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Blaenau Gwent

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

THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND

7th March 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

CORPORATE & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Corporate & Performance Scrutiny Committee will be held in on Thursday, 14th March, 2024 at 10.00 am via MS Teams (*if you wish to view this meeting please contact michelle.hicks@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk*).

Yours faithfully

Damien McCann
Interim Chief Executive

AGENDA

Pages

1. SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION

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

2. APOLOGIES

To receive.

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

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

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS**
- To receive.
4. **CORPORATE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** 5 - 8
- To consider the decisions of the Scrutiny Committee held on 18th January, 2024.
- (N.B. The decisions are submitted for accuracy points only)*
5. **SPECIAL CORPORATE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** 9 - 14
- To consider the decisions of the Special Corporate and Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 19th February, 2024.
- (N.B. The decisions are submitted for accuracy points only)*
6. **SPECIAL CORPORATE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** 15 - 16
- To consider the decisions of the Special Corporate and Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 5th March, 2024.
- (N.B. The decisions are submitted for accuracy points only)*
7. **ACTION SHEET** 17 - 28
- To receive.
8. **COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN 2022/27 REVIEW** 29 - 62
- To consider the report of the Interim Chief Executive.
9. **CAPITAL STRATEGY 2023/2024** 63 - 78
- To consider the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

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| 10. | <u>TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REVIEW – SEPTEMBER 2023 & QUARTER 3 UPDATE</u> | 79 - 120 |
| | To consider the report of the Chief Officer Resources. | |
| 11. | <u>TREASURY MANAGEMENT – TREASURY STRATEGY STATEMENT, INVESTMENT STRATEGY & MRP POLICY STATEMENT 2024/2025 (INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS)</u> | 121 - 164 |
| | To consider the report of the Chief Officer Resources. | |
| 12. | <u>STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN 2024-28</u> | 165 - 296 |
| | To consider the report of the Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships. | |
| 13. | <u>FOSTERING FRIENDLY EMPLOYER</u> | 297 - 310 |
| | To consider the report of the Head of Organisational Development. | |
| 14. | <u>REVIEW OF AGILE WORKING, AGILE WORKING AND FLEXIBLE WORKING POLICIES</u> | 311 - 390 |
| | To consider the report of the Head of Organisational Development. | |
| 15. | <u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 25TH APRIL 2024</u> | 391 - 394 |
| | To receive. | |

To: Councillor J. Wilkins (Chair)
 Councillor J. Thomas (Vice-Chair)
 Councillor J. Hill
 Councillor J. Holt
 Councillor E. Jones
 Councillor R. Leadbeater
 Councillor C. Smith
 Councillor T. Smith

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

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE CORPORATE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>An apology for absence was received from Councillor E. Jones.</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>CORPORATE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the decisions of the meeting held on 6th December, 2023.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the decisions be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>
No. 5	<p><u>ACTION SHEET</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Action Sheet.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and the information therein be noted.</p>
No. 6	<p><u>ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION STRATEGY</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager – Partnerships and Policy.</p> <p>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).</p>
No. 7	<p><u>RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION POLICY</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 Members of the Committee to considered the amendments to the Policy and recommended approval to Council (Option 1).</p>

<p>No. 8</p>	<p><u>WORKFORCE STRATEGY 2021-2026</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 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>

<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.</p>
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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

**REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE
CORPORATE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

**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>

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.

No. 5 | **REVENUE BUDGET 2024/2025**

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

REPORT TO: **THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE CORPORATE AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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>

<p>No. 2</p>	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>The following apologies for absence were received:-</p> <p>Chief Officer Customer & Commercial; and Head of Organisational Development.</p>
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.</p>
<p>No. 4</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>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>

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Action Sheet

Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee

Meeting Date	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
12.10.23	Item 6: Blaenau Gwent Council Self-Assessment 2022/23 Page 4 – Appendix 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none">In relation to economically inactive disabled residents – what is the Council doing to support those residents.	All	Information on Adult Services - Community Options provided. Action Update: 19.12.23
18.01.24	At meeting on 18 th January 2024. Members requested further information in relation to the above action, and to include any support provided by external agencies.		Following information is attached: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Adult Services – Community Options (1)Community Hubs (2)Housing – Disabled Facilities Grant (3)Care and Repair Infographic (4)Education (5) Action complete: 29.02.24

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Item 6: Blaenau Gwent Council Self-Assessment 2022/23

Page 4 – Appendix 1

- In relation to economically inactive disabled residents – what is the Council doing to support those residents.

Adult Services-Community Options (Day Opportunities)

Across Community Options we have a range of work-related opportunities for citizens with disabilities and those with additional support needs.

We also work closely with a number of third sector partners such as the Aneurin Leisure Trust where we have service level agreements to support individuals in training and work-related activities.

One example of these is Vision 21 which is a social enterprise/charity operating across South Wales providing support for people with learning disabilities to develop skills, work experience and gain qualifications in the catering industry. Each week up to ten individuals attend the service where they are supported to develop their skills in a busy kitchen environment.

The students gain confidence and experience as well as the opportunity to undertake qualifications across all aspects of a catering enterprise such as customer service, front of house, food preparation and food hygiene, as well as developing valuable social skills.

We are also developing our own catering enterprise working in conjunction with the Blaenau Gwent Community Meals Service where we prepare tea trays for our Community Meals customers to enjoy a tasty snack and cake in the evening, as well as providing buffets on a commercial basis.

We have students that are trained by a qualified cook learning to prepare and get involved with the preparation and presentation of the tea trays and buffets. In doing so they learn cooking and food preparation skills as well as enhancing knowledge of food safety and legislation.

One of our more recent developments has seen us enter into a partnership arrangement with Blaina Institute, where we have taken over the running of a Café at the Institute, where we have dedicated support workers working with individuals with disabilities who are supported with all aspects of working within a busy commercial Café environment.

The students develop the knowledge and experience to interact with the customers, take orders, help prepare teas, coffees and light meals/sandwiches and provide table service, once again developing crucial social skills and building confidence, whilst helping to integrate people with disabilities into the local community.

It is hoped that in the longer term some those that we support will aspire to move into mainstream or supported employment and becoming more economically active in the process.

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Item 6: Blaenau Gwent Council Self-Assessment 2022/23

Page 4 – Appendix 1

- In relation to economically inactive disabled residents – what is the Council doing to support those residents.

Community Hubs

Support and advice provided to economically inactive disabled people in the following ways: -

- Referrals to external agencies as and when appropriate;
- Maximization of benefit entitlements;
- Better off calculations;
- Loneliness and isolation support;
- Digital Exclusion support, help to get online and improve digital skills;
- Support helping complete application forms for various grants;
- Cost of Living payments (schemes, fuel support etc);
- Support in relation to blue badge applications;
- Employment support / improvement and development of new skills where appropriate

Citizens Advice also available to provide debt and budgeting support from the Community Hub venues

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Item 6: Blaenau Gwent Council Self-Assessment 2022/23

Page 4 – Appendix 1

- In relation to economically inactive disabled residents – what is the Council doing to support those residents.

Disabled Facilities Grants

- The provision of the Councils Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) programme is to help disabled residents by providing financial assistance to make necessary adaptations to their homes, such as installing ramps, widening doorways, installing stairlifts (internal and external), providing safe access to the garden etc... By improving accessibility and mobility within their homes and also the ability to leave their homes safely (external ramping and external stairlifts), this enables disabled residents to live more independently, allowing them to participate more fully in their communities. This can have a positive economic impact by improving their quality of life, increasing their ability to engage in work and / or education if possible.
- In 2022/23 – A total of 76 adaptations across were completed, with 50% of those directly relating to stairlifts and providing external access.

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Blaenau Gwent Briefing

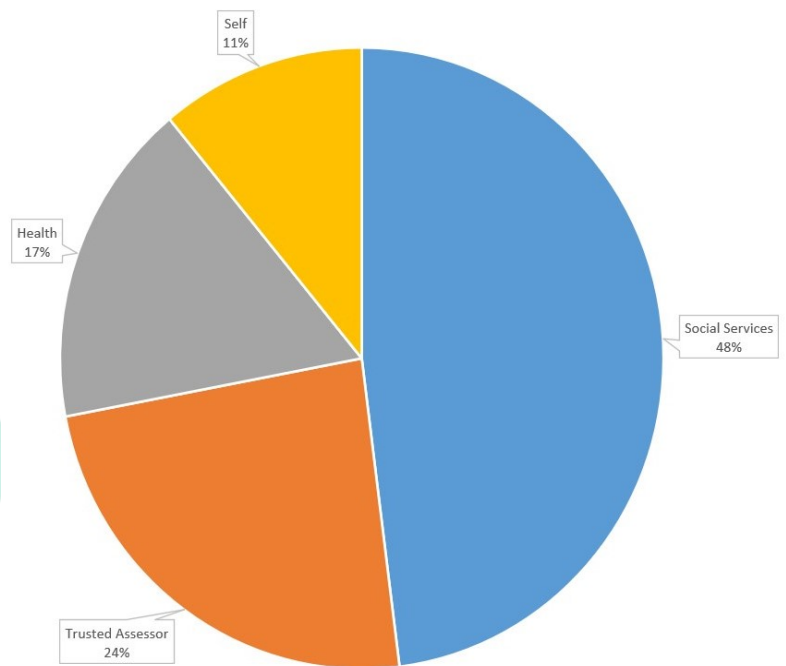
519 Referrals from community teams OTs, support workers, utilising funding from WG RRAP programme & Social services Safety at Home Project. Supporting clients with urgent Hospital discharge works & Preventative minor adaptations. (stair rails, shower seats ramping etc)

181 Referrals primarily supporting clients with safe hospital discharge back into their own homes.

127 Clients and family referrals directly into the agency for support within their owns homes.

260 Clients received Agency caseworker trusted assessor support with adaptation and essential works to stay safe within their own homes, receiving assistance to identify possible funding and welfare support.

Blaenau Gwent Referral Sources
Apr 2023 - Feb 2024



Services Delivered within Blaenau Gwent County Borough 2023-24



Helped **923** older people



Helped **9** people to increase their income by a collective **£42,370** pa



Facilitated **£323,451** worth of home repairs & maintenance



Helped prevent trips & falls for **713** people



Helped facilitate **14** bathroom and stair lift adaptations to support clients through the local authority Enable Project



Helped **73** make their homes safe & secure



Caseworkers carried out **Healthy Home Assessments** for **179** clients, this involves visiting the client in their own home and providing a holistic assessment of the clients well being and home environment, and what support can be offered.



48% of referrals were received from Local Authority/Social Services.

17% of referrals were received from partners within Health, and Gwent general hospitals.



898 referrals completed in Blaenau Gwent

(stair rails, grab rails, showers seats, galvanised rails)

109 referrals were completed to assist immediate hospital discharge.



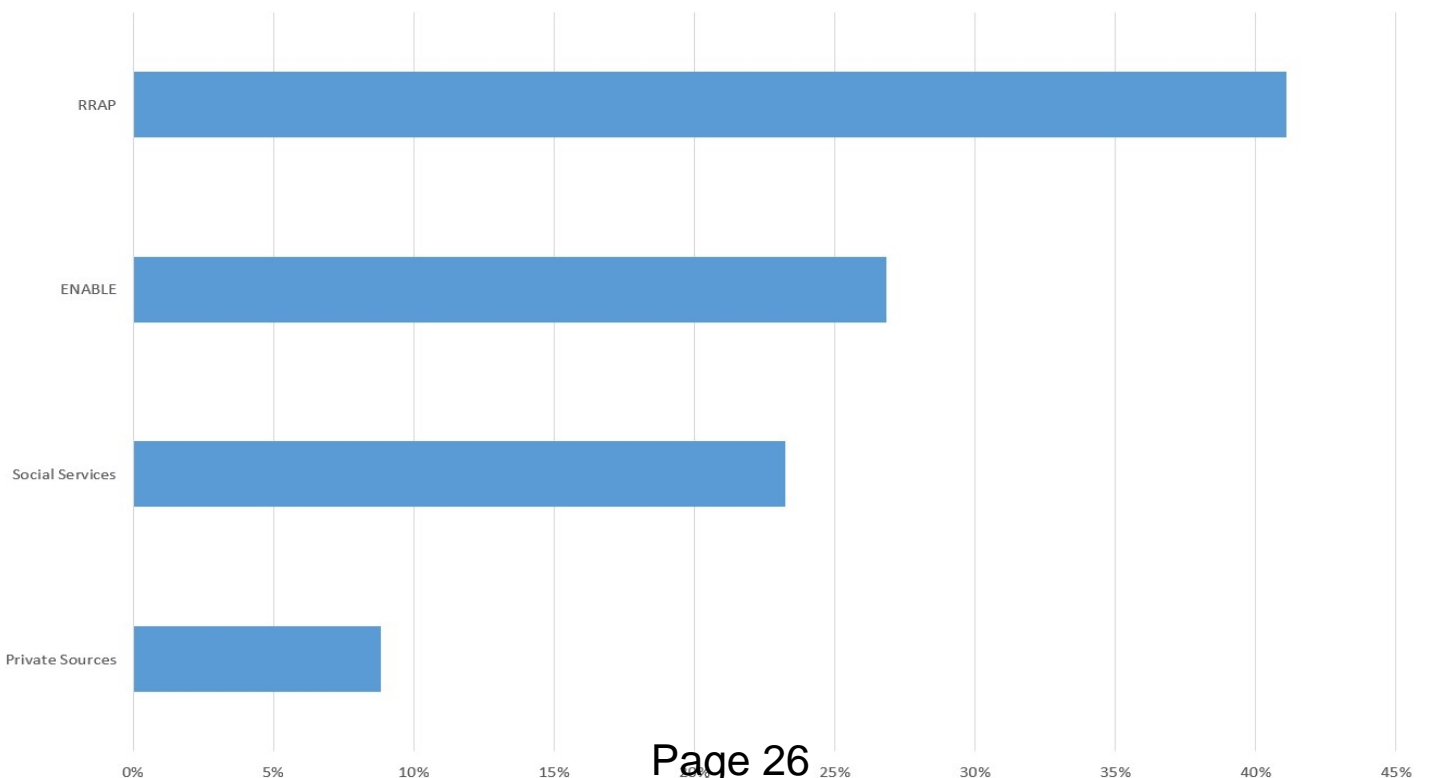
Average age of clients is **78** years old with **41%** living alone.



99% of clients stated they were **satisfied** with the standard of work and would recommend the service to others.

84% of clients stated they felt more **confident** and **independent** because of the work carried out.

Blaenau Gwent Funding Sources 2023-24



Item 6: Blaenau Gwent Council Self-Assessment 2022/23

Page 4 – Appendix 1

- In relation to economically inactive disabled residents – what is the Council doing to support those residents.

Education and Inclusion:

Some of our younger adults with disabilities 16+ are accessing the Post 16 special school provision at PenyCwm, where they are learning about skills for life to maximise their opportunities on leaving the school setting. Most of the learners will be supported to progress on to Further Education opportunities with our partner college Coleg Gwent. A minority of learners will access provision via our social care opportunities.

PenyCwm school links with external agencies to offer experiences for learners and, in collaboration with Careers Wales and the Local Authority Education Department, are delivering support events for transition, which will be attended by various agencies from the Blaenau Gwent area. Agencies will be able to provide support, advice, and guidance on future opportunities for the learners and their families.

All of the above opportunities are in place to support our young adults to become valued, active, and engaged members of their community on leaving the setting, and to prevent them from becoming inactive and isolated.

Youth Service:

From an SPF perspective we support and have supported young people with disabilities, but it depends upon level of understanding and need in relation to a specific disability. We have supported young people who were partially sighted in the past as an example and supported them into other organisations that have the expertise to support further, in this case it was Merthyr Institute for the blind who worked alongside us to get the young person into work through their contacts.

Another is supporting young people with ASD. It all depends upon needs and how much specialisms are needed to allow distance travelled.

Aneurin Leisure Trust

Aneurin Leisure Adult Community Learning provides a wide range of courses designed specifically for adults with a learning disability/difficulty or those experiencing poor mental health. All courses are taught in small friendly classes by qualified tutors and learners are encouraged and supported as individuals to work as independently as possible, while developing a wide range of skills in their chosen area. Participants are encouraged to improve their existing essential skills. Learners can gain an Agored Cymru qualification on successful completion of a course.

There are currently 15 ILS courses running in venues throughout Blaenau Gwent in subjects such as music and drama, computer and iPads, art and craft, cookery, and

essential skills. Staff work closely with a range of partners such as Blaenau Gwent Social Services, Tai Calon, a range of sheltered accommodation providers, Blaenau Gwent People First, Sirhowy Woodland and Pen y Cwm School.

For more information on ILS courses see the Aneurin Leisure ACL Facebook page or email michelle.seabourne@aneurinleisure.org.uk.

Agenda Item 8

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **14th March 2024**

Report Subject: **Council's Corporate Plan 2022/27 Review**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Steve Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member
Corporate Overview 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	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	22/02/24	04.03.24			14/03/24		21/03/24	

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 For Members of the Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee to consider the Council's revised Corporate Plan 2022/27 and Implementation Plan prior to approval and sign off at Council.
 - 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**

3.1 **Option 1**

Agree the revisions made to the Corporate Plan, outlined in paragraphs 2.10, prior to approval at Council.

3.2 **Option 2**

Make amendments to revisions within the Corporate Plan, for consideration by Council prior to approval.

4. **Evidence of how 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.

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

The Plan addresses the need to balance short and long term needs within the community and to improve the overall resilience and sustainability of the Council.

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)***

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**

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*

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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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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.

