

T: 01495 355001

E: committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk



Our Ref./Ein Cyf.
Your Ref./Eich Cyf.
Contact:/Cysylltwch â: committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND

23rd January 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams - if you would like to attend the meeting live via Microsoft Teams please contact committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk on Tuesday, 30th January, 2024 at 12.15 pm.

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. **PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

5 - 8

To receive the decisions of the People Scrutiny Committee held on 13th November, 2023.

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

5. **ACTION SHEET**

9 - 12

To receive

6. **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES 2023/2024 (QUARTERS 1 AND 2)**

13 - 72

To consider the report of the Interim Corporate Director Social Services.

7. **CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION SERVICES 6-MONTH PROGRESS PERFORMANCE REPORT APR 23-SEPT 23**

73 - 136

To consider the report of the Interim Corporate Director Education.

8. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 30TH JANUARY 2024**

137 - 140

To receive.

To: Councillor T. Smith (Chair)
Councillor J. Morgan, J.P. (Vice-Chair)
Councillor D. Bevan
Councillor J. Gardner
Councillor G. Humphreys
Councillor J. P. Morgan
Councillor G. Thomas
Councillor D. Wilkshire
T. Pritchard
Chloe Lines

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

This page is intentionally left blank

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: **THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

SUBJECT: **PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 13TH NOVEMBER, 2023**

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

PRESENT: Councillor T. Smith (Chair)

Councillors C. Bainton
D. Bevan
G. Thomas
G. Humphreys

WITH: Interim Corporate Director of Education
Interim Head of School Improvement and Inclusion
Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships
Head of Children’s Services
Head of Adult Services
Service Manger Young People & Partnerships
Service Manager Children’s Services
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer

AND: Councillor S. Edmunds, Cabinet Member for People & Education (Item No. 6)

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

	Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jen Morgan, J.P. and D. Wilkshire.	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The decisions of the People Scrutiny Committee held on 19th September, 2023 were submitted.</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>The Action Sheet arising from the meeting held on 19th September, 2023 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Action Sheet be noted.</p>	
No. 6	<p><u>CABINET DECISION - INCLUSION AND ALN STRATEGY / POLICIES / GUIDANCE (REVIEW AND AMENDMENTS)</u></p> <p>The Interim Corporate Director of Education said there was a firm commitment to work with Headteachers and Senior Leaders on any new policies when ASOS allowed.</p> <p>At the invitation of the Chair, the Cabinet Member for People & Education said she recognised the importance of Scrutiny and thanked Members for their examination of the report when presented to Committee.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member said she wanted to provide comment on advising against Option 2 when presented, and stressed that it she was in no way trying to undermine the work of Scrutiny, but felt that there was a number of issues surrounding the consultation that had not been communicated to the Scrutiny Committee and led to misunderstanding which would impact on the Education Directorate's ability to perform its statutory duties.</p>	

Firstly, issues of ASOS procedures had, and still was having a detrimental effect on Primary Schools and Headteachers refusing to engage in the consultation that was offered due to ASOS, and the Cabinet Member outlined the level of engagement offered.

Secondly, we needed to make changes to our Inclusion Strategy to ensure it was in line with policy changes coming from Welsh Government. As part of the consultation process, a Teams Channel was established with the policies uploaded and Headteachers asked to email their views rather than meet, in order to provide an opportunity to engage without going against ASOS, however, no responses were received.

Finally, there was a full formal consultation which took place in between April and June, and as a result Statutory Notice was issued and closed on 26th July, 2023 with no objections to the proposals.

The Cabinet Member said further efforts had been made to engage with Headteachers despite continuing ASOS, but she said it was imperative that the statutory responsibility of the Authority, and its responsibility to children with additional needs was not hindered by industrial action.

The Cabinet Member concluded that there was a series of events that could have been communicated better to Scrutiny, which she felt would have resulted in the report being more positively received. She would endeavour to ensure those lines of communication with Scrutiny are better performed and more robust moving forward and hoped that the explanation provided gave Members a better understanding of why she asked Cabinet to support Option 1, against the recommendation of Scrutiny.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for attending and providing an explanation. He also thanked her for the opportunity to attend Cabinet on behalf of the Committee, and said he was pleased that communication would be improved moving forward.

<p>No. 7</p>	<p><u>PROGRESS REPORT: CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL HOMES</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager, Children's Services.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted as an accurate representation of the progress to date in respect of the development of Blaenau Gwent's residential children's homes. (Option 1)</p>	
<p>No. 8</p>	<p><u>UPDATE ON PROGRESS AGAINST ESTYN RECOMMENDATIONS</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director of Education.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted as provided. (Option 2)</p>	
<p>No. 9</p>	<p><u>IMPROVING SCHOOLS PROGRAMME</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director of Education.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted as provided. (Option 2)</p>	
<p>No. 10</p>	<p><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 19TH DECEMBER 2023</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to report of the Scrutiny and Democratic Officer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT Strategy to be moved to February/March meeting. <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the FWP for the 19th December, 2023 be accepted.</p>	

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Action Sheet

People Scrutiny Committee

Meeting Date	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
13.11.23	Item 7: Progress Report: Children's Residential Homes Visit to the property to be arranged when appropriate.	Alison Ramshaw	Visits to be arranged during Summer 2024 Action Update: 13.11.23
13.11.23	Item 9: Improving Schools Programme School attendance data to be provided – Welsh Government, South East Wales Consortium and Local Authority.	Luisa Munro-Morris	Information attached. Action Complete: 14.11.23

This page is intentionally left blank

Blaenau Gwent Attendance

Latest Blaenau Gwent published release for week ending 27th October:

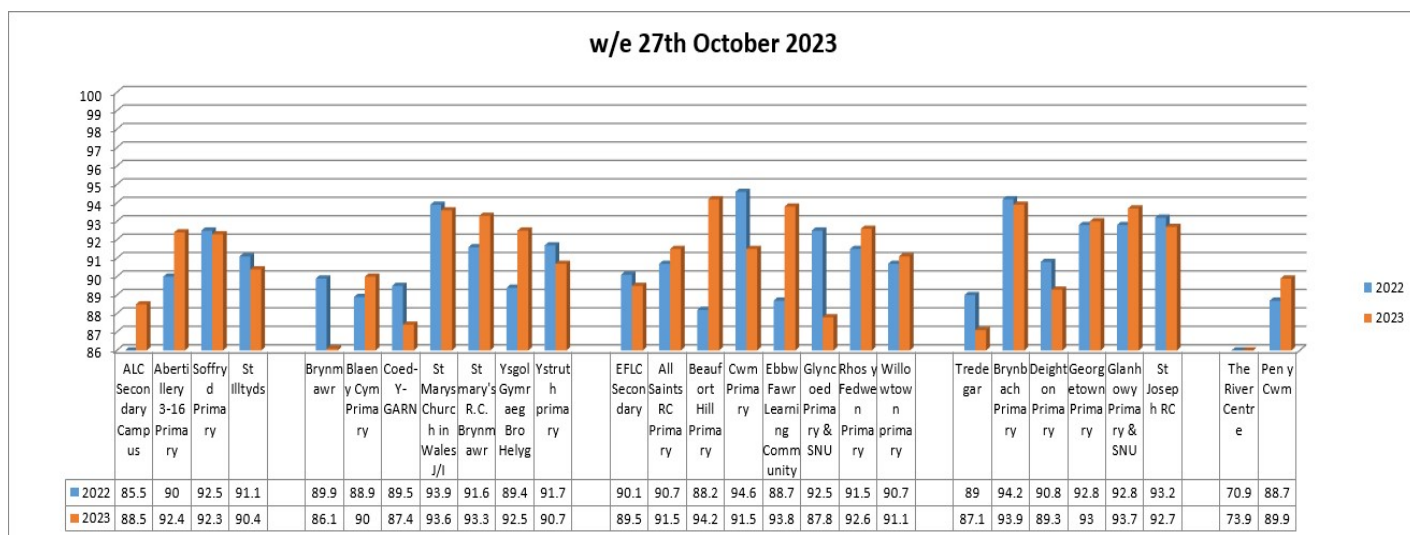
Welsh Government average 91.4%

Blaenau Gwent average 90.1%

SEWC region 91.3%

LA code	Local authority	Average number of sessions per day	Average number of sessions present	Average percentage of sessions present	Average number of sessions of authorised absence	Average percentage of sessions of authorised absence	Average number of sessions of unauthorised absence	Average percentage of sessions of unauthorised absence	Average number of sessions of absence	Average percentage of sessions of absence
679	Monmouthshire	18,296	16,898	92.4	1,085	5.9	312	1.7	1,397	7.6
666	Powys	24,948	23,008	92.2	1,595	6.4	345	1.4	1,940	7.8
667	Ceredigion	14,861	13,706	92.2	729	4.9	427	2.9	1,156	7.8
668	Pembrokeshire	26,227	24,142	92.1	1,475	5.6	610	2.3	2,085	7.9
665	Wrexham	30,166	27,735	91.9	1,808	6.0	623	2.1	2,431	8.1
664	Flintshire	35,347	32,461	91.8	2,235	6.3	651	1.8	2,885	8.2
673	Vale of Glamorgan	34,334	31,528	91.8	1,806	5.3	1,000	2.9	2,806	8.2
681	Cardiff	74,110	68,102	91.9	3,457	4.7	2,637	3.6	6,094	8.2
670	Swansea	53,112	48,725	91.7	3,045	5.7	1,343	2.5	4,387	8.3
680	Newport	42,673	39,110	91.7	2,066	4.8	1,497	3.5	3,563	8.3
672	Bridgend	33,648	30,830	91.6	2,059	6.1	758	2.3	2,817	8.4
661	Gwynedd	24,960	22,791	91.3	1,708	6.8	461	1.8	2,169	8.7
676	Caerphilly	42,580	38,804	91.1	2,632	6.2	1,144	2.7	3,775	8.9
660	Isle of Anglesey	14,159	12,892	91.0	957	6.8	311	2.2	1,268	9.0
678	Torfaen	23,683	21,552	91.0	1,615	6.8	516	2.2	2,131	9.0
669	Carmarthenshire	43,009	39,115	90.9	2,843	6.6	1,050	2.4	3,893	9.1
674	Rhondda Cynon Taf	60,052	54,576	90.9	3,491	5.8	1,985	3.3	5,476	9.1
675	Merthyr Tydfil	14,386	13,046	90.7	816	5.7	524	3.6	1,340	9.3
671	Neath Port Talbot	33,718	30,575	90.7	1,790	5.3	1,353	4.0	3,143	9.3
663	Denbighshire	25,065	22,682	90.5	1,504	6.0	878	3.5	2,382	9.5
662	Conwy	23,326	21,049	90.2	1,526	6.5	750	3.2	2,277	9.8
677	Blaenau Gwent	15,435	13,901	90.1	1,055	6.8	479	3.1	1,534	9.9
999	Wales	702,600	642,217	91.4	40,898	5.8	19,485	2.8	60,383	8.6

Blaenau Gwent half-termly analysis – October 2023



Cluster 22/23	secondary	primary
Abertillery	85.5	91.2
Brynmawr	89.9	90.8
Ebbw Vale	90.1	91.0
Tredegar	89	92.8
Authority	88.6	91.4

Cluster 23/24	secondary	primary
Abertillery	88.5	91.7
Brynmawr	86.1	91.3
Ebbw Vale	89.5	91.8
Tredegar	87.1	92.5
Authority	87.8	91.8

Unfortunately, we are seeing a decrease in secondary school attendance whilst both primary schools and special schools are showing a slight increase.

One secondary school has increased their absence whilst the other three schools have seen a decrease. The main reasons for absence at secondary are illness (5.9%), unauthorised absence (2.8%) and other authorised absence (1.6%).

Eleven primary schools have seen an increase, whilst the other ten schools have seen a decrease. The main reasons for absence at primary are illness (4.3%), unauthorised holidays in term time (1.1%) and unauthorised absence (0.8%).

Both special schools have seen an increase in their attendance. The main reasons for absence in special schools are unauthorised absence (6.4%), illness (5.2%) and other authorised absence (3.4%).

Agenda Item 6

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **People Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **19th December 2023**
Report Subject: **Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2023/2024 (Quarters 1 and 2).**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Haydn Trollope, Cabinet Member for People and Social Services**
Report Submitted by: **Tanya Evans, Interim Corporate Director of Social Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Officers	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance & Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	People Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	23.11.23	05.12.23			19.12.23	10.01.24		

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to present the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services, covering the quarter 1 and 2 period (April to September 2023) attached at Appendix 1.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 The performance of the department is monitored throughout the financial year from April to March, with six monthly reports presented to the relevant Scrutiny Committee. At the end of the year a comprehensive self-evaluation of performance is undertaken to inform the Statutory Annual Report of the Director of Social Services.

2.2 The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 places a statutory duty on all local authorities to produce an annual report on the discharge of its social services functions.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 Option 1

Members are asked to consider the detail contained in the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2023/2024 (quarters 1 and 2) and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate comments and or recommendations for amendment to the report before consideration at Cabinet.

3.2 Option 2

Accept the report as provided.

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

It is a statutory responsibility of the Director of Social Services to assess the effectiveness of the delivery of Social Services and produce an Annual Report. The Annual Report contributes to and forms part of the Annual Council Reporting Framework (ACRF).

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

The Director's Report includes budgetary information and identifies the pressures and budgetary implications for 2023/2024.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

Social Services maintain a directorate risk register which is aligned to both service level and corporate risk. The risk register is reviewed as part of the business planning process and included within the performance reporting of the Director of Social Services.

5.3 **Legal**

There is a statutory requirement, as part of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2015 for the Director of Social Services to produce an annual report following strict guidelines on content.

5.4 **Human Resources**

There are no staffing implications related in this report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

Detail is provided within the Director's Annual Report 2023/2024 (quarters 1 and 2)

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

The key theme of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 is to promote the well-being of people who need care and support. Within the annual report it is highlighted where the Directorate has worked closely with the public to improve service delivery and user outcomes. Reporting provides the public with the opportunity to view progress of the Directorate and ensure accountability.

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

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 looks to build and strengthen on existing arrangements by involving service users, carers and other key partners where possible in helping shape and influence future design of services.

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

The Annual report enables the department to plan for the future as spend, risk and performance is continuously reported on and provides a baseline of where the department is currently and where it needs to be in the future.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The work undertaken by the department looks to promote a preventative approach to practice through early identification and intervention. Having an active rather than re active approach to service planning can also help with planning resources and not spending as much on services in the future.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

Social Services work collaboratively across boundaries to benefit citizens requiring health and social care services across Gwent.

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

The purpose of the SSWBA is to foster integration between Health and Social Services. The report enables the department to plan for the future as spend, risk and performance is continuously reported on and provides a baseline of where it needs to be in the future to support a sustainable and viable service.

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

The workforce who delivers the functions of the SSWBA have adopted the agile working policy of the council which will have a positive impact on car emissions as staff are now able to work from home to undertake paperwork and do not have to travel to the office.

6.9a ***Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment***

All service provision and functions that sit under social services are subject to socio economic disadvantages for example, low income, material and area deprivation. All programmes work towards addressing these disadvantages.

6.9b ***Equality Impact Assessment***

The overarching vision is to support the needs of the most vulnerable children and adults in our communities through a range of early intervention, prevention and support mechanisms. With the aim of building resilient individuals, resilient families and resilient communities.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The Annual Report for 2023/2024 (quarters 1 and 2) will be monitored via six monthly monitoring reports to the Social Services Scrutiny Committee.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Report of the Director of Social Services

This page is intentionally left blank

The

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Director of Social Services Annual Report

2023/24 Mid Year Snapshot



Contents

Chapter	Section	Sub Section	Page No.
Chapter 1		Directors Summary	3
Chapter 2	Context / Introduction	Purpose of Report	5
		What are the eight quality standards	6
		How people are shaping our services - Engagement	7
		How people are shaping our services – Complaints and compliments	8
		Promoting and improving the well-being of those we help - Priorities	9
		Infographic	10
Chapter 3 (a)	People	Quality Standard 1 – All People are equal partners who have choice, voice and control over their lives and are able to achieve what matters to them.	11
		Quality Standard 1 – Case Studies	14
		Quality Standard 2 – Effective leadership is evident at all levels with a highly skilled well qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision.	15
		Quality Standard 2 – Case Studies	18
Chapter 3 (b)	Prevention	Quality Standard 3 – The need for care and support is minimised and the escalation of need is prevented whilst ensuring that the best outcomes for people are achieved.	22
		Quality Standard 3 – Case Studies	26
		Quality Standard 4 – Resilience within communities is promoted and people are supported to fulfil their potential by actively supporting people who need care and / or support including carers to learn, develop and participate in society.	27
		Quality Standard 4 – Case Studies	30
Chapter 3 (c)	Partnership & Integration	Quality Standard 5 – Effective partnerships are in place to commission and fully deliver fully integrated, high quality sustainable outcomes for people	32
		Quality Standard 5 – Case Studies	34
		Quality Standard 6 – People are encouraged to be involved in the design and delivery of their care and support as equal partners	37
		Quality Standard 6 – Case Studies	39
Chapter 3 (d)	Well-being	Quality Standard 7 – People are protected and safeguarded from abuse and neglect and any other types of harm.	41
		Quality Standard 8 – People are supported to actively manage their well-being and make their own decisions so that they are able to achieve their full potential and live independently for as long as possible	44
		Quality Standard 8– Case Studies	46
Chapter 4	Other information	How we do what we do - Structural arrangements that provide good governance and strong accountability / Local Political Leadership, Governance and Accountability	47
		How we do what we do - Audit & Inspection Progress	48
		How we do what we do - Our Workforce and How We Support their Professional Roles	50
		How we do what we do - Effective partnership working through Regional Partnership Boards	51
		How we do what we do - Our Financial Resources and how we plan for the future	52
		How we do what we do - Risks	53
		How we do what we do - Complaints	54
Chapter 5		Looking Forward – Areas for Progression	55
Chapter 6		Accessing further information and key documents	56

Chapter 1 - Directors Summary

The first 2 quarters of 23/24 have seen the continuation of the interim arrangements for the Director and Head of Childrens services. This has not impacted on the directorates ability to continue robust delivery of services, alongside service development and improvements.

We continue to see an increase in demand for services and an increase in the complexity of presenting need by the people of Blaenau Gwent. The Directorate has continued to meet this demand and complexity however, this has led to budget pressures particularly in relation to our children looked after. We are hopeful the development of our first children's home in the spring/summer of 2025 will look to improve outcomes for our children looked after, plus provide some easement to the budget pressure in this area.

Our workforce continues to be our greatest asset to ensure we deliver the best services possible. The workforce strategy developed in 2022 continues to run until 2025 with progress being reviewed on a quarterly basis through our business planning process. This mid-year report provides good evidence of the positive impact this strategy is having on how well supported staff feel and attendance rates across the directorate.

The second part of the year will not only continue to provide challenges in relation to meeting demand for services but also bring the need to cut services to enable the council to maintain a balanced budget. Social Services are not exempt from these cuts, but every effort will be made to mitigate against the impact these cuts will inevitably have.

Despite the challenges, we have continued to progress service developments and improvements. Some of the things we have achieved in the first two quarters of this year are;

- Our 14 plus team won a Social Care Accolade in the category of Building Brighter Futures for Children and Families
- The Independent Living PODS at Augusta House have been opened.
- We have purchased a property to develop our first Blaenau Gwent Childrens home.

Continued on the next page

Directors Summary - continued

- We have had positive feedback from a social Services Staff Survey
- We have 5 of our children looked after progress to university.
- An increase in attendance at work across the whole Directorate
- A positive inspection of Cwrt Mytton
- Increased support for carers due to grant funding
- Commencement of work to improve service delivery at Lakeview.
- Exploring working with partners to increase the use of the hydrotherapy pool at Bert Denning
- Significant increase of social activities within Cwrt Mytton to improve the wellbeing for those who live there.
- Two schools achieve the Children Looked After Friendly Schools Quality Mark
- Extensive work to improve facilities at our Cwm and Sofrydd Flying Start Hubs
- Our Families First Young Carers project have been nominated and shortlisted for a Social Care Accolade



Tanya Evans
Interim Corporate Director
Social Services



Cllr Haydn Trollope
Cabinet Member for People and
Social Services

Chapter 2 - Context / Introduction

Purpose of report

Welcome to the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Social Services six month snapshot of the Annual Report 2023/2024. Over the past few years the Department has been developing these reports to highlight the key areas of improvements and challenges that have been faced.

This report has been developed in line with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, referred to as 'the Act' throughout this document. The Act aims to provide the most radical change to the way in which Social Services is provided since 1948. It focuses on improving the well-being of people who come to Social Services for support. It is person centred and focuses on prevention and reducing the need for care and support. It recognises that responsibility lies not only within Social Services Departments, but also within the wider Local Authority and with partners (particularly Health and the Third Sector).

The Act shares similar principles with a number of key national/regional strategies that are being implemented throughout the Council, in particular the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which is legislation which aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The vision of this legislation is expressed in the seven National well-being goals.

The Well-being Act also puts a duty on public bodies to apply the sustainable development principle which states they 'must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

The sustainable development principle is made up of the following five ways of working, pictured here:



Throughout this report some areas of performance that meet these ways of working are demonstrated by these images.

The Director of Social Services has a statutory requirement to publish an annual report in relation to the delivery of its functions, to evaluate its performance and also include lessons learned. A key aspect of the report is showing how the [eight Quality Standards have been implemented in relation to well-being outcomes \(see page 6\)](#).

This format is also used within this mid-year snapshot report and provides a strategic overview of the work undertaken throughout the first 6 months of 2023/2024 and what plans are in place to move forward. Further supporting information can be found from page 53 of the report. Both this report and the annual report includes evidence of where Social Services have worked collaboratively with partners.

Experiences and learning from service users has been considered as part of the development of the report. Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) findings, Audit Wales (AW) findings, case studies, complaints and compliments and quarterly reporting have all been considered as part of the development of this report and evidence from these has been used to inform future learning.

Both the mid year and annual reports are used internally to monitor performance, identify areas where improvement is needed, recognise successes to take forward and demonstrate accountability to citizens and service users. As part of this process and the meet the statutory requirement, the annual report will be presented to full Council for ratification before it is published on the Council's website and will then be sent to Welsh Ministers. The annual report will be available on line bilingually and will be shared with partner agencies in order to share good practice, learning and experiences.

What are the eight quality standards?

The quality standards are linked to the seven well-being goals as set out in Section 4 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (<https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/>) and linked to the Page 9 of 18 definition of well-being as set out in Section 2 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/id/anaw/2014/4>

The standards aim to ensure that all people who need care and carers who need support are able to access the right support at the right time from the right place, and that there are appropriately experienced and / or qualified professionals in place to deliver this. Pages 11 to 43 of this report demonstrate progress over the past six months against these quality standards which forms part of our ongoing internal evidence and research to support existing service provision and provide improvements.

The Quality Standards			
People	Prevention	Partnerships and Integration	Well-Being
All people are equal partners who have voice, choice and control over their lives and are able to achieve what matters to them.	The need for care and support is minimised and the escalation of need is prevented, whilst ensuring that the best possible outcomes for people are achieved.	Effective partnerships are in place to commission and deliver fully integrated, high quality, sustainable outcomes for people.	People are protected and safeguarded from abuse and neglect, and any other types of harm.
Effective leadership is evident at all levels with a highly skilled, well qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision.	Resilience within our communities is promoted and people are supported to fulfil their potential by actively encouraging and supporting people who need care and support, including carers, to learn, develop and participate in society.	People are encouraged to be involved in the design and delivery of their care and support as equal partners.	People are supported to actively manage their well-being and make their own informed decisions so that they are able to achieve their full potential and live independently for as long as possible.

How people are shaping our services

Engagement -

The Social Services Directorate is committed to providing high quality services to its citizens and uses various engagement methodologies in order to understand if the service is achieving the intended outcomes, or if amendments to service delivery needs to be considered. The service ensures that the voice of people is used to inform and improve the service moving forward.

Staff ensure that users to the service are heard and listened to by having the what matters conversation to establish the personal outcomes each individual wants to achieve and the support networks they may already have in place to rely on to meet those outcomes.

Throughout April 2023 to September 2023 a variety of engagement events have taken place and some examples of these are included throughout the body of the report.



How people are shaping our services

Complaints and Compliments -

Sections titled ‘What you told us...’

can be found throughout the document and performance **detail** in respect of all complaints received during the reporting period can be found in chapter 4, page 51 .

As an Authority we concentrate on not only the statistics, but how we have utilised the information, analysing any discernible trends and considering what changes and improvements we have made, or propose to make, in response to these complaints and investigations.

The chart here details the complaint themes received during the reporting period and what actions have been put in place, or are recommended to be put in place in order to better our service provision for the future.



Promoting and Improving the Well-being of Those We Help - Priorities

The Corporate Plan 2022/27 is the Council's 'road map', setting out the vision, values and priorities of the Council, and the business plans within Social Services Directorate are aligned directly to this Plan. The Social Services priorities are shown below and the Quality Standards, (detailed over pages 11 To 42), demonstrate where improvement has been made, challenges have been addressed and where outcomes have been achieved.

Departmental Priorities 2023/24	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve accessibility, provision of information and advice to enable people to support their own well-being <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To work with people to make sure they have a say in achieving what matters to them <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater • To work with our communities and partners including Aneurin Bevan Health Board and neighbouring authorities to deliver integrated responsive care and support • Ensure we have an appropriately skilled, motivated and supported workforce with clear career development pathways in place that support our service delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm • To develop a partnership approach to reducing and alleviating the impacts of poverty 	
Children's Services Priorities 2023/24	Adult Services Priorities 2023/24
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all children are safeguarded • Ensure we have an appropriately skilled, motivated and supported workforce with clear career development pathways in place that support our service delivery • Ensure all teams deliver an outcomes based approach to practice and service delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that we provide / commission modern, flexible, cost effective high quality support services that meet both current and future well-being needs of children • Ensure that preventative support is available for children and their families, that promote early intervention and prevents needs from escalating. • Manage the Children's Services budget to ensure expenditure comes within budget <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy 2020 – 2025 actions are regularly monitored and reviewed • Ensure outcomes for children looked after continue to improve through the implementation of the Corporate Parenting action plan • Review the way in which children's services operates and decide if a change is necessary in order to manage demand and workload. • Children's Services contributes to the Sustainable Development Principles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all adults are safeguarded • Ensure we have an appropriately skilled, motivated and supported workforce with clear career development pathways in place that support our service delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all teams deliver an outcomes based approach to practice and service delivery • Ensure that we provide / commission modern, flexible, cost effective high quality support services that meet both current and future well-being needs of vulnerable adults and their unpaid family carers • Ensure that preventative support is available for adults and their unpaid carers, that promote and maintain personal independence • Manage the Adults Services budget to ensure expenditure comes within budget <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake a review of the current model of Community Options • Adult Services contributes to meeting the Sustainable Development Principles

Population of Blaenau Gwent is **66,900**

based on 2021 Census data

69 reablement packages completed

April - September 23 down from 210 in the same period previous year.

83 children on child protection register

increase of 21 from the end of previous year (March 23)

207 Children looked after after

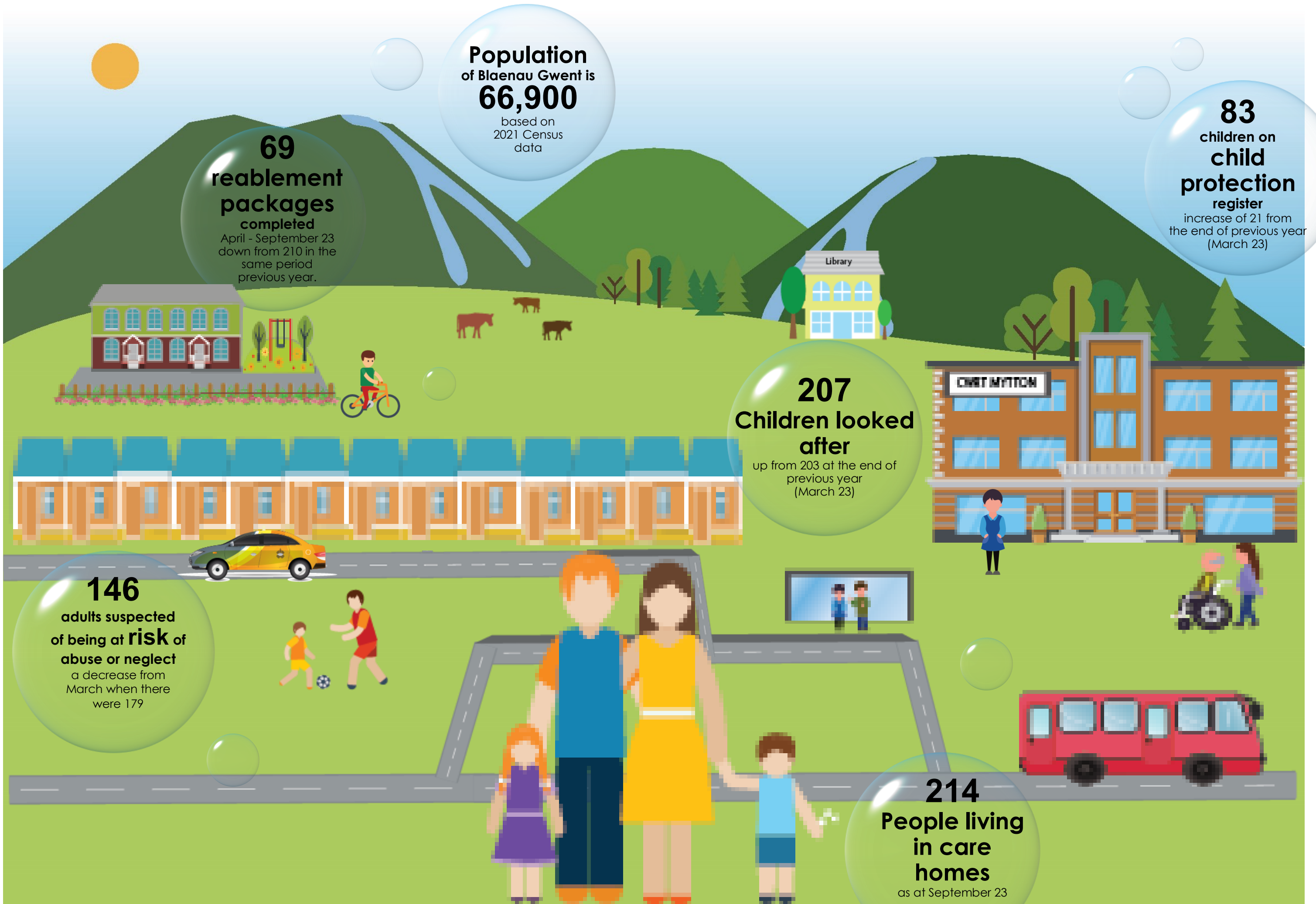
up from 203 at the end of previous year (March 23)

146 adults suspected of being at risk of abuse or neglect

a decrease from March when there were 179

214 People living in care homes

as at September 23



Chapter 3 (a) - People

People are at the centre of our services with our whole focus being on what matters to them and achieving the outcomes they wish to achieve.

Quality Standard 1

• All people are equal partners who have choice, voice and control over their lives and are able to achieve what matters to them

Key Activities

The Children and Community Grant (CCG) board continue to oversee and evaluate the **St David's Day grant expenditure**. This is an arm of the CCG grant and is an annual allocation.

The fund is to support young people who are or have been in local authority care to access opportunities that will lead them towards independent and successful lives.

This includes acting as a "bank of mam and dad" for care experienced young people as well as providing funding for an Aspire mentor which coordinates and supports care experienced young people in accessing corporate traineeship placement opportunities within the council.

This year the allocation is £99,013 broken down as follows:

- **St Davids Day (support to children leaving care fund) - £58,856;** and
 - **Aspire Mentor - £40,157 .**

During the first six months of this year, the utilisation of the above has enabled the 14+ team to provide wonderful opportunities for our Children Looked After and care leavers in line with their desired outcomes, and to support them in becoming more independent. Some examples of these are shown in the case study on page 14.

We ensure people have a strong voice and control over what they receive (with advocacy where appropriate).

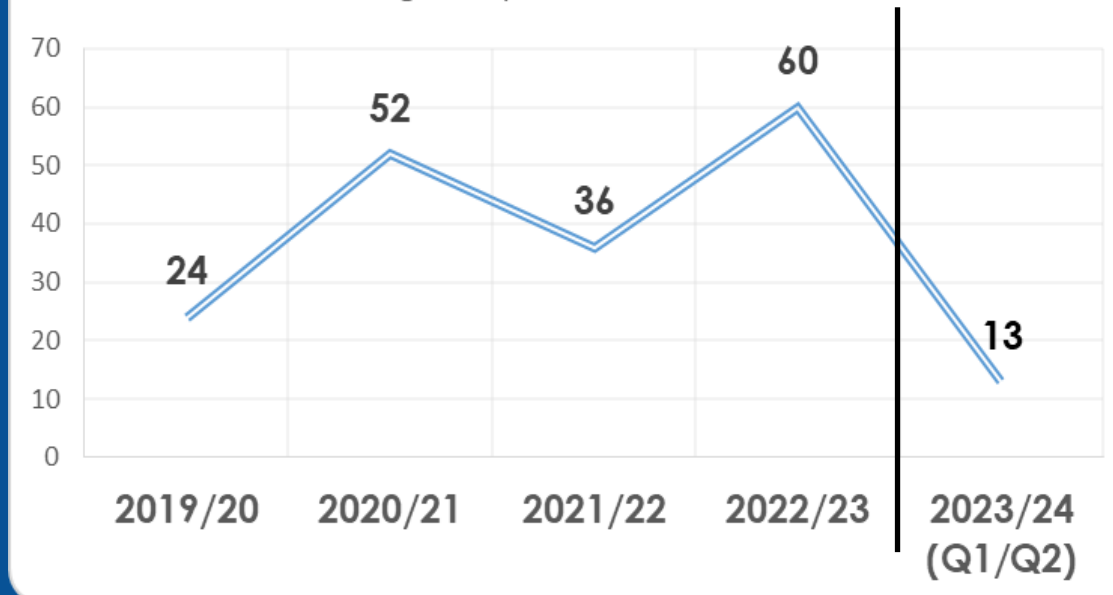


'What Matters' meetings have been

implemented and used regularly in practice with multi-agency participation and high scrutiny of all Child Protection plans.



The total number of "Active Offers" of advocacy for children during the year



In all cases above an Independent Professional Advocate was provided.



Key Activities

All people are equal partners who have choice, voice and control over their lives and are able to achieve what matters to them

In order to support the demand in IAA we have developed an action plan following due consideration of what is working well, not well and how we can provide new support to meet this demand. An action plan is now in place and will be reviewed monthly through supervision.



Information, Advice & Assistance (IAA)

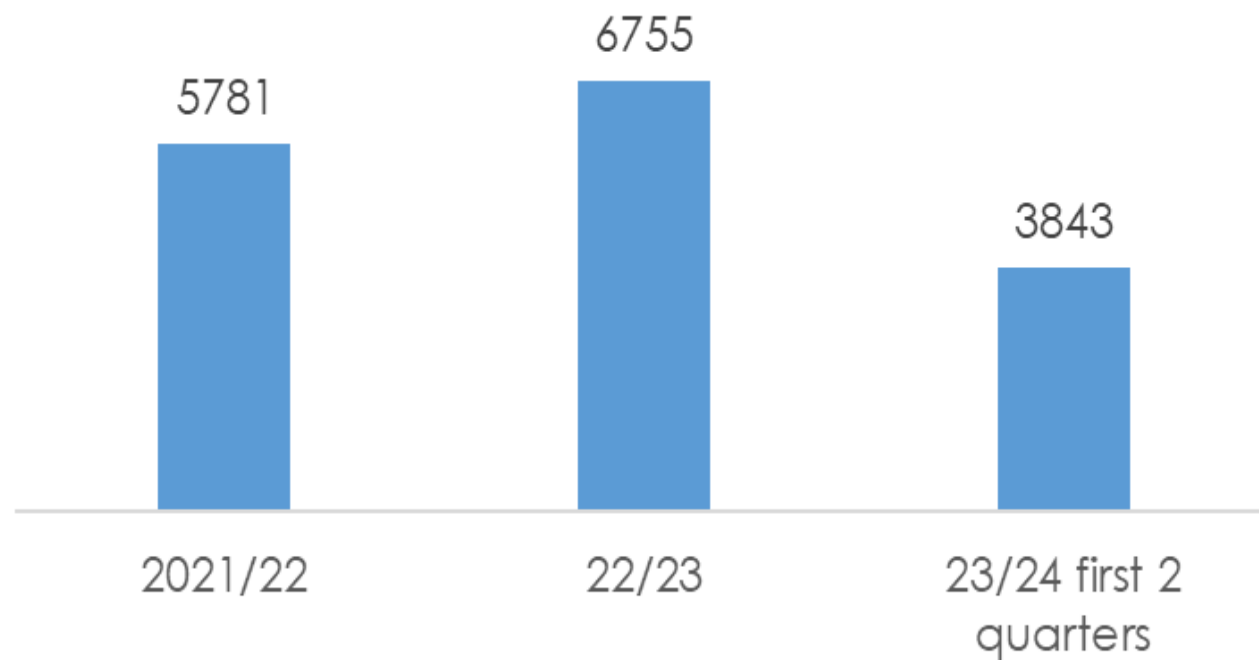
The Council has dedicated Adults and Children's Services Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) hubs which provide the first point of contact for people who wish to ask for information, advice or assistance or, with their permission, for a relative or friend. Contact with the hubs can be made in person by phone, letter or e-mail. These methods are also the first point of contact with Social Services by other agencies, such as Health, Education, Police and Housing.

