



Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol  
**Blaenau Gwent**  
County Borough Council



## **Blaenau Gwent Assessment of Performance 2020/21**

## Foreword

Blaenau Gwent is a place like no other. At the head of the Gwent Valleys Blaenau Gwent provides a unique and vibrant environment to live, work and play. With a heritage that is firmly based on an industrial past, we are a place that is changing to respond to new economic opportunities. The Tech Valleys Vision, Valleys Regional Park and Cardiff Capital Regional Deal combined with new transport links including the soon to be completed Heads of the Valley Road and rail routes to Cardiff bring a bright future. Together with the amazing location and surrounding parkland our people and communities make Blaenau Gwent great. Our people have influenced on the local, national and international stage in art, sport and politics for many generations – putting Blaenau Gwent on the map for all the right reasons.

The role of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and its partners is to maximise on the assets we have, doing more with less and doing it better. It is right that we recognise the challenges we face. The decline of heavy industry continues to impact on employment prospects and intergenerational opportunities. We face issues with health and wealth inequality, the rise of online shopping and the impact on our town centres and social issues affecting our families and young people.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been devastating globally and will have a significant detrimental impact on the economy and the way we live, work, learn and socialise for the foreseeable future. The Council has had to respond to this unprecedented situation and has done so at pace, bringing an innovative approach to problem solving and changes in service delivery, ensuring that the health and well-being of our residents and communities has been the driver for our decision making and actions.

As a Council we face increasing demand and costs for some of our services but we are tackling these issues head on with our partners, businesses and the local community. We are looking at how we spend our money to achieve the best outcomes for our residents, we are supporting new and existing businesses, we are looking at our assets to achieve new income streams and we are removing barriers to enable residents to access what they need. All in all, we are looking forward to a positive future.

## Blaenau Gwent Vision -

Proud Heritage

Strong Communities

Brighter Future

## **Councillor Nigel Daniels, Leader of the Council and Michelle Morris, Managing Director Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, A Year in Summary 2020/21**

This Assessment of Performance 2020/21 provides a self-reflection of the past year implementing the Council's Corporate Plan and Well-being Objectives as well as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. We have started to adapt practices and case studies and examples have been provided throughout the document to showcase the positive work that we are undertaking as a Council.

The Council is embracing the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (known as the 'Act') and is starting to adapt the way that it works. As part of this, we are working collectively to adapt the culture of the organisation and embed the ethos of the Act into all that we do. It is recognised however that we are still in the early years of implementing the Act and there is still more to do over the coming years.

In 2021 the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act came into force. This Act is a substantial piece of legislation covering electoral reform, public participation, governance and performance and regional working. It is designed to be a more streamlined, flexible, sector-led approach to performance, good governance and improvement. The intention is for councils to be proactive in considering how internal processes and procedures should change to enable more effective planning, delivery and decision-making to drive better outcomes. The Council is actively working to implement this Act which will also replace the current improvement duty for principal councils set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

The Corporate Plan is a very important strategic document for the Council which clearly sets out our priorities and how we will target our limited resources in order to support these objectives. The political leadership are keen that the priorities in the plan align with what local people have told us is important to them during public engagement events, in particular that they want strong and clean communities and they want to see our economy grow for the wellbeing of our future generations. Education and Social Services continue to be priorities as we work to improve standards in our schools so that all children and young people reach their full potential and we continue to look after the most vulnerable people in our communities against increasing demand for these services.

**Notable service activity from the year 2020/21 is identified throughout this document.**

### **COVID 19**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, the UK Government announced an unprecedented UK-wide 'lockdown' in order to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus. This resulted in the Council moving to the delivery of Critical Services only (as defined in the Emergency Management Plan), redeploying staff into these services, and ceasing all democratic meetings with immediate effect.

The declaration of a national health emergency led to the establishment of Emergency Planning arrangements in the region, under the Civil Contingencies Act 2005. The Gwent Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) was convened for its first meeting on 14th March 2020. The SCG is chaired by Gwent Police and includes the Local Health Board, all five local authorities and Category One Responders.

In accordance with our Emergency Planning arrangements the GOLD Group was established in Blaenau Gwent and commenced meetings on 19th March 2020. This comprises of all members of the Corporate Leadership Team, supported by the Civil Contingency Manager and

Communications Manager. The strategic aim of GOLD remains to delay and mitigate as far as practicable the spread and impact of Coronavirus within our community.

Heads of Service and Service Managers were convened as the Emergency Response Team, to support GOLD, with the Aneurin Leisure Trust, Tai Calon, GAVO and Joint Trade Unions also members of the Team. These Groups continue to meet to ensure the proper management of the emergency response in Blaenau Gwent.

When the lockdown began the Council shifted its sole focus to the emergency response. This resulted in delivery of only critical services with other available resources being redeployed to support the response. A particular focus was Adult Social Services, supporting some of the most vulnerable in the community, refuse collection and recycling and public protection, with all Councils taking on significant new enforcement responsibilities under the Coronavirus legislation.

The response involved:

- School closures and the creation of School Hubs to support key workers, by providing childcare for their children, and vulnerable learners.
- Supporting families eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) with over 2,000 supported.
- The creation of the locality response teams to provide an offer of support for the 3,521 shielding residents and 1,353 vulnerable residents (over 70 or living alone). This work included support to the delivery of weekly food boxes, arranging shopping, collection of prescriptions and befriending calls etc.
- Unprecedented support provided to local businesses, enabling them to access Government financial support schemes, with the aim of protecting our local economy from the worse impact of the Pandemic.
- Staff working from home with very low attendance in the office. This has been supported by the rapid deployment of Microsoft TEAMS which is enabling the Council to work in a totally different way based on running virtual teams and meetings.
- Suspending formal council and committee meetings at the end of March. The AGM was held, virtually, on 2nd April 2020.
- Elected Members undertaking their roles whilst working remotely.

The Welsh Government and local government have had a shared commitment to work in partnership. This shared leadership was demonstrated and strengthened throughout the crisis with an unprecedented level of dialogue and engagement and openness.

The medium to long term financial consequences of the pandemic for local business and the public sector is not yet fully known. Certainly the impact on the Council's finances in 2020/21 would have been significant without the additional support provided by the Welsh Government to fund the additional costs of dealing with the emergency and the loss of income experienced as a direct consequence of the pandemic (£11.9m). This financial support when combined with additional unbudgeted grants and reduced costs, due to closure of buildings and new ways of working, has meant that we are reporting a favourable financial position at the year-end which has enabled us to enhance our reserves to deal with unexpected issues / pressures in future.

### **COVID 19 Recovery and Moving Forward**

In an emergency the Council would normally deal with the response and then move into recovery phase to support the community back to normal. What is clear is that dealing with Covid-19 is very different. As a Council we will need to continue to respond to the pandemic, ensuring the safety of staff and the community as well as moving towards recovery. There is a Recovery Co-ordination Group (RCG) leading the recovery

work in Gwent and also a local recovery group within the Council. As part of this the Council will need to take a community leadership role in understanding the impact of the pandemic on the community and identifying the interventions that need to be put in place to support recovery – this includes recovery for the local economy. Recognising that this is a task that will be delivered in partnership with other organisations across the Region. Locally the Council will look to focus on four priority areas:

- Learners;
- Community;
- Economy; and
- Workforce.

Blaenau Gwent also needs to continue to be part of the wider regional and national work to recover and create a stronger future.

The nature of the emergency has meant that the Council has had to support both response and recovery side by side, placing a further demand on resources.

It is also the case that so much about the way we live our lives has changed and we will not simply return to normal once Covid-19 is under control. There is now the opportunity for the Council to build on the positive work over the past 18 months with the expectation being that we do not seek to return to the way things were before but harness the positive aspects of the response to strengthen and modernise the Council, adopting new working practices and challenging how we did things before, in order to map out an ambitious future, create a stronger organisation and to sustain the strong relationships forged with our communities and partners. It will not be a case of delivering services as we have done before, service delivery will have to change to take into account the learning from the pandemic as well as continuing to work proactively to plan for any potential future 'peaks.'

Despite the impact that the pandemic has had, it is possible to identify positive experience and good practice from the way the Council and community has responded in Blaenau Gwent. It is clear there is a real opportunity to hold onto these positives and to not simply return to normal but to build on our work to create a stronger and more resilient organisation and community.

The areas where this can be demonstrated include:

- the way the Council has adopted new technology and modern working practices at pace, enabling it to continue operating with staff and Elected Members almost entirely working from home.
- The targeted support provided to the more vulnerable in our communities with services coming together into multi-functional teams and working very effectively with partners and community and voluntary groups.
- The strong use of data and information to build our business intelligence about our community and the increase in digital service delivery and contact to ensure we can continue to deliver services in a way that is safe for staff and residents.
- There has been strong support for local businesses – which will need to continue – and a step change in how we communicate with our residents about service changes and the decisions being made by the Council, resulting in a real sense of a better connection with the community and an appreciation of the work of key front-line staff.

The next steps will be really important to ensure we use this experience to build that stronger organisation and Place in Blaenau Gwent, rather than simply reverting to normal.

### **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of the report is to present the performance of the Council at the end of the reporting period 2020/21. This sets out the key activities and measures used to monitor our performance of the Council's Corporate Plan.

In July 2020, Council approved a refreshed Corporate Plan 2020-22. The Plan was reviewed as part of the response and learning to date from COVID 19 and what the Council is aiming to achieve by the end of the Plan in 2022. This resulted in some amendments being made to the Well-being Objectives in order to better demonstrate the contribution different areas across the Council will contribute to achieving them, enhancing our one Council approach. The overall emphasis of each Well-being Objective has not changed and this includes the supporting activity beneath the Objectives still being aligned to our business planning, monitoring and reporting processes.

The global pandemic has also provided the opportunity to consider if everything previously prioritised was still important and if any areas of importance needed to be highlighted e.g. climate change. It was agreed that a refresh of our corporate priorities should be undertaken to reflect the impact of the pandemic and ensure the focus of business planning up to 2022 delivers on the outcomes needed to support the community and local economy.

From these considerations, the Corporate Plan 2020-22 Outcome Statements are:

- **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**
- **An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities**

There are new areas of activity identified in the refresh including our ambition to become a low carbon Council and Borough; the opportunity to accelerate agile working and the successful deployment of technology to improve how we work and the impact we have, as an organisation, on the environment.

In order to meet the statutory legislative requirements', the Council has implemented the following:

- **The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:** the report uses the priorities within the Council's Corporate Plan as its Well-being Objectives.
- **Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009:** the report also uses the priorities within the Council's Corporate Plan as its Improvement Objectives.

All of these areas have supporting actions and measures which are monitored as part of the Council's business planning process. The Corporate Plan has been strategically aligned to the Public Service Boards Well-being Plan and also identifies how each area supports the progression of the Well-being Goals.

### **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

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 principle which states they “must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The sustainable development principle is made up of the five ways of working.

### **Working with the Public Service Board to improve the well-being of Future Generations**

Blaenau Gwent Public Service Board (PSB) was established in April 2016 as part of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015. It is a partnership of key public bodies that, by working together, have a huge responsibility to create a place we want to live in now and in the future. As a PSB we agreed our Well-being Plan in April 2018 and it was published on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2018, in-line with statutory guidance.



Our plan was the result of a comprehensive programme of involvement and collaborative work to develop a coherent plan for delivering well-being. It prioritises five key well-being objectives to take forward, in order to bring about positive changes for local people and communities.

Further information on the development of the plan can be found in the plan itself and its supporting documents which are available on our website by following the link: <http://www.blaenaugwentpsb.org.uk/well-being-plan.aspx>

The PSB is working towards five well-being objectives as outlined in their Well-being Plan 2018-23:

- The best start in life for everyone
- Safe and friendly communities
- Look after and protect the natural environment
- Forge new pathways to prosperity
- Encourage healthy lifestyles

The PSB has developed a Strategic Work Programme which was signed off in January 2020. This Work Programme has identified five High Level Actions to be taken forward:

- First 1,000 days and Early Years Pathfinder;
- Building a healthier Gwent / Integrated Well-being Networks;
- Climate Change;
- Blaenau Gwent Sustainable Food Programme; and

- Foundational Economy.

Each of the high level actions has an identified PSB Sponsor.

