

# Finance and Performance Report

## End of Year 2020/21

## Foreword

The purpose of the report is to present the performance of the Council as at the end of the year 2020/21, setting out the key activities and measures used to monitor performance against achieving the outcome objectives as identified within the Council's Corporate Plan.

All of these objectives have supporting actions and measures which are monitored as part of the Council's business planning process. The Council has fully aligned all of its planning to the Corporate Plan which includes the Well-being Objectives. These are central to the organisation and future work planning and strategies are aligned to these areas.

## COVID – 19 The Council's Response

In March 2020, a decision was made by the UK Government to put the UK into lockdown in order to try and curb the spread of the global pandemic COVID 19.

In accordance with Emergency Planning arrangements, a GOLD Group was established in Blaenau Gwent which comprised of Corporate Leadership Team, supported by the Civil Contingency Manager and Communications Manager. The strategic aim of GOLD is to delay and mitigate, as far as practicable, the spread and impact of Coronavirus within the community.

GOLD was supported by an Emergency Response Team, made up of Heads of Service and Service Managers working alongside partners including the Aneurin Leisure Trust, GAVO, Tai Calon and the Joint Trade Unions.

As part of its response, the Council had to act quickly and had to consider alternative methods of service delivery, ensuring that the most vulnerable in society were supported. This resulted in delivery of critical services only, with other available resources being redeployed to support the response. Particular focus was on:

- Adult Social Services
- Refuse and recycling collection
- Public protection
- Development of school hubs to support key workers with childcare
- Supporting families eligible for free school meals
- The creation of locality hubs, working to support those vulnerable and shielding
- Supporting local businesses to access financial support

During these unprecedented times the workforce remained resilient and supported the response to the pandemic. Arrangements were put in place for the workforce to engage in virtual meetings with colleagues both internal and external to the Council, maintaining effective links with partners.

Elected Members continued to undertake their roles throughout the pandemic providing a particular focus on community leadership and intelligence. Democratic meetings were suspended however, the Council did hold a virtual AGM in April 2020 and meetings were convened to respond to urgent business. The full committee cycle resumed in September using the fully virtual platform, Microsoft TEAMS.

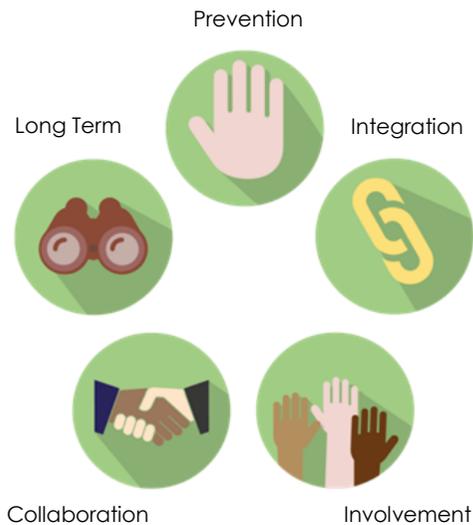
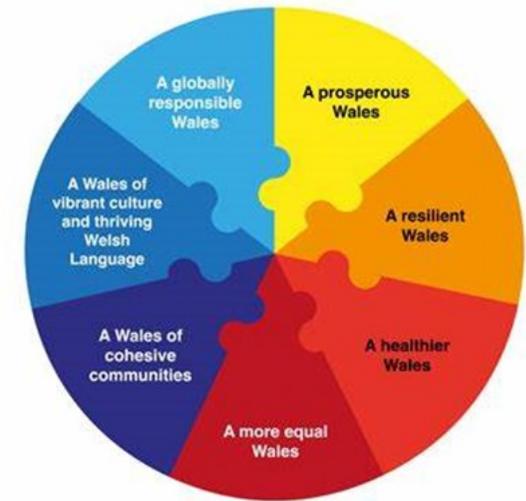
## **Corporate Plan Refresh 2020/22**

As part of the Council's annual Assessment of Performance, written in October 2019, it was identified that the Council's ambitious programme of activity was in the early stages of development and implementation. As part of this, the Council was honest, in that some changes may need to be made to the Corporate Plan moving forward. This has resulted in some amendments being made to the Outcome Statements within the Corporate Plan, in order to better demonstrate the contribution different areas across the Council will contribute to achieving them, enhancing the 'One Council' approach. The overall emphasis of each Outcome Statement (Well-being Objective) has not changed.

## **Corporate Plan 2020/22 Outcome Objectives:**

- ◇ Protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities;
- ◇ Support a fairer sustainable economy and community;
- ◇ To enable people to maximise their independence, develop solutions and take an active role in their Communities; and
- ◇ An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities.

**The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** is ground-breaking 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 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 principles are made up of the five ways of working and progress against these areas is evidenced throughout the report.

The Council's performance supports delivery of the core vision of the Council:

## Blaenau Gwent Vision -

Proud Heritage

Strong Communities

Brighter Future

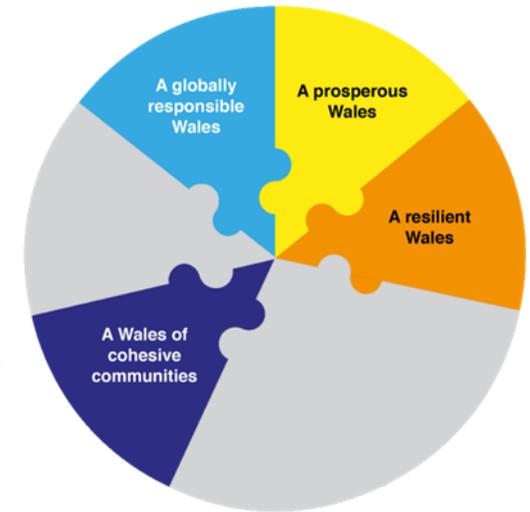
## BRAG Rating

The Council uses a BRAG rating system to assess progress against actions and measures, the definitions are provided in the table below:

| Status | Description  |
|--------|--|
| Blue   | The action/priority has been completed; all performance factors set have been achieved (time, quality, financial aspects).   |
| Green  | The action/priority is performing to plan; all performance factors are within the acceptable variance levels set.  |
| Amber  | Issues have been identified with the action/priority that will/may negatively impact on performance; the priority owner is able to resolve the problem or make corrective decisions without assistance; action/priority is at risk of failing on one or more of the performance factors set. |
| Red    | Significant issues identified with the action/priority that requires corrective action in order to meet objectives; the priority owner requires assistance to resolve the issue; action/priority is failing on one or more of the performance factors set.                                   |

## Why this is important

The Corporate Plan provides the focus for delivering lasting change for the area. It also provides the platform for transforming Blaenau Gwent into a more confident and capable Council. The ambition is to deliver better outcomes for the people of Blaenau Gwent and that ambition is underpinned by solid and sustainable plans, ensuring the Council can be held to account for what it has promised to deliver. Maximising the impact of resources to deliver those outcomes sits at the heart of this priority, including; understanding costs, controlling expenditure, maximising income and aligning resources to the needs of residents, businesses and visitors to build a Blaenau Gwent for the future.



## Progress against actions

A number of high level priorities (shown below) have been identified to support delivery of the corporate objective, '**An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities**'. These are detailed in the following overview pages along with some associated achievements and challenges.

### Priorities:-

- To demonstrate clear and visible leadership to deliver a viable and resilient Council;
- To ensure effective forward financial planning arrangements are in place to support the Council's financial resilience;
- To support and develop a workforce that has the capacity and capability to be productive and responsive to future demands;
- We will deliver online services that are simple and convenient, improving the relationship between residents, business and the council;
- COVID 19 – safe working environment for our staff and service users;
- We will work in an agile way, capturing learning and seeking continuous improvement;
- To develop a more commercial organisation to generate income and deliver cost reductions to make local services sustainable and raise money to re-invest in our priorities; and
- To be a strong and effective partner and collaborate where possible to deliver financial, business and community benefits.

*The following section reflects the overall progress position for the delivery of the above corporate objective, along with a breakdown of each individual associated delivery action, highlighting progress, achievements and challenges*

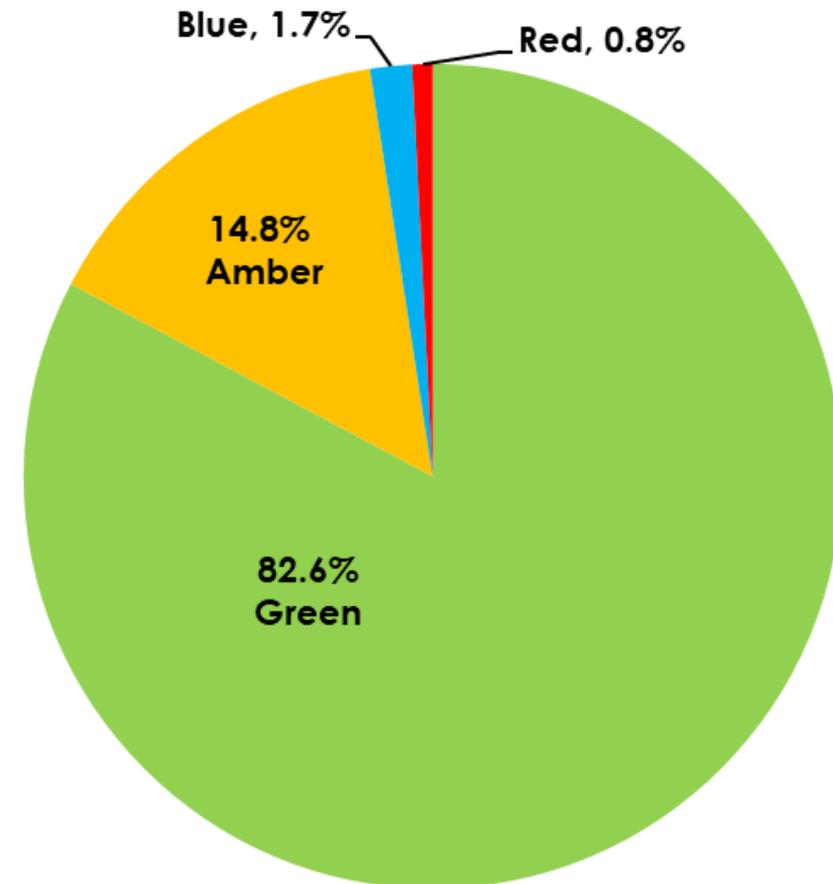
## How we performed

Throughout 2020/21 there has been progress in the implementation of the priorities supporting delivery of the outcome objective, '**An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities**' but it is recognised that there is still further work to do to fully implement the aims and objectives.

As at the 31st March 2021, the performance of this objective was evaluated as being **mainly successful as 82.6% of actions were green (on target), 14.8% were amber (behind target with manageable issues), 0.8% Red (significant issues) and 1.7% was blue (completed).**

Central to delivering this objective is looking at an approach to working in a cost effective and efficient way across the Council supported by strong leadership. The Council has worked hard to achieve 80% of its projected savings targets which has continued to support the financial resilience of the Council and has been identified as an area of good practice by Audit Wales. Clear and visible leadership has been evident throughout the past year with support to addressing the pandemic as well as implementing a new leadership development programme, put in place to support the Council's new working arrangements.

Overall corporate objective delivery position as at 31st March 2021



## Overview

### To demonstrate clear and visible leadership to deliver a viable and resilient Council

- Clear and visible leadership was evident throughout the Covid 19 Pandemic. Arrangements were put in place to establish a GOLD command group (CLT) who's strategic aim is to delay and mitigate as far as practicable the spread and impact within the community. This was supported by a multi-agency emergency response team.
- The Council took the opportunity to pause and reflect on how it had responded to the virus and also identified learning opportunities of how it could deliver services in a different way moving forward, delivering services that will be more in line with modern working practices and reduce costs and impact on the environment. This delivery is at the forefront in how we work and deliver services to improve access to council businesses and services for residents.
- The Corporate Communications Strategy 2020/25 has been aligned to the Commercial Strategy. It is designed to support the delivery of the Council's priorities, vision and values. The overall objective of the strategy is to deliver excellent, innovative and cost effective two-way communications, building a positive reputation and increasing trust and confidence that the Council is delivering services that meet resident, businesses and visitor's needs.
- As recognised by Audit Wales as an area of good practice the Council achieved 80% of its projected savings through delivery of the Bridging The Gap Programme which has continued to support financial resilience.
- The ICT investment road map has been approved to provide the Council with a more modern and sustainable infrastructure. It is a critical organisational investment strategy and is designed to secure the best use of our resources and to create ways of working that are fit for the 21st Century.
- Work has been undertaken to ensure Democratic arrangements have been able to operate remotely throughout COVID 19 and beyond. Work is now progressing on delivering a hybrid meeting option which is now a statutory requirement under the Local Government and Elections Act.
- An intelligence hub, made up of officers from across the council, has been established to share data and use behavioural insight when service planning. Using data in a more insightful way was one of the key learning points from the response to COVID 19.

## How we currently perform



Reduction in the number of working days lost due to sickness compared with the same period last year



Reached over 10 million on our social media channels and regularly posted over 100 items per day.



Average of 31,500 visitors per month to the Council website viewing about 300,000 pages per month.



87% of Audits were completed within the time allocated.