Referrals into Adults Services IAA data collation started in August

2021, therefore previous years are not yet comparable.

Of the 2284 enquiries during the period April to September 2023, **54% were resolved at IAA** (made up of those enquiries signposted, closed down before progressing to assessment and those that led to an IAA). Whereas 60% were resolved at IAA during 22/23

The number of enquires received at 'front door' - Childrens IAA



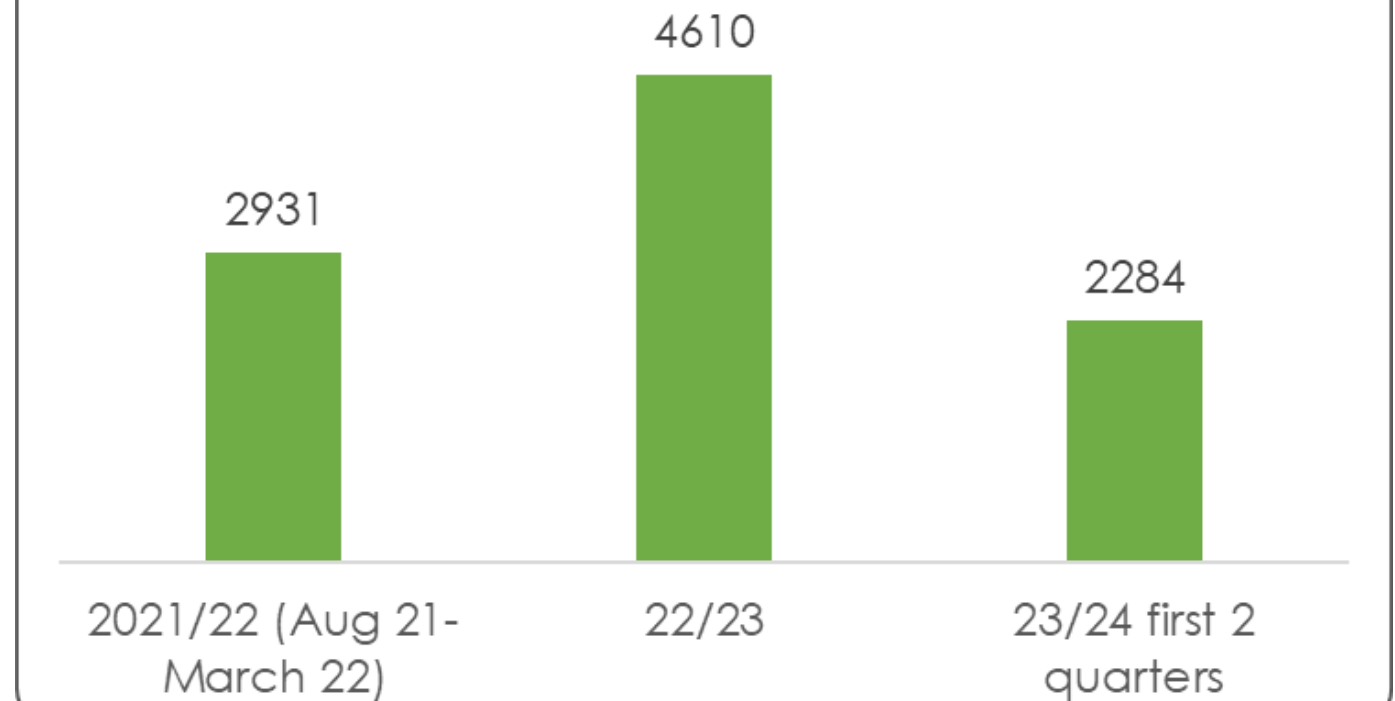
Referrals into Children's Services IAA continues to increase.

The number in quarter 2 in 23/24 is significantly higher with approximately 1927 compared to 22/23 which were approximately 1568.



Of the 3843 referrals in the first half of this year (April—September 23) **374 (10%)** were referred to preventative services (Families First), compared to 6755 referrals in the full year 22/23 with **772 (11%)** of them being referred to preventative services (Families First).

The number of enquires received at 'front door' - Adults IAA



PREVENTION - Probation and Cyfannol remain part of the IAA hub to ensure that referrals are supported correctly to avoid the need to allocate for statutory assessment. The service manager for IAA and YOS regularly correspond to ensure referrals are made to REACH where support can be offered for prevention support to young people who offend.

Key Activities

All people are equal partners who have choice, voice and control over their lives and are able to achieve what matters to them



We encourage and support the use of an individuals own strengths and resources to help promote their own well-being,

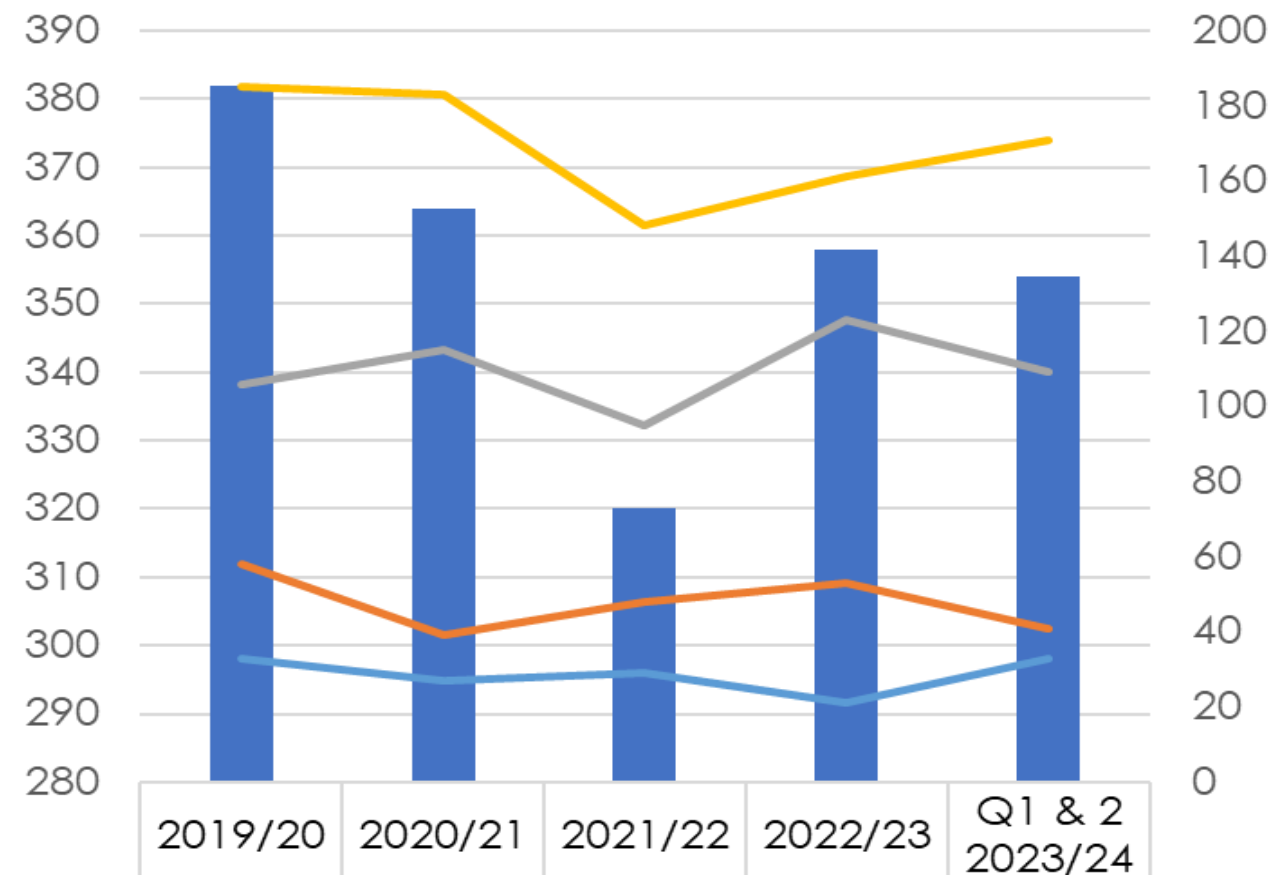


What you told us...

"I have seen a massive difference in my mental health. When I first met you, I was a mess, I felt that no one was there for me and that my world was crashing down. I now feel more confident and feel that I have the skills and knowledge to cope better. I enjoyed the walking groups and loved walking Pen Y Fan with the other dads. I will be forever grateful to you".

Families First recruited a new Ethnical Minority worker who will be engaging with gypsy and more recently relocated Nigerian communities.

The number of adults receiving Home Care (snap shot at the last week of the period):



Total number of adults receiving Home Care	382	364	320	358	354
less than 5 hours	58	39	48	53	41
5 -9 hours	106	115	95	123	109
10 - 19 hours	185	183	148	161	171
more than 20 hours	33	27	29	21	33

Page 29



COLLABORATION - Mentors group this year is focusing on the sharing of assessment tools to aid collaborative working with families to focus on priority risk, strengths, safety planning and co producing plans.



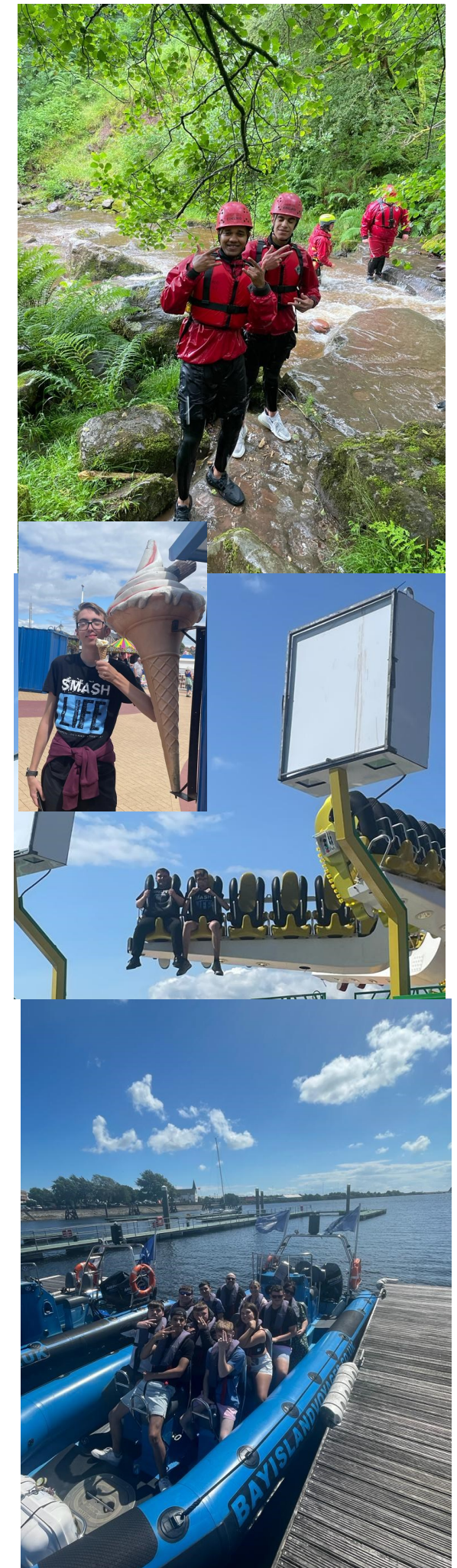
Case Study – Supporting care leavers to form independent and successful lives



So far this financial year the 14+ team have provided social opportunities such as:

- Gorge walking;
- Theatre visit;
- Paddleboarding;
- Summer BBQ with rodeo bull;
- GCSE celebration event;
- Attended the national Voices from Care - care leavers forum;
- Beach trip to Barry Island;
- Independent living skills group;
- Easter event; and
- Animal petting opportunity at the office.

The opportunities provide experiences for care leavers including, socialisation to support in developing and sustaining friendships, life skills to support the transition into adulthood, supporting positive wellbeing and emotional health, promoting self esteem and pride, and providing the opportunity to voice their views on services in order to contribute to positive change.



Quality Standard 2

- Effective leadership is evident at all levels with a highly skilled well qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision.

Key Activities

The social services function is well-led and supported at a service, corporate and political level.



Our leadership team recognise the importance of engagement with staff. During the reporting period a **survey** has been carried out to gather **staff views** on a few issues ranging from how supported staff felt in work and what they felt about levels of communication.



There was a **32% response rate** to the survey. **91 responses from adult services** and **111 responses from children's services**



The average score for how **rewarding** you found the job you are doing was **8 out of 10**.



The average score for how **supported** you felt by your senior manager was **8.57 out of 10**.



The average score for how **supported** you felt from your colleagues was **8.96 out of 10**.



The majority of those who responded had **supervision** and participated in **team meetings** in the last 12 months.



Over half of those who responded were **not aware** of the council's **volunteering policy**.



Only **half** of those who responded were **clear about the department's vision/priorities** and changes in the department.

Overall, responses painted a positive picture for staff working within the social services directorate particularly about the way in which staff were supported in their jobs. That said there are areas where we can improve on.

ACTION

Next Steps -As a leadership team we will now develop an action plan to work towards making these improvements and we will be repeating this survey next year to measure the progress that has been made. One of the first things we will do is generate a regular Social Services newsletter to keep staff informed of what is going on across the directorate.



Effective leadership is evident at all levels with a highly skilled well qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision



Workforce stability is a key consideration within Social Services as some teams are facing **staffing shortages**, however, it is acknowledged that this is a Wales wide position and there is no simple solution. The department continues to look at **innovative ways of managing the workload** within teams as well as developing recruitment and retention strategies to address workforce pressures. Despite these significant pressures the existing staff and providers of services have continued to ensure **children and adults needs are met, risks are managed, and safeguarding issues dealt with.**

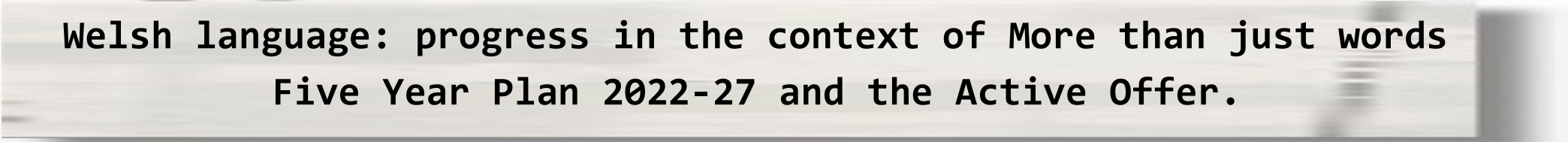
TYPES OF POST	STATUS OF EMPLOYEES IN THE POSTS					Total
	Permanent	Fixed Term	Secondment	Temporary	Relief	
Vacancies	17	48	0	0	0	65
Occupied Permanent posts	461	6	6	0	0	473
Occupied Fixed Term posts	0	117	9	0	0	126
Occupied Temporary posts	0	0	0	12	0	12
Occupied Secondment posts	0	0	3	0	0	3
Occupied Relief posts	0	0	0	0	99	99
Total posts in Social Services						778

Figures do not include agency staff

only 61% of staff are currently permanent

Key Activities

Effective leadership is evident at all levels with a highly skilled well qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision



Welsh Government’s ‘More than just words’ 2022/27 is a Welsh language plan for health and social care which aims to ensure people can access the care they deserve and require in the preferred language choice. This is aligned to the Council’s strategic responsibility for Welsh language as outlined in the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-07/more-than-just-words-action-plan-2022-2027.pdf>

As a department we continue to monitor compliance with our responsibilities within **‘More Than Just Words’** and the Active Offer. We continue to ensure that when citizens contact both our Adult and Children Services Departments, that they are **offered the opportunity to communicate in the language of their choice**. Our assessment tools within our Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) system specifically asks the question “Do you require this conversation / assessment to be carried out in Welsh?” The form is then attached to the person’s referral.

The ‘More Than Just Words’ **action plan has progressed**, there is liaison with the local Welsh language champions and **promoting the wide resources and opportunities available is now standard**. Our commissioned providers work in partnership with us to promote the Welsh Language and this is reflected in our contracts and service level agreements.

What you told us...

Census Data (measured every 10 years)	2011	2021
% Blaenau Gwent residents described their health as "very good"	40.7	41.5
% Blaenau Gwent residents describing their health as "good"	30.7	32.7
% Blaenau Gwent residents describing their health as "very bad"	2.7	2.3
% Blaenau Gwent residents describing their health as "bad"	8.5	7
% Blaenau Gwent residents (aged five years and over) reported providing up to 19 hours of unpaid care each week	6.6%	4.2%



Key Activities

Effective leadership is evident at all levels with a highly skilled well qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision

Practitioners and managers ensure that practice and supervision are grounded in up-to-date knowledge and evidence-based practice.



Our induction policy is being amended to include a mandatory introduction with team mentors so that new team members can immerse themselves in practicing in an outcome focussed way from the beginning of their career journey.



A new joint mentor scheme for staff with Caerphilly County Borough Council is being explored in order to extend our learning and development opportunities.

Commissioned providers have been notified of



care fees and all have accepted increases offered -

feedback from care homes and domicare was extremely positive and complimentary around the process and engagement - A further review will be undertaken later in the year to assess the impact in view of the current cost of living and inflationary pressures.

A **2 day mentor training programme** was **delivered** in June 2023 which was well attended by all children's services teams.



The newly trained mentors will be responsible for **continuing to embed outcomes practice in their respective teams** and report back to mentors group on a 6 weekly basis.



INTEGRATION - Close working with Workforce Development continues, delivering specific training programme for newly appointed senior social work practitioners to develop skills such as decision making, supervision skills, managing staff, having difficult conversations, basic coaching skills. We have commissioned additional SCW / balancing rights and responsibilities and collaborative conversations training for all staff.

Effective leadership is evident at all levels with a highly skilled well qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision.

The Directorate has a clear workforce strategy in place, which is having a positive impact on recruitment and sickness rates across the directorate.



Improvement in staff attendance rates are shown below and demonstrate why the status of one of our directorate risks (shown on p50) has been reduced to a medium.

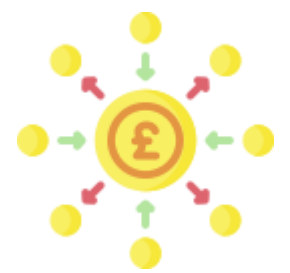
Quarter 1 progress (April - June 2023)

	Quarter 1	Quarter 1	Quarter 1 23/24 Target	Trend
	22/23	23/24		
	Outturn	Outturn		
Adult Services	4.79	2.38	2.75	↓
Provider Services	9.09	5.26	5.5	↓
Childrens Services	3.54	2.25	2.75	↓



Our budget position for the reporting period is shown on page 49.

- £ Bridging the Gap proposals have been developed for Corporate Leadership Team / member consideration.
- £ Check and challenge sessions planned for September / October with wider Corporate Leadership Team.
- £ Meetings have taken place with Gwent Directors / Heads Of Service to review potential efficiencies via collaborative working.
- £ A list of potential proposals are being scoped.



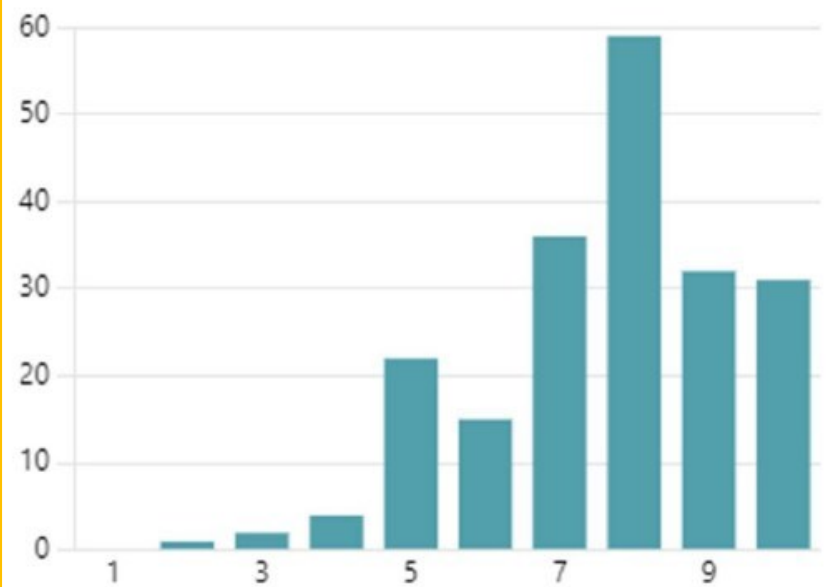
Staff in the teams within the service area have regular/monthly formal supervision, which has a pre-established agenda and is recorded. All managers are aware to include discussions on staff' wellbeing and career progression and development within their formal supervision.

Case Study – Staff Survey

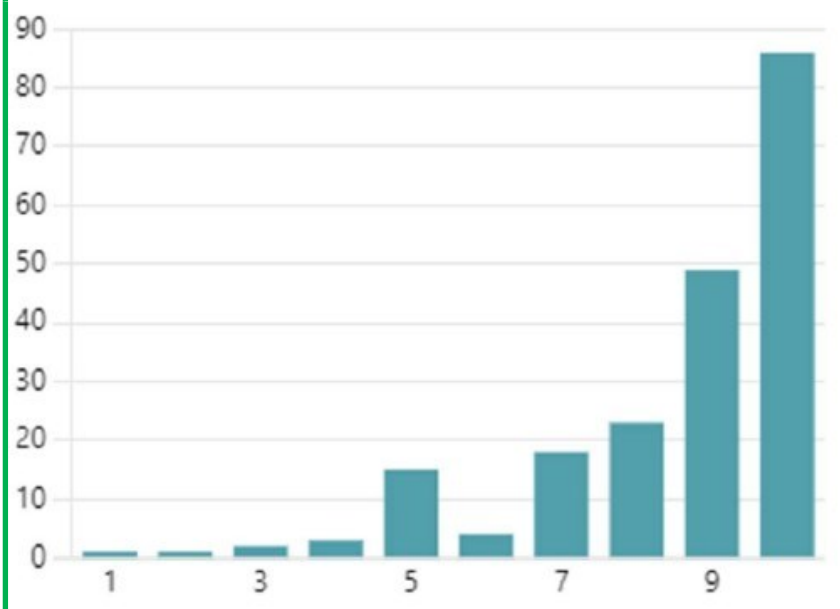
As detailed on page 15, during the reporting period a staff **survey** has been carried out to gather **staff views** on a few issues ranging from how supported staff felt in work and what they felt about levels of communication.

A full breakdown of responses will be analysed and include the following:-

When asked how staff feel about the support offered to them by the Local Authority as a whole the average response rating from 202 staff was 7.65



When asked how staff feel about the support offered to them by senior management (including Team Manager) the average response rating from 202 staff was 8.57

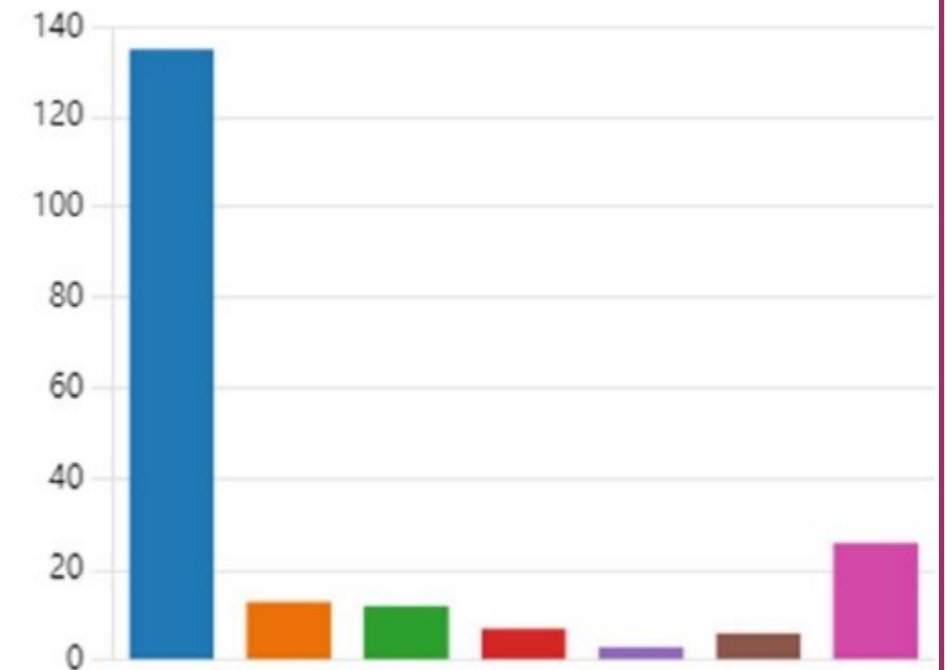


When asked How often they have had supervision/ 1-1 meetings with their line Manager in the last 12 months

the responses from 202 staff were broken down as below

- Monthly
- Bi-Monthly
- Quarterly
- Six Monthly
- Annually
- Never
- Other

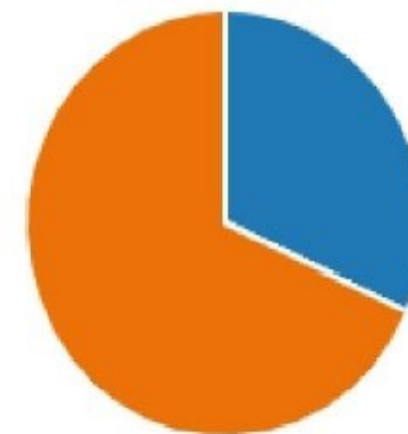
- 135
- 13
- 12
- 7
- 3
- 6
- 26



When asked were there any additional areas of training that would help them in their role

Out of 202 staff 64 said yes and 138 said no

- Yes 64
- No 138



Responses are currently being analysed and necessary actions implemented to ensure any required improvements are delivered.

This survey will be carried out annually and monitored accordingly

Case Study - Care Inspectorate Wales Inspection of Cwrt Mytton Care Home



A recent inspection by Care Inspectorate Wales of our residential care home Cwrt Mytton has resulted in a positive overall review stating

People receive a good quality of care and support at Cwrt Mytton. The environment is homely, clean, and decorated to a good standard. People told us they are happy living there; we saw people settled and at ease in their environment. Visiting relatives told us they are happy with the support provided. Activities, levels of engagement and stimulation require improvement to enhance people's well-being. Care staff are compassionate and respectful. The service has systems to ensure care and support is of a good standard. People benefit from individualised and current personal plans which are now reviewed regularly. The production and review of plans do not evidence people's involvement. Management is well-regarded and visible in the running of the service. Policies and procedures are in place to help protect people from harm or abuse. Staff recruitment process is not sufficiently robust. Care staff receive formal supervision and feel supported in their work. The service has auditing systems and meets the legal requirements in relation to Responsible Individual (RI) visits and quality of care reviews.



Recommended areas for improvement:-

Increase the number of activities and engagement on a day to day basis, to provide stimulation and a feeling of well-being for every person.

New 35 Recruitment system is not sufficiently robust.

New 15 Personal plans do not identify personal outcomes and how these can be achieved or evidence peoples involvement in the production and review of plans.

The full report can be viewed here



Chapter 3 (b) - Prevention

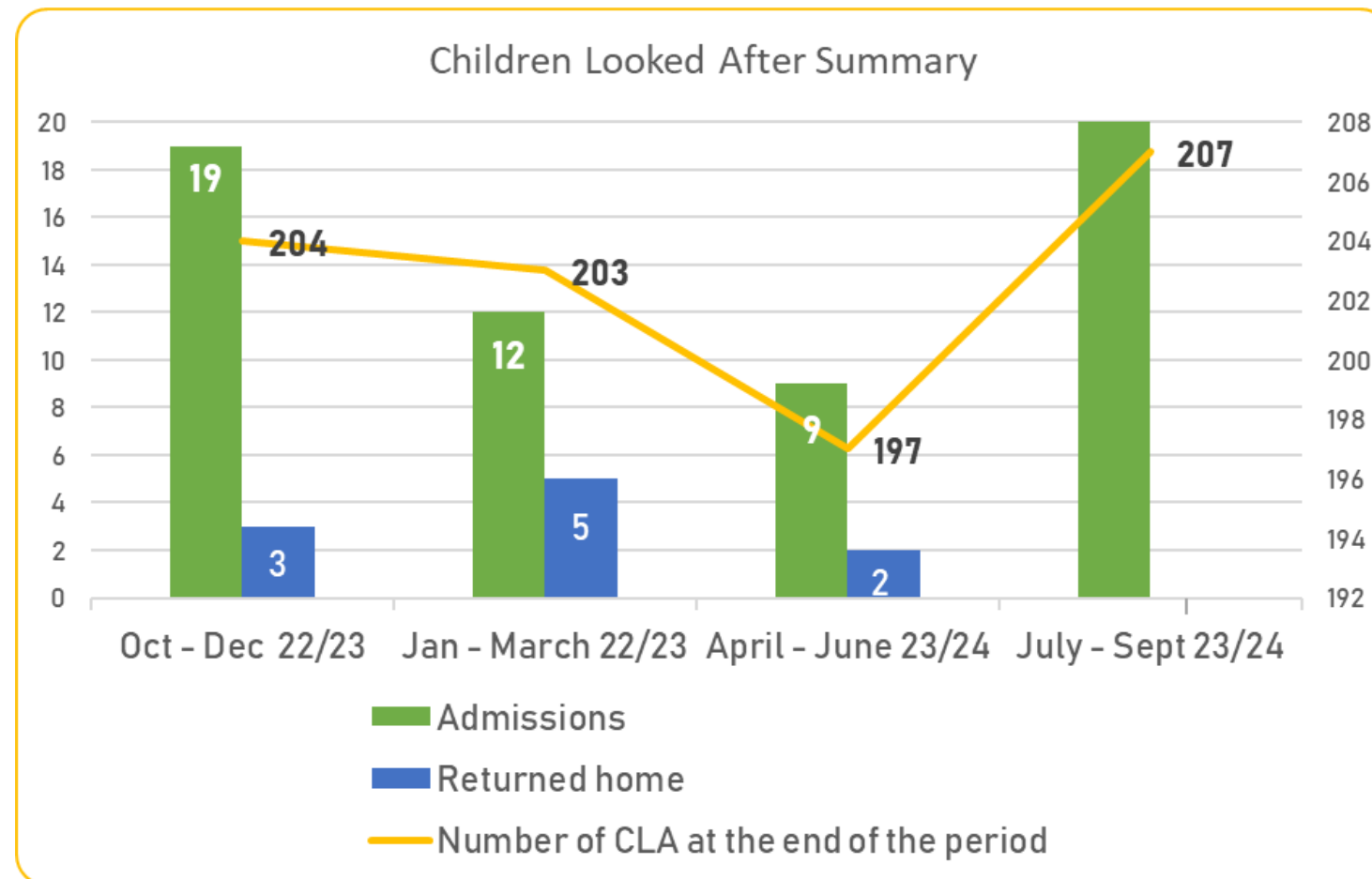
We use preventative and integrated approaches, ensuring the right care and support is there at the right time to delay or avoid the escalation of need

Quality Standard 3

• The need for care and support is minimised and the escalation of need is prevented whilst ensuring that the best outcomes for people are achieved

There continues to be ongoing monitoring of **Children Looked After** numbers.

New children are still coming into care but there are also children looked after who have returned home.



Families First continue to work intensively to prevent cases escalation into statutory services with:

- **304 cases active at the end of September 2023;**
- **387 cases being discussed at Wellbeing panels in the last two quarters (April - September); and**
- **A variety of group, community work and events have been delivered throughout the reporting period.**



• During the Quarter 1 period (April to June) 95% of Child Looked After statutory visits completed.



• During the Quarter 2 period (July to September) 87% of Child Looked After statutory visits completed.

118 young carers open to the service **benefited** from a variety of activities such as crafts, outdoor activities, games, cooking, Ninja Warrior, Fire sessions (south wales fire) YC's festival, Caerphilly adventures and Youth Club.



The need for care and support is minimised and the escalation of need is prevented whilst ensuring that the best outcomes for people are achieved

Key Activities

We support citizens with Housing Support Grant (HSG) Funded Services with the aim of **preventing homelessness** and helping people develop and maintain the necessary skills to **live as independently and self-sufficiently** as possible.

However, the **future of the HSG funding remains a significant concern** with Welsh Government announcing a standstill Housing Support Grant budget for 2023/24, despite Support Providers indicating their costs are rising considerably and their current contractual value no longer covers the costs of providing the service. This is having a detrimental impact on the delivery of current services and will also impact upon future commissioning of services.

Foster Wales Implementation of learning and development framework included the following events:

- RDM arranging regional events for staff regarding the process and foster carers regarding the policy;
- Dates for national learning events for staff have been circulated and are currently taking place;
- Promoting foster carers input for Life Journey work, attendance at workshops and training.



Learning picked up from the outcome of the Learning and Development Review:

- More flexible learning opportunities needed;
- Raise awareness of the framework as a whole;
- Greater understanding of expectations of SSW's and foster carers;
- More confidence to recognise other forms of learning;
- Develop systems that support seeking learning opportunities;
- Develop systems that ease recording plans/tracking learning;
- Gaps in some areas of learning for foster carers.

INTEGRATION - Ongoing partnership working with Supporting People enables the use of local cost effective semi-independent placements for those young people aged 16+ which require an out of home provision.



The need for care and support is minimised and the escalation of need is prevented whilst ensuring that the best outcomes for people are achieved

Key Activities

Residential placements for Children Looked After has remained stable during the reporting period. There is regular attendance at residential meeting by 14 + team manager to enable wider scrutiny of care planning for those children in residential placements.

Outreach remains popular and is delivering positive outcomes for users of the service. <https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/resident/health-wellbeing-social-care/services-that-are-provided-by-the-council/day-services-provision-day-centres/>

Modernisation refurbishment at Bert Denning office space and Lake View has commenced to integrate Community Meals, which are delivered via electric vehicles as of July as part of the Councils strategy to deliver a sustainable service and reduce carbon emissions. .



Statutory Assessment Team continue to work hard to manage demand for placements through robust assessments of children and families with only a minimal number of children requiring accommodation within their period of intervention.

During the reporting period (April–September) there were **810 new assessments completed** for children.

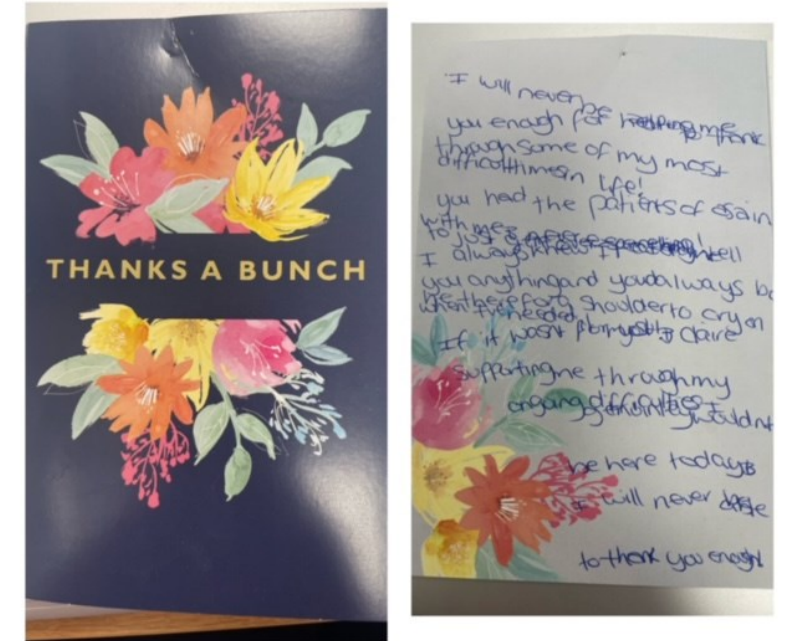


The mediation service has proven invaluable as a preventative service, preventing family breakdowns and reducing the number of children requiring out of home placements either via Children Looked After route or experiencing homelessness. Both mediation posts are fixed term via Supporting People and Regional Innovation Fund grant money and there is no identified resource at this juncture to make these roles permanent.



