required in order to meet budgetary constraints;
in anticipation of securing longer term loans at more attractive rates.

To borrow over the long term:

to reduce the Authority's average cost of borrowing;
to maintain a stable, longer term portfolio;
to maximise the potential for future debt rescheduling.

If appropriate to avoid all new external borrowing:

to maximise savings in the short term;
to run down temporary investment levels;
to minimise exposure to interest rate and credit risk.

Sensitivity of the forecast – In normal circumstances the main sensitivities of the forecast are likely to be the two scenarios noted below. Against this background and the risks within the economic forecast, caution will be adopted with the 2024/25 treasury operations. The Chief Officer Resources will monitor interest rates in financial markets and adopt a pragmatic approach to changing circumstances:

- *if it was felt that there was a significant risk of a sharp FALL in borrowing rates, then borrowing will be postponed.*
- *if it was felt that there was a significant risk of a much sharper RISE in borrowing rates than that currently forecast, fixed rate funding will be drawn whilst interest rates are lower than they are projected to be in the next few years.*

3.5 Policy on borrowing in advance of need

The Council will not borrow more than or in advance of its needs purely in order to profit from the investment of the extra sums borrowed. Any decision to borrow in advance will be within forward approved Capital Financing Requirement estimates and will be carefully considered to ensure value for money can be demonstrated and that the Council can ensure the security of such funds.

In determining whether borrowing will be undertaken in advance of need the Council will;

- ensure that there is a clear link between the capital programme and maturity profile of the existing debt portfolio which supports the need to take funding in advance of need
- ensure the ongoing revenue liabilities created, and the implications for the future plans and budgets have been considered
- evaluate the economic and market factors that might influence the manner and timing of any decision to borrow
- consider the merits and demerits of alternative forms of funding
- consider the alternative interest rate bases available, the most appropriate periods to fund and repayment profiles to use.
- consider the impact of borrowing in advance on temporarily (until required to finance capital expenditure) increasing investment cash balances and the consequent increase in exposure to counterparty risk, and other risks, and the level of such risks given the controls in place to minimise them.

3.6 Debt Rescheduling

As short term borrowing rates will be still be cheaper than longer term rates, there may be potential for some residual opportunities to generate savings by switching from long term debt to short term debt. However, these savings will need to be considered in the light of the size of premiums incurred, their short term nature, and the likely cost of refinancing those short term loans, once they mature, compared to the current rates of longer term debt in the existing debt portfolio.

The reasons for any rescheduling to take place will include: -

- the generation of cash savings and / or discounted cash flow savings
- helping to fulfil the strategy outlined in paragraph 3.4 above
- enhance the balance of the portfolio (amend the maturity profile and/or the balance of volatility).

Variations in risk will be considered when evaluating such opportunities, in order to ensure that the Authority's risk averse strategy is maintained.

All rescheduling will be reported to Council as part of the mid-year and Annual Treasury Outturn reports.

3.7 Strategy on the use of Usable Capital Receipts

The long standing policy on usable capital receipts is that they are immediately invested internally, thereby helping to improve the Authority's cash flow position and reducing the level of external loans that need to be raised. This in turn reduces external interest charges from the money market. This approach is consistent with what is regarded as good practice in terms of strategic level treasury management and overall produces savings in debt servicing costs for the Authority. However, as approved sums of usable capital receipts are subsequently used to finance part

of the annual capital programme each year, appropriate allowance then needs to be made for the use of these receipts in determining the estimated level of external borrowing required for that year. Hence usable capital receipts are released on a controlled basis and the annual estimates for external interest charges are adjusted accordingly.

4.0 Annual Investment Strategy

4.1 Background

The Welsh Government and CIPFA have extended the meaning of ‘investments’ to include both financial and non-financial investments. This report deals solely with treasury (financial) investments, (as managed by the treasury management team). Non-financial investments, essentially the purchase of income yielding assets, are covered in the Capital Strategy, (a separate report).

In setting its investment strategy the Council has regard to the following: -

- Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2003
- The Welsh Government’s Guidance on Local Government Investments (“the Guidance”)
- CIPFA Treasury Management in Public Services Code of Practice and Cross Sectoral Guidance Notes 2021 (“the Code”)
- CIPFA Treasury Management Guidance Notes 2021

The Council’s investment priorities are:

1. The **Security** of the capital sum – ensuring that our investments are safe and not at risk of being lost;
2. The **Liquidity** of its investments – ensuring that our investments are easily accessible i.e. not tied up for long periods of time;
3. Return on investment (**Yield**) – once security and liquidity have been satisfied in line with the Council’s risk appetite, then and only then will the Council seek the maximum return on its investment.

The Borrowing of monies purely to invest or on-lend and make a return is unlawful and this Council will not engage in such activity.

Investments will be made with reference to the core balance and cash flow requirements and the outlook for short-term interest rates (i.e. rates for investments up to 12 months). Greater returns are usually obtainable by investing for longer periods. The Council mainly maintains temporary, short-term investments (i.e. for periods of less than a year) and investments will accordingly only normally be made with reference to the cash flow requirements, including the investing of sums borrowed at prevailing low interest rates in anticipation of capital spending. Due to the receipt of cash in relation to specific capital schemes (Rail

Track project) where spend was likely to be incurred over a 5-year period, this has identified cash that could be invested for longer periods, this annual investment strategy has been amended to reflect this

Investment returns expectations

The current forecast shown in paragraph 3.3, includes a forecast for the decreases in Bank Rate during the second half of 2024.

The suggested budgeted investment earnings rates for returns on investments placed for periods up to about three months during each financial year are as follows:

Average earnings in each year	
2023/24 (residual)	5.30%
2024/25	4.55%
2025/26	3.10%
2026/27	3.00%
Long term later years	3.25%

For its cash flow generated balances, the Council will seek to utilise the Local Authority lending market, notice accounts, money market funds and short-dated deposits, in order to benefit from the compounding of interest.

4.2 Definition of Investments – Specified and non-specified

The Local Government Act 2003 refers to specified and non-specified investments. The Welsh Assembly Government's Guidance on Local Government Investments, effective from 1st April 2010, defines the following:-

Specified Investments:

An investment is a **specified** one if **all** of the following apply:-

- (a) it is denominated in sterling and any payments or repayments in respect of it are payable only in sterling
- (b) the investment is not a long-term one i.e. one which is due to be repaid within 12 months of the date on which the investment was made or one which may require to be repaid within that period
- (c) the making of the investment is not defined as capital expenditure by virtue of regulation 20(1)(d) of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (Wales) Regulations 2003 [SI 3239 as amended]
- (d) the investment is made with a body or in an investment scheme of * high credit quality or with one of the following public sector bodies:

- i. the UK Government
- ii. a local authority in England or Wales (as defined in section 23 of the 2003 Act) or a similar body in Scotland or Northern Ireland
- iii. a parish or community council.

* High credit quality is defined in the creditworthiness policy in 4.3

Non-specified Investments:

- (i) An investment is non-specified if it does not meet the above definition.

As a result of the change in accounting standards for 2023/24 under IFRS 9, this authority will consider the implications of investment instruments which could result in an adverse movement in the value of the amount invested and resultant charges at the end of the year to the Council Fund. The Welsh Government has passed a statutory override to allow Welsh local authorities time to adjust their portfolio of all pooled investments by delaying implementation of IFRS 9 for five years until 31 March 2023. More recently, a further extension to the over-ride to 31 March 2025 has been agreed by Welsh Government.

4.3 Creditworthiness policy

In accordance with the guidance from the Welsh Government and CIPFA, and in order to minimise the risk to investments, the Council applies the creditworthiness service provided by its Treasury Advisors. This service employs a sophisticated modelling approach utilising credit ratings from the three main credit rating agencies - Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's. The credit ratings of counterparties are supplemented with the following overlays:

- “watches” and “outlooks” from credit rating agencies;
- CDS spreads that may give early warning of changes in credit ratings;
- sovereign ratings to select counterparties from only the most creditworthy countries

Counterparties for investment purposes are selected using specific criteria, as follows:

Banks - high credit quality – the Council will only use banks which:

- are UK banks; and/or
- are non-UK and domiciled in a country which has a minimum sovereign Long Term rating of AAA (any non UK transactions would be undertaken in Sterling).

- and have, as a **minimum**, the following Fitch, Moody's and Standard and Poor's credit ratings (where rated):

Table 1:

	Fitch	Moody's	S&P
Long Term	A-	A3	A-
Short Term	F1	P-1	A-1

Long term rating – covers maturities of up to five years. It provides an assessment of the ongoing stability of the institutions prospective financial condition. **A** indicates high credit quality and low expectation of credit risk. The + or – suffixes are appended to a rating to denote the relative status within the long term rating category. The Moody's and S&P definitions are similar to Fitch. The Moody's numerical suffix indicates a rating at the higher end of the scale (1) to the lower end of the scale (3), with 1 having higher credit quality than 3.

Short term rating – covers obligations which have a maturity of less than one year. This rating places greater emphasis on the liquidity necessary to meet financial commitments. Rating **F1 (Fitch)** is the highest short term credit quality rating. It indicates the strongest capacity for timely payment of financial commitments. The Moody's and S&P definitions are similar to Fitch.

- Part nationalised UK bank** – Royal Bank of Scotland Group (NatWest, Royal Bank of Scotland, Ulster Bank). This bank can be included provided it continues to be part nationalised or it meets the ratings in Banks above.
- The Council's own banker (Barclays)** – Since under existing arrangements excess surplus funds can be held overnight with the Council's Bank, unexpected credit rating downgrades to the Bank could result in these short-term investments technically being placed with a counterparty that does not meet the minimum approved credit criteria specified above. The S&P short term rating for Barclays is A-1. A-1 means that S&P consider Barclays capacity to meet its financial commitment on its obligations as strong. Fitch and Moody's both consider this to be strong. The minimum credit rating for Barclays will therefore be A-1 (S&P) with F1 for Fitch and P-1 for Moody's. Whilst this will mean that Barclay's S&P credit ratings could be lower than those required for other institutions (as detailed above), investments with Barclays will be restricted to the overnight (or over weekend) sweep facility (where surplus balances are "swept" into an interest bearing account) up to a maximum of £10 million.

Should Barclays' credit ratings continue to meet the credit criteria required for other institutions (above), then the investment periods for

meeting the minimum criteria will continue to be applied. See below for contingency arrangements in relation to the Authority's bank.

Table 2:

	Fitch	Moody's	S&P
Long Term	A+	A1	A
Short Term	F1	P-1	A-1

- **Building societies** - The Council will *use only* the Nationwide Building Society, unless their short term credit ratings fall below the minimum specified in table 1 above for banks.
- **AAA rated Money market funds (MMFs)** – Triple A rated MMFs are considered to be highly credit rated.
- **UK Government** - The Debt Management Account Deposit Facility DMADF of the Debt Management Office (DMO). The DMO is legally and constitutionally part of HM Treasury and as an Executive Agency of Her Majesty's Treasury it operates at arm's length from Ministers. The DMO is considered to be highly credit rated.
- **UK Local authorities**, Police Authorities, parish councils etc.
- **Corporate Bonds, Ultra short and short duration bonds** - The council will invest in corporate bonds in line with the criteria below

Use of additional information other than credit ratings

Additional requirements under the Code require the Council to supplement credit rating information. Whilst the above criteria relies primarily on the application of credit ratings to provide a pool of appropriate counterparties for officers to use, additional operational market information must be applied before making any specific investment decision from the agreed pool of counterparties. Ratings will therefore not be the sole determinant of the quality of an institution and the assessment will therefore also take account of information that reflects the opinion of the markets, as follows:

Credit default swaps (CDS)

The Council will engage with its Treasury advisors to maintain a monitor on market pricing such as "credit default swaps (CDS)" and overlay that information on top of the credit ratings.

CDS spreads offer a timely market perception of the risk attached to the relevant institution. These can, on occasion, pre-empt actions by the credit rating agencies whose ratings can lag behind market reaction to changes in the credit institutions situation. Since they are traded instruments, they carry in them market perception related to that entity's credit quality. In order to "measure" the CDS data, the

Authority uses a benchmark system which allows the CDS spread of an institution to be compared against a predetermined benchmark rate. This data is then used to assess whether the market is indicating that an institution's credit quality is a cause for concern. Where there is a cause for concern then the counterparty will be either downgraded in terms of investment period or removed from the approved list.

Credit Rating Agency Comments

➤ *Rating Watch negative (or on review for possible downgrade)*

Where the credit rating agencies have placed counterparties on "rating watch negative" or "on review for possible downgrade", then this indicates that there is a reasonable probability of a rating change in a relatively short period (a few weeks). If the counterparty is on negative rating watch, then it will be downgraded in terms of the investment period or removed from the list.

➤ *Negative Outlook*

This indicates the direction a rating is likely to move over a one to two year period.

Time and monetary limits applying to investments.

The table below shows the time and monetary limits per institution on the Council's counterparty list:

	Long term Rating (Fitch, Moody's, S&P)	Short term rating (Fitch, Moody's, S&P)	Money Limit	Time Limit
Banks - higher quality	AAA, Aa2, AA	F1+, P-1, A-1+	£15m	3 years
Banks - medium quality (including Nationwide BS)	A-, A3, A-	F1, P-1, A-1	£6m	2 years
Banks – part nationalised	N/A	N/A	£4m	2 years
Council's banker (not meeting Banks - medium)	A+, A1, A	F1, P-1, A-1	£10m	overnight
DMADF	AAA	N/A	unlimited	6 months
Corporate bonds, ultra-short and short duration bonds	AA, A	A-1	£10m	4 years
Local authorities – per Authority	N/A	N/A	£10m	3 years
	Fund rating		Money Limit	Time Limit
Money market funds – per MMF	AAA		£10m	liquid

Country and Group Limits

The Council has determined that it will only use approved counterparties from non UK countries with a minimum sovereign rating of AAA from Fitch (Aa2 Moody's, AAA S&P).

In addition, no more than £6m will be placed with any non-UK Bank/Financial Institution at any time.

For financial institutions included within the same banking group, the counterparty limit will apply to the group.

Lloyds Banking Group

- Halifax Lloyds Bank Bank of Scotland

RBS Group

- National Westminster Royal Bank of Scotland Ulster Bank

4.4 Contingency Arrangements for the Authority's Corporate Bank

If credit agency ratings change and the Authority's Corporate Bank fails to comply with the approved Investment Policy criteria specified above, then delegated authority, to agree appropriate and reasonable interim contingency arrangements prior to approval by Full Council, is granted to the Members and Officers listed below:

- Nominated Members: Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council, Chair of Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee.
- Nominated Officer: Statutory Section 151 Officer (Chief Officer Resources)

The Statutory Section 151 Officer and at least two of the three nominated Members, must approve unanimously the appropriate and reasonable interim contingency arrangements.

4.5 Monitoring of credit ratings

Guidance states that the Annual Investment Strategy must state how credit ratings are to be monitored and what action is to be taken when ratings change.

The responsibility for constructing and amending the Council's approved counterparty investment list is delegated to the Chief Officer Resources and is

contained within the Treasury Management Practice Schedules. All investments will be made in accordance with this list and the limits therein.

Credit ratings for individual counterparties can change at any time. The Chief Officer Resources is responsible for applying the stated credit rating criteria above, and will add or delete counterparties as appropriate to / from the approved counterparty list when there is a change in the credit ratings of individual counterparties or in banking structures. The Authority is alerted to changes in credit ratings through its Treasury Advisors.

- If a downgrade results in the counterparty/investment scheme no longer meeting the Authority's minimum criteria, its further use as a new investment will be withdrawn immediately.
- If a body is placed on negative rating watch (i.e. there is a reasonable probability of a rating change and the likelihood of that change being negative) and it is currently near at the minimum acceptable rating for placing investments with that body, then no further investments will be made with that body.

The only exception permitted to these criteria will be the contingency arrangement for the Authority's bank described in section 4.4

4.6 Liquidity of Investments

The maximum period for which funds may be committed will depend upon future cash flow requirements and will comply with the maximum period permitted (as specified in the table above).

Specified investments may comprise up to 100% of the Council's total investments

The Authority will consider investing in long-term investments in order to manage the cash profile associated with the specific rail project. Excluding the UK Government, it is suggested that no more than £15m be placed with any one institution with duration as set out in the table above. The Authority will not have more than £50m deposited in long-term investments (the Upper Limit).

4.7 Ethical investing

Investment guidance, both statutory and from CIPFA, makes clear that the SLY principles i.e. security, liquidity and yield must remain fundamental to Local Authority investing: however ethical issues may play a subordinate role to this. It should be noted, that local authority investing, incorporates Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) metrics into credit rating agency assessments and a growing number of financial institutions and fund managers/money market

funds promote ESG products. Therefore, where appropriate the Authority will consider ESG factors when setting up any investment arrangements.

4.8 Investment monitoring reports

The Council will report on its investment activity as part of its mid-year and Annual Treasury Outturn Report.

5. Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement

The Secretary of State recommends that before the start of each financial year a local authority prepares a statement of its policy on making MRP in respect of that financial year and submits it to full Council.

Under regulation 22 of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (Wales) Regulations 2003, local authorities are required to charge to their revenue account for each financial year MRP to account for the principal cost of their debt in that financial year.

For 2007/8 and subsequent financial years, the detailed calculation has been replaced with a requirement that local authorities calculate an amount of MRP which they consider to be prudent. Local Authorities are legally obliged to “have regard” to such guidance (i.e. set a prudent MRP) – which is exactly the same duty as applies to other statutory guidance including the Prudential Code and CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

The broad aim of prudent provision is to ensure that debt is repaid over a period reasonably commensurate with that over which the capital expenditure provides benefits, or, in the case of borrowing supported by Revenue Support Grant (RSG), reasonably commensurate with the period implicit in the determination of that grant.

The legislation does not define what constitutes a “prudent provision”. However, the MRP guidance issued by the Secretary of State (WG) interprets the term and provides some ready-made examples of acceptable methods for calculating a prudent level of MRP.

The Council’s current approved MRP policy is as follows:

MRP on Supported Borrowing – this element of the CFR will be calculated on an annuity basis over 50 years.

MRP on Unsupported Borrowing – this will be based on Option 3 of the statutory guidance that allows for MRP provision using the asset life methodology on an annuity basis. The calculation looks at the average asset life for all unsupported borrowing in each year and applies the annuity calculation to the total unsupported

borrowing capital expenditure for that year. The annuity method can be argued as providing a fairer charge than equal instalments as it takes into account the time value of money. The interest rate to be used in the annuity calculation is the weighted average PWLB annuity rate. Estimated life periods will be determined under delegated powers. To the extent that expenditure is not on the creation of an asset and is of a type that is subject to estimated life periods that are referred to in the guidance, these periods will generally be adopted by the Council. However, the Council reserves the right to determine useful life periods and prudent MRP in exceptional circumstances where the recommendations of the guidance would not be appropriate.

In addition, the guidance allows for MRP to be deferred for assets under construction and this part of the guidance is adopted because the asset is not used by the authority until it is operational and therefore the MRP will match the life of the asset.

MRP on Finance Leases - Option 3 will apply in a modified form, to ensure that the MRP for Finance Leases is equal to the rental payable each year, with the following exception for capital receipts.

Capital Receipts – In circumstances where it is prudent to do so and to protect Council Tax payers from unnecessary MRP charges, capital receipts received will be used to reduce the Council's overall borrowing requirement, rather than making a conventional MRP charge to revenue.

Loans to third parties – where loans are made to other bodies for their capital expenditure, then the capital receipts generated by the annual repayments on those loans will be put aside to repay debt instead of charging MRP. However, if there is a risk during the term of the loan that collateral held as security is not sufficient to meet its obligations or there is a likelihood of default, a prudent MRP will commence as a charge to the Authority's revenue account.

Voluntary repayment of debt - the Authority may make additional voluntary debt repayment provision from revenue or capital resources. If it does so, this will be disclosed in the Authority's Statement of Accounts. The Section 151 officer can then choose to offset previous years disclosed overpayments against the current year's prudent provision providing the amount charged is not less than zero.

Application of retrospective sum – The remaining £3.2m retrospective adjustment balance from the previous MRP Policy review in 2017/18, has been re-profiled over the period 2021/22 to 2025/26. However, it is important to note that all figures have been calculated prospectively and do not amend any previous years calculations, in line with the Welsh Government Guidance which applied from April 2019.

CP 15/02/2024

APPENDIX B Treasury Management Policy Statement

1. This organisation defines its treasury management activities as: “The management of the authority’s investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks”.
2. This organisation regards the successful identification, monitoring and control of risk to be the prime criteria by which the effectiveness of its treasury management activities will be measured. Accordingly, the analysis and reporting of treasury management activities will focus on their risk implications for the organisation.
3. This organisation acknowledges that effective treasury management will provide support towards the achievement of its business and service objectives. It is therefore committed to the principles of achieving value for money in treasury management, and to employing suitable comprehensive performance measurement techniques, within the context of effective risk management.”

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Agenda Item 26

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 08.03.2024

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 07.03.2024

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **21st March, 2024**

Report Subject: **Capital Strategy 2024/2025**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Stephen Thomas, Leader/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)
	07/03/2024				14/03/2024		21/03/2024	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to give members the opportunity to consider the Capital Strategy (attached at Appendix 1) following the annual review, to be adopted for the financial year 2024/2025.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities, revised in 2017, introduced the concept of a Capital Strategy with effect from April 2019. Appendix 1 to this report is the proposed Capital Strategy for this Council.
- 2.2 The capital strategy is intended to give a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future financial sustainability. The development of a capital strategy allows flexibility to engage with full council to ensure that the overall strategy, governance procedures and risk appetite are fully understood by all elected members.
- 2.3 The Capital Strategy is reviewed and updated annually to ensure that the Council's Corporate Plan priorities continue to be delivered.

3. **Options for Recommendation**
 - 3.1 **Option 1 (Preferred Option)**

Members consider the Capital Strategy for the 2024/25 financial year (attached as appendix 1) and do not consider any amendments.
 - 3.2 **Option 2**

Members consider the Capital Strategy for the 2024/25 financial year (attached as appendix 1) and consider any amendments.
4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
 - 4.1 The Capital Strategy is aligned to the Corporate Plan and Well-being Plan and will inform the way in which long term service objectives are delivered.
 - 4.2 The Capital Strategy is intended to take a long-term view which reflects the requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.
5. **Implications Against Each Option**
 - 5.1 **Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)**
 - 5.1.1 The detailed financial implications of the Capital Strategy are contained within the Capital Programme, Treasury Management Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
 - 5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**
 - 5.2.1 The identification and mitigation of risk is contained within the Capital Strategy document.
 - 5.3 **Legal**
 - 5.3.1 There are a number of statutory requirements relating to capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity that the Council must adhere to.
 - 5.4 **Human Resources**

N/A
6. **Supporting Evidence**
 - 6.1 **Performance Information and Data**
 - 6.1.1 The Performance information is contained within Appendix 1 – Capital Strategy

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

6.2.1 The Capital Strategy will detail the financial implications for the Council in providing capital investment for the communities of Blaenau Gwent.

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

6.3.1 The Corporate Leadership Team will consider the long-term implications of capital investment and how the governance arrangements in place through full Council, enable decisions to be made by elected members.

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

6.4.1 The Capital Strategy summarises the capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management arrangements of the Authority, for the long term.

6.5 **Preventative focus**

6.5.1 The Capital Strategy will assist in the prevention of projects outside of the Council's service objectives and priorities proceeding.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

6.6.1 The future development of the Capital Strategy, particularly in relation to commercial investments, will require a collaborative / partnership approach.

6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

6.7.1 The future development of the Capital Strategy will require an integrated approach across all services.

6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

6.8.1 The Council is committed to the Decarbonisation Plan to achieve a carbon neutral public sector by 2030. The Capital Programme currently contains schemes which promote the reduction of carbon emissions such as ReFIT, Electric Vehicle Charge Points and Carbon reduction schemes. New Council buildings should be designed to the latest energy efficiency standards.

6.8.2 The Authority also considers Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) factors when setting up any investment arrangements. For example, we would avoid investing in companies linked with fossil fuels.

6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment**

See above.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The Capital Strategy will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis and be reported to full Council.

However, monitoring reports are submitted to Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee during the financial year as follows:

- Capital Programme – Quarterly
- Treasury Management Report – 6 monthly
- Update on performance against prudential indicators - quarterly

8. **Background Documents / Electronic Links**

- Corporate Plan
- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Treasury Management Strategy Statement
- Capital Programme
- Statement of Accounts
- Strategic Asset Management Plan
- Constitution
- Local Wellbeing Plan

BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CAPITAL STRATEGY

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Strategy defines at the highest level how the capital programme decision making identifies the issues and options that influence capital spending, and sets out how the resources and capital programme will be managed. In addition, the Capital Strategy should comply with the Prudential Code for local authority capital investment introduced through the Local Government Act 2003. The key objectives of the Code are to ensure that capital investment plans are affordable, prudent and sustainable.
- 1.2 Part 1, Section 3 of the Local Government Finance Act 2003 (the Act) requires that the Authority shall determine and keep under review how much it can afford to borrow. The Act is supported by the Prudential Framework for local authority capital investment and the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (the Code).

2. DETERMINING A CAPITAL STRATEGY

- 2.1 Authorities should have in place a capital strategy that sets out the *long-term context* in which capital expenditure and investment decisions are made, primarily to deliver the priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan.

This demonstrates that authorities take capital expenditure and investment decisions in line with service objectives and properly takes account of: -

- Stewardship
- Value for money
- Prudence and
- Sustainability and affordability

It will also enable due consideration *to both risk and reward and impact* on the achievement of priority outcomes. The capital strategy should form a part of the authority's integrated revenue, capital, and balance sheet planning.

- 2.2 As local authorities become increasingly complex and diverse it is vital that those charged with governance understand the long-term context in which investment decisions are made and all the financial risks to which the authority is exposed. For example, when local authorities have increasingly wide powers around commercialisation, more authorities being subject to group arrangements and the increase in combined authority arrangements, it is no longer sufficient to consider only the individual local authority but also the residual risks and liabilities to which it is subject.
- 2.3 The capital strategy is intended to give a high level overview of how: -

- capital expenditure
- capital financing
- treasury management activity

contribute to the provision of services, along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future financial sustainability. The development of a capital strategy allows flexibility to engage with full Council to ensure that the overall strategy, governance procedures and risk appetite are fully understood by all elected members.

- 2.4 The capital strategy should be tailored to the authority's individual circumstances but should include capital expenditure, investments and liabilities and treasury management. The capital strategy should include sufficient detail to allow all members to understand how stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability will be secured and to meet legislative requirements on reporting.
- 2.5 In considering how stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability and affordability can be demonstrated, local authorities should have regard to the following key areas where material.

3. LINKS TO THE CAPITAL STRATEGY

- 3.1 The report has links to the strategic themes of the Authority, taking into account cross-cutting issues where relevant. It has specific links to the following plans / strategies:

a) The Council's Corporate Plan 2022/2027

The Corporate Plan is the prime document which outlines what the Council aims to achieve. The current plan covers the period 2022 - 2027. The core vision, core values and priorities in the Council Plan are: -

Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities

The Council's Core Values:



Our Vision and Values reflect who we are as a Council, how we do things and how we are shaping the future by ensuring that these apply to everything we do.

Corporate Plan 2022/27 Outcome Priorities:

- Maximise learning and 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 key objective of this Capital Strategy is to ensure that the capital funding available to the Council is spent on projects that assist the Council to deliver the outcome statements in the Corporate plan, including maintaining, replacing or / and upgrading existing assets. This is why the Corporate Plan features strongly in the allocation of resources in the capital programme.

There are several other key strategies / documents which align with the Council's Corporate Plan. These guide how the Council works on specific aspects affecting the Council.

b) Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Capital Strategy is closely linked to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), primarily with respect to the affordability of the capital programme. The MTFS is agreed by Council on an annual basis and forms part of the annual budget setting report.

c) Treasury Management Strategy

The Treasury Management Strategy links to the Capital Strategy in determining the Council's approach to borrowing and investments, including borrowing to fund capital expenditure. The Treasury Management Strategy incorporates the requirements of the Prudential Code and includes the Prudential Indicators. The Council has an integrated Treasury Management Strategy and has adopted the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management in Public Services. The Treasury Management Strategy deals with borrowing and investment arising as a consequence of all the financial transactions of the Council, not exclusively those arising from capital spending.

d) Statement of Accounts

Capital expenditure incurred during the year is reflected in the Balance Sheet within the Statement of Accounts, ensuring that stewardship of assets is demonstrated. The accurate monitoring and recording of capital expenditure ensures that this document is free from material error. The Statement of Accounts is externally audited each financial year to certify that it presents a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council.

e) Strategic Asset Management Plan 2017/2022

The Strategic Asset Management Plan sets out how the Council manages and treats its property and land, ensuring that it is well placed to manage expectations, budgets and services going forward.

f) Regulatory Framework of Capital Spend

The Procurement Strategy, along with the Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations (part of the Council's Constitution), looks at who can supply goods and services to the Council and how these goods and services should best be obtained to secure value for money.

More generally, prudent financial management contributes to the following Well-being Goals within the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015:

- A prosperous Wales.
- A resilient Wales.
- A healthier Wales.
- A more equal Wales.
- A Wales of cohesive communities.
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language.
- A globally responsible Wales.

4

CAPITAL STRATEGY

The Capital Strategy outlines the principles and framework at the very high level that shape the Authority's capital investment proposals. The principal aim is to deliver an affordable programme of capital consistent with the medium term financial strategy that contributes to the achievement of the Council's priorities and objectives as set out in the Authority's Corporate Plan,

considers associated risks particularly with commercial opportunities, recognises financial constraints over the longer term and represents value for money.

4.1 **CAPITAL EXPENDITURE**

4.1.1 Capital expenditure is defined as costs incurred by the Council in acquiring new property, plant and equipment (PPE); or costs incurred by enhancing the existing PPE asset base. Capital expenditure can also be incurred in instances where the asset is owned by a third party but the Council has provided the third party with a grant. In such instances the expenditure is recorded as if incurred directly by the Council.

4.1.2 In accordance with accounting definitions, expenditure can be capitalised when it relates to:

- *The acquisition or creation of a new fixed asset* - capitalisation will depend on the creation of rights to future economic benefits controlled by the Authority.
- *The enhancement of an existing fixed asset* - capitalisation will depend on the works substantially increasing the value of the asset, extending its useful life, or increasing its use in service provision.

4.1.3 The Council's current asset base can be classed into two distinct areas: -

- *operational assets* i.e., those assets relating to day-to-day activities that will ensure the Council meets (primarily) its statutory requirements and
- *development assets* i.e., those assets which will help the Council achieve strategic aims and generate income

4.1.4 The Authority has a de-minimus limit for capital expenditure of £50,000.. The Policy will be reviewed during 2024/25.

Capital expenditure that is below this de-minimus limit, is charged to a revenue budget. There are however, some exceptions including Highways capital expenditure, and Health & Safety capital expenditure. In these cases, items that individually fall below this de-minimus level are allowable as capital expenditure because they are aggregated together and treated as one single item of expenditure within the year.

4.1.5 The Authority's core capital programme is considered by Council and is funded from a variety of sources including capital receipts, Prudential Borrowing, General Capital Grant and Supported Borrowing Approvals. Both of the two latter funding streams are confirmed annually by Welsh Government as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement.

4.1.6 Changes to the programme from one year to the next include: -

- New policy directives
- New proposed schemes

- Revised scheme profiling
- Slippage and
- Changes in expenditure projections

4.1.7 The Authority's forecast of capital expenditure for the next three financial years, in line with the prudential indicators and as laid out in the 2024/2025 Treasury Management Strategy is as follows: -

Capital Expenditure £000's					
	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Total	47,849	73,233	28,145	13,998	6,305

The capital programme usually covers a three-year period. The current agreed capital programme covers the financial years to 2025/2026, primarily to incorporate Band B of the 21st Century Schools Programme.

A Capital Programme for 2026/27 onwards will be considered by members for approval during the 2024/25 financial year, incorporating the forecast funding available from the Welsh Government in the form of General Capital Grant and supported borrowing. As this has not yet been formally agreed, an estimate of Capital Expenditure has been included for 2026/27 based on estimated Welsh Government settlement data and forecast expenditure.

4.1.8 Governance arrangements are as follows: -

The capital programme is considered annually by full Council

The capital programme is monitored in-year through: -

- Regular forecast expenditure reports to budget holders
- Quarterly forecast expenditure reports to the Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny Committee (via briefings) and Cabinet .
- Actual outturn expenditure is incorporated into the Council's annual Statement of Accounts, which is reported to the Governance & Audit Committee and subject to external audit.

4.1.9 If additional resources are identified, a revised capital programme will be presented to full Council for consideration. If the value of competing bids exceeds the amount of available resources, a prioritisation methodology is followed, in order to match bids to available resources. Currently that methodology incorporates the following key elements: -

- Links to the Council's Corporate Plan
- Links to national priorities
- Statutory scheme or non-statutory scheme

- An existing legal or contractual commitment
- The availability of external grant funding
- The likelihood of revenue saving generation / cost avoidance
- National Wellbeing Goals/ Sustainability Principles

4.2 **CAPITAL EXPENDITURE FINANCING**

4.2.1 All capital expenditure must be financed, either from external sources (government grants and other contributions); the Council's own resources (revenue contributions, reserves and capital receipts); or debt (borrowing supported and unsupported; leasing).

4.2.2 A detailed explanation of each of the main sources of funding is provided below:

- **General Capital Grant** – This is a sum of money which is provided by the Welsh Government as part of the annual settlement. The Council is free to use the capital grant on any capital project it wishes.
- **Supported Borrowing** – The Council will borrow internally / externally to fund expenditure. The revenue costs arising from the borrowing (Interest Costs and Minimum Revenue Provision) are funded by the Welsh Government through the annual revenue settlement, hence the term "Supported Borrowing".
- **Unsupported Borrowing** – the Council borrows internally / externally but is required to finance the revenue costs from its own resources. Projects funded by means of unsupported borrowing tend to be projects which deliver revenue savings or generate additional income and these savings are used to meet the additional revenue costs arising from the borrowing.
- **Specific Capital Grants** – The Council will be awarded capital grants which partly or fully fund the cost of a project. Capital grants usually come with restrictions surrounding the expenditure which can be funded and by when the expenditure must be incurred.
- **Revenue Contribution** – Services can make a contribution from their revenue budgets to fund projects and should deliver revenue savings/avoid future costs or generate additional income. These contributions tend to be as a match funding to a project which is mainly funded from a specific capital grant.
- **Capital Receipts** – The funds generated from the sale of assets can be used to contribute to the funding of the capital programme. These are usually generated from the sale of surplus assets (normally land or buildings).

The Council's long-standing policy on usable capital receipts is that they are immediately invested internally. This helps to improve the Council's cash flow position and reduces the level of external loans that need to be raised, which in turn reduces external interest charges from the money market. This approach is consistent with what is regarded as good practice in terms of strategic level treasury management and overall, produces savings in debt servicing costs for the Council.

However, as approved sums of usable capital receipts are subsequently used to finance part of the annual capital programme each year, appropriate allowance then needs to be made for the use of these receipts in determining the estimated level of external borrowing required for that year. Hence usable capital receipts are released on a controlled basis and the annual estimates for external interest charges are adjusted accordingly. Any request to earmark a capital receipt for a different purpose will require a report to full Council.

- **Reserves** – Funding held in reserve, e.g. unapplied capital receipts, can be used to support the capital programme.

4.2.3 The financing of the forecast capital expenditure shown in paragraph 4.1.7 above, is detailed below:

Capital Expenditure £000's	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate
Total	47,849	73,233	28,145	13,998	6,305
Financed by:					
Grants, Capital Receipts, revenue and other sources	43,969	40,629	15,924	10,102	2,264
Net financing need for the year from USB and PB	3,880	32,604	12,221	3,896	4,041

4.2.4 Debt (including leases) is a source of finance that is used to fund a capital scheme and is repayable over time. The Council sets aside a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) every year for the repayment of existing debt. MRP forms part of the debt management budget and is monitored by Corporate Finance. As part of the annual Treasury Management Strategy, (which is approved by full Council before the start of the new financial year), a MRP statement is presented as an appendix to the Strategy annually. This sets out the MRP Policy that is to be adopted by the Council at the start of the next financial year. The full MRP statement is set out in Appendix A of the Treasury Management Annual Strategy.

4.2.5 The Authority's cumulative outstanding amount of debt finance is measured by the capital financing requirement (CFR). This increases with new debt-financed capital expenditure and reduces with MRP and capital receipts used to replace debt. The Council's estimated CFR is set out in Appendix A of Treasury Management Annual Strategy and is illustrated below.

Capital Financing Requirement					
	<u>2022/23</u>	<u>2023/24</u>	<u>2024/25</u>	<u>2025/26</u>	<u>2026/27</u>
	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Estimate</u>	<u>Estimate</u>	<u>Estimate</u>	<u>Estimate</u>
	<u>£000</u>	<u>£000</u>	<u>£000</u>	<u>£000</u>	<u>£000</u>
CFR at start of financial year	170,399	174,597	205,863	216,650	219,013
CFR at end of financial year	174,597	205,863	216,650	219,013	220,833
Movement in CFR	4,198	31,266	10,787	2,363	1,820
<i>Movement in CFR represented by:</i>					
Net Financing need for the year (above)	5,785	32,604	12,221	3,896	4,041
New Finance Leases	157	500	500	500	500
less MRP	-1,744	-1,838	-1,934	-2,033	-2,721
	4,198	31,266	10,787	2,363	1,820

4.3 **TREASURY MANAGEMENT**

4.1 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy defines treasury management as "The management of the organisation's borrowing; investments and cash flows; its banking; money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks".

4.3.2 Surplus cash is invested until required, while a shortage of cash will be met by borrowing, to avoid excessive credit balances or overdrafts in the bank current account. Investment balances tend to be high at the start of the financial year as revenue income is received before it is spent but reduce in the long-term as capital expenditure is incurred before being financed.

4.3.3 Due to decisions taken in the past, the Council had £217.8m debt outstanding as at 31 March 2023, at an average interest rate of 2.42%. In addition, £1.7m was earned on investments during 2022/23 at an average rate of 1.22%. This is in part due to increases in the Bank of England base rate, but also due to the investments made in relation to the available Railway Infrastructure Loan monies (£866k). It is anticipated that investment interest of £1.7m will be earned during the 2023/24 financial year, with approximately £700k of this relating to the Railway Infrastructure Loan monies.

4.3.4 The Annual Treasury Management Strategy is approved by Full Council prior to the start of the new financial year and sets out the Council's Borrowing Strategy; Investment Strategy and respective prudential indicators.

- 4.3.5 In addition to the Capital Strategy, the Council is required to receive and approve, as a minimum, three main reports each year, which incorporate a variety of polices, estimates and actuals.

The Treasury Strategy - the first, and most important report covers:

- The capital plans (including prudential indicators)
- the treasury management strategy (how the investments and borrowings are to be organised) including treasury indicators; and
- an investment strategy (the parameters on how investments are to be managed).
- a minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy (how residual capital expenditure is charged to revenue over time);

A mid year treasury management report – This will update members with the progress of the capital position, amending prudential indicators as necessary, and an assessment of whether the treasury strategy is being met or whether any policies require revision.

An annual treasury report – This provides details of a selection of actual prudential and treasury indicators and actual treasury operations compared to the estimates within the strategy.

Quarterly reports – In addition to the three major reports detailed above, from 2023/24 quarterly reporting (end of June/end of December) is also required. However, these additional reports do not have to be reported to Full Council but do require to be adequately scrutinised. This role is undertaken by the Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

Pre-scrutiny of the Strategy and monitoring of the Strategy throughout the year is carried out by the Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

4.4 COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES

4.4.1 A number of local authorities are investing in non-treasury management investment, for example commercial property, either via a fund manager or direct purchase of property in order to generate enhanced treasury returns above the rate of inflation. The returns generated from this type of investments can support revenue budgets in an environment when Welsh Government revenue support funding has declined year on year.

4.4.2 At present the Council has no investments in commercial property either directly (through property acquisitions) or indirectly (through a fund manager). However, the Council is continually developing an investment strategy in line with a more commercial approach and so this type of investment will be considered in the future.

4.4.3 With a financial rate of return being the main objective, the Council would need to fully identify the Local Authority powers underpinning any investments i.e.

economic regeneration activity. In addition, the Council would need to understand that there is a degree of higher risk on commercial investment than with treasury investments. The principal risk exposures include a decline in the property market and capital being tied up in the medium/ long-term. In order to balance the three basic principles of security, liquidity and yield, consideration would need to be given to the proportion of commercial investments made.

- 4.4.4 Any potential commercial investment would need due diligence and expert independent external advice. Legal advice would also be required from within the Council and where necessary, externally.
- 4.4.5 As per the revised Treasury Management and Prudential codes of practice, an authority must not borrow to invest primarily for financial return.

4.5 POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS ARISING FROM THE CAPITAL STRATEGY

- 4.5.1. The Capital Strategy will enable the Council to focus its energy and resources to the priorities in the Corporate Plan. In addition, transparent governance arrangements will enable improved decision making processes and financial planning into the longer term.
- 4.5.2. By adopting a more commercial approach, the Council will be able to secure additional revenue streams to mitigate future enforced budget reductions.
- 4.5.3 The level of annual savings required over the period of the medium term financial strategy will continue to be challenging with the potential to impact on the capital programme. If the funding gap is difficult to achieve, this risk could be mitigated by a further review of the capital programme to assess the feasibility of reducing capital financing costs affecting revenue. This would involve reducing capital expenditure and the associated borrowing requirement, therefore reducing interest and loan repayment costs.
- 4.5.4. The Council's Capital Strategy is based on an assumed level of funding from Welsh Government and from external grants and capital receipts. Given the continued uncertainty over budgets and the changes to grant funding, there is a risk that this assumed level of grant funding may not be received (or has been the case more recently further funding given to local authorities). This risk can be mitigated through regular reviews of the current capital programme.
- 4.5.5. If interest rates fail to reduce or increase sharply in the medium term, there is a risk that long term capital financing costs will impact on the affordability of new capital schemes and the revenue budget. This risk can be mitigated by regular reviews of interest rate forecasts and engagement with the Council's external treasury management advisor.
- 4.5.6. The strategy acknowledges the importance of maintaining existing Council assets. There is a risk that a replacement programme is not sufficient and that the standard of the assets falls to such a point that a greater level of investment

is required in order to maintain services. This risk can be mitigated by ensuring that the capital programme delivers a balanced programme of enhancing current assets and developing new assets.

- 4.5.7. External borrowing results in a significant interest cost each year. Any sharp rise in interest rates may impact on the affordability of future projects which are funded from new borrowing. This risk is mitigated to some extent through the Treasury Management Strategy which illustrates a mix of short term, medium term and long term loans.

4.6. **KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS**

- 4.6.1 The Council employs professionally qualified and experienced staff in senior positions with responsibility for making capital expenditure, borrowing and investment decisions.
- 4.6.2 Where Council staff do not have the knowledge and skills required, use is made of external advisers and consultants that are specialists in their field. The Council tests the market through regular competitive tendering. This ensures that performance management arrangements are in place, as laid out in the contract specification.
- 4.6.3 To ensure knowledge & skills are maintained and appropriate Key relevant staff will undertake training as and when opportunities arise or whenever there are changes in regulations. Treasury management training for members has and will continue to be provided by officers and treasury management advisors on an annual basis in the future.

Agenda Item 27

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 04.03.2024

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 11.03.2024

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **21st March, 2024**

Report Subject: **Pay Policy Statement 2024/25**

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

Report Submitted by: **Andrea Prosser, Head of Organisational Development**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
Circulated to DMT on 14/2/24	29/2/24						21/3/24	Circulated to Trade Unions on 16/2/24

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval of the Pay Policy Statement for the period 2024/25 (appendix 1).

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Localism Act 2011 requires the Council to prepare and publish an annual Pay Policy Statement which must set out the Council's policies in respect of the pay of its workforce, particularly its senior staff (Chief Officers) and its lowest paid employees to provide openness and accountability in relation to the Council's approach to pay and reward.

- 2.2 The Statement must comply with the following:

- Be prepared for each financial year;
- Be approved by Full Council before the 31 March each year;
- Be published on the Council's website;
- Come into force and be complied with from the date of its approval and be subject to a review on a minimum of an annual basis in accordance with the relevant legislation prevailing at that time.

- 2.3 In "performing its functions" under the act the Council must also have due regard to any relevant guidance including the Welsh Government Pay Accountability in Local Government guidance and must set out the following:

- Policies relating to the remuneration of its Chief Officers and its lowest paid employees.
- The relationship between the remuneration of its Chief Officers and employees who are not Chief Officers.
- State its definition of "lowest paid employees" and the reasons for adopting it.
- Policies relating to the other terms and conditions applicable to Chief Officers.

- 2.4 The Act does not require the Council to use the Pay Policy Statement to publish specific numerical data on pay and rewards. However, the Council considers how information set out within the Pay Policy Statement fits with data on pay and rewards required to be published under the Code of Recommended Practice on Data Transparency and the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 2.5 The Council uses the nationally negotiated pay spine referred to as the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) as the basis for its local grading structure. This determines the salaries of the large majority of the workforce. The NJC pay award for 2024/25 is currently pending, as is the pay award for Chief Executives, Chief Officers and staff employed under the Soulbury Committee.
- 2.6 This Pay Policy Statement does not apply to staff of local authority schools who are subject to separate regional arrangements and Members of the Council as they are not employees and are governed by separate legislation and the requirements of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales.
- 2.7 The Council has commissioned an external specialist to carry out an independent equal pay audit in respect of the Council's workforce employed on NJC terms and conditions as at 31 March 2023. The methodology for the audit was based on the Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance on equal pay auditing. Reference to this work has been included in the Pay Policy Statement.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 **Option 1:** (preferred option) That Council consider and approve the Pay Policy Statement.
- 3.2 **Option 2:** That Council consider and make suggestions/comments to add to the Pay Policy Statement.

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

- 4.1 The Pay Policy Statement will assist the Council to secure and maintain a suitable workforce which is required to deliver and develop its statutory responsibilities and also priorities and services covered in the Corporate Plan.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

There are no direct financial implications from the publication of the Pay Policy Statement. National pay negotiations for 2024/25 are ongoing at the time of writing.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

The risk of not adopting the Pay Policy Statement is that the Council will not comply with its statutory obligations in line with the Localism Act 2011.

- 5.3 **Legal**
Approving the Pay Policy Statement ensures the Council complies with the requirements set out under the Localism Act 2011.
- 5.4 **Human Resources**
The Pay Policy Statement provides transparency in relation to the Council's approach to setting the pay of the workforce, particularly senior staff and lowest paid employees and meets the statutory duty of implementing national agreements on pay.
- 5.5 **Health and Safety**
There are no Health and Safety implications relating to the approval of the Pay Policy Statement.
6. **Supporting Evidence**
- 6.1 **Performance Information and Data**
N/A
- 6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**
Producing an annual Pay Policy Statement provides the public with information to ensure the Council is open and transparent with regards to pay and reward.
- 6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**
The trade unions have been consulted and they suggested some amendments which have been considered in the development of the policy.
- 6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**
The Council is committed to providing quality services which offer value for money. The Pay Policy Statement seeks to ensure the Council attracts, retains and motivates the best employees with the right skills.
- 6.5 **Preventative focus**
N/A
- 6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**
N/A
- 6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**
N/A
- 6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**
There are no direct implications arising from the publication of the Pay Policy Statement.
- 6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)**
N/A

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The Pay Policy Statement will be reviewed and updated by Organisational Development on an annual basis.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Pay Policy Statement 2024/2025

Pay Policy Statement

2024/2025



ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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

Version Control

This document is intended for:

- Council staff only School-based staff only Council & School-based staff

Version	Key Changes	Approved By
2020/21	New policy for 2020/2021	Council – 23/07/20
2021/22	New policy for 2021/2022	Council – 25/03/21
2022/23	New policy for 2022/2023	Council – 09/03/22
2023/24	New policy for 2023/2024	Council – 30/03/23
2024/25	New policy for 2024/2025	

This document may be reviewed and amended at any time and without consultation in response to legal requirements or in response to an organisational requirement and where the changes do not reflect a fundamental change or affect the spirit or intent of the document.

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- Appendix 5: Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013 Statement Of Policy - Exercise Of Discretionary Functions
- Appendix 6: Redundancy Policy
- Appendix 7: In the Interests of the Efficiency of the Service Policy

1. Introduction

Welcome to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's annual Pay Policy Statement. This statement sets out the Council's approach to setting pay for employees including senior officers and covers the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025.

The Council recognises the public interest in public sector pay and we are committed to being open, transparent and accountable ensuring that our council taxpayers have access to information about how we pay employees.

As a public sector organisation, we recognise the importance people place on the delivery of high-quality council services, whilst ensuring value for money.

As one of the largest employers in the area it is important that we offer attractive employment opportunities on fair rates of pay and reasonable terms and conditions. This will ensure we can attract, retain and motivate employees, with the right level of skills, who are committed and share our vision. This has a beneficial impact on the quality of life and prosperity within the local community as well as on the local economy.



Councillor Stephen Thomas
Leader of the Council



Damien McCann
Interim Chief Executive

2. Purpose

- 2.1 Under Section 112 of the Local Government Act 1972 the Council has the power “to appoint officers on such reasonable terms and conditions as the Council thinks fit”. This Pay Policy Statement sets out the Council’s approach to Pay in accordance with the requirements of Section 38 - 43 of the Localism Act 2011 and with regard to the latest Welsh Government guidance. The purpose of this Pay Policy Statement is to provide transparency in relation to the Council’s approach to setting the pay of its workforce, particularly its senior staff (or ‘chief officers’) and its lowest paid employees. Local Authorities are required to produce and publish a Pay Policy Statement for each financial year detailing:
- The Council’s policies in relation to all aspects and elements of the remuneration of Chief Officers;
 - The approach to the publication of and access to information relating to all aspects of the remuneration of Chief Officers;
 - The Council’s policies in relation to the remuneration of its lowest paid employees (including the definition adopted and reasons for it);
 - The relationship between the remuneration of Chief Officers and other employees.
- 2.2 The Council is a large complex organisation with a multi-million pound budget providing and/or commissioning a wide range of essential services. The general approach to remuneration levels may, therefore, differ from one group of employees to another to reflect specific circumstances at a local, regional or national level. It will also need to be flexible, when required, to address a variety of changing circumstances, whether foreseeable or not.
- 2.3 The Council will develop an annual Pay Policy Statement and will seek to align reward systems with business objectives. As required by legislation, following approval by Full Council this Pay Policy Statement will come into immediate effect and will be subject to review on a minimum of an annual basis in accordance with the relevant legislation and guidance prevailing at the time.

3. Legislative Framework

- 3.1 In determining the pay and remuneration of its employees, the Council will comply with all relevant employment legislation.
- 3.2 With regard to the Equal Pay requirements contained within the Equality Act 2010, the Council, through the use of an equality proofed Job Evaluation scheme for staff under the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) terms and conditions which directly relates salaries to the requirements, demands and responsibilities of the role, will aim to ensure that there is no pay discrimination within its pay structures and that all pay differentials can be objectively justified.

4. Scope of the Policy

- 4.1 The Localism Act 2011 requires authorities to develop and make public their Pay Policy Statement on all aspects of Chief Officer remuneration and that pertaining to the 'lowest paid' in the Council, explaining the relationship between the remuneration for Chief Officers and other groups.
- 4.2 The provisions in the Localism Act 2011 do not apply to the staff of local authority schools and as such they are not included within the scope of this Pay Policy Statement. In addition, this policy does not apply to Members of the Council as they are not employees and are governed by separate legislation via the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales.
- 4.3 The provisions of the Localism Act 2011 do not detract from the Council's autonomy in making decisions on pay that are appropriate to local circumstances and which deliver value for money for local taxpayers.

5. Key Principles

5.1 Transparency, accountability and value for money

- 5.1.1 The Council is committed to an open and transparent approach to its Pay Policy Statement which will enable the taxpayer to access, understand and assess information on remuneration levels across all groups of Council employees. The following are attached as appendices:

- Appendix 1: Local Government Services Employee Pay Scales
- Appendix 2: Chief Officer Pay Scales
- Appendix 3: Soulbury Pay Scales
- Appendix 4: Retirement Options Policy
- Appendix 5: Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013 Statement Of Policy - Exercise Of Discretionary Functions
- Appendix 6: Redundancy Policy
- Appendix 7: In the Interests of the Efficiency of the Service Policy

5.2 Pay and Reward Strategy

- 5.2.1 The primary aim of a reward strategy is to attract and retain suitably skilled employees so that the Council can perform at its best. The biggest challenge for the Council in the current circumstances is to maximise productivity and efficiency within current resources. The Pay Policy Statement is therefore a matter of striking an often difficult balance between setting appropriate remuneration levels which will facilitate a sufficient supply of appropriately skilled individuals to fill the Council's wide range of roles and ensuring that the burden on the taxpayer and a financially challenged organisation does not become greater than can be fully and objectively justified.

- 5.2.2 In this context, it does need to be recognised that, in particular, remuneration levels need to enable the Council to attract a suitably wide pool of talent from which to recruit, often when in competition with other public and private sector employers from outside, as well as within, Wales. Remuneration levels are also important in retaining suitably skilled and qualified individuals once in post. The Council recognises that pay is not the only means of rewarding and supporting employees and offers a wider range of benefits, including flexible working arrangements, access to learning and development, an annual leave purchase scheme, a staff benefits scheme and an Employee Assistance Programme, etc.
- 5.2.3 The Council's Workforce Strategy 2021-2026 will consider pay and reward under the broader themes of this Strategy.
- 5.2.4 In addition, the Council is a major employer in the area and as such it must have regard to its role in the economic well-being of the people of Blaenau Gwent. The Council also has a role in setting standards on pay and conditions to other employers in the area for similar reasons.
- 5.2.5 In designing, developing and reviewing its Pay Policy Statement, the Council will seek to balance the above factors appropriately to maximise outcomes for the organisation and the community it serves, while managing pay costs and maintaining sufficient flexibility to meet future needs.

6. Pay Structure

- 6.1 The Council uses the nationally negotiated pay spine referred to as the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) as the basis for its local grading structure. This determines the salaries of the large majority of the workforce.

The local pay and grading structure for employees employed under the National Joint Council for Local Government Services consists of 11 bands - Grades 1-11. A copy of the pay scales effective from 1 April 2023 is attached at appendix 1. The national pay negotiations for 2024/25 are ongoing at the time of writing this Policy.

- 6.2 In addition to the NJC arrangements referred to above, the Council recognises other nationally negotiated arrangements including the JNC for Chief Executives, Chief Officers and the Soulbury Agreement. The details of which are outlined in appendices 2 and 3. The national pay negotiations for staff under the Soulbury Agreement and the JNC for Chief Executives and Chief Officers for 2024/25 are ongoing at the time of writing this Policy.
- 6.3 In line with TUPE regulations some staff from merged organisations may retain their former employer's terms and conditions of service. Such arrangements would be outside of the Council's Collective Bargaining arrangements.
- 6.4 All other additional pay related allowances such as overtime, statutory holiday payments and standby are the subject of either nationally or locally negotiated rates, having been determined in accordance with collective bargaining and/or as determined by Council Policy.

- 6.5 All Council employees (with the exception of teachers) are entitled to join the local government pension scheme (LGPS). If employees are eligible they will automatically become a member of the scheme, however they can decide to opt out of the scheme. The benefits and contributions payable under the fund are set out in the LGPS regulations.
- 6.6 New appointments will normally be made at the minimum point of the relevant grade, although this can be varied where necessary due to business or market conditions to secure the best candidate.

7. Job Evaluation

- 7.1 Job evaluation is a systematic way of determining the value/worth of a job in relation to other jobs within an organisation. The remuneration for staff on NJC for Local Government Services terms and conditions is determined by an ongoing analytical job evaluation scheme. The scheme used is the Greater London Provincial Council scheme (GLPC).
- 7.2 The concept of equality was central to the Pay and Grading Structure and the changes to terms and conditions were subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) by Northgate as part of the Council's pay modelling and negotiations with the Trade Unions.
- 7.3 The Council commissioned an external specialist to carry out an independent equal pay audit in respect of the Council's workforce employed on NJC for Local Government Services terms and conditions as at 31 March 2023. The methodology for the audit was based on the Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance on equal pay auditing.

The analyses undertaken for this audit were:

- a. A comparison of the average basic annual salary of full-time equivalent (FTE) male and female employees by grade
- b. A comparison of the average total annual salary of FTE male and female employees by grade
- c. An analysis of selected additional payments to basic pay by gender

The audit examined differences of 5% or more, or any recurring differences of 3% or more as a general rule. In conclusion, the findings of the audit indicated that pay differences of men and women doing work rated as equivalent can be explained by material factors other than the sex of job holders and that disparate impact (i.e. disadvantage to one sex) would be capable of objective justification.

8. Honoraria and Secondment

- 8.1 There may be occasions when an employee is asked to act up into a post at a higher grade or undertake additional duties over and above that of their substantive post for a period of time. In such circumstances an additional payment may be granted in line with Council Policy. This Scheme is applicable for all employees.

9. Market Supplements

- 9.1 Job evaluation (this does not include officers on JNC terms and conditions) enables the Council to set appropriate remuneration levels based on internal job size relativities within the Council. However, from time to time it may be necessary to take account of the external pay market in order to attract and retain employees with particular experience, skills and capacity. In these circumstances a market supplement may be applied in line with Council Policy. In exceptional circumstances outside the policy, it will be a matter for Council's consideration.

10. Accountability and Decision Making

- 10.1 In accordance with the statutory requirements and the Constitution of the Council, policies relating to the recruitment, pay, terms and conditions of employees of the Council, except teachers, are the responsibility of the Council.

11. Chief Officer Remuneration

11.1 Definition of Chief Officer and Pay Levels

- 11.1.1 For the purposes of this statement, 'Chief Officers' are as defined within Section 43 of the Localism Act. The posts falling within the statutory definition are set out below. The pay and grading structure for these posts is attached at appendix 2.

Post	Range	Salary 2023/24	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chief Executive 	JNC CE	£108,573 £111,245 £113,910 £116,571 £116,934	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Director of Social Services Corporate Director of Education Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services 	JNC CO	£88,395 £90,559 £92,718 £94,872 £97,032	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chief Officer – Commercial and Customer Chief Officer – Resources (Statutory 151 Officer) 	JNC 5	£78,825 £80,752 £82,672 £84,584 £86,507	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Head of Adult Services Head of Children's Services 	JNC 5	£78,825 £80,752 £82,672 £84,584 £86,507	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance (Monitoring Officer) Head of School Improvement and Inclusion Head of Community Services Head of Regeneration & Development Head of Governance & Partnerships (Head of Democratic Services) Head of Organisational Development 	JNC 3	£68,955 £70,630 £72,308 £73,979 £75,650	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Manager Accountancy 	JNC 2	£62,475 £63,991 £65,500 £67,009 £68,522	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Manager Public Protection* • Service Manager Performance & Democratic • Service Manager Policy & Partnerships • Service Manager Commercial & Business Development • Service Manager Customer Experience & Transformation • Service Manager Revenues & Charging Assessments • Service Manager Inclusion • Service Manager – Education Transformation and Business Change • Service Manager – Young People and Partnerships 	JNC 1	£55,997 £57,347 £58,700 £60,043 £61,393	*The Service Manager Public Protection is in receipt of annual honoraria payment of £7,131.24 in addition to normal salary.

11.1.2 The Council employs Chief Officers under JNC terms and conditions which are incorporated within their contracts. The JNC for Chief Executives and Chief Officers negotiates on national (UK) annual cost of living pay increases for this group and any award of the same is determined on this basis. Chief Officers employed under JNC terms and conditions are contractually entitled to any national JNC determined pay rises and this Council will therefore pay these as and when determined, in accordance with current contractual requirements. Any other proposal to determine or vary the remuneration of Chief Officers (or those to be appointed as Chief Officers) must be approved by Full Council.

11.1.3 The Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 provides an Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRP) with powers to make recommendations in relation to any policy in an authority's Pay Policy Statement which relates to the salary of the Chief Executive, or any proposed change of salary of the Chief Executive.

The Council must therefore consult the IRP about any proposed changes to the salary of the Chief Executive (except one which is commensurate to a change affecting the authority's other staff more generally) and have regard to their recommendations. If the authority chooses not to follow the advice of the Panel it may become subject to a Ministerial direction to reconsider the position. The Act also allows authorities to reduce (but not increase) the salary payable to the Chief Executive in advance of a recommendation from the IRP, so long as the contract under which the salary is payable does not prevent the authority from changing the salary after receiving a recommendation.

The Welsh Local Government Association will notify the Independent Remuneration Panel of national pay awards on behalf of the Council.

11.1.4 No referrals have been made to the IRP during 2023/24.

11.1.5 In addition to agreeing the parameters for setting the pay of Chief Officers, Full Council will be given the opportunity to approve salary packages for any new posts that come within the scope of this Pay Policy Statement and as defined within the Act as being £100,000, or greater, per annum. For this purpose, salary packages will include salary, bonuses, fees, allowances routinely payable, any expenses/allowances chargeable to UK income tax, any other benefits in kind to which the officer is entitled as a result of their employment and any increase in or enhancement of the Chief Officer's pension entitlement where the increase or enhancement is as a result of a resolution of the Council.

11.1.6 No bonus or performance related pay mechanism is applicable to the Chief Executive or Chief Officers' pay; although an increment is awarded annually up to the maximum of the scale for the post.

11.2 Recruitment of Chief Officers

11.2.1 The Council's policy and procedure in relation to the recruitment of Chief Officers is set out in the Council's Constitution. When recruiting to these posts the Council will take full and proper account of its commitment to equal opportunities. The determination of the remuneration to be offered to any newly appointed Chief Officer will be in accordance with the pay structure and relevant policies in place at the time of recruitment.

11.2.2 Where the proposed remuneration of a Chief Officer's post is £100,000 or greater, per annum it will be publicly advertised externally, as set out in the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (Wales)(Amendment) Regulations 2014. There is however a facility within the regulations to make temporary appointments without the need to advertise externally.

Current arrangements for the Senior Leadership Team are as follows:

- Interim Chief Executive in place since March 2022
- Interim Corporate Director of Social Services in place since April 2022
- Interim Corporate Director of Education in place since May 2023
- The above are all internal employees and there are temporary backfill arrangements in place in the directorates.

11.3 Additions to Salary for Chief Officers

11.3.1 The Council does not apply any bonuses or performance related pay to its Chief Officers.

11.3.2 The Council does pay all reasonable travel and subsistence expenses on production of receipts and in accordance with national and local conditions. The Council pays the HMRC recommended mileage rate of 45p per mile.

11.3.3 The Council has a statutory duty to appoint a Returning Officer for specified Elections and Referenda. The Head of Legal & Compliance (Monitoring Officer) undertakes this role and is paid for discharging these functions in accordance with prescribed fees.

11.4 Payments on Termination for Chief Officers

11.4.1 The Council's approach to statutory and discretionary payments on termination of employment of Chief Officers (and all other employees), prior to reaching normal retirement age is set out within the following policies:

- Retirement Policy (appendix 5)
- Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013 Statement Of Policy - Exercise Of Discretionary Functions (appendix 6)
- Redundancy Policy (appendix 7)
- In the Interests of the Efficiency of the Service Policy (appendix 8)

In line with Council's agreed Redundancy Policy, redundancy payments are based on actual weekly earnings (up to the maximum spinal column point 46 £1,049.37 per week as at 1 April 2023). Staff who do not have access to their Pension will receive a redundancy payment based on the statutory calculator multiplied by 2 up to a maximum of 60 weeks. Those who are able to access their pension will receive a redundancy payment based on the statutory calculator up to a maximum of 30 weeks and will have immediate access to unreduced payment of their LGPS benefits.

The Council does not increase the total membership of active members of the pension scheme or award additional pension.

11.4.2 Where Chief Officers (definition in section 11.1.1) are terminated and are recommended to receive severance payments, of £100,000 or greater, the business case for this must go to Full Council for approval. Council Members must be made aware of any statutory or contractual entitlements due to the employee and the consequences of a non-approval by Council. The following components of a severance package will be included when determining whether the package exceeds £100,000:

- Salary paid in lieu
- Lump sum redundancy/severance payment and
- Cost to the authority of the strain on the pension fund arising from providing early access to an unreduced pension.

11.4.3 Decisions relating to any other payments falling outside the provisions or the relevant periods of contractual notice will be taken by those officers and Members authorised to do so by the Council's Constitution.

12. Re-Employment of Staff

12.1 Staff who have left the employment of the Council by means of a voluntary redundancy or a voluntary severance which included a financial package, will not usually be re-employed or re-engaged in any way (i.e. by way of agency or consultancy). In exceptional cases only and where there has been a break of more than two years, re-engagement will be subject to CLT approval on the basis of a report outlining a critical business case. In cases that concern the Chief Executive, Directors or Chief Officers, Full Council approval will be required.

13. Remuneration at the Lowest Level

- 13.1 The lowest paid employees under a contract of employment with the Council are employed on full time (37 hours) equivalent salaries in accordance with the minimum spinal column point currently in use within Grade 1 of the Council's grading structure. As at 1 April 2023, with the deletion of the bottom point of the pay spine, spinal column point 2 is now the minimum point with an hourly rate of £11.59 per hour (pending the pay award for 2024/25).
- 13.2 The Council runs an apprenticeship scheme and payments are made in line with the shared apprenticeship scheme.
- 13.3 The relationship between the rate of pay for the lowest paid and Chief Officers is determined by the processes used for determining pay and grading structures as set out earlier in this Pay Policy Statement.

14. The Real Living Wage

- 14.1 The Council agreed to implement the Real Living Wage with effect from 1 April 2018 and guaranteed that no member of staff in the Council will earn less than the Real Living Wage. The Real Living Wage is independently calculated each year by the Resolution Foundation and overseen by the Living Wage Commission. By paying the Real Living Wage employers are voluntarily ensuring that their employees can earn a wage which is enough to live on as determined by the Living Wage Foundation.
- 14.2 The Real Living Wage rate of £12.00 per hour will be implemented in line with the 2024/25 pay award and will be effective from 1 April 2024. This will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that no member of staff in the Council will earn less than the Real Living Wage.

15. Off Payroll Working in the Public Sector - IR35 Intermediaries Legislation

- 15.1 The Intermediaries Legislation ensures that individuals who work through their own or even another personal service company (PSC) pay employment taxes in a similar way to an organisation's own employees. This is relevant to those individuals providing services to the Council who if they were not engaged through a personal service company (PSC) or other intermediary would be employed by the Council directly.
- 15.2 This new measure, "Off-payroll working in the public sector" moves responsibility to the Council for deciding if the off-payroll rules for engagements in the public sector apply. This measure makes the Authority responsible for deducting and paying associated employment taxes and National Insurance Contributions (NICs) to HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

16. Pay Relativities within the Council

- 16.1 The statutory guidance under the Localism Act recommends the use of pay multiples as a means of measuring the relationship between pay rates across the workforce and that of senior managers, as included within the Hutton Report 'Review of Fair Pay in the Public Sector' (2011). The Hutton Report explored the case for a fixed limit on dispersion of pay through a requirement that no public sector manager can earn more than 20 times the lowest paid person in the organisation. The report concluded that the relationship to median earnings was a more relevant measure and the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Data Transparency recommends the publication of the ratio between the highest paid salary and the median average salary of the whole of the Council's workforce.
- 16.2 The multiples of pay for Blaenau Gwent which will be published annually are set out below:

	2023/24	2024/25
The multiple between the lowest paid full time equivalent employee and the Chief Executive	1:5.31	1:5.09
The multiple between the lowest paid full time equivalent employee and average Chief Officer	1:3.52	1:3.31
The multiple between the median full time equivalent earnings (excluding teachers) and the Chief Executive	1:4.23	1:4.17
The multiple between the median full time equivalent earnings (excluding teachers) and average Chief Officer	1:2.81	1:2.71

17. Gender Pay Gap

- 17.1 We are an employer required by law to carry out Gender Pay Reporting under the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017.
- 17.2 The gender pay gap is an equality measure that shows the difference in average earnings between women and men.
- 17.3 The UK gender pay gap for all employees is 14.3% (2023).
- 17.4 At the Council we are confident that men and women are paid equally for doing equivalent jobs across the business. The gender pay gap shows that the workforce is predominantly female with women occupying a high percentage of jobs across all four pay quartiles. The pay gap in Blaenau Gwent continues to be significantly lower than the national average.

Gender Pay Gap Report – 31 March 2023

Hourly Rate – Gender Pay Gap

Women's Hourly Rate is:	1.35% Lower (mean)	0.00% Lower (median)
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Pay Quartiles – Gender Pay Gap

How many men and women are in each of the quartiles:

	Men	Women
Upper Quartile:	29%	71%
Upper Middle Quartile:	30%	70%
Lower Middle Quartile:	35%	65%
Lower Quartile:	22%	78%

18. Publication

- 18.1 Upon approval by Full Council, this statement will be published on the Council's Website.
- 18.2 The Council's Annual Statement of Accounts contributes to the transparency on Council spend as it includes information on posts where the full-time equivalent salary is at least £60,000.

19. Review of the Policy

- 19.1 This Policy outlines the current position in respect of pay and reward within the Council and it will be reviewed to ensure that it meets the principles of fairness, equality, accountability and value for money for the citizens of Blaenau Gwent. The Policy will be reviewed at least annually and reported to Full Council for approval in line with statutory requirements.



Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Pay and Grading
NJC Local Government Services - 1st April 2023

Grade	SCP	Salary	Weekly	Monthly	Hrly rate
1	2	£22,366	£428.94	£1,863.83	£11.59
2	2	£22,366	£428.94	£1,863.83	£11.59
	3	£22,737	£436.05	£1,894.75	£11.79
3	4	£23,114	£443.28	£1,926.17	£11.98
	5	£23,500	£450.68	£1,958.33	£12.18
	6	£23,893	£458.22	£1,991.08	£12.38
4	7	£24,294	£465.91	£2,024.50	£12.59
	8	£24,702	£473.74	£2,058.50	£12.80
	9	£25,119	£481.73	£2,093.25	£13.02
	10	£25,545	£489.90	£2,128.75	£13.24
	11	£25,979	£498.23	£2,164.92	£13.47
5	12	£26,421	£506.70	£2,201.75	£13.69
	14	£27,334	£524.21	£2,277.83	£14.17
	15	£27,803	£533.21	£2,316.92	£14.41
	17	£28,770	£551.75	£2,397.50	£14.91
	18	£29,269	£561.32	£2,439.08	£15.17
6	19	£29,777	£571.07	£2,481.42	£15.43
	20	£30,296	£581.02	£2,524.67	£15.70
	21	£30,825	£591.16	£2,568.75	£15.98
	22	£31,364	£601.50	£2,613.67	£16.26
	23	£32,076	£615.16	£2,673.00	£16.63
	24	£33,024	£633.34	£2,752.00	£17.12
	25	£33,945	£651.00	£2,828.75	£17.59
	26	£34,834	£668.05	£2,902.83	£18.06
7	26	£34,834	£668.05	£2,902.83	£18.06
	27	£35,745	£685.52	£2,978.75	£18.53
	28	£36,648	£702.84	£3,054.00	£19.00
	29	£37,336	£716.03	£3,111.33	£19.35
8	30	£38,223	£733.04	£3,185.25	£19.81
	30	£38,223	£733.04	£3,185.25	£19.81
	31	£39,186	£751.51	£3,265.50	£20.31
	32	£40,221	£771.36	£3,351.75	£20.85
	33	£41,418	£794.32	£3,451.50	£21.47
9	34	£42,403	£813.21	£3,533.58	£21.98
	34	£42,403	£813.21	£3,533.58	£21.98
	35	£43,421	£832.73	£3,618.42	£22.51
	36	£44,428	£852.04	£3,702.33	£23.03
10	37	£45,441	£871.47	£3,786.75	£23.55
	38	£46,464	£891.09	£3,872.00	£24.08
	39	£47,420	£909.42	£3,951.67	£24.58
	40	£48,474	£929.64	£4,039.50	£25.13
	41	£49,498	£949.28	£4,124.83	£25.66
11	42	£50,512	£968.72	£4,209.33	£26.18
	43	£51,515	£987.96	£4,292.92	£26.70
	44	£52,579	£1,008.36	£4,381.58	£27.25
	45	£53,654	£1,028.98	£4,471.17	£27.81
	46	£54,717	£1,049.37	£4,559.75	£28.36

From 1 April each year, a supplement is paid to any employees earning less than the current Real Living Wage

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



Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Pay and Grading

JNC Chief Executive & Chief Officers - 1st April 2023

Grade	SCP	Salary	Weekly	Monthly	Hrly rate
Chief Executive	Min	£108,573	£2,082.22	£9,047.75	£56.28
	2nd	£111,245	£2,133.47	£9,270.42	£57.66
	3rd	£113,910	£2,184.58	£9,492.50	£59.04
	4th	£116,571	£2,235.61	£9,714.25	£60.42
	Max	£116,934	£2,242.57	£9,744.50	£60.61

Grade	SCP	Salary	Weekly	Monthly	Hrly rate
Chief Officer	Min	£88,395	£1,695.25	£7,366.25	£45.82
	2nd	£90,559	£1,736.75	£7,546.58	£46.94
	3rd	£92,718	£1,778.15	£7,726.50	£48.06
	4th	£94,872	£1,819.46	£7,906.00	£49.17
	Max	£97,032	£1,860.89	£8,086.00	£50.29

Grade	SCP	Salary	Weekly	Monthly	Hrly rate
JNC 1	Min	£55,997	£1,073.92	£4,666.42	£29.02
	2nd	£57,347	£1,099.81	£4,778.92	£29.72
	3rd	£58,700	£1,125.75	£4,891.67	£30.43
	4th	£60,043	£1,151.51	£5,003.58	£31.12
	Max	£61,393	£1,177.40	£5,116.08	£31.82
JNC 2	Min	£62,475	£1,198.15	£5,206.25	£32.38
	2nd	£63,991	£1,227.22	£5,332.58	£33.17
	3rd	£65,500	£1,256.16	£5,458.33	£33.95
	4th	£67,009	£1,285.10	£5,584.08	£34.73
	Max	£68,522	£1,314.12	£5,710.17	£35.52
JNC 3	Min	£68,955	£1,322.42	£5,746.25	£35.74
	2nd	£70,630	£1,354.55	£5,885.83	£36.61
	3rd	£72,308	£1,386.73	£6,025.67	£37.48
	4th	£73,979	£1,418.78	£6,164.92	£38.35
	Max	£75,650	£1,450.82	£6,304.17	£39.21
JNC 4	Min	£71,112	£1,363.79	£5,926.00	£36.86
	2nd	£72,845	£1,397.03	£6,070.42	£37.76
	3rd	£74,571	£1,430.13	£6,214.25	£38.65
	4th	£76,298	£1,463.25	£6,358.17	£39.55
	Max	£78,023	£1,496.33	£6,501.92	£40.44
JNC 5	Min	£78,825	£1,511.71	£6,568.75	£40.86
	2nd	£80,752	£1,548.67	£6,729.33	£41.86
	3rd	£82,672	£1,585.49	£6,889.33	£42.85
	4th	£84,584	£1,622.16	£7,048.67	£43.84
	Max	£86,507	£1,659.04	£7,208.92	£44.84

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

Soulbury Pay Agreement

Educational Improvement Professionals

SCP	01.09.21	01.09.22	01.09.23
1	37056	38981	40540
2	38383	40308	41920
3	39637	41562	43224
4	40907	42832	44545
5	42168	44093	45857
6	43431	45356	47170
7	44758	46683	48550
8	46035*	47960*	49878*
9	47522	49447	51425
10	48849	50774	52805
11	50158	52083	54166
12	51425	53350	55484
13	52860**	54785**	56976**
14	54140	56065	58308
15	55553	57478	59777
16	56831	58756	61106
17	58113	60038	62440
18	59371	61296	63748
19	60668	62593	65097
20	61338***	63263***	65794***
21	62626	64551	67133
22	63749	65674	68301
23	64985	66910	69586
24	66093	68018	70739
25	67278	69203	71971
26	68434	70359	73173
27	69616	71541	74403
28	70815	72740	75650
29	72016	73941	76899
30	73215	75140	78146
31	74404	76329	79382
32	75611	77536	80637
33	76819	78744	81894
34	78056	79981	83180
35	79291	81216	84465
36	80560	82485	85784
37	81809	83734	87083
38	83071	84996	88396
39	84316	86241	89691
40	85561	87486	90985
41	86811	88736	92285
42	88061	89986	93585
43	89309	91234	94883

44	90564	92489	96189
45	91815	93740	97490
46	93069	94994	98794
47	94327	96252	100102
48	95574	97499	101399
49	96825	98750	102700
50	98079	100004	104004
51			108164****
52			112491****

Notes to Educational Improvement Professionals above

Salary scales to consist of not more than four consecutive points based on the duties and responsibilities attaching to posts and the need to recruit and motivate staff.

**normal minimum point for EIP undertaking the full range of duties at this level.*

***normal minimum point for senior EIP undertaking the full range of duties at this level.*

****normal minimum point for leading EIP undertaking the full range of duties at this level.*

*****extension to range to accommodate structured professional assessments.*

- *Two additional points after SCP 50 with effect from **1 September 2023**.*

Young People's / Community Service Manager

SCP	01.09.21	01.09.22	01.09.23
1	38433	40358	41972
2	39691	41616	43281
3	40947	42872	44587
4	42231*	44156*	45922*
5	43535	45460	47278
6	44807	46732	48601
7	46107**	48032**	49953**
8	47585	49510	51490
9	48400	50325	52338
10	49660	51585	53648
11	50912	52837	54950
12	52166	54091	56255
13	53412	55337	57550
14	54669	56594	58858
15	55928	57853	60167
16	57191	59116	61481
17	58460	60385	62800
18	59722	61647	64113
19	60976	62901	65417
20	62257***	64182***	66749***
21	63562***	65487***	68106***
22	64898***	66823***	69496***
23	66260***	68185***	70912***
24	67650***	69575***	72358***

Notes to Young People's / Community Service Manager above

The minimum Youth and Community Service Officers' scale is 4 points.

Other salary scales to consist of not more than four consecutive points based on duties and responsibilities attaching to posts and the need to recruit retain and motivate staff.

**normal minimum point for senior youth and community service officers undertaking the full range of duties at this level (see paragraph 5.6 of the Soulbury Report).*

***normal minimum point for principal youth and community service officer undertaking the full range of duties at this level (see paragraph 5.8 of the Soulbury Report).*

****extension to range to accommodate discretionary scale points and structured professional assessments.*

Trainee Educational Psychologists

SCP	01.09.21	01.09.22	01.09.23
1	24970	26895	
2	26798	28723	29872
3	28623	30548	31770
4	30453	32378	33673
5	32279	34204	35572
6	34107	36032	37473

- *SCP 1 is deleted with SCP 2 the first point of the scale with effect from 1 September 2023.*

Assistant Educational Psychologists

SCP	01.09.21	01.09.22	01.09.23
1	30694	32619	
2	31948	33873	35228
3	33201	35126	36531
4	34448	36373	37828
5			39341

- *SCP 1 is deleted with SCP 2 the first point of the scale with effect from 1 September 2023*
- *An additional point after SCP 4 with effect from 1 September 2023.*

Educational Psychologists - Scale A

SCP	01.09.21	01.09.22	01.09.23
1	38865	40790	42422
2	40838	42763	44474
3	42811	44736	46525
4	44782	46707	48575
5	46755	48680	50627
6	48727	50652	52678
7	50584	52509	54609
8	52440	54365	56540
9	54179	56104	58348
10	55921	57846	60160
11	57544	59469	61848
12			62540*
13			63836*
14			65120*

Notes to Educational Psychologists - Scale A above

Salary scales to consist of six consecutive points based on the duties and responsibilities attaching to posts and the need to recruit retain and motivate staff.

**Extension to scale to accommodate structured professional assessment points.*

- *Three additional SCPs after point 11 with effect from 1 September 2023*
- *The SCPs added indicate the addition of three pay ranges to the current ranges, namely: A1 – 6, A2 – 7, A3 – 8, A4 – 9, A5 – 10 and A6 – 11*

SPA points will not be conflated with range points. This allows those local authorities with recruitment and retention challenges and which have the budgetary flexibility, the option to utilise that additional headroom.

Senior and Principal Educational Psychologists

SCP	01.09.21	01.09.22	01.09.23
1	48727	50652	52678
2	50584	52509	54609
3	52440*	54365*	56540
4	54179	56104	58348
5	55921	57846	60160
6	57544	59469	61848*
7	58210	60135	62540
8	59456	61381	63836
9	60690	62615	65120
10	61945	63870	66425
11	63177	65102	67706
12	64431	66356	69010
13	65707	67632	70337
14	66941**	68866**	71621
15	68235**	70160**	72966
16	69514**	71439**	74297
17	70803**	72728**	75637**
18	72090**	74015**	76976**
19			80055**
20			83257**
21			86587**

Notes to Senior and Principal Educational Psychologists above

Salary scales to consist of not more than four consecutive points based on the duties and responsibilities attaching to posts and the need to recruit retain and motivate staff.

**Normal minimum point for the principal educational psychologist undertaking the full range of duties at this level.*

***Extension to range to accommodate discretionary scale points and structured professional assessments*

- *Three additional SCPs after point 18 with effect from 1 September 2023.*



Retirement Options Policy

(Local Government Pension Scheme only)



ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Issued: November 2017 Review: August 2022

Version Control

This document is intended for:

- Council staff only School-based staff only Council & School-based staff

Version	Key Changes	Approved By
Mar 2020	Reformatted Only	DMT

This document may be reviewed and amended at any time and without consultation in response to legal requirements, in line with best practice or in response to an organisational requirement and where the changes do not affect the spirit or intent of the document.

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1. Policy Statement

Retirement is an important step in a person's life; Blaenau Gwent is committed to ensuring that the transition from work to retirement is as smooth as possible for its employees.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to lay down the principles and practices that will govern Blaenau Gwent's approach to employee retirements.

Blaenau Gwent recognises the contributions of a diverse workforce, including the skills and experience of older employees. It believes that employees should, wherever possible, be permitted to continue working for as long as they wish to do so.

The intention of the policy is to promote equality and fairness and to give managers and employees, where possible, the flexibility to plan retirements.

3. Scope

This policy has been developed in line with the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006, which came into force on 1 October 2006, and the Local Government Pension Scheme Changes 2014. It also reflects the changes following the abolition of the default retirement age with effect from 1 October 2011.

These provisions apply to all Blaenau Gwent employees with the exception of teaching staff. Any reference to pension entitlements will only apply to individuals who participate in the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

4. Advice to Employees considering their Retirement Options

A. Retirement (From National Pension Age (NPA))

With effect from 1 October 2011, the Default Retirement Age has been removed and employees will no longer have a contractual retirement date of age 65.

An employee can now choose to retire from at any time between age 55 and 75 and receive their pension benefits immediately, although there may be a reduction in the benefits if payment is taken before your NPA, as it's being paid earlier. If you take it later than your NPA it's increased because it's being paid later.

Your Normal Pension Age (NPA) is simply the age when you can retire and take the pension you have built up in full – for the pension built up from 1 April 2014 your NPA is the same as your State Pension Age (but with minimum of age 65).

Employees who have contributed to the pension scheme will be entitled to a lump sum and an annual pension upon retirement, and they can take up the option to convert an element of their annual pension into a tax-free lump sum. At state retirement age employees will receive the basic flat-rate state pension if sufficient National Insurance contributions have been paid.

If an employee wishes to work after NPA they will continue paying into the LGPS, building up further benefits. They can receive their pension when they retire or reach the eve of their 75th birthday, whichever comes first. If the employee retires at or after NPA they can, if they wish, defer drawing their pension but must draw it before age 75. An employee will continue to accrue pension benefits if they continue working beyond NPA and the pension will be uplifted in line with regulations.

B. Current Transitional Protection Arrangements

The 85 year rule, which allowed members to retire before the age of 65 with unreduced benefits provided their age and membership added up to 85 was removed with effect from 1 October 2006.

However there are currently transitional protection arrangements in place for employees who were members of the LGPS prior to this date. The following table will help you work out your general position in relation to the 85 year rule, however, you should be aware that the rules governing how the 85 year rule protection applies, and the level of that protection, are quite complex.

<p>If you would not satisfy the 85 year rule by the time you are 65</p>	<p>All your benefits are reduced if you choose to draw your pension before your Normal Pension Age. The reduction will be based on how many years before your Normal Retirement Age (protected Normal Pension Age for pension built up before 1 April 2014) and new Normal Pension Age (linked to State Pension Age) for pension built up from 1 April 2014) you draw your benefits.</p>
<p>If you will be age 60 or over by 31 March 2016 and choose to draw your pension before your Normal Pension Age</p>	<p>Provided you satisfy the 85 year rule when you start to draw your pension, the benefits you build up to 31 March 2016 will not be reduced.</p>
<p>If you will be under age 60 by 31 March 2016 and choose to draw your pension before your protected Normal Pension Age</p>	<p>Provided you satisfy the 85 year rule when you start to draw your pension, the benefits you've built up to 31 March 2008 will not be reduced.</p>
<p>If you will be aged 60 between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2020 and meet the 85 year rule by 31 March 2020</p>	<p>Some or all of the benefits you build up between 1 April 2008 and 31 March 2020 will not have a full reduction.</p>

C. Workforce Planning

With the removal of the default retirement age (Age 65), it is important that the Authority is in a position to plan its workforce requirements to meet future business needs.

The Authority encourages its managers to hold regular workplace discussions with all employees to discuss performance, development and training needs. The discussions also need to include both the Authority's and the employee's future plans and expectations. This will be an opportunity for employees to discuss any future plans or proposals for retirement and in turn allow the manager to plan for such an event.

Organisational Development are able to provide advice and support to managers to assist in workforce planning for their service area as a whole. Further information and advice can be provided by our Organisational Development Advisor.

5. Flexible Retirement - Regulation 35

The Authority relies upon the knowledge and skills of its employees. A flexible approach to retirement may mean that those employees who would otherwise retire completely can choose to explore other options which can benefit both the employee and the Authority. The Authority is actively promoting Work Life Balance options and managers will take this into consideration when considering any application for flexible retirement.

A. Eligibility

Employees can apply for flexible retirement from age 55 years onwards, (providing you have met the 2 year vesting period in the scheme).

B. Options

There are a number of flexible retirement options available as follows:

- working flexible hours leading up to retirement;
- retiring and returning to work part time in current post; or
- full-time/part time in a lower graded post with reduced responsibilities (assuming a suitable position is available).

C. Pension Implications

An employee reducing their hours or moving to a less senior position at or after age 55 can, provided there is a business case to support this, draw some or all of the benefits accrued, to help ease him/her into retirement, although the benefits may be reduced for early payment. The employer however has the discretion to waive the reduction in whole or in part.

Employees can continue paying into the LGPS on their reduced hours or in the new role, building up further benefits in the scheme up to the eve of their 75th birthday.

D. Conditions of Service

An employee's terms and conditions of service will remain unchanged as there is continuity of employment i.e. holidays, occupational sick pay, etc.

- Where an employee receives pension and returns to the Authority in a lower graded post the appointment will be made on the first point of the new scale.
- Where an employee returns to the Authority in the same role on reduced hours the salary point will remain unchanged, however the salary, holidays, etc will be pro-rata to the number of hours agreed in the application.

E. Application

Applications must be made using the Flexible Retirement Request Form, identifying the preferred flexible retirement option. This must be made to the appropriate officer who is their respective line manager/service manager and copied to the Organisational Development Division.

F. Procedure

- On receipt of the Flexible Retirement Request Form the financial implications in relation to the early release of the pension will be considered along with any service delivery issues by the directorate to ensure that:
 - there is no detrimental effect on service delivery
 - any flexible working arrangements are fair and equitable to all employees in the team
 - any flexible working arrangement is reviewed to ensure its effectiveness on both sides
 - there is a viable business case to present to the Early Retirement Panel for approval
- The Early Retirement Panel will review the business case and make a decision whether the flexible retirement is a viable option for the Authority. Once considered at the Early Retirement Panel, the employee and their line manager/service manager will be notified of the outcome.
- If the application is successful, agreement will be reached with the employee and their line manager/service manager regarding the start date and review date for the new arrangements.
- If the application is unsuccessful, the employee will be provided with an explanation why the request has been denied. The decision of the Panel is final and there is no right of appeal.

If an employee is interested in pursuing flexible retirement, they can contact the Organisational Development Division for more details.

6. Other Policies/Guidelines

These provisions should be applied in accordance with other Blaenau Gwent Policies with particular reference to the following:

- Worklife Balance Policies
- Recruitment and Selection Charter
- In the Interest in Efficiency of the Service Policy
- Redundancy Policy
- Attendance Management Policy

7. Further Information

Further information, copies of appropriate forms and guidance can be obtained from:

Organisational Development Division

Municipal Offices, Civic Centre, Ebbw Vale, NP23 6XB

Tel: (01495) 355008

Fax: (01495) 355787

E-mail: hr.division@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Resources Division

Municipal Offices, Civic Centre, Ebbw Vale, NP23 6XB

Contact: **Loren Cosh– Pensions and Technical Officer**

Tel: (01495) 355170

Fax: (01495) 356133

E-mail: loren.cosh@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Torfaen Pension Scheme Administrators

Torfaen County Borough Council, Civic Centre, Pontypool, NP4 6YB

Tel: (01495) 766266

Fax: (01495) 766275

E-mail: pensions@torfaen.gov.uk

Retirement Options

Frequently Asked Questions



Q How much notice will I have to give if I want to retire?

You will need to give sufficient notice of your intention to retire to assist the Authority in planning its workforce requirements. In cases where employer consent is required, the retirement will need to be approved by an early retirement panel, so appropriate notice would be required to ensure that up to date retirement figures can be requested, a report created and approved within this timescale.

The Authority encourages its managers to hold regular workplace discussions with staff, and this will also be an opportunity to discuss any proposals for retirement and to allow your manager to plan for such an event.

Q I am 56 years of age, can I retire?

It is possible to retire from the age of 55 and receive benefits immediately although these benefits will be reduced due to them being paid for a longer period of time. The earliest age that you could access your pension in full, would be your NPA, before this you may suffer a reduction in your benefits for early payment, depending on your service.

Q I have been unwell recently; can I finish on Ill Health?

In line with the Attendance Management policy, the Authority will make a decision in relation to the grounds for termination of your employment. Following this you will need to be assessed by an Independent Registered Medical Practitioner and satisfy the criteria to qualify for the release of your pension, i.e. "you must be incapable of undertaking your current role until the age of 65".

For further information in relation to termination of employment on the grounds of ill health please contact the Organisational Development Division.

Q I am 52 and would like to retire, what do I need to do?

In line with the pension regulations, employees would not receive release of their pension benefits before the age of 55. If you wanted to finish work you would have to voluntarily resign and your pension contributions would be frozen until such time that you are eligible to draw upon them. The earliest age you can draw your pension if you no longer work for the authority is age 55 providing you have paid pension contributions from 1 April 2014 onwards. If you left the pension scheme prior to 1 April 2014 your earliest retirement date will be your NPA, although there may be a reduction in your pension for early payment.

If you were made redundant, then you would receive the relevant redundancy payment, and any pension contributions would be frozen until you reach pensionable age.

Q Can I just retire when I want to? Will my age impact on my benefits?

An employee's pension can be released from the age of 55. Any retirements before the age of 60 are known as Regulation 31. As part of the request for retirement the Authority will need to consider the financial implications (if any) in relation to the early release of your pension. It is necessary for the retirement to be considered at a Retirement Panel, the panel will review the business case and make a decision on the retirement.

You can also choose to retire from age 55 and receive pension benefits immediately, although there may be a reduction in the pension for early payment if full service hasn't been achieved.

If you continue to work after NPA, you will continue to pay into the LGPS, building up further benefits. You will receive your pension when you retire or reach the eve of your 75th birthday, whichever come first.

Q I'm not ready to retire completely, what are my options?

If you are over the age of 55 there are a number of flexible retirement options available, such as working flexible hours, reduced hours or undertaking a lower graded post with reduced responsibilities, assuming there is a suitable position available.

Provided there is a viable business case to support your request, you can draw some or all of the benefits you have built up, although the benefits may be reduced for early payment. Again, a report would need to be considered by the Early Retirement Panel to ensure there is a viable business case before the request is approved, so sufficient notice would be required.

Q I'm approaching age 65, but don't want to retire.

The default retirement age was abolished from 1 October 2011, and there is no longer a contractual retirement age, therefore you will not need to submit a request to work beyond age 65. It is anticipated that you would have communicated your intentions to continue working to your manager during ongoing workplace discussions.

If you work beyond age 65 you will continue to pay into the Local Government Pension Scheme and build up further benefits. Your pension will be released when you retire or reach the eve of your 75th birthday, whichever comes first.

Flexible Retirement Request Form



PLEASE COMPLETE FORM AND RETURN TO YOUR LINE MANAGER

Name:

Address:

Staff Number:

Directorate:

Division/Section:

Post Title:

National Insurance Number:

Date Of Birth:

Current Pattern Of Work:

Proposed Flexible Working Option:

Employee's Signature:

Date:



Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013

Statement Of Policy - Exercise Of Discretionary Functions



The Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) 2014 effective from 1 April 2014 introduces or amends a number of discretionary elements over which the Council as the employing body can exercise its discretion.

These policy discretions are, where appropriate, as close to the discretions previously applied by the Council and have been the subject of consultation with the trades unions.

In accordance with Regulation 60 of the above regulations the Council must formulate, approve, publish and keep under review changes to the Council's Policy in relation to the exercise of its employer discretions under regulations:

- 16(2)(e) and 16(4)(d) (funding of additional pension);
- 30(6) (flexible retirement);
- 30(8) (waiving of actuarial reduction); and
- 31 (award of additional pension).

In addition and in accordance with Paragraphs 2(2) of Schedule 2 to the Local Government Pension Scheme (Transitional Provisions, Savings & Amendment) Regulations 2014 the Council must also prepare a written statement on whether, in respect of benefits relating to pre 1 April 2014 membership, to 'switch on' the 85 year rule for a member who voluntarily retires (leaves employment) and elects to draw their benefits on or after the age of 55 and before the age of 60 thereby agreeing to waive in full or part any actuarial reduction applied to the member's benefits.

The Council is required to send a copy of this Statement to the Pensions Administering Authority by no later than 30 June 2014 and publish it in a place that is easily accessible to all of its eligible scheme employees. There is also the requirement to keep this Policy Statement under review and make such revisions as are appropriate following a change of policy.

Where a revision is made a copy of the revised statement must be supplied to the Pension Administering Authority before the expiry of one month beginning with the date that any such revision is made. The Council must also publish its revised statement ensuring that it is equally accessible.

In preparing, or reviewing and making revisions to its statement, the Council must have regard to the extent to which the exercise of its discretionary powers, unless properly limited, could lead to a serious loss of confidence in the public service.

This document outlines Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's policy on the employer discretions specified in LGPS 2014, effective from 1 April 2014.

PART A – Formulation of COMPULSORY policy in accordance with Regulation 60 of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 2013

Regulation 16 – Additional Pension Contributions

Where an active Scheme member wishes to purchase extra annual pension of up to £6,500* (figure at 1 April 2014) by making Additional Pension Contributions (APCs), the employer can choose to (voluntarily) contribute towards the cost of purchasing that extra pension via a Shared Cost Additional Pension Contribution (SCAPC).

The Scheme employer may resolve to fund in whole or in part any arrangement entered into by an active scheme member to pay additional pension contributions by way of regular contributions in accordance with *Regulation 16(2)(e)*, or by way of a lump sum in accordance with *Regulation 16(4)(d)*.

The Scheme employer may enter into an APC contract with a Scheme member who is contributing to the MAIN section of the Scheme in order to purchase additional pension of not more than the additional pension limit (£6,500 from 1 April 2014 subject to annual increase in line with the Pensions (Increase) Act 1971). The amount of additional contribution to be paid is determined by reference to actuarial guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's policy concerning the whole or part funding of an active member's additional pension contributions - Regulation 16(2)(e) and 16(4)(d)

The Council's policy is not to establish a Shared Cost Additional Pension Contribution Scheme for its employees either on the basis of regular ongoing contribution or by a one off lump sum. This would be a cost pressure and as such the Council will not exercise this discretion on the basis of affordability.

Regulation 30(6) – Flexible Retirement

An active member who has attained the age of 55 or over and who with the agreement of their employer reduces their working hours or grade of employment may, with the further consent of their employer, elect to receive immediate payment of all or part of the retirement pension to which they would be entitled in respect of that employment as if that member were no longer an employee in local government service on the date of the reduction in hours or grade (*adjusted by the amount shown as appropriate in actuarial guidance issued by the Secretary of State – separate policy required under Regulation 30(8)*).

As part of the policy making decision the Scheme employer must consider whether, in addition to the benefits the member may have accrued prior to 1 April 2008 (which the member must draw), to permit the member to choose to draw all, part or none of the pension benefits they built up after 31 March 2008 and before 1 April 2014 and all, part or none of the pension benefits they built up after 1 April 2014.

Due consideration must be given to the financial implications of allowing an employee to draw all or part of their pension benefits earlier than their normal retirement age.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's policy concerning flexible retirement

The Council currently has a policy in place to consider applications for Flexible Retirement which is linked to the Council's policies on retirement and flexible working. The Authority relies upon the knowledge and skills of its employees and as such this policy provides the opportunity for retaining skills and experience as part of a transition towards retirement.

Flexible Retirement allows scheme members age 55 and over to apply to transfer to a lower graded post or to reduce hours of employment and at the same time access their retirement benefits. Both the transfer to a lower graded post or reduction in hours of work and the early release of retirement benefits is an employer discretion.

The Council currently operates a Flexible Retirement Scheme and as such this arrangement will continue. The business case in respect of a flexible retirement request will be considered at the Council's Early Leavers Panel.

Regulation 30(8) – Waiving of Actuarial Reduction

Where a Scheme employer's policy is to consent to the immediate release of benefits in respect of an active member who is aged 55 or over, those benefits must be adjusted by an amount shown as appropriate in actuarial guidance issued by the Secretary of State (commonly referred to as actuarial reduction or early payment reduction).

A scheme employer (or former employer as the case may be) may agree to waive in whole or in part and at their own cost, any actuarial reduction that may be required by the Scheme Regulations.

Due consideration must be given to the financial implications of agreeing to waive in whole or in part any actuarial reduction.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's policy concerning the waiving of actuarial reduction

The business case in respect of Early Retirements will be considered in line with the terms of reference of the Council's Early Leavers Panel. Waiving of actuarial reduction protections in such cases will not normally be considered. Only in exceptional circumstances where there is a clear financial or operational advantage for the Authority in so doing or on compassionate grounds would this be considered. This would require authorisation by the Chief Finance Officer and the Head of Organisational Development or their nominated representative.

Regulation 31 – Award of Additional Pension

A Scheme employer may resolve to award

(a) an active member, or

(b) a member who was an active member but dismissed by reason of redundancy, or business efficiency, or whose employment was terminated by mutual consent on grounds of business efficiency,

additional annual pension of, in total (including any additional pension purchased by the Scheme employer under Regulation 16), not more than the additional pension limit (£6,500 from 1 April 2014 subject to annual increase in line with the Pensions (Increase) Act 1971).

Any additional pension awarded is payable from the same date as any pension payable under other provisions of the Scheme Regulations from the account to which the additional pension is attached.

In the case of a member falling within sub-paragraph (b) above, the resolution to award additional pension must be made within 6 months of the date that the member's employment ended.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's policy concerning the award of additional pension

The Council's policy is not to fund additional pension at whole cost to the employer given the substantial costs associated with introducing an equitable scheme. This would be a cost pressure and as such the Council **will not exercise** this discretion on the basis of affordability.

Local Government Pension Scheme (Transitional Provisions and Savings) Regulations 2014 Schedule 2 – paragraphs 2 and 3

Where a scheme member retires or leaves employment and elects to draw their benefits at or after the age of 55 and before the age of 60 those benefits will be actuarially reduced unless their Scheme employer agrees to meet the full or part cost of those reductions as a result of the member otherwise being protected under the 85 year rule as set out in previous regulations.

So as to avoid the member suffering the full reduction to their benefits the Scheme employer can 'switch on' the 85 year rule protections thereby allowing the member to receive fully or partly unreduced benefits but subject to the Scheme employer paying a strain (capital) cost to the Pension Fund.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's policy concerning the 'switching on' of the 85 year rule

The business case in respect of early retirements will be considered in line with the terms of reference of the Council's Early Leavers Panel. 'Switching on' of the 85 year rule protections in such cases **will not normally be considered**. Only in **exceptional** circumstances where there is a clear financial or operational advantage for the Authority in so doing or on compassionate grounds would this be considered. This would require authorisation by the Chief Finance Officer and the Head of Organisational Development or their nominated representative.

The discretions contained within this Policy Statement are applicable to all eligible members of the Scheme. The Scheme rules allow for a revised statement to be issued at least one month in advance of the date that any new policy takes effect.

The revised statement must be sent to the Pensions Administering Authority and published in a place that is accessible to all of its eligible scheme members.

The policies made above have regard to the extent to which the exercise of the discretions could lead to a serious loss of confidence in the public service and will be exercised reasonably and only used when there is a real and substantial future benefit to the Council for incurring the extra costs that may arise.

The Council retains the right to change this Policy Statement at any time and only the version which is current at the time a relevant event occurs to an employee will be the one applied to that employee.



Redundancy Policy



ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Issued: July 2023 Review: July 2024

Version Control

This document is intended for:

- Council staff only School-based staff only Council & School-based staff

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July 2020	Reformatted and EAP details added	DMT
July 2023	Reference to the Protection from Redundancy (Pregnancy and Family Leave) Act 2023 added	DMT

This document may be reviewed and amended at any time and without consultation in response to legal requirements or in response to an organisational requirement and where the changes do not reflect a fundamental change or affect the spirit or intent of the document.

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1. Policy Statement

Blaenau Gwent Council is focused on continuous improvement in times of financial challenge and continues to be committed to providing job security for all employees however, the challenging financial situation that Local Government faces may impact on the staffing establishment of the Council.

In order to minimise the impact of reductions in staffing levels the following procedure will be adopted for all employees of the Council. In all circumstances the instigation of this policy will involve consultation and engagement with the trade unions.

In any redundancy situation the Council will ensure that the process is fair and equitable for all concerned and will ensure that all parties are consulted and communicated with at all stages of the process.

2. Scope of the Policy

This policy will apply to all members of staff employed at Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council including all school based employees, Teachers and Headteachers **regardless of length of service or contract type**. The policy complies with all relevant legislation and works within the guidelines set out within the ACAS code of practise.

Governing bodies are not obliged to adopt this policy. In such cases where Governing Bodies choose to develop their own policy, legislation must be adhered to and full consultation must take place with all relevant Unions and Professional Associations. Should Governing bodies chose not to adopt this Policy any calculations over and above the agreed payments laid out in this document are to be funded from within the School budget.

It is important that School Governors understand their legal responsibilities for declaring a post(s) redundant and the protocols to be followed in relation to the Council's Corporate Redundancy Panel as the compensating body.

3. Definition of Redundancy

Redundancy is defined in law as a dismissal for one of the following reasons:

- cessation of business;
- cessation of business at the employee's place of work;
- a reduction or cessation of work; and
- anticipation of a reduction or cessation of work.

In cases where the business or part of the business transfers to another provider, employees are not necessarily redundant and would normally transfer to another employer on their terms and conditions, commonly referred to as "TUPE" regulations (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment).

In the case of schools, redundancy will usually occur because pupils numbers have fallen, resulting in budgetary reductions, which make support for the current level of staffing impossible. There may be other reasons from time to time, for example, a school closure.

Statutory Framework: the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 and the Staffing of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2006 refer to education legislation which reinforces the provision for School Governing Bodies to appoint and dismiss staff. The contract of employment however is between the Council and the employee for Community Schools. For Voluntary Aided Schools the contract of employment is between the Governing Body and the employee.

4. Measures to Avoid Redundancy

Blaenau Gwent Council will consult with the Trade Unions with a view to establishing whether the proposed job losses can be achieved by means other than compulsory redundancies. Similarly Governors should always seek resolutions, which avoid the need for compulsory identification of a member of staff as being surplus to requirement at the school. Consideration will be given to the following alternative options, subject to the Council's immediate urgent operational considerations:

- natural wastage;
- restricting further recruitment of new staff other than where this is essential i.e. front line service;
- restricting the use of sub-contract temporary and casual staff, including termination where practical, of temporary or contract staff;
- reducing the amount of overtime working in the particular service;
- inviting applications for consideration for early retirement, flexible retirement and/or voluntary redundancy (crossmatching);
- requests to job share or part time working;
- redeploying individuals to alternative posts.

5. Notification to the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform

It is a legal requirement to notify the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR) in writing of a proposal to make 20 or more employees redundant within a 90 day period. The OD Division will coordinate this return.

Consultation will start at the earliest opportunity and within the statutory requirements. These are:

- 45 days if 100 or more employees are to be made redundant;
- 30 days for 20-99 employees; and
- for less than 20 employees no notification is required.

6. Consultation

Employees and relevant recognised Trade Unions should be made aware of the proposals for organisational change, and the reasons, at the earliest opportunity. Failure to consult could result in a finding of unfair dismissal by an Employment Tribunal. Before starting any redundancy process, advice should be sought from Organisational Development. A flowchart detailing the consultation process is attached at [Appendix 3a](#).

In the case of Schools, as soon as a budgetary problem is identified, that could lead to a potential redundancy situation, the Headteacher should liaise with Schools Finance and the Organisational Development Teams. If after discussions there is an agreement that there is a redundancy situation, the Trade Unions must be informed and the consultation process commenced. Such action will ensure that the correct support, advice and guidance is provided throughout the process.

Employees have the right to be accompanied by a work colleague or their trade union representative at all stages of the process.

Timescales for Statutory Consultation

There are minimum statutory timescales that indicate when formal consultation should begin. Where possible consultation should allow for further consideration of any counter-proposals and alternatives to redundancy:

- at least 45 days if 100 or more employees are to be made redundant; and
- at least 30 days for 20-99 employees.

The Council will consult with the Trade Unions even if it is proposed that only one employee who: a) belongs to a trade union or b) is affected by collective bargaining, will be made redundant. Consultation must include discussions on ways to:

- avoid or reduce redundancies;
- mitigate its consequences; and
- consider redeployment.

Staff will also receive information through the organisational and directorates staff communication/engagement framework.

Disclosure of Information

The Council has a statutory duty to disclose in writing to the appropriate representatives the following information:

- the reasons for the proposed redundancies;
- the number and descriptions of employees whom it is proposed to dismiss; including agency staff who are contracted for more than 3 months work;
- total number of employees employed in the same place of work;
- the proposed method of selection;
- the proposed method of carrying out the dismissal taking into account any agreed procedure including timescales; and
- method of calculating redundancy payment.

School specific information regarding disclosure is detailed in the Schools Consultation Process ([Appendix 5](#)).

7. Selection

Where the redundancy applies to a job held by one individual, the post would be redundant without the need for selection.

Where there are multiple redundancies or a reduction in posts within a group of employees the “pool” of employees from which the redundancies will be drawn must be defined. This might be one team within a Department, a group of employees doing the same job, usually working to the same or similar job description, or those performing a particular function across a number of departments, managers should seek advice from Organisational Development if the selection pool is not clear. [Appendix 2](#) details the grounds that will not be used as criteria when selecting staff for redundancy.

Consultation for employees on Maternity leave will also take place and further guidance on this should be sought from the OD Division.

Selection Criteria

The criteria used for redundancy selection must be fair, clear, objective and non-discriminatory, precisely defined and capable of being applied in an independent way. The criteria must be applied fairly and consistently to all employees at Blaenau Gwent who have been identified as at risk.

If the Council is faced with making compulsory redundancies the selection criteria will be agreed with the trade unions. The criteria applied, will as far as possible, be measurable and supported by documentary evidence. The following list gives examples of the criteria that the organisation may apply.

- Attendance records; including Number of Occasions and Number of days
- Disciplinary records; (Agreed period of time)
- Capability
- Job Knowledge and Skills
- Flexibility
- Timekeeping (Discretionary)

Standard mandatory criteria will be used in all cases and additional discretionary criteria will be used where appropriate dependent on roles identified. The selection criteria will, in all cases, be agreed with the Departmental Manager and Trade Union representatives prior to any consultation meetings taking place. [Appendix 4a](#) details the compulsory and discretionary criteria.

School Based Staff

The criteria outlined in the Redundancy Selection Matrix can be applied to school support staff. For teaching staff the relevant matrix appears in [appendix 5](#). Should the Governors chose to use criteria other than those recommended in this Policy, they must consult with the Trade Union with a view to reaching agreement on the revised criteria.

The Complete Closure of the Relevant Service

As far in advance of the proposed termination date as possible, the appropriate officer, in consultation with the OD Division, will notify all employees as a result of a service or establishment closure where there will be compulsory redundancies proposed.

Management in consultation with the OD Division will then enter into immediate consultation on an individual basis with those employees affected.

In the course of the consultation employees will be informed of the basis of their selection and invited to make representations on their proposed dismissal. Management will give full consideration to any such representations before a confirmed selection for redundancy is made by the appropriate officer in consultation with the OD Division.

Where selection has been confirmed, those selected for redundancy will be given notice of termination in accordance with contractual and/or statutory requirements.

School closures will be subject to the relevant statutory consultation requirements. At the appropriate time all post holders in the school to be closed will be identified as “at risk” of redundancy and be dealt with in accordance will necessary stages of this policy. Representation and appeals procedures will rest with the Governing Body of the closing school.

8. Suitable Alternative Employment

The Council will make every effort to establish whether there is suitable alternative employment available and offer such employment to the individual(s) concerned. In the case of school based staff this will be in conjunction with the Headteacher and Governing Body. Records of such actions should be maintained. If “suitable alternative employment” is not available redundancy will apply.

The following factors must be considered in determining whether a particular post offers “suitable alternative employment”:

- relevance of an employee’s skills, qualifications, abilities and experience to the requirements of the post;
- the practicality and cost of re-training;
- provide similar earnings including hours of work;
- have similar status; and
- not involve unreasonable additional inconvenience.

The Council will give prior consideration for suitable alternative employment to employees at risk of redundancy provided the employee’s skills and abilities match the essential criteria of the post or will do so with reasonable training. Please see the redeployment policy for guidance. For school based staff historically there has been a high success rate of identifying suitable alternative employment between schools, and Governing Bodies will be requested to maintain their co-operation in

facilitating suitable alternative arrangements to mitigate redundancy situations. Crossmatch opportunities will be explored in any redundancy situation.

Trial Period

All posts offered for re-deployment will be subject to a trial period. The length of the trial period will be agreed with the employee prior to a post being taken up, and will generally relate to the complexity and any change of duties undertaken. Detail of trial periods can be found in the [Redeployment Policy](#).

If an employee refuses an offer of alternative employment which the Council deems suitable and the refusal is considered to be unreasonable, the individual will lose their entitlement to a redundancy payment, and potential early access to their pension benefits.

Trial period arrangement should also apply to school based staff where appropriate for a trial to take place.

Ring Fencing

Ring fencing would only normally occur in the following situations:

- Restructuring: in a restructuring situation the Authority may, in certain cases where there is a reduction to the overall number of posts consider ring fencing as part of this process.
- Recruitment: an employee including school based staff on the “at risk” list who expresses an interest, and meets the essential person specification criteria, will be interviewed. In the event of more than one employee applying for a vacant post, all who meets the essential person specification criteria will be interviewed.

No appointments to ring fenced posts will be made unless:

- A candidate demonstrates sufficiently that they fully possess the requirements of the posts, as laid down in the person specification and as determined by the selection procedure (s).
- A candidate can reasonably be expected to fully meet the requirements of the posts within a reasonable period, with the provision of appropriate training and support. In such cases a “trial period” will apply.
- Where no suitable candidate is found from the “at risk” list, the post may be advertised externally.

Cross matching within Schools

The Organisational Development Division will in liaison with Headteachers maintain a list of school based staff who have expressed an interest in potential redundancy to facilitate crossmatch for staff identified as “at risk”. The list will be referred to in all compulsory redundancy situations.

9. Formal Notification of Redundancy

In accordance with this policy, and following a period of consultation notification of redundancy will be given, providing employees with appropriate notice of their employment being terminated.

The notice period will be an individual's contractual or statutory notice period, whichever is **greater**. Wherever possible notice should be worked and not paid in lieu. In those exceptional circumstances where full notice is not worked the balance will be paid in lieu except when a termination date is mutually agreed prior to the contractual date. Then any balance in lieu is not applicable.

	Continuous Service	Statutory Notice
All staff	1 month but less than 2 years	1 week
	2 years but less than 12 years	1 week of each year of continuous employment
	12 years or more	Not less than 12 weeks (unless the contract provides for a greater period)
Teachers	Subject to contract under continuous service	2 months Notice in Autumn and Spring Terms 3 months during the Summer Term Notice to be given no later than 31 st October, 28 th February and 31 st May to take effect at the end of the specified period.
Headteachers	Subject to contract under continuous service	3 months notice in Autumn and Spring Terms* 4 months during the Summer Term* Notice to be given no later than 30 th September, 31 st January and 30 th April to take effect at the end of the specified period.

In cases where notice is not formally provided to the employee by the deadline the Governing Body will be obliged to employ them for an extra period or make payment in lieu of notice, to ensure that the necessary notice periods are complied with. Headteachers are only considered surplus to requirements in the event of a school closure.

10. Right of Appeal

The employee has the right of appeal if they believe the redundancy is unjustified or that the selection for redundancy is unfair.

Stage 1 Appeal

Should an employee wish to appeal against their scoring and/or selection then this should be heard in the first instance by a Senior Officer within the department and a member of the OD Division.

Stage 2 Appeal

If an employee wishes to appeal against the decision to dismiss on the grounds of redundancy following their notice being issued the appeal letter should be sent to the OD Division in line with the timeframes set out in the appeals procedure for dismissals.

School based staff

[Appendix 5](#) outlines the appeals process for school based staff, which stipulates specific rights for representation and appeal at Governing Body Panels.

11. Compensation

Clearly, where there is a redundancy, there will be entitlement to redundancy pay and other benefits. Compensation for loss of employment due to redundancy will not be calculated on less favourable terms than in accordance with statutory entitlement laid down in existing legislation. All employees who receive redundancy payments will be given a written notification of their redundancy pay. [Appendix 1](#) details the calculation of redundancy pay.

12. Withholding Redundancy Payments

If an employee under notice of redundancy receives an **offer** of work in local government, or a related employer, to commence before the fifth Monday following the date of termination, there will be no entitlement to a redundancy payment. Related employers are those covered by the Redundancy Modification Order.

13. Continuity of Service

Continuity of service for all employees including school based staff **will not** be broken if the employee receives and accepts an offer of employment with an organisation covered by the **Redundancy Modification Order** before their employment ends with Blaenau Gwent and they start their new job before the 5th Monday following the date of termination of employment. In this situation they will not be entitled to a redundancy payment.

Where a redundancy payment is made, continuity of service will be broken for the purposes of calculating future redundancy payments. However, there is an entitlement to count previous service for notice periods, annual leave, sickness payments and maternity leave, provided that the break has not exceeded 2 years.

In the case of an employee who has more than one job with the Authority, continuity of service will be based on the redundant post. However, if at the time of redundancy the employee is employed under only one contract but in the past has had one or more overlapping contracts the length of service can be counted back to the start of the first contract if the service has been continuous.

14. Business Case/Approval Mechanism

Any termination on the grounds of redundancy or a crossmatch redundancy whereby the Council exercises its discretion must be supported by a business case.

This business case will include consideration of service delivery changes and the financial consequences of any redundancy payment and pension recovery payback over a period no greater than 5 years.

In the case of schools there will be a full consultation process in liaison with the Headteacher, Organisational Development Division and Trade Unions which will result in the school's redundancy protocols being instigated and relevant panels being held as detailed in [Appendix 5](#). An important consideration will be that the redundancy will not be formally declared until the business case for release of compensation has been approved by the Corporate Redundancy Panel, as the compensating body. It is therefore important that there is an early justification for a robust business case and the Headteacher may be required to attend the Corporate Redundancy Panel in support of their business case.

15. Employee Support and Advice

Organisational Development can support redundancy situations and where appropriate signpost to relevant bodies, details of additional support are outlined below:

Time off for attending interviews

Subject to the Council's operational needs and with approval of the relevant line manager, employees will be granted reasonable time off with pay during their notice period to look for work or to seek retraining opportunities in accordance with current legislation.

Employee Assistance Programme

The Authority has an Employee Assistance Programme in place with an independent provider called "Care first" for all employees and managers. Employees can access support on any personal or work-related issues that may be causing concern or distress such as stress awareness, debt management, well-being and relationship

issues. Contact details are below and additional information is available on the [intranet](#).

- “**Care first**” is free to use 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year and there is no need for employees to ask a manager to use the service. Employees can call **0800 174319** to speak to a professional counsellor or information specialist **in confidence** about a range of issues.
- The “**Care first Lifestyle**” website offers extensive resources including articles on health, issues at home, issues at work, management support tools, stress questionnaires and online counselling in real-time. Employees should visit the website at www.care-first.co.uk and login using the following details - username: **blaenau** and password: **employee**
- The “**Care first Zest**” app has interactive tools, helpful tips, visual and mental exercises and engaging activities. These include meditation exercises, mindfulness exercises, breathing exercises, toolkits to identify behaviours and monitor progress, mood trackers and much more. To start using the app:
 - Download the app - available on iTunes or Google Play – search for My possible self: Mental Health. Or, if you’d prefer to use the programme from your desktop, follow this link: <https://portal.my-possible-self.com/welshfram/my-possible-self/register> (the website is not compatible with Internet Explorer).
 - Enter the registration passcode **WelFram21!** then tick the “I’m not a robot” box and click “Submit”.
 - Create your personal account.
 - Once registered, you can log into the website via www.my-possible-self.com or app using the email and password you created your account with.

React Funding

Any member of staff facing redundancy will be able to access government funding for re-training. In addition to this there is an employer subsidy available to potential new employers (subject to eligibility).

Support under the ReAct II scheme is available for individuals who:

- have become unemployed in the last six months as a result of redundancy, are currently unemployed, and who have not been in continuous employment for 6 weeks or more since being made redundant;
- are currently under notice of redundancy;
- have not undertaken any publicly funded training since being made redundant, including the work-based learning suite of programmes.

In any redundancy situation all members of staff will have full access to information regarding REACT funding. In addition to this staff will be granted reasonable time off to attend any appointments with their react advisors. React advisors can also support CV creation and interview technique training depending on requirements.

Business Set Up Support

Staff under notice of redundancy who are thinking of setting up their own business will also have access to specialist advisors for advice and support. Any member of staff facing a redundancy and wishing to receive this advice can request this directly with their Manager who will make the necessary arrangements with the OD Division.

Job Centre Plus/Careers Wales

Job Centre Plus and Careers Wales are able to offer individuals advice on job search, CV compilation, interview techniques. Depending on the scale of redundancies the Council will seek to provide this service in-house. This will be determined in line with Department Managers the OD Division and individuals facing redundancy.

Appendix 1: Statutory Redundancy Payments

Currently, statutory redundancy payments depend on:

- length of continuous service by the employing authority/ies;
- how continuous service relates to a particular age band; and
- weekly pay.

Discretionary Payments

The Council exercises its discretion in line with the relevant Pension regulations and guidance. The following discretions will apply:

Redundancy payments will be based on actual earnings as opposed to “statutory” limits however an upper limit of SCP 46 will apply to all redundancies. For staff employed under teacher conditions the cap will be an equivalent amount on the teachers pay scales according to the Teacher’s Pay and Conditions Document.

Payments

Staff who do not have access to their Pension

- A redundancy payment based on the statutory calculator multiplied by 2 up to a maximum of 60 weeks.

Staff who are able to access their Pension

- A redundancy payment based on the statutory calculator up to a maximum of 30 weeks.
- Will have immediate access to unreduced payments of their LGPS/TPS benefits.

Taxation

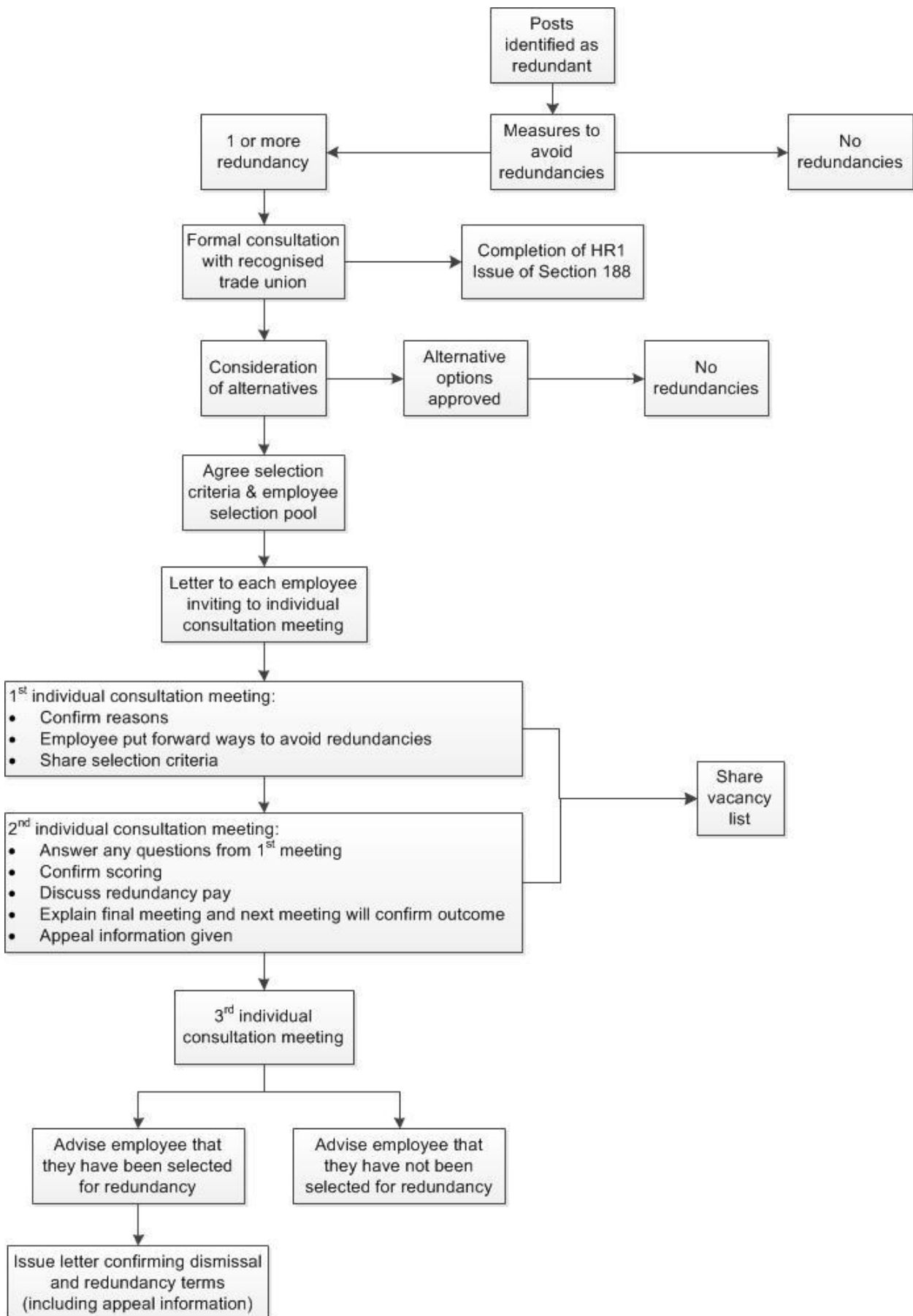
Where a discretionary award exceeds £30,000 the excess is subject to a tax deduction at the individual’s marginal rate. The component subject to assessment is the award of redundancy.

Appendix 2: Inappropriate Redundancy Selection Criteria

The following grounds shall **not** be used as criteria when selecting staff for compulsory redundancy:

- participation in trade union activities, or membership or non-membership of a trade union
- having requested flexible working arrangements
- having taken lawfully organised industrial action lasting eight weeks or less (or more than eight weeks in certain circumstances)
- having asserted a statutory employment right
- maternity-related reasons, or in relation to other rights for working parents (for example adoption leave and paternity leave)
- a reason relating to member of staff's rights under the Maternity and Parental Leave etc Regulations 1999
- criteria covered under the Protection from Redundancy (Pregnancy and Family Leave) Act 2023
- having exercised, or sought to exercise, the right to be accompanied at a disciplinary or grievance hearing
- a reason relating to the member of staff's rights under the Working Time Regulations 1998
- a reason relating to the member of staff's rights under the National Minimum Wage Act 1998
- a reason specified in the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000
- a reason specified in the Fixed-term Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002
- having made a protected disclosure within the meaning of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998
- having taken action on health and safety grounds as a designated or recognised health and safety representative, or as an member of staff in particular circumstances
- having taken part (or proposed to take part) in consultation on specified health and safety matters, or taken part in elections for representatives of member of staff safety

Appendix 3a: Consultation Process



Appendix 3b: Redundancy Procedure – Flowchart for School Based Staff

In the Annual General Meeting, the Governing Body elects a Redundancy Panel and a Redundancy Appeals Panel.



Governing Body/Head Teacher identify a potential staff reduction, after identifying the needs of the school. The OD Division can be contacted for advice. Consultation begins with trade unions and staff.



Skills & Experience Matrix distributed to all relevant teaching staff for completion. Summary Matrix to be completed by Headteacher. Redundancy Selection Matrix completed for support staff tailored to relevant selection pool and summary matrix completed by Headteacher.



Redundancy Panel uses criteria to identify staff as surplus to requirements, using the summary matrix.



Headteacher notifies staff that they have been identified as surplus to requirements and that they have the right of representation to the Redundancy Panel. LEA confirms the decision of the panel.



If required, the Redundancy Panel considers representations. The member of staff has a right to be present at a formal hearing where the right to natural justice will apply.



If the representations are rejected, the employee should be notified in writing and informed of their right of appeal.



If there is an appeal, the Redundancy Appeals panel will conduct a complete re-hearing of the case.



The decision of the Redundancy Appeals Panel is final subject to authorisation by the Corporate Redundancy Panel.



The Corporate Director of Education must be officially notified of the decision at the Corporate Redundancy Panel.

Appendix 3c: Redundancy Procedure – Flowchart for Non School Based Staff

Following 1st consultation meeting with staff in line with the Council's Redundancy Policy, agree job description for post to ensure appropriate detail and information is transferred to matrix.



Agree a timeframe to complete the matrix; the date the scoring will be based on; the date the matrix will be finalised and a timetable of all meetings, in order to give all interested parties clear information.



Ascertain which system the information is to be checked against, i.e. iTrent and establish OD contact to ensure continuity throughout the process. The same manager is to be involved throughout the process.



Arrange pre-meeting with OD and an independent officer to quality assure the scoring.



Arrange 2nd consultation meeting to explain the matrix scores with staff, give the right to appeal the decision as set out in the Policy.



Following the expiry of the appeal period, arrange 3rd consultation meeting to confirm the staff not selected for redundancy and discuss the options with the staff that have been selected for redundancy that are now at risk.



Following the decision by the corporate redundancy panel; issue final notice letter to the unsuccessful staff giving right of appeal against dismissal.

Redundancy Selection Matrix

Proposal:

Officer Lead:

Effective date of scoring:

Number of Redundancies:

Number of staff in Selection Pool:

Selection Pool Description:

Employee Name:

Designation:

Grade:

Length of Service (Mandatory)

Score:

The Council uses length of service as part of the selection criteria and recognises that this cannot be used as the only qualifying factor in selection for redundancy. The Council's aim is to apply this as part of the selection criteria for redundancy. In addition to this the council will also apply length of service as a factor in a tie-break situation. Where there is a tiebreaker in respect of the scoring, final selection will be made by reference to length of Service, where the person with the longest continuous (unbroken) local government service will be retained.

1 Day – 1 years service	5
1 year – 3 years service	10
3 years – 5 years service	15
5 years – 10 years service	20
10 – 15 years service	25
15 years or more	30

Attendance Record (Mandatory)

For the purpose of attendance records the Council will score the Attendance Record criteria over a 4 year period with effect from the date of marking. All individuals within the selection pool including those not selected for redundancy will be subject to further scoring for selection. The Council reserves the right to revisit the scoring at any point during the notice period.

Please note that consideration is required upon absences that could fall within the remit of the Equality Act 2010. Further advice and guidance is available from Organisational Development, and is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010>

In cases whereby absences maybe linked to a work related accident, these should be considered separately.

Occasions of Absence (Mandatory)

Score:

7 or more periods of absence	0
5 - 6 periods of absence	10
3 - 4 periods of Absence	20
1 – 2 periods of Absence	30
No Absences	40

Occasions of Absence are the number of times a person has been off sick over the previous 4 years i.e. 1 period of 4 weeks absence and 1 period of 2 days absence would be 2 occasions. This must be formally recorded and available for review by the employee.

Days of Absence (Mandatory)

Score:

41 or more days	0
31 – 40	5
21 – 30	10
11 – 20	15
1 – 10	20
Nil	25

Days of absence are the total amount of days lost to absence.

Disciplinary Record (Mandatory)Score:

Only disciplinary warnings that are current and do not expire prior to the date of termination will be used when scoring this section.

Final Written Warning	0
First Written Warning	10
Nothing on Record	20

Capability (Mandatory)Score:

Has entered into stage 3 of the capability process and is being considered for re-deployment, further monitoring or dismissal.	0
Has entered into stage 2 of the capability process and is currently working to a development plan to improve performance.	5
Has entered into stage 1 of the capability process and is currently working to a development plan to improve performance.	10
(Evidenced) Issues of performance being addressed through, supervision, performance management and training. As defined in the Capability Policy.	15
Nothing on Record	20

Job Knowledge Skills (Mandatory)Score:

Tailored to each Selection Pool (maximum of 20 points).

Essential Qualifications & Experience:

- This would be Essential Criteria from the agreed JD.
- Maximum of 10 points if staff are also being scored in undertaking duties across the council.
- If the individuals going through the matrix are static members of staff (i.e. office based) the maximum point scored for this section should be 20 points.

Flexibility (Mandatory)Score:

- Tailored to each Selection Pool (maximum of 10 points).
- Transferable skills across the Directorate/Council e.g. managing staff, budgets, IT skills (maximum of 10 points).

Timekeeping (Discretionary) Score:

Timekeeping criteria will only be applied when the selection pool are required to work varying shift patterns.

8 or more	0
5 – 7	5
2 – 5	10
No lateness	15

Maximum Points Achievable: Actual Points Achieved:

Scoring Manager Signature:

Print Name: Date:

Quality Assured Signature:

Print Name: Date:

Employee Signature:

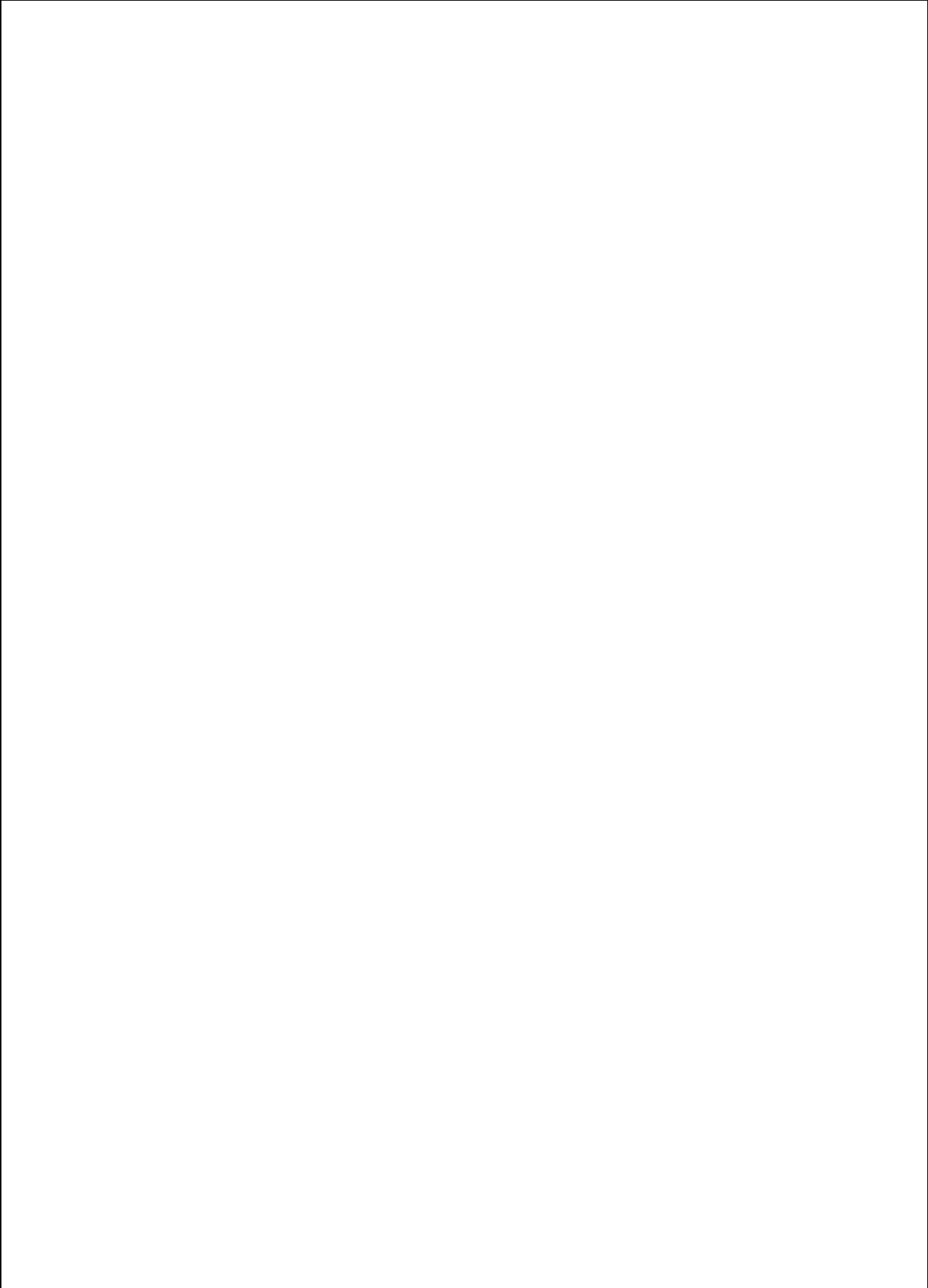
Print Name: Date:

I can confirm that I :

Agree Disagree with the scoring of the matrix

If disagree, please stipulate the grounds in which you are disagreeing.
 NB: by completing this section, an appeal against the scoring of your matrix with be raised.

Supporting Evidence



Appendix 4b: Redundancy Selection Matrix (Manager's Guide)

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Redundancy Selection Matrix

Please note that the date of scoring will need to be agreed with the Manager and Trade Union/Representative prior to the exercise taking place. All employees in the selection pool should be marked at the same effective date.

Proposal:

Officer Lead:

Effective date of scoring:

Number of Redundancies: Number of staff in Selection Pool:

Selection Pool Description:

Employee Name:

Designation: Grade:

Length of Service (Mandatory) Score:

The Council uses length of service as part of the selection criteria and recognises that this cannot be used as the only qualifying factor in selection for redundancy. The Council's aim is to apply this as part of the selection criteria for redundancy. In addition to this the council will also apply length of service as a factor in a tie-break situation. Where there is a tiebreaker in respect of the scoring, final selection will be made by reference to length of Service, where the person with the longest continuous (unbroken) local government service will be retained.

When calculating Service points, the Local Government continuous service date is required to be used. Please note the reference to Service being used in a tie-break situation. This would only apply to staff being assessed in the same selection pool.

1 Day – 1 years service	5
1 year – 3 years service	10
3 years – 5 years service	15
5 years – 10 years service	20
10 – 15 years service	25
15 years or more	30

Attendance Record (Mandatory)

For the purpose of attendance records the Council will score the Attendance Record criteria over a 4 year period with effect from the date of marking. All individuals within the selection pool including those not selected for redundancy will be subject to further scoring for selection. The Council reserves the right to revisit the scoring at any point during the notice period.

In this circumstance explanation and agreement with Trade Union/Representative/Manager/ Individual that any absence taken within the notice period may alter the scoring further, and this will be discussed on a case by case basis.

Please note that consideration is required upon absences that could fall within the remit of the Equality Act 2010. Further advice and guidance is available from Organisational Development, and is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010>

In cases whereby absences may be linked to a work related accident, these should be considered separately.

Occasions of Absence (Mandatory)

Score:

7 or more periods of absence	0
5 - 6 periods of absence	10
3 - 4 periods of Absence	20
1 – 2 periods of Absence	30
No Absences	40

Occasions of Absence are the number of times a person has been off sick over the previous 4 years i.e. 1 period of 4 weeks absence and 1 period of 2 days absence would be 2 occasions. This must be formally recorded and available for review by the employee.

Days of Absence (Mandatory)

Score:

41 or more days	0
31 – 40	5
21 – 30	10
11 – 20	15
1 – 10	20
Nil	25

Days of absence are the total amount of days lost to absence.

Disciplinary Record (Mandatory) Score:

Only disciplinary warnings that are current and do not expire prior to the date of termination will be used when scoring this section.

Final Written Warning	0
First Written Warning	10
Nothing on Record	20

The above is self explanatory and any current warnings on file will determine the score.

Capability (Mandatory) Score:

Has entered into stage 3 of the capability process and is being considered for re-deployment, further monitoring or dismissal.	0
Has entered into stage 2 of the capability process and is currently working to a development plan to improve performance.	5
Has entered into stage 1 of the capability process and is currently working to a development plan to improve performance.	10
(Evidenced) Issues of performance being addressed through, supervision, performance management and training. As defined in the Capability Policy.	15
Nothing on Record	20

The above is in line with the Capability Policy and should the employee have commenced this process, the scores must reflect this.

Job Knowledge Skills (Mandatory) Score:

Tailored to each Selection Pool (maximum of 20 points).
Essential Qualifications & Experience:

- This would be Essential Criteria from the agreed JD.
- Maximum of 10 points if staff are also being scored in undertaking duties across the council.
- If the individuals going through the matrix are static members of staff (i.e. office based) the maximum point scored for this section should be 20 points.

Examples are the flexibility to cover other roles within the department i.e. Recreational Assistant covering a Duty Manager, a Home Carer covering Duty Planner. Consideration can also include covering different areas of work within the department or being able to work across functions.

Where possible this should be objective and would relate to specific skills required for the role. This could include qualifications, skills, and specialist skills. This may also relate to particular tasks in the department that all employees within the selection pool should have had equal opportunity to train/carry out.

The criteria for this section must be mutually agreed with the Manager and the Union/representatives.

Flexibility (Mandatory) Score:

- Tailored to each Selection Pool (maximum of 10 points).
- Transferable skills across the Directorate/Council e.g. managing staff, budgets, IT skills (maximum of 10 points).

The criteria for this section must be mutually agreed with the Manager and the Union/representatives.

Timekeeping (Discretionary) Score:

Timekeeping criteria will only be applied when the selection pool are required to work varying shift patterns.

8 or more	0
5 – 7	5
2 – 5	10
No lateness	15

This should only be applied if the individuals affected work set shift patterns/times and also if the criteria is applied across the selection group.

Maximum Points Achievable: Actual Points Achieved:

Scoring Manager Signature:

Print Name: Date:

Quality Assured Signature:

Print Name: Date:

Employee Signature:

Print Name: Date:

I can confirm that I :

Agree Disagree with the scoring of the matrix

If disagree, please stipulate the grounds in which you are disagreeing.
 NB: by completing this section, an appeal against the scoring of your matrix will be raised.

Supporting Evidence

Manager to provide supporting evidence as to the rationale behind the points awarded e.g. sickness absence records, rationale for scoring in the job knowledge and skills and flexibility.

[Empty box for supporting evidence]

Appendix 5: Additional Guidance for Schools

Consultation Process

The Governing Body, usually through the Headteacher, has a duty to consult with the staff and trade unions. Any proposals on alternative options at consultation stage will also be considered by the Headteacher and Governing Body. The Headteacher should call a meeting at the earliest opportunity and invite the relevant Trade Unions. The purpose of the meeting is to inform all staff of the possibility of one or more redundancies and to explore the way in which this may be prevented, such as the methods of natural wastage, staff reducing hours, voluntary retirement etc. If these possibilities do not resolve the need for redundancies, then a compulsory process should be implemented. It is vital that any staff members who are absent are kept informed of the situation and consulted.

Establishment of Committees

At the Annual General Meeting, the Governing Body should elect or appoint two committees: the Redundancy Committee and the Redundancy Appeals Committee. It is recommended that each committee consists of at least three people, with five as a maximum, an odd number being recommended to produce a clear result in the event of a vote being taken on any issue.

It is strongly recommended that the Chair of Governors does not sit on either of the committees, as it is normal practice for him/her to be involved in the redundancy process with the Headteacher throughout. It is also important that staff members do not sit on either of these committees, as impartiality could not be ensured.