The number of Facebook followers increased to almost 20,000 (from 14,000)

## Overview

### **We will deliver online services that are simple and convenient, improving the relationship between residents, business and the Council**

- Through recent learning from COVID 19 the Council has looked to establish Community Hubs. These will operate from Libraries in order for services to be more accessible to the public including benefits, council tax and community services. Hubs will deliver services in a new and modern way.
- A customer Service delivery review is being undertaken in relation to the contact centre which will support the implementation of a uniformed approach to delivery of customer services, creating good customer experiences for our residents enabling them to resolve issues quickly and seamlessly, working out of the community hubs.
- Unprecedented support has been provided to local businesses enabling them to access Government financial support schemes with the aim of protecting the local economy. The Council paid out £28m in grants to local businesses.
- The Council's Commercial Strategy has been developed within the context of maintaining the Council's core purpose to provide public services delivering social value. A key objective of the strategy is a focus on the experience of residents when using Council services now and in the future.
- The implementation of the Citizens Access Benefits and Citizens Access Landlord Portal continues to be a positive approach to the administration of Housing Benefit and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme in an online environment. This fully supported the response to delivery throughout the pandemic.

### **To ensure effective forward financial planning arrangements are in place to support the Council's financial resilience**

- During the year the Medium Term Financial Strategy has been reviewed, and subsequently in March 2021 the Council agreed its budget for 2021/22 which included a planned contribution to reserves of £1.2m
- A capital strategy has been developed and approved for the 2021/22 financial year which gives a high level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services.
- The provisional out-turn financial position of the council for 2020/21 is a net favourable variance of £2.7m against a net revenue budget of £152.1m. In an unprecedented year with service delivery impacted by Covid 19 the positive variance arises for several reasons including a significant amount of Welsh Government funding compensating the Council for additional costs & lost income, additional grants received and underspends across services. The positive out-turn has resulted in an increase in reserves, a move towards strengthening the Council's financial resilience
- New processes are now in place between the Finance and Special Educational Needs Team to ensure improved monitoring of out of county placements as well as inter-county recoupment.
- Good progress has been made with the Industrial Portfolio review. An initial report has been completed with an operational action plan drawn out and agreed. Surveying work is underway and financial preparation completed.
- Close scrutiny of high cost residential and foster placements, plus a reduction in children looked after has led to the provisional outturn for Children's Services for 20/21 showing an underspend. Despite this favourable outturn the legal budget was significantly overspent.

## Overview

### To support and develop a workforce that has the capacity and capability to be productive and responsive to future demands

- Regular updated guidance published for leaders and the workforce on working during the pandemic in line with Welsh Government and NJC guidance
- As part of the response to the Covid 19 pandemic all service areas, partners and schools were given health and safety advice on safe systems of work to include PPE and the development of risk assessments detailing compliance with legislation.
- Full launch of Microsoft Teams to enable where appropriate for the workforce to work from home.
- Weekly newsletter published to the workforce from the Managing Director.
- Weekly position statement on the capacity of the workforce in relation to the impact of Covid to support management of workforce capacity.
- Redeployment arrangements in place to support capacity to deliver front line services.
- In order to provide support to the workforce the council actively promoted well-being sessions and the opportunity to speak with a councillor during these difficult times.
- Virtual arrangements put in place for occupational health, recruitment etc.
- The Council is committed to supporting an inclusive workforce and has recently agreed a Trans Equality Policy, developed in line with the Equality Act 2010 and the Gender Recognition Act 2004. This Policy aims to eliminate discrimination based on Gender Identity, whilst creating a culture of respect for human rights and where employees feel valued.
- As part of the Commercial Strategy there has been a focus on the residents' experience of existing and new services. Following feedback, an action plan was developed focussing on areas within the Contact Centre including:
  - A review of the answerphone message to ensure more streamlined and efficient way of contacting the Local Authority;
  - Looking at options in relation to a locally based service provision of the out of hours' service;
  - Working with colleagues within Community Services identifying opportunities to improve the customer experience;
  - Focussed on the training requirements for the staff, undertaking skill set analysis and training needs assessments and developing training plans.



**LONG TERM** - As part of the Council's future operating model works are ongoing for the relocation of the Democratic Hub into the General Offices. A lot of activity has been undertaken to date but key areas include:

- the purchase of a new Delegate System which will support the delivery of hybrid committee meetings. This is now a statutory requirement and will support the Council in the long term supporting remote working.
- A member working group has been established to consider the relocation of the civic memorabilia.



## Overview

To support and develop a workforce that has the capacity and capability to be productive and responsive to future demands

### Sickness Absence

| Directorate                       | Number of Full Time Equivalent Staff (FTE) As at 30.06.20 | Quarter 1 Average Days lost per FTE (cumulative) | Number of Full Time Equivalent Staff (FTE) As at 30.09.20 | Quarter 2 Average Days lost per FTE (cumulative) | Number of Full Time Equivalent Staff (FTE) As at 31.12.20 | Quarter 3 Average Days lost per FTE (cumulative) | Number of Full Time Equivalent Staff (FTE) As at 31.03.21 | Quarter 4 Average Days lost per FTE (cumulative) |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|
| Corporate Services                | 279.36  | 1.41   | 287.99  | 2.5  | 335.12  | 3.95   | 338.47  | 5.67   |
| Regeneration & Community Services | 462.76  | 2.33   | 467.91  | 4.05   | 480.40  | 7.02   | 485.65  | 10.20  |
| Social Services                   | 473.67  | 4.50   | 473.01  | 9.43   | 465.45  | 16.78  | 462.38  | 22.98  |
| Education                         | 920.84  | 1.68   | 915.32  | 3.21   | 932.99  | 6.39   | 932.19  | 8.75   |
| <b>Target</b>                     | -   | <b>2.63</b>                                      | -   | <b>5.25</b>                                      | -   | <b>7.88</b>                                      | -   | <b>10.50</b>                                     |
| <b>Council Total</b>              | <b>2136.63</b>  | <b>2.41</b>                                      | <b>2144.23</b>  | <b>4.67</b>                                      | <b>2213.96</b>  | <b>8.42</b>                                      | <b>2218.69</b>  | <b>11.67</b>                                     |



**PREVENTION** - The Agile Working policy will reduce travel/emissions and assist in lowering the Council's carbon footprint, in line with the Welsh Government's aspiration of increased remote working.

## Overview

### COVID 19 – safe working environment for our staff and service users

- When lockdown began the council shifted its sole focus to the emergency response. This resulted in delivery of critical services only and with resources being redeployed to support the response. A particular focus was on supporting the most vulnerable in the community.
- Locality response teams were established covering the borough to support the most vulnerable in the community, including those that were shielding as part of government advice. Support included collection of medication, shopping for those that had no other support and signposting to other agencies. Staff were redeployed to the locality teams and activity was monitored enabling provision to meet demand. School Hubs were also established to support key workers and those eligible for free school meals were actively supported.
- The Test, Trace and Protect service is a critical part of the organisational approach to support the monitoring and identification of COVID 19 throughout the borough. It supports the organisation with the main aims and objectives to: enhance health surveillance in the community; undertake effective and extensive contact tracing; and support people to self-isolate when required to do so.
- Work continues to ensure that all schools have access to the necessary PPE and Covid related items.
- Lateral Flow Testing has commenced within all Blaenau Gwent schools, this was initially for all staff and was later rolled out to Year 10 and 11 pupils with the rest of the secondary school pupils being introduced later in the year. Further rollout is planned for the Youth Service, home to school transport operators, supply staff and inclusion staff who are required to access schools in order to work with specific pupils.

### To be a strong and effective partner and collaborate where possible to deliver financial, business and community benefits.

- The Council continues to play an active role across the regional and national collaborative agenda. The National Procurement Network is making good progress in developing a forward sourcing programme with an officer representing the Council at a number of category specific work streams.
- It has been a challenging environment for the hospitality sector despite Welsh Government Covid support programmes. The Destination Management Plan has been approved and will provide an endorsed framework to support Destination Management across the County Borough.
- Work of the Regional Partnership Board has included the continued response to the Coronavirus outbreak across partner agencies and the effect on services; the reallocation of underspend for 2020/21 and the continuation of the Integrated Care Revenue and Capital Funds; the continuation of the Transformational Offer beyond 2021, in response to the Welsh Government's new long term plan for health and social care 'A Healthier Wales'; and the Integrated Winter Plan for 2020/21.
- Cardiff Capital Region City Deal positive performance continues and includes effective progress against key targets. Highlights for Blaenau Gwent include: Metro Plus Programme - Transport or Wales (TfW); CCR Levelling Up Prospectus; Ultra Low Emission Transformation Fund; Housing Catalyst Fund; Challenge Fund Application; CCR Energy Strategy; and Aspire Roll Out .



**INTEGRATION** — *The Test, Trace and Protect strategy takes a whole council approach. It promotes transparency across the organisation, building best practice outside of directorate silos and promotes the maximising and sharing of skills and learning.*

## Overview

### To develop a more commercial organisation to generate income and deliver cost reductions to make local services sustainable and raise money to re-invest in our priorities

- Learning from the pandemic has led to a focus on customer service delivery moving from face to face perspective to online. To support this change, the development of the Community Hubs has included: mapping sessions with staff who work on the front line; the upskilling of staff; and the creation of a performance toolkit with benchmarking against other contact centres.
- In 20/21 a lower level of Discretionary Housing Payments applications were received than in previous years. It is anticipated that this was due to less evictions taking place by Landlords throughout the pandemic. Monitoring will take place to see if there is a change following the national relaxation of the restrictions on evictions.
- Significant work has been undertaken to support the Council's Bridging the Gap programme, supported by a strategic commercial and commissioning board, has included the review of current 3rd party expenditure to validate legal compliance, maximise commercial benefit and to ensure effective performance and contract management.
- A bespoke baseline financial assessment (profit & loss) to quantify and challenge trading operations is under development by Resources colleagues. This will support the bridging the Gap review by providing a clear financial picture of commercial activity.
- Electronic procurement has been embedded into the activity of the organisation. All competitive tendering in excess of £25k is now facilitated via electronic means (EtenderWales).

### We will work in an agile way, capturing learning and seeking continuous improvement

- The introduction of a new model of working across the Council, incorporating modern working practices, will seek to enhance employees' working experience, maximise performance and productivity and deliver the greatest value to the organisation, in terms of improving service delivery, as well as realising financial gains.
- During the pandemic it was a challenging environment for staff, ensuring that effective delivery of key service areas continued. Any concerns are discussed and support is ongoing with staff to address any concerns and identify measures as part of the change process.
- Development, implementation and compliance with the revised Information Security & Acceptable Usage Policies will provide assurance to the public that their personal and sensitive information, held by the Council, is secure and used appropriately.
- The Agile Working Policy is a key enabler in delivering the future working model for the Council. It also links to the Council's vision for sustainable development including sustainable economic growth, de-carbonisation and the health and well-being of both staff and the community.



**COLLABORATION** - An effective partnership approach was taken to support one another throughout the pandemic, ensuring that the services that were running were appropriately supported and resourced. Partners included the Leisure Trust, Housing and the voluntary sector.

## Case Study - Climate Change

People in Blaenau Gwent were invited to share their views and solutions for tackling the climate crisis in what was Wales' first climate assembly to discuss climate change.

The Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly was held online during two weekends in March bringing residents together from across the borough to address the question: "What should we do in Blaenau Gwent to tackle the climate crisis in a way that is fair and improves living standards for everyone?"

10,000 households in Blaenau Gwent received written invitations to register their interest in participating. From those who applied to be involved, 50 people were then randomly selected to take part and learnt about climate issues facing their community, discussing the themes of housing, nature and transport before proposing and debating potential solutions.



### Michelle Morris, Managing Director, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council said:



"Climate change is a global issue and it's absolutely vital that we act now to protect our environment for the well-being of future generations and I am sure that the Climate Assembly will help us all focus on this. As a Council we recognise the importance of the challenges and we recently approved a new Decarbonisation Plan. We're already taking a number of actions to reduce our carbon impact such as improving the energy efficiency of our schools; our public buildings and our street-lighting and also reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill. This Plan will see us take a more strategic approach towards achieving carbon neutrality and will help us to prioritise work in a number of key areas of our operations which, with some changes, can make a significant contribution towards our carbon neutral aim."

## Case Study - Council Agrees Budget for 2021-22

Blaenau Gwent's budget for the 2021/22 financial year was approved by Council on 4th March 2021.

Blaenau Gwent received a positive settlement from Welsh Government for the second year running which will see its budget increase by 3.6% for 2021-22 and this has provided the Council with an extra £4.2 million in funding above initial budget estimates.

This and the focus on a series of targeted projects to strengthen the financial future of the Council has allowed a balanced budget for councillors to approve, with no cuts to front line services and a budgeted increase in reserves of £1.2m. The Council understands the value of the services it provides for local residents and this is a welcome position for next year as the priority is to recover from the unprecedented impact of Coronavirus.