What you told us...

Thank you both for your support with TM and the excellent joint working and communication.



I'm only contacting to say thank you so much for your hard work and support throughout this difficult time and id like to say I'm very sorry for saying id never forgive you for saying neglect at the conference, I've already forgiven you. You're an amazing social worker and I'm glad and grateful for you coming into our lives and kicking me up the bum, means the world to me.

The need for care and support is minimised and the escalation of need is prevented whilst ensuring that the best outcomes for people are achieved

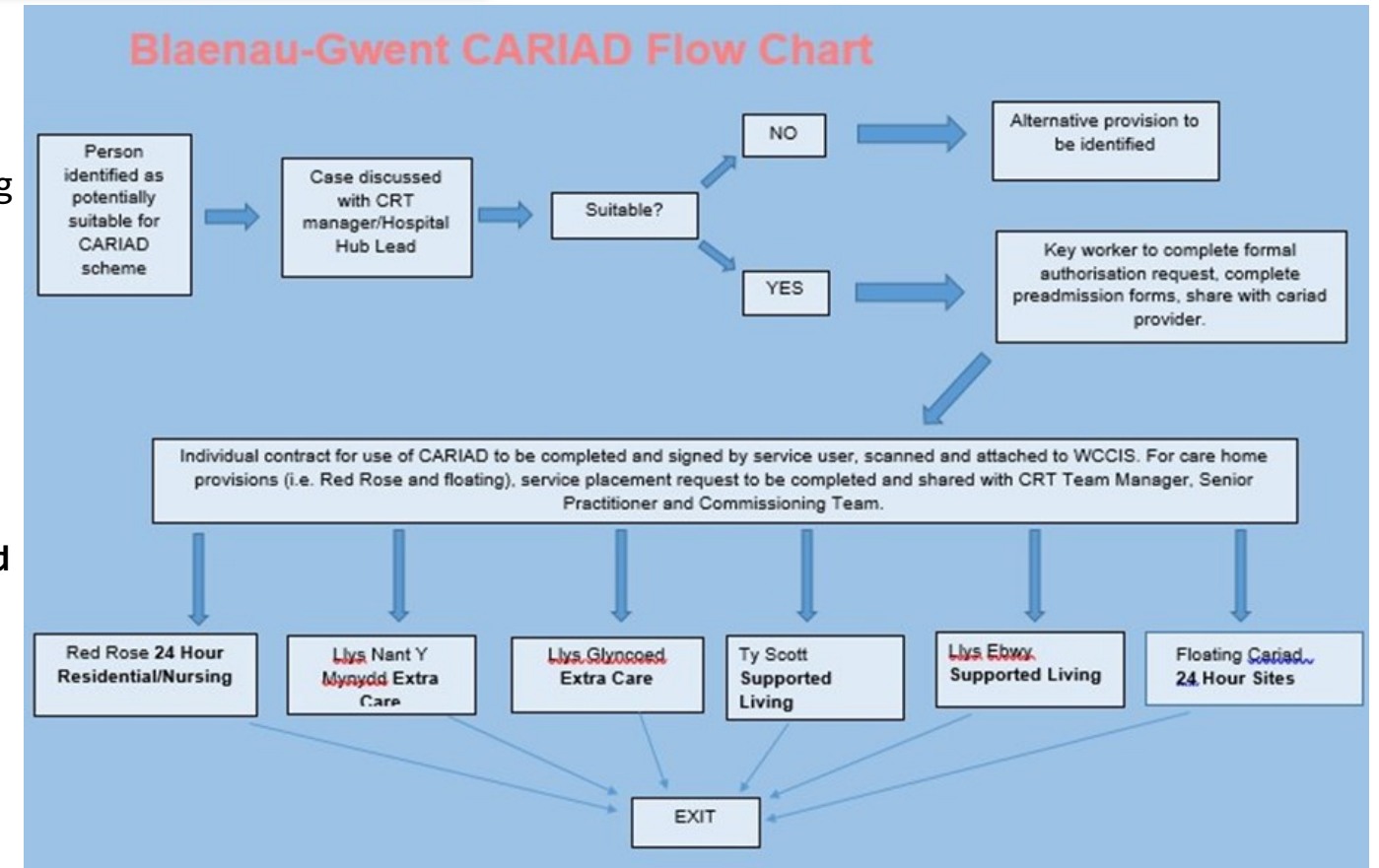
Key Activities



CARIAD (Collaborative Assessment Reducing Interventions, Admissions and Delayed transfers of care) scheme (sometimes referred to as the step up/step down scheme) is a way of enabling people to ‘step-down’ from hospital when their treatment has finished and they no longer need to be there, but may require a further period of assessment in an alternative setting. Similarly, in order to avoid admission to hospital, the CARIAD scheme can also be ‘stepped up’ from their homes to be cared for in a different setting with additional support.

This CARIAD process and bed provision has been reviewed and is being managed by Senior social work practitioner in the Hospital hub Community Resource Team. The flow chart here has been shared with wards at Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan for ease of reference.

CARIAD usage has improved and is working effectively as part of our hospital discharge pathways.



Page 41

My Support Team (MyST) involvement with a number of 14+ young people to consider residential step down or residential avoidance is ongoing -

this is reviewed through monthly meetings between MyST and 14+ managers, monthly meeting between Service Manager and MyST Manager as well as MyST steering group. Quarterly data is provided on cost saving and avoidance. And the table here shows figures for the period April 2023 to September 2023.....

Year to Date
Blaenau Gwent Total Savings
£677,870
Blaenau Gwent Cost Avoidance
£261,524

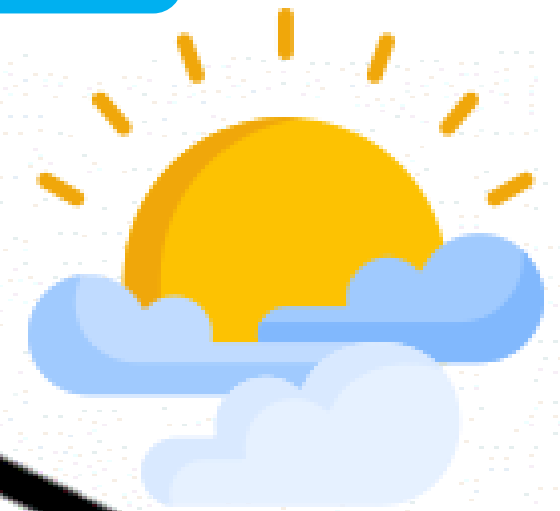


LONG TERM - Generic MyST foster carers are yet to be recruited to act as realistic options for step down placements for complex children or as avoidant placements for those children who may escalate to residential placements.

What you told us...

Just popping you a quick message, to say thank you so much for all your kindness towards me and Maya she has definitely found a real happiness in group.

Case Study – Residential provision for Children Looked After within Blaenau Gwent



Currently the Local Authority is dependent on residential care through neighbouring local authorities if space is available, but predominantly through private providers. This means placements can be out of county and takes young people away from family, school and social networks.

In its Programme for Government, Welsh Ministers made a commitment to ‘eliminate private profit from the care of looked after children by the end of the Senedd term.’ To help with this, the Health and Social Care Integration and Rebalancing Capital Fund was set up by the Welsh Government which can be used to invest in local authority residential homes to ensure they are able to meet individuals more complex needs closer to home.

Following a successful bid to this Welsh Government Radical Reform grant, Blaenau Gwent was provided with money to purchase two detached 5 bedroom houses, at a cost of approximately £900,000 along with a further £700,000 for refurbishment costs.

The houses are located next to each other on a private lane on Picton Road in Dukestown, Tredegar and following the necessary works will be **fit for purpose buildings providing a residential home that will house a maximum of 4 children**. The home will have no age restrictions and it will depend on match/suitability/assessment of risk etc. The **2nd house will be for 2 emergency beds and 3 independent living units** (these will be **specifically for our Local Authority Young People who want to try independent living**).

Now that the houses have been purchased, a local residents committee has been set up and plans drawn up for the refurbishment works. The development of this residential provision is now ongoing with the approval / sign off of building adaptations to ensure regulation compliance and progression to tender and procurement for the works which will be completed by a private provider as the scale of works will require a project manager.

This exciting project, which is **planned for completion by April 2024**, will ensure we are well placed to meet requirements following the eliminate agenda (It will become law from 2026 that LA’s cannot place children looked after in for profit care providers) and Blaenau Gwent will house **an appropriate, cost effective property within the borough to provide, safe, high-quality care for our local children.**

Quality Standard 4

Resilience within communities is promoted and people are supported to fulfil their potential by actively supporting people who need care and/or support including carers to learn, develop and participate in society

Our preventative measures include wide-scale measures aimed at the wider population as well as targeted interventions for individuals



A longitudinal study we commissioned to be undertaken by Worcester university has started with meetings arranged with families, children, young adults and carers open to the Disability Team and who are going through transition services.

The study involves researching a cohort of about 15 children and young adults (aged 14-24) open to the Disability (0-25) Team and following them over the next 5 years through the transition process, during their teenage years, and beyond into adulthood (until 25).

The purpose of the study is to gather data on services available for this cohort, challenges and opportunities in order to inform our service delivery in the long term.

The study is progressing well, with initial contact being made by the team with the families and sessions being arranged to mop out those



Provider managers have commenced engagement with **Coleg Gwent (Ebbw Vale Campus) Health and Social Care students** and will be offering work based placements to approximately **11 students during the 2023/24 academic year**. This will enable our tenants / residents to engage with the students and in addition we are planning for students from the Hair and Beauty courses to provide sessions at our Care Homes.



South East Wales Adoption Service
Achieving More Together
Gwasaneth Mabwysiadu Deddwyrain Cymru
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd!

Understanding the child days and trauma nurture timelines are completed for children ages 18 months + this provides adoptive families with enhanced analysis of the impact a child's early year may have on them which assists in the preparation for parents and informs support planning.

The aim is that all children will have a trauma nurture timeline prior to adoption but currently unable to meet this timeline.



The focus for our work with carers

Blaenau Gwent and its partner organisations continue to work together to achieve the following outcomes:

- Carers will be respected as care partners and will have access to the services they need to support them in their caring role.
- Carers will be able to have a life of their own alongside their caring role.
- Carers will be supported so that they are not forced into financial hardship by their caring role.
- Carers health and well-being will be promoted to assist them to stay mentally and physically well and their dignity respected.
- Children and young people will be protected from inappropriate caring and have the support they need to learn, develop and thrive, to enjoy positive childhoods and to optimise their abilities.

The delivery of activities specifically for young carers has continued during the reporting period and include the following



Weekly Youth Club;



Young Carers Forum;



Driving lessons; and



Duke of Edinburgh.



https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/media/giym2kzb_blaenau_gwent_young_carers.pdf



Children Looked After (CLA) mentors continue to ensure Personal Education Plan's are up to date.

Resilience within communities is promoted and people are supported to fulfil their potential by actively supporting people who need care and/or support including carers to learn develop and participate in society

Support is offered to promote successful transitions between key stages. Exclusion and destinations of school leavers continue to be monitored alongside academic achievements. Children Looked After education team will report on this years learners destinations, attainment and exclusions in December and will be recorded in the end of year report.



The Local Authority celebrated 5 care leavers who secured their places to study at University following receipt of their A-Level results in August..

What you told us...



I can't thank you enough for all you do. In my parent assessment they asked me to name people I trust and I said you. You never judge me, and I can be honest with you. However big or small my problems are I feel so much better when I've spoken to you. Thank you for helping me.



Currently there are more children waiting than adopters available.

Recruitment of adopters is an area of improvement needed for the service.



As a directorate we continue to contribute to the safe reduction of looked after children strategy -As at end of September 2023, there were 17 children subject to placement with parents and 3 in kinship placements in the 14+ team.

This demonstrated a reduction since the beginning of the year.

The team are actively working on progressing two discharges of Care Order's to Special Guardianship Order's - a sibling group placed with Independent fostering agency carers. This is in partnership with the Special Guardianship Order team.

In addition to this, the 14+ team are involved with the Eliminate profit Task & Finish which has recently sent letters to Independent Fostering Agency carers who are caring for our Children Looked After children currently to consider whether they would consider an application for a Special guardianship order.



Delivery of services and outcomes are proportionate, targeted, and sustainable, and supported through the promotion of social enterprises, co-operatives, user-led services and the third sector.

Resilience within communities is promoted and people are supported to fulfil their potential by actively supporting people who need care and/or support including carers to learn develop and participate in society



The pace of the cycles of the National Transfer Scheme are increasing meaning **Blaenau Gwent is assuming responsibility for UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) children more frequently.**



APRIL - SEPTEMBER 2023
= 8 CHILDREN



APRIL 2022 - MARCH 2023
- 7 CHILDREN

There are no independent placement options for these children which means we are relying on Internal Fostering Agency placements often considerably out of county (Nottingham, London, Birmingham).

Post 18 planning will be significantly impacted by the placement of these children.

As an authority we recognise that the support provided by unpaid carers is vital in allowing some citizens to continue living independently at home and we continue to provide support to ensure that the carers wellbeing is also maintained.....

The opportunity of **free training** is offered to all unpaid carers who want to influence decisions or organisation on behalf of carers in their local area.

Blaenau Gwent provide **free carers wellbeing groups** allowing carers to meet with like-minded peers, where they can form support networks and also learn new skills

carers WALES **gofalwyr CYMRU**

Speak up for unpaid carers!

Represent carers in Wales training
by Carers Wales

Free training for all unpaid carers who want to influence services, decisions, or organisations on behalf of carers in their local area, region or Wales-wide.

- How to get involved
- How to be influential in meetings
- The policy developments you need to know about

Regular training offered at introductory and advanced levels

Sign up on **Eventbrite** or email info@carerswales.org



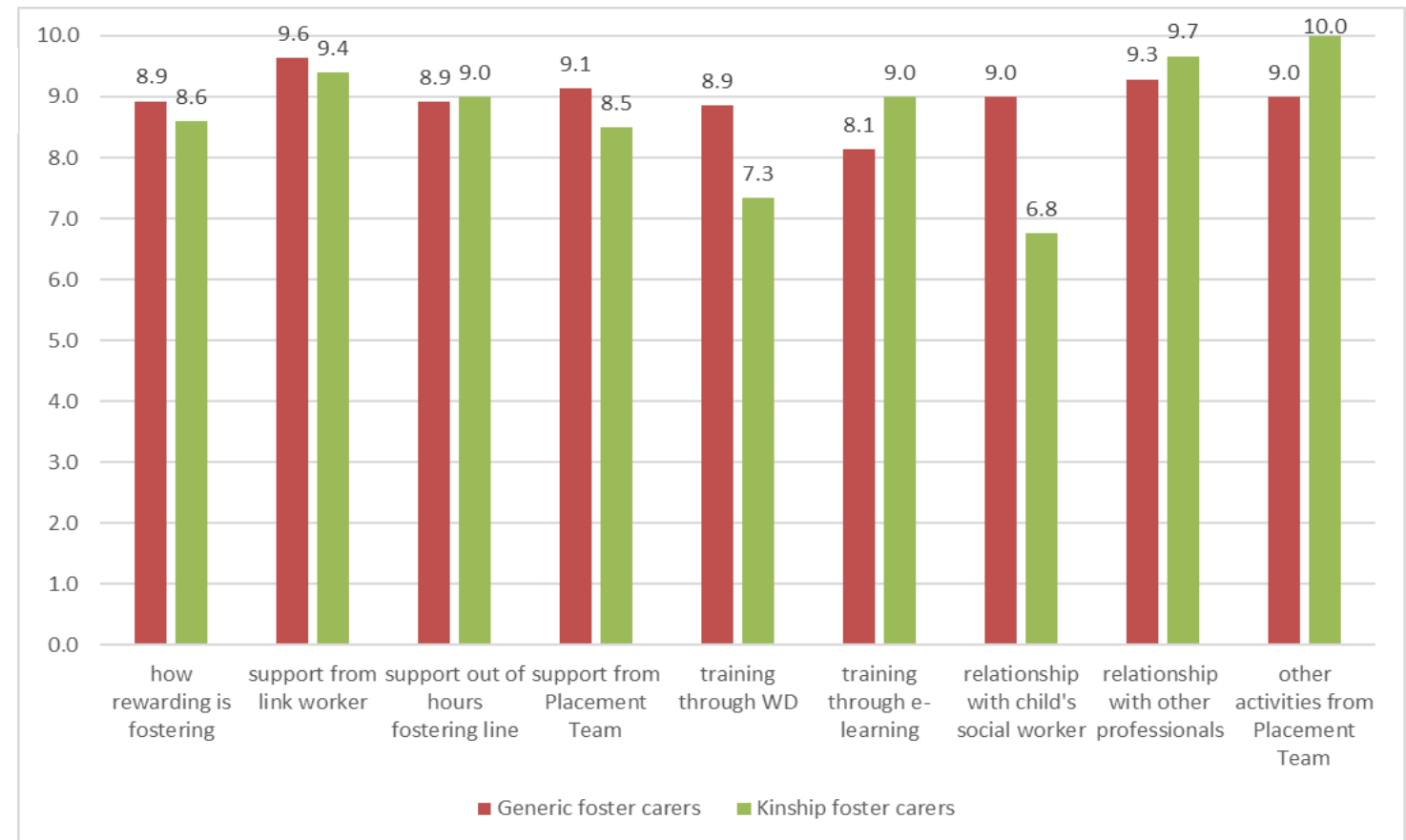
<https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/events/blaenau-gwent-free-carers-wellbeing-groups-1/>

What you told us...

Foster carer, offered her thanks for the diligent work done in relation to contact and was thankful that was always punctual in contacting her about arrangements and confirming when family members were to attend etc. 'She is always friendly and professional in her approach to carers and family members. Would you please pass this on to her and offer our thanks for making family time run smoothly'

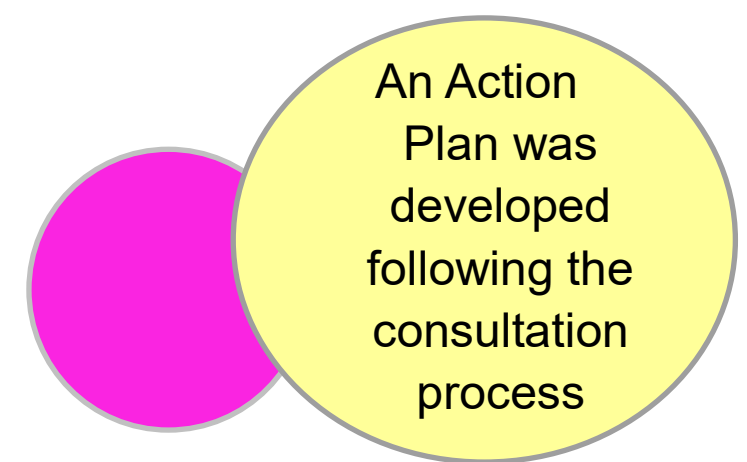
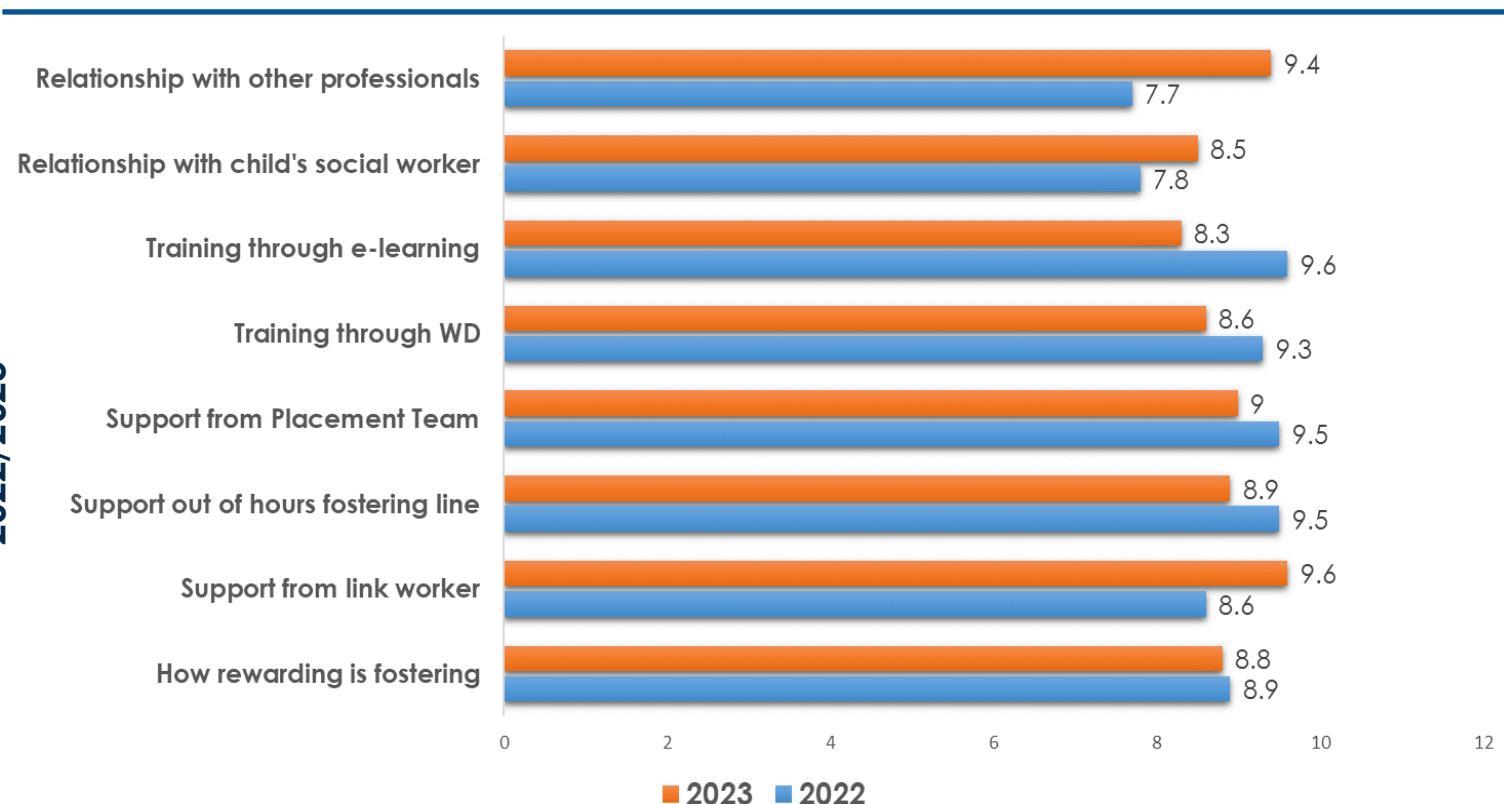
Case Study - Foster Carer Consultation

A **consultation process** is carried out annually from which feed-back informs **future improvements/changes to the fostering service**. On 31st March 2023 in Blaenau Gwent there were 44 generic foster carers households and 24 kinship foster carers households (with children in placement). All foster carers were sent a letter (and email) from the service manager with a questionnaire and were invited to respond anonymously either completing the hard copy of the questionnaire or the survey developed in Microsoft Forms. In total we had a **28% response rate** of which 14 questionnaires (**32%**) were off **generic foster carers** and 5 (**21%**) questionnaires from **kinship foster carers**. This response rate is an improvement on the previous two years when it was 11.4% in 2022 and 16.9% in 2021. **The responses as a whole are positive, as it can be seen in the graph to the right:**



The lower average scoring of **6.8** for kinship foster carers in terms of satisfaction of relationship with the child's social worker is given by a low scoring of 1 (out of 10) from one individual. The scoring was followed by the following comments: *"I have rated this very low due to low communication and people skills and very poor decision making. Lack of knowledge when dealing with kinship families. I must add that I have a new social worker since end of December so cannot comment on this relationship and communication at present"*. As the foster carer gave her name these comments are being looked into.

Comparing data from consultations 2022/2023



Case Study – Supporting Adults with disabilities in The 'Stute Café'



Social Services have recently launched the opening of a **Community Café based at the Blaina Institute, High Street Blaina.**

The department have been working in partnership with Blaina Community Institute Limited, to develop a catering enterprise within our Community Options Service (day service).



The café will support adults with disabilities to have placements as part of their day activity offer - giving the catering students an opportunity to develop invaluable life, social and future work skills within the world of catering and hospitality.

It will also give us an opportunity to showcase the delicious cakes and other goodies that are produced by our talented Social Care team as part of our existing Community Meals light snacks and afternoon tea service – which already provides nutritious and tasty treats to the most vulnerable and isolated people in Blaenau Gwent. The Café offers both sit in or takeaway service and has access to free Wi-Fi.



The Café opened for the first service on Tuesday 5th September with a formal launch opening party planned in early October 23 as a way of thanking all our Blaenau Gwent Corporate colleagues, Blaina Community Institute Ltd and Aneurin Leisure Trust who have supported the team at Community Options Social Services to get our latest venture finally open.



Chapter 3(c) - Partnership & Integration

Quality Standard 5

Effective partnerships are in place to commission and fully deliver fully integrated, high quality sustainable outcomes for people



Effective collaboration and partnership working assists us in identifying existing needs and shape and commission future sustainable services.



Barnardos has delivered the following during the reporting period with funding from the Local Authority:

- Young Person healthy relationships – 6 weeks,
- Young Person confidence club – 4 weeks,
- Young Person 'My Voice, My Choice' programme – 4 weeks,
- Family sensory play – 4 weeks,
- Parent nurture programme – 10 weeks and
- a 'Big Breakfast' event to celebrate carers week.



Teams work tirelessly within multi agency partnerships to manage some challenging young people who are embroiled in anti social and criminal behaviour. Plans of support are being managed at multiple layers of intervention to work to reduce the likelihood of further prosecution of these Children Looked After children.

We are exploring options for Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Children Services to access hydrotherapy pool etc at Bert Denning Centre.

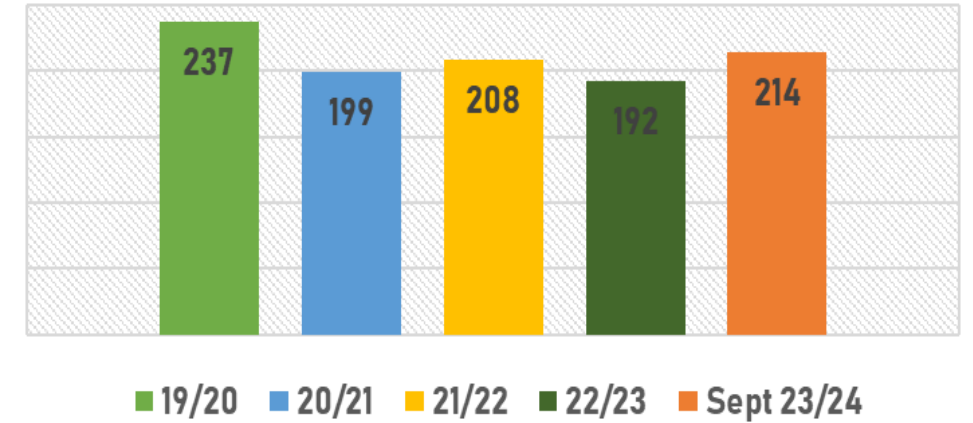


Discussions have been held with Torfaen County Borough Council to consider joint working with Bettercare Occupational Therapy to support Blaenau Gwent Community Resource Team with Bettercare discussions and decisions.

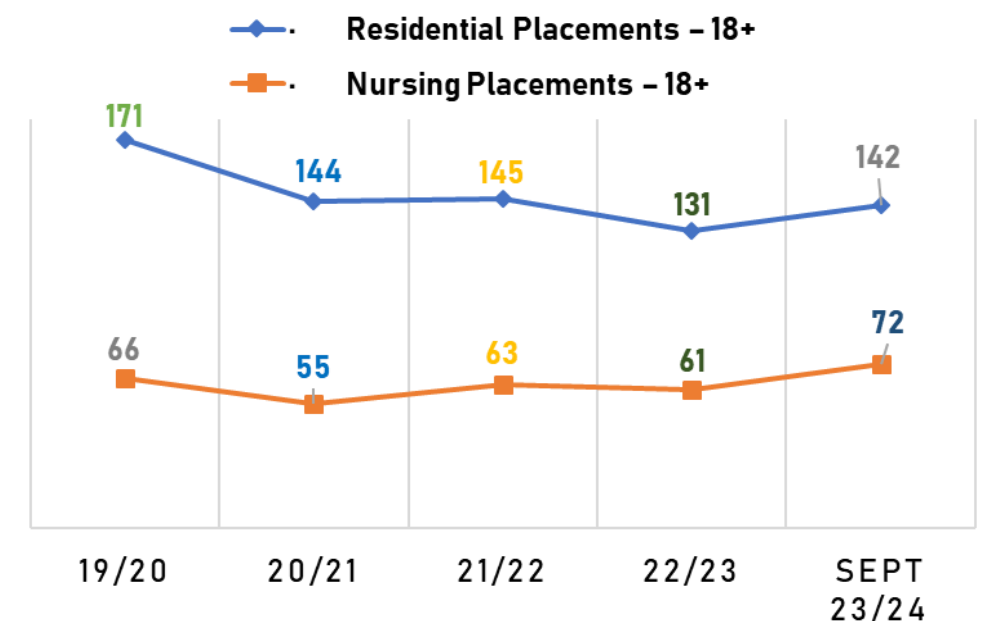
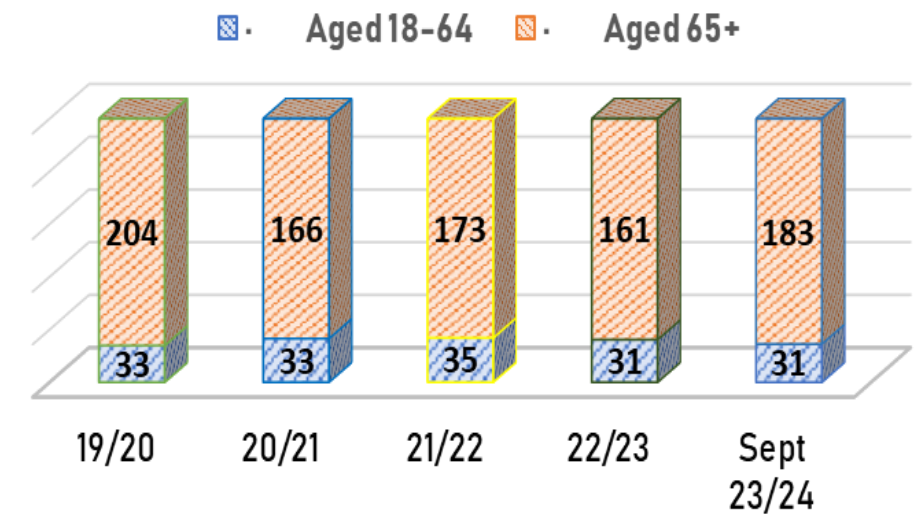


Effective partnership working delivers high quality care & outcomes for our adult clients in residential & nursing home care

The number of adult clients in residential & nursing home care (as at):



AGE RANGE OF THE ABOVE



Effective partnerships are in place to commission and fully deliver fully integrated, high quality sustainable outcomes for people

What you told us...

A **Gwent Dementia Action Plan** has been **developed** and aligns to the 20 All Wales Dementia Pathway of Standards which will also include performance measures.



Workstream subgroups have been developed to take forward this programme of work which includes the following workstreams:

- Engagement;
- Memory Assessment Service/Dementia Connector role;
- Dementia Friendly Hospital Charter; and
- Education/Workforce and Measurement/Performance.


The recruitment of 2 support officers with Alzheimers UK is also in progress.

Developments at **Cwrt Mytton Residential Care Home** have now began with architects visiting - looking to develop a **centre of excellence for dementia care**. As part of this process there are plans to visit similar facilities in Wales who share similar plans/visions and priorities as us and learn from them on what works well.

Just wanted to say how grateful we are for the professionalism, care & compassion you showed to X on her discharge from hospital. You made a difficult time so much easier for both of us and Mam



Identified lack of move on accommodation in the community for single persons is impacting on affordable housing options for care leavers. This is also negatively impacting on young people remaining within supported accommodation longer thus reducing the movement within these supported living schemes. To alleviate this issue there is an accommodation task and finish group which sits under the Corporate Parenting Action Plan

 – we have tried to work with Registered Social Landlords and housing strategy as well as our housing department.

The complex issues being identified with some young people (risk taking, challenging behaviour and Mental Health needs) are also acting as significant barriers to accessing supported/ semi-supported accommodation options in the borough currently.



A Gwent wide 'whole-system' approach is in operation to support people who are experiencing a mental health crisis and includes:

- Mental Health 111- point of contact live 28th November, this provides a point of contact that is accessible for anyone experiencing a mental health crisis or emotional distress within Gwent - also for family/friends and carers
- Emergency Department support service has been introduced at Grange University Hospital Emergency Department, peer support workers provide support to those in emotional distress, preventing escalation and improve quality of mental health support services. Alternatives to hospital
- Mental Health Shared Lives service continues to be successful in minimising those in crisis being admitted to psychiatric units and also supporting earlier discharge. Citizens report improved satisfaction.
- Crisis Support House, Ty Cynnal for those who meet requirements of a safe stay

Case Study - Partnership and Integration delivering positive outcomes.

Schools recognised for work with Children Looked After

Children's services have led on the development and launch of the Children Looked After friendly schools initiative which is being more widely recognised with 2 schools now gaining the status.

This initiative aims to promote good practice within schools and educational settings for work with pupils who are in the care of the Local Authority. As a service we provide a supporting toolkit, working and consulting with partners in education and schools.

To achieve the quality mark, schools need to demonstrate evidence of their Children Looked After friendly practices, which is verified through visits to school and listening to learners and staff. Children's Services (CLA Education/ Safeguarding in education) lead on this verification process following a school request to be considered for the award. This involves listening to learners, discussions with school leaders and representatives from the wider staffing group and consultation with the wider children's services team (social workers, Independent Review Officers, Team managers). Findings are shared with education directorate colleagues prior to schools achieving the award.

We also support schools with any aspects of their development when starting to use the Children Looked After friendly school self-evaluation tool, including the provision of a training presentation suitable for whole school staff to develop their understanding of children looked after. We regularly refer to the initiative and share examples of good practice during the termly Children Looked After designate forums.

Well done to Tredegar Comprehensive and Ebbw Fawr Primary who have become the first schools to be awarded our Children Looked After Friendly Schools Quality Mark.

The schools have been presented with plaques in recognition of this achievement.



Feedback from Gwent Attachment Service on the work the childcare staff have completed with them...



'Hope you and the Flying Start team are doing well. I wanted to get in touch to share that the Attachment Service have been invited to present at the Flying Start/ Families First conference this year and are hoping to share some of the amazing work the childcare team have partnered with us in so far. Our thoughts were to share how our service model relates and can offer support to staff within the early years sector, followed by an overview of the incredible journey the team have been on with us over the past 2+ years. We recently held a 1 year post-training focus group with them and the feedback on how they have implemented and learned from the training was fantastic, something we think will really showcase the value and impact of attachment and trauma informed training for staff in this sector and the fantastic work of the team to embed this approach and benefit the families they work with. We envision this as a true celebration of our hugely successful partnership with the team, one that we hope to continue into the future'

Case Study - Foster Care Fortnight May 2023

Foster Wales has supported regionally with events for the Fostering Fortnight including-

- Video of local care experienced young people;
- Digital Ivan featuring video driving around the region during the bank holiday weekend;
- Boosted social media ad of the video;
- approaching local businesses with specially created Foster Wales paper chain people asking them to lend their support and become a 'Fostering Friendly' employer -making it easier for their employees to combine fostering and working.
- Video of staff in those businesses holding up the chains was created and promoted;
- Social media tiles including localised content from foster carers;
- Radio advert on Capitol Radio;
- National 3 peaks challenge;
- 2 regional press releases.

