

## **Finance and Performance Report**

### **Quarter 1 and 2 (April 2021 to September 2021)**

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# Introduction

Welcome to the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Finance and Performance Report. The Report provides a mid-year review of the activity undertaken to date covering the period April to September 2021. The purpose of the report is to present the performance of the Council, setting out the key activities and measures used to monitor performance against achieving the outcome objectives as identified within the Council's Corporate Plan.

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

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

## **Blaenau Gwent Vision -**

**Proud Heritage**

**Strong Communities**

**Brighter Future**

# COVID - 19 the Council's Response

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

In accordance with Emergency Planning arrangements, a GOLD Group was established in Blaenau Gwent which comprised of Corporate Leadership Team, supported by the Civil Contingency Manager and Communications Manager. The strategic aim of GOLD is to delay and mitigate, as far as practicable, the spread and impact of Coronavirus within the community. GOLD was supported by an Emergency Response Team, made up of Heads of Service and Service Managers working alongside partners including the Aneurin Leisure Trust, GAVO, Tai Calon and the Joint Trade Unions.

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

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

## The Council's Response to COVID 19 – Recovery and Renewal

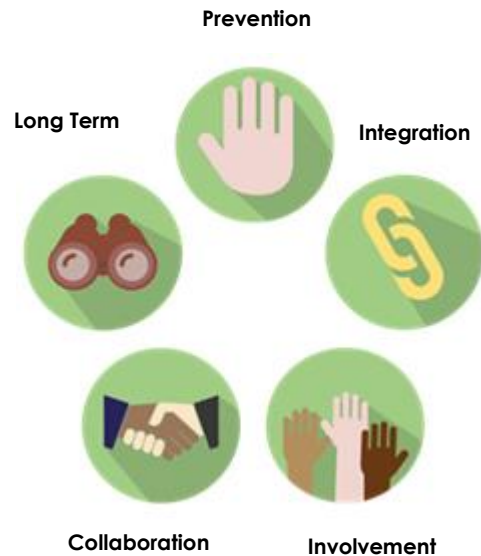
The Council has identified a number of priorities for recovery and renewal, as part of the response to the COVID-19 situation. There are five recovery themes each with an action plan and monitoring methods in place:

- Community (overarching theme);
- Social Services (Children and Adults);
- Economy;
- Education; and
- Workforce.

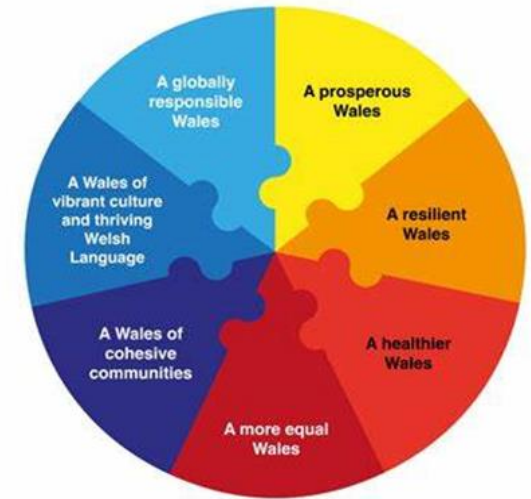
The recovery and renewal plans will act as working documents, outlining how the Council will continue to support schools, the economy, the community, service users and the workforce during, and beyond the pandemic. It is, however, highly likely that there will be a need to continue to move between alert levels and thus working to response and recovery at the same time. Therefore, an effective approach to business continuity at each level is required.

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

This is ground-breaking legislation which aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The vision of this legislation is expressed in the seven national well-being goals.



The Act also puts a duty on public bodies to apply the Sustainable Development Principles which states they 'must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. The sustainable development principles are made up of the five ways of working and progress against these areas is evidenced throughout the report.



The next page highlights some examples of how the Council has been implementing the five ways of working throughout the period:

Five Ways of Working	Council Examples of Implementing the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act Five Ways of Working
<b>Long term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council actively supports the Asylum Dispersal Scheme to provide future families, who have experienced considerable hardship, with the route to a long-term safe haven. It is recognised that there are long-term implications of participation in the Asylum Dispersal Scheme and considerations on services such as education, mental health provision, housing and homelessness.</li> <li>• Analysis of individual school performance data is a key element in ensuring that schools are known well by the Council so that appropriate support and intervention can be directed towards areas of greatest need.</li> <li>• The energy prospectus has been designed to stimulate interest in energy development within Blaenau Gwent that will facilitate a supply of renewable energy that will meet the changing and future energy needs of Blaenau Gwent. It will also contribute towards our target of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030.</li> <li>• The development of the Blaenau Gwent My Support Team (MyST) is aimed at enhancing and improving services for children looked after and young people in the longer term. Bringing children closer to home will enable them to form local support networks in their communities which will no doubt benefit them into the future.</li> </ul>
<b>Prevention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contributing to the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and ecosystem resilience will help to mitigate and adapt to climate change and provide positive opportunities to maintain and build mental and physical health and well-being.</li> <li>• Engaging with the Asylum Dispersal Scheme helps to prevent vulnerable children and their families from further trauma and suffering in areas of significant conflict and, further, discharging both our moral and humanitarian obligations.</li> <li>• Reduced exclusion rates reduces the likelihood of a pupil becoming NEET and increases the likelihood of a pupil achieving well and supports pupils to reach their potential.</li> <li>• By establishing Town Centre Advisory Boards, we hope to prevent further deterioration of Town Centres. They all face significant challenges to survive but bringing groups of stakeholders together, who want to support and help, could prevent them from facing even bigger challenges in the future.</li> <li>• One of the primary aims of the programmes delivered under the Children and Communities Grant (CCG) is to prevent needs from escalating. This not only relates to preventing families requiring the interventions from Statutory Services but also working with families to support them out of poverty via routes to employment.</li> </ul>
<b>Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The work on the Environment Act duty fits with the Blaenau Gwent well-being plan and ways of working could be shared with members of the Blaenau Gwent Public Service Board. Support for the Blaenau Gwent &amp; Torfaen Local Nature Partnership will assist with a strategic approach to environmental and ecological management in both boroughs.</li> <li>• The service delivery of Civil Parking Enforcement is a collaboration between Blaenau Gwent CBC, Caerphilly CBC and Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC (who provide a PCN processing service under the name of the South Wales Parking Group). CPE will look to work with local</li> </ul>

	<p>communities and businesses to maximise economic and regeneration benefits associated with both revenue &amp; capital services and projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council collaborates with neighbouring local authorities through the South East Wales Consortium for the provision of school improvement services from the Education Achievement Service (EAS) and a range of pupil support services for specific groups such as visually and hearing impaired learners.</li> <li>• Continuing to maximise the impact of the Energy Prospectus will be dependent on strong collaboration and partnership working with communities, the public and private sector and businesses. Progressing opportunities from the prospectus would require partnership working across the Council.</li> </ul>
<b>Integration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Powys County Council has worked successfully across the Authority. Most recently, Powys Officers have provided expert advice and support to the new Front Line Service, Estates and Community Safety service areas, in relation to the ongoing problems relating to straying animals/fly-grazing horses.</li> <li>• The Blaenau Gwent My Support Team (MyST) engages with the whole support network around the child. This includes school, youth workers and any community activities/clubs. The work undertaken to date by MyST has evidenced very close working relationships with schools both inside and outside of Blaenau Gwent.</li> <li>• SEWAS continues to form relationships with other councils in the region to improve outcomes for children who are placed for adoption. An example of this is working with communication teams to promote adoption within the region to attract adopters. Training is also provided for local authority social workers on a quarterly basis.</li> </ul>
<b>Involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation with Blaenau Gwent Civil Contingencies, Neighbourhood Services, Dwr Cymru Welsh Water and Natural Resources Wales was undertaken when preparing the Section 19 Flood Investigation Report, Llanhilleth.</li> <li>• There has been engagement with the Wider Corporate Leadership Team and Elected Members in development of the Workforce Strategy. There has been a workforce survey and a pulse survey (2020) which has supported the direction of the Strategy. There has been formal consultation with the trade unions and suggestions and amendments have influenced the Strategy.</li> <li>• Extensive engagement is on-going on the development of the 10-year BG Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) and the formal consultation will conclude early in 2022.</li> <li>• Stakeholders and end-user needs and engagement are of paramount importance to the Education Accessibility Strategy and associated action plan. An Education Accessibility Forum has been developed to secure inter-departmental working across the Council, aligned to effective delivery of both the strategy and plan. In addition, all relevant stakeholders will be consulted in line with the review process.</li> <li>• Blaenau Gwent Council will continue to work with local business parks and carry out further engagement with building owners and tenants. The project will seek to bring together a range of partners to work collaboratively to assist Blaenau Gwent to meet its aspirations of Net Zero Business Parks.</li> </ul>

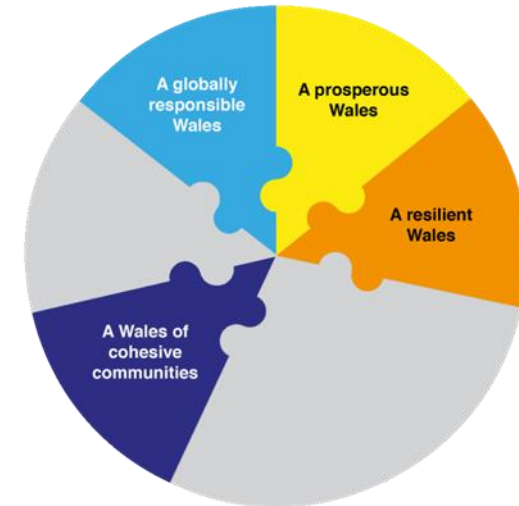
# BRAG

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

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

## Why this is important

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



## Progress against actions

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

## Priorities

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

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

- Gold and Emergency Planning Response Arrangements to respond to the pandemic have continued. With regular communications to the Workforce via the weekly Managing Directors Newsletter or where needed special communications.
- The move to Agile Working has been supported with leadership development sessions on Transitional Leadership and Strategic Leadership of an Agile Workforce.
- Workforce Engagement Plan in place to support the Agile Working policy.
- Well Being Wednesday bulletin to all employees promoting support services, events and tactics to support wellbeing.
- Well Being initiatives implemented to support wellbeing when working from home.
- Regular Wider Leadership Team meetings focussed on priorities and topical issues/development.
- New Workforce Strategy in place with an annual action plan – first year focus on the new Council operating model and the introduction of agile working.
- Strategic HR Headteachers group meeting regularly.
- Introduction of workforce facebook page to include a session with the Managing Director in December 2020.
- Regular monitoring of workforce capacity to include sickness absence and the impact of Covid 19.
- Regular monitoring of critical services in responding to Covid 19 and being able to deliver business as usual.