### The agreed budget will see the Council:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Protect key front line services</li><li>• Provide additional funding of 3.6% for all schools</li><li>• Enable new, community-focused investment including new hubs located in libraries to allow local access to council services for residents</li><li>• Create efficiencies and financial resilience for the future by continuing the 'Bridging the Gap' programme</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fund increasing demand and service pressures in key areas valued by residents and confirmed using the feedback from our recent budget survey including:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- increased funding for Social Services of £1,014,490 (+2.2%)</li><li>- extra investment in environment projects of - £683,480 (+4.1%)</li><li>- Council Tax reduction scheme budget of £9.6m</li></ul></li></ul> |
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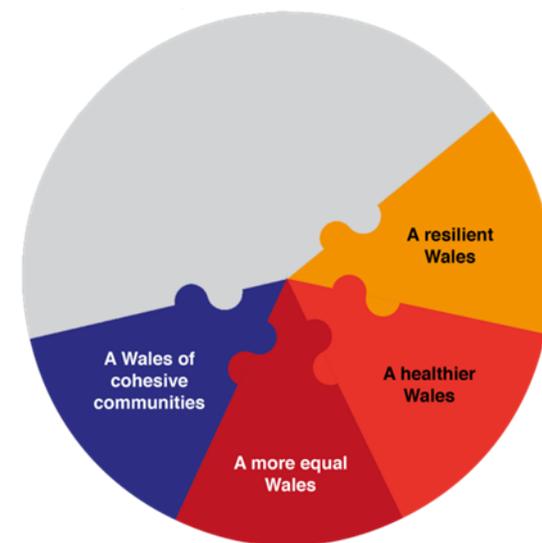
An increase of 3.3% for the Blaenau Gwent element of Council Tax was approved - this equates to an increase of 72p a week increase for a Band A property and an 84p a week increase for Band B households.

Due to the high number of properties in these lower band properties (85%), the level of Council Tax people actually pay is on average one of the lowest in Wales. The increase in the level of Council tax is expected to be the lowest in Gwent and 0.6% lower than the level agreed in 2020-21.

## Why this is important

The Council wants to encourage and support people to make healthy lifestyle choices to enable children, young people and families to thrive. Research has proven people demonstrating positive health behaviours from birth through their life will lead to greater independence, and people being free from complicated health conditions later in life and reducing costs to public services. This in turn could reduce demand on services and ensure the services that are provided are high quality, efficient and responsive to local people's needs.

With reduced funding and increasing demand on services the Council can no longer do everything it has done in the past. The focus must be on those actions that will have the greatest impact. Safeguarding the most vulnerable people in the community continues to be a top priority for the Council alongside transforming the aspirations of residents and valuing fairness and equality in everything we do.



## Progress against actions

A number of high level priorities (shown below) have been identified to support delivery of the corporate objective , '**enabling people to maximise their independence, develop solutions and take an active role in their communities**'. These are detailed in the following overview pages along with some associated achievements and challenges.

### Priorities:-

- To improve accessibility, provision of information and advice to enable people to support their own well-being;
- To work with people and families to make sure they have a say in achieving what matters to them;
- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater;
- To promote and facilitate new ways of delivering integrated responsive care and support with partners;
- To continue our programme of public engagement and respond in a timely and effective way to feedback;
- To build a collaborative culture between services, partners and communities working together and with people directly to shape and deliver services. i.e. (Community Asset Transfers);
- To put effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm; and
- To develop a partnership approach to maximising income reducing the impacts of Poverty.

The following section reflects the overall progress position for the delivery of the above corporate objective along with a breakdown of each individual priority, highlighting progress, achievements and challenges

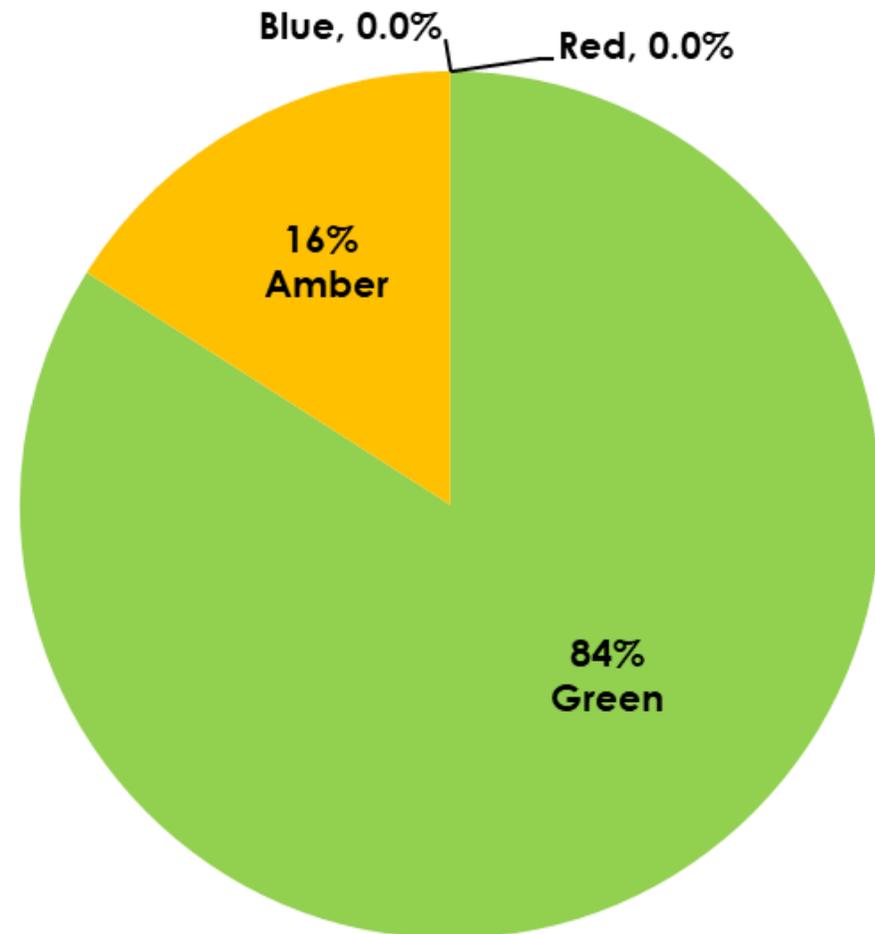
## How we performed

Throughout 2020/21 there has been progress in the implementation of the priorities supporting delivery of the objective '**Enabling people to maximise their independence, develop solutions and take an active role in their communities**' but it is recognised that there is still further work to do to fully implement the aims and objectives.

As at 31st March 2021, the Council evaluated performance and activity against this objective as mainly successful **as 84% of the actions were green (on target) and 16% amber (behind target with manageable issues)**.

This objective remains high on the Council agenda. The Council is looking to address the areas that will have a long term benefit, ensuring that the needs of people of all ages and future generations are at the centre of service design and delivery.

Overall corporate objective delivery position as at 31st March 2021



## Overview

### To improve accessibility, provision of information, advice and assistance (IAA) to enable people to support their own well-being

- IAA team staffing capacity has been temporarily increased and evidence is showing a positive impact in doing so. The numbers of new referrals going into the locality, 14 plus and disability team have been reduced and the number of Initial Assessments undertaken in the IAA team have increased.
- During the pandemic the IAA team continued to work at full capacity and following the schools reopening (April 2021) the IAA service experienced a significant rise in referrals and the evidence suggested the rise came from across the statutory agencies and the voluntary sectors.
- Service developments have continued despite the pandemic. The police restructured their Public Protection Services which allowed the development of local, multi-agency, all age safeguarding, early intervention and prevention hubs. These hubs were piloted in Newport and Blaenau Gwent and led to improving the following :-
  - Early information sharing;
  - Timely decision making;
  - Improved quality of Public Protection Notice referrals;
  - Improved, integrated service responses to children and families;
  - Timeliness of referral pathways to Early Intervention Projects; and
  - Effectiveness of support and interventions offered by the Early Intervention Projects.
- The number of adult clients assessed during the year who are provided with electronic assistive technology as part of a package of care has decreased this year with 245 in receipt in 2019/20 and 169 in receipt in 2020/21.



**COLLABORATION** - Blaenau Gwent has its own local, multi agency, all age safeguarding, early intervention and prevention Hub with elements shared such as health and education jointly with Caerphilly. The hub serves both children and adults and whilst early days the initial feedback is mainly positive.

## How we currently perform



Increase in the number of adults referred to Social Services - 3333 in 2019/20 to 3698 in 2020/21



Child Protection Numbers reduced from 61 in March 2020 to 52 in March 21



Numbers of children looked after reduced 211 in March 2020 to 200 in March 2021



Number of children's cases known to Social Services reduced from 1,105 in March 2020 to 946 in March 2021



Decrease in reports of 'adult suspected of being at risk' 540 in 2019/20 compared with 532 in 2020/21

## Overview

### To work with people and families to make sure they have a say in achieving what matters to them

- There has been a significant cultural change in Blaenau Gwent in relation to adopting a strengths based approach to the work undertaken. This in turn has enabled the children and families to have a stronger voice in saying what really matters to them. Social Care Wales has recognised the progress that has been made and as a result has been asked to speak at an event promoting this approach during 20/21.
- Bespoke training has been delivered to three different teams during this financial year and plans are in place for virtual delivery for all new staff in the Financial Year 2021/2022.
- Outcome focused work remains a priority and the paperwork/forms social workers use have been amended to enable the outcomes approach to be evidenced in these documents.
- A significant change in the service delivery of the Disability Team has resulted from an evaluation by Worcester University. After listening to those that use the service it was decided to change the team to cover 0 – 25 year olds which will include children and young adults with disabilities going through transition. Plans are in place for these changes to be implemented by 1st June 2021, so the new financial year should evidence the impact of these changes on practice and outcomes for service users.
- The active offer of advocacy is embedded into practice and quality assurance meetings take place on a quarterly basis with the National Youth Advocacy Service, our advocacy provider.

### To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater

- A significant proportion of the preventative services delivered in children's and adults services are dependent on grant funding which is allocated on an annual basis. If this funding was removed it would be a significant risk to the department. It is impossible to mitigate against this risk as all core funding is tied up in the delivery of statutory services.
- The 7 preventative programmes that sit under the Children's and Communities Grant have continued to deliver services. The 7 programmes which include Flying Start and Families First, moved to a hybrid approach of face to face and virtual service delivery, maximising virtual platforms and reaching significant numbers of children and families with support and advice during the lock downs.
- Integrated Care Fund money was utilised during 20/21 to deliver Family Group Conferencing, enhance support for special guardians, enhance support to the Supporting Change Team to include psychological support, and enhance the Young Person's Mediation Service.
- Despite the pandemic significant progress has been made in relation to implementing the objectives of the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy, plus reviewing the strategy to develop a further 5 year strategy from 2020- 25.



**INVOLVEMENT** - Two consultation exercises have been undertaken with foster carers in the last 12 months and this has produced good evidence that foster carers feel supported and have received a good service from the placement and locality teams.

## Overview

### To continue our programme of public engagement and respond in a timely and effective way to feedback

- Internal and external engagement activity continued including the Youth Forum and 50 Plus Network supporting the age friendly community planning.
- The Council continues to develop the way in which it engages with the community. The membership of the Citizens Panel has been refreshed and now integrated with other engagement activity. Engagement activity this year has included:
  - Youth Forum and Older Peoples network supporting Community Impact Assessments aligned to COVID 19;
  - Budget Setting communication exercise for 2021/22; and
  - Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly.
- The Council has also looked at developing a number of digital projects which will continue into 2021. This has included involvement from officers within the Council and also service users and the public. The projects are:
  - Adult Social Care Front Door;
  - Easy Council to Pay;
    - Tech Valleys Digital Squad; and
    - Digital Democracy.



**PREVENTION** - The Living Independently Strategy promotes preventative services including reablement and assistive technology as a model that promotes personal independence and management of a person's own well-being. The strategy delivers a preventative and early intervention approach to minimise the escalation of need and dependency on statutory services.

### To promote and facilitate new ways of delivering integrated responsive care and support with partners

- The first phase of the refurbishment of Augusta House is complete with phase 2 capital funding in place to build two new stand alone units in the grounds. Colleagues from Technical Services are currently undertaking ground surveys following planning approval.
- To support the priority of providing and commissioning a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements, supported lodging providers have been recruited, via Llamau, and the creation of 10 young person flats in (Ty Parc) Tredegar is going well and has had 17 clients to date.
- Discussions are on-going with colleagues in the Housing Strategy Team regarding the need to access and/or development of more 1 bedroom flats for care leavers. This is being fed into the Corporate Housing Strategy so it becomes a strategic consideration when bringing forward new developments.
- A floating support service, specifically for young people (funded via the Housing Support Grant), is being considered to enable access to housing support to support living independently and within their own home in the community. The service is due to commence in Spring 2021.
  - A focus on preparing children for independent living will be possible with extension to Beaufort Road being created specifically for this focus.