Establishment of Criteria

The Governing Body should have clearly defined criteria for selection of posts to be declared surplus to requirement at the school. These should be agreed by the Governing Body and publicised within school, with a statement giving a commitment to a fair, consistent, objective and non-discriminatory selection process.

Should the governors choose to use criteria other than those recommended by the Council, they must consult the trade unions, with a view to reaching agreement on the revised criteria.

The Council, however, recommends that Governors adopt the procedures within this document, which have been agreed with the recognised trades unions.

Selection Process

Background Information

In selecting criteria for identification of a post to be declared 'surplus to requirement' at a school, governors must take care to avoid use of criteria which would discriminate under the terms of the Equality Act 2010.

Clearly the process should identify a post - which is filled by an individual - but should not be aimed at justifying the selection of an individual per se.

Assessment of Needs

In order to identify the specific areas of surplus capacity, an assessment of needs should be carried out across the whole school. The Headteacher will be required to:

- Identify current and projected pupil number trends;
- Identify current and future curriculum needs;
- Identify any organisational and management requirements of the school.

In Secondary Schools a curriculum audit should be completed, which will identify the needs of the school within each subject area. Clearly this cannot be achieved until the options process has been completed and projected pupil numbers are known.

It is imperative that this information is documented accurately, as it will form the basis of any potential redundancies and could be challenged at a later date. Please be aware that this process has to be carried out in a timely manner, in order to ensure that notice periods will be adhered to.

Having identified the needs of your school, it is advisable that you contact your Council representatives in Resources and Organisational Development for advice.

Selection Criteria

In the event that all options have been unsuccessful in avoiding a compulsory redundancy situation, the adopted selection criteria must be used to identify the appropriate 'surplus' post(s).

The relevant forms (Skills and Experience Matrix) to be issued to all teaching staff within the Primary and Secondary sector respectively are attached. These forms identify the relevant agreed set of criteria for teaching posts within each sector, which will enable the Headteacher and governors to match the needs of the school with the skills and experience of the teaching staff.

Due to the number and diverse nature of support staff posts within schools, a set of criteria has not been agreed in its entirety for such staff. However, it has been agreed with the trade unions that the template in this Policy at [Appendix 4a](#) is used in all cases and is added to, according to the needs of the post. It should be pointed out that such criteria must be drawn up and agreed with the trade unions prior to any redundancy negotiations beginning.

A copy of the relevant form must be issued to all relevant staff for completion, with an explanation of its purpose. In order to ensure that all staff are fully aware of the process, a copy of this policy must be issued with the appropriate form.

It is imperative that any staff who are absent are also made aware and participate in the process. Please contact the Organisational Development Service Partner, who will advise you on the most appropriate course of action.

It is imperative that all staff are afforded sufficient time to complete the form and are provided with any necessary advice and guidance on its completion. All staff members should be made aware of the support that is available through the line management and Trade Union, in the completion of the form. On completion of the form, staff should meet with their line manager to discuss and agree its content.

Skills and Experience Matrix – Completion of the Form

The purpose of the Redundancy Selection Matrices is to enable relevant teaching and support staff to demonstrate the skills, knowledge, experience, etc that they have, which meet the current and future needs of the school. Staff should be aware that the data will be collected and used as part of an exercise to match their skills and experience to the current and future needs of the school. It is, therefore, important that all staff invest sufficient time and effort into its completion, as it forms the basis of the decision-making regarding the redundancy.

On completion of the form, the individual will meet with his or her line manager, in order to discuss the content, so that any discrepancies can be highlighted. At this meeting, documents such as job descriptions, person specifications, training records etc. should be available for supporting information. On agreement of the content of the form, the member of staff and line manager sign the bottom. All completed and signed forms should be returned to the Headteacher.

In the event of a member of staff being unable to complete the form, it will fall to a line manager to undertake this task, with the appropriate consultation. In such cases, the completed form will be sent to the individual for their information. They will then be given the opportunity to make any amendments and additions, within a given timescale. Support from the line manager will be available to assist in this process.

Failure to return the form will result in the original version being used in the process. The member of staff will be informed that this is the case.

Completion of the Summary Matrix

On receipt of the completed forms, the Headteacher or School Management Team member(s) must transfer the information onto the appropriate Summary Matrix sheet (see appendices). It is important that the information is anonymised when transferred onto the Summary Matrix, in order to ensure a fair process throughout. The Teacher No or Staff No should be completed at the top of each Criteria Matrix form and then transferred onto the Summary Matrix sheet.

In Secondary Schools, the completed forms will form the basis of any 'bumping' that can be achieved within the various subject areas. Headteachers should use the information provided on the Criteria Matrix to see whether internal staff movement within subject areas can be achieved, in order to remove surplus capacity. When this process has been exhausted, a clear picture will have emerged of where the surplus capacity remains. It must be stressed that consultation with staff is imperative during this process.

On completion of the 'bumping' process, the Summary Matrix will be completed for the subjects in which there is surplus capacity only.

Support and guidance throughout the process will be available from the Organisational Development Service Partner.

The Role of the Panel

A member of the OD Division and/or the Governor's Support Division will attend all relevant meetings to guide governors through the process and deal with the administration and consultation with the Trade Unions.

In the event that a sufficient number of staff members volunteer to accept redundancy, the panel members will be required to approve the redundancy on these grounds. However, in the event of more staff volunteering for redundancy than the number of surplus posts, the process below should be carried out, but for the volunteers only.

At the Redundancy Panel hearing, the Headteacher will explain the process adopted to date and what has been identified as the current and future needs of the school. The appropriate documentation is then issued for discussion. The Headteacher will then circulate and explain the anonymised Criteria Matrix and Summary Matrix sheets, which provide all necessary information on the relevant staff members. The panel members will then be required to match the skills and experience of the individual staff members to the needs of the school.

It should be noted that, in Secondary schools, information should be provided only for the areas of surplus capacity.

Only Part 1 of the form should be considered at this stage. If the information does not identify the required 'surplus' posts, the length of service should be considered as the deciding factor. In this case, the person with the shortest length of service with the Authority will be selected for redundancy.

Following the Hearing

Following the Redundancy Hearing, the Headteacher and Chair of the Panel should arrange to meet with the selected individual to communicate the outcome and the right to appeal, as per this policy. The meeting should also be an opportunity for the individual to ask any questions about the process and to discuss any other relevant issues.

The decision of the Redundancy panel will be communicated in writing by the Council, within seven calendar days.

As outlined the employee has the right to appeal against the decision of the Redundancy panel, in the form of a Representation Hearing. Following the outcome of the Representation Hearing, the employee has one final right to appeal to the Redundancy Appeal Panel. This is a complete rehearing of the case, with a fresh panel of Governors who have no prior knowledge of the case.

Council Panel Meeting

On completion of the process, the final authorisation is granted by the Council via a panel of Officers, comprising of representatives from Resources and Organisational Development. The decision is based on the presentation of a sound business case. Please refer to the section on Business Case/Approval Mechanism.

Representation Hearings

The purpose of this meeting is to receive representations from the member(s) of staff identified as 'surplus to requirement'. These should be on the basis of incorrect identification e.g. "I am a geographer not an historian", "I have skills in the area of x" etc.

The teacher should be encouraged to bring a colleague or trade union representative to the meeting.

Procedurally the meeting should follow this course:

- All panel members are asked to confirm that they are able to act impartially. A Chair should be elected for the duration of the Hearing.
- The Headteacher will outline the reason for the proposed redundancy (ies) and the criteria used in identifying the post in question.
- The staff member (colleague or trade union representative) may ask questions of the Head Teacher.
- Members of the Panel may seek clarification of points from the Head Teacher.
- The staff member (colleague or trade union representative) makes their representation.
- The Headteacher may ask questions of the staff member.
- The Panel may ask questions of the staff member (colleague or trade union representative).
- Both parties may sum up their case, the Head Teacher summing up first.
- The Headteacher and staff member (colleague or trade union representative) shall leave the room whilst the Panel consider the representations made to them.

- At this point advice to the panel may be offered by the relevant Support Officer in attendance.
- The parties shall return and the decision of the panel given verbally including notification of the right of appeal to the Redundancy Appeals Committee, if the representation has been rejected.

The decision of the panel will be communicated in writing to the staff member within seven calendar days and arrangements to exercise the right of appeal will be outlined in that letter.

Appeal Hearing

The Appeal Hearing should follow the pattern of the Representation hearing, but it is a complete rehearing of the case with a fresh panel of governors, who have no knowledge of the arguments and cases put previously.

The remit of this meeting is wider than that of the representation meeting. Not only might the committee hear argument on wrong identification but also on whether a genuine redundancy situation exists.

Once more the staff member is encouraged to have a colleague or trade union representative with them.

The procedure for the meeting follows that of the Representation Hearing:

- All committee members are asked to confirm that they are able to act impartially. A Chair should be elected for the duration of the Hearing.
- The Headteacher will outline the reason for the declaration and the criteria used in identifying the post in question.
- The teacher (colleague or trade union representative) may ask questions of the Headteacher.
- Members of the Committee may seek clarification of points from the Head Teacher.
- The staff member (colleague or trade union representative) will make their representation.
- The Headteacher may ask questions of the staff member.
- The Committee may ask questions of the staff member (colleague or trade union representative).
- Both parties may sum up their case, the Headteacher summing up first.
- The Headteacher and staff member (colleague or trade union representative) shall leave the room whilst the Committee consider the representations made to them.
- At this point advice to the Committee may be offered the relevant officer.

- The parties shall return and the decision of the Committee given verbally.

The decision of the Committee will be communicated in writing to the staff member within seven calendar days.

The decision of the appeals committee is final.

Redundancy/Appeal Committee

In the event of a compulsory redundancy being identified, the member of staff has the right to make representations to the Schools Redundancy Committee and then appeal against the decision to the Schools Appeal Committee. In circumstances where the employee wishes to exercise this right of representation, initially to the redundancy Committee, they have a period of 7 calendar days to inform the Chief Education Officer, in writing of their intentions and why. The 7 days takes effect from the date on which the employee is informed of the decision in writing.

The outcome of the representation hearing will be communicated to the individual within 7 calendar days. In the event that the employee is not satisfied with the outcome of representation hearing they have a right to appeal to the Redundancy Appeal Committee. In this case the employee will have 7 calendar days to notify the Chief Education Officer, in writing, if they wish to appeal against the representation decision to this Committee.

At the Annual General Meeting the governing body should elect or appoint two panels: the Redundancy Committee and the Redundancy Appeals Committee. It is recommended that each committee consist of at least 3 people, with 5 as a maximum.

It is strongly recommended that the Chair of Governors does not sit on either of the Committees, as it is normal practice for them to be involved in the redundancy process with the Head teacher throughout. It is also important that staff members do not sit on either of these Committees, as impartiality could not be ensured.

Teachers Redundancy Selection Matrix

Name of School:

Proposal:

Headteacher:

Effective date of scoring:

Number Of staff in Selection Pool:

Selection Pool Description:

Employee Name:

Designation:

Grade:

Schools should determine criteria that are relevant to their own school and the circumstances of the reduction in staffing in the School, Faculty or Department. Any changes to the template should be made in consultation with relevant Trade Unions.

Specific Skills and Experience (Mandatory)

Please provide information to support your matrix in the supporting evidence column. **Please complete the matrix electronically as the rows will then expand with the information included.**

Relevant Teaching Skills	Supporting Evidence (For completion by employee and agreed by a nominated manager)	Score Guide (Scoring to be completed by nominated manager – not for completion by employee)	Score (for completion by Manager)
Foundation/ Nursery		Experience of having taught in last 3 years = 3 Experience of having taught in last 5 years = 2 Experience but not in last 5 years=1 No Experience = 0	
KS2		Experience of having taught in last 3 years = 3 Experience of having taught in last 5 years = 2 Experience but not in last 5 years=1 No Experience = 0	
KS3		Experience of having taught in last 3 years = 3 Experience of having taught in last 5 years = 2 Experience but not in last 5 years=1 No Experience = 0	
KS4		Experience of having taught in last 3 years = 3 Experience of having taught in last 5 years = 2 Experience but not in last 5 years=1 No Experience = 0	
Subjects Taught (please list):		Not scored	

Specialist Relevant Skills – Examples	Supporting Evidence (For completion by employee and agreed by a nominated manager)	Score Guide (Scoring to be completed by nominated manager – not for completion by employee)	Score
Degree in relevant subject taught		3	
Crosscutting skills/Added Value (relating to the curriculum)		3	
Subject Leadership/ Key Stage Leadership/ Year management role/ Leadership Role/ TLR Post Holder		Experience in any of these areas in the last 3 years = 3 Experience in last 5 years = 2	
Literacy, numeracy and digital competency		Expert/Uses in practice and has taught others = 3 Confident/Intermediate user = 2 Basic use = 1	
Science/Technology		Expert/Uses in practice and has taught others = 3 Confident/Intermediate user = 2 Basic use = 1	
Wider curriculum contribution		Up to 3 points (Criteria to be school specific and agreed with Trade Unions)	

Training and Development	Supporting Evidence (For completion by employee and agreed by a nominated manager)	Score Guide (Scoring to be completed by nominated manager – not for completion by employee)	Score
Post-graduate qualification		Working towards - 1 Achieved - 3	
Other relevant qualifications		Working towards - 1 Achieved - 3	
Contribution towards a self improving schools		Up to 3	

Maximum Points Achievable:

Actual Points Achieved:

Scoring Manager Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

Quality Assured Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

Employee Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

I can confirm that I :

Agree Disagree with the scoring of the matrix

If disagree, please stipulate the grounds in which you are disagreeing.

NB: by completing this section, an appeal against the scoring of your matrix will be raised.

TIEBREAKER SITUATION

In the event of more than one teacher achieving the same score in the application of the above criteria; the decision may be concluded by using the attendance record.

Attendance Record (Mandatory)

For the purpose of attendance records the School will score the Attendance Record criteria over a 4 year period with effect from the date of marking. All individuals in the tiebreak situation will be subject to further scoring for selection. In the event that not all employees have been employed for a period of 4 years, a period of the last rolling 12 months will be applied. The School reserves the right to revisit the scoring at any point during the notice period.

Please note that consideration is required upon absences that could fall within the remit of the Equality Act 2010. Further advice and guidance is available from Organisational Development, and is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010>

In cases whereby absences maybe linked to a work related accident, these should be considered separately.

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Occasions of Absence (Mandatory)

Score:

7 or more periods of absence	0
5 - 6 periods of absence	10
3 - 4 periods of Absence	20
1 – 2 periods of Absence	30
No Absences	40

Occasions of Absence are the number of times a person has been off sick over the previous 4 years i.e. 1 period of 4 weeks absence and 1 period of 2 days absence would be 2 occasions. This must be formally recorded and available for review by the employee.

Days of Absence (Mandatory)

Score:

41 or more days	0
31 – 40	5
21 – 30	10
11 – 20	15
1 – 10	20
Nil	25

Days of absence are the total amount of days lost to absence.

In the event that the Attendance Record does not resolve the tie-break situation then length of service will be included.

Length of Service

Where there is still a tiebreaker in respect of the scoring, final selection will be made by reference to length of Service, where the person with the longest continuous (unbroken) local government service will be retained.

Maximum Points Achievable:

Actual Points Achieved:

Scoring Manager Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

Quality Assured Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

Employee Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

I can confirm that I :

Agree Disagree with the scoring of the matrix

If disagree, please stipulate the grounds in which you are disagreeing.

NB: by completing this section, an appeal against the scoring of your matrix will be raised.



In the Interests of the Efficiency of the Service Policy



ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Issued: May 2023 Review: May 2028

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

Version Control

This document is intended for:

- Council staff only School-based staff only Council & School-based staff

Version	Key Changes	Approved By
Apr 2020	Reformatted and EAP details added	DMT
May 2023	Reviewed – no updates required	DMT

This document may be reviewed and amended at any time and without consultation in response to legal requirements or in response to an organisational requirement and where the changes do not reflect a fundamental change or affect the spirit or intent of the document.

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1. Introduction

Blaenau Gwent Council recognises that the people we employ are our most valuable asset and critical in developing modern, high quality, efficient and responsive customer focused public services.

Whilst it is the Council's intention to develop and provide a stable work environment and security of employment for all its employees, it must ensure that it provides a viable, high quality, value for money service to the Community. In this respect circumstances may arise where changes in the market, technology, organisational and/or statutory requirements necessitate the need for changes in staffing requirements for a service which may lead to termination of contracts "in the interests of the efficiency of the service".

2. Definition of Efficiency

Termination on the grounds of efficiency unlike redundancy is not a dismissal, it is a mutual agreement of termination of a contract of employment by both parties i.e. employee and the Council. This is also considered to be in the best interests of both parties.

Compensation on terminating employees on these grounds is entirely at the Authority's discretion. The discretion will not be exercised as an alternative to dealing with the matter of inadequate performance through properly presented procedures.

3. Compensation

Clearly where there is a termination on the grounds of efficiency, there will be entitlement to compensation for the loss of the employment.

4. Discretionary Payments

The Council exercises its discretion in line with the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 1997 (as amended) and the Local Government (Early Retirement of Employment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2000, 2006 and 2008 (as amended) – generally called the Discretionary Compensation Regulations. Individuals who terminate on the grounds of efficiency:

- a) **Aged over 55 years**
Individuals will have immediate access to an unreduced payment of their LGPS benefits.
- b) **Aged under 55 years**
Individuals may receive a compensation payment equivalent to that calculated for redundancy as outlined in the Council's Redundancy Policy for those staff who do not have access to their pension.

5. Business Case/Approval Mechanism

Any termination on the grounds of Efficiency whereby the Council exercises its discretion must be supported by a business case with the necessary approval.

This business case will include consideration of service delivery changes and the financial consequences of any efficiency compensation and pension recovery payback over a period no greater than 5 years.

6. Employee Assistance Programme

The Authority has an Employee Assistance Programme in place with an independent provider called “Care first” for all employees and managers. Employees can access support on any personal or work-related issues that may be causing concern or distress such as stress awareness, debt management, well-being and relationship issues. Contact details are below and additional information is available on the [intranet](#).

- “**Care first**” is free to use 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year and there is no need for employees to ask a manager to use the service. Employees can call **0800 174319** to speak to a professional counsellor or information specialist **in confidence** about a range of issues.
- The “**Care first Lifestyle**” website offers extensive resources including articles on health, issues at home, issues at work, management support tools, stress questionnaires and online counselling in real-time. Employees should visit the website at www.care-first.co.uk and login using the following details - username: **blaenau** and password: **employee**
- The “**Care first Zest**” app has interactive tools, helpful tips, visual and mental exercises and engaging activities. These include meditation exercises, mindfulness exercises, breathing exercises, toolkits to identify behaviours and monitor progress, mood trackers and much more. To start using the app:
 - Download the app - available on iTunes or Google Play – search for My possible self: Mental Health. Or, if you’d prefer to use the programme from your desktop, follow this link: <https://portal.my-possible-self.com/welshfram/my-possible-self/register> (the website is **not compatible with Internet Explorer**).
 - Enter the registration passcode **WelFram21!** then tick the “I’m not a robot” box and click “Submit”.
 - Create your personal account.
 - Once registered, you can log into the website via www.my-possible-self.com or app using the email and password you created your account with.

Agenda Item 28

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 23.02.2024

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 08.03.2024

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **21st March, 2024**

Report Subject: **Fostering Friendly Policy**

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

Report Submitted by: **Andrea Prosser, Head of Organisational Development**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	14.12.23				14.03.24		21.03.24	

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to introduce a Fostering Friendly Policy (appendix 1).

2. Scope and Background

2.1 Currently, there are over 70,000 children living with foster families across the UK, and the numbers are rising, with another child coming into care every 20 minutes. Foster families give children who cannot live with their birth family the care and stability they need, and for many children this is their first positive experience of family life.

2.2 There is a shortage of foster carers across the UK, meaning children are often being placed far from their community, and often moved many times. Both of these factors can harm the wellbeing of the child. By recruiting more foster carers and supporting them means more children will be able to stay connected with people and places that matter the most to them.

2.3 In order to address national challenges in relation to fostering, and to try and encourage more working people to become foster carers, the Government has called for employers to become “fostering friendly.” Part of the national push to encourage more people to become foster carers, has been to “bust the myth” that individuals are not allowed to work if they become a foster carer.

2.4 The Fostering Network’s Fostering Friendly employers’ scheme helps employers to support and recognise the roles of their employees who foster and involves no direct costs. Members of the scheme agree to put in place a fostering friendly policy for all foster carers in their employment (regardless of their fostering service). Currently Bridgend, Flintshire and Swansea Council’s and Welsh Government are listed as Foster Friendly Employers.

2.5 In order to become a Fostering Friendly Employer, the Council will need to offer the following:

- A flexible working policy. This is already in place, and;

- Offer foster carers and those preparing to foster a minimum of five days paid leave in order to support with their fostering commitments. These commitments can include training or settling a child into their new home.

2.6 There are many benefits to becoming a Fostering Friendly employer, including:

- Building on the Council's reputation as an 'Employer of Choice' and demonstrating the Council's commitment to caring for staff and the local community through displaying a Fostering Friendly logo, and the Fostering Network recognising the Council as a Fostering Friendly employer.
- To better understand and support our employees' needs and improve staff wellbeing
- Being an attractive employer for foster carers, who are resilient, committed and skilled professionals
- Playing a vital role in recruiting and supporting foster carers, with a huge impact for children in the local community

2.7 Foster Wales is the national network of 22 Local Authority fostering services across Wales. Foster Wales evolved from the National Fostering Framework (NFF) which was one of the work streams of WG's advisory group 'improving outcomes for children.' The purpose of Foster Wales is to increase the pool of Local Authority foster carers through enhanced recruitment and marketing and to support retention by bringing consistency of support for foster carers across Wales. There is a national commitment from Foster Wales for all 22 Local Authorities to become foster carer friendly and introduce a policy for all Foster Wales foster carers in their employment. Foster Wales's commitment proposes **that the provisions would only apply to those staff who foster with a local authority and not to those who foster with an independent fostering agency** in order to support and enhance the efforts to recruit and retain local authority foster carers.

2.8 The policy being recommended will apply to all Council employees and will be recommended to School Governing Bodies for adoption. The Policy has been developed in line with Fostering Network's Fostering Friendly employers' scheme with the provisions open to employees who are foster carers regardless of their fostering service. This approach will ensure equal treatment for all employees. In addition, the policy has been extended to introduce provision for employees who are applying to become a special guardian.

The Policy provides for the following paid leave:

- Employees who are applying to become a foster carer are entitled to **up to 5 days (37 hours) paid leave, this entitlement will be pro-rata for part time employees.** This leave entitlement will be a one of entitlement for the purpose of applying to become a foster carer.
- Employees who are an approved foster carer are entitled to **up to 5 days (37 hours) paid leave during any 12-month period, this entitlement will be pro-rata for part time employees.**
- Employees who are applying to become a Special Guardian are entitled to **up to 5 days (37 hours) paid leave, this entitlement will be pro-rata for part time**

employees. This leave entitlement will be a one of entitlement for the purpose of applying to become a Special Guardian.

- Employees who are an approved Special Guardian are entitled to **up to 2.5 days (18.5 hours) paid leave during any 12-month period, this entitlement will be pro-rata for part time employees.**

In circumstances where both partners applying to become foster carers work for the Council the policy states that the leave provision will be shared which aligns to the provisions in the Council's Carer Policy.

3. Options for Recommendation

The Corporate Leadership Team considered this report on 14 December 2023 and support the proposed policy. The Scrutiny Committee are considering this report on 14 March 2024 and verbal feedback will be provided at Council.

3.1 **Option 1:** (preferred option) Members of the Council approve the adoption of the Policy.

Option 2: Members of the Council suggest further amendments/additions to the Policy.

3.2

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

4.1 Statutory Responsibilities

Becoming a Fostering Friendly employer is not a statutory requirement, however there is a national push from the Government for employers to adopt this policy and become a Fostering Friendly organisation.

4.2 Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan

The introduction of a Fostering Friendly Policy supports the delivery of the Council's Corporate Priority, to maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent, by giving every child the best start in life and enabling all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 Impact on Budget

The costs associated with the introduction of this Policy relate to the paid leave for employees and the cost of cover arrangements for those taking the paid leave.

Additional local authority foster carers will support budget efficiencies in the future as the average weekly Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council foster carer payment is £541 against the cost of an independent Fostering agency placement of £1144.

5.2 Risk

Failure to adopt the policy would impact negatively in not supporting Foster Carers and the impact on children in care, and the local community.

5.3 Legal

There are no legal implications relating to the proposals in this report

5.4 **Human Resources**

The policy will support the Council's employees who are either existing foster carers or thinking of becoming a foster carer by enabling them the time and support to care for a child.

5.5 **Health and Safety**

There are no health and safety implications relating to the proposals in this report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

Not applicable

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

By adopting this policy, there would be a positive impact on the local community, and children in care within the community. It will mean they will receive the appropriate support through their foster carer, without removing them from the area and people they are used to. This may also contribute positively to the Council's reputation among members of the public.

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

Consultation, engagement and participation regarding the amended policy has been internal to the Council, along with the Trade Unions.

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

The policy is intended to provide increased support to all Council and school-based employees with the aim of providing long term support to our employees who are foster carers, and support with the children coming into care long term.

It will also form part of the longer term thinking and commitment of the Foster Wales Program.

6.5 **Preventative focus**

The policy aims to support staff to become foster carers, to support with the increased numbers of children coming into care. It is hoped by providing this leave, more staff would consider becoming foster carers, and therefore supporting with the children coming in to care.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

Not applicable

6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

Not applicable

6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

Not applicable

6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)** (All decisions, policy reviews or policy implementation will now require a completed Integrated Impact Assessment)

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The policy will be reviewed in line with OD Service policy review schedule and as required in line with best practice and/or statutory requirements.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Fostering Friendly Policy



Fostering Friendly
Policy - December 23.

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Fostering Friendly Policy



ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Issued: xx Review: xx

Version Control

This document is intended for:

- Council staff only School-based staff only Council & School-based staff

Version	Key Changes	Approved By

This document may be reviewed and amended at any time and without consultation in response to legal requirements or in response to an organisational requirement and where the changes do not reflect a fundamental change or affect the spirit or intent of the document.

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1. Policy Statement

The Council/School recognises and values the contribution of employees who foster to society and especially the lives of children in care. There is currently a child coming into care every 20 minutes in need of a fostering family, and we recognise the need to do more to help recruit new foster carers. We are committed to support any employee who is a foster carer, kinship carer or special guardian. All reference to foster carer within this policy, is inclusive of kinship carers and special guardians, except where there is specific reference to leave provisions for special guardians.

The Council/School wishes to support employees who are foster carers and to encourage those who may be considering foster care by providing time off where necessary and recognising that foster carers may need some flexibility in their working arrangements in order to meet the needs of their fostered child or young person. The Council/School is committed to being a 'Fostering Friendly Employer' to support more working people to become foster carers and to "bust the myth" that if you become a foster carer you cannot work.

2. Definitions

Foster Carer

A foster carer, sometimes referred to as a Foster Parent is a person, that provide a safe and nurturing home for a child when they can no longer live with their birth parents. They must be assessed and approved before the child comes to live with them.

Kinship Carer

Kinship foster care is when a family member or friend becomes a child's official foster carer. They must be assessed and approved before the child comes to live with them.

Special Guardian

A special guardianship order (SGO) is a legal order given by a family court. When an individual becomes a special guardian, the child will live with them permanently until they are 18 years old. Special guardians share parental responsibility with the child's parents but can make nearly all major decisions about the child without asking for their permission.

3. Scope

This policy applies to Council and School based employees who:

- are applying to become foster carers
- are approved foster carers and have a child in placement (or have had a child in placement for 75% of the previous 12 months)

4. Policy Aims

The aim of this policy is to recognise that employees who are foster carers are providing a valuable service to the community and Children Looked After, and to allow employees of the Council/School who foster the opportunity to work flexibly where this is compatible with the demands of their job. The Council/School offer a number of flexible working arrangements and leave provisions which will apply to foster carers.

This policy sets out the additional paid time off that will be available for prospective and existing foster carers.

5. Responsibilities

Managers/Headteachers

- To be aware of the needs of foster carers and understand the conflicting demands.
- To be responsible for ensuring that staff are aware of the Foster Friendly Policy. Managers/headteachers should be flexible and assess all options to encourage and support staff.
- To be consistent in adhering to equal opportunities and be fair in their approach to requests whilst having the discretion within the parameters of the Policy to respond appropriately to individual circumstances.

Organisational Development

- To advise managers/headteachers and employees on existing policies/procedures/working practices (e.g., Flexible Working Policy, Leave Policy) and changes to legislation.
- To provide continuing support to managers/headteachers and employees in the workplace
- To provide confidential advice, information and support to employees who have foster caring responsibilities.

Employees

- To inform their manager/headteacher in writing that they are a foster carer and/or if there are any changes in their foster caring responsibilities. This is to ensure the manager/headteacher is able to continue to provide support.
- To provide reasonable notice of a request to accommodate foster caring leave, providing clear reasons for the request and how many days they are requesting.

6. Leave Arrangements

Employees with foster caring responsibilities will be entitled to request time off. Employees are encouraged to discuss their individual circumstances with their manager/headteacher and are eligible for the leave and support arrangements as set out in this policy.

- Employees who are applying to become a foster carer are entitled to **up to 5 days (37 hours) paid leave, this entitlement will be pro-rata for part time employees.** This leave entitlement will be a one of entitlement for the purpose of applying to become a foster carer.
- Employees who are an approved foster carer are entitled to **up to 5 days (37 hours) paid leave during any 12-month period, this entitlement will be pro-rata for part time employees.**
- Employees who are applying to become a Special Guardian are entitled to **up to 5 days (37 hours) paid leave, this entitlement will be pro-rata for part time employees.** This leave entitlement will be a one of entitlement for the purpose of applying to become a Special Guardian.
- Employees who are an approved Special Guardian are entitled to **up to 2.5 days (18.5 hours) paid leave during any 12-month period, this entitlement will be pro-rata for part time employees.**

This leave may be granted in full or half days and where it can be accommodated, in the case of employees operating under the flexible working hours scheme, leave may be granted in hours. The leave can be used to attend meetings, for home visits, to undertake mandatory training, to meet the needs of a child, however this list is not exhaustive. Untaken leave will not be carried over.

In circumstances where an employee may need more than the maximum entitlement, the manager/headteacher and the employee should discuss other options available:

- annual leave
- flexi-leave
- unpaid leave
- carers leave, if applicable

Should a couple be applying to become foster carers/special guardians or are approved foster carers/special guardians and are both employed by the Council/School, these provisions will be shared. The employee(s) should disclose this to their manager/headteacher when an initial request is made, further advice can be sought from Organisational Development.

7. Requesting paid leave

Employees wishing to take leave under this policy must produce written evidence to their manager/headteacher to show that they are approved foster carers or actively applying to become foster carers.

To request a period of paid leave the employee must complete a "[Request Form for Fostering Leave](#)" and submit this form to their manager/headteacher for authorisation in advance of the leave, stating the reason for the leave and the amount of leave requested.

Leave requests will be considered and granted at the discretion of the employee's manager/headteacher based on individual circumstances and the reasonableness of the request in line with the spirit of this Policy. Employees must give their manager/headteacher as much notice as possible when making a request for leave. Failure to provide sufficient notice could result in the leave not being approved.

Managers/headteachers should adopt a flexible and accommodating approach to requests for time off, leave and flexible working arrangements from foster carers and prospective foster carers in relation to the care of a looked after child or during their journey through the process to become a foster carer.

It is the manager's/headteacher's responsibility to ensure that the employee completes the request form (ensuring the employee does not exceed their annual entitlement to paid leave) and once completed by the manager/headteacher a copy of the form needs to be sent to Organisational Development.

Abuse of the Provisions

Any abuse of the provisions of this policy will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's /School's Disciplinary Policy.

Equal Opportunities

All foster carers in the workforce should be treated fairly and offered the level of support dependant on their situation and work commitments. They should be well informed of the policies in operation for supporting foster carers. These policies should be accessible to all foster carers inclusive of those covered by a protected characteristic.

Employees with foster caring responsibilities will have the same opportunities to get a job or stay in work with the Council/School regardless of their responsibilities outside of work.

Request form for Foster Friendly Leave



SECTION 1 – TO BE COMPLETED BY EMPLOYEE

Full Name:

Home Address:

Telephone Number: Home: Work:

Designation:

Place Of Work:

Staff Number:

Reason for Leave:

Date(s) Leave Required:

Total Number of Days:

Employee's Signature: Date:

SECTION 2 – TO BE COMPLETED BY MANAGER/HEADTEACHER

Date Request Received: Agreed Declined

Total number of days used of annual **paid** entitlement:

Manager's/Headteacher's Signature: Date:

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM AND RETURN TO HRpayroll@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

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Agenda Item 29

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 19.03.2024

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 19.03.2024

Committee: **Council**

Date of meeting: **21st March, 2024**

Report Subject: **Review of Agile Working, Agile Working and Flexible Working Policies**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor S. Thomas – Leader/Cabinet Member
Corporate & Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Andrea J Prosser, Head of Organisational
Development**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
x	22.02.24				14.03.24		21.03.24	

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to update the Members of Council on the review of agile working and seek endorsement of the reviewed Agile Working and Flexible Working Policies.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 A report was considered and approved at Council on the 25th March 2021 introducing a New Council Operating Model & Working Arrangements. An Agile Working Policy was approved at Council in April 2021 and implemented in September 2021 following an extensive consultation process and full engagement of trade unions. The policy was seen as a key enabler in delivering the future working model. It also linked to the Council's vision for sustainable development including sustainable economic growth, decarbonisation and the health and well-being of both staff and the community.

2.2 To support the move to agile working a number of leadership development webinars were held for managers on Transitional Leadership (moving out of pandemic) and Leading an Agile Workforce.

2.3 The review of agile working was scoped with the Corporate Leadership Team as planned in September 2022 and included:

- A staff pulse survey where 433 staff responded (26%)
- Facilitated focus groups with a cross section of staff from across the organisation – 180 staff invited and 107 attended
- A dedicated session with trade unions for feedback and suggestions for improvement

- 2.4 The full results of the pulse survey and the focus groups are attached to this report as appendix 1. The results have been communicated to the workforce and there have been facilitated sessions with the Corporate Leadership Team and the Wider Corporate Leadership Team to understand the feedback and develop actions to make improvements.
- 2.5 Staff accommodation has continued to be reviewed and plans are progressing to develop medium and long-term plans for staff accommodation and this will be led by the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services.

3. **Recommendations from the review of agile working**

- 3.1 Appendix 2 is a table detailing the recommendations from the agile working review, outlining progress to date and actions moving forwards.

4. **Agile Working Policy**

The Agile Working Policy applies to all Council employees excluding school-based staff appointed by governing bodies. The policy (appendix 3) has been reviewed to reflect the current position and future management and the following changes applied:

- Information on reasonable adjustments and the process on how to change the designation of a post has been added.
- Non-payment of allowances during maternity leave has been added following legal advice.
- The payment of allowances will stop at the trigger of long-term sickness.
- The £200 allowance for purchasing furniture for grade 6 and below has been removed. Desks and chairs will not be provided for new employees going forwards.
- Information security advice strengthened further to requests from the Information Governance Group.
- Wellbeing advice added, including how to access the Council's Employee Assistance Programme.
- Forms no longer needed have been removed from the appendices section.

4. **Flexible Working Policy**

The Flexible Working Policy is applicable for Council employees where appropriate excluding school-based staff appointed by governing bodies. It aims to provide flexibility in service delivery for the benefit of customers. It further aims to provide significant additional flexibility for employees, to enable them to better balance their work and home commitments and support the Council in becoming an Employer of Choice. The reviewed Flexible Working Policy is attached as appendix 4. The headline changes to the policy are:

- It is proposed to increase the flexi bandwidth from 7am-7pm to 6am-7pm, to increase flexibility. If this option is adopted, OD would advise that building opening times are kept to the current 7am-7pm opening to avoid additional costs such as caretaker costs, heating and lighting. Any hours worked outside of this time and within the bandwidth should be at home.
- CLT will be asked to recommend what the Council's 'normal' operating hours are – should this remain 9am-5pm, as in the existing policy, or does this need to be amended?
- The Health and Safety section has been updated to strengthen the Working Time Regulations advice.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1**

That Council notes the outcome of the agile working review, recommendations, progress/improvement and endorse the reviewed policies for Agile Working and Flexible Working.

Option 2

- 3.2 That Council make suggestions for changes/improvements to the Agile Working and Flexible Working policies.

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

The review of agile working and the updated Agile Working Policy and Flexible Working Policy align to the Corporate Plan, Council priorities and the delivery of the Council's operating model. The policies are key workforce policies in delivering the Council's Workforce Strategy.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

The reviewed Agile Working Policy removes the allowance of £200 towards a desk and chair for new employees so this will be cost avoidance for the Council.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The policies enable agile and flexible working in line with the Workforce Strategy. They lay out the parameters for the workforce in working in an agile and flexible capacity and directly mitigate health, safety and well-being risks. They also support mitigating risks to ensure the Council is able to recruit and retain staff.

5.3 ***Legal***

The Policies detail employee and managerial responsibilities in terms of health, safety and wellbeing.

5.4 **Human Resources**

The workforce is the most important resource of the Council and the Agile Working and Flexible Working policies are part of a Workforce Strategy that demonstrates the Council's commitment to its workforce and aims to create a good place to work. Developing a workforce that feels connected to and can meet the current and future needs of our community is critical in the Council's ability to deliver ambitious outcomes.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

The current workforce make up is 34% agile workers, 8% homeworkers, 58% service based (frontline workers).

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

Modern working practices and a fit for purpose Workforce Strategy make the Council a more attractive employer.

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

The Corporate Leadership Team shaped the agile working review and have reviewed the recommendations and developed actions. The results of the agile working review in terms of the focus groups and pulse survey were presented to an Elected Members Briefing in July 2023.

The trade unions have been involved in the review of agile working and have welcomed the learning and confirmed that the feedback from their members has been positive.

The trade unions are in support of the reviewed Agile Working and Flexible Working policies. They are disappointed at the removal of the allowance for furniture in the Agile Working Policy, however, accept the Council's financial challenges. The bandwidth in the Flexible Working policy was much debated – and it was reduced from the original proposal further to trade union engagement from 6am – 8pm to 6am to 7pm. The trade union continue to challenge the proposed bandwidth the rationale given is staff wellbeing and request it to remain in line with the current policy.

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

The reviewed policies are key to delivery of the Council's operating model and are deliverables of the Workforce Strategy 2021-2026.

6.5 **Preventative focus**

The contents of this report are all aimed at modernising the employment offer in line with Council priorities/operations to ensure recruitment and retention.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

Continued collaboration at a local, regional and national level to ensure that delivery actions in the Workforce Strategy are modern and in line with any legislative changes.

6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

The policies identify the workforce in scope for their application.

6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

Agile working has had impact on decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions for the Council with a reduction in buildings and travel to work.

6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment (IAA)**

The Council's Workforce Strategy promotes equality of opportunity and diversity in the workforce and as an organisation and the reviewed policies are in line with this.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The reviewed policies will be reviewed in line with the policy review framework in Organisational Development. A full staff survey planned for autumn will further test views on agile working.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 Agile Working Review – Pulse Survey and Focus Groups



BGCBC Agile Working
Review Report Feb 20

Appendix 2 Table Recommendations and Progress



Report Appendix
2.docx

Appendix 3 Agile Working Policy



Draft Agile Working
Policy - final for AJP -

Appendix 4 Flexible Working Policy



Draft Flexible
Working Scheme - Au

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Agile Working Review



Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol

Blaenau Gwent

County Borough Council

**Prepared for Andrea Prosser
January 2023**

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Introduction

In November 2022, Insight HRC Ltd undertook a review of the agile working operating model at Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.

The review comprised an online survey sent to all Council staff. This was sent to 1651 employees and was completed by 433 (26%.of all staff, excluding school-based staff).

A representative sample of staff were invited to attend focus groups (180 invited, 107 attended). These were designed to add further detail to the information gathered in the survey and to identify areas and ideas for change.

The results indicate that there are a range of views across the Council from people who feel that agile working has significantly improved their wellbeing and productivity to those who believe it is the “worst decision the Council has made”.

The areas seeing the largest improvement are factors around wellbeing, motivation, morale and work-life balance.

In general, people are positive about their relationship with their managers and this relationship seems to be a key factor in how successful the transition to agile working has been.

The greatest negative impact has been to collaboration within and between teams, although the increasing comfort with Microsoft Teams is mitigating the impact.

There has also been a decrease in the visibility of senior leaders and this may be an area for change.

The results indicate that different parts of the organisation have responded slightly differently to the change. Social Services and Education have seen the most benefits whilst Corporate Services and Regeneration and Community Services are less positive.

The survey suggests that Pay Grade has little impact on how people view the changes.

Those with less than 2 years' service and with more than 10 years' service are more positive about the changes than those with 2-10 years' service. This may be because those with less than 2 years' service have only known an agile or home-based way of working. Those with more than 10 years' service may have better established relationships and greater knowledge and confidence in their roles and so are less impacted by the change. However, this would require further investigation.

Overwhelmingly, however, staff feel that much has stayed the same through the changes to working practices. Most staff are able to describe both the benefits and the disadvantages they feel. They recognise that the change isn't perfect but absolutely don't want to go back to five days a week in the office.

There are also some staff who have been very negatively impacted by the changes and don't feel well supported. We would recommend looking at how support for these staff can be improved.

Summary

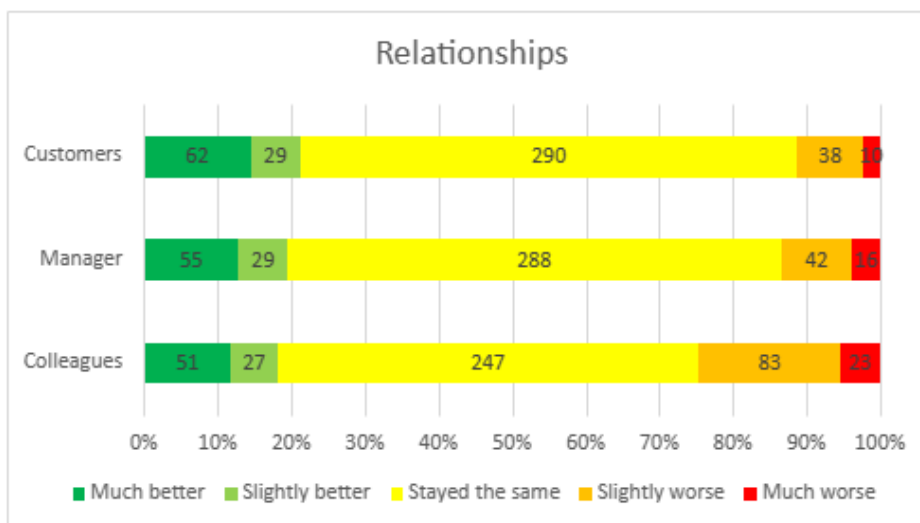
This section provides an overview of the main areas of questioning within the survey, the themes highlighted in the survey and the focus group.

433 respondents completed the survey, although not all respondents answered every question. The charts below show the total results for each question, together with the number of respondents who gave each rating.

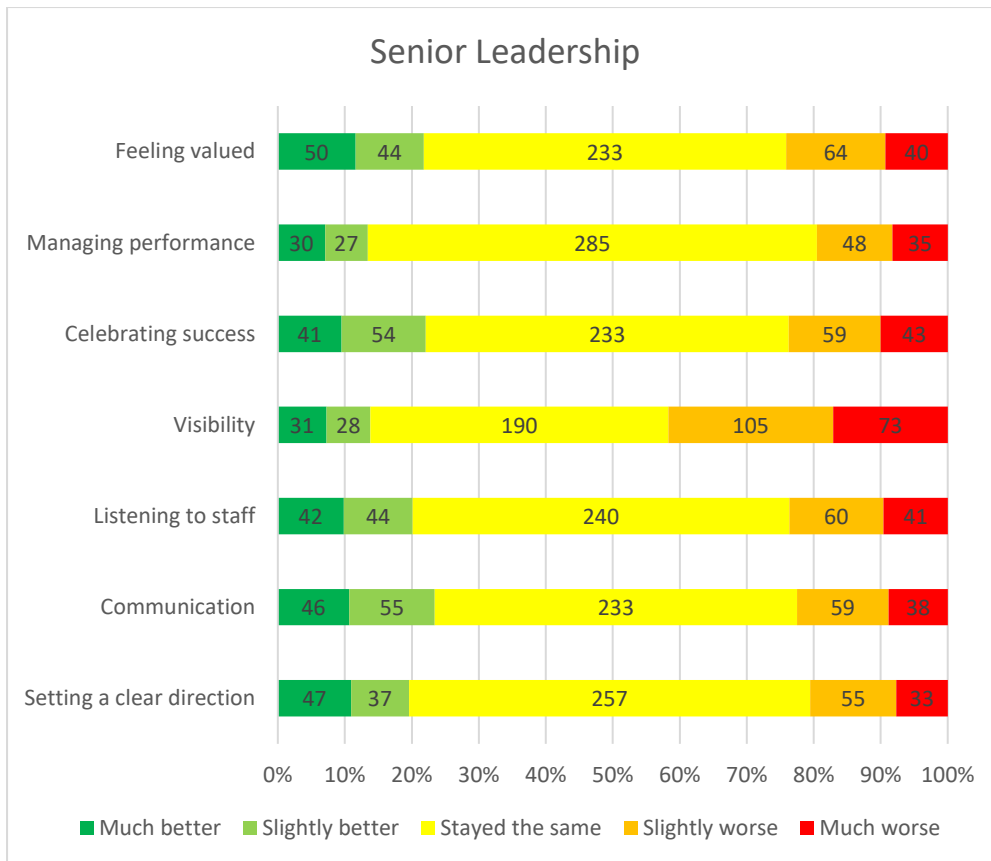
1. Survey results



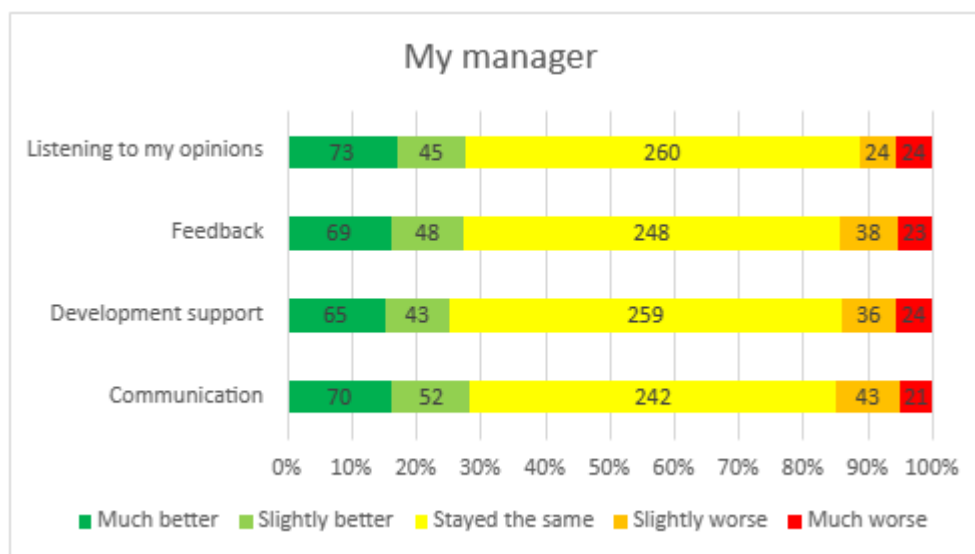
Overall, Satisfaction and Wellbeing showed the greatest percentages of Much Better or Slightly Better responses. Over 60% of respondents indicate that their work-life balance has improved as a result of the Agile Working Policy. Only 24% of participants feel that they are more fairly treated as a result of the Agile Working Policy. However, 62% feel they are treated as fairly as before, with only 13% feeling they are less fairly treated. Around a quarter of respondents feel that their wellbeing and morale has become slightly or much worse as a result of changes to the working policy.



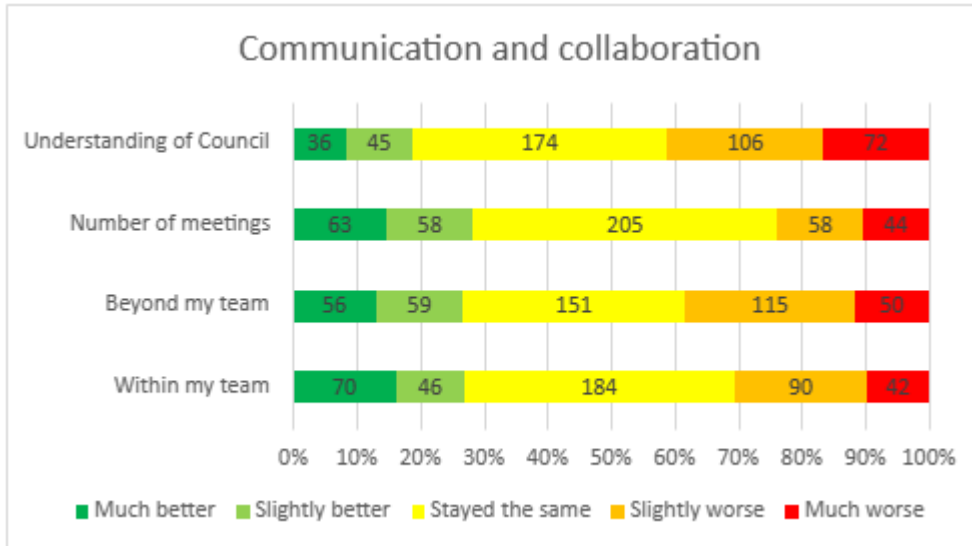
Around two thirds of respondents feel their relationships have stayed the same following the introduction of changes in working practices. This figure is slightly reduced for relationships with colleagues with 24% of respondents in this group feeling their relationships with colleagues have got worse. Around 20% feel their relationships have improved which is consistent for relationships with Customers, Manager and Colleagues.



Fewer than a quarter of respondents feel that senior leadership has got better since the introduction of the Agile Working Policy. The visibility of senior leaders is most negatively impacted with 41% viewing this as slightly or much worse. In all other areas, the majority of respondents view senior leadership as being the same as before the change in working practices.

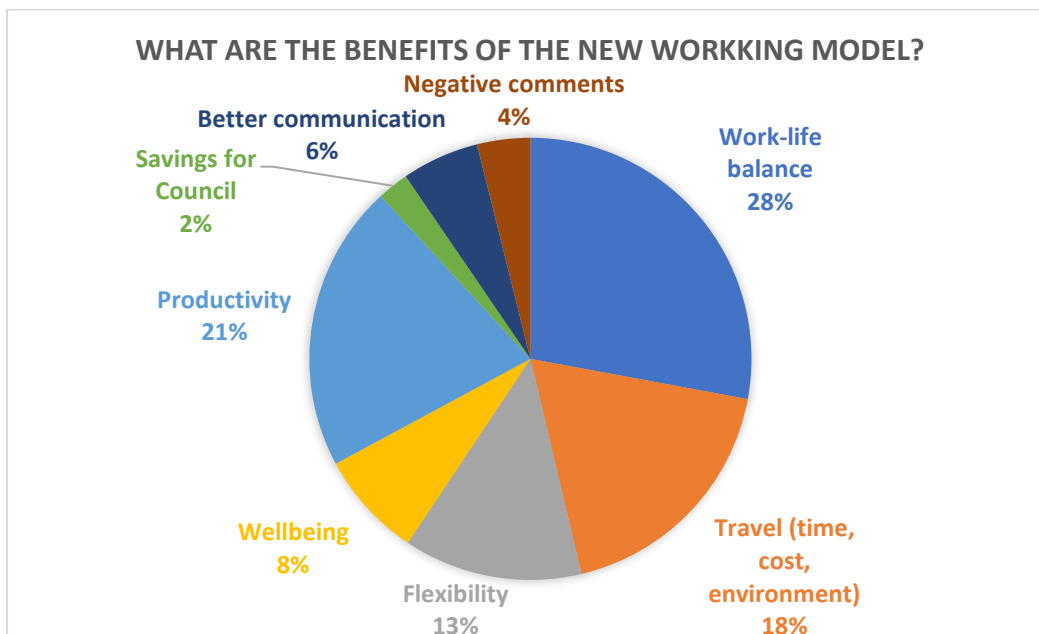


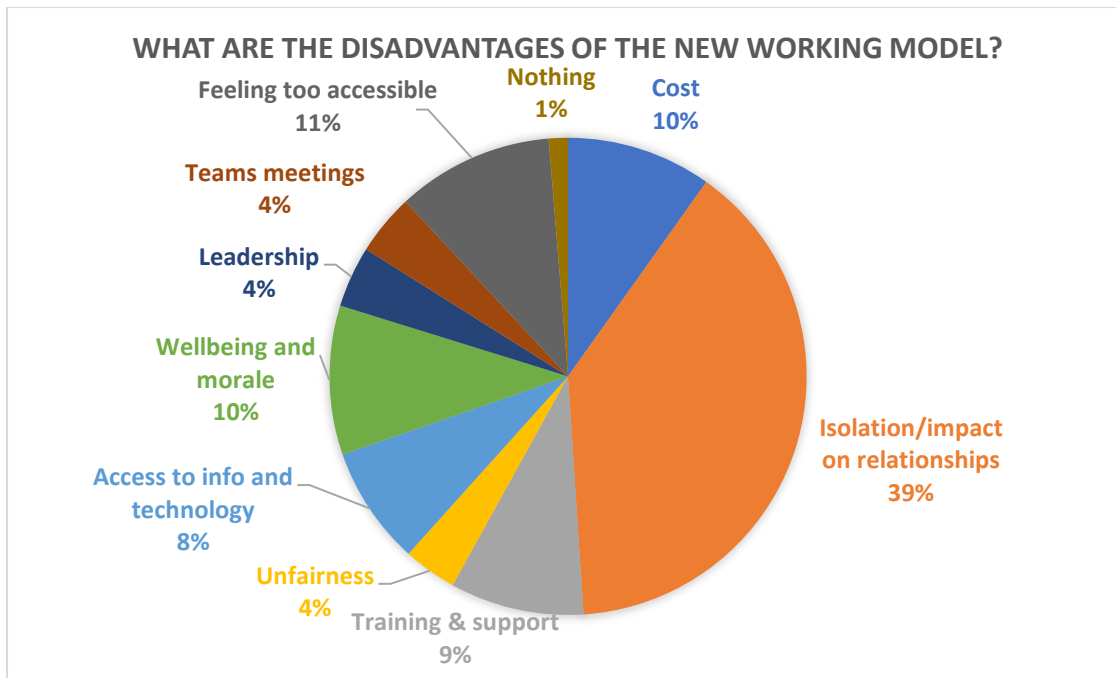
Again, the majority of respondents feel that the support they receive from their manager has stayed the same as before the introduction of the Agile Working Policy. However, more respondents have found a positive (25-28%) than a negative change (11-15%).



The area of Communication and Collaboration has shown the most negative impact since the introduction of the Agile Working Policy. Again, the largest group of respondents feel there has been no change (35-47%). The largest negative impact has been in Understanding the Council with 41% of respondents feeling this is worse since the changes. More respondents see a negative impact in communication and collaboration beyond their team (38%) than within their team (30%). However, in both these areas, more respondents see the change has negative than positive. Interestingly, given anecdotal evidence about the number of meetings, this area has the smallest negative change (24%) with slightly more respondents seeing a positive change (28%). This may be due to the convenience of Teams meetings and the reduction in travel time to attend meetings.

2. Survey comments





Focus Groups

The focus groups were attended by 107 staff and managers. The feedback followed broadly the same themes as the survey comments. Facilitators encouraged participants to focus on actions and solutions, looking for best practice that could be shared and ideas for change.

The focus groups explored the following areas:

- Benefits of agile working and how these could be maximised
- Disadvantages of agile working and how these could be mitigated
- Improved approaches to communication
- Areas of improvement for senior leaders
- How agile working might look in the future

Results by group

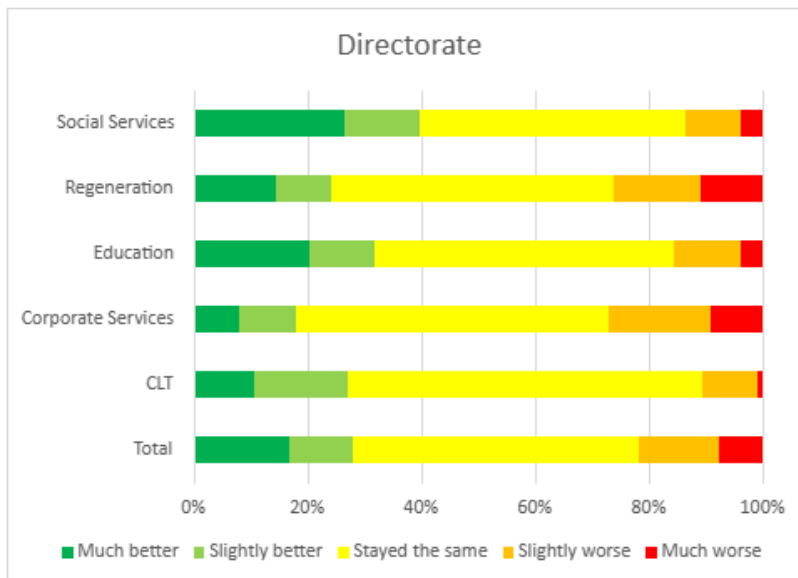
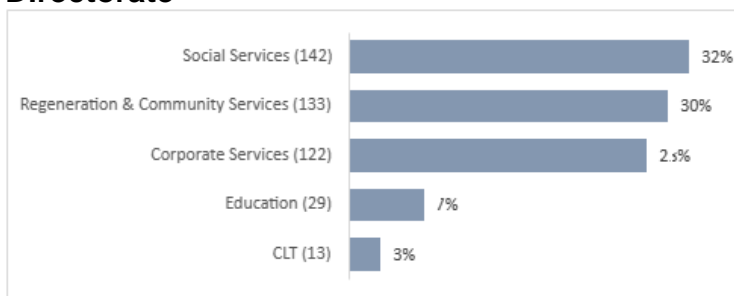
This section provides an overview of the main results broken down by different groups i.e. how respondents from different directorates responded across the survey. This is included to demonstrate the differences between directorates, departments, grades, length of service etc.

There were some inconsistencies with the initial results for the CLT group that indicated respondents had selected this group by mistake. Members of CLT were therefore asked to complete the survey again and their new results have been included in this section.

Some of the groups are small and represent less than 5% of the population that completed the survey (fewer than 25). This may lead to skewed results for these groups.

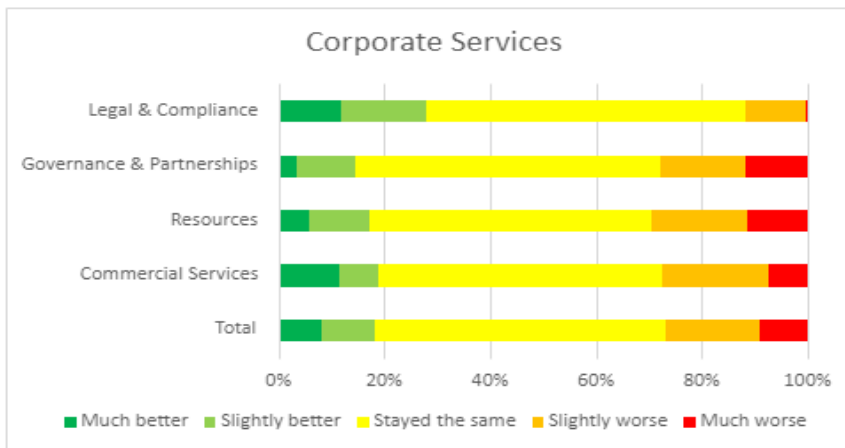
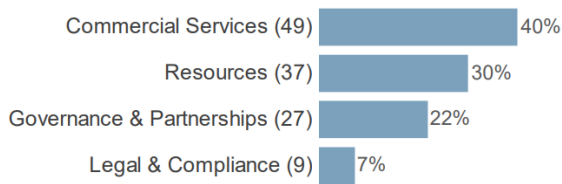
The blue graphs are taken directly from the MySurvey results generated from the survey using the Council's software. The "traffic light" graphs have been further analysed by Insight.

Directorate



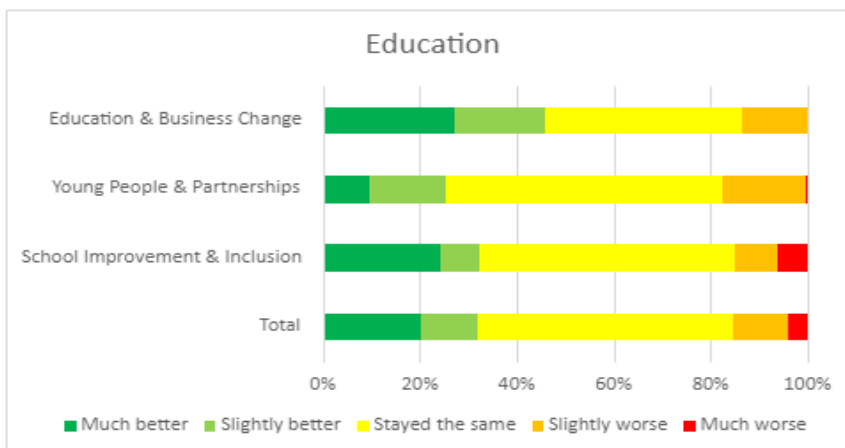
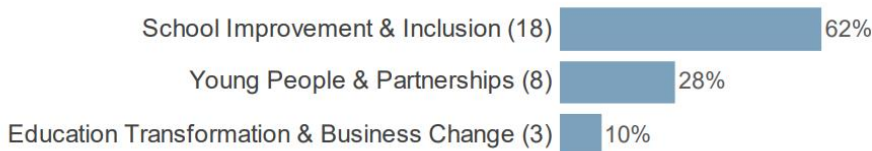
Overall, respondents from Social Services are most likely to view the changes related to the agile working model as an improvement, followed by Education and CLT. CLT and Social Services have the fewest respondents viewing the changes as making things worse. Regeneration and Corporate Services have similar response patterns with slightly more respondents from Regeneration seeing the changes as positive. Further research could explore any particular reasons for the differences across directorates.

If Corporate Services: (Please complete)



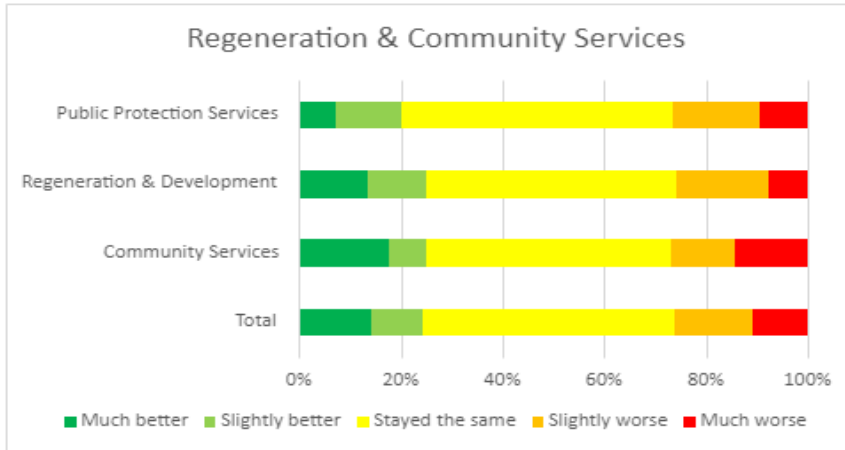
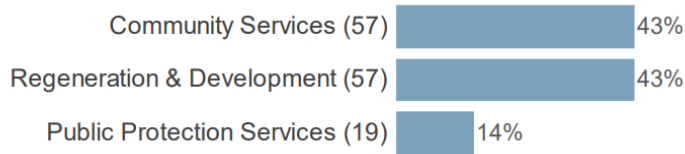
Within the Corporate Services directorate, respondents from Legal & Compliance are the most positive about the agile working arrangements, although this is from a small sample size of 9. The other departments within Corporate Services are broadly similar, with slightly more from Commercial Services seeing the changes as making work “much better”.

If Education: (Please complete)



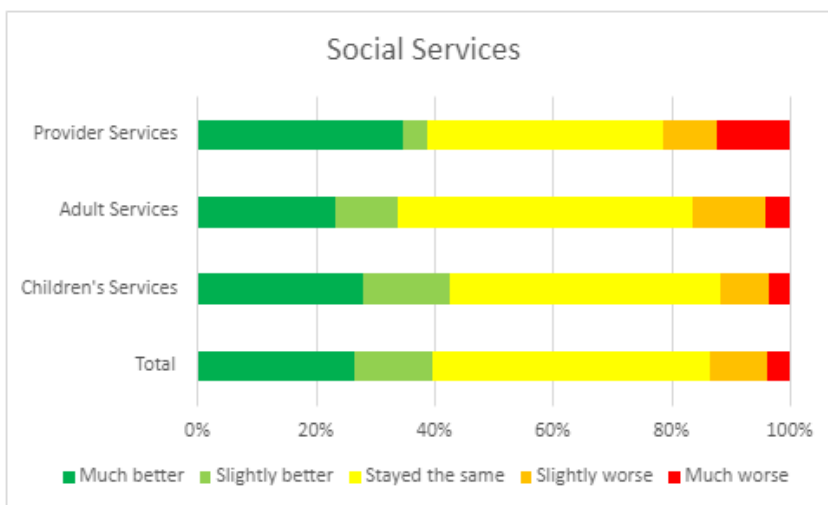
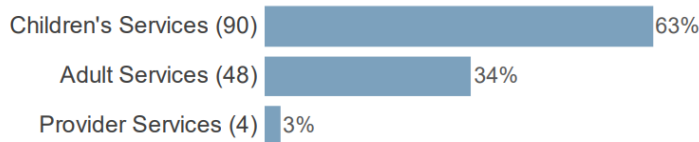
Within Education, respondents from School Improvement & Inclusion are the most positive but, again this is from a small respondent group.

If Regeneration & Community Services: (Please complete)



In the Regeneration & Community Services directorate, respondents from Public Protection have a lower percentage of respondents who see the changes as making work “much better” whilst Community Services has the largest proportion of respondents who see the changes as making work “much worse”.

If Social Services: (Please complete)

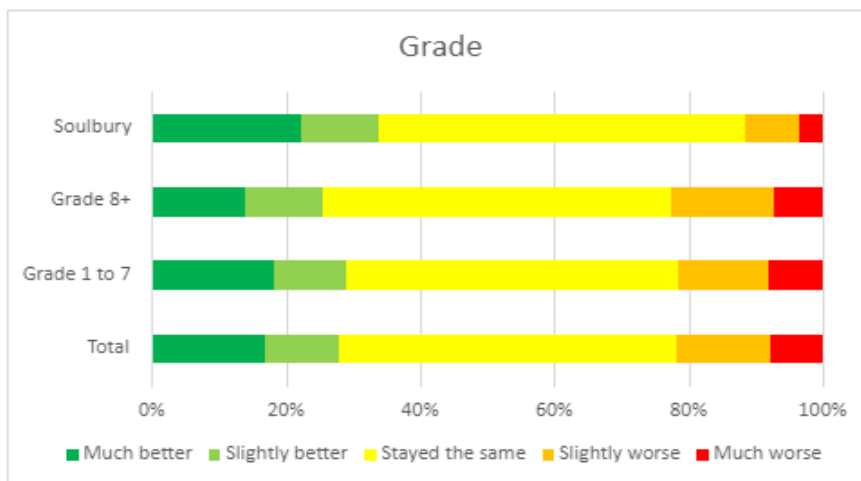


In Social Services, Provider Services has the highest percentage of respondents viewing the changes as “much better and also the highest percentage of respondents who view the changes as “much worse”. Whilst across Social Services, more respondents view the changes as positive than negative, this effect is larger for Children’s than Adult Services.

Pay Grade

This section explores the difference between different grades and their ratings of the agile working model.

Please select your grade from the list provided. (Please complete)

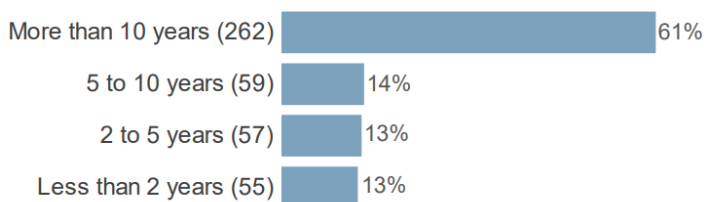


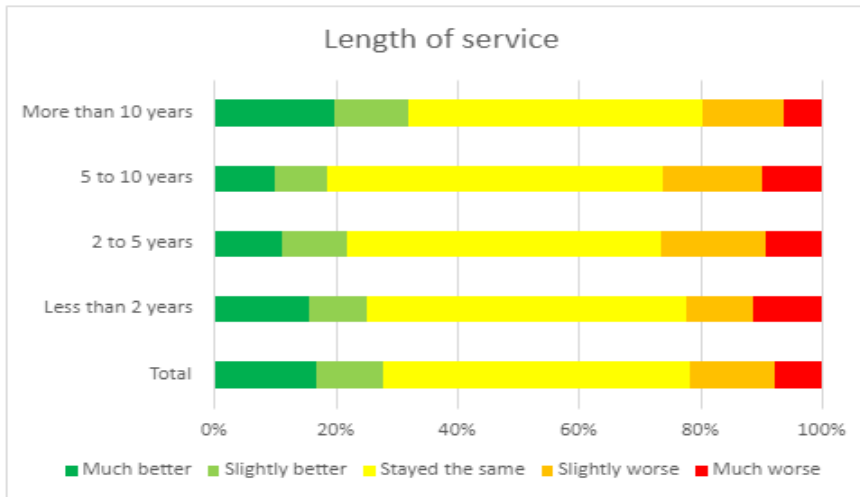
Those on the Soulbury pay grade are the most satisfied with the changes but represent a small group. Respondents in grades 1-7 are slightly more positive about the changes than those on grades 8+ but there isn't a significant difference.

Length of Service

This section looks at the impact of respondents length of service with the organisation on how positively they view the changes to the working model. Those with less than 2 years' service will have started at BGCBC after the start of the pandemic and so won't have experienced the previous model.

