Damien McCann,
Interim Chief Executive / Prif Weithredwr Interim

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
Blaenau Gwent

T: 01495 355001

E: committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Our Ref./Ein Cyf.
Your Ref./Eich Cyf.
Contact:/Cysylltwch â:

THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND

3rd April 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

CABINET

A meeting of the Cabinet will be held in Via MS Teams on Wednesday, 10th April, 2024 at 10.00 am.

Yours faithfully

Damien McCann
Interim Chief Executive

AGENDA	**Pages**

1.   **SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION**

You are welcome to use Welsh at the meeting a minimum notice period of 3 working days is required should you wish to do so. A simultaneous translation will be provided if requested.

2.   **APOLOGIES**

To receive any apologies for absence.

3.   **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND**

General Offices	Swyddfeydd Cyffredinol
Steelworks Road	Heol Gwaith Dur
Tyllwyn, Ebbw	Tŷ Llwyn, Glyn Ebwy
Vale NP23 6DN	NP23 6DN

DISPENSATIONS

To receive any declarations of interest or dispensations.

DECISIONS

To consider the report of the Interim Corporate Director Education.

11. **WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS (WPLS) ANNUAL RETURN 2022/23**

To consider the report of the Interim Corporate Director Education.

To: Councillor S. Thomas (Chair)
Councillor H. Cunningham
Councillor J. C. Morgan
Councillor H. Trollope
Councillor S. Edmunds

All other Members (for information)
Interim Chief Executive
Chief Officers

This page is intentionally left blank

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: **THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET**

SUBJECT: **CABINET – 21ST FEBRUARY, 2024**

REPORT OF: **DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER**

PRESENT:

**Leader/
Cabinet Member - Corporate Overview & Performance**
Councillor S. Thomas

**Deputy Leader/
Cabinet Member – Place & Environment**
Councillor H. Cunningham

Cabinet Member – Place and Regeneration
Councillor J.C. Morgan

Cabinet Member – People & Social Services
Councillor H. Trollope

Cabinet Member – People & Education
Councillor S. Edmunds

WITH:

Interim Chief Executive
Chief Officer Resources
Chief Officer Customer & Commercial
Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services
Interim Corporate Director Social Services
Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance
Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships
Head of Organisational Development
Service Manager – Accountancy
Senior Business Partner – Finance
Service Manager – Policy & Partnerships
Service Manager Education Transformation
Press & Public Relations Officer

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

ITEM	SUBJECT
No. 1	**SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION** It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.
No. 2	**APOLOGIES** No apologies for absence were received.
No. 3	**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS** No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.
	DECISIONS
No. 4	**CABINET** Consideration was given to the decisions of the Cabinet Meeting held on 10th January, 2024. RESOLVED that the decisions be received as a true record of proceedings.

	GENERAL MATTERS	
No. 5	**CONFERENCES, COURSES AND EVENTS**	

Consideration was given to the following:-

<u>2024 Royal Garden Party</u>
<u>Royal Garden Parties – London</u>
<u>8th May, 2024 and 21st May, 2024</u>

RESOLVED that one nominee plus guest be approved to attend on either the 8th or 21st May, 2024.

CORPORATE AND PERFORMANCE PORTFOLIO

No. 6   **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 10TH APRIL, 2024**

Consideration was given to report of the Scrutiny & Democratic Officer.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

No. 7   **GRANTS TO ORGANISATIONS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.

The following grants were received following the publication of the report.

ABERTILLERY

<u>Llanhilleth Ward - Councillor N. Parsons</u>

1.   Beaufort Hill Ponds and Woodlands   £125

BRYNMAWR

Brynmawr Ward - Councillor J. Hill

1.	Brynmawr & District Museum Society	£88

Brynmawr Ward - Councillor W. Hodgins

1.	Abertillery Piranhas	£100
2.	Nantyglo Under 10's Football	£100
3.	Brynmawr Musical Theatre Company	£200
4.	Nantyglo Mini Rugby	£100
5.	Brynmawr FC	£100
6.	Brynmawr RFC	£150
7.	North Ebbw Fach Interact	£100
8.	Brynmawr & District Museum Society	£200

EBBW VALE

Beaufort Ward - Councillor C. Smith

1.	Glyncoed Community Group	£100
2.	Beaufort Christmas Lights	£100
3.	Ebbw Vale Works Museum	£100
4.	1158 Ebbw Vale Squadron RAF Air Cadets	£110

Beaufort Ward - Councillor D. Woods

1.	Beaufort Ladies Craft Class	£100
2.	Beaufort RFC	£100
3.	Royal British Legion Rassau & Beaufort Branch	£100
4.	Beaufort Christmas Lights	£200
5.	One Life Autism	£100
6.	Beaufort Hill Ponds & Woodlands	£100
7.	Beaufort Male Choir	£100
8.	2nd Beaufort & Rassau Scout Group	£100
9.	Ffin Dance	£100

10.	Beaufort Hearts	£100
11.	Willowtown Primary School PTA	£100
12.	Glyncoed Community Group	£200
13.	Beaufort Hill Primary School	£260

Ebbw Vale North Ward - Councillor J. Morgan

1.	RTB Ebbw Vale FC	£160
2.	One Life Autism	£200

NANYGLO & BLAINA

Blaina Ward - Councillor J.P. Morgan

1.	Blaina Cricket Club	£960

RESOLVED accordingly.

FURTHER RESOLVED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

No. 8	**WORKFORCE STRATEGY 2021-2026** Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development. RESOLVED that the report be accepted, Cabinet reviewed and noted the progress against the 2022/23 delivery plan and endorsed the 2023/25 delivery plan (Option 1).

No. 9	**CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING, FORECAST FOR 2023/2024 FINANCIAL YEAR (AS AT 31ST DECEMBER, 2023)** Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources. RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Members provided the appropriate challenge to the financial outcomes in the report, continued to support appropriate financial control procedures agreed by Council and noted the budgetary control and monitoring procedures in place within the Capital Team, to safeguard Authority funding (Option 1).
No. 10	**REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2023/2024** **FORECAST OUTTURN TO 31ST MARCH 2024** **(AS AT 31ST DECEMBER, 2023)** Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources. RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Members provided the appropriate challenge to the financial outcomes in the report, noted the application of reserves and challenged the Action Plans as detailed in Appendix 2 (Option 1).

No. 11	**DISCRETIONARY FEES & CHARGES 2024/2025**
	
	Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.
	
	RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Cabinet recommended Option 2 to Council, as follows:-
	
	(1) approved the register of Fees & Charges for 2024/2025 detailed at Appendix 1 and for discretionary fees & charges, as follows:-
	
	    (a) a fee uplift of 5% in line with the proposed business case as detailed in Appendix 4;
	
	    (b) the alternative fee proposed as detailed in paragraphs 5.1.4 to 5.1.14. of the report; and

		(c) Planning Fees attached at Appendix 2.
	(2)	approved delegated power and responsibility to the Interim Director of Social Services for setting the fees and charges for 2024/2025 relating to the provision of external social care as detailed in paragraph 5.1.6 of the report; and
	(3)	approved the core price increases related to Aneurin Leisure Trust as detailed in Appendix 3.
No. 12	**REVENUE BUDGET 2024/2025**
	Consideration was given to the report of the Chief Officer Resources.
	RESOLVED that the report be accepted and agreed Option 1, as follows:-
	1) Subject to the decisions on the following recommendations, Members considered and recommended to Council the 2024/25 revenue budget as shown in the table in paragraph 5.1.15 of the report.
	2) Members provided comment on the outcomes within the overall provisional RSG Settlement and noted the potential for further change in the Final RSG Settlement (paragraphs 2.6 – 2.17 of the report).
	3) Members provided comment on the outcomes within the BGCBC provisional RSG Settlement and its impact upon the Medium Term Financial Strategy (paragraphs 2.18 – 2.26 of the report).
	4) Members considered and recommend to Council the updated cost pressures and growth items (£2.8m in total) detailed in Appendix 2 (paragraphs 5.1.10 – 5.1.16 of the report) for inclusion in the Council's budget.

	5) Members considered and recommended to Council the Bridging the Gap proposals (a summary of which is detailed at Appendix 3 and Business Cases are outlined in Appendix 4) delivering a minimum of £6.27m of financial efficiencies and budget cuts towards the budget gap (paragraphs 5.1.32 to 5.1.37 of the report). 6) Members considered and recommended to Council the level of funding provided to schools (paragraph 5.1.19-5.1.27 of the report). 7) Members recommended that any grant/s transferring into the Final Settlement for 2024/2025 be passported to the relevant service/s. 8) Members considered and recommended to Council the use of reserves up to £2.1m to balance the budget for 2024/2025 (paragraphs 5.1.38 to 5.1.42 of the report). The level would be subject to the recommendations in paragraph 3.1.5 and 3.1.6 above. 9) Members considered and recommended to Council, a Council Tax increase of a minimum of 5% for 2024/25 (paragraph 5.1.10 of the report) as per the Business Case CS12 (detailed in Appendix 3 and 4). 10) Approved the updated MTFS for 2024/2025 to 2028/2029 as detailed in Appendix 5.
	PLACE AND ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO
No. 13	**OVERVIEW POSITION OF BLAENAU GWENT TOWN CENTRE CCTV ZONES 2023/24** Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager Policy & Partnerships. RESOLVED that the report be accepted and Cabinet endorsed the updated Codes of Practice for 2023/24 (Option 1):- **Recommendation 2:** Cabinet considered the current operating practices and arrangements with Caerphilly Council and IDS; and

	Recommendation 3: Agreed to consider the Annual Report 2023/24 as part of the committee's forward work programme for 2024/25.
	PEOPLE AND EDUCATION PORTFOLIO
No. 14	**CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION SERVICES 6-MONTH PROGRESS PERFORMANCE REPORT APRIL 2023 – SEPTEMBER 2023** Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director Education. RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 2).
No. 15	**SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING ROLLING PROGRAMME** Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director Education. RESOLVED that the report be accepted and approved, and the Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling Programme proposals to be submitted to Welsh Government in March 24 (Option 1).
No. 16	**KEY STAGE 4 OUTCOMES 2023** Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director Education. RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 1).

	PEOPLE AND SOCIAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO
No. 17	**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES 2023/2024 (QUARTERS 1 AND 2)** Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director Social Services. RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 2).
	PEOPLE AND SOCIAL SERVICES/ PEOPLE AND EDUCATION JOINT PORTFOLIO
No. 18	**SAFEGUARDING PERFORMANCE INFORMATION FOR SOCIAL SERVICES - 1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER AND EDUCATION SUMMER TERM – 2023** Consideration was given to the joint report of the Interim Corporate Director Social Services and Interim Corporate Director Education. RESOLVED that the report be accepted and provided comments on where improvement can be made to the current monitoring processes (Option 2).
	PLACE AND ENVIRONMENT/PLACE AND REGENERATION JOINT PORTFOLIO
No. 19	**COMMUNITY SERVICES AND REGENERATION DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE – QUARTERS 1 AND 2 - 2023/24** Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services. RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 2).

Agenda Item 5
Cabinet and Council only
Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 25.03.24
Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 25.03.24

Committee: **Cabinet**

Date of meeting: **10th April 2024**

Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Local Well-being Partnership**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Stephen Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate Overview and Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Sarah King, Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	08.02.24	22.03.24			22.02.24	10.04.24		BG LWP

1. **Purpose of the Report**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the opportunity to monitor performance and progress of the Blaenau Gwent Local Well-being Partnership in its role as one of the five Local Delivery Groups of the Gwent Public Services Board.

2. **Scope and Background**

2.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 sets out a requirement for each Public Services Board (PSB) to prepare and publish an assessment of the state of economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being in its area and a subsequent Well-being Plan every five years.

2.2 The Gwent PSB undertook a regional Well-being Assessment *(Appendix 1)* which reviewed the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing in Gwent. The assessment used a wide range of qualitative and quantitative information including data, academic research, evidence, and people's views (engagement) to help understand Wellbeing in Gwent. The assessment took an asset-based approach, rather than focussing purely on need, to build upon and identify the strengths of both individuals and communities and it also identified problems and challenges that need to be addressed. The evidence and key issues identified in the assessment have been used to develop the Wellbeing Plan for Gwent.

2.3 The Gwent Well-being Plan 2023-28 *(Appendix 2)*, published in July 2023, is the first regional well-being plan for Gwent. It sets out the Gwent PSB's Well-being Objectives and the steps it intends to take to meet those objectives, in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Delivery of these will come via the Gwent PSB for regional at-scale activity as well as through five Local Delivery Groups in each of the Gwent LA areas.

2.4 Whilst the Gwent PSB has been developing a robust Delivery Plan 2024-28 for the new regional Well-being Plan, the Blaenau Gwent Local Well-being

Partnership (BG LWP) continued to prioritise the 2018-23 well-being programmes around Early Years Integration Transformation, Age-Friendly Communities, Integrated Well-being (IWN), Climate Change Mitigation, Food Resilience, Cost of Living, and delivering a Participatory Budget community well-being grant programme, whilst establishing current and future local well-being priorities aligned to the regional Well-being Plan through public and stakeholder engagement.

2.5 The BG LWP has held three stakeholder engagement workshops in addition to three formal LWP meetings since April 2023. The aim of the workshops was for local and sub-regional stakeholders to work in partnership with each other to reflect on the success, barriers and challenges for existing local well-being projects/programmes. Furthermore, to consider well-being priorities for our local communities and identify opportunities for new partnership working and/or where existing well-being projects could be scaled up or used as model to more collaboratively across the sub-region or region.

2.6 The stakeholder engagement workshops were well-attended by partners and have provided valuable insight into existing local well-being projects and priorities as well as potential opportunities for increased collaboration and partnership working in future (Appendix 3).

2.7 Some key areas of focus and local well-being priorities emerged from these in-person sessions, including working in partnership to: Tackle Health Inequity; Affordable Transport to well-being; Best Start in Life and Early Years; Cost of Living and Sustainable Food Provision; and Protecting and Making use of our Natural Environment. It was also consistently acknowledged that the 3rd Sector and volunteers play a vital role in local well-being delivery given the current funding landscape.

2.8 The plan is for this evidence gathered through stakeholder engagement to form a local well-being action plan that aligns to the regional priorities coming out of the regional work to develop a robust Delivery Plan 2024-28 for the Gwent Well-being Plan.

2.9 At its most recent meeting in December 2023, the LWP suggested that the regional Delivery Plan should be data and outcomes oriented, whilst providing an opportunity for LDGs to focus on what they hope to achieve locally for the benefit of their communities and follow an evidence-based approach to make a meaningful, lasting impact. It was also noted that the need to maintain momentum at LDG level was important in unlocking capacity and resource to develop and deliver against future local well-being priorities identified through the recent positive stakeholder engagement.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The Partnership Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 22nd February 2024, recommended Option 1, that Members note and accept the report and appendices as provided.

3.2 **Option 1**

For Cabinet to endorse the report and appendices for approval by the Blaenau Gwent Local Well-being Partnership.

3.3 **Option 2**

Make comments or requests to the Blaenau Gwent Local Well-being Partnership for their consideration.

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

The Gwent Well-being Plan covers all LA areas across Gwent, including Blaenau Gwent, with opportunities for the LDGs like the BG LWP to deliver against local priorities through their own local action plans under the Delivery Plan 2024-28 going forward. The Blaenau Gwent Council Corporate Plan 2022-26 also makes a commitment to contribute towards the regional well-being objectives and the eight Marmot principles.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 *Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)*

The Gwent Well-being Plan sets a strategic direction for the Gwent PSB and its LDGs. Specific projects, programmes or partnerships to help achieve the well-being objectives and steps are being developed as part of the Delivery Plan.

Where additional funding may be required, costed recommendations will be made to the appropriate decision maker, but there is no specific funding available to deliver PSB or LDG well-being programmes as part of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WBFGA) or the Well-being Plan. Blaenau Gwent Council Policy & Partnerships Team is overseeing the coordination of the BG LWP and local input into the Gwent PSB Delivery Plan development work as part of its core business.

5.2 *Risk including Mitigating Actions*

Failure to deliver effectively against the Gwent Well-being Plan 2023-28 risks not complying with the collective duties set out in the WBFGA. To mitigate against this, a local well-being action plan is being developed as part of the BG LWP forward work programme.

5.3 *Legal*

The programme has been developed in line with the 5 Ways of Working and other requirements stated in WBFGA.

5.4 *Human Resources*

The work of the BG LWP relies on and is being developed via effective collaboration with representatives from local partner organisations areas being

actively involved from an analytical, programme delivery and public engagement perspective.

Local progress against the regional Well-being Plan is reported to the Gwent PSB, which in turn is supported by the local representation (through officer reps from BGCBC & statutory PSB partners) on the Gwent Strategic Well-being Action Group (GSWAG).

Blaenau Gwent Council Policy & Partnerships Team is overseeing the coordination of the BG LWP and local input into the Gwent PSB Delivery Plan development work as part of its core business.

6. **Supporting Evidence**
6.1 *Performance Information and Data*
The two main Objectives in the Gwent Well-being Plan 2023-28 are:

1. We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all.
2. We want to create a more climate-aware Gwent, where our environment is valued and protected, ensuring our well-being now and for future generations.

The five steps to achieve these two overarching objectives are:-
- Take action to reduce the Cost of Living crisis in the longer term
- Provide and enable the supply of good quality, affordable, appropriate homes
- Take action to reduce our carbon emissions, help Gwent adapt to climate change, and protect and restore our natural environment
- Take action to address inequalities, particularly in relation to health, through the framework of the Marmot principles
- Enable and support resilient, connected, thriving and safe communities

The regional Gwent PSB Delivery Plan 2024-28 will be centred around these in the context of four Areas of Focus for well-being as agreed by the PSB in December 2023, aiming to address some of the recommendations from the Building a Fairer Gwent: Improving Health Equity & the Social Determinants report through the regional well-being delivery plan:
- Everyone has the Best Start in Life.
- Everyone has the same Economic Chances.
- Everyone lives in a Place they feel Safe.
- Everyone lives in Climate-ready Communities where our Environment is Valued and Protected.

As a first step in this process, the Gwent Strategic Well-being Action Group (GSWAG) is conducting a regional mapping exercise to identify and collate the existing projects, programmes and activities that are taking place at a local, sub-regional and/or regional level across Gwent relating to these four areas. The aim of this exercise is ultimately to Identify any gaps or opportunities where

more collaboration and partnership working, or upscaling existing work, could improve outcomes and add value at a regional Gwent level.

It is expected that local delivery of the regional priorities and/or programmes identified in the new Delivery Plan would be overseen by the LDGs. This will include a) local delivery of regional priorities, and b) the opportunity to focus on collaborative activity on issues which may be felt acutely in Blaenau Gwent but are not necessarily priorities at a Gwent level.

6.2 *Expected outcome for the public*
The Well-being Plan delivery process, supported by engagement, involvement and local delivery to ensure local well-being issues are prioritised as part of the BG LWP's well-being programme, are crucial in ensuring that the regional well-being plan is delivery effectively in Blaenau Gwent to improve local well-being for our communities.

6.3 *Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)*
Feedback from Stakeholder Engagement workshops about current and future well-being priorities for BG communities:

> Consider where we (as partner organisations) and local community groups are already making a difference, protect our assets and try to build on that good work.

> Less reactive short-term funding, more preventative long-term approach based on levels of need.

> Place local residents in areas of higher deprivation at the centre of identifying actions to reduce inequalities in their local communities.

> Put health equity and sustainability at the centre of planning decisions.

> Develop linked or shared data to better identify and support those who are homeless or living in insecure housing to address determinants of health e.g. through Decarb retrofit.