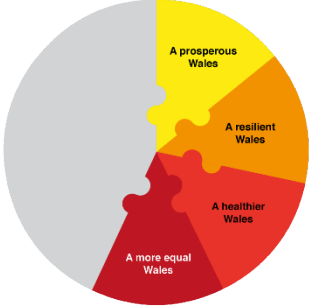
Our Corporate Plan has been written to cover the 5 year period 2022 to 2027 and beyond. On a six monthly and annual basis we will review our progress and consider what we need to do the following year to ensure we keep on track. There are things we need to do to support well-being in our communities 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		
<p>We will work in Partnership / Collaboration With...</p>	<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
<p>We will work with a focus on Long term planning</p>	<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. 	
<p>We will work with a focus on Integration</p>	<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. 	
<p>We will work with a focus on Prevention</p>	<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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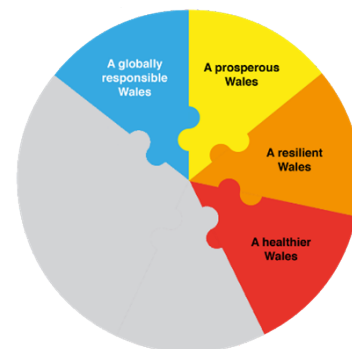


Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities

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	
<p>We will work in Partnership / Collaboration With...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gwent PSB • Local Authorities in Wales • Trade Unions • Town and Community Councils • Welsh Government • WLGA • Audit Wales • SRS
<p>We will work with a focus on Long term planning</p>	<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>
<p>We will work with a focus on Integration</p>	<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>
<p>We will work with a focus on Prevention</p>	<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>
<p>We will work with a focus on Involving the public and partners in all that we do</p>	<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

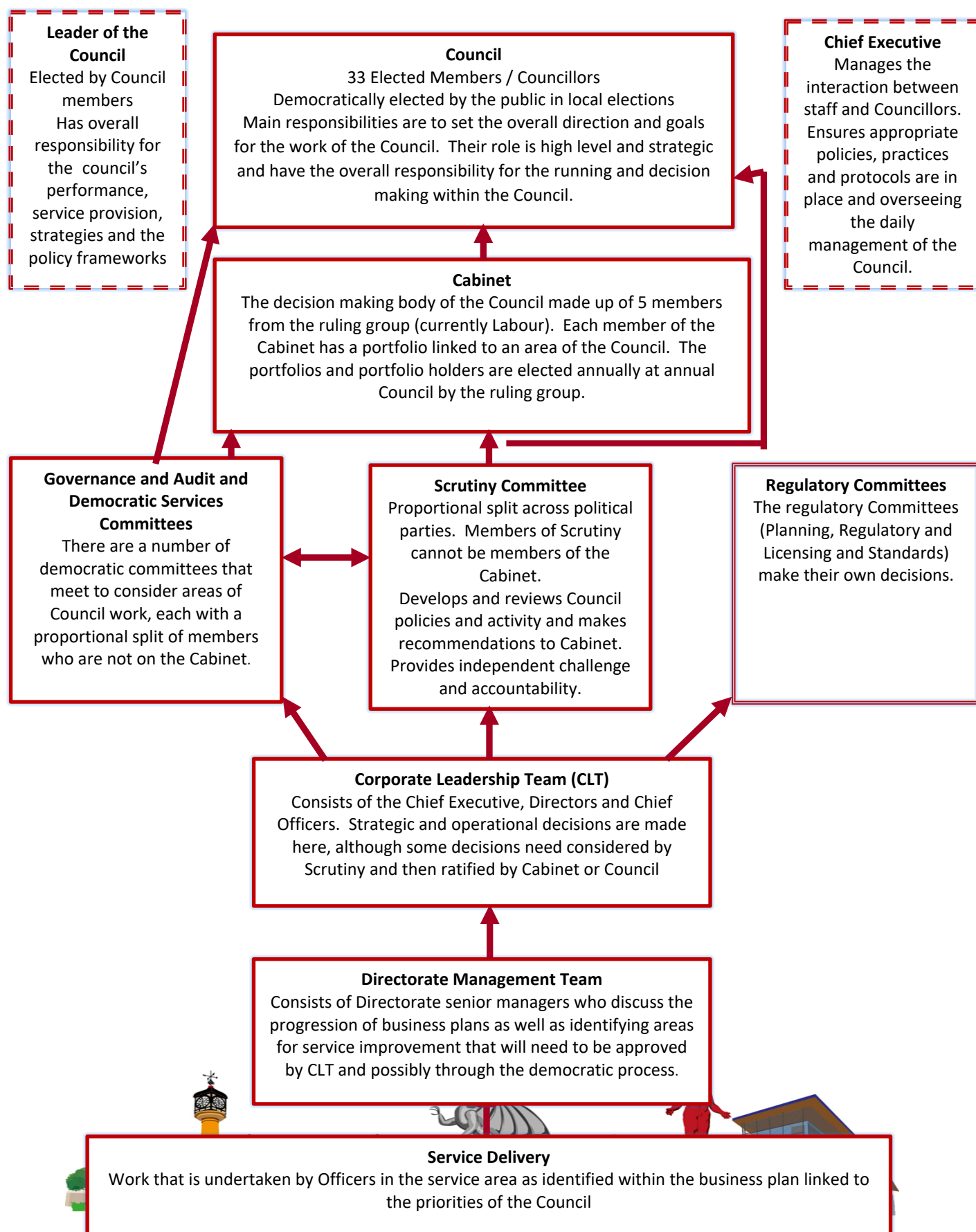
What We Aim to Achieve - An increase in the resilience of Communities, where everyone is welcome and safe and which minimises dependency and maximises independence

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.	

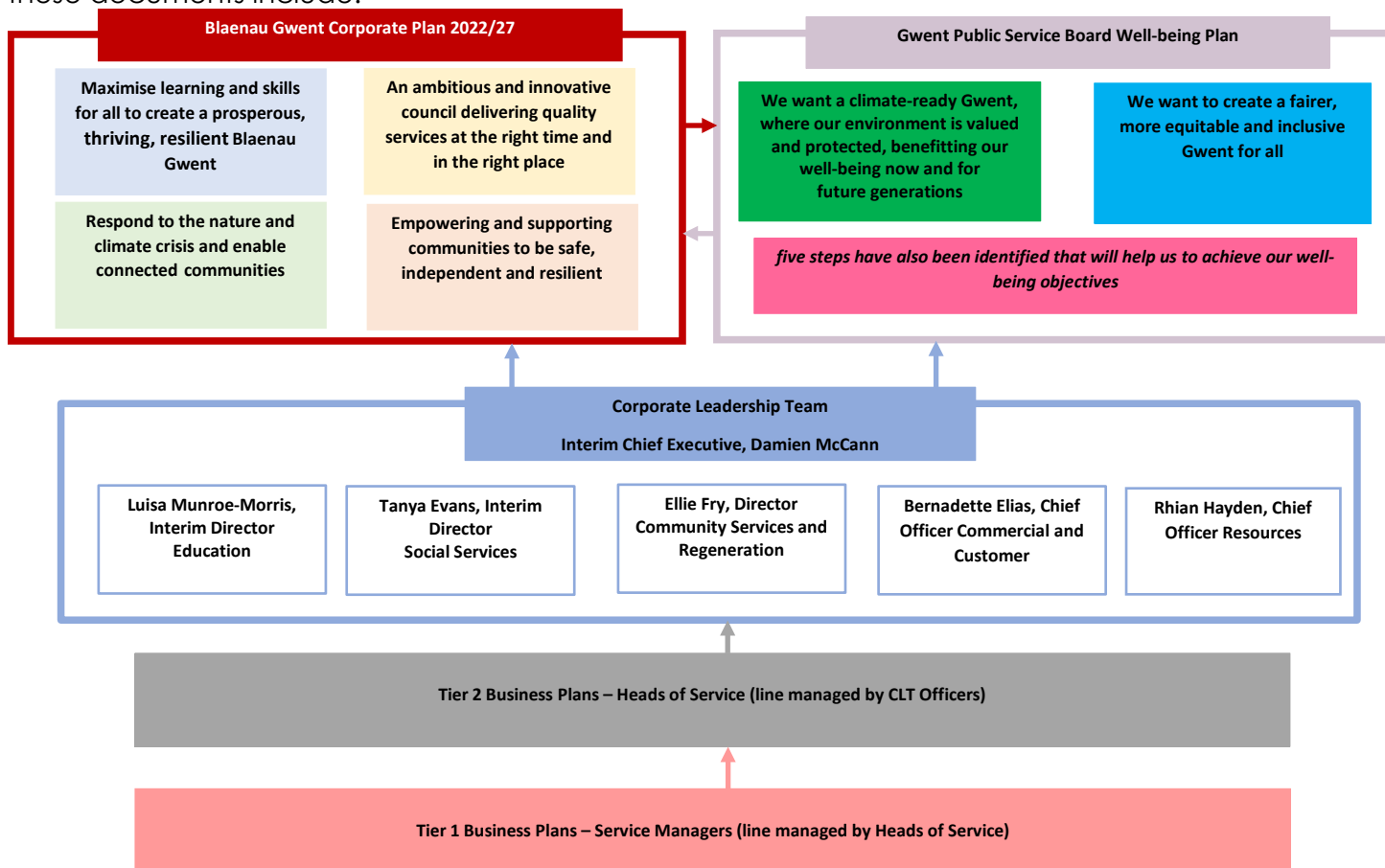


The Council's Governance Framework

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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Corporate Services
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
General Offices
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Ebbw Vale
NP23 6DN
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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.

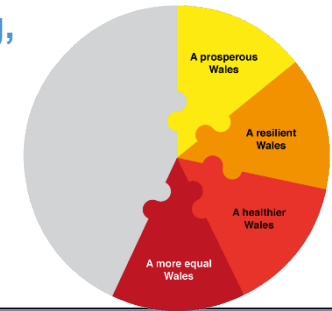
This Council's Corporate Plan 2022/27 has been subject to an Integrated Impact Assessment screening.



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.



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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 Baccalaureate) 	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%

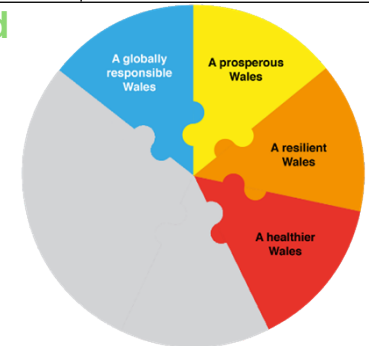


Corporate Plan Annual Implementation Plan 2023/24

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.



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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

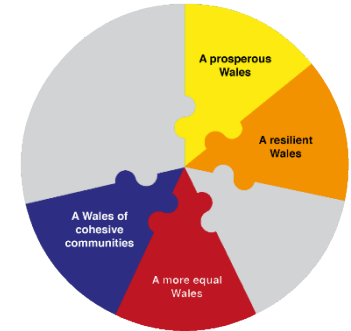
Performance Indicator	Data				Annual Target and or Figure We Are Aiming For
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	
The percentage of municipal waste collected by local authorities sent to landfill	0.3	0.6	1.3	0.31	2% Lower Figure is Better
The percentage of municipal waste incinerated with energy recovery	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 Population Share	-	-	-	57 74%	Higher Figure is Better

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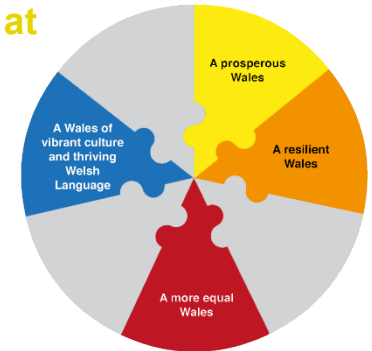


Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities

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 9

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **14 March 2024**

Report Subject: **Capital Strategy 2023/2024**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr 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, prior to submission to Council for formal approval.

Option 2

3.2 Members consider the Capital Strategy for the 2024/25 financial year (attached as appendix 1) and consider any amendments, prior to submission to Council for formal approval.

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

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 policies, 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 10

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **14 March 2024**

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

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr 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 scrutinise 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 scrutinise 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**
N/A
- 6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**
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 As the nominated scrutiny Committee, Corporate & Performance Scrutiny will receive a minimum of five 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.

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%

Treasury Management Update | Quarter 3 2023/24

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.

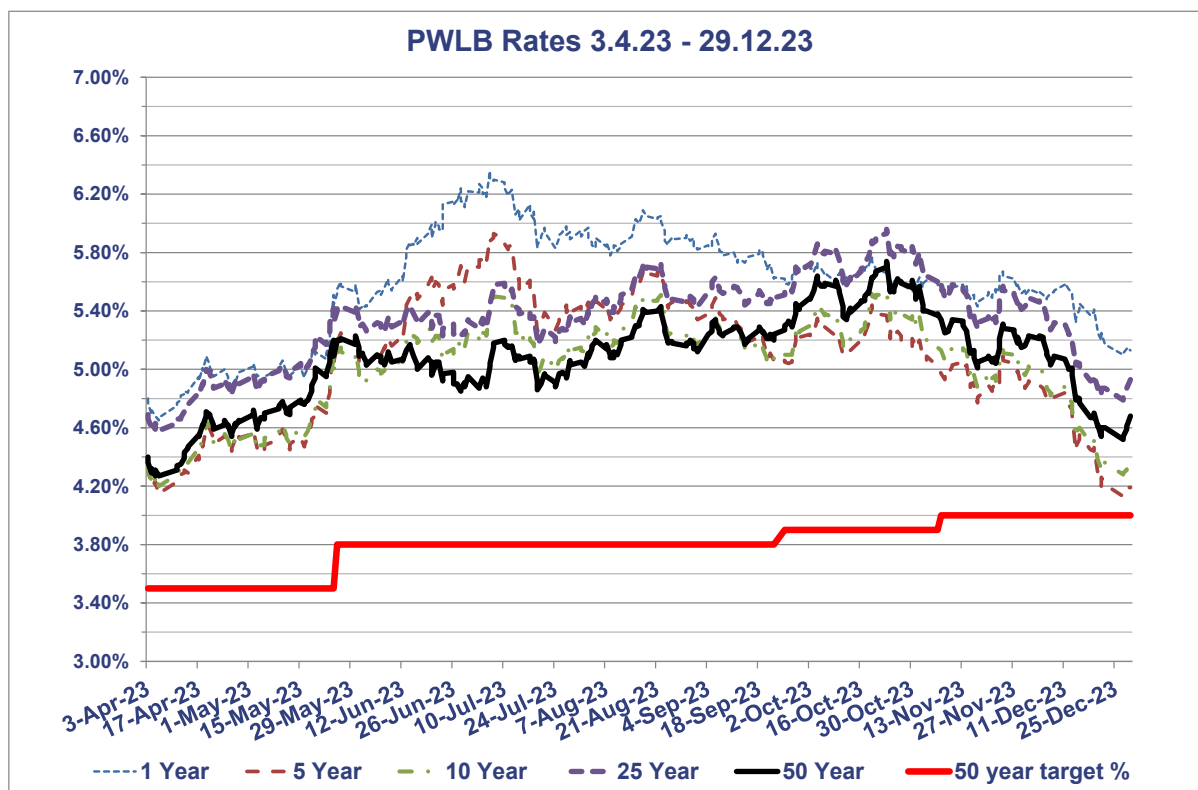
PWLB maturity Certainty Rates 1st April to 31st December 2023

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%

Treasury Management Update | Quarter 3 2023/24

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	CHELTEMHAM 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								
01/04/2023	LLOYDS CALL ACCOUNT	4,000,000	Variable		28/07/2023	118	65,778.32	4,000,000	0
01/04/2023	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
07/09/2023	DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE	4,000,000	5.130		13/09/2023	6	3,373.15	4,000,000	0
08/09/2023	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
05/10/2023	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 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	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 11

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **14 March 2024**

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

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr 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 to give Members the opportunity to scrutinise the Treasury Strategy, Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy (including prudential indicators) to be adopted for the 2024/2025 financial year, prior to formal recommendation to Council.

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. Prior to recommendation for formal approval by Council the TMSS is required to be adequately scrutinised by the Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee.
- 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**

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 consider any amendments, prior to submission to Council for formal approval.

3.2 Option 2 (preferred option)

Members consider 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) and do not consider any amendments, prior to submission to Council for formal approval.

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.
- 6.1.7 The documents contained within this report are required to be adequately scrutinised before being recommended to 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 As the nominated Scrutiny Committee, Corporate Overview and Performance 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, this Scrutiny Committee will receive quarterly monitoring reports on the Authority's performance against its Treasury Management Prudential Indicators.