## Overview

### To develop a partnership approach to maximising income reducing the impacts of Poverty

- Free School Meals monitoring systems are working well, the application round is opening bi-weekly throughout the school closures, for newly eligible families to apply for the provision. Effective Partnership work between Education and Benefits assists with the process of reviewing applications and determining eligibility. Successful applicants are then set up for payments from the following week. Processes have also been put in place for providing Free School Meal direct payments to families, that have been asked to self isolate as a result of being a contact of a COVID-19 case.
- The number of adults (aged 18+) receiving a service in the community who receive a direct payment has decreased this year, with 120 in receipt in 2019/20 and 113 in receipt in 2020/21.
- The Legacy delivery and associated funding is now part of the Children and Communities Grant. During 20/21 a range of projects were supported including :
  - Community Links;
  - Mental Health worker support;
  - Dads Worker;
  - Childcare grants;
  - Community Engagement Officers;
  - Social Workers in Schools;
  - CAB;
  - Digital Youth Project;
  - Aspire internal mentor;
  - Wild camps;
  - Therapeutic Support;
  - Locality Response;
  - Disabilities Youth Club;
  - Speech and language; and
  - Childcare assisted places.

To ensure Legacy funding is fully utilised moving forward and supports projects most aligned to the objectives a Legacy review has been agreed for early 2021/22.



**LONG TERM / INTEGRATION** - Both the Integrated Care Fund and transformation grant funded projects provide the opportunity to test innovative practices and work collectively to progress integration and partnership working across the Gwent region. All Integrated Care Fund projects focus as much as possible on how Health and Social Services can integrate to provide a seamless service model for recipients of health and social care provision.

## Overview

### To put effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm

- The Gwent Safeguarding Board continue to support partner agencies and practitioners at this time, as they perform their safeguarding duties to ensure that the safeguarding of children, young people and adults at risk remains at the forefront of work.
- Numbers of children on the child protection register have remained stable over the last 12 months.
- The Corporate Safeguarding Policy has been updated and a Corporate Safeguarding Training Plan devised.
- COVID 19 continues to have an impact on services and the community with many groups/venues closed and people becoming more socially isolated. However, some groups have started to operate remotely and the Community Connectors are encouraging and supporting people to access the groups via this new way of operating.
- There has been no drop in referrals to safeguarding throughout the pandemic.
- Due to the pandemic there has been a delay in all governors being DBS checked as well as the move to encourage greater uptake and participation by governors in safeguarding training. Virtual sessions are being arranged for the summer term.
- The 360 degree policy has been approved by the Executive Committee for distribution to Governing Bodies for adoption.
- The Wales Safeguarding App is available to all those staff who have a works mobile and communications have gone out to alert those staff without a works mobile of the App which is available to all, via Google search engine.

### To build a collaborative culture between services, partners and communities working together and with people directly to shape and deliver services. i.e. (Community Asset Transfers).

- In order to finalise the transfer of Tredegar Recreation Ground, external assistance has been commissioned to deal with legal standing of selection process.
- Communication is ongoing with Brynithel RFC and Llanhilleth FC to finalise transfer of Brynithel Recreation Ground.
- Charity Commission consent is still being obtained in respect of the transfer of Cwm Recreation Ground and Ebbw Vale Welfare.
- In-house cemetery maintenance works have commenced. Tenders have been sought for essential cemetery road and path infrastructure maintenance works to be completed, which will support and assist communities by providing good access together with providing opportunities for local businesses through contract work, thus supporting the economic prosperity for local and regional communities.
- Consideration is being given to the fact that there is just over two years before burial capacity will become a major issue for the Tredegar Area.
- The review and delivery of the Strategic Asset Management Plan is no longer progressing due to capacity and demands on the service.
- An action plan for Industrial Portfolio Review is now progressing. The Pandemic is affecting businesses but the portfolio is still doing well with income generation being up.
- All regions of the South East Wales Adoption Services continue to work collaboratively, sharing information and good practice to shape and deliver effective services.

## Case Study - Christmas Toy appeal

The annual Christmas Toy Appeal was incredible this year. The Council is extremely grateful for all of the wonderful donations received, which helped to support some of the most vulnerable families within Blaenau Gwent.

This year each child received a Christmas Eve box, a filled stocking and a sack of toys. Each family received a hamper of festive food. The generosity of the individuals from within the community and also from companies and organisations both within and outside of Blaenau Gwent is unprecedented and the appeal went to another level this year.

The appeal supported over 300 children and their families aiming to make a difference to their lives. How Santa manages with the amount of children in the world is baffling – we need some of his magic dust! We would like to extend a huge thank you to all those who coordinated, recorded and posted the Santa messages via our social media platforms. The feedback received from families was amazing! Below are some of the messages received from families who were supported via this appeal.

***Mum dropped to her knees when she opened the bag and was crying inconsolably because she was so overwhelmed with the toys she was given. Mum said 'I can't believe how kind people have been, you do not realise how happy I feel'. She later messaged to say, 'Thank you so much for all this stuff, I can't believe it'.***

*'Hi we just want to say a big thank you for all the toys and the hamper. We really appreciated it all and thank you to everyone who helped to put all these together, it's really appreciated'.*



***Mum could not stop smiling, she kept saying 'oh my God, I cannot believe what we have been given, we were only expecting a toy each. I can't thank you all enough, this has taken a weight off my shoulders. Thank you Thank you Thank you'.***

*Mum was given the packages and she said you really don't understand what this means to my family and how grateful I am that we have been helped. I thank you all from the bottom of heart. Thank you so so much for these toys they are amazing I am so grateful - thank you, I hope you all have a lovely Christmas'.*

## Case Study - Compassionate Communities

Mr P was referred through Compassionate Communities – referral stated that Mr P was struggling with 'self-neglect', 'alcoholism' and that he needed to move into a care home.

I contacted Mr P and had a good conversation with him about what matters. Mr P's outcome was to move into a suitable affordable property – his current property had two flights of stairs and due to poor mobility and over confidence when drinking, Mr P had experienced numerous falls resulting in hospital admissions. Mr P had lost all confidence and didn't feel safe in his own environment. This also affected his mental health – he began to develop low self-esteem and he became isolated. This had a real knock-on in terms of how Mr P was able to take care of himself and his home.

Mr P is a very private and proud gentleman and so was very upset with his current situation. He has no family members that live close by and a very limited amount of informal support networks.

With consent I made a referral to Supporting People as a starting point – a POBL support worker was allocated and Mr P was quickly allocated an adapted affordable flat. While in the process of his move however, Mr P experienced another fall and was re-admitted into hospital.

Realising that a return to his property was unsuitable, while Mr P was in hospital myself and POBL arranged for Mr P furniture and belongings to be moved into the new premises for discharge. His internet was installed in his new property to enable Mr P to keep in touch with family members and carry out his shopping. Even the local councillor helped with the practicalities of moving.

Mr P was discharged into the new premises with CRT support around confidence-building and falls management. After a few weeks of intervention, Mr P had reached his optimum and CRT were able to withdraw.

Mr P has settled well into his new accommodation. He receives some minimal support from community meals and a private domestic arrangement. Mr P no longer feels like he needs assistance to manage his alcohol use as he is in such a good place. His mood has much improved and he has seen a real difference in his wellbeing as a whole.

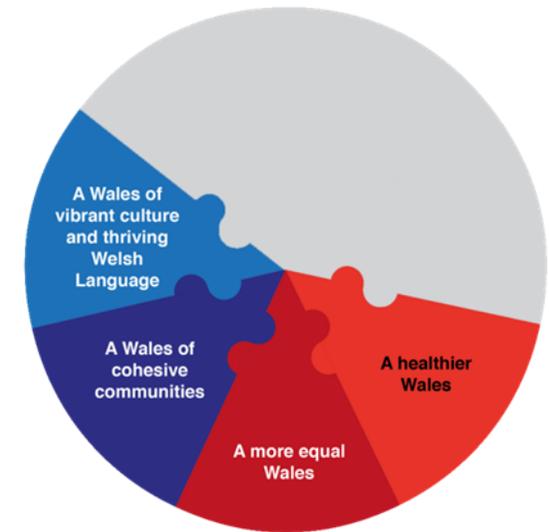


## Why this is important

Improving the quality and provision of teaching and learning is vitally important to ensure the service is achieving ambitious outcomes for all. The Council will continue to invest in services in order to support economic development and regeneration in order to provide opportunities for local people and businesses.

## Progress against actions

A number of high level priorities (shown below) have been identified to support delivery of the corporate objective, '**Support a fairer sustainable economy and community**'. These are detailed in the following overview pages along with some associated achievements and challenges.



### Priorities:-

- Support all learners to achieve improved outcomes;
- To improve pupil outcomes, progress and wellbeing;
- Improve skills and promote digital participation;
- To work with partners to provide effective employment support and access to skills development (Apprenticeships);
- To increase the start-up business rate, retention and growth of local businesses and attract new inward investment;
- To actively participate in partnerships such as Tech Valleys and CCRCDD to attract investment; and
- To work with partners to develop a new vision for our town centres ensuring their long term future.

## Support a fairer sustainable economy and community

This section reflects the overall progress position for the delivery of the above corporate objective, along with a breakdown of each individual priority, highlighting progress, achievements and challenges.

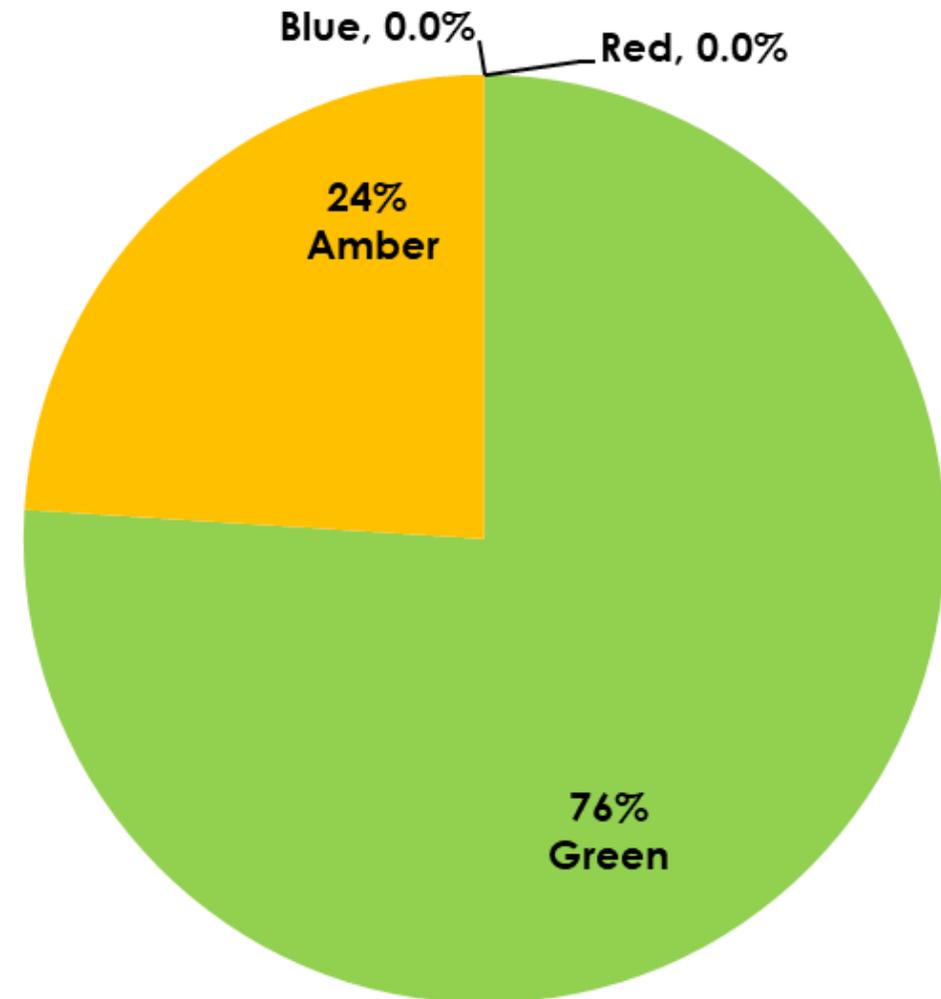
Overall corporate objective delivery position as at 31st March 2021.

### How we performed

Throughout January to March there has been substantial progress in the implementation of the priorities supporting delivery of the objective 'Support a fairer sustainable economy and community' but it is recognised that there is still further work to do to fully implement the aims and objectives.

As at the 31st March 2021, the performance against this objective was **evaluated as mainly successful as 76% of the actions were green (on target) and 24% were amber (behind target with manageable issues )**.

This objective remains high on the Council's agenda. The Council is looking to support the well-being agenda of all citizens as well as support improvements in attainment.



## Overview

### Support all learners to achieve improved outcomes

- A post-16 enhanced transition pilot is underway in Abertillery Learning Campus to look at how best to ensure pupils transitioning from year 11 are able to access appropriate provision and access it successfully.
- Outreach work - A number of referrals were made for young people who wanted further support to transition from school to college, training or employment. A number of discussions took place around fire safety, alcohol, healthy relationships and consequences of actions leading to young people feeling empowered to make informed decisions. A number of young people disclosed that they felt listened to and their opinions were valued.
- The Corporate parenting action plan continues to provide the framework for the development of Children Looked After Friendly schools, which is currently at pilot stage. Good cross directorate working is in place to support this. In addition, robust systems are in place to monitor the appropriateness and effectiveness of EAS Children Looked After grant funding.
- There has been an increase in Elected Home Education (EHE) as a result of COVID. Work is currently progressing via the SEWO to support families who want to see their children return to school and to encourage others in that direction. Whilst also recognising the responsibility placed on the Local Authority by Welsh Government through grant funding to support families who have chosen to Elected Home Education.