> Tackle the lack of affordable or appropriate transport options that limit people's access to health care, social & well-being activities, affordable food etc.

> Shift to prevention approaches in delivering sustainable and healthy food security.

> Identify any areas of low childcare provision, map to deprivation and assess quality of provision, with a view to improving provision for the benefit of our children and young people.

Future local Actions & Steps to consider as part of the local well-being action plan development process:

Lead on best practice and set the example as LWP member organisations e.g. Living Wage & support for staff to actively travel / use greener transport options to work.

Work in partnership with Community Transport Association Wales to develop better transport options for lonely & isolated people.

Work with young people to better communicate available youth services and future youth services.

Best start in life: consider the quality and safety of outdoor spaces and play areas and encourage more active travel to School options.

Identify opportunities to combine new crop and biodiversity growth on public sector land.

Encourage increased gym & leisure centre use from residents in higher deprivation areas by considering opportunities for subsidised / concessionary membership.

Tackle the Volunteering gap between the number of community groups and 3rd sector organisations looking for volunteers vs a perceived current lack of local volunteers.

6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**
The Well-being Plan takes consideration of the data and future trend information including the Gwent well-being assessment and public engagement on what people consider would make the area a better place for the future and have most positive impact on their well-being.

6.5 **Preventative focus**
The BG LWP focuses on Prevention as one of the five ways of working, and outlines a series of Steps for taking preventative action to help achieve the each of the well-being objectives.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**
Local Delivery Groups (LDG) of the Gwent PSB have existed within each local authority area in Gwent since the inception of the GPSB, initially to ensure the continued delivery of the local 2018-23 Well-Being Plans, and to consider local delivery against regional well-being objectives going forward. Our LDG is known as the Blaenau Gwent Local Well-being Partnership (BG LWP). Membership of the BG LWP comprises officer representatives of partner organisations who are key to local well-being delivery, including:

- Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
- Natural Resources Wales
- South Wales Fire & Rescue
- Gwent Police
- Office of the Gwent Police & Crime Commissioner
- Probation Service

- Department for Work & Pensions
- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
- GAVO
- Tai Calon Community Housing
- Coleg Gwent
- Aneurin Leisure Trust

Additional subject-specific partner organisations are also engaged with with via regular steering group and partnerships associated with well-being programme delivery, such as the Climate Mitigation Steering Group, BG Food Partnership, IWB Collaborative, 50+ Stakeholder Network.

6.7 **_Integration(across service areas)_**
The BG LWP follows an approach of considering opportunities to enhance local well-being through an evidence-based approach taking into account the well-being and sustainable development pillars: economic, social, cultural and environment issues. The local well-being planning process follows an integrative approach that considers each of the five ways of working (including Integration), and opportunities for integration between local & regional well-being objectives and with the Marmot principles.

6.8 **_EqIA(screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)_**
The engagement approach is built on the national principles for public engagement. There are number of established forums which support engagement covered by the protected characteristics.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**
The Gwent PSB, regional Gwent PSB Scrutiny Committee and BGCBC Partnerships Scrutiny Committee monitor progress of the BG LWP through its forward work programme performance management arrangements.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- **Appendix 1 –** Gwent Well-being Assessment
- **Appendix 2** – Gwent Well-being Plan 2023-28
- **Appendix 3** – Gwent PSB LDG Update Blaenau Gwent Dec 2023 *(attached)*

This page is intentionally left blank

BLAENAU GWENT LOCAL DELIVERY GROUP UPDATE

The Blaenau Gwent Local Well-being Partnership (LWP) has held three stakeholder engagement workshops in addition to three formal LWP meetings since April 2023.

The aim of the workshops have been for local and sub-regional stakeholders to work in partnership with each other to reflect on the success, barriers & challenges for existing local well-being projects/programmes, as well as consider well-being priorities for our local communities & identify opportunities for new partnership working and/or where existing well-being projects could be scaled up or used as model to more collaboratively across the region or sub-region.

The stakeholder engagement workshops have been well-attended by partners and have provided valuable insight into local well-being projects and priorities.

BG LWP Development Session at Rassau Resource Community Centre, July 2023

BG LWP Development Session at the General Offices Ebbw Vale, November 2023

The plan is for this evidence gathered through stakeholder engagement to form a local well-being action plan that aligns to the regional priorities coming out of the Gwent WBP Delivery Plan development work.

At its most recent meeting in December 2023, the LWP noted the approach to developing the regional delivery plan and suggested that it should be data & outcomes oriented, whilst providing an opportunity for LDGs to focus on what we hope to achieve locally and follow evidence-based approaches to make a meaningful impact. It was also noted that we must keep momentum at Local Delivery Group level to develop & deliver against local well-being priorities identified through recent stakeholder engagement.

Cabinet and Council only
Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:
Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee:	**Cabinet**
Date of meeting:	**10ᵗʰ April 2024**
Report Subject:	**Business Rates Relief – Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief 2024-25**
Portfolio Holder:	**Cllr S Thomas, Leader & Cabinet Member Corporate & Performance**
Report Submitted by:	**Rhian Hayden - Chief Officer Resources**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	**Corporate Leadership Team**	**Portfolio Holder / Chair**	**Governance Audit Committee**	**Democratic Services Committee**	**Scrutiny Committee**	**Cabinet**	**Council**	**Other (please state)**

1. **Purpose of the Report**

1.1 The purpose of the report is for the Cabinet to consider and adopt, on behalf of the Council, the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief – 2024/25 scheme (RLHRR), as a section 47 discretionary rate relief for 2024/25.

2. **Scope and Background**

2.1 In recent years, the Welsh Government have provided grant funding to Local Authorities in order for them to consider delivering the Retail Leisure and Hospitality Rate Relief schemes for certain businesses within their area.

2.2 Blaenau Gwent Council adopted these discretionary schemes and the Revenues Team have targeted businesses that they believe meet the criteria for relief and have invited them to make an application.

2.3 In December 2023, The Minister for Finance and Local Government announced that Welsh Government intended to fund a scheme for 2024-25 but due to budget constraints the amount afford to qualifying ratepayers would reduce to 40% relief against their rate liability.

2.4 Therefore, retail, leisure and hospitality ratepayers in Wales can receive 40% non-domestic rates relief for the duration of 2024-25. The scheme

announced by the Welsh Government will still be capped at £110,000 per business across Wales.

2.5   The full criteria and guidance for the operation and delivery of the scheme can be accessed by the link detailed in section 9 of this report.

2.6   Welsh Government have confirmed the provisional funding allocation for Blaenau Gwent for 2024/25, is £1.28M to allow delivery of the scheme.

2.7   In order that assistance may be given to ratepayers, the Council must resolve to adopt the Welsh Government prescribed scheme as a discretionary rate relief scheme in line with s47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

3.   **Options for Recommendation**
      To include Recommendation(s) / Endorsement by other groups, e.g. CLT/Committees/Other groups)

3.1   **Option 1**
       That Cabinet resolves not to implement the Retail, Leisure, and Hospitality Rates Relief – 2024/25 scheme as set out in the guidance in appendix 1.

3.2   **Option 2 (preferred option)**
       That Cabinet adopts the Retail, Leisure, and Hospitality Rates Relief – 2024/25 scheme on behalf of the Council, to supplement the Council's discretionary rate relief scheme.

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

4.1   The adoption of the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief – 2024/25 scheme would support the Council Priority, 'Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient', in offering financial support to businesses in the borough during the cost-of-living crisis.

5.   **Implications Against Each Option**
5.1   *Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)*

5.1.1 **Option 1**
       There will be no financial implications for the Council.

5.1.2 **Option 2**
       £1.28M of grant funding will be provided by Welsh Government as a section 31 grant in order for the RLHRR scheme to be delivered.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

5.2.1 <u>**Option 1**</u>
Failure to adopt the scheme will result in an inability to award financial assistance under the RLHRR scheme to qualifying local business within Blaenau Gwent.

5.2.2 <u>**Option 2**</u>
Welsh Government withdraw their provisional funding offer.

5.3 ***Legal***

5.3.1 The Council must resolve to adopt a discretionary relief scheme in accordance with s47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

5.4.1 The administration of the scheme will be absorbed and delivered within existing staff resources.

6. ***Health and Safety***

6.1. Not applicable to this report

7. **Supporting Evidence**
7.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

7.1.1 To date for 2023/24, 117 businesses have currently benefited from the 2023/24 RLHRR scheme totalling circa £472,600.

7.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

7.2.1 Adoption of the relief scheme will reduce financial burdens on qualifying businesses and aid their economic recovery from the pandemic.

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

7.3.1 Details of the scheme will be published on the Authorities website and via the appropriate social media channels.

7.3.2 Due to the £110,000 relief cap and declarations required in respect of the Subsidy Control Act 2022, businesses will need to complete an online registration in order to be considered for relief.

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

7.4.1 The availability of the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief scheme is dependent on Welsh Government decision to offer such a scheme in future years.

7.5 *Preventative focus*

7.5.1 Not applicable to this report

7.6 *Collaboration / partnership working*

7.6.1 Each individual local authority in Wales must adopt this scheme in order to consider applications from businesses. Applications will then be assessed and awarded by the Revenues section.

7.7 *Integration (across service areas)*

7.7.1 Not applicable to this report

7.8 *Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions*

7.8.1 Not applicable to this report

7.9 *Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) (All decisions, policy reviews or policy implementation will now require a completed Integrated Impact Assessment) To note a screening template no longer needs to be completed*

7.9.1 In adopting the RLHRR scheme 2024/25, the Council will be able to assist all qualifying businesses within Blaenau Gwent that apply for RLHRR in 2024/25 and aid the businesses sustainability.

7.9.2 If the scheme is not adopted, qualifying businesses within Blaenau Gwent will not be able to receive the rate relief in 2024/25 which may have a detrimental effect on the Socio-Economic status of Blaenau Gwent.

8. **Monitoring Arrangements**

State how the work will be monitored e.g. through scrutiny or directorate performance management arrangements.

8.1 The Revenue section will monitor the potential for qualification for the Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief scheme during the financial year and will notify and consider applications from ratepayers where appropriate.

9.   **Background Documents /Electronic Links**

9.1. [Non-Domestic Rates – Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief 2024-25 | Business Wales (gov.wales)](#)

This page is intentionally left blank

Committee: **Cabinet**

Date of meeting: **10th April 2024**

Report Subject: **Local Government Act 1972 Proposed Transfer of Further Land to Abertillery Bluebirds**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Helen Cunningham, Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member for Place & Environment**

Report Submitted by: **Ellie Fry, Corporate Director for Regeneration and Community Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Corp. Asset Management Working Group
27.02.2024	29.03.24	22.03.24				10.04.24		18/7/23

1. **Purpose of the Report/ Update**

1.1 To return this report to Cabinet following presentation of the original report on 4th October 2023 which resolved: -

1.2 RESOLVED that the report be accepted and, subject to conditions being in place to permit continued public access, a lease be granted to Abertillery Bluebirds in respect of the sports field at Windsor Road to facilitate use by junior members of the club (Option 1).

1.3 This was modified at the meeting from the original resolution of: -

Option 1 (Preferred) To allow Abertillery Bluebirds to take on control of the sports field at Windsor Road to facilitate use by junior members of the club.

1.4 Officers have spoken to both representatives of Abertillery Bluebirds and sought advice from the Council's Solicitor to see how a lease to allow continued public access could be granted and if this would be acceptable to the football club.

1.5 The Council's Solicitor advised: -

- As we are granting exclusive use it would be difficult to envisage any wording which would suit.
- Even if there were a form of words which would suit it would be very difficult to enforce.

1.6 The Club had also indicated they would be reluctant to accept any guaranteed public access as this would mean them effectively maintaining land to which the public had continued access. They have indicated that at this stage there is no intention to restrict unofficial public access but would need to keep this under review moving forward.

1.7   The Club have also indicated that they feel the pitch has not been open access like parks are, but was available for public use if the facility was rented. This would continue in the same way it does at Cwm Nat- y Groes.

1.8   This was something echoed by the Team Manager – Street Scene who confirmed it had always been a fenced/ lettable field and not promoted as public open space. Although the demise of Six Bells Junior Football meant its use had declined as a formal sports facility.

1.9   Cabinet is therefore asked to re-consider the report and to approve or decline the transfer of a sports pitch at Windsor Road, Six Bells for use by the junior section of Abertillery Bluebirds. The extent of the property is shown edged red on the plan attached as Appendix 1.

2.   Scope and Background

2.1   In July 2019, following completion of the Community Asset Transfer process, Abertillery Bluebirds signed a 50-year lease for the football facilities at Cwm Nant-y-Groes. The Club have successfully run the facilities since then and recently gained promotion to the Cymru South Division.

2.2   The club has increased their junior section and are finding it difficult to accommodate all the use on the current pitch. They have enquired about taking on the pitch at Windsor Road.

2.3   As the club had already applied for and shown they can run a facility they have not been asked to complete a full Community Asset Transfer (CAT) application as it was expected that the Windsor Road pitch would be added to their existing lease. However, as the land at Cwm Nant-y Groes was dedicated under Fields in Trust should the transfer proceed then the Council's Solicitor feels that the issue of a new lease to run to the same term as the existing would be the simplest way forward.

2.4   The Windsor Road pitch did not have a primary home user when the sports facilities were all transferred in 2018/2019 and as such was not requested as a transfer by any club. As such it was not advertised as a loss of public open space under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 and before the proposal to include the land within the Bluebirds Lease can move forward it has been necessary to advertise the land under the Act.

2.5   This was done via adverts in the local paper -The Gwent Gazette – 13th and 20th April 2023 with any objections to the proposal to be made to the Council by the 27th of April 2023.

2.6   Site notices were also erected during the same time- period confirming that plans of the proposed area could be viewed at the General Offices.

2.7   One letter concerning the proposal has been received raising concern at the loss of public access to the area. The author confirmed that if the transfer allows the same use of public access to the land as now, then they

would have a minor objection and if it is anything less, then they would have a total objection to the transfer.

2.8 The land lies within the settlement boundary of Six Bells and is included in the open space assessment and identified as a park. This means that policy DM13 Protection of Open Space is triggered. The policy states:

Development proposals which affect existing open space will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that:
   a. The site has no significant amenity, nature conservation or recreational value; and
   b. There is a surplus of such facilities in the locality; or
   c. The loss can be replaced with an equivalent or greater provision in the immediate locality; or
   d. The development enhances an existing facility.

2.9 There are no proposals by the club to develop the site but the club have indicated that they intend to try and invest in the facility to improve the pitch and potentially to provide storage/ changing facilities.

2.10 They have confirmed that at this stage they do not intend to restrict public access but would not wish to be restricted on proposals moving forward.

2.11 The site is designated as a Dog Exclusion Area under the Council Order PSPO – DC – 013 and is completely fenced albeit with access gates which currently allow entry to the site.

2.12 Should the Council be minded to dispose of the property at an undervalue, it will need to comply with the Local Government Act 1972, General Disposal Consent (Wales) 2003 – Disposal of Land in Wales for Less than Best Consideration, which came into effect on 31st December 2003 and removes the requirement for Authorities to seek specific consent for any disposal and undervalue where the Authority considers that the disposal is in the interest of the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of the whole or part of its area, or any persons resident or present in the area and the undervalue is £2,000,000.00 Million Pounds (two million pounds) or less.

2.13 As the proposed long-term lease is more than 7 years, the Council will need to comply with these requirements. In this case the market value of the site being certified by a qualified valuer in accordance with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors – professional standards, who has confirmed that given the restrictions on the use of the land and the restrictions which will be attached to the proposed lease there is no value to the property other than a nominal £1.

2.14 The Council needs to consider any issues under the UK Subsidy Control Act 2022 which replaces previous advice on European State Aid Given the market value of the site it is not felt this is relevant in this case.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 That the Cabinet consider the following options:

3.2 **Option 1 (Preferred)** To allow Abertillery Bluebirds to take on control of the sports field at Windsor Road to facilitate use by junior members of the club.

3.3 **Option 2** To retain the site and not transfer responsibility to Abertillery Bluebirds.

3.4 Consultation took place with local members, Cabinet Member and Town Council and no adverse comments were received.

3.5 Consultation also took place with the Council's Community Asset Transfer Group and no comments were received.

3.6 Consultation with CAMWG (Corporate Asset Management Working group) took place and the proposed transfer was supported by all those who responded.

3.7 Divisional Leadership Team discussed the report at their meeting of the 8th August 2023 and supported the report and option 1.

3.8 The public were given the opportunity to comment via the Local Government Act 1972 as detailed in section 2 above. There has been one objection which has resulted in this report being presented to Cabinet.

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

4.1 The proposals within this report support the achievement of the priorities contained within the Corporate Plan 2022-2027, including:

- To respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities.
- An ambitious and innovative Council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place.
- Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient

5. **Implications Against Each Option**
5.1 *Impact on Budget (short- and long-term impact)*
Option 1
5.1.1 The impact will remove the maintenance burden for the site from the Environment department but this will be in the region of £1500 p.a. based on the frequency of cutting the pitch and surrounding area.

5.1.2 There could also be potential income for the Council should the club decide to utilise the Council for ongoing grounds maintenance although for their nearby site they utilise non – Council contractors for maintenance.

5.1.3 **Option 2**
Council will continue to maintain the site.

5.2 *Risk including Mitigating Actions*

5.2.1 **Option 1**
There are no real risks associated with the transfer as Council will still own the site and any proposals for the site would be limited via the lese and normal land related permissions – planning.

5.2.2 **Option 2**
No risk but continued maintenance cost when site is not being utilised as a sports pitch.

5.3 *Legal*

5.3.1 **Option 1**
The Council will need to bear the legal costs of entering an agreement with the club.

5.3.2 **Option 2**
No costs over and above the cost of advertising under the Local Government Act 1972 which have already been incurred.

5.3 *Human Resources*
Staff time in dealing with the proposal.

5.4 *Health and Safety*

5.4.1 **Option 1 –** continued responsibility for fence line and gates.

5.4.2 **Option 2 –** responsibility for whole site

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 The Council resolved to transfer all sports facilities to users in 2018/19 and whilst this pitch did not have an identified main user the same principles relating to any transfer would be the same as back then.

The success of the club in increasing numbers which means they now need an extra facility point to the success of the original transfer.

6.2 *Expected outcome for the public.*
Restoration of site as a formal sports pitch and increased opportunities for youngsters to participate in football.

6.3 *Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)*
Detailed at section 3 above.

6.4   ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
        The proposal supports elements of the Council's Corporate Plan which sets
        out long term intentions for the Borough.

6.5   ***Preventative focus***
        The proposal will reinstate use as a pitch and training facility and mitigate
        against deterioration of the site should grounds maintenance funding be
        reduced.

6.6   ***Collaboration / partnership working.***
        None identified.

6.7   ***Integration (across service areas)***
        Not applicable

6.8   ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***
        Limited reduction in Council's carbon emissions if not maintaining the area.