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 polices, 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 – Unhypothecated 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

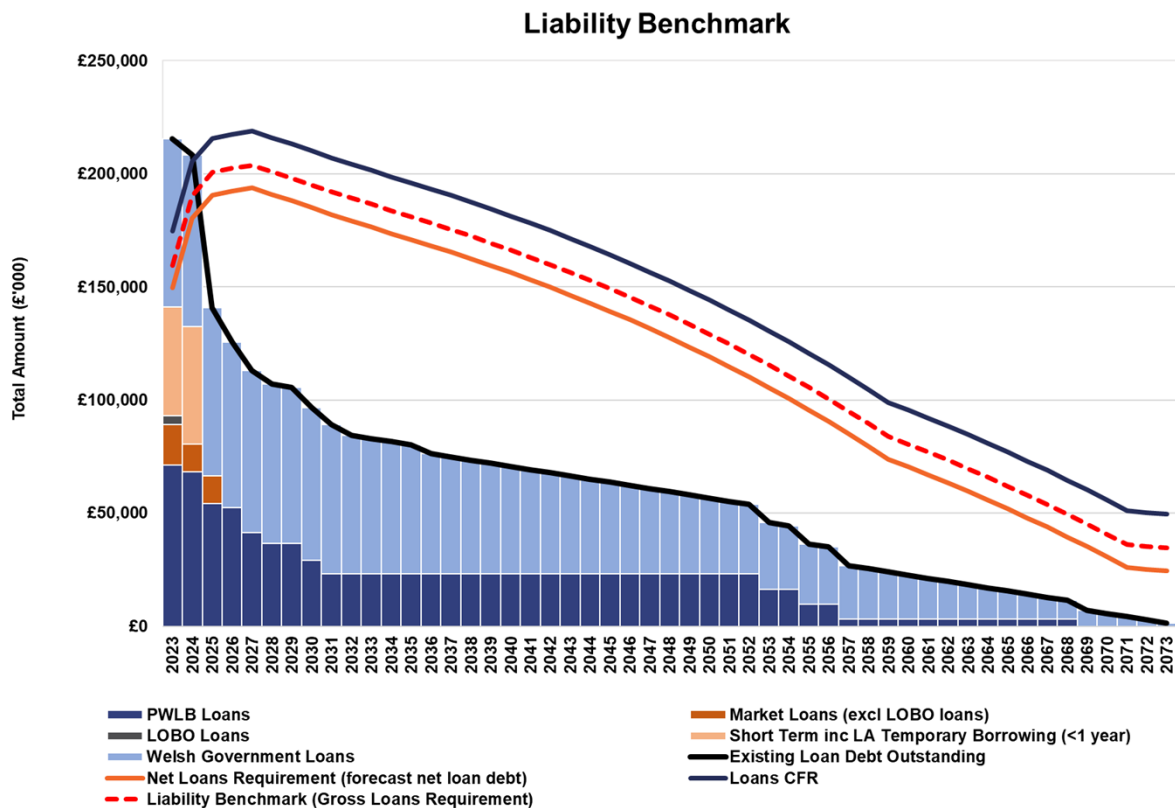
2.3 Liability Benchmark

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>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>£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:

- a. Nominated Members: Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council, Chair of Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee.
- b. 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

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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 12

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **14th March 2024**

Report Subject: **Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr S. Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate Overview 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	05.03.24			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 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**

3.1 **Option 1** - That the Committee considers the proposed Strategic Equality Plan and supports prior to approval at Council.

Option 2 - That the Committee considers the proposed Strategic Equality Plan and make specific recommendations to prior to approval at Council.

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 the Governance and Partnerships.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

Failure to develop and publish a new Strategic Equality Plan and Equality Objectives by 31st March 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 action plan (with prioritised actions), 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)***

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 to 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 strengthened 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.

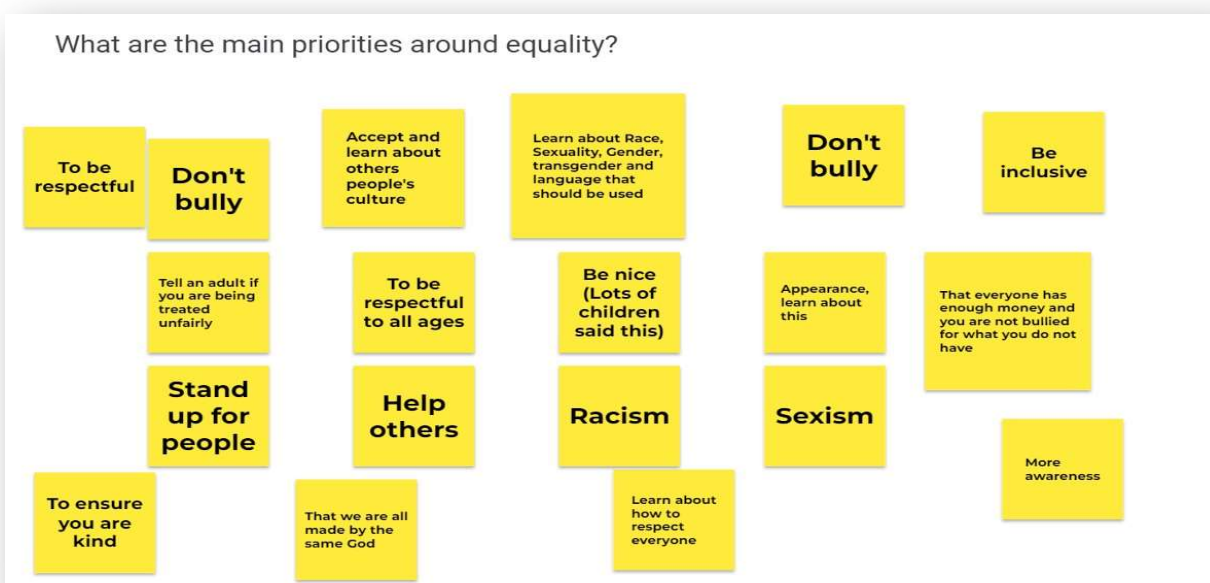
We have also been working on the new Welsh Government guidance- [Education guidance to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people | GOV.WALES](#) in order to support education practitioners in their efforts to provide inclusive and supportive education for Gypsy Roma Traveller pupils.

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.

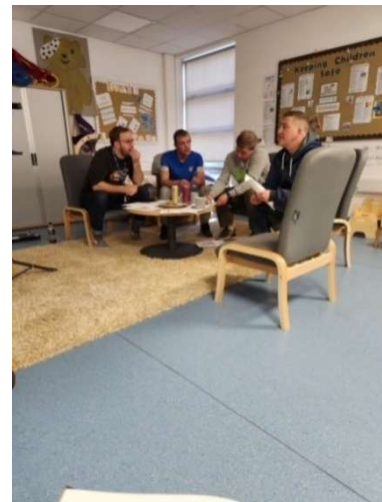
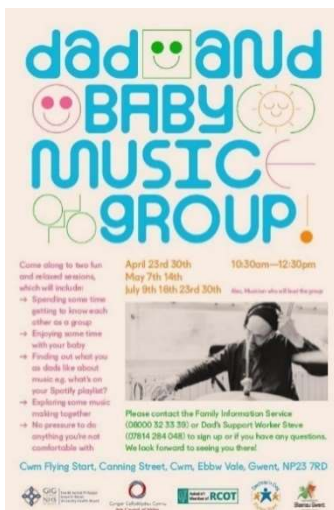
The project has done very well in reaching out to fathers and ongoing

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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

Fuel Support and Assistance
 In 2023/24 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 2023/24 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 families receiving Free School Meals over the summer holidays.

Food support
 In 2023/24 we:
 • Made a £20,000 contribution to the main Blaenau Gwent Foodbank.
 • Made a £75,000 to other local food distribution groups and organisations.

General Support
 In 2023/24 we:
 • Administered over £20,000 funding to set up Warm Hubs.
 • Provided £50,000 to the CAB to continue supporting food people.
 • Supported the Cost of Living team with our partners in energy advice and support.

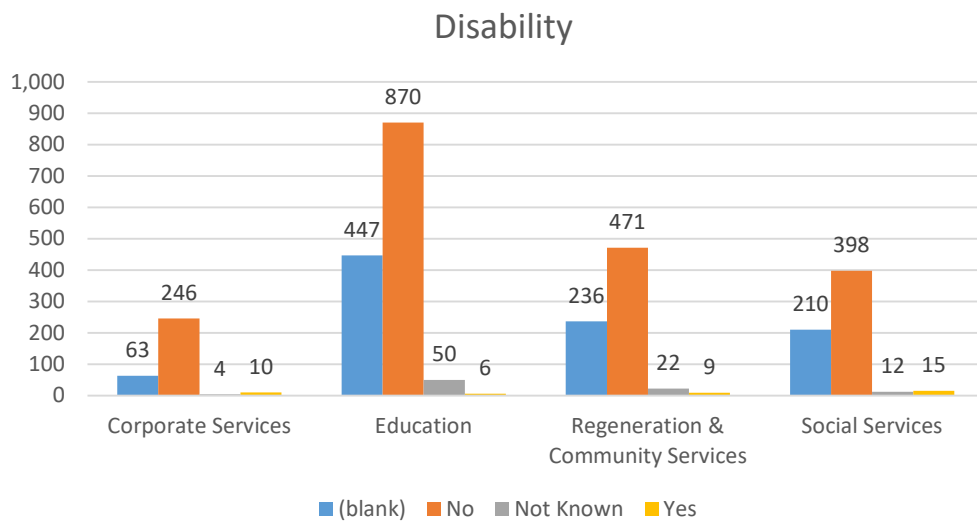
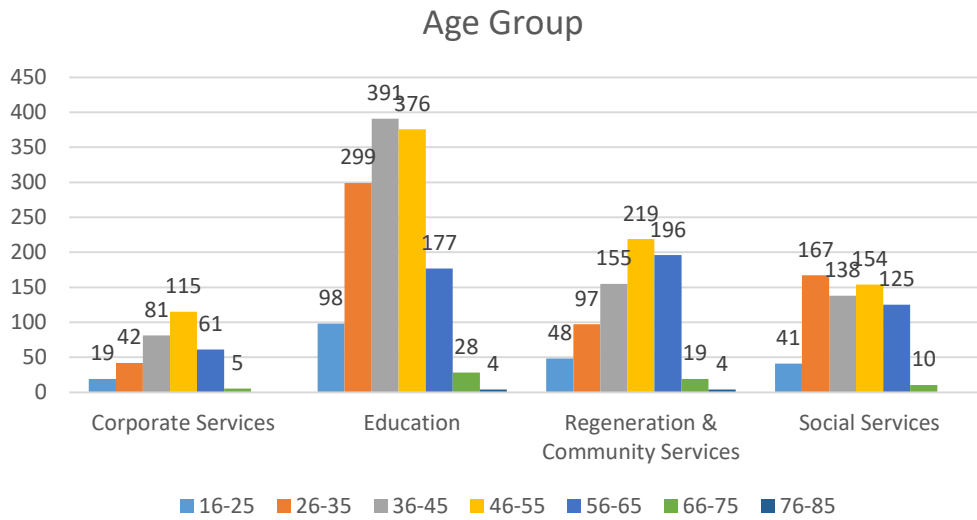
Next steps and action planning 2024-2028

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.

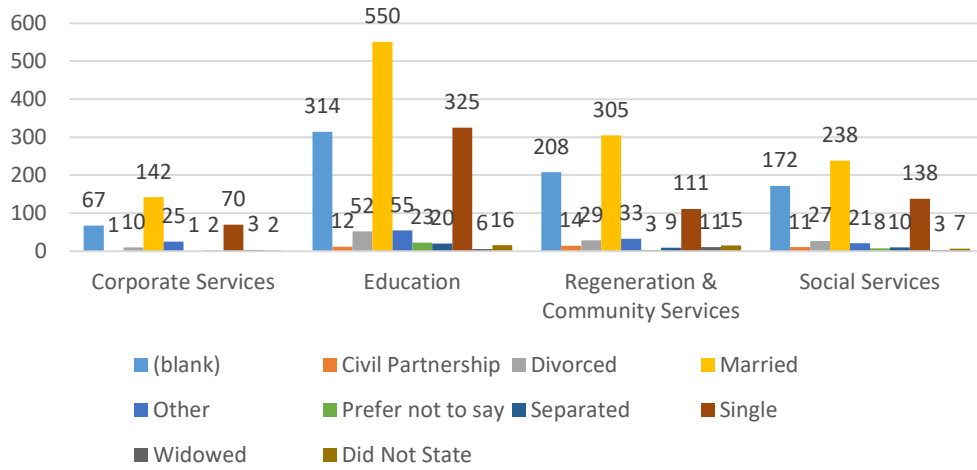
We acknowledge that although we have made progress, we realise that there is still work to do. We have tried to demonstrate in this report that we recognise that there are many aspects of our work to date that we will need to carry over into the development of our new Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028.

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.

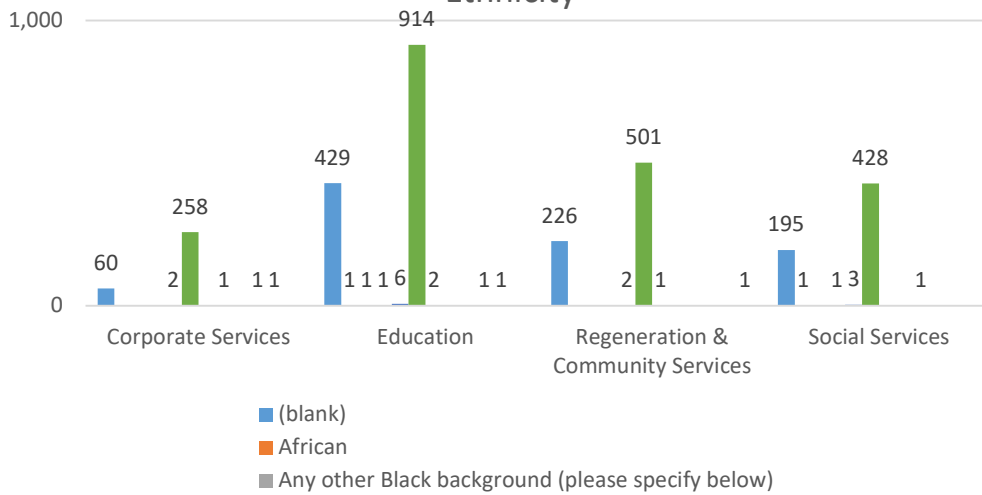
Workforce Summary Data April 2022-March 2023

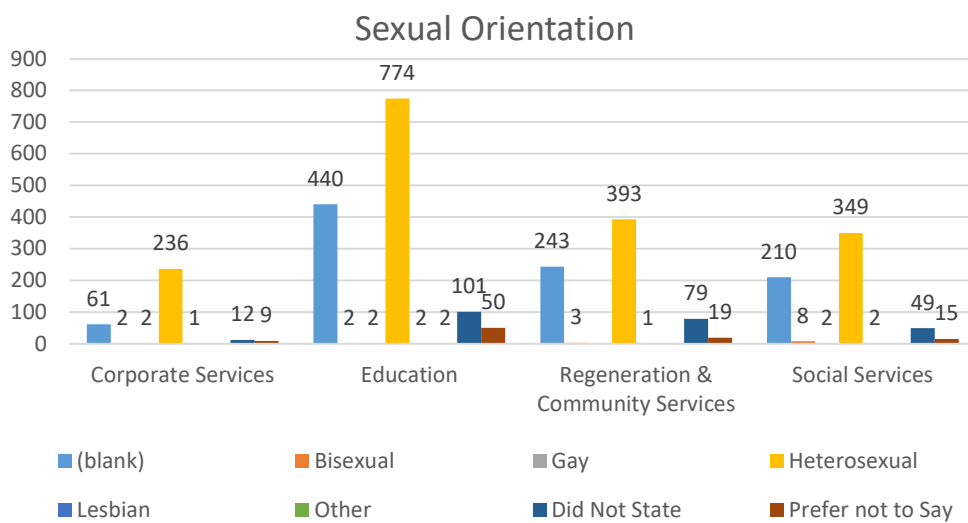
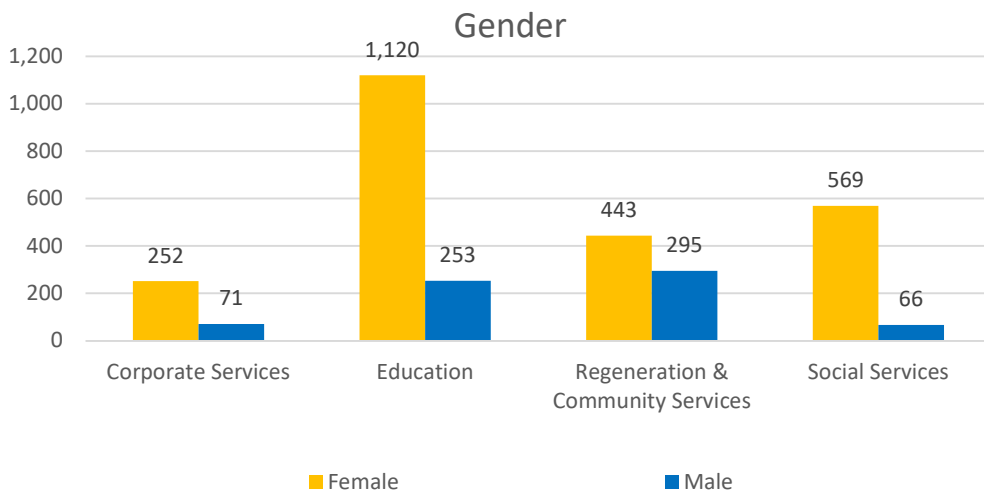
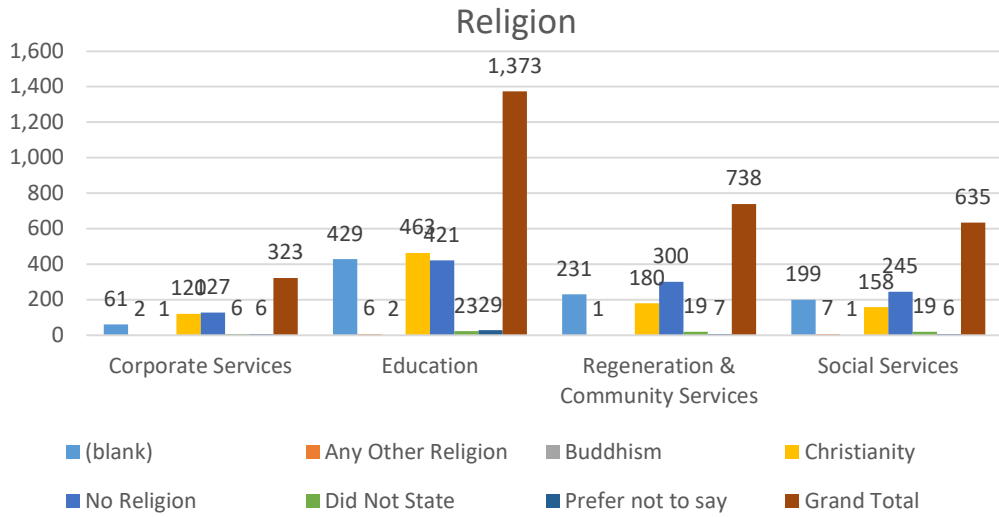