The events triggered a higher number of fostering enquiries with **10 Foster Care enquiries followed up by 5 home visits and 1 new fostering household approved by the Panel during quarter 2.**

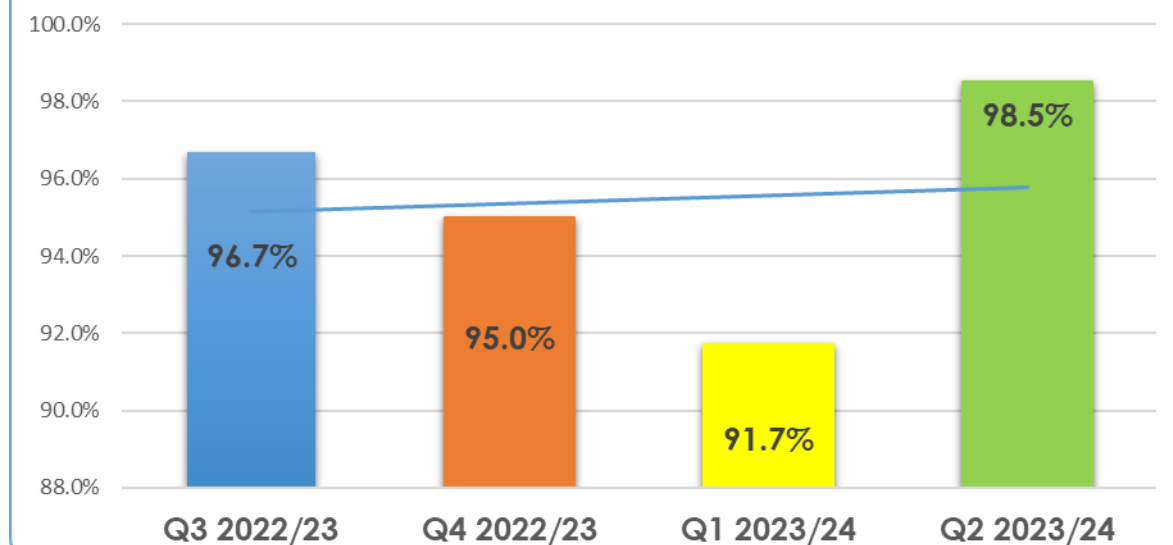
Right click and open hyperlink - foster wales calls on welsh employers to support foster carers.....



At the end of the reporting Period (April–September) we had **73 approved foster carers**, 29 of which were kinship carers.

This equates to the same number as at the end of 22/23. However during the reporting period **10 foster carers were newly appointed and 10 foster carers de-registered.**

Percentage of Foster Carers that have an up to date review.



Case Study - Partnership working with schools, Cwm Sensory Garden & Hub open day & Sofrydd Flying Start.

The Cwm Sensory Garden and hub open day held provided an opportunity for children aged 0-5 and their families residing in those areas to explore the sensory garden, engage with staff, and see what activities, programmes and support is available at the hub.

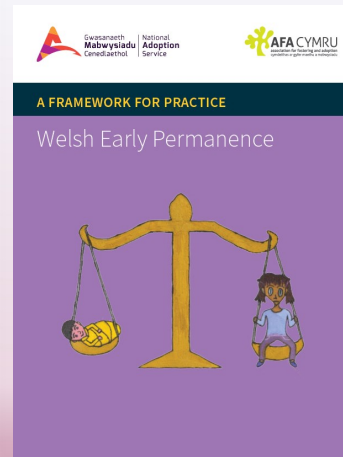


Extensive building work has been carried out at Sofrydd Flying Start Hub including an extension. These improvements raise the standard to now align with other Flying Start hubs.



Quality Standard 6

• People are encouraged to be involved in the design and delivery of their care and support as equal partners



Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) is the care planning option that provides a child with a secure base as early as possible, when weeks and months really do matter; it enables healthy brain development and attachment through safe, predictable relationships with sensitive adults, and minimises the distressing moves that cause further trauma. WEP is the umbrella term given to the practice of placing children, with foster carers who are also approved as prospective adoptive parents. The WEP carer supports the child in the same way as other mainstream foster carers, undertaking all fostering tasks, including facilitating contact. If the child's care plan becomes that of adoption, WEP carers have the capacity to go on to offer that child a long-term permanent home.

Welsh early permanence is now being considered within care planning processes in Blaenau Gwent. **First WEP adopter was approved** in this period with a potential link with a Blaenau Gwent child.

Life journey work coordinator is providing therapeutic sessions to a Blaenau Gwent placed child - this is proving beneficial to the success of what is a second adoption placement for this young person. This specialised training has been invaluable for this specific family.

More widely the coordinator is **sharing her knowledge and skills with the adoption support team** so the ideas, skills and techniques can be used in their work.



Life journey work coordinator also held **training for family time workers** in July and this was well attended across the 5 South East Wales Adoption Service Local Authorities and included 2 workers from Blaenau Gwent. The coordinator also ran **putting the puzzle together training** in the period.

Blaenau Gwent had 5 children matched for adoption in the reporting period and **100%** had their **life journey material available within timescale.**

Need to identify a life journey work champion for Blaenau Gwent



Earlier conversations at matching stage for children with adopters are taking place regarding potential post adoption contact with an **emphasis on promoting contact with siblings**. Contact agreements now reflect this.

There has been a **11 meetings for birth parents with prospective adopters** during the reporting period, an increase which evidences the change in

SEWAS continues to utilise **in house psychology support provision** for any additional needs outside those that the team can meet. This along with referrals to Pathways provision run by adoption UK funded by Welsh government investment grant **enables families to access specialised support** avoiding a need to source external provision wherever possible.

<https://www.adoptcymru.com/> - NAS

<https://southeastwalesadoption.co.uk/> - keeping it local - SEWAS

We are now collating data regarding contact that is set up for adopted children, this data is manually collated and further **work is needed to support childcare social workers to complete agreements in a timely manner**

People are encouraged to be involved in the design and delivery of their care and support as equal partners

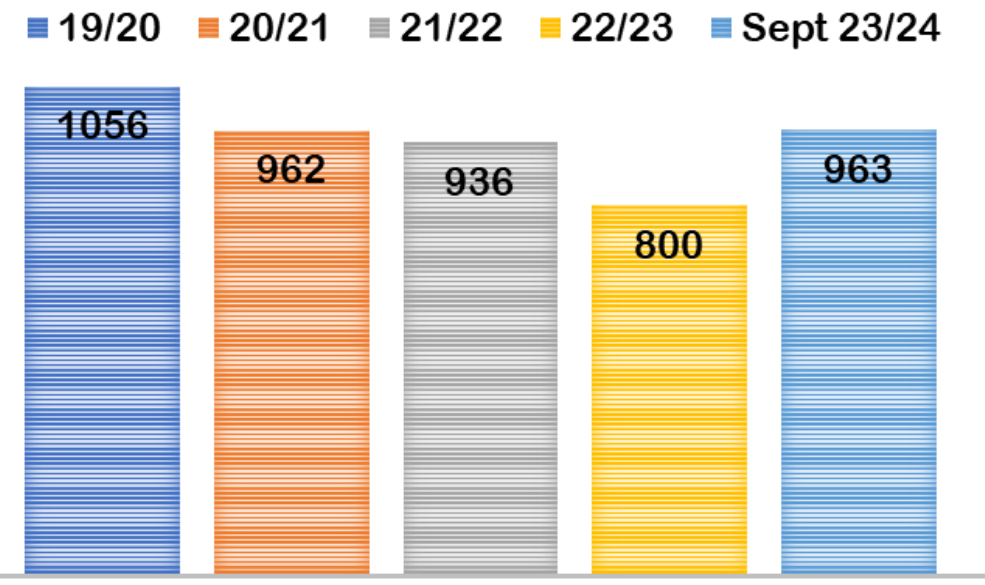
Our **new Promoting Independence pods** at Augusta Respite Centre are developing well following an allocation of funding from the Welsh Government Regional Integration Fund (RIF) grant. They are due to open in the Autumn of 2023 and will provide opportunities for people with a learning disability to experience independent living in a safe environment. Final orders of furniture / assistive technology etc has been completed and we are now awaiting delivery.



Short Breaks, sometimes called respite, provide parents and carers with a break from caring for a few hours in the day or an overnight stay. Short breaks can help prevent family breakdowns and ease the stresses of everyday family life. We provide a range of short break services in collaboration with partners.

Whilst there is no formal respite/short breaks strategy in place for children with disabilities, we have provision of regular respite for 7 children :-

-  1 with Local Authority foster carers
-  1 with commercial residential Placement
-  6 with Augusta House.



The number of adults with a Care & Support Plan

What you told us...



To Tracey
 Thank you so much for supporting me + Freya over the past few weeks.
 THANK YOU
 also thanks so much for teaching me new techniques to battle Freya's meltdowns
 Love
 Tyler + Freya

PIC-COLLAGE

Case Study - Coronation Weekend

The Early Years Childcare and Play Team invited children and parents to Blaina Integrated Children's Centre for a garden party to celebrate the Kings Coronation on 4th May. 25 children and parents enjoyed sensory play, stories, arts and crafts and outdoor games followed by a picnic outside in the play area. Lots of fun was had by all and families were able to take their crafts home to decorate their own houses and gardens ready for the Coronation weekend.



Case Study - 14 Plus Team Win Social Care Wales Accolade Award

Our Children's Services 14 Plus Team have won the prestigious **Social Care Wales 2022 Accolade Award** in the category of 'Building brighter futures for children and families'.

The Award was won by the team for showcasing an excellent example of social care practice for a project titled 'A Place to Grow'.

This is a great achievement and recognition of the team's commitment for high level of support and services being delivered to this cohort (currently 123 young carers identified and registered by the service).



L-R) Simon Burch - Social Care Wales Board Member, Nicola Williams, Alison Ramshaw, Beth Thomas; Aimee Evans, Hannah Watts & Sue Evans - Chief Executive of Social Care Wales

The project is aimed to:

- Provide a safe space for Children Looked After, care leavers & children in need of care & support;
- To empower and help develop sustainable life skills;
- Be a part of the local community;
- As well as giving them a safe space to visit and enjoy as their own.



The award has recognised the 14 Plus project as an excellent example of social care practice; keeping a person-centred practice at the very heart of their work and improving outcomes for our children, young people and their families.



Chapter 3(d) - Well-being

Key Activities

The well-being of people needing our care and support and carers needing support is paramount to service delivery and this includes respecting their culture, beliefs and other personal characteristics, and respecting their wishes and feelings

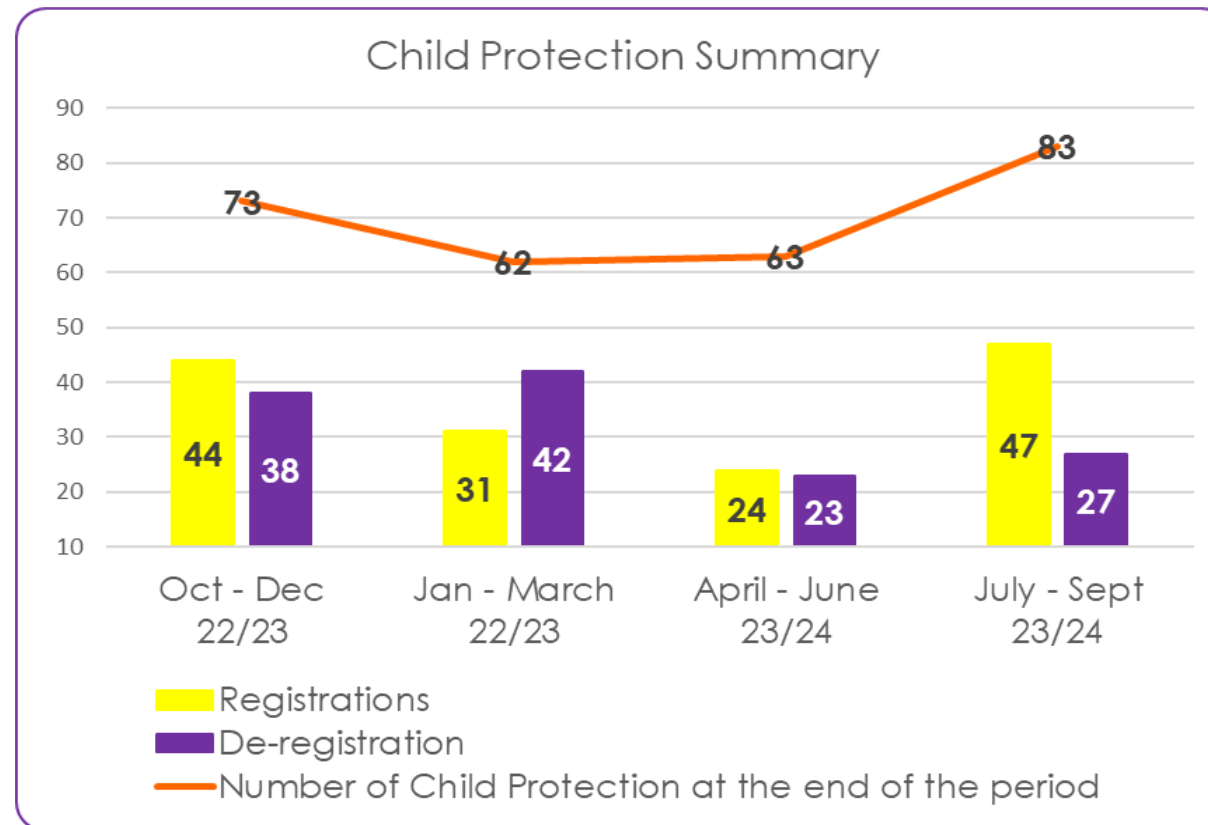


The Department recognises the importance of having robust and sustainable **Safeguarding Teams across both Adult and Children Services** to ensure we not only meet our legislative requirements, but that we are also able to protect our most vulnerable citizens.

Quality Standard 7

• People are protected and safeguarded from abuse and neglect and any other types of harm

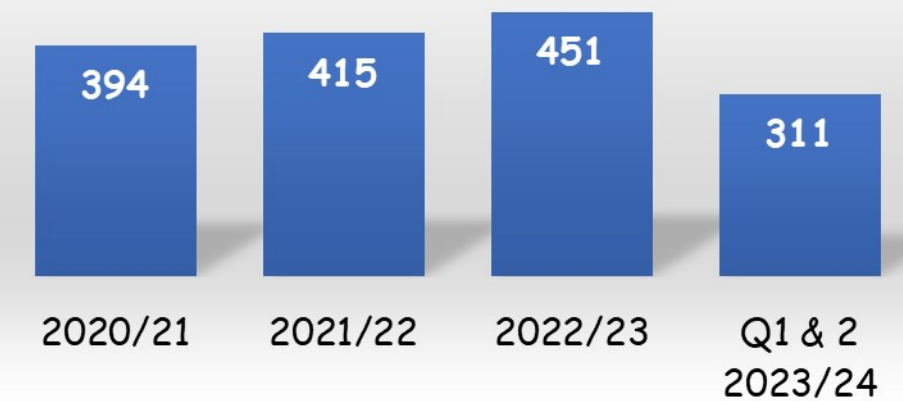
Safeguarding Manager continues to provide quarterly Child Protection reports to quality assure Child Protection performance. Q1 & 2 Child Protection reports identified that 100% Initial Child Protection Conferences were held in timescales.



As at end of Quarter 2 there were 83 children on the Child Protection register in comparison to 63 children as at end of Quarter 1. Analysis of this data will be considered as part of Q2 Child Protection report by Safeguarding manager.

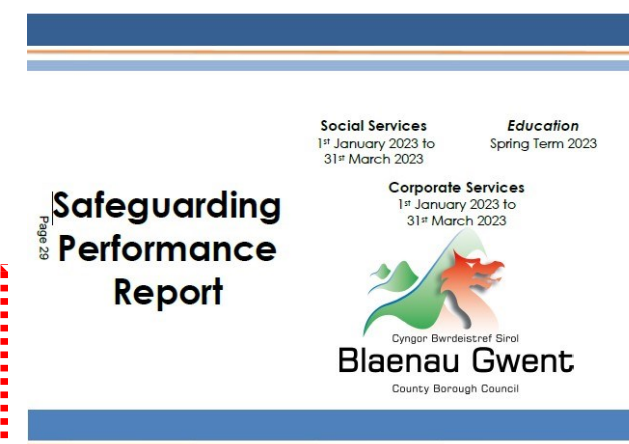
There is further work to be completed in respect of child protection conferences being more strongly aligned with outcome focussed practice which will be considered later this year with Safeguarding Team.

Number of adults suspected of being at risk of abuse or neglect reported



We have seen an **increase in adult safeguarding referrals** during 2023/24 compared to the same period of 2022/23.

April—September 2023 = 311
April—September 2022 = 246



Right click here and open hyperlink to view our most recent Safeguarding Performance Report



Key Activities

Effective safeguarding arrangements are in place and are continually reviewed and improved

All newly appointed Council staff are informed of the Council's safeguarding arrangements as part of their induction programme.



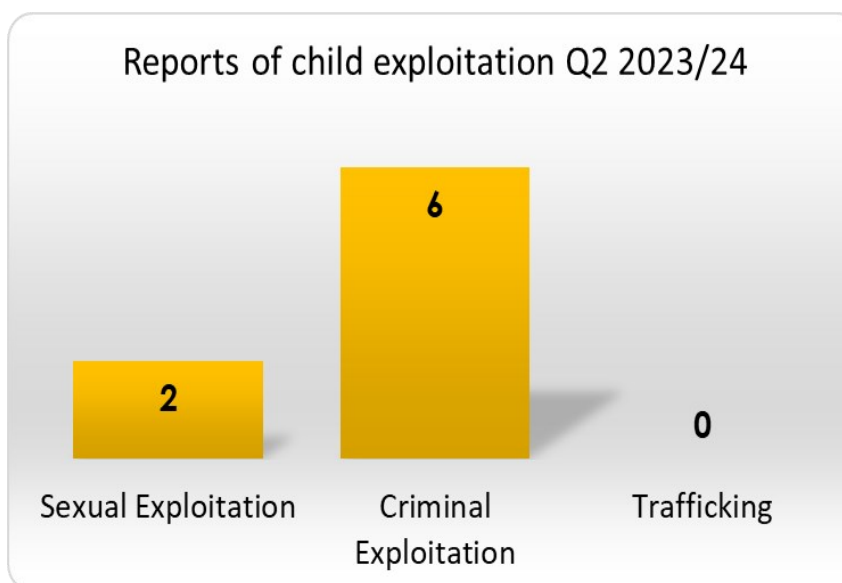
The Safeguarding Education Manager undertakes a programme of visits to all schools over a 3 year period for **Safeguarding Quality Assurance (QA)**.

All schools have now been completed during the academic year 2022-23 (September 2022—July 2023).

There is also a Safeguarding QA process in place for education services used by Blaenau Gwent to cover out of county independent settings and alternative provisions. 3 of these provisions underwent a QA visit in the reporting period (April 2023 - September 2023).

People are protected and safeguarded from abuse and neglect and any other types of harm

Safeguarding performance is good, **100%** of newly registered children were **visited within 10 days** of being registered.



For children on the child protection register, the average number of days they have been registered is **124.9**

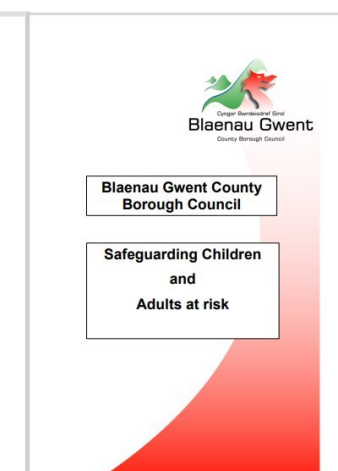


Prevention/Long term - Safeguarding Education Team continue to work closely with educational establishments to meet the educational needs of children looked after. The team have appointed 2 education support workers via the Virtual Schools Grant to further enhance the educational support available to our CLA children.

Integration - 14+ and SAT team continue to utilise Family Group Conference service within Supporting Change Team where this is appropriate and required. This has been particularly relevant for Statutory Assessment Team when considering the requirement for safeguards for families within enquiry periods.

All safeguarding referrals continue to be managed in line with the **Wales Safeguarding Procedures** and statutory requirements.

Safeguarding is recognised corporately as being everybody's responsibility. The Safeguarding Policy has recently been updated.



What you told us...

We moved into our new house today, we are only here today because of your help. Thank you so much.

No complaints, assessment went as was told and completed on time. nice and friendly all round, only minor thing was I was not informed we were under review, and not told that a meeting had been arranged by the duty team. thanks for all the support.

Key Activities

An audit framework for the Safeguarding Team to work to over the next 2 years has been proposed in order to satisfy ourselves on our practice across



The Safeguarding Manager has developed an Independent Review Officer (IRO) **good practice standards action plan** during this period to act as a framework to benchmark the IRO roles and responsibilities against. Progress against the action plan will be reported on with the annual IRO report.



As an Authority we continue to examine opportunities to deliver our S.16 responsibilities to promote Social Enterprises. As a directorate currently, we commission some social enterprises in Adult Services (Vision 21 etc) and have been working on a regional and national level to look at opportunities for social enterprise models to meet health and social care needs (Gwent micro carers / national subsidiary model for domiciliary care etc). Plus we have discussed as part of the catering enterprise model we are developing in Blaenau Gwent opportunities to develop in to either a social enterprise or Local Authority trading company as part of our commercial and income plans. The self assessment tool has been put on the November Directors meeting agenda for the suggestion of this tool to be used on a regional basis to give us a Gwent picture and enable us to progress this area of work further.



People are protected and safeguarded from abuse and neglect and any other types of harm

A Section 47 enquiry means that Childrens Social Care must carry out an investigation when they have 'reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm'.



The majority of S47 investigations are being completed by our SAT team. Those S47 investigations in SAT or 14+ that require an extended enquiry timeframe are approved by the service manager. The IPC S47 recommendations Task & Finish Group continues to meet to ensure the recommendations are being implemented, this is chaired by the Safeguarding lead.

All staff within teams have completed the relevant level of safeguarding training.



Other Training includes: -

- training on Circle of Security parenting programme
- Non-violent resistance which is a specific way of working with children when they are angry and violent
- Attachment training and substance misuse.
- Medication training

What you told us...

When I had a phone call saying I was having a support worker I was very anxious about not knowing what was going to happen. The support worker came to my house she explained step by step how a support worker works. This made my mental health feel better that I went to the doctors to get it sorted. In the short amount of time of coming out she's been amazing and has given us the help we needed and everything that needed doing has now been achieved. She has made me feel so comfortable and has been so supporting and been so helpful with everything.

Quality Standard 8

• People are supported to actively manage their well-being and make their own decisions so that they are able to achieve their full potential and live independently for as long as possible

We consider and build upon people's personal circumstances, capabilities, networks and local Communities when providing care & support.

Digital Switchover - A TEC Position Statement which includes a project plan in relation to the digital switchover and was presented to Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in April 23 and a financial impact report has now been completed ready for submission to Senior Leadership Team in Quarter 3. The Gwent Regional Team are also in the process of developing a region paper in relation to the financial impact on the Gwent Local Authorities which is also due to be completed in Quarter 3.



TEC Cymru is looking to hold a Gwent wide event in November inviting providers of digital lifeline alarms to attend to showcase their equipment. Following the outcome of both the SLT and regional report a **project plan will be drafted to take forward the digital switchover in Blaenau Gwent.**



A cultural change is needed to consider assistive technology as a solution that enables people to achieve their outcomes and live independently and helps prevent/delay costly health and social care interventions. The development of the smart flat assists with this by further promoting assistive technology to professionals, individuals and their families/carers.

There are significant financial implications in the switchover to digital which is due to take place in 2025. It is critical we fully understand these implications on the local authority so we are able to continue to provide a service that meets the needs of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent.

Financial challenges have been identified in relation to some of the new technologies we are piloting especially if an annual subscription cost is attached. Care Providers are less likely to accept this type of technology due to the annual charge. This element has been included in the Position Paper which was presented to Senior Leadership Team in April 2023.

Varied care and support packages are provided for our carers.....



A new Bridging the Gap Flexible Time Out Service is being piloted across the Gwent Region, the pilot is in its early stages but already there has been a number of carers who have benefitted from the service, one of the Blaenau Gwent carers who has been successful with their application has been able to get some quality time out to visit family in London knowing the person they look after has been well cared for by a participating care agency.



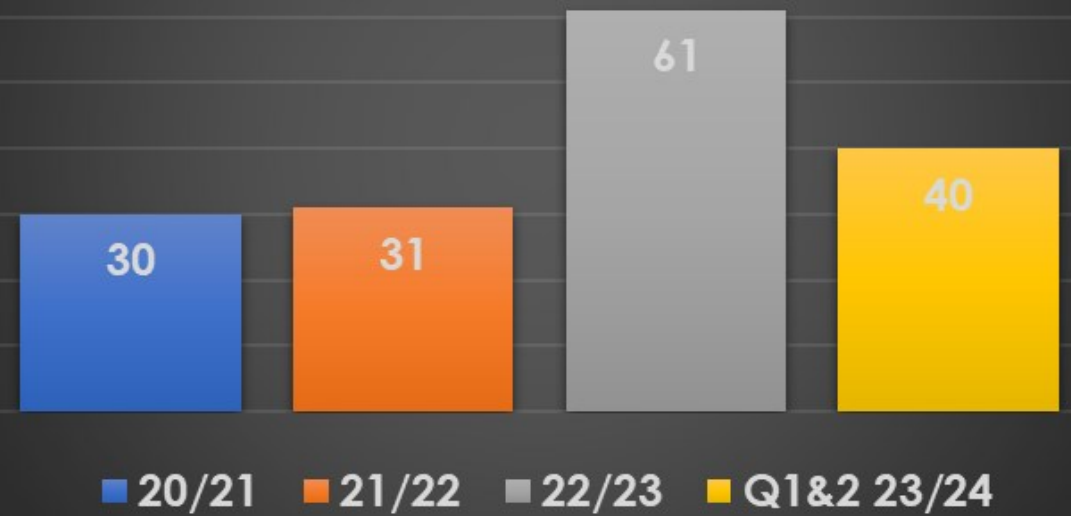
People are supported to actively manage their well-being and make their own decisions so that they are able to achieve their full potential and live independently for as long as possible

We continue to work with people to develop solutions which support their individual needs

THE NUMBER OF ADULTS PROVIDED WITH ELECTRONIC ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY DURING THE YEAR



Number of Disabled Facilities Grants Completed



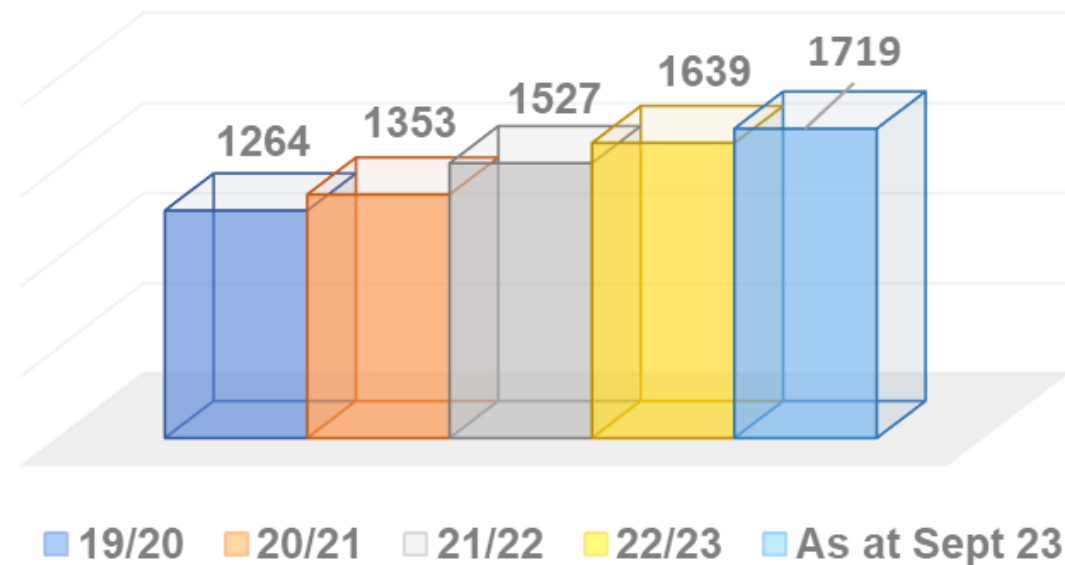
Page 61



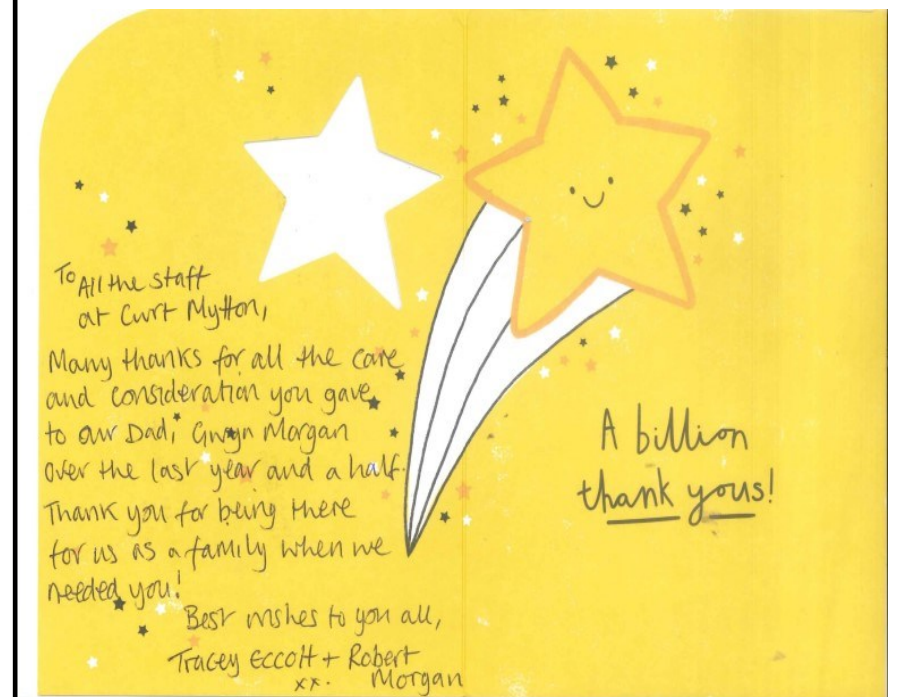
Further work needs to be done around this to ensure that all those that are no longer in receipt of equipment are ended on the system



The total number of adult clients currently in receipt of electronic assistive technology



What you told us...



Case Study - Supporting our carers

Blaenau Gwent and its partner organisations make sure that carers are treated with dignity and respect. This involves ensuring that they are recognised as people first, with the same rights as everyone else to have choice and control, quality of life, and aspirations in their own right, separate to those of the person being cared for.

We actively support and empower our carers, engaging with them regularly, taking time to listen and provide carer centre focussed events.

- We held our **annual event to celebrate Carers week** on Wednesday 7th June at Brynmawr Rugby Club, it was a great success and it was truly wonderful to see so many of our unpaid carers attend, it's our way of just thanking our unpaid carers so much for all the invaluable work they do. Its fair to say those who attended were entertained from start to finish with local performers including local magician Adam Reeves and local singing artists Sara Ashley Davies and Elvis Tribute Act Rick Jenkins, there was a raffle and a lovely buffet also provided.



Photos here are from the Carers Week event held at Brynmawr rugby club and another from the Carers Singing bowls group session which was run for our Parent Carers of Children with Disabilities.

"The carers who attended shared how they loved their time out from their caring role and would love these type of events/session to take place on a regular basis".

This year we also run an Unpaid Carers Cost of Living Grant which was extremely popular and successful, the grant offered those carers who were financially struggling an opportunity to apply for a one off grant of up to £500 to pay for emergency costs for things like white goods, food bills and household goods. The grant also offered carers wellbeing opportunities like counselling courses, gym memberships and hobby activities, along with driving lessons and driving test costs.

One of our carers who's grant application for driving lessons was successful responded by saying - "Good afternoon Tania, this is amazing news! Can you please thank everyone on the panel, this will make such a difference to mine and my sons life. I cried happy tears receiving your email as our luck has been terrible for a good year and a half now and I honestly can't thank you and your team enough. I really can't thank you enough, this will be life changing".



Chapter 4 - Other Information

How we do what we do

Structural arrangements that provide good governance and strong accountability / Local Political Leadership, Governance and Accountability

The structure of the Social Services Directorate provides clear levels of management and accountability. The Council has a clear governance and accountability framework in place which all directorates are signed up to. This framework identifies how reporting and monitoring works throughout the Council to create a 'golden thread'. This framework is

complied with by Social Services who also have additional monitoring requirements as part of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

The Corporate Director of Social Services is a member of the Council's Corporate Leadership Team, whereby all Council Directors meet on a weekly basis to consider and make strategic and operational decisions, although some decisions need to be considered by Scrutiny and then ratified by Cabinet or Council.

In 2023/24 the Directorate has one Executive Member with Portfolio responsibility for People and Social Services and is scrutinised by the People Scrutiny Committee, with safeguarding information also reported to this Committee. Regular liaison meetings are held with the Directorate, the Cabinet Member and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Scrutiny Committee.

The Social Services Directorate is subject to audit, inspection and review by the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). On a quarterly basis the Director of Social Services and/or Heads of Adult and Children's Services meet with CIW to discuss achievements, performance and key challenges. CIW also undertake an annual review and evaluation of the Directorate's performance.



How we do what we do - Audit & Inspection Progress

Care Inspectorate Wales

No new Social Services CIW Inspections have been instigated during the reporting period that were specific to Blaenau Gwent. However, A **National** study 'Rapid Review on Child Protection Arrangements' was instigated and details are below. Also, in response to previous audits carried out by CIW, recommendations for improvement were made which are then monitored as part of the corporate business planning process until fully delivered upon.

Report title: Rapid review of child protection arrangements
Local or National Report: National
Completion date: Published September 2023
Report Link: [Full report - Rapid Review of Child Protection Arrangements FINAL FOR PUBLICATION \(hiw.org.uk\)](#)

CIW made recommendations for improvement which will be reviewed and a decision taken by CLT on whether they need to be monitored as part of the corporate business planning process.

Audit Wales

No new Social Services Audit Wales Inspections have been instigated during the reporting period that were specific to Blaenau Gwent. However, in response to previous audits carried out by Audit Wales recommendations for improvement were made which are then monitored as part of the corporate business planning process until fully delivered upon. Ongoing recommendations are:-

Report title: Corporate Safeguarding Follow-up
Local or National Report: Local
Completion date: Published November 2022
Report Link: https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/bg_safeguarding_follow-up.pdf

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

Report title: Springing Forward
Local or National Report: Local
Completion date: Published November 2022
Report Link: https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/bg_sf.pdf

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

Report title: 'Time for Change' – Poverty in Wales
Local or National Report: National
Completion date: Published November 2022
Report Link: [https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/Time for %20Change %20Poverty English.pdf](https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/Time_for_%20Change_%20Poverty_English.pdf)

**Recommendation - Councils optimise their digital services by creating a single landing page on their website
 Creation of a single gateway into services**

How we do what we do - Audit & Inspection Progress

Audit Wales Continued

<p>Report title: unscheduled care review Local or National Report: National Completion date: Awaiting publication</p>	<p>Awaiting final report</p>
<p>Report title: Social Enterprises Local or National Report: National Completion date: Published December 2022 Report Link: https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/A_missed_opportunity_Social_Enterprises_English_0.pdf</p>	<p>Recommendation - Ensure the local authority delivers its S.16 responsibilities to promote Social Enterprises we recommend that it reports on current activity and future priorities following the evaluation of its Action Plan including the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services</p>



**Arolygiaeth Gofal
 Cymru
 Care Inspectorate
 Wales**

How we do what we do - Our Workforce and How We Support their Professional Roles

Having a skilled and motivated workforce is essential in order to provide high quality services. As part of this, the Council has a Joint Workforce Development Team with Caerphilly County Borough Council with responsibility for delivering a training and development strategy that supports development opportunities for staff at all levels in Social Services.

A full programme of learning is provided for the whole social care sector. All statutory, legislative, and registration linked requirements are planned and accounted for. The offer includes developmental opportunities for the workforce and support for resilience and well-being.

Legislative change and Welsh Government guidance has provided numerous priority themes such as More Than Just Words, Dementia Standards, reacting to the pause in the implementation of Liberty Protection Safeguards, and new preferences for assessments from the Family Judiciary.

The challenges for the workforce to fully embrace learning opportunities remain high. The current recruitment environment has a major impact on the sector and forces harsh choices that without doubt impact on the capacity available to fully embrace development opportunities beyond the essentials.

