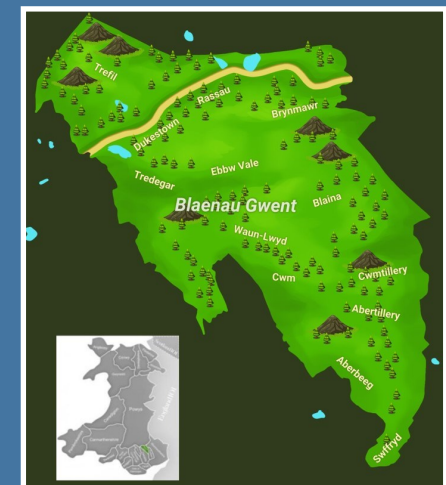




Finance and Performance Report Executive Summary

2022-23



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council has a responsibility to provide performance related information to the public in order to scrutinise the Council's performance and to gauge how well the Council is doing.

The Finance and Performance Report has been developed to provide a reporting framework against the Council's Corporate Plan, including areas of progress and where further improvement is needed. The Report is used as a key improvement tool for the Authority and draws on evidence from service area business plans, strategic reports, and data analysis.

The report forms part of an on-going process of development within the Council's Performance Management Framework.

This executive summary of the full Finance and Performance Report provides a snapshot of the key activity that has been undertaken across the Council for 2022/23 and provides information against each of the Corporate Plan Priorities:

- **Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent**
- **Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient**
- **Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities**
- **Ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place**

The priorities above are in place to support the Blaenau Gwent Council Vision:

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

- The 2021 Census identified that Blaenau Gwent had a **decrease in population** from around 69,800 in 2011 to 66,900 in 2021, equating to a **4.2% reduction**, making Blaenau Gwent the second **smallest population in Wales**. Overall, Wales has seen an increase of 1.4% in population.
- Although Blaenau Gwent has the second smallest population, it is the sixth **most densely populated area** of Wales's 22 local authority areas, with **615 residents per square kilometre** up from 148 residents per square kilometre in 2011.
- In Blaenau Gwent, **one in five people (20.3%) are aged 65 years and over**. Across Wales, this is 21.3%, a higher percentage than ever before. Blaenau Gwent has also seen an increase of 9.0% in people aged 65 years and over, a decrease of 7.5% in people aged 15 to 64 years, and a decrease of 5.4% in children aged under 15 years.
- Between the last two censuses, the **average (median) age** of Blaenau Gwent increased by two years, from 41 to **43 years** of age.
- The **percentage of Welsh speakers** in Blaenau Gwent **fell from 7.8% in 2011 to 6.2% in 2021**. In 2021, there were around 1,200 fewer Welsh-speaking Blaenau Gwent residents (over the age of three years) compared with 2011. The number of people who did not speak Welsh decreased by 1,300. Across Wales, the percentage of Welsh speakers fell from 19.0% to 17.8%.
- In the latest census, around **58,900** Blaenau Gwent residents said they were **born in Wales**. This represented **88.0%** of the local population. The figure has decreased from just over 63,000 in 2011, which, at the time, represented 90.3% of Blaenau Gwent's population. England was the next most represented, with around 5,600 Blaenau Gwent residents reporting this country of birth (8.4%). This figure was up from around 4,900 in 2011, which, at the time, represented 7.1% of the population of Blaenau Gwent. The number of Blaenau Gwent residents born in Poland rose from around 350 in 2011 (0.5% of the local population) to around 650 in 2021 (0.9%).
- In 2021, **56.4%** of Blaenau Gwent residents reported having "**no religion**", making it the most common response in this local authority area (up from 41.1% in 2011). Across Wales, the percentage of residents who described themselves as having "no religion" **increased from 32.1% to 46.5%**.
- In 2021, Blaenau Gwent has the **highest proportion of children in low income families** in Wales with **32.2% living in relative poverty** and **21.9% in absolute poverty**.

BLAENAU GWENT IN NUMBERS

66,900
people

43
average age

30,300
households

4,239
Children living in poverty



25 schools
across
31 sites

9000+
pupils

416km
of public roads being
maintained by the council

300km
of public rights of way

1,490
Active enterprises

11,000
Welsh speaking residents

INVESTING IN BLAENAU GWENT

Blaenau Gwent Council Planning Committee have approved for the property developer, Mercia Real Estates, to change the use of the former shopping mall site at Festival Park, Ebbw Vale into a mixed use business centre. The alterations will eventually provide nine buildings which would accommodate 28 units of varying floor space from 89 to 790 square metres. The overall application is deemed to be a major development as the site area is in excess of 1 hectare.

PCI Pharma Services, a leading global contract development and manufacturing organisation, will be expanding their world-class facility in Tredegar. The expansion will address the growing and urgent need for specialty global manufacturing services within the oncology arena.

Further Electric Vehicle infrastructure has been installed across the region and has continued to be rolled out extensively in 22/23. This has included the installation of a Electric Vehicle infrastructure at further 12 sites across Blaenau Gwent.

Money from the Home Office's Safer Streets fund is being invested into youth services in Brynmawr and Tredegar to support young people who are at risk of becoming involved in crime or anti-social behaviour. A dedicated youth worker will be appointed to engage with young people and a bespoke youth shelter has been built in Welfare Park, Brynmawr. Young people from Brynmawr were consulted as part of the funding bid and said they would feel safer if they had a dedicated space to call their own. They helped to design the shelter which will act as a focal point for youth outreach.



Ambitious and innovative delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place



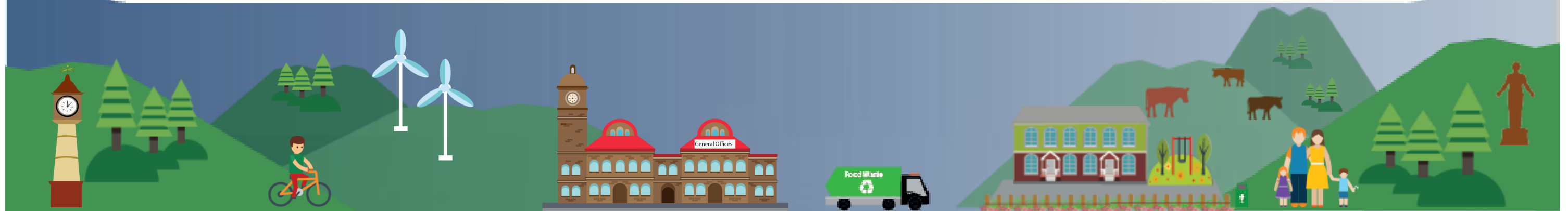
Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent



Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities



Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

51.1%

Of **people aged 16 years** and over were **employed** in 2021, this is a rise from 48.2% in 2011 and is **Wales's largest rise**

£3.9
M

Increased funding was **provided directly to schools** in 2022. The Education portfolio received a 17.17% increase in funding overall.

91%

Of the **business units** on the Council's portfolio are **occupied**

210

Places to be provided as part of the new **Welsh Medium seedling provision** to be opened in Blaenau Gwent September 2023

£4.75
M

Was **spent on our road network** between 2017 and 2022

400+

community litter picker volunteers in Blaenau Gwent who have collected **2,471 bags of general waste** and **248 bags of recycling** over the year

Data is showing that the Council is **reducing its carbon emissions** on an annual basis

The Council is working with Keep Wales Tidy to support **'Not up my street'** a new national campaign to **tackle Fly-tipping.**



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

2

Residential properties have been purchased this year to provide residential care **for children with more complex needs**, saving money and allowing them to be looked after closer to home .

Throughout 22/23 **referral rates** to both the children's and adults **IAA** Teams **increased**, despite this, the majority of referrals have been dealt with within statutory timescales

Funding has been provided to residents to improve energy efficiency and **reduce fuel poverty** of social rented homes

Safeguarding citizens is central to the work of the Council and **work has progressed** to further **strengthen** these arrangements

£127,527

Participatory budgeting provided **16 community groups with monies** to deliver local **well-being project** at its second participatory budgeting programme, Community Voice, Community Choice.

6,132

Customers have been **supported** face to face in our **Community Hubs** across the borough since April 2022

3,736

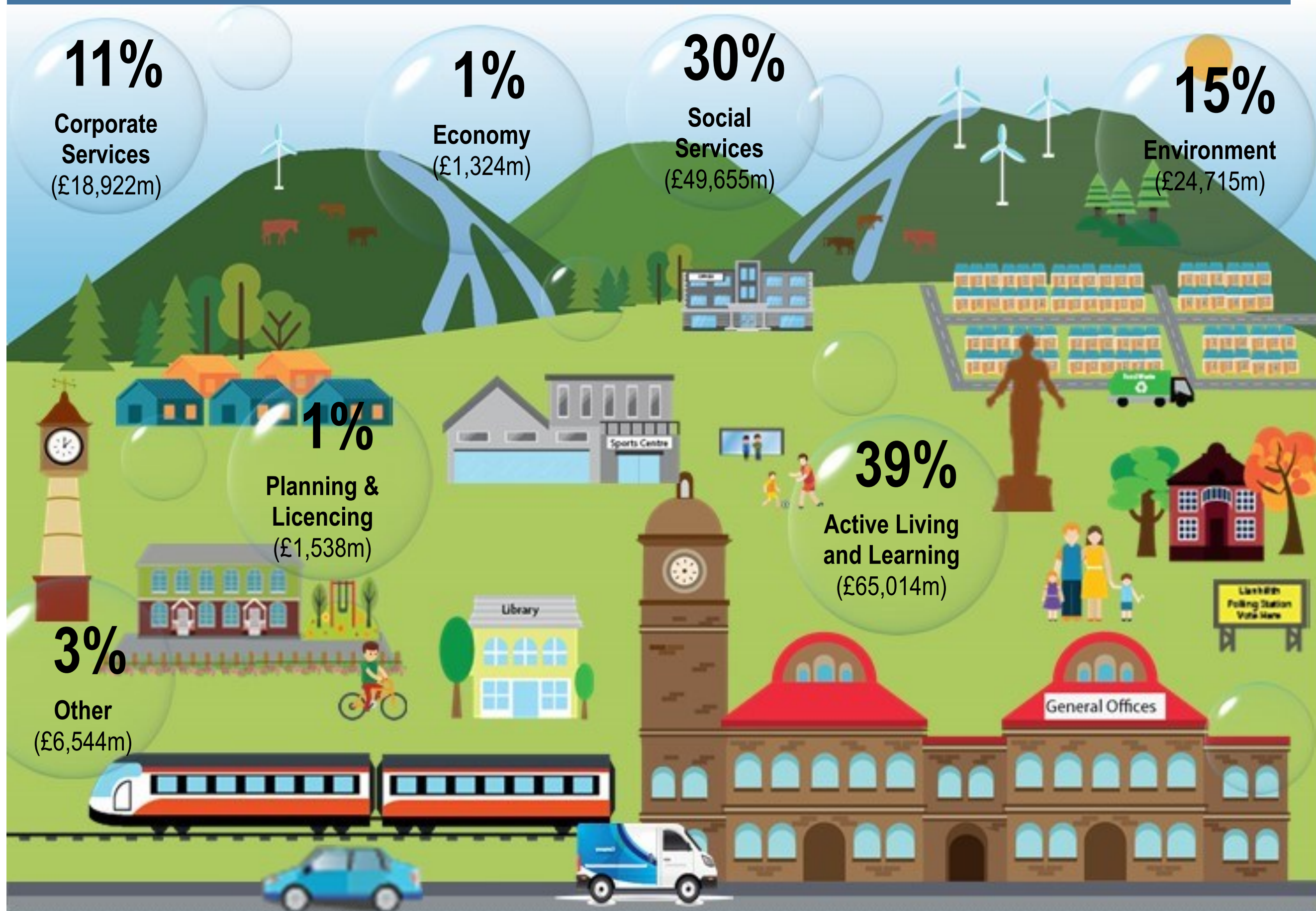
questionnaires were completed by members of the public on the budget consultation which were used to inform the Council's budget for 2023/24. This equates to over **5.5% of the area's population**

The **UK Competitive Index** has identified that **our competitiveness has moved upwards** relative to other local authority areas.