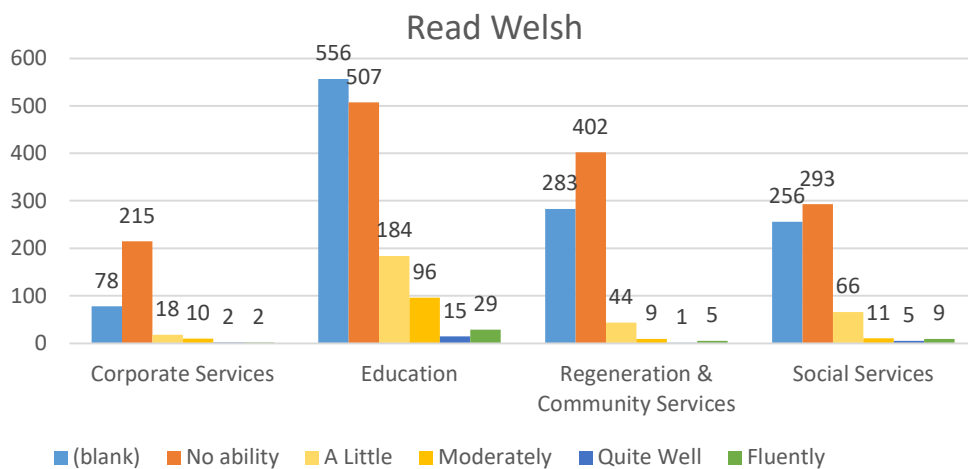
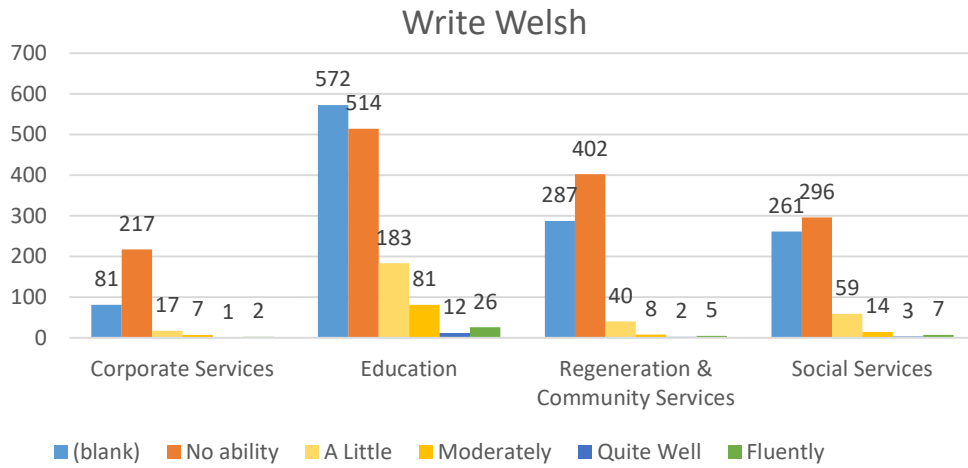
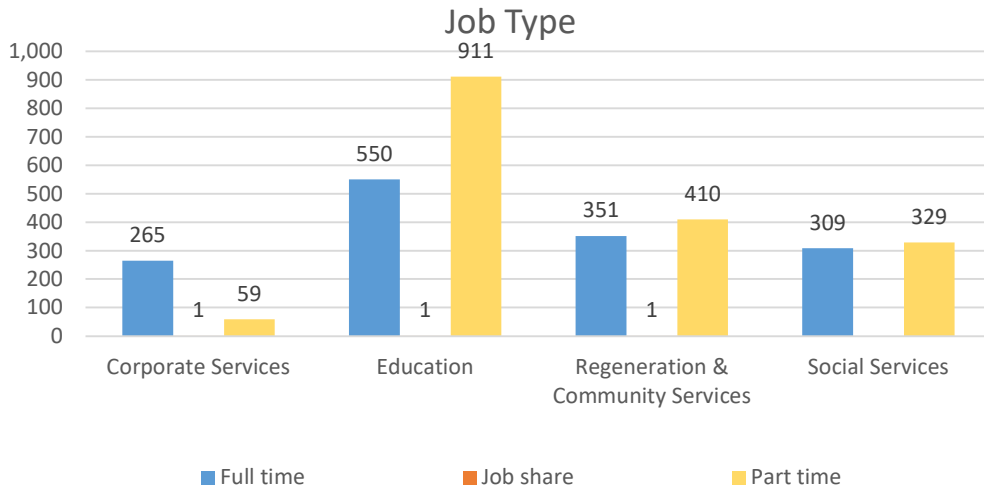
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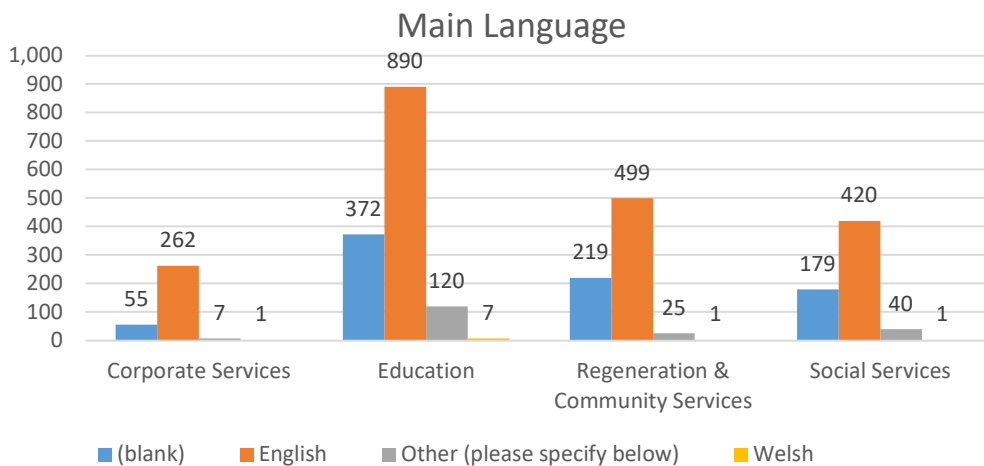
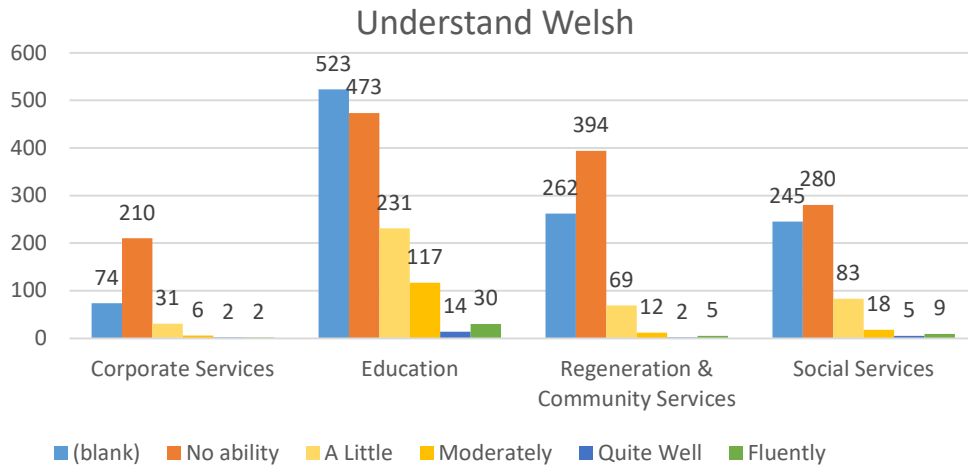
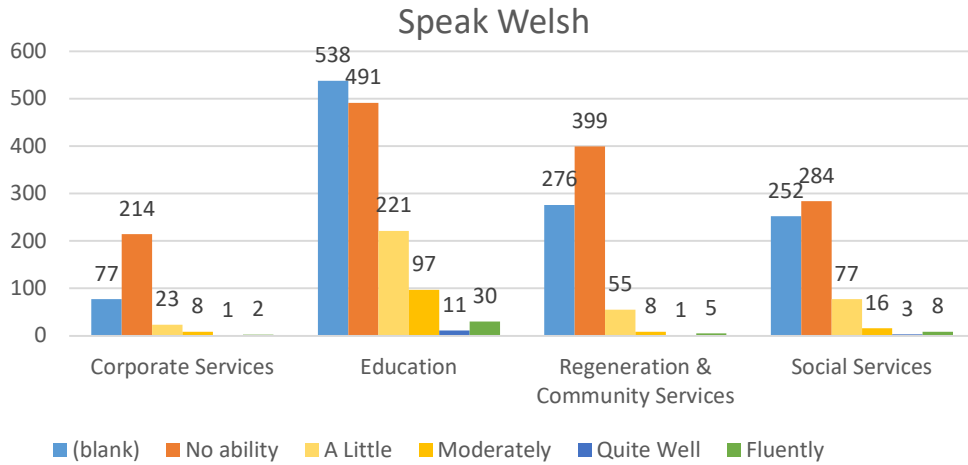


Ethnicity









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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 \(www.gov.uk\)](http://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	The plan aims to mitigate any negative impacts, by ensuring integrated	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.
Disability (<i>people with disabilities/ long term conditions</i>)	how we will ensure we support those with protected characteristics both organisationally and through the services we deliver.	impact assessments are carried out and those with protected characteristics are considered throughout the organisation.	
Gender Reassignment (<i>anybody who's gender identity or gender expression is different to the sex they were assigned at birth</i>)	The plan outlines our commitment which strives to have a positive		We also aim to build on the stakeholder reference group to ensure we have ongoing accountability throughout the plans delivery cycle.

<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 meeting the Welsh</p>		
<p>Race (<i>people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and different racial backgrounds</i>)</p>	<p>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)			
The Welsh Governments Socio-economic Duty provides a framework in order to ensure tackling inequality is at the forefront of decision making.			
.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>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>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>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](#)



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<p>Priority 1 - Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>Priority 2 - Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities</p>	
<p>Priority 3 - An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place</p>	<p>Equality Objective 5: We will ensure effective engagement and participation for people with protected characteristics.</p> <p>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>

	<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.

1. **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.

2. **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/KkstkSTrHjxFQln?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
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"/>

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 13

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **14th March 2024**

Report Subject: **Fostering Friendly Employer**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Steve Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate Overview and Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Andrea J. 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	04.03.24			14.03.24		21.03.24	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to give Scrutiny Members the opportunity to scrutinise, challenge and give views on the proposed Fostering Friendly Policy, and seek a recommendation to Council to approve the 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; and
- 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 the 14th December 2023 and support the proposed policy.

3.1 **Option 1:** (preferred option) Members of the Committee to consider the Policy and recommend approval to Council.

3.2 **Option 2:** Members of the Committee suggest further amendments/additions to the Policy.

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)**

An Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed and there is no adverse impact.

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

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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 14

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **14th March 2024**

Report Subject: **Review of Agile Working, Agile Working and Flexible Working Policies**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Steve Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate Overview and 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	04.03.24			14.03.24	10.04.24		

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to update the Members of the Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee on the review of agile working and give the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge the proposed 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 Scrutiny notes the outcome of the agile working review, recommendations, progress/improvement and support the reviewed policies for Agile Working and Flexible Working for progression to Council for endorsement.

3.2 **Option 2**

That Scrutiny Members make suggestions for changes/improvements to the Agile Working and Flexible Working policies prior to progression to Council.

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
- Appendix 2 Table Recommendations and Progress
- Appendix 3 Agile Working Policy
- Appendix 4 Flexible Working Policy

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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

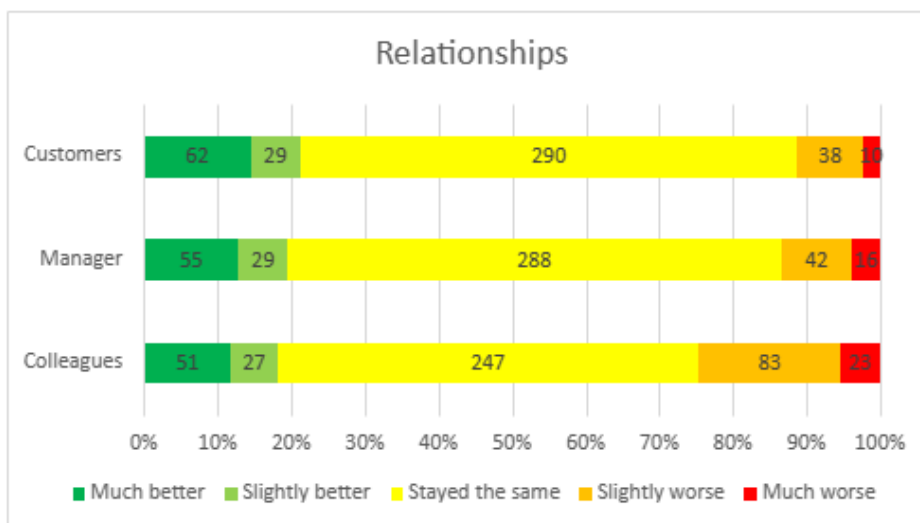
This section provides an overview of the main areas of questioning within the survey, the themes highlighted in the survey and the focus group.

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.

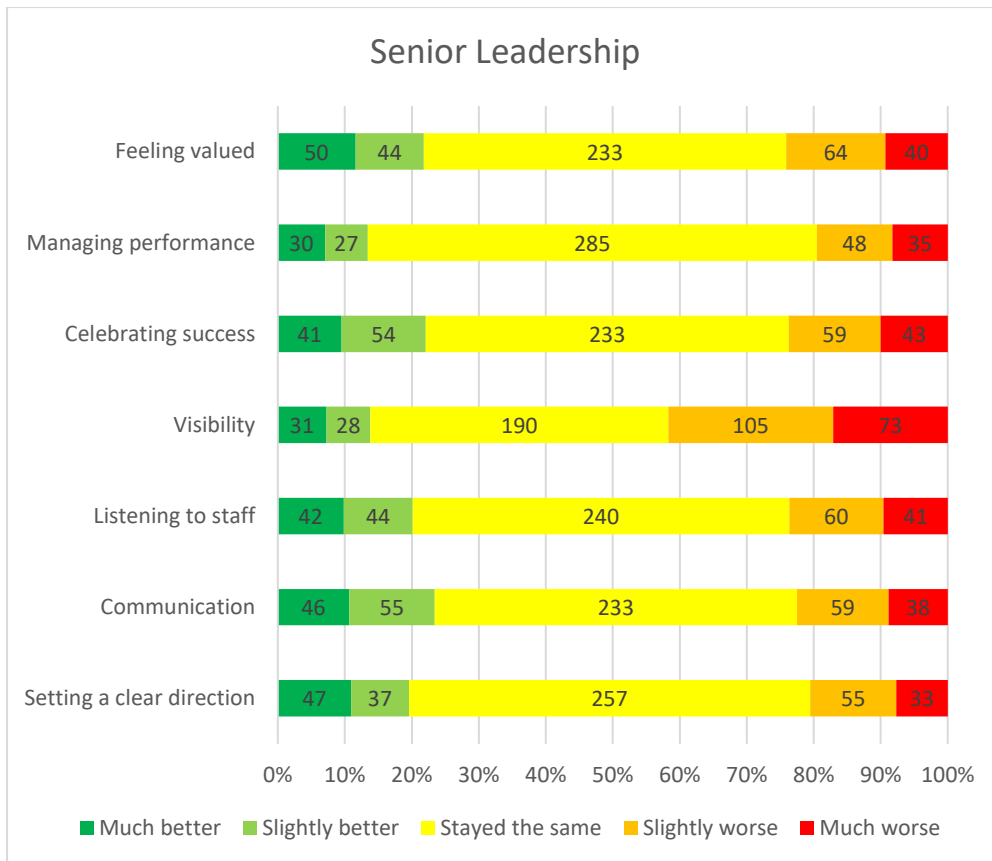
1. Survey results



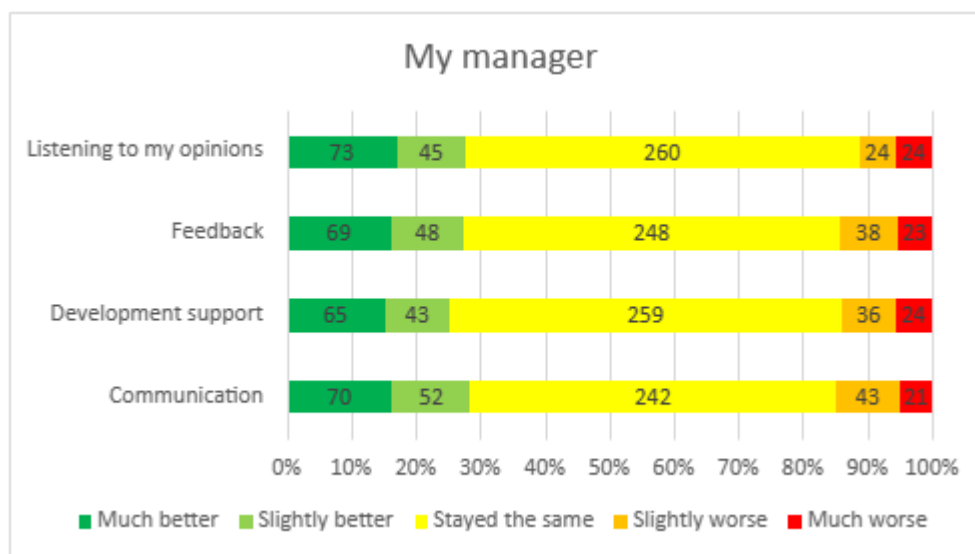
Overall, Satisfaction and Wellbeing showed the greatest percentages of Much Better or Slightly Better responses. Over 60% of respondents indicate that their work-life balance has improved as a result of the Agile Working Policy. Only 24% of participants feel that they are more fairly treated as a result 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.