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

The Corporate Communications Team remains a key member of the Gwent Local Resilience Forum Warning and Informing Group. This group is responsible for aligning communications and communicating key information to the residents of Gwent during the phases of the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring a consistent approach between local partners, Public Health Wales (PHW) and Welsh Government. The content has been a mixture of partner material (Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, Health Board) and content created by the team maximising their creative skills.

The health, safety and wellbeing of staff has remained a key priority as we move to more business as usual with the following in place:

- Workplace risk assessments to manage the risk of COVID-19.
- Staff to continue to work from home where possible.
- Encouraging and supporting staff to take up the COVID-19 vaccination
- Asymptomatic Lateral Flow Testing.
- Ongoing wellbeing support for staff impacted by the pandemic.
- Promotion and encouragement for staff to take up the flu jab.

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

A number of the digital projects have attracted Welsh Government funding and this is being used to support the Council's digital ambitions aligned to the Commercial Strategy, including:

- Working with the Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS) to deliver better public services for Wales, funding has been secured to explore more user focussed and efficient ways of service delivery.
- Participation in a collaborative Adult Social Care project with Neath Port Talbot and Torfaen local authorities, looking at unavoidable contact at the front door.
- Commencement of a Tech Valleys funded project on exploring the digital interaction with the customer using a service. This project also included the establishment of a Digital apprentice. There was a high level of interest in the role and the successful candidate has joined the digital team in Commercial Services.
- The Digital Democracy Project discovery work involving user research with 16-25 year olds has been completed and findings presented to various groups, including Members. Prioritisation of the findings has taken place and work is being undertaken to include areas within the Diverse Council Action Plan as many of the findings also support this work. The project is being externally supported by Perago, including presenting the findings to Welsh Government to highlight areas that may inform a national focus and approach.

A planned 12-month digital programme has been scoped. This includes (in addition to the externally supported digital projects) corporate activity aligned to the ICT investment roadmap and development of a leadership and training programme for both officers and Members raising awareness and understanding of the scope and opportunities of our digital ambitions and activity.

A review of digital strategies across local authorities is being undertaken with the WLGA, this will inform the development of the Council's digital strategy which it is anticipated will be taken through the Decision making process in 2022.

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

Audit Wales undertook an assessment of the Councils' financial sustainability. A baseline assessment of the initial impact of COVID-19 on local councils' financial position was undertaken. Following this, in October 2020, Audit Wales published a national summary report – Financial Sustainability of Local Government as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In summary, the findings were:

- Improved financial planning and better-than-expected Welsh Government settlements mean the Council is better placed to maintain its financial sustainability over the short term but challenges remain to fully close budget gaps over the medium term.
- The immediate impact of COVID-19 on the Council's financial sustainability has been mitigated by additional Welsh Government funding.
- The Council continues to develop a more sustainable approach to financial planning and recognises the need to understand the ongoing financial impact of the pandemic.
- The Council is increasing its useable reserves and remains committed to doing so over the medium term.
- The Council's overall performance against budget is improving and, whilst some service areas continue to overspend, the Council is taking steps to help address some of these budget pressures.
- The Council has developed a more sustainable approach to savings planning but further challenges remain to identify sufficient savings to fully close the estimated medium-term funding gap.
- The Council's liquidity position remains the lowest in Wales.

During February / March 2021, the Council engaged Treasury Advisors, Link Asset Services, to conduct a review of the current MRP policy. The review identified the opportunity to change two elements of the current policy which would provide positive benefits to the Council by reducing the annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) charge until 2031/32 for unsupported borrowing and 2057/58 for supported borrowing.

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

Bridging the Gap remains the Council's medium/long term strategy to address the budget gaps currently identified. Additional proposals will be developed to mitigate the possible residual funding gaps in future years.

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

Improving attendance remains a key priority for the Council and is identified as a key risk for the Council as it is acknowledged that high levels of sickness absence will have a detrimental impact on the ability of the Council to deliver services.

During 2020/21 the Council, like all workplaces, had to rise to the enormous challenge of responding to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the dramatic impact it had on the way the Council had to work, prompting a transformation to working practices on an unprecedented scale to safeguard people's health, safety and wellbeing. This resulted in delivery of critical services only, with other available resources being redeployed to support the response.

Workforce is a key theme as part of the Council's Recovery Plan, it is acknowledged that COVID-19 will not disappear and a continuing priority will be to manage the capacity of the workforce to ensure that services are delivered.

It is also anticipated that the Council's workforce will be impacted by the NHS treatment waiting lists which could lead to an increase in sickness levels. Also anticipated is a surge in seasonal illnesses with increased prevalence of influenza, winter bugs etc.

The Workforce Strategy 2021-26 aims to build on existing good practice and to promote the Council as a safe, healthy and supportive environment in which to work and will have a strategic focus on wellbeing which will play a significant role in supporting attendance at work.

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

The community hubs became fully operational on 26th July 2021. The Community Hubs work closely with the Locality Teams to proactively provide support solutions and options to those experiencing difficulties and those seeking advice. The Locality Response Team has achieved the following throughout the period:

- 65 residents have been supported throughout in quarter 1 with a wide range of assistance given from food shopping to supporting residents to apply for grants
- 20 supported to enable self-isolation
- 40 supported who received financial benefit gains, i.e. Discretionary Assistance Fund applications
- 33 food vouchers allocated to residents

Blaenau Gwent plays an active role in the wider region through the Cardiff City Region (CCR) partnership. The Council is a member of the Regional Cabinet and Investment Panel. There are a number of new projects that have benefitted from CCR funding over the last few years including design and acquisition work at Abertillery in preparation for the rail line extension; funding for Ebbw Vale (EV) charging and EV taxi trials which strongly links to our decarbonisation aims; Housing Catalyst fund to unlock one of our difficult housing sites in the area and funding to roll out our award winning ASPIRE apprenticeship scheme.

Throughout the response to COVID-19, the Council has worked closely with partner organisations to deliver a joined up emergency response for the community. Civil Contingencies multi-agency response structures were established alongside health specific structure to ensure there was a joint understanding of the current situation and risks, make joint decisions and coordinate the partner response. Specific areas of focus included coordinated public communication, health and social care impact, ensuring partners were able to continue with high priority services, requests for support between partner organisations, mitigating impacts of COVID-19 as far as possible and developing a resilient test, trace and protect service.

The Gwent Regional Partnership Board (RPB) is an advisory body, that takes oversight of and provides direction to, any areas of integrated working across health and social care. The Council is an active partner on the Board. Using transformation funding a number of projects are ongoing across Gwent, these include 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); and the development of an integrated 'Home First' discharge model. All these models have been successfully implemented and been evaluated externally.

The Regional Partnership Board has also been key in overseeing our joint response to the COVID 19 pandemic over the last 20 months, with regular updates provided to reassured the Board that the hospital capacity and support in the community has been able to cope with each wave of the virus locally and regionally, which has been very much due to the success of collaborative working by all partners and more lately due to the vaccination roll out.

## **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**

The Commercial Strategy approved by Council in September 2020, sets out key themes which support a commercially minded organisation and includes all directorates of the Council. As part of this, a Strategic Commissioning and Commercial Board (SCCB) chaired by the Managing Director has been put in place. The Board has a revised schedule of meetings and a forward work programme which reflects the ambitions set out in the Commercial Strategy. This includes early consideration of potential commercial activity to test ideas, with the Board taking the leading role for the Bridging the Gap review.

A process for 'check and challenge' of third party contracts and commercial opportunities has been established. The Board focus is on contracts above the tender threshold of £75k.

A bespoke baseline financial assessment (profit & loss) to quantify and challenge trading operations has been developed by Resources colleagues for consideration. The aim is to support the Bridging the Gap reviews by providing a clear financial picture of commercial activity.

The Transactional Procurement Group has been established to ensure the same degree of check and challenge is applied to the contracts under the 75k threshold.

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

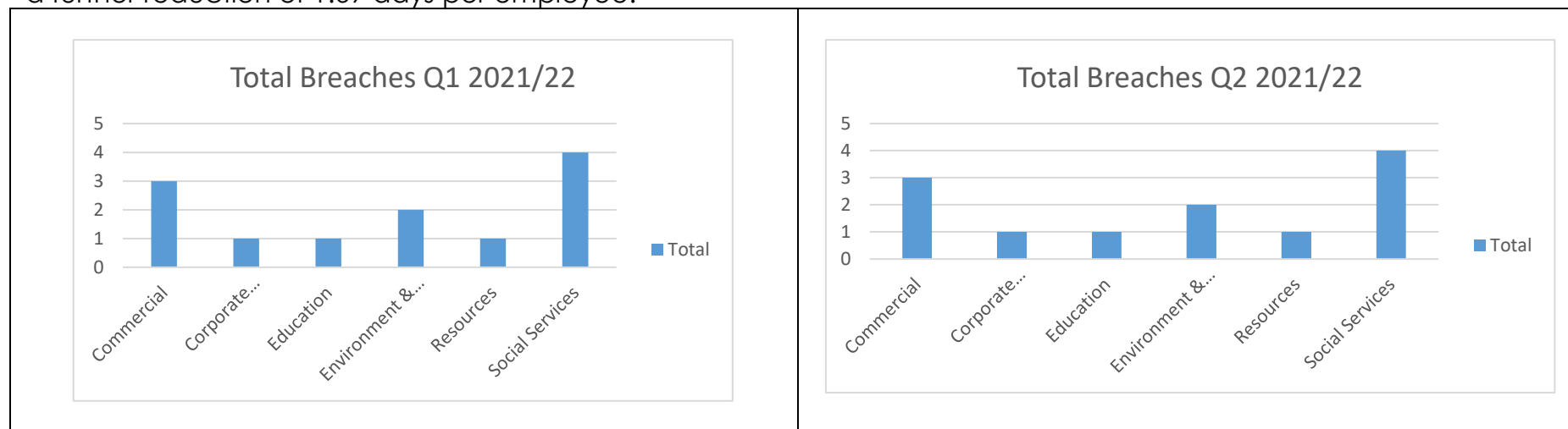
The new Council Operating Model was agreed at Council in March 2021 and included the move to agile working and the development of a supporting policy. The new operating model introduces modern working practices, seeks to enhance employees' working experience, maximise performance and productivity and deliver the greatest value to the organisation, in terms of improving service delivery, as well as realising financial gains. The Operating Model has also introduced new Community Hubs across the Borough, improving customer access to Council Services.