YOUR COUNCIL TAX 2022/23

- Council Tax accounts for 20.9% of funding, 79.1% comes from other financial sources.



How your council tax was used to support the services we provided

IMPROVING OUTCOMES

The Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone's performance in 2022 continues to be **good** and provides clear **value added** to a range of learners across some areas of very high deprivation. The transformation of post 16 provision across the County Borough has delivered;

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

The Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone's performance

saw a **97.8%**

overall pass

rate for A*-E which

is in line with the Welsh average.



All A-Level learners studying at the Learning Zone achieved their first choice university

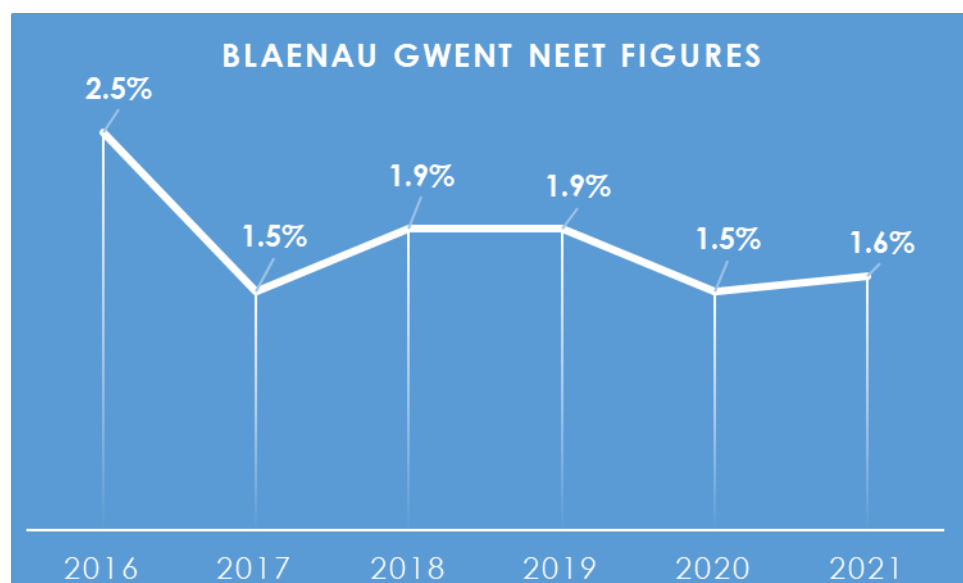


Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent



Key Activities

The number of young people **NEET** (not in education, employment or training) on leaving year 11 was **1.6% (9 young people)** for 2021. This is a 0.9% decrease since 2016. During this time, Blaenau Gwent's ranking in Wales has improved from having the 4th highest levels of NEETS in 2016, 10th highest in 2021.



The proportion of pupils eligible for **Free School Meals** have increased to circa **33%**, the highest of all **Local Authorities** in Wales by a significant margin



Aspire, Shared Apprenticeship Programme continues to deliver apprentices for businesses in Blaenau Gwent and for the Council. In total we have around **40 apprentices**

Key Stage 4 (KS4) results for 2022 **demonstrated progress** and were in line with the school development plan targets set by the four secondary settings. There were improvements in 29 out of 32 key measures

Kick Start Plus

supported new businesses from 6 months up to 3 years, to help them develop and expand. The implementation of the programme was very successful with the **delivery of over 100 placements**

A new scheme **Quickstart** is due to be launched which offers 6 month paid work placements for unemployed residents within Blaenau Gwent.

32 businesses have expressed an interest in taking part in the scheme offering at least 1 placement each



Two of our Primary Schools have taken part in training on anti-discrimination offered by our regional West Gwent Community Cohesion Team.

This saw **over 60 pupils** (Year Five and Year Six) exploring themes of: Similarities and Differences; Identity; Exploring diversity; Communities Culture and Cohesion; Belonging and Inclusion; and Prejudice.



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



Two large Cardiff Capital Region investment deals have been delivered this year for companies in Blaenau Gwent.

A **UK Competitive Index** (UKCI) deep dive has identified that Blaenau Gwent has increased its competitiveness and moved upwards relatively to other local authority areas.

Competitive Index Ranking CCR March 2022

	2013	2016/17	2018/19	2021/22
1. Cardiff	134	↑ 128	↓ 134	↑ 133
2. Monmouthshire	167	↑ 162	↑ 158	↑ 147
3. Newport	232	↑ 228	↑ 191	↓ 198
4. Vale of Glamorgan	225	↓ 253	↓ 257	↓ 272
5. Bridgend	294	↑ 283	↑ 270	↓ 289
6. RCT	367	↑ 355	↑ 282	↓ 323
7. Torfaen	366	↑ 352	↑ 341	↓ 342
8. Caerphilly	374	→ 374	↑ 309	↓ 331
9. Merthyr	378	↑ 376	↑ 359	↑ 358
10. Blaenau Gwent	379	↓ 379	↓ 362	↑ 362*

*Figures are all relative, ranked across all other local authorities. BG productivity gap between next to last was worsening and has now improved.

Despite our position not changing in the overall table, this is the **first time we have made a positive move in the last six years.**

The **Tech Valleys programme** has a vision "In 2027 the South Wales valleys and Blaenau Gwent in particular, will be a globally recognised centre for the development of new technologies, to support cutting edge industry" In support of this vision :-

The Council and Coleg Gwent have proposed to develop an **Advanced Engineering Centre** which will create an environment that will attract hi-tech inward investors within the Advanced Manufacturing sector. This includes a full refurbishment of the Former Monwell Building located on Letchworth Road, Ebbw Vale to create a state-of-the-art, carbon-neutral and entirely digital education facility, training the future workforce in advanced engineering disciplines such as robotics, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, autonomous manufacturing, simulation, and augmented reality.



The proposed date to be operational and welcoming first students is anticipated to be September 2024. Business case for the refurbishment cost was successful, plans are now progressing to start the construction phase.

Regain 2 -The team are working with Tech Valleys to develop an Enterprise Hub for Blaenau Gwent. The facility will support individuals and new businesses by creating a managed workspace with hot and warm desk spaces and will also include separate offices for hire on the first floor. **Construction is progressing well with completion programmed for Autumn 2023.**

REGAIN2 anticipated contract sum being £5,484,996.99



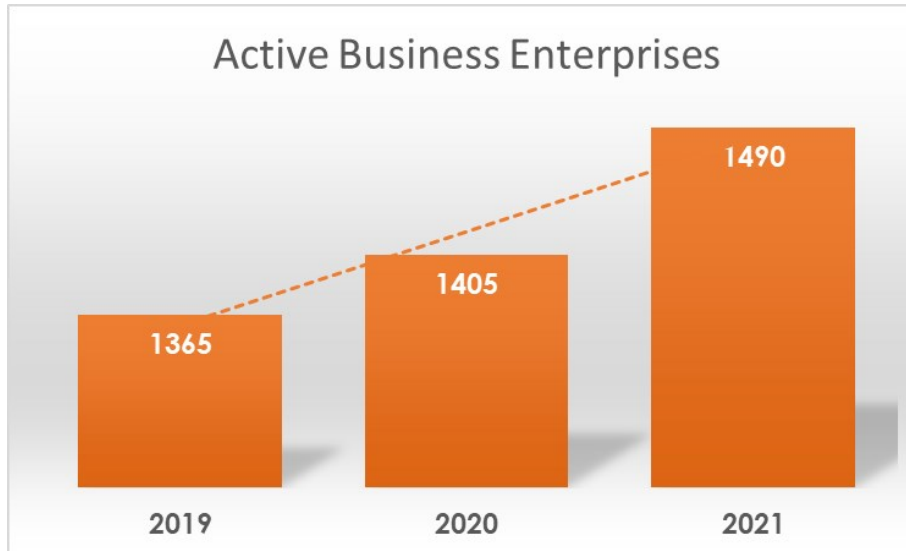
Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent



Cymunedau Dysgu Cynaliadwy
Sustainable Communities for Learning

The delivery of the Sustainable Communities for Learning **Band B programme** is well underway with an **investment of circa £26m** into the school estate.

The suitability and condition of the school estate is improving with circa 61% categorised as A/B



There were **1.2% more businesses start-ups** in Blaenau Gwent during December 2022 compared to the corresponding period of 2021. This growth rate ranks **Blaenau Gwent** at **5 out of the 22 Welsh districts.**

Current remodelling of the **River Centre Secondary Campus** is subject to investment **circa £450,000.**

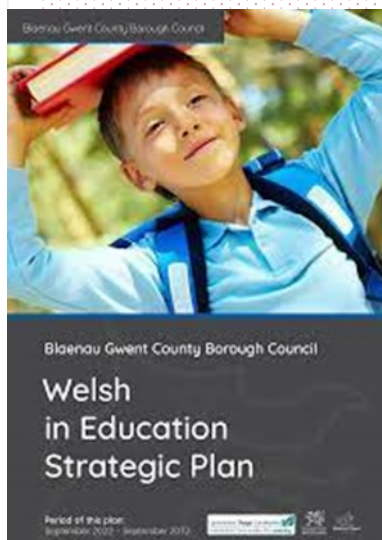
Our Hybrid Units:

- 9 out of the 9 units are now occupied – Thales UK, Apex Additive Technologies Ltd and new business PNR Pharma Limited.



WESP—The plan sets out how the local authority will carry out its education functions to improve and increase the use of Welsh in Education over the next ten years.