**INTEGRATION**- Closer working is taking place between the Inclusion Service, Children's Services and Health regarding Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Transformation and a number of other areas including Out Of County Children Looked After placements, Corporate Parenting priorities, and MYST.

## How we currently perform



**BG Effect - \*9 Drop-in sessions held with 20 enquiries; \* 17 grant awards given totalling £17,467; and \* 28 f/t and 4 p/t jobs created.**



**Aspire SAP currently has 21 host employers, 38 live apprentices, 7 of which are internal apprentices.**



**519 on time School Reception applications received with all pupils being offered their first preference school**



**Reduction in the level of support that schools require for the period 2017 to 2019**



**Industrial property portfolio :- \*12 Business unit transactions completed since April 2020 \*85% business units occupied**

## Overview

### To improve pupil outcomes, progress and wellbeing

- The School Admissions Policy for the 2020-21 admission round was approved and published following a statutory consultation with key stakeholders including: schools, partners, governing bodies, parents etc.
- All school admission rounds for this academic year have been effectively implemented.
- A Leisure Trust review has now concluded with the client function now being aligned within the Education Portfolio. A Leisure and Culture Strategy has also been developed to provide strategic direction for the future of leisure services and identifies key priorities for the next 10 years.
- Regular liaison with Headteachers has taken place regarding the pause of breakfast clubs due to the current Covid restrictions and the decision has been taken to introduce a healthy snack at registration as of May 2021.
- A formal consultation has been carried out in respect of a new 210 place Welsh-medium Primary School. 198 formal responses were received electronically with the proposal receiving a greater level of support than challenge.
- An ESTYN review recognises the positive work of the Council during the pandemic period in four main areas:
  - **Strong Collaboration Work** across the Council and externally to respond appropriately to the needs of learners.
  - Working to support the most **Vulnerable Learners** with a wide range of particular needs.
  - **Youth Service** changed the ways it works to continue to support around 750 children and young people.
  - **Digital Support** -Working with IT partners to provide over 1,600 electronic devices to digitally excluded families to enable them to engage with blended learning opportunities.

### Improve skills and promote digital participation

- The Hwb EdTech project, has continued to be rolled out, providing a range of digital services which will inspire our teachers and learners to confidently embed digital practices, while developing their culture, competencies, skills and knowledge:-
  - 142 devices have been re-built and handed out to pupils to enable them to engage with home learning throughout school closures and any periods of self isolation,
  - MiFi units have been distributed to enable families with connectivity issues to be able to gain access to Wi-Fi hwb edtech project, again, to enable the pupils to engage with home learning.
  - This takes the total of devices distributed to date to 1,359 devices and 161 MiFi units.
- The work of regional and cluster ALNCoS has continued during the COVID period and considerable training has been made available on line.
- School admissions is now a fully online process.
- Digital communication channels were the main means of delivering the enormous volume of information to local residents during the pandemic.



**PREVENTION** - Ensuring that the ALN Act is implemented in an efficient and effective manner, in line with good practice and in partnership with schools and other services/agencies, will ensure an improved system that works for the benefit of pupils, families and the wider community now and in the future.

## Overview

### To work with partners to provide effective employment support and access to skills development (Apprenticeships)

- The Tech Valleys Advisory Group has endorsed the STEM facilitation proposal and Welsh Government funding has been awarded to support a 2 year pilot project (21/22, 22/23). Officers have been appointed and the project will commence in early 21/22.
- A future skills study has been commissioned and concluded to inform the Advanced Engineering Centre proposal. Tech Valleys Advisory Group endorsed the proposal to deliver a centre of excellence that would facilitate future skills requirements, relating specifically to Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering. With Coleg Gwent as a key delivery partner there would be a curriculum and industry training programme to meet demand from local industry. A business case has been submitted to Welsh Government and initial development funding to progress the scheme has been secured.
- Aspire SAP has operated during the pandemic providing ongoing support to both the host employers and the apprentices to ensure the apprenticeship placements have been sustained. Further funding (to Sep 22) has been secured to support the programme delivery.
- There are risks around Cardiff Capital Region not yet signing off the Aspire roll-out.

**LONG TERM** - Close work with Welsh Government is ongoing to shape support programmes whilst continuing to support business on response and recovery in the long term.



**COLLABORATION** - Covid has posed significant challenges for town centres - collaborative working through Town Centre Facilitator, Task & Finish Groups and partners has and will continue to be key for town centre recovery.

### To increase the start-up business rate, retention and growth of local businesses and attract new inward investment

- Interest has been expressed in developing the Employment Park, Lime Avenue. The project has the potential to deliver a key site forming part of the Works Masterplan, working to provide premises for local businesses. The project has the ability to increase the range of premises available to local businesses and a pathway for growth in the area. Fundamentally, the project represents an excellent opportunity to continue the development of the Works Site, delivering a collaborative project which will support local businesses and residents.
- Work is continuing with Ciner and Welsh Government on the next stages which include Planning application approval / Blaenau Gwent land transfer / Welsh Government Grant approval / Preparation to begin on site.
- The Council's Industrial business units remain in high demand and enquiries are coming in daily – stock is now an issue, with demand for units of 300 – 2000 sq. ft. remaining high.
- Work is ongoing for the Box Business Hub, which will include 21 box containers (159 sq. ft. & 220 sq.ft) adapted for business use. The units will accommodate new and existing businesses with 9 active enquiries registered at the end of March 21.
  - BG Effect has continued to provide business support to local people, start-up ventures, existing businesses and social enterprises and has now been awarded £60,000 to extend the scheme for additional 3 years.
  - 13 Kick Start Plus applications awarded in 2020-2021 with total grant award of £10,765.

## Overview

### To actively participate in partnerships such as Tech Valleys and Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRCD) to attract investment

- Additional to the Social Housing Grant Programme a housing viability gap funding application was made to the CCRCD to support further housing development within Blaenau Gwent (circa 70 units inc of 10% social rent). The proposal has been shortlisted at stage 1 and the final cabinet decision is anticipated June 2021.
- A business case has been submitted to the CCRCD outlining a proposal for a regional roll out of the Aspire SAP, this has not progressed in year however will be a priority for 21/22.
- Work on the Local Development Plan will begin in the 10 local planning authorities of South East Wales later in 2021. A review of capacity within Blaenau Gwent delivery team is needed prior to undertaking this key piece of work.
- Work is continuing with partner Local Authorities to support resilience and develop collaborative projects such as the recent application for CRF funding, Transport projects and other CCR initiatives.
- Challenges remain to maximise investment in the Heads of the Valleys area to support businesses and communities. Work continues at a senior level to influence investment programmes to benefit Blaenau Gwent.

### To work with partners to develop a new vision for our town centres ensuring their long term future

- Targeted Regeneration Investment Thematic grant funding has enabled the council to work with property owners across the borough to tackle properties held on the empty properties register as a way of encouraging retail, housing and business opportunities.
- The Brynmawr and Nantyglo Masterplan has been agreed enabling the outcomes of the Masterplan to be taken forward next financial year
- Through TRI and Valleys Taskforce Welsh Government agreed to the establishment of a Town Centre COVID recovery Grant scheme. Premises across Blaenau Gwent were awarded up to £15,000 (80% funding) to support their re-opening as a result of lockdowns and COVID measures. In total we expect £519,012 of grants to be awarded.
- Additional £550,000 of funds were secured for repayable town centre loans.
- Urban Centre Property Enhancement Grants - £920,000 was allocated over two years to support refurbishment and enhancement of commercial properties. In total £1,044,000 will be spent over this period.
- Tredegar Townscape Heritage Initiative has continued with work being concluded to No.10, The Circle in early 2021.

Complimentary initiatives to support the heritage centre at No.10 the circle have also been completed.

- Works to the NCB Town Hall have been severely delayed as a result of COVID-19 and discussions are ongoing with the HLF to manage the funding deadlines.



**INTEGRATION** - *The Business & Innovation Team have been working in conjunction with Estates, Finance, Technical Services & Legal to prepare the necessary legal documents & marketing materials for the new Hybrid Units that will be available at The Works site in early 2021. Viewings have already taken place with 5 of the 9 units at lease stage (by one Global business). The remaining 4 are being marketed and will be available during May.*

### Case Study - Youth Service Response to COVID-19

Since March 2020, the Youth Service has supported the response to COVID-19. Although school based youth workers and councillors returned to buildings in September, initially, the service refocussed to identify and support the most vulnerable young people known to the Youth Service, Education and schools. Since March 2020, the service supported 600 11-16 year olds and 250 16-25 year olds and from March to July made weekly contact. Initially the focus was supporting young people around the challenges they faced linked to the pandemic, including delivering essentials such as food, toiletries, wellbeing packs, supporting issues around lack of money, losing employment and facing eviction. Youth workers supported young people to find accommodation, and the local authority placed some young people, who would not usually be eligible to access support in bed and breakfast accommodation, to try to ensure that they had a safe place to live. Youth workers also helped young people to apply for financial support.

Over time, the emergency response changed to support young people around their wellbeing. Online activities were developed such as music, cooking and art club, and face to face activities included wellbeing walks, supporting attendance at college and job interviews.



The Counselling Service has continued throughout COVID 19, providing online sessions, meeting young people outside, in school and the youth centre. A full summer programme was provided including a mixture of online and face to face activities. Throughout, youth club staff have been redeployed to provide outreach and the detached team have continued to work in the evenings, responding at times to requests from the Police and community members. This has been an opportunity to keep young people informed about the restrictions, any changes and what that means for them. Between April 2020 and December 2020, 24 referrals (MARFS) were made to Social Services.

Through the Youth Service and Counselling Service, young people are able to access support if and when they need it and are able to access new opportunities. These opportunities help broaden young people's horizons, raise their aspirations and the support ensures that all young people, no matter their experience, are able to participate. This can result in young people becoming active citizens in their communities, making informed choices about their future and reaching their potential.



## Case Study - 21st Century Schools

### Proposed new Glyncoed Primary and Childcare.

Work has commenced on a proposed new 360 place primary school and separate full day childcare building on the former Glyncoed comprehensive site.

The project is funded by Blaenau Gwent and Welsh Government (21<sup>st</sup> Century Band B and Childcare grant). Planning application is now being submitted with an aim for completion being for the Autumn term 2023.



### Proposed Welsh medium primary and childcare within the Tredegar valley.

Work has commenced on a 210 Welsh medium primary school with integrated childcare unit.

The project is in the early design development stage and site investigations. The ambitious programme is to deliver the seedling facility for Autumn term 2023.



## Case Study - Youth Service outreach work.

With an increase in anti-social behaviour, fire setting, waste and theft of recycling bins the Youth Service were asked to support a multi-agency approach to reduce these concerns.

An intense period of 3 weeks Outreach work was carried out consisting of a small team of qualified staff from the Youth Service walking the identified area engaging young people, building trusting relationships and, if necessary, addressing the identified issues and explaining the potential issues and consequences of their actions. The young people were more than happy to chat and engage due to the approach of the staff which involved going on to the territory where these young people hang out and taking the time to get to know them and listen to their opinions.



Over this period the youth service engaged over 100 individual young people aged between 10 and 23 resulting in :-

- A number of referrals being made for young people who wanted further support to transition from school to college, training or employment.
- A number of discussions taking place around fire safety, alcohol, healthy relationships and consequences of actions;
- A number of young people disclosing that they felt listened to and their opinions were valued making them feel empowered to make informed decisions.

The wider impact the outreach work has had on the young people and community has resulted in no wild fires being reported, youth related ASB calls and incidents to the Police reducing and a serious allegation regarding young people inhaling toxic fumes has been completely dispelled.



Staff were able to also highlight to partner organisations the issue of community members providing young people with waste material such as old sofas and wardrobes to take away. This led to the Cleansing Department further educating the community regarding fly tipping and the dangers of this. It has also led to further information being provided to partners such as damage to woodland and specific areas that require cleaning.

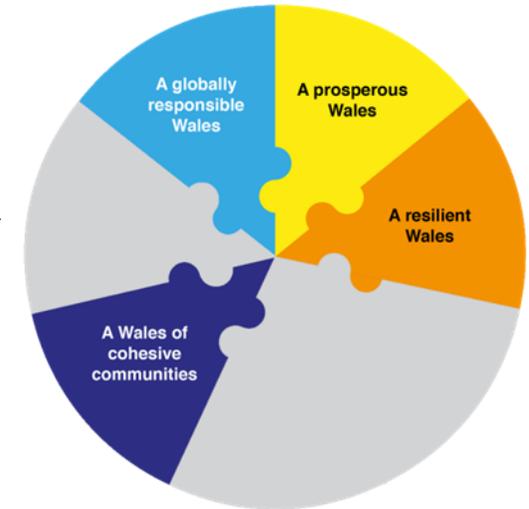


The Detached Youth Work Service will continue to work alongside young people and the community with the plan to develop the ideas that were fed back by young people regarding creating a space for themselves. A litter pick for May half term has also been organised where young people will help to clean the area making it more attractive for all.