Please select your length of service from the list provided. (Please complete)





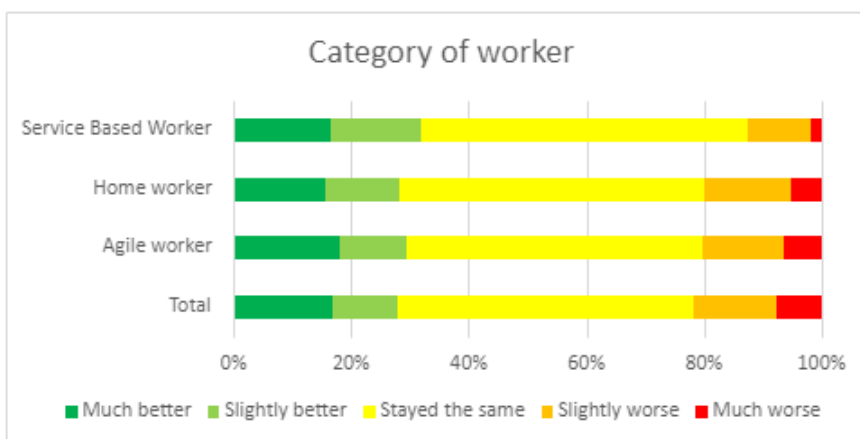
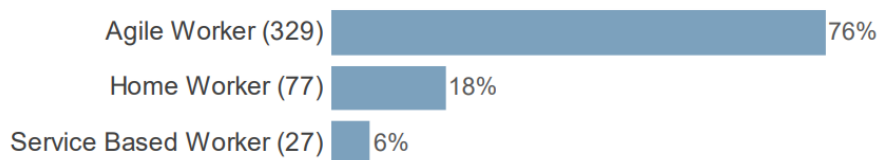
Interestingly, those with more than 10 years’ service and those with less than 2 years’ service are the most positive about the new working model. Those with less than 2 years’ service are likely to have no experience of the previous model and may applied for their role because of the agile working model.

There is some evidence beyond this organisation, that home working works best for people who are experienced in their roles, with fewer development needs and already established relationships which may have positively impacted those with more than 10 years’ service.

Category of worker

This section looks at whether the different categories of workers impact on how positively respondents view the change in working model.

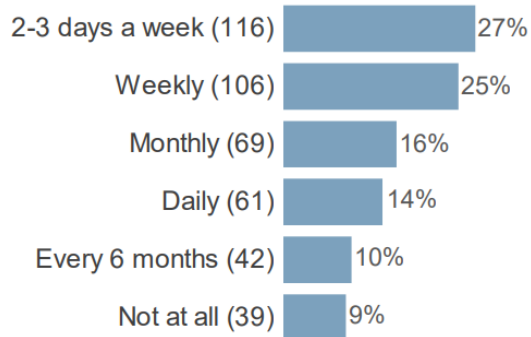
What category of worker are you? (Please complete)



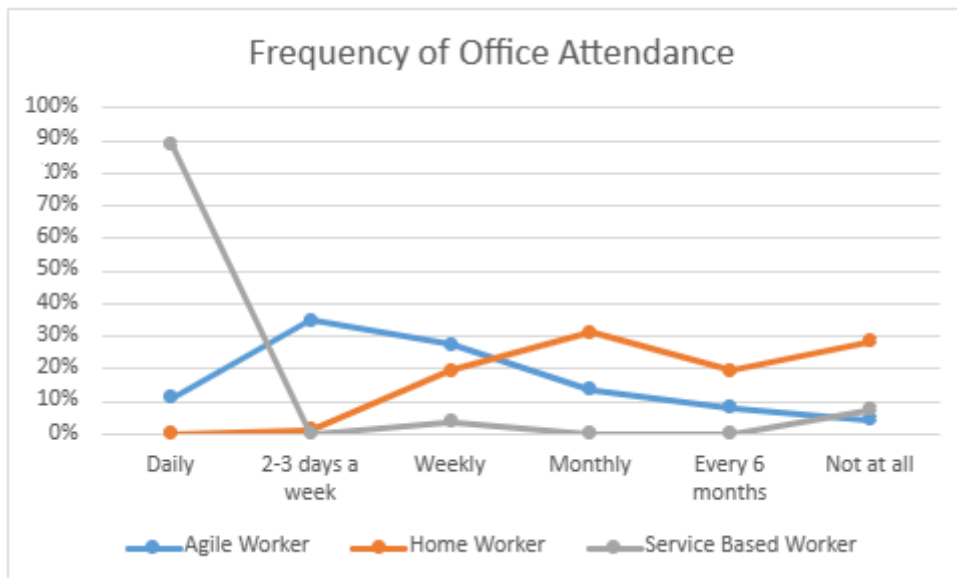
There is little difference between the groups with Service Based Workers having the lowest proportion of negative experiences. However, the changes will have had limited impact on Service Based Workers, beyond their interaction with colleagues and managers who are agile or home workers.

Frequency of office attendance

How often do you work at BGCBC offices or onsite?



76% of staff completing the survey are currently classed as “Agile Workers”. 18% are Home Workers and 6% are Service Based Workers.



This graph shows the office attendance of respondents from each of the three categories as a percentage.

	Total	Agile worker		Home worker		Service Based Worker	
Daily	61	37	11%	0	0%	24	89%
2-3 days a week	116	115	35%	1	1%	0	0%
Weekly	106	90	27%	15	19%	1	4%
Monthly	69	45	14%	24	31%	0	0%
Every 6 months	42	27	8%	15	19%	0	0%
Not at all	39	15	5%	22	29%	2	7%

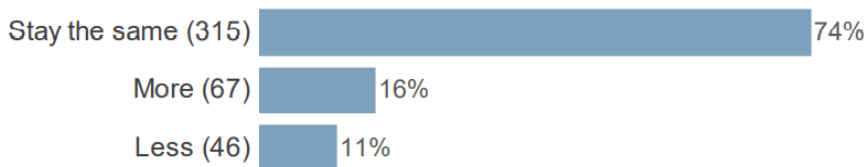
As expected, most Service Based Workers attend the office daily, although some agile workers (11%) also attend offices daily. 27% of agile workers attend offices monthly or less frequently.

The data suggests that, whilst the trends of attendance are broadly correct, there is inconsistency between the categorisation of staff as home and agile workers and how frequently they attend the office.

The survey doesn't define "office" so it may be that staff are attending hubs, libraries or other council sites without defining them as the "office".

The comments and focus groups did highlight the inconsistency of application as a potential source of conflict and perceived unfairness. However, others recognised the definition of "agile" as meaning working from the best location for the work.

Would you like to work from BGCBC offices more or less?



The vast majority of staff (74%) are happy with the frequency that they work in the office. It would, however, be worth keeping this as a "live" area of management discussion with staff in order to avoid tensions.

What are the main reasons for working from BGCBC offices or onsite? (tick all that apply)



Of the 33 comments made under "other", 31 are covered in the items above or no further information is provided. The remaining comments relate to cost of living concerns.

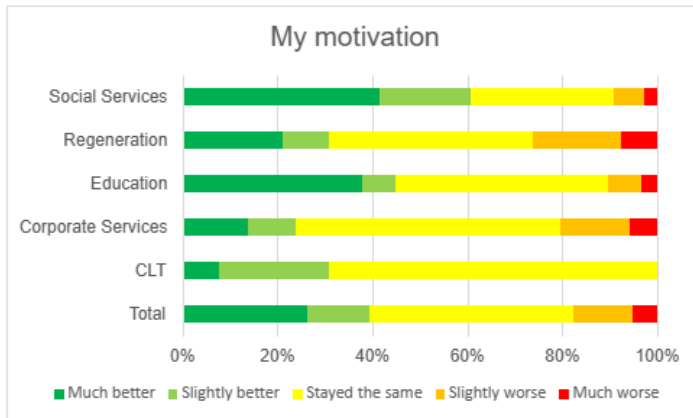
Detailed feedback

In this section the feedback for each question is provided by directorate.

Section One: My work satisfaction and wellbeing

Since the new operating model has been implemented, please rate how the following has changed:

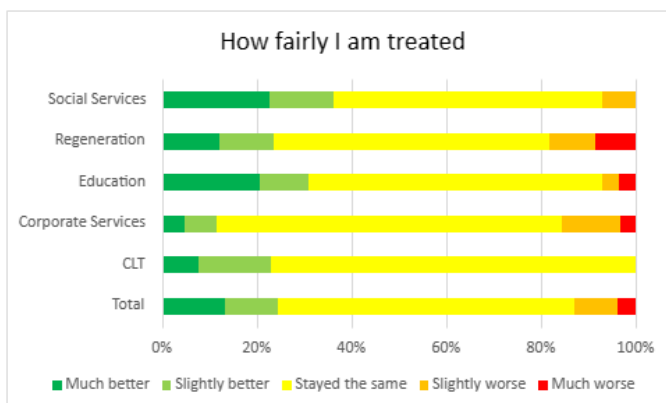
1. My motivation



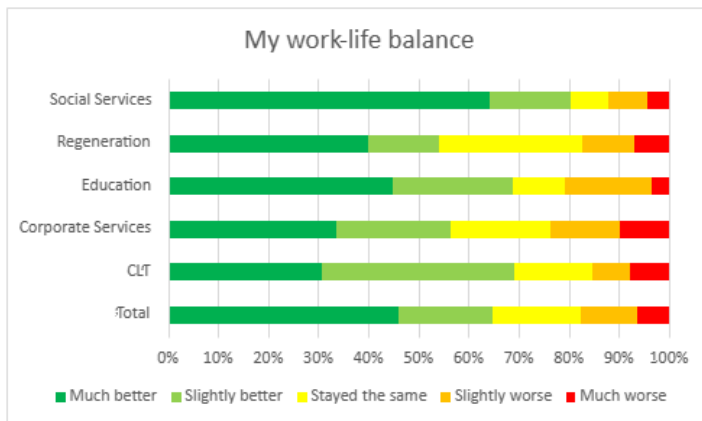
2. My job satisfaction



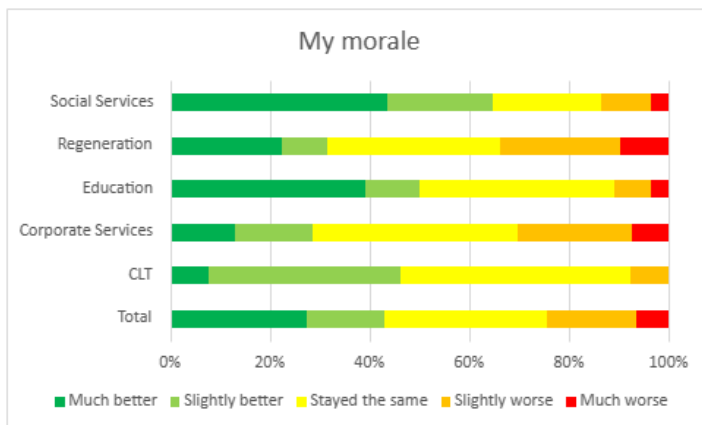
3. How fairly I am treated



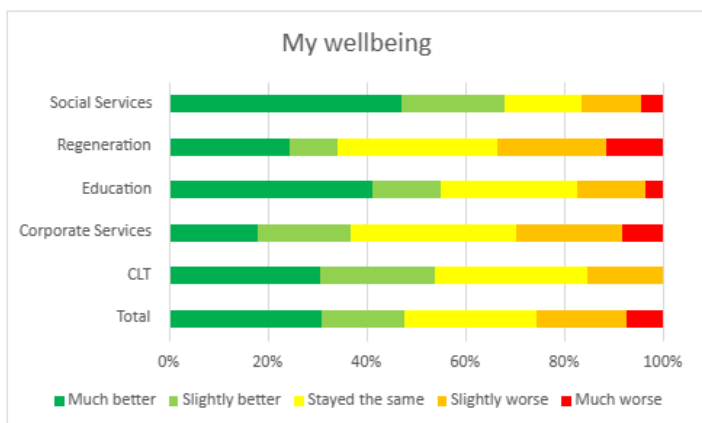
4. My work-life balance



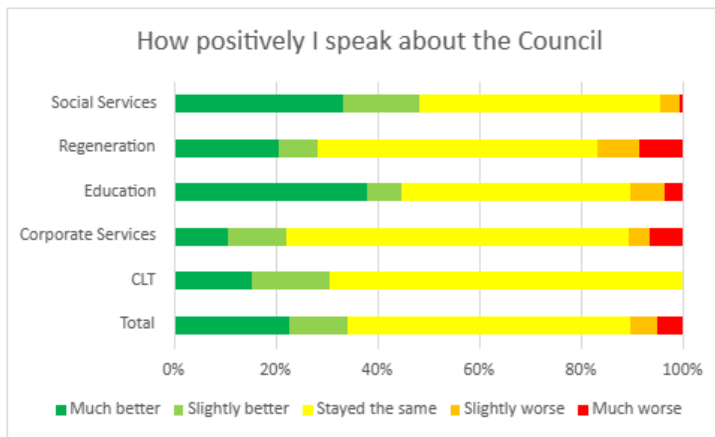
5. My morale



6. My wellbeing



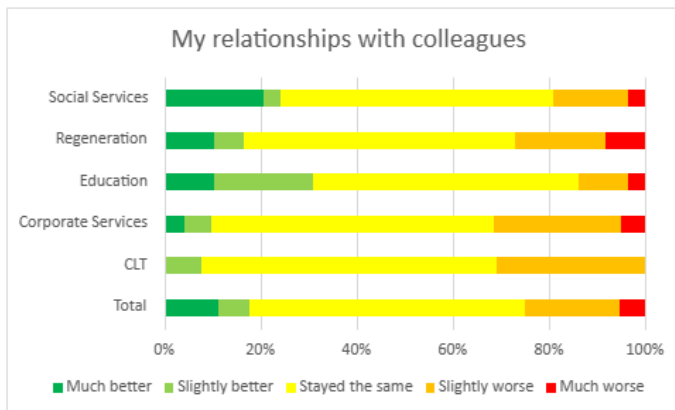
7. How positively I speak to others about the Council



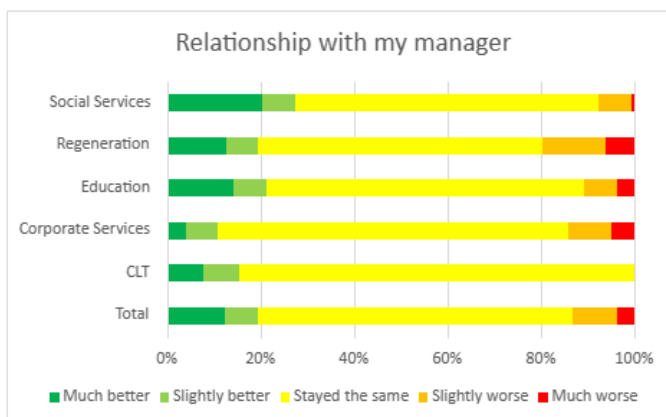
Section Two: Relationships

Since the new operating model has been implemented, please rate how the following has changed:

1. My relationships with colleagues



2. My relationship with my manager



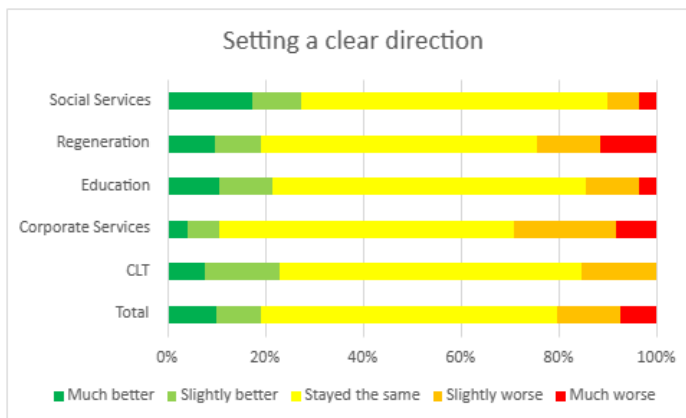
3. Relationship with customers/clients



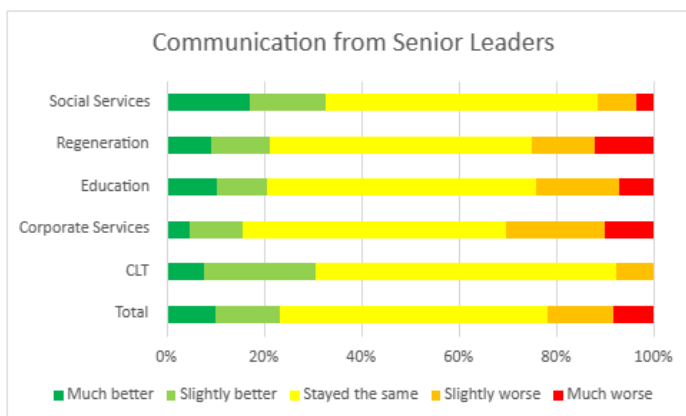
Section Three: Senior leadership and culture

Since the new operating model has been implemented, please rate how the following has changed:

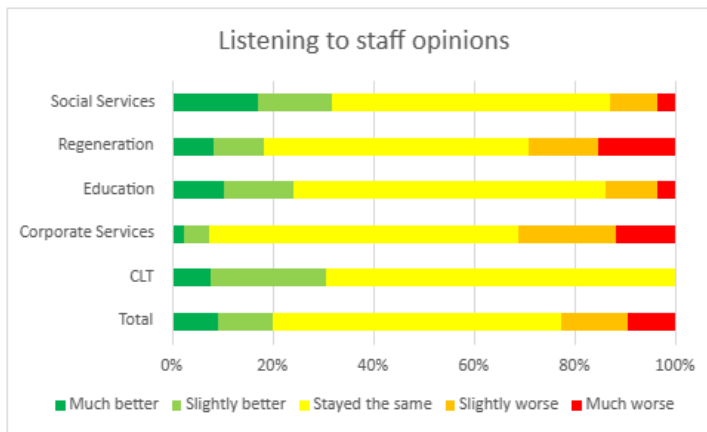
1. Senior Leaders setting a clear direction for the organisation



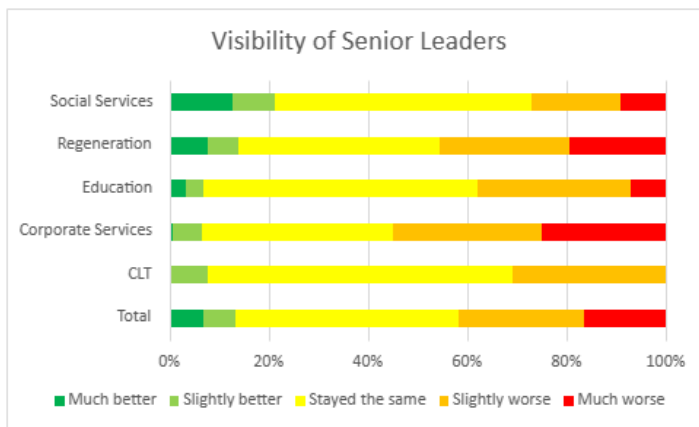
2. Communication from Senior Leaders



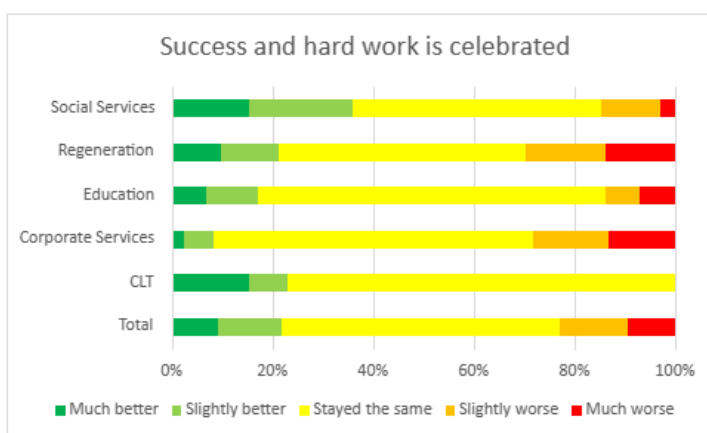
3. Senior Leaders listening to staff opinions



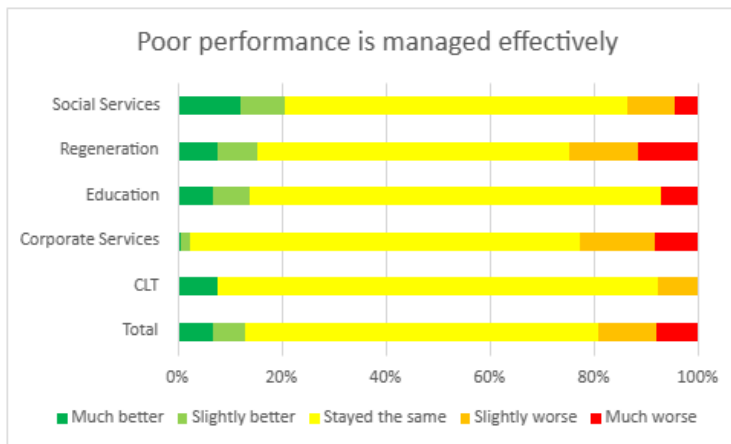
4. Visibility of senior leaders



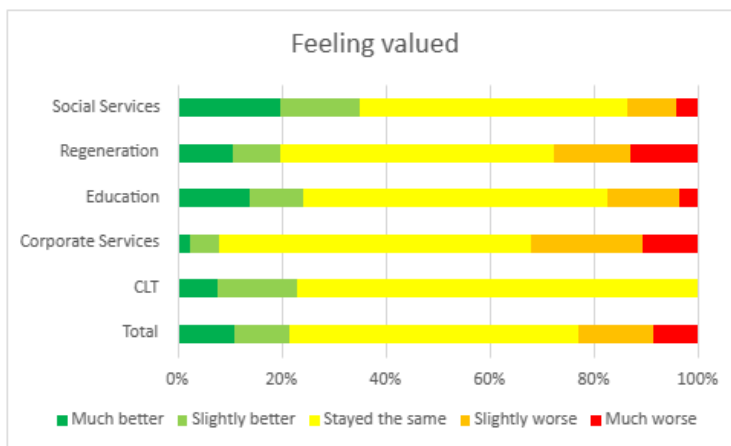
5. Success and hard work is celebrated



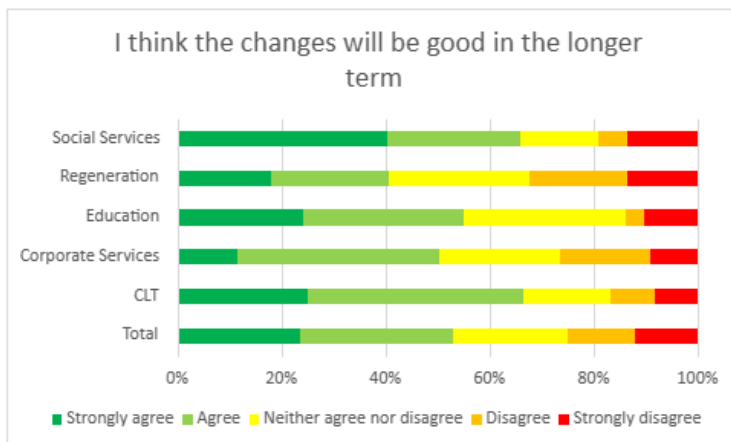
6. Poor performance is managed effectively



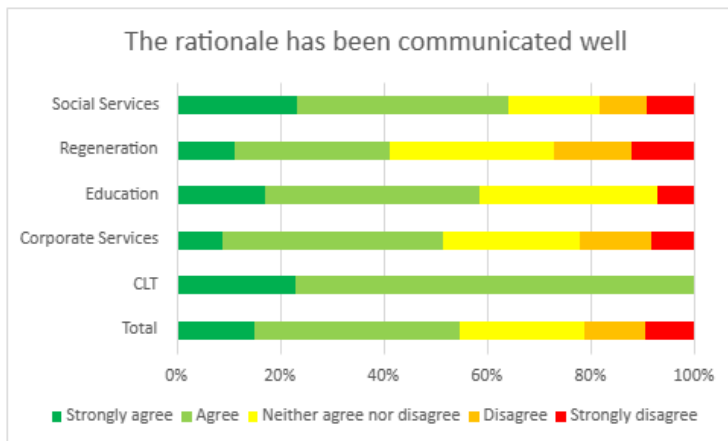
7. Feeling valued by the organisation



8. I think the changes to the working arrangements will be good for the longer-term future of this organisation



9. The rationale for the changes has been communicated well



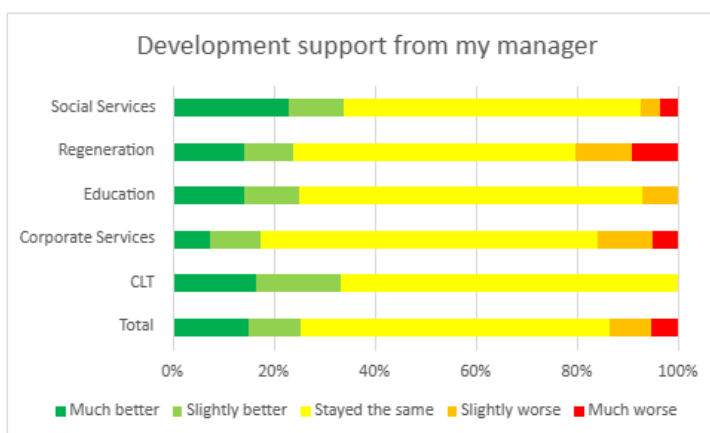
Section Four: My manager

Since the new operating model has been implemented, please rate how the following has changed:

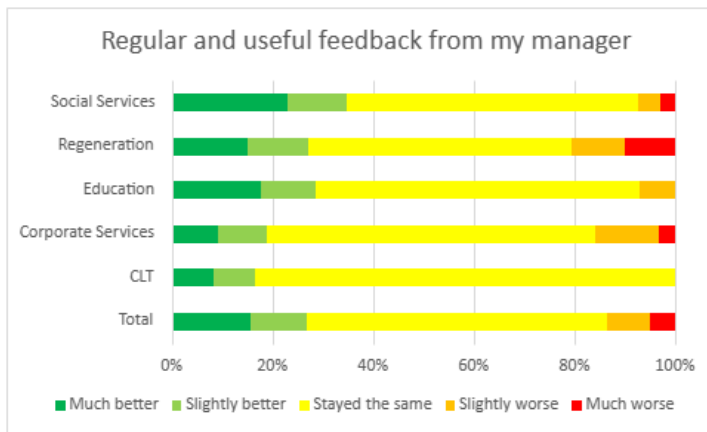
1. Communication from my manager



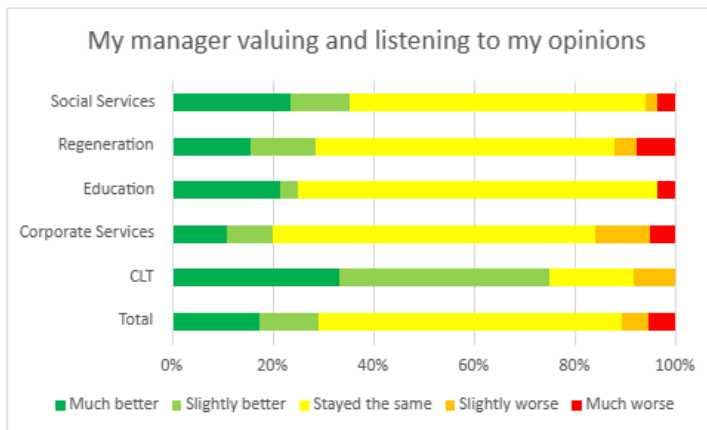
2. Development support from my manager



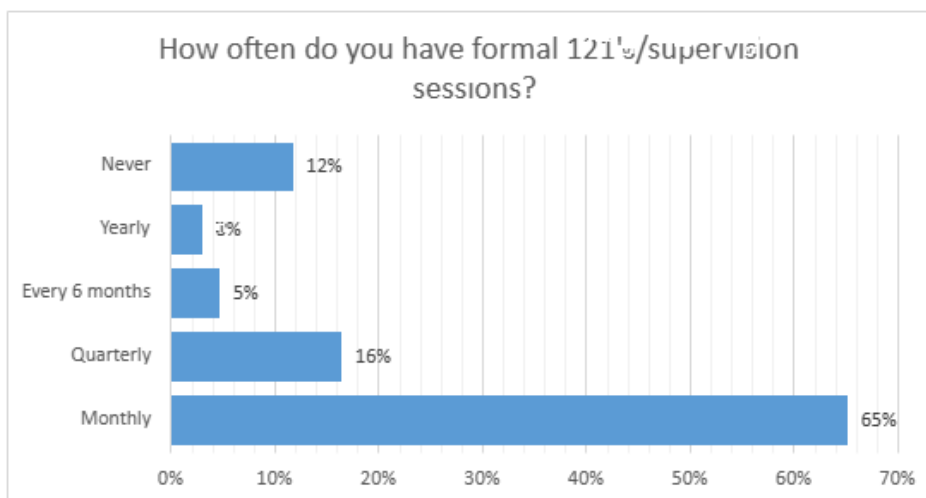
3. Regular and useful feedback from my manager

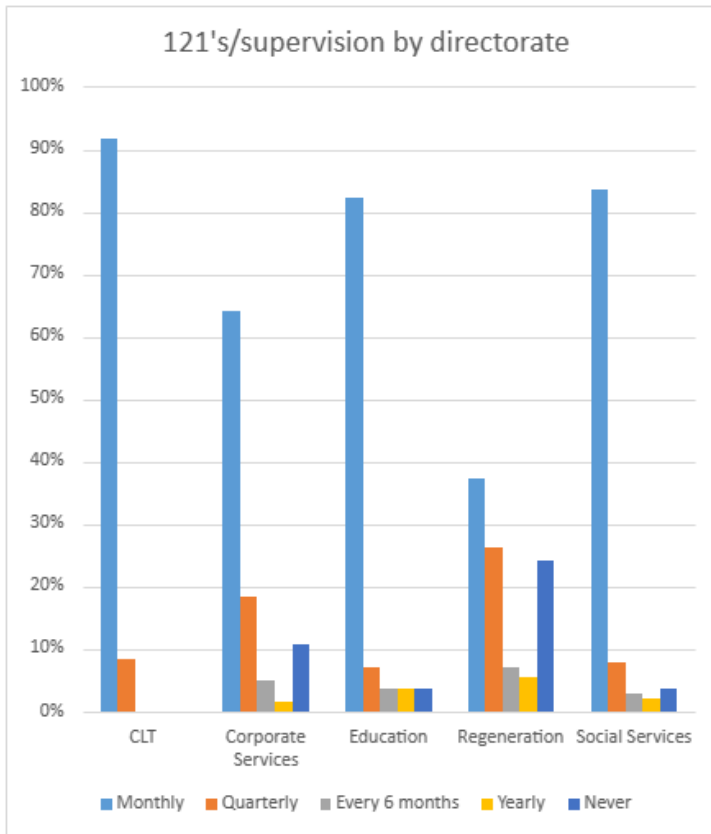


4. My manager valuing and listening to my opinions

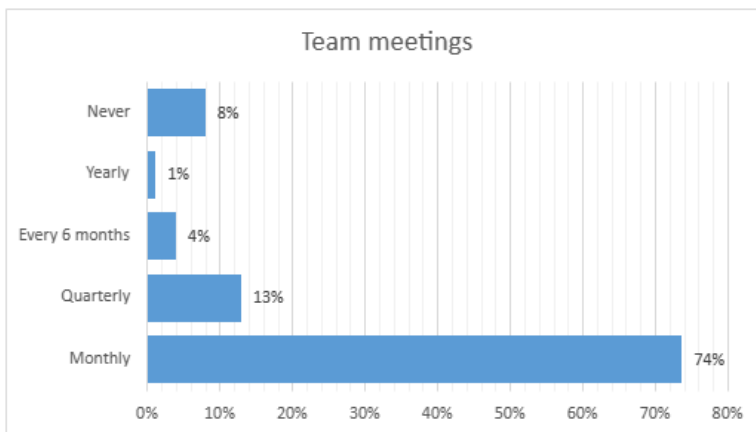


5. How often do you have formal 121's / supervision sessions with your manager?

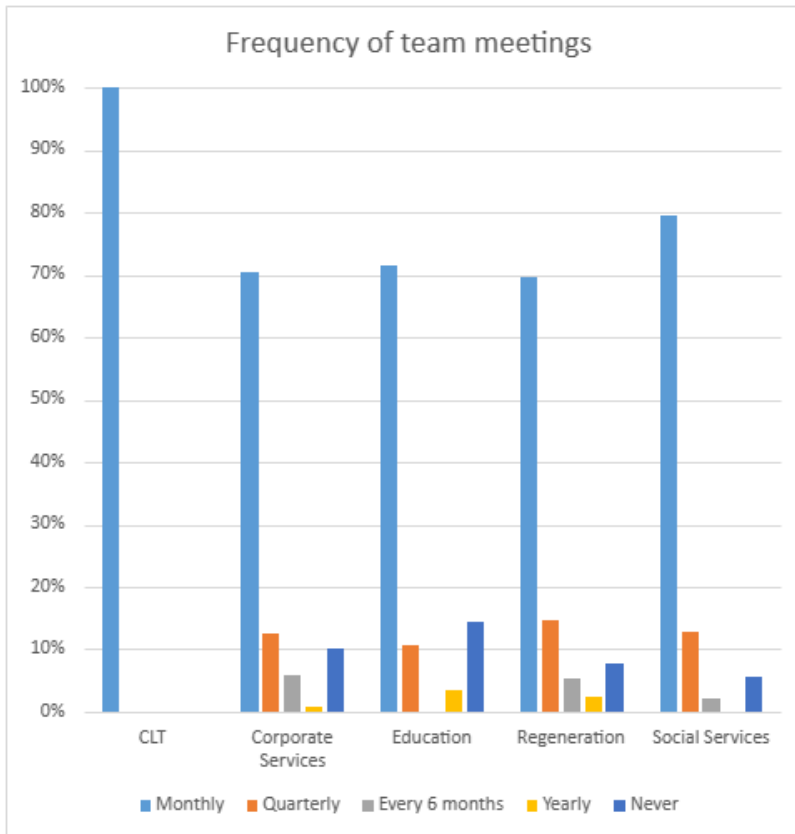




6. How often do you have formal Team Meetings?



In the comments, staff referred to weekly team meetings so team meetings may be occurring on a more frequent than monthly basis.



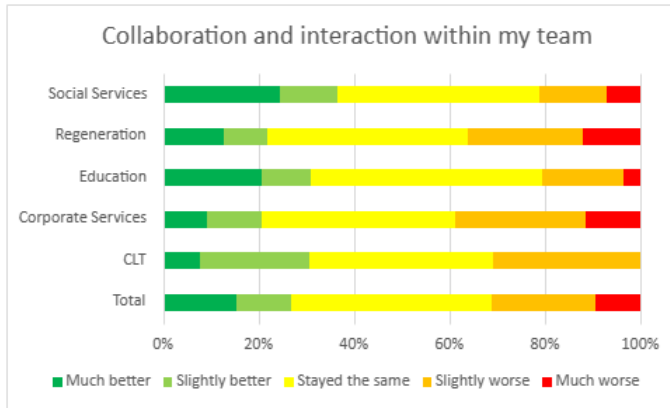
7. As a manager, I am able to lead a remote team effectively



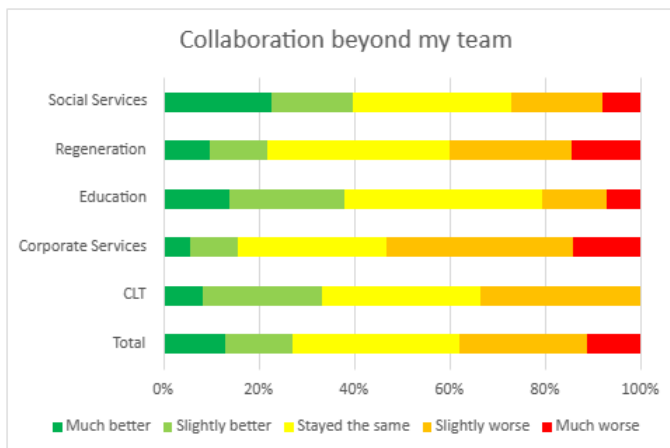
Section Five: Communication and collaboration

Since the new operating model has been implemented, please rate how the following has changed:

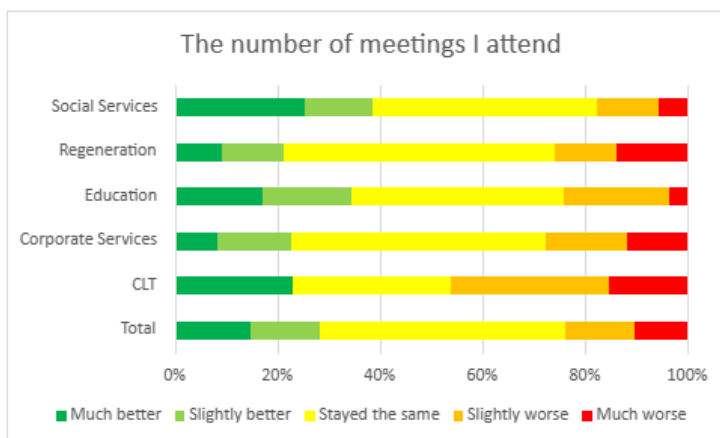
1. Collaboration and interaction within my team



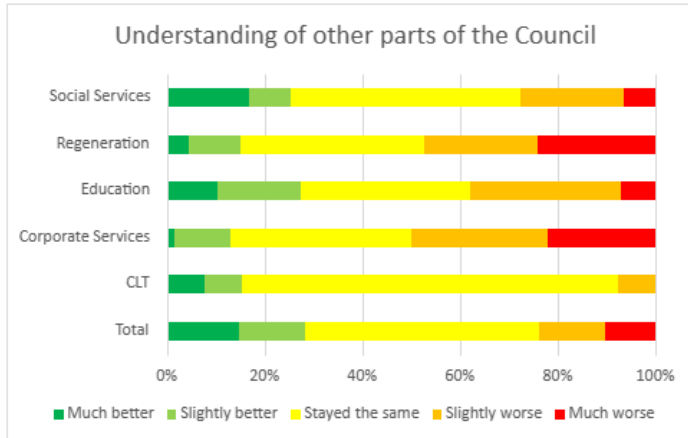
2. Collaboration and communication with other teams and colleagues I work with



3. The number of meetings I attend

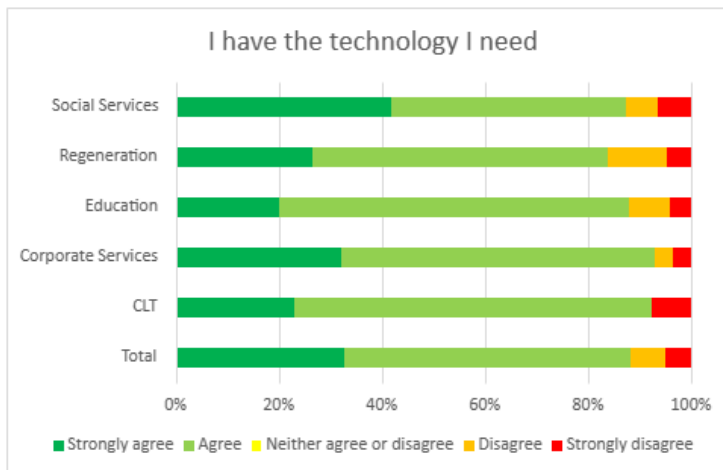


4. My understanding of what is going on in other parts of the Council

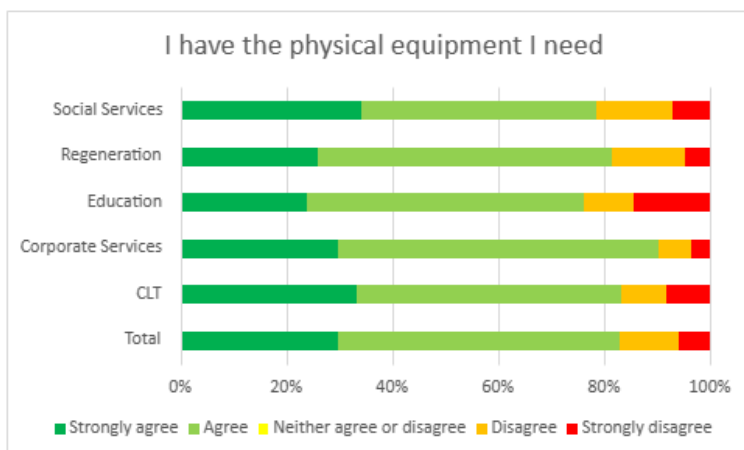


Section Six: Equipment, skills and training

1. I have the technology I need to work away from the office.



2. I have the physical equipment I need to work away from the office



As a result of the new operating model, do you require additional training to support your use of technology?



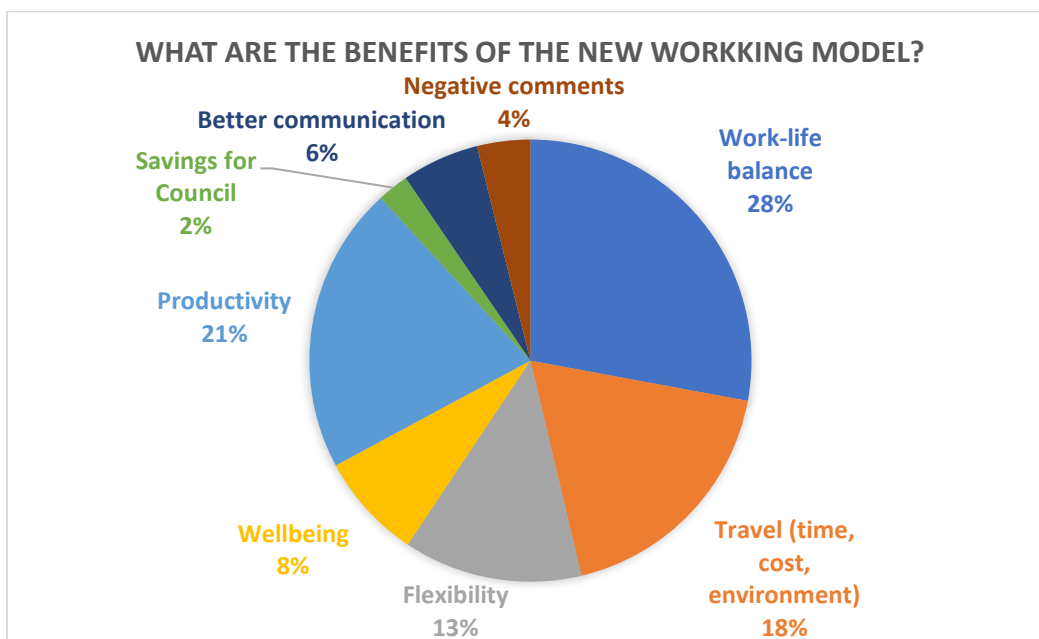
36 comments were received for this question requesting additional training on:

Teams	9
Microsoft 365	12
Capita ONE	1
OneDrive	1
Dropbox	1
Adobe Acrobat	1
Practical demonstrations	2
General training	4
Other comments (not training related)	3

Section Seven: Comments

Participants were asked to comment on both the positive and negative elements of the new operating model. Thematic analysis has been used on this data.

336 comments were received outlining the benefits of the new operating model. The key themes were:

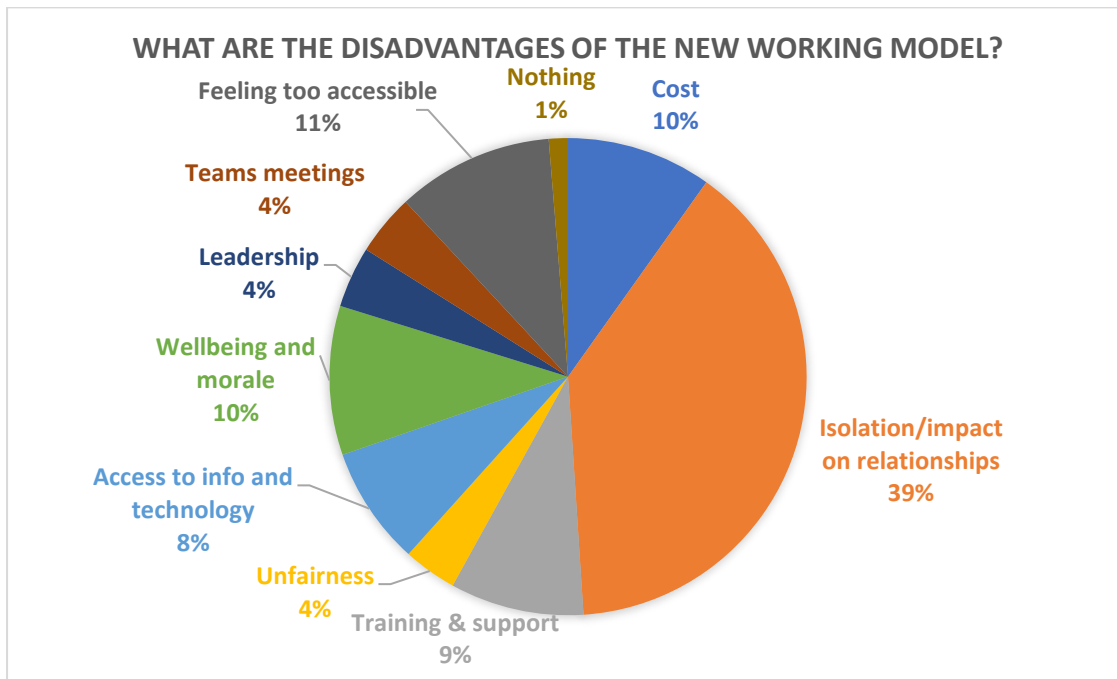


Most commenters identified multiple and related benefits. For example, reduced travel time led to greater productivity or improved work-life balance led to improved wellbeing.

323 people provided comments for the disadvantages of the new working model. These comments tended to be longer and more complex (10,318 words in total, compared to 7,106 for benefits).

The comments range in severity from people struggling to find a disadvantage to people significantly struggling with the new way of working.

The main theme of comments are:



Clearly the impact on relationships is the most significant challenge that people are experiencing. Again, this ranges from those who miss the social interaction but find that Teams is useful for collaboration and teamwork, to those who feel very isolated and lonely.

Focus Groups

Twelve focus groups were held between November 21st and 25th. 107 staff attended from across the organisation:

Corporate Services	23	21%
Social Services	29	27%
Regeneration & Community	52	49%
Education	3	3%
Total	107	

Education was therefore underrepresented and Corporate Services overrepresented as a proportion of staff as a whole. School staff weren't included in the review which accounts for some of the under-representation.

Most staff attending were agile workers, a smaller number were home workers and only a couple were service based. More agile workers were invited to the focus groups as they are primarily those impacted by the agile working operating model.

The aim of the focus groups was to focus on what is working well and what changes could be made to improve agile working.

Staff worked in small groups to discuss each topic, making notes on a flipchart which was collected at the end. This feedback is recorded below.

Participants were engaged, vocal and positive. They valued being asked for their opinion and also being given the opportunity to network with colleagues from other parts of the organisation.

The main themes and comments are given below, together with the number of times each comment was made. Responses are given verbatim or summarised when a number of groups made similar comments.

1. What are the benefits of agile working?

Productivity		Wellbeing	
Fewer interruptions	6	Home / work balance	13
Technology has improved	1	Flexibility	9
Better focus and concentration.	1	Less sickness leave	3
More independent decision making / empowered	5	Personal health reasons	1
More productive at home	9	Travel – less stress driving / getting to workplace / costs	10
Financial	2	Trust	4
Environmental	1	Wellbeing	2
Benefits seen in very different roles	1	Confidence	1
Office environment is more enjoyable as it's a change rather than a constant	1	Generally happier and motivated	2

2. How can the organisation maximise the benefits?

Communication		Other	
Protocols on the use of Teams vs phone calls, or use of cameras	2	Better / easier access to all agile hubs or office space	1
Regular days when the whole team work together in the office	1	More control over meeting room booking	1
Regular 1.2.1 meetings	3	Fairness and Equality	4
Weekly team meetings	1	Reduce the sense of pressure to always be available	4
Clear communications across depts, who is where & when available	1	Be able to rollover more flexi	2
Organisational trees need to be up to date on Teams/other (intranet))	1	Giving more choice	3
News & networking are useful (quarterly) (EYCP/Children's Services/Social Services)	1	Good/trusting line managers	3
Caerphilly newsletter is useful	1	Enable different approaches for different roles/teams/departments	2
Less disjointed comms (don't just put things on FB)	1		
Greater networking with wider organisation	1		

3. What are the main disadvantages of agile working?

Waiting for responses	3	Cost of living with heating and lighting rises	7
Too many meetings	2	Needing resources e.g. printing, mail and supplies	4
Feeling pressure to be available (guilt complex about being offline or yellow on Teams)	3	Access to business support	2
Structure of day is lost	1	Disruptions to home life/boundaries	4
Personal safety – keep team updated	1	Decreased communication	7
Feeling isolated / lonely	6	Pressure to work when ill	1
Unable to switch off as work is always there	3	Working longer hours	1
Too many communication channels	2	Reduced motivation	4
Difficult to learn new skills	2	Lack of awareness of other work going on / wider Council	5
Mental challenges and anxiety	1	Friday feeling/celebrations	2
New employees – learning and getting to know people	2	Fairness	1
Team building/team get togethers	12	Screeentime	2
Access to agile buildings and confusion around booking space	4	Perception of “shirking from home”	3
Collaboration	8		

4. What can be done about them?

Teambuilding
Team get togethers on an agreed day
Weekly Teams meeting
Weekly face to face meeting with lunch afterwards
On Teams a lot
Regular 1.2.1s
Debriefs
Flexibility of offsite places to meet e.g parks etc
It's more acceptable to be at work but not at your desk
Consistency about what is ok e.g confidentiality of location discussions
Can receive too much information on organisational wide news

5. How have you changed the way you manage as a result of agile working?

More relaxed – not as worried about who is doing what
Work reviews – and more autonomous decision-making
More trust
More confidence – you can be 'you'
Experience of a 'newer' manager can be challenging – less peer support for new managers
Created respect with all officer levels
Work / managing / leadership style has changed

6. How could communication be improved?

Ideas
Video updates from each area so we are kept up to speed with other parts of the council
Integration of new starters
Up to date intranet and directories
Open up Flexi properly to allow work outside of 7am-7pm
Re-evaluate the financial rewards
Q&A's with Chief Exec and Councillors
Get people together – social contact
Purchase an 'owl' for people to use during meetings that are both virtual and face-to-face
Providing and ensuring minimum speeds for internet at home
Focus on wellbeing
Ensure regular one to ones
Approachable managers makes it easy
Communication matters
Approaches for listening
Induction
Newsletters
Meeting discipline – only invite people who need to attend, only attend if you need to

7. What would you like to see from senior leaders to support agile working?

Greater visibility – who is who, what are their roles, what are their key challenges and priorities?	2	Proactive – sharing the vision	1
Video messages from Chief Executive and members to keep us all in the loop	1	Information to guide own departmental planning	1
Live and recorded Q&A with the senior team – even if they don't have all the answers	1	Make service more efficient – restructure	1
Celebrate success / More appreciation	4	Risk management	1
Accountability		Retain staff	1
Visibility	2	Collaboration across agencies and departments	1
Better communication – wider team meetings	2	Opinions asked and listened to	2
Acknowledgment of challenges	1	Assist change with training and good communication	1
Understanding how work fits into bigger picture	1	Feel trusted	1
Ensure information is passed down by managers	1		

8. The survey suggests that agile working is improving morale and motivation. Do you agree or not? Why?

Agree:		Disagree:	
Work/life balance and being able to pick your hours of work	4	Isolation does not help morale	1
Research more yourself rather than asking others	1	Training and learning new things is more difficult	2
Flexibility	3	Can't just ask "how do I do this" or "can you show me"	1
More control on working day	2	Difficulties with systems – skills and support	2
More productive	2	Reduced	1
Self-care	1	Requires self-motivation and discipline	1
Less stress	2		
Less travel	1		
Cost saving – fuel, room hire	2		

9. How can collaboration work better in an agile environment?

Within teams		Between teams	
More face to face meetings	3	Increase the knowledge of what we are all working on	1
A focus on wellbeing for the whole team	1	Global awareness – community driven calls	1
Response times being agreed	1	Better technology (and fully utilise Teams) to support more immediate collaboration	3
Digital Champions	1		
Staff accessibility	1	Contact with other LA's has been good	1
Merging teams – higher morale	1	Wider throughout Wales collaboration	1
Managers adapting/listening to us/proactive	1	Better handovers between	1
Use of digital enhancement – utilising Teams	1	Regular meetings with other depts – may build better working relationships/rapport so collaboration not awkward	4
Regular team meeting (daily, weekly, fortnightly and monthly all suggested)	3	Update address book / intranet with departmental updates and staff names – have a central phone book	1
Better work phones – using WhatsApp	1	Email updates (bullet points) on workload and priorities each month to neighbouring teams	1
One to one line manager meetings weekly	1	Inductions for new staff members between teams	1
Social events – even informal meet-ups for coffee and a chat	1		
Believe in what you're doing – what is the shared purpose of the team	1		

10. What does the future of agile working at BGCBC look like?

Better balance between face to face & Teams
Clearer mileage instructions (claims clockings etc)
Informal discussions venues offsite of the standard workplaces
Agile areas – available in non council settings – police station
Annual review of current agile workers, allowances etc
Greater flexibility in location, number of days etc
Increase payment homeworking allowance
Further manager training – so they can manage a hybrid team
Flexi for the hours worked and not lose it
Iron out current issues – printing, emails, access to buildings, IT support / Return of central print – more facilities and technology to enable printing
Implementation of enhanced digital resources (e.g. Teams/Sway) and the introduction of Digital Champions
Consistent availability of IT equipment in office (e.g. keyboard, mouse, screen) and ergonomic requirements of staff
A focus on wellbeing and managers having the knowledge to recognise and manage mental health issues with reduced face-to-face contact
Promote a better attitude to remote working as a benefit – some staff are still very critical of the approach
Ensure some ground rules – ‘yellow’ on Teams does not mean you are not working – a little more trust is needed from some managers
Better feedback from senior management and better communication across the organisation in general

Recommendations

Overall, there is much in the Agile Working Policy that is working for staff and the organisation. Even where there are frustrations or niggles, staff at focus groups emphasised that they wouldn't want to go back to five days in the office.

We therefore suggest focusing action on the following areas:

1. Line management support

The support, trust, empowerment and regular feedback provided by the majority of line managers has a positive effect on how staff are adjusting to know ways of working and teamwork within those teams. Staff that described a positive relationship with line managers also seemed to be more proactive about overcoming challenges and were more positive about their general experience.

Conversely, at the focus groups, those who were struggling with agile working also often described a lack of support, perceived unfairness and fewer 121s and team meetings. These line managers may also be struggling with change and receive less support from their own managers.

We recommend this is investigated further with a view to provide additional support, training and coaching to managers who need it.

2. Wellbeing support

The survey and focus groups both showed a clear improvement in wellbeing for many staff. However, for some staff, there has been a significant decline in this area which is often linked to isolation.

We recommend that line managers identify staff requiring additional support and are the first point of contact. If, however, this is not possible then a dedicated "Wellbeing Champion" could be the next point of call. This could sit alongside normal work duties and could, potentially, also look at issues around sickness absence.

3. Leadership visibility

Staff themselves provided a number of ideas in this area including video/Teams calls with senior leadership, wider Directorate meetings (which have been received positively in those areas that have had them) and updated information about who is in CLT.

4. Ironing out IT niggles

Many staff are positive about the increased use of technology and the benefits of Teams. Staff approaches to technology have changed over time as they have become more confident. Teams and individuals are working out how to use technology effectively for them.

The introduction of Digital Champions has been viewed positively, where people knew about them. This role is likely to embed further over time.

Staff highlight frustrations with the speed of IT support which could be investigated to see if improvements can be made.

Some systems are difficult for staff to update themselves such as updating the intranet with changes to job titles and names. This would enable staff to know who to contact across the organisation.

5. Map agile working to organisational performance

Agile working has had, in general, a positive effect on wellbeing and the comments indicate that people feel more productive. Is this translating into improvements in performance?

Can this be sustained in the long-term if there are negative impacts on training and informal workplace development?

6. Celebrate success and positive stories

Whilst there are some areas for improvement, there is also much positive news in this report. Staff would like to see success celebrated more, and this can be used to increase buy-in (as long as staff feel their concerns have been heard and addressed).

7. Complete a full engagement survey

The data above focuses on the change in perceptions following the introduction of the Agile Working Policy. It doesn't provide a measure of engagement – only whether it has got better, worse or stayed the same since the policy was introduced. E.g. a score of "stayed the same" could indicate that performance was poor in this area before, or good in this area before.

A full engagement survey would provide greater information about areas for change and development.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE REVIEW OF AGILE WORKING

RECOMMENDATION	PROGRESS TO DATE	FURTHER ACTIONS
<p>Improve Line management support The support, trust, empowerment and regular feedback provided by the majority of line managers has a positive effect on how staff are adjusting to know ways of working and teamwork within those teams. Staff that described a positive relationship with line managers also seemed to be more proactive about overcoming challenges and were more positive about their general experience. Conversely, at the focus groups, those who were struggling with agile working also often described a lack of support, perceived unfairness and fewer 121s and team meetings. These line managers may also be struggling with change and receive less support from their own managers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for managers on managing an agile workforce rolled out across organisation • Facilitated sessions held with CLT and Wider CLT in terms of the feedback and recommendations from the agile working review • See update on leadership visibility below 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further communications to managers to remind on the Council's expectations with workforce communication and engagement as part of the Managers Brief • Directorates to audit of 121s
<p>Managers to target Wellbeing support The survey and focus groups both showed a clear improvement in wellbeing for many staff. However, for some staff, there has been a significant decline in this area which is often linked to isolation. It is recommended that line managers identify staff requiring additional support and are the first point of contact. If, however, this is not possible then a dedicated "Wellbeing Champion" could be the next point of call. This could sit alongside normal work duties and could, potentially, also look at issues around sickness absence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workstyles have continued to be reviewed and there has been adjustments made to support where staff have reported feeling isolated • Wellbeing Wednesday continues to promote wellbeing and offer various support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers to continue focus on workforce wellbeing and work with their OD Senior Business partner to make adjustments as necessary
<p>Improve Leadership visibility Staff themselves provided a number of ideas in this area including video/Teams calls with senior leadership, wider</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft contact list for CLT developed for roll out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of the Learner Experience and Management

RECOMMENDATION	PROGRESS TO DATE	FURTHER ACTIONS
<p>Directorate meetings (which have been received positively in those areas that have had them) and updated information about who is in CLT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop held with CLT and purpose for CLT and principles to support agile working developed and communicated to the workforce • Webinars with the Chief Executive and the Chief Officer Resources held with workforce regarding the budget consultation process 	<p>System will include welcome information</p>
<p>Ironing out IT niggles individuals are working out how to use technology effectively for them. The introduction of Digital Champions has been viewed positively, where people knew about them. This role is likely to embed further over time. Staff highlight frustrations with the speed of IT support which could be investigated to see if improvements can be made. Some systems are difficult for staff to update themselves such as updating the intranet with changes to job titles and names. This would enable staff to know who to contact across the organisation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Champions support staff on implementation of new technology • Lunch and learn sessions held to support the roll out of new technology • Email correspondence issued to all staff around new technology and how to use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number of Digital Champions • Encourage staff with system issues to go to their champions for support • Promote the Digital Champions across services • Intranet review being considered and form part of Corporate Digital programme
<p>Map agile working to organisational performance Agile working has had, in general, a positive effect on wellbeing and the comments indicate that people feel more productive. Is this translating into improvements in performance? Can this be sustained in the long-term if there are negative impacts on training and informal workplace development?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of agile working hubs and improvements to facilities made eg. printing, hybrid mail. • See update under improve leadership visibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full staff survey autumn 2024
<p>Celebrate success and positive stories Whilst there are some areas for improvement, there is also much positive news in this report. Staff would like to see success celebrated more, and this can be used to increase</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of internal communications completed and action plan in place. One of the 6 key objectives of the plan is to improve internal communications and 	

RECOMMENDATION	PROGRESS TO DATE	FURTHER ACTIONS
<p>buy-in (as long as staff feel their concerns have been heard and addressed)</p>	<p>to ensure staff are well informed about key corporate plan priorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on celebrating success and including positive staff stories in the quarterly staff newsletter • There is also a plan in place to improve the recruitment section of the Council’s website. This will include staff case studies and other positive information about working for the Council 	
<p>Complete a full engagement survey</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action as part of the Workforce Strategy Delivery Plan to carry out a full staff survey autumn 2024

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Agile Working Policy

‘Work is an activity we do, rather than a place we go’



ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Issued: Review:

Version Control

This document is intended for:

- Council staff only School-based staff only Council & School-based staff

Version	Key Changes	Approved By
April 2021	New Policy	Council on 29/4/21
August 2023		

This document may be reviewed and amended at any time and without consultation in response to legal requirements or in response to an organisational requirement and where the changes do not reflect a fundamental change or affect the spirit or intent of the document.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (the “Council”) recognises the need for modern working practices to enhance employees’ working experience and to maximise performance and productivity and deliver the greatest value to the organisation. This Policy will focus on employee wellbeing by promoting a good work-life balance. In addition, new technologies are making it easy to access information remotely and work from a variety of locations within the community, whilst promoting a more joined up service.
- 1.2 The Council has a modern model of working which assists in improving service delivery as well as realising financial benefits for the organisation. It also links to the Council’s vision for sustainable development, placing emphasis on the importance of sustainable economic growth, de-carbonisation and the health and wellbeing of both staff and the community. The benefits of improved work-life balance, employee engagement and reduced travel make a direct contribution to this strategic priority.
- 1.3 Home/agile working supports the modernisation of our working practices and is part of the continuous change management process. Welsh Government has detailed its clear ambition to see around 30% of the workforce working from home or working remotely.
- 1.4 The Council’s workforce model designates roles in one of three categories:
- Home Worker
 - Agile Worker
 - Service/Community Worker

Although the nature of most of the roles within the Council cannot be classed as totally flexible, there is considerable scope in many cases for some form of agile working. The different ways in which agile working can be undertaken is dependent on the demands and needs of the role and the service within which the role is based.

2. Benefits of Home/Agile Working

- 2.1 Home/agile working offers benefits to employees, customers, and the Council.

For employees, home/agile working can:

- provide an opportunity to manage their working day more efficiently.
- increase engagement as a result of autonomy and trust at work.
- improve work-life balance.
- enable them to work more effectively on a particular piece of work, where concentration is important, by avoiding the interruptions that are part of the office environment.
- reduce travelling time and related costs; and
- increase their wellbeing, health, and happiness through a better sense of control.

- 2.2 The key benefits for the Council are as follows:

- allows the Council to provide improved services to our customers.

- allows the Council to focus time and money on delivering services.
- reduces unnecessary travel time, which increases productivity and reduces cost.
- creates an environment which allows employees to achieve an improved work-life balance, greater job satisfaction, motivation, morale and productivity.
- results in reduced costs through reduced travel and expense claims.
- lowers our carbon footprint, through reduced emissions from reduced travel.
- improves the recruitment and retention of employees via the Council becoming an employer of choice; and
- reduced absenteeism and related costs.

3. Scope

- 3.1 The Policy applies to all Council employees working at any level within the organisation but will exclude school-based staff under the delegated powers of the Governing Body. The nature and extent of home/agile working will depend upon the role undertaken and considerations will include the impact on the ability to meet customer demand (internal and external) and employee welfare.
- 3.2 The Policy will enable both managers and staff to gain a better understanding of home/agile working and understand the basic principles.

4. Agile Working

- 4.1 The three workstyles are set out below:

Home Worker	Agile Worker	Service/ Community Worker
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Home is the base – defined as the permanent residence as recorded with the Council ❖ All work can be carried out from home ❖ Appropriate workstation and tools to do the job at home ❖ No need to access an alternative base to work on a frequent basis ❖ Occasional attendance at an alternative base for e.g. team meetings/training ❖ Allowance of £26 per month (Part-time worker £15.60 monthly) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Home is the base – defined as the permanent residence as recorded with the Council ❖ Work time split between homeworking and alternative Council locations/community ❖ Work is carried out at home and an alternative base – requiring desk space (e.g. using a booking system) ❖ Appropriate workstation and tools to do the job at home ❖ Could be required to attend meetings in an alternative base ❖ Allowance of £15.60 per month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Work is carried out 100% from a base in a building or 100% community working ❖ Some roles would require desk space – usually no fixed workstation ❖ Roles/worker not possible to work from home ❖ No allowance will be paid by the Council

- 4.2 Each post has a designated workstyle based on service needs. Review of the workstyle designation will be carried out in line with any service review, redesign or change. Reasonable adjustments must be considered, where necessary. **All relief roles to be designated as a “service/community worker”. In exceptional circumstances and where Managers identify that an employee is eligible for a payment then arrangements can be made to authorise this through the timesheet process.**
- 4.3 In the event that a reasonable adjustment is required due to a change in circumstances for an employee, this should be discussed with the manager and an Agile Working Workstyle Designation Form should be completed (see [Appendix A](#)). Once agreed this document should be forwarded to OD. This will ensure that the relevant contractual/allowance changes are actioned and correspondence is issued by OD. In these circumstances no change will be made to the position designation only the personal designation.
- 4.4 Position designations should only be changed in line with a service review/redesign or business change. If a post(s) is occupied then this will require a contractual change and consultation with the affected employee(s), OD should advise on this process. If a post is vacant the change can be implemented as part of the structure report. In these cases, the business case for the position designation changes will form part of the structural report and approved in line with agreed processes. The implications of any change(s) including finance, accommodation and consistency of approach will need to be clearly set out in the report. OD will implement any changes as part of the structure report.
- 4.5 Where a post becomes vacant and a position designation change is being proposed, this should be approved as part of the recruitment authorisation and approved in line with agreed processes. The business case for the change including any implications as outlined above should be set out as part of the approval process. OD will implement the change as part of the recruitment process.
- 4.6 Managers should consider the best practical and operational arrangements for working in accordance with the workstyle designation including:
- Clear and realistic objectives and expected work outputs for the employee, should be agreed between the employee and their manager and employees will be expected to deliver the agreed outcomes.
 - Regular performance coaching and 1 to 1 discussions.
 - Methods of, and arrangements for, communication and support need to be agreed. Regular communication is imperative to promote employee wellbeing and to ensure that employees do not feel isolated, lonely or frustrated, using a combination of face to face conversations, emails, telephone and team meetings/briefing, etc.
- 4.7 Home/agile workers will not have fixed hours (unless the role dictates this) and will be able to perform their work at times convenient to them in line with the [Flexible Working Scheme](#), however employees must be available for online meetings and to respond to calls and emails, etc. in line with business needs. In particular:
- Employees should ensure that their electronic diaries are up to date so that others are aware of their availability. It is imperative that wherever individuals are

working, others e.g. the manager, the team and other colleagues, know how to contact them.

- When individuals are not working, laptops and phones should be switched off to enable individuals to have a right to privacy out of hours and be able to separate their working and home lives.

- 4.8 Home/agile working must not affect the provision of services and therefore managers must ensure that they have systems in place to maintain the correct compliment of staff, as required, and to monitor the level of available frontline staff working at any one time.
- 4.9 Employees must note that during active work, time at home is not a substitute for childcare or similar carer responsibilities. It is the employee's responsibility to ensure adequate provision is in place although there are other policies, which offer options and support to staff in such circumstances.
- 4.10 All staff must ensure that adequate breaks are taken, whichever workstyle is adopted with a minimum of 30 minutes taken for lunch. Those working at desks should take a short break from the desk/screen and move around often, ideally at least every hour. In addition, as a minimum, all staff must comply with the requirements of the Working Time Regulations 1998. Managers should discuss health, safety and wellbeing at every 1 to 1 session.
- 4.11 For further information on claiming travel expenses please refer to the [Officers Allowances and Expenses Policy](#).
- 4.12 The agile working hubs are the General Offices, Blaina ICC, ViTCC and the Energy Centre.

5. Reporting and other requirements

- 5.1 The Council's policies and procedures apply to all employees, whichever workstyle is adopted. The contractual obligations, duties and responsibilities (apart from place of work) remain unchanged and the Council's workplace policies continue to apply including, but not limited to, GDPR compliance, as detailed in clause 11 of this Policy.
- 5.2 All employees are expected to report to their manager in accordance with an agreement reached. Each employee must also comply with any formal reporting procedures set out in their contract.
- 5.3 All managers must keep in regular contact with their staff, via phone, email, meetings or Microsoft teams conferencing.

6. Illness or injury

- 6.1 If an employee cannot work on a day on which it has been agreed that they will work from home because they are ill or injured, they must follow the procedure set out in the Council's [Attendance Management Policy](#) to report their absence.

7. Payment of Allowances

- 7.1 An employee who is a home/agile worker will be provided with the necessary ICT equipment and technology. The employee should use the Council's equipment whilst home/agile working and will not be eligible to claim expenses for use of personal equipment such as home phone lines.
- 7.2 The Council will pay the following allowances to contribute towards home-related expenses as a result of working from home:
- a. Home workers - £26 per month per employee (which is the maximum amount payable in line with HMRC guidance).
 - b. Part-time home workers - £15.60 per month per employee.
 - c. Agile workers - £15.60 per month per employee.

Employees will not have to pay tax and national insurance contributions on these allowances. Service/community-based workers will not be eligible for payment of these allowances.

- 7.3 These allowances are reimbursement for additional expenses incurred as a consequence of home working and do not therefore count in the calculation of redundancy pay, sick pay, maternity, adoption and other similar family-based pay.
- 7.4 During any periods of continued absence where the employee is not working these allowances will not be paid, this includes but is not limited to maternity and adoption leave. In the case of sickness absence, the allowance will cease at four weeks which is the trigger for long-term sickness absence. Where the absence commences or ends mid-way through the month the allowance payable for that month will be pro rata to the period worked.

8. Allocation of Equipment

- 8.1 The Council will be responsible for determining and providing the equipment and technical requirements for the employee undertaking a home/agile working arrangement. Equipment **must not** be removed from offices for home working purposes.

This provision does not extend to the installation of or subscription for the home broadband connection, which is the responsibility of the employee. All equipment provided will remain the Council's property at all times. Only equipment which the Council has provided to employees, or which the Council has authorised employees to use, may be used for homeworking.

Employees can use their own furniture e.g. desks/chairs, provided that it is compliant with the requirements of the Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Workstation Checklist ([Appendix C](#)).

- 8.2 Additional equipment may be provided for staff who require reasonable adjustments as determined by occupational health.