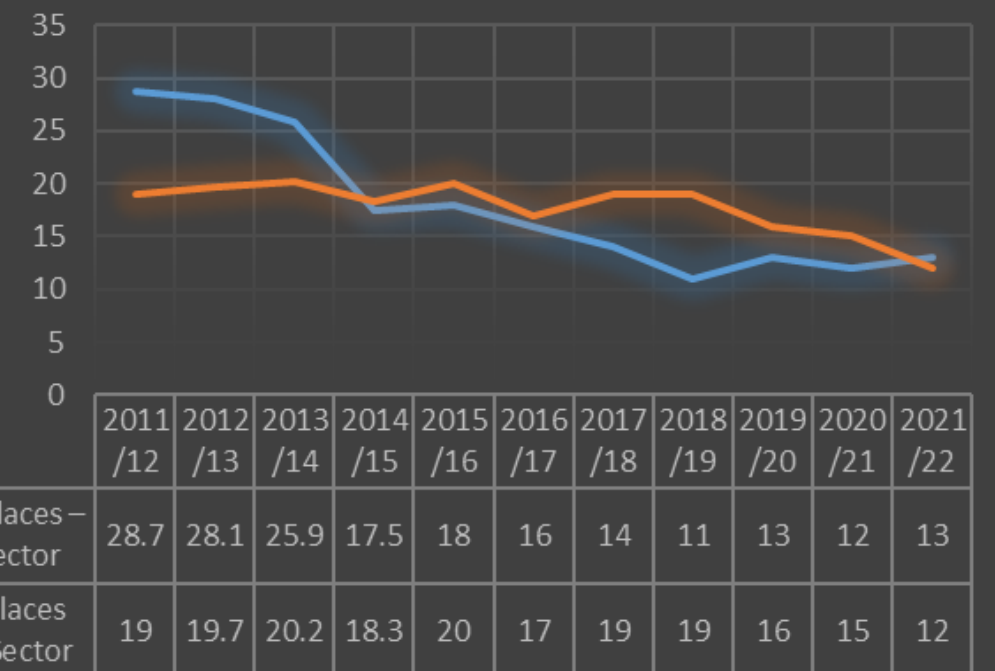
The plan will contribute to Cymraeg 2050 initiative, where the Welsh Government wants to have 1 million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050



We have seen a **reduction** in **Schools Causing Concern** from **6 schools in 2019** to only **2 schools in 2022.**

School Surplus Places (%)

Surplus places have reduced to the targets set in the School Organisation Policy at 15%.



The Local Authority does have some elements of sufficiency of school places emerging that will need to be monitored closely, especially in the secondary/special school sectors.



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



Percentage of people aged 16-64 that are in employment-

(As of Oct 21 – Sep 22)

Blaenau Gwent stood at 74.6% compared to 73.4% in Wales

CiNER continues to progress following the approval of planning. The glass manufacturing facility is a major investment which will bring much needed jobs to Blaenau Gwent and the region, both during the construction phase and when fully up and running.



The Planning Department continue to work with the Ciner Consultancy Team to deliver this landmark investment project on Rassau Industrial Estate

Early intervention for homelessness has meant that

64%

of potentially homeless households were

prevented

from becoming **homeless**

during the period

April 2022 to December 2022.



Percentage of adults 16-64 with no qualifications (2021) in Blaenau Gwent - **16.3%** . With the Wales average being **8.1%**

Average gross annual pay for people who live in Blaenau Gwent and work full time (January 2022) - **£28,040** which is lower than the Wales average of £29,265.

The **Arts Award project** for children aged 11-21 years provides opportunities to gain new skills as well as an academic qualification. The project benefits all children who attend school or are home educated.



Working age population (16-64) in Blaenau Gwent with NQF level 4 and above - **26.7%**, compared to **41.4%** across Wales (January 2021 to December 2021)



Percentage of working age people who are economically active (Oct 2021 to Sept 2022) - **76.3**

Male – 80.1
Female – 72.8

91%

of the **business units**

on the Council's portfolio are **occupied**

In 2019 the **business survival rate**

in Blaenau Gwent was

92.1%

with the Wales figure being 90.7%

IMPROVING OUTCOMES



Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient



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



Trading Standards activity contributes to crime reduction and protection of vulnerable people from scams and rogue traders. Intervention visits were made to **100%** of identified vulnerable potential scam victims during the period.

Blaenau Gwent has been recognised by Social Care Wales for the outcomes approach taken. Staff have been asked to speak at a number of national events to share our approach to this area of practice. The department has received a number of compliments from people receiving this approach to practice and told of how this has improved their outcomes.



Key Activities

This year so far we have seen a slight **increase in the numbers of Children Looked After**, moving from **198** at the end of **2021/22** to **204** children at the end of **quarter 3 22/2023**

In 2021, **4.2% of Blaenau Gwent residents** (aged five years and over) reported providing up to **19 hours of unpaid care** each week. This figure **decreased from 6.6% in 2011**.

The **Transitional Capital Funding Programme** – supported Tai Calon and Linc Cymru with funding bids to **refurbish 4 empty homes for Ukrainian Families**.

The Blaenau Gwent Well-being Partnership has poverty as one of its priorities so work undertaken by the cost of living (col) group will be reported into this partnership. Some of the successes of the col group are:-

- Supporting **27 warm hubs** across Blaenau Gwent with grant funding
- Supporting **19 foodbanks** across Blaenau Gwent with council funding
- Funding extra citizens advice support until November 2024
- Supporting **458 referrals** to the **Fuel bank partnership**

35.52% of children were in poverty in 2020/21.

*Source: End Child Poverty Coalition

Welcome to your Wellbeing Map for Blaenau Gwent

Supporting our communities well-being is a key priority. The Blaenau Gwent Integrated Well-being Network Team recently launched a new online map that connects people of Blaenau Gwent to everything that can help their mental and physical well-being in their local area.

The Authority are currently offering **Universal Primary Free School Meals** to 6 full time Nurseries, Reception pupils and to pupils in years 1&2. There has been a continuing increase of the take up of meals for the 19 active school days in September the catering department served:

- 78 Nursery Pupils
- 367 Reception Pupils
- 484 Pupils in year 1
- 424 pupils in year2

Total meals served 1,353

Throughout 22/23 referral rates to both children's and adults IAA Teams increased, despite this **all referrals have been dealt with within statutory timescales.**

The Rate of older people in residential & nursing home care per 1,000 population aged 65 or over has **reduced since 2021/22**





Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient



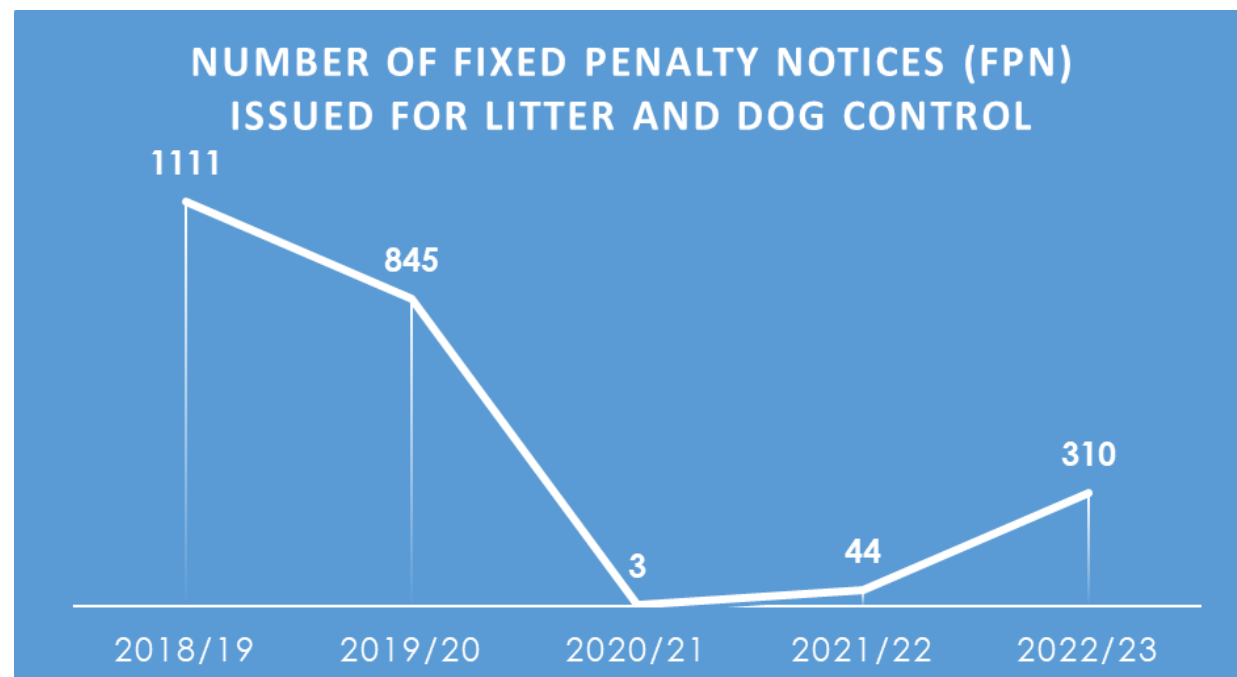
Trading Standards aims to ensure a fair, safe and equitable environment for all who purchase and sell goods and services in Blaenau Gwent. This is undertaken through a range of intervention, advice and enforcement activities with businesses and consumers. The team works closely with partner agencies in order to gather intelligence and enforce the legislation covering areas such as Weights and Measures / Food Labelling and composition / Counterfeit Goods/ Product Safety / Pricing/ Rogue Trading and Doorstep Crime /Consumer Credit/ Misdescribed Goods /Scams and Age Restricted Sales. More information on the work of Trading Standards can be obtained at [:About Trading Standards | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](https://tradingstandards.gov.wales/) <https://tradingstandards.gov.wales/>



Blaenau Gwent's **Food Hygiene** Service continues to deliver against its programme of planned inspections and post COVID-19 recovery work. **154 inspections** were **completed** at **high risk** businesses by the close of December 2022 (end of Quarter 3). This work has continued alongside our other ongoing programmed and reactive workload.