### **Regional Gwent Public Service Board**

The Act also provides for two or more PSBs to be able to merge if it would assist them in contributing to the achievement of the well-being goals. There have been discussions at the Gwent-wide leadership group 'G10' and at each PSB about the merger of the Gwent PSBs to form a single regional PSB. The decision to do this must be agreed by each of the individual PSBs as the statutory bodies. Each PSB in the Gwent region has agreed this in principle. The PSBs and G10 have also considered the importance of maintaining strong local partnerships in each area to support delivery of the Well-Being Plan and also other partnership work.

The drivers for the change to a regional approach and Plan considered by the G10 leadership were:

- improving the well-being of people across Gwent by strengthening governance, accountability, improving collaborative working and supporting a clearer partnership landscape;
- providing the catalyst for a regional well-being assessment and well-being plan that maintains local accountability.
- opportunities to align partnership legislation and PSB statutory duties for a more strategic overview of areas such the Crime and Disorder Act, Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) and the Children's Act.
- opportunity to develop regional scrutiny arrangements.
- opportunity of aligning the focus of both the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) and PSB that will reduce duplication of activity, align strategic priorities and much closer collaboration over assessment, planning and delivery functions.
- The approach supports the Welsh Government review on 'strategic partnerships' and specifically recommendation 3 of the recent Audit Wales Review of Public Services Boards.

The current Well-Being Plans (2018-2023) form the delivery arrangements for the next two years and these will continue to be delivered by the local partnerships (One Newport; The Blaenau Gwent We Want; The Caerphilly We Want; Our Monmouthshire; Torfaen Public Services Board) supported by the regional PSB, and scrutinised by partnership Scrutiny Committees in each of the local areas.

On 21st July 2021 Council approved:

- To move to a regional PSB as outlined in the report with the importance of maintaining strong local partnerships;
- To establish regional scrutiny and the developing arrangements, and to receive further details as appropriate;
- The local assessment of well-being, to be agreed by 5th May 2022, will be part of the PSB Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2021/22;
- To support the proposed regional PSB terms of reference and requirements to make any relevant changes to committee structures and constitution;
- The development of Local Delivery Partnerships to be considered in local scrutiny work programmes; and
- To continue to support Scrutiny of the current Well-being Plans to 2023 through existing local partnership Scrutiny arrangements

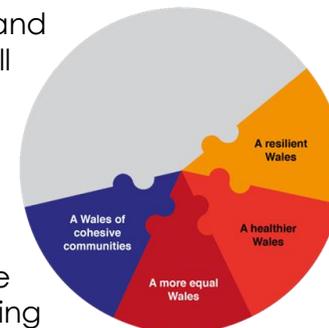
Arrangements for local delivery are still being explored in order to build on and strengthen the local partnerships already in existence that has supported the Blaenau Gwent PSB.

## To enable people to maximise their independence, develop solutions and take an active role in their communities

### 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 healthy 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.



### Priorities

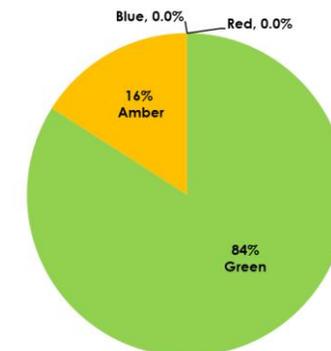
- To improve accessibility, provision of information and advice to enable people to support their own well-being;
- To work with people and families to make sure they have a say in achieving what matters to them;
- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater;
- To promote and facilitate 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.

### Overview 2020/21

Throughout 2020/21 there has been progress in the implementation of the priorities supporting delivery of this objective 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.

Some key areas of activity include:

The **Council's Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy** 2017-2020 has three clear objectives:



1. To support families to stay together;
2. To manage risk confidently and provide support at the edge of care; and
3. To provide affordable high quality placements.

Each of the objectives has a number of actions aligned to them and these actions are embedded within the Council's business planning. Since the implementation of this strategy the Local Authority has seen a very slow but steady decrease in the numbers of children becoming looked after. Despite the pandemic significant progress has been made in relation to implementing the objectives of the Strategy.

The Blaenau Gwent Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy has been independently evaluated by Worcester University. The findings acknowledge the considerable work undertaken in relation to implementing the strategy. It concluded that the strategy and its underpinning objectives are broadly appropriate at the current time. The report highlights areas of progress towards meeting the objectives and the considerable challenges related to taking the strategy forward, not least in relation to developing and sustaining a stable, highly trained workforce and creating and sustaining a range of high quality, flexible local placements. The report offers twenty main recommendations grouped around six themes:

1. Strategy development;
2. Workforce issues;
3. Partnership working;
4. Placement capacity;
5. Interventions; and
6. Strategy implementation.

The recommendations have been considered and have been translated into actions under the 3 objectives which underpin the refreshed 2020 - 2025 Strategy.

The **Regional Partnership Board** has been focused on how organisations had worked collectively during the Coronavirus pandemic and what had worked well, not so well and any future lessons.

The Integrated Care Fund is currently governed via the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) structures and the grant funding is administered through the ICF performance monitoring unit within Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB). The fund can be accessed by sectors that support the priorities of the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) and the overarching population needs assessment for Gwent. The grant supports the delivery of the key priorities in the areas of:

- Older people with complex needs and long term conditions including dementia
- People with Learning Disabilities
- Children with Complex Needs due to disability or illness
- Carers, including young carers

There continues to be close working with partnership organisation delivering ICF capital projects. As a region we are able to fully deliver Year 3 of our Capital Investment Plan, albeit delivery timeframes have slipped due to the impact of the pandemic on procurement and contracting. Our own proposal for Augusta House is one such project that has slipped and is now likely to be completed hopefully by the end of 2021.

The current Blaenau Gwent ICF allocation for revenue is £950,275 (Adult Services) and £372,909 (Children Services). The allocation of capital ICF for BG is currently £544,979 - (£375,829 – Adult Services and £169,150 – Children Services).

Within Blaenau Gwent we have been successful and proportionate in accessing this fund since its inception. Projects we have developed have been aligned to our strategic priorities including both the 'Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent in the 21st Century' Strategy and the Safe Reduction in Children Looked After Strategy alongside the wider cultural changes required following the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and Welsh Government's new long term plan for health and social care 'A Healthier Wales' including alignment to the 'Gwent transformational offer'.

The Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) funding will no longer be provided via the ICF governance mechanism and has therefore been removed from the guidance and allocation letter. The £2million previously utilised for WCCIS implementation has been repurposed for a new priority area 'Safe accommodation for children with complex, high end emotional and behavioural needs'. This priority area has been introduced in direct response to the Children's Commissioner for Wales' report, No Wrong Door and in line with current Ministerial priorities.

In response to this priority area, and the invitation for applications, a regional proposal to develop a children's residential home at Windmill Farm, Newport was submitted to Welsh Government on 10th February 2021. This is an integrated model of delivery using ICF Capital. The proposal also sets out the opportunity of exploring joint commissioning methodologies for a wider cohort of children with complex needs.

The Gwent RPB was successful in receiving £13.4 million to support:

- The development of early intervention and prevention services (Integrated Wellbeing Networks);
- The development of primary and community care services (Compassionate Communities);
- The redesign of child and adolescent emotional and mental health services (Iceberg model);
- The development of an integrated 'Home First' discharge model; and
- The development of workforce planning and organisational development to underpin transformational activity.

An additional £10 million across Wales was announced by the Minister for Health and Social Services on the 24th January 2020 for Regional Partnership Boards, the Board agreed that this funding be equally split between Health and Social Services on a 50:50 basis and subsequently was shared equally between the Gwent local authorities. An additional £191K was allocated to Blaenau Gwent on top of the £133K from the Winter Plan to flexibly spot purchase step up/step down beds, to purchase additional domiciliary care packages, to purchase additional social work capacity over bank holidays and weekends and funding for hiring an additional 4x4 vehicle for adverse weather conditions. There were also some separate bids for additional health capacity locally and some Gwent wide bids for equipment e.g. single handed hoists.

The joint **My Support Team (MyST)** between Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire provides a multi-disciplinary intensive therapeutic fostering service for Children Looked After. The Team work intensively with children currently in residential care with the aim of bringing them back to live closer to Blaenau Gwent and be placed with foster carers or family members. The Team also works with those children in care who present with complex needs and are at risk of going into residential care, to prevent this from happening.

At the heart of the MyST is the relationship developed between workers with the children and their support networks. The small numbers the MyST work with at any one time allows their work to be very intensive, providing 24/7 support to the child and their carers.

It should be noted that throughout the COVID 19 pandemic, MyST continued to provide direct interventions to young people during lockdown, including 24 hours on call and managed risky complex situations and young people. Four children were stepped down from residential care during extremely difficult conditions (three of them in the first lockdown period and one during the summer of 2020).

Throughout 2020/21 the Social Services Directorate responded to the **COVID-19** pandemic as well as continuing service delivery to ensure that the most vulnerable residents and children continued to get the care and support they required, both in their own homes and registered settings. The significant input from staff and volunteers at all levels across organisations was extremely positive which enabled services to adapt to change in working conditions and was key to the response across Blaenau Gwent and the region.

### **Children's Services**

- The Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) service was maintained throughout the pandemic and prioritised home visits to safeguarding investigations, children on the Child Protection Register, Children Looked After and care leavers and those children on the 'edge of care'.
- Child Protection Conferences, Core Groups and Reviews were undertaken virtually as have all Court attendances. However, contested Court Hearings and Final Hearings were postponed. A number of digital platforms have been used to undertake these virtual meetings. These have included teleconferencing, SKYPE and Microsoft TEAMS.
- The number of Children Looked After stands at 200 (down from a high of 237). The My Support Team has continued to engage with the most complex children in residential care by providing face to face support in line with public health guidance. The service also saw a decrease in the numbers of children in residential care reduce from a high of 18 down to 13.
- Children's Services have been able to continue working throughout the pandemic outbreak and meet the needs of our children and families. Three Flying Start children's hubs remained open for children of keyworkers throughout the pandemic. Some of the Families First staff have been redeployed to help the Supporting Change Team to support those children on the 'edge of care' as this is one of our highest priorities and seen as an even higher risk area during the COVID-19 crisis.

### **Adult Services**

- The Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) service was maintained throughout the pandemic and have prioritised home visits to families and individuals to undertake safeguarding investigations.
- At the outset of the pandemic day services and the respite care facility had to close to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable people and to maintain social distancing and to ensure resources were concentrated at caring for people in their own homes and care homes. However, a respite facility was available in case of an emergency to prevent carer breakdown.

- The service successfully redeployed staff from community options to care homes and home care teams to provide cover when staff became sick or more residents require 1:1 support due to isolation. There was a reduction in the care families required from domiciliary care agencies. This has been principally driven by family members providing care while they are off work and the fear that domiciliary care staff may transmit the virus into their homes. It is felt that demand will increase as more people return to work.
- From the start of lockdown Adult Services had to be available 7 days a week to ensure the service could react appropriately to the issues being faced i.e. getting recovering COVID-19 patients home, ensuring care homes and domiciliary care agencies were being supported and provided with PPE, and reacting and supporting NHS colleagues to maintain bed capacity within the hospital system. This meant staff working on the wards at community and acute hospitals including working on the COVID-19 wards.

Progress has been made with the **Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) Action Plan** throughout 2020/21.

An audit was concluded in October 2020 to identify children looked after who were at risk of exploitation which showed that between January 2019 and September 2020:

- 14 children had been identified as being at risk of exploitation.
- 10 children were deemed at risk Child Sexual Exploitation (9 children were female and 1 child was male).
- 3 children were believed to be at risk of 'Missing' (1 was female and 2 were male).
- 1 child was deemed at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation.

The audit concluded that the social work teams involved had recognised exploitation risks and were effectively working with the children to help reduce these risks by holding regular risk assessment meetings to monitor and review the potential risks of exploitation. Additionally, Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings are held on a quarterly basis.

At the end of academic year 2019-2020, 162 children of statutory school age were looked after by Blaenau Gwent local authority. The majority of children who are looked after by Blaenau Gwent continue to be educated within Blaenau Gwent and attend mainstream schools. A small proportion of our children looked after attend more specialist education settings. Just over half of our children looked after have additional learning needs and 20% have a statement of special educational needs.