6.9   ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***
        Not applicable

7.   **Monitoring Arrangements**
7.1   No formal monitoring but contact will be maintained with the club
        periodically to assess how things are going and if there are any issues with
        the site
        Background Documents /Electronic Links
        - Appendix 1 –Windsor Road Field Plan

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

Richard Crook BSc, DipTP, MBA, MRTPI
Corporate Director Environment and Regeneration / Cyfarwyddwr Corfforaethol yr Amgylchedd ac Adfywio

PROJECT:

TITLE: Appendix 1

                  Playing Field Windsor Road, Six Bells

Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol
Blaenau Gwent

N

Date : 12/04/2023   **Map Reference : SO2203SW**   **Scale : 1:1250**
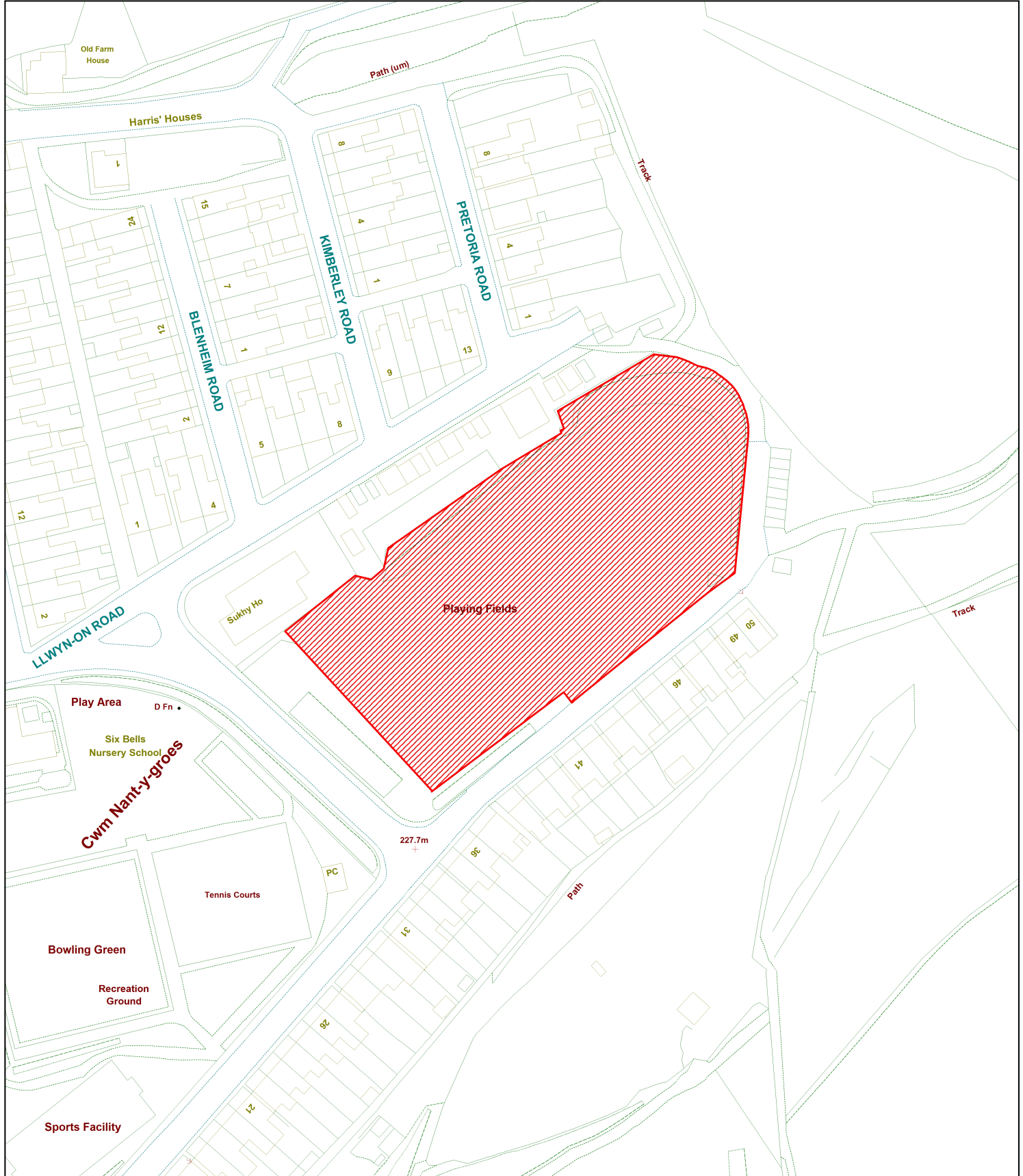
Old Farm House

Path (um)

Harris' Houses

Track

KIMBERLEY ROAD

PRETORIA ROAD

BLENHEIM ROAD

LLWYN-ON ROAD

Sukhy Ho

Playing Fields

Play Area

D Fn

Six Bells Nursery School

Cwm Nant-y-groes

Track

227.7m

PC

Tennis Courts

Path

Bowling Green

Recreation Ground

Sports Facility

Licence Number 100042734

This page is intentionally left blank

Committee:	**Cabinet**
Date of meeting:	**10ᵗʰ April 2024**
Report Subject:	**Improving Schools Programme**
Portfolio Holder:	**Cllr S Edmunds, Cabinet Member People and Education**
Report Submitted by:	**Luisa Munro-Morris, Interim Corporate Director of Education**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	**Other (please state)**
05.03.24	07.03.24	22.03.24			19.03.24	10.04.24		

1. **Purpose of the Report**

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update on the Blaenau Gwent Improving Schools Programme.

2. **Scope and Background**

2.1 The report covers all schools and settings within the County Borough that have been identified by the Education Directorate, supported by the Education Achievement Service (EAS), and/or Estyn as needing to improve. The Blaenau Gwent Improving Schools Programme operates within the regional arrangements for supporting schools across South-East Wales. It also provides a high-level overview of any school inspections from September 2023 to February 2024.

2.2 From February 2023 to November 2023, many of our headteachers and senior leaders engaged with Action Short of Strike (ASOS). This led to the majority of our primary headteachers not engaging with Professional Discussions with the LA during this time. Professional Discussions are an important way for the LA to engage with schools on their priorities for improvement, progress with implementing national reform, and to offer appropriate support where relevant. Since the end of ASOS in November 2023 the Local Authority has worked closely with the EAS to arrange and undertake Professional Discussions, prioritising those schools identified in most need initially, according to agreed factors discussed during our partnership meetings.

2.3 Presently, one of our schools is still formally within the Schools Causing Concern category - The River Centre. Brynmawr Foundation School was removed from a School Causing Concern category in December 2023. The school continues to engage with the Team Around the School process to ensure that there continues to be effective and purposeful dialogue between the school and the LA. *(Please see appendix 4).*

Following an inspection in the summer term, Bryn Bach Primary requires Estyn follow up. This does not place the school in an Estyn category. Instead Estyn will re-visit the school approximately one year after the initial inspection in order for the school to provide evidence and reassurance to Estyn that the school continues to develop in accordance with their school improvement priorities.

During the Autumn Term, three of our schools have been inspected Beaufort Hill, Deighton Primary and Ebbw Fawr Learning Community. None of the schools that have been inspected require a follow up (*Please see appendix 1-3).*

3. **Options for Recommendation**
3.1 The People Scrutiny Committee supported Option 2, at its meeting on 19th March 2024.

3.2 **Option 1**
Members are asked to consider the information detailed within the report and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate recommendations.

Option 2
Accept the report as provided.

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

4.1 Education remains a priority in the Corporate Plan. The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 consolidates, clarifies, and reforms the law in relation to intervention in schools causing concern. The Welsh Government's statutory guidance for schools causing concern (February, 2014) details a local authorities' powers of intervention in schools causing concern, the grounds on which those powers can be invoked and the procedures governing the intervention process.

4.2 Through our education provision we seek to ensure that provision is appropriate and able to meet the needs of children and young people so that their progress and performance is ambitious and raises aspiration levels.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**
5.1 *Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)*

The Council allocated £52.563 million to schools in 23/24 via the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) to provide high quality education and to improve pupil outcomes. In addition, Blaenau Gwent continues to make a financial contribution to the regional EAS arrangements which was £326,668 for the financial year 23/24, from the core Education Directorate Budget. Processes such as monthly LA/EAS Partnership meetings are in place to ensure the LA

can hold the EAS to account for the support and challenge they provide to schools and ensure value for money for the Local Authority.

5.2 *Risk including Mitigating Actions*
Failure to raise standards in schools causing concern features in the corporate risk register of the Council. This risk is also reflected in the Education Directorate and EAS risk registers. A graduated response is in place to mitigate these risks; this approach is based on an early identification and support model:

Universal support: areas for improvement in relation to individual schools may be raised by a School Improvement Partner (SIP) or an LA Officer, and these are discussed in weekly LA/EAS meetings and more formally in monthly LA/EAS Partnership meetings, and appropriate courses of action agreed.

NB. Professional Discussions are held with all schools once per year. These are timetabled for the whole year. In schools where there are emerging risks they are prioritised early in the academic year. However, these discussions did not take place in the majority of our primary schools during the period of ASOS. Now that ASOS has come to an end, professional discussions with all schools have been undertaken or dates for them have been agreed.

5.2.1 **Targeted support/provision:** If a school is identified as needing more support by the LA, a 'Team Around the School' approach will be adopted. Key partners are brought together on a half-termly basis, to support and challenge a school with specific areas for improvement.

5.2.2 **Specialist support/provision:** A school that has been issued with a statutory warning notice by the LA or has been placed in an Estyn category will receive further bespoke support, in addition to half-termly meetings. For example, a school will be supported with creating and delivering against a Post Inspection Action Plan.

KS4 data was reported on for the first time since 2019 for the 2022/23 cohort. The Welsh Government have reintroduced All Wales Core Data Sets. KS4 results were published on 'My Local School' in February 2024 and have been shared with members in a previous report. Schools have been placed in Core Data Set families from the Autumn term 2023. *(See Appendix 5)*

School attendance and exclusion figures are monitored by DLT on a half-termly basis. School's safeguarding processes are also closely monitored. The quality assurance arrangements that are in place include the safeguarding matrix, which is currently being reviewed and further developed. Holistic support packages are devised via regular intra Council services meetings between OD, finance, health and safety, education, and school governor support services. The quality of provision in schools and leadership is monitored and evaluated in conjunction with the EAS and is in addition to the work the LA undertakes directly with its schools.

5.3 *Legal*
The Improving Schools Programme operates within the legal framework of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013.

5.4 *Human Resources*
There are implications arising from the actions created to support those schools identified as a school causing concern and/or in an Estyn category. This information is held within each school's single plan.

5.5 *Health and Safety*
As part of their inspection, Estyn will comment on any health and safety concerns that they identify. The River Centre was issued with a health and safety letter. All of the recommendations in the letter have been actioned. No schools that have been inspected to date in the academic year 2023/24 have been issued with a health and safety letter.

6. **Supporting Evidence**
6.1 *Performance Information and Data*

6.2 *Schools in an Estyn Category*
6.2.1 **The River Centre**

- The Governing Body of the school remains under statutory intervention because of the Statutory Warning Notice to improve dated November 2021.
- Staffing - The Headteacher remains absent from work. The school was previously supported by an Executive Headteacher arrangement. Since November 2022 an Acting Headteacher was in post to provide consistent support for the school. However, this arrangement was changed from December 2023 where an internal Acting Headteacher and Acting Deputy Headteacher arrangement has been put in place on an interim monthly review. In the period since December 2023, systems and processes for safeguarding and health and safety have been improved.
- The senior leadership team has been further strengthened through an extensive network of support though mentorship for the Acting Headteacher, LA involvement, increased governor representation on the Governing Body and regular partnership review with the EAS.
- Following an Estyn inspection July 2022, the school was placed in Special Measures. Estyn made a number of recommendations:
  o Address those issues identified in the health and safety letter.
  o Establish a clear purpose and vision for the school and implement a staffing structure that is fit for purpose and adequately reflects roles and responsibilities.
  o Ensure that the curriculum is sufficiently engaging, broad and balanced and prepares pupils well for their next stage in life and learning.
  o Improve the behaviour of pupils, particularly on the secondary campus.
  o Improve the quality of the learning environment and culture, particularly on the secondary campus.

o   Improve the outcomes for pupils, particularly those on the secondary campus.
o   Establish systems, procedures and routines across the school that are clearly understood by staff and relevant partners.
- A Post Inspection Action Plan to address the recommendations was created by the school, with the support of the EAS, and the LA. Some good progress has been made against the actions within the school including the remodelling of the secondary site and new safeguarding procedures being put in place. In addition, Home to School transport is now being provided by the LA since September 2023 which has enabled staff to focus on teaching and learning. However, there are still a number of the Estyn recommendations where limited progress has been made, in particular around teaching and learning.

The school was subject to an Estyn re-visit in May 2023. Estyn recognised that good progress had been made against some of the recommendations and that the school is focusing on the right things to develop first. However, it also identified that the school was very early in its improvement journey. Estyn and all relevant stakeholders have been informed and updated on the current Leadership arrangements. Since January 2024 the school have had to realign their focus to operational and safeguarding priorities. However, moving forward there is an expectation for strategic priorities linked to the Estyn recommendations to be prioritised again.

6.2.2 **School Inspections**

6.2.3 **Beaufort Hill Primary School (Appendix 1)**

Estyn inspected the school in Autumn 2023. Estyn reported Beaufort Hill Primary School is a happy and nurturing school that supports pupils and their families well. Nearly all pupils enjoy and value being part of the school and they speak appreciatively of the opportunities they have to learn and play. Nearly all pupils engage well with their learning and their behaviour is exemplary. Most pupils make good progress across the curriculum.

The headteacher and governors have a clear vision for education, and they work well with a range of partners to ensure that the curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant to the pupils and the community. Teaching staff monitor the progress of pupils carefully and provide a wide range of exciting and varied learning experiences. Although teachers generally use assessment effectively to plan learning, they do not always identify or share clear next steps for learning for all pupils in their feedback.

Teachers work effectively in partnership with local schools to ensure that the school's curriculum is relevant for its pupils and allows for clear progression of skills. They ensure that learning experiences are exciting and varied. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply their numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum at a suitably high level of challenge.

Generally, vulnerable pupils and pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make good progress through the wide range of learning and support interventions on offer. Support staff work in close partnership with teachers to ensure that both academic and emotional and social needs are met.

The school's approach to developing health and well-being is a strength. Staff know pupils and their families well. They ensure, through effective communication, that any issues arising are addressed quickly and that relationships are mutually beneficial.

The school will be expected to draw up an action plan for the following recommendations with no follow up from Estyn:

- Improve teachers' marking and feedback across the school to ensure that pupils have a clear understanding of their next steps in learning.
- Strengthen opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum.

6.2.4 **Ebbw Fawr Learning Community (Appendix 2)**

Estyn inspected the school in Autumn 2023. Estyn reported staff in Ebbw Fawr Learning Community are committed to the school's vision of creating a safe, secure and caring environment to ensure that pupils are 'learning to achieve together'. This vision is communicated clearly by the headteacher who is a strong role model that has high expectations of himself and others. Leaders work well with each other and succeed in creating an ethos across the school sites that encapsulates the 'Ebbw Fawr Way' of being 'Ready, Respectful and Safe'.

Promoting pupil well-being is central to the school's work and it has an extensive range of provision to support pupils in an inclusive and supportive environment. This contributes towards its pupils feeling safe in school and displaying a positive attitude towards their work and school life. A positive feature of the school is the numerous opportunities it provides for pupils to take on leadership roles.

Most teachers plan and adapt work that meets the needs of nearly all pupils. They engage pupils in their learning, provide valuable experiences that relate to their everyday lives and successfully remove barriers to learning. As a result, most pupils in the primary phase and many pupils in the secondary phase, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) and those eligible for free school meals make at least suitable progress over time. Whilst there are good opportunities for pupils to develop their oracy and reading skills, they do not write at length often or purposefully enough.

Teachers promote positive behaviour well and there are robust arrangements to promote good attendance. The Ebbw Vale Engage ('EVE') programme ensures that a few pupils in danger of disengagement attend regularly and benefit from alternative off-site provision. Although attendance at the time of the inspection remains lower than before the pandemic it has improved significantly over the last few months. The learning resource base (LRB)

successfully supports secondary pupils with a range of significant additional educational needs to make sound progress and attend school regularly.

Leaders mitigate the effect of poverty on pupils' attainment and well-being effectively. They monitor and evaluate the school's work carefully and implement changes effectively. They use the opinions of pupils and parents well to make improvements to provision, especially for pupils' well-being. However, when evaluating teaching, leaders do not always consider the impact on pupils' progress well enough

The school will be expected to draw up an action plan for the following recommendations with no follow up from Estyn:

- Sharpen self-evaluation processes to focus more specifically on the impact of teaching on learning.

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills and write at length for authentic purposes.

6.2.5 **Deighton Primary School (Appendix 3)**

Deighton Primary School was inspected in Autumn 2023. Estyn reported leaders, staff and governors of Deighton Primary have worked effectively as a community to develop an inclusive school focused on raising aspirations for all pupils and developing them as resilient, lifelong learners. Relationships between pupils and adults are strong, and the school's partnership with parents is outstanding. Most pupils behave well, and are friendly, courteous and respectful. The support for pupils with additional learning needs, and those who are vulnerable, is effective. In particular, pupils appreciate the high-quality care and support when they experience social and emotional difficulties. Nearly all feel safe. They are confident that leaders and staff will look after them whenever they need their help.

The school provides a stimulating, engaging and nurturing learning environment for all pupils. This supports many to make suitable or better progress, often from very low starting points. The youngest pupils settle well into daily routines and benefit from the many purposeful opportunities, indoors and outside, that help them to explore, problem-solve, and develop their language and physical skills successfully. Most pupils make strong progress in developing their social and communication skills. They listen well to adults and, by Year 6, many enjoy drama activities, collaborate effectively and discuss their learning activities confidently.

The headteacher places great importance on staff communicating and working with parents and carers, as partners in their children's education. A few years ago, parental engagement with the school was limited so leaders adapted their approach, developing a programme of social events and fun activities that pupils and parents could enjoy together. For example, on 'Come and Do' curriculum days, parents and pupils learn circus skills

together as part of the school's 'This is me' topic. Staff ensure that the school is a welcoming space and this helps to develop positive relationships within the school community. Most parents now feel comfortable to take part in social and learning experiences in the school and nearly all attend meetings to discuss their children's learning and progress.

A positive culture of continuous improvement and reflection is developing well in the school.

The school will be expected to draw up an action plan for the following recommendations with no follow up from Estyn:

Ensure that improvement processes and professional learning drive improvements to the quality of teaching and assessment to meet pupils' learning needs.

- Improve pupils' writing skills.

- Improve attendance, particularly for pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those with additional learning needs.

6.2.6 **Brynmawr Foundation School** **(Appendix 4)**
The school was originally inspected in October 2019 and placed within the category of schools requiring Special Measures. As a consequence, the school was subject to an LA statutory warning notice to improve.

The school received preliminary KS4 data in August 2023 which showed good progress when compared to the Welsh average and the Family of Schools the school is a part of data. As a consequence of the KS4 data and Estyn re-visits to the school, which indicated progress in the school, the LA made the decision to lift the statutory warning notice in September 2023.

Brynmawr Foundation School received a follow up Estyn visit in November 2023. Estyn's monitoring Report following their visit concluded that Brynmawr Foundation School was judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the most recent core inspection. As a result, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales removed the school from the list of schools requiring special measures. It has been concluded Leaders have continued to focus sharply on the areas for development from the recommendations, for example, a specific focus on teaching and learning and improving pupil outcomes. Estyn commented since the core inspection, the headteacher and his senior team have focused successfully on their vision for improving teaching and learning, pupils' engagement and aspirations, and building leadership capacity at all levels. This work has had a significant impact on the quality of teaching, pupils' attitudes to learning and leaders' ability to plan robustly for improvement. Many teachers plan learning activities that build well on each other and challenge pupils effectively to make strong progress from their starting points. Across the curriculum, many teachers provide relevant and beneficial opportunities to help pupils develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***
The River Centre and Brynbach Primary are both participating in a Team Around the School approach. This is a multi-agency meeting where the school is both supported and appropriately challenged. The School Improvement or the Principal School Improvement Partner from the EAS attend meetings to consult on ideas for supporting the school and to discuss engagement with opportunities such as EAS reviews. We have additional schools involved in the Team Around the School Process to support their progress in the key areas they have identified for their development.