The **Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation** states that Blaenau Gwent has 47 areas **6 of which are in the 10% most deprived in Wales.**



During **2022/23** **78 Fly-tipping offences** were captured on CCTV



We have continued to improve housing conditions by way of financial assistance and support with the following being completed during the period April -December 2022:-

- **42 adaptations** completed at a **cost of £444,492.**
- **15 Empty Properties grants** completed at a **cost of £462,845.08**
- 2 Home Improvement loans issued
- 2 Houses to homes loans issued and another 2 awaiting approval

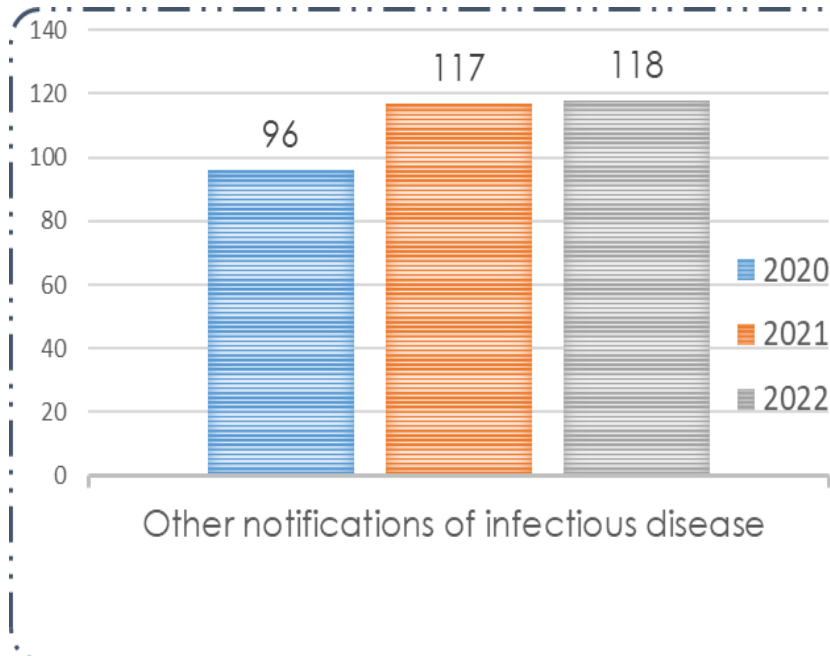
UKRAINE
How you can help

Blaenau Gwent are continuing to provide support to the resettlement scheme for Ukrainian people. Once in initial accommodation, Ukrainian arrivals are supported to resettle into more medium and longer-term 'hosting' accommodation within communities. **Blaenau Gwent Council is working to seek new expressions of interest for hosts, and then inspect relevant properties to ensure they are safe and suitable.**

In 2022/23 the Council provided support overseeing the **Food Distribution Support Grant** with over **£80,000** being available to groups

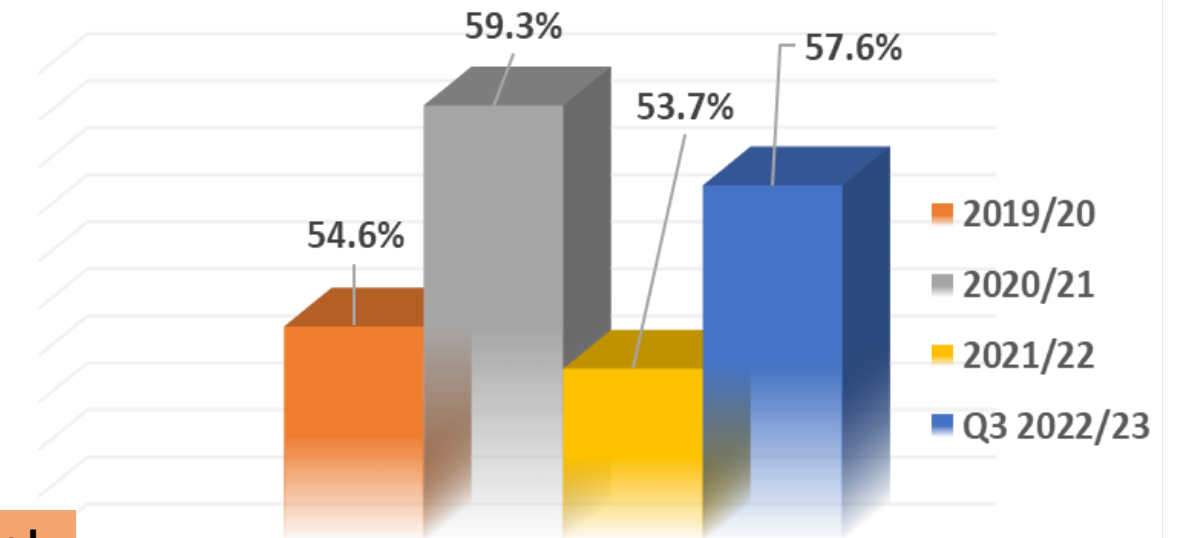


Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient



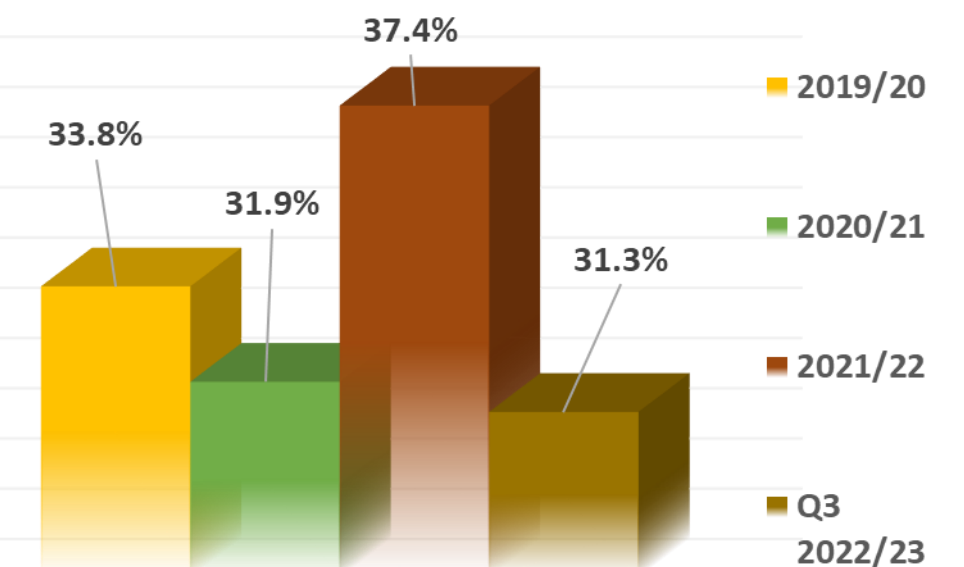
We continue to respond to notifications of infectious disease for which the Local Authority have a duty to investigate. The number of recent reports of such infectious disease cases are provided here together with comparisons from previous reporting year periods (note these indicate Q1-3 only and do not include any requests for advice in respect of COVID-19)

PROPORTION OF CHILDRENS SERVICES CASES SUPPORTED BY PREVENTATIVE SERVICES

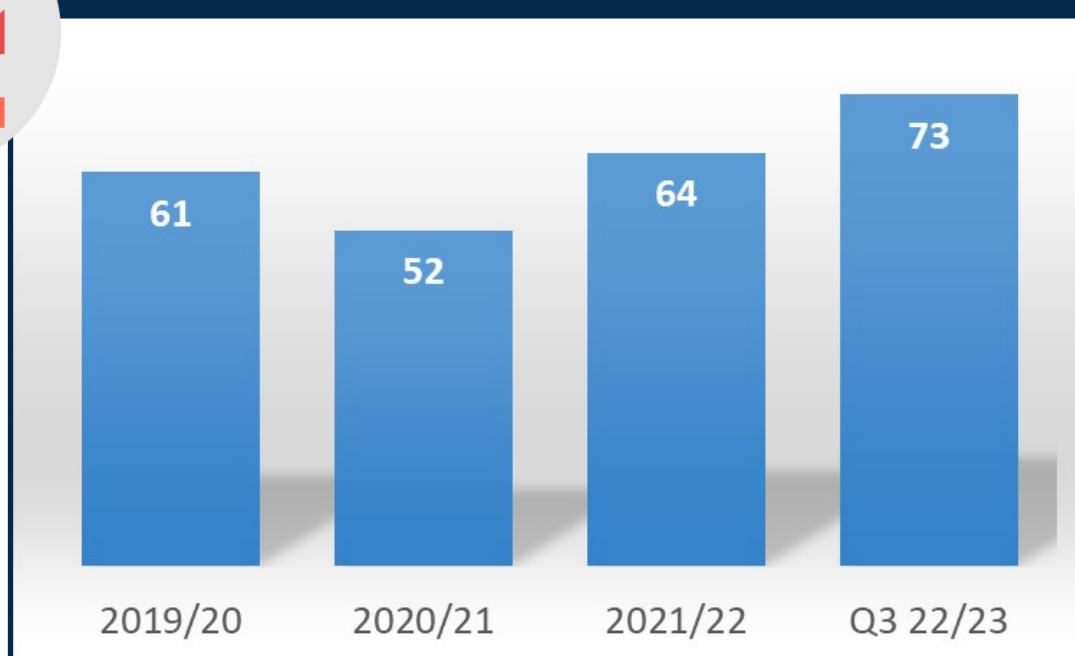


Despite targets still being met we have seen a **decline** in the **% of overall premises that are broadly compliant with food hygiene standards** in comparison to pre-pandemic figures. At the close of the reporting year for 2018/19 performance was reported to be at 92.3%. In comparison with the current position of 91.7% this is a **drop of 0.6%**.

PROPORTION OF ADULTS SERVICES CASES SUPPORTED BY PREVENTATIVE SERVICES



The NUMBER OF CHILDREN on the CHILD PROTECTION REGISTER has INCREASED



We successfully delivered three **Children's Grand Council** sessions to a cohort of **59+ pupils** within Blaenau Gwent.

- Children's Rights
- Why we have a Children's Grand Council
- How children and young people can get involved
- Healthy relationships food
- Gwent Well-being Plan consultation

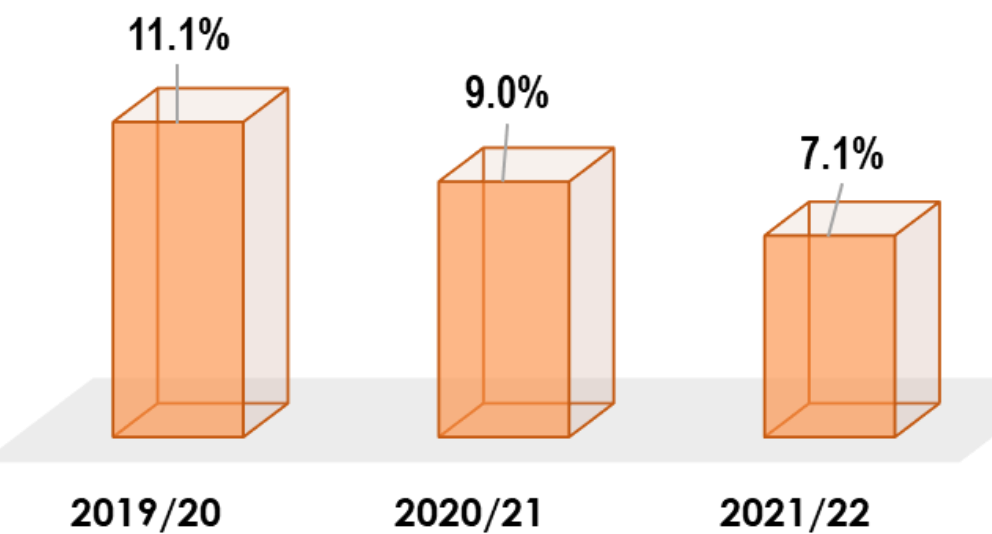
As at May 2022 **5,751 Households** in Blaenau Gwent were claiming **Universal Credit**



Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient



The % of children looked after who have had 3 or more placements during the year reduced over the past 3 years.