During academic year 2019-20, a total of 15 young people who were looked after by Blaenau Gwent completed their statutory school studies. All but 2 children were awarded recognised qualifications in Summer 2020. All 15 children are engaged in post 16 learning opportunities. Of the young people who were looked after and completed their statutory studies in summer 2020 half had additional learning needs and 2 had a statement of special educational needs.

A new Supported Lodgings advertising and promotion scheme has been developed and is run by Llamau and funded by the Housing Support Grant. There have been 3 new supported lodging providers recruited by the Authority in a short time. There has been the creation of 10 young person flats in Tredegar that has housed 17 clients to date. Unfortunately, 1 bedroom flats are still in short supply across the Authority and desperately needed.

A review of the '**Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent in the 21st Century**' Strategy was due to have been undertaken during 2020/21 at the end of the 15-year lifespan with a view to relaunching a further 5 to 10-year strategy from April 2022. Unfortunately, this work was impacted by the

COVID pandemic and capacity within Adult Services to undertake this significant and important task. However, the Local Authority has recently worked with colleagues in Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) to secure funding, via the Welsh Government Transformation Grant, to employ a project lead to support this review. The post will implement a partnership approach to both the revision of the Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent in the 21st Century' Strategy and the ABUHB Place Based Care Strategy.

The Council has an active role in trying to reduce the impact of **poverty** across Blaenau Gwent. Free School Meals monitoring systems are working well, the application round opened 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. 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 **Safeguarding** service developments continued despite the pandemic. The police restructured the Public Protection Service allowing 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:

- early information sharing;
- timely decision making;
- improved quality of PPN referrals;
- improved integrated service responses to children and families; and
- timeliness of referral pathways and effectiveness of support and interventions offered by the Early Intervention Projects.

The various meetings required under the Wales Safeguarding Procedures have continued to take place but by virtual means. This has seen greater participation of partners, however some children and families initially struggled to engage with the process. The department saw this process as crucial so worked with these families to engage. The Regional Safeguarding Board continued to meet virtually and increased its frequency to monthly to ensure safeguarding data is regularly monitored and so that partner agencies could share intelligence on emerging safeguarding issues in the region. The board led on raising awareness of the need to report safeguarding concerns across the region and lobbied Welsh Government to take a national approach to this.

## Sustainable Development

<b>Long Term</b>	<i>The initial Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy was a 3-year strategy and is due to end this year. It is recognised that the refreshed strategy needs to be longer term in recognition of the significant work required to continue and maintain the downward trend in numbers of children looked after.</i>
<b>Prevention</b>	<i>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.</i>
<b>Integration</b>	<i>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.</i>
<b>Collaboration</b>	<i>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.</i>
<b>Involvement</b>	<i>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.</i>

**Performance Indicators** – Owing to the review undertaken on the Corporate Plan in 2020, the national indicators will be provided to support the implementation of the objective. The national Social Services Performance Framework for 2020/21 has been deemed an experimental year by Welsh Government. A review will be undertaken nationally to consider the information returned across all 22 local authorities.

Performance Indicator	Outturn 2018/19	Outturn 2019/20	Outturn 2020/21	Trend	Comments
The number of contacts for adults received by statutory social services during the year	3,511	3,941	4,572	↑	The department continues to see an increasing demand for support and includes where we have seen increasing pressures due to the COVID 19 pandemic.
The number of contacts for adults received by statutory social services during the year where advice or assistance was provided	2,979	3,333	4,255	↑	
The total number of packages of reablement completed during the year	Not available		232	N/A	No trend data available as not previously collated
The total number of services for adults started during the year (residential, domiciliary and day care and short breaks)	380	414	310	↓	This reduction in new services being offered is as a direct consequence of impact of pandemic and ability for our most vulnerable to access provisions outside of their home i.e. day centres / care homes / respite due to COVID restrictions.
The total number of reports of an adult suspected of being at risk received during the year	491	518	532	↓	These numbers fluctuate in a month by month basis but a proportion of the increases during 20/21 will be attributed to COVID related incidences and outbreaks across social care settings.
The number of contacts for children received by statutory social services during the year	3,823	4,183	4,512	↑	The number of contacts received has increased year on year. However, the number of those contacts receiving <b>statutory</b> advice and assistance has decreased. This demonstrates that referrals are being successfully rerouted to our preventative services
The number of contacts for children received by statutory social services during the year where advice or assistance was provided	908	638	623	↑	
Number of Children with a care and support plan at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2021	576	669	556	↓	These numbers fluctuate according to demand. It is impossible to attribute one factor to the rise and fall as it is predicated on a set of complex socio economic factors
The total number of children on the Child Protection Register during the year	107	115	96	↑	The number has declined over the past 3 years which indicates that much work is being done to reduce risk preventing the need for children's names being placed on the CPR

## Case Studies

### **Frailty Team, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board**

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Immediate access to information, better team working, and improved communications are just some of the benefits that have been gained by an integrated frailty team since they began using WCCIS (Welsh Community Care Information System).

The Community Resource Team (CRT), made up of staff from Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, launched a pilot project to use WCCIS as a single system for managing referrals.

Prior to the pilot, the referral process was complicated with a number of systems and points of access in use. Initially referrals would be routed through the Gwent Frailty Programme Single Point of Access who would log the information on the Gwent Frailty system and transmit to the CRT who would then transfer the referral to be logged on WCCIS.

For example, a hospital occupational therapist may log a reablement request via the Single Point of Access and the Gwent Frailty Portal but the adaptation to the home, which would be a social services function, would need be requested via WCCIS. Now all referrals for the majority of CRT functions come through the Blaenau Gwent Adult Social Services Information, Advice and Assistance Team and are logged in one place.

“Managing everything on one system has so many benefits and the transition was fairly easy as most staff were used to using WCCIS...You don't have to log onto separate systems for information which means it's far more efficient and there is better communication, particularly for patients who are no longer receiving requests for multiple information from multiple people. There is better team working and it eliminates duplication.”

Around 50 staff were involved in the pilot to move to the one system approach.

### **Carers Engagement Team**

The Carers Engagement Team work with carers to provide support to them in time of need.

Many calls have been received after seeing the Facebook Post. Carers are saying that they are relieved to know that there is a service available specific to them and their needs and concerns. Most concerns, throughout the pandemic, have been around caring for individuals that live separately and when one or both parties fall in to the high risk category. Carers have appreciated having the opportunity to talk their concerns through, to know who to contact and how to get help should they need it going forward.

Lady A contacted the team as she had concerns about getting food deliveries arranged for her vulnerable brother and sister-in law as she was self-isolating. Her brother and sister-in law had carers to the home four times a day and relied on getting their meals delivered. Lady A had tried and failed to get an online delivery slot and local volunteers in Tredegar couldn't cover the Six Bells area. The team considered the information they had on local information and services and were able to provide list of services that were able to help.

Lady B contacted the service as she was worried that her Carers Allowance would be affected as she was having to step back from a lot of her practical support. The service contacted Carers Wales on Lady B's behalf. The response was that emotional support was being recognised as part of the 35hrs carers support.

Some positive comments into the service have included:

- *"It's been so good to have had someone to talk to about all of this – so glad this service exists"*
- *"I feel so much better now I've spoken with you and been able to talk it all through with someone – feel clearer about what I can do now"*
- *"I am so thankful for your time. I can't believe there is someone interested in me and who has truly listened to my side of the story"*
- *"So glad for the phone call, I've really enjoyed talking to you"*
- *"It's frightening and I'm glad to be able to talk to somebody"*
- *"Thank you for thinking of me, I wasn't expecting anyone to ring"*

### **Supporting Change Team**

Throughout the pandemic, the team has continued to be fully operational; with an increased compliment of staff re-deployed from early intervention and prevention services. Where at all possible, staff have maintained home visits supporting children and families to continue living together safely. Where it has not been possible to visit families in their own homes, due to the family's own vulnerabilities, staff have maintained regular contact via telephone and through the use of video conference calling.

The Community Connector Service has been adapted with the Community Connector now providing home-based activity packs to vulnerable families to keep children occupied during this difficult time. Telephone contact has been maintained between the Education Support Service, Families and School Professionals to ensure that children are as equipped as possible to return to school when they re-open. The Family Group Conference Service has been maintained and where feasible conferences have been coordinated virtually.

### **The Placement Team**

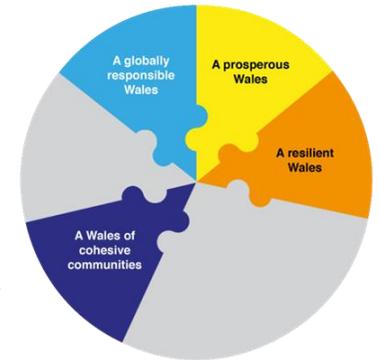
The team recently had the opportunity to deliver a small token of thanks and appreciation to all of the foster carers in Blaenau Gwent. They shopped on-line to purchase small gifts and put together gift bags for the carers and the children to enjoy. This has hopefully helped to support the valuable work our foster carers are doing during this very difficult time. Certainly the response was really positive with a number of carers emailing their thanks, as the example below shows.

*"Hope you're all well. Just wanted to say thank you for the Easter gifts we received today. I was in a bit of a fluster when the lady came to drop them off as I was doing a video call with CP and the guardian, but it was such a nice surprise for us all – Thank you". [Feedback from a Foster Carer]*

## Protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities

### 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. Through focusing on delivering against the main priorities set out in the Corporate Plan we can begin to transform Blaenau Gwent into a more prosperous and welcoming area that celebrates its heritage and plays its part on the regional and national stage. We will continue to invest in our neighbourhoods so that they are places where people are proud to live. The environment remains as a high priority for the community.



### Priorities

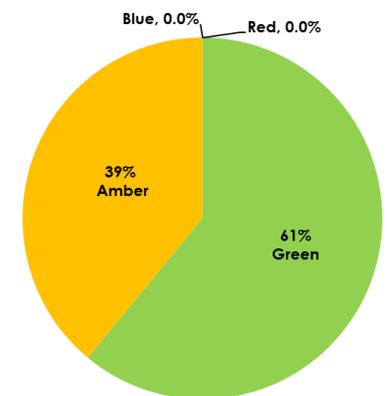
- To re-invest in highways maintenance particularly improvements to our residential roads, streets and pavements;
- To increase rates of recycling to enable us to achieve national targets;
- To re-invest in environmental services to address the issues created by fly-tipping, dog fouling, littering, grass 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

### Overview 2020/21

Throughout 2020/21 there has been progress in the implementation of the priorities supporting delivery of the objective 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.



Some key areas of activity include:

The **Highways Capital Works Programme** is an ambitious programme that looks to improve the highway infrastructure across the borough. Each year, the programme is reviewed in order to prioritise works. The 2020/21 programme provided a focus on improving the residential / unclassified network as this makes up 74% of all of Blaenau Gwent roads. Also, the majority of reactive maintenance and insurance claims relate to the unclassified network. In addition to the resurfacing of the highest priority ranked roads, other works undertaken included safety barriers, illuminated traffic signs and speed reduction measures.

The overall percentage of un-classified roads in a poor condition pre-commencement of works was 17%. As a result of the works there has been a 5.6% reduction of poor conditioned unclassified roads. The figure now stands at 11.4%.

All schemes within the Highways Capital Works Programme for 2020/21 have been completed. 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. In 2019 the Council introduced **Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE)**. This means that the Council has the powers to enforce its own Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs), whereby any Penalty Charge Notices (parking tickets) issued carried a financial penalty.

The staffing for the service is provided by Caerphilly County Borough Council via a Service Level Agreement. The Council currently has two civil parking enforcement officers. Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council provide a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) processing service, under the name of the South Wales Parking Group. Both these vital administration arrangements are working well in supporting Blaenau Gwent civil parking enforcement.

Civil Parking Enforcement gives the Council the powers to tackle wider transport and environmental issues such as traffic congestion, road safety and to safeguard the interests of residents, blue badge holders, transport operators and local businesses. It also allows the Authority to target enforcement in key areas such as town centres and other areas where indiscriminate parking creates potential risks to pedestrians and other road users, like parking congestion in the immediate vicinity of schools. This is in line with the Council's priorities around safe and sustainable communities.

The Council would not be able to manage and enforce Traffic Regulation Orders within the Borough without an effective CPE service. Indeed, the introduction of CPE has allowed the Council to successfully monitor and target areas where complaints of illegal and dangerous parking are received. The Council receives a high volume of requests for consideration of parking enforcement.

