

DRAFT AGENDA

ID	2289
Committee	Pwyllgor Craffu Trosolwg Corfforaethol
Date	16/07/2021
Attendees	<p>Cynghorwyr Stewart Healy (Cadeirydd)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr Martin Cook (Is-gadeirydd)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr Peter Baldwin (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr Garth Collier (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr Malcolm Cross (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr Gareth A. Davies (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr D. Lyn Elias (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr John Hill (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr Julie Holt (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr Hedley McCarthy (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr Clive Meredith (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorydd John P. Morgan (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr Greg Paulsen (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr Tommy Smith (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Cynghorwyr Stephen Thomas (Aelod Pwyllgor)</p> <p>Michelle Morris (Swyddog)</p> <p>Damien McCann (Swyddog)</p> <p>Richard Crook (Swyddog)</p> <p>Rhian Hayden (Swyddog)</p> <p>Lynn Phillips (Swyddog)</p> <p>Clive Rogers (Swyddog)</p> <p>Bernadette Elias (Swyddog)</p> <p>Andrew Parker (Swyddog)</p> <p>Gemma Wasley (Swyddog)</p> <p>Liz Thomas (Swyddog)</p> <p>Gwasanaethau Democraataidd (Notify)</p> <p>Leeann Turner (Secretary)</p> <p>Pob Cynghorydd (Notify)</p> <p>Louise Bishop (Notify)</p> <p>Sean Scannell (Notify)</p> <p>Steve Berry (Swyddog)</p> <p>Andrea Jones (Swyddog)</p>

Item ID	4790
Item Title	Cyfieithu ar y Pryd
Summary	Mae croeso i chi ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg yn y cyfarfod, mae angen o leiaf 3 diwrnod gwaith o hysbysiad ymlaen llaw os dymunwch wneud hynny. Darperir gwasanaeth cyfieithu ar y pryd os gwneir cais.

Item ID	4791
Item Title	Ymddiheuriadau
Summary	Derbyn ymddiheuriadau.

Item ID	4792
Item Title	Datganiadau Buddiant a Goddefebau
Summary	Ystyried unrhyw ddatganiadau buddiant a goddefebau a wnaed.

Item ID	4795
Item Title	Amser Cyfarfodydd y Dyfodol
Summary	Ystyried amser cyfarfodydd y dyfodol.

Item ID	4793
Item Title	Cofnodion Pwyllgor Craffu Trosolwg Corfforaethol
Summary	Derbyn cofnodion y cyfarfod o'r Pwyllgor Craffu Trosolwg Corfforaethol a gynhaliwyd ar 16 Ebrill 2021. (Dylid nodi y cyflwynir y Cofnodion er pwyntiau cywirdeb yn unig).

Item ID	5046
Item Title	Blaennraglen Gwaith 2021-22 Arfaethedig y Pwyllgor Craffu
Summary	Ystyried yr adroddiad..

Item ID	5048
Item Title	Strategaeth Gweithlu 2021-2026
Summary	Ystyried adroddiad y Pennaeth Datblygu Sefydliadol.

Item ID	5047
Item Title	Adroddiad Cyllid a Pherfformiad Diwedd y Flwyddyn 2020/21
Summary	Ystyried adroddiad y Rheolwr Gwasanaeth Perfformiad a Democrataidd.

Item ID	5129
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Item Title	Diwygio Polisi Isafswm Darpariaeth Refeniw
Summary	Ystyried adroddiad y Prif Swyddog Adnoddau.

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16TH APRIL, 2021

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S. HEALY (CHAIR)

Councillors M. Cook

P. Baldwin

J.C. Morgan (sub for Cllr M. Cross)

G.A. Davies

L. Elias

W. Hodgins (sub for Cllr J. Hill)

J. Holt

H. McCarthy

C. Meredith

B. Summers (sub for Cllr J.P. Morgan)

G. Paulsen

T. Smith

S. Thomas

AND: Corporate Director of Social Services
Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services
Interim Chief Officer Commercial
Chief Officer Resources
Head of Organisational Development
Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change
Press & Publicity Officer
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

WITH: Mr. D. Rees, Unison

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>An apology for absence was received from Councillor G. Collier.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>CORPORATE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Minutes of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 5th March, 2021.</p> <p>A Member advised that he had not received a response to the request he made at the last meeting. The Member was disappointed that the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services had not responded to his request and felt that it was unacceptable.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services apologised to the Member and advised that he would contact him direct at a mutually convenient time as it was information outside of the report presented at the last meeting.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	

No. 5

ACTION SHEET – 5TH MARCH, 2021

The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee held on 5th March, 2021 was submitted; whereupon:-

CCTV

A Member asked when the report to review the equality of provision of CCTV could be expected. The Interim Chief Officer Commercial advised that data would be gathered over a period of time and needed to include intelligence gained from meetings with Members. These findings would then be presented as part of the annual monitoring report.

The Member felt that these issues needed to be addressed sooner rather than later as communities needs continually change.

The Interim Chief Officer Commercial advised that a period of monitoring before a progress/update report could be presented.

The Member reiterated that Nantyglo Ward had no cameras and therefore he felt it was important to this Ward that updates are more regular than annually.

Another Member concurred with the concerns raised and advised that Members wanted to see progress. The Member added that other local authorities in Gwent had direct links to the Cloud and therefore Police had footage as it happened and this was what was required by residents and Members. It would demonstrate the Council working in partnership with the Police to assure our residents are safe.

The Interim Chief Officer Commercial advised that following further contact with the PCC their position remained unchanged there was no funding available. The Member noted the benefits of being linked to the Cloud, however if there were no cameras in certain locations then there would be no benefit to those areas. The Member looked forward to future reports to monitor progress of this matter.

The Committee AGREED that the action sheet be noted.

No. 6	<p><u>CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY – QUARTERLY UPDATE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Chief Officer Commercial.</p> <p>The Interim Chief Officer Commercial advised that the report provided progress as at Quarter 4 against the Corporate Communications Strategy. The Interim Chief Officer spoke to the report and advised that the pandemic had resulted in the delivery of the strategy being entirely focused on the communication related to Covid-19. The importance of digital and social media became even more significant during the pandemic to ensure our communities were kept informed.</p> <p>It was noted that the Corporate Communications Team was a key member of the Gwent Local Resilience Forum Warning and Informing Group. The Group was responsible for aligning communications and communicating key information to the residents of Gwent during the pandemic. The Interim Chief Officer Commercial noted the importance of the Team ensuring a consistent approach between local partners, PHW and Welsh Government. The continually changing nature of the Pandemic had required a constant flow of information and which needed to be clear and effective as well as coordinated between all sectors.</p> <p>The Interim Chief Officer Commercial further outlined the aims of the Communication Plan in respect of the Covid-19 response as detailed in the report.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee considered the Quarter 4 (January to March 2021) update against the Communication Strategy prior to it being presented to the Executive Committee.</p>	
No. 7	<p><u>COMMERCIAL STRATEGY QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Chief Officer Commercial.</p>	

The Interim Chief Officer Commercial spoke to the report which outlined Quarter 4 of the Commercial Strategy. The Interim Chief Officer advised that the Council's commercial activities were driven by the ambitions as detailed in the Strategy. The pandemic continued to have an impact on the delivery of the Strategy, however substantial progress had been made in Quarter 4 and referred Members to the key activity which was summarised in the report in line with the Council's key themes and ambitions.

The following questions were raised at this juncture and responded to accordingly:-

Strategic Commissioning and Commercial Board – it was confirmed that the Board was made up of the Corporate Leadership Team, Legal, Resources and Procurement officers.

Welsh Government Digital Democracy Fund – it was informed that the fund was in relation to user research with 16 to 25 year olds to gain an understanding of how young people access the democracy and obtain feedback on their experiences.

Contact Centre – concerns were raised around the Contact Centre, particularly 'Out of Hours Service' being sourced outside of Blaenau Gwent as it was important that operators knew the local area. It was also asked that if there are any changes that Elected Members be informed.

An Officer confirmed that a local based service provision would be pursued. The Officer further advised that a number of actions were being taken forward with SRS to address issues raised.

Closure of the Civic Centre – concerns were raised around the services offered at the Civic Centre via the Receptionist and asked if these services, such as Blue Badge applications would be available at the Community Hubs.

The Interim Chief Officer Commercial advised that all these aspects of the services available at the Civic Centre are being looked at in order to understand the needs of the customer. The data would be collected and communicated to Members to ensure they are informed accordingly.

Bilingual Contact Centre Message – it was advised that residents had raised concerns with Members that Welsh was first for the Contact Centre greeting. It was a long message and in some cases costly to the resident. A Member asked if the English could be first, which was practice in some other local authorities.

The Interim Chief Officer Commercial reminded Members that the Council had an obligation to the Welsh Language Act and advised that this request could be investigated, however it was important that the Council operated within their responsibilities to the Act.

Calls Times to the Contact Centre – in response to concerns raised in relation to the cost of the sometimes lengthy wait times to the Contact Centre, the Interim Chief Officer Commercial advised that waiting times are monitored as part of the service performance arrangements and improvements such as a que system would be developed.

Officers Mobile Numbers – due to agile working arrangements it was pointed out that some officers were hardly in the office and had been provided with mobile phones. A Member asked if these mobile phone numbers could be issued to Members as it was important they remain accessible to Members.

The Interim Chief Officer Commercial advised that office numbers should be re-directed to officers mobile phones.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely the Quarter 4 progress update against the Commercial Strategy was considered prior to the report being presented to Executive Committee.

No. 8	<u>TEST TRACE AND PROTECT SERVICE</u>	
	<p>Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Chief Officer Commercial and the Service Manager Customer Experience and Transformation.</p> <p>The Interim Chief Officer Commercial provided an overview of the report and invited the Service Manager Customer Experience and Transformation to provide an update on the current position and performance of the service as detailed in the report. It was noted that performance of Gwent TTP service as a region was in the top quartile.</p> <p>A Member advised that he had requested this report as he had been monitoring the report issued by Monmouthshire County Council who provided these details on a Ward by Ward basis. The Member appreciated the excellent work of the NHS and the Local Authority, however as an Elected Member he felt that this level of detail was needed for Blaenau Gwent. It was hoped that Covid-19 numbers would now continue to reduce and thanked the Officers for an informative report.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely accepted the progress update.</p>	
No. 9	<u>AGILE WORKING POLICY</u>	
	<p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development.</p> <p>The Head of Organisational Development presented the report which provided Members with the opportunity to scrutinise, challenge and make suggestions on the proposed Agile Working Policy for the Council's workforce further to the report that was approved at Council on the 25th March, 2021 on the New Council Operating Model & Working Arrangements</p>	

The Officer advised that the introduction of a new model of agile working would bring modern working practices, enhance employees' working experience, maximise performance and productivity and realise financial gains. The Agile Working Policy being key to delivering the future working model and linked to the Council's vision for sustainable development including sustainable economic growth and decarbonisation.

The Head of Organisational Development further spoke to the report and noted the responsibilities as detailed in the Policy. The Officer noted that Unison, GMB and Unite trade unions had all been fully engaged in the development of the and the draft Agile Working Policy.

The Draft Policy had been sent to trade unions for formal consultation and two requests had been received from Unison for consideration, as follows:-

- Unison would like to see a £16 allowance for Agile workers not £12. The Corporate Leadership Team discussed this proposal and support a figure of £15.60 to recommend to Members for their consideration (pro rata figure which would be fair to all workers); and
- all current employees that are designated as home or agile workers be able to utilise an allowance of up to £200 to cover the cost of a chair and desk that would be able to fit in within the home environment. The allowance to be used with an approved council supplier. The Corporate Leadership Team support the choice for the workforce from approved suppliers/including recycled equipment. Unison also requested that any future workforce (new recruits) be given the option of the allowance if they are paid scale 6 or below.

The Head of Organisational Development referred Members to the options and noted the preferred option.

The Officer invited questions/comments from the Members at this juncture.

A Member asked that following approval of the New Working Arrangements which formulated this Policy had any members of staff left the Council sighting agile working as the reason.

The Member stated that he had made his point clear at the Council meeting and reiterated that he was totally against the new way of working at this time. The Member had many concerns which included employee's mental health. The last year during the pandemic had been horrendous which saw people confined to their homes. The Member wanted assurances from the Council that if an employee did not wish to work from home for a specific reason that this would be accommodated.

The Head of Organisational Development advised that as part of the Policy there were a number of documents to be completed with the employee and their manager as part of 1-2-1 consultation meetings to be undertaken. The individual's circumstances, their health and wellbeing and mental health would all be taken into account and if adjustments are to be made these would be put in place. The 1-2-1s would identify the individuals needs and agree an appropriate course of action or adjustment. Homeworking will not be forced on any member of the workforce.

The Head of Organisational Development said she was not aware that any members of staff had left the Authority because of plans for the New Council Operating Model.

The Member had hoped that all employees would be dealt with sympathetically.

The Member also noted the £15.60 put forward by the Corporate Leadership Team and proposed that the figure be rounded up to £16.00 in conjunction with the Trade Unions proposal.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Trade Union representative addressed the Committee. The representative welcomed the opportunity to attend the meeting to ensure that any misinformation could be clarified for Members. The Trade Union representative advised that staff and Elected Members had stepped up to the way in which the pandemic had seen the Council work from home and adjust to new technology in the past year.

The Trade Union representative advised that the option for home working had been raised by unions at the WLGA and at the Workforce Partnership for Wales. The work undertaken with the Council had been first class and the Council was now at an important stage in the process. It was added that as part of that work by the trade unions, a survey of 1000 people from across Wales was undertaken and this would be shared with staff shortly. The thinking and negotiating of the trade unions had been captured in the policy and advised that the £16.00 costs had been rounded up from the £15.60 put forward by CLT, however, the Trade Union representative confirmed that the £15.60 was in line with HMRC and based on the 3 days pro rata, therefore, the £15.60 was acceptable.

The Trade Union representative noted the comments raised by the Members and stated that no one would be forced to work from home. There could be a number of reasons for this in relation to mental health issues, the health and safety of the employee or an issue in terms of confidentiality within their home environment. Therefore, it was reiterated that no one would be would be forced to work from home and these assurances had been given by the Council.

With regard to 'office' furniture, the Trade Union representative appreciated that it would be beneficial to repurpose the office furniture currently used, however, we needed to be mindful that this furniture would be in employees' homes. There are some instances where that particular furniture may not fit the décor of the employee homes or be suitable for their home space, therefore on these occasions employees would be allowed to purchase their own furniture. The trade unions also felt it was important to provide an allowance to staff on a Scale 6 and new recruits who are lower paid to ensure our lowest paid workers are supported.

The Trade Union representative also suggested that consideration be given to mileage policy and it was put forward that mileage be claimed from the boundary of Blaenau Gwent and not their homes which would be a financial saving to the Council.

The Unison Representative informed that Blaenau Gwent was the first local authority in Wales to deliver on this Agile Working Policy and it was paramount that in order for it to be successful our staff needed to be supported. During the last year staff had to endure many hardships and needed to make decisions whether to feed their children or put on the heating, unfortunately these were the sacrifices of the cost of living for our lower paid staff. This was another reason for 1-2-1s with employees as any concerns would be addressed and the Trade Union representative reiterated that employees would be given a choice. There were employees who wanted to work from home as well as employees who do not want to work at home and both these options could be supported.

The Trade Union representative said that the Union supported the report progressing to Council. The staff had been working over a year with this uncertainty and it was important that such assurances are now given to staff.

The Chair invited questions/observations from Members at this juncture.

In response to concerns raised around the monies to be paid to staff as well as monies which could be claimed via the HMRC. The Chief Officer Resources advised that the budget implication was due to the payment the Council had proposed of £26.00 per month or £15.60 per month dependant whether staff were permanent home workers or agile respectively. If workers were in receipt of these allowances from the Council, then no claims can be made for tax relief from HMRC.