Healthy life expectancy at birth in Blaenau Gwent:

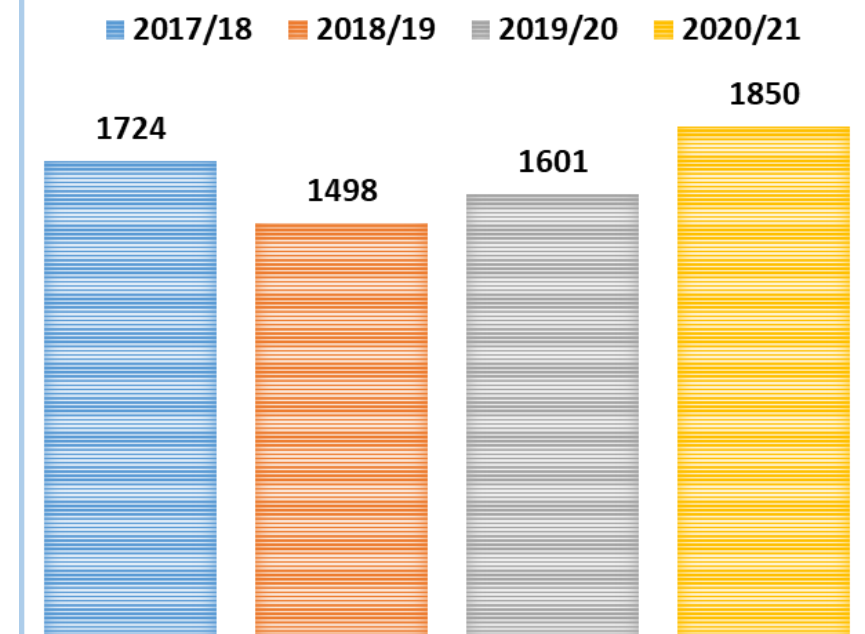
Male - 55.6
Female - 56.5

Healthy life expectancy at birth in Wales:

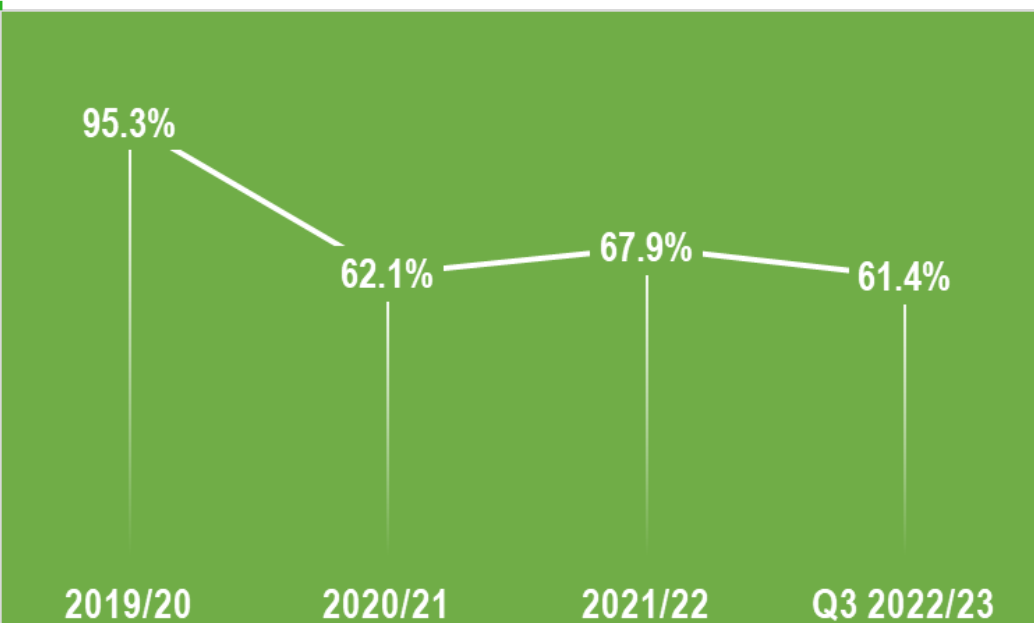
Male - 61.5
Female - 62.4

We continue to support young carers to ensure that they are supported, and their voices are heard. A weekly **Young Carers group** is held and on average **22 members** regularly attend. On average, 32 Young Carers attend residential events or planned

Latest data, 2020/21, shows the number of children living in working families in absolute low income was the highest it has been in 4 years.



The % of adult protection enquiries completed within statutory timescales has decreased



A new **Community Café and Community Pantry** has been opened at Pen-y-Cwm Special School & Ebbw Fawr Learning Community's Primary Phase and was officially launched by the Blaenau Gwent MP, Nick Smith. This is a joint venture between the two schools who share a site. The Community Café will be **run by post-16 pupils** from Pen-y-Cwm and will provide valuable work experience to pupils as well as a welcoming space for parents and the wider community. The aim of the Community Pantry is, like **a foodbank, to provide food to families in both schools when needed.** Ebbw Fawr Primary Phase's Heddlu Bach are taking the lead on organising and stocking the community pantry.

Social media campaign - working within Blaenau Gwent supporting an individual with a diagnosed learning disability to live as a fulfilled life as possible.



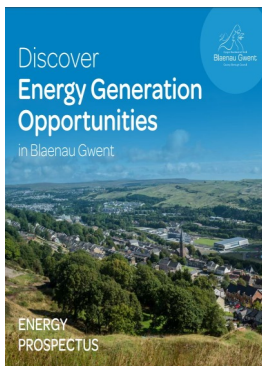
<https://fb.watch/jxhvxtmZ3o/>

IMPROVING OUTCOMES

Blaenau Gwent Council's Decarbonisation Plan continues to be delivered by the council as a whole.



The Energy Prospectus has been designed to stimulate interest in energy development across the borough that will facilitate a supply of renewable energy to meet the future energy needs of Blaenau Gwent



Cardiff Capital Region City Deal secured funding from Welsh Government to **install rapid charge points for taxi ranks and to purchase 44 wheelchair accessible electric taxis for trials** to take place across the region. The taxis were to be offered under a 30 day free trial for taxi drivers. **Two** of the 44 **taxis have been made available for Blaenau Gwent** and the trial will run until 30th November 2023.



Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities



Key Activities

Up to 2022/23 financial year there has been almost **£800,000** allocated in the Councils Capital Programme for the **Cemetery Capacity Works** associated with Cefn Golau, Dukestown, Brynmawr and Brynithel Cemeteries.

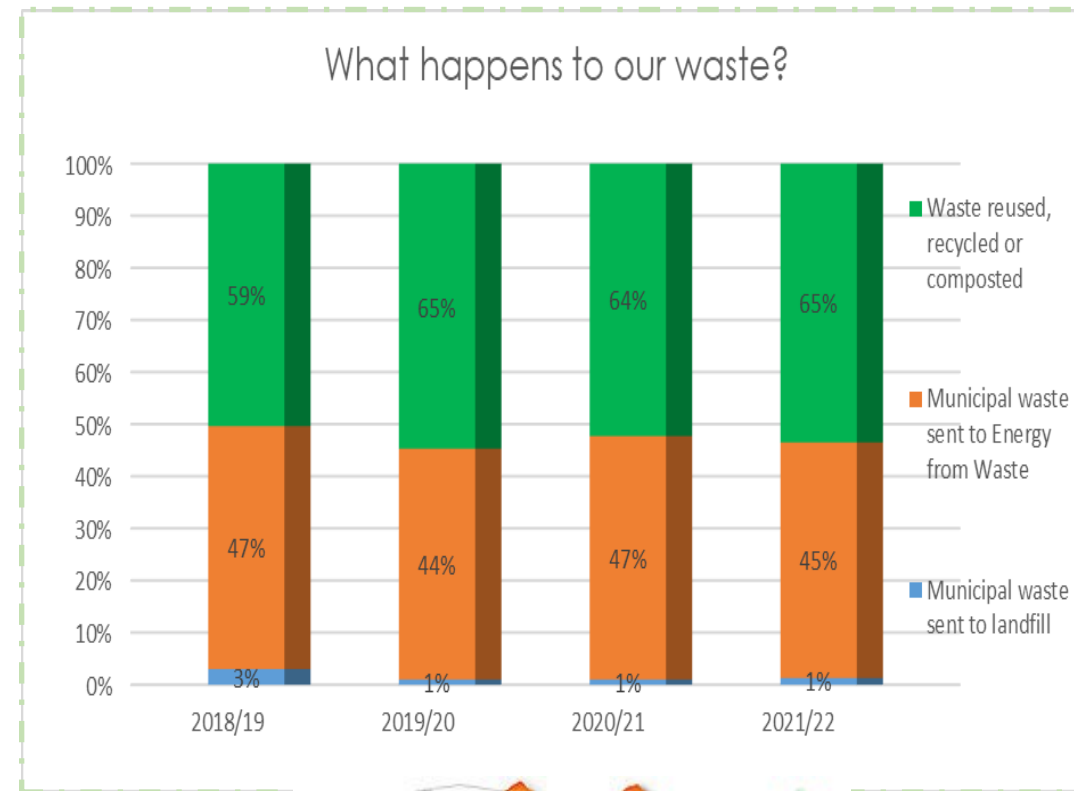


Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure – An initial Gwent project led by Blaenau Gwent installed a total of **73 charge points across 35 sites**

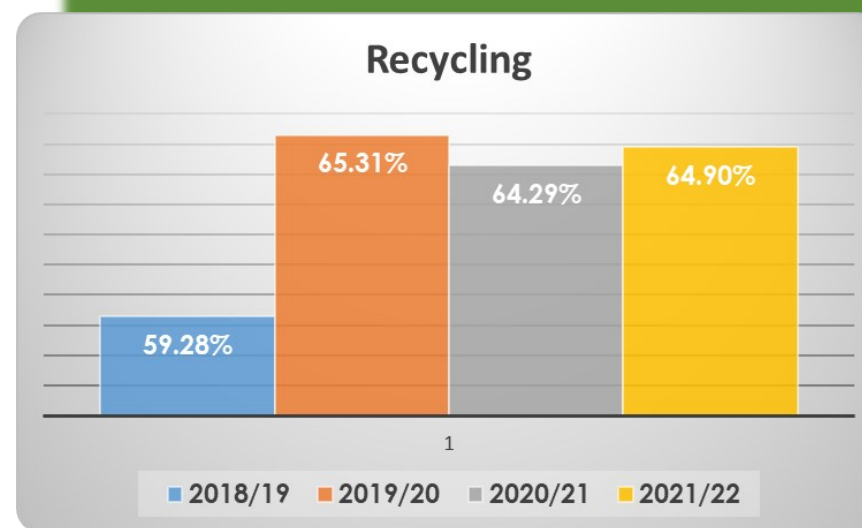
in Gwent. We have also worked with Cardiff Capital Region City Deal on a number of projects to install further EV infrastructure across the region and has continued to be rolled out extensively in 22/23.