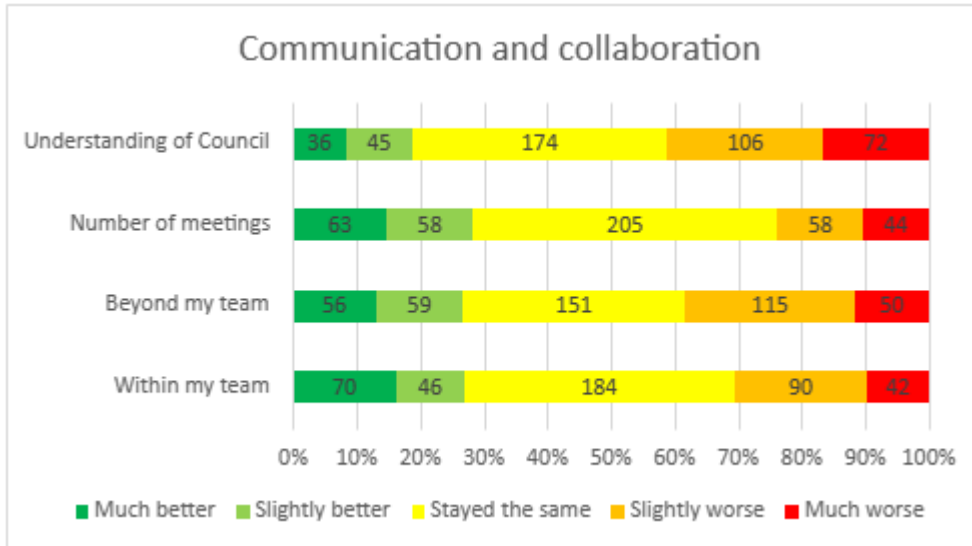
Around two thirds of respondents feel their relationships have stayed the same following the introduction of changes in working practices. This figure is slightly reduced for relationships with colleagues with 24% of respondents in this group feeling their relationships with colleagues have got worse. 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.

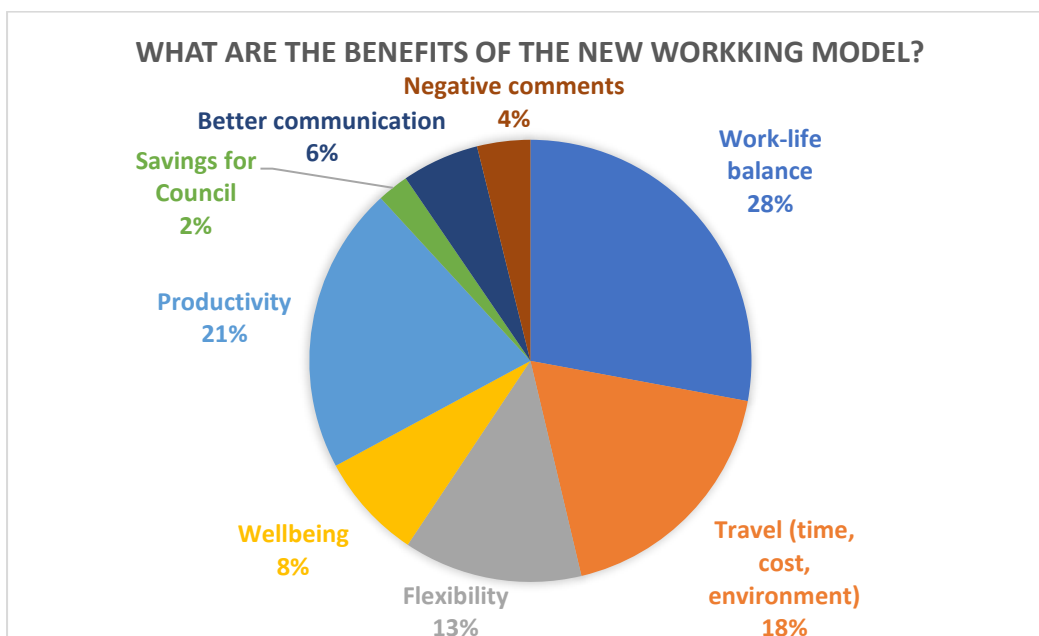


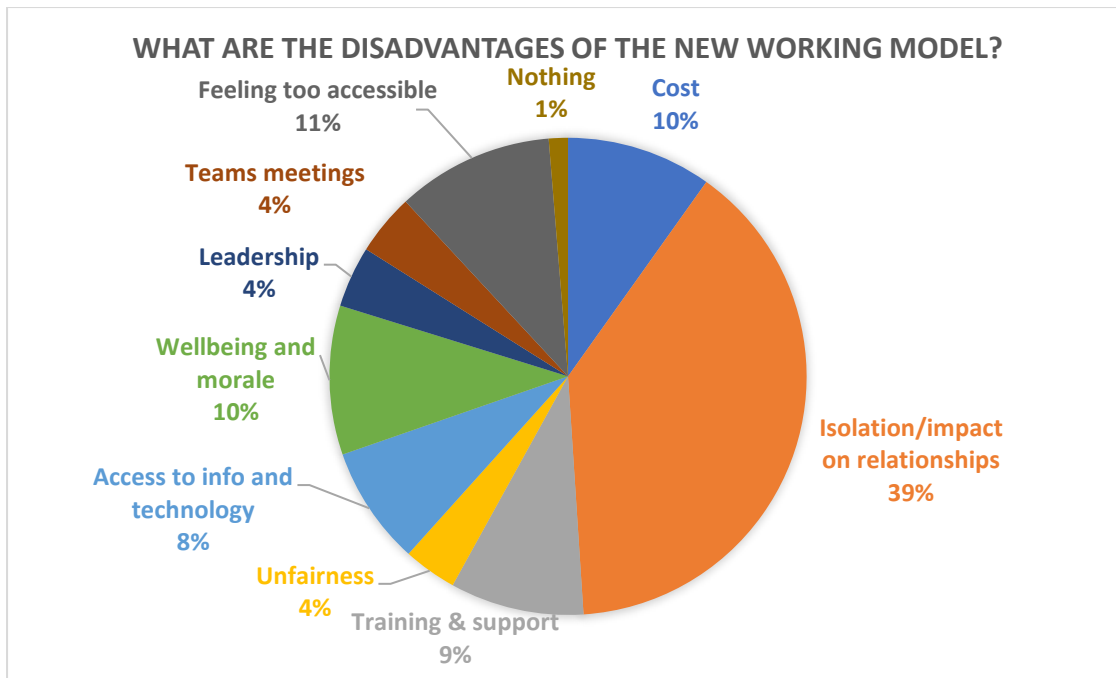
Again, the majority of respondents feel that the support they receive from their manager has stayed the same as before the introduction of the Agile Working Policy. However, more respondents have found a positive (25-28%) than a negative change (11-15%).



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

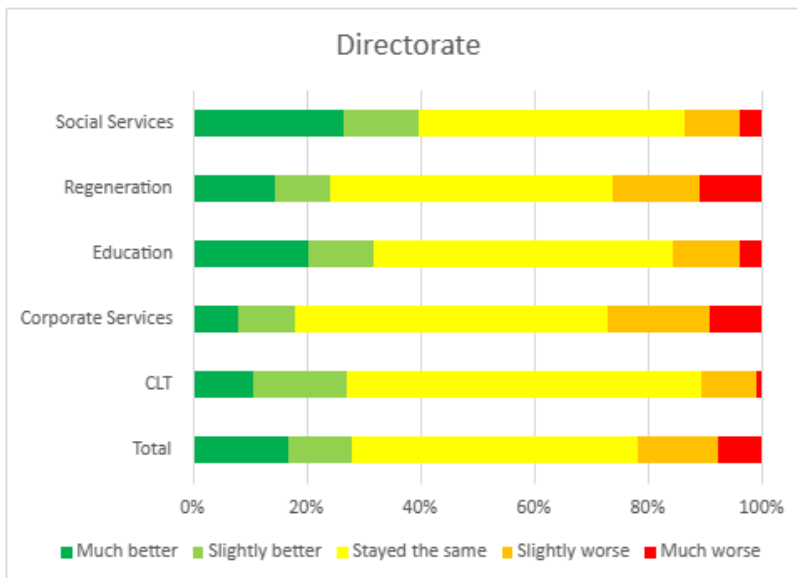
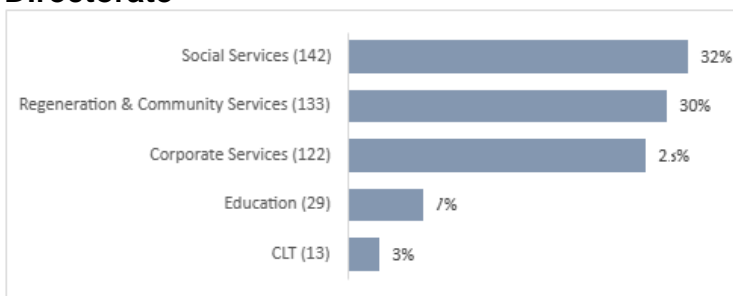
This section provides an overview of the main results broken down by different groups i.e. how respondents from different directorates responded across the survey. This is included to demonstrate the differences between directorates, departments, grades, length of service etc.

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.

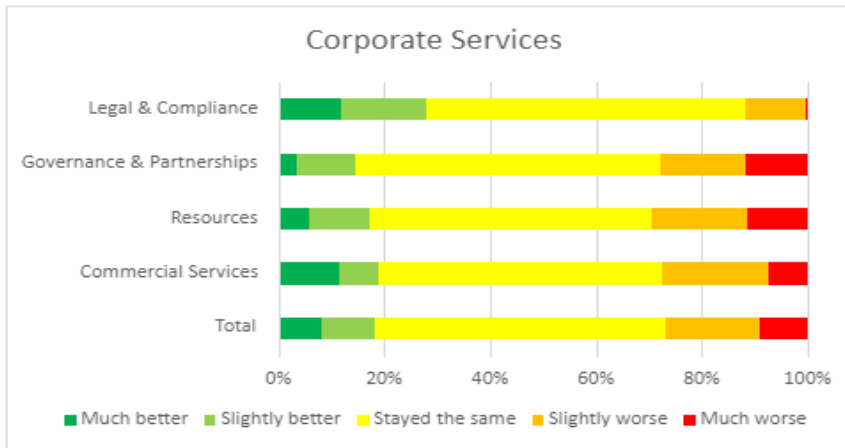
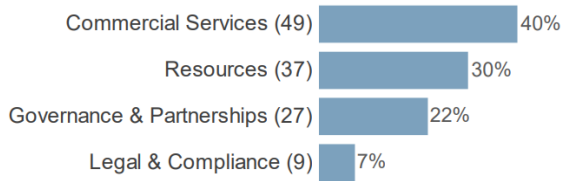
The blue graphs are taken directly from the MySurvey results generated from the survey using the Council's software. The "traffic light" graphs have been further analysed by Insight.

Directorate



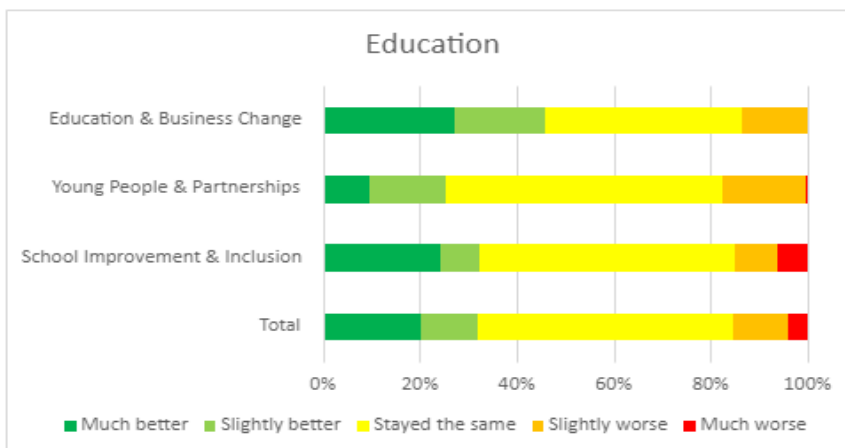
Overall, respondents from Social Services are most likely to view the changes related to the agile working model as an improvement, followed by Education and CLT. CLT and Social Services have the fewest respondents viewing the changes as making things worse. Regeneration and Corporate Services have similar 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)



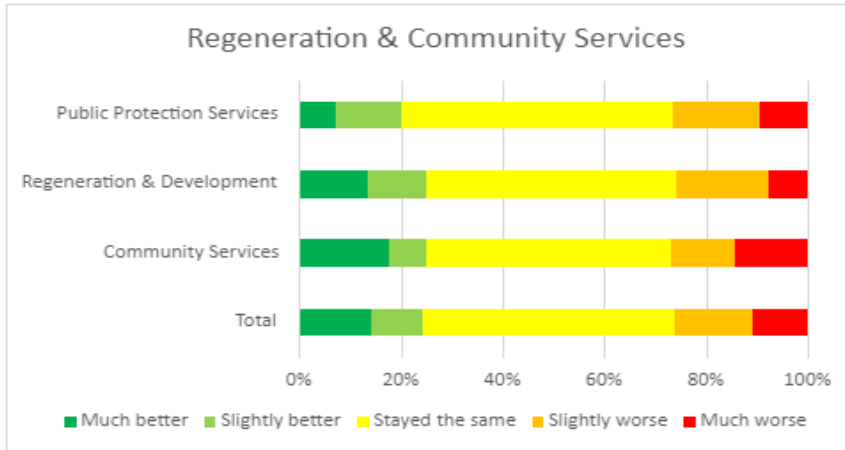
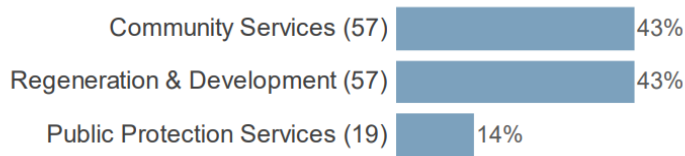
Within the Corporate Services directorate, respondents from Legal & Compliance are the most positive about the agile working arrangements, although this is from a small sample size of 9. The other departments within Corporate Services are broadly similar, with slightly more from Commercial Services seeing the changes as making work “much better”.

If Education: (Please complete)



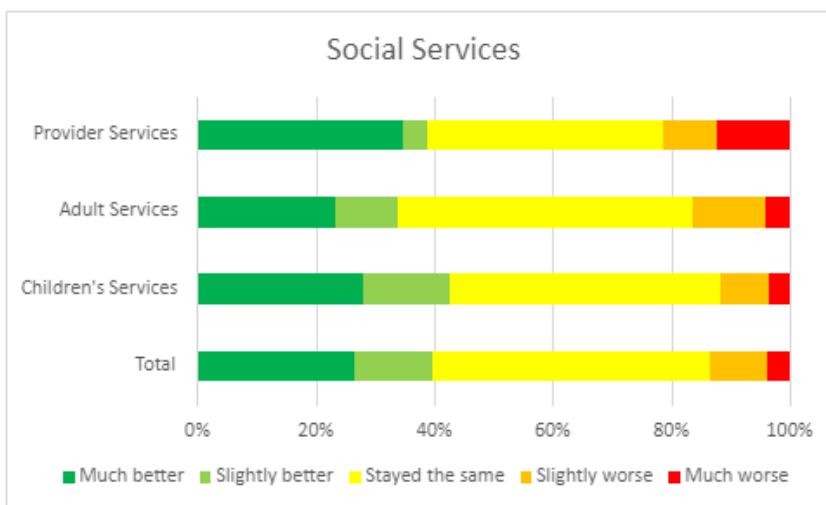
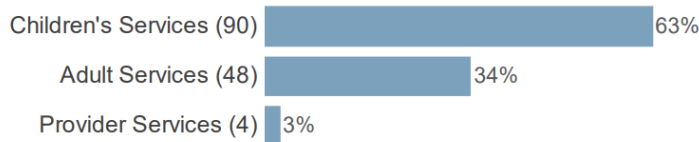
Within Education, respondents from School Improvement & Inclusion are the most positive but, again this is from a small respondent group.