- 8.3 Personally adapted equipment will be provided to an individual should a workstation assessment deem this necessary; however, this equipment will be provided at the place where they predominantly work and not across multiple sites. Therefore, the individual will be responsible for ensuring that this equipment is available for their use wherever they work. If, as a result of a risk assessment, other equipment is identified as necessary, this will also be provided, subject to the agreement of the employee.
- 8.4 Where the Council has provided equipment, employees must:
- take reasonable care of it;
 - use it only for the purposes for which it was provided;
 - make it available to the Council for inspection at any time if requested, and for collection if homeworking arrangements cease, if applicable, or on leaving employment;
 - promptly report any damage to or malfunctioning of any item to their manager.
- 8.5 The Council will maintain the equipment but employees will be responsible for any damage to the equipment that goes beyond reasonable wear and tear.
- 8.6 If an IT issue or other equipment problem prevents an employee from working effectively from home, employees should contact their manager as soon as possible and agree what needs to happen.

9. Responsibilities

9.1 Corporate responsibilities

- The Chief Executive, on behalf of the Council, carries overall responsibility for ensuring that the Council has the appropriate processes in place, which adequately and appropriately support its employees, regardless of what working pattern or arrangement they have.
- The OD Service is responsible for providing advice and guidance on this Policy and is responsible for reviewing, updating and amending this Policy to reflect changes in legislation or employment practice in conjunction with trade unions.
- Corporate Leadership Team is responsible for establishing their own arrangements to ensure:
 - Effective implementation of the Policy
 - Continued service delivery; and
 - Consultation with their employees on these arrangements.

9.2 Management Responsibilities

Managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring flexibility in relation to discussions and agreements about home/agile working with employees within their area of responsibility, whilst remaining focused on the needs of the service.
- Ensuring good communication with employees and agreeing clear communication lines, including arrangements for employees to report sickness absence. Making arrangements for both regular individual and team meetings,

ensuring regular communication is maintained between themselves and team members, providing support for employees and implementing ways of measuring and monitoring work output that has been mutually agreed.

- Setting and monitoring defined performance measures in line with the Council's performance coaching and regular 1 to 1 meetings.
- Allowing employees who are using their homes to work from to have a right to privacy out of working hours and the ability to separate their working and home lives.
- Meeting their duties in relation to health, safety and welfare by undertaking appropriate risk assessments and acting on any areas of concern for employees who they are responsible for, as outlined in section 10 of the Policy.
- Any recruitment going forward is based on the designation of the role.
- Undertaking a regular review of the home/agile working arrangements. If it is not working, every effort will be made to resolve any issues.

9.3 Employee Responsibilities

Employees are responsible for:

- Complying with this Policy in a reasonable, constructive and appropriate manner.
- Being flexible, open and constructive in discussing and agreeing home/agile working arrangements, whilst remaining focused on the needs of the service.
- Maintaining regular contact with their manager.
- Working as agreed (appropriate work area for working at home, etc.) and abiding by all the Council policies whilst working in this way.
- Optimising meetings to minimise the amount of travel time.
- Complying with health and safety Policy and procedures by participating in and undertaking risk assessments; carrying out any necessary actions to minimise risk; maintaining a safe working environment and taking reasonable care of their own safety, as outlined in section 10 of the Policy.
- Complying with confidentiality, data protection and information security policies, for example locking laptops using Ctrl; Alt; Delete to prevent unauthorised people from using it. If conversations can be overheard by family members or visitors, employees should take reasonable precautions to ensure confidential information is not overheard. Also, paperwork must be stored away securely at the end of the working day.
- Ensuring that all reasonable care is taken of all Council supplied IT equipment.
- Reporting immediately once known, any loss, theft or damage to Council IT equipment or the loss of confidential information.
- Consulting with any necessary parties, such as landlords, insurance or mortgage companies, regarding home working.
- Ensuring that any personally adapted equipment (e.g. left-hand orientation or widescreen laptop), required in order to undertake their duties, is available for their use wherever they are working under this arrangement.

10. Health and Safety

- 10.1 In addition to the employer, employees have a responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of themselves and others while they are carrying out work activities, regardless of the work location. Home/agile workers have the same health and safety responsibilities as other workers and will be required to take reasonable care

of their own health and safety whilst working from home. All employees must comply with all health and safety instructions issued by the Council.

- 10.2 Where employees use Council locations to work, they should familiarise themselves with the local arrangements for managing health and safety. They should ensure that they are aware of fire safety arrangements to ensure they are fully conversant with the actions to be taken in the event of discovering a fire or on hearing the fire alarm signal and ensure they adhere to the local signing in and out arrangements.
- 10.3 Due consideration to lone working arrangements should be explored fully between the manager and employee to ensure safe working arrangements are in place.
- 10.4 The Council retains the right to check all homeworking areas for health, safety and welfare purposes, including carrying out risk assessments, to consider, for example, work equipment, in cases where reasonable adjustments may be necessary, and display screen equipment. All access requirements will be discussed prior to the visit, and appropriate notice given. The Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Workstation Checklist ([Appendix C](#)) will be carried out for employees required to work from home. This will need to be carried out again if any substantial changes are made to the working environment or arrangements. Employees must fully participate in completing the necessary risk assessment paperwork and review this with their manager.
- 10.5 When working from home, even if only partially, the employee has a responsibility to ensure they have an appropriate workspace with adequate security, storage and screening from activities and noise in the rest of the home. There must also be adequate ventilation and lighting.
- 10.6 Home workers who need to attend site meetings should be aware that the Council has a Corporate Employee Protection Register (“CEPR”), which holds details of any violent individuals/dangerous incidents against Council employees. Any employee whose role involves personal contact with members of the public should initiate a search of the database prior to any visits/interviews in order to make an informed assessment of any potential risk. Employees should also comply with the [Lone Working Policy](#) and departmental procedures.
- 10.7 Employees must not, under any circumstances, give details of their home address or personal contact details to clients/customers or third parties. No formal or informal work-related meetings of any kind are to be held in any employee’s home (save that employees may, of course, attend meetings virtually from their own home).
- 10.8 Employees must report any accident at home to their manager, in line with current arrangements.
- 10.9 Employees should report any health and safety concerns to their manager, as soon as possible.
- 10.10 Managers should focus on, and prioritise, employee wellbeing. Employees should contact their manager if they have any concerns regarding wellbeing. The

employee assistance helpline, [Care first](#), is also available.

- 10.11 Employees working from home should ensure that the general fabric of the home and its fixtures and fittings, including in any area in which they work, is maintained in a safe and functional state for performance of their duties e.g. electrical sockets. Staff should ensure that no equipment is left to charge unattended and that the correct charging device is used in relation to each item of equipment.
- 10.12 Staff working from home will be required to bring equipment into a specified Council building for PAT testing, when requested to do so.
- 10.13 Managers should seek advice regarding any specific concerns around health and safety issues as all health and safety requirements must be appropriately addressed if full or partial homeworking is to occur.
- 10.14 Copies of the completed Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Workstation Checklist (Appendix C) should be submitted to Organisational Development.

11. Data Protection, Security and Confidentiality

- 11.1 The Council provides employees with access to the personal and confidential information they need to do their job. The Council's Information Security and Information Governance Policies including, but not limited to, the [Information Security Policy](#), [Data Protection Policy](#) and the [Acceptable Use Policy](#), apply at all times regardless of the working location. It is particularly important to ensure that non-authorized personnel cannot gain access to confidential or personal information. This includes, but is not limited to, the requirement to prevent unauthorised personnel from:
 - seeing and/or accessing, electronic and/or paper files;
 - being able to overhear telephone/Microsoft Teams conversations, etc.
- 11.2 When working in a mobile manner, the employee is responsible for the security of equipment, files and any other information in their possession, including the transportation of such items whenever outside Council premises.
- 11.3 Employees working from home, whether fully or partially, will be responsible for ensuring the security of all Council equipment, documents and information and must take all necessary steps to ensure that private and confidential information is kept secure at all times. Wherever possible, this should be locked away. At a minimum, all equipment should be stored out of sight of windows and doors to deter equipment from being stolen.
- 11.4 In particular, every employee must:
 - screen lock their computer whenever it is left unattended;
 - store confidential papers securely when not in use;

- ensure the secure disposal of confidential materials by returning items to Council premises for disposal using the contracted confidential waste arrangements. Where this is not feasible, employees should contact their manager or the Data Protection Officer to make alternative arrangements;
 - report any data security breach to their manager immediately and also the Data Protection Officer: DataProtection@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk.
- 11.5 No work-related emails or sensitive data should be sent to the employee's home email addresses. No work-related files should be stored on an employee's personal computer.
- 11.6 All employees should make every effort to minimise the amount of paper records which they use, carry or transfer and should consider using more secure electronic methods wherever possible. Not only is this better for the environment, but it reduces costs for the Council and is more secure.
- 11.7 Where employees do need to print documents and send in the post, the Council's hybrid mail system must be utilised to do this and staff should not print and send documents on home equipment using standard public postal arrangements. Staff are reminded that the Council's Information Security Policy includes the requirement that staff should not connect their own unapproved hardware (e.g. a printer) to their Council devices.

12. Equal Opportunities/Reasonable Adjustments

- 12.1 The Council will ensure that all staff are treated in a fair, equitable and consistent manner. It undertakes to comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and will identify appropriate reasonable adjustments and options for those employees who may require specific support in planning and undertaking any homeworking arrangements.
- 12.2 Particular reference should be made to the provisions of the Act to ensure that appropriate communication and monitoring is in place to support an employee with any matters arising from the protected characteristics and requirements of the Act.
- 12.3 The employee is responsible for ensuring that they inform their manager of any issues that may need to be addressed under the Act. This is particularly pertinent to home workers where equalities matters may be undetected for a prolonged period.
- 12.4 Where an individual has been assessed as requiring a specific workstation set-up as part of reasonable adjustments made following an Occupational Health referral under the Equality Act they will, should these not be able to be accommodated at home, be provided with a desk allocation at a hub and be expected to consider this their base.

13. Insurance, Mortgage/Tenancy Arrangements

- 13.1 In general, working from home should not give rise to any special difficulties from an insurance point of view. The guiding principle is that good practice should reduce or

eliminate the possibility of injury or loss to employees. Insurance by itself does not prevent injury or loss and good risk management techniques are required.

- 13.2 It is vital that employees and managers adhere to this Agile Working Policy and associated guidelines, in order to maintain the validity of the insurance provision.
- 13.3 Employees' own insurance policies are unlikely to be affected by working from home. However, employees are **strongly advised** to inform their insurers of working at home arrangements. If in doubt, employees should let their insurance company know to ensure there is no risk of non-disclosure invalidating a policy. No formal or informal work-related meetings are to be held in any employee's home as this would affect the employee's home insurance policy.
- 13.4 Liability insurance protects the Council and its employees jointly for accidental death, injury and loss of property where the Council has been negligent. This insurance will operate in respect of employees who are working at home with the knowledge and consent of their manager, subject to the appropriate health and safety risk assessments, together with the appropriate training and support being in place. Employees must comply with Section 10 (Health and Safety) of the Agile Working Policy and any accidents must be reported immediately in accordance with the Council's health and safety guidelines.
- 13.5 Computers provided by the Council as part of the home/agile working arrangement will be covered by the Council's insurance policy. Employees must not do, cause or permit any act or omission which will avoid coverage under the Council insurance policy and reasonable care must be taken to avoid loss or damage to the equipment. If in doubt as to whether particular acts or omissions will have this effect, employees should consult their manager immediately. It is essential that any loss, theft or damage to Council IT equipment is reported immediately. Computer equipment should not be left in an unattended vehicle.
- 13.6 There is no formal insurance cover for work equipment provided aside from a computer however, employees must report promptly any damage to or malfunction of any work equipment to their manager for consideration to enable the Council to ensure that a safe working environment is maintained.

14. Temporary arrangements

- 14.1 If there is the need to temporarily cover a post, if leave is taken (other than sickness absence leave) which lasts for over 4 weeks, including, but not limited to, maternity leave, parental leave, adoption leave, employees who have been provided with Council equipment, should return equipment to a Council location, which will be stipulated by the manager prior to the commencement of their leave. In the case of sickness, manager discretion will apply to the return of Council equipment during any period of absence.

15. Domestic abuse/violence

- 15.1 Any individuals who are experiencing domestic abuse/violence, who do not wish to work within the home, will be accommodated in Council locations and are referred to

the Council's [Domestic Abuse, Violence and Sexual Violence Policy](#), which offers further support.

16. Additional Information

16.1

The Council has an Employee Assistance Programme in place with an independent provider called “Care first” for all employees and managers. Employees can access support on any personal or work-related issues that may be causing concern or distress such as stress awareness, debt management, well-being and relationship issues. Contact details are below and additional information is available on the [intranet](#).

- “**Care first**” is free to use 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year and there is no need for employees to ask a manager to use the service. Employees can call **0800 174319** to speak to a professional counsellor or information specialist **in confidence** about a range of issues.
- The “**Care first Lifestyle**” website offers extensive resources including articles on health, issues at home, issues at work, management support tools, stress questionnaires and online counselling in real-time. Employees should visit the website at www.care-first.co.uk and login using the following details - username: **blaenau** and password: **employee**
- The “**Care first Zest**” app has interactive tools, helpful tips, visual and mental exercises and engaging activities. These include meditation exercises, mindfulness exercises, breathing exercises, toolkits to identify behaviours and monitor progress, mood trackers and much more. To start using the app:
 - Download the app - available on iTunes or Google Play – search for My possible self: Mental Health. Or, if you’d prefer to use the programme from your desktop, follow this link: <https://portal.my-possible-self.com/welshfram/my-possible-self/register> (the website is not compatible with Internet Explorer).
 - Enter the registration passcode **WelFram21!** then tick the “I’m not a robot” box and click “Submit”.
 - Create your personal account.
 - Once registered, you can log into the website via www.my-possible-self.com or app using the email and password you created your account with.

16.2 Employees should familiarise themselves with other Council policies to include:

- [Flexible Working Scheme](#)
- [Information Security Policies](#)
- [Display Screen Equipment \(DSE\) Policy](#)
- [Lone Working Policy](#)
- [Attendance Management Policy](#)
- [Domestic Abuse, Violence and Sexual Violence Policy](#)

Appendix A: Agile Working Workstyle Designation



Section 1 - Employee/Role Details

Employee Name:

Position Title:

Contract Type: Permanent Fixed Term Temporary

Position Reference:

Service: Manager:

Current Designation: Home Worker Agile Worker Service/Community Worker

Section 2 - Individual/Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments must be discussed between the manager and employee, as any change to a workstyle designation will be a variation to contract. Details of the considerations including any service / resource implications should be detailed below. *Where homeworking is being considered a Home Working Agreement and the relevant health and safety assessments must be completed to ensure that homeworking can be carried out safely and effectively.*

Please outline the change in workstyle being adopted based on the agreed adjustments:

Home Worker Agile Worker Service/Community Worker*

*Please specify the designated base for Service / Community Worker:

The change in workstyle is a result of: Reasonable Adjustment Contractual Change

Employee Signature: Date:

Manager Signature: Date:
(Authorised signatory)

Please forward a copy of this document and where appropriate a copy of the Homeworking Agreement and Health and Safety assessments to Organisational Development

April 2023

Appendix B: Homeworking Agreement



Employee Name:

Position Title: Position Ref:

Service: Manager:

Your role has been designated a Home/Agile Worker as defined in the Agile Working Policy, you are therefore required to complete this Homeworking Agreement.

Employee:

- I agree to provide an appropriate safe workspace in my home to enable me to work effectively.
- I am aware of my responsibility to inform as appropriate my landlord/mortgage/Insurance company in writing of my intention to work at home.
- I understand the requirement for me to continue to comply with all Council policies, practices and procedures whilst working from home including all Health and Safety requirements.
- I will maintain regular contact with my manager and inform them of changes to my home or personal circumstances, which could affect my ability to undertake my work effectively including health and safety.
- I understand that I have a duty to ensure, insofar as is reasonably practicable, that I work in a safe manner and follow all health and safety requirements of the Council including participating in and undertaking risk assessments; carrying out any necessary actions to minimise risk; maintaining a safe working environment and taking reasonable care of my own safety.
- I am aware and understand the requirement to report any work-related accidents whilst working at home or other locations.
- I agree to provide reasonable access to my home by an employee of the Council, or their representative to support home working arrangements (but not for meeting purposes). All access requirements will be discussed prior to the visit, and appropriate notice given.
- I am aware of the information security measures required and the sensitive nature of data with which I work. I agree at all times to protect access, maintain and store the data securely and confidentially in line with the Data Protection Acts and Council requirements.
- I understand that I am responsible for the proper care of Council equipment and that the computer and other equipment must be used for work purposes only and will not be used by anyone other than myself.
- Reporting immediately, once known, any loss, theft or damage to Council IT equipment or the loss of confidential information.

- I understand that I may be required to attend an alternative hub (location to be confirmed as appropriate) from time to time for specified communications/meetings/training as defined by my manager.
- I am aware and understand the requirements to notify my manager when I am unable to work or absent from work due to sickness or any other reason. I will also continue to use the My Options flexible working to record my times whilst working at home or otherwise in line with relevant Policy, including taking adequate rest breaks.
- In the event of home or agile working ceasing or leaving the employment of the Council, I will co-operate with the Council in arranging a time for any equipment to be collected or I will return the equipment to the Council within 5 working days of home working ceasing.

Employer:

- The Council has a range of policies and guidance to support employees working from home including the Agile Working Policy.
- Under health and safety legislation the Council is obliged to ensure the health and safety of home workers in the same way as for office-based staff.
- The manager will ensure that the appropriate risk/DSE assessments are carried out in respect of the work that you carry out.
- Reasonable adjustments will be considered and put in place where necessary.
- The standard equipment required to work from home will be provided by the Council and any relevant testing of equipment will be facilitated by the Council.
- An allowance as set out in the Agile Working Policy will be paid by the Council with the employees' monthly salary. This allowance may cease to be paid in certain circumstances as set out in the Policy.
- Regular performance coaching/supervision/reviews will continue to be conducted in line with Council Policy.

Employee Declaration

Please sign to confirm that you have read, understood and agree to the conditions relating to home working in line with the Council's Agile Working Policy.

Employee Signature: Date:

The Agile Working Policy can be accessed on the intranet or from your Manager.

Please forward a copy of this document to Organisational Development

Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Workstation Checklist

Workstation location and number:

User:

Checklist completed by:

Assessment checked by:

Any further action needed? Yes No Follow-up action completed on:

The following checklist can be used to help you complete a risk assessment and comply with the Schedule to the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 as amended by the Health and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2002.

The questions and 'Things to consider' in the checklist cover the requirements of the Schedule. If you can answer 'Yes' in the second column against all the questions, having taken account of the 'Things to consider', you are complying. You will not be able to address some of the questions and 'Things to consider', e.g. on reflections on the screen, or the user's comfort, until the workstation has been installed. These will be covered in the risk assessment you do once the workstation is installed.

Work through the checklist, ticking either the 'Yes' or 'No' column against each risk factor:



- 'Yes' answers require no further action.
- 'No' answers will require investigation and/or remedial action by the workstation assessor.

They should record their decisions in the 'Action to take' column.

Managers/Assessors should check later that actions have been taken and have resolved the problem. Remember, the checklist only covers the workstation and work environment. You also need to make sure that risks from other aspects of the work are avoided, e.g. by giving users health and safety training, and providing for breaks or changes of activity.

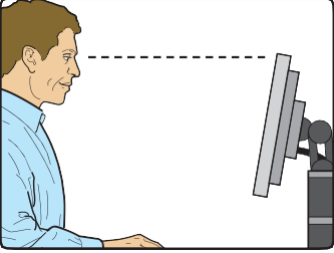
Watch this short video: [Temporary Working at Home - Workstation Setup - YouTube](#)



Risk Factors	Yes	No	Things to consider	Action to take
Keyboards				
Is the keyboard separate from the screen?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This is a requirement, unless the task makes it impracticable (e.g. where there is a need to use a portable).	
Does the keyboard tilt?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tilt need not be built in.	
Is it possible to find a comfortable keying position?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Try pushing the display screen further back to create more room for the keyboard, hands and wrists. Users of thick, raised keyboards may need a wrist rest.	
Does the user have good keyboard technique?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Training can be used to prevent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hands bent up at the wrist; • hitting the keys too hard; • overstretching the fingers. 	
Are the characters clear and readable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keyboards should be kept clean. If characters still can't be read, the keyboard may need modifying or replacing. Use a keyboard with a matt finish to reduce glare and/or reflection.	
Mouse, trackball, etc				
Is the device suitable for the tasks it is used for?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If the user is having problems, try a different device. The mouse and trackball are general-purpose devices suitable for many tasks, and available in a variety of shapes and sizes. Alternative devices such as touch screens may be better for some tasks (but can be worse for others).	




Risk Factors	Yes	No	Things to consider	Action to take
Is the device positioned close to the user?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Most devices are best placed as close as possible, e.g. right beside the keyboard.</p> <p>Training may be needed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prevent arm overreaching; • encourage users not to leave their hand on the device when it is not being used; • encourage a relaxed arm and straight wrist. 	
			 	
Is there support for the device user's wrist and forearm?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Support can be gained from, for example, the desk surface or arm of a chair. If not, a separate supporting device may help. The user should be able to find a comfortable working position with the device.	
Does the device work smoothly at a speed that suits the user?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>See if cleaning is required (e.g. of mouse ball and rollers).</p> <p>Check the work surface is suitable. A mouse mat may be needed.</p>	
Can the user easily adjust software settings for speed and accuracy of pointer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Users may need training in how to adjust device settings.	

Display Screens

Are the characters clear and readable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Make sure the screen is clean and cleaning materials are available.</p> <p>Check that the text and background colours work well together.</p>	
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Risk Factors	Yes	No	Things to consider	Action to take
Is the text size comfortable to read?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Software settings may need adjusting to change text size.	
Is the image stable, i.e. free of flicker and jitter?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Try using different screen colours to reduce flicker. If there are still problems, get the set-up checked, e.g. by the equipment supplier.	
Is the screen's specification suitable for its intended use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	For example, intensive graphic work or work requiring fine attention to small details may require large display screens.	
Are the brightness and/or contrast adjustable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Separate adjustment controls are not essential, provided the user can read the screen easily at all times.	
Does the screen swivel and tilt? 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Swivel and tilt need not be built in; you can add a swivel and tilt mechanism. However, you may need to replace the screen if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • swivel/tilt is absent or unsatisfactory; • work is intensive; and/or • the user has problems getting the screen to a comfortable position. 	
Is the screen free from glare and reflections?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Use a mirror placed in front of the screen to check where reflections are coming from. You might need to move the screen or even the desk and/or shield the screen from the source of the reflections. Screens that use dark characters on a light background are less prone to glare and reflections.	
Are adjustable window coverings provided and in adequate condition?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Check that blinds work. Blinds with vertical slats can be more suitable than horizontal ones. If these measures do not work, consider anti-glare screen filters as a last resort and seek specialist help.	

Risk Factors	Yes	No	Things to consider	Action to take
Software				
Is the software suitable for the task?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Software should help the user carry out the task, minimise stress and be user-friendly. Check users have had appropriate training in using the software. Software should respond quickly and clearly to user input, with adequate feedback, such as clear help messages.	
Furniture				
Is the work surface large enough for all the necessary equipment, papers, etc?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Create more room by moving printers, reference materials, etc elsewhere. If necessary, consider providing new power and telecoms sockets, so equipment can be moved. There should be some scope for flexible rearrangement.	
				
				
Can the user comfortably reach all the equipment and papers they need to use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rearrange equipment, papers etc to bring frequently used things within easy reach. A document holder may be needed, positioned to minimise uncomfortable head and eye movements.	
Are surfaces free from glare and reflection?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider mats or blotters to reduce reflections and glare.	
Is the chair suitable? Is the chair stable? Does the chair have a working:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The chair may need repairing or replacing if the user is uncomfortable, or cannot use the adjustment mechanisms.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seat back height and tilt adjustment? • seat height adjustment? • castors or glides? 				

Risk Factors	Yes	No	Things to consider	Action to take
Furniture				
Is the chair adjusted correctly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The user should be able to carry out their work sitting comfortably. Consider training the user in how to adopt suitable postures while working. The arms of chairs can stop the user getting close enough to use the equipment comfortably. Move any obstructions from under the desk.	
				
Is the small of the back supported by the chair's backrest?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The user should have a straight back, supported by the chair, with relaxed shoulders.	
Are forearms horizontal and eyes at roughly the same height as the top of the DSE?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adjust the chair height to get the user's arms in the right position, and then adjust the DSE height, if necessary.	
Are feet flat on the floor, without too much pressure from the seat on the backs of the legs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	If not, a footrest may be needed.	
Environment				
Is there enough room to change position and vary movement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Space is needed to move, stretch and fidget. Consider reorganising the office layout and check for obstructions. Cables should be tidy and not a trip or snag hazard.	
Is the lighting suitable, e.g. not too bright or too dim to work comfortably?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Users should be able to control light levels, e.g. by adjusting window blinds or light switches. Consider shading or repositioning light sources or providing local lighting, e.g. desk lamps (but make sure lights don't cause glare by reflecting off walls or other surfaces).	

Risk Factors	Yes	No	Things to consider	Action to take
Does the air feel comfortable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	DSE and other equipment may dry the air. Circulate fresh air if possible. Plants may help. Consider a humidifier if discomfort is severe.	
Are levels of heat comfortable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Can heating be better controlled? More ventilation or air conditioning may be required if there is a lot of electronic equipment in the room. Or, can users be moved away from the heat source?	
Are levels of noise comfortable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider moving sources of noise, e.g. printers, away from the user. If not, consider soundproofing.	

Final questions to users

- Has the checklist covered all the problems that exist when working with DSE?
- Have there been any discomfort or other symptoms which can be attributed to working with DSE?
- Are you aware that you can ask for spectacles to wear when working with DSE?
- Regular breaks from using DSE should be taken. Does the user take regular breaks working away from DSE? Take short breaks often, rather than longer ones less often. For example 5 to 10 minutes every hour is better than 20 minutes every 2 hours. Ideally, users should be able to choose when to take breaks. In most jobs it is possible to stop DSE work to do other tasks, such as going to meetings or making phone calls. Breaks or changes of activity should allow users to get up from their workstations and move around, or at least stretch and change posture. See the link below for some ideas about moving:

[Posturite A4-Advice-Sheet Agile-Working-timings 241016.pdf](#)

DSE Arrangement



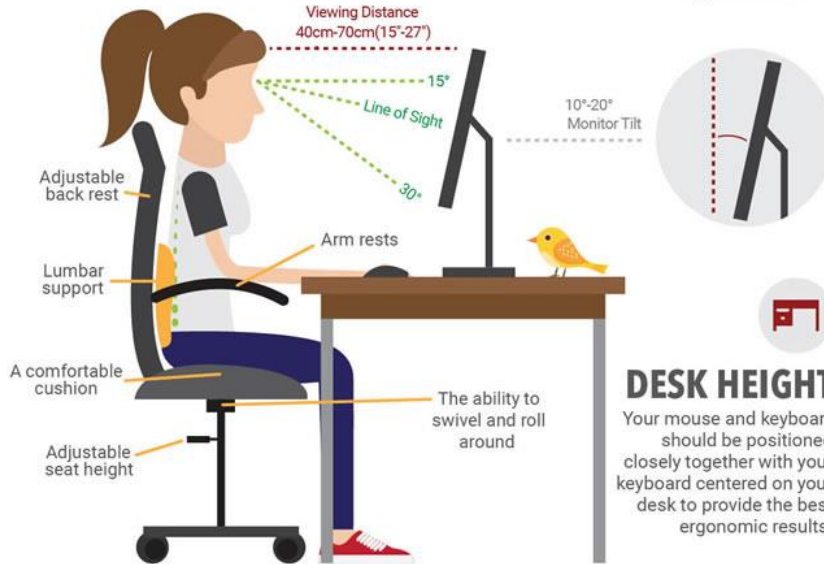
Monitor

Viewing distance 40cm–70cm (15"–27"), line of sight 15°–30°, and monitor tilt 10°–20° is a visually comfortable range for a majority of sitting users.



DESK

Your mouse and keyboard should be positioned closely together with your keyboard centered on your desk to provide the best ergonomic results.



Write down the details of any problems here:

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Flexible Working Scheme



ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Issued: Review:

Version Control

This document is intended for:

- Council staff only School-based staff only Council & School-based staff

Version	Key Changes	Approved By
July 2020	Reformatted only	DMT
August 2023	Core Hours information removed; Expectations & Responsibilities updated	

This document may be reviewed and amended at any time and without consultation in response to legal requirements or in response to an organisational requirement and where the changes do not reflect a fundamental change or affect the spirit or intent of the document.

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1. Introduction

Blaenau Gwent is committed to being an employer that supports a positive work life balance. It recognises that everyone has a life outside of work and that at some point employees may need help from their employer to balance their work and home life commitments. In addition to this, customers are requiring a more flexible service to meet their own needs, and as a Council we provide a very diverse range of services that require staff to be flexible.

The Flexible Working Scheme aims to provide flexibility in service delivery for the benefit of customers. It further aims to provide significant additional flexibility for employees, to enable them to better balance their work and home commitments and support the Council in becoming an Employer of Choice.

2. Benefits to the Council

- Improved employee retention as a result of being recognised as an employer of choice.
- A more flexible workforce that responds to peaks and troughs in work and can respond more effectively to customers outside of traditional 9-5 hours of work.
- Improved service provision.
- Reduced absence levels.
- A more motivated and engaged workforce.
- Enhanced work performance.
- Improved inclusion and diversity of workforce.
- Positive working culture.

3. Benefits to Employees

- Promotes a healthy work life balance.
- Flexibility to balance interests and responsibilities in and outside of work.
- Flexible working for parents and those with caring responsibilities.
- Reduced stress through greater control of work life.
- Improved job satisfaction.
- Improved accessibility to work.

4. Key Principles

- Council services operate at different times dependent on the service area but business operating hours will continue to primarily be 9am – 5pm and staff cover is vital during these times.
- It is imperative that the Council's efficiency and levels of service provided are maintained (and where possible, improved).
- The operational business requirements of each service area are paramount. The provision of service and working hours should reflect this.
- The online flexi system is used to monitor time and attendance and where appropriate service areas should operate utilising this system. Employees are not able to opt out of utilising the system.

- Managers are responsible for administering and managing the Flexible Working Scheme within their own teams.
- Increased flexibility is not an automatic entitlement, and at all times the provision of a quality service is essential. For example, this scheme is not an opportunity for employees to permanently amend their working pattern. If employees wish to consider an alternative working pattern, they should refer to the [Right to Request Flexible Working Policy](#).
- Providing service needs can be met, employees could work in 'bursts of time' throughout the day, for example, personal appointments, for the school run, for caring responsibilities and for health & wellbeing.
- The accrual of flexi time should be consistent with the demands of the service. The accrual of excessive hours is strongly discouraged in order to manage employee health and wellbeing.

5. Expectations & Responsibilities

Managers will:

- Manage employees time and Wellbeing.
- Operate the Flexible Working Scheme fairly and reasonably for all their direct reports.
- Ensure the needs of customers, the organisation and other employees are considered.
- Ensure there is always cover to provide an effective service.
- Explain the reason for refusal if a request for flexi leave cannot be granted.
- Show employees how to work the flexi system.
- Ensure the flexi system is up to date and accurate by managing exceptions and requests for leave in a timely manner.
- Ensure excess flexi/TOIL is not being accrued.
- Ensure employees are not consistently in a negative flexi balance.
- Inform the appropriate superuser (a flexi system administrator) when a member of staff terminates their employment so that they can be removed from the system.
- Advise their superuser of any change to an employee's annual leave entitlement including any carry over at the start of the entitlement year in order for the flexi system to be updated.
- Not convert excess flexi into TOIL.

Employee's will:

- Ensure that cover is maintained between the team throughout the day.
- Consider their own workload and that of their team to ensure hours are only accrued to meet the demands of the service.
- Ensure that contractual hours are worked and will usually only work within the bandwidth hours.
- Ensure their flexi system is up to date and accurate by submitting any relevant adjustments i.e. missed clocking's.
- Not work excessive hours and should be mindful of their health and wellbeing.
- Only book flexi time off (whole days) when the time has been accrued and not before.
-

- Discuss with their manager any carry over of annual leave prior to the flexi system being updated.

Superusers will:

- Set up new users (managers must inform a superuser of the details).
 - Be responsible for closing accounts when employee leaves (managers must inform a superuser of leaving date and any annual leave adjustments).
 - Add new leave entitlements based on managers instructions.
 - Link new patterns should an employee change their working hours.
 - Move employees to different branches based on managers instructions.
- Offer basic advice and guidance to managers should their query not be resolved with the online guides.

Superusers will not:

- Administer the system on behalf of managers.
- Override the system and convert flexi into TOIL.
- Calculate annual leave entitlements.

6. Flexible Working Scheme

The Council's flexible working scheme is detailed below:

Standard Hours	Week: 37 Hours Day: 7 Hours 24 Minutes Half Day: 3 Hours 42 Minutes
Bandwidth	7am – 7pm
Core Hours	No core hours.
Lunch Period	Staff must clock out on the system and take a 30 minute lunch break if a shift is in excess of 6 hours. No restriction when this must be taken.
Accounting Period	4 weeks
Flexi Leave	13 full days per annum (96 hours 12 minutes for full time employees, pro rata for part time staff). Only full days need to be recorded and can only be booked once the necessary time has been accrued. The use of half days to top up periods of Annual Leave needs to be managed.
Credit/Debit that can be carried over into next accounting period	14 hours 48 minutes credit (pro-rata) 7 hours 24 minutes debit
Appointments	Dentist, Doctors, Optician appointments must be taken in own time. Hospital appointments will be credited for appointment time only. Travel time for hospital appointments will not be credited. All appointments must be scheduled to minimise the disruption to service delivery wherever possible.

The following documents are available on the [intranet](#) for employees/managers:

- End of Accounting Periods
- List of Superusers
- Guide for Employees
- Guide for Managers

7. Flexi Balances

Where a minus balance of up to the maximum of 7 hours 24 minutes is carried over, there will be a requirement to make up those hours in the next accounting period. If the carry over is more than the allowed maximum debit, in exceptional circumstances and where the manager has agreed, the excess hours (i.e. over and above 7 hours 24 minutes) must be cleared during the first five days of the new accounting period. However, the discretion of the manager should recognise a genuine effort to reduce debit hours.

Where an employee is transferring to another team in the Council, excessive credit/negative balances should be cleared as far as is possible before the transfer and not carried into the new team.

8. Reviewing the Flexible Working Scheme

Managers may at certain times be required to review the flexible working scheme in line with the operational needs of their service. If it is not felt that the scheme is working for the benefit of the service, this should be discussed with the Senior HR Business Partner. Where an amendment to existing working practices is being considered, this must be done in conjunction with key stakeholders such as OD and the Trade Unions.

9. Overtime

Overtime traditionally refers to where employees are required to work additional hours beyond their usual weekly contractual hours.

In circumstances where employees are entitled to time off in lieu, the hours accrued will be based on the time worked.

Part-time employees are entitled to these entitlements and enhancements only at times and in circumstances in which full-time employees would qualify (over 37 hours).

10. Time Off In Lieu (TOIL)

TOIL may be accrued when an employee, at the request of management, works additional hours that have been authorised in line with Council protocols. This would

normally relate to hours worked over and above standard full time hours (37 hours per week) and for those employees operating on the flexible working hours' scheme for time worked outside of the bandwidth (i.e. 7am – 7pm). In addition, TOIL is accrued for bank holiday working.

In circumstances where employees are entitled to TOIL, hours accrued will be based on the time worked.

When authorising additional hours' managers need to consider the Working Time Directive, which states no employee should be asked to work more than 48 hours a week (including overtime) without prior consent. Managers are responsible for monitoring hours worked and the accrual of any TOIL to ensure staff are not regularly accruing lieu time and to also ensure the workloads are at a manageable level.

TOIL should be recorded by management and in the case of staff operating on the flexi system, there is a facility to record this time and this should be used.

TOIL should not accrue to excessive levels and should be taken within the month that it is accrued; and no later than 3 months of it being accrued. Managers need to ensure that, within operational requirements, that resources are managed so that staff are allowed to take this accrued time off work, as time in lieu **will not be paid**.

Employees and Managers must also ensure that any accrued TOIL is taken prior to termination of employment as any untaken lieu time **will not be paid**.

For employees working under the flexible working hours scheme any time accrued as flexi time should be managed by the employee. Any excess flexi over the allowed carry-over of time from one accounting period to another i.e. 14.48 hours **should not be converted to TOIL** to avoid losing it.

11. Termination of Employment

When an employee terminates employment with the Council, the manager will need to ensure that:

- They inform the appropriate superuser when a member of staff terminates their employment so that they can be removed from the system.
- The employee has worked the full number of contracted hours appropriate to the date of termination (any debit balances may be subject to an adjustment of pay).
- Accrued flexi time **will not** be paid upon termination.
- On the last working day, the employee will return key fobs and any other equipment/documentation to their Manager.

12. Disciplinary Action

Employees who do not adhere to their responsibilities, or abuse the scheme, may be subject to action in line with the Council's Disciplinary Policy & Procedure. Managers can consider removing an employee from the scheme and returning them to a 'standard' working day in addition to dealing with the employee under the Disciplinary Policy & Procedure.

13. Health and Safety

- Staff must be aware of their own safety and adhere to the [Lone Working Policy](#) and Health and Safety Procedures as appropriate.
- The Flexible Working Scheme operates in accordance with the [Working Time Regulations](#), therefore the maximum working week, including overtime, should be no more than 48 hours averaged over a 17 week period, and must include a rest break of 30 minutes for every 6 hours worked. Staff must ensure that their working hours allow for a period of at least 11 hours away from the workplace between working days. The Flexible Working Scheme does not encourage longer working hours.

Agenda Item 30

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 16.02.2024

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 16.02.2024

Committee: **Council**

Date of meeting: **21st March, 2024**

Report Subject: **Returning Officer & Electoral Registration Officer**

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

Report Submitted by: **Damien McCann, Interim Chief Executive**

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

- Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of the report is to seek Council's approval for continuation of the current arrangements in relation to the appointment of the local Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for Blaenau Gwent.
- Scope and Background**

At the Special Council meeting on 17th February 2022, the Head of Organisational Development presented a report proposing arrangements as a consequence of the former Managing Director leaving the Council to take up the role of Ombudsman. As part of the report, it was proposed and accepted that the role of Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer be temporarily designated to the Head of Legal and Corporate Compliance who had previous experience in acting as the Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer. The Chief Officer Resources was to continue in the role of Deputy Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer. This was an interim measure until such time as the substantive role of Chief Executive was filled. However, it has not yet been possible to recruit to the role of Chief Executive and there are two national Elections due to take place in 2024, namely, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in May 2024 and a UK General Election, date yet unknown but must be held before January 2025. In terms of the Returning Officer/ERO roles, certainty is therefore required for the purposes of the statutory designation.

3. **Options for Recommendation**
 - 3.1 **Option 1:**
Council confirms the appointment of the Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance to act as the Returning Officer & Electoral Registration Officer for Blaenau Gwent, until such time as the designation is reviewed.
 - Option 2:**
Council considers an alternative appointment.
4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
There is a statutory duty to appoint a local Returning Officer and Electoral Registration officer.
5. **Implications Against Each Option**
 - 5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***
There is no impact upon the budget for centrally funded Elections.
 - 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***
If a Returning Officer/ERO is not appointed there is a risk of non-compliance with legislation.
 - 5.3 ***Legal***
There is a legal requirement to appoint a Returning Officer/ERO.
 - 5.4 ***Human Resources***
The Returning Officer is separate appointment to any current employment, and is designated under the various legislative provisions.
 - 5.5 ***Health and Safety***
N/A
6. **Supporting Evidence**
 - 6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***
 - 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***
 - 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***
 - 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
 - 6.5 ***Preventative focus***
 - 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
 - 6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***
 - 6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)** *(All decisions, policy reviews or policy implementation will now require a completed Integrated Impact Assessment) **To note a screening template no longer needs to be completed***

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The arrangements will be reviewed once the substantive role of Chief Executive has been appointed.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

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Agenda Item 31

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 04.03.2024

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 08.03.2024

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **21st March, 2024**

Report Subject: **Annual Report of the Ethics & Standards Committee**

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

Report Submitted by: **Andrea Jones, Head of Legal & Corporate
Compliance/Monitoring Officer**

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						21.3.24	X Standards Committee

1. Purpose of the Report

To provide Council with the Annual Report of the Ethics & Standards Committee for the year 31st December 2022 to 31st December 2023.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Local Government Act 2000 requires the Council to establish a Standards Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and probity in the conduct of Councillors. The Ethics & Standards Committee has been in operation since November 2000.

The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 has introduced a mandatory requirement for Standards Committees to present an Annual Report to full Council. This statutory report must describe how the Committee has discharged its functions during the previous year and must include a summary of any reports, actions or recommendations made or referred to the Committee. In addition, it should be noted next year's Annual Report must include an assessment of the extent to which leaders of political groups on the Council have complied with their new duties to promote and maintain high standards of conduct within their groups.

3. Options for Recommendation

- 3.1 Option 1: Council considers the report and confirms that the statutory duty imposed by the Act (outlined above) has been met.

Option 2: Council considers the report and provides specific comments and/or suggestions prior to confirming that the statutory duty has been met.

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
- 4.1 As outlined above, there is a statutory duty for the Ethics & Standards Committee to report annually to Council on its work during the previous twelve months.
5. **Implications Against Each Option**
- 5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***
There is no impact upon budget arising out of this report.
- 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***
N/A
- 5.3 ***Legal***
The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 imposes a duty upon Standards Committees to produce an annual report and for the report to be presented to full Council within three months.
- 5.4 ***Human Resources***
There are no human resource implications associated with the report.
6. **Supporting Evidence**
- 6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***
Data is contained within the report which is pertinent to the work of the Ethics & Standards Committee.
- 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***
The report provides valuable information to the Council and the Public on the functions of the Standards Committee, and how this is closely connected to the promotion of good standards in public life.
- 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***
N/A
- 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
This information will be presented annually to Council.
- 6.5 ***Preventative focus***
N/A
- 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
N/A
- 6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***
N/A
- 6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***
N/A

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment***

N/A

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

The Monitoring Officer will monitor compliance of the reporting statutory duty.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – The Annual Report of the Blaenau Gwent Ethics & Standards Committee 2022/2023.

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BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Ethics and Standards Committee Annual Report 2023



Blaina – Cwmcelyn Pond

THE TEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

<p>Selflessness – Members should serve only the public interest and should never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person.</p>	<p>Personal judgement – Members may take account of the views of others, including their political groups, but should reach their own conclusions on the issues before them and act in accordance with those conclusions.</p>
<p>Honesty and integrity – Members should not place themselves in situations where their honesty and integrity may be questioned, should not behave improperly, and should on all occasions avoid the appearance of such behaviour.</p>	<p>Respect for others – Members should promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person, and by treating people with respect, regardless of their race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability. They should respect the impartiality and integrity of the authority’s statutory officers and its other employees.</p>
<p>Objectivity – Members should make decisions on merit, including when making appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for re-wards or benefit.</p>	<p>Duty to uphold the law – Members should uphold the law and, on all occasions, act in accordance with the trust that the public is entitled to place in them.</p>
<p>Accountability – Members should be accountable to the public for their actions and the manner in which they carry out their responsibilities, and should co-operate fully and honestly with any scrutiny appropriate to their particular office.</p>	<p>Stewardship – Members should do whatever they are able to do to ensure that their authorities use their resources prudently, and in accordance with the law.</p>
<p>Openness – Members should be as open as possible about their actions and those of their authority, and should be prepared to give reasons for those actions.</p>	<p>Leadership – Members should promote and support these principles by leadership, and by example, and should act in a way that secures or preserves public confidence.</p>

FOREWARD BY THE CHAIR

I am pleased to present this Annual Report of the Ethics and Standards Committee for 2022/2023. The Annual Report provides information to the Council about the work carried out by the Committee in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by elected Members and co-opted Members during the past 12 months and identifies specific issues that have arisen.

Standards Committees are required by virtue of Section 63 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and Part 3 of the Local Government Act 2000 to make an annual report after the end of each financial year and for full Council to consider that report within 3 months. This statutory report must describe how the Committee's functions have been discharged during the previous year and must include specific reference to any reports, actions or recommendations made or assigned to the Committee. This is the first year that the report includes formal reference to the work of the Group Leaders on promotion of high standards within their Groups. We thank them for their important work in this area. Copies of this Annual Report must also be sent to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and to all local community councils.

The Ethics and Standards Committee is committed to promoting high standards of ethical conduct among elected Members, co-opted Members and officers in order to maintain public confidence in local government. The Committee has, and will continue, to proactively review all ethical standards policies and procedures as part of their important forward work programme. In this reporting period, there were no referrals to the Ethics and Standards Committee under the Local Resolution Protocol. There was a conduct complaint in relation to an Elected Member that was taken to investigation by the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW). In addition, the PSOW made two completed investigation referrals to the Ethics and Standards Committee. Further detail is provided later in this report at page 5. It is essential that the good standards are maintained in the future and the Ethics and Standards Committee needs to monitor against any possible drift towards complacency or reduction of ethical values.

The training requirements for County Borough Councillors will continue to be monitored as part of the Committee's forward work programme. It is a continued commitment to ensure that all mandatory training has been completed and that all declarations of acceptance of office and registers of members' interests have been completed where appropriate.

The Ethics and Standards Committee continues to benefit from the expertise of Councillors Lisa Winnett, Jacqueline Thomas and Malcolm Cross. Following the sad demise of the previous Town Councillor, we are pleased to welcome Town Councillor J Rawcliffe to the Ethics and Standards Committee. This appointment took effect in November 2023.

Finally, I would like to thank all Members of the Committee and Council officers for their invaluable advice and support throughout the last 12 months.

Ronnie Alexander

1. Introduction

The Local Government Act 2000 requires Councils to establish a Standards Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and probity in the conduct of Councillors. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council established a Standards Committee in October 2000.

The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 introduced a mandatory requirement for Standards Committees to present an annual report to full Council. This statutory report must describe how the Committee has discharged its functions during the previous year and must include a summary of any reports, actions or recommendations made or referred to the Committee. In addition, it should be noted each year's Annual Report should include an assessment of the extent to which leaders of political groups on the Council have complied with their new duties to promote and maintain high standards of conduct within their groups.

The current terms of reference for the Ethics and Standards Committee is appended to this report.

This Ethics and Standards Committee Annual Report covers the period from 31st December 2022 to 31st December 2023.

2. Membership of the Ethics and Standards Committee (9 Members)

The Standards Committees (Wales) Regulations 2001 sets out the statutory framework which determines the size and composition of Standards Committee Membership. It should be noted that Regulation 12 of those Regulations specifies that the rules of political proportionality do not apply to those elected representatives/ members who are nominated by the County Borough Council to sit on the Standards Committee. At least half of the Committee members shall be independent (lay) members with no affiliation (within the specified rules) to the Council for whom they are appointed. Five of the nine members of Blaenau Gwent's Standards Committee are independent (lay) thus satisfying the composition requirements.

The Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Ethics and Standards Committee is comprised of the following members:

- Mr R Alexander (Chair)
- Miss J White
- Mr S Williams (Vice Chair from July 2022 to present)
- Mr FR Lynch
- Mrs S Rosser
- Councillor L Winnett
- Councillor M Cross
- Councillor J Thomas
- Town Councillor J Rawcliffe (appointed Nov 2023, post vacant prior to this)

During 2023 the previous Town Councillor sadly passed away and created a vacancy. Following a period of consultancy with the relevant Town Council where responsibility to provide a member currently sits Cllr J Rawcliffe was appointed in November 2023.

3. Term of Office - Independent Members of the Ethics and Standards Committee

Regulations 18 – 21 of the Standards Committees (Wales) Regulations 2001 sets out the detailed rules in relation to the permitted terms of office of members of a Standards Committee. The term of office for an independent member of the Standards Committee is for an initial term of between 4 and 6 years. The independent member can be reappointed for a second term of no more than 4 years.

Below is a table which sets out the current position in connection with individual terms of office.

	Appointment Date	Term Time (Yrs)	End Date
1. Cllr Jacqueline Thomas	22/02/2018	4	02/05/2026
2. Mr Francis ROY Lynch	23/07/2020	6	22/07/2026
3. Mr. Stephen Williams	28/02/2019	6	27/02/2025
4. Miss Jenny White	26/01/2023	6	25/01/2029
5. Sarah Rosser	26/11/2020	6	26/11/2026
6. Mr Ronnie Alexander	01/05/2016	10	30/04/2026
7. Cllr M Cross	01/06/2022	4	01/06/2026
8. Cllr L Winnett	01/06/2022	4	01/06/2026
9. Town/Community Cllr Roger Clark	10/11/2023	4	01/07/2026*

*Cllr Rawcliffe's end date for his term takes into consideration that some of the term allocated to Abertillery and Llanhilleth Town Council has already been served by his predecessor.

4. Term of Office - Community / Town Council Member of the Ethics and Standards Committee

The term of office for a Community/Town Council Member of the Standards Committee shall be no more than 4 years or the period until ordinary elections for the community council on which the member sits, whichever is the shorter.

A member may be reappointed for a further consecutive term upon consultation with other community councils within the area.

A Community/Town Council Member shall cease to be a member of the Standards Committee if that member ceases to be a member of the Community/Town Council.

5. Meetings of the Ethics and Standards Committee

In the period between 31st December 2022 and 31st December 2023 the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Ethics and Standards Committee met a total of 3 times on the following dates:

- 24th January 2023
- 2nd March 2023
- 21st September 2023

6. Detail of the Work undertaken by the Ethics and Standards Committee

The following paragraphs set out the work carried out by the Ethics and Standards Committee during the reporting period:

- a) No applications for dispensations were made to the Ethics and Standards Committee. In certain circumstances Councillors may be granted a dispensation by the Standards Committee which enables them to take part in Council business where this would otherwise be prohibited because they have a personal interest as defined by the Members' Code of Conduct. Provided Councillors act within the terms of their dispensation there is deemed to be no breach of the Code of Conduct or the law.
- b) During the period the Committee considered the Annual Report of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW). This report did not raise any conduct issues for Blaenau Gwent but did report on each Local Authority's performance on code of conduct issues and it was noted that Blaenau Gwent were shown to have an excellent record with the fewest complaints referred to PSOW. This low figure was largely attributed to the Council's successful early resolution and prevention process using its Local Resolution Policy.
- c) No referrals were made to the Ethics and Standard's Committee under the Council's Local Resolution Protocol (LRP). The LRP is set out in the Council's Constitution and is a mechanism for encouraging early resolution of internal Member Conduct complaints without the need to engage the PSOW's office.
- d) Complaints of Breach of the Code of Conduct: One conduct complaint in relation to an Elected member of Blaenau Gwent was taken to investigation by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales during the relevant period, and in addition the PSOW made two completed investigation referrals to the Ethics and Standard's Committee for determination during this period.
- e) The first referral made to the Ethics and Standards Committee during this period was considered by the Committee between September and October of this period. Following a thorough review and hearing which took place on 26th October 2023 involving all relevant parties it was determined that a Community Councillor had failed to comply with paragraphs 6(1)(a)(disrepute), 7(a) and 7(b) i), ii), iii) (misuse of position and resources) and 11(1), 11(2)(b), 14(1)(a)(i), 14(1),(a),(ii) and 14(1)(c) (which relate to interests) of the Members' Code of Conduct. The Committee decided that the appropriate action was to censure the defendant and included a recommendation that further training be undertaken on the Member's Code of Conduct.

- f) The second referral made to the Ethics and Standards Committee during this period was considered between September and December of this period. Following a thorough review and hearing which took place on 21st December 2023 it was determined that the defendant had not breached the Member's Code of Conduct. Whilst the Community Councillor had placed his signature on one document it was determined that it had been reasonable for him at that time to have relied upon assurances provided by others and it was not his conduct in isolation which gave rise to financial loss or brought the Community Council into disrepute.
- g) A decision was reached in March 2023, that was later ratified by full Council, to rename the committee from the Standards Committee to the Ethics and Standards Committee.
- h) Other work relating to training considerations, composition of the Committee and recruitment have also been reported and/or considered during this period.

7. Annual Meeting with Political Group Leaders

Section 62 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act imposes new duties on Leaders of political groups and they must take reasonable steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of their group. In addition, the changes to the legislation also provide the Standards Committee with additional functions to ensure that group leaders have access to advice and training to support these new duties and to monitor their compliance with them.

The Ethics and Standards Committee met with the Group Leaders of Blaenau Gwent in October 2022 to discuss the changes in legislation where it was agreed to work together on matters of standards, ethics and the code of conduct. It was agreed that Group Leaders would continue to meet with the Ethics and Standards Committee on an annual basis and also extend an invite to all Committee meetings with a view to promoting a good working relationship. Due to the scheduling of meetings in this period, the Committee has not met with the Group Leaders. However, a meeting with the Leaders has now been scheduled for March 2024.

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Agenda Item 32

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 04.03.2024

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 11.03.2024

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **21st March, 2024**

Report Subject: **Council's Corporate Plan 2022/27 Review**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Steve Thomas - Leader / Cabinet Member
Corporate Services and Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Gemma Wasley, Service Manager Performance and
Democratic
Damien McCann, Interim Chief Executive**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance & Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	22/02/24				14/03/24		21/03/24	

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 To consider and approve the Council's revised Corporate Plan 2022/27 and Implementation Plan.
 - 1.2 The Council's revised Corporate Plan 2022/27 is attached at appendix 1.
 - 1.3 The Council's Implementation Plan 2023/24 is attached at appendix 2.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 Legislative Requirements

In order to comply with relevant legislation, the Council is required to produce a Corporate Plan, outlining its intentions for the coming years. The Plan has been written to cover the current 5 year political cycle from 2022 to 2027.
 - 2.2 The Corporate Plan is required to fulfil the requirements as outlined within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
 - 2.3 Blaenau Gwent's Corporate Plan

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 to thrive. The Corporate Plan is the Council's commitment to the communities of Blaenau Gwent, to provide modern and high quality services which support economic growth and well-being.
 - 2.4 The Plan outlines four high level priorities, each of which will be 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.

2.5 The four high level priorities are:

- Maximise learning and 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.

2.6 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.

2.7 The priorities have not been developed in isolation and alignment has also been made to the Marmot Principles (further detail is found in appendix 1) and the priorities from the Gwent Public Service Board Plan (PSB) Well-being Plan.

2.8 The Corporate Plan also outlines the Council Vision:
'Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities'

2.9 A core set of Council Values has also been included within the Plan for all staff and Members to follow:

- Respectful
- Inclusive
- Collaborative
- Accountable
- Supportive

2.10 **Revisions to the Corporate Plan since its approval by Council on 26th October 2022**

2.10.1 As part of their review of the Council's Well-being Objectives, Audit Wales recommended that the Council include detail, as part of the Well-being Statement, of how we developed our Well-being Objectives and plan to implement them moving forward. A new section has been added into the Plan, found on page 7 of appendix 1.

2.10.2 As reported in October 2022, there is an ongoing process of gathering a wide-range of information to understand the issues that are most important to people in our area. We have also looked at future trends to make sure we consider the things that will affect how we work in the longer term.

2.10.3 It is important that we can demonstrate progress against the Council priorities outlined in the Plan and be held to account against them, therefore an annual implementation plan and suite of Key Performance Indicators, which underpin the priority areas, have been developed and can be found at appendix 2.

2.10.4 The Corporate Plan was agreed before the Gwent Well-being Plan, therefore the priority links identified in the original Corporate Plan were draft only. These priorities have now been updated following the approval of the Gwent Well-being Plan in 2023.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

To include Recommendation(s) / Endorsement by other groups, e.g. CMT/Committees/Other groups)

3.1 The revisions to the Corporate Plan have been approved by CLT and are to be considered by Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee on 14th March. Any changes or feedback on the content of the report from this Committee will be fed in verbally to Council.

Option 1

Agree the revisions made to the Corporate Plan, outlined in paragraphs 2.10.

Option 2

Make amendments to revisions within the Corporate Plan for consideration before approval.

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

4.1 The document is the Council's Corporate Plan, setting out the most important areas for implementation in the short to medium term.

4.2 The Corporate Plan has been written to align to the priorities as identified in the Gwent Public Service Board Well-being Plan.

Legislative Requirements

4.3 The Council is currently under two pieces of legislation:

- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015; and
- Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

4.4 The Council has specific duties are part of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which requires the Council to produce Well-being Objectives and a Well-being Statement. The priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan also act as our Well-being Objectives and the Corporate Plan also acts as our Well-being Statement.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

There is a statutory requirement to have an agreed and published Corporate Plan in place.

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

There are no specific financial implications as a result of the development of this Plan, however, the Corporate Plan priorities will be used as the basis for budget setting and in allocating resources as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There is a risk that without a clear and published set of Council priorities, governance arrangements; budgetary allocations; service planning and decision making could be adversely affected.

5.3 ***Legal***

The Corporate Plan also meets our statutory legislative obligations. If the Plan were not approved or did not meet the legislative requirements this would be a reputational risk to the Council, potentially resulting in corrective action.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

There are no specific staffing or workforce implications as a result of the Plan. The Corporate Plan emphasises the need to work with partners as well as with communities (utilising all available resources) in pursuing the achievement of the Council priorities.

Officers have established robust business plans which support the delivery of the Corporate Plan.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

An Implementation Plan for 2023/24 and suite of Key Performance Indicators, which underpin the priority areas, has been developed and included within the revised Plan at pages 11, 13, 15 and 17 of appendix 1.

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

The Corporate Plan identifies the key areas of activity for the Council over the next five years. These will have direct benefits for the people of Blaenau Gwent.

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

Engagement remains a key priority for the Council and these proposals are intended to continue this work and ensure that all services are focussed on their customers and communities through strong engagement and communication.

- 6.5 ***Preventative focus***
The Plan aims to work in a preventive way, identifying need before it escalates.
- 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
The Outcome Statements have been written to identify contributions from across different service areas and this will help us to deliver our 'One Council' approach by working together to deliver better outcomes for our communities.
- 6.7 ***Integration(across service areas)***
The Plan references the need to be clear about the Council's role in the delivery of services now and in the future and how it can work with its communities, partners and businesses to improve the overall well-being of the area.
- 6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***
The Plan includes specific reference to decarbonisation and prioritising activity around this agenda.
- 6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) (All decisions, policy reviews or policy implementation will now require a completed Integrated Impact Assessment)***

Across Gwent, all councils, including Blaenau Gwent, will work towards becoming a region that aims to tackle and reduce inequalities, based on the Marmot principles (further detail in appendix 1). The Council will work across all public services in the area to ensure that our policies, approaches and resources are geared towards creating a fairer, more equal society for today's residents and future generations. This will be at the centre of how we develop and deliver our services across early years, education and skills, transport, housing, places and spaces, and jobs and businesses. As an anti-poverty council, we will do everything within our power to support people trapped in poverty and those who are most vulnerable. By valuing and promoting good health, education and learning we can help people to reach their full potential. This in turn will contribute to creating better informed and connected communities throughout Blaenau Gwent that are fair, open and welcoming to all; where everyone gets to play an active part.

An Integrated Impact Assessment has been undertaken and no negative impact on the protected characteristics have been identified.

7. ***Monitoring Arrangements***
State how the work will be monitored e.g. through scrutiny or directorate performance management arrangements
- 7.1 The business planning process is aligned to the Corporate Plan and feeds the information within the Joint Finance and Performance report.
- 7.2 Progress of the Corporate Plan is highlighted within the Joint Finance and Performance report.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix 1 Corporate Plan 2022/27*
- *Appendix 2 Implementation Plan and Key Performance Indicators 2023/24*



Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan 2022/27



Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities

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Our Statutory Well-being Statement for 2022/27	7
Council Priorities 2022/27:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent</i> 	9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities</i> 	11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place</i> 	12
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Blaenau Gwent Vision:

Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities

The Council's Core Values:

Respectful

Inclusive

Collaborative

Accountable

Supportive

Our Vision and Values reflect who we are as a Council, how we do things and how we are shaping the future by ensuring that these apply to everything we do.

Foreword



Blaenau Gwent is a place like no other. At the head of the Gwent Valleys – Blaenau Gwent provides a unique environment to live, work and play. Blaenau Gwent is a place of heritage and dramatic change, with a sense of its past but its eyes firmly on the future.

The Tech Valleys Vision, Valleys Regional Park and Cardiff Capital Regional Deal combined with new transport links through the soon to be completed Heads of the Valley Road and rail routes to Cardiff bring a bright future. Together with the amazing location and surrounding parkland our people and communities make Blaenau Gwent great. Our people have influence on the local, national and international stage in the arts, sport and politics for many generations – putting Blaenau Gwent on the map for all the right reasons.

The role of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and its partners is to maximise on the assets we have, doing more with less and doing it better. It is right that we recognise the challenges we face. The historical decline of heavy industry continues to impact on employment prospects and intergenerational opportunities. We face issues with health and wealth inequality, the rise of online shopping and the impact on our town centres and social issues affecting our families and young people. As a Council we face increasing demand for some of our services putting more pressure on our available budgets. But we are tackling these issues head on with our partners, businesses and the local community. We are looking at how we spend our money to achieve the best outcomes for our residents, we are supporting new and existing businesses, we are looking at our assets to achieve new income streams and we are removing barriers to enable residents to access what they need. All in all, we are looking forward to a positive future.

Across Gwent, all councils, including Blaenau Gwent, will work towards becoming a region that aims to tackle and reduce inequalities, based on the Marmot principles (further detail on page 7). We will work across all public services in our area to ensure that our policies, approaches and resources are geared towards creating a fairer, more equal society for today's residents and future generations. This will be at the centre of how we develop and deliver our services across early years, education and skills, transport, housing, places and spaces, and jobs and businesses. As an anti-poverty council, we will do everything within our power to support people trapped in poverty and those who are most vulnerable. By valuing and promoting good health, education and learning we can help people to reach their full potential. This in turn will contribute to creating better informed and connected communities throughout Blaenau Gwent that are fair, open and welcoming to all; where everyone gets to play an active part.

Blaenau Gwent Cabinet



Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities

Blaenau Gwent Council's Cabinet is made up of the Leader of the Council and four other Elected Members, called Cabinet Members. Each Cabinet Member looks after an individual area of responsibility, called a portfolio. They make decisions on how your money is spent and how services are delivered. The Cabinet is responsible for delivery of the Corporate Plan. A full list of all Elected Member, including information about how to find your local Member, is available on our website: [Councillors and Committees | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)



Cllr Steve Thomas
Leader of the Council
Cabinet Member
Corporate Overview
and Performance



Cllr Helen Cunningham
Deputy Leader of the Council
Cabinet Member
Place and Environment



Cllr John C Morgan
Cabinet Member
Place and Regeneration



Cllr Sue Edmunds
Cabinet Member
People and Education



Cllr Hadyn Trollope
Cabinet Member
People and Social Services

Introduction

The Corporate Plan acts as the Council's business plan and sets out the vision, values and priorities for 2022/27. It outlines not only what the people of Blaenau Gwent can expect from the Council but equally, what the Council is asking from its citizens and partners.

The Plan has been developed at a time of significant financial turbulence and change within the public sector. The Council has had to take some tough decisions on where to prioritise spending, ensuring vital services are maintained for the most vulnerable in our communities.

Through focusing on delivering against the main priorities set out in the Corporate Plan we can begin to transform Blaenau Gwent into a more prosperous and welcoming area and that plays a part on a regional and national stage. It is about achieving real outcomes for the people of Blaenau Gwent and is underpinned by solid and sustainable business plans, ensuring the Council can be held to account for what it has promised to deliver.

The Corporate Plan is a requirement of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The primary aim of the Act is to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act sets out seven national well-being goals that we have a duty to contribute to. The Act intends to make the Council think more about the long term, work better with people and communities, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach.

The Corporate Plan identifies four priorities, known as well-being Objectives, which set out the direction for action and agenda for change over the next five years. The ambitions set out in this Plan require for the Council, communities and partners to work in new and innovative ways to drive change and transform the area in order to have a positive impact on the lives and well-being of current and future generations.

Our Corporate Plan



Our 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 our communities to thrive. The people of Blaenau Gwent are at the heart of all that we do and the Corporate Plan is our commitment to the communities of Blaenau Gwent to provide modern and high quality services which support economic growth and well-being.

As a Council we will be an outward looking organisation who will work in partnership with businesses, the public and voluntary sectors, and communities to be a more commercially minded and business orientated organisation.

Our Corporate Plan 2022/27 Priorities are:

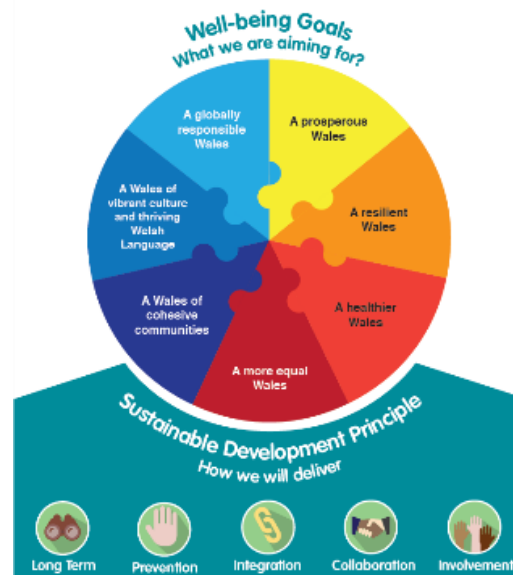
Priority	Outcome
Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent	An increase in the resilience of the community, providing high quality educational and skills opportunities to create a thriving economy from birth onwards, minimising dependence and maximising independence
Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities	Blaenau Gwent Council greatly reduces its carbon emissions, provides an environment which supports growth and well-being and connects communities
An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place	Blaenau Gwent Council works in partnership to provide high quality services to meet local need, and improve the quality of life and well-being within the community
Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient	An increase in the resilience of Communities, where everyone is welcome and safe, and which minimises dependency and maximises independence

Through focusing on delivering the Corporate Plan we can begin to transform Blaenau Gwent into a more prosperous and welcoming area that celebrates its heritage and plays its part on the regional and national stage. It is also a key part of building a more confident and capable Council. It is about achieving real outcomes for the people of Blaenau Gwent and is underpinned by solid and sustainable plans, ensuring the Council can be held to account for what it has promised to deliver.



The priorities have not been developed in isolation and have been identified in order to support the progression of a number of policy and partnership areas:

The **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act** has outlined the responsibilities on all public sector bodies to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. This is referred to as the sustainable development principle which states public bodies '**must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs**'. We have ensured that these responsibilities are a part of all that we do and our priorities and actions reflect how we will work to improve these key areas. We have also considered the contribution our priorities will have on working towards the Well-being Goals and the five ways of working.



Alignment has also been made to the **Marmot Principles** and the priorities from the **Gwent Public Service Board Plan (PSB) Well-being Plan**.

Gwent PSB have agreed to become a **Marmot Region** and to adopt the **eight Marmot principles** to reduce health inequalities across Gwent and to work in partnership with the Institute of Health Equity (IHE) to address the social determinants of health. Gwent is the first area in Wales to become a Marmot region.

Michael Marmot is Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at University College London and currently the Director of The UCL Institute of Health Equity. He has led research groups on health inequalities for over thirty years, working for various international and governmental bodies. Key to his approach to addressing health inequalities is to create the conditions for people to take control of their own lives which requires action across the social determinants of health and beyond the reach of the NHS. Recognising the inequality that exists in our communities, the Gwent Public Service Board has agreed to become a 'Marmot' region with the intent to implement this approach to undertake evidence-based action to reduce inequalities in Gwent. This will re-focus and accelerate progress towards reducing the root causes of health and related inequalities across Gwent. As part of this, the PSB will use the eight Marmot Principles, alongside the Objectives and Steps, as part of the Well-being Plan.

Eight Marmot Principles:

1. Give every child the best start in life
2. Enable all children, young people, and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
3. Create fair employment and good work for all
4. Ensure a healthy standard of living for all
5. Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
6. Strengthen the role and impact of ill-health prevention
7. Tackle racism, discrimination, and their outcomes
8. Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together



Alongside the Marmot Principles, The Council has aligned to the priorities outlined in the draft Well-being Plan, a Plan owned by the Gwent PSB.

How the Council's Priorities Align

The table below highlights the links between the Corporate Plan 2022/27, the Marmot Principles and the Gwent PSB's Well-being Plan.

Corporate Plan 2022/27	Marmot Principle	Gwent Well-being Plan
Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give every child the best start in life • Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives • Create fair employment and good work for all • Ensure a healthy standard of living for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all
Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities • Strengthen the role and impact of ill-health prevention • 'Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to create a more climate aware Gwent, where our environment is valued and, ensuring our well-being now and for future generations
An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create fair employment and good work for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all
Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackle racism, discrimination and their outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all

Our Statutory Well-being Statement for 2022/27

The Well-Being statement acts as a key driver for improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Blaenau Gwent by seeking to ensure 'that the needs of the present are met, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

The Council has identified four Well-being Objectives that have been developed through extensive local, regional, and national research and evidence bases, using key data sources, directorate and service area information, from existing plans and strategies, audit and inspection outcomes, regulatory reports as well as existing commitments and key legislative drivers. The



Regional Partnership Board population needs assessment has informed our ambition to prevent need arising and escalating as well as the extent to which residents or their carers require our support. The Gwent Public Service Board Well-being Assessment informs us about well-being across Gwent and Blaenau Gwent now but also with the future challenges such as social and economic differences, an ageing population, health inequalities, educational attainment gaps and climate change.

Each Well-being Objective has a description of what we want to achieve as well as how we will work within the requirements of the Well-being Act. This includes working at a Blaenau Gwent level but also recognising how we will contribute to regional and Wales wide collective duties.

Each Well-being Objective has been aligned to our service area business planning process to ensure progress is being made and to establish where further action is needed. Our business planning process is iterative and reflects changing needs. A series of performance indicators have also been identified against each Well-being Objective. Our approach is underpinned by a commitment to ongoing engagement with our local communities and partners that will help us to deliver our shared vision, determine future strategy, set priorities and ensure they are at the heart of all we do. This commitment is outlined within the Council's new Participation and Engagement Strategy.

As part of developing the Corporate Plan the Council developed a new Vision Statement, **'Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities'**. This vision is a key driving factor for the Council with a focus for us working collaboratively with communities, working with them to deliver collective services that meet the needs. Close working with the community will inform our policy making, service design and decision making. By working more collaboratively we will be able to maximise experience and knowledge in order to target resources and focus on key areas of need.

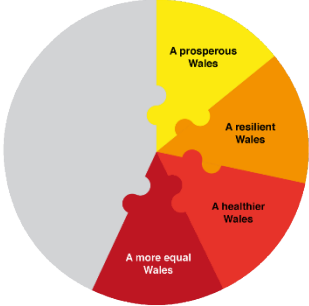
Our Corporate Plan has been written to cover the 5 year period 2022 to 2027 and beyond. On a six monthly and annual basis we will review our progress and consider what we need to do the following year to ensure we keep on track. There are things we need to do to support well-being in our communities now, but we've also looked at how well-being could develop in the future and how we can prevent issues occurring or from becoming worse.