The Chief Officer Resources added that the Council would be responsible for the costs to be paid to staff.

It was further asked if employees needed to create office space in their homes would the Authority be in position to provide staff with a loan to undertake these adjustments, to allow, if needed, that additional space and/or confidentiality.

The Chief Officer Resources advised that this assistance had been considered, however the Council was not in position to offer significant loans to staff for changes to their properties or to purchase summer houses.

The Trade Union representative added that work across other authorities in Wales was currently being held up as not all local authorities wanted to provide an agile working allowance. It was felt that staff were saving on travelling expenses, therefore such payments are outweighed. It was felt that Blaenau Gwent Council was adjusting as an employer of choice and through the pandemic the Authority had realised that there was benefits from home working for our staff. The Unison Representative felt that the new working arrangements would be beneficial to the staff.

Further concerns were raised around home working and it was reiterated that staff would not be forced to work from home.

In terms of accommodating staff, it was confirmed that the Council was confident that staff who did not want to work from home could be accommodated in existing buildings.

A Member referred to Monmouthshire County Council who had proposed hybrid working arrangements and the Head of Organisational Development confirmed a hybrid worker was the same as an agile worker, working between home and office buildings.

Another Member welcomed the report and the joint working between the Council and trade unions to achieve these negotiations for the benefit of staff. The Member felt that the agile working arrangements was good news for the Authority and was satisfied that the Council's staff well-being had been considered. It was also excellent news that this Council was the first to achieve such a modern way of working.

A Member felt that there were areas missing from the Policy in relation to training and development of new employees, and possibly a period of time in the office before taking up position at home.

Also, the Member raised concerns around the recruitment of new staff, as an agile worker the person could reside anywhere and work from home. The Council was the largest employer in Blaenau Gwent and therefore it was important that local jobs be retained locally. A mileage stipulation for officers on a particular grade should also be considered for future applicants. It was proposed that there be a social clause applied to contracts that recruitment was made within about 30 miles of the Borough.

The Head of Organisational Development advised that there would be an engagement plan which included training and development programme which would run alongside this policy for leaders and the workforce. The induction programme across the Council would need to be reviewed not just in conjunction with the policy but also in line with the digital opportunities now available.

In terms of recruitment, it was reported that the majority of Council staff were frontline and school based staff. The agile and permanent home workers were only a fraction of the workforce.

The Head of Organisational Development advised that the mileage policy would be reviewed once the Agile Working Policy had been approved by full Council.

The Trade Union representative added that the Council was aware of the importance of retaining jobs locally and noted that during recent recruitment for the Track, Trace and Protect roles individuals were applying from Birmingham. The Trade Union representative was pleased to confirm that Blaenau Gwent took on board the 'local jobs for local people' and the majority of employees were from the local areas.

In response to a question raised in relation to staff being asked to clear their desks at the Civic Centre, it was reported that this had not been a formal instruction as there was agreed protocols in place for staff who wished to enter the Civic Centre.

In response to a question raised in relation to trade union involvement, it was confirmed that all unions had been consulted and the Unison Representative had been invited to speak on behalf of the Joint Trade Unions.

A Member asked if staff had been consulted if they were not in a union. It confirmed that staff had been communicated via the MD Message, updates from managers and would be individually consulted in the 1-2-1 engagement with managers and staff.

The Chair thanked the Trade Unions for their involvement and cooperation as well as officers for producing an excellent report. The Chair also expressed thanks to Mr. D. Rees for his presentation and response to questions raised by Members.

A Member pointed out that the Committee was making a recommendation to Council, however this would not prohibit further questioning at Council. The Member concurred with the Officer that the Policy was a live document and stated that views could change. The Member supported Option 2 in this instance notwithstanding things could change following consideration at Council.

A Member seconded Option 2, although taking into account young people's future within this Borough, the Member requested that Organisational Development give consideration to an employee local social clause as part of the recruitment process.

RESOLVED accordingly.

<p>It was further informed that £15.60 allowance was agreed following the explanation from the Unison Representative.</p>	
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<p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely the formal representations of the trade union was considered and amendments was suggested to the policy prior to presentation at Council.</p>	
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Agenda Item 6

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **16th July 2021**

Report Subject: **Proposed Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme 2021-22**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Nigel Daniels, Leader / Executive Member Corporate Services**

Report Submitted by: **Councillor Stewart Healy, Chair of Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
May 2021	27.5.21	06.07.21			16.07.21	Executive FWP – 16.06.21	Council FWP – 29.7.21	

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 To present the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Work Programme for 2021-22 (Appendix 1) and to seek approval from Committee.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 The Scrutiny Work Programmes are key aspects of the Council's planning and governance arrangements and support the requirements of the Constitution.
 - 2.2 The topics set out in the Forward Work Programme link to the strategic work of the Council as identified by the Council's Corporate Plan, agreed by the Council on 23rd July 2020, corporate documents and supporting business plans.
 - 2.3 The Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programmes are also aligned to the Governance and Audit Committee, Executive Committee and Council Forward Work Programmes.
 - 2.4 The Work Programme is a fluid document and there is flexibility to allow for regular review between the Chair and the Committee.
 - 2.5 The Work Programmes have been discussed with Chairs and Vice-Chairs of individual committees, prior to presentation to the respective scrutiny committees for consideration and approval.
3. **Options for Recommendation**
 - 3.1 The work programmes have been endorsed by the relevant departments of the Council.

3.2 **Option 1**

To agree the Forward Work Programme for the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee.

Option 2

To suggest any amendments prior to agreeing the Forward Work Programme.

**DRAFT Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme
2021/22**

Dates	Topic	Purpose	Lead	Executive / Council
Friday 16th July 2021 Deadline: 2nd July 2021	1. Joint Finance and Performance report	Performance Monitoring Members to receive the end of year report for 2020/21, for consideration.	Gemma Wasley	Executive 21 st July 2021
	2. Workforce Strategy	Pre Decision To consider the workforce strategy including change in circumstances following COVID and future working arrangements.	Andrea Prosser	Executive 21 st July 2021 Council 29 th July 2021
	3. Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Revision	Pre Decision To consider and recommend the revision policy for adoption by Council.	Rhian Hayden	Council

Dates	Topic	Purpose	Lead	Executive / Council
Friday 10 th September 2021	1. Counter Terrorism – Chanel Duties and Contest	Pre Decision Review of Local Authority Plan to implement responsibilities.	Bernadette Elias Andrew Parker	Executive
	2. Assessment of Performance	Performance Monitoring To consider the Assessment of performance against the Corporate Plan prior to approval by Council.	Gemma Wasley	Executive 22 nd September 2021 Council 30 th September 2021
	3. Treasury Management – Outturn 2020/21	Budget Monitoring Provides the Treasury Management out-turn position for the 2020/21 financial year, including details of all Treasury management activities undertaken during the year.	Rhian Hayden	Council 30.09.21
	4. Communications Strategy Quarterly Monitoring	Performance Monitoring To consider the performance of the Communication Strategy focus on the impact of the strategy during COVID19 Pandemic	Bernadette Elias	Executive 22.09.21
	5. Commercial Strategy Quarterly Monitoring	Performance Monitoring To consider performance of the Commercial Strategy, focus Strategic Commercial Board element. In depth look at each of the 5 elements	Bernadette Elias	Executive 22.09.21
	6. Review of staff attendance 2020/21, as at end of March 2021	Performance Monitoring To undertake an annual review of staff sickness absence.	Andrea Prosser	Executive Info Item
	7. CCTV	Performance Monitoring To consider the latest position in relation to CCTV.	Bernadette Elias	Executive 22.09.21
INFORMATION ITEMS				
	Welsh Language Annual Report	Information To receive the annual report.	Andrew Parker	Executive Info Item

Dates	Topic	Purpose	Lead	Executive / Council
Friday 22 nd October 2021	1. Welsh Language Promotion Strategy	Pre Decision Policy review and development.	Andrew Parker	Executive 10.11.21
	2. Recovery – Workforce	Performance Monitoring To ensure that Members are aware of arrangements to support the workforce recovery and renewal activity from the pandemic and to monitor progress.	Andrea Prosser	Executive 10.11.21
	3. Medium Term Financial Strategy / Bridging the Gap	Performance Monitoring To provide Members with an update on the MTFS / Bridging the Gap programme.	Rhian Hayden Bernadette Elias	Executive 10.11.21 Council 25.11.21
	4. Annual Health and Safety Report	Performance Monitoring To monitor the performance of the Annual Health and Safety report and to influence areas of focus.	Andrea Prosser	Executive Info Item

Dates	Topic	Purpose	Lead	Executive / Council
Friday 3rd December 2021	1. Communications Strategy Quarterly Monitoring	Performance Monitoring To consider the performance of the Communication Strategy focus on the impact of the strategy during COVID19 Pandemic	Bernadette Elias	Executive - 15.12.21
	2. Commercial Strategy Quarterly Monitoring	Performance Monitoring To consider performance of the Commercial Strategy, focus Strategic Commercial Board element. In depth look at each of the 5 elements	Bernadette Elias	Executive – 15.12.21
	3. Treasury Management – Mid-Year Review	Budget Monitoring To scrutinise the Treasury Management activities carried out by the Authority during the first half of the 2021/22 financial year.	Rhian Hayden	Council – 27.01.22
	4. Joint Finance and Performance report	Performance Monitoring Members to receive quarters 1 and 2 for consideration.	Gemma Wasley	Executive 15.12.21

Dates	Topic	Purpose	Lead	Executive / Council
Friday 4th February 2022	CCTV Annual Monitoring Performance reporting	Performance Monitoring Members to consider the annual report.	Andrew Parker	Executive 02.03.22
INFORMATION ITEMS				

	Information Management Monitoring Report	Information To provide information of progress against identified action on a half yearly cycle.	Rhian Hayden	Executive Information
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Dates	Topic	Purpose	Lead	Executive / Council
Friday 18th March 2022	1. Treasury Management – Strategy Statement 2022/23	Budget Monitoring To present the Treasury Management Strategy, Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy recommended for adoption in the 2021/22 financial year.	Rhian Hayden	Council by 31 March 2022
	2. Capital Strategy Review	Performance Monitoring To consider the implementation of the Capital Strategy 2021/22.	Rhian Hayden	Council by 31 st March 2022
	3. Strategic Equality Plan	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed of the progress made to date against the priorities within the SEP and approve actions moving forward.	Andrew Parker	Executive 27.04.21
	4. Joint Finance and Performance report	Performance Monitoring Members to receive quarter 3 for consideration.	Gemma Wasley	Executive 27.04.21

Dates	Topic	Purpose	Lead	Executive / Council
Friday 29 th April 2021	1. Recovery – Workforce	Performance Monitoring To ensure that Members are aware of arrangements to support the workforce recovery and renewal activity from the pandemic and to monitor progress.	Andrea Prosser	Executive FWP 2022/23
	2. Communications Strategy Quarterly Monitoring	Performance Monitoring To consider the performance of the Communication Strategy focus on the impact of the strategy during COVID19 Pandemic	Bernadette Elias	Executive FWP 2022/23
	3. Commercial Strategy Quarterly Monitoring	Performance Monitoring To consider performance of the Commercial Strategy, focus Strategic Commercial Board element. In depth look at each of the 5 elements	Bernadette Elias	Executive FWP 2022/23
	4. Progress of the Agile Working Policy	Performance Monitoring To consider progress of the Agile Working Policy.	Andrea Prosser	Executive – FWP 2022/23

Dates	Topic	Purpose	Lead	Executive / Council
Dates for Items TBC	Audit Wales Reporting	Performance Monitoring As required linked to Audit Wales Programme.	Various	Audit
	Global Resettlement Programme	Pre Decision To consider the new items of the Global Resettlement Programme.	Bernadette Elias	
	Corporate Joint Committees			

Member Briefing Sessions – Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee			
Date	Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer
Quarterly	Directorate Briefings	A closely focused directorate update session to provide information and detail on service areas in order to raise the interest and enthusiasm of members. This also provides a legitimate avenue to raise local issues outside of the scrutiny process.	All
September	Exiting the EU	To provide members an overview of the local consequences and opportunities of the Exiting the EU	Ellie Fry/David Arnold
Quarter 3 (Oct to Dec)	Armed Forces Covenant	To provide members with an overview on the legislative changes and requirements for the local authority in relation to the Armed Forces	Lisa Rawlings

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Agenda Item 7

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **16th July 2021**
Report Subject: **Workforce Strategy 2021-2026**
Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Nigel Daniels, Leader / Executive Member Corporate Services**
Report Submitted by: **Andrea J. Prosser – Head of Organisational Development**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
x	10.06.21 01.07.21	06.07.21			16.07.21	21.07.21	29.07.21	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to give Members of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee opportunity to scrutinise and challenge the draft Workforce Strategy 2021-2026 (Appendix 1).

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Council's Organisational Development Strategy 2015 -2020 had a strategic focus on preparing the Council and its workforce for transformation and change, and successfully promoted the 'one Council' approach, supported the transformation of the organisation in response to financial efficiency which included the review of services and the introduction of new and alternative service delivery models and workforce downsizing. Headline achievements of the Strategy are attached as appendix 2.
- 2.2 In March the Council agreed to introduce a new Council Operating Model and Working Arrangements the report is attached as appendix 3. This New Operating Model will introduce modern working practices, will seek to enhance employees' working experience, maximise performance and productivity and deliver the greatest value to the organisation, in terms of improving service delivery, as well as realising financial gains. The New Operating Model will also introduce new Community Hubs improving customer access to Council Services and develop the Democratic Hub at the Council's General Offices in Ebbw Vale.
- 2.3 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 Workforce Strategy is a 5-year strategy with an annual action plan for delivery.

The Strategy will cover all Council employees including school based staff appointed by governing bodies.

The Strategy clearly uses the Council's vision and organisational ambition and sets out:

- What the Council needs to look like
- Describe the Council's future service delivery model
- Outlines workforce priority outcomes for the next 5 years
- Includes the action plan for 2021/22

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1:** To support the proposed draft Workforce Strategy 2021 – 2026 to progress for endorsement at Council.

3.2 **Option 2:** Members to consider the draft Workforce Strategy 2021-2026 and make suggestions/amendments for improvement prior to progression to Council for endorsement.

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

4.1 **Corporate Plan Priorities**

The New Workforce Strategy aligns to the Corporate Plan and will support the delivery of priorities.

4.2 **Statutory Responsibilities**

The Workforce Strategy has been drafted in accordance with, and to comply with key legislations such as, the Equality Act 2010 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

4.3 **Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

The Workforce Strategy will promote and support workforce wellbeing.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 **Impact on Budget**

There is no impact on budget with the introduction of the new Workforce Strategy.

5.3 **Human Resources**

The workforce is critical and the most important the resource the Council has in delivering services to the community. This Workforce Strategy demonstrate the Councils commitment to its workforce and aims to create a good place to work – developing a workforce that feels connected to and can meet the current and future needs of our community is critical in the Council's ability to deliver ambitious outcomes for the County Borough of Blaenau Gwent.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

The Strategy contains data that gives a position in terms of the current workforce.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

Members of the public may be attracted to an employer that demonstrates strategic commitment in its workforce. The Strategy will support enhancing the reputation of the Council as an employer.

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

There has been engagement with the Wider Corporate Leadership Team and Elected Members in development of this 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 been taken on board and influenced the draft Workforce Strategy.

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

The Strategy is a 5-year commitment aiming to create a good place to work.

6.5 **Collaboration / partnership working**

Continued collaboration at a local, regional and national level to ensure that delivery actions in the Strategy are modern and in line with any legislative changes.

6.6 **Integration (across service areas)**

The Workforce Strategy will continue to promote a 'one Council' approach.