This has included the **installation of a EV infrastructure at further 12 sites across in Blaenau Gwent.**

A further regional bid for funding has been submitted to the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) and if funding is agreed this will increase EV infrastructure across the region further.



Welsh Government set a statutory recycling target of recycling 70% by 2024-25, towards which Blaenau Gwent has made significant moves in the direction of achieving over the last few years.

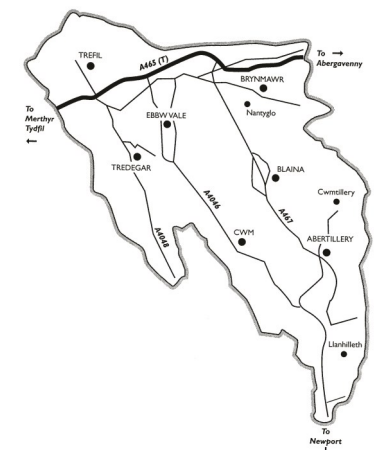


65% of waste produced was recycled as at the end of quarter 3 2022/23

It was reported that **98.8%** of streets in Blaenau Gwent were **clean** during 2022/23.

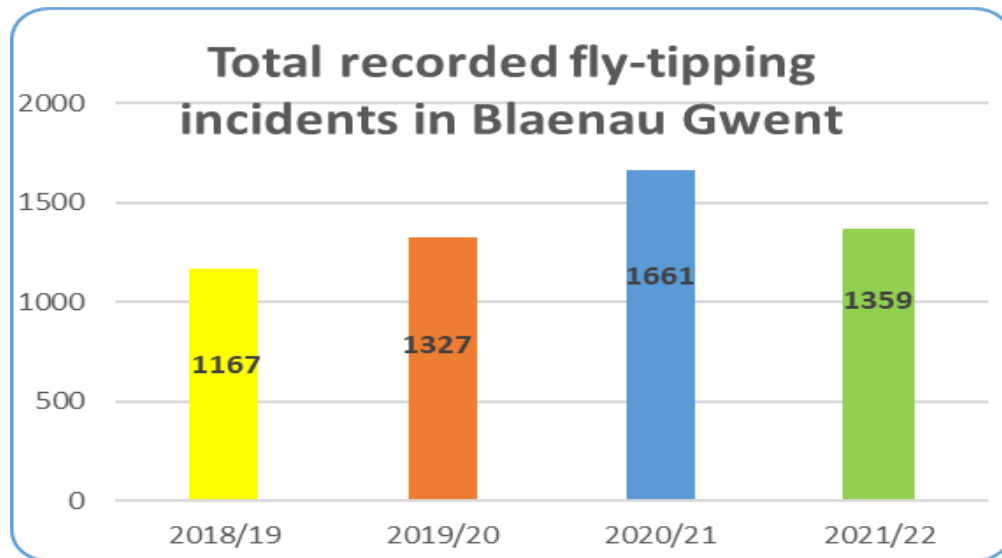
% people satisfied with local area as a place to live:

- 2020 - 74%
- 2019 - N/A
- 2018 - 66%
- 2017 - N/A
- 2016 - 66%





Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities



700 Fly-tipping incidents were reported during April to December 2022, the average number of days taken to clear was **4.7 days**

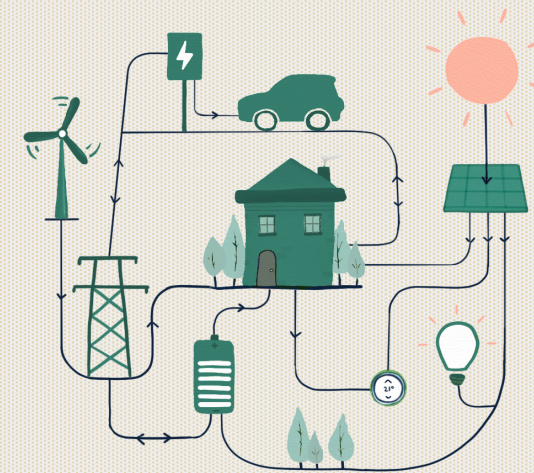
We've joined forces with Keep Wales Tidy to support **'Not up my street'** a new national campaign to tackle Fly-tipping. Fly-tipping in Wales has been on the rise in recent years, and it has a devastating impact on the environment and our local communities. Whilst illegally dumped rubbish looks bad, it is also dangerous and expensive to remove.



The nationwide campaign is being run as part of Caru Cymru (a Welsh phrase meaning 'Love Wales') – an inclusive movement led by Keep Wales Tidy and councils to inspire people to take action, and care for the environment

The Council works to improve homes across Blaenau Gwent with the aim of increasing energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty.

Making homes more energy efficient helps to tackle the climate emergency and also helps people living in poverty save money on energy bills.



The current gross replacement value of the Highway Network is estimated at

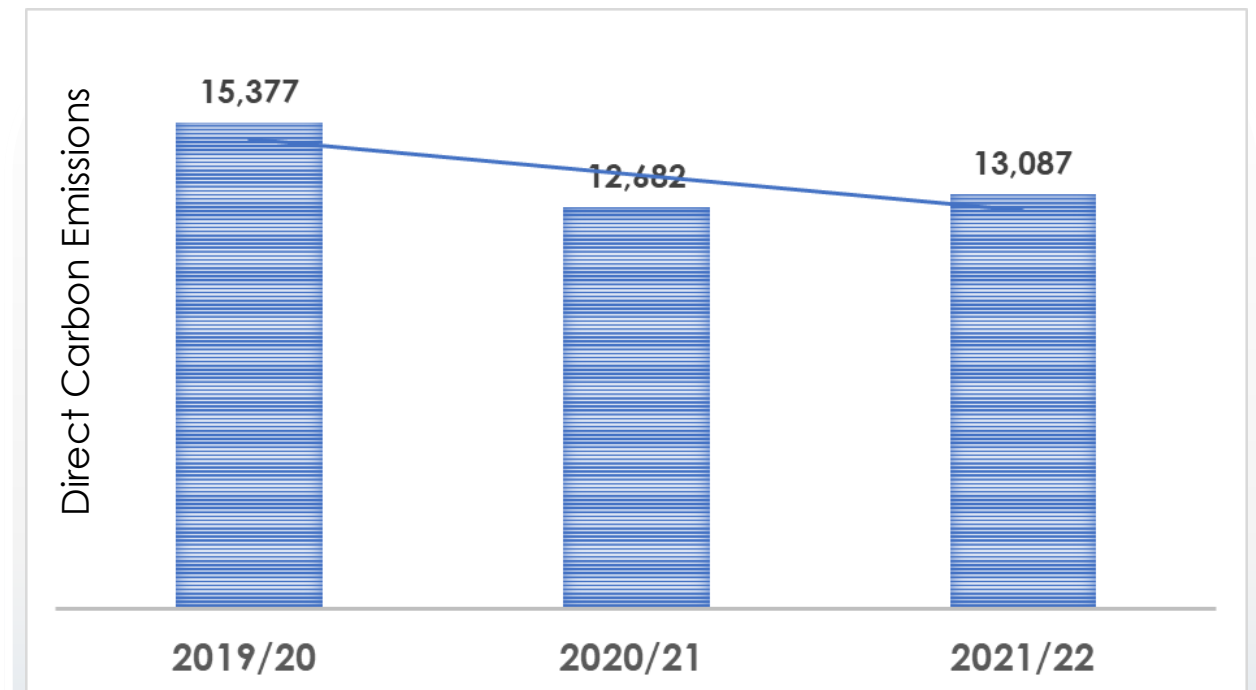
£1.093 billion

From 2017 to 2022 a total of **£4.75 million** was spent on our road network

As part of the programme of work **103 residential highways were resurfaced** along with priority works to the A and B classified road network.

The overall percentage of poor condition unclassified roads before the programme started was 17% and after the had dropped to 11.4%

BLAENAU GWENT CARBON FOOTPRINT - tonnes CO₂e/year



Change from Base Year Change from Last Year

↓ **-15%**

↑ **3%**



Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities



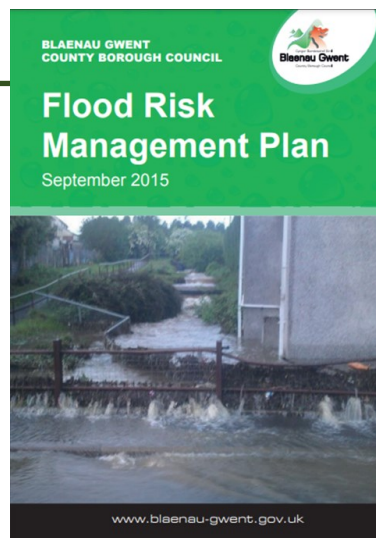
Resilient Greater Gwent project Nature Recovery Action Plan .



The Council takes part in regional initiatives like **Resilient Greater Gwent** which collaborates to support ecology, deal with invasive species, and grow sustainable communities which brings together all the components of environmental resilience; and **Nature Isn't Neat** – which alters verge grassland management to encourage pollinators for ecological improvement. School involvement is key in these initiatives and over

1100 school children have benefited

from being involved in understanding natural resource management workshops.



Progress continues to deliver the Councils

Flood Management Plan

and natural flood risk management continues .

Other works to support this during the period include:-



Work with schools has continued in respect of the Keep Wales Tidy "**Spring Clean**" Initiative with **30 workshops** being held over the period. There are over 400 volunteers on the Councils records, for community litter picks and although not all active at any one time they have together collected **2,471 bags** of **general waste** and **248 bags** of **recycling** was collected over **a number of Litter** pick sessions

New drainage to alleviate flooding has been completed at Newchurch Rd / Beaufort Terrace Roundabout.

Investigations relating to flood incidents and requests for assistance ongoing at Pantypwlyn Rd, Reservoir Rd, and Brynithel Estate.

Ongoing Schemes include Glanfrwyd Avenue, Ebbw Vale, culvert renewal (waiting for commencement date). Trash screen renewal at Newchurch Rd. (waiting for commencement date).



Wind Generation

Projects are ongoing. A planning application has been submitted for the installation of a wind turbine at Silent Valley former landfill site. The application is being considered by Planning Officers and will go through the normal determination process. Work will be undertaken on a business case for investment alongside the planning process. If planning consent is achieved the Council will be asked to consider a business case for investment.



Hydro Generation - Initial

investigation and feasibility studies for small scale hydro generation opportunities within the wards of Cwm and Llanhilleth presented two sites with some potential for hydro generation. These were presented to Scrutiny and Cabinet for consideration and it was determined that the potential returns and payback were not sufficiently positive for the projects to be developed further at this time.

Funding is being sought to further develop the feasibility of a hydro generation scheme at Silent Valley. If the funding is secured work will be undertaken to investigate the option to utilise hydro generation to power electric pumps.