The way the workforce wants to learn has changed, they expect choice and flexibility. Various initiatives within the organisation are in place to support improving digital confidence and access to digital learning. The authority underpins its approach with the recognition of barriers that exist for parts of the social care workforce, so the offer includes the traditional classroom route. Classroom activities use digital devices to provide safe space learning with facilitator and peer support:

The authority has co led the All-Wales project on securing an organisational level, fit for purpose, future proof, digital learning platform that will meet the needs of the whole sector, communities and volunteers. The authority, one of three in the first phase, continued to demonstrate nationally the power to the workforce of sharing across boundaries. The approach has encouraged all 22 local authorities to confirm their interest along with several other public organisations. The learning delivery model includes blended learning approaches, a choice of digital or face to face, and hybrid delivery. Hybrid, where participants can simultaneously join either in the classroom or virtually has been welcomed as a very supportive option by the frontline workforce.

The engagement from the workforce with new ways of learning is exceptional and they continue to reward the community with their ongoing resilience and determination.

Benefits continue to be realised for and by the workforce through the scale of opportunity possible due to the joint workforce development service model hosted by us in partnership with Caerphilly. When comparing the performance of the collaborative approach to other workforce development services in Gwent some key headlines from 2022/23 include

- Supported 63% of the internally sponsored social work students in Gwent
- Hosted 56% of the university direct entry social work students in Gwent
- 9 members of internally sponsored staff qualified as social workers
- The social care workforce in the area had access to the largest training offer provided within Gwent

Workforce stability is a key consideration within Social Services as some teams are facing staffing shortages, however, it is acknowledged that this is a Wales wide position and there is no simple solution. The department as a whole has been working hard to look at innovative ways of managing the workload within teams as well as developing recruitment and retention strategies to address workforce pressures. Despite these significant pressures the existing staff and providers of services have continued to ensure children and adults needs are met, risks are managed, and safeguarding issues dealt with.

Social Services are working closely with Organisational Development to establish a Strategic Workforce Plan to support capacity concerns in the short, medium and longer-term as well as considering the opportunity to collaborate on a regional basis. The workforce in Social Services has been identified as a critical risk and has therefore been included on the Council's Corporate Risk Register.



How we do what we do - Effective partnership working through Regional Partnership Boards

Working in Partnership

Part 9 of the Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act places a key emphasis on partnership working including a statutory requirement for the development of Regional Partnership Boards. The Boards have been established on current local health board footprints. The Gwent Board includes ABUHB and Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen local authorities. The Cabinet Member in each local authority, with responsibility for health and social care, sits on the Regional Partnership Board. It is an advisory body which provides oversight and direction for areas of integrated working across health and social care.

Blaenau Gwent Council supports partnership and collaborative working and the Social Services Department continues to work with a wide range of partners where partnership opportunities provide better outcomes for local residents than the Council could achieve if working on its own. Social Services work in partnership with a variety of stakeholders including staff, residents and businesses. In addition, Social Services fully participates in the sharing of knowledge, good practice and information, which can result in improved services. Social Services partnership arrangements include:

- **Joint Partnership and Workforce Development Service with Caerphilly**
- **Greater Gwent Workforce Development Board**
- **Regional Adoption Service**
- **South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS)**
- **South East Wales Emergency Duty Team**
- **South East Wales Adult Placement Scheme**
- **Gwent Frailty Programme Integrated Health and Social Care Teams**
- **South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB)**
- **Gwent Wide Adult Safeguarding Board (GWASB)**
- **Regional Safeguarding Board covering all partners across Gwent**
- **Shared Lives scheme run on behalf of six Local Authorities and the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board**
- **Gwent Mental Health & Learning Disabilities Partnership Team**
- **South East Wales Improvement Collaboration -4C's (SEWIC)**
- **Gwent Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) Team**
- **Gwent Regional Collaborative (RCC) - Supporting People**
- **Gwent wide agreement with National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) to provide children's advocacy services**



How we do what we do - Our Financial Resources and how we plan for the future

Budget 2023-24- Quarter 1 & 2 (April 2023 to September 2023)

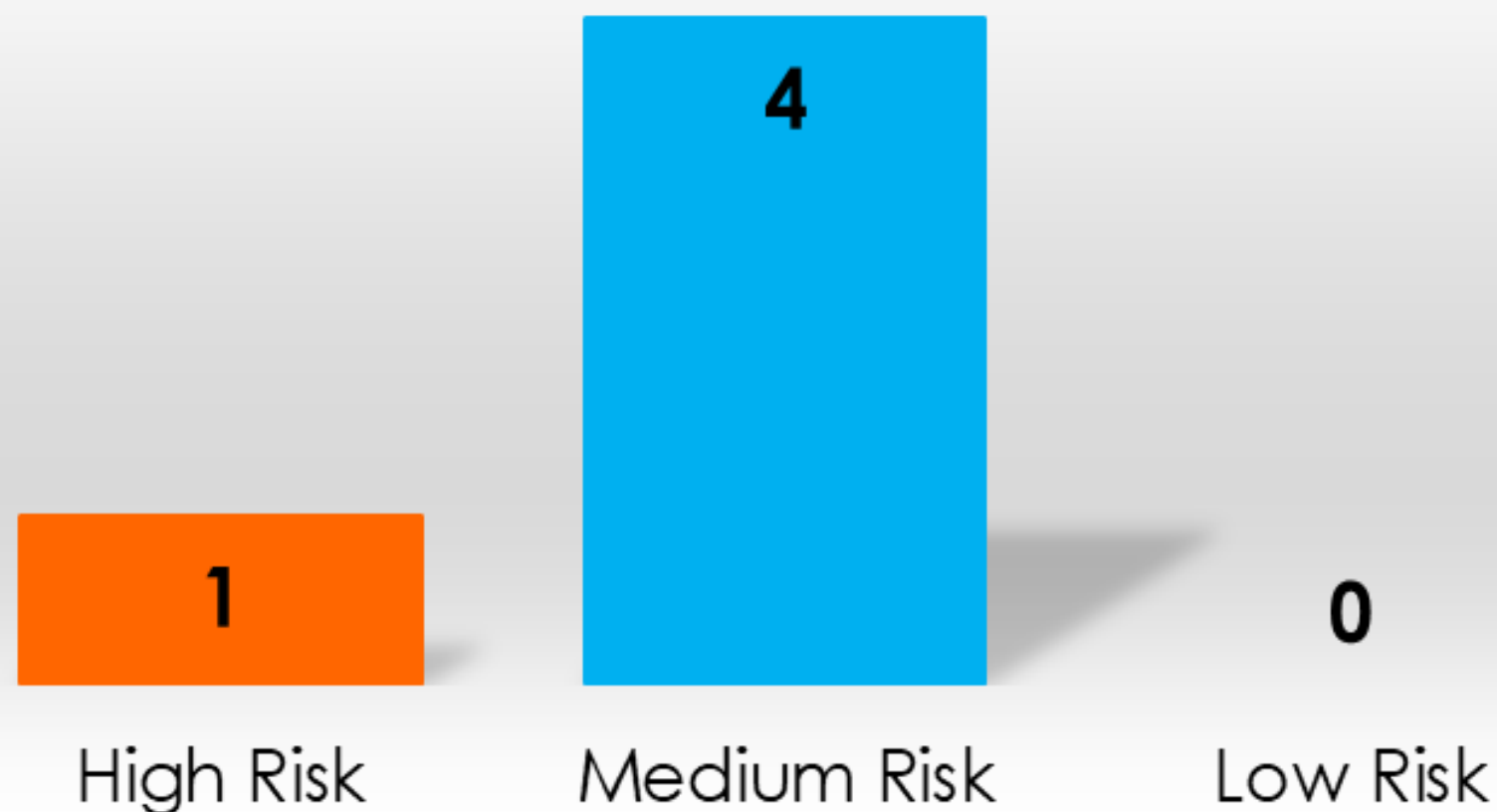
Budget Area		Budget	Forecast	Variance	
		£	£	£	%
1	Commissioning & Social Work	4,247,760	4,195,578	52,182	1.23
2	Children Looked After	7,314,350	8,790,710	(1,476,360)	(20.18)
3	Family Support Services	203,070	203,071	(1)	0
4	Youth Justice	276,080	276,023	57	0
5	Other Children's and Family Services	2,537,840	2,632,040	(94,200)	(3.71)
6	Older People Aged 65 and Over	8,034,610	7,776,765	257,845	3.21
7	Adults under 65 with Physical Disabilities	7,880	7,880	0	0
8	Adults under 65 with Learning Disabilities	4,015,310	3,840,820	174,490	4.35
9	Adults under 65 with Mental Health Needs	560,690	549,855	10,835	1.93
10	Other Adult Services	434,760	437,763	(3,003)	(0.69)
11	Community Care	20,007,270	19,651,823	355,447	1.78
12	Support Service & Management Costs	948,740	917,090	31,650	3.34
13	Corporate Recharges	5,803,660	5,803,659	1	0
Grand Total		54,392,020	55,083,076	(691,056)	

How we do what we do - Risks

In line with the Council's Risk Management Strategy Department Leadership Team review and challenge the risks on the Directorate Risk Register on a quarterly basis. As part of this process, they will consider new risks for inclusion on to the Directorate Risk Register and consider risks for escalation to the Corporate Risk Register.

The Social Services Directorate Risk Register has 5 risks, with 1 having a high residual status and the remaining 4 being medium status. These risks are detailed below and mitigating actions are in place

Social Services Directorate Risks



- There is a risk that increasingly complex needs and demand for services provided by Social Services and Education in particular for Looked After Children, will put further significant pressure on the Council's budget
- Safeguarding - Failure to ensure adequate safeguarding arrangements are in place for vulnerable people in Blaenau Gwent.
- There is a risk that identified staffing pressures in social services will result in an inability to deliver services particularly in provider services and domiciliary care.
- Failure to improve attendance rates within Provider services will lead to an unacceptable impact on the ability to deliver services effectively.
- Instability and sustainability of the provider care home and domiciliary care market

How we do what we do - Complaints

Number of complaints received in children's services and some examples of complaints received

From 1st April 2023 to 30th September 2023 in children's services there were 4 stage 1 complaints and 2 stage 2 complaints (the 2 stage 2 complaints are both on-going investigations).

Complaints

- o Lack of communication, documents not provided in a timely manner, lack of clarity to whether photographs of injuries are required for Child Protection Enquires
- o Workers who visited family did not introduce themselves or provide identity of who they were
- o Limited communication and engagement from social services, lack of support and advice
- o Lack of professional conduct, social services not listening to the views of family members

2023/2024 examples of learning identified and actioned within Childrens services

- o Staff are reminded of the importance via supervision and training sessions of the importance of communication with families
- o Staff are reminded of the importance of sending out documents within the relevant timeframe
- o Recommendation to develop procedures relating to the use of photographs in Child Protection Enquires so that there is a clear practice structure which can be used as a point of reference for Local Authority staff as well as any other agency e.g. childcare/education settings
- o Recommendation that managers with case management responsibility remain vigilant to the allocation of work to practitioners where this is a planned absence from work as this will likely impact on the quality of engagement with families due to the lack of physical presence for visits/communication.
- o Staff are reminded of the importance of signposting families to access advice from other agencies e.g. citizens advice, etc. when there are new arrangements in place such as caring for a relative as part of a family arrangement

Number of complaints received in adults services and some examples of complaints received

From 1st April 2023 to 30th September 2023 in adults services there were no complaints received.

Chapter 5 - Looking forward / Areas for progression

Delivery and monitoring of the overarching departmental / corporate priorities (See page 9) continues daily in order to provide effective services to our citizens. To assist effective delivery of these overarching priorities, specific areas for progression have been highlighted throughout this report to support our continual monitoring of performance and are detailed below:-

- Continue to deliver our workforce strategy whilst giving due consideration to necessary staffing improvements highlighted in complaint feedback ie communication /clarification and identification/clear practice structure / timeliness /continuity of staff /partnership working and engagement;
- Continue to implement the children looked after strategy and monitor numbers to ensure a downward trend;
- Deliver and monitor the Information, Advice and Assistance action plan to meet demand in the most efficient way;
- Deliver improvements detailed in staff survey action plan and repeat survey next year to measure the progress that has made;
- Continue to work on recruitment and retention strategies;
- Progress the exploration of partnership working with neighbouring authorities to include a joint mentor scheme for staff with Caerphilly CBC in order to extend our learning and development opportunities and Bettercare occupational therapy opportunities with Torfaen County Borough Council ;
- Carry out a further review of commissioned providers care fees to assess the impact in view of the current cost of living and inflationary pressures;
- Budget and Grant consideration to continue and improvement proposals to be scoped and implemented;
- Deliver recommended improvements following all Care Inspectorate Wales and Audit Wales Inspections;
- Work towards meeting target of all children having a trauma nurture timeline prior to adoption;
- Continued delivery of Gwent Dementia Action Plan and progress development of centre of excellence for dementia care at Cwrt Mytton;
- Improve on timelines for delivering foster care reviews;
- Need to identify a life journey work champion for Blaenau Gwent;
- Analysis of increase in child protection numbers to be considered as part of Q2 Child Protection report by Safeguarding manager;
- Child protection conferences to be more strongly aligned with outcome focussed practice;
- Progress suggestion that Section 16 social enterprises self assessment tool be used on a regional basis to give us a Gwent picture and enable us to progress this area of work further; and
- Following the outcome of both the SLT and regional report, Draft a project plan to take forward the digital switchover in Blaenau Gwent.
- Further work needs to be done around the numbers in receipt of assistive technology ensuring that system is up to date.



Chapter 6 - Accessing Further Information and Key Documents

Useful Documents

Reports to Social Services Scrutiny Committee - <http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=1157&Year=0&LLL=0>
Council Corporate Plan – <https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/council/policies-plans-strategies/blaenau-gwent-corporate-plan-2022-27/>
Blaenau Gwent Council Budget Monitoring - <http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=1148&Year=0&LLL=0>
Social Services Website – <http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/resident/health-wellbeing-social-care/>
Workforce Development - <http://socialservicesblaenau-gwent.caerphilly.gov.uk/>

Balancing Rights and Responsibilities Programme Evaluation, October 2022



Appendix B.docx

Internal Audit Corporate Safeguarding Report
Audit Wales Safeguarding Report <https://www.audit.wales/publication/blaenau-gwent-county-borough-council-corporate-safeguarding-follow>
Safeguarding Performance Report April 2022 – June 2022 <https://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/documents/s12813/Appendix%201.pdf?LLL=0>

Useful Websites

Social Care Wales - <https://socialcare.wales>
Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) - <https://careinspectorate.wales/>
Data Cymru - www.data.cymru
Dewis Wales - <https://www.dewis.wales>
Gwent Safeguarding - <https://www.gwentsafeguarding.org.uk/en/Home.aspx>
Public Service Board - <http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/council/partnerships/partnership-working/>
South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board - www.sewsc.org.uk

Providing Feedback

Social Services welcomes feedback on the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services. Your views are important to us. Please contact us if you would like to give feedback on the plan 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 Adroddiad Blynyddol y Cyfarwyddwr Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol ar gael ar wefan y Cyngor.

Write to us:

Director of Social Services
Anvil Court
Church Street, Abertillery, NP13 1DB

Call us: (01495) 355 006

Email us: info@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Visit our website: www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Agenda Item 7

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **People Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **19th December, 2023**

Report Subject: **Corporate Director of Education Services 6-month Progress Performance Report Apr 23-Sept 23**

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

Report Submitted by: **Luisa Munro-Morris, Interim Corporate Director of Education**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
28/11/23	30.11.23	05.12.23			19.12.23	20.01.24		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present the Corporate Director of Education's Annual Performance Report covering the 6-month period April 23-September 23 and is attached as (*Appendix 1*).

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 It is a statutory responsibility of the Corporate Director of Education to assess the effectiveness of the delivery of Education and produce updates for Members that forms part of the Annual Council Reporting Framework. The provision of Education is regulated under the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework and this report will complement the Directorate's self-evaluation arrangements.

3. Options for Recommendation

- 3.1 The report has been considered by Education's DLT and the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT).
- 3.2 **Option 1**
Members are asked to consider the information detailed within the Corporate Director of Education's Report and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate recommendations to Cabinet.
- 3.3 **Option 2**
To consider and accept the report as presented.

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

- 4.1 It is a statutory responsibility of the Corporate Director of Education to assess the effectiveness of the delivery of Education and this annual report has been produced, in line with the Scrutiny and Cabinet Forward Work Programmes.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

The attached report identifies the financial and budgetary implications from April 2023 to September 2024.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**

The Education service maintains a Directorate Risk Register, which is aligned to both service level and corporate risks. The attached report highlights the main risks currently under consideration and the mitigation. The risk register is reviewed as part of the business planning process and included within the performance reporting of the Education service.

5.3 **Legal**

Monitoring performance of the Education Directorate

5.4 **Human Resources**

There are implications arising from the priorities identified in the report and these are captured within the Business Plans which set out the Education Directorate improvement priorities.

5.5 **Health and Safety**

N/A

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1

The detailed performance information is included within (Appendix 1). The Education Directorate is working together with key stakeholders on a joint purpose to deliver 'Better Schools, Better Citizens and Better Communities – all through a children and young person centred approach'.

In a previous People Scrutiny Committee meeting, Members requested that the performance report and associated data was shared in a more user-friendly manner. Consequently, the Education Directorate has worked with the Corporate Performance team to produce a revised report format with a greater emphasis on infographics to highlight performance across the board.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

Reporting performance provides the public with the opportunity to view progress of the Education Directorate and ensure accountability.

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

Pupil voice is a key area for the Education Directorate and examples of this are included within (Appendix 1).

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

The report enables the Education Directorate to plan for the future as spend, risk and performance is continuously reported on and provides a baseline of where the department is currently and where it needs to be in the future.

6.5 **Preventative Focus**

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

6.6 **Collaboration/partnership working**

The LA collaborates with neighbouring local authorities through the South East Wales Consortium for the provision of school improvement services through the Education Achievement Service (EAS). This supports the school improvement work of the council. This work has positively impacted on the reduction of schools causing concern and the positive KS4 results.

The Local Authority also secures a range of pupil support services through regional collaboration.

6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

The Local Authority commissions its school improvement function on a regional basis through the EAS.

6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

All school improvements/re-modelling of school buildings are planned in a way that reduces carbon emissions.

6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)**

There are no implications arising from this report.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

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

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Report of the Corporate Director of Education Services

This page is intentionally left blank

The
Blaenau Gwent County
Borough Council
Education &
Leisure Services
Annual Performance
Report

2023- 24 Mid Year Snapshot



Empowering our communities to be ambitious, ethically-
informed Life-long learners who lead full and healthy lives

Contents

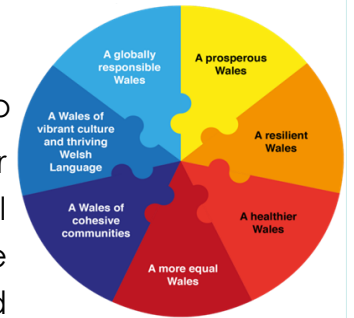
Page 78



Foreword	3
The Shape of Our Place	4
Director's Overview & Reflections on 2022/23	7
Local, Political Leadership, Governance & Accountability	11
Audit and Inspection	12
Maximise learning, skills and wellbeing for children, young people and the community	14
Ensure effective corporate leadership of Education Services	44
Ensure effective governance and delivery of commissioned services	49
Maximise partnership working to meet community need	50
Case Studies	51
Ensure effective self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management	58
Future Direction	

Foreword

Why this is important - Improving the quality and provision of teaching and learning is vitally important to ensure we are achieving ambitious outcomes for all children and young people. We will continue to invest in our education services and present service activity which highlights how we are contributing to the Council's overall aim of delivering all seven national well-being goals. These goals are set out within The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which is legislation aiming to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The vision of this legislation is expressed in the seven National well-being goals.



The Act also puts a duty on public bodies to apply the **sustainable development principles** which states they 'must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

The sustainable development principle is made up of the following five ways of working, pictured below:



Integration



Collaboration



Involvement



Long Term



Prevention

Page 79

Throughout this report some areas of performance that meet these ways of working are demonstrated by the above images.

The Purpose of this report - To present service activity for the period, detailing achievements and challenges aligned to the priority areas identified in the Corporate Plan 2022/27, which are to :



Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent



An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place



Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities



Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient



The Shape of Our Place



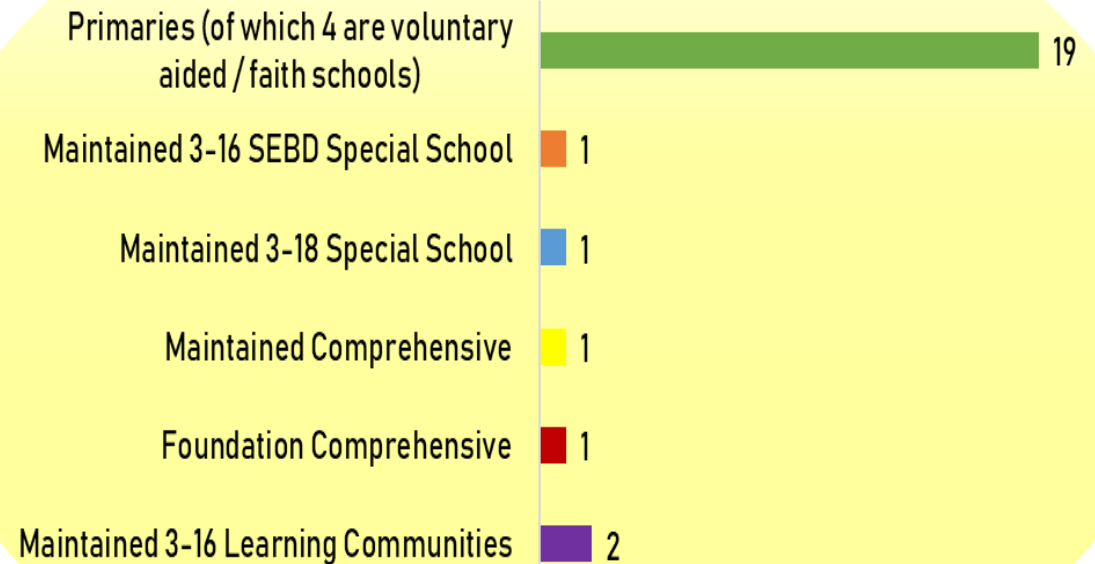
Blaenau Gwent is relatively small geographically, being at most 15 miles north to south, and 8 miles east to west. It is defined physically by high hillsides dividing three main valleys. These valleys are home to our towns and villages and house our education provision, made up of sustainable communities for learning nestled within beautiful countryside.

Blaenau Gwent has 25 schools across 31 school sites and there are currently circa 9,000+ pupils on roll across all Blaenau Gwent schools.

The Education Directorate provides services to support children and young people's educational learning opportunities whilst working collaboratively with our schools and the Aneurin Leisure and Awen Trust in a Council client function role.

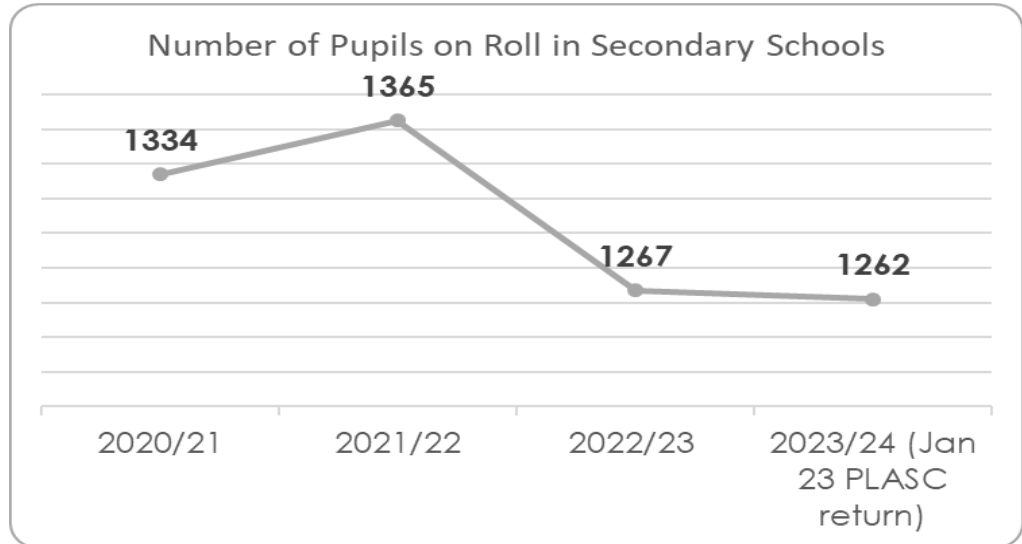
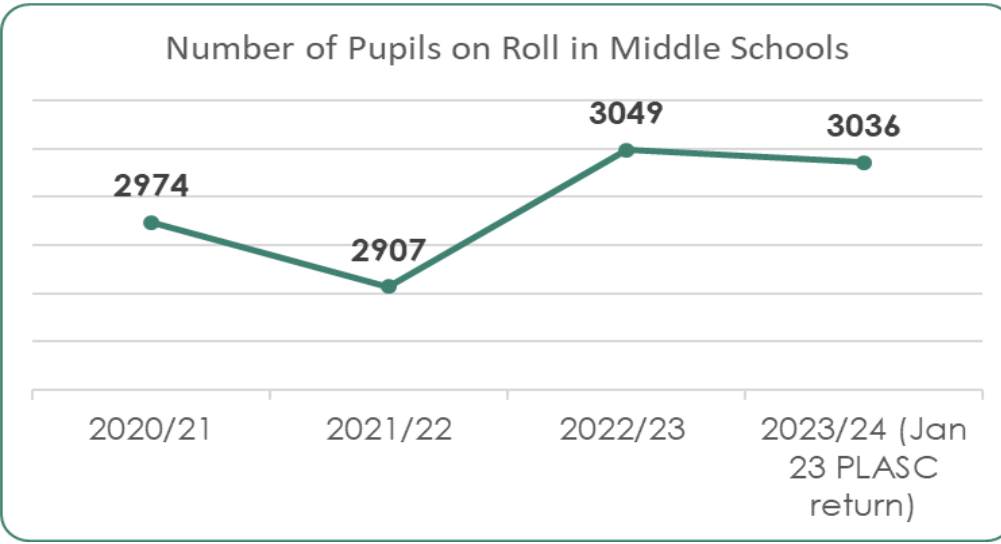
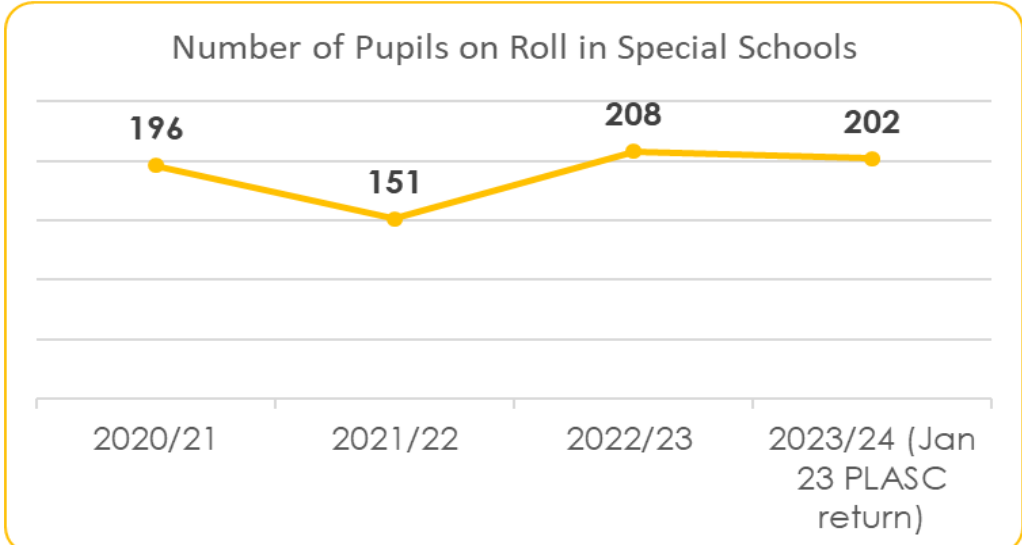
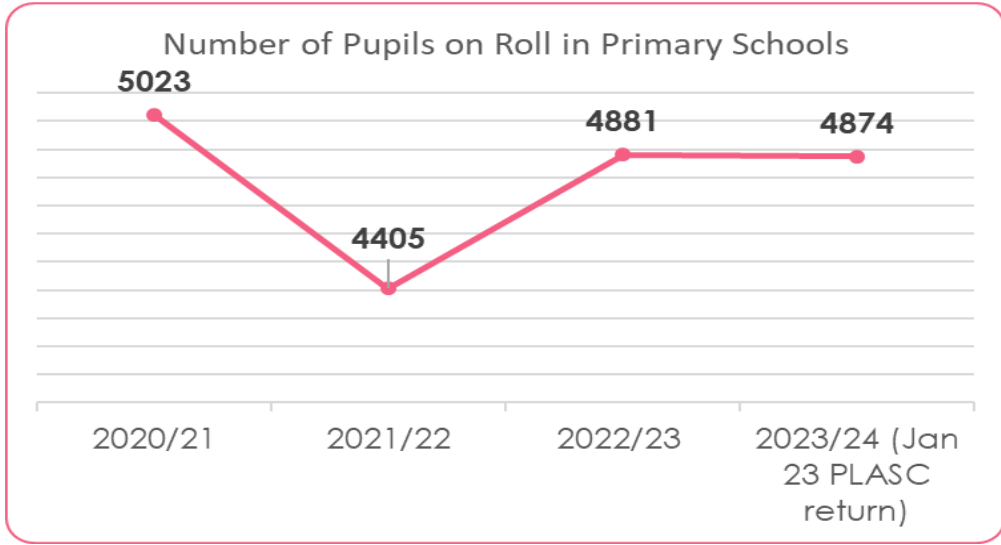
The Education Directorate's three main areas of core service delivery are

- **School Improvement and Inclusion;**
- **Education Transformation and Business Change; and,**
- **Young People and Partnerships.**



The Shape of Our Place (continued)

Number of pupils on roll in each categorisation of school.



Location of Schools



Key:	 Primary Schools	 Welsh Medium School	 Special School
	 Faith Schools	 Comprehensive School	 Foundation School
	 3-16 Learning Provision		

- 1 Brynbach Primary School
- 2 St Joseph's RC School
- 3 Glanhowy Primary School
- 4 Deighton Primary School
- 5 Georgetown Primary School
- 6 Tredegar Comprehensive School
- 7 Rhos y Fedwen Primary School
- 8 Glyncoed Primary School
- 9 All Saint's RC School
- 10 Willowtown Primary School
- 11 Beaufort Hill Primary School
- 12 Ebbw Fawr Learning Community Secondary Phase
- 13 Ebbw Fawr Learning Community Primary Phase
- 14 Pen Y Cwm Special School
- 15 Cwm Primary School
- 16 Brynmawr Foundation School
- 17 St Mary's Church in Wales School
- 18 St Mary's Roman Catholic School
- 19 Blaenycwm Primary School
- 20 Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg
- 21 Coed y Garn Primary School
- 22 Ystruth Primary School
- 23 Abertillery Learning Community - Roseheyworth Road Campus
- 24 Abertillery Learning Community - Secondary Campus
- 25 Abertillery Learning Community - Tillery Street Campus
- 26 Abertillery Learning Community - Six Bells Campus
- 27 St Illtyds Primary School
- 28 Sofrydd Primary School
- 29 River Centre 3-16 Learning Community - Secondary Campus
- 30 River Centre 3-16 Learning Community - Primary Campus
- 31 River Centre 3-16 Learning Community - House

Director's overview and reflections on 2023/24 (April to September)

Overview

Blaenau Gwent has big ambitions for our schools and learners. We are determined to play our part in Wales being a first class education system with a clear ambition to increase the skills and standards of education across the County Borough. We fully support and are committed to the Welsh Government's national mission for educational transformation, including curriculum and ALN reforms. The Education Directorate are currently consulting on a new vision and strategic priorities.






Education Directorate Draft Vision:

'Empowering our communities to be ambitious, ethically-informed life-long learners who lead full and healthy lives.'

How are we going to deliver this:

- Ensure that people are consulted and informed
- Provide effective and responsive school support services
- Provide a school estate that is fit for the 21st Century
- Prioritise people's physical, mental health and well-being
- Ensure effective collaboration with key stakeholders
- Ensure all services are inclusive
- Maximise opportunities for our communities

Education Improvement Plan (Business Plan) – 5 Priorities, supporting delivery of the Corporate priority areas identified in the Corporate Plan 2022/27 (detailed on page 3):-

-  Ensure effective corporate leadership of Education Services
-  Maximise learning, skills and wellbeing for children, young people and the community in Blaenau Gwent
-  Ensure effective self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management
-  Ensure effective governance and delivery of commissioned services
-  Maximise partnership working to meet community need

Reflections on 2023/24

This report demonstrates how the Education Directorate contributes to the team (the council as a whole) aim of delivering our corporate priorities. Throughout the body of the report you will find details of performance, both positive achievements and areas that we continue to focus on improving. We recognise that even the achievements are not yet completed but remain areas for progress to be maintained and improved upon where possible.

You will find below a short summary detailing some examples of these performance outcomes, broken down into sections of how they are supporting delivery of our corporate objectives.

As a council we are looking to be **'an ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place'**. To support this, the Education Directorate aim to deliver effective and efficient services within financial constraints. The Local Authority has a track record of spending within its education budget in recent years and 2022-23 provisional end of year position was favourable despite an overspend on Transport. During the reporting period new and better processes have been put in place between Education & Finance to ensure improved monitoring of the budgets and 2023/24 portfolio is currently on target or underspending in some areas. The financial outlook, however, for the public sector will be challenging over the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and continued close financial management will be essential to achieve value for money. The Education Directorate wants to drive forward the right leadership approaches, right staffing capacity, people with the right skills/capabilities and the right forward planning to prepare for the future needs of the service. Appropriate training has been delivered to staff during the period and good engagement with staff and members continue. The Directorate sickness absence levels have also improved. It is recognised that one of the main strategic risks identified for the directorate is dependency on external funding to support key services and the workforce. During the reporting period a full review of directorate priorities has been carried out and the new vision statement and associated priorities are now directly aligned with Estyn recommendations for improvement.



As a council we are looking to **'Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent'**. To support this, the Education Directorate aim to ensure that all children and young people are given the best start in life, enabling them to live healthy, fulfilling lives whilst contributing to society and forming a valuable part of their community. We prioritise the importance of language acquisition and reading across the board, to support with positive outcomes and attainment. We continue to support children and young people to be in a good position to find skills and employment at the appropriate times, However, our NEET figures for 2022 demonstrate an increase in this category leading to a deep dive into the reasoning behind this increase. As a result improved processes/systems have been put in place allowing resolutions for other gaps to be developed. The monitoring of school attendance and exclusion numbers is key to understand potential barriers to learning. This is one area that needs further work and something that we will be analysing in much greater depth. Our long term aim is to decrease the percentage of adults aged 16-24 with no qualifications, and a number of new areas of work detailed throughout the report will support this, including a new Youth Service provision development of which was led by engagement with young people within our community, development of a digital presence making it more accessible and effective links with Elected Home Education young people, all of which will support these better outcomes. Partnership working and effective communication continually improves and better links have now been developed with early years and health. There are some new initiatives around mental health which will help to improve access to timely and appropriate support and the counselling / play therapy service has been extended to include the age range of below 6 years. The ICT Infrastructure and Connectivity project is progressing well alongside delivery of our Additional Learning Needs expansion and Sustainable Communities for learning Band B projects. Our educational building provision continues to deliver suitable learning environments due to effective monitoring and management of capacity and pupil places, effective delivery of needed minor works and larger school remodelling and rebuild works.



Director's overview and reflections on 2023/24 (continued)



As a council we are looking to '**empower and support communities to be safe, independent and resilient**'. To deliver this, the Education Directorate support children and young people's educational learning opportunities whilst working collaboratively with the Aneurin Leisure and Awen Trust in a Council client function role, with an aim to ensure that all children and young people's well-being and educational needs are catered for. There is an appropriate safeguarding culture within the local authority where all staff and elected members receive suitable safeguarding training. Effective integration and collaboration between directorates and external partners such as education, schools, health and children's services delivers a system which manages the needs of our pupils and young adults. Counselling services and youth support services are in place and working well. Our dedicated staff and the implementation of integrated systems and processes support our children and young people to be resilient members of society.



As a council we are looking to '**Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities**'. To support this, the Education Directorate aim to ensure that decarbonisation measures are at the forefront of our future planning and teaching. The environment and biodiversity considerations form the basis of all new school buildings and existing school upgrades and we encourage nature friendly management on school grounds. Effective partnership working enables us to provide advice and guidance to support our children and young people around biodiversity, decarbonisation, equalities, diversity and inclusion. These partnerships with schools and the Children's Grand Council are very effective and not only inform but support our children and young people to have a voice. We are and will continue to deliver effective sustainable communities for learning which are environmentally friendly and support the delivery of our educated young people who will in the future form our connected communities.