The Council's Priorities 2022/27

Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent

What We Aim to Achieve – An increase in the resilience of the community, providing high quality educational and skills opportunities to create a thriving economy from birth onwards, minimising dependence and maximising independence.

Why This is Important - Identified Need		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling the cost of living and supporting residents and families • Examining the potential for further economic improvement and growth for Blaenau Gwent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maximisation of opportunities and income levels ○ Children, young people and adults with the right qualifications and skills for life ○ Skills / employment ○ Job prospects ○ Growth • Community – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Independent living ○ Thriving and Resilient ○ Aging population • Access to services 		
		
Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Sustainable Development and the Five Ways of Working		
We will work in Partnership / Collaboration With...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gwent Public Service Board • Aneurin Bevan University Health Board • Education Achievement Service • Regional Partnership Board • Cardiff Capital Region City Deal • Local Nature Partnership Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen • Tech Valleys • Valley Task Force • Gwent Wide Adult Safeguarding Board (GWASB) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB) • Town Centre Forums • Business Hub • Enterprise Board • Greater Gwent Health, Social Care and Well-being Partnership • Gwent Frailty • WAST • Cost of Living Sub Group
We will work with a focus on Long term planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a key area for Blaenau Gwent and it is recognised that evidence to show improvement will take time but it is vital that work is undertaken now to support communities now and in the future. 	
We will work with a focus on Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This priority is cross cutting in nature and will include a number of Council Services including Regeneration, Social Services and Education. 	
We will work with a focus on Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent the impacts of poverty and material deprivation from getting worse by providing good quality local employment opportunities and supporting a thriving and resilient Blaenau Gwent 	



<p>We will work with a focus on Involving the public and partners in all that we do</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engagement with businesses and partners will be key to support economic growth and job creation / opportunities.• The Education Directorate is committed to providing high quality services to its citizens and uses various engagement methodologies in order to understand if the service is making the intended outcomes or if amendments to service delivery need to be considered• An important aspect of providing Social Services to service users is that their voice is heard and they are able to shape the services they receive. Consultation with children and families occurs on a case by case basis and is captured in the care planning documents of each child.
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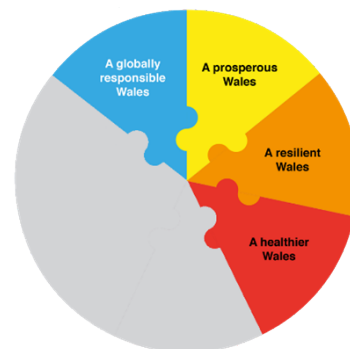


Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities

What We Aim to Achieve - Blaenau Gwent Council greatly reduces its carbon emissions, provides an environment which supports growth and well-being and connects communities

Why This is Important - Identified Need

- Connectivity -
 - Digital Infrastructure
 - Digital Skills
 - Transport
 - Prioritising active and safe transport
- Community –
 - Natural and built environment
 - Attractive area to live
 - Minimising air pollution
 - Building energy efficient homes
- Decarbonisation –
 - Net zero by 2030
 - Building Adaptions (including schools)
 - Tackling climate change
 - Energy provision



Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Sustainable Development and the Five Ways of Working

We will work in Partnership / Collaboration With...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gwent PSB • Local Authorities in Wales • CCRC • Transport for Wales • Climate Ready Gwent • Local Nature Partnership Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen • Dwr Cymru Welsh Water • Natural Resources Wales
We will work with a focus on Long term planning	Protecting the environment and working towards new zero carbon is an immediate aim with actions being put in place now to support in the long term.
We will work with a focus on Integration	The Council has developed a Decarbonisation Strategy and an Environment and Biodiversity Strategy both of which outline responsibilities to support these agendas across all Councils services. Through a joined up approach to service delivery the Council will be able to achieve more and use less resources.
We will work with a focus on Prevention	Contributing to the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and ecosystem resilience will help to mitigate and adapt to climate change and provide positive opportunities to maintain and build mental and physical health and well-being.
We will work with a focus on Involving the public and partners in all that we do	Support to local community groups is continuing with local litter champions being provided with materials, equipment, staff support and the collection of waste following clean up and clearance.

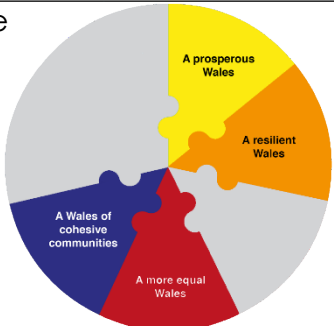
An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place

What We Aim to Achieve – Blaenau Gwent Council works in partnership to provide high quality services to meet local need, and improve the quality of life and well-being within the community

Why This is Important - Identified Need	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital infrastructure • Commercially minded Council • Strong Resilient Council • Financially Resilient • Recruitment and retention • Adapting (Exit from the EU and post COVID) • Partnership Working / Regionalisation • Celebrate success • Focus on the future • Building Blaenau Gwent's reputation • Data and intelligence 	
Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Sustainable Development and the Five Ways of Working	
We will work in Partnership / Collaboration With...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gwent PSB • Local Authorities in Wales • Trade Unions • Town and Community Councils • Welsh Government • WLGA • Audit Wales • SRS
We will work with a focus on Long term planning	<p>The Council is committed to supporting communities in the long term and looks to achieve this through active engagement with the community, understanding data and need and by developing plans and strategies that will be implemented over a number of years to ensure the future investment and improvement of services in Blaenau Gwent.</p>
We will work with a focus on Integration	<p>The Council operates a 'One Council' approach whereby services work together to share resources and expertise and support one another to achieve the intended outcomes for the community.</p>
We will work with a focus on Prevention	<p>The Council uses a preventative approach to the services it provides to the community. This can cover a number of areas such as education, social services, poverty, infrastructure. The Council works to prevent problems getting worse.</p>
We will work with a focus on Involving the public and partners in all that we do	<p>The Council is proactive in how it engages the community. The Council has developed an Engagement Strategy 2018/22 which outlines the approach to engagement for the community, stakeholders, staff and members. Effective engagement is crucial to ensure the Council runs effectively, the services delivered are appropriate and meet the needs of those that use them. The Council also has a Corporate Engagement Calendar in order to map the type and level of activity being delivered across the organisation. This is then used to maximise the use of resources and value of engagements and to promote a 'One Council' approach.</p>

Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient

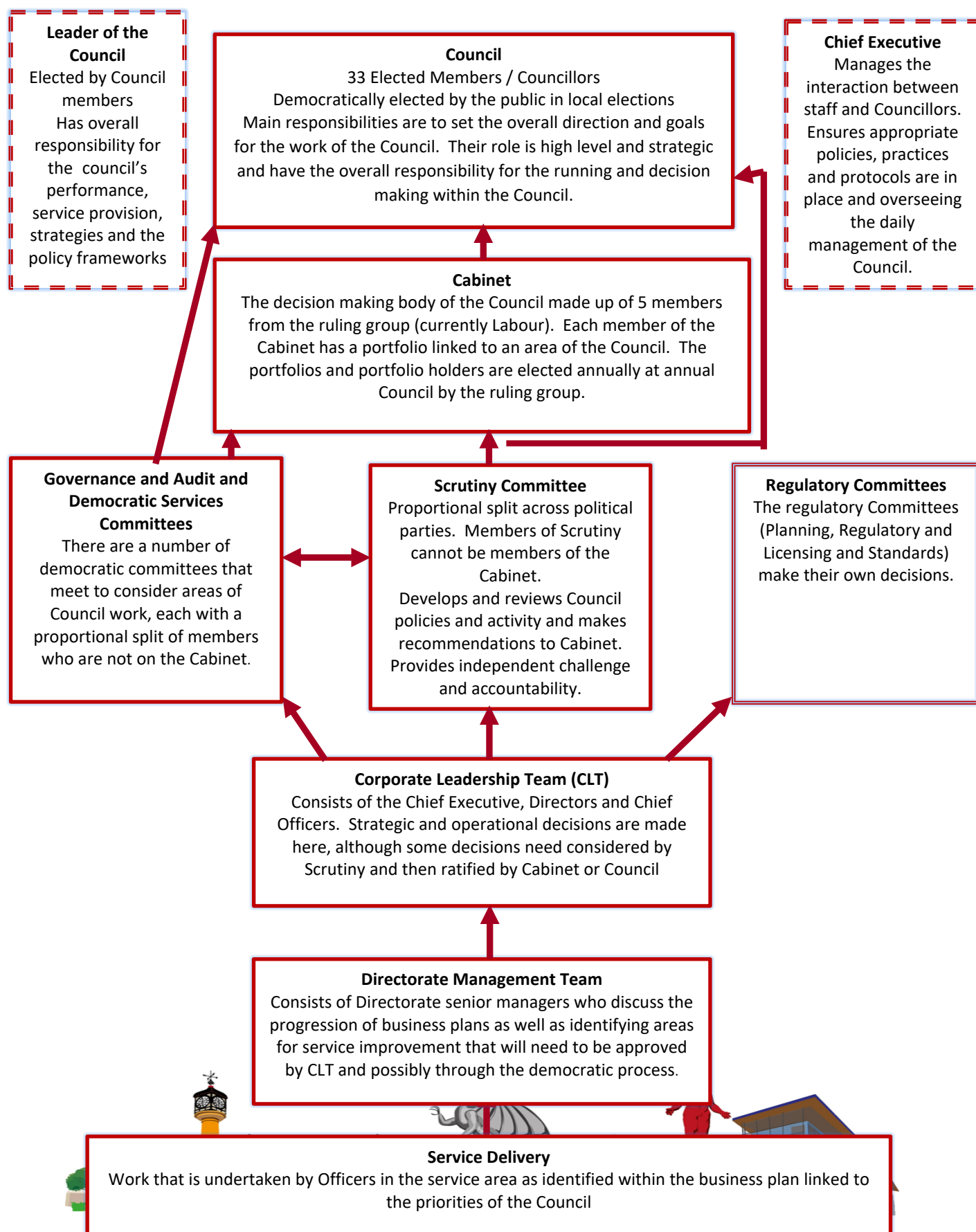
What We Aim to Achieve - An increase in the resilience of Communities, where everyone is welcome and safe and which minimises dependency and maximises independence

Why This is Important - Identified Need		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote awareness and understanding and encourage and celebrate diversity Strengthen community spirit and resilience Community Safety Blaenau Gwent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is a welcoming, diverse and thriving place to live and visit Creates volunteering opportunities to empower residents to have control over their own communities 		
Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Sustainable Development and the Five Ways of Working		
We will work in Partnership / Collaboration With...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gwent PSB West Gwent Community Cohesion Programme Community Safety Partnership Safer Gwent Gwent Community Cohesion Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other Local Authorities Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan priorities Wales Strategic Migration Partnership UK Resettlement Scheme Home Office
We will work with a focus on Long term planning	The Council's community safety initiative is to support crime reduction whilst also implementing preventative measures to ensure long-term reductions in crime and disorder.	
We will work with a focus on Integration	Blaenau Gwent Council, together with its fellow local authorities across Gwent, have worked with schools, not only to challenge racism and hate crime, but to also promote inclusion and celebrate the region's diversity. Last year schools were involved in producing an anti-racism poster competition which was organised by Race Equality First.	
We will work with a focus on Prevention	Home and fire safety services have been provided to victims of crime, anti-social behaviour and domestic violence in the area. Initiatives have also been provided in order to protect, support and empower those who are vulnerable to exploitation, violent extremism or terrorism, as well as human trafficking and modern slavery.	
We will work with a focus on Involving the public and partners in all that we do	The Council has successfully raised awareness and understanding of numerous International and National Equality and Cohesion Campaigns via social media, as well as delivering on specific initiatives with staff, communities and stakeholders (for example, the Youth Forum, Citizen Panel etc.). Examples of the campaigns supported includes Holocaust Memorial Day, Show Racism the Red Card, LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer +) History Month, Pride, White Ribbon Day (campaign to end domestic violence), Black History Month and International Children's Day.	

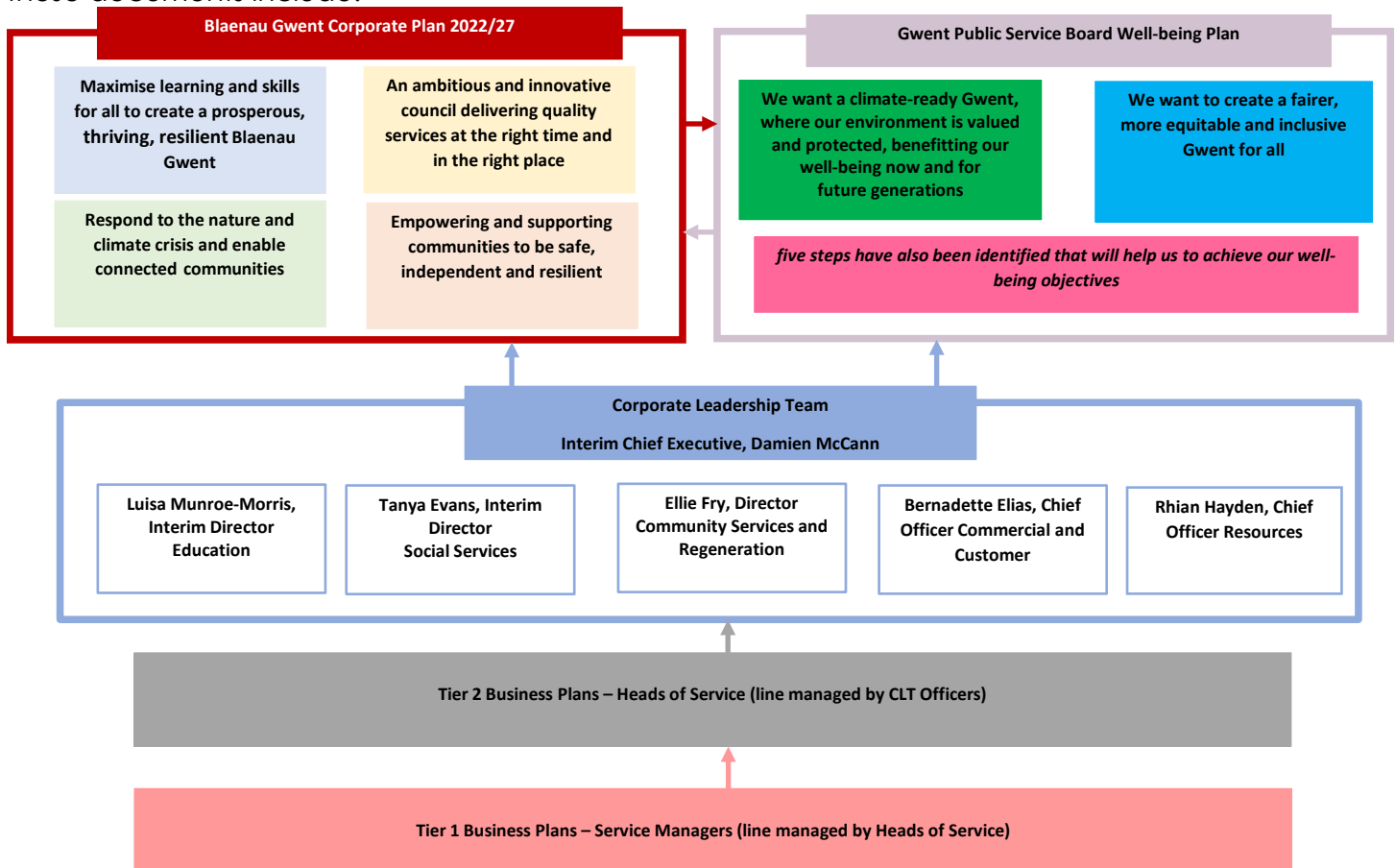


The Council's Governance Framework

Blaenau Gwent Council operates through a Governance Framework which brings together an underlying set of legislation, governance and management processes. The Framework provides a clear line of accountability throughout the Council for monitoring, reporting and decision making. As part of this, the Corporate Plan acts as the Council's overarching strategic document which provides a framework for all that we do and all of the decisions that are made.



Although the Corporate Plan is the overarching strategic document for the Council, it is supported by a number of other key policies and strategies that work together to create a golden thread, these documents include:



- The **Communications Strategy** looks to deliver excellent, innovative and cost effective two-way communications, building a positive reputation and increasing trust and confidence that the Council is delivering services that meet resident, businesses and visitor's needs.
- The **Strategic Equalities Plan** aims to put fairness and equality at the heart of everything the Council does and this is central to maximising well-being outcomes for residents, local communities, staff and visitors, now and in the future
- The **Medium Term Financial Strategy** is a key and integral part of the Council's planning arrangement and provides an assessment of the spending requirements the Council is likely to face to deliver its priorities and the level of potential cuts.
- The **Welsh Language Promotion Strategy aims** of the Blaenau Gwent's Welsh Language Strategy are linked with the Welsh Government's vision to create a million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050.
- The **Workforce Strategy** looks to build on existing good practice and continuing to promote the Council as a good place to work – developing a workforce that feels connected to and can meet the current and future needs of our community.



- At the heart of everything the Council does is the community of Blaenau Gwent. **Engagement, participation and customer experience** feature as a key theme which runs across the Council in order to shape services and make decisions.

Legislative Requirements

The **Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021** sets out a new performance and governance regime which is a fundamental component of empowering local government by firmly defining principal councils as self-improving organisations through a system based on self-assessment and panel performance assessment. This approach is intended to build on and support a culture in which councils continuously challenge the status quo, ask questions about how they are operating, and consider best practice in Wales and wider. It will be important for the sector as a whole to take the lead in the implementation of the new regime, in supporting improvement and in sharing innovations and best practice.

As part of this requirement, the Council has undertaken a corporate self assessment process to consider the progress made and the further areas for improvement since 2021/22. The learning from the self assessment has helped to develop the priority areas within this Corporate Plan. The self assessment is meant to be used as a continuous method to keep performance under review and the Council has in place arrangements to achieve this throughout the year via its performance management framework and reporting methods.

The **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** (WBFG) is ground-breaking legislation which aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales and create a Wales that we all want to live in, now and in the future. We have used our priorities within the Council's Corporate Plan to act as our Well-being Objectives.

The **Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (Section 15)** places a duty on all Local Authorities in Wales to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. As part of this, the Council is required to develop a Corporate Plan. The report also uses the Outcome Statements within the Council's Corporate Plan as its Improvement Objectives.



Contact Information

This document is available electronically and in hard copy by request.

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Providing Feedback

We welcome any feedback you might have about the Council's Corporate Plan 2022/27. Your views are important to us and we want to know what information you would like to see and how you would like to see it reported. Please contact the team on the details above if you would like to give feedback on the Corporate Plan, if there is any information you think could be considered for inclusion in the future, or if you require this document in a different format e.g. large print, Braille, audio version, etc.

Fersiwn Gymraeg

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

This document acts as Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's Well-being Statement, prepared under section 7 of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and related guidance issued by the Welsh Government.

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

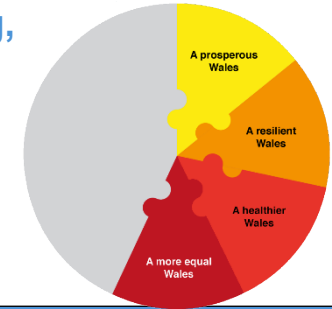
This Council's Corporate Plan 2022/27 has been subject to an Integrated Impact Assessment screening.



Corporate Plan Annual Implementation Plan 2023/24

Well-being Objective - Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent

Our intentions by 2027 and beyond - An increase in the resilience of the community, providing high quality educational and skills opportunities to create a thriving economy from birth onwards, minimising dependence and maximising independence.



Programme	What we have planned for 2023/24
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improve attendance and attainment rates and reduce school exclusions in both Primary and Secondary sectors. ● Focus on improving the pace of change for Schools Causing Concern. ● Monitor Home to school transport funding issues. ● Monitor closely school place and sufficiency of all schools, use data more effectively to inform long term planning.
Vulnerable Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase capacity at Pen-Y-Cwm and River Centre and reduce out of county placements, reducing annual financial loss. ● Develop a vision and strategy for the future provision of ALN.
Estyn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Respond to the recommendations from the recent Estyn Inspection.
Attainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continue to monitor and improve on attainment levels. ● Focus on Higher levels of language acquisition and reading across the board, but particularly in our very young children in early years. ● Supporting the community to gain the right skills for a changing world and build capacity for lifelong learning.
Growth and Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Secure external funding for Shared Prosperity Funding (SPF) programmes ● Continue to examine the opportunity for new industrial space across the borough. ● Progress with the development of CiNER and Regain 2 to support growth and investment into the area. ● Work to further improve our competitiveness across the UK.



Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities

Corporate Plan Annual Implementation Plan 2023/24

Performance Indicator	Data				Annual Target and or Figure We Are Aiming For
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	
% of Pupils entitled to Free Schools Meals (eFSM) BG	25.5	31.4	33.3	24.6	To be identified through PLASC
% of Pupils entitled to Free Schools Meals (eFSM) Wales	19.9	22.9	23.3	22.2	
% Attendance – Primary	N/A	89.9%	89.0%	90.4%	Lower Figure is Better
% Attendance – Secondary		84.8%	84.8%	85.8%	
Number of Pupils being Electively Home Educated in BG	70	89	132	137	Lower Figure is Better
Number of Schools in the category of Causing Concern (out of a total of 25)	4	2	2	2	1
Number of pupils in LA maintained schools (across 25 schools)	9378	9527	8828	9392	To be identified through PLASC
% of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN)	19.2	17.9	15.7	13.8	To be identified through PLASC
% Attainment at Key Stage 5: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall pass rate • A* to C grades • A* to A grades • AS Level A* to C • Number achieving the Advanced Skills Challenges for (for Welsh Baccaulaureate) 	98 76 29 68 *	99 82 31 70 *	97.8 80.5 26 65 *	97.8 76.5 27.2 54.6 95.2	We have no targets as we have no authority over these figures
<i>*data represents the first year of a full cohort since Covid</i>					
Number and % of young people who are NEET <i>*Data gathered June and verification in October</i>	1.9%	1.5%	1.6%	Awaiting Figure	Lower Figure is Better
Aspire Internal Apprentices - LA Apprenticeships	N/A	5	10	12	Higher Figure is Better
Aspire External Apprentices- Apprenticeship offered in industry	13	9	8	17	Higher Figure is Better
% Occupancy of Blaenau Gwent Industrial Units	89%	88%	87%	85%	70% Higher Figure is Better
% Occupancy floorspace of Blaenau Gwent Industrial Units	81%	92%	93%	93%	70%

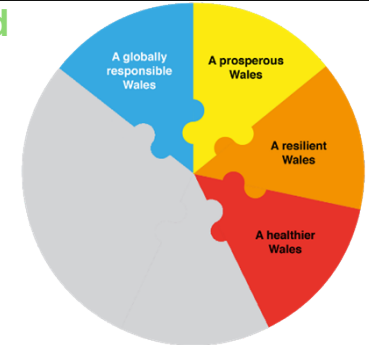


Corporate Plan Annual Implementation Plan 2023/24

Higher Figure is Better

Well-being Objective - Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities

Our intentions by 2027 and beyond - Blaenau Gwent Council greatly reduces its carbon emissions, provides an environment which supports growth and well-being and connects communities



Programme	What we have planned for 2023/24
Decarbonisation and Net Zero Carbon commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Our Climate group will work to prioritise key actions from the Decarbonisation plan in order to work towards achieving the Welsh Government Net Zero Targets of reaching a 63% reduction by 2030, an 89% reduction by 2040 and a 100% reduction by 2050. ● Continue to work towards the recommendations made by our climate assembly. ● Continue with the delivery of the Energy Prospectus to interest in energy development across the borough to facilitate a supply of renewable energy to meet the future energy needs of the area including consideration of wind and hydro generation projects.
Street Cleansing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continue to support the national campaign to tackle Fly- Tipping (not up my street).
Waste and Recycling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continue to work towards meeting the Welsh Government statutory recycling target 70% by 2024-25.



Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities

Corporate Plan Annual Implementation Plan 2023/24

Performance Indicator	Data				Annual Target and or Figure We Are Aiming For
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	
Direct Carbon Emissions Footprint Total tones CO2e/year	14,750	11,793	13,087	12,336	Lower Figure is Better
Number of Fly-tipping £400 fixed penalty notices issued	2	0	18	79	Higher Figure is Better
Number of household duty of care £300 fixed penalty notices issued	7	0	5	6	Higher Figure is Better
Number of commercial duty of care £300 fixed penalty notices issued	1	0	1	1	Higher Figure is Better
Number of fly-tipping incidents on private land investigated	7	44	77	54	Lower Figure is Better
Number of Enforcement Warden enquiries received	900	464	471	717	To Remain Static
Number of first stage warning letters issued for misplacing domestic waste at unofficial waste collection points.	0	0	13	237	Lower Figure is Better
Total number of recorded fly tipping incidents in Blaenau Gwent	1,327	1,661	1,395	1,200	Lower Figure is Better
% of municipal waste reused, recycled or composted	65.31%	64.29%	65%	66.74%	70% Higher Figure is Better
Average amount of waste produced per resident during a financial year	447kg	449kg	443kg	443kg	Lower Figure is Better
Average amount of waste disposed of through residual waste disposal streams during the financial year	155kg	160kg	155kg	147kg	140Kg per resident Lower Figure is Better



Corporate Plan Annual Implementation Plan 2023/24

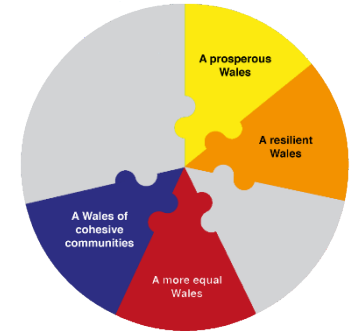
Performance Indicator	Data				Annual Target and or Figure We Are Aiming For
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	
The percentage of municipal waste collected by local authorities sent to landfill	0.3	0.6	1.3	0.31	2% Lower Figure is Better
The percentage of municipal waste incinerated with energy recovery	44.3	46.7	45.2	44.20	45% Lower Figure is Better
Amount invested into active travel routes (£)	-	234,000	295,000	766,154.73	Higher Figure is Better
Average % of planning applications determined on time (cumulative average over a year)	-	96%	91%	93%	95% Higher Figure is Better
% of procurements that consider Social and Well-being objectives (including Decarbonisation and Foundation Economy etc.)	-	-	-	70	100
Carbon Footprint associated with the Council's Commissioning and Procurement activities	-	-	-	0	0



Corporate Plan Annual Implementation Plan 2023/24

Well-being Objective - Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient

Our intentions by 2027 and beyond - An increase in the resilience of Communities, where everyone is welcome and safe, and which minimises dependency and maximises independence.



Programme	What we have planned for 2023/24
Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-establish and strengthen existing engagement networks as well as establish new opportunities for people to get involved.
Identified Need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to implement the regional action plan to meet the needs identified within the population needs assessment. Take forward any learning from the outcome report requested by Care Inspectorate Wales on Public Law process.
Cost of Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide support to those impacted by the cost of living crisis via actions identified by the Cost of Living Member and Officer Groups.
Vulnerable People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy 2020 – 2025 actions are regularly monitored, implemented and reviewed. Ensure that preventative support is available for adults and their unpaid carers, that promote and maintain personal independence.



Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities

Corporate Plan Annual Implementation Plan 2023/24

Performance Indicator	Data				Annual Target and or Figure We Are Aiming For
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	
The number of adults provided with electronic assistive technology during the year	245	169	216	210	Higher Figure is Better
The total number of adult clients currently in receipt of electronic assistive technology.	1264	1353	1527	1639	Higher Figure is Better
Number of children on Child Protection Register	61	52	64	62	Lower Figure is Better
Number of Children becoming Looked After (During the Year)	62	38	47	63	
Total number of CLA who are placed within Wales, but outside of the responsible LA (excluding those in adoption placements) (as at 31st March)	Not available	65	51	52	Lower Figure is Better
The total number of CLA at the end of the collection year who are placed outside of Wales (as at 31st March)	Not available	5	6	12	Lower Figure is Better
% households successfully prevented from homelessness (section 66)	72	59	75.2	63.5	60 Lower Figure is Better
Number of additional affordable housing units delivered	12	90	43	Figure to be calculated	Dependent on WG grant
Numbers waiting on the social housing register:					
Total	2,151	1,218	4,191	4,688	Lower Figure is Better
Single Applicants	1,051	592	1,742	2,592	
Number of disabled facilities grants completed	N/A	30	31	61	Higher Figure is Better
Homes for Ukraine Scheme:					
Guests	-	-	-	57	Higher Figure is Better
Population Share				74%	

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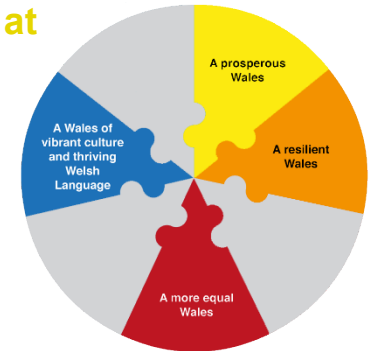


Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities

Corporate Plan Annual Implementation Plan 2023/24

Well-being Objective - An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place

Our intentions by 2027 and beyond - Blaenau Gwent Council works in partnership to provide high quality services to meet local need, and improve the quality of life and well-being within the community.



Programme	What we have planned for 2023/24
Digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gain a greater understanding of the barriers to access digital solutions within our communities and develop support for those who wish to improve their digital skills.
Welsh Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responding to the recommendations from the Welsh Language Commissioner. Gather quarterly OD information showing staff Welsh language abilities.
Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress the Workforce Strategy including consideration of recruitment and retention across the Directorates. Work to reduce the sickness levels across the Council.
Council Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage effectively across the organisation, with partners and key groups to develop the new Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028. Progress the Engagement and Participation Strategy to ensure the voice of the community is considered when planning and decision making. Further embed safeguarding arrangements across the whole Council.



Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities

Corporate Plan Annual Implementation Plan 2023/24

Performance Indicator	Data				Annual Target and or Figure We Are Aiming For
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	
Number of complaints received by Blaenau Gwent Council	-	-	105	133	Lower Figure is Better
Number of Complaints Closed at Stage 1 during the period	-	-	100	123	Higher Figure is Better
Number of Complaints Closed at Stage 2 during the period	-	-	1	7	Lower Figure is Better
Total Number of Complaints Closed during the period	-	-	101	130	Higher Figure is Better
Number of Compliments received by Blaenau Gwent Council	-	-	29	28	Higher Figure is Better
Council attendance and sickness	13.9	11.67	16.74	15.5	10 days per FTE Lower Figure is Better
Total employee headcount	2777	2,854	2896	2,953	N/A
Council	1565	1,648	1673	1650	
Schools	1212	1,206	1223	1303	
Labour turnover:					N/A
• Council	7.96%	5.2%	8.68%	15.05%	
• Schools	9.67%	3.7%	7.13%	8.55%	
% of external expenditure placed with Local and Regional Suppliers (i.e. Registered within Blaenau Gwent) and SME	-	-	-	21.5	25 Higher Figure is Better
% of external expenditure placed with SME's	-	-	-	10.7%	15% Higher Figure is Better
Revenue outturn expenditure					N/A
£ per thousand	177,300	178,616	193,776	199,583	
£ per head	2,543	2,557	2,767	2,850	



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Agenda Item 33

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 06.03.2024

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 08.03.2024

Committee: **Council**

Date of meeting: **21st March 2024**

Report Subject: **Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr S. Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate and Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Sarah King, Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	29.02.24				14.03.24		21.03.24	

1. **Purpose of the Report**
To present the Council's proposed Strategic Equality Plan for 2024-28.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 Under the Equalities Act 2010 the Council has a statutory duty to prepare and publish a Strategic Equality Plan with equality objectives every four years. The plan must show due regard how the Council can contribute to a fairer society by advancing equality and good relations in our day-to-day activities.
 - 2.2 The Equality Act (Wales) 2010 legally protects people from discrimination, victimisation, and harassment if they share one or more of the following protected characteristics; age (older people, children, and young people), disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and pregnancy and maternity.
 - 2.3 This will be the Council's fourth Strategic Equality Plan and will set out the Council's commitments for meeting its statutory aims to:
 1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.
 2. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.
 3. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - 2.4 Since our last Strategic Equality Plan was published in 2020 the Welsh Government have set out comprehensive and specific commitments in light off the inequalities that were highlighted and intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is our intention that specific actions where relevant from the national plans will relate directly to action plans for each of the strategic objectives within our new plan, this will demonstrate our accountability and

commitment to helping to achieve the national commitments and goals set out by the Welsh Government.

- 2.5 Our new Strategic Equality Plan for 2024 to 2028 will focus on the outcomes that matter to the community and people who use Council services. We want it to be about services that are accessible, delivered effectively and on an equitable basis. The Plan will take into consideration the findings from our engagement and consultation activity undertaken specifically for this plan, which has involved people with lived experience from across the identified protected characteristics.
- 2.6 We know that many of the barriers facing people with protected characteristics are long-standing and entrenched and it takes long-term commitment to be fully addressed. Therefore, the equality objectives which we had in place during the previous plan 2020-2024 have been reconsidered and refined rather than replaced.
- 2.7 The equality objectives are ‘themed’ as we acknowledge that many of the key equality issues, we have identified are not isolated to one specific ‘protected characteristic’ – we recognise intersectionality for people living in our area. We feel the themed approach will help to tackle relevant issues, and therefore we are sure that the steps we want to take to deliver the objectives will also deliver positive equality outcomes for people covered by one, or more of the protected characteristics. Our themes cover:
- Organisational Culture and Leadership.
 - Workforce Inclusivity and Diversity.
 - Fair and Inclusive Learning.
 - Inclusive Engagement and Participation.
 - Community Cohesion.
 - Tackling Disadvantage caused by Poverty.
- 2.8 To create a Strategic Equality Plan that is relevant to those living and working within Blaenau Gwent, public engagement has been crucial. Key phases have included a public engagement programme which has involved 160 people with lived experiences from across the identified protected characteristics and a formal consultation process which took place in January 2024. Furthermore, we also consulted through our internal management structures on the proposed objectives and confirmed that they agreed with the knowledge and information shared by professionals in relation to equality.
- 2.9 Following formal consultation, the Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028 has been developed (Appendix 1). The plan contains our Equality Objectives which are:
- Equality Objective 1: We will be a fair and equitable organisation.
 - Equality Objective 2: We will be a workplace that champions diversity and inclusion.
 - Equality Objective 3: We will create a fair and inclusive learning culture for all children and young people with a focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion.

- Equality Objective 4: We will promote and support inclusive, safe and cohesive communities.
- Equality Objective 5: We will ensure effective engagement and participation for people with protected characteristics.
- Equality Objective 6: We will strive to reduce inequality caused by poverty.

2.10 The plan is supported by our 2024/25 Action Plan (Appendix 2) which outlines a set of prioritised actions we will carry out to help us achieve our objectives, and our 2023/24 SEP Annual Report (Appendix 3) which provides a summary of progress made in 2023/24 against our previous plan for 2020-24.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

Corporate and Performance Scrutiny Committee met on the 14 March 2024, and their recommendation will be presented verbally.

3.1 **Option 1** - That Council approve the Strategic Equality Plan 2024 to 2028, in-line with the expectations of the specific duties of the Equality Act 2010.

Option 2 - That Council does not approve the Strategic Equality Plan 2024 to 2028, in-line with the expectations of the specific duties of the Equality Act 2010.

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

The report relates to the Council meeting the specific duties identified under the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties).

The Strategic Equality Plan will also support the Council in meeting other statutory duties set out within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which set a national well-being objective to create “a more equal Wales”.

The proposed equality objective relating to strive to tackle disadvantage caused by poverty will also put the Council in a strong position to be able to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty named the ‘socio-economic duty’ (2021).

Since our last Strategic Equality Plan was published in 2020, the Welsh Government have set out comprehensive and specific commitments in light of the inequalities that were highlighted and intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, national strategic plans and key action plans have been developed and published by the Welsh Government to tackle the existing inequalities experienced by individuals and communities.

These plans include:

- LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales (2023)
- Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (2022)
- Age Friendly Wales Strategy (2021)
- Children and Young People's Plan (2022)

- Violence Against Women and girls, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) strategy (2022)

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

There are no direct financial implications as a consequence of this report. The publication and translation of the report, on behalf of the Council, is met within existing budget of Governance and Partnerships.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

Failure to develop and publish a new Strategic Equality Plan and Equality Objectives by 1st April 2024 would result in the Council failing to comply with its statutory requirements and specific duties of the Equality Act 2010.

This risk has been mitigated by effective project planning to develop equality objectives and the supporting plan, and by ensuring timely professional and political approval.

5.3 ***Legal***

The Council has a legal requirement to develop and publish a Strategic Equality Plan and Equality Objectives by 1st April 2024.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

There is a duty across the organisation to comply with the Act and proactively support the implementation of the Strategic Equality Plan. The Policy and Partnerships Team will oversee this responsibility via the Professional Lead for Engagement, Equality and Welsh Language.

The plan commits to a quarterly Equality Oversight Group, which will be member led (by our Equality Champion), whereby appropriate representatives from across the colleague will consider progress made against the prioritised actions.

5.5 ***Health and Safety***

This report has no direct implications towards Health and Safety matters.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

Underpinning the development of the Strategic Equality Plan and Equality Objectives is intelligence and research including:

- Understanding each of the protected characteristic;
- Information, data and statistics considered at a local, regional and national level;
- National Research undertaken by the Equality and Human Rights Commission: Is Wales Fairer? (2023);
- Feedback received from interested parties through our formal consultation and engagement work.

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

A more equal Wales: A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic background and circumstances).

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

To create a Strategic Equality Plan that is relevant to those living and working within Blaenau Gwent, extensive public engagement has been undertaken. The initial step taken was to review the 2020-24 plan to influence the creation of a public survey, we wanted to know what people thought of our previous objectives and what we should be prioritising. The results were collated and used to shape our proposed objectives outlined in the Consultation Document.

The new Strategic Equality Plan for 2024 to 2028 focuses on the outcomes that matter to the community and people who use Council services. The Plan takes into consideration the findings from our engagement and consultation activity undertaken specifically for this plan, which has involved 160 people with lived experiences from across the identified protected characteristics.

Furthermore, we have had forty-eight individuals participate via an online questionnaire, to encourage people to share their views and experiences, and talk to us broadly about equality, diversity, and inclusion.

We gathered and analysed the results of the consultation and used them to create proposed objectives in the Consultation Document. We asked the public again if we had reflected their feedback in the proposed objectives through a second survey.

Besides the public consultation, we also consulted through our internal management structures on the suggested objectives and confirmed that they agreed with the knowledge and information shared by professionals in relation to equality.

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

The objectives will be in operation until 2028 and will be monitored annually to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and considers future trends and needs.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The plan works to ensure that no person is discriminated against now or in the future.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The plan has been developed with the involvement of key stakeholders and partners and this activity will continue, as part of the delivery of the plan.

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

The plan is to be linked to the implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act to ensure alignments and avoid duplication. The action plan linked to the plan will be integrated into the Business Planning process

of the Council to ensure all service areas are effectively taking into consideration the requirements of the Act and our identified equality objectives.

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

This report has no direct implications towards decarbonisation or reducing carbon emissions.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) (All decisions, policy reviews or policy implementation will now require a completed Integrated Impact Assessment)***

The IIA for the policy development of our Strategic Equality Plan 2024/28 is included at Appendix 4. The assessment process identified no adverse impacts to be mitigated.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

The Council is obliged to carry out an annual reporting process to outline how progress has been made against the plan. The report is published on the Council's website and sent to the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Additionally, the annual report is taken through democratic processes via the Corporate and Performance Scrutiny and Cabinet Committees.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 - Blaenau Gwent Strategic Equality Plan 2024/28
- Appendix 2 - Blaenau Gwent SEP Action Plan 2024/25
- Appendix 3 - Blaenau Gwent SEP Annual Report 2023/24
- Appendix 4 – Integrated Impact Assessment for SEP 2024/28



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol

Blaenau Gwent

County Borough Council

Blaenau Gwent

Strategic Equality Plan

2024-2028

Blaenau Gwent Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028

This document is available electronically at [[insert link](#)].

A version of this document is also available in Easy Read [[insert link](#)] and in hard copies at each of Blaenau Gwent's local libraries.

If you require this document in a different format, e.g. large print, Braille, audio version, etc. please contact:

Policy and Partnerships

Email: pps@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk



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



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol

Blaenau Gwent

County Borough Council

Welcome and Introductions

We are pleased to present Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's fourth **Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28**; a plan which sets out how we will meet our duties under the Equality (Wales) Act 2010.

Putting fairness and equality at the heart of everything we do is central to maximising well-being outcomes for our residents, local communities, staff and visitors, now and in the future.

We recognise as public service providers that we have a key role to play in making a real difference to people's lives. Therefore, we will continue to strive to meet our priority 'Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities' as outlined in [Corporate Plan 2022-27](#)

Our plan sets the approach we will take over the next four years to strengthen and advance equality across Blaenau Gwent. We will continue to build on the steps we have made over the past four years and continue to embed equality throughout our organisation to bring about meaningful change.

We would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the engagement processes to develop the plan and we look forward in continuing this journey with you throughout the plan's delivery.

Introduction

Under the Equalities Act 2010, the Council has a statutory duty to prepare and publish a Strategic Equality Plan with equality objectives every four years. The plan must show due regard to how the Council can contribute to a fairer society by advancing equality and good relations in our day-to-day activities.

The Equality Act (Wales) 2010 legally protects people from discrimination, victimisation, and harassment if they share one or more of the following protected characteristics.

The Act protects people because of:

- **Age** - A person belonging to a particular age (e.g. 32 year olds) or range of ages (e.g. 18 - 30 year olds).
- **Disability** - For example, a physical, or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
- **Gender reassignment** - For example, transgender. People who were born into their body and feel it is not right for them. This might mean that they want to change from being a woman to a man, or a man to a woman.
- **Marriage and civil partnerships** - Marriage is a union between a man and a woman or between a same-sex couple. Same-sex couples can also have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must not be treated less favourably than married couples.
- **Pregnancy and maternity** – The condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth, and is linked to

maternity, or paternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks' after giving birth and includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.

- **Race** - This refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origins.
- **Religion or belief** (including non-belief) - Religion has the meaning usually given to it but belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (e.g. Atheism). Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.
- **Sex** - A man or a woman.
- **Sexual orientation** - Being heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28

This is the Council's fourth Strategic Equality Plan and will set out our commitments for meeting its statutory aims to:

- (1) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
- (2) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
- (3) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Strategic Equality Plan will also support the Council in meeting other statutory duties set out within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales for the people of today and future generations. The Act sets out seven National Well-being Goals, including '*A more equal Wales*', '*A Wales of cohesive communities*' and '*A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language*' which is something that the Strategic Equality Plan will help contribute towards.

Within the Act the sustainable development principles of the five ways of working will also be central to the delivery of the Strategic Equality Plan:

1. Prevention
2. Integration
3. Collaboration
4. Involvement
5. Long-term

Welsh Government Equality Commitment

Equality and Human Rights are central to the work of the Welsh Government and their vision to support a fair and equitable Wales.

Since our last Strategic Equality Plan was published in 2020, the Welsh Government have set out comprehensive and specific commitments in light of the inequalities that were highlighted and intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, national strategic plans and key action plans have been developed and published by the Welsh Government to tackle the existing inequalities experienced by individuals and communities.

These plans include:

- LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales (2023)
- [Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan](#) (2022)
- Age Friendly Wales Strategy (2021)
- [Children and Young People's Plan](#) (2022)
- [Violence Against Women and girls, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence \(VAWDASV\) strategy](#) (2022)
- [Socio Economic Duty](#) (2021)

It is our intention that specific actions where relevant from the national plans will relate directly to action plans for each of the strategic objectives within our new plan. This will demonstrate our accountability and commitment to helping to achieve the national commitments and goals set out by the Welsh Government.

How did we decide what our equality objectives should be?

To create a Strategic Equality Plan that is relevant to those living and working within Blaenau Gwent, public engagement was crucial. The initial step taken was reviewing our 2020-24 plan to influence the creation of a public survey, we wanted to know what you thought of our previous objectives and what we should be prioritising. The results were collated and used to shape our proposed objectives outlined in the [Consultation Document](#).

To successfully deliver a plan requires us to have an effective framework in place that has:

- Strong political and professional leadership.
- A structural approach for delivering equality across the organisation.
- Clear objectives and actions.
- A meaningful involvement and engagement programme; and
- Effective monitoring and performance arrangements.

Our new Strategic Equality Plan for 2024 to 2028 will focus on the outcomes that matter to the community and people who use Council services. We want it to be about services that are accessible, delivered effectively and on an equitable basis. The Plan takes into consideration the findings from our engagement and consultation activity undertaken, which has involved 160 people with lived experiences from across the identified protected characteristics. Some examples of those involved so far include:

- Parent Networks
- School Council's
- Representatives from Faith and Religious Groups
- LGBTQ+ Support Groups

- Older People
- Young Carers Support Groups
- Representatives from minority ethnic groups
- Individuals with a Disability

Furthermore, we have had forty-eight individuals participate via an online questionnaire, to encourage people to share their views and experiences, and talk to us broadly about equality, diversity, and inclusion.

We gathered and analysed the results of the consultation and used them to create our proposed objectives in the Consultation Document. We asked the public again if we had reflected their feedback in the proposed objectives through a second survey. We also engaged with various local networks and groups face to face, as mentioned above, for more in depth feedback please see the link: [SEP Engagement Feedback](#)

Besides the public consultation, we also consulted through our internal management structures on the suggested objectives and confirmed that they agreed with the knowledge and information shared by professionals in relation to equality.

We already know that many of the barriers facing people with protected characteristics are long-standing and entrenched and it takes long-term commitment to be fully addressed. Therefore, the equality objectives which we had in place during the previous plan 2020-2024 have been reconsidered and refined rather than replaced.

Our equality objectives are 'themed' as we acknowledge that many of the key equality issues that we have identified are not isolated to one specific 'protected characteristic' – we recognise intersectionality for people living in our area.

We feel our themed approach will help us to tackle relevant issues, and therefore we are sure that the steps we want to take to deliver the objectives will also deliver positive equality outcomes for people covered by one, or more of the protected characteristics. Our themes cover:

- Organisational Culture and Leadership.
- Workforce Inclusivity and Diversity.
- Fair and Inclusive Learning.
- Inclusive Engagement and Participation.
- Community Cohesion.
- Tackling Disadvantage caused by Poverty.

Monitoring and review

We will incorporate the objectives into our corporate reporting process, which are monitored quarterly, this will support us in making equality everyone's business.

As part of the plan development, we established a stakeholder reference group which will also be used to monitor progress and accountability. This group will be further developed by establishing an Oversight Group to monitor progress and accountability of the actions related to each Strategic Objective. The group will meet quarterly and will review and monitor the progress for each action.

We have a duty to produce an annual report to highlight progress towards our objectives, this will also be a key time to consider whether our actions may need to be changed to incorporate our next steps.

Over the four years of our plan, we will deliver a series of targeted high-level actions underpinned by our objectives which will align to the national equality plans already mentioned.

Our Strategic Equality Objectives are as follows:

Equality Objective 1: We will be a fair and equitable organisation.

Equality Objective 2: We will be a workplace that champions diversity and inclusion.

Equality Objective 3: We will create a fair and inclusive learning culture for all children and young people with a focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Equality Objective 4: We will promote and support inclusive, safe and cohesive communities.

Equality Objective 5: We will ensure effective engagement and participation for people with protected characteristics.

Equality Objective 6: We will strive to reduce inequality caused by poverty.

Blaenau Gwent Equality Objective 1

We will be a fair and equitable organisation.

Overview

We recognise that everyone is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. The ability to live and work without prejudice is a fundamental right, regardless of people's background, identity, and experiences.

Equality is not only a legal obligation, but also a moral and social responsibility. To be a fair and equitable organisation requires effective political and professional leadership that promotes a culture of respect, accountability, and collaboration across the organisation.

One of the ways we demonstrate our commitment to equality is by fulfilling our role as a corporate parent for children and young people who are looked after or have left care.

As an organisation we are committed to delivering the equality duties placed on us as a public body and understand the need to ensure that our policies, practices, and services are fair, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs and aspirations of our communities and workforce.

What people have told us:

People have told us that they recognise the importance of equality and diversity within the organisation, but also highlight some of the challenges and areas for improvement. They suggest that people want to see more action and commitment from the leadership and management, as well as more opportunities for collaboration and learning across different groups and teams.

Some of the key themes and messages that people have told us about Objective 1 include:

“We should be an organisation that rejects and challenges any discrimination and ensure equity and inclusion for all.”

“Consistency is required across the organisation with strong leadership, good management with partnership working and collaboration with external partners and Union support.”

Source: Blaenau Gwent Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Survey 2023

“We need to ensure that all people are aware of prejudice, I am happy to correct others but some of what is said may upset others who identify as being gay”.

Source: BGCBC staff Member, equality engagement 2023

What valuable work are we continuing from:

- Development of a new Integrated Impact Assessment and associated guidance document for staff.
- Delivery of targeted racial equality training to our Leadership Team and Elected Members.
- On-going support for national and regional equality campaigns.
- Taken a leadership approach to tackling issues affecting our communities with an organisational approach e.g. Cost of Living Crisis and Resettlement.
- Enhanced the equality data collected from our staff which provides a better understanding of the organisation’s workforce.

- Implemented the Blaenau Gwent Corporate Parenting Action Plan 2023/24.

Some of the main actions we will do to help us achieve Equality Objective 1:

- Demonstrate a strong commitment and desire to lead anti-discriminatory values and behaviours throughout the organisation.
- Commit to integrating key expectations from national strategies and plans into our approach for equality, diversity, and inclusion e.g. Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan and LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales.
- Strengthen our plans, policies, and procedures in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion considering the most up-to-date guidance e.g. in terms of declarations, definitions, and statements.
- Embed the re-designed Integrated Impact Assessment throughout the organisation decision-making processes.
- Champion equality issues by embedding the lived experiences of people with protected characteristics into our service design, delivery, and reviews.
- Strive to understand the barriers which prevent people from accessing and benefitting from our services and do all we can to mitigate them.
- Further develop and deliver a range of up-to-date and relevant equalities training, seminars, events, and learning resources for our political and professional leaders.
- Commit to the principles of the National Corporate Parenting Charter.

What difference do we want to make:

We want to make a difference by creating an organisation that respects and values the diversity of its staff and customers, and that promotes a culture of inclusion and belonging. We want to ensure that everyone has equal

opportunities to develop their skills and talents, and to contribute to our vision and mission. We want to remove any barriers that prevent people from accessing and benefitting from our services, and to address any issues of discrimination, harassment, or bullying. We want to be a role model for other organisations and sectors, and to influence positive change in our communities and beyond.

We want to demonstrate that by being a good corporate parent, we not only fulfil our statutory obligations, but also contribute to the wider equality agenda. We will strive to promote the rights and interests of a vulnerable and often marginalised group of people, and ensure they are treated with respect, dignity, and fairness.

Equality Objective 2

We will be a workplace that champions diversity and inclusion.

Overview

As the largest employer in the area, we recognise the importance for staff to feel valued and safe in the workplace. We understand the need to cultivate an inclusive and diverse workplace that enables individuals and teams to thrive and create optimum levels of job satisfaction.

We aim to foster a culture of inclusion that celebrates diversity and promotes belonging, collaboration, and innovation. We aspire to be an employer of choice that attracts and retains diverse talent from all backgrounds and identities.

It is essential that we provide staff at all levels with appropriate up-to-date guidance, training, and support on key issues such as Anti-Racism, LGBTQ+, Disability, Gender, and Age.

What people have told us:

Feedback from the survey showed us that the people are keen to see more diversity and representation in the organisation and that staff are eager to learn and change. Staff have stated that they are looking for more clarity on the organisational structure and how it supports diversity and inclusion.

Positive attitudes towards equality and diversity have been expressed and people are seeking more knowledge and awareness on the issues people with protected characteristics face.

Some of the key themes and messages that people have told us about Objective 2 include:

“There is enthusiasm to create change within the organisation”.

“We need better understanding as a workforce on how the organisation is built and how people with protected characteristics are represented”.

Source: Blaenau Gwent Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Survey 2023

“More training and awareness is needed, we don’t need to be scared to look within as this will bring about positive change”.

Source: Staff members as part of SEP engagement conversation 2023

What valuable work are we continuing from:

- Development and implementation of our Organisational Workforce Strategy.
- Annual consideration of the Gender Pay Gap.
- Development and review of key policies such as Agile Working Policy and Right to Request Flexible Working Policy.
- On-going training and development opportunities for staff on equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- Promotion of equality, diversity, and inclusion to our staff through national and international campaigns.
- Delivery of the ASPIRE shared apprenticeship programme and the ASPIRE mentor project for children looked after.

Some of the main actions we will do to help us achieve Equality Objective 2:

- Create an inclusive staffing culture where equality, diversity and inclusion are recognised, valued, and celebrated.
- Increase understanding on Positive Action as defined in the Equality Act 2010 and understand how to embed it in our staff's work.
- Meet our legal requirement to publish gender pay data and consider report on disability and ethnicity pay gaps.
- Ensure equality of opportunity when recruiting staff.
- Seek to identify levels of minority ethnic diversity using Organisational Development data and use this as a benchmark to explore any structures and cultural barriers.
- Monitor equality in our staff promotions, training, and discipline and grievance policies and procedures.
- Implement and review the equality, diversity and inclusion training opportunities using the new training portal 'Thinqi' with a specific focus on key issues such as Anti-Racism, LGBTQ+, Disability, Gender and Age.
- On-going provision of support services to our staff for issues associated to equality, diversity, and inclusion e.g. Counselling support, Menopause cafes and Health related issues.
- Ensure staff that work directly with people with protected characteristics are sufficiently trained and able to respond appropriately to equality issues.
- Aim to increase levels of self-identification from our staff on all protected characteristics and increase confidence in sharing data.
- Commit to collecting and using the 'lived experiences' of our workforce.

What difference do we want to make:

We want our staff to reflect the diversity of the communities we serve by providing equal opportunities for career development and progression for all staff, regardless of their protected characteristics or personal circumstances.

We want to encourage staff to share their experiences for us to inform our policies and practices and improve our workplace environment.

We want to promote awareness and understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation and challenge any forms of discrimination, harassment, or bullying.

Equality Objective 3

We will create a fair and inclusive learning culture for all children and young people with a focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Overview

Understanding your identity is an important part of a child's development. It takes place in the early years of their lives and follows them into adulthood.

Tackling inequalities in our education and learning settings is not a new concept and remains an on-going challenge in Blaenau Gwent. We know that fair and inclusive learning cultures promote equity, access, participation, and achievement for all learners, regardless of their identity, ability, or circumstance. Fair and inclusive learning cultures also foster a sense of belonging, collaboration, and mutual support among learners and educators.

Creating a positive and respectful learning environment for all learners requires commitment and collaboration from all stakeholders involved in the learning process, including educators, learners, administrators, policymakers, and community members.

What people have told us:

Children and young people have shown courage, openness, and honesty during our consultation work with them. They have expressed what they think needs to change and that often equality and diversity recognition is superficial rather than integrated as part of the learning culture. In particular, they mentioned tick box exercises rather than systemic change.

Children and young people with specific protected characteristics said that sometimes they feel unsafe and discriminated against compared to those who do not.

Some of the key themes and messages that people have told us about Objective 3 include:

"I get called you stinking Gypsie XXXX, but nothing is done, it's like it's not seen as a race issue".

"Where are you from, do you live in a caravan?".

Source: Session with Gypsie Traveller Community in school setting as part of
SEP engagement 2023

"I was continually bullied throughout school for being feminine".

Source: 121 session with service user as part of SEP engagement 2023

'We need to start with the children as they are our future as the African saying goes It takes a whole community to raise a child. It's not about punishment, it's about ensuring Children and Young People understand kindness, empathy'.

Source: Equality Session 2023 Members of the Blaenau Gwent Baha'i Faith

What valuable work are we continuing from:

- Targeted and specialist intervention for young carers through our Families First provision.
- The development of a LGBTQ+ Support Group within three of the four secondary schools in the borough.
- Supporting Gypsy and Traveller children and young people through a targeted service.

- Development of a regional approach to tackling racism in schools.
- Recruitment of a Minority Ethnic worker through the Families First programme.
- Children’s Grand Council – equality focused workshops to understand the equality issues that children and young people face.
- Collaborative and partnership working with schools to develop School Equality Plans.
- Youth forum priorities that reflect the voices of children and young people in relation to equality, including, Show Racism the Red Card, International Women’s Day etc.

Some of the main actions we will do to achieve Equality Objective 3:

- Improve equality data and performance monitoring arrangements with schools.
- Deliver the tackling racism in schools’ action plan developed as part of the regional approach.
- Support a range of appropriate interventions to be made available to schools to meet the wellbeing needs of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Strengthen reporting on equality, diversity, and inclusion issues within schools.
- Work with Education establishment to increase representation from minority ethnic groups on the Youth Forum.
- Working with schools to embed and deliver school equality plans.
- Consider equality focused peer support network for school’s staff.
- Support School Governors to appoint anti-racism leads.

- Seek to adopt and implement Welsh Government’s trans guidance when published.
- Create better feedback channels from the LGBTQ+ Support Groups in the secondary schools to ensure the voices of young people are heard.

What difference do we want to make:

We want to enhance the quality and relevance of learning by acknowledging and addressing the diverse needs, interests, and goals of learners. Our goal is to improve the outcomes and well-being of learners by providing them with opportunities to develop their potential, express their voice, and contribute to their communities. We will strive to advance the values and principles of social justice, human rights, and democracy by challenging discrimination, prejudice, and oppression, and by empowering learners to become active and responsible citizens.

Blaenau Gwent Equality Objective 4

'We will promote and support inclusive, safe and cohesive communities'.

Overview

To ensure cohesive communities within Blaenau Gwent, all individuals living and working in the area must feel included and safe, a notion that echoed within our continued commitment to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. Working in partnership we will aim to support the National Goals set out within the Act of creating *'a more Equal Wales'* and *'a Wales of Cohesive Communities'*. These goals will be incorporated within the programmes and initiatives that we deliver that increase awareness and understanding of matters surrounding equalities to celebrate and bring together communities.

What people have told us:

To deliver on the objective to promote and support inclusive, safe and cohesive communities, it is imperative that we consider the protected characteristics when delivering services that educate and support vulnerable individuals within the community. Ensuring that our Community Safety Team are well-informed on all plans, strategies, and initiatives such as the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan, LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales etc. is essential in addressing matters that hinder objective 4, like anti-social behaviour wherein inequality is a driving component in its cause.

We must be confident that adequate education on the importance of equality is provided as this is crucial to the prevention of attitudes that encourage prejudice within the community. Therefore, we must engage with the public to understand not only those subject to prejudice but also the perpetrators. This

engagement will support a positive embrace of equality as celebration of people of different race, gender, age etc forming cohesive communities.

Some of the key themes and messages that people have told us about Objective 4 include:

'How do we ensure that everyone knows about the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan?'

Source: Equality Session 2023 Members of the Blaenau Gwent Baha'i Faith

"We are all the same, it doesn't matter about the colour of your skin, faith, religion or sex"

Source: Children's Grand Council Session November 2023

"Why can't they leave me and my community alone, why do they have to be unkind, I am sick of seeing how my people are affected because of who they are, I am myself and I am being me!"

"I use the female toilets, I am sorry if that makes you feel uncomfortable."

Source: Individual session with service user as part of SEP engagement

"Why are we not believed, why are we treated differently to women and why is International Women's day so upbeat and International Men's Day about suicide!"

Source: Dads group as part of the SEP engagement

What valuable work we are continuing from:

- Delivering a host of National and International campaigns that raise the profile of matters relating to equality such as Holocaust Memorial Day, Show Racism the Red Card, White Ribbon Day, International Women's Day and Black History Month.
- Effectively support the implementation of the UK's resettlement scheme that Blaenau Gwent has supported since 2016.
- Provide support to community projects with initiatives that promote understanding and respect between different groups of people and create opportunities for people from all backgrounds to unite in obtaining Community Cohesion grants.

Some of the main actions we will do to achieve Equality Objective 4:

- Work with community groups, particularly those vulnerable in relation to their protected characteristics, to gain a rich and up-to-date understanding of attitudes in relation to equality.
- Work closely with our partners to monitor activity that threaten the safety of communities to understand how to put preventative measures in place.
- Develop innovative campaign that promote and inform the community while celebrating diversity and commemorate relevant historical events.
- Challenge negative stereotypes on an organisational-wide level.
- Review our monuments and street names to implement appropriate action upon those associated with slavery and colonialism.
- Identify champions for equality, diversity and inclusion across all departments to help ensure due consideration is given to the protected characteristics when delivering our services.

- Continue to work in partnership with a wide range of public, third sector and private sector organisations, to deliver a holistic package of support for those requiring resettlement.
- Learn from the experiences of people seeking sanctuary in Blaenau Gwent.
- Continue our support of the LGBTQ+ Community and give consideration to hosting Pride events.
- Raise awareness of what a hate crime is and ensure the public know how and where to report hate crime.

What difference we want to make:

We want to be able to take pride in our communities knowing that its members feel safe and included.

We aim to see an increased awareness among our communities surrounding the protected characteristics, in turn reducing incidents that jeopardize the feeling of safety for all individuals within our area. Furthermore, we aim to continuously improve our collaborative working between our equalities officer and champions and the community safety and cohesion teams to monitor public ongoings relating to matters of equality. We want it to be clear to the public that their safety and inclusion are priorities for the Council and ensure individuals are aware of the resources available to them to seek guidance surrounding the support and development of more cohesive communities.

Our vision is to be a community that sees the value in equality and exemplified by the consideration of those most vulnerable in the Council's decision making and service delivery.

Equality Objective 5

We will ensure effective engagement and participation for people with protected characteristics.

Overview

As a Council we are committed towards everyone playing their part in delivering our vision and ambitious programme for action and change. Instrumental to this will be how we engage specifically with people who are under-represented and have protected characteristics. We also understand how aspects of a person's identities combine to create different and multiple discrimination and privilege. Our Engagement and Participation Strategy is being developed in compliance with the The Equality Act (2010) and Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, with intersectionality being taken into consideration. We will utilize all available engagement tools from in person discussion to formal online survey.

What people have told us:

As a member of the Blaenau Gwent Community and Baha'i Faith group said "conversation is where change begins" and as such we must invest in effective engagement. Not only should Blaenau Gwent be engaging with the public on matters when planning how we deliver our services and set out our plans and policies; but providing the public with clear feedback on the outcomes and how we have considered their views within our work. It is vital that we continue to gather the public's opinions on our actions to measure their success and rectify any shortcomings.

Some of the key themes and messages that people have told us about Objective 5 include:

‘Invest in engagement, bring people together, in shared, safe space, encourage conversations, this could bring about real change’

Source: Equality Session 2023 Members of the Blaenau Gwent Baha’i Faith

“More Dad’s workers to support dad’s within Blaenau Gwent”

Source: Dad’s group as part of SEP engagement 2023

“Feedback to communities about outcomes so communities are clear on decisions being made”

Source: One Life Community Group as part of SEP engagement 2023

What valuable work we are continuing from:

- Development of an Engagement and Participation Strategy.
- Development of a Stakeholder Reference Group.
- Community Impact Assessment undertaken to understand the impact of the COVID pandemic on Children & Young People aged 16-24, those with a Learning Disability, Families with children under the age of 11, new vulnerables and armed forces.
- Community Engagement Officers continue to focus on listening to the voices of vulnerable children and families in the community to understand what matters to them and deliver community focussed services, including:

- Sow Pretty gardening project at Bryn Bach Park in collaboration with Aneurin Leisure Services
- Youth Clubs running weekly activities including Zumba, Yoga, Cookery, Art, Storytelling, and DJ'ing.
- Young Carers trips, events and festival
- 18-25 Disability Arts Club
- Spoken Word (maternal mental health) Project
- World Book Day Celebration – making resources available to all.

Some of the main actions we will do to achieve Equality Objective 5:

- Implementation of the Engagement and Participation Strategy.
- Carry out engagement and participation activities that capture the ‘lived experiences’ of people living within protected characteristics.
- Encourage improved representation and participation in council activities and decision-making from young people, disabled people, LGBTQ+ people and people from minority ethnic groups.
- Oversee engagement and participation activity to monitor how well and how often we engage with people with protected characteristics.
- Review Blaenau Gwent Citizen’s Panel and how we promote the panel to gain person centred insight into equality issues.
- Review and strengthen how children and young people feel heard and considered in the delivery and design of our services.
- Further encourage and support participation of Children Looked After and Children leaving care throughout Council services.

What difference do we want to make:

We want to see an increase in public engagement, particularly in terms of engaging the views of areas within the community that we are currently seeing low levels of participation. A protected characteristic that we acknowledge needs addressing is that of young people. The National Survey for Wales noted that Blaenau Gwent was ranked below the national average in 'percent of adults aged 16+ who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local areas'. Therefore, we want to work with our education providers, youth services, and youth forum to strengthen how we engage with children and young people.

Equality Objective 6

We will strive to reduce inequality caused by poverty.

Overview

We are committed to meeting our requirements under the Public Sector Equality Duty which now includes tackle inequality caused by poverty. We look to ensure those who experience poverty, or those who live in less favourable living standards, are considered during all decision-making processes relating to the services we deliver.

Inequality affects people with protected characteristics disproportionately. Poverty is one of the main causes and consequences of inequality, and it has specific and differential impacts on different groups. Tackling inequality for people with protected characteristics caused by poverty requires a holistic and targeted approach that addresses the root causes and the manifestations of poverty.

The cost-of-living crisis that has swept across the United Kingdom in 2022 has meant that people are struggling with escalating costs such as bills for energy and food. Inflation has continued to soar, and wages have not increased at the same or similar levels.

As an organisation, we have been determined to help those within our communities that require support, help, advice, or guidance, particularly for those that need it the most.

What people have told us:

The engagement captured the real-life challenges faced by many people with multiple protected characteristics. The difficulty to pay for basic needs like food, heating, and leisure activities is common. People have shared that they are using coping strategies such as limiting their gas, wearing more clothes, or using hot water bottles to stay warm.

The economic impact people experience now has made people feel stressed, frustrated, or hopeless about their financial situation and how it affects their quality of life.

Some of the key themes and messages that people have told us about Objective 6 include:

“Both me and my husband work and we still can’t afford to do anything, our food bill has gone up and leaves us with little monies for life”.

“Most months in the last week I run out of money, so I am unable to put anymore gas on the meter until I receive my money”.

“My child is older now so I can layer him in clothes, and I put a hot water bottle under his mattress, so he is always warm”.

“Receiving my benefits monthly has been a real struggle”.

“Zero-hour contracts effect your benefits so it’s so hard to budget”.

“I’d love to work but there are no childcare places for the hours I can work”.

Source: Parent groups as part of the SEP engagement 2023

Some examples of progress to date:

- Delivery of Welsh Government funded anti-poverty programmes through the Children and Communities Grant.
- Establishment of 'warm hubs' throughout Blaenau Gwent, which offer sanctuary during the daytime to those struggling with rising living costs.
- Working in partnership with community settings to enhance and support the foodbank provision across the area.
- Development of Cost-of-Living Group and Workstream
- Successful delivery of the Blaenau Gwent 'Christmas Toy Appeal' for identified vulnerable children and young people.
- Promoted Cost-of-Living support schemes e.g. Council Tax discounts and reductions, winter fuel payments, and school uniform grants.
- Revised the Integrated Impact Assessment to ensure socio-economic groups with protected characteristics are fully considered.

Some of the main actions we will do to achieve Equality Objective 6:

- Evidence how we are meeting the statutory duties placed by the Socio-economic duty.
- Consider the socio-economic aspect of the Integrated Impact Assessment
- Further promote and enhance cost of living support to our communities and Blaenau Gwent workforce.
- Seek to use the issues identified through the Community Hubs and Citizens Advice services to influence the Cost-of-Living workstream.
- Ensure socio-economic disadvantage is considered in engagement and participation.

- Undertake work, research, and analysis to understand the socio-economic situation of our LGBTQ+ and minority ethnic groups within Blaenau Gwent.
- Continue to prioritise support to Care leavers whose lives have been adversely affected because of the cost-of-living crisis.
- Consider the Children in Wales's Child Poverty Report's findings.

What difference do we want to make:

We aim to address the inequality faced by people who live in poverty and have protected characteristics, so that everyone can access opportunities and resources equally, no matter who they are, where they come from, or what they face. We aim to enable people with protected characteristics to engage fully and effectively in society, and to have a say and impact in the choices that affect them and finally, we hope to narrow the gaps and differences in outcomes and well-being among different groups and ensure that no one is excluded or treated unfairly because of their economic circumstances.

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Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol

Blaenau Gwent

County Borough Council

DRAFT

**Blaenau Gwent
Strategic Equality
Plan**

Action Plan 2024/28

DRAFT

**Blaenau Gwent Strategic
Equality Plan
Action Plan 2024/28**

2024/25 version

Introduction

The Strategic Objectives will form part of our corporate reporting process, which are monitored quarterly, and will support us in making equality everyone's business.

As part of the plan development, we established a Stakeholder Reference Group. This group will be further developed by establishing an Oversight Group to monitor progress and accountability of the actions related to each Strategic Objective. The group will meet quarterly and will review and monitor the progress for each action.

We have a duty to produce an Annual Report for the Strategic Equality Plan, to demonstrate our progress towards our equality objectives, and as part of this we will revise the Action Plan based on the Annual Report to ensure actions remain appropriate.

The actions within the Action Plan have been split into three different priority levels:

Priority 1 – Actions will begin within year 1 of the plan (2024/25).

Priority 2 – Actions will begin within the first two years of the plan (2024/25 and 2025/26).

Priority 3 – Actions to be delivered over the course of the plan 2024/28.