6.7 **EqIA**

The Workforce Strategy will actively promote equality of opportunity and diversity in the workforce and as an organisation.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

The Strategy will have an annual delivery plan and this will be monitored on an annual basis by the Corporate Management Team and Corporate Overview Scrutiny.

8. **Background Documents /Electronic Links**

Appendix 1 – Workforce Strategy 2021 – 2026

Appendix 2 – Organisational Development Strategy 2015 -2020 Headline Achievements

Appendix 3 - New Council Operating Model & Working Arrangements report to Council March 2021

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Workforce Strategy 2021 - 2026

*“Agile Services delivered
by an Agile Workforce”*



FOREWARD

This Workforce Strategy aims to build on existing good practice and continuing to promote the Council as a good place to work – developing a workforce that feels connected to and can meet the current and future needs of our community. The Council is the major employer in Blaenau Gwent and any action which impacts on the workforce will also directly impact the community and levels of aspiration, income and employment. It provides and commissions some of the most important services to the community, working with a range of other public, private and voluntary organisations in ensuring that public services are delivered to high standards.

The Workforce Strategy demonstrates the Council's commitment and investment in its workforce and wants staff to feel engaged and motivated so that the best services can be delivered to the residents of Blaenau Gwent.

There are clear drivers for change focussed on agility and sustainability by reducing environmental impact as well as property related costs that can be reinvested into front line services, improve resilience, organisational and individual outcomes, customer focus, and create a better work life and corporate social responsibility.

This is a five-year strategy focussed on the future, integrating the Council's vision, objectives, financial planning arrangements and improving the Council as an employer. This includes working with services to achieve ambitions for the community and schools to become sector leading.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we live, work and travel. Many of our people have worked away from the office during lockdown. This Strategy will support the workforce to transition from responding to the emergency situation and act as a key lever to facilitate culture change and continue with transformational change and performance improvement.



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Councillor Nigel Daniels
Leader of the Council

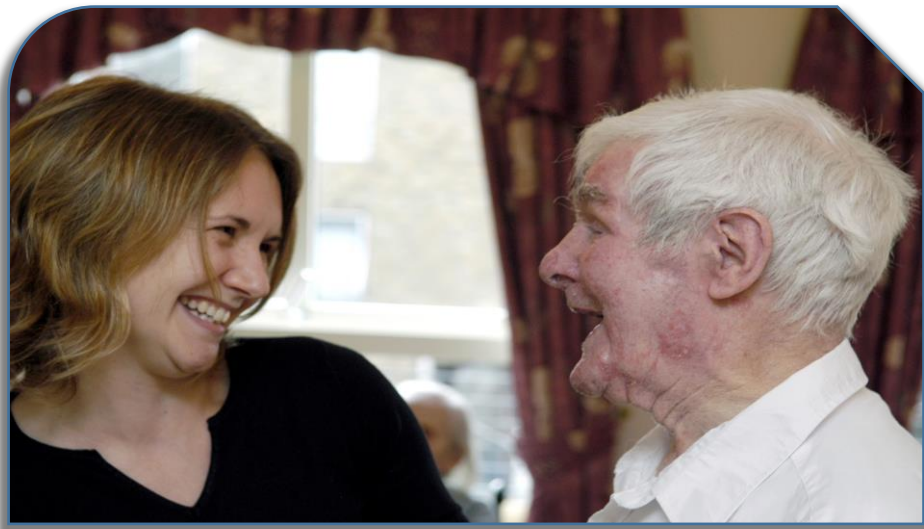


Handwritten signature of Michelle Morris in black ink.

Michelle Morris
Managing Director

AIMS OF THE STRATEGY


- The workforce voice will be heard and have influence in shaping the future of the Council
- The right people with the right skills, in the right place, at the right level and at the right cost
- An agile collaborative workforce delivering high quality services to the residents of Blaenau Gwent
- Safe working situations/environments and promotion of workforce health and well being
- The workforce demonstrates expected behaviours, standards and culture in line with the Council's values
- The workforce will be performance/outcome and results focussed with recognition of effort and accountability
- The workforce has the opportunity to develop and learn
- Promote diversity and equality



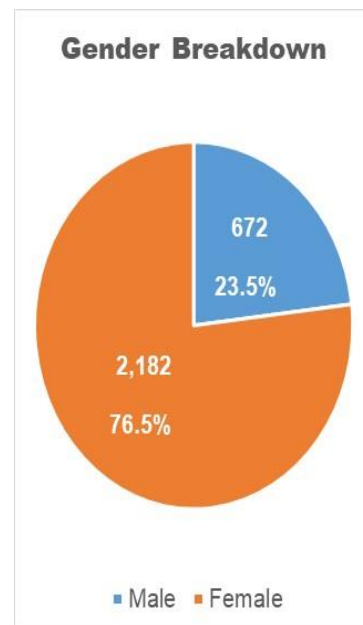
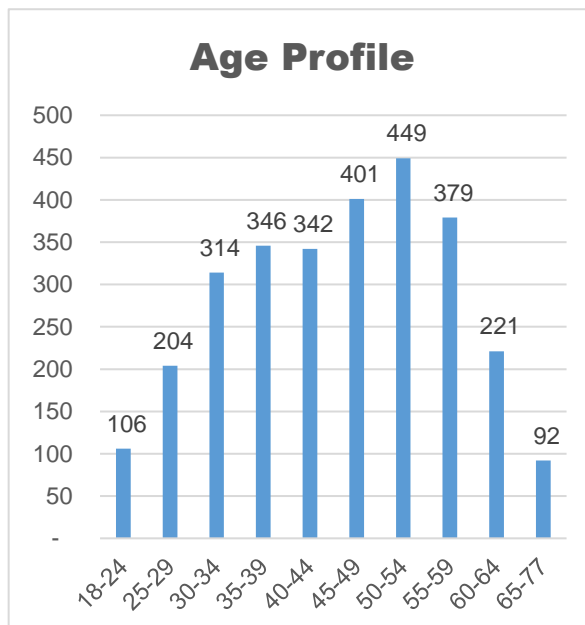
WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Blaenau Gwent serves a population of just under 70,000 with 62.1% of whom are of working age and 24.7% who are economically inactive. It is expected that funding will continue to be a challenge over the next 5 years, while demand for services and demographic pressures continues to increase. The Council has strived to realise efficiencies by for example; the introduction of a Commercial Strategy, financial efficiency, optimising income generation, redesigning services, reviewing service delivering models and reshaping the workforce. 2020/2021 has been a challenging year in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and continuing to deliver services to the residents of Blaenau Gwent.

What do we currently look like?

<p>2,854 employees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council: 1,648 Schools: 1,206 	<p>Low Gender Pay Gap Women's Hourly Rate is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.21% lower (mean) 2.84% lower (median) <p>Gender female bias 76.5% to 23.5%</p>	<p>Low level of diversity in the workforce:</p> <p>Ethnic Minority 0.96%</p> <p>Disability 1.38%</p>	<p>High level of sickness 11.7 days per employee average days lost</p>
<p>4 Directorates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Social Services Regeneration & Community Services Corporate Services 	<p>More than half the workforce is over 45 and a quarter of the workforce is over 55</p>	<p>Response to Pandemic: Approximately 500 staff working from home</p>	<p>Staff survey demonstrating a motivated workforce</p>
<p>Labour turnover low</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council: 5.2% Schools: 3.7% 	<p>Largest employer in the area with a population of 69,862</p>	<p>Council budget £167 million</p> <p>In 2019/20 59% of Council spend related to staffing costs</p>	 <p>Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council</p>

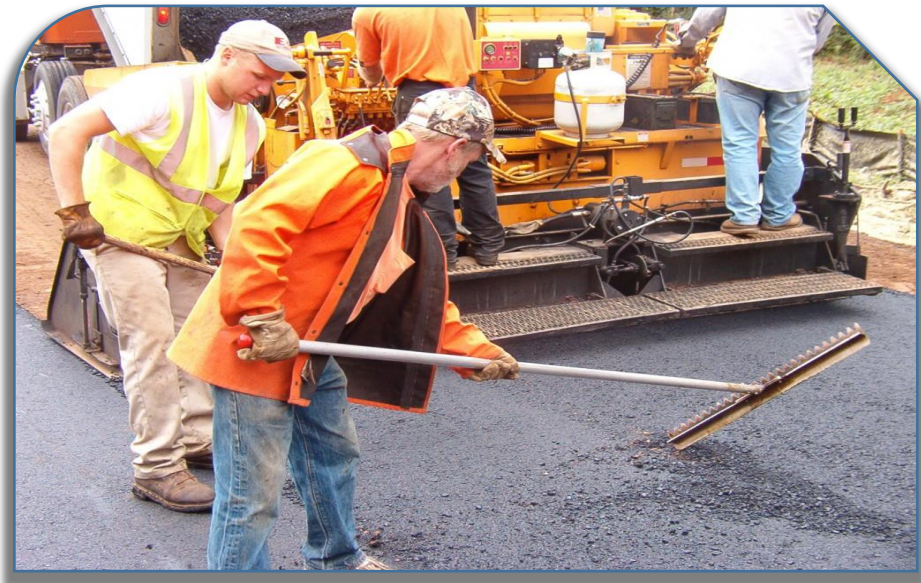
Workforce Profile		
Age Profile	See graphic below	31.3.21
Gender Profile	See graphic below	31.3.21
Turnover (Quarter 4)	4.69% (9% target)	1.4.20 - 31.3.21
Disability (Quarter 4)	1.38%	31.3.21
Ethnic Origin (Quarter 4)	0.96%	31.3.21
Sickness (Quarter 4)	11.67	1.4.20 - 31.3.21



Workforce Engagement

The Council recognises the critical need to communicate and engage staff in service delivery, transformation, change, new commercial thinking and financial efficiency. This is currently undertaken through a number of methods:

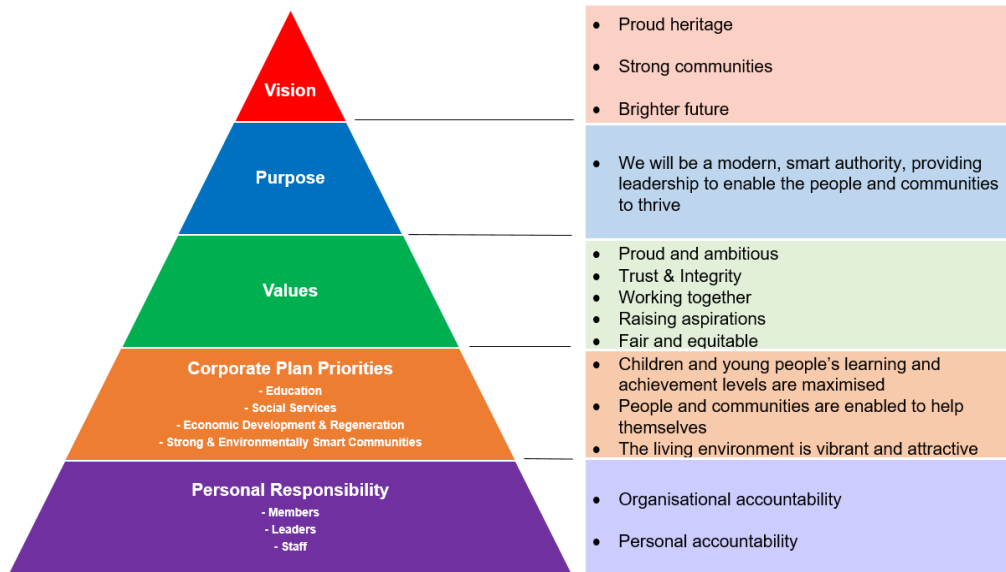
- Regular one to one performance coaching
- Annual performance review
- Team meetings
- Staff meetings
- Management team meetings
- Wider Leadership group
- Regular newsletter from the Managing Director
- Staff newsletter
- Managers brief
- Engagement in financial planning
- A dedicated engagement and consultation framework with trade unions
- Bi-annual staff surveys and pulse surveys



WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

The Council's Vision and Organisational Ambition

The Council's primary role is to facilitate the delivery of services that are high quality and the future model of service delivery is aiming to be sustainable, affordable and demonstrate the best value for money maintaining customer focus. The Council wants to be proactive, looking to embrace potential national, regional, partnership and local opportunities over the next few years to better meet the needs of the community. The Council has a clear ambition with a vision for the future articulating the organisational purpose, values and accountability.



WHAT DOES THE COUNCIL NEED TO LOOK LIKE?

To meet the challenges ahead the Council will not be able continue as it is and will need to prioritise planning and how its budget is spent. The organisation has significantly changed over the past few years and will need to continually change and will look differently in the future in creating agile services delivered by an agile workforce. The following list is not exhaustive but outlines some ambitions:

- Engaged, motivated and resilient – workforce well engaged and resilient to meet challenges
- Customer focus – ensuring the best customer service at all times
- Digitally competent
- Demonstrate leadership – demonstrable, visible, fair and proactive leadership ensuring staff are supported, but where there is poor performance it is identified and managed effectively
- Working in a safe, healthy and supportive environment – enabling staff to perform at their best
- One Council – internal and external collaboration
- Commercially minded, agile and business focussed with delivering services in different ways, tight management of spend, trading where possible, using technology
- Outcome focussed and high performing – identifiable outcomes for our residents with everyone working to 100%
- Council priorities and values – staff are clear about the direction of the organisation and how they contribute and the values that need to be demonstrated



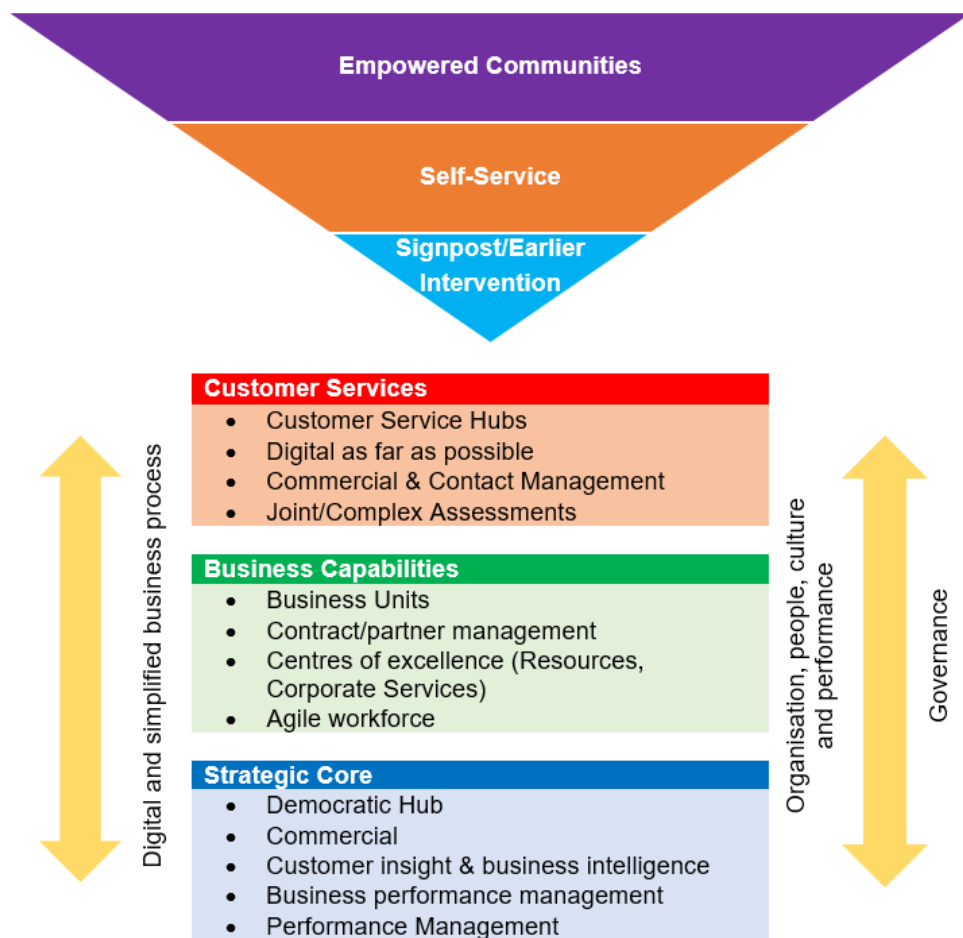
THE FUTURE SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

The Council’s future delivery model will see the Council’s role focus on community leadership. Building community capacity through empowerment and cross-public sector collaboration. Promotion of early intervention and self service will support the reduction of dependence on the Council. A strong strategic core will enable the delivery of modern customer focussed services.