6.4 ***Thinking for the long term (forward planning)***
Monitoring school progress against priorities facilitates support for schools to ensure that they achieve and maintain high quality outcomes in the long term.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***
Through effective monitoring and evaluation of school performance, early identification of emerging areas for improvement can be achieved with consequent early intervention to secure improvement. The effectiveness of the LA's monitoring, evaluation and intervention programmes ensure that preventative action is taken early in order to minimise the escalation of concerns.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
The LA collaborates with neighbouring local authorities through the South East Wales Consortium for the provision of School Improvement services through the Education Achievement Service (EAS). The LA also works closely with colleagues in the SEWC region sharing good practice and ideas for what has worked well.

The LA also secures a range of pupil support services such as Hearing Impaired, Visually Impaired, Speech and Language, and Gwent Education Multilingual Service support services through regional collaboration. Within the LA, the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion ensures that there is a co-ordinated approach to supporting schools within the Education Directorate and across the Council corporately as a whole.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***
The LA commissions its school improvement function on a regional basis.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***
There are no implications arising from this report.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***
There are no implications arising from this report.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**
7.1 Monitoring of improvement pathways is an important mechanism for ensuring that Members are sufficiently informed to enable them to hold the authority

to account effectively for the quality of education provision and hence pupil progress and outcomes.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- **Beaufort Hill Primary School (Appendix 1)**

- **Ebbw Fawr Learning Community (Appendix 2)**

- **Deighton Primary School (Appendix 3)**

- **Brynmawr Foundation School (Appendix 4)**

- **KS4 Results (Appendix 5)**

Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

Beaufort Hill Primary School

Beaufort Hill
Beaufort
Ebbw Vale
NP23 5QD

Date of inspection: October 2023

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Beaufort Hill Primary School

Name of provider	Beaufort Hill Primary School
Local authority	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	239
Pupils of statutory school age	173
Number in nursery classes	37
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Primary is 23.0%)	17.4%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 16.1%)	12.1%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2004
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	07/07/2015
Start date of inspection	23/10/2023

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

a.	The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Beaufort Primary School is a happy and nurturing school that supports pupils and their families well. Nearly all pupils enjoy and value being part of the school and they speak appreciatively of the opportunities they have to learn and play. Nearly all pupils engage well with their learning and their behaviour is exemplary. Most pupils make good progress across the curriculum.

The headteacher and governors have a clear vision for education, and they work well with a range of partners to ensure that the curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant to the pupils and the community. Teaching staff monitor the progress of pupils carefully and provide a wide range of exciting and varied learning experiences. Although teachers generally use assessment effectively to plan learning, they do not always identify or share clear next steps for learning for all pupils in their feedback.

Teachers work effectively in partnership with local schools to ensure that the school's curriculum is relevant for its pupils and allows for clear progression of skills. They ensure that learning experiences are exciting and varied. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply their numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum at a suitably high level of challenge.

Generally, vulnerable pupils and pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make good progress through the wide range of learning and support interventions on offer. Support staff work in close partnership with teachers to ensure that both academic and emotional and social needs are met.

The school's approach to developing health and well-being is a strength. Staff know pupils and their families well. They ensure, through effective communication, that any issues arising are addressed quickly and that relationships are mutually beneficial.

Recommendations

R1   Improve teachers' marking and feedback across the school to ensure that pupils have a clear understanding of their next steps in learning

R2   Strengthen opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils, including those who are affected by socio-economic disadvantage and those with ALN, make strong progress from their individual starting points.

Most pupils make effective progress in developing their oracy skills. The youngest pupils make rapid progress. They communicate effectively when playing and learning, responding readily to questions and instructions. As they move through the school, pupils develop as confident, articulate speakers who listen carefully to adults and each other. Older pupils respond with accuracy when questioned about their knowledge and understanding. For example, they refer to the features of a non-chronological report when skimming for information.

Younger pupils, particularly those in nursery and reception, develop their reading skills well. They explore simple books with enthusiasm and use a growing range of strategies to understand simple stories. Most reception pupils recognise initial sounds, and a minority are beginning to blend sounds with increasing accuracy when reading familiar words. By Year 2, pupils read with increasing accuracy, and they decode unfamiliar words successfully. Many older pupils are confident readers who enjoy reading a range of books. They show a good understanding of complex texts and use their knowledge effectively when researching.

Most pupils develop their writing skills well. Younger pupils explore mark making enthusiastically with a range of materials and the majority develop accurate letter formation quickly. As they move through the school, they begin to use basic punctuation correctly. Pupils in Year 1 create simple sentences retelling stories they hear, making good attempts to spell familiar words. In Year 2, pupils combine simple sentences effectively when writing letters asking for advice about a panda that they found in the school garden. Older pupils develop their knowledge of text types with growing confidence. They write for a wide range of purposes with an awareness of the audience and they take pride in the presentation of their work. Many pupils use a dictionary and thesaurus efficiently to enhance their writing, making effective vocabulary choices. For example, they choose words that elicit empathy when writing a diary entry for a child caught up in the holocaust.

Across the school, many pupils make good progress with their mathematical and numeracy skills. Younger pupils use a suitable range of mathematical terms well. For example, pupils in Year 2 refer to vertices when describing and investigating 2D shapes. Pupils in Year 4 demonstrate their understanding of angles when performing turns in their gymnastics lessons. Many older pupils have a solid grasp of number facts. They recall these quickly and use them skilfully when investigating the relationship between values. For example, Year 6 pupils use their understanding of multiplication and division with efficiency when working with equivalent fractions. However, pupils do not always apply their mathematical knowledge and skills at an appropriate level across the curriculum.

Overall, most pupils use their digital skills suitably to support their learning. The youngest pupils begin to develop their early digital skills appropriately, for example

3

when typing simple instructions into programmable toys. Older pupils combine text and images carefully to create eye-catching presentations. They use editing tools with increasing proficiency, adding backgrounds to their videos and constructing simple stop-motion animations. However, older pupils do not develop and apply a wide enough range of digital skills across other across areas of learning.

Many pupils are enthusiastic Welsh learners who make suitable progress when using and responding to the Welsh language. Pupils of all ages follow a range of Welsh instructions correctly and many use the chosen phrase of the week accurately in their conversations with others. As pupils move through the school, they extend their vocabulary well, discussing hobbies and past events with increasing fluency. Many older pupils use the present and past tense appropriately in their talk.

Pupils across the school develop their creative skills well through a wide range of opportunities. For example, Year 2 and Year 4 pupils develop a sense of rhythm and pitch by playing musical instruments such as the violin and ukulele. Younger pupils demonstrate their creativity well using movement in response to a range of stimuli. Older pupils develop their understanding of line, colour, and expression well when recreating the work of Welsh artists.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils appreciate and value their school. They approach each day with enthusiasm and a positive attitude. Pupils form positive working relationships with adults in the school and this ensures a settled and productive learning environment. Most pupils feel that staff look after and care for them well. They feel safe and secure and, as a result, develop well as learners and members of the school community.

Most pupils are exceptionally well mannered. They behave well in class, at breaktimes and at lunchtimes and they understand and respond positively to the school's positive behaviour approaches. Pupils move around the school calmly, showing care and respect for their peers, staff and visitors to the school. Pupils use school resources carefully and help to ensure that classrooms are well organised.

Nearly all pupils collaborate well with each other and value each other's contributions and ideas. Younger pupils show kindness towards each other and are happy to wait their turn when using equipment. Older pupils engage with each other well during class discussions, sharing and developing ideas together. For example, they make suggestions and respond to others' thoughts when deciding what vocabulary to use in order to have the greatest impact when campaigning against a proposal to ban chocolate.

Most pupils play an active role in the life and work of the school. They take full advantage of their opportunities to influence school life through a wide range of pupil leadership groups. Members of each group plan and review their impact and achievements carefully. This allows them to ensure that their work is effective and in the best interests of their peers. In addition, pupil groups make a positive contribution to their local community. For example, they promote the Welsh language by making Welsh signs for local shops.

Most pupils develop a clear understanding of the importance of eating and drinking healthily. They make informed choices about foods that will benefit their long-term health. Most pupils understand the benefits of exercise. They take part in a range of play activities and after-school clubs that develop their physical skills well. As a result, pupils show a good understanding of their own emotional well-being, and they establish supportive relationships with their friends.

Most pupils have an acute awareness of their rights and responsibilities as global citizens. Pupils show pride in and talk passionately about the inclusive nature of the school. Many pupils recognise the important role and impact of influential Welsh people such as Betty Campbell, Wales' first black headteacher.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teachers create calm and purposeful learning environments. They foster warm relationships with pupils, and this promotes effective learning and positive behaviour successfully. Teaching assistants provide a high level of support for pupils' health and well-being. They place a high priority on ensuring that all pupils, particularly those with ALN, feel safe and able to make good progress.

Nearly all teachers provide a range of engaging activities that enable pupils to develop and apply new skills appropriately. Staff promote high expectations consistently and this is reflected through the pride pupils display in the quality and presentation of their work.

Staff plan a range of opportunities for pupils to develop their independent learning skills. Teachers include interesting opportunities for older pupils to apply their skills and knowledge independently. However, teachers do always plan for pupils to apply their numeracy and digital skills in other curriculum areas at a high enough level.

Most lessons are well paced and provide an appropriate balance between teacher input and pupil activity. Staff ask well-framed questions that enable pupils to clarify and extend their thinking. This ensures that many pupils are challenged and supported according to individual need.

Staff use a wide range of strategies effectively to assess pupil progress. Teachers meet with individual pupils regularly to discuss learning and to agree areas for improvement. As a result, many pupils are beginning to take a more active role in setting their own improvement targets. Written feedback helps pupils understand what they have done well and to identify and correct basic errors such as spelling and punctuation. However, the use of written feedback to enable pupils to understand the next steps in their learning is in the early stages of development.

The school's curriculum engages pupils effectively, providing exciting learning experiences that ignite curiosity in the world around them. Teachers enrich the curriculum thoughtfully, providing an interesting range of trips and visitors to school. For example, Year 5 pupils discover and celebrate the history and culture of Wales through visits to the local ironworks.

Staff collaborate closely with colleagues across the cluster to develop a shared curriculum. This provides useful support for teachers in planning for progression in

learning. As a result, in many areas of the curriculum, learning experiences build successfully upon pupils' skills as they progress through the school.

Teachers plan for regular and meaningful opportunities to improve pupils' oracy skills carefully. As a result, pupils become confident and enthusiastic when talking to others and sharing their ideas. Staff plan well for the development of pupils' reading skills, from an early age. Staff are beginning to develop literacy-rich classrooms that encourage pupils to read a wider range of books for pleasure.

Staff plan meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop their writing for a range of purposes. Teachers ensure that pupils build a sound understanding of different genre, before using them in a variety of contexts. For example, teachers plan carefully to develop pupils' persuasive writing skills over time, resulting in pupils producing skilfully written arguments. Overall, the curriculum ensures that pupils' mathematical skills are developed effectively across the school. Staff ensure that maths lessons offer suitable challenge and allow pupils to practise and revisit skills regularly.

Staff plan well for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills. They ensure that pupils regularly hear and respond to spoken Welsh in classrooms and around the school. Staff are also beginning to teach French across the school.

Teachers are developing their understanding of progression in digital skills and overall, they plan useful opportunities for pupils to practise these skills in a range of contexts. However, in a few instances, teachers do not plan enough opportunities for pupils to develop and apply digital skills at a high enough level.

The school provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop physical and creative skills through extra-curricular clubs. This provision is a strength with all clubs being well attended by pupils, including those who are vulnerable. Year 6 pupils participate in a residential trip that further develops their resilience and independence.

Care, support and guidance

The school's leaders, including the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo), teachers and support staff, work effectively to ensure that pupils with ALN are successfully integrated into the classroom and participate fully in school life. Teaching assistants support pupils' learning through a range of carefully chosen interventions. The school has created useful learning spaces, such as the 'Cwtch Corner,' that provide a safe haven for pupils to help them relax and improve their readiness to learn.

The ALNCo collaborates effectively with staff to identify pupils who need additional support. They provide this through targeted interventions for literacy, numeracy and emotional well-being. The impact of these interventions is generally monitored effectively. However, in a few instances, improvement targets are not always used effectively enough to ensure that pupils make sustained progress over time.

The ALNCo communicates appropriately with parents of pupils with ALN. She meets with families whose children receive targeted support to discuss or review progress.

When more significant concerns arise, the ALNCo engages with relevant external agencies to identify further support. The school benefits from strong partnerships with advisers who support teachers and parents in discussing potential concerns and offering additional support.

The school ensures that pupils have a good understanding of their rights. Staff work with pupils to create useful class charters that reflect the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This has a notable impact on the high level of empathy and understanding that pupils show toward each other.

The school provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to take on important roles and responsibilities. Pupil leadership groups are well developed and influence the school's work effectively. The school's Digital Leaders, for example, recently ran a successful campaign to install a Digital Den in the school where pupils can continue to develop digital skills throughout the day. The Heddlu Bach improved the local area by planting apple trees in the local Welfare Hall Community Garden.

The school provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to influence what and how they learn. Pupils share the things that interest them when new class topics are discussed. Teachers then ensure that these ideas are incorporated into their planning where appropriate. As a result, pupils feel that their ideas are valued and this helps ensure strong levels of engagement with learning.

Overall, the school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to understand the diverse nature of Wales and the cultures that make up its history. For example, they research important Welsh figures, such as Eddie Paris, who was the first Black man to play football for Wales. Older pupils also broaden their understanding of Britain's cultural diversity. For instance, Year 6 pupils research and discuss governmental decision making and its impact on members of society such as those involved in the Windrush generation.

The school offers good opportunities for pupils to develop as active citizens who make a difference in their local community. For example, through its intergenerational work, pupils regularly visit patients at a local hospital. During these visits, pupils and patients share their experiences, play board games, or create artwork together.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. The school has comprehensive processes for monitoring and supporting pupils' attendance and, as a result, attendance levels for most pupils are improving over time. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements well and are not a cause for concern.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides strong, compassionate leadership with a clear vision for school improvement. He has worked effectively with all stakeholders to establish a vision for the school focused on the community it serves.

School leaders promote and sustain a strong team ethos. They place a high value on staff well-being and work with pupils to ensure that staff feel appreciated and supported. For example, the Wellbeing Warriors pupil group nominates and rewards

staff weekly with a mug of treats. All staff work together to encourage pupils to be responsible and respectful and, as a result, pupils feel safe and behave well.

Leaders know the school's strengths and areas for development well. They plan and implement school development successfully. Leaders provide high levels of support for all staff to support them with their roles and responsibilities. The robust school performance management processes in place, together with a detailed programme of professional learning, ensure that the whole school team receive appropriate development. School staff take ownership of their professional development and are given time to implement and embed improvements. This is having a positive impact on collaboration and the quality of teaching and learning.

School leaders draw upon a wide range of assessment information to monitor the progress pupils are making. Senior leaders hold termly meetings with class teachers to discuss individual pupil progress and to ensure that provision is suitable. Leaders use these meetings well to identify areas where they can provide further support and any additional resources. They discuss the progress of vulnerable pupils in detail to ensure that provision is well matched to pupil need.

School staff use highly beneficial links with local schools to establish a shared understanding of effective progression and assessment. These links have enabled the development of a cluster curriculum that spans seamlessly across the primary and secondary phase. The school's professional learning lead works effectively with staff to ensure that the curriculum and learning activities reflect the local community of Beaufort, Wales and the wider world. The headteacher and staff build highly beneficial links with parents, governors and the community. As a result, they widen and enrich the curriculum through an extensive range of useful partnerships.

The school communicates effectively with parents through a wide range of media. Parents are often involved in opportunities to share their own experience, for example to enrich the school's work on careers and the world of work. They take part in Welsh language activities alongside their children.

The governing body provides strong support for the school and governors are passionate about working with the whole community. They work effectively with staff through regular visits to school and this ensures that they have a sound understanding of school strengths and areas for improvement.

The headteacher and governing body work well together to ensure that spending is closely linked to the school's plans for development. Leaders ensure that pupils who are affected by socio-economic disadvantage take part in and benefit from all school activities. For example, they arrange access to free school uniform and subsidise school trips and visits where needed.

Governors promote a positive culture of safeguarding. The headteacher works with governors to evaluate the school's safeguarding procedures effectively. They use this information well to make necessary improvements, such as supporting the introduction of an online internet use agreement for parents and carers. Governors ensure that the school promotes healthy eating and drinking effectively.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publications Section
Estyn
Anchor Court, Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales

This page is intentionally left blank

Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

Ebbw Fawr Learning Community

Lime Avenue
Ebbw Vale
Blaenau Gwent
NP23 4GL

Date of inspection: November 2023

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

This inspection was undertaken as part of pilot inspection arrangements. As a result, this report may be slightly different in format to other published reports for providers in the sector.

This report is also available in Welsh

About Ebbw Fawr Learning Community

Name of provider	Ebbw Fawr Learning Community
Local authority	Blaenau Gwent
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	All age school
Religious character	Not applicable
Number of pupils on roll	1381
Pupils of statutory school age	1315
Number in nursery classes	40
Number in sixth form	Not applicable
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in All age schools is 21.6%)	28.1%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in All age schools is 11.0%)	11.4%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.6%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	1.4%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2016
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	08/02/2016
Start date of inspection	27/11/2023

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

a.   The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Staff in Ebbw Fawr Learning Community are committed to the school's vision of creating a safe, secure and caring environment to ensure that pupils are 'learning to achieve together'. This vision is communicated clearly by the headteacher who is a strong role model that has high expectations of himself and others. Leaders work well with each other and succeed in creating an ethos across the school sites that encapsulates the 'Ebbw Fawr Way' of being 'Ready, Respectful and Safe'.

Promoting pupil well-being is central to the school's work and it has an extensive range of provision to support pupils in an inclusive and supportive environment. This contributes towards its pupils feeling safe in school and displaying a positive attitude towards their work and school life. A positive feature of the school is the numerous opportunities it provides for pupils to take on leadership roles.

Most teachers plan and adapt work that meets the needs of nearly all pupils. They engage pupils in their learning, provide valuable experiences that relate to their everyday lives and successfully remove barriers to learning. As a result, most pupils in primary phase and many pupils in the secondary phase, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) and those eligible for free school meals make at least suitable progress over time. Whilst there are good opportunities for pupils to develop their oracy and reading skills, they do not write at length often or purposefully enough.

Teachers promote positive behaviour well and there are robust arrangements to promote good attendance. The Ebbw Vale Engage ('EVE') programme ensures that a few pupils in danger of disengagement attend regularly and benefit from alternative off-site provision. Although attendance at the time of the inspection remains lower than before the pandemic it has improved significantly over the last few months. The learning resource base (LRB) successfully supports secondary pupils with a range of significant additional educational needs to make sound progress and attend school regularly.

Leaders mitigate the effect of poverty on pupils' attainment and well-being effectively. They monitor and evaluate the school's work carefully and implement changes effectively. They use the opinions of pupils and parents well to make improvements to provision, especially for pupils' well-being. However, when evaluating teaching, leaders do not always consider the impact on pupils' progress well enough

Recommendations

We have made 2 recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

R1 Sharpen self-evaluation processes to focus more specifically on the impact of teaching on learning

R2 Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills and write at length for authentic purposes

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to the impact of the whole school approach to remove barriers to learning, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Teaching and learning

Nearly all teachers and staff at Ebbw Fawr Learning Community know their pupils well and form positive working relationships with them. They have high expectations of pupil behaviour and overall, manage this well. As a result, most pupils are friendly, enthusiastic and well-behaved. Nearly all pupils treat each other with respect and work effectively in small groups, collaborating well with each other. They display a positive attitude towards their work and school life.