**Luisa Munro-
Morris**
Interim Director
of Education



Cllr Sue Edmunds
Cabinet
Member
Education

Local Political Leadership, Governance and Accountability

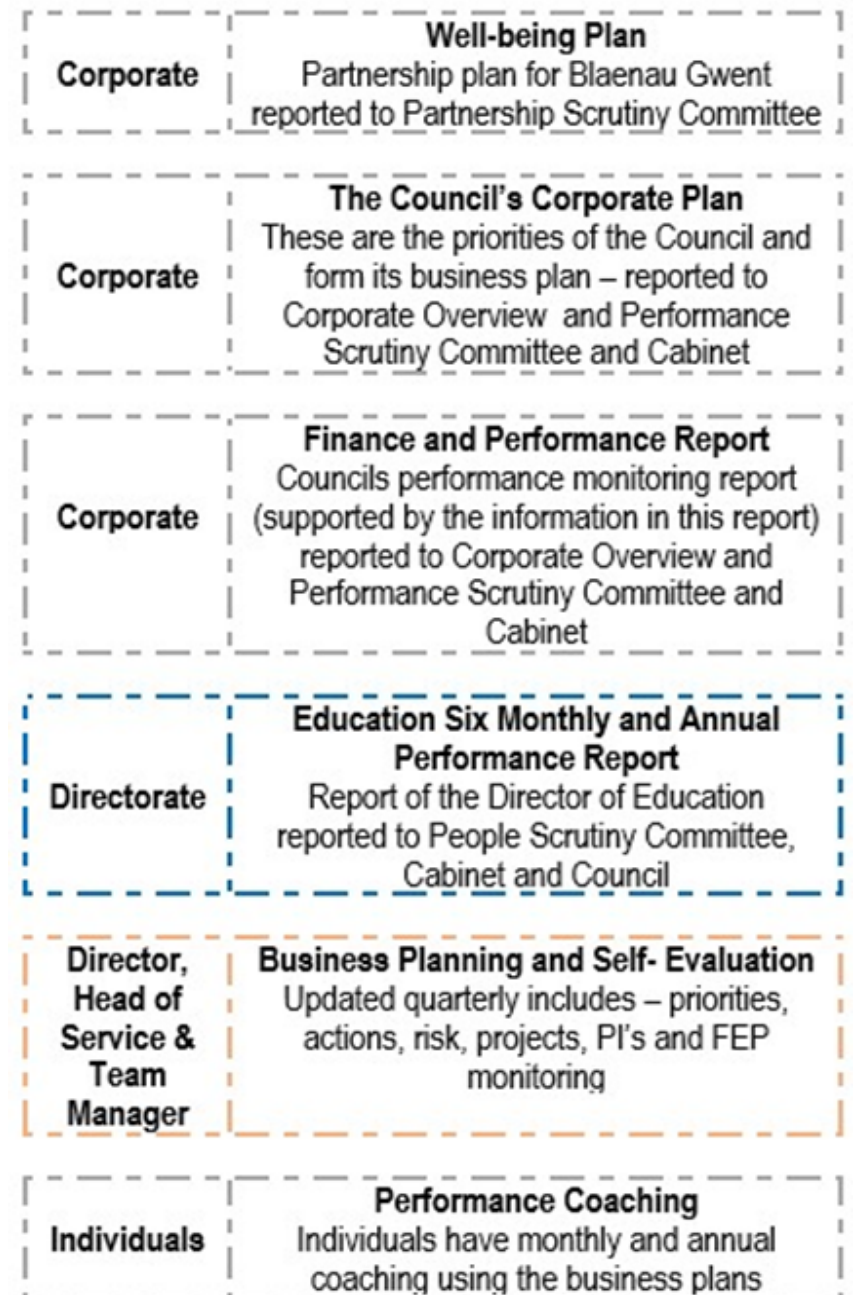
The structure of the Education Directorate provides clear levels of management and accountability. The Council has a clear governance and accountability framework in place which all directorates are signed up to. This framework identifies how reporting and monitoring works throughout the Council to create a 'golden thread'. This framework is produced corporately and Education is compliant, the services also have additional regulatory requirements as part of the Estyn Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework.

The Internal Planning framework to the right demonstrates how reporting and monitoring works throughout the Council to create this 'golden thread'.

Progress against actions

This report is broken down into the Directorate priority areas previously detailed in the 'Director's Overview' on page 7.

The following overview pages and case studies detail our performance for the period along with some associated achievements and challenges aligned to supporting delivery of the corporate priority areas identified in the Corporate Plan 2022/27.



Audit and Inspection

The Education Directorate is subject to audit, inspection and review by Estyn and Audit Wales. On a quarterly basis the Director of Education and service managers meet with Estyn to discuss achievements, performance and key challenges. Estyn also undertake an annual review and evaluation of the Directorate's performance.

Estyn



No new Estyn Inspections have been instigated during the reporting period that were specific to Blaenau Gwent. However, at the end of 2022, Blaenau Gwent Council was subject to an Estyn inspection resulting in the following recommendations for improvement which are being monitored as part of the corporate business planning process until fully delivered upon.

Report title: Report on Blaenau Gwent Education Services

Local or National Report: Local

Completion date: Published February 2023

Report Link:- You can read the full inspection report [here](#)

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

Audit Wales



No specific Education Audit Wales Inspections have been instigated during the reporting period. However, in response to previous corporate inspections carried out by Audit Wales, recommendations for improvement were made which are then monitored as part of the corporate business planning process until fully delivered upon. Ongoing recommendations are:-

Report title: Corporate Safeguarding Follow-up

Local or National Report: Local

Completion date: Published November 2022

Report Link:-You can read the full inspection report [here](#)

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

The following pages detail Performance broken down into the five priority areas of the Directorate :

Maximise learning, skills and wellbeing for children, young people and the community.

Ensure effective corporate leadership of Education Services

Maximise partnership working to meet community need

Ensure effective self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management

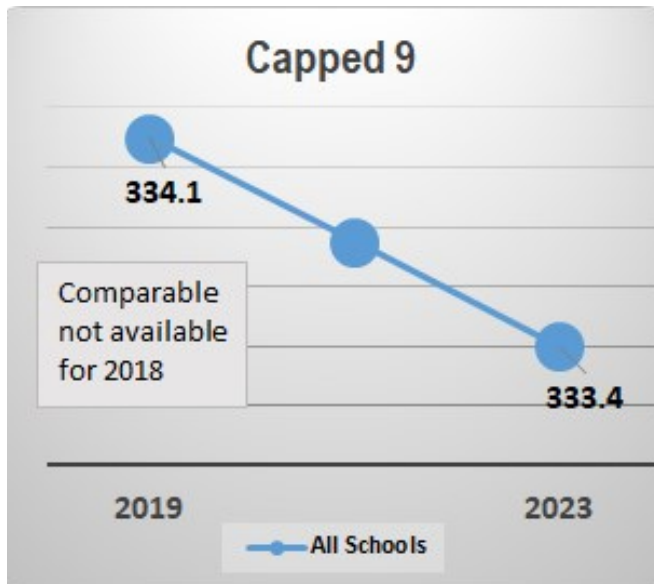
Ensure effective governance and delivery of commissioned services



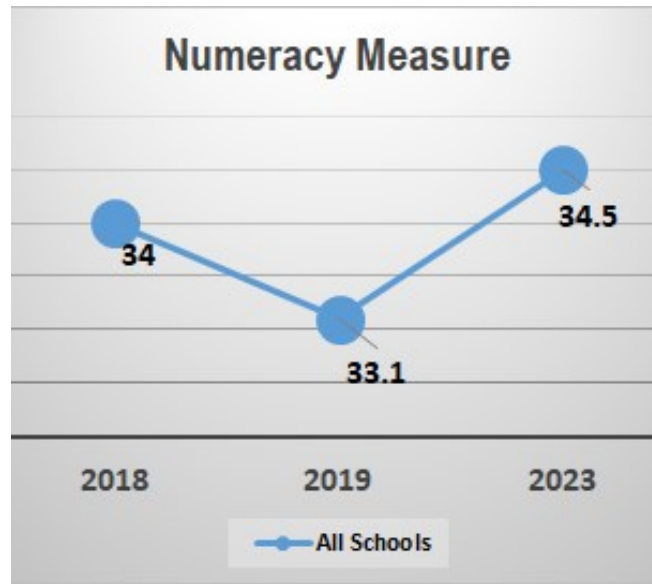
The **KS4 results were positive** and are anticipated to be in line with the School Development Plan targets Some examples are shown below :-

(Note: only 2018 2019 and 2023 comparison data shown due to routine data collection impacted by the covid pandemic)

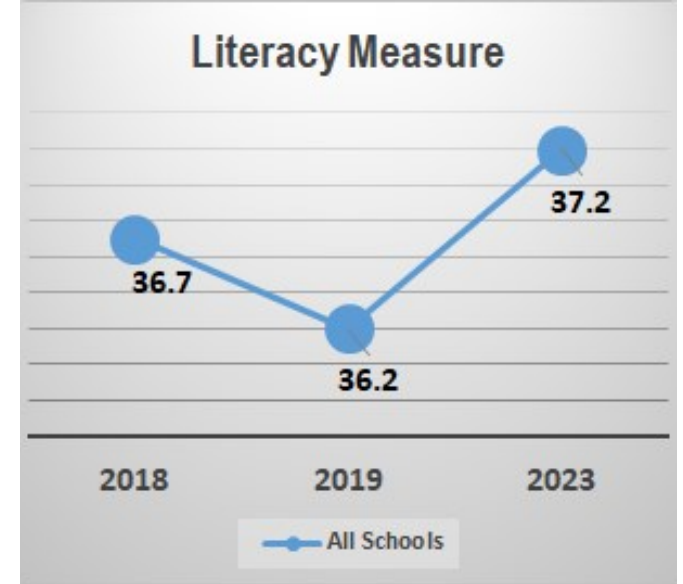
Capped 9



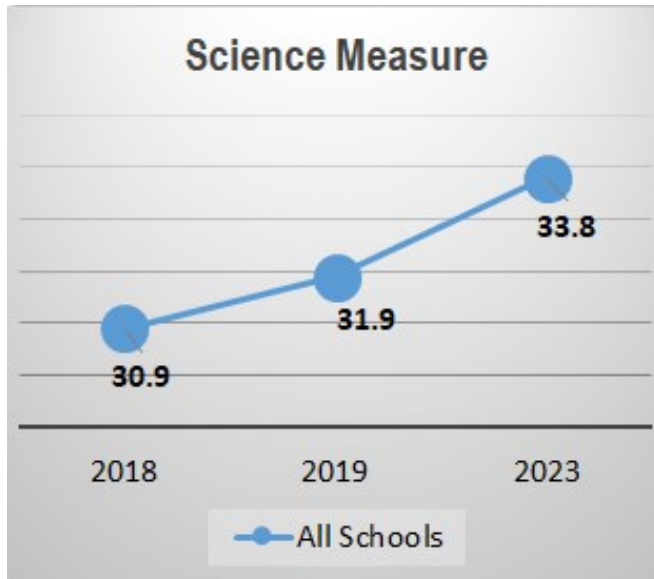
Numeracy Measure



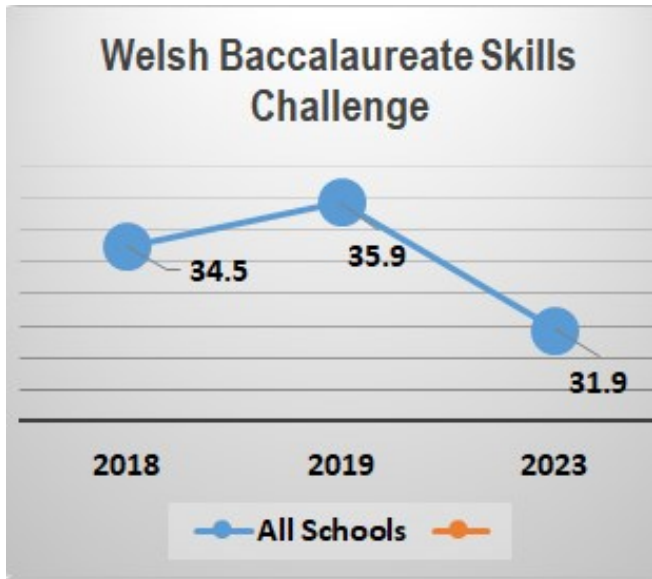
Literacy Measure

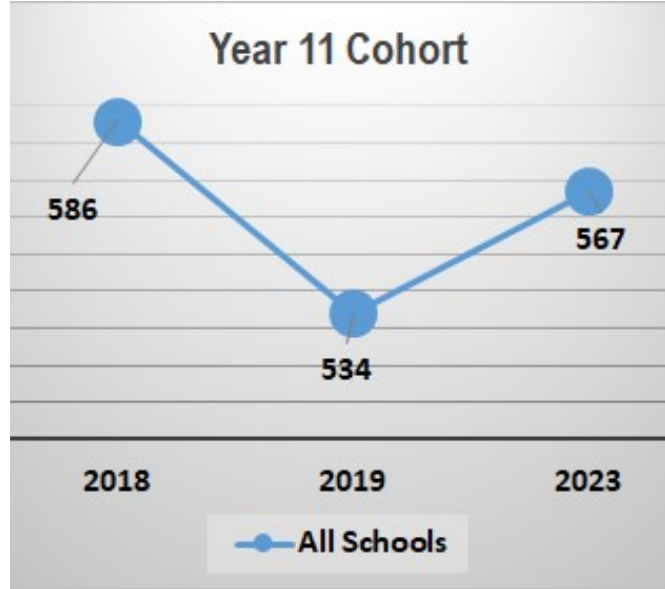


Science Measure

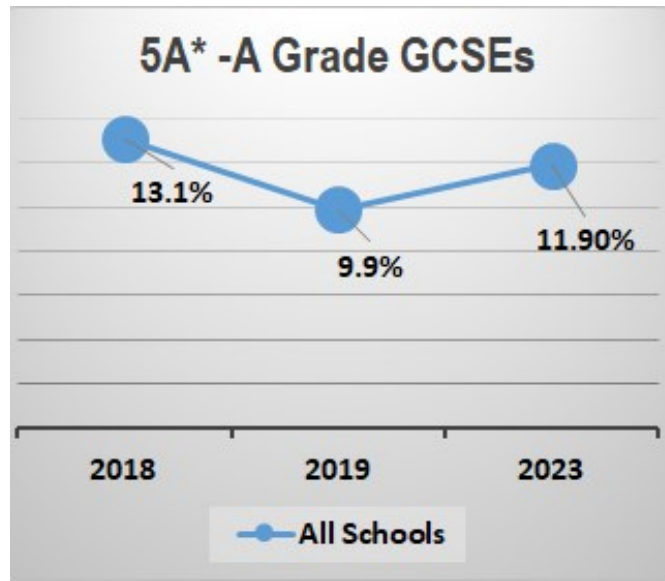


Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge





Note: "All Schools" incorporates the 4 main secondary settings plus the "special schools" that also contribute to the KS4 results. The breakdown by school is not yet available.

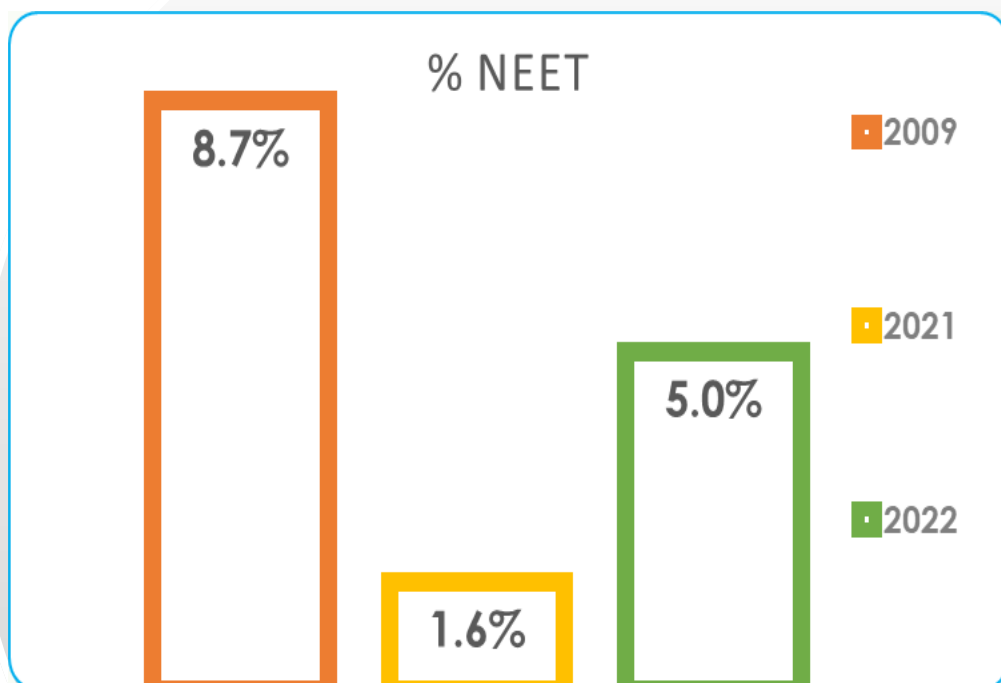


We have seen a **reduction** in **Schools Causing Concern** from **6 schools in 2019** to **2 schools in 2023**.

Going forward we will monitor and ensure the pace of change in school's causing concern is improved.



Blaenau Gwent continues to deliver a number of services that offer support for young people aged 11-25 who at risk of becoming or are currently not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).



In 2022 Blaenau Gwent had a larger than expected figure of 5% (31 young people) NEET.

Following this increase, there was a **deep dive evaluation with key partners** to understand and determine the cause and other contributing factors. This provided several findings, such as **gaps in the post 16 transition** for young people linked to **Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD)** provisions and/or linked to Social Services, **out of county learners** and **faults in systems leading to the processing of Education, Training and Employment (ETE) status** (sometimes impacting the visibility of young people to key support services).

The evaluation proved to be a meaningful exercise and achieved its intended purpose, and as a result it has helped place more emphasis across the partnership on their engagement and involvement, leading to improved processes/systems and has allowed resolutions for other gaps to be developed (i.e., creating dedicated youth and community workers at SEBD/ALT education provisions).





Blaenau Gwent provides a good accessible counselling service to young people using counsellors who are qualified and experienced in working with young people. This will also continue using a range of digital means where young people cannot be seen in one of the appropriate settings. There are some new initiatives around mental health which may improve access to timely and appropriate support, links continue to be made by the co-ordinator with these services to ensure there is open discussion and a joined up approach in improving access to mental health services particularly for those with diagnosis/clinical mental health conditions.

A total of **263 young people** aged year 3 to 25 years **accessed counselling or play therapy** during 22/23 academic year - **222 of these were new referrals**



For the financial year 2023/2024 Welsh Government has again provided additional funding, with indicative funding provided until March 2024, to extend the service to below year 6. This indicative funding has assisted in being able to retain the current play therapist. In Blaenau Gwent and across Wales, there is a need for a service such as play therapy for young people aged 10 and under.

By providing a digital presence, the Youth Service has become more accessible to a wider audience of young



Youth workers contribute to care and support plans and attend various multi-agency meetings in relation to safeguarding issues including Section 115 meetings and Community Safety Meetings. Good relationships are forged with Social Workers and Families First Support Workers which enables a good mechanism for sharing appropriate information with regard to improving well-being or improved outcomes for young people.





The partnership with Schools, Coleg Gwent and Post 16 providers has strengthened through the establishment of the Post 16 Strategic Partnership Board.



A-level A*-C grades in Coleg Gwent were slightly lower (76.5%) than All Wales figures of 78.9%. A*-E grades in Coleg Gwent (97.8%) were slightly higher than the all-Wales overall pass rate of 97.5%.



The Youth Service is established as an **accreditation centre** with Youth Workers also providing support for parents of Elected Home Education (EHE) young people wanting to deliver units.

Currently it has contact with **18 EHE young people**, to provide a link with the service.

The **Positive Futures** school groups and community referrals are highly successful in helping young people better understand their behaviour and how to manage it. **38 young people** are **supported** in a weekly social group and 8 young people who are on the cusp of permanent exclusion from across all mainstream secondary schools are supported each year to develop social skills, understand peer pressure and how to manage their emotions through attending a rolling programme of workshops.

The scheme **promotes positivity, health and wellbeing** and new experiences to help **raise aspirations, resilience, reduce anti social behaviour** and first-time entrance into youth justice system.

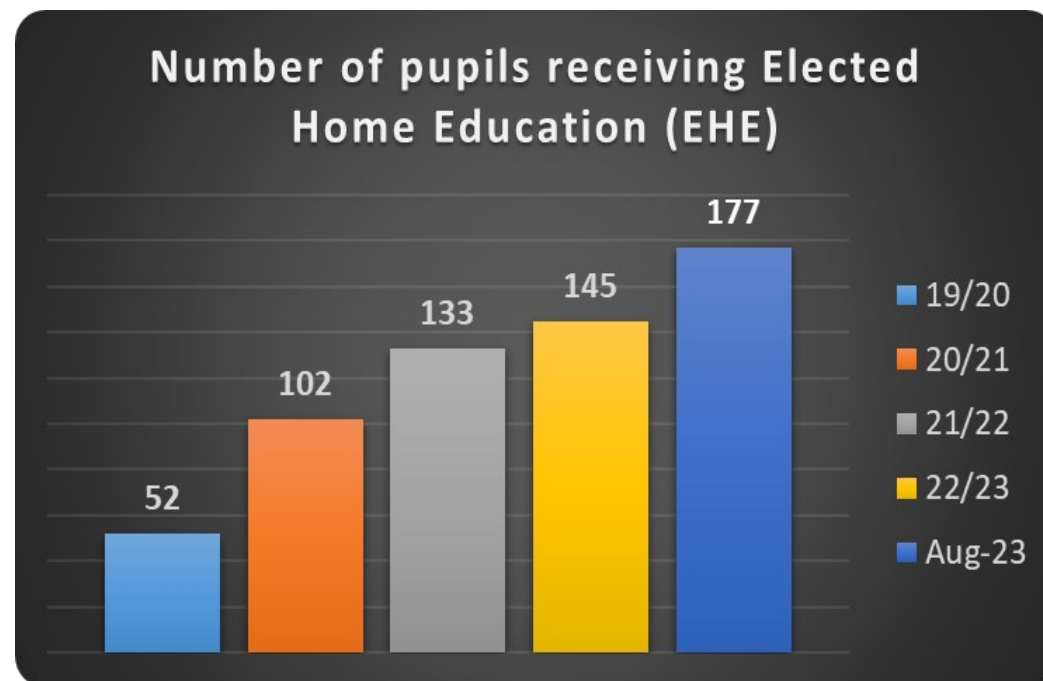




Elected Home Education within Blaenau Gwent

As demonstrated in the chart there has been an increase in the number of home educated children within Blaenau Gwent over the past few years. Elected Home Education (EHE) pupils continue to be supported by the Education Welfare Service, however this needs to be monitored closely going forward to ensure that the number of visits increase in line with the above.

As at 31st August 2023 there were 177 pupils on the EHE database compared to 145 at the end of February 2023. This is an increase of 18%. Thirty of these pupils are from the Gypsy Roma Traveller Community (GRT).

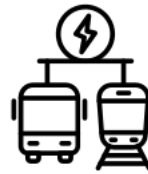


Between 1st September 2022 and 31st August 2023, 74 children became EHE. Fifty-Two of these were secondary aged and Twenty-two were primary age.

Thirteen children were from schools outside of the Local Authority, seven children were from Abertillery Learning Community, 10 from Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, 11 from Tredegar Comprehensive and 11 from Brynmawr Foundation School.



Cymunedau Dysgu Cynaliadwy Sustainable Communities for Learning



The delivery of the Sustainable Communities for Learning **Band B programme** is well underway with an **investment of circa £33m** into the school estate.

The suitability and condition of the school estate continues to improve with circa **58%** categorised as A/B

The Band B Programme seeks to deliver the following key projects:

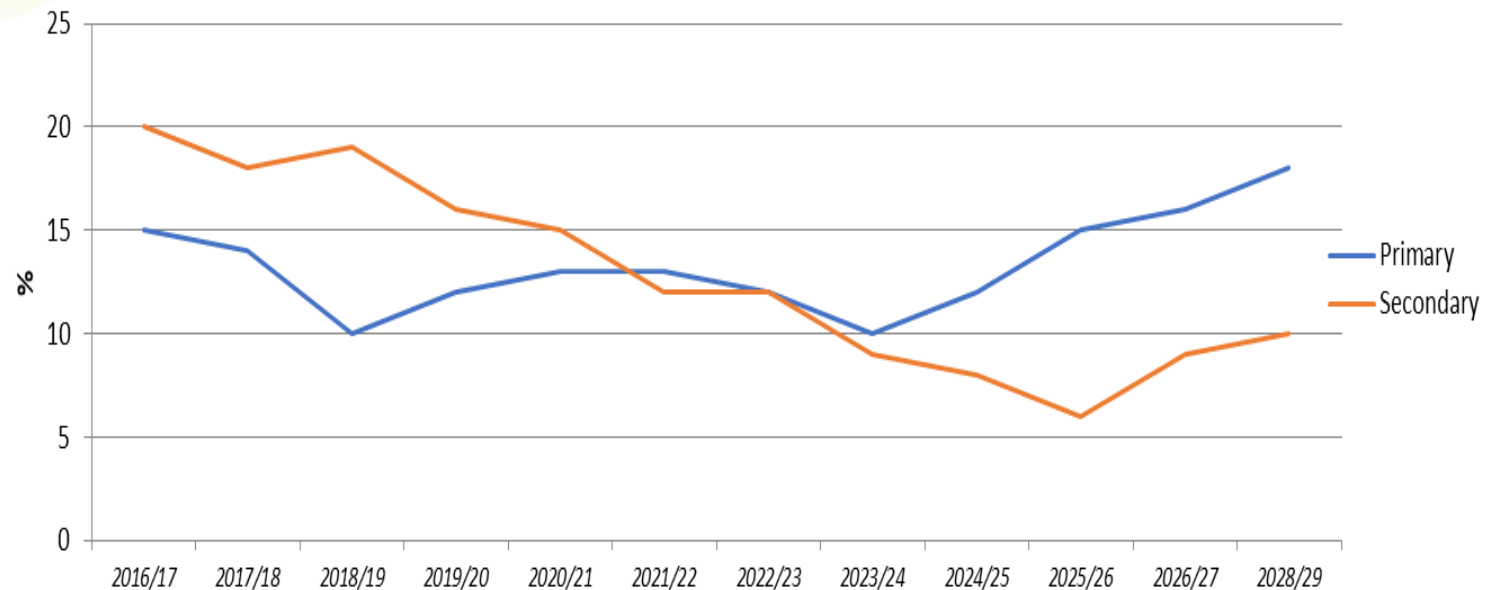
- **Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg Refurbishment**
- **Ebbw Fawr Primary Redevelopment**
 - Glyncoed Primary New Build
 - Rhos y Fedwen Primary Refurbishment
- **Continued Secondary School Re-modelling**



The 2023 primary projections show a small number of primary schools projected to have over 15% surplus places during the next 5 years. However, the surplus in these schools does need to remain higher, to enable pupil population growth in line with live birth rate fluctuations, also due to the fact that a reduction in the admission number would negatively affect configuration of the teaching and learning environment and staffing levels.



LONG TERM –Building condition and suitability ratings and capacity projections inform the prioritisation of projects within Band B and the rolling programme for Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, along with potential further school organisation priorities, minor and planned works programmes etc.





Rhos y Fedwen Primary - Remodelling - Willis is the appointed contractor for the Foundation Phase scheme, they commenced works in August 2023 and are scheduled to conclude February 2024. Tender documents will be going out January 2024 for the 3G pitch area, this has been moved due to the contractor also being on site now and the advice from professionals is not to lay pitches in cold/wet weather and plan between April/September months. The project group meets regularly to inform implementation of works.

Brynmawr Foundation School - Remodelling of Brynmawr Foundation school is needed and the project team have been working closely with Community Services and the school to carry out a comprehensive Options and Cost appraisal - The outcome of this determined that the school will need extensive remodelling/refurbishment in the next 10 years at a very high cost therefore longer term options for the school are being explored.

Ebbw Fawr – Secondary Campus - In 2022 the school raised sufficiency issues for the 2024/25 academic year, stating that it needed additional classrooms to accommodate pupil needs. Since then, this has become a priority for the Education Transformation team to develop options. A full business case is intended to be submitted to Welsh Government, based on the preferred option of a standalone extension with additional classrooms, a canteen and dining area on the grounds of the existing school site in April 2024.

Tredegar Secondary - A project group in relation to Tredegar Secondary school has met several times over the last year, the project brief is being developed by the school in relation to an extension to the building (Subject to planning approval) in line with projected sufficiency figures. This will then form the basis of the business case submission to WG, which depending on the development of the project brief, is intended to be submitted in the Spring term 24



By March 2024 Welsh Government has stipulated that any remaining projects for delivery under the Band B programme will automatically move over to the Rolling Programme. This programme will benefit Councils across Wales as it has a 1-3 year plan, a 4-6 year plan and a 7 year and beyond plan. This means that any project not delivered under the Band B programme will automatically transfer into their 1-3 year plan. A new Strategic Outline Programme (SOP) will need to be completed and submitted by the deadline date. The Project team are currently carrying out a desktop exercise on the priorities coming forward from schools capacity and condition survey.





The inclusion team lead by Education Transformation team went out to consultation in April 2023 to increase the capacity for resource bases and ASD provision in mainstream schools. The statutory notice period ran through June/July with a decision for implementation scheduled for this year. The proposal is in 2 parts, part one meet the need of learners in secondary and Welsh-medium provision. Part 2 will focus on the success and need for additional bases after 2025, this will also consider religious character schools.

The council have been awarded 2 grants 2022/23 and 2023/24 from Welsh Government Additional Learning Needs (ALN) capital grant.



- The 2022/23 grant was used predominantly for Pen y Cwm and River Centre 3-16 Learning Community – Secondary Site
- The 2023/24 grant allocation will be used to implement the ALN review.

River Centre Learning Community – Secondary Campus

- In 2022, the school had an Estyn Inspection which recommended change and with this in mind the ALN grant was used to transform the learning environment, both internally and externally, making this a fit for purpose facility for vulnerable learners .

The River Centre Secondary Campus was **subject to investment circa £450,000.**

The complete refurb included 3 extra classrooms including sensory provision, new furniture, home economics and independent living area, outdoor muga and gym.



Works to Pen y Cwm Special School includes remodelling the existing learning environment to create additional classroom spaces and associated facilities i.e. additional sensory rooms and a hobbit house, to create an outdoor learning space. This work continues whilst the Council are working with the school to develop a long-term plan to support sustained growth and development.



Better links have been developed **with early years and health**, and a more comprehensive **tracking tool has been created** in order to improve the tracking of pupils with Additional Learning Needs **to ensure better planning of provision.**

Our Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer (EY ALNLO) now holds registers and continues to work closely with health colleagues, attending ISCAN panel meetings to maintain accurate registers.

Early Years Additional Learning Needs

Every Local Authority will have a designated officer known as the 'Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer' (EY ALNLO), who will have responsibility for strategically co-ordinating the Local Authority's functions in relation to children under compulsory school age who are not attending maintained schools.

The role of the EY ALNLO is to work with parents, early years settings, health professionals and others who may be working with children below compulsory school age, to raise awareness of the ALN system and to promote early intervention. The EY ALNLO holds robust and

Page 99

Early Years ALNLO

Promotes early intervention.
Focus on early years.



What does the EYALNLO do?

The EY ALNLO works closely with health visitors as well as many other health professionals and monitor children below the age of 5 to identify ALN at the earliest opportunity. The EY ALNLO also works alongside the Early Years Support Team and the Inclusive Practice Team here in Blaenau Gwent, to provide support and advice as well as signposting of services within a strategic role.

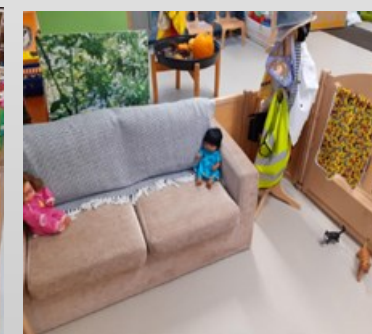
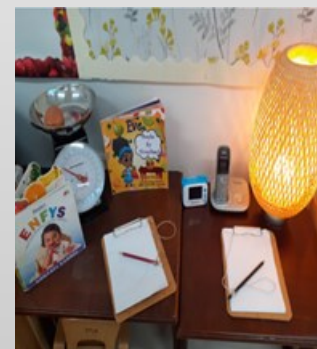
The EYALNLO has responsibility for co-ordinating the local authority's role in relation to children under statutory school age, who are not attending maintained schools. This is applicable to all children until they are of statutory school age – the term after their 5th birthday.

What happens when a learner starts school nursery/reception?

The EY ALNLO will support a learner until they begin school. Once the learner is registered at, and attends a school, responsibility for supporting this learner passes onto the school and the schools Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo).

Additional Learning Needs coordinator (ALNCO)

The school ALNCO is the lead co-ordinator for learners with additional needs. They work in maintained schools, school nurseries, resource bases and special schools.





The ALN Code makes it clear that learners should be able to access provision, in so far as possible, within their locality.

The Local Authority are keeping their Additional Learning Needs provision under review as per the Welsh Government directive. As is similar in most Local Authorities across Wales, and certainly within the South East Wales Consortium family, placements for specialist provision are extremely limited for learners with cognition and learning difficulties in primary settings and secondary is running above capacity. We are already running **over capacity at Primary Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) placements**, and we currently hold a **waiting list of 6 pupils** requiring an ASD placement as determined by Additional Learning Needs Panel.

In order to mitigate the need for out of county placements for ASD learners, **Inclusion and Education Transformation worked together over 22/23 to plan future resource base allocation within the Borough.** This involved an ALN consultation which formed the basis to move forward to a development and implementation stage, with the first being the **development of an ASD base at the Tredegar Comprehensive site, which opened September 23** with an investment of **approximately £200k**.



Page 100

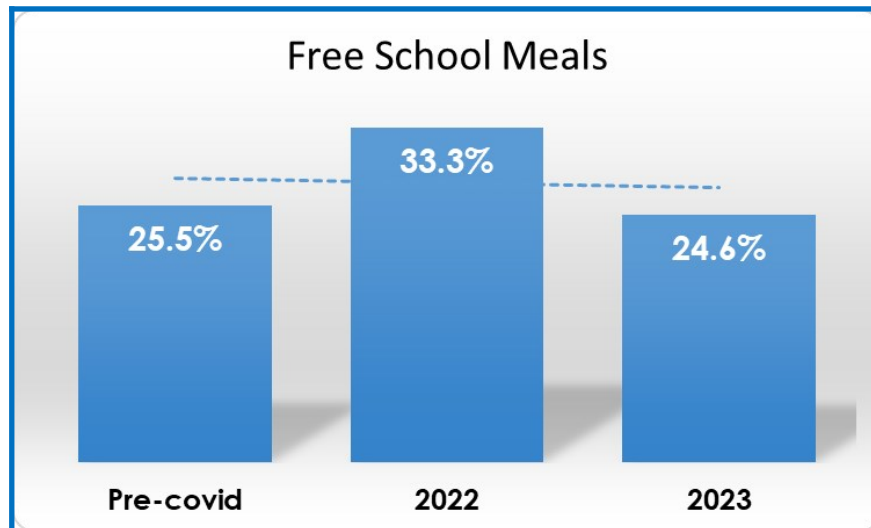


There are further plans in place to extend capacity in primary settings for 24/25 with 2 schools earmarked for ASD bases, one of which is Welsh medium. This should mitigate the need for seeking out alternative options for the learners on waiting lists for specialist ASD provision. Further information regarding the plans to increase capacity is available via the ALN Consultation. [RIGHT CLICK HERE AND OPEN HYPERLINK](#)





In terms of transition panel for year 6 – 7, last year the Local Authority considered 33 children for a more specialist placement for secondary. By December 2023 the team will be aware of figures for entry Sept 24 and those learners will be presented at panel for consideration.



Current data suggests that eFSM figures have gone down, however a robust check is currently being undertaken to ensure figures are accurate.

A resource base review was carried out in the autumn/spring terms and recommendations for inclusion were made and shared with all resource base placements. We are aware that across Blaenau Gwent there is a variation in inclusion to mainstream time for learners and thinking ahead, and in order to move a learner on back in to mainstream, there needs to be promotion of inclusion. We are, for example, aware of in excess of 10 learners in Penycwm Special School that would potentially be able to move across to a resource base; however, places in those resource bases appear to be currently stagnant and there is work needing to be done to support integration with mainstream peers.