This will be achieved by:

- Promoting self-assessment and enabling self service
- Designing services around the customer
- Developing strong strategic capability
- Improving business processes and capabilities by taking a commercial approach and optimising the opportunity of digital technology

The following diagram illustrates the future service delivery model:



HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET THERE?

Workforce Strategy Priority Outcomes

Healthy Culture, Effective Leadership

- Leadership development
- 'Sparkly Leaders' to motivate and develop workforce
- Constructive partnership working with elected leaders to generate and deliver solutions
- Elected Members Development Programme
- Promotion of diversity and equality in everything
- Work in social partnership with trade unions

Excellence in management across the Council

- Development of managerial skills
- Consistent, robust and easy to follow HR policies
- Positive employee relations
- Commercial and financially astute in all we do
- Performance management and accountability
- Workforce policies and practices embraced, embedded and consistently applied

A highly motivated and engaged workforce

- Suggestions and feedback are valued – organisational listening and action
- Modern ongoing opportunities to engage
- Equipped to be flexible to respond to future challenges
- Staff empowered to make decisions and participate in service delivery and development

Evidence based decision making, planning and delivery

- Accurate workforce data, management information
- Optimisation of digital
- Workforce profiling and planning to assess future needs

Modern Employer of Choice

- Recruitment and retention align to workforce plans
- Reward and recognition align to workforce plans
- Employee engagement levels increase as staff identify the Council as a good place to work
- Career development and talent management
- Workforce health, well being and safety is prioritised



WORKFORCE STRATEGY: ACTION PLAN 2021/2022

The first action plan of the Workforce Strategy will focus on the transition from responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and transition to a future working model – “**Agile Services delivered by an Agile Workforce**”.

Healthy Culture, Effective Leadership

- Engagement and planning for future working model
- Leadership Development Model
- Transitional Leadership training/development
- Strategic Leadership and Managing an agile workforce training and development

Excellence in management across the Council

- Implementation of key strategies; Commercial, Digital and Communication
- Agile working policy and guidance
- Review of other HR policy to support agility in the workforce

Modern Employer of Choice

- Implementation of the agile and flexible working model
- Review and improvements to recruitment processes
- Increase the offer of the staff benefits scheme
- Implementation of modern agile designed workspace
- Initiatives to increase the diversity in the workforce


A highly motivated and engaged workforce

- Workforce engagement and communication plan and implementation – future Council Operating Model
- Learning and development for the workforce to support delivery of the future working model

Evidence based decision making, planning and delivery

- Development and implementation of digital solutions to support delivery of modern HR/Payroll service
- Review information requirements in line with key strategies e.g. Carbon Neutral ambitions
- Health, Safety and wellbeing to support through continued pandemic and transition to future working model
- Support schools causing concern

OD Strategy 2015-2020 Progress

<p>Organisational Design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative service delivery models; Leisure Trust, Shared Resource Service for IT, Hosted services e.g. South East Wales Adoption Service and Blaenau Gwent/Caerphilly Workforce Development Service Fundamental review of senior management structure and organisational design 	<p>Pay & Reward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of Foundation Living Wage April 2018 New NJC Pay Spine April 2019 Pay Policy based on performance implemented in schools All equal pay claims resolved 	<p>Performance Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance Coaching to include 360 degree appraisal for managers Implementation of employee and manager self-serve for the iTrent HR/Payroll system Annual reviews of sickness absence – improvements to processes and policy 	<p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership Development Programme 2016/17 aimed at shifting managers to leaders
<p>Engagement & Consultation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff surveys used to identify organisational areas for development and improvement Reintroduction of Managers Brief and Staff Newsletter Manager's Conference October 2019 Embedded Trade Union Consultation and Engagement Framework 	<p>Employee Relations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal industrial action and claims to employment tribunals Trade unions engaged in transforming Blaenau Gwent projects and service reviews Fundamental review of Trade Union Facilities Arrangement, Engagement and Consultation Framework 	<p>Organisation Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core competency Framework in place All Wales public sector platform in place Supporting professionalization of the workforce in social care Apprenticeship options integrated into recruitment and development approaches across the organisation 	<p>Wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managers toolkit to support managers managing stress/mental health Range of wellbeing and family friendly policies for staff Fundamental review and improvements in occupational health provision
<p>Improving Performance in Schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership arrangement strategically shaping the approach to human resource management in schools Significant review of policies and alignment to Council policy New delivery models; Ebbw Fawr 3-16 Learning Community, Abertillery 3-16 Learning Community, Riverside Special Education Needs School 3-16 	<p>Equality and Diversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender pay reporting in place – the Council has a female bias this includes at a senior management level Recruitment processes has guaranteed interview for those with a disability Positive Disability Award awarded by the Department for Work and Pensions Various awareness training e.g. religion, Violence Against Women, Domestic and Sexual Abuse, Mental Health, etc 	<p>Elected Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance review process in place with a competency framework Elected Member induction Elected Member mentoring framework 	 <p>Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council</p>

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APPENDIX 3

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 15.03.2021

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 15.03.2021

Committee:	Council
Date of Meeting:	25th March, 2021
Report Subject:	New Council Operating Model & Working Arrangements
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor N. Daniels – Leader/ Executive Member - Corporate Services
Report Submitted by:	Managing Director
Report Authors:	Michelle Morris, Gina Taylor, Andrea Prosser & Gemma Wasley.

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	12.03.21						25.03.21	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report proposes and seeks approval for a new Operating Model and Working Arrangements for the Council which will support the achievement of the decision made to permanently vacate the Civic Centre; create a new Democratic Hub, at the General Offices, and a network of Community Hubs co-located with libraries.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Since March 2020 the Council has been operating under emergency arrangements introduced across the UK as a result of the Coronavirus Pandemic. During this extended period the advice from Government has been that, where staff can, they must work from home in order to prevent workplace and community transmission of the virus. This has meant that office based staff and Elected Members have been working remotely for the last 12 months and the organisation has had to shift to new working arrangements based on digital platforms, with offices closed and staff only attending offices where it is necessary – for example to access equipment or files, or in response to difficulties working from a home base for an extended period of time.
- 2.2 In early 2021 the mass vaccination of the population and the positive impact of the most recent lock-down, has seen a fall in infection rates across the UK and there are early signs that we will be able to move out of lock-down from the Spring onwards. However, we now know that we will have to adapt to living our lives with the virus present in our communities and so it will not be a case of simply returning to normal, we can for example expect social distancing to continue for some time. It is widely accepted that what we will

move to as a society is a 'new normal' and that the way we live and work will be very different, and has the potential to be better. Welsh Government has already signalled an ambition within Wales and a commitment to 30% of the workforce working from home or remotely. The vision being to reduce the numbers commuting to work and keeping more people working in their local communities. The Council has an opportunity, now, to be at the forefront of delivering this national ambition by making a step change in how we work, how we deliver services and to improve access to council businesses and services for our residents.

- 2.3 In the early summer we took the opportunity to pause and reflect on how the Council had responded to the initial surge in the virus. From this we identified that staff and Elected Members had responded admirably to the challenge of remote working and the investment that had previously been made in technology had stood the Council in good stead. The realisation that we can run our business and deliver services in a very different way, be more in line with modern working practices and reduce our costs and impact on the environment has opened up new opportunities for us to make a step change now and not to simply return to how we operated before. A survey of staff conducted late in 2020 shows that staff have responded positively to home working and consider that the Council has handled the change well. This shows support from staff to continue working in a more agile and flexible way and the positive impact this has had on productivity and a reduction in staff absence due to sickness. It is also notable that the Council has reduced its costs in relation to running buildings and business travel, with a subsequent decrease in carbon generated as a result of Council operations.
- 2.4 Linked to the Council's ambition emerging out of the first wave of the pandemic, a number of reports were considered by Council in 2020 regarding the possible acquisition of a site in Ebbw Vale and the opportunity to develop alternative arrangements for its democratic and customer services, which would remove reliance on the Civic Centre.
- 2.5 On 23rd July 2020 Council first considered a report regarding the potential purchase of Festival Park and agreed that detailed negotiations be undertaken with the current owners with a view towards agreeing Heads of Terms for acquisition of the site for refurbishment/redevelopment and that a Business Case be prepared for acquisition and future use, for consideration by Council in September 2020. It was also agreed that a Member Working Group be established to work on the Business Case alongside officers.
- 2.6 A Special Council meeting was held on 22nd October 2020 to consider the Business Case and it was agreed that the report be approved with the recommended option, as outlined in the business case, to proceed with the purchase Festival Park subject to funding approval from Welsh Government and the finalisation of the purchase arrangements be delegated to the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Community Services in consultation with the Leader/Deputy Leader. It was also agreed that a further report relating to the commercial negotiations be presented to Council, prior to the finalisation of any purchase arrangements.
- 2.7

At the Ordinary Meeting of the Council on 26th November 2020 a further report was considered and recommended that the position previously agreed at Council, to proceed with acquisition of Festival Park, had been reconsidered by the Member Working Group, and that it should now be left to private investors who had expressed an interest in the site to take it forward. Also that the Council should take forward the other aspects agreed at Council (October 2020) to develop the democratic facility at the General Offices (GO), community hubs in town centres, and vacate and demolish the Civic Centre. A capital allocation of £180,000 was agreed to fund the cost of the required works at the GO and the Community Hubs and a further £650,000 for demolition of the Civic Centre. The subsequent sale of land was expected to generate a capital receipt that would cover this cost.

2.8

Since the decision of Council in November the Member Working Group has worked with Officers and Trade Union representatives to develop a model for new working arrangements, based on agile working, which will allow the organisation to operate out of its remaining offices at Anvil Court, ViTCC, General Offices and other appropriate Council buildings. These proposals are detailed in Section 5 of this report. Work has also progressed the Democratic Hub and Community Hubs, and this report also provides an update on the new hubs and these are detailed in Section 5.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option One (Preferred)**

Council approves the new Operating Model based on Agile Working, Democratic Hub and Community Hubs, and confirms work can now proceed to decommission the Civic Centre.

3.2 **Option Two**

Council does not approve the new Operating Model based on Agile Working, Democratic Hub and Community Hubs, and does not confirm that work can now proceed to permanently vacate and demolish the Civic Centre.

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

4.1 This supports the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan priority to be an efficient organisation and to operate using modern working practices in a way which supports our workforce, effective service delivery and improves access to Council business for our residents. It also supports the priority to regenerate the site in Ebbw Vale opening up the opportunities for investment in new homes and community facilities in the centre of the community.

4.2 The proposals also support delivery of our ambition set out in the Decarbonisation Plan to reduce our carbon emissions to a point where our impact is net zero carbon.

4.3 Finally, this will support the delivery of the Bridging the Gap Programme which seeks to reduce the cost of our corporate property estate through a

process of rationalisation and introduction of more modern and efficient workplaces.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 Budget Implications

The Financial Plan is attached at Appendix 1 and details the potential costs and funding, based on a number of assumptions. In summary the financial implications are:

Capital Costs

Total capital costs of development of the Democratic & Community Hubs, decommissioning / demolition of the Civic Centre and refurbishment of Anvil Court / VITCC are estimated to cost £1.2m.

The Council has already agreed capital funding of £180,000 to support the delivery of the Democratic Hub and Community Hubs and has agreed that the costs for the demolition of the Civic Centre will be offset by capital receipts generated from the sale of the site which is estimated to achieve in excess of £650,000.

It is proposed that the remaining capital requirement be funded by a contribution from revenue, utilising the Transformation budget for 2021/2022.

Revenue Costs

Total revenue costs of the new operating model are assessed as £1.47m in the first year reducing to £1.1m in year 2 and £1.05m in subsequent years.

The revenue financial plan shown at Appendix 1, indicates that over a five year period there are potential savings of £1.46m compared to current budgets. However, this will be subject to the:

- agreed home/agile working / set up allowances
- the outcome of job evaluation (Community Hubs)
- the timescale and cost for decommissioning the civic centre
- Termination costs (if applicable)

The assessment of revenue costs & funding is analysed below:-

Democratic Hub

There are no additional revenue implications arising from the Democratic Hub.

Community Hub

There will be a revenue cost relating to the operation of the Community Hubs of approximately £151,000 per year (subject to job evaluation). These costs will be largely met by re-purposing 4 posts resulting in a budget transfer of £107,000, a cost pressure of £25,000 which has been agreed as part of the 2021/22 Revenue Budget and repurposing of £19,000 budget.

Agile Working

The estimated revenue costs of providing a home/agile working allowance to around 750 staff is £322,000 (including an allowance for set up costs) in year 1 and £171,000 per annum thereafter. It is proposed to fund these costs through re-purposing the budgets for mileage and operating costs of the Civic Centre.

It is proposed that the savings / cost reductions identified by moving to the new operating model will be built into the Workplace Transformation project within the Bridging the Gap programme.

5.2 Workforce

- Agile Working – this will impact on working and contractual arrangements for c.750 staff who are currently office based at locations in the borough including (but not exclusively) Civic Centre, Anvil Court, ViTCC, Depot and General Offices. Proposals will impact all staff which will involve a varying of their contracts of employment and will designate posts as either homeworker, agile worker or service/community based worker. This will involve statutory consultation and reaching a joint agreement with trade unions, a new Agile Working Policy and the designation of posts. The new policy which will require scrutiny and Council endorsement will include allowances to support permanent and agile workers and this will be subject to negotiation with the trade unions. There will also be the need to ensure those permanent and agile workers have appropriate workstations at home and take into account the health, safety and well-being of workers, including reasonable adjustments, where staff are not able to work from home. It will be critical to engage the workforce and their representatives along this journey.
- Community Hubs – there will be the deletion of 4 posts within the existing Commercial Services structure, and the creation of 4 new posts to run the Hubs. There is a risk of redundancy if not all staff are able to be redeployed into other posts within the Council.
- Democratic Hub – no workforce implications.

5.3 Legal

There will be a requirement to reach a formal agreement with the trade unions regarding the change to terms and conditions and the payment of home/agile working allowance.

An Equality Impact Assessment will also be completed prior to the full implementation of the change programme, and will be signed off by the Programme Board.

5.4 Risks

Workforce - If there is no joint agreement to the new Agile Working policy and variation of the contract the Council will need to consider the impact on timelines and contractual obligation. However, the trade unions have worked with Officers on these proposals and have co-produced the new working arrangements and this reduces the risk that an agreement will not be achieved.

Cost Reduction – If there is not close management of the programme then there is a risk that the cost reductions will not be achieved. A Programme Board is established to provide leadership for the work and this is supported by lead officers for each workstream to ensure that the work progresses and that outcomes are delivered.

Behaviours required to sustain new working arrangements not achieved – If there is not a permanent change to how we work as an organisation then the move to new arrangements will not work successfully. The proposals are however informed by the change in work practices achieved successfully over past 12 months and the recent staff survey shows that the majority of staff support the new arrangements and consider they have been more productive.