## Why this is important

Blaenau Gwent has a rich heritage and its buildings and countryside are part of Blaenau Gwent's attractiveness as a place to live, work and visit. The local environment should be used to help improve the health and well-being of families and communities and be enhanced for future generations to continue to enjoy. There is also a real desire to see the communities where people live kept clean, tidy and useable, creating areas that people can be proud of.



## Progress against actions

A number of high level priorities (shown below) have been identified to support delivery of the corporate objective, '**Protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities**'. These are detailed in the following overview pages along with some associated achievements and challenges.

### Priorities:-

- To re-invest in highways maintenance particularly improvements to our residential roads, streets and pavements;
- To increase rates of recycling to enable us to achieve national targets;
- To re-invest in environmental services to address the issues created by fly-tipping, dog fouling, littering, grass cutting, street cleansing and pest control;
- To improve the access to and quality of open spaces for the benefit of our communities, businesses and visitors; and
- To work with partners to provide a variety of homes
- To develop an excellent digital infrastructure including internet and mobile network connectivity that can support the needs of the whole community.
- To develop a portfolio of potential energy opportunities to deliver economic, business and community benefits
- To improve the quality of our school buildings to help learners achieve great outcomes
- To be a carbon neutral Council by 2030

The following section reflects the overall progress position for the above corporate objective, along with a breakdown of each individual priority, highlighting progress, achievements and challenges

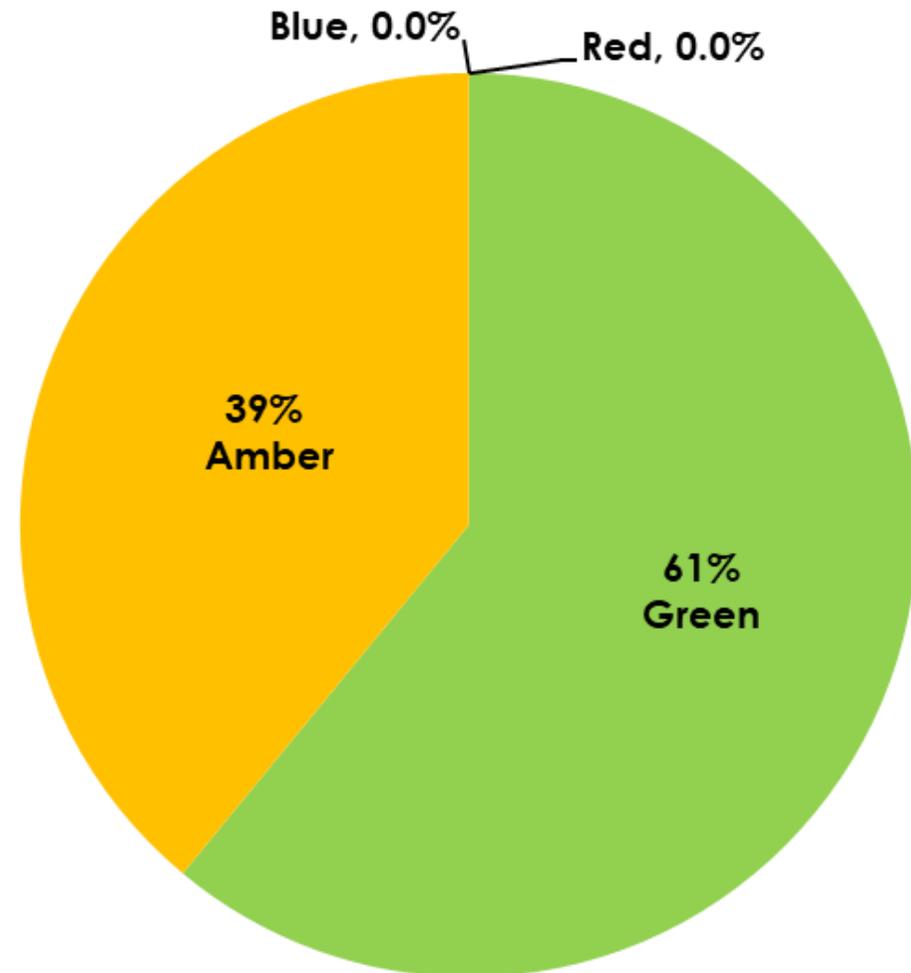
## How we performed

Throughout 2020/21 there has been progress in the implementation of the priorities supporting delivery of the objective, 'Protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities' but it is recognised that there is still further work to do to fully implement the aims and objectives over the remainder of the Corporate Plan.

As at the 31st March 2021, the performance was **evaluated as being mainly successful as 61% of the actions were green (on target) and 39% were amber (behind target with manageable issues).**

The environment remains as a high priority for the community. The Council is looking to improve the area so that it is somewhere to be proud to live. Through focusing on delivering against the main priorities set out in the Corporate Plan the Council can begin to transform Blaenau Gwent into a more prosperous and welcoming area that celebrates its heritage and plays its part on the regional and national stage. Investment will continue to be made throughout Blaenau Gwent so that it is an area that people are proud to live in and be a part of.

Overall corporate objective delivery position as at 31st March 2021



## Overview

### To increase rates of recycling to enable us to achieve national targets

- Work is ongoing to build the Education Centre located at the new Roseheyworth HWRC. Following issues with the original planned location, a new location on site has been agreed and updated drawings are in process. The building has been based on a typical classroom for 30 pupils. Further communication is needed with Education regarding the feasibility/usefulness of the building as a classroom.
- Following soft market testing being carried out and responses being considered, Silent Valley Waste Services Ltd. has prepared and submitted a Business Plan which is planned for an independent review in May 2021. A vision/masterplan document for the site has also been prepared which considers the opportunities that exist at the site including the regional wood facility, additional storage areas and energy opportunities. A service specification of services required by the Council has also been developed. If approved, planning application will be developed and submitted for approval, procurements for design and build and equipment prepared.
- The revised pricing structure for the trade waste service is complete and preparation to issue new contracts and duty of cares to customers as they re-open following Lockdown is underway.
- Despite vehicles for the development of a new source segregated trade waste service being ordered, Covid has impacted on delivery timescales due them being delivered from Italy.
- Route optimisation for waste and recycling Services has continued. This will allow us to make waste and recycling rounds more efficient and responsive to community needs.

\* figure not yet verified by NRW

## How we currently perform



**73 Electric Vehicle Charge points have been installed across 35 sites.**



**The Percentage of waste reused, recycled or composted has increased to 65.5% \***



**Lighting replacement at Ebbw Vale Sports Centre and installation of Motorised Pool Covers**



**100% of Emergency issues / complaints regarding falling trees were dealt with within 1 day**



**In total 6000 non-LED street lights have been replaced with LED lights.**

## Overview

### To re-invest in environmental services to address the issues created by fly-tipping, dog fouling, littering, grass cutting, street cleansing and pest control

- The Litter and Dog Control Order enforcement initiative has previously tackled the priority of 'improving street cleanliness' and reinforces the Authority's zero-tolerance approach. Unfortunately, as a result of the current COVID 19 pandemic and subsequent redeployment, the service has needed to be suspended.
- Following a consultation process being undertaken with stakeholders, a shared vision and a number of key objectives have been established for a new Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy 2021-2026 that will deliver recognised environmental improvements, supporting delivery of the vision 'To radically reduce litter and fly-tipping so we can improve our natural habitats as well as our wild and urban landscapes, increasing pride and awareness of our local heritage and desire to keep it litter free'.
- The Pest Control Treatment Service has continued with restrictions imposed by the Covid 19 pandemic having no significant impact on the ability to deliver the service as appropriate risk mitigation measures were introduced to ensure that pest control visits could be conducted safely.
- Support to local community groups has continued throughout this period providing litter champions with materials, equipment, staff support and collection of waste following clean up and clearance work where COVID restrictions allowed.



**PREVENTION** - A consultant has undertaken a fundamental review of the Street Cleansing Service. The findings of the review formed the basis of the Litter and Fly Tipping Strategy and identified the key objectives, and actions to improve the local environmental quality for the future.

### To re-invest in highways maintenance particularly improvements to our residential roads, streets and pavements

- Planning of remedial works to the Big Arch has commenced with consultation with Cadw ongoing due to its listed structure status.
- Draft highways maintenance and winter maintenance plan in place. Further officer meetings to be convened to finalise draft plan and then report through Council process for adoption.
- All schemes within the Highways Capital Works Programme 20/21 are complete. A Programme for 2021/22 is being developed and works are subject to Welsh Government Grant Award & Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Capital funding provision.
- The Highways Asset Management Plan is continually being reviewed and updated in order to provide the key data & information to inform decisions on future investments into the highway network. In order to improve the effectiveness of this plan better integration of services is needed.
- An application for works to Tredegar Company Shop (Truck Shop) has been made to Cadw, awaiting response.
- A Stage 2 sketch proposal for Trinity Chapel has been produced and handed over to the Coal Regeneration Trust (CRT) who will procure and deliver the following:
  - Complete building installation;
    - Lower Ground Floor will be space for Abertillery Library;
    - Upper Ground Floor will be space for Adult Community Learning; and
    - First Floor will be Exhibition / Rental Space.

## Overview

### To work with partners to provide a variety of homes

- The allocation of £2.1m was successfully allocated to support the delivery of affordable housing at Ebbw Vale School Site and Glanffrwyd. Further slippage funding of £824k was also secured.
- Affordable (social rent) housing developments completed during the year, were:
  - College Road Phase 2, Ebbw Vale - 33 units
  - Gwaun Helyg Phase 3/4, Ebbw Vale -72 units in total
  - Sirhowy, Tredegar -23 units
- Schemes on site and progressing:
  - Glanffrwyd, Ebbw Vale -23 units, social rent
  - Greenacres, Tredegar -22 units, social rent
  - Golwg Y Bryn, Ebbw Vale -100 units -70 open market, 30 social rent with 56 completed
  - Ebbw Vale School Site -277 units - 222 open market, 55 social rent
- Development work to progress additional housing sites within Blaenau Gwent is ongoing.
- To support the residential development of Abertillery Leisure Centre site further surveys were commissioned to enable a determination of suitable access. Information has now been received and will be used to inform a decision.
- An options appraisal paper has been drafted in respect of Six Bells Plateau and will be discussed with local ward members.
- A development brief for the Civic Centre has been prepared and an options paper will form part of the Ebbw Vale Placemaking Plan. This will inform residential development opportunities at this site, for implementation following the civic centre demolition.

### To improve the access to and quality of open spaces for the benefit of our communities, businesses and visitors

- Blaenau Gwent continues to support the delivery of the South East Wales Resilient Uplands Project with some examples of progress being:-
  - fencing reducing incidents of animals straying onto the public highway;
  - Mynydd Llanhilleth management plan which will have significant benefits for the Communities in the lower Ebbw Fach; and
  - New gates, barriers, boulders and bunds to reduce landscape crime.
- Access improvements to sites have been delivered to the value of £34,000 and Funding for 2021/22 has also been awarded in the value of £54,000.
- Utilisation of the Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being Funding is progressing well and continues to meet the agreed outputs and outcomes .
- Green Recovery funding of £90,000 has been used for biodiversity enhancement and woodland management.
- Project work has been delivered in the value of £240,000 for improvements of the Active Travel network including projects at Parc Bryn Bach , Glyn Coed and Brynmawr to Beaufort.
- Metro Plus Programme - Progress is continuing on the rail investment, alongside Transport for Wales on the project components put forward as part of the Metro Plus scheme in Blaenau Gwent, including both the Ebbw Valley line and the Abertillery spur.

## Overview

### To develop an excellent digital infrastructure including internet and mobile network connectivity that can support the needs of the whole community.

- Digital infrastructure is being developed in areas of Blaenau Gwent including within town centres and other innovative projects through the GovTech Catalyst.
- Delays to the delivery of the Local Full Fibre Network - awaiting update following discussions with UK Gov.
- The Council has been part of a number of pilot digital projects with a focus on the user experience and customer journey. The projects have included a number of service areas including Social Services and Community Services supporting internal awareness and capacity building in the service re-design approach. Additional training has been accessed via the WLGA with more planned. Directorate digital roadmaps are being developed, highlighting areas of opportunity for service redesign and better use of technology and systems. A prioritisation and planning exercise is underway and activity being scoped to support services included in the new operating model.



**COLLABORATION / PARTNERSHIP WORKING** - *The Welsh-medium Regional Planning of School Places and Demand Group have identified that a regional solution to the anticipated shortfall in Welsh-medium secondary school places is the highest priority.*

### To develop a portfolio of potential energy opportunities to deliver economic, business and community benefits

- Annual review of the Energy Prospectus completed - projects will span 21/22/23
- Delivery and final claims have been submitted for the PENTAGON and DRIVE Projects.
- Horizon2020 Proposals submitted for the last two rounds of funding under the Horizon2020 programme, awaiting decision. This will be replaced by the Horizon Europe programme in 2021/22.
- Partners developed a simulated project that would install Solar PV to the Coldmill School (11 to 16) and provide renewable energy to the building. Although it was originally only intended to be a simulation, the predicted results were extremely positive so this is a potential project that can be explored as a future investment.
- Funding was secured in 2020/21 to carry out small scale hydro generation investigations within the wards of Cwm and Llanhilleth through the Rural Development Programme. Identification of sites for further investigation and up to two sites for feasibility analysis will now follow. If suitable opportunities exist this work could provide us with a small portfolio of hydro generation projects that can be considered further for investment and delivery.
- Discussions are ongoing with Western Power Distribution to ensure infrastructure readiness for future business investment.
- The Council continues to work with Tech Valleys to develop and deliver projects, including completion of the Business Park- on the Works Site, development work around a Future Skills Academy and a range of other projects in development.