In partnership with the LA Support Ltd the Council has worked towards improving **street cleanliness**, in line with the community and corporate priority. Against the backdrop of a difficult financial climate, Blaenau Gwent has utilised a cost effective environmental enforcement service that reinforces the Authority's zero-tolerance approach to these Environmental Offences.

For several years Blaenau Gwent was identified as having some of the dirtiest streets in Wales by annual surveys carried out by Keep Wales Tidy. Street cleanliness is consistently considered to be a priority for constituents during community engagement exercises. However, recently, the Council has been one of the top performing local Authorities in Wales for the issuing of Litter and Dog Control fixed penalty notices.

Recently the total number of litter fines has decreased and littering complaints have reduced slightly in comparison to previous years, however it does need to be noted that the service was suspended for a time owing to COVID 19.

The number of fines being issued for Dog Control Order offences has decreased slightly. While there has been a slight decrease in fines issued for dog control offences, 2019/20 saw the lowest level of complaints regarding dogs since the enforcement initiative began.

Enforcement Officers are directed to patrol specific areas based on complaints received, particularly in relation to dog control offences. Enforcement Officers work closely with the Authority's dog warden to identify and seize unattended stray dogs, which can be the cause of significant issues associated with dog fouling.

The Council has a three-year delivery project in place supporting the **regional South East Wales Resilient Uplands (SEWRU) project (2018-2021)**. This project also supports the Carbon Reduction Strategy and 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.

The SEWRU is a collaborative project arrangement, involving Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Councils, Natural Resources Wales, Police, Fire and Rescue Services, Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Brecon Beacons National Park. Torfaen County Borough Council is the project Lead for the collaboration.

To date the project has identified and completed several peatland restoration projects, produced common land management plans (including a detailed management plan for Mynydd Llanhilleth), restored many kilometres of commons boundary stock fencing, installed physical barriers to reduce landscape crime on commons and managed important upland heathland to reduce fire risk and facilitate conservation grazing. SEWRU is currently working with Gwent Police and other partners to update the NRMP and produce upland-focussed landscape crime management plans for each common within the project.

The Council was successful in receiving funding from Caru Cymru for a 3-year period from 2019/20 to improve the **quality of the environment** for everyone. The project emphasis is on long term behavioural change rather than continuing to rely on just cleaning up. The scheme supports projects that make environmental improvements within residential areas by developing benefits for people, businesses and their communities.

The funding application included the appointment of a Local Environmental Quality (LEQ) Officer who would work with existing Litter champions and groups along with engaging with schools and community groups to raise awareness, educate and promote Local Environmental Quality issues within the borough, raise awareness and support long term behaviour change, unfortunately this work was delayed due to the Covid pandemic.

It was identified that for the Council to have a more effective and positive impact on the scheme, a relevant strategy and supporting policies would be required to support the management of the project's aim.

In 2020 the Council approved a new **Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy 2021-2026**. The vision for the strategy is:

*“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 strategy includes an action plan setting out the key actions to be undertaken during the lifespan of the strategy 2021-2026, these are set out under four themes:

- Influence
- Engage
- Adopt Best Practice
- Empower

The Council has statutory duties under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems. In order to comply with the Act, the Council is implementing a **Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan**. Progress includes:

- Environment Champions meetings, with ten champions in the network representing all Service Areas and Councillors.
- Environment objectives included within the relevant service area business plans to monitor progress
- Blaenau Gwent leading on the Blaenau Gwent on the Move Project (PSB funded project) with associated biodiversity benefits on the Ebbw Fawr Trail.
- Paperless pay slips and expenses
- Ongoing development of outside spaces
- The inclusion of ecosystem resilience in the Local Development Plan 2018-2033
- Five Local Nature Reserves were designated in March 2019
- Engaged with 17 schools providing indoor and outdoor learning sessions linked to the natural environment
- Schools built as part of the 21st Century Schools programme built to excellent Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) standard.

In 2018/19 Blaenau Gwent exceeded the statutory Welsh Government **recycling** target of 58% for the first time, achieving 59.28%. In 2019/20 this success was built on and exceeded the new higher target of 64%, attaining 65.31%. The unverified figure for 2020/21 has the recycling figure to be 64.29%. The next challenge will be continuing to improve performance and working towards the 70% target which will come into force from 2024/25. This has been achieved through the hard work and dedication of the Waste Team in partnership with WRAP and with support from the Communications Team, Performance Team, Senior Management, The Elected Leadership and most importantly, the residents of Blaenau Gwent. This year on year success has seen Blaenau Gwent move from 22nd in 2017/18 to 11th in 2019/20 when compared to all other Welsh Local Authority's, this is as a direct result of the significant improvement we have accomplished in the collection of dry recycling materials at the kerbside. The Welsh Government, through Local Partnerships, approached Blaenau Gwent to develop a regional facility for municipal wood waste reprocessing at Silent Valley. Following confirmation from Blaenau Gwent agreeing to be the Lead Authority on the project, the Welsh Government allocated funding to develop the project to an Outline Business Case (OBC). The OBC introduces a viable opportunity for the public sector to set up and operate its own waste wood recycling facility. The OBC sets out the case for public sector capital investment into a public-owned, wood waste recycling facility in South East Wales, harnessing a configuration of advanced wood recycling machinery installed in a purpose-built

processing building at Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's (BGCBC) Silent Valley waste site. The five cases of the OBC (Strategic, Economic, Commercial, Financial and Management) explore how the proposed integrated wood recycling facility can realise significant cost savings, economic and environmental benefits for the public sector.

It is proposed that with government support in the form of capital funding, this project will enable Blaenau Gwent and participating Local Authorities to create an effective public sector investment model to create a more efficient and transparent approach to the management of its waste wood in South Wales.

Blaenau Gwent has seen a lot of investment over recent years with regards to **new build housing**. Most recently £2.1m was allocated to support the delivery of **affordable housing** at former Ebbw Vale School Site and Glanffrwyd. Development work to progress additional housing sites within Blaenau Gwent is ongoing including:

- Consideration of a residential development at the Abertillery Leisure Centre
- An options appraisal paper has been drafted in respect of Six Bells Plateau
- 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

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.

**Digital infrastructure** is being developed in areas of Blaenau Gwent including within town centres and other innovative projects through the GovTech Catalyst.

In December 2019 the **Energy Prospectus** was approved. The prospectus provides a mechanism through which a range of available development opportunities within Blaenau Gwent can be promoted and is a means of engaging proactively with potential investors, scheme developers, other Local Authorities and community groups in an effort to stimulate local energy development and supply. This will in turn address the fuel poverty challenges we currently face.

Through progression of the prospectus the Council had set out its aspirations of taking a pro-active approach to addressing future energy challenges. One of the key areas which will directly impact on future energy requirements is the understanding of energy infrastructure across the area. In some parts of Blaenau Gwent there are constraints within existing grid infrastructure that will impact upon the deliverability of projects. **Cardiff Capital Region City Deal** through Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council have secured £1.3million from the Welsh Government Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV) fund to support the delivery of infrastructure to support taxis in the transition to low emission vehicles. Blaenau Gwent has identified sites where infrastructure would be required and shared details of the procurement approach taken by the Gwent Authorities.

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, this work could provide the area 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 the infrastructure readiness for future business investment.

### Sustainable Development

<b>Long Term</b>	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,
<b>Prevention</b>	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.
<b>Integration</b>	The development of the regional wood recycling facility required support from Technical Services, Planning, Procurement, Legal and Finance. Also integration with Chief Commercial Officer to develop the asset as a commercial opportunity.
<b>Collaboration</b>	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.
<b>Involvement</b>	Extensive consultation was undertaken through a Street Cleansing review to provide the necessary information needed in the drafting of the Litter and Fly Tipping Strategy, this included engagement with Blaenau Gwent Member Engagement, Keep Wales Tidy, Litter Champions, External partners/Community Groups , Welsh Government and Departmental officers

**Performance Indicators** - Owing to the review undertaken on the Corporate Plan in 2020, the national indicators will be provided to support the implementation of the objective.

Performance Indicator	Outturn 18/19	Outturn 19/20	Outturn 20/21	Trend	Comments
Percentage of highways inspected of a high or acceptable standard of cleanliness	94%	97%	99%	↑	High standards of performance have been improved.
Average number of working days taken to clear fly-tipping incidents reported to the authority during the year	2	4	6	↓	New reporting system implemented during 2018/19. The impact was not seen until Q2 which resulted high numbers during Q1 (2018-19). In 2020-21 Q1 and Q2, high number reported due to service disruption during the initial stages of the pandemic.
Average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)	207	312	373	↓	Due to capacity issues there has been a lack of capacity to deliver the grants.
Number of visits to local authority sport and leisure facilities during the year where the visitor will be participating in physical activity per 1,000 population	9115	7838	1061	↓	Figures impacted owing to the closure of the Leisure Centre because of the pandemic and then restrictions on numbers. Online classes were delivered during lockdown but capacity was not available to record the number of participants.
Percentage of principal A roads that are in overall poor condition	3.9%	2%	1.8%	↑	Improvement based on the investment of Capital money and reduction of survey length.
Percentage of principal B roads that are in overall poor condition	4.4%	4.9%	4.8%	↑	As above
Percentage of principal C roads that are in overall poor condition	14%	5.3%	5.2%	↑	As above
Percentage of food establishments which are 'broadly compliant' with food hygiene standards	95.6%	91.5%	91.2%	↔	Very minor reduction in figure
Percentage of waste reused, recycled or composted	59.28%	65.31%	64.29%*	↓	Very minor reduction in figure but exceeding Welsh Government target.

\* Unverified Figure

## Case Studies

### New five-year council litter and fly-tipping strategy supported by Council

Blaenau Gwent Council is one of the first councils in Wales to develop its own litter and fly-tipping strategy, which has been designed to build on the successful work of its past schemes and to reduce the problem of illegal littering.

The new strategy includes a comprehensive action plan to show how the council and its partners can work together and reduce the impact of waste crime throughout the borough. There are a range of actions specifically for tackling this growing problem which include, community engagement, enforcement, education and awareness. Overall the plan will ensure the borough's residents, landowners and businesses understand their waste responsibilities.



The council has recruited over 200 Litter Champions who are provided with equipment, whilst increased partnership work (through a multi-agency approach Police, Natural Resources Wales Agency) will help identify those responsible for enviro-crime, such as fly tipping incidents. At the heart of our ambitious and vital Strategy is the need to change behaviour around litter and fly-tipping. We want to create a culture here in Blaenau Gwent where littering and fly-tipping is socially unacceptable.

Councillor Joanna Wilkins, Executive Member for the Environment says:

“Fly-tipping and littering is an awful stain on our beautiful landscape and towns. Not only is it an illegal eyesore but often adds to the risk of flooding by blocking water courses and drains. Our new litter and fly-tipping strategy will show our commitment to keeping Blaenau Gwent a clean and green environment, making it not only a great place to live and work but also to visit. As fly-tipping has been on the increase this new approach will help reduce the current yearly clean-up costs. Maintaining clean streets and our environment has been a high priority for the council for a number of years and the minority of illegal fly-tippers have a negative impact on the majority of our responsible residents. We are doing everything we can to try and stop it and I am sure the people of Blaenau Gwent will show the same commitment as we introduce this new strategy”.

The five-year bespoke strategy aims to significantly reduce the existing litter and fly-tipping issues and adhere to the document's vision:

*“to radically reduce litter and fly-tipping so we can improve our natural habitats as well as our wild and urban landscapes, increase pride and awareness of our local heritage and desire to keep it litter free”.*

# Blaenau Gwent **Community Benefits**

## Wild flower and Tree planting with ESP at Georgetown Primary School, Tredegar



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol  
**Blaenau Gwent**  
County Borough Council



'It was fantastic to be able to help out at Georgetown School, with their new plants and trees for the pupils to plant and watch grow. Helping local and community schemes is a core value for ESP, and so we were pleased to be able to be involved'.