Insufficient capacity to deliver the changes – This programme represents a significant change to working arrangements, for staff and Members, on a permanent basis and will need careful implementation. If there is insufficient capacity it could result in desired outcomes not being fully delivered. If further capacity is required the Council would have the option to allocate funding from the Transformation Fund.

Further surge in Covid 19 – if there was an increase in cases and/or another lockdown then the timescales for delivery would be impacted.

Increase in numbers of posts allocated as Homeworkers or Agile Workers, above/below the assumed levels – if there is an increase in number of posts categorised as agile workers then there is flexibility to accommodate this increase (up to the c.400 desk capacity available); if there is an increase in number of home workers then this will make additional office capacity available.

Risk of lost opportunity – the Council has an opportunity to build on the positive work done over the past 12 months and to make a step change in how it works and delivers services. There is a risk that if this is not agreed now the organisation will simply move back to operating as it did before and these benefits will not be achieved.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 Agile Working

The new working arrangements will support the closure of the Civic Centre and put in place a model of agile working to enable staff to work either at home, in Council buildings or in the service or community. It is planned to roll

this out from May onwards, dependent on the relaxation of Welsh Government guidance on working from home. It is intended to implement the change on an incremental basis, accepting that while some coronavirus restrictions continue i.e. social distancing, this will limit the capacity within offices.

The Agile working arrangements will be a contractual change and place job roles in one of 3 categories - Homeworker, Agile Worker or Service Based Worker. Those posts designated as home or agile workers will receive a home/agile working allowance to compensate for the costs associated e.g. heating, electricity, broadband.

Home Worker - Home is the base and all work can be carried out from home. An appropriate workstation and tools to do the job will be required (if necessary facilitated by the Council) and there will be no need to access an office to work on a frequent basis. There will be a need for occasional attendance at an alternative base for e.g. team meetings/ training. Estimated c.370 Staff (Example - Support Services).

Agile Worker - Home is the base with time split time between home and office working i.e.3 days' home working and 2 days in office. Work is carried out at home and in the office. Agile workers will not have a dedicated desk in the office but will book desk space (using a booking system) for the days' they are in the office. They will also require an appropriate workstation and tools to do the job at home (if necessary facilitated by the Council). They will be required to attend meetings in the office. Estimated c.390 Staff (Example - support for democratic processes, Social Workers, Public Protection).

Service Based - Work is carried out 100% from a base in a building or in the community. Some roles would require desk space – but no fixed workstation. These workers cannot work from home due to the nature of the job. Estimated c. 950 staff (Examples - Social Services Cwrt Mytton, Extra Care, Flying Start, schools, refuse, cleansing).

An assessment of the office space available shows that there are 271 desk spaces in AC and the GO, 24 at the Depot and 122 at the ViTCC providing an overall desk space availability of **417** (including shared space with the ABUHB).

As the initial appraisal identifies c.390 Agile staff will need to be accommodated under this model, for 2 or 3 days a week, then it is apparent that the Council could operate on a reduced office footprint, with an average of 160 staff in the office on any one day.

There will be a requirement to refurbish offices to ensure that the layout supports new working arrangements and provides access to the digital platforms (i.e. MS Teams) including facilitating a blended approach to meetings.

6.2 Democratic Hub

A new Democratic Hub would provide a similar level of space as in the Civic with enhanced functionality for blended meetings and improved public access.

A phased approach is being used for planning purposes i.e. temporary arrangements working with Covid 19 restrictions from May 2021 and then permanent Democratic Hub arrangements when restrictions in the community are relaxed sufficiently. While social distancing remains a requirement it will be necessary for some Members, and Officers, to continue to participate remotely using a blended solution based on MS Teams. The new Democratic Hub will continue to offer an agile approach to meetings by providing hybrid meetings when restrictions are lifted as part of the requirements of the Local Government and Elections Bill.

The first floor of the GO will be the Democratic hub including flexible office and meeting space for Members and Officers. The new Hub will enable the Council to meet the requirements of the Local Government and Elections Bill e.g. on broadcasting, and provide improved facilities for public access to formal meetings and council business.

The existing fixtures and fittings from the Civic Centre will be used, wherever possible, and some investment will be required in new audio-visual equipment to support delivery of the requirements of the Bill and to facilitate improved working arrangements for Members.

6.3 Community Hubs

The Hubs will be located in the main libraries at Abertillery, Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale and Tredegar. As these libraries are open 4 days a week there is capacity to offer an outreach/surgery style service in Blaina, Cwm and Llanhilleth once a week. The Hubs will:

- Provide a face to face counter service dealing with requests from residents to pay, register, ask, tell, apply, book and check the status of their request across a range of services including benefits, council tax and community services;
- Help to residents wanting to self-serve using computers based in the libraries through the My Council Services application or through direct support where necessary;
- Signpost/connect residents to other council services including housing, parking and environmental health;
- Signpost/connect residents to services delivered by partners including support from Job Centre Plus, Citizens Advice Bureau, Integrated Health and Well-being network activities and voluntary/community based provision. This has been the approach of the Locality Response Team and have proved very successful;
- For more complex service queries requiring access to council officers, options for booking appointments will be offered. This will include access to surgery style appointment so residents can access planning

officers, building control officers, support around welfare benefits, employment services and business advice.

The timescales for implementation will be determined by the relaxation of current restrictions and the full re-opening of libraries.

6.4 Expected Outcomes for Residents

The new arrangements will improve customer access to the Council and to council services through the Community Hubs. These will be based conveniently in our main communities and remove the requirement for travel to Ebbw Vale for those needing to speak directly to an officer.

6.5 Involvement

There has been staff consultation regarding home and agile working and work is in progress to ensure that statutory consultation takes place with the workforce regarding the implementation of new terms and conditions.

6.6 Thinking for the long term

The new working arrangements will establish how the council will work in the future and will enable it to consolidate its property portfolio, reduce its carbon impact and to align with Welsh Government's ambition to modernise delivery of public services in Wales.

6.7 Preventative Focus

The new working arrangements will support preventative models of service delivery.

6.8 Collaboration/Partnership Working

It is anticipated that partners will be part of service delivery through the Community Hubs.

6.9 Integration

The new working arrangements will be delivered in an integrated way across all Services.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

7.1 The delivery of this programme will be overseen by a Programme Board comprised of the Corporate Leadership Team. Project/Workstream Leads have been identified for each element of the work including Agile Working, Democratic Hub, Community Hubs, Office Re-configuration, Decommissioning Civic Centre.

7.2 The financial benefits delivered by the Programme will be reported as part of the Bridging the Gap Programme.

Background Papers:

**Minutes of Festival Park Member Working Group
Staff Survey**

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Agenda Item 8

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **16th July 2021**
Report Subject: **End of Year 2020/21 Finance and Performance Report**
Portfolio Holder: **Leader / Executive Member Corporate Services**
Report Submitted by: **Gemma Wasley, Service Manager Performance and Democratic**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	24/06/21	06.07.21			16/07/21	21/07/21		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present to the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee the end of year position of the Finance and Performance Report for the year 2020/21 (attached at Appendix 1).

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Corporate Plan was refreshed and approved by Council in July 2020 following a review of learning so far with implementing the plan, as well as learning from the COVID 19 pandemic.
- 2.2 The Finance and Performance Report has been written to align to the priorities within the refreshed Corporate Plan.
- 2.3 The report is presented to the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee to provide detail of the work that has been undertaken throughout the Council and where further development is required.
- 2.4 The Finance and Performance Report includes the following information:
- Key messages against the priorities within the Corporate Plan
 - Expenditure – Revenue and Capital
 - Key improvement actions
 - Key performance indicators
 - Case Studies
 - Performance against external regulation reports
 - Corporate Risk
- 2.5 The report also includes key actions and activity undertaken in response to the COVID 19 pandemic.
- 2.6 The Finance and Performance Report is to be used as a key improvement tool for the Authority.
- 2.7 Information included within the report has been gathered from a number of different sources including updates from business plans and drawing evidence from strategic reports. This has provided a detailed view of the activity and performance of directorates throughout the year.

- 2.8 The report forms part of an on-going process of development within the Council's Performance Management Framework in identifying further areas for improvement and areas of good practice and performance.
- 2.9 The key themes and notable activity across the Council are included in Appendix 1.
3. **Options for Recommendation**
- 3.1 The Finance and Performance Report has been approved by CLT at their meeting on 24th June 2021.
- 3.1.1 **Option 1**
Provide suggestions to the content of the Finance and Performance Report in order to make it more efficient and effective as a management tool.
- 3.1.2 **Option 2**
Accept the information as presented.
4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
- 4.1 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. There is also a requirement for Members to scrutinise the Council's performance. Reporting of such information contributes to the Council's Performance Framework.
5. **Implications Against Each Option**
- 5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***
Financial information is included within Appendix 1 and is split per directorate.
- 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***
Risk information is included within Appendix 1 and is split per directorate.
- 5.2.1 The Finance and Performance Report acts as a key monitoring tool for the Council and is considered by external regulators which can have an impact on the reputation of the Council.
- 5.3 ***Legal***
There are no legal implications arising from this report.
- 5.4 ***Human Resources***
Sickness information is included within Appendix 1 and is split per directorate.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

Performance information and data is included within Appendix 1 and is split per directorate.

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

The information included within the report will provide opportunity for the public to scrutinise the Council's performance and provide accountability across the Council.

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

Services look to involve partners and involve citizens in consultation where possible. This information is included as part of the planning arrangements of the Council.

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

The Finance and Performance Report is reported on regularly and is aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The Council aims to work using a preventative approach wherever possible so that problems can be tackled before they are escalated. Preventative actions are included in the Council's business plans.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

There are a number of collaborations that the Council is involved with and, where relevant, information on some of these has been included within the Finance and Performance Report.

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

The Council's business plan includes where an integrated approach to planning and delivery is taking place.

6.8 ***EqlA***

The Finance and Performance Report has no negative impact on the protected characteristics.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The report will be monitored quarterly through the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee and the Executive Committee.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Finance and Performance

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Finance and Performance Report

End of Year 2020/21

Foreword

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

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

COVID – 19 The Council's Response

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

Page 64

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

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

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

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

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

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

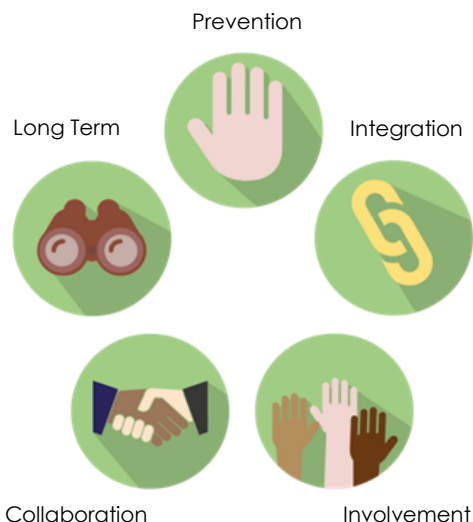
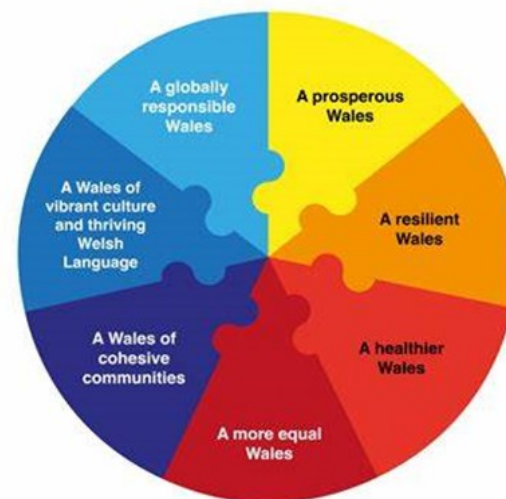
Corporate Plan Refresh 2020/22

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

Corporate Plan 2020/22 Outcome Objectives:

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

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is ground-breaking legislation which aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The vision of this legislation is expressed in the seven national well-being goals.



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

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

Blaenau Gwent Vision -

Proud Heritage

Strong Communities

Brighter Future

BRAG Rating

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

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

Why this is important

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



Progress against actions

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

Priorities:-

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

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

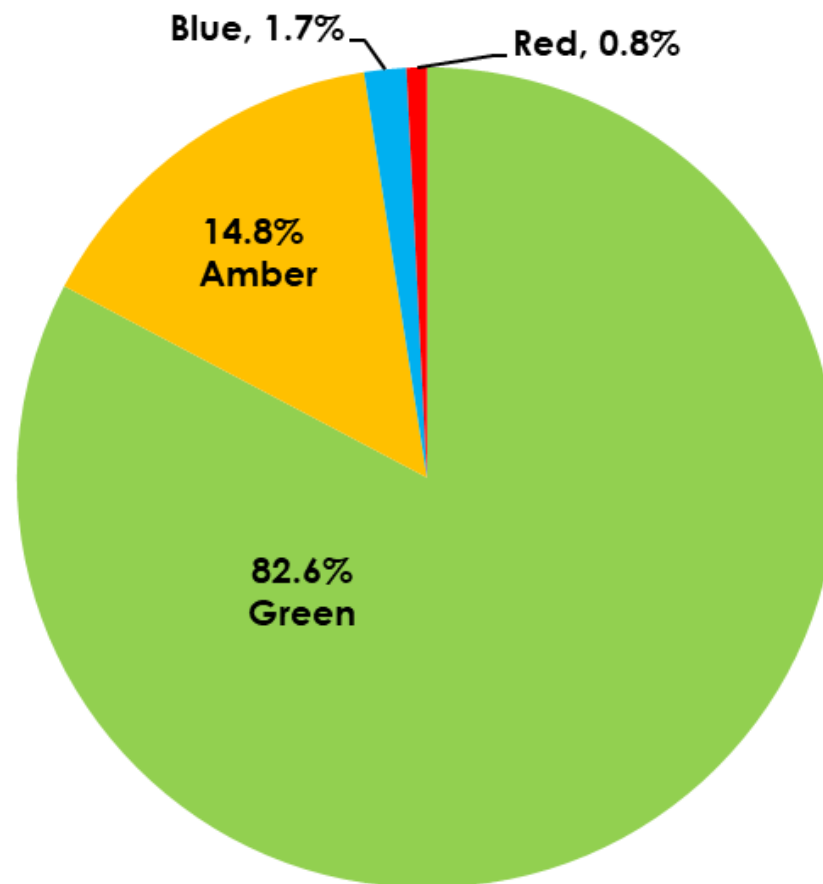
How we performed

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

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

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

Overall corporate objective delivery position as at 31st March 2021



Overview

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

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

How we currently perform



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



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



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



87% of Audits were completed within the time allocated.



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

Overview

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

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

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

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

Overview

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

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

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

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



Overview

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

Sickness Absence

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



Overview

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

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

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

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



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

Overview

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

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

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

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



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

Case Study - Climate Change

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

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

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



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



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

Case Study - Council Agrees Budget for 2021-22

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

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

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

The agreed budget will see the Council:

- Protect key front line services
 - Provide additional funding of 3.6% for all schools
 - Enable new, community-focused investment including new hubs located in libraries to allow local access to council services for residents
 - Create efficiencies and financial resilience for the future by continuing the 'Bridging the Gap' programme
- Fund increasing demand and service pressures in key areas valued by residents and confirmed using the feedback from our recent budget survey including:
 - increased funding for Social Services of £1,014,490 (+2.2%)
 - extra investment in environment projects of - £683,480 (+4.1%)
 - Council Tax reduction scheme budget of £9.6m



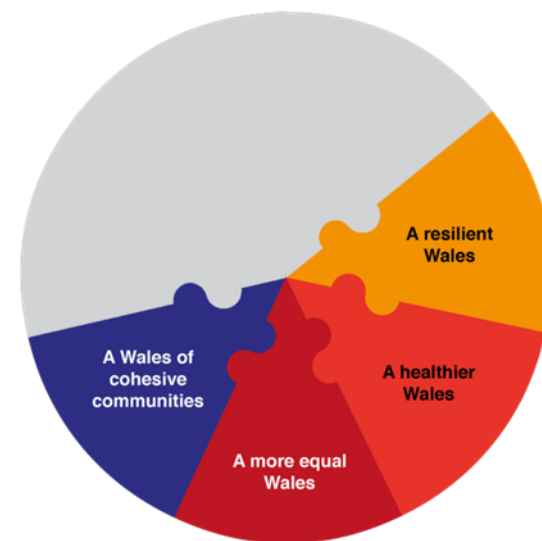
An increase of 3.3% for the Blaenau Gwent element of Council Tax was approved - this equates to an increase of 72p a week increase for a Band A property and an 84p a week increase for Band B households.