The new Workforce Strategy will be a key enabler in delivering the Council's ambition, the New Council Operating Model and key priorities. It is a five-year strategy focussed on the future, integrating the Council's vision, objectives and financial planning arrangements. It links service outcomes with the workforce required to deliver them and an on-going understanding of how the workforce should look in the future through continual review, re-alignment and measurement of how outcomes are achieved. It will support the workforce to transition from responding to the emergency situation in relation to the pandemic COVID-19 and act as a key lever to facilitate culture change, capacity and skills, continuation of transformational change and performance improvement. The Strategy will aim to ensure we have the right people, with the right skills, in the right place, at the right level, and at the right cost.

The Recovery Plan and the Workforce Strategy will link 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.

## Key Performance Information

For 2020/21 the Council's **sickness** outturn was 11.67 days on average per employee. This is a decrease of 2.24 days per employee in comparison to the year before. If the COVID related absence is removed from the 11.67 days, the sickness outturn reduces to 9.98 - a further reduction of 1.69 days per employee.



During the period the **Council website** received 84,000 visitors viewing around 5 pages per visit. There were 3,200 **social media posts**. The number of **social media followers** remains steady with Facebook followed by 15,000 residents.

## Community Hub Support

A breakdown of the number of residents supported through the Community Hubs during the period:

	Ebbw Vale	Tredegar	Brynmawr	Abertillery	Cwm	Blaina	Llanhilleth	Overall
June	10	4	7	4	7	4	4	40
July	39	39	17	20	23	19	8	165
August	133	110	54	89	15	13	5	419
September	110	112	55	87	12	14	0	390
Total	292	265	133	200	57	50	17	1014

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

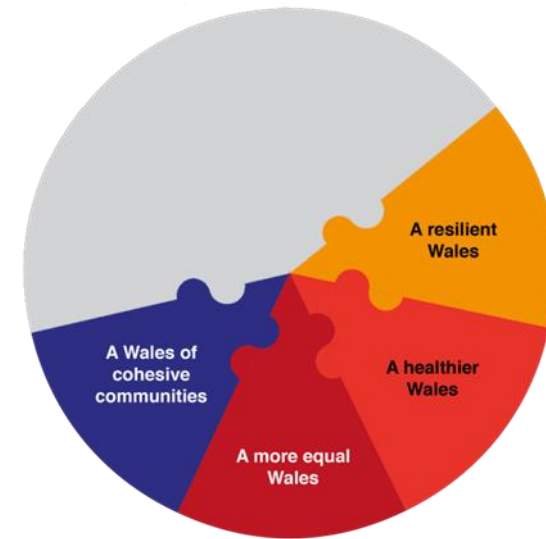
## Why this is important

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 health behaviours from birth through their life will lead to greater independence, and people being free from complicated health conditions later in life and reducing costs to public services. This in turn could reduce demand on services and ensure the services that are provided are high quality, efficient and responsive to local people's needs.

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

## Progress against actions

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



## Priorities

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

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

During quarter 1 2021/22 the Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) Team saw a significant increase in the numbers of referrals received across all partners. Analysis of the data over the past two years has been undertaken to understand the increase in the numbers pre and post pandemic. This information has been included within a report identifying the impact that this increase is having on the service. The overarching message was that the number of referrals during the height of the Pandemic was higher than the referral rates the previous year. The total number and average monthly referrals has increased by 7.7%. Despite this overarching message, the report did not include detail of outcomes achieved. Therefore, a more detailed report is in the process of being written and will be completed by the end of November 2021 to consider how best to respond to this demand in the longer term.

Funding for additional resources in the IAA Team has been agreed until March 2022 from the Social Services Sustainability Fund. The long term plan is to make these additional posts permanent using the monies saved by reducing the numbers of children looked after. The rise in workload is presenting a challenge along with securing longer term funding for the additional resources in the team.

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

Children's Services has received feedback from Children Inspectorate Wales (CIW) who undertook an assurance check in May 2021. The following comments were made in relation to the outcomes culture in Blaenau Gwent and how the voice of the child is heard: 'Senior managers with staff and partners have worked hard to embed strength based outcomes focused practice. The authority's commitment to strength based outcome focused practice was evident in the files reviewed and staff spoke of how this underpinned their work in both adult and children's services. The authority recognises the importance of gaining people's views to inform practice development and support service improvement. We saw evidence of mentoring groups and peer supervision to share and reflect on case issues and identify potential responses to learning. Evidence showed people's views were sought and their voices heard. Information gathering to represent people's circumstances was also informed by intelligence from a number of relevant partner agencies, notably during early stages of intervention'. The mentors programme continues with regular 6 weekly meetings where live cases are discussed and feedback from families and children is included. In addition, the service as a whole continues to deliver interventions based on an outcomes/strengths based approach which has the voices of children and families at the centre of care planning. To ensure this approach is cemented in practice, each team holds group supervisions to hold reflective discussions on cases. The mentor groups still continue to meet monthly to share good practice across the service.

Assessment and care planning activity continues to promote the active voice, choice and control philosophy of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Outcomes focused and strengths based approaches to practice continue to be modelled, and National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) remains an active partner in ensuring that children and their families engage in a meaningful way.

In order to raise awareness of advocacy and increase demand into the service via the Gwent Access to Advocacy (GATA) helpline an awareness campaign was undertaken. However, the Covid-19 pandemic halted progress and made it difficult to establish the true need and demand for advocacy across Gwent. Advocacy providers and the GATA helpline have highlighted that referrals are now returning to pre-covid levels with a marked increase in parent advocacy relating to child protection cases. Data is still being collated, but an overall picture of advocacy provision within Gwent is now being developed. This will help to measure the success of the GATA pilot and inform an options paper for future advocacy commissioning, scheduled in early 2022.

In 2023 the Community Health Council will be replaced by a new 'Citizen Voice Body' which should provide the opportunity to co-ordinate the provision of advocacy support across the health board in order to strengthen the citizen's voice in relation to health and social care.

## To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater

The 2021/22 Children and Communities Grant (CCG) delivery plan has been developed and signed off by Welsh Government. The CCG steering group meets bimonthly to monitor and oversee the delivery plan. A workshop is planned for late 2021 to develop the plan for 2022/23. Progress of the plan to date includes:

- Families First holding reflective practice sessions and reviewing their paperwork to make it more strengths based;
- A full review for Families First and Flying Starts reporting requirements is scheduled;
- New model for coordinating administrative duties implemented, which includes a streamlined approach to supporting all 6 internal CCG programmes;
- Engagement and Participation has become a standard agenda item for the CCG Board which provides full updates on developments;
- A Locally developed outcomes framework been implemented to measure and monitor progress linked to the programmes intended outcomes (awaiting the WG framework);
- Full review of Legacy commissioned projects has been undertaken;
- Financial management procedure used as the basis for the review of the Legacy Fund, focusing on outcomes; and
- Findings from the Community Impact Assessment (CIA) have been reviewed in order to identify the needs and demands falling out of it and how they link to the Community element of the CCG.

Consultation has taken place with staff regarding the reconfiguration of preventative services including the Support Worker roles within IAA and Community Resource Team and the Community Connector roles. It is anticipated the new structure will be in place by April 2022. The new structure will be resilient and sustainable and not be reliant on grant funding. Within the new structure, a Senior Practitioner and Senior Therapist will be co-located within the IAA Team to be at the 'front door'.

Capacity at Augusta House has been safely increased to support up to four guests. Work is continuing to develop new Augusta Promoting Independence Pods at the site. This project has been delayed due to complications with increasing development costs, but the project has now secured additional funding from Welsh Government and should be open by Spring 2022. As part of these plans, the respite offer to young adults, as part of the transition planning from Children's to Adult Services will be increased.

The development of the enhanced Day Activities / Community Options Team has progressed well despite the ongoing COVID 19 pressures. Both the Lake View and Bert Denning buildings have safely re-opened but with limited sessional access which will hopefully increase during quarter 3. The outreach service is growing well and is successfully supporting citizens to meet their outcomes both in their own home or in wider community settings.

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

The numbers of Children Looked After (CLA) continue to slowly but steadily decrease. Welsh Government has recognised the need to safely reduce the number of children coming into care and identified this as a priority area. In light of this, Integrated Care Fund (ICF) grant money was allocated to each local authority in Wales, via the Regional Partnership Boards in April 2019, to invest in and develop services to safely reduce the numbers of children coming into care.

It is important to recognise that the success of the CLA reduction strategy is dependent on a whole service approach. The robust preventative interventions delivered by Families First and Flying Start prevent needs from escalating into statutory services. The Information Advice and Assistance Team provides robust screening and initial assessment of all referrals ensuring the appropriate action is taken to meet needs. All of the Social Work Teams work exceptionally hard to keep families together and work with families using a strengths based approach. One of the key elements of the strategy is to promote workforce stability. However, operational teams are facing staffing shortages. It is accepted that this is a Wales wide position and there is no simple solution. The senior leadership team is addressing how best to respond to the staffing short-fall from multiple standpoints; a separate strategy has been devised to consider short, medium and longer-term solutions (and considering the opportunity to collaborate on a regional basis).

The new Corporate Parenting action plan for 2021/22 has been finalised and updates given in September 2021. The Corporate Parenting Board meets quarterly and each January the Social Services Scrutiny Committee receive a detailed report on progress of the Board, including an action plan and separate report for Education.

As part of the continuous improvement plan, work has been ongoing regarding the pathway for Part 5 investigations. In line with the All Wales Safeguarding Procedures, strategy discussions, in connection with a potential person in a position of trust, will be held by the safeguarding manager. The safeguarding manager will then assess if threshold has been met to proceed to a full strategy meeting. The chairing of these meetings will continue to be the responsibility of the service manager. The new pathway will be in place by 1st November 2021.

A three-year Strategic Plan was published for The South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB) and the Gwent-wide Adult Safeguarding Board (GwASB) covering the period 2020/21 and 2022/23. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has caused significant disruption to all services and communities across the region. Despite this, Gwent Safeguarding Board and Blaenau Gwent Safeguarding team have worked diligently to ensure that essential services have remained operational to provide support to the most vulnerable adults.

We continue to plan for the implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) legislation as a replacement for Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) and are delivering training as part of the Regional consortium in addition to increasing capacity at a local level.

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

The Council has provided support to a number of National equality campaigns, such as preparation for 'Proud Council' and contribution to Welsh Government National consultations such as the LGBTQ+ Action Plan.

The Council has been working in consultation with Gwent Public Service Board partners to develop a draft regional Well-being Assessment for Gwent. BGCBC has led on the Economic well-being chapter and supported NRW in the development of the Environmental well-being chapter.