**Danilo Bettosi, Associate Director - Earth Science Partnership**

**Project Title:** Earth Science Partnership

**Contract Lead:** Blaenau Gwent CBC

**Project Date:** April 2021

**esp**

ENGINEERS  
GEOLOGISTS  
SCIENTISTS

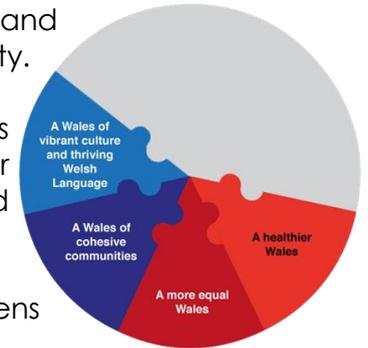
## Support a fairer sustainable economy and community

### Why this is important

Improving the provision of Education services is vitally important to ensure that teaching and learning in both school and community settings is achieving ambitious outcomes for all, and therefore, supporting a fairer and sustainable community.

Improvements in educational standards are complemented through investing in community and regeneration services to support a fairer and sustainable economy. This is a key strand of work Blaenau Gwent, including working with a number of regional programmes including the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (including the Metro scheme), Tech Valleys and the Valleys Task Force.

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



### 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 CCRCDC to attract investment; and
- To work with partners to develop a new vision for our town centres ensuring their long term future.

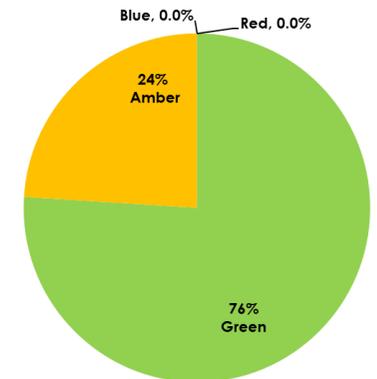
### Overview 2020/21

There has been substantial progress in the implementation of this objective 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).

Some key activity includes:

In 2020-21 the Council appointed a permanent Corporate Director of Education and the Education Directorate has a new Leadership and Management team in place, involving greater capacity for school improvement through a newly appointed Head of School Improvement and Inclusion post. Permanent appointments have also been made to the Service Manager positions for Education Transformation and Business Change as well as Young People and Partnerships. This has created capacity and a strong team to take the Education Directorate forward, especially in the way that we support children and young people in school/college and



community settings.

Strong progress has been made on the **Welsh medium School provision** in Blaenau Gwent with the consultation concluded and implementation planned from September 2023. By 2029 the school will be fully established, with all year groups from Nursery to Year 6 operational. The full implementation of the new school will include a new 210 places Welsh-medium primary school in the Tredegar /Sirhowy valley.

The development of the school will support implementation of the **Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)** 2017-20, which is directly aligned to both the Welsh Government's and the Council's Welsh Language strategic frameworks.

Throughout 2020/21 **Education and its schools** have had to respond to the changing requirements with regards to supporting the education of pupils throughout the pandemic. The focus for Education has clearly been supporting a safe return to school for learners and staff, however, throughout each phase of the pandemic the range of support to schools has flexed in order to respond to emerging learner and school improvement needs. The EAS, the commissioned school improvement service has worked closely with the Council, school leaders, staff and governors to support the identified needs. A high-level summary of the extensive work that is ongoing to support schools is detailed below, but clearly this is not an exhaustive list:

- Securing re-purposed school provision for key worker families and vulnerable learners throughout the COVID pandemic;
- Providing timely communication and access to virtual networks for school settings and governors, in line with the Welsh Government's Continuity of Learning Plan (CoLP);
- Supporting adaptive and innovative blended learning to enable children and young people to continue with learning in home settings;
- Providing bespoke leadership support to schools and settings with a focus on self-evaluation, quality assuring current provision and planning for return;
- Supporting circa 2,200 families entitled to Free School Meals (eFSM);
- Providing wellbeing resources and guidance materials, particularly to support remote learning;
- Continuing to provide a range of professional learning that meets the needs of the entire workforce (and governors) over the 2020-21 academic year; and,
- Support for circa 1,400 digitally disadvantaged learners with funding of £600,000+ support from the EdTech initiative.

**The Welsh Inspectorate body for Education, Estyn undertook a Thematic Review** across Wales to consider how Local authorities and regional consortia supported schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19. The review covered the period June to November 2020 and the report was published in January 2021. **Estyn undertook a Thematic Review** across Wales to consider how Local authorities and regional consortia supported schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19. The review covered the period June to November 2020 and the report was published in January 2021.

The report focused specifically on two aspects:

- Promoting learning – the quality of the learning offer and how has this been supported through further guidance and professional learning?  
Supporting vulnerable pupils – how did the local authority targeted services; and,
- Support to vulnerable pupils to support them to engage in learning? What barriers still exist?

In Blaenau Gwent there were two sessions convened with Estyn Local Authority Link Inspectors (LALI) during the Autumn term and they also interviewed a cohort of Blaenau Gwent's Headteachers.

The BG Estyn Thematic Review letter is positive overall and highlights four cameos of notable practice, covering;

- Strong collaboration across the Local Authority;
- Beneficial support for vulnerable pupils by the Educational Psychology service;
- The work of the local authority youth service; and,
- Effective sharing of ICT resources.

The narrative from the Estyn Thematic Review findings provides assurance that the Council/ Education Directorate has handled the emergency response well in supporting schools.

A school improvement and learner **Recovery and Renewal Action Plan** has been developed to support for all learners, including wellbeing considerations. There is an extensive impact assessment that covers all key stakeholders and this will be used to inform the Recovery and Renewal programme of activity and business planning moving forward.

The **Youth Service** also supported young people throughout the emergency period in both school and community settings. The team liaised with secondary schools regarding support for school-age young people on a weekly basis along with the following key activities:

- Providing emotional wellbeing support for young people.
- Emergency support for young people in crisis, including the provision of food.
- Resources to support Elective Home Educated (EHE) young people and families in line with requests.
- Reviewing the 'stay at home' campaign with vulnerable 18-25 year olds (liaising with local partners such as Gwent Police).
- Providing support for young people experiencing homelessness issues.

The **Blaenau Gwent 21st Century Schools Programme** continues to deliver improvements in the school estate. The Band A programme was completed on time and to budget and generated an investment of more than £21m into the school estate, including new schools such as the Tillery Street and Six Bells Campuses that form part of the Abertillery Learning Community.

The delivery of the **21st Century Band B programme** is continuing and will be delivered over the period 2020-25. The Band B investment and new Welsh medium school will realise a further circa £26m investment into the school estate to transform the provision. The Band B planning arrangements are well underway, including the submission of business cases to WG. Moreover, the digital infrastructure has improved significantly across the schools in response to COVID and in line with the HWB EdTech initiative. The next step is to deliver a BG ICT Strategy for schools to improve T&L in the classroom.

The Welsh Government rolled out the Hwb EdTech (HET) initiative which provides a £2 million investment **ICT Infrastructure** throughout the school estate to improve access for learners to the latest in digital developments, in line with the Welsh Government's Digital Competency Framework.

The status of the ICP placed Blaenau Gwent in a strong position to further enhance infrastructure in line with the Hwb EdTech funding. This meant that we were able to incorporate the additional work programme into the ICP, and realise efficiencies in terms of both time and resources.

During the Spring-term 2020, Welsh Government announced funding to address the needs of digitally disadvantaged learners and associated device replacement in schools, including a **Hwb In-schools Infrastructure Grant Scheme (HISIG)**. This aspect of the device-based funding was initiated earlier than planned, to address issues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the funding allocation for Blaenau Gwent was confirmed as £605,254. The criteria for the funding included: device replacement costs, servers, licensing to support re-build and programming of end of life (EOL) devices to meet the needs of digitally excluded learners; along with Mi-Fi units to support home-based connectivity. Despite the impact of COVID-19, which has resulted in both school access and resourcing issues, along with extensive additional planning and risk assessment requirements; excellent progress has been made in line with delivery of the ICP. In addition, sustainability planning is underway to address the associated long-term strategic priorities throughout the school estate. Schools and relevant partners have already been consulted upon and agreed key underlying principles. A detailed plan will be developed for implementation from September 2021.

The **Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone** delivers an annual performance report to the Council. The 2020 performance continued to improve overall. The transformation of post 16 provision across the County Borough has delivered:

- more post 16 learners,
- a greater range of courses, particularly for vocational provision;
- improved attainment levels, in most measures.

The partnership between the Council and Coleg Gwent has matured and a systematic approach is in place to share data at a strategic and operational level. The partnership was developed further through the establishment of a **Post 16 Partnership Board** with representation from the Education Directorate, Coleg Gwent, work based learning providers and Blaenau Gwent secondary school settings. There are also representatives from colleagues in Regeneration to encompass the broader skills and economic development agenda, contributing towards the Blaenau Gwent Employment and Skills Plan. Through this, learner experiences have been improved by providing a wider breath in the provision on offer and the curriculum being delivered by industry experts with links to companies such as Thales, TVR and Tech Valleys. the opportunities for our young people through these learner pathways into Further Education have been very much strengthened.

The Education Portfolio has also changed in 2020-21 to include the client function for the **Aneurin Leisure Trust**. This is transforming the relationship between the Council and the Leisure Trust, with a new five-year agreement in place. A Leisure and Libraries Strategic Partnership Board has been established, which is Chaired by the Leader of the Council. The ALT financial position has improved significantly and the Trust has supported the Council exceptionally well during the COVID-19 pandemic and with the community hub provision, in line with the new operating model.

As part of the **Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCR)**, the Council has worked closely with Transport for Wales (TfW) on a number of project components put forward as part of the Metro Plus scheme in Blaenau Gwent. This includes both the Ebbw Valley line and the Abertillery spur. The work progressing with the Metro Plus (Phase 1) work is part of a programme of 10 transport schemes which are part of the wider metro infrastructure. These Metro Plus schemes are not individual projects, but a programme of regional enabling infrastructure, to stimulate economic

growth and regeneration across Cardiff City Region, supporting the sustainable mobility of people, and improving the way people make their economic contribution. Merthyr Council is the financial host for this program.

Work is continuing on the improvements to the Ebbw Valley line to increase frequency of services and will be continuing over the next few years to enable the line to take more train capacity. The design work on the Abertillery line is being tested as part of the infrastructure and scheduling work to provide a service to Cardiff and Newport.

CCR has been awarded £1.3million from the Welsh Government Ultra Low Emission Vehicle (ULEV) Transformation Fund to assist with the transition to Low Emission across the region. One of the projects within this is the Taxi ULEV project, providing charging infrastructure on taxi ranks for the sole purpose of charging taxis.

Sites in Blaenau Gwent have been agreed as Abertillery, Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale and Tredegar. The second part of the project is to provide some electric taxis to each local authority to encourage take up of these.

As part of the CCR Blaenau Gwent have put forward 10 sites on Council owned land/car parks across the borough, to be included within the tender, for the installation of 22kw charging points. CCRCDD developed a £35million Viability Gap Fund, a targeted funding programme to bring forward new homes on key strategic housing sites across South East Wales.

CCR Investment panel received a proposal from Aspire BG to roll out the offer across the Region to provide support for Industries of the Future in 2020. The Investment panel have requested a review to be undertaken of the existing apprenticeship landscape across SE Wales, specifically focussing on Shared Apprenticeship Programme aspect and Industries of the Future. The review work will identify gaps in service delivery and business needs. We are still awaiting the outcomes of the review to understand whether the Aspire proposal will be funded. This has been delayed, but we are expecting it by the summer.

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.

The **Blaenau Gwent Destination Management Plan** (BGDMP) is a strategic document that sets out priorities for tourism development in Blaenau Gwent over the period 2020-2025 and complements the new Visit Wales Tourism Action Plan over the same period.

The BGDMP aims to ensure that people, businesses and organisations work together in a coordinated way to deliver agreed targets and priorities for investment. The plan identifies six Cross Cutting Themes and five main themes and priority areas. The cross cutting themes are Business development, Challenging and changing perceptions, Partnership working, Research and Analysis, Skills and Transport. The main themes are Business Tourism; Culture, Heritage (including the Home of the NHS) and Genealogy; Events and Green/Eco Tourism (including Outdoor Activity, Trails and Town Centres).

The BGDMP and associated Action Plan have taken account of national, strategic and local trends and priorities. The Plan and Action Plan have been developed by the Destination Partnership which comprises representatives from the Private, Public and Third sectors.