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)

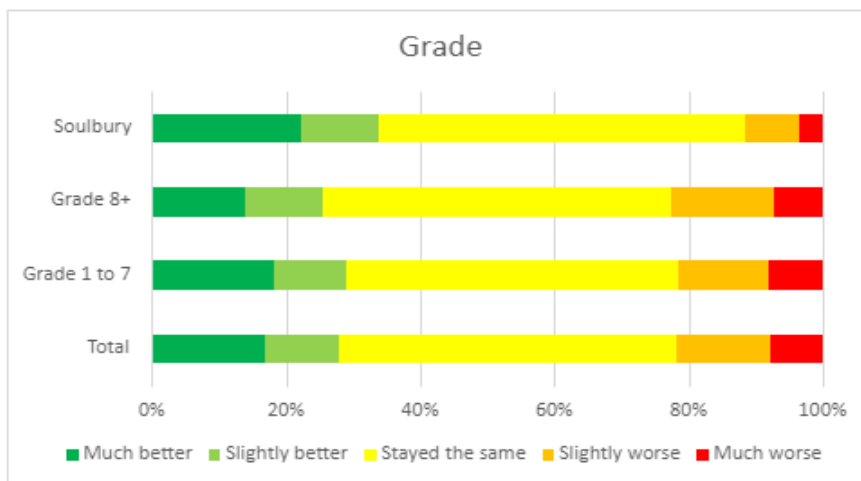


In Social Services, Provider Services has the highest percentage of respondents viewing the changes as “much better and also the highest percentage of respondents who view the changes as “much worse”. Whilst across Social Services, more respondents view the changes as positive than negative, this effect 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)

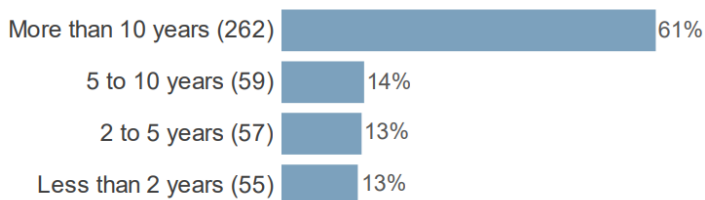


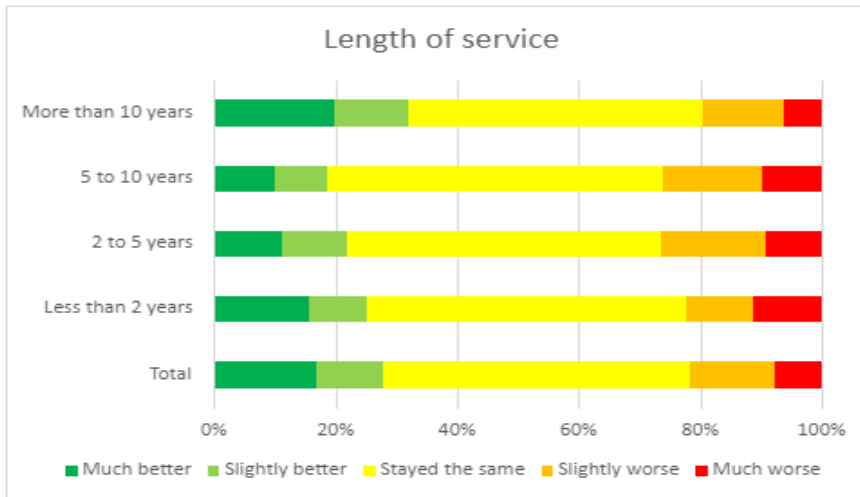
Those on the Soulbury pay grade are the most satisfied with the changes but represent a small group. Respondents in grades 1-7 are slightly more positive about the changes than those on grades 8+ but there isn't a significant difference.

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)





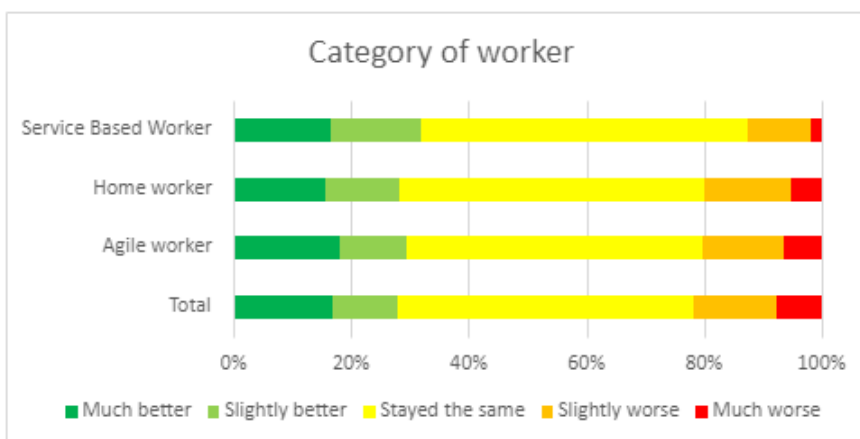
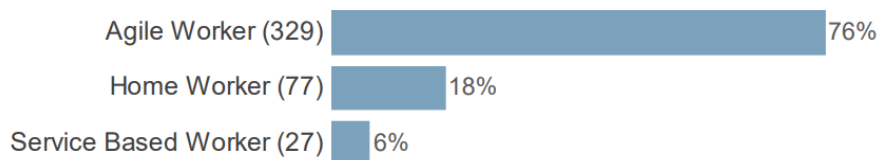
Interestingly, those with more than 10 years' service and those with less than 2 years' service are the most positive about the new working model. Those with less than 2 years' service are likely to have no experience of the previous model and may have applied for their role because of the agile working 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.

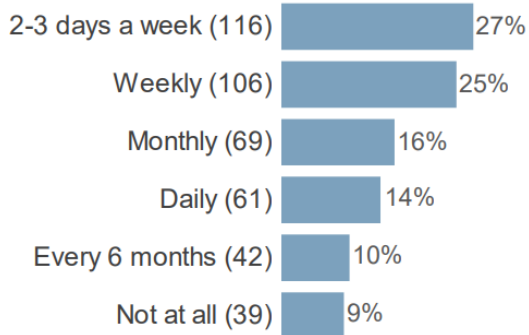
What category of worker are you? (Please complete)



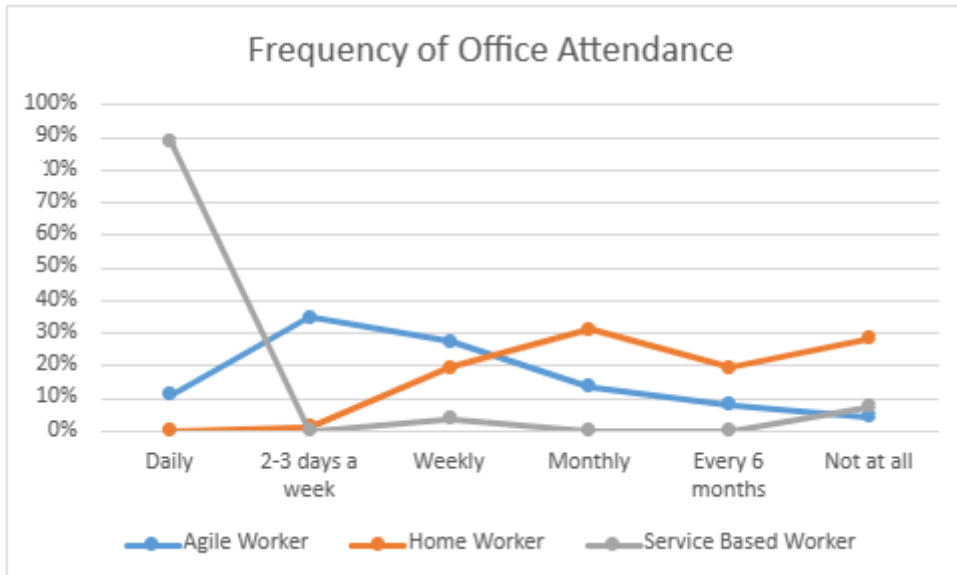
There is little difference between the groups with Service Based Workers having the lowest proportion of negative experiences. However, the changes will have had limited impact on Service Based Workers, beyond their interaction with colleagues and managers who are agile or home workers.

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%

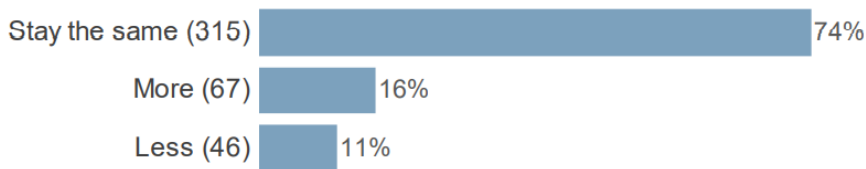
As expected, most Service Based Workers attend the office daily, although some agile workers (11%) also attend offices daily. 27% of agile workers attend offices monthly or less frequently.

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.

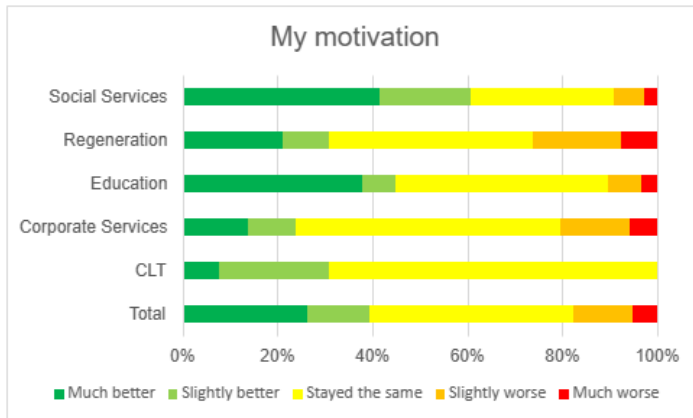
Detailed feedback

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:

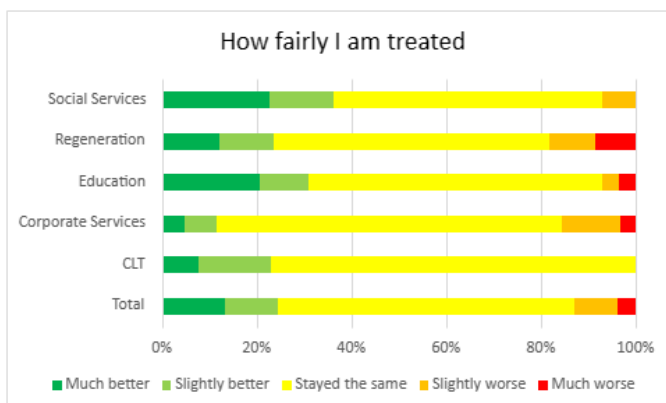
1. My motivation



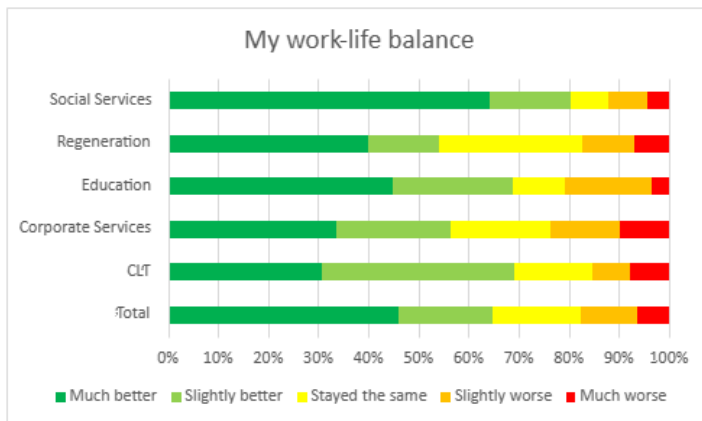
2. My job satisfaction



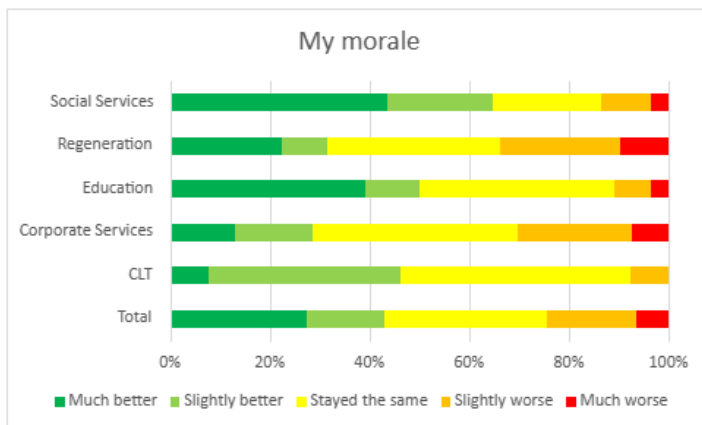
3. How fairly I am treated



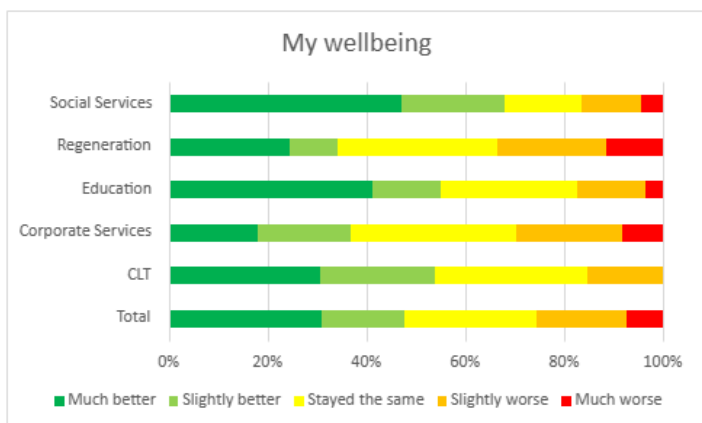
4. My work-life balance



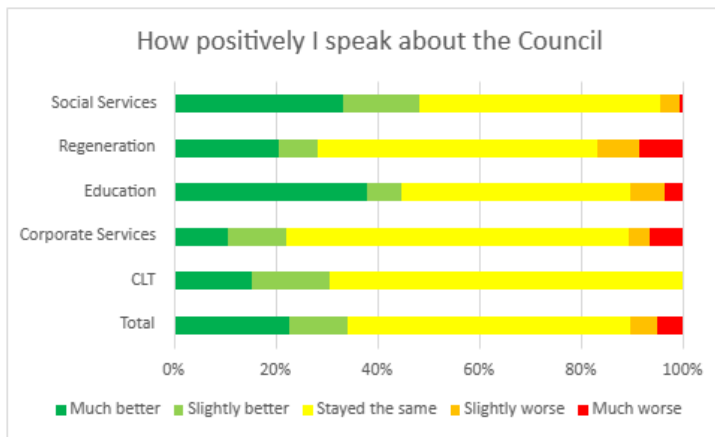
5. My morale



6. My wellbeing



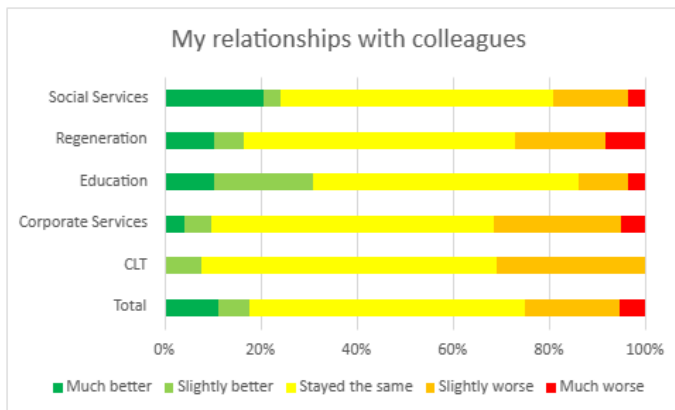
7. How positively I speak to others about the Council



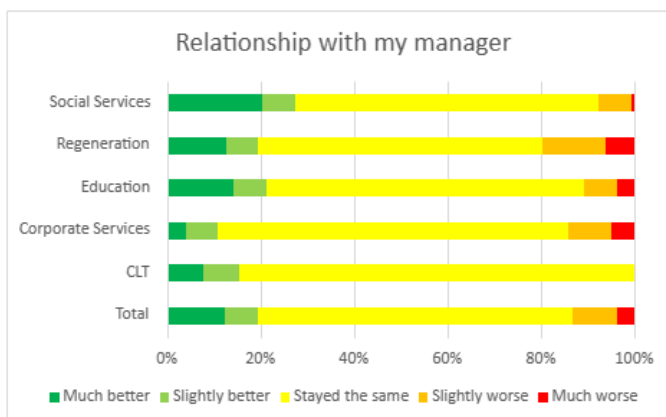
Section Two: Relationships

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



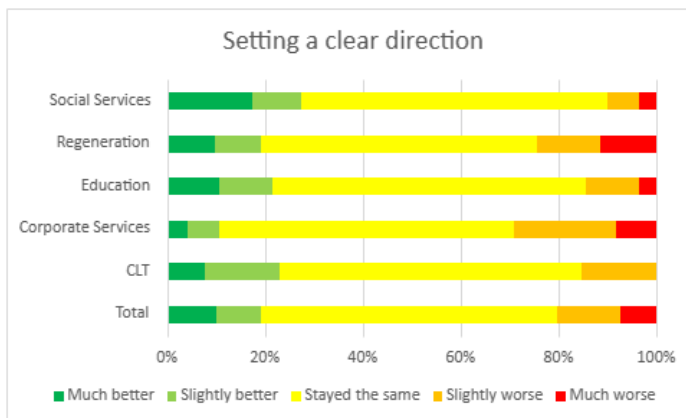
3. Relationship with customers/clients



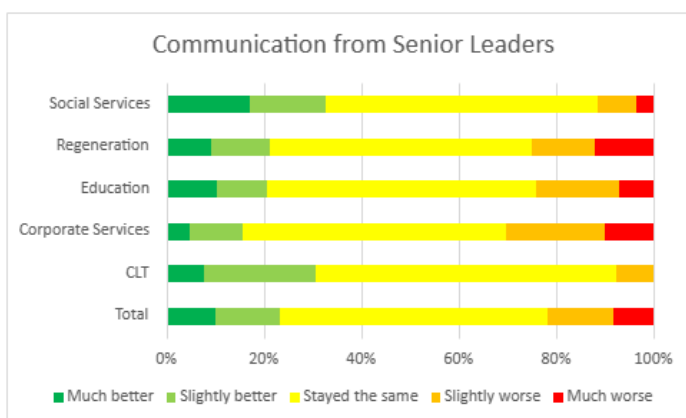
Section Three: Senior leadership and culture