The Council has developed a Corporate Engagement Calendar in order to map, type and level of activity being delivered across the organisation. This is then used to maximise the use of resources and value of engagements and to promote the 'One Council' approach.

Analysis of Active Travel Phase 1 Involvement programme has been undertaken which was delivered via the WG digital platform, 'Common Places', as well as through the delivery of online public engagement events. This intelligence was then used to support the statutory consultation on Active Travel Phase 2.

The Council's Engagement Team has provided advice and guidance to a range of service areas over the period to develop and deliver a number of key consultation exercises (including statutory) as well as promote the opportunities via internal and external partnership networks. For example, Pen-y-cwm School capacity consultation, Social Services department survey and Section 19 Flood Investigation Survey.

Owing to the restrictions of the pandemic, the Youth Forum has been delivered online. There is also work being undertaken on the development of a wider Youth Forum network and Children's Grand Council sessions with schools. A review has been undertaken on the Blaenau Gwent Citizen Panel. The Panel will be used to promote BG and partner information as well as specific engagement opportunities. E.g. Social Services, Adult Services user research project.

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

In the last two years only four Community Asset Transfers can be referenced which are:

- Met Theatre
- Tredegar Recreation Ground
- Sirhowy Woodland
- Llanhilleth Playing Field and Changing Rooms

Arrangements are also close to completion for:

- Millennium Gardens Brynmawr – to Growing Spaces from original Trustees.
- Brynmawr Welfare pitch to Brynmawr FC
- Cwm Welfare – fields and pavilion to Cwm Community Sports

Occupation also needs to be regularised on some sites where groups are in occupation but formal / revised paperwork need to be concluded. This has been hampered by lack of legal resources/ issues with groups registrations/ other issues but include:

- Eugene Cross Park – Eugene Cross Park Sports Limited
- Orchard Street former Community Centre
- Blaina Institute
- Brynithel Recreation Ground
- Llanhilleth Institute
- Market Hall Cinema

New CAT's currently being processed include:

- Queen Street school – CAT process complete, applicant has not completed planning
- Trinity Chapel/ Abertillery Library – CAT process complete, legal agreements still to be complete
- Community Growing Space – Cwm – awaiting business plan
- Community Growing Space – Cwmtillery – awaiting EOI/ Business Plan
- RTB RFC – Beer Garden – CAT process (excluding advert under 1972 Local government Act 1972) complete, awaiting outcome of planning application.

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

In July 2021 Foster Wales was launched at the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) Summer Festival supported by the deputy minister Julie Morgan. This is a collaboration across all of the 22 local authorities in Wales working together to increase the number of local authority foster carers with the intention of ensuring all children who need to become looked after can remain within their local communities in high quality foster placements. This will allow children to remain in their schools and have easy access to spend good quality time with their families.

There continues to be ongoing strengthening links between the Community Resource Team (Gwent Frailty) and IAA team. This includes close working with GP colleagues to support pressures across the Health and Social Care sectors. Close work is also ongoing with other professionals such as WAST, Primary and Secondary care colleagues to deliver proportionate assessments at the front door.

We have continued to develop a Hospital Hub at Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan to expedite safe discharge from hospital sites. Working with Gwent local authorities to support unnecessary hospital admissions to the acute sites by enhancing the support provided by the Gwent Home First Service. The hospital hub is focussing on a model of 'Discharge to Recover and Assess' whereby a patient undertakes an assessment at home as opposed to being assessed in hospital when it is deemed appropriate.

Meetings are held daily with ABUHB to discuss the escalating crisis across hospital sites. Where possible, to avoid lengthy in patient stays, owing to availability in care homes, assessments at hospital are being prioritised for social work assessments and the availability of domiciliary care packages.

Work is currently ongoing with Age Cymru to consider options for remodelling the service to increase capacity to deliver a 7-day emergency response team, working alongside the Domiciliary Care Brokerage service. This will then assist in responding to the current pressures in the domiciliary care sector by providing low level support to domiciliary care agencies and the in-house emergency care @ home team (DASH). The service will also support hospital discharges and provide low level prevention support post discharge, to help alleviate the current demands facing hospitals and support people to return home with the support they require.

Regular contact is being maintained with all care homes throughout Blaenau Gwent. Information in relation to staff vaccinations and testing is continuing to be collated and provided to ABUHB for analysis. Information on occupancy and bed vacancies is gathered and shared weekly on a regional basis, this includes updates on Homes which may be closed because of a COVID incident. The service is working in partnership with ABUHB to develop an Infection Control Support Team (IPAC) to support care settings with appropriate advice and guidance to prevent outbreaks. Work is being undertaken with commissioned providers to review when care homes are requiring the support of the WAST within care settings and to seek alternative and safe support to avoid conveyancing residents to hospitals.

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

Audit Wales is currently undertaking a review on how local authorities ensure they deliver services to minimise or reduce poverty. Blaenau Gwent will be included as part of this review. A series of documents have been provided to Audit Wales for them to consider if the Council is:

- targeting resources to have the most effect, with a focus on poverty from the service user's lived experience.
- how services are geared and structured to help tackle poverty.

Estyn is also considering the poverty agenda and during a recent Link Inspector meeting they considered the following:

Socio-economic inequality: tackling disadvantage –

- What is Blaenau Gwent's strategic vision for addressing educational inequality as a result of poverty?
- How effectively do directorates work together to achieve this vision?

The Council is well placed to evidence the extensive work it has undertaken to tackle poverty. Both the Wellbeing Plan and Corporate Plan identify two key areas to support the poverty agenda:

- Blaenau Gwent wants everyone to have the best start in life – key to the delivery of this objective is looking to tackle childhood poverty (including in work poverty). Evidence shows this can have a positive impact on the quality of overall family life, leading to better educational attainment, better health, increased life expectancy and positive outcomes for the communities in which they live.
- Blaenau Gwent wants to forge new pathways to prosperity – in Wales, one in four currently live in poverty and Blaenau Gwent is at the sharp end of this. We have the highest child poverty rate in Wales and some of the most deprived communities.

The Corporate Plan also has the following areas:

- To enable people to maximise their independence, develop solutions and take an active role in their communities - To develop a partnership approach to maximising income reducing the impacts of Poverty.
- Support a fairer sustainable economy and community

The Director of Social Services is the Council's strategic lead for tackling poverty. The Council's Community Hub model proactively looks at support options available to those experiencing poverty, most recently those effected by the Universal Credit Uplift and the possibility of increased gas and electric prices. The teams have started to see residents who are struggling financially due to the loss of £20 a week in their Universal Credit Payment. Since Community Hubs launched on the 21st June, 6 people have presented as Homeless to the team. They have all been supported in finding accommodation, a support worker and as much financial support as possible. Alongside Blue Badge applications, the most common queries are related to Benefits and Council Tax, with an increased number of residents requiring help with paying their Council Tax and Housing Costs due to financial difficulty. Residents regularly require 3rd party support from Citizens Advice to manage their debts and finances as well as needing support to claim Universal Credit.

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

## Key Performance Information

Performance Indicator Description	21/22 (as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March)	Q1 (as at June)	Q2 (as at September)
Number of Children Looked After	200	195	190
Number of Children on the Child Protection	52	61	68
The total number of contacts to statutory social services during the year for children	4512	1603	1394
Number of referrals received by Adult Services	4572	1494	1462
Total number of packages of reablement completed during the year	232	77	175

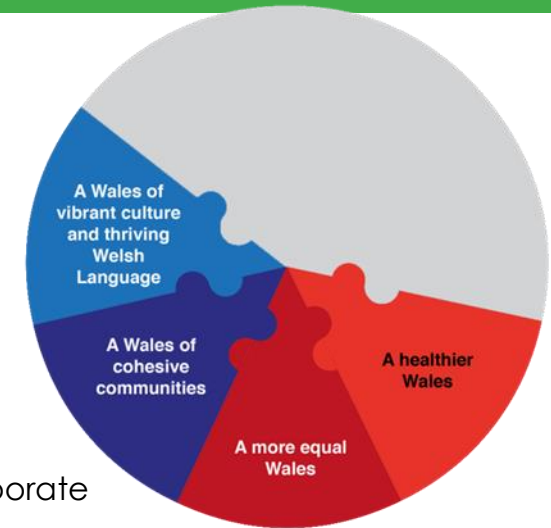
### Why this is important

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

### Progress against actions

A number of high level priorities (shown below) have been identified to support delivery of the corporate objective, '**Support a fairer sustainable economy and community**'.

These are detailed in the following overview pages along with some associated achievements and challenges.



### Priorities

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

## Support all learners to achieve improved outcomes

The Education Directorate Leadership team has all positions fully appointed to. 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 both school/college and community settings.

There continues to be 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 over the last two academic years in Wales by WG. However, Summer 2021 KS4 results demonstrated progress in Capped 9 and L2inc. scores and were in line with the targets set in the 4 secondary settings School Development Plans (SDPs). The KS4 Centre Determined Grades in 2021 generated very few appeals. A Strategic Post 16 Partnership has been established to ensure that BG learner pathways into Further Education are very much strengthened. The Learning Zone's performance at KS5 continues to be good and A Level pass rates for A\*-E were 99,1%, which is in line the Welsh mean average.

There are 4 schools currently identified as a School Causing Concern/ Team Around the School approach, however, it is likely that 2 schools will be removed during the next academic year. There continues to be very good progress made at Abertillery Learning Community (ALC), Brynmawr Foundation School (BFS) and Sofrydd Primary Schools. BFS will be subject to an Estyn Monitoring Visit early in the Autumn term. The River Centre has not responded appropriately to the pre-warning notice letter, therefore, a Statutory Warning Notice was issued on the 14th September. The ALC Corporate Group is working effectively and the revenue financial position is improving with deficit reducing to circa £324,000 when the prediction was in the region of £1m. Sofrydd Primary School appointed a permanent Headteacher early in the new academic year and is highly likely to be removed from the Schools Causing Concern (SCC) category in academic year 2021-22.

Blaenau Gwent is well placed to continue with the transformation of the Education Service and supporting children and young people. The strategic links with key partners such as the EAS, Coleg Gwent, Schools, Work Based Learning providers are effective. The Education Directorate has supported schools through the Centre Determined Grades (CDGs) changes effectively, and learner outcomes met SDP expectations.

The corporate and education response to COVID-19 has been strong, as evidenced in the Estyn Thematic Review findings. The Estyn Summer letter received towards the end on the Summer term, provided additional feedback from the Inspectorate. The Education Directorate has established an 'Education Recovery and Renewal' plan and working group. These have a strong focus on supporting the physical and mental health of pupils. Officers feel that, over the last year, supporting pupils' wellbeing has been a strength in all schools and was recognised in pupil surveys and engagement with parents.