Of all the Welsh local authorities, **child poverty rates are highest in Blaenau Gwent (30.3%) and Ceredigion (30%).** <https://www.business-live.co.uk/economic-development/new-data-reveals-extent-child-27044774> It is also reported that **children from larger families are significantly more likely to live in poverty.** The current Child Poverty Strategy for Wales has been in place since 2015.

A “Draft Child Poverty Strategy for Wales 2023: Integrated impact assessment”



has been published by Welsh Government to help alleviate the situation. Right click here to view the strategy





Accessibility and Poverty -

Over the summer 2023, young people were consulted on what is needed in each area and since September, Youth Service teams have implemented new provision in each area covering Abertillery, Brynmawr, Cwm, Ebbw Vale and Tredegar. The Youth Service's Detached Team works across all areas going to where young people are at – town centres, shop fronts, parks, bus stops and other areas where young people are meeting and gathering. By delivering a mix of both



detached and centre based work the Youth Service provides opportunities for young people to access within a variety of settings. Most the Youth Service's open access activities and opportunities are provided outside of school hours either during the evening, weekends or school holidays to ensure they are accessible when young people need to access them.

The ethos within the Youth Service is to assume that all young people may need financial support, to avoid stigmatising any individuals. Therefore, all opportunities are provided free and where possible transport is provided. Where activities maybe more than an a few hours, refreshments and food is provided to all young people so that those who would not normally be able to provide this for themselves are not 'singled out'.



We provide Free Activities and youth club access



We provide Free facility hire at sports centres (sports pitches)



Free gym memberships



Monthly free movie screenings at Brynmawr Cinema



Free sanitary products available – part of the period poverty/equity approach



Free hygiene products available such as toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap and deodorants



Free clothes washing and drying facilities at both youth centres



Fresh new bedding/sleeping bags/cooking equipment available for those who need it



Prom outfits/Interview clothes/General clothing



Equipment/resources for college/school/training/employment





Youth Service Activities include providing a full summer and winter programme during school term and school holidays, supported by the Welsh Government Youth Support Grant.

The full summer programme of activities had themed days and were mixed with both positive activities, health and well-being and new experiences.

Page 103

At the start of the summer period **over 250 young people attended the Open 4 youth event** at Ebbw Vale Sports centre.

Over **400 young people participated in the full summer programme.** To make the booking process fair and accessible for all young people there was an electronic booking process. This was promoted via our social media channels.

Food was provided to any young people that may need it on activities during the school holidays



Through the development of the Service's digital platforms (social media and website) young people can access information and support without the need to physically attend at a time that suits them. By providing a digital presence, the Youth Service has become more accessible to a wider audience of young people.



As of September 22 a transition process commenced whereby the duties for Post 16 Additional Learning Needs became the local authority responsibility.

Arrangements are currently in place for the transfer of Welsh Government (WG) post 16 funding to local authorities until the end of implementation when WG will transfer a mean amount of funding via the LEAG for post 16. At this current time we must use the funding only for registered Independent Specialist Provision (ISPI); however, then we will be able to utilise these funds as we wish for Post 16 following the end of implementation.

This year (Sept 23 entry) there were 2 applications for Independent Special Post-16 Institutions ISPI from Year 11 learners where the local Further Education college had indicated they could not meet the need.

COLLABORATION - The Early Years ALN Lead Officer has close links with the ALN Teams both in the education and social services directorates; the focus is learners pre statutory school age, those with emerging needs and those who may be identified as ALN.

During academic year 22/23 there were no learners who were identified as requiring an IDP in the Early Years settings (An IDP is a document for children and young people with additional learning needs which helps teaching staff to plan for your child, teach them, and review their progress.)

This academic year there has been extensive work with Early Years team in Social Services, which has included forging relationships with the Local Authority team and also the early years settings.

There were **21 referrals to Early Years panel** during the summer term of 2023 in readiness for learners **commencing nursery in September 23**; these referrals were specifically following Education Psychology assessments for two terms of Rising 3 funding for schools.

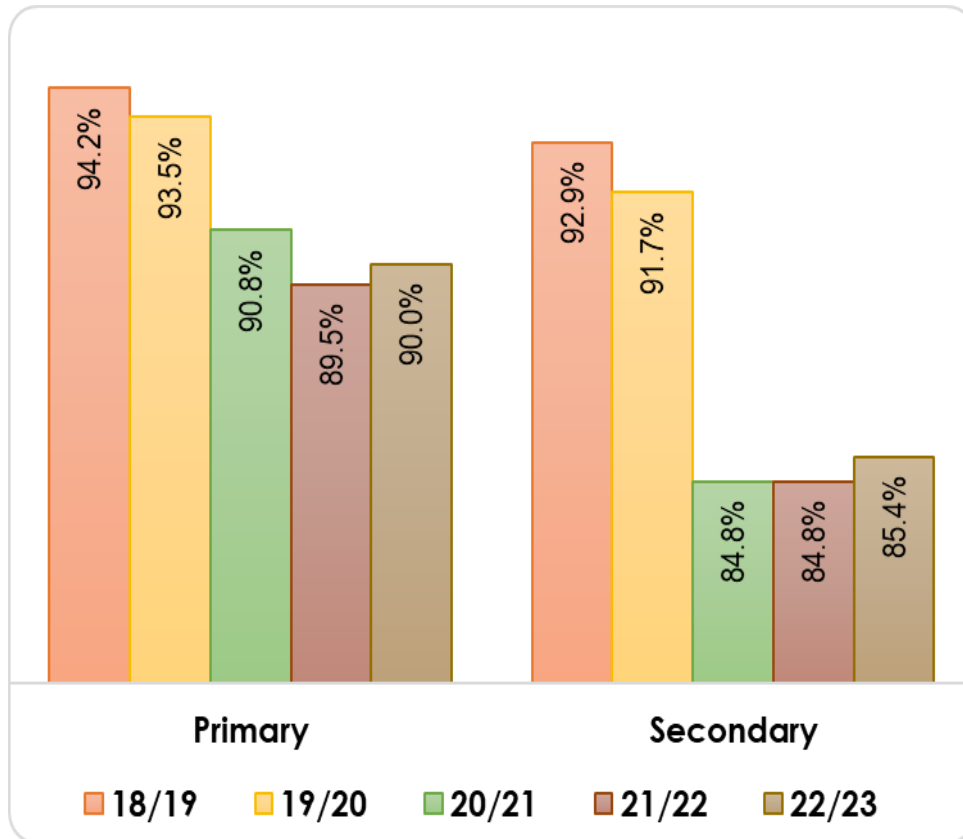
Moving forward into the new academic year of 23/24 Early Years panels will become part of the ALN statutory panel.



Joint meetings between Head teachers, senior Education Welfare Officer and Youth Service Manager have taken place with secondary schools to support improving attendance and reducing exclusions. Further analysis will take place in order to identify the reason for decline and put mitigating actions in place.



School Attendance



Attendance/exclusions are still following the National trend although the downward trend for attendance in Blaenau Gwent seems to have settled.

Education Minister Jeremy Miles said he would establish a National Attendance Taskforce which would "look in depth" into the reasons behind non-attendance, along with the publication of new "engagement and attendance guidance".

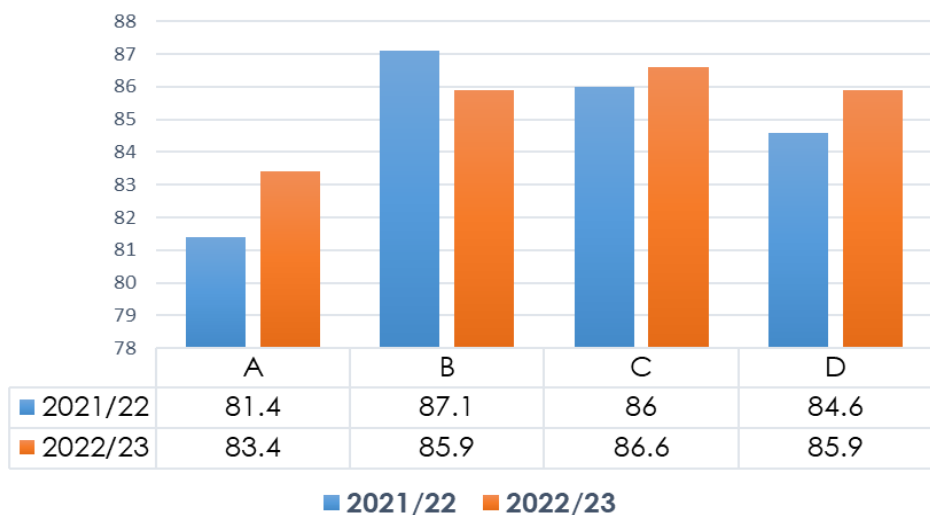
In a written statement, he said: "There are often complex and multiple factors lying behind non-attendance. These could include mental health and wellbeing, availability of specific learning support services, and the ever-rising cost of living and attitudes of parents and learners towards school attendance generally. As such a priority of the group will be to look in depth into the reasons behind non-attendance and bring to bear their expertise to identify actions that can bring about sustained improvements."

Taken from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-66933229> date 27 September 2023

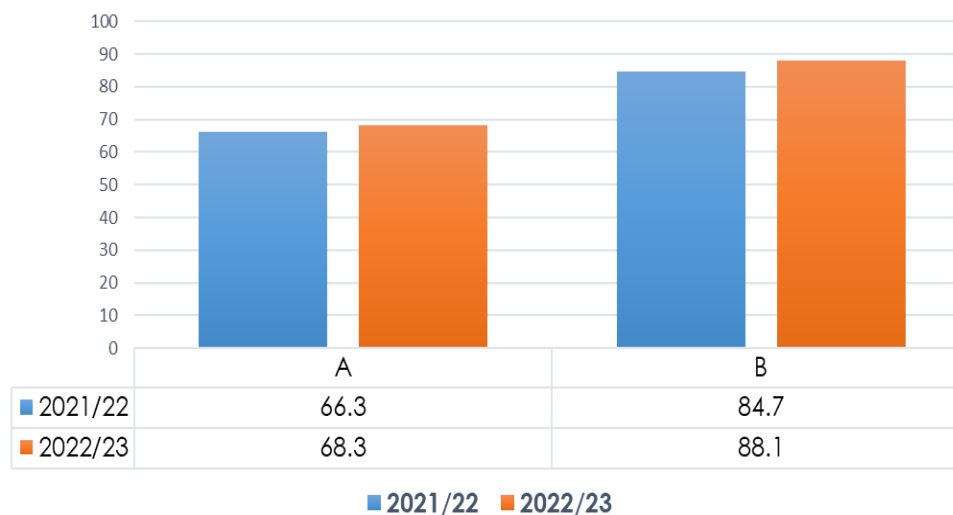




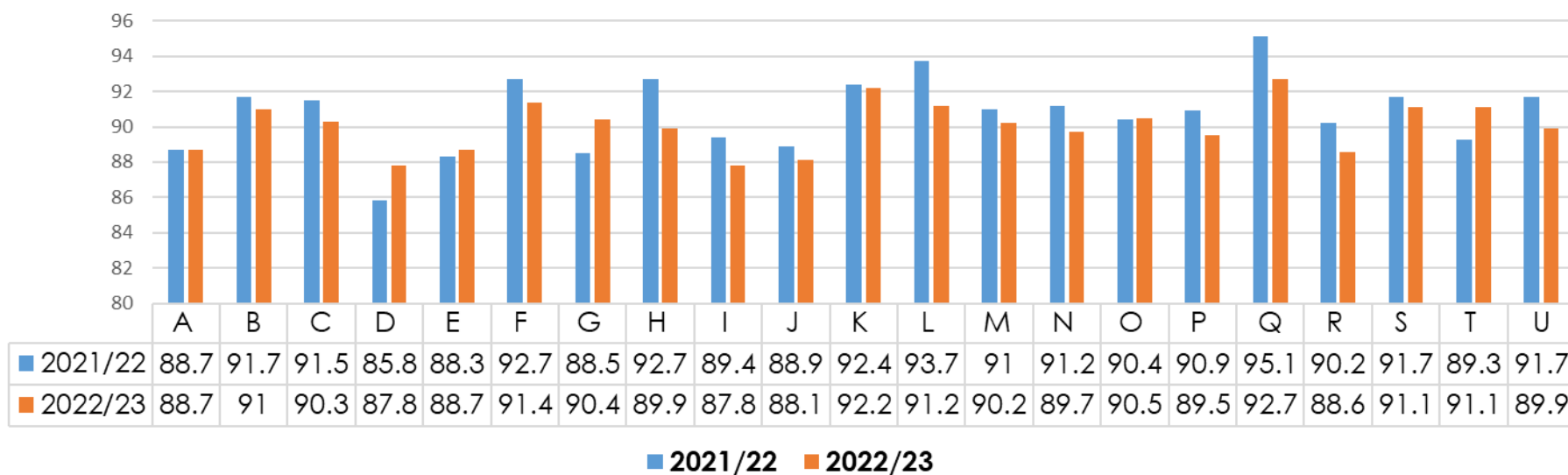
Secondary Attendance Data W/E 21st July 2023



Special School Attendance Data W/E 21st July 2023



Primary Attendance Data W/E 21st July 2023



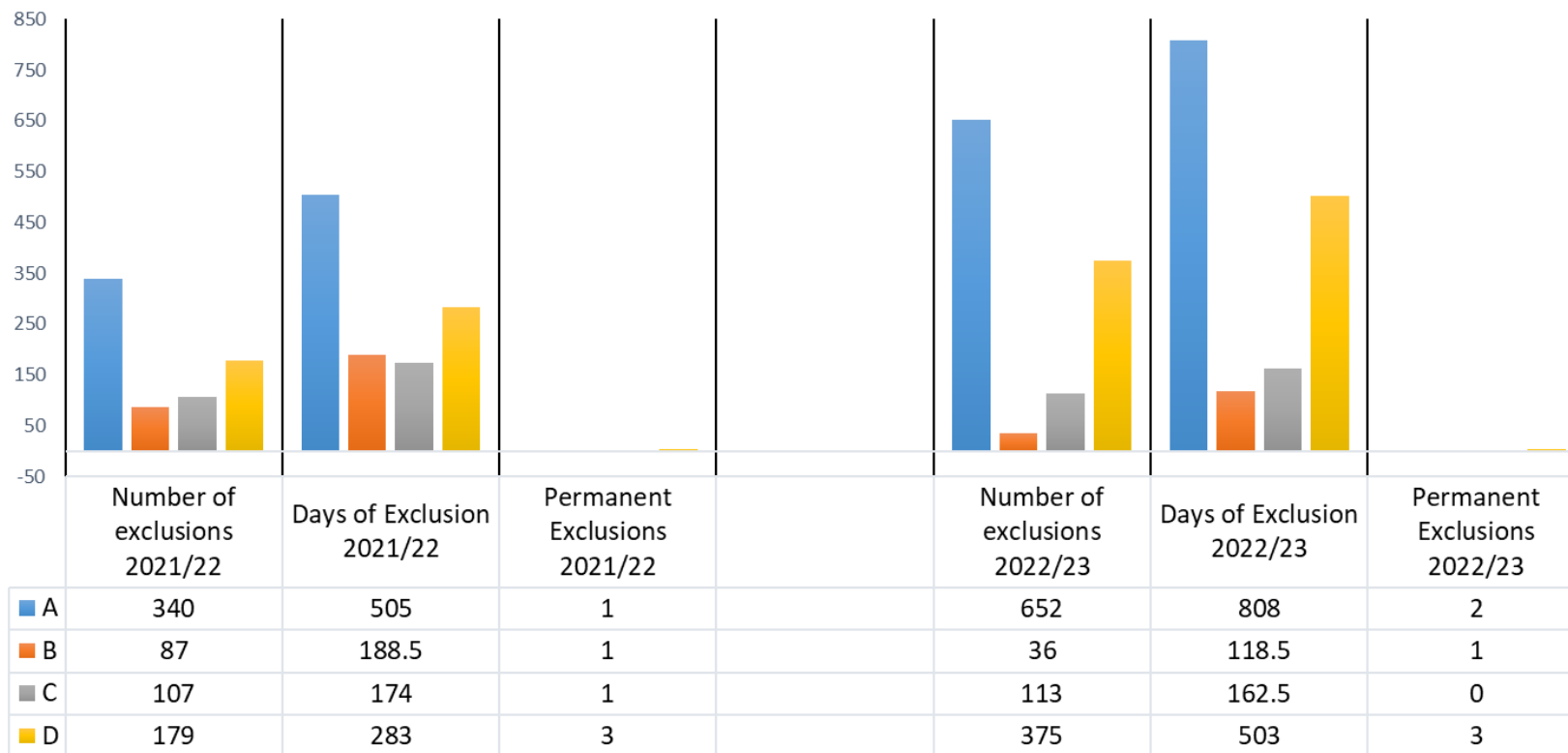


Historically in **Blaenau Gwent, exclusions** have been represented by high numbers and this had started to reduce slightly; however, we are now experiencing an **increase in exclusions** related to an increase in **adverse behaviours in school**. With the introduction of the Vulnerable learner Panel (VLP) this year, the Local Authority has been able to support learners that have been at risk of permanent exclusion and support schools in reducing this category of exclusion. However, the Local Authority is seeing a significant increase in referrals to VLP and we need to be mindful that there is only limited provision and funding available.

The exclusion data detailed over the next few pages shows the comparison of data during the 2022/23 academic year compared to the 2021/22 academic year.

During the academic year 22/23 there were a **total of 1176 exclusions in our Secondary school estate compared to 713 in the previous year** of 21/22.

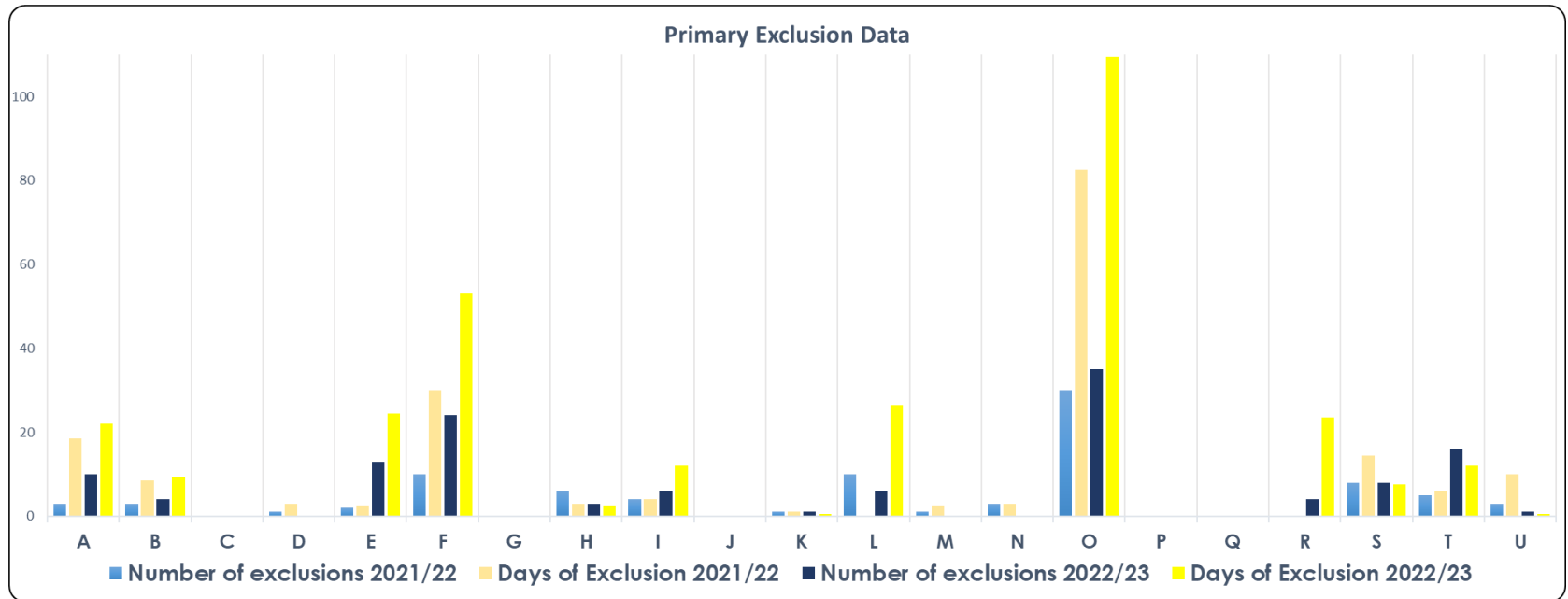
Secondary Exclusion Data



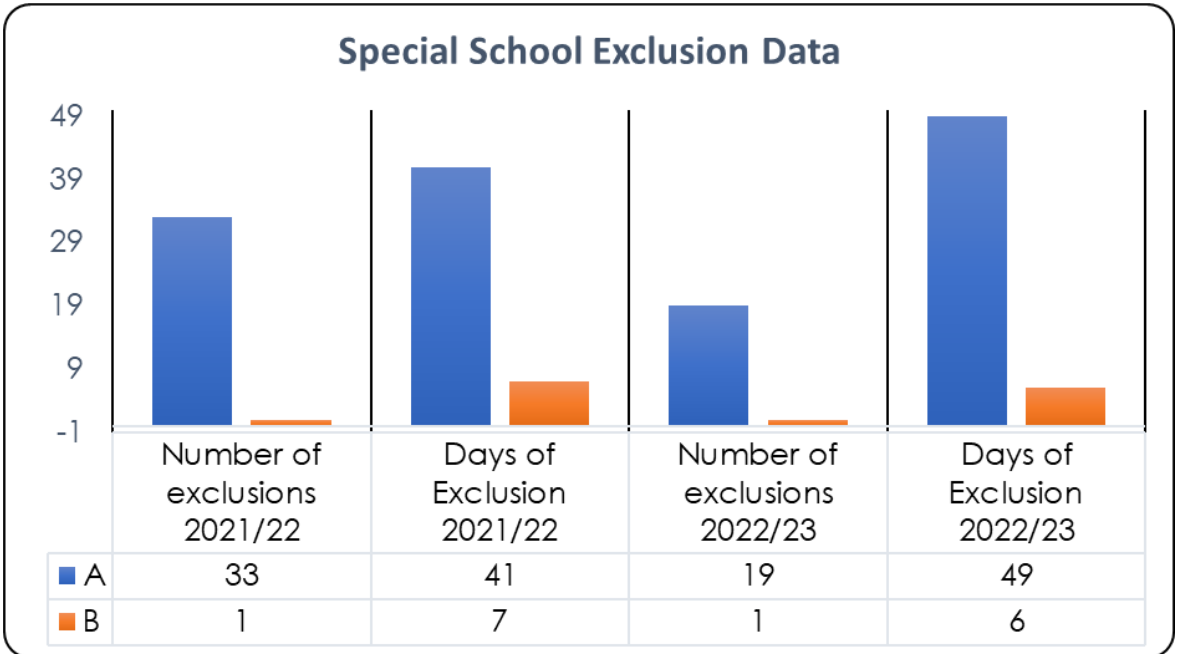


During the academic year 22/23 there were a **total of 131 exclusions overall throughout our primary school estate compared to 90 in the previous year of 21/22.**

There were no permanent primary school exclusions this year.



Although figures show that **exclusions from the 2 special schools have decreased** on the previous year, **the days lost are increased.** There were no permanent special school exclusions this year.





The summary table below details the overall increase / decrease of exclusion numbers, number of days of exclusion and permanent exclusions across our education settings from 2022/23 academic year compared to the previous academic year 2021/22.

Overall it is not showing a positive picture with an **increase of 490 pupil exclusions across the school estate** compared to last academic year and an **increase of 561 days lost to exclusion**. The number of Permanent exclusions during 2022/23 academic year is again 6 pupils.



Secondary	Number of Exclusions has increased by 463	The number of days of exclusion has increased by 441.5	The number of permanent exclusions has remained the same at 6
Primary	Number of Exclusions has increased by 41	The number of days of exclusion has increased by 114.5	The number of permanent exclusions has remained the same at 0
Special Schools	Number of exclusions has Reduced by 14	The number of days of exclusion has increased by 5	The number of permanent exclusions has remained the same at 0
Total increase compared to last academic year	490	561	0



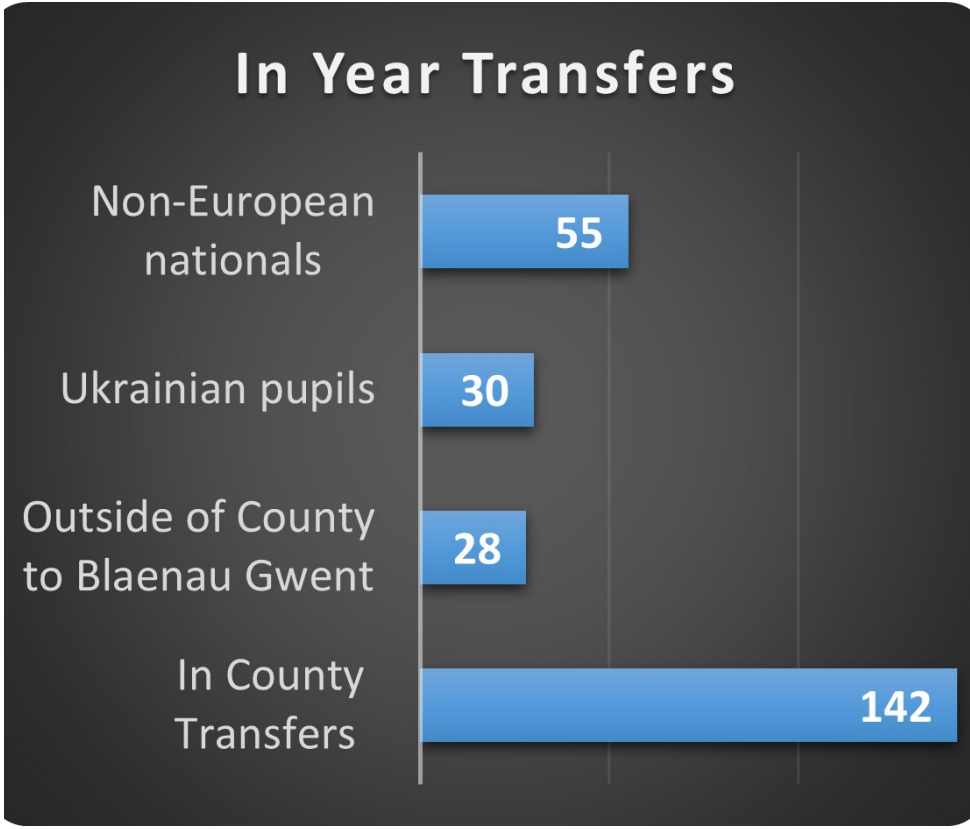
There is merit in looking at what the schools and Local Authority currently provide in terms of alternative curriculum and exploring if there is a more appropriate way of working.



All **admission rounds** were **completed** for 2022/23 academic year with **100% of first preferences being met** for both **nursery and secondary place allocation** and **99% of first preferences were met** for the **reception year group**. This is attributable to the **effective monitoring and management** of school capacities and pupil places along with the continued achievement of **surplus place reduction**.

Page 110

There have been **255 In Year Transfers** between **September 2022 and July 2023** **33% of which were due to inward migration** from foreign nationals moving **into Blaenau Gwent**. **100%** of these transfers were **processed within 15 days**



Two admission appeals were held for the **reception admission round** during the **summer** period. **Both** appeals were **upheld in favour of the admissions authority** due to them being **class size appeals**.



Options for further **engagement and promotion** is being explored to **increase the number of in-time applications** for reception and secondary school.



INTEGRATION / COLLABORATION - Strategic links with key partners such as the EAS, Coleg Gwent, Schools, WBL providers continue to be effective, ensuring that Blaenau Gwent is well placed to continue with the transformation of the Education service and supporting our children and young people.





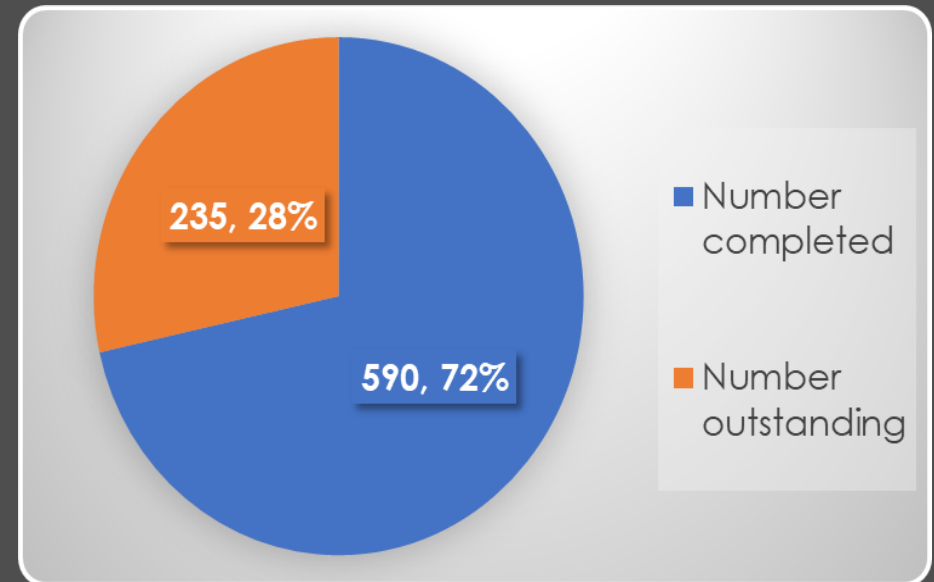
This year the Council received a Welsh Government **Schools Capital Maintenance Grant**, which alongside minor works has resulted in capital investment of **approximately £900,000 in the school estate** to date.

12 projects were completed during the summer holidays, these included full replacement of a toilet block in a secondary school, 8 classrooms refurb, full refurb of a nursery demountable building, creation of a Learning Resource Base (kitchen, office, toilets 3 classrooms) in a former unused building and refurb of 3 rooms in Bedwellty House to create a temporary seedling provision for the new Welsh primary.

825 TE100's (requests for maintenance, repair and planned works) were received between September 2022 and August 2023, **100%** of which were acknowledged and **received a response within the specified timeframe.**

72% (590) of the 825 TE100 requests have been completed with remaining 28% scheduled for completion within the 2023/24 academic year. Delays to resolution have been due to the following factors:-

- Budgetary issues in line with identified costs;
- Market forces including material availability;
- Access to school buildings;
- Securing contractors to undertake the work; and
- The capacity of Technical Services to assess the extent of repair/ maintenance work and associated costs.





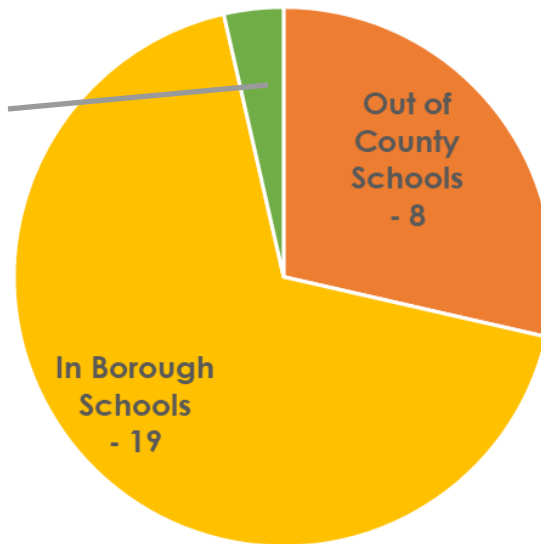
INTEGRATION - An effective internal partnership between the Education Directorate and the Build Environment, Environment and Regeneration continues, leading to the delivery of an efficient home to school / college transport provision.



We procure and monitor 28 operators providing transport for over 78 contracts. This includes mainstream, Welsh-medium, faith education and specialist provision for ALN.

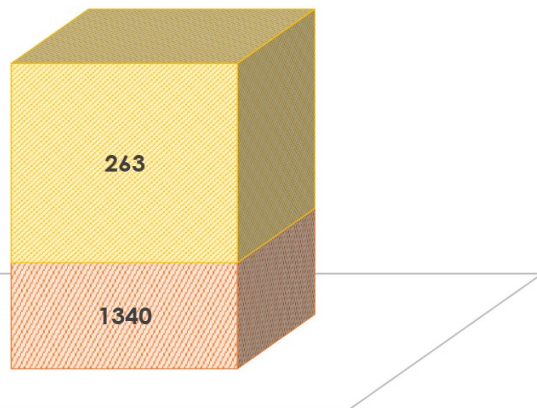
We transport to:

Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone and Post 16 Provision - 1



Over 1600 school pupils use Home to School transport:

Legend: Mainstream Pupils (orange), ALN Pupils (yellow)



We provide support for over 550 Post 16 students living in Blaenau Gwent, they are provided with a discounted bus ticket or travel grant. Applications for this academic year are still being processed.

The transport policy seeks to ensure that there is an appropriate framework to aid delivery of the services. The **Home to School Transport budget out-turn position for 2022/23 was £2.7m** (after the use of £450,000 of funding from reserves) against a budget of £2.2m.

For **2023/24** the **Home to School Transport budget is approximately £3.3m**, this is following the award of a **£682,000 cost pressure in the budget setting process in relation to the uplift in contract prices awarded to contractors as a result of the fuel crisis**. The Council received a number of requests from operators for an increase in the historical contractual rates as a result of the fuel crisis. This was agreed to ensure continuity of the home to school transport service.



The ICT Infrastructure and Connectivity Project

- The Local Authority has again made strong progress in line with its strategy for improving standards in ICT. This has involved continued progression of the Infrastructure and Connectivity Project, implementation of Waves 1-4 of the Welsh Government HWB EdTech Programme and work towards the development of a strategy and associated sustainability plan for both infrastructure and devices in Blaenau Gwent.

Estyn & Welsh Government Thematic Review

A recent ICT thematic review was undertaken by Estyn and Welsh Government which provided the council with suggestions to improve practice and enhance outcomes for learners in the LA. The review is based around 4 key areas:

1. Education Digital Standards
2. Quality and impact of online provision for schools
3. Hwb Approach and Other platforms
4. Digital Resilience

Overall the review was positive, highlighting the active work that the Education team have undertaken thus far. There were three recommendations identified:

- Blaenau Gwent to work with schools to re-focus on utilising 360 Safe Cymru tool.
- Provide finalised Digital Strategy to WG once consultation is completed.
- WG to support Blaenau Gwent with planned Hwb email migration and further Hwb adoption across the LA.

The 360 Safe Cymru tool forms part of the council's Education ICT strategy. There are Bi-monthly ICT strategy meetings due to restart in the Autumn-term 2023 where this recommendation will be added to the agenda and discussed in depth .

The ICT strategy is currently in draft format and the consultation has concluded. There were no further comments received from the consultation, however, Education have been liaising with the Digital Team to ensure the strategy aligns with the corporate ICT strategy. The final draft is to be reviewed in the Autumn-term 2023 for final sign off.

Education will collaborate with the Digital team and SRS to consider the Hwb Migration in the Autumn 2023 term

The **Educational Digital Standards** are designed to assist schools to understand, manage and implement their digital environment. The Standards also provide guidance on how schools should future-proof their digital environment to meet the needs of a more digitally focused school curriculum. The standards suggest all infrastructure work undertaken to meet the standards should be carefully considered, planned and procured in compliance with national procurement regulations and installed by professional organisations.



A corporate ICT strategy has been devised by the Digital team, and Education has worked with the team to ensure the Education strategy aligns with the corporate strategy

'To secure continued development ensuring that all learners regardless of age or demographic have continued safe access to a blend of digital resources, hardware and cloud-based learning throughout the course of their education.'



- Infrastructure and Connectivity
- Digital Inclusion
- Device Sustainability
- Migration to and use of Hwb
- Digital tools and resources
- Training and Development
- Online Safety
- Support for Schools
- Education Management and support systems
- Blaenau Gwent corporate approach and overview

Page 114

There are 9 priority areas identified within the strategy. These areas have been focused on heavily over the past 2 years, we will continue to progress these in line with the Digital competency framework.





Through a partnership approach the Youth Engagement and Progression Team continue to support young people to prevent youth homelessness and to support emotional wellbeing.

Youth Service

The Youth Service provides a number of high quality projects providing young people with personal support, advice, guidance, advocacy and counselling services in school and community settings - this is supported by a well-developed workforce.

The team has continued to support individuals on a one-to-one basis, along with running groups and community projects.