Since the new operating model has been implemented, please rate how the following has changed:

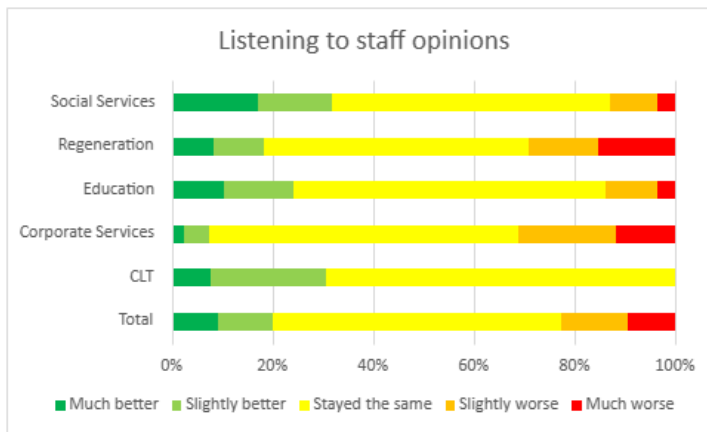
1. Senior Leaders setting a clear direction for the organisation



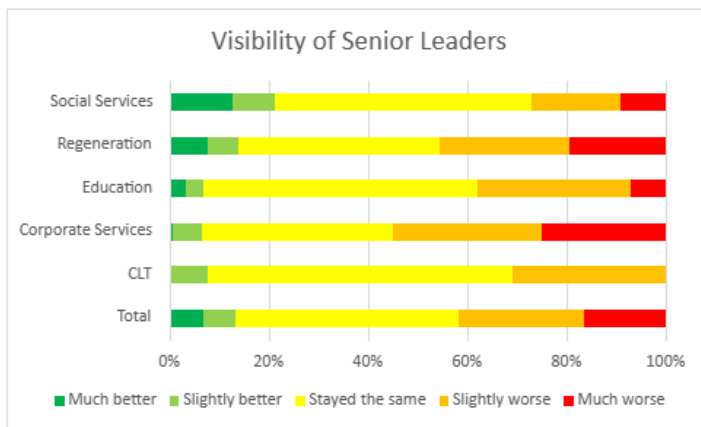
2. Communication from Senior Leaders



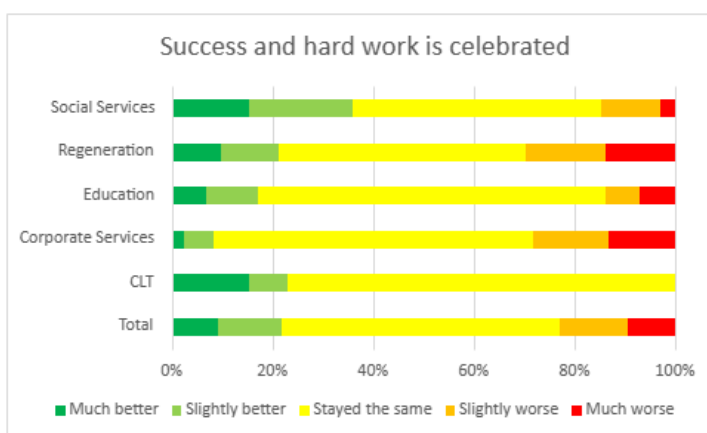
3. Senior Leaders listening to staff opinions



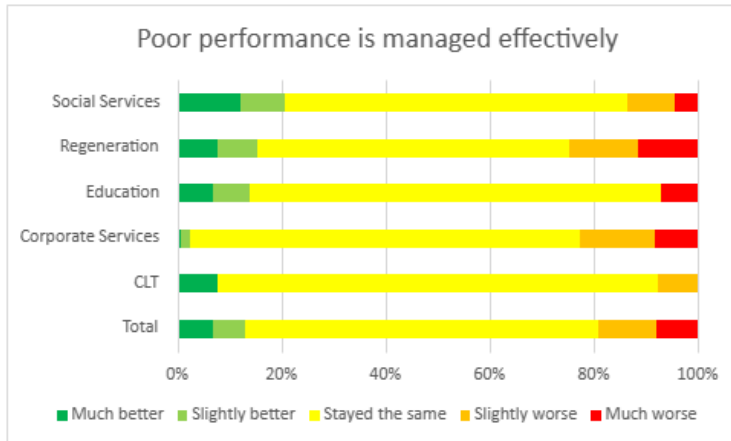
4. Visibility of senior leaders



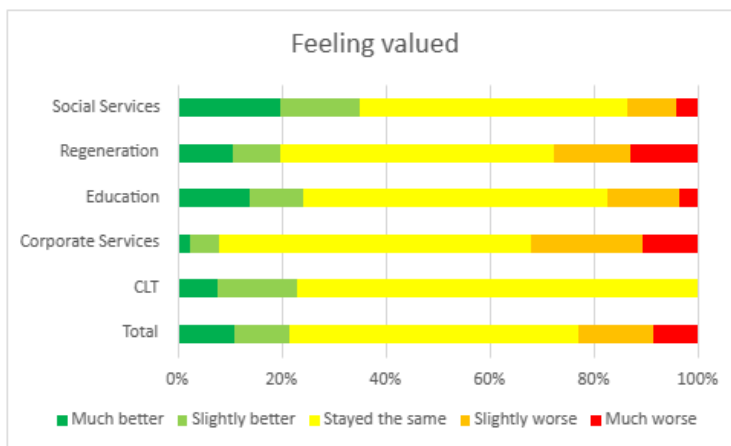
5. Success and hard work is celebrated



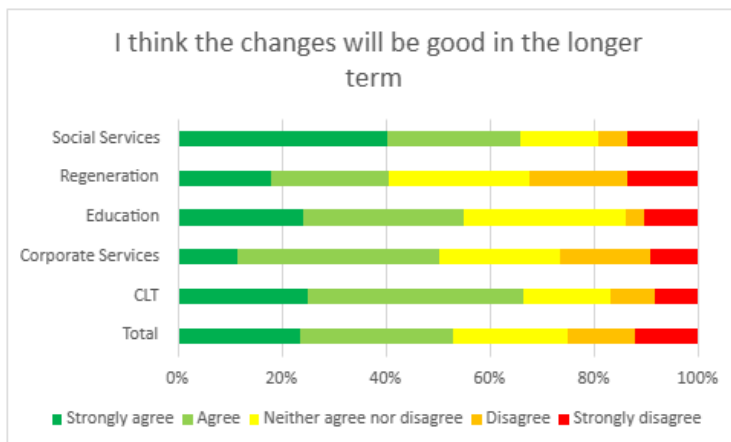
6. Poor performance is managed effectively



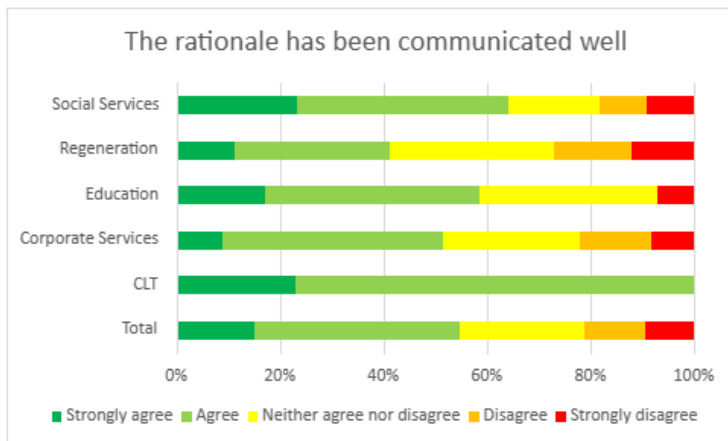
7. Feeling valued by the organisation



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



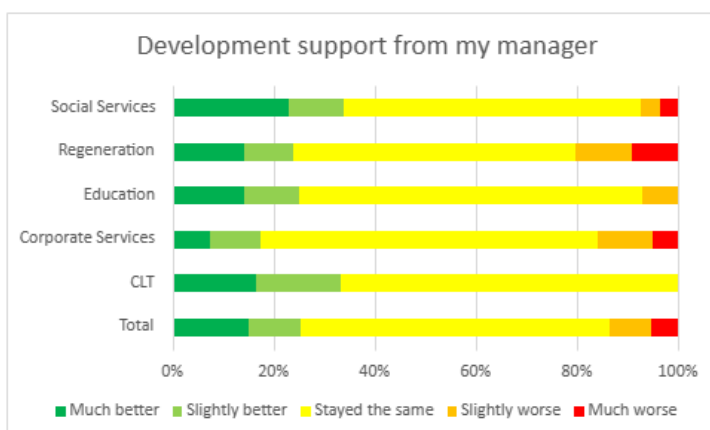
Section Four: My manager

Since the new operating model has been implemented, please rate how the following has changed:

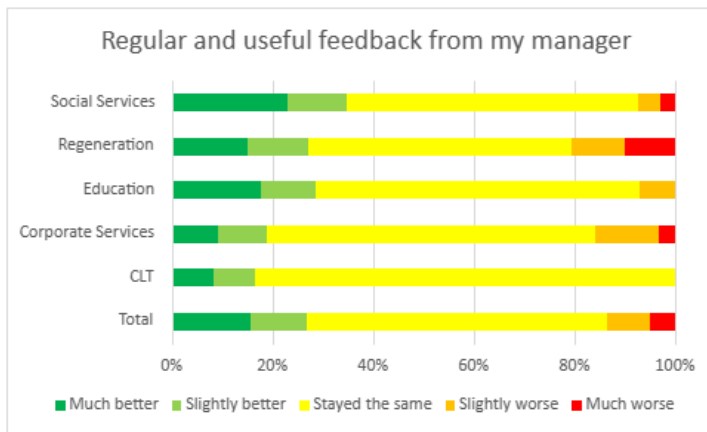
1. Communication from my manager



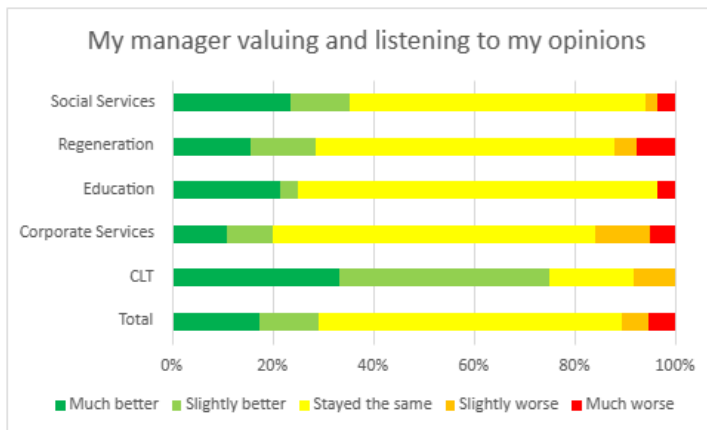
2. Development support from my manager



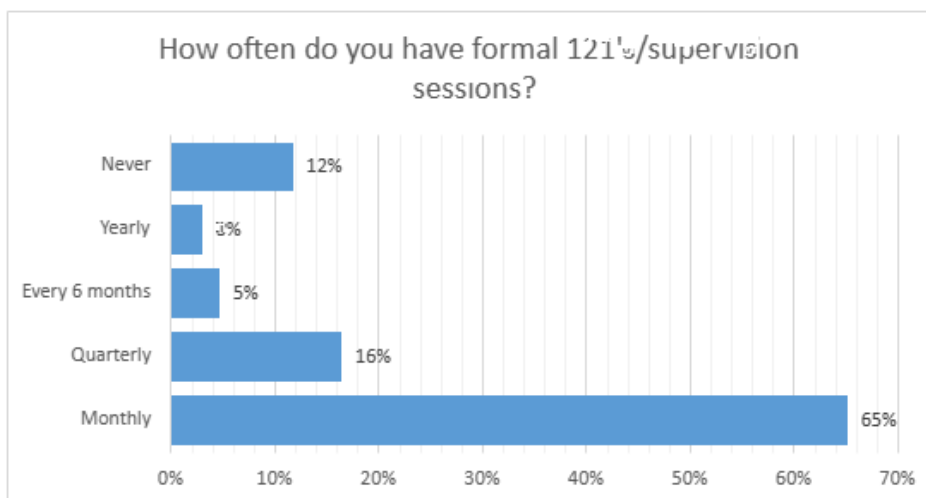
3. Regular and useful feedback from my manager

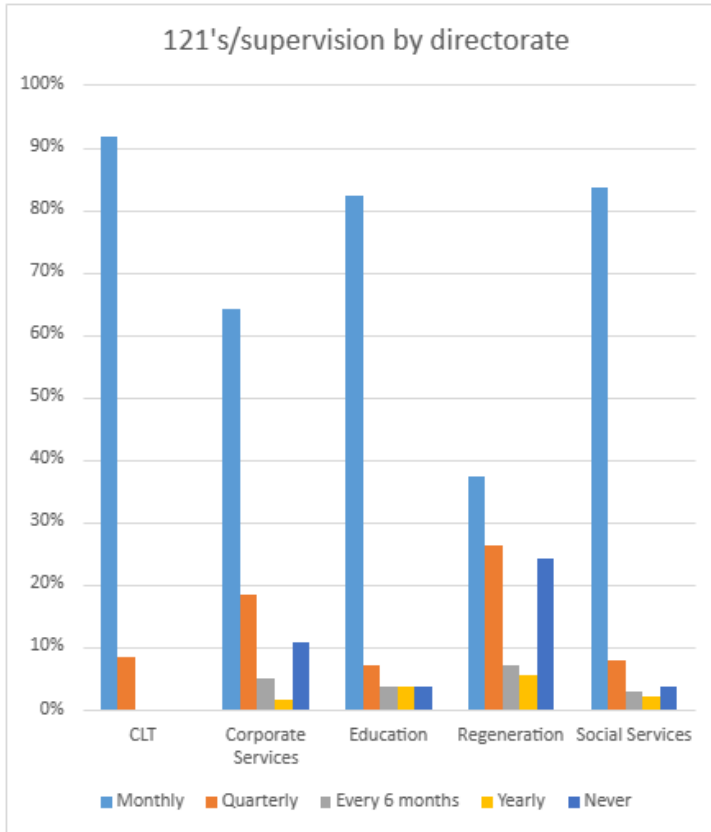


4. My manager valuing and listening to my opinions

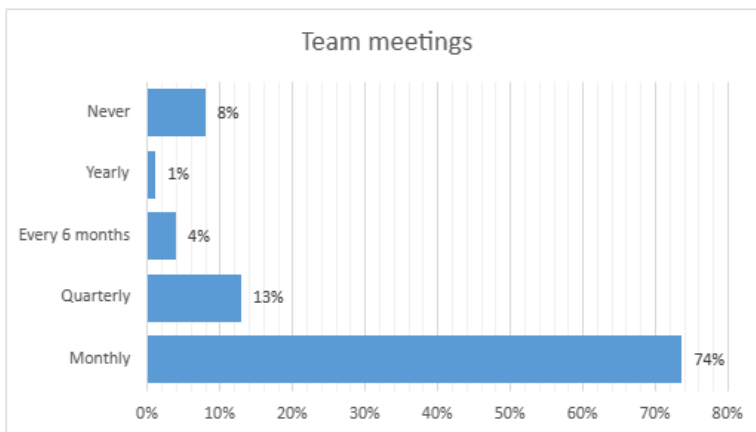


5. How often do you have formal 121's / supervision sessions with your manager?

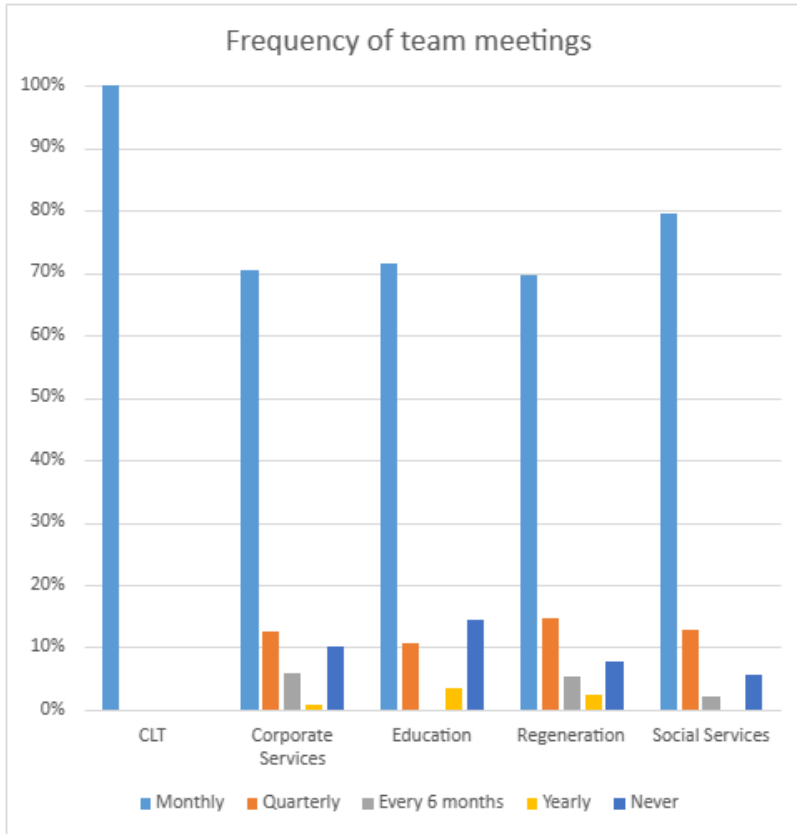




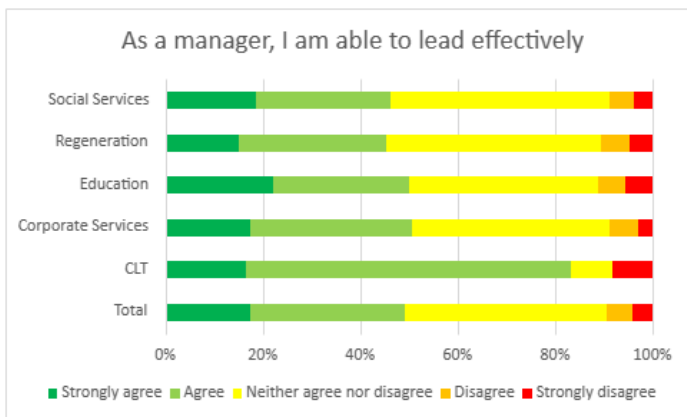
6. How often do you have formal Team Meetings?