## To improve pupil outcomes, progress and wellbeing

The Vision for Education is embedded i.e. a school-led self-improving system. However, the Education Directorate's key purpose is under review based on a new approach of 'Better Schools, Better Citizens and Better Communities'. There will be consultation/engagement starting in 2021-22.

There is strong progress on the Welsh-medium school consultation which has concluded and implementation is planned from September 2023. The Pen-y-Cwm consultation has now concluded with positive feedback overall. Works were completed over the Summer, but it is recognised that space will remain a focus at the school going forward due to the increase in pupils with profound and complex needs. As a result, within the consultation approach, there is the provision for consideration of additional capacity creation as a Part 2 proposals. The proposal is now in implementation stages and the capacity will increase to 175 in 2021-22.

School to school working has continued throughout the period, but physical attendance on sites has been largely curtailed due the stringent risk assessment measures that are in place to prevent the spread of the virus. As such, schools have become competent at varying their approaches to school to school work, particularly cluster working.

The Council will continue to work with partners across the Council, for example, Children's Services, Regeneration, Legal, Finance and Organisational Development to focus the work on improving pupil outcomes and supporting school leaders. The Council will also continue to work with partners, such as the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to support school leaders to improve pupil outcomes and wellbeing.

The Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility has increased to over 30%+ of the pupil population as a result of the socio-economic impact of COVID. Monitoring systems are working well and a process is in place for providing FSM direct payments to families that have been asked to self-isolate.

## Improve skills and promote digital participation

The Executive Committee and the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee supported the Education Directorate's Recovery and Renewal plan is in line with the corporate approach led by the Director of Regeneration and Community Services. The plan sets out how the Directorate will work with schools on the continuing response to Covid-19, but also beyond the Pandemic in order to recover, and importantly, learn lessons to strengthen the work across the Education Directorate. Whilst the emergency response is very much ongoing, we also need to look forward at how learners and school staff can be supported to remain well, access the best opportunities and achieve the best life outcomes.

The 'Recovery and Renewal Plan' is a working document, which will evolve to take into account emerging challenges. Its overarching priority is to: *'Minimise the impact of COVID 19 on learner development and progress, including improving the digital competency of all learners and staff in the wider Blaenau Gwent school community.'*

The Estyn Thematic Review letter had a particular focus on computers and connectivity:

R1 Urgently address barriers to learning at home, particularly where this is due to a lack of access to suitable computers or adequate connectivity

- Weekly assessments were undertaken to assess the need for pupils requiring ICT devices and monthly monitoring also took place to consider the local authority's overall digital support for schools and families.
- The Shared Resource Service (SRS) provided devices within seven days of a need being identified.
- The local authority has planned to continue with these ICT arrangements until at least the end of the summer term 2021.
- As of May 2021, the local authority had loaned 1,359 devices and 161 Mi-Fi units to pupils.
- A review of the 'Digitally Disadvantaged Device' project plan future provision is being undertaken to allow all families continued digital access. Officers reacted responsively at the start of the pandemic but now have time to reflect and look at the digital learner journey more strategically.
- The local authority has recognised that many parents have a lack of pedagogical understanding and it is recognised that there may be a need to provide more learning opportunities for parents on how to support their children's literacy and numeracy at home, should there be a third wave.

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

Procurement and Economic Regeneration officers are actively engaged in a collaborative procurement project which is sponsored by Welsh Government and facilitated by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES). The project outcome is to maximise procurement spend in Wales to support local wealth building and to create a more resilient Welsh economy.

Employment and Skills showcases the Aspire shared apprenticeship scheme with success being demonstrated through businesses taking on a second apprentice following a productive first experience.

The Council's industrial portfolio is at 85% occupancy rate, supporting 615.5 jobs and newly developed units coming to market offering an additional 26,000 sq ft.

Start-ups in BG are higher than this time last year by 6.7% and community benefits to a number of communities delivered through physical projects.

Covid-19 related support grants to businesses amounted to £1.9M (894 grants) delivered alongside other priorities.

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

As part of the development of the Works site, Ebbw Vale, the Council has sought to provide an attractive range of business units to cater for demand within the County Borough itself and the wider south east Wales region. Within this context, a need was identified for a range of higher quality premises to appeal to a wider range of businesses. To deliver this, the Council entered into a Joint Venture with the Welsh Government to develop Hybrid Units at Lime Avenue, creating high quality business space, comprising 3 separate buildings housing 9 units. Thales has taken occupation of two buildings and the Council is nearing completion on a further lease for a business requiring space in the remaining building. This is an exciting development for Blaenau Gwent, continuing the regeneration of the strategic Works site and provides an excellent opportunity for business to establish, grow and develop within the area creating employment and helping to support local supply chains.

Like the Hybrid Units, the development of the Hwb Bocs provides attractive premises, complemented by on site-business support from the Council's Regeneration staff and access to a range of other sources of support and inspiration. The project was delivered in partnership with Welsh Government and has transformed shipping containers into 21 separate office spaces alongside communal facilities and is located adjacent to the Coleg Gwent building. The Council is working closely to identify suitable tech-based businesses and entrepreneurs as part of its marketing programme with significant interest being expressed.

Department for Work and Pensions approached Blaenau Gwent CBC to act as a Gateway organisation to support applications from local businesses. As a Gateway the Employment and Skills team are required to liaise with partners within their networks to identify Kickstart job placements, submit bids directly online through the Kickstart portal and administer grant funding to companies. A number of expressions of interest were received from a range of sectors including childcare, production/manufacturing, retail, hospitality and construction. To date the Blaenau Gwent Gateway has:

- supported 25 businesses
- created 109 placements
- 63 placements filled
- 48 placements in recruitment stage

## To actively participate in partnerships such as Tech Valleys and CCRCDD to attract investment

The STEM Facilitation Project, created as a result of Tech Valleys, is a co-ordinated programme of support, centred on “industry in schools STEM facilitation” within a cluster of Blaenau Gwent based schools, raising aspiration and preparing children for their journey into the world of work, whilst remaining complementary to the school curriculum. The project is also seeking to support and develop a sustainable relationship between local businesses and schools, via the industry liaison element of the role. In the first six months the project has engaged with thirty-one businesses and twenty-nine have pledged to support where possible. Of the twenty-nine businesses that have engaged there is a wide range of industry sectors covered including manufacturing, a range of aspects of Engineering, Environmental, Renewable Energy and Chemistry within Science.

The Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRCDD) Housing Viability Gap Fund is a targeted funding programme to bring forward new homes on key strategic housing sites across South East Wales. Blaenau Gwent made a successful submission to the fund as it was identified that there is a viability gap which requires a grant input to support the development to go ahead.

The funding for the Civic Crowdfunding project through the Cardiff City Region Challenge Fund submission was unsuccessful. Blaenau Gwent was advised that it didn't fit the criteria for the Challenge Fund although initially the Council was encouraged to submit it as a project. The CCR Team have advised that they will assist the Council in looking at other funds.

The 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. Following a review of the existing apprenticeship landscape across SE Wales, specifically focussing on Shared Apprenticeship Programme aspect in relation to growing and priority sectors, a response has been received: 'The CCR Investment panel approved the paper in October 2021 along with the sum of £500k for two years, this will need to be agreed by CCR Cabinet and they will meet on the 29th November. It is understood that this funding will be for a Shared Apprenticeship pilot delivery model and further research'.

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

Placemaking plans for all towns are now in place across all Blaenau Gwent Towns. Footfall has been increasing in towns over the last 3 months with a total of 864,612 people. Grants and loans for privately owned property continue to be successful with around £2M in total being approved.

Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) in Tredegar Town Centre continues with NCB Town Hall and ongoing funding discussions with HLF continue. Rail improvements are gathering pace for both Ebbw Vale and Abertillery as funds from WG have been secured and funds from UK Government are awaited. Key, are complex buildings and structures like Big Arch, Trinity Chapel and Truck Shop have all been progressed during this period.

The Council only has limited financial and human resources in order to deliver projects. Therefore, we need to look at ways we can involve other key stakeholders and partners to achieve our vision. The Tredegar Advisory Board has provided a platform for both discussion, development and delivery of projects. Adopting a similar approach across each of the other towns could help the Council to support projects across each of the Towns supported by a wide range of stakeholders. The Council is looking to form a series of Advisory Boards for the Town Centres of Abertillery, Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale based upon the Tredegar Advisory Board approach. The Advisory Board shall act as a consultative body to oversee development and delivery of Town Centre Strategies and Plans.

It is hoped that by bringing Advisory Boards together we will be able to deliver projects that encourage future use of our Town Centres. Changing the way our Town Centres operate and offering a diverse range of uses would improve the variety of services that residents have access to.

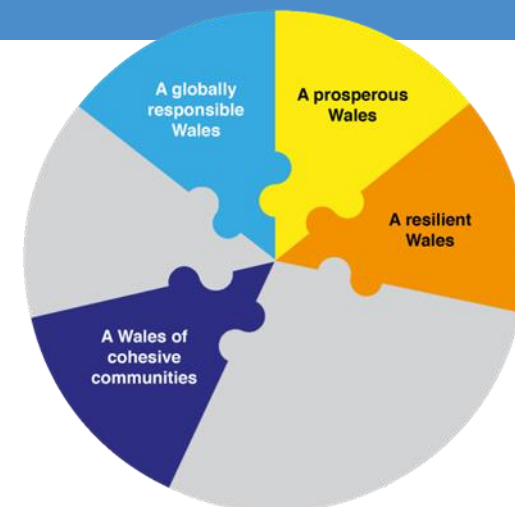
## Key Performance Information

Performance Indicator Description – School Applications	18/19	19/20	20/21
Applications – Nursery	693	696	714
Applications – Primary	739	731	701
Applications – Secondary	677	679	696
Performance Indicator Description - School Attendance	July 19	July 20	July 21
Attendance – Primary	94.4	93.5	90.7
Attendance Secondary	93.3	91.7	84.8
Performance Indicator Description – Schools Exclusions	April 19 to March 20	April 20 to March 21	April 21 to September 21
Exclusions Primary	108	25	17
Exclusions Secondary	459	135	183
Average Number of Primary exclusions per month (no. of months in brackets)	108 (9.8)	25 (3.6)	17 (3.4)
Average Number of Secondary exclusions per month (no. of months in brackets)	459 (41.7)	135 (19.3)	183 (36.6)
Performance Indicator Description – Free School Meals	2019	2020	2021
Entitlement to FSM/Transitionally Protected (%)	21.1	24.6	30.4