## Overview

### To improve the quality of our school buildings to help learners achieve great outcomes

- The delivery of the 21st Century Schools Band B programme/timeline has and continues to be subject to regular review throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic. The financial profile has also undergone review in discussion with Welsh Government, with the latest profile submitted in December 2020. To date the following outcomes have been achieved:-
  - Learning from the Band A Programme has been used to inform Band B development and implementation.
  - Welsh Government has approved all Business Case submissions to date in line with delivery of the Band B Programme.
  - Band B projects are currently on profile and programme.
- 62% of school maintenance and repair requests have been addressed and works completed. Technical services is in the process of providing a timeframe for completion of all outstanding actions.
- Emergency works that were postponed due to Covid restrictions will be undertaken during the Whitsun half term holidays.
- The Penycwm consultation document is complete and out for consultation. Work will be scheduled to be carried out over the Summer but it is recognised that space will remain a focus at the school going forward due to the increase in pupils with profound and complex needs.



**LONG TERM** -The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Programme is a long-term investment programme that, at present, spans the period 2014 to 2034. The Band B element covers the period 2019 to 2025. Its emphasis is on delivering a school estate that is fit for purpose and contributes to raising educational standards,

### To be a carbon neutral Council by 2030

- As part of the Carbon Reduction Strategy, the South East Wales Resilient Uplands (SEWRU) project includes enhancement of our Upland Heath and Bog habitats which are an excellent Carbon Sink. Enhancing these habitats will improve their performance in terms of carbon sequestration, making a positive contribution to the carbon reduction strategy.
- All Electric Vehicle Charging Points have been installed across Gwent. In total 73 charge points across 35 sites.
- The Decarbonisation Plan has been adopted and an outline approach to implementation approved with a focus on establishing an officer focused Board to take forward the approach to transition. A Terms of Reference for the Board has also been established using best practice from elsewhere and the Climate Change Committee Sixth Carbon Budget.
- To mitigate the challenge of developing a 'carbon focused' culture where people understand their role in becoming a carbon neutral public service by 2030, officers across the organisations are being involved in the PCAN focused Readiness Assessments for each of the 9 transition areas identified in the plan.

## Case Study - Advanced Engineering Centre

Work has commenced on an Advanced Engineering Centre in the Former Monwell Building for Coleg Gwent. Establishment of this leading engineering centre would support hundreds of learners in Ebbw Vale and include refurbishment of the former Monwell factory in Letchworth Road, Ebbw Vale. £200K has been awarded for the design element and design works are well under way with a planning application expected in the next month. This is an exciting project with a steep learning curve – very unique use.

The state-of-the-art facility would be a pioneering Centre of Excellence, which would be capable of delivering a new curriculum fit for the engineering industry of the future. Around 600 learners are expected to attend the centre by 2026/27 on a range of full-time, part-time, higher education and apprenticeship courses.



Regeneration Director, Richard Crook Says:

“This project brings together Tech Valleys, Coleg Gwent and a number of partners to develop its vision of a global centre for the development of new technologies. It will create an environment that will attract hi-tech inward investors within the advanced manufacturing sector.

“The Advanced Engineering Centre will be constantly adapting to produce highly trained students who have a real passion for engineering

and upskill the current engineering workforce, ready for the next industrial revolution. The partnership with the Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme will ensure local industry are provided with skilled young people for the jobs of the future.”

The initiative is supported by The Tech Valleys board. If the funding bid is approved, the facility is expected to open in September 2022. The centre will support Tech Valleys vision for South Wales Valley and Blaenau Gwent to be recognised as a global centre for the development of new technologies by 2027.

## Case Study - New Council Centre of Operations

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is committed to delivering front line services in an effective and efficient manner.

To support this delivery, proposals to develop a new Council Centre of Operations is underway. This would act as a direct replacement of the existing Central Depot currently located in Brynmawr.

The New Council Centre of Operations, is currently out for a 1 month Pre-application Consultation prior to the Full Planning Application.



EXISTING CENTRAL DEPOT



PROPOSED NEW COUNCIL CENTRE OF OPERATIONS

# Financial Management

2020/21 Forecast (as at 31st March 2021)

| Revenue Budget                                       |                          |   |   |  |
|--|--------------------------|---|---|--|
| Portfolio  | £,000<br>Budget<br>20/21 | £,000<br>Draft<br>Provisional<br>Outturn<br>20/21 | £,000<br>Variance<br>Favourable/<br>(Adverse) | Favourable/<br>(Adverse)<br>Variance % |
| Corporate Services & Financial Management & Strategy | 16,730                   | 15,366  | 1,364   | 8.2                                    |
| Economy  | 1,215                    | 1,185   | 30  | 2.5                                    |
| Education & Leisure                                  | 62,128                   | 61,751  | 377   | 0.6                                    |
| Environment  | 25,532                   | 25,643  | (111)   | (0.4)                                  |
| Licensing  | 70                       | 93  | (23)  | (32.9)                                 |
| Planning   | 1,118                    | 1,169   | (51)  | (4.6)                                  |
| Social Services                                      | 45,352                   | 44,231  | 1,121   | 2.4                                    |
| <b>Council Total</b>                                 | <b>152,145</b>           | <b>149,438</b>                                    | <b>2,707</b>                                  | <b>1.7</b>                             |

| Capital Budget                        |                          |                   |  |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Portfolio                             | £,000<br>Budget<br>20/21 | £,000<br>Variance | Favourable/<br>(Adverse)<br>Variance % |
| Corporate Services & Strategy         | 122                      | 0                 | 0                                      |
| Environment, Economy & Infrastructure | 14,446                   | (91)              | (0.6)                                  |
| Social Services - Adult & Children    | 873                      | 0                 | 0                                      |
| Education, Active Living and Learning | 1,777                    | 0                 | 0                                      |
| All Portfolios                        | 628                      | 0                 | 0                                      |
| <b>Council Total</b>                  | <b>17,846</b>            | <b>(91)</b>       | <b>(0.6)</b>                           |

**Current Budget Position:** The Draft provisional out-turn position across all portfolios to 31 March 2021, is a significant favourable variance of £2.7m against a net revenue budget of £152.1m. This is an improved forecast when compared to Q3 (£0.5m forecast favourable). In an unprecedented year with service delivery impacted by Covid 19 the positive variance arises for several reasons including a significant number of Welsh Government funding compensating the Council for additional costs & lost income, additional grants received in the final quarter of the financial year and underspends across services. The provisional out-turn position is subject to external audit and could therefore change by the completion of the audit.

**Current Budget Position:** Despite the Covid-19 Pandemic Capital Expenditure has been largely unaffected by the Lockdown restrictions.

The provisional outturn position indicates a favourable variance of £0.16m against an in year budget of £17.78m. Previous reports identified significant in year overspends on the Household Waste Recycling Centre and Lime Avenue Business Park projects of £0.2m & £0.23 respectively. Expenditure on these schemes for 2020/21 are within agreed budget levels however overspends against overall funding levels are expected during the next financial year.

The final account on the Roseheyworth Household Waste Recycling construction will be settled in the first quarter of 2021/22. The Authority will continue to liaise with the contractor to mitigate the final costs and to secure additional funding.

Discussions have been ongoing with Welsh Government with regards to funding the forecast overspend on the Lime Avenue Hybrid Units.

# Regulatory Proposals

The Council is subject to numerous internal and external audits and regulatory reviews each year which ensures local authorities provide value for money when delivering services, services are being run efficiently and effectively, and identifies local authorities approach in planning and delivering improved services in the future. This section aims to capture the progress being made against these proposals.

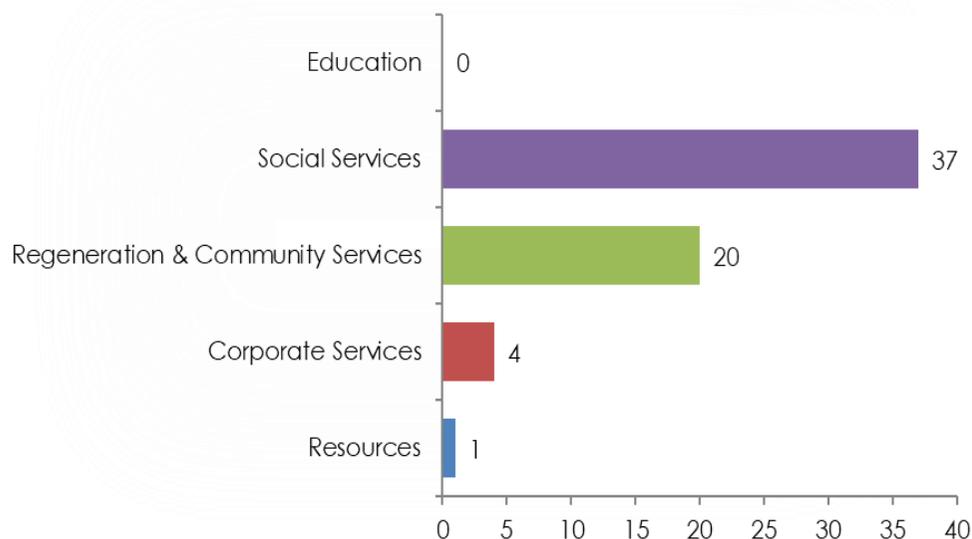
## Reports and Proposals

At 31st March 2021 there were 19 'live' audit reports. Of those:-

- 7 reports were still at the initial stages, either being newly received or due to be taken through the Democratic process; and
- 12 reports are being monitored via business plans, totalling 62 proposals for improvement being implemented.

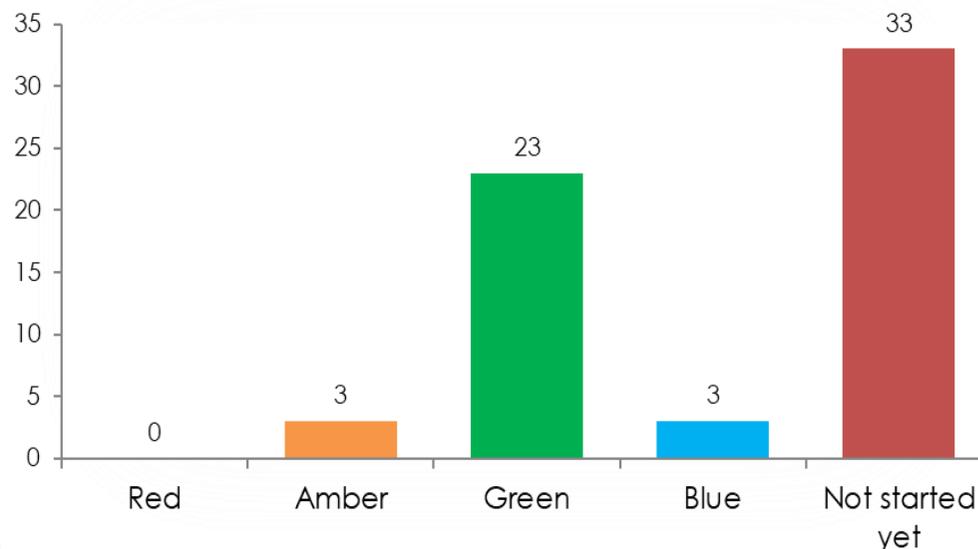
### Open proposals for improvement

#### Open Proposals for Improvement



### Current proposals status

#### Current Proposal Status



# Corporate Risk Register

| Risk Description and Lead  | End of Year 2020/21  | Status |
|--|--|--------|
| <p>CRR20 -</p> <p><b>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.</b></p> <p>Director of Social Services and Councillor John Mason</p> | <p><b><u>End of Year Review 2020 2021</u></b></p> <p>Although we have had to change and adapt processes and procedures during the pandemic to fulfil our statutory responsibilities and maintain the wellbeing of our communities and staff, this has created increased financial pressures but the Welsh Government's hardship fund has mitigated these costs. Additional funding being used through ICF and Transformation funding has been confirmed for a further 12 months covering 2021 to 2022. There has continued to be a slow reduction in the number of children looked after during the year and good evidence that the Supporting Change Team and the Myst team are having an impact on both numbers and budget.</p> <p>A review by Worcester University and a subsequent refresh of the children looked after reduction strategy 2017-2020 took place during the year with a New Strategy and Action plan agreed covering 2020 to 2025 this is currently beginning to be implemented. In addition a review was also undertaken of our disability team and a new model of operation proposed for this team, which will begin implementation in the first quarter of 2021-22.</p>                      | High   |
| <p>CRR21</p> <p><b>The Financial resilience of the Council could be at risk if the Council does not ensure that financial planning and management decisions support long term stability and sustainability.</b></p> <p>Chief Officer – Resources and Councillor Nigel Daniels</p>                                    | <p><b><u>End of Year Review 2020 2021—During the year the status of this risk reduced from critical to high</u></b></p> <p>In the early part of 2020/21 there were significant concerns around the potential financial impact the Covid 19 pandemic would have on the local / national economy and consequently the Council.</p> <p>WG announced that funding would be provided for additional costs and loss of income incurred as a consequence of delivering services in response to the pandemic. This funding will continue until at least September 2021.</p> <p>A review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy was undertaken and budget gaps for the 5 years to 2025/25 are currently predicted. To address these budget gaps work has continued on the development and implementation of the Bridging the Gap proposals.</p> <p>A positive WG local government settlement for 2021/22 has resulted in Blaenau Gwent receiving a funding increase of £4.3m and in March 2021 the Council agreed a budget which included a planned increase to both the General Reserve (£200k) &amp; the Financial Resilience Earmarked Reserve (£1m), a further step in improving the Council's financial resilience.</p> | High   |