IMPROVING OUTCOMES



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



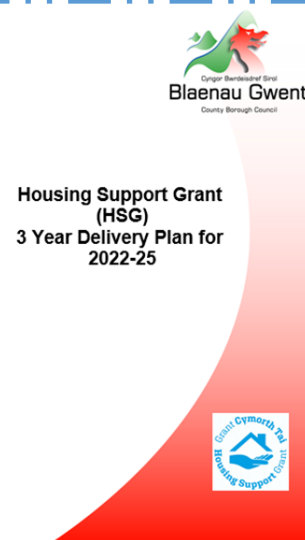
The Council has agreed a budget for 2023/24, and is planning to invest a total of **£182million** into providing services for the people of Blaenau Gwent. Significant budget gaps remain to be addressed during the year in preparation for 2024/25 onwards

At Quarter 4 Blaenau Gwent had **45 data breaches**. This is **higher than the previous 12 month period** which was 37 data breaches in total. No pattern or single cause for this increase as been identified but this will **continue to be monitored**.

Women and men are paid equally for doing equivalent jobs across the Council, with a predominantly female **workforce (77.3% female, 22.7% male)**, occupying a high percentage of jobs across all four pay quartiles. Furthermore, our gender pay gap is significantly lower than the national UK average

Key Activities

Following a detailed analysis of available systems and procurement process a new planning system has now been secured which enables us to have a web presence where the public can view and comment on planning applications online. Customers can also book Building Regulations appointments online. By having a web presence we improve our customer services and can streamline processes more effectively.



Development of a Strategic document and action plan assists the Council to transition to a Homeless Rapid Re-Housing Approach. **Rapid Rehousing** is a recognised approach which ensures that anyone experiencing homelessness can move into a settled home as quickly as possible, rather than staying in temporary accommodation for long periods of time.

Members have been involved in the council position in relation to Homelessness and the Housing Waiting List.

6,132 customers

have been **supported** face to face in our **Community Hubs** across the borough since April 2022.

Below are our most popular queries we receive day to day in Hubs

Benefits queries	1005
Blue Badges	937
Bus Passes	402
Council Tax queries	616
Cost of Living Support	1924
Discretionary Assistance Fund Application	134
Food Bank Referrals	213
Fuel Bank Vouchers	586
Housing queries	103
Waste and Recycling	242

Blaenau Gwent Community Hubs



Blaenau Gwent Community Hubs offer residents easy access to services in local communities operating out of town centre libraries.

Services Available include:

- Council Tax and Non-Domestic rates information and advice.
- Benefits information and advice including Universal Credit, Council Tax reduction, free school meals, school clothing grants and benefit overpayments.
- Apply for a Blue Badge.
- Make bulky waste bookings, get waste/recycling timetables, make a booking at a HWRC site and order new recycling receptacles.
- Pick up waste bags - including dog waste, food waste and hygiene waste
- Requests for information on many other Council services.
- Offering help and guidance on many other organisations.

Opening Times:

Location	Opening Hours	Day
Abertillery Library	9am - 5pm Tuesday, Thursday & Friday Closed: 1pm - 2pm 10am - 5pm Wednesday Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday
Brynmaur Library	9am - 5pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday
Ebbw Vale Library	9am - 5pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday
Tredgar Library	9am - 5pm Monday, Tuesday & Friday Closed: 1pm - 2pm 10am - 5pm Wednesday Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday
Blaina Library	9:30am - 5pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Monday
Cwm Library	9:30am - 5pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Thursday
Llanhilleth Institute	10am - 5pm Closed: 1pm - 2pm	Wednesday

For further information visit your local Community Hub or call 01495 311556. Website: www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

A Flying Start project and a 'Ti a Fi' group has been established which will promote the **Welsh Language** to mother and babies. The purpose of the project is to **provide younger generations an opportunity to play and learn a new language** before attending school whilst raising the importance of early years education and the Welsh Language.



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

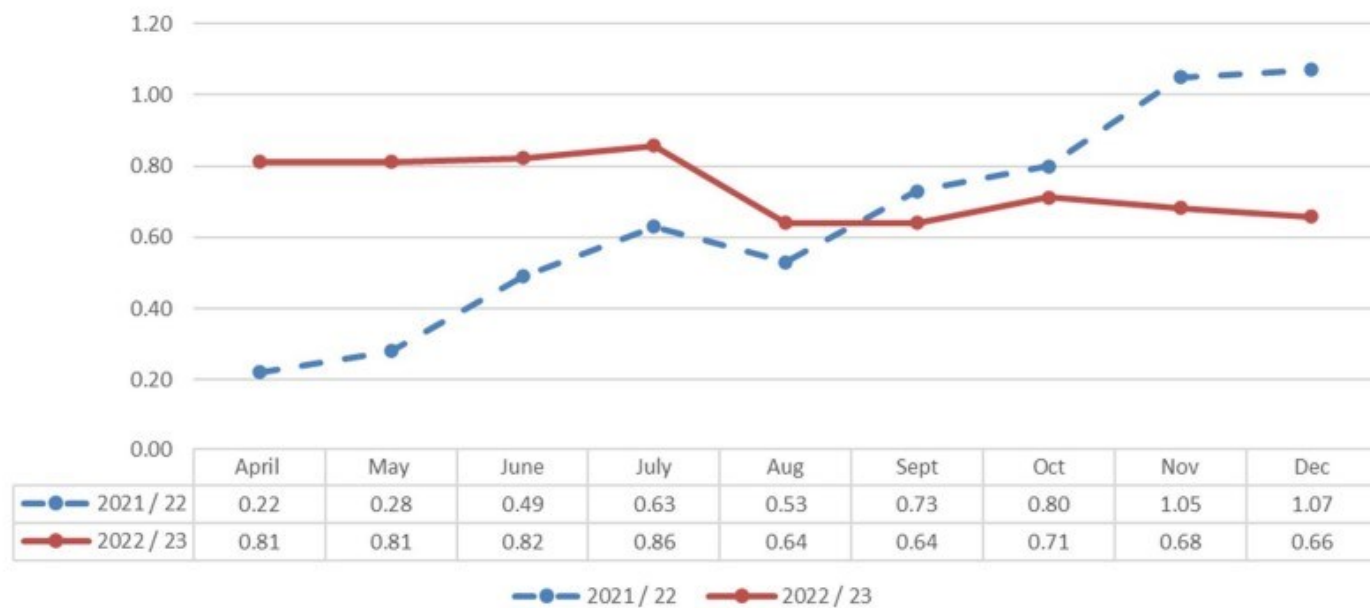


Council staff sickness absences have risen from 11.67 in 2020/21 to 16.74 in 2021/22. Even when removing absences due to Covid-19, the figures rose from 9.98 to 14.2, above the council's target of 10 days per full-time member of staff. (FTE)

As at quarter 3 the cumulative outturn for council staff sickness absences stands at 11.98 (10.38 excluding Covid absences) well above the target figure for this period of 7.50

MONTHLY ABSENCE STATISTICS BY DIRECTORATE

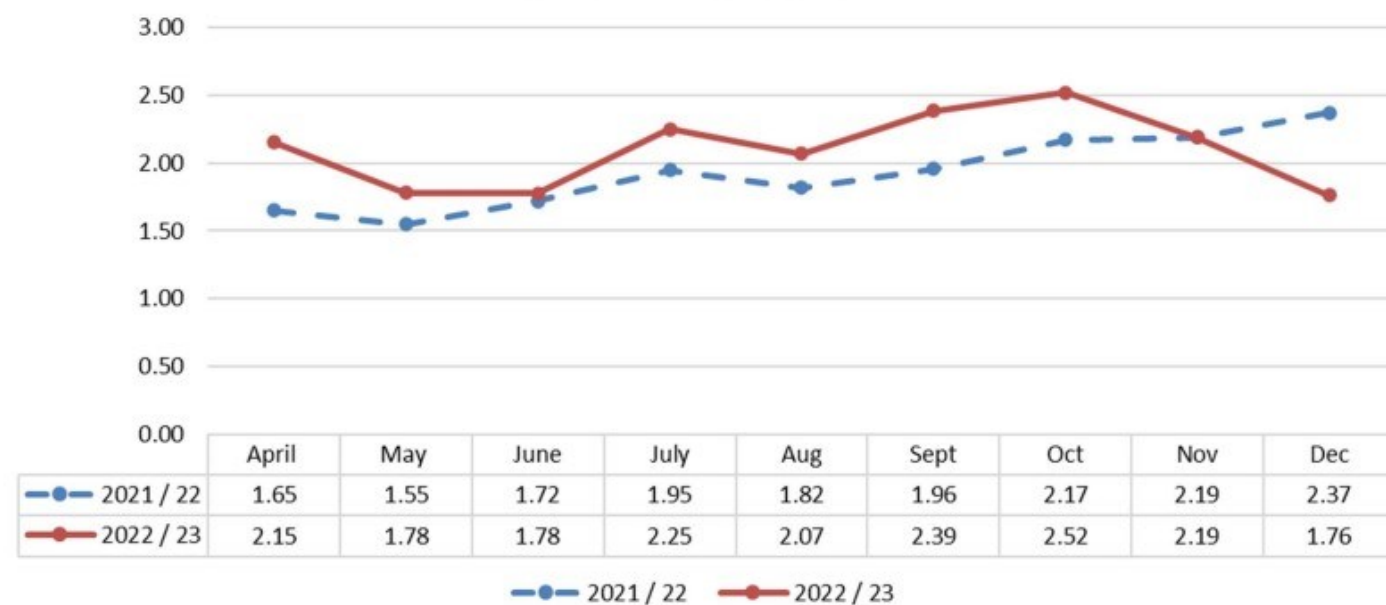
Corporate Services Directorate



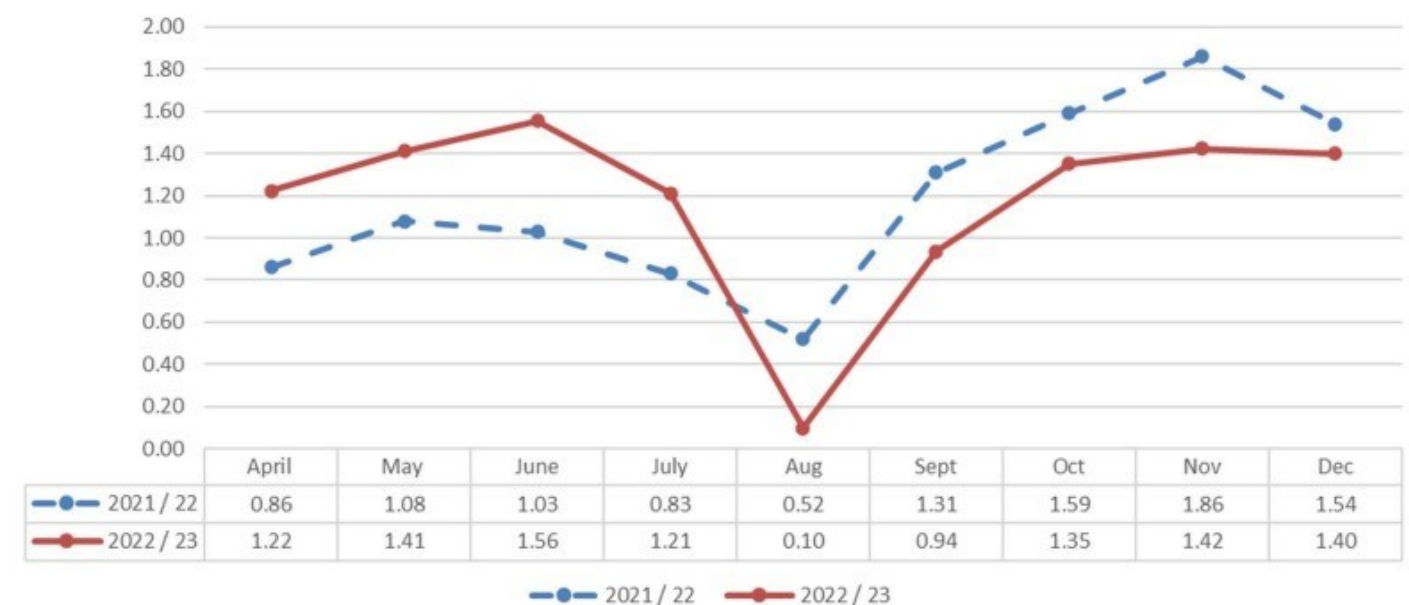
Regeneration & Community Services Directorate



Social Services Directorate



Education Directorate (inc. Schools)





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



Our Strategic Equality Annual Plan has been published detailing progress towards delivery of the plan.