Performance Indicator Description – Business Estates Council and Non-Council	20/21	21/22 (to date)
Number of Business Unit Lease Transactions	12	14
Total Floor Space	35000 sq. ft.	16,000 sq. ft.
% Occupied Business Units (Council Portfolio)	85%	88%
% overall floor space occupied (Council Portfolio)	91%	93%
Kick Start Plus Approved	13	5
Total (£)	£10,765.00	£4,142.00
Number FTE Jobs Created	6	5
Number of FTE Jobs Safeguarded	22	7

## Why this is important

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



## Progress against actions

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

### Priorities

- To re-invest in highways maintenance particularly improvements to our residential roads, streets and pavements;
- To increase rates of recycling to enable us to achieve national targets
- To re-invest in environmental services to address the issues created by fly-tipping, dog fouling, littering, grass cutting, street cleansing and pest control
- To improve the access to and quality of open spaces for the benefit of our communities, businesses and visitors
- 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

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

Building on the success of a previous Highways Capital Works Programme, which improved the nature and condition of the classified network, a programme targeting unclassified/ residential roads was approved by the Authority in 2017 covering the period up to 2022. A capital sum of £2.115million was generated from a 20 year prudential borrow based on revenue contributions of £130k per year. This Capital Sum has been augmented by Welsh Government Highways Refurbishment grant funding over the period 2017 to 2021 as detailed below:

Funding	Amount
Prudential Borrowing	£2,115,000
WG Grant 2017-2018	£553,000
WG Grant 2018-2019	£380,065
WG Grant 2019-2020	£409,776
WG Grant 2020-2021	£383,000
WG Refurbishment Grant* 21/22 & carry over 20/21 WG Revenue Grant	£602,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£4,442,841</b>
*Welsh Government Refurbishment Grant is awarded to Authorities on the basis that it will be spent in line with Authority's Highways Asset Management Plan [HAMP].	

In accordance with the HAMP, with its identified priorities & risks to the Blaenau Gwent Highways Network, it is proposed that the 2021/22 programme will continue to pay due attention to high priority works to the Network whilst retaining a focus around improving the residential/ unclassified network. Following on from the previous works programme it is proposed that a priority ranking of residential streets is determined, utilising the assessment matrix criteria that was developed in line with the specific features associated with residential highways.

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

The Litter and Fly Tipping Strategy for the Council is now in place. An LEQ Officer has been appointed who is working on implementing the strategy and supporting action plan. An Engagement Strategy and Litter Bin Protocol is also now in development.

Support to local community groups is continuing with local litter champions being provided with materials, equipment, staff support and the collection of waste following clean up and clearance.

The intention is to further develop the Mobile Worker App so that service requests can be reported quickly and resources applied as required. However, owing to COVID, this work was put on hold. Work will continue when resources allow. Once completed staff will undertake training on the new app features.

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

In July 2021, Audit Wales published their report 'Review of People, Performance and Financial Resilience in Community Services' following workshops and interviews that took place early 2021. Key findings included:

- Waste Services has achieved substantial progress since 2015 through sound strategic planning supported by the adoption of a learning culture to manage change effectively.
- Waste and recycling performance has improved significantly but the use of performance data is inconsistent across Community Services and some performance reports lack sufficient detail
- Robust corporate budget monitoring arrangements have helped manage
- Community Services' overspends but the scope and focus of financial planning is overly short-term

In both 2018/19 and 2019/20 we exceeded the WG statutory recycling targets of 58% [achieving 59.26%] and 64% [achieving 65.31%] respectively, this year, we have maintained that success and exceeded the target of 64% once again, attaining 64.29%. This has been achieved through the hard work and dedication of the Waste Team as a whole [officers, wardens and the frontline staff], working 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, in what has been one of the most difficult years in recent history. That being said, through careful prioritisation and engagement with our workforce, we have been able to maintain all Waste & Recycling collections throughout the Pandemic.

In 2020/21 we saw a shift in tonnages of different waste streams as a result of the Pandemic. Certainly tonnages have increased at kerbside because of the stay at home orders issued during the pandemic and changing buying habits at home. These trends have created significant operational issues which we needed to overcome, cardboard in particular, was a problem and continues to be so. We saw a 36.66% increase in the amount of cardboard being collected at the kerbside; this was something our collection vehicles were not designed for. Yet, we expect this trend to continue, so will factor this into our collection rounds and future vehicle specifications.

The current Pandemic has thrown up significant challenges throughout, and it is a testament to the Frontline Staff, who have continued to maintain services in such difficult circumstances. It has also meant we have seen a significant change in how many of our residents manage their waste, so a special thanks must go to them also. Through resolve and resilience, we have been able to overcome these challenges together and adapt the way we work to still achieve this success.

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

The Active Travel (Wales) Act encourages healthy and sustainable travel throughout Wales and is further supported by the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015. All local authorities in Wales must, by law, encourage walking and cycling as a preferred travel mode for purposeful journeys within short distances. Whilst cycling and walking as leisure activities are healthy in their own right, an active travel journey is one that is taken by a person(s) to get to a destination to carry out a specific task without using a car. Blaenau Gwent CBC, successfully applied for funding and received £429,000 for the following schemes to enhance the existing and future Active Travel network:

- Ebbw Vale Town Centre Sustainable Link Feasibility study - to determine a suitable sustainable route between the railway station and town centre for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Glyncoed Footpath Upgrading Works – feasibility and design
- The Dingle, Brynmawr – Existing cycle path extension
- Heathfield, Tredegar – Feasibility / design of a suitable footway link from the near-by residential area (Georgetown, Peacehaven areas) to the Bedwellty active travel route.
- Minor Works - includes small scale schemes of localised improvements such as dropped kerbs & tactile paving, lighting, signage, path widening etc to upgrade existing routes to the required standard set by Active Travel guidance.
- Active Travel Network Mapping (ATNM), submission of final draft to Welsh Government and Community and Statutory Consultation

The purpose of the Safe Routes in Communities (SRiC) funding is to support capital schemes that contribute to the Welsh Government's objectives to improve accessibility, safety and encourage walking and cycling in communities (Active Travel). There is particular emphasis on improving routes to and from schools. The aim is to change how people travel for purposeful journeys, resulting in greater social inclusion and improved community safety. Having more families walking or cycle around their neighbourhoods can also help community cohesion, bringing people together and having people look out for one and other (improving overall safety).

The Authority successfully applied for £25,000 of funding under the Safe Routes in the Communities grant scheme for the financial year 2021/22. The funding has been used to commission a feasibility study and design work on footpath improvements between Mafeking Terrace and Georgetown Primary School, Tredegar. In the previous financial year, 2020/21, £19,479 was spent on improving the footpath along Ebenezer Street, Tredegar, providing a safe footpath to help connect Ebenezer Street to Glanhwy School, Tredegar.

The actions identified within the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan (2019-2022) prioritises actions, to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems. The three delivery mechanisms, for implementing activities, are Service Area Action Plans; Environment Champions network and advice from the Natural Environment team.

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

There continues to be an improvement in the number of affordable and private homes delivered and delivery of new sites for housing, with high numbers of homes accessing funding for making them more energy efficient. Alongside this, the early intervention for homelessness means 73% of potentially homeless households were prevented from becoming homeless.

During the reporting period the announcement that the team has been shortlisted for Council of the Year (UK Housing Awards) was made - awards ceremony will be held in November 2021.

Progress against each housing development is captured below:

- Glanffrwyd, Ebbw Vale (23 units) (social rent); WRW the appointed contractor has gone into administration, Tai Calon have re-tendered the works with a view to recommencing the development during 2021/22
- Greenacres, Tredegar (22 units) (social rent) on site and progressing though completion date is delayed.
- Golwg Y Bryn, Ebbw Vale (100 units) (70 open market) (30 social rent) is nearing completion (October 2021) slightly delayed but all homes the open market homes are sold. The scheme was shortlisted for the Welsh Housing Awards - Building Quality Homes category.
- Ebbw Vale School Site (277 units) (222 open market) (55 social rent); The ground-breaking event was held during this period and development at the site continues, including construction of the show home.
- Glan Yr Afon development phase is progressing, pre application consultation completed, planning application and SAB application submitted, anticipate Tai Calon being in contract this financial year. The other package deals i.e. Crawshay House and Briery Hill are at negotiation stage for acquisition during this financial year.

Progress on Development Sites includes:

- Pithead Baths Land Release Funding has been secured for Year 1 associated development work. Work for the rest of the year will include: Site Investigation Works; land valuations; legal negotiations; and initial site layouts. A public consultation meeting, facilitated by the Executive Member, was also held with residents during this period.
- Civic Centre Site; Initial design layout prepared by the Urbanists for comment. Options appraisal paper for consideration by the commercial board will be prepared and presented late 2021.
- The independent valuation commissioned for Ashvale highlighted the viability of the scheme without grant. During the period, extensive work to engage with the CCRC took place and to challenge the findings. Managing partner relations and maintaining positive dialogue have been critical to maintaining momentum.
- Initial design layouts for Abertillery Leisure Centre, with appropriate access, have been developed by the RSL partner.

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

In Blaenau Gwent, there is a placemaking plan in place for Ebbw Vale Town Centre. Placemaking looks to deliver sustainable development and provide solutions and investment that addresses the needs of an area.

The primary purpose of the Placemaking Plan for Ebbw Vale is to inform and influence future strategic decision making for regeneration activity within the town and act as an evidence base to support the Council with future external funding options and support development of the replacement Local Development Plan (LDP). The overall vision of the Ebbw Vale Placemaking Plan is:

*“We want Ebbw Vale to be a smart, resilient and sustainable town that is a great place to work, have a business, live and visit.”*

Delivery of our vision shall be done by exploiting three opportunity areas for Ebbw Vale Town:

- Connect the town with the locality and destinations
- Build on the area's green legacy
- Exploit tech and digital investment opportunities

The technical and digital measures include developing a digital presence for the town, strengthening the quality of WI-FI coverage, creating a favourable commercial environment for businesses to survive and grow and establishing a regular series of events and initiatives that raise interest in the town as a destination and increase visitors.

The digital interventions of the project include:

- 5G connectivity throughout the town centre with 5G classroom at the Works site.
- Create a digital high street through development of an app that allows interaction with Ebbw Vale and provides access to local businesses.
- Establish a brand and marketing strategy for the town, that consistently promotes the leisure, tourism and retail offer that is available in the town and wider region.
- Create or link to existing digital resources (online maps/council website/app) to aid way-finding for the cycle and walking opportunities through the town

The placemaking plan embraces the digital and technological revolution with trying to establish Ebbw Vale with world-class connectivity. This will support businesses and provides a means for retailers to trade online.