Many pupils start school with literacy and numeracy skills below the level expected for their age. In the primary phase, most pupils including those with ALN and those eligible for free school meals make secure progress in their learning from their individual starting points. In the secondary phase, many pupils make at least suitable progress, and a few make strong progress in lessons and over time.

Most teachers are good language models and create a calm and purposeful learning environment. They have a sound understanding of Curriculum for Wales and deliver appropriate learning experiences. Nearly all teachers have strong subject knowledge and embed classroom routines well. Most plan and adapt activities that meet the needs of nearly all pupils. They successfully remove barriers to learning to ensure that pupils make at least suitable progress.

Where teaching is most effective, teachers ensure that it promotes pupil independence, particularly for the youngest pupils. These teachers create stimulating learning environments and make creative use of resources. They plan activities that build well on each other and engage pupils' interest by relating learning activities to their everyday lives.

Cameo – Creative use of resources

Most teachers in the primary-age classes make skilful use of resources to make their classrooms engaging environments with clear opportunities to develop pupil skills effectively. This includes making regular use of real-life stimuli. For example, pupils in Years 2 and 3 inspect and draw a real squid. Teachers use learning resources that celebrate diversity, for example pupils read the story 'Amazing Grace' and make rangoli patterns and Diva Lamps.

3

In many cases, teachers plan activities that have a clear purpose and promote the development of pupils' independence and their literacy and numeracy skills well. They give clear, concise instructions and use support staff effectively to meet individual needs. They provide appropriate verbal feedback and pose challenging questions to ensure understanding. Their useful written feedback encourages pupils to read their comments and use them to move their learning forward.

In a few cases in the secondary phase, teachers plan and deliver activities that do not sufficiently challenge pupils, leading to a slow pace of learning. They heavily scaffold activities, limiting pupils' creativity and independence.

Teachers in the LRB form strong, positive working relationships with pupils. They have established strong routines which help pupils stay on task and focus. These teachers provide opportunities for pupils to participate in a variety of meaningful activities. They plan and deliver a sequence of activities that build logically on one another and ensure that pupils develop their knowledge and understanding. Nearly all pupils in the LRB listen effectively to teachers and peers and respect each other's opinions. Many read and write appropriately using a suitable range of vocabulary and generally with accuracy.

The school's curriculum is broad and balanced, and successfully supports the school vision of enabling pupils to be aspirational and preparing them to be citizens of the future. It provides equitable access to pupils, including those with ALN, from low-income households and with English as an additional language. Leaders carefully adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of individuals and groups of pupils. For example, the Ebbw Vale Engage 'EVE' project enables pupils to benefit from useful work-based experience and supports pupils in danger of disengagement. In the learning resource base, a personalised curriculum develops pupils' skills for the next stage of learning effectively. Highly skilled staff deliver valuable life and social skills sessions to support pupils to develop conversations and make friends. This helps these pupils to achieve appropriate qualifications.

'Cwricwlwm Enfys', a framework developed with partner primary schools within its cluster to support the delivery of Curriculum for Wales, helps teachers plan skills development progressively. As a result, pupils on transition to the secondary phase from the primary phase benefit from a curriculum that progresses seamlessly. There is a suitable range of worthwhile opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their numeracy skills across the curriculum. Many pupils develop these skills well as they move through the school. Although the curriculum provides many beneficial opportunities to develop pupils' literacy skills, there are more limited opportunities for them to develop their extended writing.

The school supports pupils' personal, spiritual, moral and cultural awareness well through purposeful assemblies and personal and social education (PSE) sessions. The school makes sound use of external providers and charities to enrich this provision and to respond to current needs such as healthy eating, exercise and mental health.

The curriculum includes valuable opportunities to promote pupils' understanding of equality and diversity. For example, in religious values and ethics lessons, pupils

learn about discrimination and prejudice against Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

The school offers a broad and beneficial range of extra-curricular activities for pupils to develop their wider skills, including personal, physical, and creative skills. This includes the Duke of Edinburgh award, a healthy eating club, and woodland and theatre experiences. The school enhances pupils' learning well through school trips, visitors to school and partnership working. The school also ensures that the cost of activities is not a barrier to learning. For example, all pupils can access free musical instrument lessons. This includes regular whole-class sessions for all primary-aged pupils.

The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their appreciation and understanding of the Welsh language and culture through activities such as eisteddfodau, visits to the local area and the annual residential trip to Llangrannog. This helps most pupils make good progress in their Welsh language skills.

The curriculum includes worthwhile opportunities for pupils to learn about their local community and to develop an understanding of what it is like to grow up in modern-day Wales. For example, older pupils learn about the work of local people of interest such as Aneurin Bevan, Lady Rhondda and Keir Hardie.

Across the school, relationship and sex education (RSE) provision is a strength. Pupils benefit from a range of useful opportunities provided by key partners, both inside and outside of the classroom, for example through 'Wonder Wednesdays' and 'Table Talk Thursday' sessions.

A wide range of opportunities provide pupils with valuable experiences and information about careers and the world of work. For example, the Alumni project attracted over 50 ex-pupils to talk to pupils about their lives in the world of work and opportunities following their time in school. This provision is supported well by external partners, such as local businesses, who offer advice to pupils regarding apprenticeships and post-16 pathways.

A summary of pupils' development in literacy, numeracy, digital, Welsh and other skills:

Literacy

The youngest pupils develop their speaking and listening skills quickly, learning new vocabulary successfully, for example when engaging effectively in role play as they make afternoon tea for visitors. Most older pupils in the primary phase listen attentively to staff and each other. They consider carefully their peers' ideas, contribute confidently to class discussions, and articulate their opinions successfully. This continues into the secondary phase where most pupils are eager to participate in discussions. Although a few secondary aged pupils develop their responses to questions in detail when asked, many only offer brief responses and teachers do not always challenge them to develop their answers.

Most younger pupils develop their early reading skills successfully. They have a good understanding of phonics and apply these skills well. As they move through the

school, many pupils have a good understanding of what they read and use skimming and scanning appropriately to find key information. Many older pupils in the primary phase are confident readers and develop their fluency and expression. They choose increasingly mature reading material that interests them, such as 'The Diary of Anne Frank'. They are beginning to read between the lines and show empathy with characters. Most secondary pupils locate specific facts accurately from information texts. The majority summarise main ideas and develop advanced reading skills such as analysis, inference, and synthesis suitably when given the opportunity to do so. However, a minority struggle to explain the significance of key ideas in texts independently.

Many of the youngest pupils develop their writing skills effectively, making their pens 'dance' up and down the paper. Many younger pupils begin to use their letters and sounds well when spelling unfamiliar words and extend their ideas into simple sentences. Most older pupils in the primary phase develop sound language skills and have a good understanding of figurative language, such as when they use onomatopoeia and personification. However, as they move through the school, pupils do not develop their ability to write for sustained periods or at length well enough. Many secondary aged pupils plan and structure their writing coherently. They vary their tone and vocabulary to suit purpose and audience. However, a minority have difficulty writing fluently using formal language. In addition, they make regular spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. Although many older pupils in the primary phase take pride in the presentation of their work, a few pupils' handwriting and presentation skills are not developed well enough. A minority of secondary age pupils have weak handwriting and presentation skills which have a negative impact on their work.

Numeracy

The focus on ensuring that pupils develop their conceptual understanding and numerical reasoning skills within their mathematics lessons is a strength. This includes a focus on connecting new learning to what pupils already know and moving between concrete, pictorial and abstract representations of concepts. Across the curriculum, there is a suitable range of worthwhile opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their numeracy skills. Despite their low starting points, many pupils develop their numeracy skills well as they move through the school.

In the primary phase, younger pupils show a good understanding of place value to one hundred. As they move through the primary phase, they build on their early number skills well. Many apply their maths skills appropriately such as when calculating the cost of materials to make salt dough for the class role play café. Many older pupils in the primary phase use their knowledge of number facts effectively and apply their skills suitably to solve problems. They use inverse operations well to check the validity of their answers.

In the secondary phase, many pupils develop their understanding of number well. They use the four rules of number confidently and convert between fractions, percentages, and decimals. In science, they successfully use and apply equations and formulae, such as that connecting current, voltage and resistance, to solve numerical problems. Many pupils have a suitable grasp of shape and measures. In their mathematics lessons, they convert between different measures and solve

problems involving the perimeter and area of a various shapes. The majority of pupils analyse data well, such as when they interpret graphs in geography to describe the correlation between the average income of a country and the life expectancy of its residents. A few pupils in the secondary sector have weak basic number skills. This hinders the development of their numeracy skills.

Digital skills

The majority of primary phase pupils develop their digital skills suitably. Younger pupils use digital applications with increasing confidence such as when they use online maps to identify roads and areas that are familiar to them. As they move through the school, the majority of pupils make suitable progress in their ability to produce and refine their work digitally. Older pupils create presentations adding hyperlinks and transitions to enhance their work.

Many secondary phase pupils apply their digital skills well across the curriculum. They use specific software and platforms to produce presentations and analyse data. They work collaboratively on documents, produce and edit videos, embedding files in presentations.

Welsh language skills

Many primary pupils develop their Welsh language skills suitably, using Welsh phrases and greetings with increasing confidence. Many older primary pupils respond to questions in the present tense appropriately, for example explaining who they are, how they feel and how old they are. They begin to extend their sentences in Welsh suitably.

Most secondary aged pupils contribute positively during language drilling exercises in Welsh lessons. They pronounce basic Welsh words accurately and are able to hold short conversations in Welsh in pairs or groups. Many are able to answer questions in Welsh using full sentences, although a few mis-pronounce Welsh words occasionally. Many read Welsh words, sentences and short paragraphs aloud in a confident manner.

Many secondary aged pupils produce short, accurate pieces of writing in Welsh. A minority structure extended paragraphs of writing in Welsh well. The majority of pupils are able to apply their knowledge of mutations accurately in their writing. However, a minority of pupils make careless errors in their Welsh written work.

Other skills

Across the school most pupils develop their creative, musical and physical skills well through a range of lessons and activities. For example, pupils in the primary phase develop an understanding of rhythm and beat through their work on keyboards. Pupils develop their creative and imaginative skills successfully through a range of structured activities that support pupils to express themselves appropriately. For example, pupils in the secondary phase display strong performance skills and express themselves creatively through drama and dance. Many pupils demonstrate effective physical skills and show agility, poise and control in their actions.

Care, support and well-being

Staff in Ebbw Fawr Learning Community are committed to the school's vision of creating a safe, secure and caring environment to ensure that pupils are 'learning to achieve together'. Promoting pupil well-being is central to the school's work and staff are sensitive to pupils' individual needs.

The school has an extensive range of tailored provisions that support pupils to improve their well-being in an inclusive environment. Every pupil is given the opportunity to nominate a 'go to person' in order to ensure that they have an adult they can turn to for support and guidance. Staff work with a broad range of external agencies to provide beneficial additional support for those pupils who need it.

The school has developed a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff and governors receive regular beneficial training in this area and have a good understanding of their roles in ensuring that pupils are happy and safe. Arrangements for referring safeguarding or child protection issues are detailed and robust. Leaders make beneficial use of a variety of relevant information to identify and carefully monitor the welfare of vulnerable pupils.

The school deals in a timely and effective manner with the very few cases of bullying that occur. A strong feature of the school's work in this area is the work of the anti-bullying ambassadors. These pupils work proactively to promote respect and hold anti-bullying advice clinics for their peers. Staff presence on corridors and at breaktimes provides pupils with reassurance. The school provides pupils with numerous ways to share any concerns that they have, including the school's self-referral app. As a result, most pupils feel that they are treated fairly and that they are safe at school.

Leaders monitor pupils' attendance closely to identify trends in the attendance of individual and specific groups of pupils. A notable strength of the school's work to improve attendance is the work of staff, including the family engagement officers, to build relationships with families, so that staff understand the barriers to pupils attending regularly. Pupils appreciate the rewards given for high levels of attendance, as well as positive engagement and good behaviour. Leaders evaluate the impact of attendance interventions regularly and adapt their approaches accordingly. The school's work in this area has led to substantial improvements in the rate of attendance of pupils, including those eligible for free school meals. In the primary phase, the attendance rate, including that of pupils eligible for free school meals, has improved substantially this year and is close to pre-pandemic levels. Despite recent improvements, the rate of attendance of pupils in the secondary phase is still below that seen before the pandemic.

In response to the increase in challenging behaviour seen following the pandemic, the school has recently revised its behaviour policy in conjunction with staff and pupils. This new policy is being applied consistently by staff. A key part of the behaviour strategy is the restorative conversations that are held to ensure that relationships are re-built following any incident. Leaders analyse data on pupils' behaviour thoroughly to identify pupils who require specialist support in the secondary phase. Pupils who have social and emotional behaviour difficulties are supported well through the school's alternative curriculum provision, 'EVE', which has

had a beneficial impact on these pupils' attendance, engagement, and behaviour. The implementation of these approaches has led to substantial improvements in pupils' behaviour with most pupils behaving well in lessons and around the school.

Pupils with ALN benefit from suitable provision and a nurturing and safe atmosphere. There are appropriate interventions in place to support pupils with weak literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils with ALN have useful one-page profiles which include key information about how staff can best support them. The school is developing its provision appropriately in line with the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act.

In the learning resource base, there is a close and constructive relationship between staff and pupils. Staff know the pupils and their individual needs well and ensure those needs are met. Relevant members of staff working on the secondary campus are informed of the individual needs of the pupils from the base before they attend mainstream lessons, and all members of the school's staff receive autism awareness training.

An outstanding feature of the secondary phase is the way pupils influence the work of the school, for example through the numerous leadership groups. For example, leaders created an innovative "Spot it, Sort it" app following pupils' concern about feeling safe in school. Opinions voiced on this app resulted in leaders introducing a rule to walk on the left in corridors which has resulted in a calmer atmosphere.

Cameo – Leadership groups

There are extensive opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills throughout the school. In total, around 400 pupils carry leadership or ambassador roles. The groups are inclusive and diverse. Pupils take great pride in being an ambassador and are visible and active at break and lunchtimes. They have developed valuable leadership skills in representing and advising their peers. For example, the children's rights and Ebbw Fawr Way ambassadors have linked the school's core values to pupils' rights and ensured that every thought for a week focuses on one of the United Nations rights of a child.

The school provides a varied and inclusive range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for pupils. The annual school production provides primary and secondary pupils with opportunities to work collaboratively, develop their creativity and increase their confidence. Staff inspire pupils in both phases to be physically active and healthy. The school offers cheerleading, handball and triathlon, in addition to more traditional sports.

The school provides a comprehensive post-16 transition programme which supports pupils to make informed choices about their future. Pupils in Year 10 run a 'Wonder Wednesday' platform where their peers can request knowledge about future career pathways. This has led to a wide variety of representatives from the world of work visiting the school to provide guidance for the pupils.

Leading and improving

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school. He is a strong role model who has high expectations of himself and others. He is well supported by heads of school on both sites and the senior leadership team. Their roles and responsibilities are distributed appropriately. Together they take pride in promoting and embodying the school's core values which include kindness, prioritising the well-being of all, and 'going the extra mile'. Senior leaders are visible around the school sites. They contribute effectively to raising pupils' aspirations, for example by hosting a 'proud' stall on a regular basis where pupils are recognised for recent successes.

Leaders know their school well and have successfully implemented changes which have brought about improvements over time. For example, they have ensured pupils have a strong influence on the work of the school. A notable strength is the way senior leaders use pupil and parent surveys to identify and act upon areas for improvement in well-being.

Cameo – Improving provision as a result of pupil feedback

Leaders analysed pupil questionnaires and found that after the pandemic the number of pupils worried about bullying had increased. The school launched its 'spot it, sort it' campaign. Pupils can report incidents to their 'go to person'. This is a staff member that they feel comfortable talking to. Alternatively, they can approach an anti-bullying ambassador during break times. In addition, pupils can access a bespoke app created by the school's information technology team in school or at home. They can use the app to request help for themselves or to flag a concern that someone else may benefit from support. The school promotes the app through attractive posters and information screens throughout the school. As a result, the most recent surveys analysed by the school have shown a decrease in pupil concerns. Recently, the campaign and supporting app have been developed further to encourage pupils to improve the school's provision in other ways, for example for pupils to refer themselves for counselling.

The school has a suitable calendar of quality assurance activities to help leaders gather evidence about strengths and areas for improvement in its provision. Senior leaders conduct worthwhile cross-phase self-evaluation activities to look at key areas such as literacy and attendance. Leaders evaluate the school's provision for pupils impacted by poverty robustly. In the secondary phase, senior and middle leaders use evidence from pupil voice activities and work scrutiny appropriately to evaluate aspects of their work such as Curriculum for Wales. Although senior leaders use lesson observations suitably to identify areas for development in teaching, middle leaders do not have sufficient opportunities to observe lessons to help them evaluate provision and learning within secondary departments. In the best examples, particularly in the primary phase, leaders evaluate the impact of provision on pupils' progress appropriately. Leaders are beginning to consider the impact of teaching on pupils' learning but this is not implemented consistently at all levels and across both phases.

Generally, middle leaders understand their roles suitably. Leaders have fostered a strong culture of collaboration between the primary phase and secondary subject

departments. Middle leaders benefit from regular link meetings with senior leaders which are focused suitably on teaching and learning.

Leaders ensure that national priorities are central to the school's work. For example, to tackle the impact of poverty on learning, they use the pupil development grant to fund transport home for pupils who attend extra-curricular clubs on the secondary site, which has resulted in higher participation rates. They help to tackle barriers that can hinder pupils from feeling part of the school community. For example, the school provides uniform banks and laundry facilities. Staff are relentless in securing that pupils can access all relevant learning experiences by working closely with agencies and families to understand and mitigate factors that may prevent pupils from participating.

Leaders successfully promote the Welsh language to ensure it has a high profile across the school. As a result of opportunities in lessons and extra-curricular activities, pupils have a positive attitude towards learning and using the language. In addition, leaders ensure valuable opportunities for staff to develop their own Welsh language skills.

The school provides a comprehensive range of worthwhile professional learning activities that are linked to whole-school and performance management priorities. Activities are focused on developing teaching and learning through small steps of improvement. This is particularly well established in the primary phase, where all classroom-based staff undertake enquiry-based research to develop their practice. Staff across both phases collaborate well with each other and with other schools to share good practice. The school also provides beneficial opportunities for staff to develop leadership skills. Overall, leaders invest a considerable amount of time, energy and resource into becoming an organisation committed to continuous improvement. This is a strength of the school.

Governors have a sound understanding of the school's vision, strengths and areas for improvement. They support and challenge the school well. They take part in useful activities that help them to further their understanding of specific aspects of the school's work, such as undertaking a learning walk to evaluate pupils' experiences during lunch times.

The headteacher, business manager and governors set the budget appropriately and monitor spending closely. They allocate funding, including grant funding, suitably to support the school's priorities, such as using the pupil development grant effectively to reduce the impact of poverty on well-being and achievement.

Statutory compliance

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including use of the pupil development grant.

The school's arrangements for site security do not give any cause for concern.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. *'most pupils…'* or *'very few pupils…'*. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

14

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (http://www.estyn.gov.wales/)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publications Section
Estyn
Anchor Court, Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales

This document has been translated by Trosol (English to Welsh).