As part of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee a Town Centre Task and Finish Group has been established to consider the key areas for inclusion within the future **Town Centre Strategy**. The key areas are:

### Infrastructure:

- Traffic Orders / Parking Enforcement across the Towns
- Pedestrian zones and their overall impact upon town centre viability
- Parking facilities and availability
- Town Centre Gateways and Wayfinding

### Retail and Enterprise

- Recognising current challenges resulting from COVID-19
- Developing an enterprise culture to compliment other projects being delivered by the Council such as the Boxworks including the potential for pop-up town centre space that could allow test trading and supporting businesses to use start-up retail premises.
- Supporting outdoor markets
- Along with infrastructure and physical retail premises consider additional support town centre businesses may need to continue to operate.
- Identifying training and development opportunities to help businesses to operate and grow in the future

### Image

- Minimising negative perceptions of town centres.
- Promoting positive news stories as much as possible
- Highlighting the essential services that are provided to our community.
- Creating a sense of place and enhance the overall town centre experience.

### Digital Communications

- look at how the Council can use digital communications to promote and support town centres, exploring the use of social and digital media.
- Supporting those who want to trade online
- Installing free public Wi-Fi across the town centres

### Delivery Approach

- Development of a partnership model for delivery of the strategy

## Sustainable Development

<b>Long Term</b>	Close work with Welsh Government is ongoing to shape support programmes whilst continuing to support business on response and recovery in the long term.
<b>Prevention</b>	Within the Employment and skills plan there is acknowledgement of current employment, skills and attainment figures relating to the local population and our relatively weak performance comparative to other areas within the region. The plan seeks to address this by putting in place measures to address current performance.
<b>Integration</b>	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.
<b>Collaboration</b>	COVID 19 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.
<b>Involvement</b>	CCRCDC are formally launching the Viability Gap Fund Opportunity, which may stimulate additional interest from land owners and developers to work with BGCBC to bring forward development. Engagement with existing partners on the identified sites will continue. Consultation and engagement would also form part of any planning applications associated with a given development site.

**Performance Indicators** - As a result of the review undertaken on the Corporate Plan in 2020, the national indicators will be provided to support the implementation of the objective. There are robust governance arrangements in place between the Council and the EAS to monitor school performance. The reporting of Council/School level performance data has been relaxed in Wales by WG due to the COVID 19 pandemic. However, Blaenau Gwent's schools Summer 2020 KS4 results improved overall and were in line with the targets set in the 4 secondary settings School Development Plans (SDPs). Preparations are well underway for KS4 Centre Determined Grades in 2021. The BG Learning Zone's Post 16 A and A/S Level results are shown below, which continue to remain strong.

Performance Indicator	Outturn 18/20	Outturn 19/20	Outturn 20/21	Quarterly Performance Trend	Comments
% achieving A-Level (Key Stage 5) A*-E	100%	100%	99.1%	↓	Small decline seen at A Level, but in line with Welsh national average.
% achieving AS-Level (Key Stage 5) A*-E	90.9%	92.7%	94.1%	↑	Upward trend in positive progression for AS Level
Percentage of empty private sector properties brought back into use during the year through direct action by the local authority	4.6%	6%	2%	↓	Decline in 2020/21 due to transferring staff resources to Covid 19 infection control work including the Empty Property Officer.
Number of additional dwellings created as a result of bringing empty properties back into use	-	12	0	↓	2019-20 Increase arose from additional number of conversions to flats within previous empty properties. No additional dwellings were created from other empty properties during the 2020/21 year.

## Case Studies

### Aspire Blaenau Gwent

The success of a pioneering Apprenticeship Programme that is breathing new life into the advanced manufacturing sector across two South Wales local authority areas has been recognised with a prestigious national award. **Aspire Blaenau Gwent & Merthyr Tydfil's Shared Apprenticeship Programme** won the Large Employer of the Year award at the virtual Apprenticeship Awards Cymru 2021 ceremony in June.

The Shared Apprenticeship Programme was created six years ago to tackle high unemployment and relatively low skill levels within the manufacturing industry. The programme has directly benefited 123 apprentices as well as companies that have adopted its innovative approach. Learners are rotated around host employers to plug skills gaps by training on-the-job and working to achieve units towards their apprenticeship.

Celebrating outstanding achievement in training and apprenticeships, the Apprenticeship Awards Cymru 2021 saw 35 finalists compete in 12 categories. Highlight of the work-based learning calendar, the awards showcased businesses and individuals who have excelled on the Welsh Government's Apprenticeship and Traineeship Programmes and gone the extra mile to achieve success during these unprecedented times. Jointly organised by the Welsh Government and the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW), the awards had Openreach, the UK's digital network business and passionate supporter of apprenticeships, as the headline sponsor.

The Apprenticeship Programme in Wales is funded by the Welsh Government with support from the European Social Fund. Welsh Government apprenticeship programmes have benefitted 50,360 people across South East Wales since May 2016.

Aspire's Shared Apprenticeship Programme was first established in 2015 when Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone Board identified a significant lack of employees with skills at Level 3 and above in Blaenau Gwent. Two years later, Merthyr Tydfil joined to develop its business growth and enhance skills whilst tackling unemployment.

Aspire is now working with both Coleg y Cymoedd, who link with Coleg Gwent, and Coleg Merthyr Tydfil to foster the next generation of skilled workers through apprenticeships covering Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, ICT, Applied Science, Quality Engineering as well as Business/Commercial Administration and Finance.

With a target to recruit 20 new apprentices every year, Aspire has achieved a 100% success rate through a team facilitating their employment with hosts and then dealing with any issues as they occur. More than 30 employers have engaged with the programme



## Support to Businesses

The Crucial work undertaken as part of Welsh Government's £100m Tech Valleys programme in Blaenau Gwent, established to support high value, sustainable jobs, attract investment and create opportunities, has enabled companies including Insurgo Media Services to really kick on in the area.

Insurgo are tape media experts and specialists in the supply and support of tape media. They provide services to support the data throughout its lifecycle and handle environmentally-friendly data disposal for end-of-life tape. The company required additional space to support their growth plans, and have now taken on four units, two of which are newly refurbished in the business park. In 11 years the company has grown from a back bedroom business to now occupying six units on Roseheyworth, and will likely need more as time passes.

Insurgo's Managing Director Gavin Griffiths said: "Within 12 months we hope to double our current workforce of 16 as we progress our main plan to become global leaders of secure tape disposal services. We have patented technology granted in six countries, and a further 46 patents pending globally.

"We have the best environmental credentials of any tape disposal method in the world, and we're aiming to start working on the only 100% recycling method of all tape media formats in Roseheyworth. The refurbishment of the business park allows us to stay where we want to be and grow our service offering, enabling us to recruit and expand the team. It's an ideal base for us."

The extensive work at Roseheyworth involved the refurbishment of four dilapidated business units, repairing the roof, doors and windows, and adding suspended ceilings, new flooring and heating systems, creating an additional 12,386ft<sup>2</sup> / 1,150m<sup>2</sup> of floor space. The Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating has improved from 'G' to 'C' through the use of energy efficient aluminium double-glazed panels, void insulation, and the fitting of LED lighting throughout.

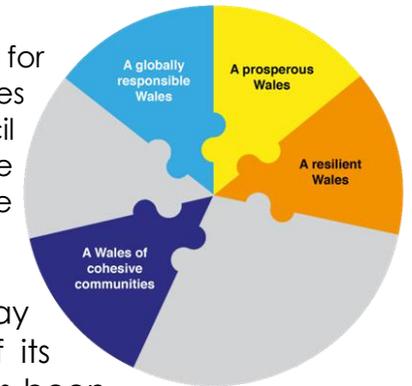
Councillor Dai Davies, Deputy Leader of Blaenau Gwent Council and Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development said: "The investment in Roseheyworth by Tech Valleys is really welcome news and demonstrates our commitment to working with businesses based in Blaenau Gwent. It has helped create modern premises to help these great local businesses with their expansion plans creating more job opportunities in the local area."



## An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities

### 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.



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.

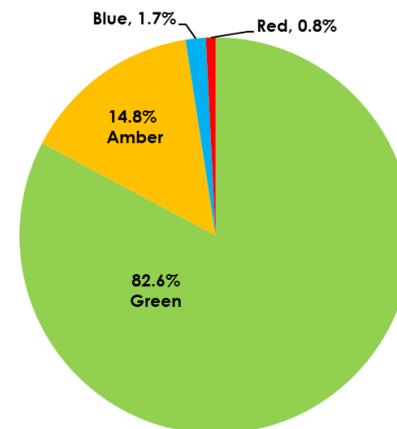
### Priorities

- 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.

## Overview 2020/21

Throughout 2020/21 there has been progress in the implementation of the priorities supporting delivery of this objective 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).



Some key activity includes:

The **Commercial Strategy** was approved by Council in September 2020. The Strategy brings together themes that will contribute to Blaenau Gwent Council being commercially minded and focused within the context of maintaining the Council's core purpose to provide public services delivering social value.

The response to the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the delivery of the Strategy. However, focus has been given to building on the initial 'Bridging the Gap' Strategic Business Review of third party expenditure with work being undertaken on:

- Excellence in Commissioning and Procurement; and
- Excellence in Contract and Supplier Management.

Work in the early part of 2021/22 looked to re-ignite our approach to:

- Managing commercial activities through profit and loss accounting;
- Creation of an Investment Portfolio; and
- Creation of a Commercial and Entrepreneurial Culture.

Progress of the Strategy is governed through a newly created Strategic Commissioning and Commercial Board.

The Corporate **Communications Strategy** was approved by Council in September 2020. Its main objective is to ensure that, as a commercial organisation, the Council is seen as a trusted brand delivering quality services.

Through implementing the Strategy, the Council is looking to deliver excellent, innovative and cost effective two-way communications, building a positive reputation and increasing trust and confidence that the Council is delivering services that meet resident, businesses and visitor's needs.

The Strategy has six themes, however, since the COVID 19 pandemic, focus has been on one specific theme, to 'make sure residents are informed in advance of and at times of emergency'. Informing staff and members has also been key throughout this period.

During the unprecedented challenge that the pandemic brought, and the move to remote working, meant that the importance of digital and social media became even more significant. The fast moving environment required an almost constant flow of information and content being produced by the Corporate Communications Team.

The Council's Corporate Communications Team was also a key member of Gwent Local Resilience Forum Warning and Informing Group. This group had responsibility for aligning communications and communicating key information to the residents of Gwent during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring a consistent approach between local partners, Public Health Wales and Welsh Government. The content was a mixture of partner material (Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, Health Board) and content created by the team using their creative skills.

The **Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)** is a key element within the Council's strategic planning framework. It is this financial framework which will support the Council's financial resilience and ensure it operates sustainably.

The MTFS provides a future look over the next five years in order to:

- assess the spending requirements that the Council is likely to face;
- delivering the priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan; and
- highlights the level of cuts (reducing or stopping services) that will need to be made to ensure the Council can set a balanced budget each year.

The MTFS proposes the approach that the Council will take to respond to the financial challenges over the next five-year period. This will be an iterative process and one that will be developed and refined as the Council's funding position from Wales Government becomes clearer and strategic business reviews are further developed and implemented.

During the year, the Medium Term Financial Strategy has been reviewed, and subsequently in March 2021, Council agreed its budget for 2021/22 which included a planned contribution to reserves of £1.2m.

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 and lost income; and
- 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.

In August 2020 the Council received its 'Supporting Financial Resilience Follow Up Review' from Audit Wales. The review sought to answer the question, 'Can the Council provide assurance that it has addressed the proposals for improvement detailed in the 2018 Supporting Financial Resilience review output?'

The main findings from Audit Wales was that, 'the Council has responded positively and is making progress against the proposals for improvement and has future work planned to fully address them'.

Audit Wales found that:

- the Council is taking steps to understand and address the reasons for its lower than average council tax collection rates and high staff costs;
- the Council has developed a central grants register and is beginning to manage grants more strategically;
- the Council is making good progress with its strategic review of fees and charges;
- the Council is strengthening its financial planning and management arrangements;
- although levels of useable reserves remain low, the Council has taken proactive steps to improve its position and the MTFS demonstrates an ongoing commitment to strengthen the General Reserve; and
- the Bridging the Gap programme is making effective use of data and further work is underway to improve the way the Council uses data.

The **UK exited the EU** on 31st Jan 2020 and entered a **transition period** until 31st December 2020, during which the UK's relationship with the EU remained largely the same as it was.