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

Regeneration has a commitment to managing a sustainable future energy delivery programme to allow a choice of affordable energy and to reduce fuel poverty for future generations, with the aim of:

- Improving the choice of supply;
- Developing models that enable community ownership of energy; and
- Meeting the energy needs of vulnerable households.

The Regeneration Opportunities Team has been exploring the potential to develop a range of renewable energy generation opportunities, including small scale hydro (micro-hydro) generation projects across the Borough. In 2017, Carbon Trust reported on Hydro potential in Blaenau Gwent as part of a borough wider study of potential renewable energy generation including wind, solar and hydro schemes. In September 2020 an application was submitted to the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme under the LEADER scheme for funding to undertake a Community Hydro Study of potential opportunities within the electoral wards of Llanhilleth and Cwm. The funding was awarded in December 2020 and together with funding from within the Council.

The Feasibility Study identified there is potential for a 15 – 25kW hydro scheme at Cwm Cynw with a power output of 17kW and average generation of 55MWh a year. This is the equivalent of powering 14 average homes for a year and that there is potential for a 20 – 30kW hydro scheme at Cwm Big with a power output of 28kW and average generation of 62mWh a year. This is the equivalent of powering 16 average homes for a year.

The Energy Prospectus has been completed 'Energy Generation Opportunities' is now in the market place. Funding for electric charging points in BG has been successful enabling 73 charge points across 35 sites for the community and visitors in addition to workplace, taxi and bus points. Work on the ReFIT program of works continues – 6000 non-LED street lights have been replaced with LEDs and will generate energy savings for the Council. Hydro and wind generation projects are being investigated in detail. The GovTech Catalyst project is in the last stages of development and final reporting will enable BG to assess the suitable tech for us. £20million National Digital Exploitation Centre (NDEC) is running and has started to assist SMEs and micro businesses with cyber security and digital design – the first R&D facility of its kind in Wales.

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

The preparations for the 21st Century Schools Band B Programme are progressing well with WG business case submissions being made and agreed for key projects. The Managing School Places report is demonstrating progress towards meeting the SOP 15% target.

A review of the overall Band B Programme including timeline, cost and challenges have been considered and prioritised which will see some work spanning into the Band C programme.

A meeting has been held to discuss current facilities and use of school buildings. From this, a questionnaire is planned for Autumn term to support the action plans to enhance facilities for community use

- Glyncoed project Pre-planning Consultation April 2021 outturn report has been generated and submitted as part of the planning application.
- Remodelling of the 3-16 River Centre secondary campus - business case preparations are to be undertaken for Autumn Submission.
- Brynmawr 3G Pitch will be for community use and a Community Use agreement has been developed in conjunction with the school for the grant purpose.
- The monitoring form for the existing Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2017/20 has been extended and will continued to be monitored annually until the new 10-year plan in 2022. There have been several workshops and meetings to inform the direction of the new plan.

A new Welsh-medium 210 place Primary School with Co-Located Childcare Provision on Chartist Way has been approved for development.

## To be a carbon neutral Council by 2030

The Council has a Decarbonisation Plan in place and declared a Climate Emergency on 24 September 2020. The Plan sets out we would deliver our commitment to the ambition of the Welsh Public Sector to achieve net Zero by 2030. It outlined how we could reduce our organisational emissions across nine transitions:

- Transport Direct
- Transport Commissioned
- Sequestration
- Procurement Goods
- Procurement Services
- Procurement Works
- Electricity
- Heat
- Waste

Since the plan was adopted a Decarbonisation Board has been established, chaired by the Managing Director, and consisting of a range of experienced officers from across the Council. The Council is working closely with partners at both a local Blaenau Gwent level, through our newly formed Well-being Partnership Group and the Regional Gwent PSB and Climate Ready Gwent.

Blaenau Gwent has been responsible for the development of the Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly, the first climate assembly in Wales, which took place online in March 2021. 44 demographically representative Blaenau Gwent residents, heard from over 20 expert speakers and deliberated for 23 hours about 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 Assembly produced five official recommendations, drafted by Assembly participants that received 80% support.

The Climate Assembly recommendations will help to inform the development of a plan to address territorial emissions in Blaenau Gwent. Continuing this public engagement is a priority for both the council and the PSB.

Regional projects have included:

- Electrical Vehicle Charging Project where 62 new dual electric vehicle 22kw fast charging units have been installed at 34 sites across Gwent.
- Gwent Green Grid Partnership, where funding has been secured by Gwent partners for a three-year programme of work in support of woodland creation and management, green spaces cycle ways and the enhancements of vital habitats.
- Contributed to the development of Cardiff Capital Region Energy Strategy.

## Key Performance Information

### Recycling Outturn

Quarter	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
<b>Quarter 1 (April – June)</b>	62.24%	62.17%	66.51%
<b>Quarter 2 (July – Sept)</b>	64.95%	65.94%	37.3%
<b>Quarter 3 (Oct – Dec)</b>	69.69%	63.06%	
<b>Quarter 4 (Jan – March)</b>	63.66%	65.53%	
<b>Annual (as at 31st March following validation).</b>	<b>65.31%</b>	<b>64.29%</b>	

### Annual Recycling Comparisons between 19/20 and 20/21

- Residual waste increased by 1269.832 tonnes (10.69%)
- Food waste increased by 501.07 tonnes (15.53%)
- Kerbside Recycling increased by 1473.766 tonnes (28.95%)
- Garden waste increased by 20.014 tonnes (1.16%)
- HWRC Recycling has decreased by 2628.502 tonnes (46.43%)

Since **Civil Parking Enforcement** commenced on the 10th September 2019, a total of 3,777 Penalty Charge Notice (PCN's) have been issued.

The number of PCN's issued during this period has been sub-divided into geographical areas as detailed below:

Location	Number of PCN's Issued	
Abertillery	218	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1,029 PCN's issued between 1st Nov 2020 to 30th Sept 2021.</li> <li>• 95% collection rate of PCN's (percentage of PCN's paid). This is an improvement on last year's collection rate (88%)</li> <li>• <i>* Note - The Ebbw Vale total includes 212 PCNs issued at The Works</i></li> </ul>
Blaina and Nantyglo	5	
Brynmaur and Beaufort	244	
Ebbw Vale*	406	
Tredeggar	145	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1029</b>	

## Budget 2021/22 - Quarter 1 & 2 (April 2021 to September 2022)

**Capital Budget** - The overall financial position as forecast at 30th September 2021 indicates an adverse variance of £283,128 against a total in year capital budget of £17.12m.

Portfolio	Total Funding	In Year Budget	Forecast Variance (Adv) / Fav
Corporate Services Portfolio	2,531,799	812,650	0
Social Services Portfolio	5,734,482	1,739,119	(1,761)
Economy Portfolio	13,773,153	3,263,132	(234,710)
Education and Active Living	26,446,098	2,433,361	0
Environment Portfolio	5,863,489	3,928,576	(42,756)
Infrastructure Portfolio	4,676,520	3,187,699	(3,900)
All Portfolios	1,952,775	1,750,860	0
Total Capital Funding	60,978,316	17,115,397	(283,127)

Significant overspends have been identified on the following projects:

- **Household Waste recycling Centre - £42,752**  
The overspend relates to increased costs due to the Covid-19 pandemic & future proofing of the site.
- **Lime Avenue Business Park - £234,710**  
The latest anticipated final account advises of a loss & expenses claim for items in relation to unforeseen issues caused by Covid-19 pandemic.

Discussions with funding bodies are ongoing to determine whether additional funding is available, therefore, at this stage it is not proposed that funding for these schemes be built in from the Capital contingency.

**Revenue Budget** – The forecast includes actual and estimated funding from the Hardship fund for April to September 2021 of £3.555m. Claims have been submitted, in line with the set of principles issues by Welsh Government, for quarter 1 and quarter 2 loss of income and £104,000 is included in the forecast for Social Services. It has been confirmed that Welsh Government Hardship Funding will continue to March 2022. The forecast overall financial position across all portfolios at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021 (before the inclusion of Covid-19 related expenditure):

Portfolio	2021/2022 Revised Revenue Budget £m	2021/2022 Forecast Outturn 30 Sept 2021 £m	Favourable/ (Adverse) To 31 March 2022 £m
<b>Underspending Portfolios</b>			
Corporate Services & Financial Management & Strategy	18.425	17.171	1.254
Education & Leisure	63.863	63.693	0.170
Social Services	46.329	44.825	1.504
Planning	1.274	1.274	0.000
Licensing	0.106	0.106	0.000
<b>Sub Total (1)</b>	<b>129.997</b>	<b>127.069</b>	<b>2.928</b>
<b>Overspending Portfolios</b>			
Economy	1.551	1.568	(0.017)
Environment	26.484	26.581	(0.097)
<b>Sub Total (2)</b>	<b>28.035</b>	<b>28.149</b>	<b>(0.114)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>158.032</u></b>	<b><u>155.218</u></b>	<b><u>2.814</u></b>
Covid-19 Costs Social Services		1.487	(1.487)
Covid-19 Costs Education		0.277	(0.277)
Covid-19 Costs Environment		1.791	(1.791)
<b>Sub Total – Covid19 spend</b>		<b><u>3.555</u></b>	<b><u>(3.555)</u></b>
<b>WG Hardship funding</b>			<b><u>2.068</u></b>
<b>WG SS Hardship funding</b>			<b><u>1.487</u></b>
<b>Revised Total</b>			<b><u>2.814</u></b>

# Regulatory Monitoring

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

## Reports and Proposals

At 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021 there were 10 open audits, 7 of which are 'active' audit reports.

### **Active Reports:**

- Springing Forward – workshop undertaken on 25th November 2021. Information from this session will inform the future direction of this review.
- Building Social Resilience – CLT lead identified and interview scheduled for early 2022.
- Social Enterprises – CLT lead identified and interview scheduled for early 2022.
- Poverty in Wales – CLT lead identified and interview scheduled for early 2022.
- Nation Auditor Generals Equality Review – documentation provided and interview to take place December 2021.
- Public Service Ombudsman Review on Homelessness – Council considering the national proposals received.
- Decarbonisation baseline review – Council in the process of pulling information together for this review.