15

Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

Deighton Primary School

Stockton Way
Tredegar
Blaenau Gwent
NP22 3ES

Date of inspection: December 2023

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

This inspection was undertaken as part of pilot inspection arrangements. As a result, this report may be slightly different in format to other published reports for providers in the sector.

Evaluation

Main evaluation

Leaders, staff and governors of Deighton Primary have worked effectively as a community to develop an inclusive school focused on raising aspirations for all pupils and developing them as resilient, lifelong learners. Relationships between pupils and adults are strong, and the school's partnership with parents is outstanding. Most pupils behave well, and are friendly, courteous and respectful. The support for pupils with additional learning needs, and those who are vulnerable, is effective. In particular, pupils appreciate the high-quality care and support when they experience social and emotional difficulties. Nearly all feel safe. They are confident that leaders and staff will look after them whenever they need their help.

The school provides a stimulating, engaging and nurturing learning environment for all pupils. This supports many to make suitable or better progress, often from very low starting points. The youngest pupils settle well into daily routines and benefit from the many purposeful opportunities, indoors and outside, that help them to explore, problem-solve, and develop their language and physical skills successfully. Most pupils make strong progress in developing their social and communication skills. They listen well to adults and, by Year 6, many enjoy drama activities, collaborate effectively and discuss their learning activities confidently.

Cameo: Enriching pupils' lives through cultural experiences

There is strong provision for pupils' cultural and social development. Leaders use grant funding to enrich pupils' lives with learning opportunities they might not otherwise experience. For example, they fly to Scotland to visit heritage sites, and travel to London to watch a theatre show, as part of their 'We're off to see the wizard' topic. After this, collaboration with professional musicians and a local theatre company helps to develop pupils' creative skills, their appreciation of the performing arts and raises their aspirations about possible future careers.

Staff provide a wide range of authentic learning experiences and capture pupils' interests by giving them carefully considered opportunities to influence what they learn. Older pupils develop their independent learning and creative skills well through making choices about how they learn or present their work. This includes Year 6 pupils having the freedom to explore how to convey values, such as empathy and compassion, in their artwork as part of Remembrance Day reflections on the consequences of war. While pupils use digital technology well to support their learning across the curriculum, their understanding and use of graphs and databases is less well developed.

Provision for the progressive development of pupils' mathematical and reading skills is effective. Both have been a focus for improvement in recent years and staff have benefited from the school's weekly professional learning programme to support the development of their skills and knowledge. This has made a positive difference to pupils' progress in the different areas of mathematics, with most developing their

2

understanding well. They solve problems appropriately and apply useful strategies to carry out mental calculations and check their work. Staff have been successful in developing a positive culture of reading that helps most pupils to become competent readers. However, many pupils' writing skills are underdeveloped. Older pupils still make basic errors and their letter formation is often poor. Very few pupils write independently at length or with suitable depth.

In many cases, teaching provides an appropriate level of support and challenge for pupils' learning. However, in a few classes, it does not meet pupils' needs well enough. On occasions, staff tend to direct younger pupils' learning too much, and this limits the opportunities for them to learn independently. In older classes, where pupils do not have secure literacy skills, or where tasks are not sufficiently challenging, a few pupils lose focus and make limited progress.

Teachers provide useful feedback during lesson 'pit stops' that help to reinforce learning or address misconceptions. However, in writing activities, feedback to individual pupils often focuses too narrowly. This limits the opportunity for them to make meaningful improvements to the quality of their work or to discuss their learning and next steps in depth.

The headteacher provides effective leadership and has high expectations for pupils' learning and well-being. Leaders, including governors, have successfully established a happy and calm school community, based on a respectful team ethos. The school runs efficiently and communication is a strength. This contributes strongly to its robust safeguarding practices. During the past few years, parental engagement in school life has increased substantially.

Cameo: Building parental engagement in school life

The headteacher places great importance on staff communicating and working with parents and carers, as partners in their children's education. A few years ago, parental engagement with the school was limited so leaders adapted their approach, developing a programme of social events and fun activities that pupils and parents could enjoy together. For example, on 'Come and Do' curriculum days, parents and pupils learn circus skills together as part of the school's 'This is me' topic. Staff ensure that the school is a welcoming space and this helps to develop positive relationships within the school community. Most parents now feel comfortable to take part in social and learning experiences in the school and nearly all attend meetings to discuss their children's learning and progress.

A positive culture of continuous improvement and reflection is developing well in the school. By taking part in purposeful self-evaluation activities, leaders and staff have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. However, at times, monitoring processes do not focus well enough on identifying whether the actions the school has taken have had a positive impact on developing the quality of teaching or pupils' skills.

The school's strategic planning takes good account of national priorities, such as developing pupils' Welsh language skills. Leaders know that while younger pupils

Page 79

develop suitable skills in listening and speaking, older pupils' ability to use the Welsh language is limited and they are working to address this. Leaders, staff and governors work together well to keep strategic decisions under review to ensure these are in pupils' best interests. For example, the school organised the learning week with a combination of longer and shorter days for pupils. It has realised that this arrangement has had a negative impact on the attendance of a minority of pupils, especially for those who are eligible for free school meals and pupils with additional learning needs. The attendance of pupils in these groups is notably lower than that of their peers.

Statutory compliance

Safeguarding arrangements

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

Healthy eating and drinking

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

School finances

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including use of the pupil development grant.

Health and safety (site security)

The school's arrangements for site security do not give any cause for concern.

Recommendations and next steps

We have made 3 recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

R1   Ensure that improvement processes and professional learning drive improvements to the quality of teaching and assessment to meet pupils' learning needs

R2   Improve pupils' writing skills

R3   Improve attendance, particularly for pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those with additional learning needs

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Additional information

Teaching and learning

- Many pupils start school in the nursery with skills well below those expected for their age.
- During their time in school, many pupils, including those affected by socio-economic disadvantage and with additional learning needs (ALN), make at least suitable progress from their starting points. A few make good progress in many aspects of learning.
- Most pupils make strong progress in developing their social and communication skills. Through effective, nurturing provision in the nursery class, the youngest pupils settle well into daily routines. They listen well to adults and many soon enjoy talking to each other during their play. As they move through the school, most pupils develop their listening and speaking skills successfully. By Year 6, many engage enthusiastically in drama activities, discuss their learning activities confidently and a few share their opinions maturely about sensitive topics, such as the Holocaust.
- Most pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. They work collaboratively with their peers, are respectful of one another, and persevere when faced with difficulties. Many follow the whole-school expectations to present their work neatly, despite struggling with handwriting.
- When given the opportunity, they develop appropriate independent learning skills. For example, older pupils make choices about how they learn or present their work. However, in the younger classes, where there are opportunities for independent learning, these are often not at a sufficiently challenging level (i.e. Pupils complete low-level tasks, such as colouring in templates, copying sentences or completing word searches).
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides pupils with a wide range of worthwhile, authentic learning experiences.
- In all classes, pupils have timely opportunities to influence what they learn within their topics. This motivates and engages them. Most are enthusiastic about what they study and talk passionately about the learning activities they have taken part in.
- The curriculum reflects the cultural, linguistic and diverse nature of the local community and Wales successfully and is beginning to support pupils appropriately to explore the wider world. It offers pupils varied opportunities to study a range of religions and values through worthwhile lessons and assemblies.
- Work to ensure the curriculum builds systematically and progressively on pupils' existing knowledge, understanding and skills is at a different stage of development for each area of learning and experience.
- There is strong provision for pupils' cultural development through the expressive arts. For example, during their 'We're off to see the wizard' topic,

5

pupils travel to London to watch a professional theatre show. Then, they collaborate with professional musicians and work alongside a local theatre company on lighting, designing costumes and writing scripts for their own production. This helps to develop pupils' creative skills successfully, their appreciation of the performing arts and raises their aspirations about possible future careers **(cameo)**

- Staff establish strong links with the local community to enhance pupils' learning experiences, for instance by giving pupils the opportunity to work with a local charity shop that helps those in need in their area. This has had a positive impact upon pupils' social and moral development, where they show understanding of, and empathy for, the struggles that some families face.

- The school's learning environments are stimulating and engaging. Nursery and reception pupils benefit from the many fun, exploratory opportunities staff provide that help them to develop their language, problem-solving and thinking skills. Staff make good use of the school's outdoor spaces as part of daily learning activities and, as a result, most pupils develop their physical and teamworking skills well.

- Older pupils develop their artistic skills effectively and have the freedom to explore and make decisions about how they wish to represent their ideas. A particularly powerful example is Year 6 pupils' artwork as part of Remembrance Day reflections. However, too often, staff over-direct artistic and creative activities for younger pupils.

- Provision for the systematic and progressive development of pupils' mathematical and reading skills is effective. Both have been a focus for improvement in the school in recent years.

- Most pupils make good progress in developing their understanding of the different areas of mathematics. In all year groups, many solve problems appropriately and older pupils develop sound strategies to carry out mental calculations and know how to check their work. However, in general, pupils' ability to apply their numeracy skills in their work across the curriculum is at an earlier stage of development.

- As a result of effective teaching in focused daily reading sessions, most pupils' reading skills develop well and they enjoy it. There is a positive culture of reading across the school.

- Many younger pupils have appropriate phonological knowledge and decode simple texts suitably. Nearly all pupils benefit from adults' effective, modelled reading of a class story or text and the opportunities to practise reading aloud regularly. As a result, most older pupils read fluently and expressively. Through purposeful class and group discussions, many infer meaning from texts successfully.

- In the few best examples, teachers help older pupils to develop an appreciation of language and to see connections between the techniques authors use to engage the reader, and those they are learning to use in their own writing.

6

- While there are valuable opportunities for pupils to learn about different genres of writing and to apply their literacy skills across all areas of learning, many pupils' writing skills are underdeveloped. In general, they do not make sufficient progress within lessons and over time. Many older pupils still make basic errors in spelling and punctuation, and their letter formation is often poor. Very few pupils write independently at length or with suitable depth.

- The school has identified the development of pupils' Welsh language skills as an improvement priority. Many younger pupils develop suitable skills in listening and speaking. They enjoy singing songs and responding to adults' questions. However, older pupils' knowledge and ability to use the language to engage in simple conversations is at an early stage.

- Most pupils use digital technology well to support or enhance their learning and have a good awareness of how to stay safe online. Many older pupils are confident in coding, producing presentations and videos, and carrying out research. However, their understanding and use of spreadsheets, graphs and databases is less well developed.

- In most classes, teaching moves at a good pace and pupils focus well. In nearly all classes, relationships between pupils and adults are strong and, in most cases, the calm environments are conducive to learning.

- Many staff use questioning effectively during lessons to support or extend pupils' learning. Staff are adept at asking pertinent questions as part of younger pupils' play to arouse their curiosity or extend their thinking.

- There is mostly an appropriate level of support and challenge for most learners. However, in a few classes, teachers direct pupils' learning too much and do not meet the individual needs of pupils, hindering their engagement and progress. In these instances, pupils either do not have the necessary literacy skills to be successful in their tasks, or activities do not challenge them well enough.

- In most classes, teachers provide useful feedback to the whole class during lesson 'pit stops' that help to reinforce learning or address pupils' misconceptions. Older pupils find this particularly helpful in mathematics and, as a result, make suitable corrections to their work.

- Most staff routinely share success criteria with pupils during lessons. In a few cases, this is effective in supporting pupils to self-assess, talk constructively about their learning and make improvements to their work.

- In writing activities, individual feedback to pupils is often focused only on correcting basic errors, such as spelling or presentation. This means pupils are not given enough opportunities to make meaningful improvements to the quality of their work or to discuss their learning and next steps in depth.

Care, support and well-being

- The school has clear systems for promoting good behaviour and for managing incidents which do not meet the school's expectations. As a result, the behaviour of most pupils is good, and they move around the school building in

7

a calm and orderly manner. Most pupils are welcoming, courteous and respectful to staff and visitors.

- Nearly all pupils feel safe in school and feel that staff will listen to and act on any concerns they may have.

- The school has a strong safeguarding culture which promotes the safety and well-being of pupils and staff successfully, including when working online. Leaders share information about the dangers of social media and how to keep children safe regularly with parents and families. They address any issues that affect pupil welfare sensitively and swiftly.

- Nearly all pupils have a good understanding of how to be healthy and make suitable choices with healthy eating and drinking.

- The school provides useful support for pupils' personal and physical development. For example, this enables older pupils to gain a suitable understanding of puberty and personal hygiene.

- The school has robust systems for monitoring pupil attendance and works closely with external partners to support families. However, the number of pupils persistently absent continues to be a concern for the school and is a current priority for improvement.

- Pupils eligible for free school meals and those with additional learning needs have a notably higher rate of absence compared with other pupils. The school recognises that the 'asymmetric week' (with a combination of longer and shorter days in school – i.e. closing the school to pupils on Friday afternoon) has had a negative impact on pupil attendance. Consequently, it is taking appropriate steps with support from the local authority to return to a normal school week from September 2024.

- The school's systems for supporting pupils with ALN is a strength.

- The ALN co-ordinator and class teachers ensure that there is swift identification of pupils with ALN and provision of effective tailored support to meet their individual needs.

- All pupils on the school's ALN register have detailed pupil profiles that focus clearly on important information about their individual needs and personal targets. This helps to ensure that most pupils with ALN make suitable or better progress from their starting points.

- The school's provision for pupils with social, emotional or mental health difficulties is strong. It has developed valuable dedicated support rooms and sensory areas, as safe spaces for pupils. Staff provide high-quality support, for example for pupils who have had difficult childhood experiences. This helps pupils to develop useful strategies to regulate and express their emotions.

- Pupils take on responsibility well through a range of leadership groups. The groups value opinions from other pupils and develop realistic action plans with targets that have a measurable impact on the school. For example, the school ambassadors work with the senior leadership team to ensure that the school is a clean and safe space, and the school council raises money for charity. Pupils feel that they are involved in whole-school decision-making and that leaders and staff value their opinions.

- The school provides effective support for pupils when they transition to a new class or to secondary school. For example, 'relationship weeks' in September each year are beneficial in helping pupils and staff to get to know each other and begin to develop mutual trust. Staff provide pupils with helpful transition support to secondary school, including extra bespoke visits for those pupils with additional needs.
- There are good opportunities for pupils to learn about the world of work as part of the 'When I grow up' curriculum topic. Parents and members of the community visit the school to talk about their jobs. Pupils learn about what is involved in different types of employment and develop aspirations of their own for their future lives.
- Pupils across the school take part in a good variety of extra-curricular activities that support their understanding of the importance of physical activity and the value the performing arts can bring to people's lives.

Leading and improving

- The headteacher and governors provide clear strategic direction for the development of the school. They have worked effectively with the community to develop an inclusive vision focused on raising aspirations for all pupils and developing them as resilient, lifelong learners.
- Leaders, staff and governors have a strong understanding of the needs of the pupils and the local community. They have successfully established a purposeful team ethos, based on professional respect, with a firm commitment to ensuring that economic disadvantage will not be a barrier to pupils achieving success.
- The headteacher provides effective leadership and has high expectations of all members of the school community. Staff appreciate leaders' support and care, and the steps they take to keep workload under review, ensuring that the school only adopts practices that add value to its work.
- The school's performance management arrangements to support and improve the work of all staff through well-structured professional discussion and review are robust. These align closely with the school's improvement priorities and focus well on the needs of individuals.
- When necessary, the headteacher addresses underperformance, ensuring there is sensitive, tailored support for individuals, with clear targets and timescales.
- Leaders have designed effective systems and processes that make good use of available technology. These support the efficient running of the school and ensure that communication between leaders and staff about important matters, such as pupil welfare, is timely. This contributes strongly to the school's robust culture of safeguarding.
- The headteacher places a strong focus on building leadership capacity across the school so staff understand their roles and responsibilities well. These reflect national priorities and the needs of the school community. Through

well-structured opportunities to work in teams and lead on priorities, such as improving provision to support pupils' emotional well-being, staff at all levels are beginning to have a positive influence on the school's work.

- Governors are highly committed to Deighton Primary and fulfil the role of critical friend well. They have a strong understanding of the school's context, its strengths and important areas for development, such as improving pupils' attendance and Welsh language skills. They play an active role in the life of the school, using their experience and expertise to support leaders and staff to improve provision for pupils. During more challenging times for the school community, where it has experienced tragedy and loss, they offer sensitive reassurance, prioritising the well-being of pupils, parents and staff.

- The school's partnership with families is outstanding. During the past few years, parental engagement with the school has increased substantially. Leaders ensure that the school is a welcoming space where parents feel comfortable to share in social and learning experiences with their children and this helps to develop positive relationships within the school community. Leaders value parents' views and act on their feedback **(Cameo)**.

- The school is developing a sound track record of improvement but recognises there is still much work to do to achieve its aims. Leaders have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development, and this has helped them to improve important aspects of pupils' learning, such as reading and mathematics.

- A positive culture of continuous improvement and reflection is developing well. There are effective arrangements for ensuring that there is ongoing professional dialogue between leaders and staff about the school's improvement work and the professional learning offer that underpins this.

- Improvement planning takes appropriate account of national priorities, such as developing pupils' Welsh language skills, as well as school-specific priorities to improve the consistency of teaching and the usefulness of assessment processes.

- Leaders involve all staff and stakeholders in a range of purposeful self-evaluation activities as part of a continuous improvement cycle. During the past year, the headteacher has worked closely with staff and governors to make changes to the school's improvement processes so they take better account of the outcomes of self-evaluation and provide the flexibility to address emerging issues, through termly action planning.

- On occasions, however, review processes focus too heavily on aspects of compliance, rather than identifying precisely the impact the school's provision has on the development of pupils' skills. Currently, the school is trying to tackle too many priorities at the same time. As a result, staff are not able to focus well enough on addressing the aspects of pupils' learning most in need of improvement, such as their writing skills.

- There is clear whole-school 'roadmap' for professional learning that involves all staff in reflecting on and improving their skills and knowledge through a range of beneficial individual and collaborative activities. This includes

carrying out well-focused professional enquiries into areas of personal interest or aspects of practice they identify for improvement, linked to the school's priorities (e.g. reading). Increasingly, they reflect on the difference the development of their teaching or provision makes to pupils' learning, using evidence they have gathered about pupils' progress and attitudes to learning. However, there is not always a sufficient focus on professional learning at a whole-school level to drive forward needed improvements in the quality of teaching and key aspects of pupils' learning, such as writing.

- Leaders and governors deploy the school's resources appropriately to support pupils' learning and well-being. They share a common moral purpose to ensure equity for all pupils in the learning opportunities they receive. Governors monitor expenditure of the pupil development grant closely, for those pupils who are eligible, to ensure that they benefit from the additional learning support the school provides.

- In addition, leaders ensure that grant funding enriches pupils' lives and develops a broad range of skills, by providing them with learning experiences they might not otherwise have, such as flying to Scotland to take part in a residential visit.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Appendix 1: Deighton Primary

Name of provider	Deighton Primary School
Local authority	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	234
Pupils of statutory school age	173
Number in nursery classes	37
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Primary is 23.7%)	46.9%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 13.2%)	3.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2019
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	04/12/2023

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

14

Appendix 2: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. *'most pupils…'* or *'very few pupils…'*. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

This page is intentionally left blank

Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

Report following monitoring

Level of follow-up: Special measures

Brynmawr Foundation School
Rhydw
Brynmawr
Blaenau Gwent
NP23 4XT

Date of visit: November 2023

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

Outcome of visit

Brynmawr Foundation School is judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the most recent core inspection.

As a result, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales is removing the school from the list of schools requiring special measures.