A level of uncertainty still remains as to what the full implications of exiting the EU will be for local authorities in Wales. This uncertainty, combined with the ongoing impact of the Covid19 pandemic, has impacted the scope of preparedness activity and modelling that can be undertaken at local authority level.

The Core Planning Group continued to meet during the pandemic to facilitate EU transition preparations. The Group receives information from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and Welsh Government about the national picture, as well as information from the Home Office regarding the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). Blaenau Gwent is also represented on the WLGA Brexit Coordinator network.

The WLGA submitted a bid to the Welsh Government's EU Transition Fund for each Welsh local authority to receive £45,000 funding during 2019/20 and 2020/21 towards corporate capacity support for resourced work on preparing for and responding to exiting the EU. The Council has received this funding to support the corporate Brexit planning work. This funding, for all 22 councils in Wales, was secured by the WLGA as part of their Brexit Transition Support Programme. A decision is awaited from Welsh Government on whether funding for local authorities will continue in 2021/22, with representations being made about the importance of the funding for councils to respond to the impact of EU transition. Monitoring the local impact and undertaking work to maximise opportunities and mitigate against any risks from the UK's exit from the EU will help to create a more resilient and prepared local authority for the public.

The **Agile Working** is aligned to the Council's new Operating Model and Working Arrangements, approved on 25th March 2021.

The Policy will look to introduce a new model of working across the Council, incorporating modern working practices, seeking 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.

The Agile Working Policy is a key enabler in delivering the future working model. 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.

The policy clearly sets out Corporate, management and employee responsibilities and includes:

- Designation of roles into one of three workstyles, defined as; Homeworker, Agile Worker, Service/Community Worker;
- Proposes payments to support homeworking for the Homeworker (£26 per month tax free) and Agile Worker (£12 per month tax free);
- Details the standard equipment which the Council will provide to home/agile workers. Reasonable adjustments may necessitate additional equipment
- Focuses on health, safety and welfare including employee/employer responsibilities;
- Outlines data protection, security and confidentiality requirements; and
- Demonstrates commitment to equal opportunities/reasonable adjustments and to treat staff in a fair, equitable and consistent manner and to comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

The policy will improve employee well-being, engagement and performance, aid employee recruitment and retention and reduce absences.

A **staff survey** was undertaken in 2020 to consider the impacts of COVID 19 and working remotely as well as considerations for future working. From the survey analysis it shows the majority of staff:

- rate their productivity as the same or better compared since homeworking;
- feel they are appropriately supported;
- feel they have a healthy work/life balance; and
- rate their wellbeing as fair, good or very good.

The **Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) Service** was put in place as a response to tracking COVID 19 in order to enhance health surveillance in the community, undertake effective and extensive contact tracing, and support people to self-isolate where required to do so.

Welsh Government set out its Strategy for leading Wales out of the coronavirus pandemic in May 2020 based on 3 pillars:

- The measures and evidence by which current infection levels will be judged upon and transmission rates for coronavirus in Wales;
- The principles by which proposed measures will be examined to ease the current restrictions; and
- Enhancing public health surveillance and response system to enable prevention of infection and track the virus as restrictions are eased.

Contact tracing starts with self-reporting of symptoms, followed by testing suspected cases, tracing the contacts of those who have tested positive and then protecting families, friends and communities through self-isolation.

In Wales, there exists a robust public health system delivered by local health boards. As local authorities have significant expertise in contact tracing the TTP services are being run from within local authorities unlike in England.

Blaenau Gwent TTP Service is a regional approach with four other local authorities across Gwent (Caerphilly, Newport, Monmouthshire and Torfaen) all working in partnership with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Public Health Wales.

The TTP service is in operation 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm, operating across bank holidays and deals with:

- New cases for tracing by Tracers, where contacts are identified;

- Contacts of positive cases identified are contacted by Advisors who carry out daily check ins over the period of isolation. The Advisors will look out for symptoms, give advice around self-isolation making sure this is maintained through the isolation period. Also link into the Locality Response Teams and Benefits Teams for the Self Isolation payment scheme;
- Backward tracing of cases;
- Heavily involved in the variant tracing; and
- Lateral Flow Testing.

In response to the pandemic, the Council put in place arrangements to support the most vulnerable within the community and those shielding by setting up **Locality Response Teams**. The Teams were established across the borough and support included the collection of medication and shopping for those that had no other support and also signposting to other agencies. Staff across the Council were redeployed to the Locality Teams and activity was monitored to ensure that the provision met demand.

Through recent learning from COVID 19 the Council has looked to establish **Community Hubs**. These will operate from Libraries to create more accessible services to the public including benefits, council tax and community services. The Hubs will deliver services in a new and modern way.

At the outset of the pandemic and the national lockdown, a decision was made, alongside other Local Authorities, to suspend the full schedule of formal **Council Committees** at the end of March 2020. Blaenau Gwent put in arrangements for the AGM to be held virtually, one of the first in Wales to do so on 2nd April. Arrangements were also put in place for Executive, Planning and Full Council to meet virtually before the Summer Recess. The full committee cycle was re-established from September 2020.

At the outset of the pandemic arrangements were put in place to provide all members with laptops to ensure that they could still take part in meetings and engage with constituents and one another. Elected Members responded to the need to move to more agile working, and did so at a pace. During the initial implementation phases there were inevitably some 'teething' problems experienced. To support Members to move to more agile working a number of activities were undertaken, including:

- Sourcing, distribution and set up of laptops for all members;
- Council implementation of Microsoft Teams;
- Specific guidance on how to set up laptops to enable the use of Microsoft Teams;
- Test session held prior to the formal Planning Committee which was the pilot for the use of Teams;
- Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny meeting held where, 'how to run a virtual meeting' was included on the agenda;
- Specific guidance and support on using emails, diary management and accessing documents;
- Offers for 'buddying' with officers of the Democratic Services Team to support members who felt this would be of value;
- Ongoing support to check in with members on any issues they were experiencing to access committee meetings; and
- Specific guidance on using Teams in the committee environment.

As part of the Council's **new Operating Model and Working Arrangements**, the Council's **Democratic Hub** will be relocated from the Civic Centre to the General Offices in Ebbw Vale. As part of this the Council Chamber needed to be relocated. This provided an opportunity for the Council to reflect on learning from COVID 19 and also to prepare for legislative requirements that would needed to be put in place as part of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, such as remote access, hybrid meetings and the recording of meetings.

The Council has procured a new delegate system which supports remote access enabling members, officers, the press and public the opportunity to observe a meeting remotely or attend physically. The intention of enabling remote access is to support work / life balance and to protect well-being. The arrangements should also support working members and those with parental or caring responsibilities, providing a more diverse democratic arrangement.

### Sustainable Development

<b>Long Term</b>	The decisions made as part of the Bridging the Gap programme are designed to support the long term financial resilience of the Council and to influence the design of services for the future.
<b>Prevention</b>	The Commercial strategy is designed to support the needs of the Council now and in the future. It is designed to build financial resilience and to prevent the need to seek service cuts.
<b>Integration</b>	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.
<b>Collaboration</b>	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.
<b>Involvement</b>	When the Council brought its CCTV system back in-house, there was extensive involvement and consultation with Gwent Police who also represented views from town centres traders.

**Performance Indicators** - Owing to the review undertaken on the Corporate Plan in 2020, the national indicators will be provided to support the implementation of the objective.

<b>Performance Indicator</b>	<b>Outturn 19/20</b>	<b>Outturn 20/21</b>	<b>Quarterly Performance Trend</b>
Number of working days/shifts per full-time equivalent (FTE) local authority employee lost due to sickness absence during the year	13.9	11.6	

## Case Studies

**Locality Team** - During the COVID 19 pandemic, when many vulnerable people were advised to shield and self isolate, Mrs X was referred to Locality Team from the foodbank. This referral was made as Mrs X was contacting the food bank constantly for food but was also ringing them to take the food back that she did not want/need. As Mrs X did not have a support network via friends or family, it was suggested that Mrs X may benefit from a buddy or good neighbour scheme. A referral was made to Cymru Creations for regular shopping support as was a referral to the Citizens Advice Bureau for a benefits check; to ensure Mrs X was getting all of the benefits to which she was entitled.

**Test, Trace, Protect (TTP)** - A family had been identified as contacts of someone who had tested positive for covid-19 and been told to self-isolate for 10 days. The service contacted the family to see what support was needed. It was felt that food shopping would be manageable but that support would be needed to walk the dog. Using the local volunteer list, compiled of Blaenau Gwent staff members who had offered their services to people who were shielding or self-isolating, someone was identified to support the family and walk the dog.

**Community Hubs** - A customer came to the Community Hub with her family who had recently moved from Hong Kong and bought a flat and a business in the area. They had a number of queries in which the team were able to directly support including:

- help amending the liability on their flat and their business rates - the service was able to make a referral in the Council Tax system so that the liability could be directly amended.
- how to register their son at a local school - the telephone number for school admissions was provided as well as information on how to register.
- how to register for a National insurance number – information provided from gov.uk website which included showing the customer the online application form
- how to register for a NHS number - advised the customer that they could register with a local GP surgery who would issue them with an NHS number.

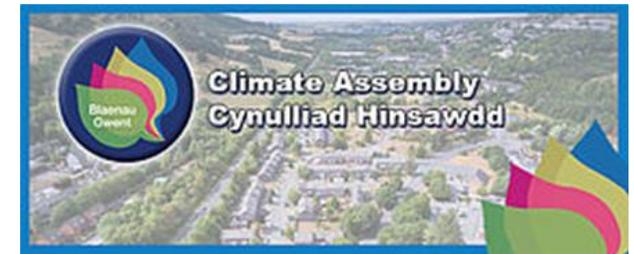
The family were very happy with the service provided and that all of their queries had been answered.

## Case Studies - 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."*

## How we keep track of what we are doing

The application of the Sustainable Development Principle and the reach of the Well-being Objectives mean changing the ways in which we work. The Council has focused on seven key corporate areas as part of implementing the Act. Below provides an update against the core set of activities that are common to the corporate governance of public bodies, recognising that there is still more to do in these areas over the coming years.

**Performance management** - The Council has a well-established performance management framework in place which supports all aspects of service planning, delivery and improvement. As part of this, the Council's Well-being Objectives, as identified within the Corporate Plan, have been used to shape all service planning throughout the Council. A 'golden thread' has been developed from the Corporate Plan throughout the organisation.

As part of our business planning arrangements, progression of the sustainable development principles has been included and is reported on against each Well-being Objective.

On a quarterly basis, the Council receives performance monitoring of the Corporate Plan as part of the Finance and Performance Report. Alongside this reporting, there are a number of other performance reports that are reported internally and through the democratic process.

**Financial planning** - The Council continually reviews its financial management and planning arrangements to enable it effectively demonstrate how we use resources to deliver sustainable long term outcomes to both current and future generations. This is especially difficult against a backdrop of annual resource allocations from central Government. Consequently, there will be a need to adapt to ongoing changes during the lifetime of these Objectives and further review them accordingly.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is a key element within the Council's strategic planning framework. It is this financial framework which will support the Council's financial resilience and ensure it operates sustainably. The MTFS brings together all known factors affecting the Council's financial position and forms the basis for decision making. The MTFS includes a forward look over the next five years to assess the spending requirements the Council is likely to face when delivering the priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan, and highlights the funding requirement that will need to be made to ensure the Council can set a balanced budget each year.