### **Open Reports:**

- SRS Follow Up – awaiting final report from Audit Wales
- Data Driven Decision making – part one report received, awaiting part two to take place in 2022
- Value for Money of Direct Payments - awaiting final report from Audit Wales

# Corporate Risk Register

Ref:	Risk Description	Residual Score	Progress against further controls	Target Score
CRR14	Failure to improve staff attendance rates within the Council will lead to an unacceptable impact on the ability of the Council to deliver services effectively and financially support the cost of sickness absence.	<b>3 x 4 Critical</b>	<p>The inherent risk score has moved from High to Critical. The impact score was amended from a 3 to a 4 to reflect the consequences more adequately owing to an increase in sickness absence being reported.</p> <p>Unpublished data is indicating that Blaenau Gwent has the worst performance in Wales on sickness. Critical levels of sickness being experienced in Provider Services, with 39.25 days per employee which is pushing the Council's total average sickness up – capacity in this service also has a direct impact on the risk score. Covid and long Covid will continue to impact negatively on sickness absence as well as the waiting times for NHS treatment and seasonal illnesses. All this will impact on the capacity of the workforce alongside any recruitment and retention issues. Other Councils are also suggesting they have significant increases in sickness absence.</p> <p>Sickness reporting has been taken to CLT and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee. Some activity to reduce sickness absence includes: reviewing the top 20 cases in each directorate; Workforce Wellbeing bulletin published weekly; Agile Working policy agreed by Council March 2021.</p>	<b>2 x 4 High</b>
CRR	If the Council does not manage its information assets in accordance with requirements set down within legislation then it may be faced with financial penalties and possible sanctions that hinder service delivery.	<b>3 x 4 Critical</b>	<p>The inherent risk score has moved from High to Critical. The impact score was amended from a 3 to a 4 to reflect the consequences more adequately.</p> <p>The Information Security Policy and Acceptable Use Policy have been reviewed and progress is being made with the review of the Records Management, Social Media and Password Policy and the Record of Processing Activities (ROPA).</p> <p>Increased data breach numbers seen in Q3 2020/21 but returned to more normal levels in Q4 and have continued this trend in 2021/22 with a total of 6 by quarter 2 with limited severity. The risk of cyber-attacks is increasing with a number of high profile attacks against Councils being reported in recent years. Consideration is being given to enhancing the protection in place on the Council's IT network by implementing a SOC / SIEM solution which will monitor and warn of potential threats.</p>	<b>2 x 4 High</b>

Ref:	Risk Description	Residual Score	Progress against further controls	Target Score
CRR24	There is a risk that exiting the EU will have an adverse impact at a national and local level which could impact on the community and on the Council and its ability to deliver public services.	<b>3 x 4</b> <b>Critical</b>	<p>*** Draft target score has been added for discussion by CLT ****</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The EU Settlement Scheme closed in July 2021. 1,490 EU citizens registered to addresses in BG have now applied for settled or pre-settled status.</li> <li>OD pre-employment checks and offer letters to new staff revised to ensure the new right to work requirements are outlined and captured. Impact not yet known as Covid travel restrictions during first half of 2021 resulted in an additional reduction of EU citizens entering the UK for work.</li> <li>Ongoing monitoring of labour and supply shortages associated with EU exit i.e. HGV driver shortages due to visa blockages and its impact on public service delivery through ERT &amp; LRF. Currently low impact but keep monitoring as winter pressures grow.</li> </ul>	<b>3 X 4</b> <b>Critical</b>
CRR26	Business Continuity. The on-going COVID 19 pandemic presents a continued risk to service delivery.	<b>3 x 4</b> <b>Critical</b>	<p>Gwent SCG and BG GOLD reconvened in August to respond to issues in health and social care in Gwent.</p> <p>SRG continue to meet with a focus on Recovery across were in place the following themes: Community, Social Services, Learners, Workforce and Economy.</p>	<b>1 x 4</b> <b>Medium</b>
CRR1	Failure to deliver and sustain the changes required to ensure that vital services are prioritised within the financial constraints faced by the Council	<b>2 X 4</b> <b>High</b>	<p>Council agreed the new operating model in March 2021. The Programme Board, chaired by the Managing Director, which includes CLT and all Workstream Leads oversees the delivery of the new operating model; work to decommission the Civic Centre remains on target; Democratic Hub at the General Offices is now operational; designs have been agreed for the refurbishment of Anvil Court to an agile workspace; staff were issued with an amendment to their contracts to reflect a move to agile working. Six new Community Hubs have opened across the Borough. The Workforce Strategy 2021 – 2026 was approved by Council July 2021.</p>	<b>1 X 4</b> <b>Medium</b>

Ref:	Risk Description	Residual Score	Progress against further controls	Target Score
CRR4	Safeguarding - Failure to ensure adequate safeguarding arrangements are in place for vulnerable people in Blaenau Gwent	<b>2 x 4</b>  <b>High</b>	<p>*** Draft target score has been added for discussion by CLT ****</p> <p><b><u>Social Services</u></b>  Referrals have increased with the easing of lockdown but it remains to be seen whether these will materialise into cases where further action is needed. A programme has been put together for Safeguarding training which was to be implemented in Q2, this is delayed as queries have been raised by CLT around delivery and cost. Safeguarding Policy has been updated but as linked to the training programme has not been progressed via the political process to date. Q2 has seen increased pressures within health and social services relating to employees taking annual leave after a difficult period during the pandemic, increase in numbers of staff self-isolating, staff off sick and difficulties recruiting and retaining staff, particularly in the domiciliary care and residential sector. This will be the subject of a separate risk on the Corporate Risk Register but it is highly likely that these pressures could have a direct effect on safeguarding arrangements and this risk will need to be kept under close review as we move into Q3.</p> <p><b><u>Education</u></b>  Education, including the Youth Service, provided partial performance information for the Joint Scrutiny/Executive performance report in Q4. Due to periods of school/pupil disruption. However, full data for Q1 in 2021-22 are being collated following a full return to face to face learning in schools during the Spring/Summer terms of 2021.</p> <p>The Local Government Education Services Safeguarding Policy has been updated and discussed at Joint Scrutiny Committee and was subsequently agreed by the Executive Committee in July 2021. The policy is now in line with the latest Keeping Learners Safe Guidance.</p>	<b>1 X 4</b>  <b>Medium</b>

Ref:	Risk Description	Residual Score	Progress against further controls	Target Score
CRR20	There is a risk that increasingly complex needs and demand for services provided by Social Services and Education, in particular for Looked After Children, will put further significant pressure on the Council's budget.	<b>2 X 4</b> <b>High</b>	<p>Number of children looked after continues to reduce (187 as at 21/09/21) however there is a risk that the rise in referrals may result in more children coming into care. We have started to implement the revised Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy 2020 to 2025 following its agreement by Executive. We are also working with Education to implement the new ALN reforms. This remains a high risk given the gradual reduction of COVID-19 restrictions and the possibility of more children at risk coming to light over the coming months.</p> <p>In adult services, cases are more complex and needs of the older population are at a higher level than anticipated as early intervention and preventative work has not been possible due to the pandemic. Discussions are ongoing in respect of a future collaboration with Caerphilly for the provision of legal services in respect of children's services in particular. It is anticipated that this will reduce the budget for legal services which is high in particular in respect of children's services due to currently being outsourced due to a lack of capacity within the Council's legal services.</p>	<b>1 X 4</b> <b>Medium</b>
CRR21	The Financial resilience of the Council could be at risk if the Council does not ensure that financial planning and management decisions support long term stability and sustainability.	<b>2 X 4</b> <b>High</b>	<p>Target risk score has been set as High as it is doubtful that the likelihood will reduce given the annual funding settlements, changing political priorities and economic environment of BG which is likely to remain reliant on WG funding and grants as opposed to Council Tax and Fees and charges.</p> <p>Whilst good progress is being made in reviewing the MTFs, significant cost pressures are emerging for 2022/23 onwards not least the announcement by the UK Government of a 1.25% increase in National Insurance contributions, the predicted increase in gas prices (40%) and the potential for additional costs connected to the Council's response to and recovery from the Covid 19 pandemic to continue into 2022/23 and onwards.</p> <p>BtG estimated achievement has increased for future years with the review of the MRP policy and the Prevention &amp; early intervention work throughout the Council however these are not at the level to fully offset the budget gaps currently being forecast. WG annual settlement announcements are not being made until December and there remains a high level of uncertainty around the level of the Council's funding for future years.</p>	<b>2 X 4</b> <b>High</b>

Ref:	Risk Description	Residual Score	Progress against further controls	Target Score
CRR25	The 2 schools currently in receipt of Council Intervention fail to make appropriate progress against the Statutory Warning Notice to Improve and their Post Inspection Action Plans	<b>3 X 3</b> <b>High</b>	<p>The overall position against this risk remains, however, the Education Directorate and EAS are increasingly confident in the progress that both settings are making. Progress includes:</p> <p><b>Abertillery 3-16 Learning Community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governance has improved significantly.</li> <li>The impact of leadership consolidation can now be seen in more consistent provision and practice across the community, with standards in books overall broadly in line with age and stage.</li> <li>The school is engaging well with Tonyrefail School as its Learning Network School.</li> <li>In addition to Learning Network School support, the school has engaged in a range of helpful programmes to support improvements in teaching and learning, developing middle leadership, preparing for curriculum reform, supporting wellbeing of learners and improving outcomes for disadvantaged learners.</li> <li>The May verification visit showed that the school has made satisfactory progress overall with some aspects identified as strong (e.g. leadership development).</li> </ul> <p><b>Brynmawr Foundation School</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governance has significantly improved.</li> <li>The school has had several beneficial changes in senior leadership since the core inspection.</li> <li>A strong support plan is currently in implementation as part of the EAS Learning Network School model, working closely with Cardiff High School.</li> <li>The school is part of the national pilot for multi-agency support for schools in special measures national initiative.</li> <li>From on-site visits during Summer 2021, there is still work to be done, but the school is making progress against its recommendations with good progress made in strengthening leadership. This assessment will be verified during the Estyn monitoring visit in October.</li> <li>Both schools engaged positively with the Celebrate, Share, Support and Refine initiative, which demonstrated that it had in place strong practice during the time of school closure in providing online learning for pupils, and good support for families within the community.</li> </ul>	<b>2 X 3</b> <b>Medium</b>

Ref:	Risk Description	Residual Score	Progress against further controls	Target Score
CRR22	Failure to deliver the Council's priorities within the agreed annual budget resulting in the increased use of emergency finance measures and the drawdown of reserves.	<b>1 X 4</b>  <b>Medium</b>	<i>It is recommended that the risk score be amended to medium.</i>  2021/22 budget agreed March 2021. During Q2, the Council agreed a supplementary budget to undertake additional Highways maintenance works funded by general reserves. Despite this, the forecast outturn for 2021/22 continues to be favourable which will result in the general reserves increasing further by the year end with no unplanned draw from the general or earmarked reserves. Delivery of the 2021/22 BtG proposals are on track and estimated to be achieved	<b>1 X 4</b>  <b>Medium</b>

# Contact Details

**If you require any further information or have any feedback you wish to share, please:**

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