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

Why this is important

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

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



Progress against actions

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

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Priorities:-

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

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

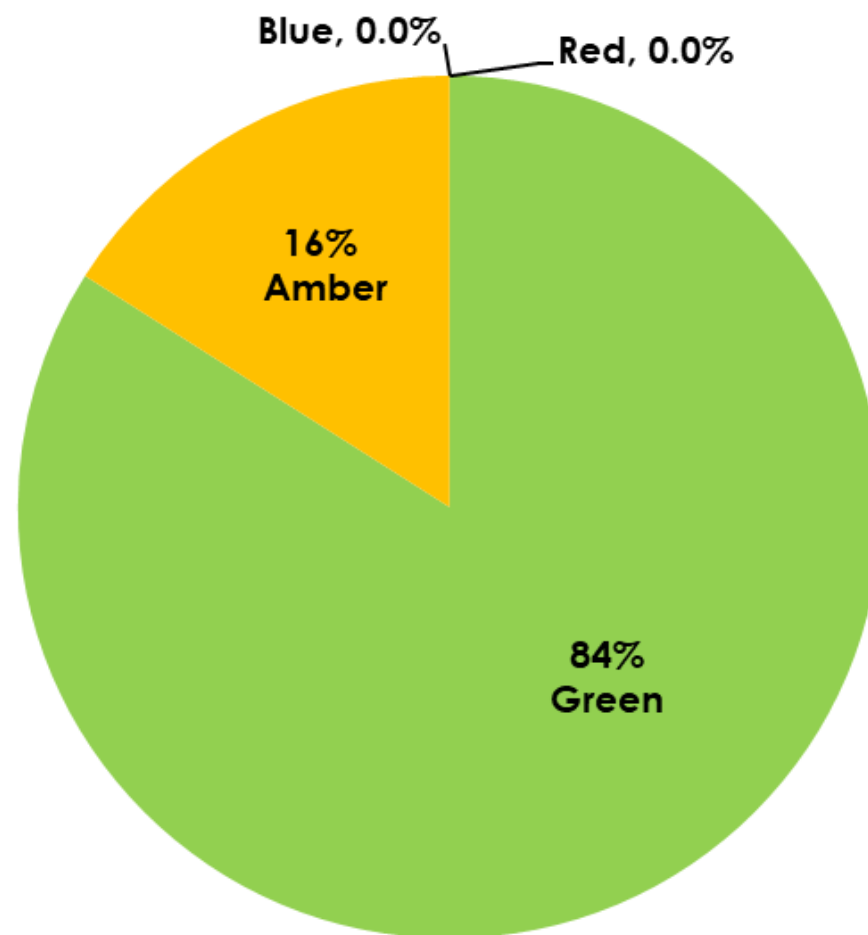
How we performed

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

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

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

Overall corporate objective delivery position as at 31st March 2021



Overview

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

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

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

How we currently perform



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



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



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



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



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

Overview

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

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

To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater

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



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

Overview

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

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

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

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



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

Overview

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

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

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

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



Overview

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

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

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

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

Case Study - Christmas Toy appeal

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Case Study - Compassionate Communities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

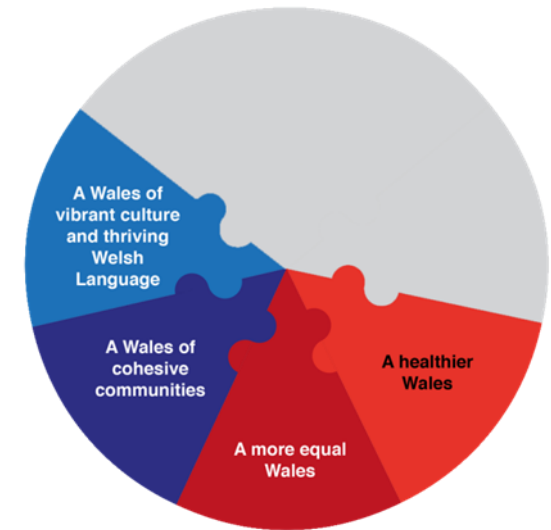


Why this is important

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

Progress against actions

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



Priorities:-

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

Support a fairer sustainable economy and community

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

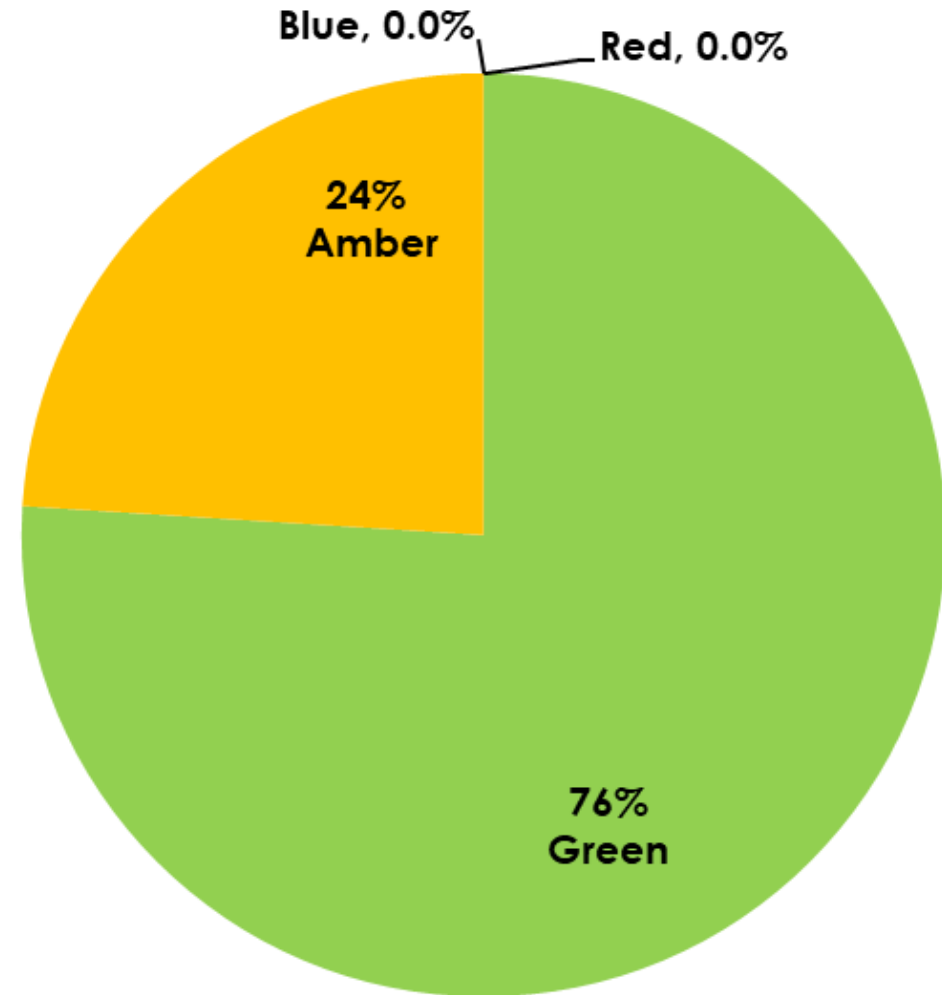
Overall corporate objective delivery position as at 31st March 2021.

How we performed

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

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

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



Overview

Support all learners to achieve improved outcomes

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

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

How we currently perform



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



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



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



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



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

Overview

To improve pupil outcomes, progress and wellbeing

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

Improve skills and promote digital participation

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



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

Overview

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

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

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



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

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

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

Overview

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


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

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

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

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

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



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

Case Study - Youth Service Response to COVID-19

Since March 2020, the Youth Service has supported the response to COVID-19. Although school based youth workers and councillors returned to buildings in September, initially, the service refocussed to identify and support the most vulnerable young people known to the Youth Service, Education and schools. Since March 2020, the service supported 600 11-16 year olds and 250



16-25 year olds and from March to July made weekly contact. Initially the focus was supporting young people around the challenges they faced linked to the pandemic, including delivering essentials such as food, toiletries, wellbeing packs, supporting issues around lack of money, losing employment and facing eviction. Youth workers supported young people to find accommodation, and the local authority placed some young people, who would not usually be eligible to access support in bed and breakfast accommodation, to try to ensure that they had a safe place to live. Youth workers also helped young people to apply for financial support.

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

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

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



Case Study - 21st Century Schools

Proposed new Glyncoed Primary and Childcare.

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

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



Proposed Welsh medium primary and childcare within the Tredegar valley.

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

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



Case Study - Youth Service outreach work.

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

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



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

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

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



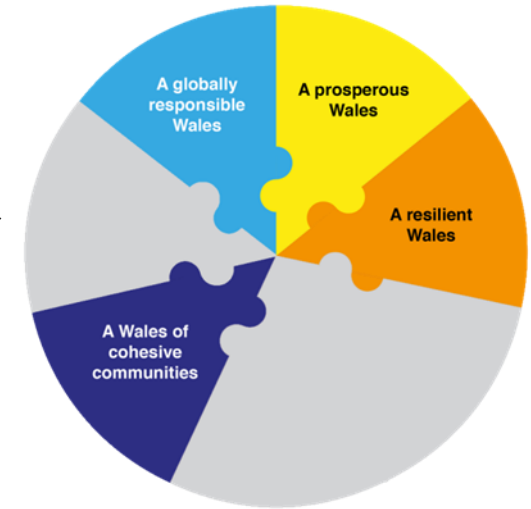
Staff were able to also highlight to partner organisations the issue of community members providing young people with waste material such as old sofas and wardrobes to take away. This led to the Cleansing Department further educating the community regarding fly tipping and the dangers of this. It has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

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



Why this is important

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



Progress against actions

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

Priorities:-

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

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

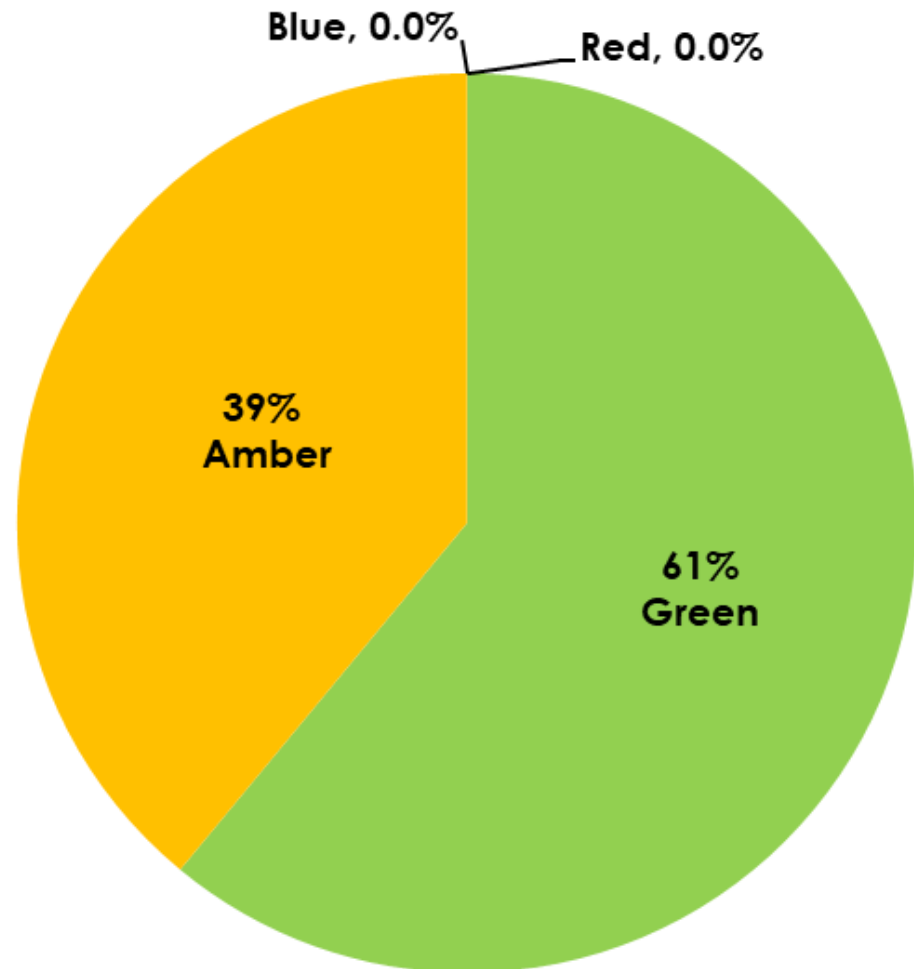
How we performed

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

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

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

Overall corporate objective delivery position as at 31st March 2021



Overview

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

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

* figure not yet verified by NRW

How we currently perform



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



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



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



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




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

Overview

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

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



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

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

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

Overview

To work with partners to provide a variety of homes

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

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

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

Overview

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

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

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

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



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

Overview

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

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

To be a carbon neutral Council by 2030

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



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

Case Study - Advanced Engineering Centre

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

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



Regeneration Director, Richard Crook Says:

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

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

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

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

Case Study - New Council Centre of Operations

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

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

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



EXISTING CENTRAL DEPOT



PROPOSED NEW COUNCIL CENTRE OF OPERATIONS

Financial Management

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Regulatory Proposals

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

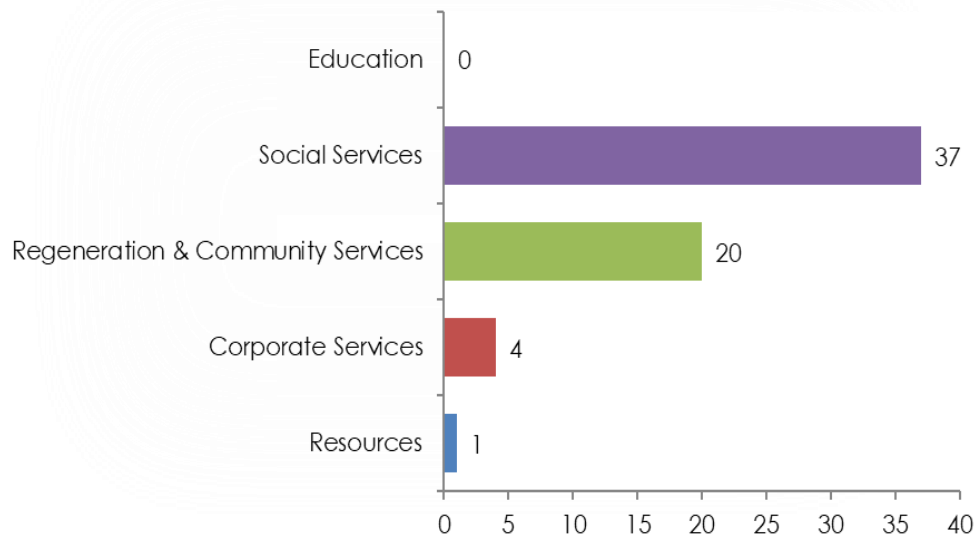
Reports and Proposals

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

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

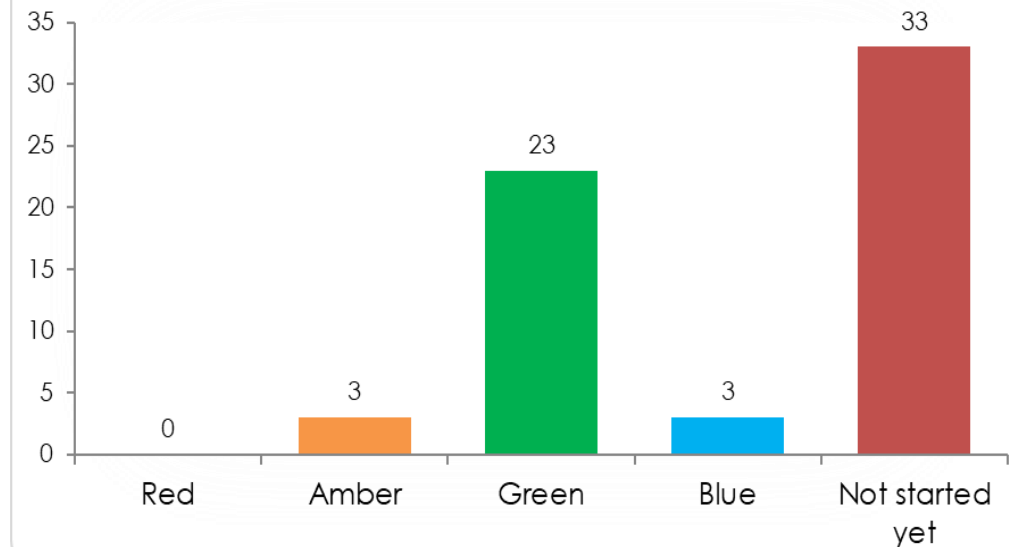
Open proposals for improvement

Open Proposals for Improvement



Current proposals status

Current Proposal Status



Corporate Risk Register

Risk Description and Lead	End of Year 2020/21	Status
<p>CRR20 -</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Director of Social Services and Councillor John Mason</p>	<p><u>End of Year Review 2020 2021</u></p> <p>Although we have had to change and adapt processes and procedures during the pandemic to fulfil our statutory responsibilities and maintain the wellbeing of our communities and staff, this has created increased financial pressures but the Welsh Government's hardship fund has mitigated these costs. Additional funding being used through ICF and Transformation funding has been confirmed for a further 12 months covering 2021 to 2022. There has continued to be a slow reduction in the number of children looked after during the year and good evidence that the Supporting Change Team and the Myst team are having an impact on both numbers and budget.</p> <p>A review by Worcester University and a subsequent refresh of the children looked after reduction strategy 2017-2020 took place during the year with a New Strategy and Action plan agreed covering 2020 to 2025 this is currently beginning to be implemented. In addition a review was also undertaken of our disability team and a new model of operation proposed for this team, which will begin implementation in the first quarter of 2021-22.</p>	High
<p>CRR21</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Chief Officer – Resources and Councillor Nigel Daniels</p>	<p><u>End of Year Review 2020 2021—During the year the status of this risk reduced from critical to high</u></p> <p>In the early part of 2020/21 there were significant concerns around the potential financial impact the Covid 19 pandemic would have on the local / national economy and consequently the Council.</p> <p>WG announced that funding would be provided for additional costs and loss of income incurred as a consequence of delivering services in response to the pandemic. This funding will continue until at least September 2021.</p> <p>A review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy was undertaken and budget gaps for the 5 years to 2025/25 are currently predicted. To address these budget gaps work has continued on the development and implementation of the Bridging the Gap proposals.</p> <p>A positive WG local government settlement for 2021/22 has resulted in Blaenau Gwent receiving a funding increase of £4.3m and in March 2021 the Council agreed a budget which included a planned increase to both the General Reserve (£200k) & the Financial Resilience Earmarked Reserve (£1m), a further step in improving the Council's financial resilience.</p>	High

Corporate Risk Register

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

Corporate Risk Register

Risk Description and Lead	End of Year 2020/21	Status
<p>CRR14</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Head of Organisational Development and Councillor Nigel Daniels</p>	<p><u>End of Year Review 2020 2021</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall outturn figure is 11.67 days per full time equivalent employee (FTE) which has exceeded the corporate target (10.50 Days) by 1.17 days • When comparing the overall outturn with the previous year, there has been a decrease of 2.24 days from 13.91 days • Covid-19 impact – when excluding sickness absence related to Covid-19 the outturn figure reduces to 9.98 days a reduction of 1.69 days which comes in below the corporate target • Annual report reviewing sickness absence to be developed and presented to CLT and Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee • Directorate and service targets for 2021/22 to be set by directorates • More detailed analysis of the hotspots to be undertaken with directorates • Ongoing management of sickness absence by managers supported by OD – including any long Covid and top 20 long term cases 	High
<p>CRR19</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance and Councillor Nigel Daniels</p>	<p><u>End of Year Review 2020/21</u></p> <p>Due to the pandemic progress on a number of areas stalled initially whilst directorates focussed on the obvious priorities of the Covid response and/or staff were redeployed. Despite this there has been significant progress with a number of policies being approved, or developed to draft stage, which will further protect the organisation and better communicate the messages to staff and raise awareness. Further policies are planned in 2021/22 Q1 to add to this progress along with providing guidance documents on how to safely use the new technologies being provided to staff whilst the organisation moves to new ways of working.</p> <p>Overall throughout 2020/21 there was a total of 47 data breaches of which 2 required reporting to the ICO (who chose to take no action), this is a slight increase on the total of 45 from the previous year. However, it is difficult to make direct comparisons due to the pandemic. Work continues on training and different methods to conduct this effectively and safely to the most amount of people are being explored. As refresher training is required for all staff on a rolling 2-year basis this is a constant area of work.</p>	High

Corporate Risk Register

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

Corporate Risk Register

Risk Description and Lead	End of Year 2020/21	Status
<p>CRR24</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Managing Director / Head of Governance and Partnerships and Councillor Nigel Daniels</p>	<p><u>End of Year Review 2020 / 2021</u></p> <p>In many cases businesses have been substantially disrupted or closed during this year due to the Coronavirus Pandemic; with the first lock-down commencing at the end of March 2020 and further waves in the pandemic resulting in another extended lock-down from December 2020 with relaxation in restrictions only commencing in May 2021. There has been significant and sustained impact on businesses in BG resulting in some businesses closing, less start-ups and businesses holding back on investment. Issues surrounding leaving the EU have been clouded by COVID19 restrictions therefore we believe that the full effects of leaving have not yet been experienced.</p> <p>EU Transition group refreshed its terms of reference to monitor the impact of EU transition on council services, our communities and the local economy using the existing risk assessment and action plan, highlighting any emerging risks not previously identified or downgrading existing risks if impact is found to be low. The risk assessment was updated based on known impact of EU transition since 1st Jan, plus a new opportunities register has been developed to plan for opportunities arising from replacement EU funding, new trade & travel rules, and other new UK legislation. Many of the implications for the local economy remain unknown until travel and trade starts to increase when Covid restrictions begin to ease during 2021/22.</p> <p>Refreshed situation reporting process has been put in place for service areas to report any EU transition issues (by exception) for escalation to Welsh Government & WLGA where necessary (this has not been required yet). Welsh and UK Government EU Transition planning information shared with local businesses and EUSS material shared via council's social media.</p> <p>Welsh Government agreed to continue the EU Transition Fund Brexit Coordinator funding for local authorities in 2021/22. As in previous years, the EUTF funding was awarded to the WLGA who have redistributed £45,000 to each local authority to enable EU Transition coordinators “to remain at the heart of activity as the nature of the focus of required work now changes from planning to implementation.</p> <p>The risk of further disruption to business exists particularly in the Autumn/Winter period given the uncertainty as to the impact of reducing restrictions and the presence of variants of concern. The modelling does show the likelihood of a third wave from the late summer but it is hoped that the successful vaccination programme will mitigate the worse impact of this on our community and businesses.</p>	<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Critical</p>

Corporate Risk Register

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

Corporate Risk Register

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

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Agenda Item 9

Date Signed off by Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date Signed off by Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **16th July 2021**
Report Subject: **Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Revision**
Portfolio Holder: **Leader, Corporate Services**
Report Submitted by: **Rhian Hayden, Chief Officer Resources**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
					16.7.21		29.7.21	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To consider a proposed change to the Authority's Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy and the impact this will have on the minimum revenue provision going forward.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 During February / March 2021, the Council engaged Treasury Advisors, Link Asset Services, to conduct a review of the current MRP policy.
- 2.2 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 MRP charge until 2031/32 for unsupported borrowing and 2057/58 for supported borrowing.
- 2.3 This report, supported by the Link review, will provide a reasoned justification supporting the case to change:-
- the supported borrowing element of the MRP from 2% straight line to a 50-year annuity basis. and
 - changing the unsupported borrowing element of the MRP from an annuity basis to a weighted average annuity basis.
- 2.4 Under regulation 21 of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (Wales) Regulations 2003, local authorities are required to charge Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) to their revenue account for each financial year to provide for the repayment of debt resulting from capital expenditure. The Council is required to determine a level of MRP it considers to be **prudent**, whilst having regard to MRP Guidance issued by WG, which states "The broad aim of prudent provision is to ensure that the cost of debt is charged to a revenue account over a period that is commensurate with that over which the capital expenditure provides benefits or, in the case of borrowing supported by Revenue Support Grant (RSG), reasonably commensurate with the period implicit in the determination of that grant".

- 2.5 The legislation does not define what constitutes a “prudent provision”, however the MRP guidance (attached at Appendix 1) issued by the Secretary of State (WG) interprets the term and provides some ready-made examples of acceptable methods for calculating a prudent level of MRP.
Overall, the original statutory intent is that it is for an authority to itself determine what represents a prudent annual amount of MRP

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 Option 1

Members to scrutinise the proposals and recommend to Executive/Council not support the change of the supported borrowing element of the MRP from 2% straight line to a 50-year annuity basis and to changing the unsupported borrowing element of the MRP from an individual asset annuity basis to a weighted average annuity basis.

3.2 Option 2 (preferred option)

Members to scrutinise the proposals and recommend Executive / Council to support the change of the supported borrowing element of the MRP from 2% straight line to a 50-year annuity basis and to changing the unsupported borrowing element of the MRP from an individual asset annuity basis to a weighted average annuity basis. This change is to be applied from 1st April 2021.

The calculation of the MRP proposed in Option 2 is in line with the examples provided in WG guidance on MRP.

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

- 4.1 The report is written under legislation the Local Government Act 2003 Welsh Government guidance and CIPFA codes of practice.
- 4.2 This report also supports the Corporate Plan proposed outcome statement 2020/2022 “An ambitious and innovative Council delivering the quality services we no matter to our communities”.
- 4.3 The proposal has also been identified as part of the Bridging the Gap programme with the aim of supporting the Council’s financial resilience.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)

- 5.1.1 The following table illustrates the impact on the MRP charge the methodology will have:

Financial Year	MRP based on the Current Policy	MRP based on the Proposed Policy (revised Methodology)	Change in the MRP charge	Impact on the MTFS (Original method) Increase / decrease	Impact on the MTFS (New method)
	£	£	£	£	£
2021/22	1,026,573	1,025,961	-612	0	
2022/23	4,470,516	1,744,449	-2,726,066	3,443,943	718,489
2023/24	4,301,872	1,837,629	-2,464,242	-168,644	93,180
2024/25	4,335,574	1,933,697	-2,401,876	33,702	96,068
2025/26	4,370,510	2,032,745	-2,337,765	34,937	99,047
2026/27	4,385,674	2,720,657	-1,665,016	15,164	687,912
2027/28	4,413,668	2,826,975	-1,586,693	27,994	106,317
2028/29	4,437,023	2,898,430	-1,538,593	23,355	71,456
2029/30	4,474,208	2,972,243	-1,501,965	37,185	73,813
2030/31	4,471,907	3,048,494	-1,423,413	-2,301	76,250
2031/32	4,039,439	2,712,834	-1,326,605	-432,468	-335,660
2032/33	4,076,695	2,794,209	-1,282,487	37,257	81,375
2033/34	4,029,319	2,878,277	-1,151,042	-47,377	84,068

5.1.2 The above table illustrates that if agreed, the revised policy would reduce the expected MRP charge from 2022/23 onwards. Under the current policy the MRP charge for 2022/23 is forecast to be £4.47m this will reduce to £1.74m under the proposed policy and will increase incrementally in the following years as shown above.

5.1.3 The 2022/23 the MRP charge of £1.74m is higher than the current charge of £1.03m (by £718k) but lower than the current forecast increase of £3.4m.

5.1.4 Based on the current MTFS assumptions, the proposed change in policy would have a positive impact of in excess of £750,000. The MRP charge is estimated to increase in subsequent years but this charge will be lower than current estimates and will mitigate some of the cost pressure previously identified and reduce the currently assessed budget gaps.

5.1.5 It is important to note that the changes are prospective and do not amend any previous year calculations. The figures incorporate the re-profiling of the remaining £3.2m retrospective adjustment balance from the previous MRP Policy review in 2017/18. over the period 2021/22 to 2025/26. In 2026/27 at the point where the full retrospective amount has applied the MRP is expected to increase by £600,000.

For the purpose of this report the Authority's future capital expenditure estimates have not been included in the analysis and all options are based on the CFR position as at 31 March 2021.

5.2 Risks including Mitigation

5.2.1 Audit Wales monitor the minimum revenue provision as part of their annual audit of the statement of accounts, we are not expecting AW to challenge the

proposals. However, the Authority's Treasury advisors will be available to assist in any queries the auditors may have.

- 5.2.2 The impact of a revised MRP policy would need to be kept under regular review in order to ensure that the annual provision is prudent. The MRP policy will be reviewed in line with the annual budget setting process. As the MRP policy is scrutinised by Corporate Overview Committee and approved by Council each year there will be an opportunity to monitor this and change the policy if required.

5.3 *Legal*

- 5.3.1 The report is written under legislation (the Local Government Act 2003), Welsh Government guidance and CIPFA codes of practice.

5.4 *Human Resources*

- 5.4.1 There are no direct staffing implications to report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 Performance Information and Data

6.1.1 ***Current Policy***

The Council's current policy for:-

- 6.1.2 ***Supported Borrowing*** (i.e. borrowing that receives central government support through the RSG) - The Council currently makes MRP for supported borrowing and borrowing pre 1st April 2008 on a straight-line basis at 2% (i.e. over 50 years).

- 6.1.3 ***Unsupported borrowing*** (i.e. prudential borrowing) is based on Option 3 of the statutory guidance that allows for MRP provision using the asset life methodology on an annuity basis. It is applied to particular items of capital expenditure for example Highways prudential borrowing, IT Infrastructure and 21st Century Schools projects and spreads the expenditure over the useful life of the asset. MRP is chargeable in the first financial year after the relevant asset becomes operational. The interest rate to be used in the annuity calculation is the average PWLB annuity rate for a loan with a term equivalent to the estimated life of the asset.

6.1.4 ***Proposed Changes***

6.1.5 ***Supported Borrowing***

The Authority currently makes MRP for supported borrowing and borrowing pre 1st April 2008 on a straight-line basis at 2% (i.e. over 50 years). It could choose instead to make MRP for this element of its Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) on an annuity basis.

CIPFA puts forward the following reasoning for using the annuity method in CIPFA's 'The Practitioner's Guide to Capital Finance in Local Government' (2019) which states: 'The annuity method provides a fairer charge than equal instalments as it takes account of the time value of money, whereby paying £100 in 10 years' time is less of a burden than paying £100 now. The schedule of charges produced by the annuity method thus results in a consistent charge over an asset's life, taking into account the real value of the amounts when they fall due. The annuity method would then be a prudent basis for providing for assets that provide a steady flow of benefits over their useful life.'