Progress since the last inspection

R1. Improve pupils' standards across the school, including their literacy and numeracy skills

In lessons, many pupils make sound progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. They recall prior knowledge confidently and apply this well to new contexts. A few pupils make exceptional progress in lessons, although a few learners make limited progress overall.

Most pupils listen well to teachers and to each other. Many engage well with teachers' questions and express their ideas clearly in class discussions. A minority of these pupils provide extended verbal responses, successfully conveying their thinking and reasons, particularly when prompted by their teachers to expand their answers. However, a minority of pupils' verbal responses are too brief.

Many pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of the texts that they read. They use a range of approaches to identify different writing techniques and select information competently, for example to justify their opinions or interpretations or to write summaries. A majority of pupils infer meaning accurately from text. A minority provide thoughtful interpretations of meaning, combining their prior learning with evidence from the text, such as when analysing the writer's intent in the poem 'To My Father' by the Carmarthenshire poet Tony Curtis.

Many pupils write well at length in English and across the curriculum. These pupils write with a clear sense of purpose and increasing confidence in adapting language to suit their audience. They explain their ideas clearly, using subject terminology accurately where appropriate. Many pupils' writing is broadly technically accurate. The majority of pupils explain their ideas using increasingly engaging language. However, there are weaknesses in the writing of a minority of pupils. In these cases, pupils do not write at sufficient length, they do not structure their writing appropriately or have a secure enough understanding of how to express their ideas to suit their audience. Others make frequent technical errors or have weak handwriting.

In relevant contexts across the curriculum, including mathematics, many pupils use the four rules of number competently. They can convert accurately between units, and many are confident when converting fractions to decimals in mathematics. The majority of pupils use data skills well, such as when collecting, recording, presenting and interpreting their practical science experiments or analysing employment trends in Blaenau Gwent and Cardiff from stacked bar graphs and charts. Many pupils

produce accurate graphs and charts. However, a few pupils do not apply their basic times tables securely.

Generally, pupils are developing well their confidence in speaking Welsh in Welsh lessons. With support, many pupils construct short sentences in Welsh using suitable vocabulary. A few more able pupils can write extended phrases and justify their opinions securely. Overall, however, pupils' Welsh language skills remain underdeveloped.

R2. Improve pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning

Since the core inspection, the school has strengthened its approaches to supporting pupils' behaviour, well-being and engagement in learning. This is having a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning.

Nearly all pupils are punctual to lessons. Nearly all teachers develop positive working relationships with pupils and manage classroom behaviour effectively. As a result, most pupils engage well and persevere with their learning. They listen attentively to their teacher's instructions and settle readily to their learning. They engage well with classroom discussions and are willing to contribute when asked questions or given opportunities to discuss in pairs.

Nearly all pupils are courteous towards each other, staff and visitors to the school. Most behave sensibly during breaks and lunch and when moving around the school.

Pastoral leaders have further strengthened their approaches to monitoring behaviour and attendance. Pupils receive timely intervention and support when required. The school has evaluated and developed further its approach to supporting pupils' behaviour by providing a sensible, staged response to meet their needs. This includes beneficial provision with a specialist teacher to help pupils re-engage with their learning.

The school has further strengthened the leadership opportunities for pupils. The 'change and create' programme allows pupils to take on leadership roles by leading assemblies and organising charity events. Pupils also benefit from a new house system with rewards for good behaviour, progress and engagement in learning. This work is contributing well to improvements in pupils' confidence, attitudes to learning, and a sense of community in the school.

Between the academic years 2018-2019 and 2022-2023, the school's rate of attendance fell by a larger amount than that seen nationally. Last year it was below that of similar schools, although the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals was similar to the national average for this group of pupils. Since the beginning of this academic year, the rate of attendance has improved compared with the same period last year, including for pupils eligible for free school meals.

R3. Improve the effectiveness of teaching to motivate, engage and challenge pupils to make good progress in lessons

The development of teaching continues to be a key focus for self-evaluation, professional learning, and priority planning within the school. Senior leaders continue to drive improvements in teaching successfully. They have developed middle leaders

to become more confident and competent in reviewing teaching and bringing about sustainable improvements.

Nearly all teachers have built strong working relationships with pupils and have secured calm and productive classroom environments. They are confident in their subject knowledge. Most plan lessons appropriately to support pupils' progress in learning and cross-curricular skills and to provide them with an appropriate level of challenge. Most use teaching strategies identified as key to the 'Brynmawr Way' with increasing confidence. For example, they use a range of approaches to developing pupils' speaking and discussion skills and beneficial questioning strategies to explore pupils' understanding and assess learning.

Many teachers plan learning activities that build well on each other and challenge pupils effectively to make strong progress from their starting points. Across the curriculum, many teachers provide relevant and beneficial opportunities to help pupils develop their literacy and numeracy skills. For example, they focus effectively on subject terminology, develop pupils' oracy skills and sequence learning activities successfully to support pupils' extended writing skills. They use helpful approaches to meet learners' individual needs, such as targeted questions on mini-whiteboards, one-to-one support or extension tasks. Overall, many teachers have high expectations of pupils' progress and ensure an effective pace for learning.

In the majority of cases, teachers demonstrate precisely the quality of work they expect from pupils by using either examples, clear success criteria or modelling the writing process effectively. They question skilfully to probe pupils' understanding, extend their learning or verbal responses, and ensure that pupils have suitable time to respond.

The most effective teachers plan very well-structured and engaging lessons. They target questions to specific pupils to give them a high level of challenge from their starting points, and listen carefully to pupils' responses before probing and extending their learning further. However, in a few lessons, there are shortcomings in teaching. In these cases, teachers plan activities that do not secure strong progress in learning, or they do not adjust the pace of teaching to match pupils' learning or support pupils with additional learning needs well enough.

Many teachers provide beneficial verbal feedback to pupils in lessons to help them to improve their work. Their written feedback to pupils explains what to improve helpfully. However, a minority of teachers' written feedback does not explain how to improve well enough. Particularly in these cases, pupils do not respond well enough to teachers' comments to improve the quality of their work.

R4. Strengthen leadership at all levels to improve leaders' ability to identify areas for development and to plan effectively for improvement

Since the core inspection, the headteacher and his senior team have focused successfully on their vision for improving teaching and learning, pupils' engagement and aspirations, and building leadership capacity at all levels. This work has had a significant impact on the quality of teaching, pupils' attitudes to learning and leaders' ability to plan robustly for improvement.

Senior leaders are now more strategic in their work. Following the headteacher's model of considered support and challenge, they have set a clear direction for school improvement and have successfully secured a shared sense of purpose amongst all staff.

Line management arrangements have been carefully revised so that senior leaders work well with middle leaders to build their leadership capacity through modelling rigorous but supportive accountability processes. These arrangements help ensure that leaders at all levels clearly understand the school's priorities and their contribution to the school's progress. Overall, many middle leaders are developing well their capacity to lead their departments and year groups, and now demonstrate a strong understanding of strengths and areas for development in their areas of responsibility.

A clear whole-school self-evaluation cycle considers a wide range of first-hand evidence. Senior leaders evaluate of the quality of provision and its impact on pupils' knowledge, skills and progress precisely. These activities are carried out with middle leaders, which helps ensure that subject skills are balanced well against whole-school teaching and learning priorities. This approach is also helping to build the capacity of subject middle leaders to evaluate provision accurately and provide any support, professional learning or challenge required. Pastoral leaders also monitor attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning closely.

Overall, department improvement planning has improved further since the last monitoring visit. The departmental priorities identified through whole-school and departmental self-evaluation align well with strategic priorities. Many middle leaders determine meaningful and relevant actions and select appropriate teaching strategies to address any shortcomings and work well with senior leaders to monitor progress closely. They discuss their findings regularly in their team meetings and use this process to refine their actions in a responsive and timely way.

Despite these improvements, there remain inconsistencies in a few middle leaders' evaluations of the quality of provision. They occasionally rely too heavily on assessment information, do not evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' progress precisely enough, or do not draw upon the most pertinent evidence to monitor quality.

The headteacher has a secure understanding of the strengths and areas for development in leadership. Leaders receive general and targeted professional learning to improve their leadership skills, supported where appropriate by external partners. There are also valuable opportunities for staff to take the lead on strategic priorities and enhance their leadership experiences further. However, the bespoke professional learning offer for pastoral leaders is not fully developed.

Arrangements for managing the performance of staff at all levels are robust. Staff are set meaningful targets that reflect well whole-school priorities for teaching and learning, pupils' well-being or leadership. Governors have a secure understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the school. They have supported the school well by providing beneficial guidance and relevant challenge.

This page is intentionally left blank

Cabinet and Council only
Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:
Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee:	**Cabinet**
Date of meeting:	**21st February 2024**
Report Subject:	**Key Stage 4 Outcomes 2023**
Portfolio Holder:	**Sue Edmunds, Executive Member for People and Education**
Report Submitted by:	**Luisa Munro-Morris, Corporate Director of Education (Interim)**
Report Written by:	**Debbie Harteveld, Managing Director, EAS**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	**Corporate Leadership Team**	**Portfolio Holder / Chair**	**Governance Audit Committee**	**Democratic Services Committee**	**Scrutiny Committee**	**Cabinet**	**Council**	**Other (please state)**
10.01.24	11.01.24	17.01.24			30.01.24	21.02.24		

1. **Purpose of the Report**

   This report provides members with final outcome data for Secondary schools within the Local Authority for 2022-2023 (Summer 2023).

2 **Scope and Background**

2.1 This year, for the first time since 2019, the Welsh Government are producing Key Stage 4 All Wales Core Data Sets (AWCDS) at individual school level.

2.2 Each of the last 4 years used essentially different methods for determining grades, so none are directly comparable. In 2023 national outcomes are lower than 2022, 2021 and 2020, but not as low as 2019.

2.3 Provisional outcomes were available to schools, LAs and consortia in Provisional form in mid-November 2023 (via Data Exchange Wales (DEWi)). These were then used to contribute to a school level checking process, so any errors could be addressed, before final versions were published on 20 December 2023. This report uses the final versions.

   Welsh Government published measures for 2023

2.4 These include the following points-based measures:
   - The Capped 9 measure
   - Literacy measure (best of Language / Literature)
   - Numeracy measure (best of mathematics / numeracy)
   - Science measure (best of science)
   - Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate measure

2.5 In addition to the above 'points based' measures the percentage of learners achieving 5 or more A*-A and percentage of learners achieving No Qualifications are also included.

2.6   As well as comparisons of All Pupils, comparisons are also made Male / Female and FSM / non-FSM for each of the indicators, but only Capped 9 comparisons are included in this report at LA level.

2.7   In terms of analysis the two main comparisons are the Welsh Government line of modelled outcomes, and a comparison with a 'family' of similar schools.

Families

2.8   Schools face different challenges based on their context. The AWCDS contains comparative outcomes against similar schools – known as 'Families'. Families (of 9-10 schools) have been created by grouping on size and linguistic delivery and then ordering schools according to the values of an index of 'challenge', calculated as follows:

- 50% x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age eligible for Free School Meals (FSM)
- 30% x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age who live in an area classed as in the 20% most deprived parts of Wales using the 2019 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)
- 10% x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age subject to an Individual Development Plan (IDP) or with a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- 10% x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age who are either new to the English language (or Welsh where relevant), at an early acquisition stage or developing competence.

2.9   A three-year average of data from PLASC 2021-2023 is used.

2.10   For 2023 there are 6 Welsh medium families, numbered from 1 (the most disadvantaged) to 5 (the least disadvantaged). There are 15 English medium families numbered from 7 (the most disadvantaged) to 21 (the least disadvantaged).

2.11   **Families with Blaenau Gwent Schools (2023)**

Moved to a MORE disadvantaged Family (0 Schools)
Moved to a LESS disadvantaged Family (1 School)
14 English Medium families (7-21)

School Name	Family	Position*
St Teilo's C-in-W High School		1
Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School		2
Cefn Hengoed		3
Abertillery Learning Community		4
St Julian's School	010	5
Bedwas High School		6
Cwmbran High School		7
Ysgol Nantgwyn		8
Brynmawr Foundation School		9
BISHOP GORE SCHOOL		10
St Cenydd School		1
Ysgol Uwchradd Caergybi		2
Ebbw Fawr Learning Community		3
MORRISTON COMPREHENSIVE		4
Hawthorn High School	011	5
BIRCHGROVE		6
Tonyrefail Community School		7
Tredegar Comprehensive School		8
Ysgol Cwm Brombil		9
Rhosnesni High School		10

*This is the position of the school in the family in terms of social deprivation, not the position of the school in terms of how well they have achieved at KS4, when compared to other families.

2.12   The 4 Blaenau Gwent schools with secondary provisions are in families 10 and 11, the 4th and 5th most socio-economically disadvantaged families of the 15 English medium families.

3.   **Options for Recommendation**

3.1   The People Scrutiny Committee considered and supported Option 1 on 30th January 2024.

3.2   **Option 1:**
For members to receive the report for information.

3.3   **Option 2:**
For members to consider the information and offer further comment on the outcomes.

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

4.1 **Statutory Responsibility**

4.1.1 The Local Authority is required to monitor the standards of educations within its schools.

4.1.2 **Corporate Improvement Plan**

Education Aims

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

4.1.3 **Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan**

The content of the EAS business plan is clearly aligned to the objectives in the Blaenau Gwent Wellbeing Plan which aims for everyone to have the best start in life. Through this plan it seeks to ensure that the education provision is appropriate and able to meet the needs of children and young people so that their progress is as good as it ought to be.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 *Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)*
There are no budgetary implications for either option.

5.2 *Risks including Mitigating Actions*
The risks related to future outcomes for at school level being below families and the Welsh Government modelled expectations, meaning that individual learners in Blaenau-Gwent do not achieve their full potential.

5.3 *Legal*
None for this report.

5.5 *Human Resources*
None for this report.

5.6 **Health and Safety**
There are no health and safety implications from this report.

6.   Supporting Evidence

6.1   Capped 9 – all pupils – compared with the family average

6.1.1   The table below shows the Capped 9 performance of all learners compared with their individual family. Two schools are above their family, and two below, one significantly so.

| School Name	Capped 9	Family Capped 9	Capped 9 - School-Family difference	
Blaenau Gwent School	370.9	353.8	17.1	
Blaenau Gwent School	366.7	353.4	13.2	
Blaenau Gwent School	334.7	353.8	-19.1	
Blaenau Gwent School	305.9	353.4	-47.6	

6.1.2   For all GCSE subjects the points difference between every grade is 6 points. So, for example a B is worth 6 more points than a C.

6.1.3   This means that for the Capped 9, a difference of 54 points indicates that on average, every learner in a school is performing above or below the family by a whole GCSE grade in every subject. (6 points x 9 subjects=54 points).

6.1.4   Please note that the indicative bars on the right for this table and all below are adjusted to the minimum (negative) and maximum (positive) values for each table individually and automatically. Therefore, a bar '47.6 points' long will not be consistent across each chart.

Capped 9 – all pupils – compared with WG 'Modelled Outcome' line

6.1.5   The chart below does not compare with the family, but rather the Welsh Government 'Modelled outcome'.

Capped 9 - Blaenau Gwent
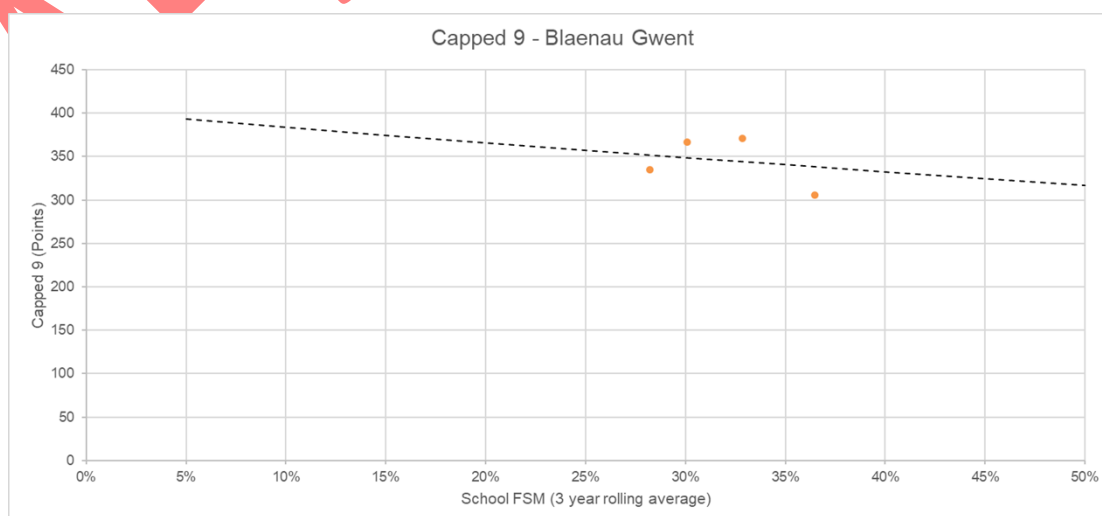
6.1.6   Two schools in Blaenau Gwent are above the modelled outcome line and two below.

Capped 9 – Comparison by 'Thirds' with WG 'Modelled Outcome' line

6.1.7   The chart below groups learners in each individual school into 'thirds. For example, if 120 learners in a cohort, they would be split into three groups of 40 by their Capped 9 scores. Three averages would then be calculated for each of these groups. The table below gives the average of each third.

School Name	Upper Third			Middle Third			Lower Third		
	Achieve	Modelle	+/-	Achieve	Modelle	+/-	Achieve	Modelle	+/-
Blaenau Gwent School	461	446	15	375	372	3	276	239	37
Blaenau Gwent School	448	451	-3	381	376	5	271	246	25
Blaenau Gwent School	441	452	-11	351	377	-26	206	248	-43
Blaenau Gwent School	405	442	-37	322	368	-45	188	232	-44

6.1.8   For the highest achieving third, one school is above expectation, one in-line, but two below, one significantly so. For the middle third two schools are in-line, but two below, both significantly so. There are however two positive differentials for the lowest thirds, which are significant.

6.1.9   The same data represented around 3 regression lines based on eligibility. This shows the relatively low level of variance for Blaenau Gwent in the outcomes for each school in each third.
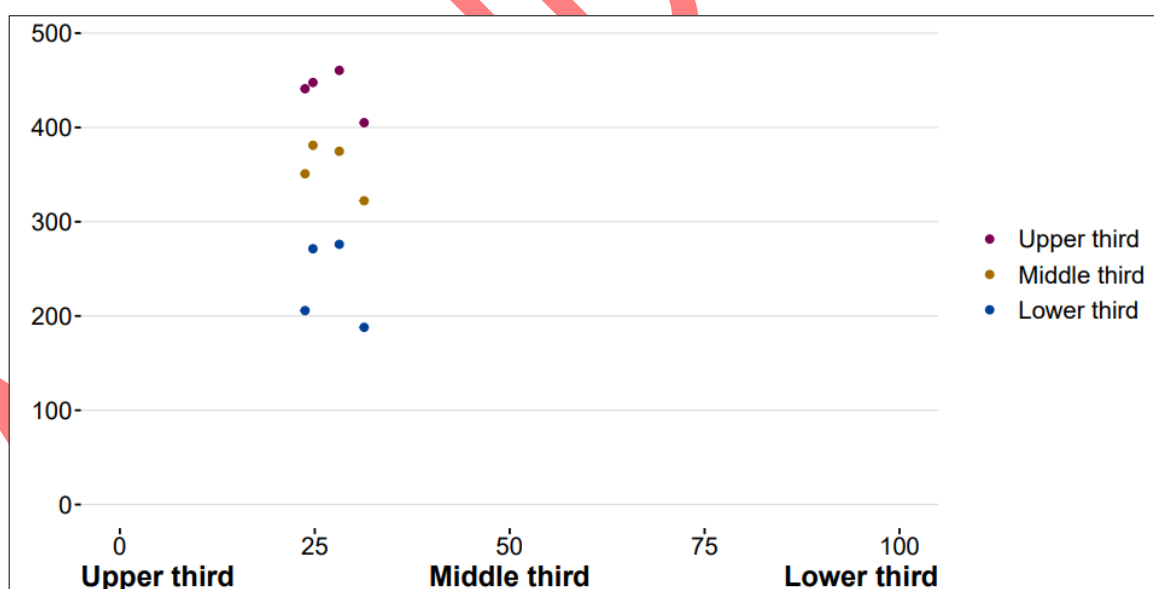
Literacy Measure – compared with the Family average

6.1.10   To put these charts in perspective a difference of +/- 6 points is the equivalent of a GCSE grade difference for every learner. +/- 3 points would therefore be a half a grade difference.