In the comments, staff referred to weekly team meetings so team meetings may be occurring on a more frequent than monthly basis.



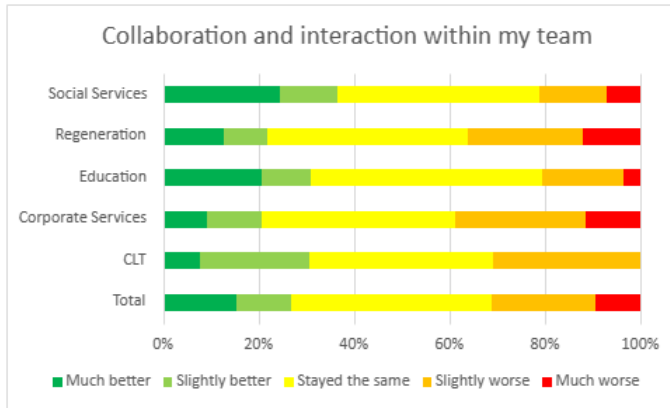
7. As a manager, I am able to lead a remote team effectively



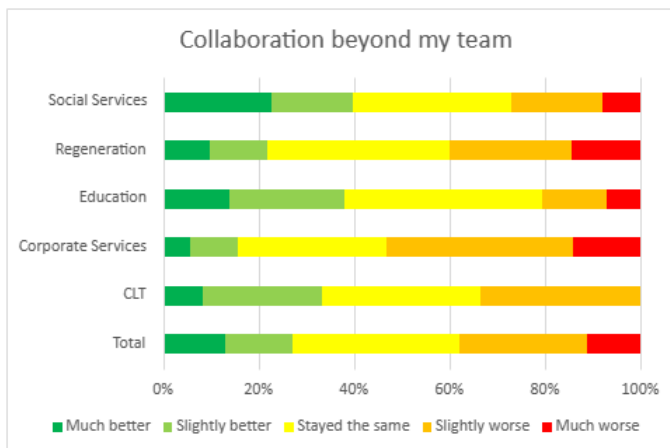
Section Five: Communication and collaboration

Since the new operating model has been implemented, please rate how the following has changed:

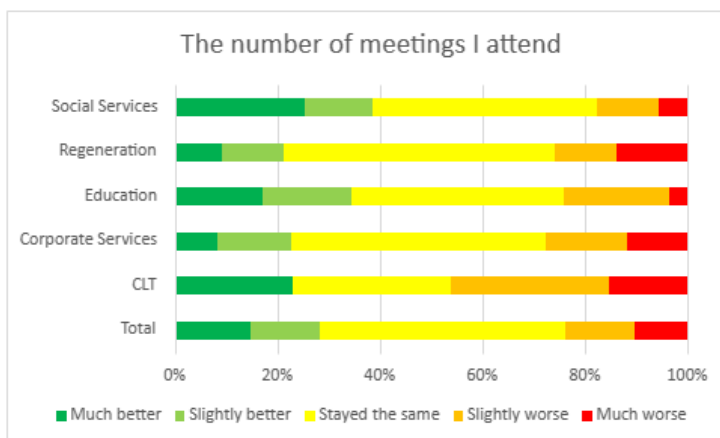
1. Collaboration and interaction within my team



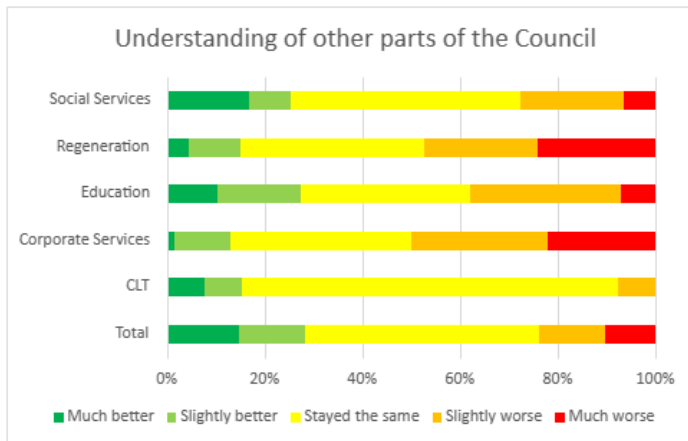
2. Collaboration and communication with other teams and colleagues I work with



3. The number of meetings I attend

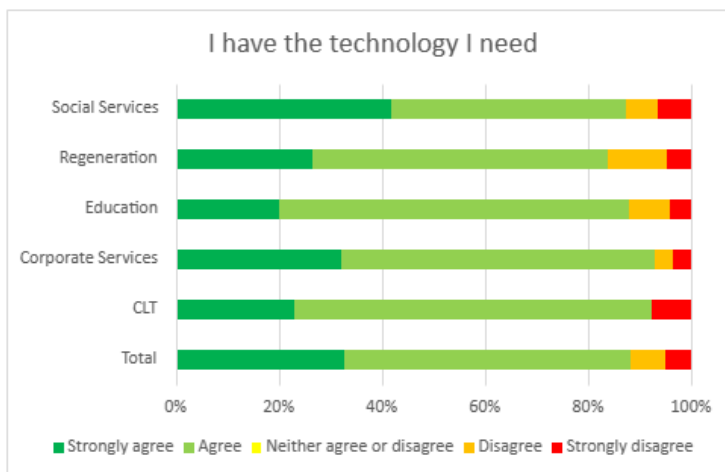


4. My understanding of what is going on in other parts of the Council

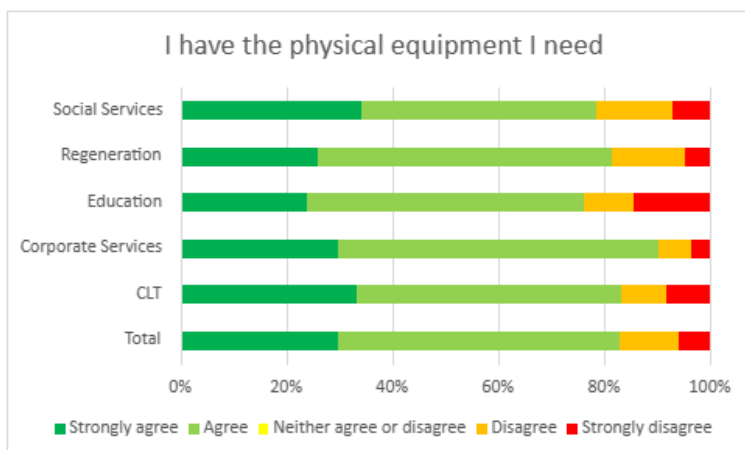


Section Six: Equipment, skills and training

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?



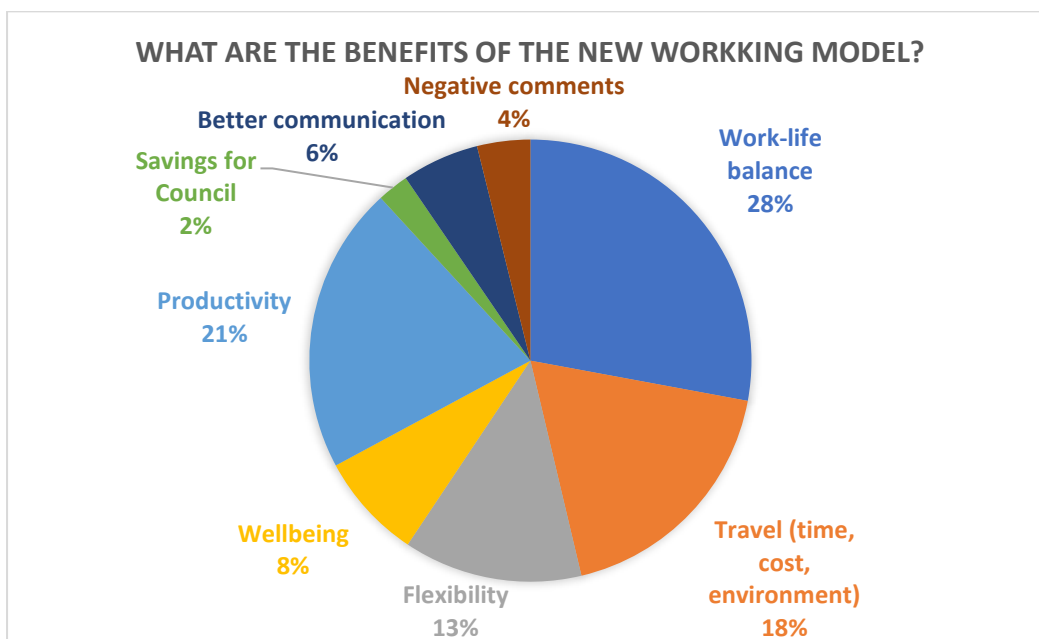
36 comments were received for this question requesting additional training on:

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:

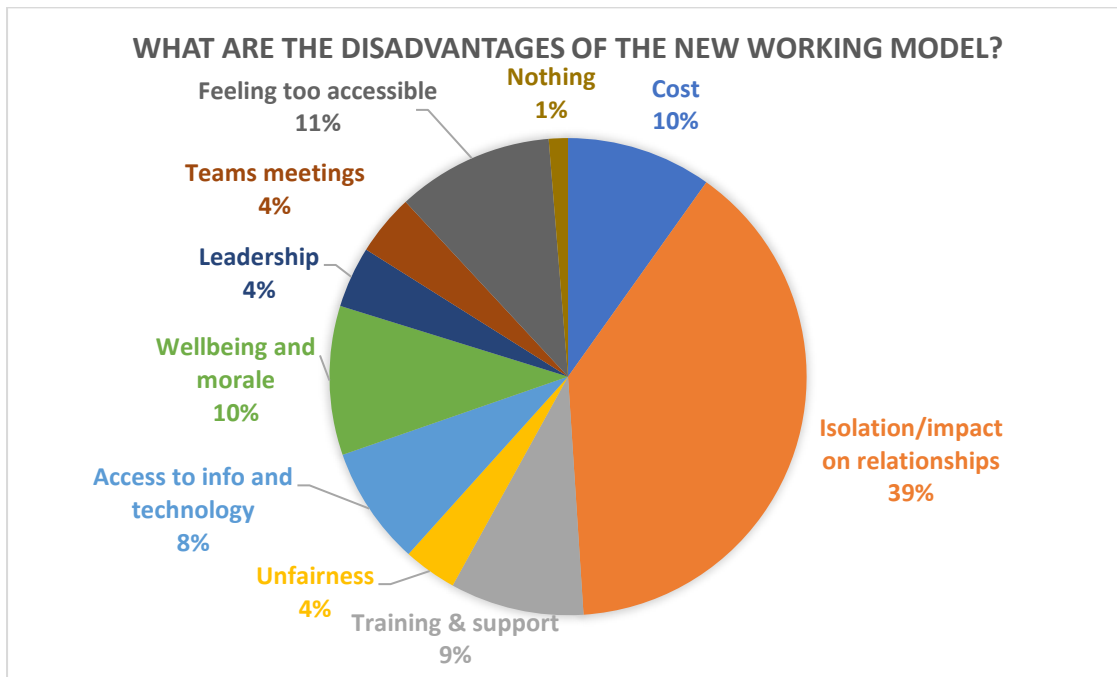


Most commenters identified multiple and related benefits. For example, reduced travel time led to greater productivity or improved work-life balance led to improved wellbeing.

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	Screen time	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-authorised 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:

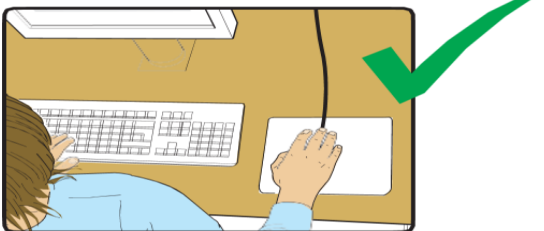
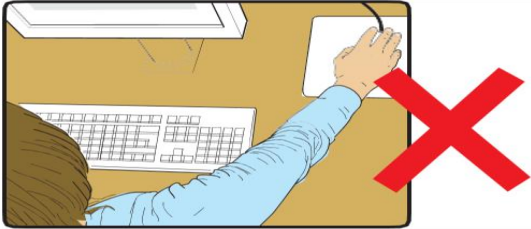
- 'Yes' answers require no further action.
- 'No' answers will require investigation and/or remedial action by the workstation assessor.

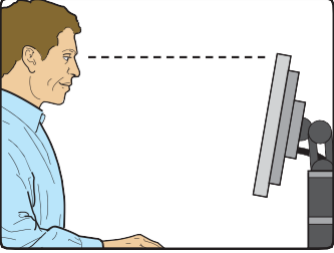
They should record their decisions in the 'Action to take' column.



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. 	
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">   </div>				
Is there support for the device user's wrist and forearm?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>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.</p>	
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"/>	<p>Users may need training in how to adjust device settings.</p>	
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>	

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



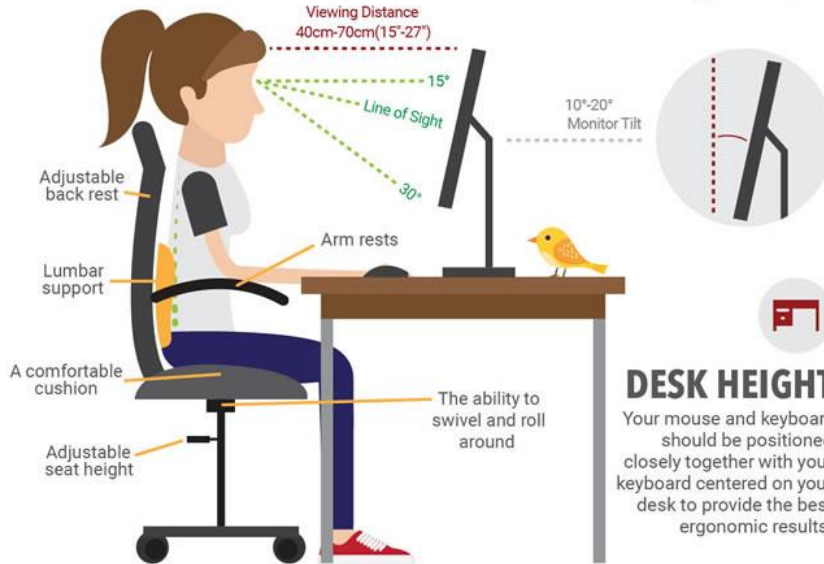
Monitor

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.



DESK HEIGHT

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.

Commented [ML1]: AJP to check with CLT on operating hours

Commented [ML2]: AJP to check if senior officers using the flexi 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.

Commented [GC3]: 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.

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 15

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **14th March 2024**

Report Subject: **Forward Work Programme: 25th April 2024**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Steve Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member
Corporate Overview and Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Scrutiny and Democratic 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	x	04.03.24			14.03.24			

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To present to Members the Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the Meeting on 25th April 2024 for discussion and agreement.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Work Programmes are key aspects of the Council's planning and governance arrangements and support the requirements of the Constitution.
- 2.2 The topics set out in the Forward Work Programme link to the strategic work of the Council as identified by the Council's revised Corporate Plan, corporate documents and supporting business plans.
- 2.3 Effective work programmes are essential to ensure that the work of scrutiny makes a positive impact upon the Council's delivery of services.
- 2.4 The Committee's Forward Work Programme was agreed in June 2023, recognising the fluidity of the document to enable the Committee to respond to urgent and emerging issues, and included timescales when reports will be considered by the Committee. The work programme is managed and implemented by the Scrutiny and Democratic Officer under the direction of the Chair and Committee.
- 2.5 The forward work programme for the forthcoming meeting will be presented to Committee on a 6 weekly cycle in order that Members can consider the programme of work; request information is included within the reports, as appropriate and / or make amendments to the work programme.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1:** The Scrutiny Committee agree the Forward Programme for the meeting 25th April 2024, as presented.

3.2 **Option 2:**

The Scrutiny Committee consider the Forward Work Programme for the meeting 25th April 2024, and

- Make any amendments to the topics scheduled for the meetings;
- Suggest any additional invitees that the committee requires to fully consider the reports; and
- Request any additional information to be included with regards to the topics to be discussed.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Forward Work Programme – Meeting on 25th April 2024

Corporate Overview and Performance Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Dates	Topic	Purpose	Lead	Cabinet / Council
25 th April 2024	Welsh Language Compliance	To present progress on implementing the Action Plan in response to the open Welsh Language investigation.	Andrew Parker	Cabinet
Deadline: 11 th April 2024	Commercial Strategy	Pre-Decision To consider the strategy.	Bernadette Elias	Cabinet
	Organisational Development Policies	Pre-Decision To consider the policies.	Andrea Prosser	Council

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