# Corporate Risk Register

| Risk Description and Lead  | End of Year 2020/21   | Status |
|--|---|--------|
| <p>CRR22 -</p> <p><b>Failure to deliver the Council's priorities within the agreed annual budget resulting in the increased use of emergency finance measures and the drawdown of reserves.</b></p>              | <p><b><u>End of Year Review 2020 2021</u></b></p> <p>For 2020/21, the Council set a budget which required Bridging the Gap efficiencies of £1.5m whilst also addressing £2.05m of cost pressures and growth items and a plan to increase reserves by £1.7m.</p> <p>The global Covid-19 pandemic and the response had a significant impact on the Council both financially and on the delivery of services throughout the year. The changing circumstances during the year saw a number of services being suspended or being delivered in an alternative way.</p> <p>Financial forecasts improved during the year and the provisional outturn indicates a favourable variance of £2.639m (1.7%), against a total revenue budget of £152m .</p> <p>The favourable variance has arisen for a number of reasons, including Welsh Government Hardship funding which has compensated the Council for the additional costs incurred supporting enhanced service delivery in response to the Covid 19 pandemic and lost income (from Covid restrictions) ; reduced costs due to closure of buildings, staff mileage, delays in filling vacant post, general administration and service provision due to changes in working practices; underspends on cross cutting budgets (Commercial &amp; Contract management - and Transformation Fund) not utilised fully and unbudgeted grants that have offset core budget funding</p> <p>The favourable variance results in a significant increase in both general &amp; specific reserves.</p> | High   |
| <p>CRR 25</p> <p><b>The 2 schools currently in receipt of Council Intervention fail to make appropriate progress against the Statutory Warning Notice to Improve and their Post Inspection Action Plans.</b></p> | <p><b><u>End of Year Review 2020 2021</u></b></p> <p>Over 2020-21 there has been satisfactory progress made by both schools that are in an Estyn category and this is triangulated through the Schools Causing Concern review meetings. The risk remains the same, however, due to Estyn being unable to undertake monitoring visits to verify the progress made at this stage. The schools will be reviewed during the Autumn term monitoring visits and it is acknowledged that both schools are improving.</p>   | High   |

# Corporate Risk Register

| Risk Description and Lead   | End of Year 2020/21  | Status |
|---|--|--------|
| <p>CRR14</p> <p><b>Failure to improve staff attendance rates within the Council will lead to an unacceptable impact on the ability of the Council to deliver services effectively and financially support the cost of sickness absence.</b></p> <p>Head of Organisational Development and Councillor Nigel Daniels</p>        | <p><b><u>End of Year Review 2020 2021</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall outturn figure is 11.67 days per full time equivalent employee (FTE) which has exceeded the corporate target (10.50 Days) by 1.17 days</li> <li>• When comparing the overall outturn with the previous year, there has been a decrease of 2.24 days from 13.91 days</li> <li>• Covid-19 impact – when excluding sickness absence related to Covid-19 the outturn figure reduces to 9.98 days a reduction of 1.69 days which comes in below the corporate target</li> <li>• Annual report reviewing sickness absence to be developed and presented to CLT and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee</li> <li>• Directorate and service targets for 2021/22 to be set by directorates</li> <li>• More detailed analysis of the hotspots to be undertaken with directorates</li> <li>• Ongoing management of sickness absence by managers supported by OD – including any long Covid and top 20 long term cases</li> </ul>   | High   |
| <p>CRR19</p> <p><b>If the Council does not manage its information assets in accordance with requirements set down within legislation, then it may be faced with financial penalties and possible sanctions that hinder service delivery.</b></p> <p>Head of Legal &amp; Corporate Compliance and Councillor Nigel Daniels</p> | <p><b><u>End of Year Review 2020/21</u></b></p> <p>Due to the pandemic progress on a number of areas stalled initially whilst directorates focussed on the obvious priorities of the Covid response and/or staff were redeployed. Despite this there has been significant progress with a number of policies being approved, or developed to draft stage, which will further protect the organisation and better communicate the messages to staff and raise awareness. Further policies are planned in 2021/22 Q1 to add to this progress along with providing guidance documents on how to safely use the new technologies being provided to staff whilst the organisation moves to new ways of working.</p> <p>Overall throughout 2020/21 there was a total of 47 data breaches of which 2 required reporting to the ICO (who chose to take no action), this is a slight increase on the total of 45 from the previous year. However, it is difficult to make direct comparisons due to the pandemic. Work continues on training and different methods to conduct this effectively and safely to the most amount of people are being explored. As refresher training is required for all staff on a rolling 2-year basis this is a constant area of work.</p> | High   |

# Corporate Risk Register

| Risk Description and Lead   | End of Year 2020/21   | Status  |
|---|---|---|
| <p>CRR26</p> <p><b>Business Continuity. The on-going COVID-19 pandemic presents a continued risk to service delivery.</b></p> | <p><b><u>Year End Review (2020/21)</u></b></p> <p>The response to the Coronavirus Pandemic has been the focus for the business during this year with the first lock-down commencing at the end of March 2020 and further waves in the pandemic resulting in another extended lock-down from December 2020 with relaxation in restrictions only commencing in April 2021.</p> <p>There has been significant and sustained impact on business continuity through the year with many services, particularly those classed as non-critical, being suspended or significantly reduced either as a result of the restrictions or due to staff being redeployed into critical service areas or high levels of staff absence due to self-isolation and/or shielding. As at April 2021 the majority of services have returned to more normal operations, enabled by the return of schools, end of shielding and the return of staff from redeployment. Some services have altered arrangements in place to enable social distancing e.g. refuse collection, and some personal services such as Day Care and Respite have not yet been able to return to normal operations, but will do so as soon as safe and practical to do so.</p> <p>Those staff who are able to work from home continue to do so and formal council meetings are still taking place remotely, these arrangements will change over the summer in line with the expected relaxation in restrictions. The new Democratic Hub will be able to pilot some agile meetings (both remote and in person attendees) in June with the intention of all meetings moving to an agile basis from September onwards. Similarly, when staff are able to return to office working they will do so under the new Agile Working Policy with home working being a significant aspect of work on an on-going basis and with agile office space available at the General Offices, Anvil Court, Tredegar and the Depot. The Civic Centre will not re-open and work to decommission the building has commenced.</p> <p>The risk of further disruption to service delivery exists particularly in the Autumn/Winter period given the uncertainty as to the impact of reducing restrictions and the presence of variants of concern. The modelling does show the likelihood of a third wave from the late summer but it is hoped that the successful vaccination programme will mitigate the worse impact of this on our community and workforce.</p> | <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Critical</p> |

# Corporate Risk Register

| Risk Description and Lead   | End of Year 2020/21   | Status          |
|---|---|-----------------|
| <p>CRR24</p> <p><b>There is a risk that exiting the EU will have an adverse impact at a national and local level which could impact on the community and on the Council and its ability to deliver public services.</b></p> <p>Managing Director / Head of Governance and Partnerships and Councillor Nigel Daniels</p> | <p><b><u>End of Year Review 2020 / 2021</u></b></p> <p>In many cases businesses have been substantially disrupted or closed during this year due to the Coronavirus Pandemic; with the first lock-down commencing at the end of March 2020 and further waves in the pandemic resulting in another extended lock-down from December 2020 with relaxation in restrictions only commencing in May 2021. There has been significant and sustained impact on businesses in BG resulting in some businesses closing, less start-ups and businesses holding back on investment. Issues surrounding leaving the EU have been clouded by COVID19 restrictions therefore we believe that the full effects of leaving have not yet been experienced.</p> <p>EU Transition group refreshed its terms of reference to monitor the impact of EU transition on council services, our communities and the local economy using the existing risk assessment and action plan, highlighting any emerging risks not previously identified or downgrading existing risks if impact is found to be low. The risk assessment was updated based on known impact of EU transition since 1st Jan, plus a new opportunities register has been developed to plan for opportunities arising from replacement EU funding, new trade &amp; travel rules, and other new UK legislation. Many of the implications for the local economy remain unknown until travel and trade starts to increase when Covid restrictions begin to ease during 2021/22.</p> <p>Refreshed situation reporting process has been put in place for service areas to report any EU transition issues (by exception) for escalation to Welsh Government &amp; WLGA where necessary (this has not been required yet). Welsh and UK Government EU Transition planning information shared with local businesses and EUSS material shared via council's social media.</p> <p>Welsh Government agreed to continue the EU Transition Fund Brexit Coordinator funding for local authorities in 2021/22. As in previous years, the EUTF funding was awarded to the WLGA who have redistributed £45,000 to each local authority to enable EU Transition coordinators “to remain at the heart of activity as the nature of the focus of required work now changes from planning to implementation.</p> <p>The risk of further disruption to business exists particularly in the Autumn/Winter period given the uncertainty as to the impact of reducing restrictions and the presence of variants of concern. The modelling does show the likelihood of a third wave from the late summer but it is hoped that the successful vaccination programme will mitigate the worse impact of this on our community and businesses.</p> | <p>Critical</p> |

# Corporate Risk Register

| Risk Description and Lead  | End of Year 2020/21  | Status      |
|--|--|-------------|
| <p>CRR 4</p> <p><b>Safeguarding - Failure to ensure adequate safeguarding arrangements are in place for vulnerable people in Blaenau Gwent</b></p> | <p><b><u>End of Year Review 2020 2021</u></b></p> <p>Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the directorate has continued to provide a consistent and timely response to safeguarding including face to face visits. Initially there was a reduction of referrals when we first went into lockdown but quickly this returned to more 'normal levels'. We have continued to report safeguarding performance to Welsh Government throughout the pandemic and to the Regional Safeguarding Board. Now that schools have returned full time to face to face contact we will continue to monitor the impact on referrals during quarter 1 of 2021-22.</p> <p>In Adult Services due to the number and complexity of referrals we have created an additional social worker post within the safeguarding team, however the post is unlikely to be filled until quarter 1 of 2021-22. Also our lead service manager for Corporate Safeguarding has led on the update of the Corporate Safeguarding policy as well as the proposed corporate safeguarding training programme which will be implemented in quarter 1 of 2021-22.</p> <p>The risks around pupils not receiving "face to face" learning in the school setting as a result of the pandemic were recognised , WG guidance "Stay safe, Stay Learning: supporting the education system" encouraged practitioners to make virtual contact with learners based on routines developed by head teachers while following WG guidance on live streaming and video conferencing.</p> <p>In relation to vulnerable learner provision, there was a strong provision in place to support learners that are Children Look After and those learners that are on the Child Protection Register whose families may have needed support. There were also arrangements in place with the education welfare service. The lack of meaningful safeguarding data available primarily due to most learners receiving their learning remotely resulted in the postponement of the Joint Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p><i>The Joint Safeguarding Committee will now be held on 26<sup>th</sup> April and a report will highlight a need following the emergency response to the pandemic to re-establish the collection of data from schools through the safeguarding and inclusion protocol. This action is in hand and will be presented to CLT/Members accordingly. The Safeguarding in Education Manager has been tasked to provide a Focus area of Analysis Development Way Forward (FADE) evaluation of the safeguarding matrix as at the end of the Spring term. The information on the matrix includes policy adoption, training, DBS escalations and volunteer information. The Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) policy is being finalised and will be presented to the Joint Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee in the near future. The implementation of the data management system, namely MyConcern across the school estate continues. The Summer term Estyn Local Authority Link Inspector (LALI) meeting will cover an update to the inspectorate on safeguarding aspects of work.</i></p> | <p>High</p> |

# Corporate Risk Register

| Risk Description and Lead  | End of Year 2020/21   | Status      |
|--|---|-------------|
| <p>CRR 1</p> <p><b>Failure to deliver and sustain the changes required to ensure that vital services are prioritised within the financial constraints faced by the Council</b></p> | <p><b><u>End of Year Review 2020 2021</u></b></p> <p>The financial out-turn for the Council will be a positive one with a surplus projected, allowing monies to be transferred into general reserves which will support financial resilience. The focus on the emergency response to the pandemic during the year has been supported by additional funding from Welsh Government and this has enabled the Council to manage financial pressures effectively and sustain service delivery, where that has been possible within the Covid restrictions.</p> <p>Priority services have continued to be funded and supported through the year with additional funds channelled into Education, Social Services and Community Services. Some work was inevitably delayed due to the pandemic but no funding has been diverted to the detriment of the council's priorities and this work is now re-commencing.</p> | <p>High</p> |