**During the last academic year,
25 young people were supported
on a one-to-one basis.**

These young people are often in precarious housing situations, and support is based around navigating appropriate information, advice and guidance from other services to help provide some stability and to enable them to improve their housing situation.

**Groups continue to be facilitated with young people in alternative school settings accessing opportunities and provision.
This includes a group linked to having difficulties in a mainstream setting (and a group at the SEBD provision), in total 38 young people have engaged.**

This has continued to develop, with ongoing relationships with partners growing and understanding of routes and support available locally expanding, overall becoming more efficient and effective.



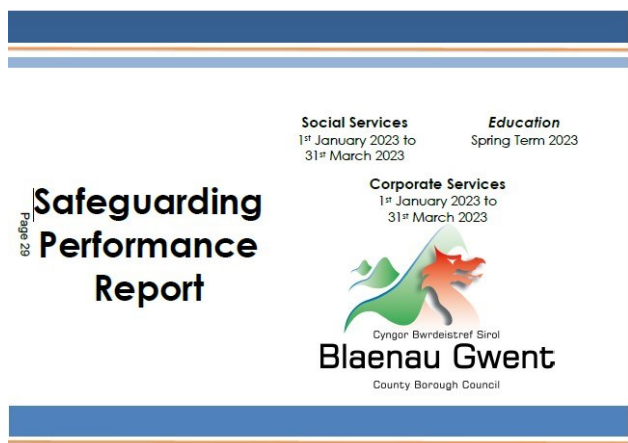


Safeguarding processes are well established in the Youth Service and are fit for purpose. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place, with robust records kept on all safeguarding matters including Duty to Report (DTRs) Referrals to Social Services, feedback and staff training. Termly meetings are held between the Youth Service and the Safeguarding in Education Officer, and any areas of concern outside of child protection are escalated through this process. All Youth Service staff have received training in Prevent and actively use this understanding to identify any concerns in youth settings. Staff are giving regular opportunities to attend other training to identify, support and report safeguarding issues which include child exploitation, domestic abuse, emotional wellbeing support.



Safeguarding is a corporate responsibility and is an important aspect of the Education Directorates service delivery.

Between September 2022 and August 2023, **44 referrals (DTRs)** were made to Social Services and more detail relating to these are included in the Joint Safeguarding Report.



Right click here and open hyperlink to view our most recent Safeguarding Performance Report



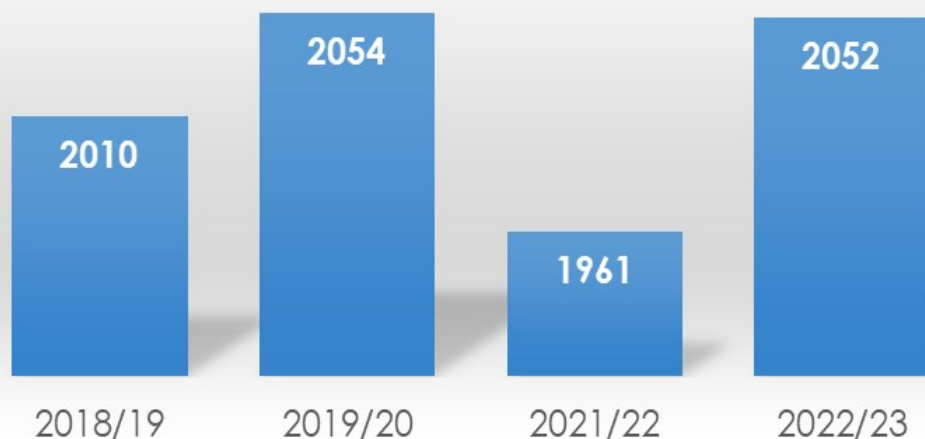
The Youth Service operates a Safeguarding Policy and Procedure which sits underneath The Corporate Safeguarding Policy and Education Directorate Local Government Education Services Safeguarding Policy and includes the procedure for Youth Workers who work out of hours and the procedure for Safeguarding Adults at Risk.

All youth service staff, students, counsellors, therapists and volunteers receive **safeguarding training**. Depending on the role, staff also attend additional training in specific areas such as child exploitation, substance misuse and Prevent to ensure **effective identification and reporting** of safeguarding concerns.





Number of 11-25 year olds supported by the Youth Service

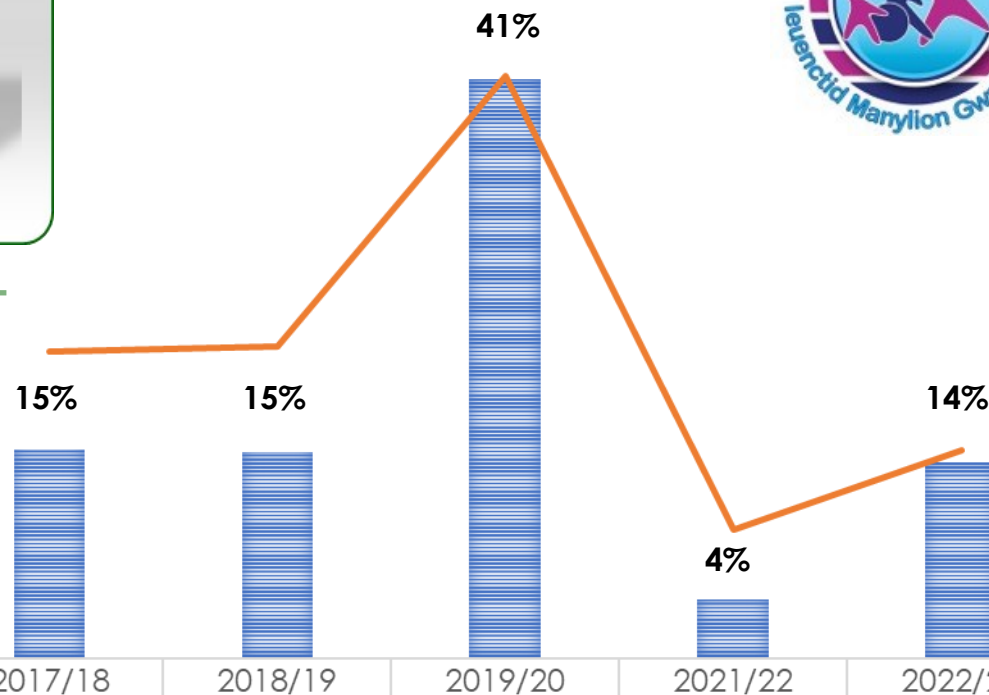


The **number of 11-25 year olds supported by the Youth Service** during 2022/23 is 2052 (Reach of 19%). The reach is 2% higher than the 2021/2022 data and shows that the reach has almost returned to pre-pandemic levels.



Page 117

Out of the 2,052 11-25 year olds supported by the Youth Service above, **14% (287 young people) have gained 340 nationally recognised qualifications.** Any achievements are made voluntarily and completed during the young people's spare time.

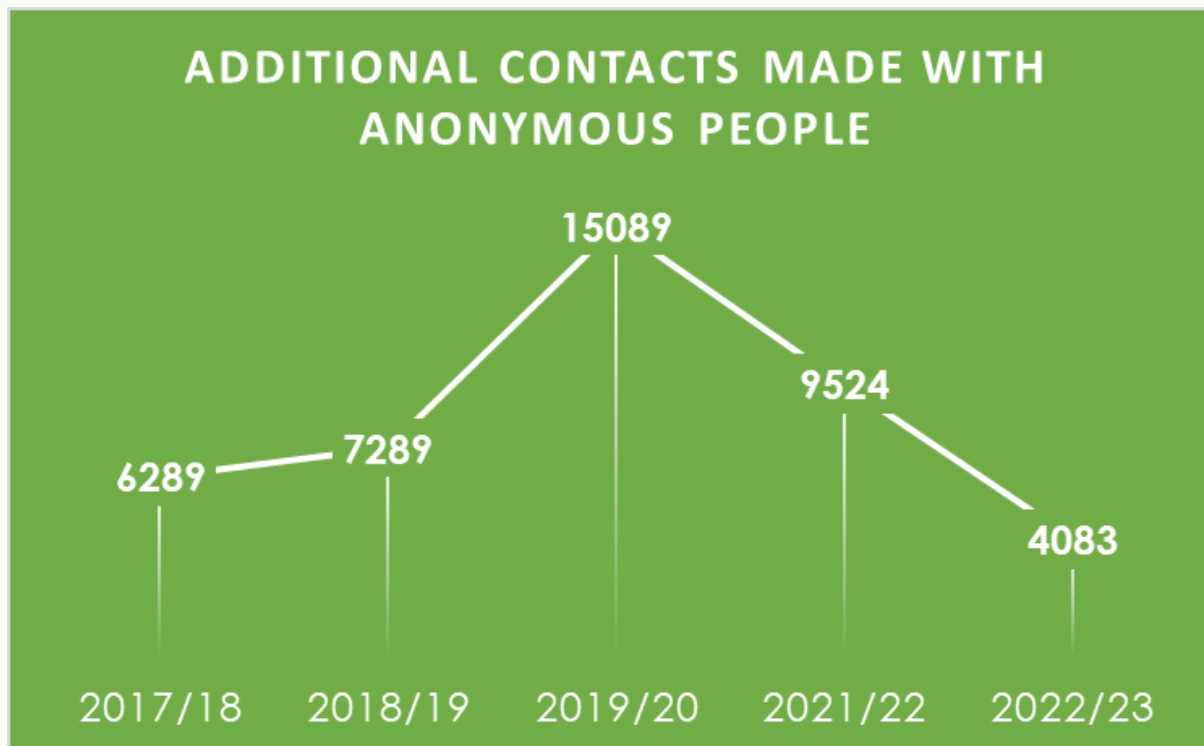


	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2021/22	2022/23
Number of young people supported (11-25) that gained accredited qualifications	306	301	847	86	287
Number of qualifications achieved	448	456	851	188	304



The number of additional contacts made with anonymous young people (not registered with the service)

through the 11-25 Counselling Service, detached youth work, outreach and out of school activities and events with some online activities offered.



(one contact is between 1-3 hours long)



Prevention - The service is led by the needs and interests of young people, and as we returned to face to face delivery accreditations were not the focus of the work, as needs being presented by young people have been mostly around **emotional well-being** where different approaches have been needed. Dependent on the project, the outcomes for each programme are now measured on participation, improved wellbeing as well as improvement in either school attendance or behaviour, rather than accreditations. Despite this a significant number of young people still undertook an accreditation .





Over the last year, both core and external funding has been secured to continue a variety of projects to meet identified needs which include :

- SPF 11-25 Youth and Community programmes;
- Youth Homelessness;
- Mental Health and Wellbeing;
- Duke of Edinburgh;
- Detached and Outreach Youth Workers;
- Positive Futures (ASB programmes);
- Open for Youth Nights;
- Youth Clubs;
- Youth Information Service;
- Young Ambassadors (YAMs);
- the 11-25 Counselling Service;
- the Young Reps Volunteering Programme; and
- the school holiday programme.



Funding was secured via the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) from 1st April 2023 until 31st March 2025 to continue the successful delivery of both Inspire 2 Achieve and Inspire 2 Work. The SPF programme has been planned and developed based upon learning from Inspire and youth workers within the SPF project continue to support young people aged 11-25 who are at risk of becoming or are NEET.

The programme will again support young people within learning settings and in the community. The programme aims to support 900 young people within its duration and key outcomes include development of life skills, employability skills, achieving additional qualifications and transition into further education, training or employment.

Partnership working will remain and continue as a key function of the programme in both 11-16 and 16-25 support pathways, ensuring young people receive the appropriate access to a wide of support without duplication.

Ysbrydoli  Gyflawni
Inspire  Achieve



Inspire  Work
Ysbrydoli  Weithio



Ensure effective corporate leadership of Education Services



The Council's Workforce Strategy 2022-26 aims to build on existing good practice and is 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.**

The Directorate recognises the critical need to communicate and engage staff in service delivery, transformation, change, new commercial thinking and financial efficiency. This is currently undertaken through a number of methods: • Regular one to one performance coaching • Annual performance review • Team meetings • Staff meetings • Management team meetings • Staff Surveys • Engagement in financial planning

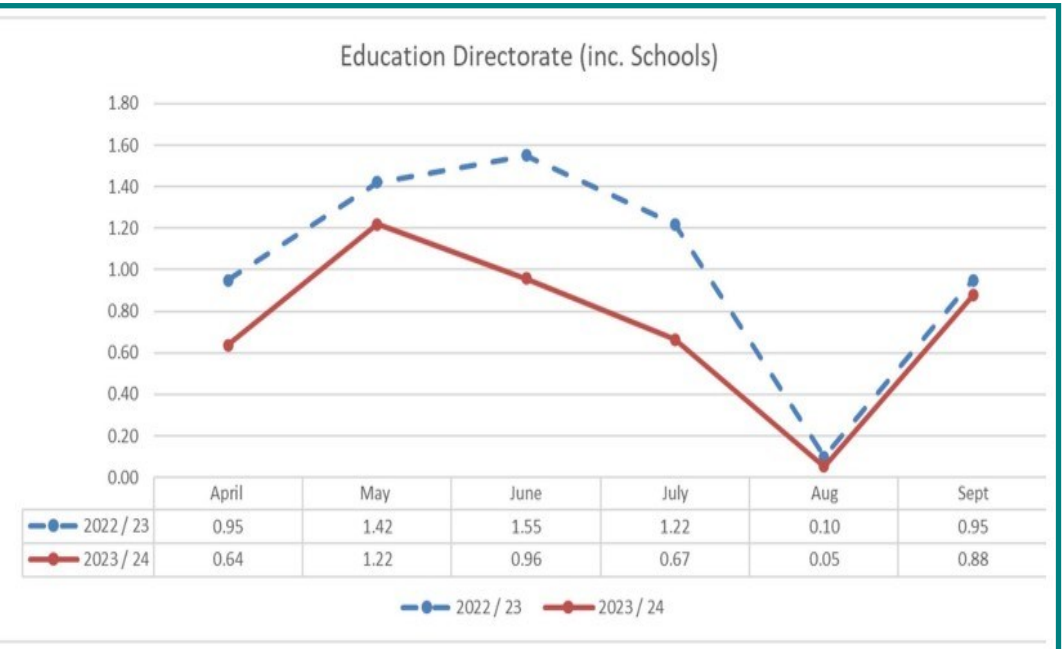
Close work with Organisational Development continues and includes monitoring of staff attendance rates.

	Quarter 1 (Cumulative) 2022/23	Quarter 2 (Cumulative) 2022/23	Quarter 2 - 22/23 Target	Quarter 1 (Cumulative) 2023/24	Quarter 2 (Cumulative) 2023/24	Quarter 2 - 23/24 Target	Trend
Education Directorate							
Education Transformation and Business Change	0.60	9.40	2.75	3.56	4.20	3.5	Improvement but over target
School Improvement & Inclusion	0.25	0.47	2.75	0.49	2.32	3.5	Decline but within target
Young People and Partnerships.	2.46	2.46	2.75	0.82	0.78	3.5	Improvement and within target
Senior Management	0.00	0.00	2.75	26.09	40.50	3	Decline and over target
School Based Staff (excluding Teachers)	4.98	7.87	4.25	3.28	5.18	6	Improvement and within target
Teachers	3.29	4.90	4.25	2.53	3.73	6	Improvement and within target



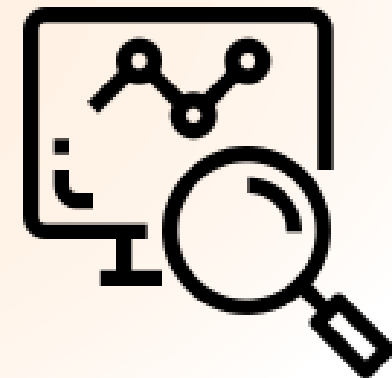
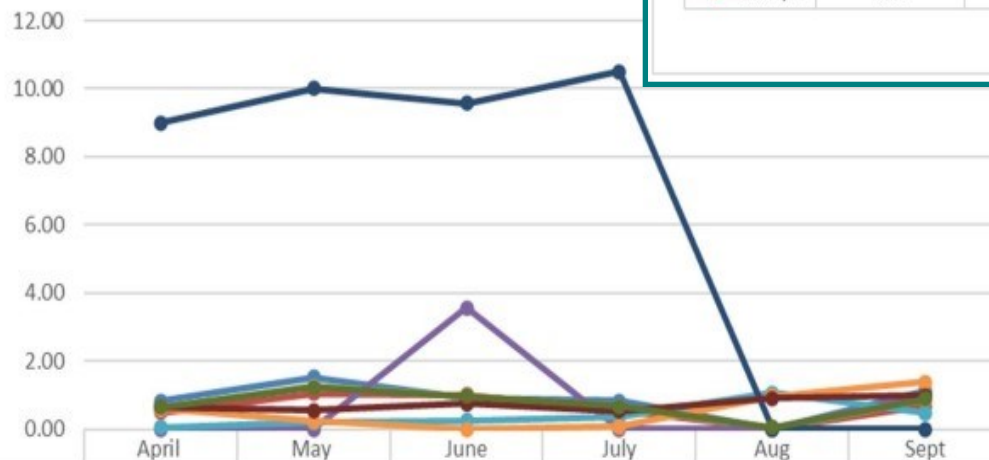
Ensure effective corporate leadership of Education Services

Education staff absence rates - Two year comparison



April - September 2023/24 Sickness Breakdown

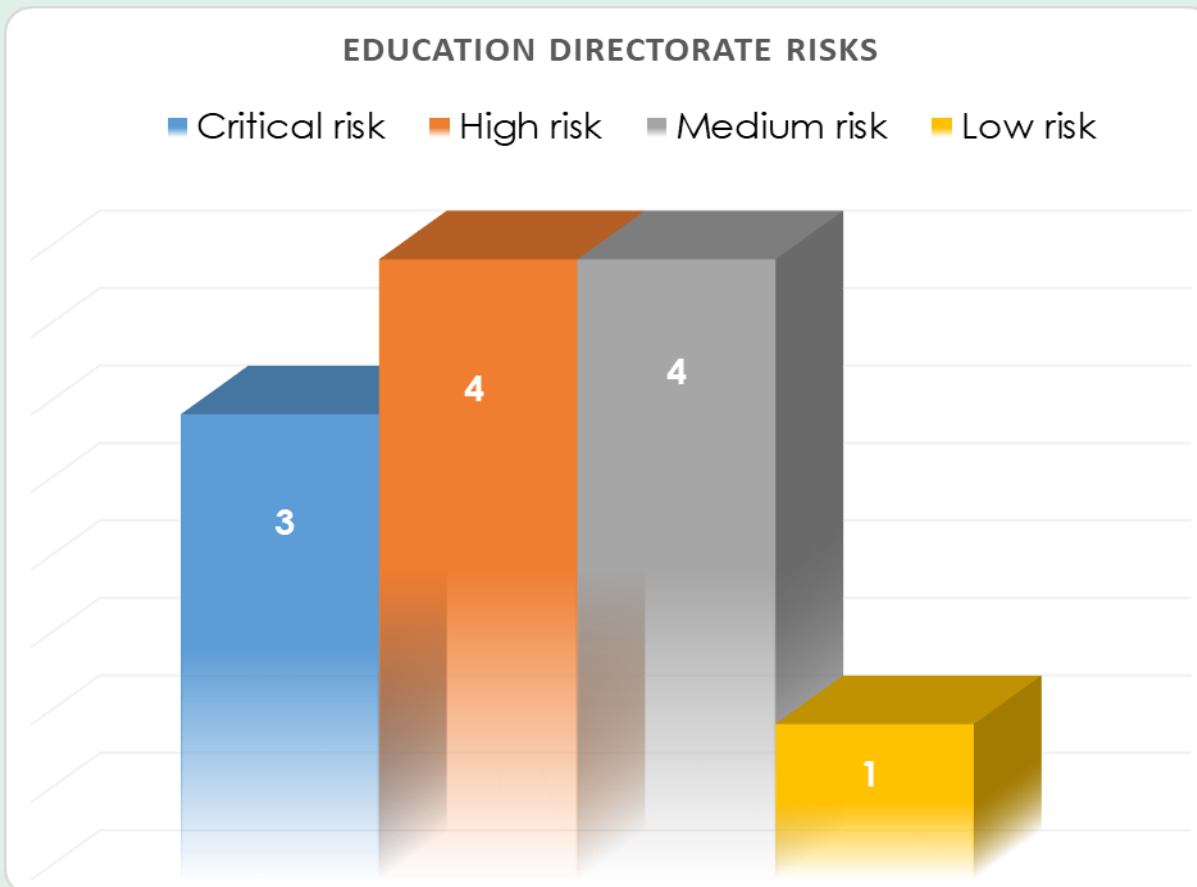
Education Directorate (inc. Schools)





In line with the Council’s Risk Management Strategy Department Leadership Team review and challenge the risks on the Directorate Risk Register on a quarterly basis. As part of this process, they will consider new risks for inclusion on to the Directorate Risk Register and consider risks for escalation to the Corporate Risk Register.

The Education Directorate Risk Register has 12 risks, with 3 having a critical residual status, 4 having a high residual risk status, 4 being medium status and the remaining one being of low status. Mitigating actions are in place for all risks and the critical risks are detailed below



- **Failure to support schools in improving pupil outcomes and wellbeing.**
- **Free School Meal (FSM) figures reported to Welsh Government have included pupils who are entitled to a FSM based on transitional protection**
- **Budget concerns**



Ensure effective corporate leadership of Education Services



Proposals have been shared with schools in terms of Rising 3 funding becoming a lump sum of funding shared among all schools to align with the Additional Learning Needs agenda for inclusion and to provide equity among schools in being able to build capacity to meet the needs of all learners. Discussions are



The education directorates aim is to work towards developing a robust **strategic plan for partnership working** which enables opportunities for children, young people and the wider community to be maximised. This plan will ensure communication between different service areas and partners is effective , with partnership working leading to improved services and value for money. Partners know the Education Directorate's vision and strategic aims and they provide services which positively build on these.



Engagement with Members -

Aside from the work programmes for Scrutiny, Cabinet and Council, the Education Directorate also regularly engages with Elected Members to inform Members of key areas of the Directorate to enhance their learning and understanding.



At this stage the Local Authority has not yet received any monitoring forms, which schools are requested to return to demonstrate how the funding has been used and the impact. We are not able to evidence whether this funding has had any positive impact.



Directorate Priority Review - A full Business Plan review has been undertaken within the period in line with a review of each service area under the Education Directorate. This has led to new Business Plans being created based on this review, Estyn recommendations (detailed on page 12) and Corporate priorities.

We continue to develop a clear vision for all teams based on the newly formed vision for the Education Directorate. The plan needs to be supported by clear timelines, related actions and measurable success criteria.

Professional Learning reviews are completed, particularly with a focus on ALN to support equity & Inclusion.



Improvement planning is based on sharing of key data across service areas and wider stakeholders.



Need to build on the audit of our professional learning across service areas to promote the best opportunities for our children and young people.

A **Review of what commissioned services** sit within the Education Directorate has been undertaken and these include:-



- GEMS - Gwent Education Minority-ethnic Service
- SENCOM - Sensory and Communication Support Service
- YOS – Youth Offending Service
- IPS - Inclusive Practice Service
- SNAP Cymru
- EAS - Education Achievement Service



Regular contact has been maintained between the Local Authority and these commissioned services, with a clear vision shared for engagement and measurable, purposeful success criteria aligned to our bespoke priorities for our learners and schools in place.



A system for reviewing the current governance arrangements of each of these commissioned services has been created in preparation for review in quarter 3.





People, Partnerships and Engagement

The Education Directorate is committed to providing high quality services to its citizens and uses various engagement methodologies to understand if the service is making the intended outcomes or if amendments to service delivery need to be considered. Throughout the period a variety of engagement events have taken place and some of these are demonstrated by the following symbol throughout the report



During quarter 3 we are aiming to develop a strategy for community engagement - linked to Community Focused Schools.

The Education Directorate recognises the importance of **effective partnership working** in maximising opportunities to support children, young people and the wider community.

It is key to the vision for the directorate:

Empowering our communities to be ambitious, ethically-informed Life-long learners who lead full and healthy lives

Some examples of **existing partnership working** are **demonstrated by the following icons** shown throughout the report and examples include:-



Integrated working with all other directorates within the council / a focus on the education of children looked after with Social Services and preventative services / A focus on the development of Educational facilities ensuring that they are fit for the future with the Environment Directorate, such as HIVE and sustainable communities for learning.



Collaborative working with partners such as the Education Achievement Service / Aneurin leisure trust / Health Board - school place planning .

Case Study - Education Minister visits Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg

Welsh Minister for Education & the Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles MS, visits Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg to see remodelling work funded by Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, creating both internal and external spaces to improve the teaching and learning environment.

The Minister said: "Well-designed buildings and pleasant surroundings are so important to supporting learners and staff, delivering high standards and aspirations for all. I want our schools to be inspiring places to learn and to teach, for our pupils to thrive, and Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg shows how this can be done."

Page 127



Being creative in the media suite



Quiet time in the library



Enjoying the outside space

Case Study - Glyncoed Primary New Build

Works are progressing well on the new build to provide a 360 place primary school and separate childcare facility in Ebbw Vale. There are also close links with the Hive (STEM) Project in Blaenau Gwent. A project team continue to meet regularly. Good progress has been made by Morgan Sindall, the contractor and works on the school are half way completed with occupation is scheduled for April 2024.



Cymunedau **Dysgu** Cynaliadwy 
Sustainable Communities for **Learning**



Case Study - Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM)

Secondary Schools in Blaenau Gwent have received grant funding of over £66,000 from the Welsh Government's Tech Valleys programme to purchase new equipment to enhance the teaching of science, technology, engineering and maths.

Twenty schools across Blaenau Gwent and three across Merthyr successfully bid for Welsh Government funding of up to £3,000. The successful applications were awarded funding for a range of equipment from autoclaves and Raspberry Pi computers to on-line post-mortem sessions and chocolate 3-D printers all designed to help bring authentic work experiences into the classroom. The applications were judged by a panel which included representatives from the Education Advisory Service (EAS), Industry Wales, the Tech Valleys STEM Facilitation Co-ordinator and Welsh Government.



These grants to schools are part of the much wider Tech Valleys STEM Facilitation activity, a **commitment of £570,000 over four years by the Welsh Government**. The aim of the project is to increase the uptake of STEM GCSEs at Key Stage 3 and maintain that interest at Key Stage 4.

Blaenau Gwent Council – STEM Facilitation Project has reached the final of the Wales STEM Awards 2023

and has been named as one of the 55 companies and individuals shortlisted in the Awards, which is sponsored by Cardiff Metropolitan University. The Wales STEM Awards is back for the third time to shine a spotlight on the organisations and individuals raising the profile of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in Wales. All finalists from across a total of 13 categories will now be considered by an industry-leading panel of judges, with the winners being announced at the awards ceremony at the Mercure Holland House Hotel on **13th October**.

Councillor John C Morgan, Cabinet Member for Place and Regeneration and Economic Development said:

Curriculum Reform -

STEM The focus going forward is at a strategic school level for Recovery and Renewal, with an emphasis on Curriculum Reform e.g. STEM activity.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, and

STEM Schools focus on these subjects to help our nation's youth gain the skills required to succeed in today's challenging world.



Case Study - Blaina school becomes first Prem Aware School in Wales

The Smallest Things charity has presented Ysgol Gynradd Coed-y-Garn Primary School with their Prem Aware Award! By completing additional training and steps to become a Prem Aware School teaching staff at Ysgol Gynradd Coed-y-Garn Primary will have a better understanding of the learning needs some children born prematurely may have, will be able to identify needs earlier, and will be able to provide timely and targeted support.



Lauren Cairns, Headteacher, at Ysgol Gynradd Coed-y-Garn Primary said:

"Having taken the pledge earlier this year, we are ever so proud at Coed-y-Garn to become the first school in Wales to achieve The Smallest Things Prem Aware Award. As a school, we are committed to improving wellbeing and supporting learners, and having an improved understanding of the impact that being born prematurely can have on an individual will be beneficial in supporting our learners and our families."

Congratulating the steps taken by Ysgol Gynradd Coed-y-Garn Primary School, Catriona Ogilvy, Founder and Chair of The Smallest Things said:

"The Smallest Things is delighted that Ysgol Gynradd Coed-y-Garn Primary School has joined our growing list of Prem Aware schools across the UK. In doing so they have shown their commitment to meeting the needs some pupils born premature may have. With an average of two to three children in every classroom being born prematurely, we know that teachers can play a crucial role in supporting and improving the long term outcomes for this cohort of children. Having trained teachers who know what to look out for and how to help pupils born prematurely will have such a positive impact on the children's educational journeys."

The Smallest Things Prem Aware Award scheme promotes use of the 'Preterm Birth Information for Educational Professionals', a free online training resource developed by Professor Samantha Johnson and her colleagues in the PRISM (Premature Infants' Skills in Mathematics) Study Team. The online resource outlines the impact premature birth can have on a child's development and learning, and offers practical ways to support children born prematurely at school.

While pupils born extremely prematurely (before 28 weeks' gestation) are most likely to need extra support,

Case Study - Telephony in Blaenau Gwent Schools and the wider Council

In line with the Digital Teams review of telephony across the council, Education are collaborating with the team to review and provide telephony solutions for schools. This is one of the key projects of the Council's Digital Programme which contributes to the Bridging the Gap programme in aiming to reduce our Third Party Spend and maximising the use of core digital systems. Education's involvement is vital in this project in order to engage and co-ordinate with schools. It has already been established that 9 schools are using the current corporate telephony provider (Avaya).



Avaya platform is at "End of Life", and the Council are due to cease the contract. In addition, the PSTN analogue lines are due to be switched off nationwide in December 2025. A number of schools are also experiencing severe issues with alternative providers and there is a risk to safeguarding should these systems fail. Microsoft Teams telephony has been identified as the corporate solution, and to mitigate the potential risks and issues that schools are facing, there are aspirations to move all schools to Teams telephony.

Education recently met with Head teachers to understand current systems, individual requirements, and work towards a "one council approach" for telephony. Including schools in this corporate approach will ensure that communications are modern and fit for purpose. It will enable us to better manage the telephony estate, licenses and call plans. It will help deliver services in the most effective way. A single solution will reduce inefficiencies, duplication, and licence costs.

Page 131



Education has identified two schools who will pilot the Teams telephony product in the Autumn 2023 term. These schools have been chosen based on the level of risk that their current telephony poses. Following this pilot, all other schools will be given the opportunity to move to Teams telephony by the end of the Autumn term/ Early Spring 2024 term.



The Education Directorate continue to work with partners, both internal and external in order to support our pupils development.



Case Study - Period Equity work in Blaenau Gwent

Blaenau Gwent Council is working with schools and a range of local partners to ensure that no female, whatever their age, is disadvantaged by not having access to period products and has made sure these are now readily and freely available in over 100 education and community settings.

The Welsh Minister for Social Justice Jane Hutt MS has visited Blaenau Gwent to see the pioneering work in period equity and dignity which is being delivered across the county borough, and met with residents and school pupils who have benefitted from the scheme.



Some highlights of the visit

The Council's Cabinet Member for People & Education, Cllr Sue Edmunds says:

"We're immensely proud of the work going on here in Blaenau Gwent to tackle period poverty and promote period dignity, so it was wonderful to have Jane Hutt MS visit to find out more about our approach to this important issue. We have a very enthusiastic project team with a range of partners who are all fully committed to making sure that no female should be at a disadvantage when it comes to their period. Not only are we committed to making sure products are available, but we are also working with all our partners to break down the stigma around periods. Periods are normal and we want people not to be embarrassed to request products.



#BalchOrMislif
llyw.cymru/balchormislif

#PeriodProudWales
gov.wales/periodproud

Case Study - New Welsh Medium school, Tredegar



Blaenau Gwent Council is building a new 210 place Welsh Medium Primary School, inclusive of a Welsh-medium childcare provision, at Chartist Way, Sirhowy Tredegar. The Council has secured £13.4million of capital funding via the Welsh Government Welsh Medium Capital Grant and Childcare Capital Grant schemes to progress with the school build and will also incorporate a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA), a forest play area, a growing orchard and wild-flower meadows. The school will also be climate conscious with solar panels and electric vehicle charging points. A play area on the site will also be relocated as part of the project on the same site and be furnished with new play equipment.

The project has progressed to full planning and appointment of contractor in July 2023. The works on site are commencing September 2023 with the new park being erected outside the school boundary, then the main contractor will start the school build November 2023 with completion being expected early 2025.

In the interim period temporary accommodation was opened in September 23 at Bedwellty House, for pupils of Nursery and Reception age signed up for the new school , so that they can start this academic year.

There are currently 6 pupils that started in September rising to 9 in January 2024.



Ensure effective self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management



Future Direction and areas that we feel we need to focus upon going forward

As stated at the beginning of this report our overall aim is to support delivery of our corporate objectives. Listed below are some of the areas we recognise that we need to continue to focus on improving. We recognise that even the achievements are not yet completed but remain areas for progress to be maintained and improved upon where possible.

As a council we are looking to be '**An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place**'. Alongside the many achievements detailed throughout this report we recognise that the following are areas that need further improvement:-

- Further engagement and promotion to increase the 'on time' admission applications;
- Monitor Home to school transport funding issues;
- Secure external funding for the future delivery of services;
- Ensure that our vision and strategic aims for education are fully understood by other officers, elected members, school staff and external partners;
- Develop a strategy for community engagement, linked to community focussed schools;
- Progress analysis of Rising 3 funding impact;
- Develop a strategic plan for partnership working;
- Build on the audit of our professional learning across service areas to promote best opportunities for our children and young people;
- Develop clear timelines, related actions and measurable success criteria to support delivery of the new vision and business plans;
- Develop a suitable vision and strategy for the future provision of ALN; and
- Continue to improve the quality of self-evaluation, strategic planning and performance management.





Future Direction and areas that we feel we need to focus upon going forward (continued)

As a council we are looking to '**Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent**'. Alongside the many achievements detailed throughout this report that have been delivered by the Education Directorate over this past year to support delivery of this corporate objective, we recognise that the following are areas that need further improvement:-

- Further analysis of reasons for decline in attendance and exclusion and mitigating actions put in place;
- Monitor NEET figures and ensure new systems and processes put in place are effective;
- Continue to monitor and improve on attainment levels;
- Focus on pupil integration back into mainstream and promotion of inclusion;
- Explore options for further engagement and promotion to increase the number of in-time pupil school applications;
- Higher levels of language acquisition and reading across the board, but particularly in our very young children in early years; and
- Focus on improving the pace of change for Schools Causing Concern (SCC) improvement journeys.





As a council we are looking to '**Empower and support communities to be safe, independent and resilient**'. Alongside the many achievements detailed throughout this report that have been delivered by the Education Directorate over this past year to support delivery of this corporate objective, we recognise that the following are areas that need further improvement:-

- Continue to closely monitor safeguarding and use data more effectively to inform long term planning;
- Monitor timeliness and access to mental health provision along with new referral numbers;
- Monitor numbers of referrals to vulnerable learners provision; and
- Continue to improve the reach of 11-25 year olds supported by Youth and increase the number for which well-being improvements are made.



As a council we are looking to '**Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities**'. Alongside the many achievements detailed throughout this report we recognise that the following are areas that need further improvement:-

- Continue to effectively deliver sustainable communities for learning which are environmentally friendly;
- Further encourage nature friendly management on school grounds;
- Develop a schools Biodiversity policy and support with the integration; and
- Continue to engage all young people with the environment.

Agenda Item 8

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **People Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **19th December 2023**
Report Subject: **Forward Work Programme: 30th January 2024**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Sue Edmunds, Cabinet Member People and Education**
Cllr Haydn Trollope, Cabinet Member People and Social Services
Report Submitted by: **Scrutiny and Democratic Officer**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
x	x	05.12.23			19.12.23			

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 To present to Members the People Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the Meeting on 30th January 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 July 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 consider the Forward Work Programme for the meeting 30th January 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.

3.2 **Option 2:** The Scrutiny Committee agree the Forward Programme for the meeting 30th January 2024, as presented.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Forward Work Programme – Meeting on 30th January 2024

People Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Dates	Scrutiny Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer	Cabinet / Council
Meeting: 30th January 2024	Safeguarding Performance reporting	Performance Monitoring To provide members with Corporate, Children's and Adult Safeguarding Performance.	Tanya Evans Luisa Munro-Morris	Cabinet
Deadline: 16 th January 2024	Key Stage 4 Results	Performance Monitoring To consider the KS4 results.	Luisa Munro-Morris Ed Pryce (EAS)	Cabinet
	Proposed Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling Programme	To consider the report.	Luisa Munro-Morris	Cabinet

This page is intentionally left blank