Objective 1: We will be a fair and equitable organisation

**Intersectionality – cross cutting protected characteristics*

Ref No.	Action	Key Involvement	Prioritisation/ Timescales	Intersectionality*/Specific Protected Characteristic
1.1	On-going equality training for professional and political leadership.	Policy and Partnerships, CLT, Wider CLT, Cabinet, Elected members	Priority 1	Intersectionality; Race focus 24/25
1.2	Develop an Equality Policy for the organisation	Policy and Partnerships	Priority 1	Intersectionality
1.3	Respond to national guidance, research and reports relating equality issues, including advice and guidance	Policy and Partnerships & CLT	Priority 1	Race; Intersectionality;
1.4	Hold Elected Member Briefing Session on relevant equality topics	Policy and Partnerships & Democratic Services	Priority 1	Intersectionality; Race focus 24/25
1.5	Implement an overarching monitoring approach to track progress against Strategic Equality Plan	Member Champion, Policy and Partnerships All Directorates (representation)	Priority 1	Intersectionality
1.6	Strengthening the work programme for the Elected Member Equality Champion	Policy and Partnerships, Democratic Services & Member Champion	Priority 2	Intersectionality;
1.7	Promote the progress identified from the Annual Reporting	Policy and Partnerships & Communications Team	Priority 2	Intersectionality
1.8	Embed, monitor and evaluate the organisational use of the Integrated Impact Assessment	All Directorates & Policy and Partnerships	Priority 2	Intersectionality
1.9	Ensure robust complaints policies and processes for racial harassment.	Policy and Partnerships, Cohesion Team, Legal Services, Social Services Directorate	Priority 1	Race and Religion
1.10	Develop channels to create and showcase the lived experiences of people with protected characteristics	Policy and Partnerships & Communications Team	Priority 2	Intersectionality; Race & LGBTQ+

Equality Objective 2: *We will be a workplace that champions diversity and inclusion*

**Intersectionality – cross cutting protected characteristics*

Ref No.	Action	Key Involvement	Prioritisation/ Timescales	Intersectionality*/ Specific Protected Characteristic
2.1	Use Organisational Development data to monitor the diversity among staff.	All Directorates, Organisational Development & Policy & Partnerships	Priority 2	Intersectionality
2.2	Develop an overarching communication plan that raise awareness of the Equality Objectives and understanding on Positive Action as defined by the Equality Act 2010.	Policy and Partnerships & Communications Team	Priority 1	Intersectionality
2.3	Undertake research to consider options to meet legal requirements to publish gender pay data, and to report on disability and ethnicity pay gaps.	Organisational Development & Policy & Partnerships	Priority 3	Sex, Disability and Race.
2.4	Continue to review organisational policies and procedures to ensure equal opportunity is effectively included.	Organisational Development	Priority 3	Intersectionality
2.5	Develop, implement and monitor an organisational training provision for equality, diversity and inclusion	Organisational Development, Business Support & Policy and Partnerships	Priority 1	Intersectionality, Race, LGBTQ+, Disability, Gender and Age
2.6	Regularly promote increasing self-identification from our staff on all protected characteristics	Organisational Development & Policy & Partnerships	Priority 2	Sex, Sexual Orientation, Race, Disability

Equality Objective 3: *We will create a fair and inclusive learning culture for all children and young people with a focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion.*

**Intersectionality – cross cutting protected characteristics*

Ref No.	Action	Key Involvement	Prioritisation/ Timescales	Intersectionality */Specific Protected Characteristic
3.1	Review monitoring arrangement of equality data and performance within schools.	Schools, Education Directorate, Performance, Policy & Partnerships	Priority 2	Intersectionality
3.2	Effectively deliver the tackling racism in schools developed as part of the regional approach.	Schools, Education Directorate, Policy & Partnerships	Priority 1	Race
3.3	Assess interventions made available to schools to meet the wellbeing needs of learners that taking into consideration the protected characteristics.	Schools, Education Directorate	Priority 2	Intersectionality
3.4	Increase representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities on the Youth Forum.	Schools, Education Directorate, Policy & Partnerships	Priority 2	Race
3.5	Support schools to successfully embed and deliver equality plans.	Schools, Education Directorate, Policy & Partnerships	Priority 2	Intersectionality
3.6	School Governors to appoint anti-racism leads.	Schools, Education Directorate, Policy & Partnerships	Priority 3	Race
3.7	Adopt and implement Welsh Government national trans guidance.	Education Directorate, Policy & Partnerships	Priority 2	Gender Reassignment
3.8	Support LGBTQ+ Support Groups in the secondary schools to ensure the voices of young people are heard	Schools, Education Directorate, Policy & Partnerships	Priority 1	Sexual Orientation

Equality Objective 4: *We will promote and support inclusive, safe and cohesive communities*

**Intersectionality – cross cutting protected characteristics*

Ref No.	Action	Key Involvement	Prioritisation/ Timescales	Intersectionality */Specific Protected Characteristic
4.1	Development of engagement calendar to continue to get feedback from the community, particularly those with protected characteristics	Policy and Partnerships, Communications Team & All Directorates	Priority 1	Intersectionality
4.2	Monitor activity that threatens the safety of communities to support preventative measures.	Community Safety, Cohesion Team	Priority 1	Intersectionality
4.3	Implement appropriate action upon monuments and street names associated with slavery and colonialism.	Policy and Partnerships, Environment Directorate	Priority 2	Race
4.4	Identify champions for equality, diversity and inclusion across service areas.	All Directorates	Priority 3	Intersectionality
4.5	Work in partnership with a wide range of public, third sector and private sector organisations, to deliver a holistic package of support for those requiring resettlement.	Community Safety, Cohesion Team, Policy and Partnerships + All relevant Directorates	Priority 3	Intersectionality
4.6	Develop learning case studies from cohesion experiences of people seeking sanctuary in Blaenau Gwent	Policy and Partnerships, Cohesion Team, Communication Team	Priority 1	Intersectionality

Equality Objective 5: We will ensure effective engagement and participation for people with protected characteristics.

**Intersectionality – cross cutting protected characteristics*

Ref No.	Action	Key Involvement	Prioritisation/ Timescales	Intersectionality */Specific Protected Characteristic
5.1	Implementing the Equality actions associated to the Engagement and Participation Strategy	Policy and Partnerships	Priority 2	Intersectionality
5.2	Carry out engagement and participation activities that capture the 'lived experiences' of people living and impacted by protected characteristics.	Policy and Partnerships + All Directorates	Priority 1	Intersectionality
5.3	Improve representation and participation in council activities and decision-making from young people, disabled people, LGBTQ+ people and people from minority ethnic groups.	Policy and Partnerships & Democratic Services	Priority 3	Age, Disability, LGBTQ+, Race
5.4	Continue to promote the Youth Forum to encourage wider children and young people's participation.	Policy and Partnerships & Education Directorate	Priority 2	Age
5.5	Consider how we support LGBTQ+ events and continue to be a key partner of Proud Councils.	Policy and Partnerships, Cohesion Team, Communication Team	Priority 2	Sexual Orientation
5.6	Further encourage and support participation of Children Looked After and Children leaving care throughout Council services	Social Services & Policy and Partnerships	Priority 2	intersectionality

Equality Objective 6: *We will strive to reduce inequality caused by poverty.*

**Intersectionality – cross cutting protected characteristics*

Ref No.	Action	Key Involvement	Prioritisation/ Timescales	Intersectionality */Specific Protected Characteristic
6.1	Delivery of the Cost of Living Group, considering inequality from poverty	All Directorates	Priority 1	Intersectionality, Socio-Economics
6.2	Delivery of Welsh Government funded anti-poverty programmes through the Children and Communities Grant	Cost of Living Group	Priority 2	Intersectionality, Socio-Economics
6.3	Working in partnership with community settings to enhance and support the foodbank provision.	Cost of Living Group, Policy & Partnerships, Local Well-being Partnership	Priority 2	Intersectionality, Socio-Economics
6.4	Analysis the socio-economic aspect of the Integrated Impact Assessment	Policy & Partnerships	Priority 2	Intersectionality, Socio-Economics
6.5	Seek to use the information identified through the Community Hubs and Citizens Advice services to influence the Cost-of-Living workstream.	Cost of Living Group, Policy & Partnerships, Customer Experience Team	Priority 2	Intersectionality, Socio-Economics
6.6	Undertake research and analysis to understand Blaenau Gwent's socio-economics focusing on inequality from protected characteristics.	Policy & Partnerships	Priority 3	Intersectionality, Socio-Economics
6.7	Continue to prioritise support to Care leavers whose lives have been adversely affected because of the cost-of-living crisis	Social Services Directorate, Cost of Living Group	Priority 1	Intersectionality, Socio-Economics
6.8	Consider the Children in Wales's Child Poverty Report's findings.	Cost of Living Group	Priority 2	Age, Socio-Economics

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Blaenau Gwent Strategic Equality Plan

Annual Report 2023 – 2024



Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Annual Strategic Equality Monitoring Report

April 2023 – March 2024

“Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open, and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities”

If you do require this document in a different format, e.g., large print, Braille, audio version, etc. please contact:

Email: pps@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

*Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg
This document is available in Welsh*

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Foreword

I am pleased to present the final annual report on our progress towards the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24 of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. This report showcases some of the achievements and challenges we have faced in the past year.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion are at the heart of our vision and values as a council. We want to ensure that everyone who lives, works, or visits Blaenau Gwent can fulfil their potential and enjoy a good quality of life. We are and remain fully committed to being a 'place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities' as outlined in our Corporate Plan 2022-27.

We recognise that there is still more work to do to address the persistent and emerging inequalities that affect our residents and staff. We are committed to learning from our experiences and evidence, engaging with our stakeholders and partners, and taking positive action to make a difference. Our work also contributes towards the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the seven National Well-being Goals, which are fundamental in realising change within our communities.

This report provides an overview of how we have delivered on our six strategic equality objectives in 2023-24, covering areas such as leadership and governance, workforce representation and development, community engagement and involvement, community cohesion and inequality caused by deprivation. It also highlights some of the good practice examples and case studies that demonstrate our progress and impact.

Within this report we have also considered national strategic plans and key action plans, that the Welsh Government have developed to address

the current inequalities faced by individuals and communities.

These plans include:

- LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales (2023)
- Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (2022)
- Age Friendly Wales Strategy (2021)
- Children and Young People's Plan (2022)
- Violence Against Women and girls, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) strategy (2022)
- Socio Economic Duty (2021)

We would like to thank all our staff, councillors, partners, service users and communities who have contributed to our equality work in the past year. We value your feedback and suggestions on how we can improve our performance and outcomes. We look forward to working with you in the next year and beyond to achieve our vision of a fair, open and welcoming Blaenau Gwent for all.



Councillor Stephen Thomas

Leader, Portfolio for Equality & Diversity



Damien McCann

Interim Chief Executive

Introduction

Our annual report highlights how we are meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty (the “general duty”) or (PSED) by ensuring we are supporting a fairer society through advancing equality and fostering good relationships.

We do this this by delivering policies and services on a day-to-day basis that support and value diversity, in order to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Annual Report is presented into six sections. Each section corresponds each of the current equality objectives and provides the following:

- Overview of the Objective
- Examples of how we advanced the objective in 2023-24
- Identified next steps to inform the Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28

The annual report ends with the presentation of the Council’s Workforce data for 2022-23.

Progress against Equality Objectives

Equality Objective One *“We will be an organisation who ensures fairness and equalities in everything that we do”.*

Overview

We want to be an organisation that embeds fairness and equality throughout everything that we do. The Council is committed to being a ‘place that is fair, open, and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities’.

Recognising and valuing this work has helped us to see meaningful changes for our local community, citizens, stakeholders and key partners. We are fully committed to and want to continue to develop a supportive workforce and accessible services for all.

It is important that we continue to build and create a strong framework which is underpinned by a whole organisational approach with effective and strong political leadership in order to advance equality across Blaenau Gwent.

Over the last year the Corporate Leadership Team have regularly reviewed our Public Sector Equality Duties, as well as leading and helping to ensure equality outcomes across the organisation were met. We have kept on developing the “One Council Approach” in pursuing our equality objectives and have enhanced our equality programme through the School Management Team.

Championing equality throughout the organisation remains a key priority both politically and professionally. Throughout 2022-23 year we have continued to recognise and mark international campaigns, including,

International Women's Day, Holocaust Memorial Day and LGBTQ+ History Month.



Key Examples of Actions from 2022-23 Corporate Plan for 2022-27 – Our Corporate Plan was agreed by Council in October 2022 and reflects our vision and core values of being respectful, inclusive, collaborative, accountable and supportive. Furthermore, we have set four priorities that we feel will allow us to achieve the

best outcomes for our communities which are:

- Maximise learning and 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 continues to work in partnership across Gwent through our Public Services Board and has made progress towards becoming a region with the goal of addressing and lowering inequalities, by using the Marmot principles:

- Give every child the best start in life
- Enable all children, young people, and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
- Create fair employment and good work for all
- Ensure a healthy standard of living for all

- Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
- Strengthen the role and impact of ill-health prevention
- Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together
- Tackle racism, discrimination, and their outcomes

Our Strategic Equality Plan is recognised as a key policy driver in achieving our ambitions set out within our Corporate Plan 2022-2027.

Partnership Work and Collaboration – As a council, we continue to support national equality campaigns to raise awareness and encourage solidarity, acceptance and understanding. We are fully committed to Welsh Government’s vision of an [Anti-Racist Wales](#) by 2030 and the [LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales](#). Our Elected Member Equality Champion represents the Council on the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Members Equality Network, and Blaenau Gwent Council is represented at the Regional Equality Network as well as other National/Regional Networks to share best practice, learning opportunities and to work collaboratively.

Being a part of the Proud Councils Network gives us the opportunity to collaborate with other councils to participate in Pride events and celebrate LGBTQ+ history month together. We think that by joining forces, we can show solidarity and make more positive changes and effects for our LGBTQ+ communities.

As we reported previously, we have developed a new Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process to incorporate the Socio-Economic Duty and to facilitate and inform decision making processes. We followed the recommendations of the Audit Wales Report *Equality Impact Assessments: more than a tick box exercise?* As part of the

implementation, we consulted with departmental management teams which provided to opportunity for us to explain the approach and raise awareness. The newly developed IIA enables managers/teams to conduct effective assessments on any service or policy changes and provides a clear insight into the impact of the proposals. The assessment can be accessed on the intranet, along with associated guidance documents that support the process.

Key Strategy Development - Our Annual Workforce Equality data for 2022-23 is available via 'Open Source' on Blaenau Gwent Council's website under the "[Equality in Blaenau Gwent](#)" page. The data helps us to understand the diversity of our organisation, which has informed the development of the workforce strategy.

Training for Elected Member, Corporate Leadership Team and Senior Staff – During the last year, various training opportunities have been offered to Senior Officers and Elected Members in the Council. 'No Boundaries' delivered three sessions on "*Making the Uncomfortable Comfortable*", with the support of Unison and the WLGA. The training covered cultural diversity, language and unconscious bias, and personal 'lived experiences' from the trainers.

Working with the WLGA – We have promoted e-modules developed by the WLGA for Elected Members who are actively encouraged to complete.

The WLGA have trained Organisational Development and Policy Officers on Positive Recruitment, which is about how organisations can modify their process/principles to improve the recruitment experience.

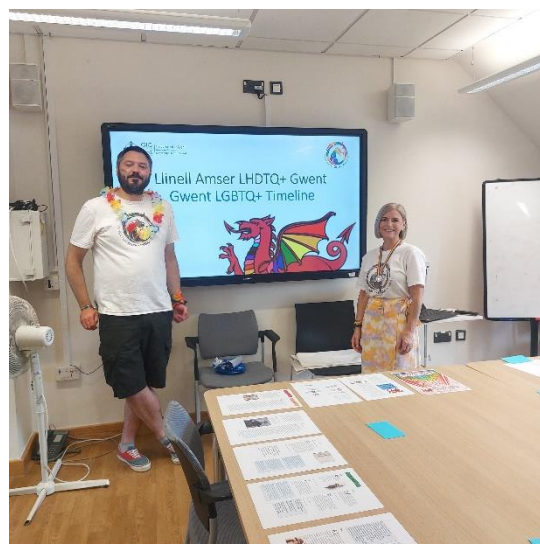
Championing Key Equality Campaigns – As in previous years, the organisation continues to champion national and international equality

campaigns which have been supported both politically and professionally. As an example, in 2023/24 we supported and delivered organisational campaigns and events including Pride, LGBTQ+ History Month, Holocaust Memorial Day and International Women’s Day.

LGBTQ+ - As part of Proud Councils we attended Cardiff Pride, Caerphilly Pride and launched the Gwent LGBTQ+ timeline.



Proud Councils and Councillor Diane Rowberry (Blaenau Gwent) march Cardiff PRIDE



Caerphilly Pride and launch of the Gwent LGBTQ+ timeline [GWENT LGBTQ+ timeline](#)



HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
DAY 27/1

The theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2024 was “Fragility of Freedom”. Deputy Leader, Councillor Helen Cunningham took part in the national ‘Light in the Darkness’ campaign by lighting a candle and as act of solidarity. The General Offices, Ebbw Vale was illuminated in purple on the 27th January 2024. The full press release can be found here [HMD 2024](#)



Deputy Leader Councillor Helen Cunningham HMD 2024

In our last report we highlighted that it had been agreed to award [Eva Clarke](#) the **Freedom of the Borough**, the highest accolade the Council can bestow.

Eva Clarke was born in a concentration camp and was one of only three babies that survived. Eva has worked tirelessly over the years to ensure the stories of those survivors are shared, ensuring their memories live on and what they endured is never forgotten. Eva has strong links with South Wales, and Blaenau Gwent in particular. The award ceremony took place at the General Offices, Ebbw Vale 5th April 2024. The event was emotive

and provided real context and understanding of what took place during this time.



Eva Clarke-Freedom of the Borough Event April 2023

Equality Objective Two - *“We will be an equal opportunity employer with a workforce that values equalities and diversity”.*

Overview

Blaenau Gwent Council values and supports our staff as an equal opportunity employer and an employer of choice, to attract a workforce that is diverse. We recognise that our communities are evolving and we know that having a diverse workforce gives us various viewpoints and expertise, helping us both within the organisation and in the communities we work with.

Our workforce strategy is in place until 2026 and sets out priorities in order to create an effective, dynamic workforce which are as follows; -

- Health, culture, and effective leadership
- Excellence in management across the council
- Highly motivate engaged workforce
- Evidence based decision making, planning and delivery; and
- Modern employer of choice

We keep working on new policy development to help us grow as an employer. We also monitor our workforce data, which helps us improve our diversity as an organisation.

Key Examples of Actions from 2023/24



Key Workforce Data – We previously reported that we had worked on improving the quality of our workforce's data by collecting more equality information. The information is available on our I-Trent system and staff have been asked to update their personal information. We will keep encouraging this as it will aid better reporting in the future and give us a better insight into our workforce.

Gender Pay Gap – As an employer we are required by law to carry out Gender Pay Reporting under the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017. The UK gender pay gap is just over 15% (2021). We are confident as a Council that men and women are paid equally for doing equivalent jobs across the organisation. The gender pay gap shows that the workforce is predominantly female with women occupying a high percentage of jobs across all four pay quartiles. The pay gap in Blaenau Gwent continues to be significantly lower than the national average.

Pay policy statement 2023-2024- [Pay Policy Statement | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/pay-policy-statement)

Hourly Rate – Gender Pay Gap

Women's Hourly Rate is:	-0.69% Lower (mean)	-4.93% Lower (median)
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Pay Quartiles – Gender Pay Gap

How many men and women are in each of the quartiles:

	Men	Women
Upper Quartile:	29%	71%
Upper Middle Quartile:	32%	68%
Lower Middle Quartile:	36%	64%
Lower Quartile:	30%	70%

As you can see from the above there is significantly more women than men in all of the quartiles within the organisation.

Agile Working – An agile working policy was implemented across the organisation in 2021, this policy was implemented for staff to work at home, in the community or at an office base. Staff are continually asked about the policy to ensure its effectiveness and monitor the wellbeing of the workforce. Staff are also encouraged to liaise with their manager about any necessary adjustments they may need to carry out their duties.

Our Organisational Development Policies – The following policies have been reviewed and updated since April 2023:

Dignity at Work Policy	Oct-23
Grievance Policy for school based staff	Oct-23
In the Interests of Efficiency of the Service Policy	May-23
Induction - A Manager's Guide	Jun-23
IVF Policy	Jul-23
Pay Policy	Apr-23
Pay Policy for Schools	Apr-23
Redundancy Policy	Jul-23

Education policies reviewed and updated

Additional Learning Needs Policy	Sept-23
Exclusion guidance	Sept-23
Educated other than school	Sept-23
Elective home educated	Sept-23

Education new policy development

Additional Learning Needs-Early Years Guidance	Sept-23
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The Recruitment Policy has recently been approved and will be communicated to manager's March 2024. The IVF Policy and Neurodiversity Guidance have both been approved and are available to access on the intranet. We believe regularly monitoring, reviewing, and implementing policies allows us to maintain organisational effectiveness and strengthens equality of opportunity.

Training for council staff and school-based staff – Corporate Leadership Team and senior managers have received “Making the Uncomfortable Comfortable” through [No Boundaries](#).

The WLGA facilitated a session looking at an Introduction to Anti-Racism for equality officers across Wales. School staff and Policy Officer (Equality & Engagement) attended training around managing difficult conversations with Children & Young People facilitated by [Brook](#)

Over 50 staff members from across the organisation attended Cultural Awareness and Diversity training (55), the training talked about different cultures/beliefs/understandings with a particular focus on Nigerian

Culture. Staff reported that they found the training useful and insightful. Similarly, over 50 staff members from across the organisation completed an online e-module around Unconscious Bias (59).

Gwent Community Cohesion Team's Schools Programme



The West Gwent Cohesion Team have developed three training packages for schools, the workshops can be delivered to a maximum of 30 pupils at any one time. The workshops aim to raise awareness around similarities & differences, train & capacity build, mitigate tensions, be inclusive, prevent hate, exploitation & extremism.

To support the Council's [Guide to Neurodiversity in the Workplace](#), an “**Introduction to Neurodiversity**” training package has been made available to managers in February and March 2024. The course has been delivered through AP Cymru and has been designed for organisations and individuals who want to become more neuro-inclusive and support neurodivergent people.

We also work in partnership with Caerphilly County Borough Council, to offer tailored training for Health and Social Care workers. The training ensures that equality is a core theme in the training programme that staff have access to. In 2023-24, 628 Council and school staff took part in 89 training opportunities online and in person.

Further support around Training and Development – Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) have provided training to officers around the “Is Wales Fairer Report”, these sessions highlighted findings

and provided key information for the development of the new Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028.

A new training portal called “Thinqi” will host an Equality e-module that the West Community Cohesion Team have created. It will launch in April 2024 and be part of an induction programme for new employees. Current employees will also be required to complete the training to increase the organisation's awareness and participation in equality issues.



Communicating on Equality and Diversity – Through 2023-2024 we have continued to deliver our staff Wellbeing Wednesday Newsletter, which offers key information about support, training opportunities as well as promoting equality days, Welsh, mental health support etc.

Communicating with Schools on Equality and Diversity – Regular educational bulletins are prepared to provide schools with key equality and diversity information, resources, and training. Examples include LGBTQ+ History Month, Black History Month, Hate Crime Awareness Week, Holocaust Memorial Day etc. As an organisation we work effectively with our Gwent Cohesion Team to coordinate this work.

International Women’s Day – In March 2024, staff across the council were encouraged to participate in International Women’s Day. This day looks to celebrate women’s achievements, celebrate gender equality and support action for gender parity. The theme for 2024 [Inspire Inclusion](#)

As part of the International Women's Day celebration, we ran a social media campaign where staff were encouraged to send in their picture using the 2024 International Women's Day pose.

<https://www.internationalwomensday.com/>

We also provided schools with resources through the education bulletin to raise awareness and encourage participation.

Social Care Recruitment Drive – The recruitment drive for Social Care keeps promoting the benefits of working in the care sector by urging staff to apply for roles that help people with protected characteristics in our community.

Equality Objective Three - *“We will support children and young people, particularly those with protected characteristics, to achieve their learning ambitions”.*

Overview

Within our Corporate Plan 2022-27 we have identified education as a key priority *“Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent”.* We understand that improving outcomes, wellbeing and progress for children and young people is essential for their future development.

We want to make sure that children and young people have the same chances to learn and improve their skills and abilities, with a goal to work with children and young people who belong to one or more of the groups that are protected by law.

Key Examples of Actions from 2023-24

School Support & Guidance – We offer equality advice and guidance to schools, and we keep and develop good relationships with them. This is very important, so that schools can see and understand how their work helps achieve the overall vision of the Strategic Equality Plan. This is something we think is essential for advancing our work around equality.

We have continued to build relationships with schools in relation to equality. We have promoted a two paged equality template and provide schools with resources. Going forward, we will seek to enhance the existing template to align with the new Strategic Equality Plan 24/28.

We are still working on a framework for reporting incidents through the “My Concerns” system. The system, when fully implemented, aims to

provide information on school-based issues and will enable tailored training and interventions to be offered, if needed, to support outcomes for schools, staff, and pupils.

The Traveller Education Service - A Education Club has recently been established in Brynmawr Foundation school to promote equal access for our Gypsy Roma Traveller learners who are elective home educated. The Education Club focuses on literacy and numeracy as well as promoting secondary education. The outcome is to try and engage Gypsy Roma Traveller pupils to transition to secondary school and improve literacy and numerously levels.

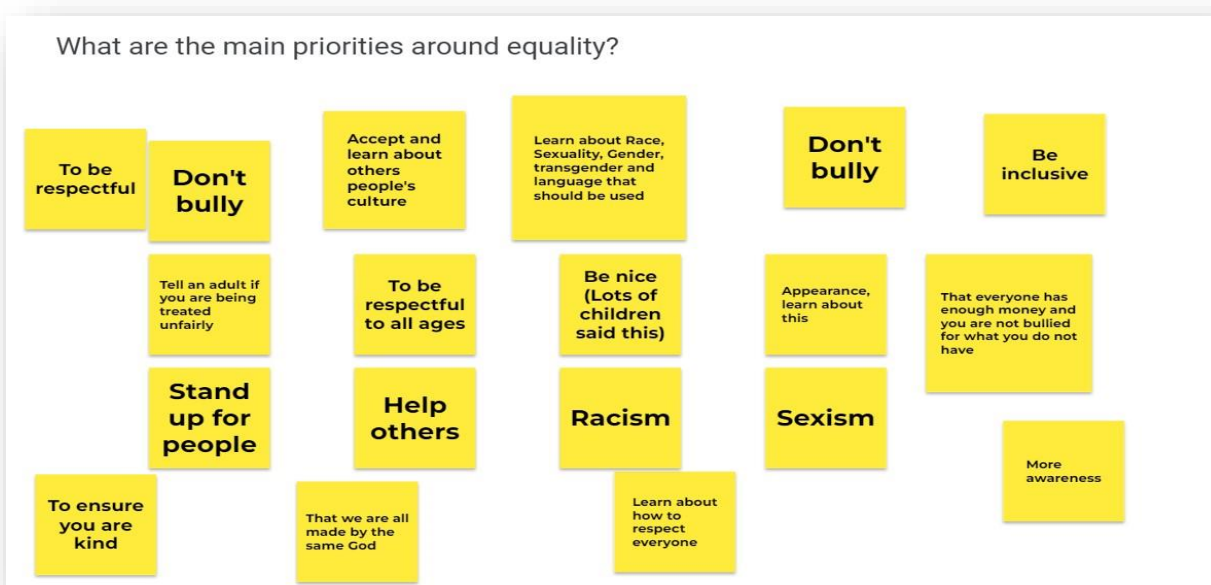
We have also been working on the new Welsh Government guidance- [Education guidance to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people | GOV.WALES](#) in order to support education practitioners in their efforts to provide inclusive and supportive education for Gypsy Roma Traveller pupils.

School Grand Council - There have been three Children's Grand Council sessions in the past year. Two pupils from year six of every primary school in the borough are invited to attend these sessions.

The sessions have focussed on:

- Children's Rights
- Why we have a Children's Grand Council
- How children and young people can get involved
- Healthy food relationships
- Gwent Well-being Plan consultation
- Equality
- Community Safety
- Period dignity

Examples of what the Children feedback from the sessions are included in the 'Think about one thing you have learned today' images below:



LGBTQ+ Support Groups - Groups across Blaenau Gwent offer support to Young People who identify as LGBTQ+. These are spaces where they feel accepted and have an opportunity to share and express their emotions, as well as a chance to celebrate and promote diversity.

Young Carers - Families First in Blaenau Gwent has been the pioneer for Young Carers since February 2020. The programme aims to support by providing respite, direct support, training opportunities, Young Carers assessments and the Young Carer ID card scheme. The programme actively promotes the rights of Young Carers and raises awareness so that professionals can recognise a Young Carer and refer them to the service for support. Families First supports Young Carers aged 5-25 who live in Blaenau Gwent ensuring their voices are listened to so that they have the same rights regarding their choices and control, quality of life and aspirations as individuals.

The Young Carers Project passed the first stage of the Social Care Wales accolades in recognition of the good work that has been done in Blaenau Gwent. The team have set up a steering group which consists of internal and external partners to share information and work together to make the best use of the resources for children and young people living in Blaenau Gwent.

South Wales Fire Service have offered free home safety visits to all Young Carers. Going forward training will be offered to Young Carers to carry out home safety checks as well as an accredited training programme for all Young Carers in partnership with the Phoenix Project in Blaenau Gwent. The Young Carers project is also working in collaboration with the Unpaid Carers Respite which enables young carers and families to receive a £30 food voucher before the Christmas period.

Inclusive Youth Club – The Youth Club meet on a weekly basis with 15-20 regular participants. The club provides support children and young people with disabilities and additional needs. It aims to provide peer

support to the individual and their families. Many parents and carers have said that the group has helped them make more connections and feel more confident in taking care of their child's complex needs.

Art Club for young adults with a disability who are 16-25 years old - offers weekly sessions that give parents two hours of relief and help those who join to develop useful life skills. A professional artist is working with the group, and they have been able to sell their creations in a local Christmas Market which helps to support the group financially and gives those who participate a feeling of accomplishment for what they have created.

Parenting programme - Early Bird (0-5), Early Bird Plus (6- 10) and Teen life (10-18) is available to any parent caring for a child with diagnoses of Autism. The programme has been successful receiving referrals from Children's Services teams. Families First are also relaunching the parent support group 'Small Steps'. 'Small Steps' group will aim to support parents whose children are in the process of assessment for a Neuro Diverse diagnosis or have a diagnosed disability.

LEGOLAND adventure - The Families First programme helped 35 families with a disability enjoy a night at LEGOLAND theme park. The families who participated in the trip gave positive feedback and reinforced that these trips are often too expensive for them to access, so they rarely get opportunities to have these kinds of experiences.

Children and Young People Staff and Partnership Network – The network keeps communicating and collaborating with each other to ensure a coordinated way of offering support, services for children and young people, preventing overlap as well as creating more opportunities.

Regional approach to tackling racism in schools - We fully support the Welsh Government's Action plan to make Wales an Anti-Racist country by 2030. To help with this, Education leads from the across the Southeast Wales Consortium have developed a draft Education Action Plan to tackle racism in schools.

Equality Objective Four- *“We will promote and support safe, friendly and cohesive communities”*

Overview

Our aim is to learn about the local problems and disputes that impact people. By learning about the problems, we can help to increase awareness and improve community ties and appreciation for diversity. This aligns with our continuous commitment to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, National Goals of ‘A more Equal Wales and a ‘Wales of Cohesive Communities’.

Key Examples of Actions from 2023/24

National & International Campaigns – As an organisation we continue to work together with partners to deliver key cohesion and national campaigns through social media as well as in person events.

Examples include:

- Holocaust Memorial Day
- Show Racism the Red Card
- LGBTQ+ History Month
- Pride month
- White Ribbon Day (campaign to end domestic violence)
- Black History Month
- International Children’s Day

Gwent Community Cohesion Team – work to promote and facilitate Inclusive and Cohesive Communities, to advocate community diversity and work with services and partners to celebrate equality of difference.

- In this report period, the Cohesion Team identified local Ukrainian and European communities to help leadership teams get ready for arrivals related to wider migration.
- The team has worked with communication teams across the region to communicate the Homes for Ukraine Scheme to ensure the dissemination of accurate information.
- Three ‘Homes for Ukraine’ regional meetings with hosts and their guests have been held. The sessions aided the necessary checks that are part of hosting families. The third session was co-facilitated by a clinical psychologist and focused on well-being and addressing the emotional difficulties faced by those who have suffered trauma.
- The team continue to engage minority communities, sharing their lived experiences via our Valleys Voice Podcast: [Valleys Voices - Podcasts | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/valleys-voices-podcasts)

Campaign Work- We have worked closely with other Local Authority areas to increase awareness around the following campaigns:

Ramadan– A social media campaign that teaches about other religions to foster understanding and create a culture that prevents intolerance, hate speech and bullying. We used some of our earlier work that is still a valuable resource to learn about Ramadan. (47 Ramadan 1st Session – YouTube.

We have also provided useful resources to all schools which explored; the origins of Ramadan, the importance of observing Ramadan in the UK and dispelling myths and promoting understanding.

LGBTQ+ history month - We launched an awareness campaign, 'did you know' to help people learn more about topics such as the history of the rainbow flag and the meanings of words like bi, non-binary, pan sexual etc. and what they involve, along with key messages of acceptance. We have provided more training on hate crime in schools and have conducted several classroom workshops and assemblies to reinforce the wider themes of acceptance.

Black History Month - Schools received resources for a poetry contest. The resources had lesson plans, posters, and assembly presentation, and they also had; television and book resources related to Black history and information about the Windrush exhibition.

A monument was unveiled in Brynmawr in October 2023, to honour Roy Francis a rugby league pioneer. He was the first black man to play for Great Britain, as well as the first black head coach of a British top tier professional team. The event was publicised in the National press.



Councillor Chris Smith at the Roy Francis memorial unveiling

Hate Crime Awareness Week - Local schools took part in various activities to raise awareness of the importance of cohesion/inclusivity and to make a Canvas that reflected the theme of cohesion/inclusivity. A social media pack was shared throughout the week - working with Victims Support to ensure a unified message. Hate Crime Road shows took place in, Ebbw Vale.

Small Grants Scheme - endorsed several community initiatives that fostered a sense of unity and belonging; The small grants fund, facilitated the implementation of community-oriented projects which involved;

- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council – Youth Service Calendar of community-based activities

Project centred on facilitating a calendar of cohesion events such as sports, disco and cooking, bringing young people from the 5 Youth Centres within Blaenau Gwent (Abertillery, Brynmawr, Cwm, Ebbw Vale & Tredegar) together.

- Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, School and community mural

The core values mural deliver messages of acceptance, ambition, going the extra mile, respect, kindness, positivity and trust.

- TLC Café, Community Café

The TLC Café to work with Salvage Creations Wales to provide wood working classes on a regular basis. This is a Social Enterprise that works with communities.

Connected Communities: Loneliness and Social Isolation Fund 2023/24 - The Partnerships Team have administered the third and final

year of the Connected Communities: Loneliness and Social Isolation Fund. The fund is designed to help grass root organisations bring people together to help them build social connections in the post COVID environment.

A steering group was established, made up of representatives from GAVO, ABUHB, the customer experience team and the partnerships team, to consider the applications for the grant. The total available to share amongst the successful applications was £22,727.

35 applications were received, with a total request of £63,675. The steering group considered each application individually, for suitability against the funding criteria, the impact on isolated individuals and whether the application would be better seeking assistance from another funding source. For example, there were several applications for food related projects which did not necessarily combat loneliness and isolation, but we were able to re-direct them to the Direct Food Support Fund, via the council website.

Funding was allocated to 24 organisations throughout the borough, covering Swffrydd, Six Bells, Aberbeeg, Llanhilleth, Cwm, Ebbw Vale, Tredegar, Beaufort, Brynmawr and Blaina. The individual funding allocation ranged from £400 to £1250. The funds have been paid to all organisations and spending is due to be completed by the end of March 2024. The financial support will enable these organisations to continue to deliver a vital service to the residents of Blaenau Gwent in combating loneliness.

Over the three years of the available funding, support has been provided to 47 different groups, and some organisations have been successful more than once in securing support from the fund.

Equality Objective Five - “We will ensure there is meaningful involvement with people who have protected characteristics and key stakeholders that represent their interests”.

Overview

We value hearing from our communities and their perspectives. We want to establish good methods to make sure that we provide opportunities for people to engage and participate in a way that is meaningful and can influence the council's decisions. The Council has produced a Participation and Engagement Strategy which will be published April 2024.

We continue to follow the National Principles of Public Engagement and the Principles for Children and Young People’s participation.

Key Examples of Actions from 2023/24

Engagement Highlights – Over this period we have delivered and planned effective engagement across Blaenau Gwent with groups that represent protected characteristics to develop the new Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028. Those engagement activities have helped to inform our objectives and develop our key actions going forward.

Through surveys, user research, interviews, focus groups we continue to support local people with a chance to get involved and share their views on local matters. Key examples of consultations include:

- Council Budget 2024-25
- Strategic Equality Plan Consultation for 2024-2028
- Participation and Engagement Strategy

Gwent Public Services Board, Gwent Well-being Plan – We as a Council are a committed member of the Gwent Public Services Board and

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This document is available in Welsh*

have continued our commitment to supporting the Well-being of Future Generation's Act's five ways of working, which includes "involvement", both locally and regionally.

Blaenau Gwent Youth Forum – Blaenau Gwent Youth Forum is a forum that comes together to give Children and Young People living in Blaenau Gwent a chance to have their say, feel heard and be involved in things that matter to them. Over the past year the forum has continued to grow and as a result has brought different perspectives and opinions, representing Children & Young People across Blaenau Gwent.

The forum continues to represent Children & Young People of Blaenau Gwent through National / Local Campaign Work (for example Climate Change, Anti-Bullying, Holocaust Memorial Day etc.). Examples of their work are outlined below.

- Winning the prestigious "Blue Balloon" award for their anti-bullying film "Stamp it Out"
- Attendance at House of Commons Debate November 2023
- Welsh Youth Parliament Debate November 2023
- Consultations to support policy development- Strategic Equality Plan
- Armistice Day of Remembrance
- Police Crime Commissioner Question Time Event
- Young person Adopted-Member role on scrutiny committees

The Youth Forum received their third award in three years for their Anti Bullying Film "Stamp it out" which is a film developed to encourage Children and Young People to talk and raise awareness about bullying issues.

We continue to grow youth participation and promote the Youth Forum to encourage more Young People to join. Previously, we reported that the forum only had female members, but now we are pleased to report that there have been three new members who all identify as male.

The Youth Forum developed a Climate Change Film for primary schools which has been shared on social media and with the primary schools across Blaenau Gwent



The Children's International Film Festival Awards October 2023



House of Commons Debate 2023



Welsh Youth Parliament Debate 2023

Blaenau Gwent Dad Support Worker Project - The Dad's Support Worker project began in July 2018 as part of the Flying Start Programme. The project aimed to provide fathers/male carers in the borough with an inclusive service that ensured equality with the support that was offered to mothers as part of Flying Start. It was noticed that the support was open to fathers, but because most of the workforce was female, there was low engagement from men with the service.

After talking to fathers, it was clear that they felt that many services were aimed and created for mums and that fathers felt 'invisible'. There are now three Dad Support Workers in the team who are trained to help fathers/male carers with issues such as parenting, ante-natal support, mental health support, sleep and behaviour and reducing the effect of poverty on families etc. The project makes more equal opportunities for males to access the service to help improve their children's lives, and also improve their own skills and aspirations.

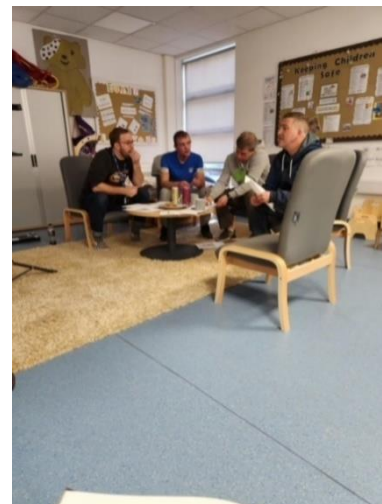
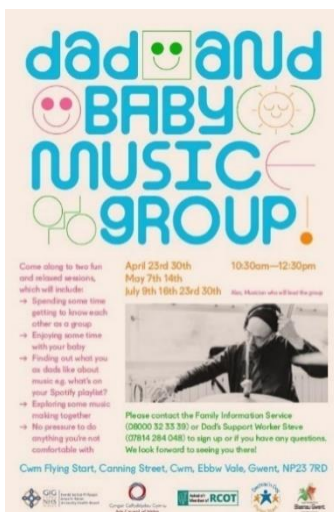
The project has done very well in reaching out to fathers and ongoing

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support has shown common themes that fathers in Blaenau Gwent were having difficulties with. This included mental health, debt and financial pressure, unemployment, managing relationships with their partners and fear of accessing wider services such as GP's, Social Services, or other support agencies. The Dad Support Workers offer advice, guidance and support, and also act as an advocate for them, especially during difficult/complex meetings such as Social Services meetings, mental health support services or GP visits.

Fathers are supported on a one-to-one basis in the home/community hubs and peer support is promoted through groups in community settings. These exclusive programmes give an opportunity for fathers to meet, support each other, and spend quality time with their children. Groups include, coffee mornings, walking and swimming groups, parenting groups such as the Aces Toolkit or Circle of Security and antenatal programmes.



Equality Objective Six *“We will strive to tackle inequality caused by poverty for people who have protected characteristics”*

Overview

We are committed to fulfilling our responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty 2011. We strive to tackle inequality caused by poverty, and to ensure that those affected are fully engaged in decision making processes.

In the past year, we have continued to work with the Welsh Local Government Association and the Equality and Human Rights Commission to learn from recent research presented as part of the "Is Wales Fairer?" report, so that we can comprehend the equality situation and the socio-economic conditions of our communities in Blaenau Gwent. This work will also help us to prepare and create our new Strategic Equality Plan Objectives 2024-2028.

Blaenau Gwent together with the rest of the UK is feeling the pressure of the "Cost of Living Crisis". As a Council, we also face the consequences and will have to make tough choices in the future that will impact the people living and working in the area. However, we remain committed to provide the best services to our communities by assisting and supporting those who are most vulnerable.

Key Examples of Actions from 2023/24

Revised Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) – We have kept reviewing our Integrated Impact Assessment process this year, and we have made it accessible across the organisation, making it the main tool to help and guide decision making processes. The form has been changed to include:

- Well-being of Future Generation Act Goals

- New Corporate Objectives
- Armed forces (new national duties)
- Community Safety considerations

The requirement to carry out and report on impact assessing continues to be expected as part of the corporate reporting and decision-making process. It is to be used for any proposed service or policy change. To assist the process, we have created associated guidance, which include; key reports, statistics, and example assessments. Corporately, we continue to offer on-going support, advice, and guidance to the organisation.



Community Hubs - People who are facing financial difficulties can get various kinds of help and guidance from the community hubs. The hubs can provide support to people by giving them discretionary payments for living expenses and rent assistance for older people and those with disability. Also, the hubs can assist with eligibility checks for council tax reductions which can especially benefit those with mental or physical disabilities, carers or those on low income. There is also help for families with children, such as school uniform grants.

The hubs are places where people can get help in local libraries that are in each valley. From April 2023 to January 2024, the hubs served 5373 people. The main reasons why people visited the hubs were for benefit support, blue badges, council tax and food banks. The hubs are considered vital for residents to receive the help they need in places that are easy to reach.

Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership

Direct Food Support Fund Grants



There was funding for local authorities to help more people who struggle to afford food by improving existing community food initiatives in each authority, including a focus on activity that helps to tackle the reasons why people are food poor.

The funding helped organisations get, store and give out more food, including good food that would otherwise be wasted, increasing their ability to provide good quality, nutritious food to their customers.

In this round of DFSF grant funding, we aimed to promote a more long-lasting ‘Pantry model’, where organisations ask for a small membership fee from customers to support the organisations long-term activities and reduce dependence on uncertain funding sources.

Also, we lowered the maximum award available this year to increase the number of individual grants available. This was done to ensure a wide

range of support, especially within some of the poorer areas of the borough.

The grant scheme offered up to £2000 for each organisation to help with their existing activities and/or increase their capacity through: buying storage and cooking equipment, paying for volunteer expenses, training volunteers, and buying more food to distribute.

The total amount awarded was £44,143 to 23 organisations.

The recipients of the grants were required to provide information about their activities, as well as stories from their communities, photographs, and videos. The BGCBC Food resilience team hope to use these personal accounts to learn more about the main reasons for food poverty in Blaenau Gwent and improve our strategy for dealing with these problems.



“I like the food pantry because we can get food to make us healthy and strong”

“I find the pantry helpful for me and my children. I come every week and would sometimes struggle without it, I am so Happy the school has it”

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Participatory budgeting Programme- The programme was delivered in 2022, however project delivery covered a period within 2023/24. **16 projects** in total were funded through the programme, there were 7 projects within Tredegar, 3 projects within Ebbw Vale, 2 projects in Abertillery and 4 projects that covered the whole of the Blaenau Gwent area. In total **£137, 527.50** of funding was provided to support the project delivery.

Blaenau Gwent Cost of Living Support for residents – over the last year a task group has worked together to ensure a coordinated approach to supporting people, focusing around five main areas: Housing, Food, Fuel, Financial Support and General Support.

Helping Blaenau Gwent through the Cost of Living Crisis

Tredegar Cost of Living Event

After the success of the Ebbw Vale Cost of Living drop-in session in April, the Council organised an afternoon/evening event in Tredegar Leisure Centre on 28 November. This was equally successful with over 90 residents attending to get advice on topics such as energy bills, grants, housing, education, council tax and health and wellbeing. A huge thank you to all the staff and our partners who made this happen.

Cost of Living support for residents.

Blaenau Gwent Council is again preparing to provide advice and support to residents struggling with the Cost-of-Living this winter.

A task group has been working together for over a year to ensure a coordinated approach with our partners to support people, focussing around five main areas: Housing, Food; Fuel; Financial Support & General Support.

This has included:

- Producing a comprehensive information booklet and webpage packed with information on support schemes available. This was regularly updated to offer the latest advice.
- Working to administer Welsh Government support schemes locally such as the Winter Fuel Support Scheme & the Cost-of-Living Scheme. The Council also used discretionary funding to offer households up to Council Tax band H a payment and an extra payment for household in receipt of Free School Meals.
- Voting to use Welsh Government discretionary funding to make significant contributions to the Blaenau Gwent Foodbank (£30,000), Citizens Advice Bureau (£50,000) and other local food distribution groups (£70,000)
- Issuing payments to households without a direct relationship to an energy supplier
- Helped to organise and distribute funding to Warm Hubs
- Issuing fuel bank vouchers through Community Hubs
- Organising a well-attended Cost of Living event where there was a range of advice and support available for residents.

Supporting Blaenau Gwent residents with the Cost of Living

Event Support and Assistance
In 2022/23 we:

- Administered over 9,000 Winter Fuel payments.
- Supported the Energy Bills Support Scheme/Alternative Funding
- Issued over 1,000 Fuel Bank Vouchers from our Community Hubs.

Financial Support
In 2022/23 we:

- Made £100 Cost of Living payments to households in bands A to H
- Made a £100 payment to households in receipt of Free School Meals
- Provided energy payments to eligible emergency Free School Meals over the summer holidays.

Food support
In 2022/23 we:

- Made a £25,000 contribution to the main Blaenau Gwent Foodbank.
- Made a £75,000 to other local food distribution groups and organisations.

General Support
In 2022/23 we:

- Administered over £25,000 funding to set up Warm Hubs.
- Provided £25,000 to the CAB to continue supporting food people.
- Provided a Cost of Living grant with our partners in energy advice and support.

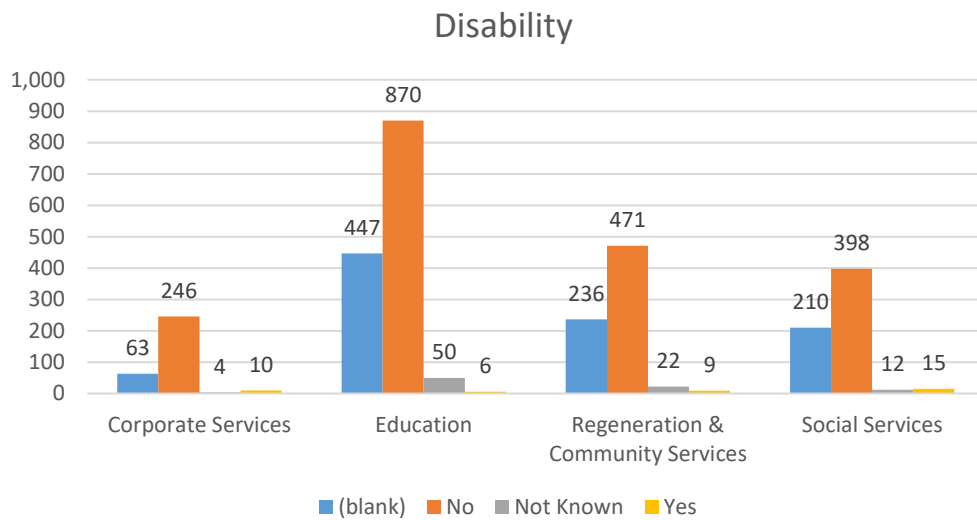
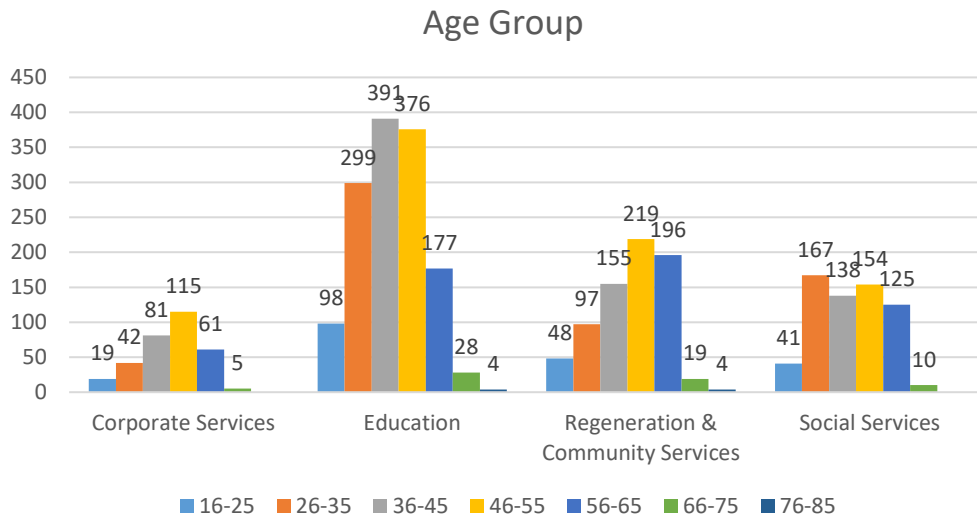
Next steps and action planning 2024-2028

Our annual report has shown the ongoing advancement towards fulfilling our Public Sector Equality Duty as well as showing key examples to illustrate our progress towards our Strategic Equality Plan Objectives 2020-2024, which continues to increase the awareness of equality throughout the organisation.

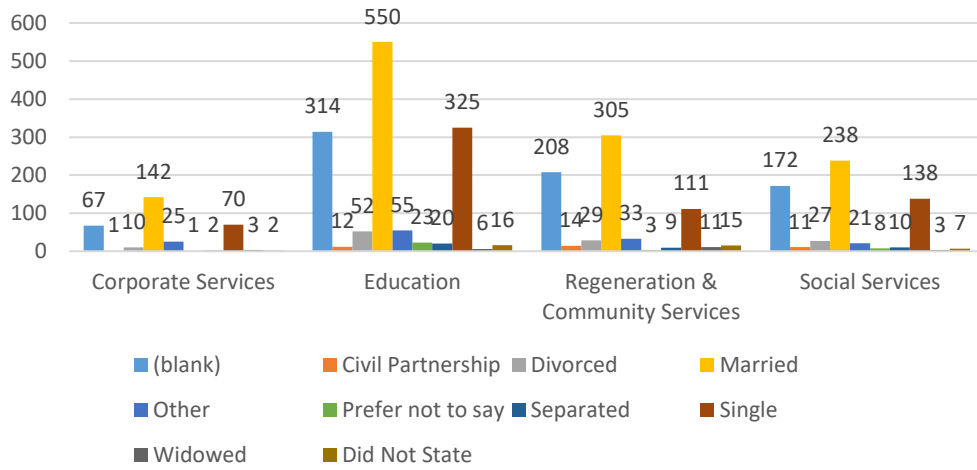
We acknowledge that although we have made progress, we realise that there is still work to do. We have tried to demonstrate in this report that we recognise that there are many aspects of our work to date that we will need to carry over into the development of our new Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028.

Over the next year we plan to build on the work outlined in this document to inform the development of new Action Plan that will underpin the first year of Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028. The Action Plan will include the commitments to deliver against the Welsh Governments Strategic Action Plans for Equality, including the Anti Racist Wales Action Plan and LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales.

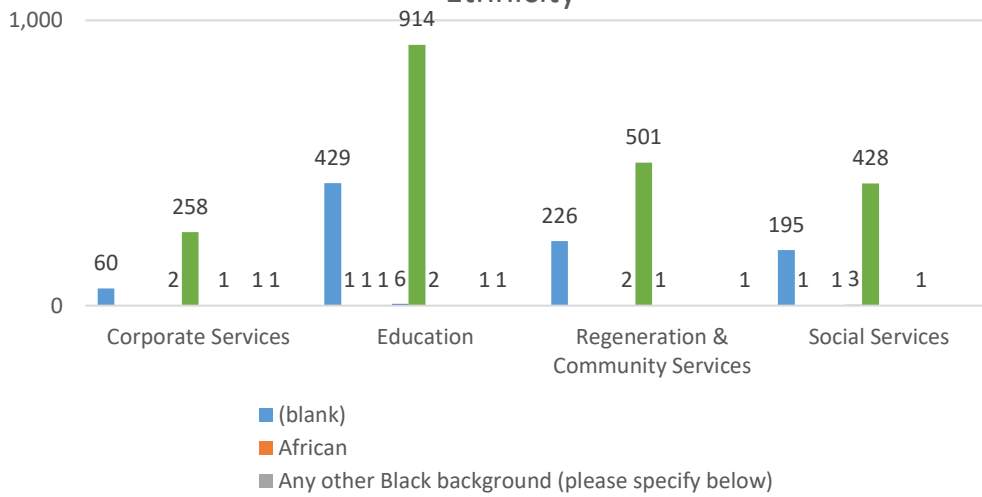
Workforce Summary Data April 2022-March 2023

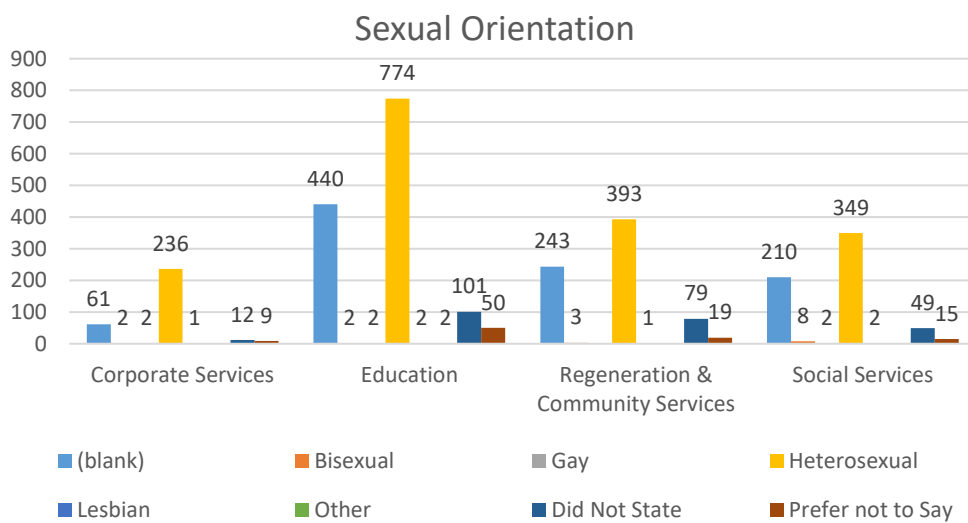
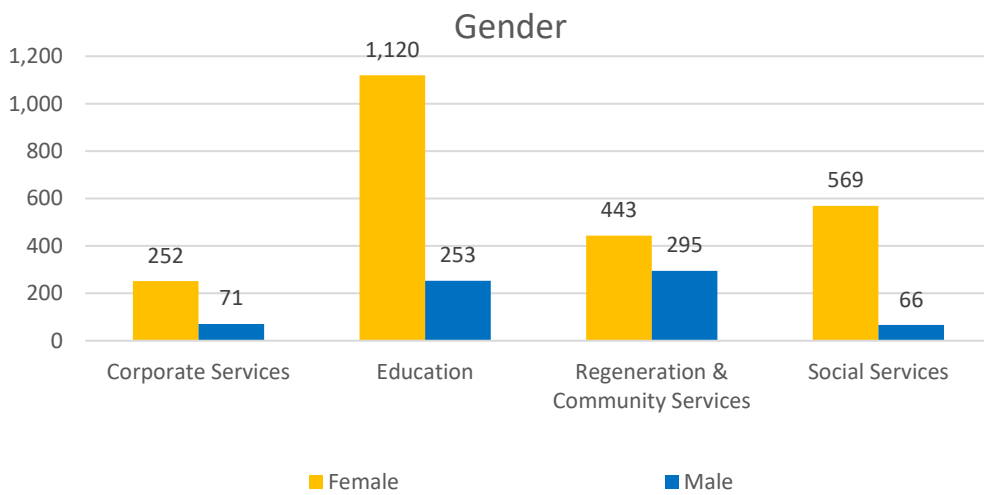
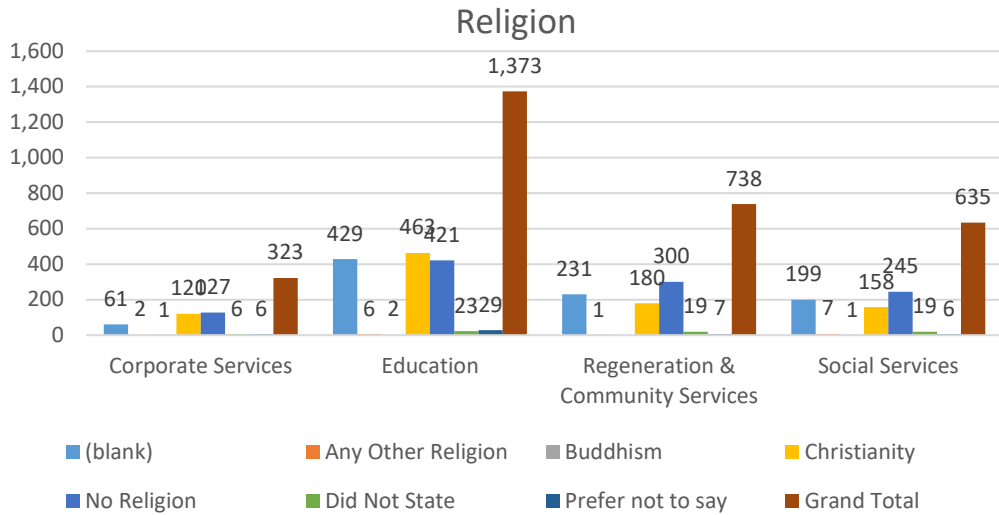


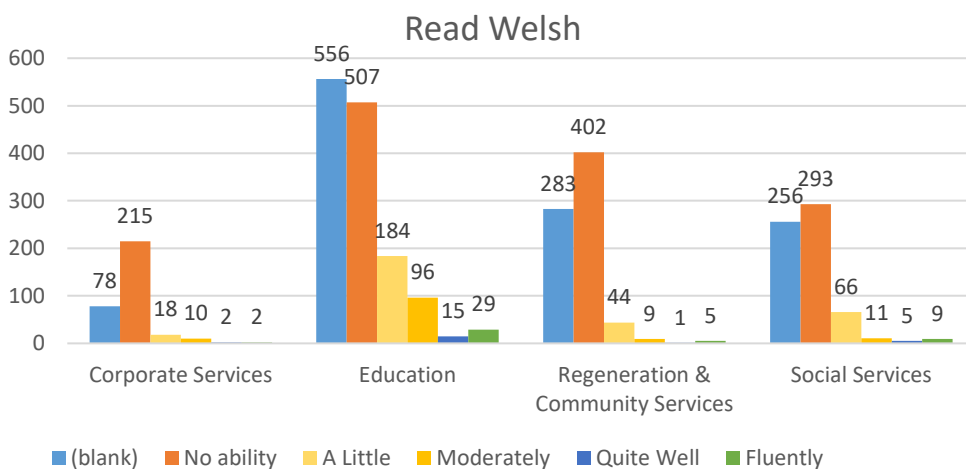
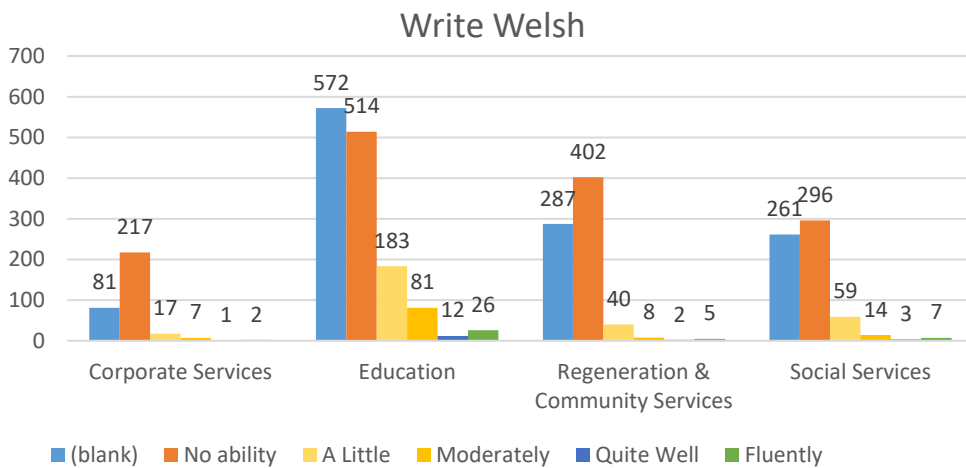
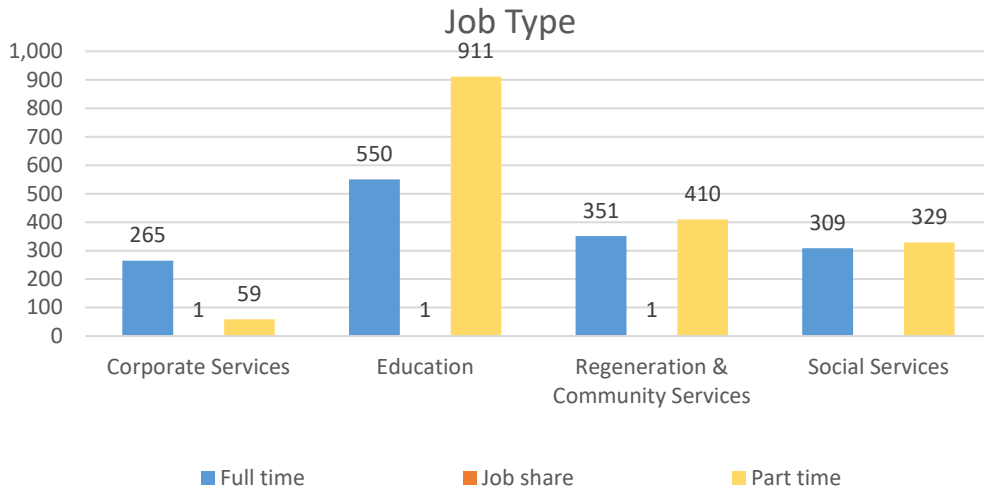
Marital Status

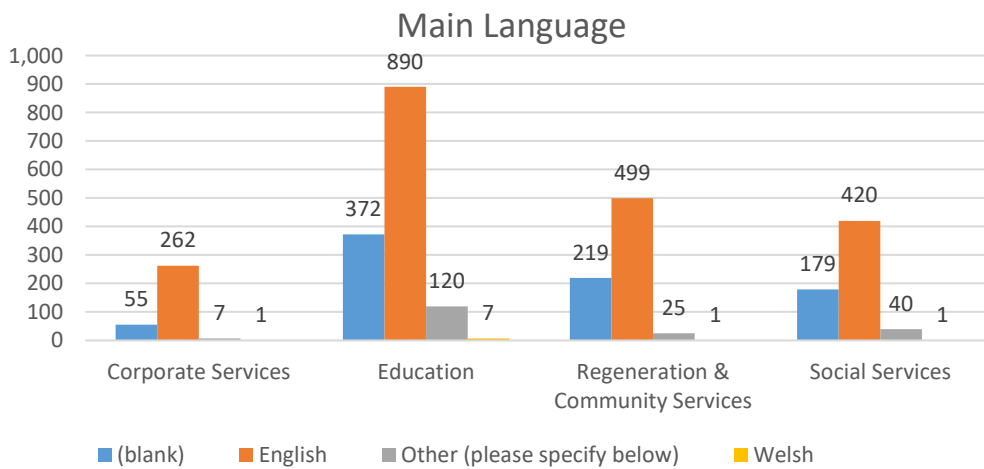
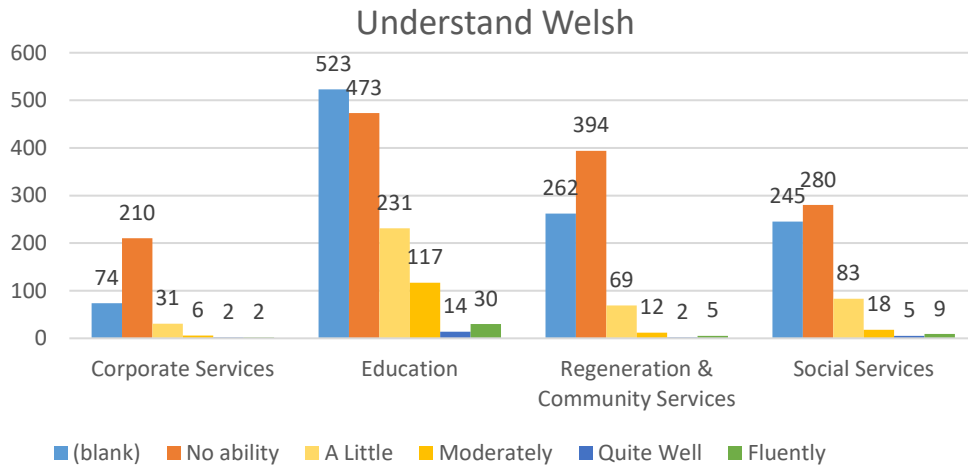
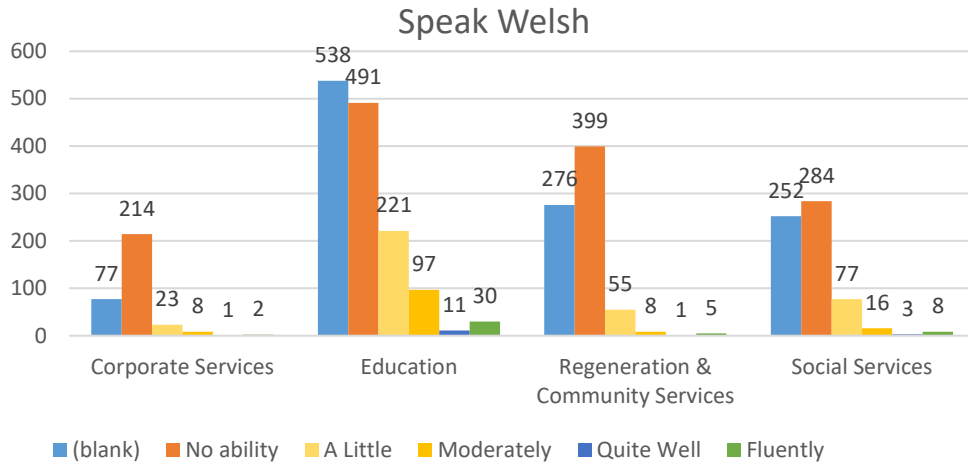


Ethnicity









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Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council - Integrated Impact Assessment

All decisions, policy reviews or policy implementation will now require a completed Integrated Impact Assessment.

- Section 1-Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011
- Section 2-Socio-economic Duty – Sections 1 to 3 of the Equality Act 2010
- Section 3-Corporate Plan
- Section 4-Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Section 5-Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011
- Section 6-Children’s Right “The Right Way”
- Section 7-Community Safety
- Section 8 Armed Forces
- Section 9-Data
- Section 10-Consultations Statutory Consultation Doctrine of Legitimate Expectation and Gunning Principles
- Section 11-Monitoring
- Section 12-Decision of proposal

Lead Officer	Head of Service	Service Area & Department	Date
Kate James	Sarah King	Policy and partnerships	27/02/24

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 proposal being put forward for assessment is the new iteration of the Strategic Equality Plan for 2024-2028

Under the Equality Act 2010 (the Act) the Council has a statutory duty to; -

- Prepare & publish equality objectives every 4 years
- Involve people covered by the protected characteristics within council functions and decision making
- Prepare and produce annual reports outlining progress against objectives

The Act aims to put fairness at the heart of society and is a law which protects people because of:

- Age - A person belonging to a particular age (e.g. 32 year olds) or range of ages (e.g. 18 - 30 year olds).
- Disability – For example, a physical, or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
- Gender reassignment - For example, transgender. People who were born into their body and feel it is not right for them. This might mean that they want to change from being a woman to a man, or a man to a woman.
- Marriage and civil partnerships - Marriage is defined as a 'union between a man and a woman'. Civil partnerships are legally recognising ‘same-sex couples’ relationships. Civil partners must be treated the same as married couples on a wide range of legal matters. The Act applies to this characteristic, but only in respect of the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination.

- Pregnancy and maternity – The condition of being pregnant, or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth, and is linked to maternity, or paternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks’ after giving birth, and includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.
- Race - This refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origins.
- Religion or belief (including non-belief)
- Religion and belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (e.g. Atheism). Generally, a belief should affect your life choices, or the way you live, for it to be included in the definition.
- Sex - A man or a woman.
- Sexual orientation - Being heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

This is the Council’s fourth Strategic Equality Plan which sets out our equality objectives. It aims to strengthen and advance equality across all of our service areas and achieve meaningful outcomes for local residents, communities, staff and visitors. It also outlines our intended steps for meeting our general Public Sector Equality Duties which are to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Advance equality of opportunity; and
- Foster good relations.

We recognise as a Council that the successful delivery of this plan will require us to have an effective framework in place that has:

- Strong political and professional leadership;
- A ‘One Council Approach” for delivering equality across the organisation;
- Clear aims, objectives and actions;
- Meaningful involvement and engagement programme; and
- Effective monitoring and performance arrangements.

The following steps were undertaken as part of drafting the new objectives:

- Conducted a preliminary survey
- Undertook direct engagement activities to learn from 'lived experiences'
- Prepared a formal consultation document and a second survey to consult on the proposed strategic objectives
- Engaged with internal and external stakeholders to receive feedback on the suggested objectives
- Carried out further direct engagement sessions with people with protected characteristics to inform a supporting engagement document

This feedback and engagement activity was used to formulate the new Strategic Equality Plan and proposed objectives for 2024-2028 which is the proposed document for assessment.