## Financial Management

<u>Revenue Budget</u>	Revised Budget 2020/21	Provisional Outturn 2020/21	Variance Favourable / (Adverse)
<b>Portfolio</b>			
Corporate Services & Financial Management & Strategy	16.730	15.408	1.322
Social Services	45.352	44.231	1.121
Education / Leisure	62.128	61.765	0.363
Economy	1.215	1.195	0.020
<b>Sub Total (1)</b>	<b>125.425</b>	<b>122.599</b>	<b>2.826</b>
Environment	25.532	25.644	(0.112)
Planning	1.118	1.170	(0.052)
Licensing	0.070	0.093	(0.023)
<b>Sub Total (2)</b>	<b>26.72</b>	<b>26.907</b>	<b>(0.187)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>152.145</b>	<b>149.506</b>	<b>2.639</b>

<u>Capital Budget</u>	Funding 2020/21	Future Funding	In Year Budget	Expenditure	Variance Favourable / (Adverse)
<b>Portfolio</b>					
Corporate Services & Strategy	1,455,306	1,333,726	2020/21	121,580	0
Social Services	5,660,930	4,728,032	121,580	868,325	5,325
Economy	19,863,349	12,020,218	873,650	7,843,131	0
Education and Active Living	30,005,965	28,133,649	7,843,131	1,863,475	8,841
Environment	8,819,944	5,161,384	1,872,316	3,624,612	33,948
Infrastructure	3,710,982	929,843	6,658,560	2,668,503	112,636
<b>All Portfolios</b>	<b>971,335</b>	<b>343,020</b>	<b>2,781,139</b>	<b>628,315</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total Capital Funding</b>	<b>70,427,811</b>	<b>52,649,872</b>	<b>628,315</b>	<b>17,617,941</b>	<b>160,750</b>

### Current Revenue Budget Provisional Position:

The overall financial position across all portfolios at 31 March 2021, is a favourable variance of £2.639m (1.7%), against a total revenue budget of £152m. The figures are provisional and subject to external audit. The outturn is a significant improvement on the forecast financial position at the end of December 2020, at which time the forecast was a favourable variance of £0.6m.

### Capital Budget Provisional Outturn 2020/21

The overall provisional financial position as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 indicates a £161k underspend against a total in year capital budget of £17.78m.

A number of infrastructure projects are reporting an underspend at year end, the total cost of the works was less than the in-year grant approval allocated by the Welsh Government, therefore the grant allocation was not able to be claimed in full. Future year funding of £52m which consists of approved external grant and the authorities own funding will be carried forward into future financial years. The authorities own Capital Programme Funding will be carried forward to the financial year 2021/2022 in accordance with slippage procedures.

**Risk management** – the Council's Risk Management Mission Statement is *'Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council will adopt best practices in the identification, evaluation and cost-effective control of risks to ensure that they are eliminated or managed to an acceptable level.'*

To ensure that the Council meets the risk management requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, our risk management approach ensures that long term risks and challenges to both service delivery and our community are considered.

The Council believes that risk management is a vital component to ensuring that it becomes a high performance organisation. We are committed to ensuring that risk management is embedded throughout the Council as managing risks will lead to more effective use of resources, direct improvements to services, customers and stakeholders, as well as improving corporate governance and performance. As part of these arrangements, the Corporate Risk Register is reviewed quarterly and reported to Members as part of the Finance and Performance Report.

**Procurement** – procurement activities are facilitated in compliance within existing legal obligations; predominately defined within the Public Contract Regulations (PCR's) 2015 as well as the Council's internal Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs). The Council has adopted the Welsh Procurement Policy 2012 (amended 2015) and applies these principles to all commissioning and procurement requirements. To support the implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, including Community Benefits, at the outset of each procurement, client and procurement officers determine project scope and consider opportunities for the inclusion of the Act and Community Benefits.

**Corporate planning** – 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. The Sustainable Development Principles, Environment Act and Decarbonisation have been included within the business planning template used across all service areas. The five ways of working are also captured within the Corporate Reporting Template, this is supported by guidance which is reviewed and shared periodically.

**Workforce** - In the early summer we took the opportunity to pause and reflect on how the Council had responded to the initial surge in the virus. From this we identified that staff and Elected Members had responded admirably to the challenge of remote working and the investment that had previously been made in technology had stood the Council in good stead. The realisation that we can run our business and deliver services in a very different way, be more in line with modern working practices and reduce our costs and impact on the environment has opened up new opportunities for us to make a step change now and not to simply return to how we operated before. A survey of staff conducted late in 2020 shows that staff have responded positively to home working and consider that the Council has handled the change well. This shows support from staff to continue working in a more agile and flexible way and the positive impact this has had on productivity and a reduction in staff absence due to sickness.

On 25th March 2021 Council approved a new Operating Model & Working Arrangement incorporating modern working practices 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. The Agile Working Policy is a key enabler in delivering the future working model. 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.

**Assets** – Owing to the pandemic and in line with Government guidelines, where possible, staff have been working from home in order to prevent workplace and community transmission of the virus. This meant that office based staff and Elected Members worked remotely since March 2020, moving towards digital based platforms with offices closed and staff only attending offices where necessary.

Welsh Government has an ambition for 30% of the workforce to work from home or remotely. The vision being to reduce the numbers commuting to work and keeping more people working in their local communities. The Council has an opportunity, now, to be at the forefront of delivering this national ambition by making a step change in how we work, how we deliver services and to improve access to council businesses and services for our residents.

In October 2020 Council approved a new operating model and working arrangements for the Council moving forward, this included:

- Development of a democratic facility at the General Offices;
- Development of community hubs in town centres; and
- To vacate and demolish the Civic Centre.

Since the decision, the Member Working Group along with Officers and Trade Union representatives worked to develop a model for new working arrangements, based on agile working, which will allow the organisation to operate out of its remaining offices at Anvil Court, ViTCC, General Offices and other appropriate Council buildings.

This approach supports the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan priority to be an efficient organisation and to operate using modern working practices in a way which supports our workforce, effective service delivery and improves access to Council business for our residents. It also supports the priority to regenerate the site in Ebbw Vale opening up the opportunities for investment in new homes and community facilities in the centre of the community. The continuing of working from home will also support delivery of the Council's ambition, as set out in the Decarbonisation Plan, to reduce our carbon emissions to a point where our impact is net zero carbon.

Finally, this also supports the delivery of the Bridging the Gap Programme which seeks to reduce the cost of our corporate property estate through a process of rationalisation and introduction of more modern and efficient workplaces.

### **The Strategic Equalities Plan**

The Council is committed to implementing the Equality Act 2010 and this is evidenced by the Blaenau Gwent Strategic Equality Plan 2020/24. The Plan was developed using research and engagement as well as developing a Member's Task and Finish Group. The plan contains the Council's Equality Objectives:

- We will be an organisation who ensures fairness and equality is in everything that we do;
- We will be an equal opportunity employer with a workforce that values equality and diversity;

- We will support children and young people, particularly those with protected characteristics, to achieve their learning ambitions;
- We will promote and support safe, friendly and cohesive communities;
- We will ensure there is meaningful involvement with people who have protected characteristics and key stakeholders that represent their interests; and
- We will strive to tackle inequality caused by poverty for people who have protected characteristics.

The plan and supporting documents can be found at <http://cc-mgov-01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1134&Mid=2172&Ver=4&LLL=0>

### **Decarbonisation**

The Council supports the Welsh Government's ambition for the Welsh public sector to be carbon neutral by 2030. In order to respond to this, the Council has developed a Decarbonisation Plan 2020 to 2030 with the ambition of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. The plan sets out how we intend to deliver on this ambition over the next ten years. Alongside the plan, a Decarbonisation Programme Management Board has been established with the responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the plan including: coordination; performance management; communication; and delivery.

On page 44 is a case study detailing Blaenau Gwent's Climate Assembly which was one of the first Climate Assemblies in Wales. In March 2021, it brought together 50 people from the Blaenau Gwent area 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?

### **The Welsh Language Annual Report**

The Welsh Language Annual Report for 2019/20 sets out the highlights and key pieces of work, which demonstrate how we, as a Council, have endeavoured to meet the requirement set by the Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice issued in September 2015.

Standard 145 requires Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to produce a strategy detailing how it will promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language over the next five years. The aims of the Blaenau Gwent's Welsh Language Strategy are linked with the Welsh Government's vision to create a million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050. In order to meet a target of 44% increase of Welsh speakers by 2050, we would need to gain an additional 2,324 Welsh speakers against the 2011 Census Blaenau Gwent baseline of 5,284. Therefore, this represents an average annual increase of 70 additional Welsh speakers, i.e. 3% of the target figure of an additional 2,324 in Blaenau Gwent for the next 33 years.

The Council has identified the following three Welsh Language Promotion objectives:

- Promote and encourage the use of the Welsh language within the families and the community;
- Increase the provision of Welsh language education and informal activities for children and young people and to increase their awareness of the value of the language; and
- Increase opportunities for people to use Welsh in the workplace. Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2017-22.

On the 30th November 2019 the Council had a Performance Monitoring Visit from the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office. The meeting was very positive, with discussions covering the following areas of interest:

- Findings of monitoring work in 2018-19 in relation to the organisation;
- Rights in Use 2018-19, the Commissioner's 2018-19 assurance report which encourages organisations to have robust internal arrangements to ensure compliance, increase workforce capacity to improve provision, and prompt people to use services in Welsh;
- Internal arrangements to ensure compliance;
- Increasing workforce capacity;
- Prompting people to use services in Welsh;
- Increasing the use and number of speakers in Welsh; and
- Operational matters

### **Elected Members**

Throughout the 2020/21 year members have engaged in a number of training and learning sessions as part of the Member Development Programme, which is linked to the priorities within the Council's Corporate Plan and Committee Forward Work Programmes. All Senior Salary Holders also undertook a Personal Development Review which was externally facilitated. From each of these sessions a personal action plan was developed, to be implemented throughout the coming year.

### **External and Internal Regulation**

The Council is monitored by a number of regulatory bodies, the main of which are:

- Audit Wales;
- Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW); and
- Estyn.

The Council monitors all proposals for improvement it receives from both internal and external auditors on a quarterly basis through the Finance and Performance Report. Each of the proposals is monitored through the relevant business plan. Periodically, a review of the open proposals is undertaken and presented to Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) to consider which proposals can close as they have been completed or have moved to business as usual.

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 being monitored via business plans, totalling 62 proposals for improvement being implemented.

Reports received during 2020/21 include:

Local Reports -

- Audit Wales Audit of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's 2020-21 Improvement Plan
- Audit Wales Supporting Financial Resilience Follow-up Review
- Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Local Authority Performance Review

National Audit Wales Reports –

- WCCIS
- Test, Trace & Protect
- Emergency Response
- Commercialisation
- Cyber Resilience

In order to action the proposals within these final reports, the relevant business plans include activity that should address the areas for improvement identified by the Auditor.

### **Well-being Statement**

As part of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 all Public Bodies have a duty, under section 7 of the legislation, to publish a Well-being Statement at the same time that they publish their Well-being Objectives. As part of the review of the Corporate Plan in July 2020, each Well-being Objective has been written to contribute to the Well-being Goals and observe the requirements as outlined by the Sustainable Development Principles. Both of which is also observed through our Council Business Planning process. This Assessment of Performance 2020/21 provides detail of activity undertaken by the Council in meeting the Well-being Objectives.

### **Council Governance**

As part of our ongoing governance arrangements, we monitor the implementation of the Corporate Plan and Well-being Objectives using a well-structured performance management framework which includes business planning, reporting and self-evaluation. The Council operates a single performance management system which includes the majority of Council planning and holds information in one place in order to avoid duplication.

Everything we do should contribute to the Council's priorities (the 'golden thread') so that all our effort and resources are linked into the delivery of the Corporate Plan. The Council's business planning framework is strategically aligned from the Corporate Plan throughout the organisation so that all staff can understand their contribution to implementation.

The corporate requirement is for all business plans to be updated at least quarterly. Achievements, challenges, PIs and progress against any internal or external regulatory proposals for improvement are then included within our Finance and Performance Report which is reported to Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee.

### **Contact Information**

This document is available electronically at <http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/council/performance/> and in hard copy by request.

Corporate Performance Team Corporate Services  
Email: [pps@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk](mailto:pps@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)

## **Providing Feedback**

We welcome any feedback you might have about the Council's Assessment of Performance 2020/21. Your views are important to us and we want to know what information you would like to see and how you would like to see it reported. Please contact the team on the details above if you would like to give feedback on the Assessment, if there is any information you think could be considered for inclusion in the future, or if you require this document in a different format e.g. large print, Braille, audio version, etc.



## **Fersiwn Gymraeg**

Yn unol â Chynllun Iaith Gymraeg y Cyngor, bydd fersiwn Gymraeg o'r Cynllun Gwella ar gael ar wefan y Cyngor.

This document acts as Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's Well-being Statement, prepared under section 7 of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and related guidance issued by the Welsh Government.

This Assessment of Performance outlines the Council's responsibility to publish an assessment of performance for the financial year 2020/21 as outlined in section 15 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

The Council is satisfied that the information given in this plan is accurate based on the information available at the time of publication.

This Council's Assessment of Performance 2020/21 has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment screening.