This can be accessed via the following link:-

<http://cc-mgov-01/documents/s13784/CO2303D17%20-%20Report%20meeting%20requirements%20of%20the%20Equalities%20Act.pdf?LLL=0>

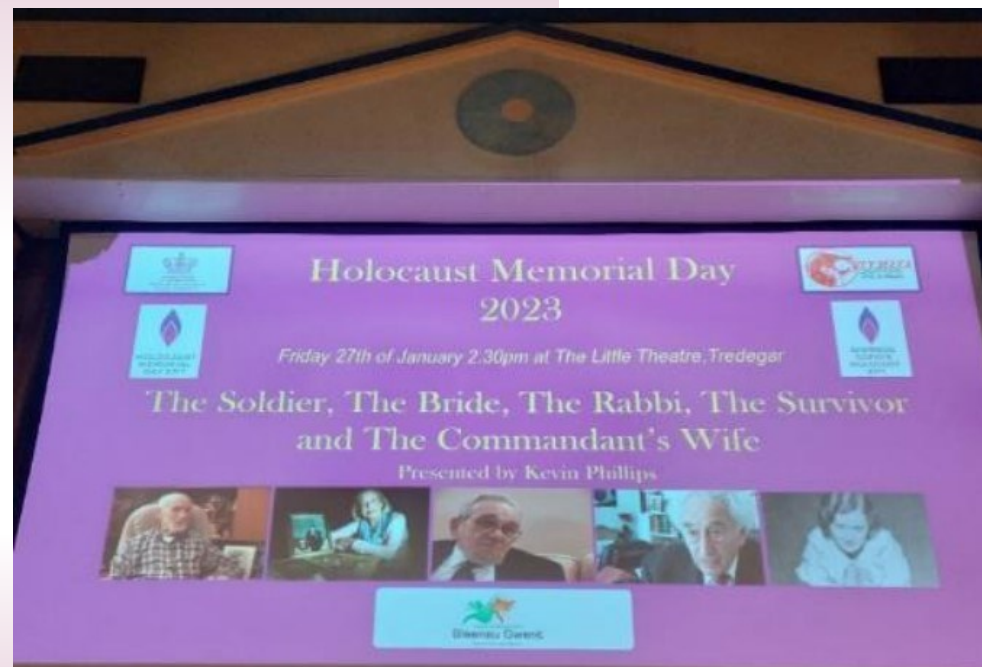
The Council, along with our partners across Gwent through our Public Services Board, are working towards becoming a **Marmot Region** that aims to **tackle and reduce inequalities**, via the Marmot principles to:

- Give every child the best start in life
- Enable all children, young people, and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
- Create fair employment and good work for all
- Ensure a healthy standard of living for all
- Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
- Strengthen the role and impact of ill-health prevention
- Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together
- Create fair employment and good work for all
- Tackle racism, discrimination, and their outcomes



Council unanimously agreed to award Eva Clarke the Freedom of the Borough, the highest accolade the can the Council can bestow. Eva Clarke was born in a concentration camp and was one of only three babies that survived. Eva is also the first woman to receive the Freedom of the Borough in Blaenau Gwent.

Eva has worked so hard over the years to ensure the stories of those survivors have been told, ensuring their memories live on and what they endured is never forgotten. Eva has strong links with South Wales, and Blaenau Gwent particularly. The award ceremony took place in March 2023.



Elected Member Training – This reporting year coincides with a new Council following the local election held in May 2022. To support all elected members, both new and returning, a **Member Induction Programme** was put in place. One of the core courses was on Equality and Diversity. The training was co-delivered by an equality and diversity specialist company, Red Shiny Apple, and a representative from Victim Support. The training focused on giving elected members an understanding of the legal responsibilities in relation to Equality and Welsh Language. It provided an overview of the Council's equality and diversity policies which promote our PSED commitments (for example, the Integrated Impact Assessment). The session also focused specifically on hate crime and equality issues for people with protected characteristics. We also encourage our elected members to consider e-modules available online developed by the WLGA which further support them to understand their duties.



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



Progress continues to be made with both internal and external partners to **build digital innovation** into how we plan and deliver services. The focus remains building services around the user. The organisation is now exploring how digital solutions can form part of that, for the benefit of residents and the organisation. This work **supports the commitment to decarbonisation** as well as the potential for avoiding cost or realising efficiencies. External partners and **projects include the WLGA digital transformation fund, where Blaenau Gwent are leading on a project looking at how people access our services and how we can improve,** as well as being involved in a number of projects on the programme. A key focus of this area of work is understanding barriers to digital participation within our communities and developing support for those who wish to improve their digital skills

An external review of customer experience and access has been undertaken and findings will be presented at the end of the year. This will inform the organisational approach and the customer services strategy. Work included mapping the customer journey as they accessed council services, interaction with a sample of residents who had recently utilised council services, and meetings with staff including in the community hubs to see how arrangements work in practice.

The Budget for 2023/24, has been agreed following widespread engagement with residents on savings ideas and spending priorities.

The Council had earlier warned of difficult decisions about services following its financial settlement from the Welsh Government, which, at 6.5%, is significantly below the all Wales increase of 7.9%. Like all organisations, the Council is facing some well-publicised financial pressures, despite increased funding from Welsh Government to almost £140 million. These pressures include the global pandemic, cost pressures, rising inflation, soaring energy and fuel costs and social care demands.

As a result, the funding gap for next year's Budget is £ 6.6 million. Council Leader, Cllr Steve Thomas, said councillors had listened to and considered residents' concerns about savings proposals when preparing to debate and set the Council budget.

A range of savings, efficiencies and income-generating projects worth just over £3million was agreed upon at the meeting to close the budget gap, as well as a draw on reserves of £ 4.3 million. A number of proposals which would have affected frontline services valued by residents were rejected by councillors.

Schools in the borough are to receive a 4.2% uplift in funding after councillors voted to increase this to take into account the cost pressures they face as they recover from the pandemic.

A 3.45% increase in Council Tax was also agreed upon.

Significant budget gaps remain to be addressed during the year in preparation for 2024/25 onwards.





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



The Authority's reserves have improved over the last few years.

In order to balance the 2023/2024 budget, a net draw from reserves of £4.3M is required. Reliance on the use of reserves to balance the budget in future years will impact on the financial sustainability of the Council. To mitigate this further, strategic business reviews will be developed and implemented to support a balanced budget moving forward. The use of reserves will be monitored and reviewed during the financial year in order to ensure that they are maintained as a sustainable level in the medium term.

The following saving proposals were **agreed**:

- Growth Strategy – Housing - £150,000.
- Review of Fees & Charges for income generating services across the Council - £100,000.
- Reduction in the Transformation Fund - £270,995.
- [Removal of Commercial and Contract Management Budget - £271,000.](#)
- Removal of Additional Pension Costs Budget - Aneurin Leisure Trust - £152,000.
- Third Party Spend (Establish a Professional Buying Team) - £396,550.
- Review of Telephony - £48,000.
- [Review of Electronic Document Management & Retention System \(EDRM\) - £104,000.](#)
- Members Remuneration – £50,000.
- General Offices Income Generation - £60,000.
- Members Grants (Special Levy) £8,910.
- Prevention & Early Intervention - Establishment of MYST Team - Invest to Save Scheme - £416,000.
- Reduction in Legal Fees Budget (Children's Social Services) - £175,000.
- Utilisation of the Children & Communities Grant - £21,025.
- [Review of Provider Manager Capacity \(Supported Living and Augusta / Community Options\) - £25,000.](#)
- Reduction in Community Options (day services bases) - £143,170.
- Reduction in Transport at Community Options - £58,200.
- Closure of Mechanical Link - £41,000.
- Regeneration Income – £30,000.
- Removal of Dog Waste Bag Provision - £14,596.
- [Move to Fortnightly Collection for Green Waste - £75,000.](#)
- Industrial Units - £100,000.
- Review of SLA Contracts - £20,000.
- Review of Operational Buildings - £250,000.
- Commercial Activity & Investment - £50,000

The above proposals totalled £3.03m.

Council Tax increase of 3.45%. The total use of reserves would amount to **£4.3m.**

The following budget proposals were **not agreed**:

- Home to School Transport Service Review.
- Aneurin Leisure Trust Management Fee – Review of Service Provision.
- Move to 4 Weekly Refuse Collection.
- Closure of all Play Areas.
- Reduction in Street Cleansing Provision.
- Reduction in Street Lighting Provision.
- Public Toilet Provision - Withdraw Funding.
- Waste - Closure / Part Closure of HWRC's.
- Waste - Reduction in Recycling Rounds.
- Removal of School Crossing Patrollers.
- Removal of Match Funding re: Subsidised Bus Service.
- Discontinuation of Pest Control Treatment Service.
- Cease Support for Armistice Parades.
- Reduction in Enforcement Wardens.
- Income Generation - Cwrt Mytton.
- Capping of Community Domiciliary Care High-Cost Packages.
- Closure of Supported Living Bungalow – Reducing from 4 to 3.
- Income Generation - Hydrotherapy Pool (Bert Denning).
- Outsource / Closure of Cwrt Mytton.
- Review of In-House Domiciliary Care Service and Potential Externalising of Extra Care.
- The Leader of the Council further proposed 4.2% increase in the Individual Schools Budget (ISB).



CONTACT DETAILS

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

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Ebbw Vale
NP23 6AA

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www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol

Blaenau Gwent

County Borough Council