Unsupported Borrowing

- 6.1.6 The Authority currently uses the asset life annuity basis methodology for MRP on unsupported borrowing, which is in line with option 3 in the MRP Guidance. An asset life is determined for each item of capital expenditure financed by unsupported borrowing and a calculation of MRP is carried out for each individual item.

A prudent option needs to ensure that the MRP repayment period is reasonably commensurate with the period over which the capital expenditure provides benefits. An alternative simplified method has therefore been developed that uses an average asset life for all unsupported borrowing in each year and applies the annuity calculation to the total unsupported borrowing capital expenditure for that year, rather than to individual project.

6.1.7 Prudential Indicators

The MRP is a statutory requirement for local authorities to charge to their revenue account for each financial year a prudent amount for the principal cost of their debt in that financial year. It impacts upon the Councils prudential indicators that are set at the start of the financial year. Prudential Indicators however are not intended to be a measure of the Council's performance against other local authorities; they should instead be used as indicators of affordability of the Council's capital spending plans.

- 6.1.8 Amending the MRP as proposed will cause an increase in our CFR compared to current projections reflected within our prudential indicators. This is because the MRP reduces the CFR each year, so a decrease in the amount of reduction causes an increase in the current projected CFR. It is important to recognise however that this will not affect our actual debt repayments or actual debt outstanding which will remain unchanged. MRP is the statutory amount required to be charged to the revenue account each year to represent debt repayment and the CFR is a measure of indebtedness rather than actual debt.

- 6.1.5 The decrease in MRP will not adversely impact upon the Council's ability to repay its future debt obligations

6.2 Expected outcome for the public

- 6.2.1 The Council's Treasury Management activities support delivery of services to the public. Revising the MRP policy will mitigate the large rise in the MRP costs from 2022/23.

- 6.3 *Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)*
- 6.3.1 Members of the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee and full Council are involved in developing and monitoring compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Strategy, the MRP Policy forms part of this.

- 6.4 *Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)*
 Changing the MRP policy will still result in the debt being written off over the same period of time, however it will avoid large fluctuations in the charge which can impact significantly on the budget setting in those individual years.

 This proposal also forms part of the Bridging the Gap programme which has been developed to support the Council's ongoing financial resilience.

- 6.5 *Preventative focus*
- 6.5.1 Revising the MRP policy will mitigate the large rise in the MRP costs impacting upon 2022/23 and future years.

- 6.6 *Collaboration / partnership working*
The report has been prepared in conjunction with the Authority's Treasury Management advisors, Link.

- 6.7 *Integration(across service areas)*
 n/a

- 6.8 *EqIA(screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)*
 n/a

7. Monitoring Arrangements

- 7.1 The MRP policy will be reviewed in line with the annual budget setting process

- 7.2 As the MRP policy is scrutinised by Corporate Overview Committee and approved by Council each year there will be an opportunity to revisit any decision at least annually, or make additional voluntary payments.

Background Documents

Appendix 1 – Guidance on minimum revenue provision

GUIDANCE ON MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION

Guidance issued by Welsh Ministers
under section 21(1A) of the Local Government Act 2003
[Revised 2018]

DEFINITIONS

1. In this guidance:

2003 Act means the Local Government Act 2003.

2007 Act means the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

2003 Regulations means the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (Wales) Regulations 2003 [SI 2003/3239, as amended].

CFR means the Capital Financing Requirement, as defined in the Prudential Code.

Credit arrangement has the meaning given in section 7 of the 2003 Act.

Housing assets means any land, houses or other property to which subsection (1) of section 74 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (duty to keep Housing Revenue Account) applies. (Section 74 was amended by section 222 of, and paragraph 24(2) of Schedule 18 to, the Housing Act 1996).

Lease means a lease transaction as defined under proper accounting practices.

Local authority has the meaning given in section 23 of the 2003 Act. (This guidance does not apply to community councils and charter trustees).

MRP means Minimum Revenue Provision.

Non-housing CFR has the meaning given in regulation 22 of the 2003 Regulations before this was amended by the 2008 regulations.

Prudential Code means the code of practice referred to in regulation 2 of the 2003 Regulations.

Supported Capital Expenditure means the total amount of capital expenditure which a local authority has been notified is to be taken into account in the calculation of the revenue grant due to the authority in respect of its use of borrowing and credit. It excludes any expenditure which is supported by capital grant.

APPLICATION

Effective date

2. This Guidance applies for accounting periods starting on or after 1 April 2019. It supersedes all previous versions of this Guidance.

Transitional arrangements

3. There is no requirement for local authorities to recalculate MRP charged for 2018-19 or any prior year following the issue of this updated guidance. Where, prior to 31 March 2019, a local authority changed the methodology that it uses to calculate a prudent provision and thus calculated an over-provision, it can continue to incorporate that overprovision into the future calculations of prudent provision, if the Authority considers it appropriate to do so.
4. As set out in paragraph 19 of the statutory guidance, if a local authority changes the methodology it uses to calculate MRP, then this change can never give rise to an overpayment.

Local authorities

5. This guidance applies to all local authorities in Wales and their relevant bodies. It does not apply to town and community councils or charter trustees.

INTRODUCTION

6. Under regulation 21 of the 2003 Regulations, local authorities are required to charge to their revenue account for each financial year MRP to account for the cost of their debt in that financial year. Prior to its amendment by the 2008 Regulations, regulation 22 set out details of the method authorities were required to follow in calculating MRP. This has been replaced with a requirement that local authorities calculate an amount of MRP which they consider to be prudent.
7. In calculating prudent provision, local authorities must have regard to this guidance. Where this guidance is not followed and authorities adopt an alternative method of calculating a prudent provision, the authorities must explain the non-compliance and how this calculates a more appropriate provision

ANNUAL MRP STATEMENT

8. It is recommended that before the start of each financial year a local authority prepares a statement of its policy on making MRP in respect of that financial year and submits it to the full council. The statement should indicate how it is proposed to discharge the duty to make prudent MRP in the financial year.
9. If it is ever proposed to vary the terms of the original statement during the year, a revised statement should be put to the council at that time.

MEANING OF “PRUDENT PROVISION”

10. Regulation 22 of the 2003 Regulations requires a local authority to calculate for the current financial year an amount of MRP which it considers to be prudent. Welsh Ministers recommend that, for the purposes of regulation 22, the prudent amount of provision should normally be determined in accordance with paragraphs 11 and 12 below.
11. An underpinning principle of the local authority financial system is that all capital expenditure has to be financed either from capital receipts, capital grants (or other contributions) or debt. The broad aim of prudent provision is to ensure that the cost of debt is charged to a revenue account over a period that is commensurate with that over which the capital expenditure provides benefits.
12. In the case of borrowing supported by the Welsh Government Revenue Support Grant, the meaning of prudent provision is to put funds aside over a period commensurate with the period implicit in the determination of that grant. “Commensurate” is not intended to require exactly the same period as in the determination of the grant.

13. Welsh Ministers consider that the methods of making prudent provision include the options set out in paragraphs 21 to 26, subject to the conditions in paragraphs 27 to 35. This does not rule out or otherwise preclude a local authority from using alternative approaches differing from those exemplified should it decide that it is more appropriate.

OVERPAYMENTS OF MRP

14. Local authorities may choose to pay more MRP than they consider prudent in any given year. If they do so they should separately disclose the in-year and cumulative amount of MRP overpaid in the Statement presented to full council.

MEANING OF CHARGE TO A REVENUE ACCOUNT

15. A charge to a revenue account for MRP cannot be a negative charge.

16. A charge to a revenue account can only be £nil if:

- A local authority's CFR was nil or negative on the last day of the preceding financial year; or
- A local authority chooses to offset a previous year's overpayment (as set out in paragraph 14) against the current year's prudent provision. If a local authority chooses to offset a previous year's overpayment, they should disclose this fact and any remaining cumulative overpayment of MRP in the Statement presented to full council.

CHANGING METHODS FOR CALCULATING MRP

17. A local authority may change the method(s) that it uses for calculating part or all of its MRP at any time.

18. Where a local authority changes the method(s) that it uses to calculate MRP, it should explain in its Statement why the change will better allow it to make prudent provision.

19. The calculation of MRP under the new method(s) should be based on the residual CFR at the point the change in method is made (i.e. it should not be applied retrospectively). Changing the method used to calculate MRP can never give rise to an overpayment in respect of previous years, and should not result in a local authority making a reduced charge or a charge of £nil for the accounting period in which the change is made, or in any subsequent period on the grounds that it needs to recover overpayments of MRP relating to previous years.

TRANSFERRED DEBT

20. Where debt is transferred between authorities, the authorities concerned should agree on arrangements for the continued making of MRP and adjust their CFRs accordingly. Normally, the authority relinquishing the debt should cease to make MRP in respect of it and the authority taking it over should begin to make MRP as if incurring new debt funded capital expenditure.

OPTIONS FOR PRUDENT PROVISION

Option 1: Regulatory Method

21. MRP is equal to the amount determined in accordance with the former 2003 regulations, as if they had not been revoked by the 2008 Regulations. For the purposes of that calculation, the Adjustment A should normally continue to have the value attributed to it by the authority in the financial year 2004-05. However, it would be reasonable for local authorities to correct any perceived errors in adjustment A, if the correction would be in their favour.

22. The former Regulations 28 and 29 of the 2003 Regulations are included at Annex A.

Option 2: CFR Method

23. MRP is equal to 4% of the non-housing CFR at the end of the preceding financial year.

Option 3: Asset Life Method

24. Where capital expenditure on an asset is financed wholly or partly by borrowing or credit arrangements, MRP is to be determined by reference to the life of the asset. There are two main methods by which this can be achieved, as described below. Under both variations, authorities may in any year make additional voluntary revenue provision, in which case they may make an appropriate reduction in later years' levels of MRP.

(a) Equal instalment method

MRP is the amount given by the following formula:

$$\frac{A - B}{C}$$

Where-

A is the amount of the capital expenditure in respect of the asset financed by borrowing or credit arrangements

B is the total provision made before the current financial year in respect of that expenditure

C is the inclusive number of financial years from the current year to that in which the estimated life of the asset expires.

(b) Annuity method

MRP is the principal element for the year of the annuity required to repay over the asset life the amount of capital expenditure financed by borrowing or credit arrangements. The authority should use an appropriate interest rate to calculate the amount. Adjustments to the calculation to take account of repayment by other methods during the repayment period (e.g. by the application of capital receipts) should be made as necessary.

Option 4: Depreciation Method

25. MRP is to be equal to the provision required in accordance with depreciation accounting in respect of the asset on which expenditure has been financed by borrowing or credit arrangements. This should include any amount for impairment chargeable to the Income and Expenditure Account.

26. For this purpose standard depreciation accounting procedures should be followed, except in the following respects:

- MRP should continue to be made annually until the cumulative amount of such provision is equal to the expenditure originally financed by borrowing or credit arrangements. Thereafter MRP shall be zero.
- On disposal of the asset, the charge should continue in accordance with the depreciation schedule as if the disposal had not taken place. This does not affect the ability to apply capital receipts or other funding sources at any time to repay all or part of the outstanding debt.
- Where the percentage of the expenditure on the asset financed by borrowing or credit arrangements is less than 100%, MRP should be equal to the same percentage of the provision required under depreciation accounting.

CONDITIONS FOR USING THE OPTIONS

27. Options 1 and 2 may only be used in relation to:
- (a) capital expenditure incurred before 1 April 2008; or
 - (b) capital expenditure which forms part of its supported capital expenditure.
28. For expenditure incurred on or after 1 April 2008 which does not form part of the authorities supported capital expenditure, prudent approaches include Options 3 and 4.
29. For all capitalised expenditure incurred on or after 1 April 2008, the Welsh Government recommends that authorities should use Option 3, adapted in accordance with paragraphs 39 and 40 below.
30. Where a local authority uses options 3 or 4 or any other alternative methodology that has the useful life of assets as a component to the calculation, asset lives should not normally exceed a maximum useful life of 50 years. Local authorities may exceed this maximum in two scenarios;
- Where a local authority has an opinion from an appropriately qualified professional advisor that an asset will deliver service functionality for more than 50 years it can use the life suggested by the professional advisor; and
 - For a lease or PFI asset, where the length of the lease/PFI contract exceeds 50 years. In this case the length of the lease/PFI contract should be used.

Estimated useful life of assets

31. The estimated life of the asset should be determined in the year that MRP commences and not subsequently be revised.

Investment Properties

32. The duty to make MRP extends to investment properties where their acquisition has been partially or fully funded by an increase in borrowing or credit arrangements. As depreciation is not charged on investment properties, Option 4: the Depreciation method is not a suitable approach for calculating the MRP to be charged in respect of investment properties.

Freehold land

33. If no life can reasonably be attributed to an asset, such as freehold land, the life should be taken to be a maximum of 50 years. However, in the case of freehold land on which a building or other structure is constructed, the life of the land may be treated as equal to that of the structure, where this would exceed 50 years (subject to conditions of paragraph 25).

Commencement of provision.

34. Subject to paragraph 35 below, MRP should normally commence in the financial year *following* the one in which the expenditure was incurred.

MRP commencement.

35. When borrowing to provide an asset, the authority may treat the asset life as commencing in the year in which the asset first becomes operational. It may postpone beginning to make MRP until the financial year following the one in which the asset becomes operational. "Operational" here has its standard accounting definition. Investment properties should be regarded as becoming operational when they begin to generate revenues.

Leases and PFI

36. In the case of finance leases (or, when applicable, leases where a right-to-use asset is on balance sheet) and on balance-sheet PFI contracts, the MRP requirement would be regarded as met by a charge equal to the element of the rent/charge that goes to write down the balance sheet liability.
37. Where a lease (or part of a lease) or PFI contract is brought onto the balance sheet, having previously been accounted for off-balance sheet, the MRP requirement would be regarded as having been met by the inclusion in the charge, for the year in which the restatement occurs, of an amount equal to the write-down for that year plus retrospective writing down of the balance sheet liability that arises from the restatement.

Housing Assets

38. The duty to make MRP to cover borrowing or credit arrangements used to finance capital expenditure on housing assets remains unchanged from the current determinations.

Capitalised Expenditure

39. Where on or after 1 April 2008 an authority incurs expenditure which is:
- (a) funded by borrowing or credit arrangements; and
 - (b) treated as capital expenditure by virtue of either a direction under section 16(2)(b) of the 2003 Act or regulation 20(1) of the 2003 Regulations,

The authority should make MRP in accordance with Option 3.

40. For the purpose of the formula in paragraph 24 above, in the initial year of making MRP the variable, "C" should be given the maximum values as set out in the following table:

<u>Expenditure type</u>	<u>Maximum value of “C” in initial year</u>
Expenditure capitalised by virtue of a direction under s16(2)(b)	“C” equals the period specified in the direction. This will generally not exceed a maximum of 20 years.
Regulation 20(1)(a) Expenditure on computer programs	“C” equals the value it would have for computer hardware or the length of the software license.
Regulation 20(1)(b) Loans and grants towards capital expenditure by third parties	“C” equals the estimated life of the assets in relation to which the third party expenditure is incurred
Regulation 20(1)(d) Acquisition of share or loan capital	“C” equals 20 years
Regulation 20(1)(e) Repayment of grants and loans for capital expenditure	“C” equals 25 years or the period of the loan if longer
Regulation 20(1)(f) Expenditure on works to assets not owned by the authority	“C” equals the estimated life of the assets
Regulation 20(1)(h) Expenditure incurred on the acquisition, production or construction of assets not owned by the authority	“C” equals the estimated life of the assets

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