Section 1 Outline how the proposal will impact on any people or groups of people with protected characteristics, please refer to the Equalities Act 2010 (Wales) for further information Equality Act 2010: guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) and the EHRC guidance The Essential Guide to the Public Sector Equality Duty: EHRC Briefly outline below if there will be any positive or negative impacts as a result of the proposal being considered.			
Protected characteristics	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on those with a protected characteristics?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on those with a protected characteristics?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
Age (<i>people of all ages</i>)	The equality plan outlines through a set of key objectives and actions how we will ensure we support those with protected characteristics both organisationally and through the services we deliver. The plan outlines our commitment which strives to have a positive	The plan aims to mitigate any negative impacts, by ensuring integrated impact assessments are carried out and those with protected characteristics are considered throughout the organisation.	We aim to maximise outcomes for those with protected characteristics by ensuring our actions against our agreed objectives consider the feedback gained throughout the consultation process as well as on going engagement throughout the plan's delivery. We also aim to build on the stakeholder reference group to ensure we have ongoing accountability throughout the plans delivery cycle.
Disability (<i>people with disabilities/ long term conditions</i>)			
Gender Reassignment (<i>anybody who's gender identity or gender expression is different to the sex they were assigned at birth</i>)			

<p>Marriage or Civil Partnership (<i>people who are married or in a civil partnership</i>)</p>	<p>impact particularly those with a protected characteristic.</p>		
<p>Pregnancy and Maternity (<i>women who are pregnant and/or on maternity leave</i>)</p>	<p>It also highlights key steps that we will take in order to build on previous work over the next four years as well as ensuring we are</p>		
<p>Race (<i>people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and different racial backgrounds</i>)</p>	<p>meeting the Welsh Government actions of becoming an anti-racist Wales by 2030 and the LGBTQ+ action plan vision of making Wales the most</p>		
<p>Religion or Belief (<i>people with different religions and beliefs including people with no beliefs</i>)</p>	<p>LGBTQ+ friendly country in Europe. It is felt that incorporating all of this under one umbrella plan with key actions that it</p>		
<p>Sex (<i>women and men, girls and boys and those who self-identify their gender</i>)</p>	<p>will also allow for intersectionality to be recognised.</p>		
<p>Sexual Orientation (<i>lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, other</i>)</p>			

NOTE: Section 2 only needs to be completed if proposals are of a strategic nature or when reviewing previous strategic decisions. See page 6 of the Preparing for the Commencement of the Socio-economic Duty Welsh Government Guidance.

Section 2 Socio-economic Duty (Strategic Decisions Only) <i>The Welsh Governments Socio-economic Duty provides a framework in order to ensure tackling inequality is at the forefront of decision making.</i>			
.Please consider the below vulnerable groups and consider how the proposal could affect them:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ 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 misusing substances ➢ 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 			
Socio Economic disadvantage definitions.	Will the proposal have a positive, negative or neutral impacts on the below?	How could you mitigate the negative impacts outlined?	Please highlight any evidence that has been considered.
<p>Low Income / Income Poverty <i>(cannot afford to maintain regular payments such as bills, food, clothing, transport etc.)</i></p> <p>Low and/or No Wealth <i>(enough money to meet basic living costs and pay bills but have no savings to deal with any unexpected spends and no provisions for the future)</i></p>	<p>Equality Objective 6: <i>We will strive to reduce inequality caused by poverty for people who have protected characteristics.</i></p> <p>The plan for 2024-2028 aims to; -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take into account feedback from the consultation and 	<p>We recognise that throughout the consultation that there are external factors that the Council alone cannot change or may have no influence over, however as Council we are committed to sharing intelligence and working with partners to mitigate negative impacts on those who are at a socio-economic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation feedback • Welsh Government reports • Census data • Community impact assessments • Community hub data • EHRC findings from the “Is Wales Fairer” report

<p>Material Deprivation (<i>unable to access basic goods and services i.e. financial products like life insurance, repair/replace broken electrical goods, warm home, hobbies etc.</i>)</p>	<p>face to face engagement leading up to the development of the plan, objectives and actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be flexible in order to ensure it incorporates changes that may be needed throughout its cycle • Build on the good work that has already taken place • Develop key actions that will be monitored regularly and reported annually. • Ensure the actions are being delivered as well as being updated on an annual basis to ensure continuous improvement. • Consider cross organisational work and policy • Consider those from socio economic backgrounds when delivering, reviewing and setting actions • Share intelligence with partners in order to increase the chances of positive outcomes 	<p>disadvantage as well as ensuring our services are fit for purpose.</p>	
<p>Area Deprivation (<i>where you live (rural areas), where you work (accessibility of public transport) Impact on the environment?</i>)</p>			
<p>Socio-economic Background (<i>social class i.e. parents education, employment and income</i>)</p>			
<p>Socio-economic Disadvantage (<i>What cumulative impact will the proposal have on people or groups because of their protected characteristic(s) or vulnerability or because they are already disadvantaged</i>)</p>			

Section 3-Corporate Plan
 Please outline any Corporate Plan linkages of the proposal - [BG Corporate Plan 22-27](#)

Priority 1 - Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent

Equality Objective 3
 We will create a fair and inclusive learning culture for all children and young people with a focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Understanding your identity is an important part of a child’s development. It takes place in the early years of their lives and follows them into adulthood.

Tackling inequalities in our education and learning settings is not a new concept and remains an on-going challenge in Blaenau Gwent. In order to provide the foundation for creating better life prospects for our children and young people, we recognise the need to embed equality, diversity and inclusion within all our learning environments.

Priority 2 - Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities



Priority 3 - An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place



Equality Objective 5:
 We will ensure effective engagement and participation for people with protected characteristics.

As a Council we are committed towards everyone playing their part in delivering our vision and ambitious programme for action and change. Instrumental to this will be how we engage specifically with people who are under-represented and have protected characteristics. We also understand how aspects of a person's identities combine to create

	<p>different and multiple discrimination and privilege. Part of our approach for achieving this objective is set out in our Corporate Engagement Strategy 2023-27.</p>
<p>Priority 4 - Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient</p>	<p>Equality Objective 4: We will promote and support inclusive, safe and cohesive communities</p> <p>Our commitment towards the Wellbeing of Future Generation Act Wales National Goals of supporting ‘a more Equal Wales and ‘a Wales of Cohesive Communities’ continues. Working in Partnership with the West Gwent Community Cohesion Team alongside our Community Safety Team we deliver programmes and initiatives that increase awareness and understanding, celebrate diversity and bring together communities</p>

Section 4-Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – The Five Ways of Working (ICLIP)
Sustainable development principles. The WBFG Act requires the Council to consider how any proposal improves the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales using the five ways of working as a baseline)

Five Ways of Working	How have you used the Sustainable Development Principles in forming the proposal?
<p>Long Tern</p> 	<p>Consider the long-term impact of the proposal on the ability of communities to secure their well-being.</p> <p>The plan outlines the objectives for the next four years, but this is based on the work done by the council in the previous three versions of Strategic Equality Plans, which together span 12 years. The plan shows how we think we can keep progressing over the next four years to enhance the wellbeing of the community. We believe that by involving staff, service users with protected characteristics, and ensuring good political and organisational leadership, we will achieve the objectives stated in the plan.</p>
<p>Prevention</p> 	<p>Consider how the proposal is preventing problems from occurring or getting worse</p> <p>The plan explains how we will fulfil our obligation under the Equality Act 2010 as an organisation to improve the culture, working environment and how we want to be a fair, inclusive organisation that promotes diversity and inclusion. We think that this will create a working environment where staff feel happy, supported, and thus create a place where people want to stay and work.</p> <p>We also explain how we will interact with groups and individuals with protected characteristics, and we also show how important it is to us that we demonstrate how we as a council value equality and diversity. We think that by demonstrating this, it will help our communities by raising awareness, to reduce any tensions or discrimination, creating the communities where people want to live and work.</p>

	<p>By making sure we monitor and implement the integrated impact assessment work, and by involving those with protected characteristics in decisions that affect them, we will ensure full understanding and create joint practices that will help us to create the most suitable services to meet the needs of the organisation and the communities we serve.</p>
<p>Integration</p> 	<p>Consider how your proposal will impact on other services provided in our communities (these might be Council services or services delivered by other organisations or groups)</p> <p>The proposal has been informed by the input from partners, staff, groups and individuals in the community, which has been essential to the plan's development. The four-year plan outlines how we will build on previous work, including working in partnership to deliver the most effective services that match the needs of our communities. The plan will be reviewed throughout its cycle and regular communication with those who have contributed to the development will be maintained to strengthen those relationships and get ongoing feedback.</p> <p>We will keep working on the integration of the integrated impact assessment to help the organisation as a whole understand the impacts of any service or policy changes or implementation, both to the organisation and the wider community.</p>
<p>Collaboration</p> 	<p>Consider how you are working with Council services or services delivered by other organisations or groups in our communities.</p> <p>The plan was created through consultation sessions that were either in person or online. Staff also had the opportunity to fill out a survey and share their opinions. This input, along with personal experience, informed the development of the plan. We also held Departmental Management Team sessions with the different directorates to increase awareness and receive feedback. The plan will be tracked as part of the corporate reporting process to ensure accountability and commitment to the plan and our approach to equality as an organisation. We will expand the stakeholder reference group, which will consist of staff (officers, organisational and community members) to maintain communication and feedback throughout the implementation. We will also work with services and partners to highlight the work done in the annual report as well as gathering valuable personal experiences.</p>

Involvement



Consider how you involve people who have an interest in this proposal and ensure that they represent the diversity of our communities.

The Plan takes into consideration the findings from our engagement and consultation activity undertaken specifically for this plan, which has involved 160 people with lived experiences from across the identified protected characteristics.

Furthermore, we have had forty-eight individuals participate via an online questionnaire, to encourage people to share their views and experiences, and talk to us broadly about equality, diversity, and inclusion.

We gathered and analysed the results of the consultation and used them to create our proposed objectives in the Consultation Document. We asked the public again if we had reflected their feedback in the proposed objectives through a second survey. We also engaged with various local networks and groups face to face, as mentioned above, for more in depth feedback please see the link: [SEP Engagement Feedback](#)

Besides the public consultation, we have also consulted through our internal management structures on the suggested objectives and confirmed that they agreed with the knowledge and information shared by professionals in relation to equality.

How does your proposal link to the Welsh Governments Priorities for Wales? Please indicate below.

- A PROSPEROUS WALES ...** an innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.

Equality Objective 3: We will create a fair and inclusive learning culture for children and young people with protected characteristics.

Equality Objective 6: We will strive to reduce inequality caused by poverty.

The plan sets how we will ensure that our young people are educated within a safe and inclusive environment in order to help them grow, providing them with the skills to move onto further education or gain meaningful employment. There is also the focus of how we ensure integration within communities to ensure wellbeing and cohesive communities as well as working collaboratively in tackling issues caused by poverty in order foster a prosperous Wales.

Understanding your identity is an important part of a child's development. It takes place in the early years of their lives and follows them into adulthood.

Tackling inequalities in our education and learning settings is not a new concept and remains an on-going challenge in Blaenau Gwent. We know that fair and inclusive learning cultures promote equity, access, participation, and achievement for all learners, regardless of their identity, ability, or circumstance.

We are committed to meeting our requirements under the Public Sector Equality Duty 2011 which includes tackle inequality caused by poverty. We look to ensure those who experience poverty, or those who live in less favourable living standards, are considered during all decision-making processes relating to the services we deliver.

- A RESILIENT WALES ...** a nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change). Think about how your activity will have regard to protecting and enhancing biodiversity.

3. **A HEALTHIER WALES ...** a society in which people’s physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.

The plan has been fully developed in partnership with staff, communities and partners who have helped shape the objectives for the next four years.

The plan aims to set how we should be including those that identify with a protected characteristic in service development, change or implementation.

The plan also sets out how we will meet the Welsh Government goals of becoming an Anti-Racist Wales by 2030 and how we will contribute to the LGBTQ+ action plan for Wales. By being inclusive, raising awareness around people’s rights and choice that we will be supporting our staff and communities to make healthy life choices as well as understanding the barriers/concerns raised.

4. **A MORE EQUAL WALES ...** A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances).

The plan sets out how we as an organisation propose to carry out this work over the next four years. The plan aims to be inclusive, understand barriers in accessing services or people reaching their full potential. The plan sets out how we will build on past work and how we will continue to engage those with protected characteristics to ensure that they achieve their potential no matter their background or circumstances.

We will do this with a set of actions against each of our objectives. The objectives align to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act Wales and we feel by delivering on these actions it will not only meet our PSED duty but also help towards the goal of achieving “A more Equal Wales”

5. **A WALES OF COHESIVE COMMUNITIES ...** attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.

Equality Objective 4:

We will promote and support inclusive, safe and cohesive communities

Our commitment towards the Wellbeing of Future Generation Act Wales National Goals of supporting ‘a more Equal Wales’ and ‘a Wales of Cohesive Communities’ continues. Working in Partnership with the West Gwent Community Cohesion Team alongside our Community Safety Team we deliver programmes and initiatives that increase awareness and understanding, celebrate diversity and bring together communities

6. **A WALES OF VIBRANT CULTURE AND THRIVING ...** a society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.

Our plan aligns with the Corporate Plan and our Welsh Promotion Strategy

7. **A GLOBALLY RESPONSIBLE WALES ...** a nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.

Section 5-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 the positive or negative impact that any proposal may have on opportunities to use the Welsh language. [Welsh Language Standards](#))



Requirement	Does the proposal have any positive, negative or neutral impacts in regards to the below?	What can be done to mitigate any negative impacts?	Please demonstrate any evidence used to form this opinion.
Compliance with the Welsh Language Standards. <i>Specifically Standards 88 - 93</i>	No negative impacts within the New Plan 2024-2028. The plan aligns to the Welsh Promotion	We abide by the Welsh Language Standards	We have a Welsh Promotion Strategy & duty under the Welsh Language Standards

<p>What opportunities are there to promote the Welsh Language? <i>e.g. status, use of Welsh language services, use of Welsh in everyday life in work / community</i></p>	<p>Strategy and recognises that our staff and communities should be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote the Welsh Language • converse using the Welsh Language or access services • opportunities to use the Welsh Language • The plan will be produced in the Welsh Language • Our annual reports will also be available in the Welsh Language 	<p>We ensure all documents such as the plan and annual report is produced and published in both the English and Welsh Language</p>	
<p>What opportunities are there for a person or person to use the Welsh Language? <i>e.g. staff, residents and visitors</i></p>			
<p>Has the Welsh Language been considered in order to treat the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?</p>			

Section 6 – Children’s Rights Approach - [The Right Way](#)

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

Protected characteristics	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on the Children’s Rights Approach?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on the Children’s Rights Approach?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
<p>Participation (child or young person as someone who actively contributes to society as a citizen)</p>	<p>The new plan outlines how we intend to build on the participation work with children and young people though</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Forum • Children’s Grand Council • Council scrutiny committee • 14+ team • Young Carers • Youth Service • LGBTQ+ groups 	<p>No negative impacts of the plan, the plan set out how we intend to ensure the engagement and participation of C & YP</p>	<p>By continuing to build on the work undertaken over the past years it is felt that the plan will go towards maximising outcomes for children and young people</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gypsy Roma Travellers C & YP • C & YP with a learning disability or physical disability <p>Children and Young People were consulted and involved in the development of the plan</p>		
<p>Provision (the basic rights of children and young people to survive and develop)</p>	<p>Children & Young People will be included throughout the delivery of the plan.</p> <p>The ongoing work in regards to the monitoring and further organisational integration of the Integrated Impact Assessment process will have a positive impact in terms of inclusion and understanding the impacts of policy</p>		

	<p>development or service change may have in regards to children & young people</p>		
<p>Protection (children and young people are protected against exploitation, abuse or discrimination)</p>	<p>The plan outlines how we will create a culture that is safe for children and young people, it also talks about strengthening reporting mechanisms to ensure children and young people are protected against exploitation, abuse or discrimination.</p> <p>The plan is adopted across all departments including education to ensure we work in partnership. Our equalities officer sits on the participation network for Wales, the participation group for ABUHB and the Gwent Safeguarding sub group</p>		

Section 7– Community Safety

Duty to Consider Crime and Disorder Implications

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a duty on the local authority to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder, anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment, the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances, re-offending and serious violence.

Impacts	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on crime and disorder?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on crime and disorder?	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>Crime (consider impact on each: victims, offenders and neighbourhoods)</p> <p>Anti-Social Behaviour and behaviour adversely affecting the local environment (consider impact on each: victims, offenders, neighbourhoods and green spaces)</p>	<p>The plan sets out how we as an organisation will work towards the Public Sector Equality Duty, we understand that knowing our communities and understanding the issues will help us to ensure we work together collaboratively in order to achieve positive outcomes towards</p>	<p>The plan aims to mitigate negative impacts in relation to community safety within the actions of Equality objective 4: <i>We will promote and support inclusive, safe and cohesive communities.</i></p>	<p>By working in partnership, sharing intelligence will help to maximise positive outcomes and minimise any negative outcomes.</p>

<p>Misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances (Think vulnerable children, adults, families and communities)</p>	<p>achieving safe and cohesive communities.</p>		
<p>Re-offending (Think young people and adults, victims, families, communities)</p>	<p>Our plan has a specific objective with actions that will help us to continue to build on positive work with the Gwent Community Cohesion team,</p>		
<p>Serious Violence (Think vulnerable young people, vulnerable adults, victims, families, communities)</p>	<p>community safety team, as well as our resettlement programme to continually improve going forward.</p>		
<p>Counter Terrorism (People and places that are vulnerable to terrorism or violent extremism)</p>	<p>The plan outlines how we will ensure actions are taken in order to achieve the Welsh Government vision of an Anti-Racist Wales by 2030, as well as ensuring we have a focus for LGBTQ+ plan.</p>		
<p>Community Cohesion (Asylum seekers, Migrants, Victims or Hate Crime, Community tensions)</p>	<p>Equality Objective 4: <i>We will promote and support inclusive, safe</i></p>		

	<p><i>and cohesive communities</i></p> <p>Our commitment towards the Wellbeing of Future Generation Act Wales National Goals of supporting ‘a more Equal Wales’ and ‘a Wales of Cohesive Communities’ continues. Working in Partnership with the West Gwent Community Cohesion Team alongside our Community Safety Team we deliver programmes and initiatives that increase awareness and understanding, celebrate diversity and bring together communities</p>		
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Section 8- Armed Forces Covenant Duty [AFC Draft Statutory Guidance - Final.pdf](#)

Impacts	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on the armed forces community?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on the armed forces community?	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>Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of services • Planning and funding • Co-operation between bodies and professionals <p>These healthcare functions are within scope of the Duty in the following settings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NHS Primary Care services, including general practice, community pharmacies, NHS dental, NHS optometry services and public health screening services. • NHS Secondary Care services, including urgent 	<p>Equality Objective 6: <i>We will strive to reduce inequality caused by poverty for people who have protected characteristics.</i></p> <p>The plan for 2024-2028 aims to; -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take into account feedback from the consultation and face to face engagement leading up to the development of the plan, objectives and actions 	<p>We recognise that throughout the consultation that there are aspects such as outside external factors that the Council alone cannot change or may have no influence, however as Council we are committed to sharing intelligence and working with partners to mitigate negative impacts on those who are at a socio-economic disadvantage as well as ensuring our services are fit for purpose.</p>	<p>The plan aims to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive outcomes. Also continuing to work in partnership with our armed forces regional officer we feel we can continue the good work that has already started, as well as continuing to raise awareness and improve the lives of those from the armed forces community.</p>

<p>and emergency care, hospital and community services, specialist care, mental health services, and additional needs services (as applicable).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local authority-delivered healthcare services, including sexual health services and drug and alcohol misuse services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be flexible in order to ensure it incorporates changes that may be needed throughout its cycle Build on the good work that has already taken place Develop key actions that will be monitored regularly and reported annually. Ensure the actions are being delivered as well as being updated on an annual basis to ensure continuous improvement. Consider cross organisational work and policy to ensure that we fulfil “the one council approach” Consider those from socio economic 		
<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions Educational attainment and curriculum Child wellbeing Transport Attendance Additional needs support Use of Service Pupil Premium funding (England only) <p>These education functions are within scope of the Duty in compulsory education settings, that is, primary, secondary, and, for England only, compulsory further</p>			

<p>education. The Duty does not cover nursery (early years education), higher education, or other voluntary adult education settings</p>	<p>backgrounds when delivering, reviewing and setting actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share intelligence with partners in order to increase the chances of positive outcomes 		
<p>Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocations policy for social housing • Tenancy strategies (England only) • Homelessness • Disabled Facilities Grants 	<p>Equality Objective 3: We will create a fair and inclusive learning culture for children and young people with protected characteristics</p> <p>The plan sets how we will ensure that our young people are educated within a safe and inclusive environment in order to help them grow, providing them with the skills to move onto further education or gain meaningful employment. There is also the focus of how we ensure integration within communities to ensure</p>		

	<p>wellbeing and cohesive communities as well as working collaboratively in tackling issues caused by poverty in order foster a prosperous Wales.</p> <p><i>Understanding your identity is an important part of a child's development. It takes place in the early years of their lives and follows them into adulthood.</i></p> <p><i>Tackling inequalities in our education and learning settings is not a new concept and remains an on-going challenge in Blaenau Gwent. We know that fair and inclusive learning cultures promote equity, access, participation, and achievement for all learners, regardless of their identity, ability, or circumstance.</i></p>		
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Section 9-Data-Please outline any data or evidence that has been used to develop the proposal, this can be previous consultations, local/national data, pilot projects, reports, feedback from clients etc.		
Data/evidence –What data/evidence was used? - provide any links.	What were the key findings?	How has the data/evidence informed this proposal?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey data • Workforce data • Training data • Face to face engagement • Community impact assessments • EHRC “Is Wales Fairer” • Audit Wales “not just a tick box exercise” • Welsh Government Anti-Racist Plan • Welsh Government LGBTQ+ Action Plan • Children’s Commissioner-Take it seriously report 	<p>https://sway.cloud.microsoft/KkstkgSTrHjxFQIn?ref=Link</p>	<p>All of the data/evidence was used to shape the objectives and plan outline which we then carried out further consultation which involved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further survey • DMT meetings • Consultation with groups such as the Youth Forum • Face to face engagement <p>This along with what we know helped to devise the plan for 2024-2028</p>
Are there any data or information gaps and if so what are they and how do you intend to address them?		

Section 10-Consultation. Please provide details of consultation undertaken to support the proposal. Please consider the Gunning Principles: -

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

Briefly describe any planned consultations or consultations that have been carried out to date. Please consider the above principles.

Please consider the following questions; -

1. Who did you consult?

- Staff, Managers, Groups, Partners and community groups and individuals

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

- Initial survey October 2023 and initial face to face engagement
- DMT meetings January 2024
- Formal consultation December 2023 to end of January 2024
- Further face to face engagement sessions January 2024

3. Was there enough information provided to response effectively?

Yes

Summary details can be found here

<https://sway.cloud.microsoft/KkstkgSTrHjxFQln?ref=Link>

4. What were the findings?

Main issues raised were

- Transport
- Cost of Living
- Housing

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

Yes, all of the findings including other reports and data have been used to shape the new plan for 2024-2028

Section 11-Monitoring and Review

How will the implementation of the proposal be monitored, including the impacts or changes made?	Will be monitored regularly throughout its delivery to ensure the actions are being delivered as well as forming new actions to continually improve and work towards the objectives outlined. The plan will also be reported on annually as part of our Public Sector Equality Duty
What monitoring tools will be used?	Actions plans will be developed in line with the objectives Those actions will be regularly reported against through the corporate reporting process This will be shared with the stakeholder group where we will provide updates and look at further solutions or actions to be considered
How will the results be used for future development?	The results will be used to build on good work and build the next stage of the actions plans towards the overall objectives within the four-year plan
How and when will it be reviewed?	Through quarterly corporate reporting process Annual report
Who is responsible for ensuring this happens?	Policy & partnerships team

Section 12 - Decision

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

Continue with the proposal in its current form	Yes X	No
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Continue with proposal but take into account reasonable steps to mitigate any negative impacts of the proposal	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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Name of person completing the IIA	
Name:	Lissa Friel
Job Title:	Policy Officer Equality and Engagement
Date:	27 th February 2024

Head of Service Approval			
Name:	Sarah King		
Job Title:	Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships		
Signature:		Date:	28/02/2024

Agenda Item 34

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 11.03.2024

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 08.03.2024

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **21st March, 2024**

Report Subject: **Multi Location Meeting Policy and Council Chamber Options Moving Forward**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor S. Thomas - Leader of the Council/Cabinet Member Corporate Services and Performance**

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

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance & Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	22/02/24			11/03/24			21/03/24	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To review the Council's Multi Location Meeting Policy (found at appendix 1), which is used to inform Members, Officers and the public how multi-location meeting arrangements and the electronic broadcasting of meetings will operate at Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.
- 1.2 The Policy has been developed in line with legislative requirements as outlined by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- 1.3 The Policy was first approved by Council in September 2022.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Since April 2021, the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 has come into force and enables Councils to operate multi-location meetings whereby Members, Officers, the public and Press are able to attend meetings physically or remotely.
- 2.2 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 provides that Councils are required to:
 - a) Electronically broadcast meetings (with effect from May 2022).
 - b) Make and publish arrangements to ensure that all Council, Cabinet, Committee, Sub-Committee and Joint Committee meetings may be attended remotely (i.e. enabling persons who are not in the same place to attend the meeting) – also referred to as 'multi-location meetings'.
 - o Meetings must be capable of being held virtually, but each authority must decide whether their meetings will be held fully virtually,

partially virtually or as physical meetings (authorities may not mandate physical attendance at meetings).

- Participants in the meetings must be able to speak to and hear each other; and for meetings which are required to be broadcast (full Council meetings), participants must also be able to see and be seen by each other.

c) Publish all meeting documents on the Council's website, including notices, summonses, agendas, reports and background papers.

- A note of the meeting, including Members in attendance and decisions made, must be published within 7 working days of the meeting.
- Notice of meetings is no longer required to be posted at the Council's offices. However, copies of agendas and reports must be made available for the public if meetings are held physically.
- The Council is also required to make public access provision for members of the public who cannot access electronic documents, for example, by providing access to computers, copies of documents, or making documents available for inspection.

2.3 When considering arrangements for remote attendance or 'multi-location meetings', authorities must have regard to the statutory guidance as part of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

2.4 The statutory guidance sets out a number of general principles to guide authorities when developing their meeting arrangements, namely, transparency, accessibility, good conduct, Welsh language, local needs and future generations. The guidance confirms the meeting arrangements should be reflected in the procedure rules set out in the constitution.

2.5 The statutory guidance also stipulates that authorities should develop a policy setting out how the multi-location meetings will operate and reflect the meeting arrangements in the constitution.

2.6 **The Purpose of a Multi-Location Meeting**

The establishment of multi-location meetings has a number of benefits which the Council is looking to promote. Multi Location Meetings:

- Provide greater participation in meetings by the public and external participants;
- Make it easy for the public to view and participate in decision making and the democratic process observing discussions, recommendations and decisions are made in a transparent way;
- Ensure compliance with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in terms of making the authority more sustainable and resilient. Multi-location meetings reduce the carbon footprint of physical meetings. They also reduce both the reliance on paper and reduce the need for travel;
- Provide significant time and cost savings for councillors and officers particularly in relation to regional arrangements; and

- Make it easier for participants to take part in meetings when they have employment, family, caring or other commitments.

2.7 **Blaenau Gwent Council Multi-Location Meetings**

Multi-Location meeting facilities are available within two rooms at the General Offices, Ebbw Vale, within the Sir William Firth Room and Hot Mill Room.

2.7.1 The Multi-Location Meeting Policy is to be used to support all meetings of the Council, its Committees and member development sessions, whose participants are not all in the same physical place.

2.7.2 The Multi-Location Meeting Policy includes detail of:

- Legislative requirements;
- Detail of what a Multi Location Meeting is;
- The process in Blaenau Gwent;
- Broadcasting of Meetings;
- Recording of Meetings by Others;
- Exempt and Confidential items;
- Calendar of Meetings;
- Attendance;
- Meeting Procedures; and
- Chairing.

2.7.3 The Multi Location Meeting Policy is supported by a number of other documents that should be considered when either conducting or participating in a multi location meeting, including:

- The Council's Constitution;
- Hybrid Meeting Protocol; and
- Information Security Policy.

2.8 **Changes to the Multi Location Meeting Policy**

The first Blaenau Gwent Multi Location Meeting Policy was agreed by Council on 29th September 2022. Since this first iteration, a number of minor amendments have been made, following learning and to make it more efficient, the changes include:

Page Number on Policy, Section and Change Made	Reason for Change
Page 1 Contents Page Added	To ease use of the Policy and its contents
Page 2 Background – WG web link removed	Outdated link
Page 3 Blaenau Gwent Multi Location Policy – Changed name of room Includes Council decision of how meetings are currently held	Rooms have changed since the first iteration of the Policy. Reflects Council decision
Page 3 Exempt or Confidential Items – Added a recommendation regarding exempt or confidential items	Suggestion to improve how we operate for exempt or confidential items
Page 4 Attendance at Meetings – Process amended Information now in bold, ‘If no response is received, then it will be assumed that invitees wish to attend via Microsoft Teams’. Process - Minimum number of physical attendees amended to minimum number of members in physical attendance Table - Scrutiny Committees added, ‘(meetings to be held at the Chair’s discretion)’ Table - Member Development Sessions – Change from all meetings as hybrid to fully remote unless requested	Change to process to make it more efficient and easier to collect responses directly through email rather than contacting Democratic Services by phone. Bold to highlight the process. The Multi Location Meeting policy is in place for Members and not officers. Bracket added to reflect decisions of Chairs when conducting their meetings. Change made following majority of Member Development Sessions being held fully remote and also reduces administrative burden on staff
Page 5 Procedures at Meetings – included legislative requirements regarding member cameras	Under legislation Members should be seen and heard in meetings and members should have their cameras on during meeting

<p>Page 6 Attendance at Meetings Whilst Out of the Country – Added a link to the Blaenau Gwent Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Policy</p>	<p>Ease of access to this policy</p>
<p>Page 6 Chairing – Section amended from, ‘Chairs and vice-chairs are encouraged to attend meetings in person in order to benefit from the direct support of Democratic Services’ to, ‘As hybrid meeting arrangements have been operational for some time, Chairs and vice-chairs are encouraged to manage meetings how they feel most comfortable whether that be in person or remotely. Support and advice from advisors and Democratic Services are provided in either scenario, when required’.</p>	<p>Amendment reflects current processes.</p>
<p>Page 7 Supporting Documents</p>	<p>Added link to updated Constitution</p>

2.9 Future Options for the Location of Committee Meetings

- 2.9.1 Since the Covid pandemic in 2020, rooms at the General Offices have been used to facilitate a Mass Vaccination Centre which brought in income to the Council.
- 2.9.2 Recently the ABUHB have vacated the space at the General Offices. This offers an opportunity for the reconsideration of a venue to accommodate a Council Chamber.
- 2.9.3 The Jack Williams Conference Hall, located on the ground floor of the General Offices is a large space that could accommodate a Council Chamber, or there are potentials to consider other space for a Council Chamber if needed.
- 2.9.4 A number of factors would need to be considered and agreed before the establishment of a new Council Chamber.

3. Options for Recommendation

To include Recommendation(s) / Endorsement by other groups, e.g. CMT/Committees/Other groups)

- 3.1 The report has been considered by Democratic Services Committee on 11th March and verbal feedback on their recommendations will be fed back verbally to Council for their consideration.

1. Multi Location Meeting Policy (appendix 1) –

Option 1a

Recommend approval of the Multi Location Meeting Policy and for it to be used to support all future democratic meetings and member sessions.

Option 1b

Make amendments to the content of the Multi Location Meeting Policy, noting the legislative requirements, before approval, and for it to be used to support all future democratic meetings and member sessions.

2. Future Options for a Council Chamber–

Verbal feedback to be provided to Council from Democratic Services Committee on their recommendation for a Council Chamber moving forward:

Option 2a

For Council to approve the recommendation as set out by Democratic Services.

Option 2b

For Council to not approve the recommendation as set out by Democratic Services.

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

- 4.1 The Multi Location Meeting Policy is a requirement of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- 4.2 The statutory guidance also stipulates that authorities should develop a policy setting out how the multi-location meetings will operate and reflect the meeting arrangements in the constitution.

5. Implications Against Each Option

Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)

5.1 Multi Location Meeting Policy –

- 5.1.1 The resources required to support multi location meetings have already been established. No further investment is required at this time.

5.2 Council Chamber –

5.2.1 There will be costs associated with creating a Council Chamber at the General Offices should members wish to pursue this option or at an alternative location including:

- Cost to relocate the hybrid meeting system, or the purchasing of a new system;
- Electric and socket installation;
- Wifi;
- Furniture;
- Room Design;
- Acoustic works and sound enhancement (replace windows or alternative to reduce noise)

5.2.2 *Please note - any works at the General Offices would need to be approved by CADW and no work can disturb the current building design. There may be costs associated with undertaken work with CADW.*

5.2.3 If it is agreed for works to be undertaken at the General Offices, or an alternative location, a budget code would need to be established as there is currently no budget to support this type of work.

5.3 Risk including Mitigating Actions

5.3.1 There is a risk to the Council if the Multi Location Meeting Policy is not adopted in line with Legislation.

5.3.2 The Council is required to offer for democratic meetings to be held on a hybrid or remote basis. **Authorities may not mandate physical attendance at meetings.**

5.4 Legal

5.4.1 The Multi Location Policy has been developed following Welsh Government guidance and the requirements as part of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

5.4.2 There is a requirement for all meetings of Council to be broadcast live. This will be a future development for the Council.

5.5 Human Resources

5.5.1 Democratic Services staff are trained in use of the hybrid meeting system and in operating multi location meetings. However, the staff resource to operate the system is significant, therefore a minimum attendance at the General Offices is required.

5.5.2 Further training is being sought on the broadcasting of live meetings as there is a statutory requirement for all Council meetings to be broadcast live (the

current arrangements for recording meetings and uploading the recordings onto the website are suitable for all other democratic meetings).

6. Supporting Evidence

Performance Information and Data

6.1 As part of the Council’s performance management information the number of attendees at committees and those attending virtually or physically is recorded.

6.1.1 Data collated from June 2023 to January 2024. Prior to this the system was not being used and all meetings were held remotely using Microsoft Teams.

6.1.2 Committees not offered as hybrid during the period:

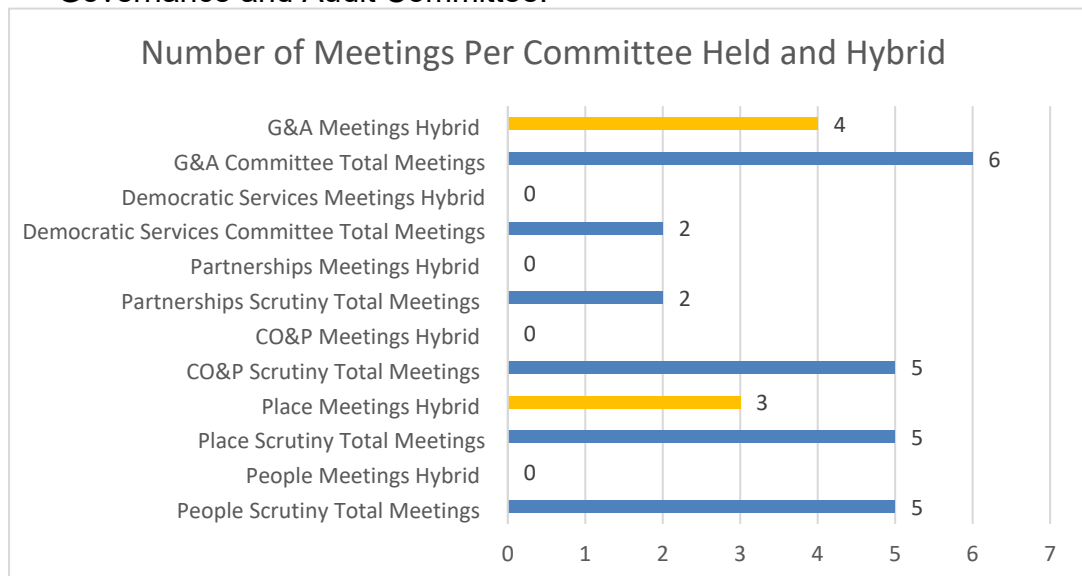
- Council;
- Planning Committee; and
- Licensing Committee.

6.1.3 Committees offered as hybrid during the period:

- Place Scrutiny Committee;
- Partnerships Scrutiny Committee;
- People Scrutiny Committee;
- Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny Committee);
- Democratic Services Committee; and
- Governance & Audit Committee.

6.1.4 Since June 2023, 28% of meetings offered as hybrid have been held hybrid. The chart below shows that only two committees have conducted their meetings using a hybrid format:

- Place Scrutiny Committee; and
- Governance and Audit Committee.



6.1.5 The table below shows member attendance at meetings held as hybrid:

Month	Hybrid Committee	Number of Members at the GO	Number of Members on Teams	Total Meeting Attendance
21 st June 2023	Governance & Audit Committee	3 out of 8*	5 out of 8*	100%
20 th June 2023	Place Scrutiny Committee	7 out of 9	2 out of 9	100%
12 th July 2023	Governance & Audit Committee	2** out of 8*	3 out of 8*	62.5%
August 2023	Summer Recess			
20 th September 2023	Governance & Audit Committee	3 out of 8*	5 out of 8*	100%
5 th September 2023	Place Scrutiny Committee	4 out of 9	3 out of 9	77.7%
18 th October 2023	Governance & Audit Committee	2** out of 8*	4 out of 8*	75%
November 2023	No hybrid meeting held; all meetings fully remote			
5 th December 2023	Place Scrutiny Committee	4 out of 9	5 out of 9	100%
January 2024	No hybrid meeting held; all meetings fully remote			

*Governance and Audit Committee had a vacancy therefore between June and November the total number on the Committee was 8 and from December onwards it was 9.

**As per the multi-location meeting policy, 3 members indicated attendance at the General Offices but then attended remotely

6.1.6 The table below shows the number of meetings offered as Hybrid but held fully on Teams and Member Attendance:

Meeting Date	Committee Meeting Held Fully Remote	Member Attendance
22 nd June 2023	Corporate Overview & Performance	8 Members - 88.8%
5 th July 2023	Special Corporate Overview & Performance	8 Members - 88.8%
13 th July 2023	Democratic Services Committee	9 Members plus 4 Chairs/Vice-Chairs - 100%
18 th July 2023	People Scrutiny Committee	9 Members - 100%
August 2023	Summer Recess	
14 th September 2023	Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny	8 Members - 88.8%
19 th September 2023	People Scrutiny	9 Members - 100%
12 th October 2023	Corporate Overview & Performance	9 Members - 100%
18 th October 2023	Governance & Audit	6 Members - 66.6%

19 th October 2023	Special Partnerships	8 Members - 88.8
13 th November 2023	People Scrutiny	5 Members - 55.5%
16 th November 2023	Partnerships Scrutiny	9 Members - 100%
1 st December 2023	Governance & Audit	7 Members - 77.7%
6 th December 2023	Corporate Overview & Performance	8 Members - 88.8%
16 th January 2024	Place Scrutiny	9 Members - 100%
17 th January 2024	Governance & Audit	6 Members - 66.6%
18 th January 2024	Corporate Overview & Performance	7 Members - 77.7%
30 th January 2024 (10am)	People Scrutiny	7 Members - 77.7%
30 th January 2024 (12:15pm)	People Scrutiny	6 Members - 66.6%

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

Multi Location Meetings provide greater participation in meetings by the public and external participants.

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

Multi Location Meetings:

- Make it easy for the public to view and participate in decision making and the democratic process observing discussions, recommendations and decisions are made in a transparent way; and
- Make it easier for participants to take part in meetings when they have employment, family, caring or other commitments.

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

The hybrid meeting system and Multi Location Meeting Policy supports long term thinking for the Council and provides future proofing for democratic meetings that support digital infrastructure.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The Multi Location Meeting Policy and Information Security Policy have been developed to prevent issues arising from the inappropriate use of the Council's ICT.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

Arrangements can be made in future for partner organisations to utilise the hybrid meeting system at the General Offices.

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

Training and support for managing the hybrid system will be provided across Council Services, such as Business Support, so that meetings, outside of the democratic arrangements, can operate on a hybrid basis.

6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

Multi Location Meetings:

- Ensure compliance with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in terms of making the authority more sustainable and resilient. Multi-location meetings reduce the carbon footprint of physical meetings. They also reduce both the reliance on paper and reduce the need for travel; and
- Provide significant time and cost savings for councillors and officers particularly in relation to regional arrangements.

6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)** (All decisions, policy reviews or policy implementation will now require a completed Integrated Impact Assessment) *To note a screening template no longer needs to be completed*

The Multi Location Meeting Policy provides alternative options for attendance at meetings, supporting those with caring or work needs as well as those who may not be able to attend meetings physically. Reasonable adjustments can be considered, on a case by case basis, to support the engagement and participation in meetings by members, officers and the public.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

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

The Democratic Services Committee will have responsibility for the reviewing of the Multi Location Meeting Policy before approval at Council.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 Multi Location Meeting Policy
- Constitution - [The Council Constitution | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)
- Hybrid Meeting Protocol



Hybrid Meetings
Protocol.docx

- [Blaenau Gwent CBC: Democracy \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)
- Information Security Policy



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Blaenau Gwent Multi-Location Meetings Policy



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Background

Since April 2021, the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 has come into force and enables Councils to operate multi-location meetings whereby Members, Officers, the public and Press are able to attend meetings physically or remotely.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 provides that Councils are required to:

- a) Electronically broadcast meetings (with effect from May 2022).
- b) Make and publish arrangements to ensure that all Council, Cabinet, Committee, Sub-Committee and Joint Committee meetings may be attended remotely (i.e. enabling persons who are not in the same place to attend the meeting) – also referred to as ‘multi-location meetings’:
 - Meetings must be capable of being held virtually, but each authority must decide whether their meetings will be held fully virtually, partially virtually (where some participants are in the same physical location, whilst others join the meeting virtually, also referred to as ‘hybrid meetings’) or as physical meetings (authorities may not mandate physical attendance at meetings).
 - Participants in the meetings must be able to speak to and hear each other; and for meetings which are required to be broadcast (full Council meetings), participants must also be able to see and be seen by each other.
- c) Publish all meeting documents on the Council’s website, including notices, summonses, agendas, reports and background papers.
 - A note of the meeting, including Members in attendance and decisions made, must be published within 7 working days of the meeting.
 - Notice of meetings is no longer required to be posted at the Council’s offices. However, copies of agendas and reports must be made available for the public if meetings are held physically.
 - The Council is also required to make public access provision for members of the public who cannot access electronic documents, for example, by providing access to computers, copies of documents, or making documents available for inspection.

When considering arrangement for remote attendance or ‘multi-location meetings’, authorities must have regard to the statutory guidance under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

The statutory guidance sets out a number of general principles to guide authorities when developing their meeting arrangements, namely, transparency, accessibility, good conduct, Welsh language, local needs and future generations. The guidance confirms the meeting arrangements should be reflected in the procedure rules set out in the constitution.

The statutory guidance also stipulates that authorities should develop a policy setting out how the multi-location meetings will operate and reflect the meeting arrangements in the constitution.

What is a Multi-Location Meeting?

A Multi-Location Meeting is a meeting whose participants are not all in the same physical place. Some of the participants may be physically located in the meeting venue whilst others join from their home or other remote location.

The Welsh Government Statutory Guidance stipulates that local democracy and the needs of the public in engaging with multi-location meetings are an important consideration in deciding where and when meetings will be convened.

It is also acknowledged that some participants may prefer physical meetings due to protected characteristics or circumstances which limits their ability to participate online. Some participants however may wish to join council meetings remotely and from another location as a matter of default because they have working or caring responsibilities, protected characteristics, which make attending meetings in person difficult.

The Purpose of a Multi-Location Meeting

The establishment of multi-location meetings has a number of benefits which the Council is looking to promote.

Multi Location Meetings:

- Provide greater participation in meetings by the public and external participants;
- Make it easy for the public to view and participate in decision making and the democratic process observing discussions, recommendations and decisions are made in a transparent way;
- Ensure compliance with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in terms of making the authority more sustainable and resilient. Multi-location meetings reduce the carbon footprint of physical meetings. They also reduce both the reliance on paper and reduce the need for travel;
- Provide significant time and cost savings for councillors and officers particularly in relation to regional arrangements; and
- Make it easier for participants to take part in meetings when they have employment, family, caring or other commitments.

Blaenau Gwent Council Multi-Location Meetings

There are two rooms at the General Offices, Ebbw Vale, with multi-location meeting capability to enable participants to attend and fully participate remotely or in person. The room is also able to accommodate a designated public gallery to allow the public and Press to attend in person if required. The section of the Multi Location Meeting Policy, 'Attendance at Meetings', identifies the current arrangements for holding Committee meetings.

All Committees may be viewed at: [Blaenau Gwent CBC: Democracy \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk) please select the chosen committee to view from the options provided.

This Multi-Location Meeting Policy is to be used to support all meetings of the Council, its Committees and member development sessions, whose participants are not all in the same physical place. Such meetings can either be held:

- Hybrid – with some participants joining through remote means (Microsoft Teams) and some attending physically in the same place as others. Hybrid Meetings will be conducted and broadcasted via the Council's hybrid meeting solution from the Council Committee Room. These meetings will be recorded and uploaded, within two days of the meeting taking place, onto the Council's website (apart from meetings which are either partly or wholly confidential in nature).
- Entirely Remote – whereby all participants are taking part via remote means (Microsoft Teams) and recorded and uploaded, within two days of the meeting taking place, onto the Council's website (apart from meetings which are either partly or wholly confidential in nature).

Broadcasting Meetings

The Act requires for all Full Council meetings to be broadcast live with the broadcast being shown on the Council's website. The process for this is being sourced for future use. All other formal Committee meetings will be recorded and then uploaded to the Council's website within two days of the meetings taking place. All recordings can be found here [Blaenau Gwent CBC: Democracy \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk) please select the chosen committee to view from the options provided.

Recording of Meetings by Others

In meetings which are open to the public, filming and use of social media is permitted during meetings so long as there is no disturbance to the conduct of the meeting.

Exempt or Confidential Items

On occasions Committees will be required to consider exempt information in which the public and Press will be excluded from the meeting, both physically and remotely.

When this happens, the agenda will be scheduled to ensure that all exempt items are included at the end of the meeting in order to minimise any disruption to the meeting. There will also be two meeting invites sent to participants:

- Electronic meeting invite 1 will be for the open part of the agenda and will include Members, Officers, the Press and public. This section will be recorded and uploaded to the Council website within two days of the meeting taking place.

- Electronic meeting invite 2 will be for the exempt part of the agenda and will ONLY include those Members and Officers required to this part of the meeting. This section of the meeting will be recorded but WILL NOT be uploaded onto the website and will be kept in a locked electronic folder only accessible by Democratic Services Staff and CLT.

**note a transcript for both meetings will be available following the meeting, but ONLY those invited to the meeting of the exempt items will be able to access this.*

It is recommended that all members and officers present for an exempt item are either located alone where they cannot be overheard, or wear headphones to ensure that confidential information is not heard by anyone outside of the meeting.

Calendar of Meetings

A programme of meetings will be developed annually which identifies when, where and how each of the Council’s meetings will be held. This may be subject to change during the year for operational reasons.

Attendance at Meetings

Invitations to meetings will be provided electronically and will provide details of the meeting, its location and timings. Certain meetings will include links to enable the participants to join remotely should they wish to do so. On receipt of the invitation, and if requested, participants will need to indicate their intentions to attend the meeting physically or remotely to enable any necessary administrative and support arrangements to be put in place by Democratic Services.

Process

Democratic Services will email all those invited to attend a Committee meeting seeking confirmation of whether invitees wish to attend the meeting either via MS Teams, or in person at the General Offices. This email will be sent in advance of the meeting.

Please note that in order for the meeting to proceed on a hybrid basis, a minimum of 3 Members of the Committee are required to physically attend the meeting at the General Offices. If this number is not met, the meeting will proceed via Microsoft Teams. **If no response is received, then it will be assumed that invitees wish to attend via Microsoft Teams.**

A few days before the meeting, Democratic Services will inform the Committee of whether the meeting will be held as hybrid or fully remote.

Owing to the necessary administrative and system support that is required to hold hybrid meetings a minimum number of physical attendees will be put in place for each meeting. If the minimum number is not met, the meeting will be held fully via remote methods.

Meetings are also attended by a range of participants other than committee members. Officers and committee members should notify Democratic Services of additional participants who will be attending with details and contact information of the participant. The external participants will be contacted by Democratic Services to confirm their attendance, explain how they can join the meeting either as a physical or remote participant and the meeting procedures. If the external participant is joining the meeting remotely an electronic meeting invitation similar to that of other participants will be sent.

The minimum physical attendance number of members (excluding Officers and external participants) will be in place as follows:

Meeting	Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny Committees (meetings to be held at the Chair’s discretion) • Governance and Audit Committee • Democratic Services Committee 	All meetings will be offered as hybrid. Minimum number of physical member attendees – 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Committee • Licensing Committee 	All meetings will be offered as fully remote.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet • Council 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member development sessions 	<p>All meetings will be offered as fully remote unless a specific request is made for the session to be hybrid.</p> <p>Minimum number of physical member attendees – 5</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other 	<p>All meetings will be offered as hybrid.</p> <p>Minimum number of physical member attendees – 5</p>

Members of the public will also be able to attend physical meetings at the General Offices. In the event that the number of members of the public needs to be limited then seats will be allocated on a first come first served basis. Members of the public who wish to view a meeting which is to be fully remote should make a request to the Head of Democratic Services, by noon three days before the remote meeting, to enable appropriate arrangements to be made.

Procedure at Meetings

Those participants attending the meeting remotely should also ensure that they have appropriate internet connectivity to join and maintain their attendance throughout the meeting.

If attending physically and using a laptop the person should ensure that it is on mute and the sound is off (**this is imperative to stop sound feedback**).

All those participating in the meeting, physically or remotely, will need to indicate when they would like to speak, via physical hands up in the Committee Room or hands up on Teams. Only when brought in by the Chair may someone speak. They should remember then to unmute their microphone when speaking and to re mute when finished. Participations must speak clearly and into the microphone.

For all meetings, Members are requested to leave their cameras on throughout the duration of the meeting. This is to ensure members of the Press and public are aware of who the elected representatives are in each meeting. This is also a legal requirement under Chapter 4 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, Section 47, *'Attendance at local authority meetings - in the case of meetings of a principal council required to be broadcast under section 46 (electronic broadcasts), or any other local authority meetings required to be broadcast by regulations made under that section, Members to speak to and be heard by each other and to see and be seen by each other. Officers will only turn on their cameras if they are speaking and members of the public and Press will be asked to keep their cameras off for the duration of the meeting.*

It is inevitable that there will be occasions when a remote participant may need to disable their camera due to poor connection/internet issues. If this occurs the participant should use the chat function to inform the meeting Chair and Democratic Services staff of the issue.

Reports will not be shown on screen. Only on rare occasions, such as providing a presentation, will the information be shown on screen. Please see section above on the legal requirement for members to be seen when attending local authority meetings.

All attendees are encouraged to use their Council devices at meetings so that agendas and papers can be viewed online.

A participant at a meeting wishing to speak in Welsh is required to contact Democratic Services at least 3 days in advance of a meeting so that the necessary translation arrangements can be made.

All meetings will be facilitated by a Democratic Services Officer.

Attendance at Meetings Whilst out of the Country

Members wishing to attend meetings whilst out of the Country and using their own personal or Council devices will be able to do so by accessing free Wi-Fi facilities as the Council will not be able to reimburse costs. However, to enable access to Council meetings abroad the Information Security Policy states that approval must be sought from SRS, the SIRO and Data Protection Governance Officer before taking equipment abroad. Information will be sought to understand, where the device will be securely stored/locked, what Wi-Fi will be accessed and is it secure, international data transfer and the risk of the device being lost/stolen.

Should Members wish to access meetings using mobile phones (Council or Personal) or other personal devices such as laptops, iPads etc the Council will not be able to reimburse call or data costs. This access would therefore be a matter for the Member and subject to the Council's existing BYOD (bring your own device) policy. Please note, no documentation or personal information should be downloaded to a personal device.

Technical support on any Council supported devices whilst abroad will not be provided by the Council's ICT provider SRS, or Democratic Services Officers.

<http://intranet/media/186101/Blaenau-Gwent-BYOD-Policy-v032- FINAL.docx>

Record of Attendance

The Democratic Services Officer will record attendance of each committee member and participant at the meeting and record attendance in the minutes of the meeting. Committee Members are to inform the relevant Democratic Services if they are unable to attend a meeting and their apologies will be recorded at the meeting and published in the minutes of the meeting.

Quorum

The quorum of a meeting is one quarter of the voting Members unless specified otherwise within the Council's Constitution. The quorum shall include those attending remotely and physically; providing they are able to speak and be heard by each other and to see and be seen by others when actively participating in proceedings.

If the numbers present fall below the quorum required, the meeting ends immediately.

Voting

It is acknowledged that technical issues may dictate the method of voting but voting will comply with the voting rules set out in the Council Procedure Rules. Methods of voting include electronic voting, a roll call vote and show of hands (either physical or virtual). Committee members should ensure that they have been present for the discussion and debate on agenda items so as to be able to exercise their vote.

The result of any vote will be announced immediately following the vote by either the Chair or the Democratic Services Officer.

Chairing Meetings

It is understood that chairing a multi-location meeting is very different to chairing a face-to-face only meeting and the job of the Chair is particularly challenging. As hybrid meeting arrangements have been operational for some time, Chairs and vice-chairs are encouraged to manage meetings how they feel most comfortable whether that be in person or remotely. Support and advice from advisors and Democratic Services are provided in either scenario, when required.

In general Chairs of meetings should:

- Ensure they are prepared for the meeting.
- Ensure all participants are able to access the meeting and can see and hear each other.
- Introduce themselves and others to members of the public who may be present.
- Check occasionally to ensure no one has been lost due to technical difficulties and provide support to those participants experiencing challenges.
- Remember that all participants may want to participate whether attending physically or remotely. If attending physically, ensure those attending remotely are able to contribute and if attending remotely ensure that you ask if anyone attending physically from the Committee Room would like to contribute.

- Ask all those attending, whether physically or remotely, to mute their microphones and to only take them off mute when brought in by the Chair. All will then need to re mute once they have spoken.

When opening the meeting inform everyone that the meeting will be recorded and will be uploaded onto the Council's website (for Council meetings the recording will be live broadcast).

If any public or Press are in attendance physically at the General Offices inform them that the public seating area is not generally filmed, however, by entering the meeting room and using the seating area they are consenting to being filmed and the possible use of these images being used on the website and/or for training purposes.

As identified above also note that filming is allowed to be undertaken by those seated in public gallery and again, by sitting in the seating area, they consent to being filmed.

Disruptive Behaviour – If a member of the public interrupt's proceedings, the Chair will warn the person concerned. If they continue to interrupt, the Chair will order their removal from the meeting. With regards to Elected Members, the procedure outlined within the Council's Constitution will apply.

Chat Function Use

Participants should only use the chat function if there is something they need the meeting to be aware of i.e. are having sound issues, or need to leave the meeting early etc.

The chat facility **is not** to be used for discussions, as all discussions must be made verbally in the meeting for the sake of individuals observing the meeting and / or the meeting recording if a recording is being made.

The chat is not to be used for other reasons. Be mindful that everyone in the meeting can see the chat content.

Supporting Documents

This guidance Policy should be read in conjunction with the Councils Constitution, Hybrid Meeting Protocol and Information Security Policy.

Constitution – [The Council Constitution | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/council-constitution)

Note – the Constitution will be undertaking a review. The arrangements outlined in this report will be reflected in a future Constitution

Hybrid Meeting Protocol –



Hybrid Meetings
Protocol.docx

Information Security Policy –



Information-Security-Policy-v12-FINAL.d

Agenda Item 35

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 11.03.2024

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 08.03.2024

Committee: **Council**
Date of Meeting: **21st March, 2024**
Report Subject: **Annual Report of the Head of Democratic Services**
Portfolio Holder: **Councillor S. Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member**
Corporate Overview & Performance
Report Submitted by: **Sarah King (Statutory Head of Democratic Services)**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	28/02/24			11/03/24			21/03/24	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To present the annual report of the Head of Democratic Services for 2023-24 and to provide an opinion on the appropriateness and adequacy of the support being provided to Elected Members.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The annual report outlines the comprehensive set of arrangements in place to support Elected Members to enable them to fulfil their roles effectively in a safe and compliant manner.

3. Options for Recommendation

- 3.1 The Democratic Services Committee will consider the report at its meeting on 11th March, 2024 and any recommendations will be provided verbally to Council.

Option 1 – That Council approves the report on the basis that it is satisfied there is a sufficient level of support for Elected Members before consideration by Council.

Option 2 – That Council provides comment and amendments to the report of the Head of Democratic Services for consideration by Council.

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

- 4.1 The role of the Head of Democratic Services is a statutory role, following the requirements as outlined by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, and set out in the Council's Constitution.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**
Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)

5.1 The Council must provide the Head of Democratic Services with resources that, in its opinion, are sufficient to allow the function of the role set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to be discharged.

The Member Development Budget for 2023-24 was £6,260.87

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There are potential risks if the levels of support arrangements for Elected Members are deemed by Council to be not sufficient. The Democratic Services Committee can recommend to Council a review of resources and/or support, if appropriate.

5.3 ***Legal***

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires the Council to designate an officer to the post of Head of Democratic Services. The role is set out in the Council's Constitution as a statutory function as outlined by within the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

5.4.1 The Head of Governance & Partnerships is the appointed Head of Democratic Services.

5.4.2 The role of the Head of Democratic Services is to:-

- carry out the Local Authority's function of designated Head of Democratic Services;
- keep under review the adequacy of provision of staff, accommodation and other resources made available to discharge the democratic services functions of the authority; and
- make reports, at least annually, to the full Council in relation to these matters.

5.4.3 The Head of Democratic Services can make recommendations including with regard to the appointment, organisation and management of staff discharging democratic functions. They may arrange for the discharge of democratic functions by staff and can delegate functions to staff as they feel appropriate.

5.4.4 In addition to the Head of Democratic Services, there is comprehensive expertise and support provided by the Deputy Head of Democratic Services (Service Manager, Performance and Democratic) and the Democratic Services Team, who comprise of 5 members of staff providing member services, committee secretariat and support to the Leadership, Cabinet and Presiding Member. There is also 1 Scrutiny Adviser.

6. **Supporting Evidence**
6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

A summary of the key areas and main changes to existing support arrangements for Elected Members which have been implemented in 2023-24 is below.

a) New Democratic & Governance Structure

Following the modernisation and strengthening of the democratic function in the Council following the election, several of the new processes and changes have bedded in and are working well.

- the establishment of the **Presiding Member** position has been well received and in response to a request from Members, an Annual Report outlining the duties and activities conducted by the Presiding Member is presented each year;
- attendance and engagement at **Scrutiny Committees** has been generally good and the cross cutting nature of the Committees are working well. We have revised and expanded the remit of the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee to include Gwent Archives and Gwent Crematoria, following a decision by Council;
- a change to **Scrutiny agendas** with a maximum of two items for either Pre-decision or Performance has worked well in most Committees, although further consideration of the Forward Work Programme for Corporate Performance & Overview Scrutiny Committee is needed;
- Reviewed and implemented a revised **evaluation** process for scrutiny which is undertaken after each Scrutiny Committee meeting and any issues raised at the Chairs and Vice Chairs meeting or directly with the Head of Democratic Services or Scrutiny Adviser;
- A further change was made to the **Planning Committee** members and voting structure to ensure enhanced and appropriate ward representation (picking up good practice from elsewhere) – this has been a significant improvement;
- A Young Person has been co-opted onto the People Scrutiny Committee to represent the views of Children and Young People and better inform decision making.

b) Gwent Public Services Board Regional Scrutiny Committee

Blaenau Gwent is the lead authority for hosting the above regional scrutiny committee. The team has worked across the five local authorities and other statutory and non-statutory partners to convene an informal workshop to determine the Terms of Reference, Membership (including Chair & Vice Chair), Forward Work Programme, Timing of Meetings, and other arrangements for the Committee (based on the model used for the Cardiff City Region Joint Scrutiny & Overview Committee led by RCT Council). In addition, we liaised with WLGA to ensure training was provided for all Committee Members on joint scrutiny arrangements and decision making.

c) Member Development Programme & Member Briefings

The role of an Elected Member can be complex and challenging. Constantly changing priorities and legislation require difficult decisions for which Members need to be well informed. It is therefore essential that Members are equipped and supported to allow them to undertake their role confidently.

Following the highly successful Induction Programme for all new and returning Members delivered in 2022-23, we continue to deliver an ongoing **Development Programme** to build up additional knowledge and skills for Members in key areas of Council business. As part of this we have recently revised the **Members Handbook**, to account of organisational changes.

This is supplemented by a large programme of **Member Briefings** where Members are exercising their right to question and gain further understanding of subjects/issues to allow them to be better equipped and more effective in conducting Council business. Some directorates also have quarterly Member briefing sessions diarised which they are using for updates on key portfolio information.

All sessions as part of the Member Induction and Member Development programmes and all Member Briefing sessions have been recorded. The recordings have been uploaded onto the **Members Library** for ease of reference and for those who may have been absent. In addition, all of the online training from WLGA has also been deposited in the Library.

A suite of Member Development policies have been reviewed and updated including the **Member Development Strategy**, Members **Mentoring Framework** and Members **Personal Development Review** and **Competency Framework**. We have been working with Members who have come forward to be Mentors/Mentees as part of the framework to help improve their skills, knowledge and competencies.

In addition, all Senior Salary Holders have undertaken a Personal Development Review and have Personal Action Plans in place for implementation with a follow up meeting in six months. For all other Members who requested a Personal Development Review, the initial meetings have taken place and Personal Action Plans being developed.

d) Informal Wellbeing Sessions

The Wellbeing Champion continues to Chair these sessions and is working with the Head of Democratic Services Team to get a Forward Work Programme of items that Members want to discuss in 2024-25, incorporating in-person catch ups.

e) Local Bi-Election – February 2024

Information provided for the newly elected Councillor immediately following election count and times for the Orientation Meeting at the General Offices where the Member collected ICT equipment and ordered mobile phones; and received copies of the Members Handbook and the Members Induction Programme.

An informal ICT session was put in place to provide support and guidance for the new Member on the set up, access and usage of their Council ICT equipment.

f) New Petitions protocol

The petitions protocol was reviewed in line with the new requirements in legislation and a new protocol (including the use of e-petitions) was adopted and agreed.

g) Family Absence Policy

A policy was developed in line with legislation and existing policies, adopted and agreed to provide for family absences for Elected Members for certain specified circumstances. The adoption of this policy helps to remove any barriers that individuals might face when considering standing for nomination/election to become a Councillor.

h) Health and Safety

The health and safety of Elected Members is important and an area that is prioritised including personal safety and self-care, stress management, personal resilience, work-life balance and bullying and harassment, including online abuse.

As part of the Induction Programme for Members, following the election in May 2022, specific sessions were provided on personal safety and Health & Safety at Work.

The WLGA also provide a number of training sessions for Elected Members including sessions designed around specific areas of concern. Resources from the WLGA include:

- [Personal Safety Guidance for Councillors](#)
- [Personal Safety Advice](#)
- [Online Abuse Guidance for Councillors](#)
- [Get Safe Online guidance](#)
- [Recognising the Terrorist Threat Guidance](#)

Elected Members are encouraged to speak to the Council's Health and Safety section and or Head of Democratic Services for support where required.

i) Activity Data

Number of Member Training and/or Briefing sessions	48 sessions (with 13 scheduled for remainder of this cycle)
Number of Council Meetings	1 AGM, 5 Ordinary Meetings, 3 Special Councils
Number of Scrutiny Meetings	17 meetings & 3 Special meetings
Number of Gwent PSB Regional Scrutiny Committee	2 meetings
Chair & Vice Chair Scrutiny Meetings	1 meeting & 1 scheduled
Informal Wellbeing Sessions	2 meetings & 1 scheduled
Personal Development Reviews	14 meetings
Mentoring Framework	2 Mentors & 5 Mentees
WLGA Community Leadership Programme	4 Members since 2022 (current programme concludes in March 2024)
Members Annual Reports	9 Reports

6.2 *Expected outcome for the public*

By providing a democratic function with sufficient support and resources means Elected Members are provided with the support, guidance and training needed to operate effectively and compliantly. In addition, this will support them in their role within the community and representing their ward.

6.3 *Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)*

Opportunities to maximise engagement by Elected Members in the range of training and support available to them will assist in meeting current and future demands of their roles.

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

Any changes or improvements made to Elected Member support arrangements are done with a view to them being sustainable in the longer term and in recognition of the increasing complexity of the roles Members undertake.

6.5 *Preventative focus*

The content of the Member Development & Briefings programme is aimed to help them build on the solid grounding of the Induction programme by gaining further skills and knowledge across the Council.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The Member Development Programme and individual Member Briefings should encompass all the local, regional and national collaborations and partnerships in place, in which the Council has an interest. Blaenau Gwent Members sit on many outside bodies with other Councillors from across Wales to service these partnerships/bodies.

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

All Council services are involved with the democratic functions of the Council. Forward Work Programmes and agendas are developed jointly with Elected Members and Officers. The change in the remit of the Scrutiny Committees to be more cross-cutting has also helped to facilitate this.

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

The modernisation of the democratic arrangements enables Members and officers to attend meetings without the need for travelling.

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

No assessment is required for this report.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The Head of Democratic Services presents an annual report to Democratic Services Committee and Council.

7.2 Evaluation is undertaken after each formal Scrutiny Committee meeting and any comments and considerations can be raised formally at the Chairs and Vice Chairs meetings as necessary or directly with the Head of Democratic Services and/or the Scrutiny Adviser.

7.3 Elected Member attendance is collected and monitored for all formal meetings and development sessions. Evaluations are also taken after all member development sessions.

7.4 Regular meetings also take place between the Chief Executive, the Monitoring Officer and the Head of Democratic Services to assess and consider the existing arrangements for Elected Members and any issues of improvement and/or compliance.

7.5 The Head of Democratic Services is keen to look at ways of continually improving the service and the experience of Members and is always happy to receive constructive feedback in ways to take this forward for the benefit of all Members. A Member Survey may be considered in 2024-25 to gather data on all support currently provided from across the Council to see how this could be strengthened and improved.

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Agenda Item 36

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 11.03.2024

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 11.03.2024

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **21st March, 2024**

Report Subject: **Presiding Member's Annual Activities Report: April 2023 – March 2024**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor C. Smith – Presiding Member**

Report Submitted by: **Councillor C. Smith – Presiding Member**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance & Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
							21.03.24	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present to Members of Council details of the events and engagement activities undertaken by the Presiding Member for the period April 2023 – March 2024.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Pursuant to the Special Meeting of the Council held on 26th October, 2022 Members requested that a report be prepared detailing the engagements and events attended by the Presiding Member.

- 2.2 The Role of the Presiding Member is to chair the Ordinary, Annual, Extraordinary and Special Meetings of the Council and to represent the Council at official and public events where representation has been requested and to promote the Council and its work as and when opportunities arise.

3. Summary of Activities

- 3.1 This report provides a summary of activities undertaken for the period April 2023 – March 2024, details below:

April 2023:

- Official handover of the Freedom of the Borough Scroll to Eva Clarke.
- Attendance at the Ceremony of Declaration of the High Sheriff of Gwent 2023-2024, Prof. Simon J. Gibson, CBE at the ICC, Newport.

May 2023:

- Visit to St. Mary's CIW Primary School, Brynmawr.

June 2023:

- Facilitated visits by Pen-y-Cwm Special School and Ebbw Fawr 3-16 Learning Community to the General Offices, Ebbw Vale.
- Attended official opening of Tennis Courts at Six Bells Park.
- Attendance at the Wales National Armed Forces Day in Newport.
- Attendance at the celebration of 225 years of worship at Siloh Baptist Uniting Church, Tredegar.

July 2023:

- Attendance at NHS@75 Presentation Morning with Vaughan Gethin, MS Minister for the Economy at PCI Pharma, Tredegar.
- Attendance at School Debate re NHS 75 at Bedwellty House, Tredegar.
- Attendance at Blaenau Gwent District Scouts Annual General Meeting, Cwm Scout HQ.
- Attended the visit of the Secretary of State for Wales to Six Bells Park.

August/September/October 2023:

There were no events scheduled during this period.

November 2023:

- Facilitated visits by Brynmawr Foundation School, Abertillery 3-16 Learning Community and Georgetown Primary School to the General Offices, Ebbw Vale.
- Visited Cwm Primary School.

December 2023:

- Attended Youth Mayor Inauguration.

March 2024:

- Attendance at the Gwent High Sheriffs' Community Fund 'Your Voice, Your Choice' Grant-Giving Event in Hengoed.
- Ebbw Vale Primary School Cluster Welsh Art Competition for St. David's Day - Presentation of Certificates at General Offices, Ebbw Vale.
- Facilitated visit by Tredegar Comprehensive School to the General Offices, Ebbw Vale.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 That Council notes the activities and events attended by the Presiding Member for the period April 2023 – March 2024.

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Agenda Item 37

Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **21st March, 2024**

Report Subject: **Memberships Report**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor S. Thomas – Leader/
Cabinet Member – Corporate Overview
& Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Democratic Services**

Report Written by: **Democratic Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance & Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
							21/03/2024	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To present a list of Memberships for consideration and determination by Members of the Council.

2. Scope

2.1 ADVISORY PANEL FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY GOVERNORS

To ratify the following appointments made at the panel meeting held on 14th March, 2024:

Cwm Primary School – Councillor Derrick Bevan

Blaen-y-Cwm Primary School – Natasha Tepielow

The River Centre 3-16 Special School – Councillor Jennifer Morgan

Abertillery 3-16 Learning Community – Darryl Tovey

2.2 PLANNING COMMITTEE

To appoint Councillor Jonathan Millard as the Ebbw Vale South Ward Member to the above Committee.

2.3 GRANTS WORKING GROUP

To appoint Councillor Jonathan Millard as the Ebbw Vale South Ward Member to the above Committee.

2.4 **TOMORROW VALLEY PROJECT GROUP**

To note that the above-named Project Group has been disbanded.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

To consider the above.