School Name	Literacy Measure	Literacy Measure - Family	Literacy Measure - Difference	
Blaenau Gwent School	40.4	38.2	2.2	
Blaenau Gwent School	40.2	38.3	1.9	
Blaenau Gwent School	39.2	38.2	1.0	
Blaenau Gwent School	31.6	38.3	-6.7	

6.1.11 Three schools are above the family average for the literacy measure, but one school is significantly below, by over a GCSE grade per learner.

6.1.12 The table below gives the individual contribution of each of the GCSEs that contribute to this measure.

School Name	English Language	English Literature
Blaenau Gwent School	34.7	39.8
Blaenau Gwent School	37.9	37.4
Blaenau Gwent School	36.6	39.0
Blaenau Gwent School	30.4	31.5

6.1.13 Three schools have a higher contribution made by literature rather than language.

Numeracy Measure – compared with the Family average

School Name	Numeracy Measure	Numeracy Measure - Family	Numeracy Measure - Difference	
Blaenau Gwent School	34.0	31.1	2.9	
Blaenau Gwent School	31.6	31.1	0.5	
Blaenau Gwent School	32.8	32.4	0.3	
Blaenau Gwent School	22.5	32.4	-10.0	

6.1.14 For the numeracy measure two schools are in line with the family average, one above (by an average of half a grade), but one significant below the family average, by over 1.5 grades per learner.

6.1.15 The differences between the individual numeracy GCSE and mathematics GCSE are relatively small for each school, except one school where the difference is more than a grade per learners. Both are relatively lower than similar schools.

School Name	Numeracy	Mathematics
Blaenau Gwent School	34.0	36.0
Blaenau Gwent School	31.6	33.0
Blaenau Gwent School	32.8	34.7
Blaenau Gwent School	22.5	29.3

Science Measure – compared with the Family average

School Name	Science Measure	Science Measure - Family	Science Measure - Difference	
Blaenau Gwent School	37.9	33.7	4.2	
Blaenau Gwent School	36.2	36.0	0.2	
Blaenau Gwent School	33.4	33.7	-0.3	
Blaenau Gwent School	28.7	36.0	-7.3	

6.1.16 Two schools are approximately in line with families, with one above, by approximately half a GCSE grade per learner and one below, by over a whole GCSE grade per learner.

Welsh Baccalaureate Measure – compared with the Family average

6.1.17 It is this measure which has the greatest variance, with some family averages across Wales particularly low.

School Name	Welsh Bacc. Measure	Welsh Bacc. Measure - Family	Welsh Bacc. Measure - Difference	
Blaenau Gwent School	32.0	25.5	6.5	
Blaenau Gwent School	39.3	36.1	3.2	
Blaenau Gwent School	35.9	36.1	-0.2	
Blaenau Gwent School	18.0	25.5	-7.6	

6.1.18 Two schools are approximately in line with family averages, with these averages being as expected. For the remaining schools, their family comparators are both low, with one being well above and then one well below those 'low' averages.

No Qualifications – compared with the Family average

6.1.19

6.1.20 Please note the reversed colour coding on the bars to indicate that a negative difference from the family is positive.

School Name	No Qualifications (%)	No Qualificaitons (%) Family	No Qualificaitons (%) Difference
Blaenau Gwent School	0.0	0.4	-0.4
Blaenau Gwent School	0.0	0.4	-0.4
Blaenau Gwent School	0.0	0.0	0.0
Blaenau Gwent School	0.0	0.0	0.0

6.1.21 All 4 schools in Blaenau Gwent have no learners leaving without a qualification. The reason for the positive difference compared with the family is that the family average for their family is 0.4 (it is the same family for both schools).

5+ A*-A – compared with the Family average

School Name	5+ A*-A (%)	5+ A*-A (%) Family	5+ A*-A (%) Difference
Blaenau Gwent School	16.9	13.5	3.4
Blaenau Gwent School	15.3	13.5	1.8
Blaenau Gwent School	14.7	15.0	-0.2
Blaenau Gwent School	6.3	15.0	-8.7

6.1.22 Two schools 5+ A*-A percentage are in line with the family, with one above. One school's rate is less than half that of the family average. This will be linked to the lower relative performance of the Upper Third of learners on the capped 9 for this school.

Local Authority Aggregate Data

Key measures – Compared with Wales

6.1.23 Please note that these measures are not contextualised but compare with the Wales average.

Table 1.1c - Qualifications outcomes

Title	2023 - Blaenau Gwent	2023 - Wales
Capped 9 points score (interim)	340.2	358.1
WBacc Skills Challenge Certificate indicator – points score	31.9	31.6
Literacy indicator – points score	37.2	39.7
Numeracy indicator – points score	34.5	37.1
Science indicator – points score	33.8	36.9
No qualifications - % of pupils	0.5	1.4
5+ A*-A or equivalent	13.2	20.3

6.1.24 For nearly all measures the Blaenau Gwent average is below the Wales average, except the Skills Challenge Certificate indicator and also no qualifications (where a lower rate is positive).

Key measures – Compared with 'Modelled' by FSM

6.1.25 Modelled expectations for each indicator are all above expectation indicated by Free School Meals. Please note that each table number is from the original data pack, not this report.

Table 4.1 - KS4 Capped 9 points score (interim) - LA Average

Title	2023 - Capped 9 points score (interim)	2023 - Modelled score	2023 - Difference
Blaenau Gwent	346.4	355.5	-9.1

6.1.26 The Capped 9 Points Score is 9 points below the modelled expectation. The equivalent of approximately 1/6th of a GCSE grade per learner.

Table 4.2 - KS4 WBacc Skills Challenge Certificate indicator - points score - LA Average

Title	2023 - WBacc Skills Challenge Certificate indicator – points score	2023 - Modelled score	2023 - Difference
Blaenau Gwent	32.6	33.1	-0.5

6.1.27　The Skills Challenge Certificate Indicator score is approximately in line with expectation.

Table 4.3 - KS4 Literacy indicator - points score - LA Average

Title	2023 - Literacy indicator – points score	2023 - Modelled score	2023 - Difference
Blaenau Gwent	37.9	38.8	-0.9

6.1.28　The Literacy Indicator score is slightly below expectation, the equivalent of 1/6th of a GCSE grade per learner.

Table 4.4 - KS4 Numeracy indicator - points score - LA Average

Title	2023 - Numeracy indicator – points score	2023 - Modelled score	2023 - Difference
Blaenau Gwent	35.1	35.9	-0.9

6.1.29　The Numeracy Indicator score is slightly below expectation, the equivalent of 1/6th of a GCSE grade per learner.

Table 4.5 - KS4 Science indicator - points score - LA Average

Title	2023 - Science indicator – points score	2023 - Modelled score	2023 - Difference
Blaenau Gwent	34.4	35.3	-0.9

6.1.30　The Science Indicator score is slightly below expectation, the equivalent of 1/6th of a GCSE grade per learner.

Capped 9 – Males and Females
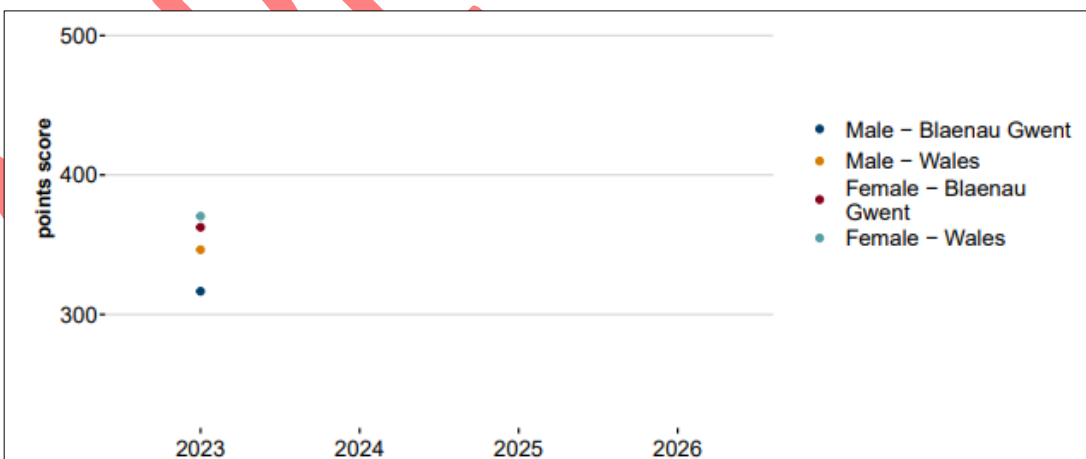

Note: The y axis does not start at zero in this plot.

Table 3.2 - KS4 Capped 9 points score (interim) (average)

Title	2023
Male - Blaenau Gwent	316.6
Male - Wales	346.4
Female - Blaenau Gwent	362.6
Female - Wales	370.5

6.1.31 Both Males and Females in Blaenau Gwent perform less well than their peers in Wales, however the difference between boys in Blaenau Gwent and boys in the test of Wales is approximately four times larger than the corresponding gap for girls.

Capped 9 FSM – non-FSM

/Overleaf

Note: The y axis does not start at zero in this plot.

Table 6.2 - KS4 Capped 9 points score (interim) (average)

Title	2023
FSM - Blaenau Gwent	286.4
FSM - Wales	296.7
Non FSM - Blaenau Gwent	360.4
Non FSM - Wales	383.8
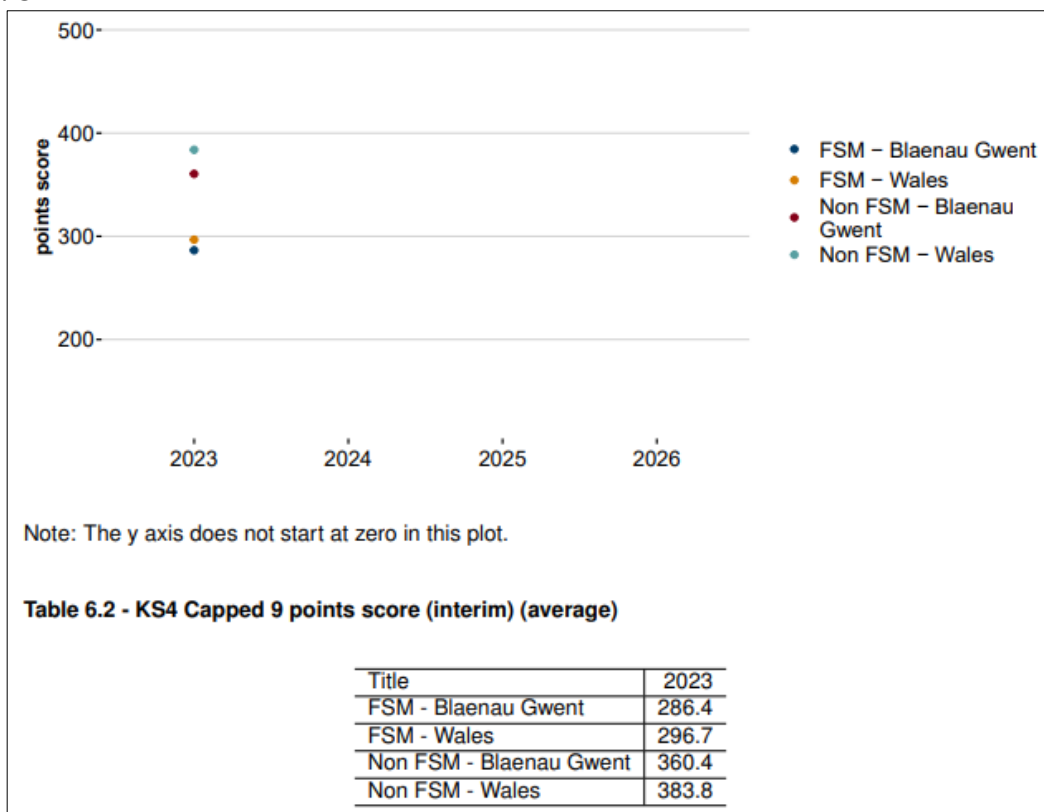
6.1.32 Both FSM and non-FSM learners in Blaenau Gwent perform lower than their peers in Wales.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***
High Quality education is a fundamental pre-requisite of ensuring future local and national prosperity through the provision of an informed and well-educated workforce and society. The Local Authority's statutory role to monitor and evaluate school performance and the quality of provision, coupled with its statutory powers of intervention in schools causing concern is funtamental to ensuring that all schools provide high quality education provision.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***
Involvement of partners is fundamental to securing and sustaining school improvement. The statutory framework advocates this and the work of the Local authority, its commissioned school improvement service (EAS) and schools evidences the positive impact of working in this way.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
Monitoring school outcomes is key element in ensuring that schools are known well by the Council so that appropriate support and intervention can be directed towards areas of greatest need. Constant monitoring of school performance facilitates

early intervention to ensure that schools maintain high quality outcomes in the longer term.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***
A key element of the Council's work is to monitor settings and ensure appropriate support to secure continuing high standards. Review of schools' outcomes reflects the extent to which settings and Local Authorities have been effective in achieving this.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
Educational improvement in Blaenau Gwent is delivered on a regional basis through the South East Wales Consortium in collaboration with Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport, Torfaen and Blaenau-Gwent Councils.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***
Ensuring that schools deliver high quality education provision to secure high pupil outcomes relate to the Council's high-level outcomes within the Corporate Improvement Plan that children's and young people's learning and achievement levels are maximised. These overarching outcomes and objectives permeate the work of a range of Council departments and partners. Effective monitoring, evaluation and intervention are fundamental to the Council's wellbeing objectives.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***
No specific impact related to this report.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***
Not required for this report.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 As part of existing arrangement.

Background Documents /Electronic Links
None – information included within the report.

Cabinet and Council only
Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:
Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Cabinet**

Date of meeting: **10th April 2024**

Report Subject: **Education Digital Strategy**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Sue Edmunds, Cabinet Member People and Education**

Report Submitted by: **Joanne Watts, Service Manager for Education Transformation and Business Change**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	29/2/24	07.03.24			19/03/2024	10.04.24		

1.   **Purpose of the Report**

1.1   The purpose of the report is to present the Council's Education Digital Strategy to Cabinet for approval.

2.   **Scope and Background**

2.1   The Education Transformation Team has been progressing with its Digital Transformation over the last few years and the purpose of this Strategy is to highlight the Education Department and its schools' aspirations regarding the digital learner journey in Blaenau Gwent.   The Blaenau Gwent Estyn inspection report published February 2023 highlighted in relation to ICT & Digitalisation that 'despite there being appropriate plans in place to improve connectivity and developments there is no clear ICT strategy'.

2.2   A well-established Digital Strategy working group meets on a termly basis where members collaborate to outline objectives and priorities to achieve the agreed vision for Digital in Education in Blaenau Gwent, which is;

> "*To secure continued development ensuring that all learners regardless of age or demographic have continued safe access to a blend of digital resources, hardware and cloud-based learning throughout the course of their Education*".

A digital Strategy has been developed **(Appendix 1)** to support this vision, there are 7 Priority areas that have been identified in order to achieve the vision:

1. *Infrastructure and Connectivity* - Hwb EdTech funding (waves 1-3) permitted additional infrastructure priorities to be addressed. The Education team will continue to work with Schools, SRS, and the Finance team to plan for the school's infrastructure to be replaced when approaching end of life.

2. *Device and Equipment Sustainability -* The Council are currently in Wave 4 (Device Replacement) of the Hwb EdTech Project, and currently signing off the 5-year device replacement schedules with schools to allow progress to Wave 5.
3. *Hwb EdTech -* As mentioned above, the Council plans to move into Wave 5 of the EdTech programme in the Spring 2024 term. Wave 5 is to support the implementation of audio-visual tools and resources within schools
4. *Migration to and use of Hwb -* The Authority continues to promote Hwb as a first approach and signposts schools to the platform for all software, teaching resources, training opportunities and guidance. The next step towards achieving this priority is to migrate all school-based staff from corporate licences to Hwb accounts
5. *Online Safety -* This has been set as a priority area for 2024 and discussions with the EAS and Safeguarding team are underway for the promotion and monitoring of the 360 safe tool.
6. *Support for schools, Training and Development -* Schools in Blaenau Gwent receive a high level of support from both the Local Authority, EAS, and the Shared resource Service. The well-established Digital Strategy Group meets termly and oversees, prioritises, and monitors the delivery and investment of Digital services in schools. A new monthly Digital lead meeting has also been established, where there is a main agenda point discussed each month. The EAS has a digital network meeting half termly, with updates on the professional learning offer. The SRS aims to provide a comprehensive and all-inclusive offering that caters for the needs of the school and is underpinned by the SLA.
7. *Education Management Information Systems -* All schools in Blaenau Gwent use SIMS as their MIS. The SIMS system is currently hosted for all schools by SRS on behalf of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, although this is due to change in Spring 2024. Owing to contract changes, at that time ESS will take on all SIMS hosting as part of their SIMS Connected model. This migration is currently being planned.

2.3   These priority areas are critical to support the delivery of the Digital Competency Framework and moreover the Curriculum for Wales.
The aim of the strategy is to achieve the following objectives:

- Create a safe teaching and learning environment fit for the digital age.
- Effectively engage practitioners in seeking to improve and enhance the quality of Teaching and Learning.
- Secure continued access to high quality devices both in and outside of the classroom.
- Encourage and develop the use of technology in the classroom to facilitate improved learner outcomes in line with the Digital Competency Framework.
- Use and incorporate new technologies to inspire learners to become digitally skilled and enabled citizens.
- Facilitate effective connectivity for all learners, with the delivery of flexible blended learning, both inside and outside of the classroom setting.
- Establish a secure and sustainable approach to school-based infrastructure.

- Create structured data management processes ensuring maximum data Security.
- Provide effective management information systems to ensure consistency of the transfer and sharing of data information, throughout the learner journey.
- Create a continual professional learning journey which reflets on national, regional and local priorities, through monitoring, reviewing and effective collaboration.
- Develop collaborations with key partners and neighbouring authorities to inform localised developments, opportunities and create a regional strategic overview which is aligned to national priorities and associated policies.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The People Scrutiny Committee supported Option 1 at its meeting on 19th March 2024.

3.2 **Option 1:** That Cabinet considers and approves the Strategy.

Option 2: That Cabinet considers the Strategy and provides comments relating to improvements prior to approval.

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

4.1 The Strategy supports one of the key priorities in the Council's corporate plan to "*Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent".* The use of Digital in schools has the potential to transform traditional teaching and learning methods, enhance pupil engagement, and prepare learners for the digital age.

4.2 The Strategy has been aligned with the Corporate Digital Transformation Strategy and supports the delivery of the two principles and three key priorities of the Strategy:
   - Principle One, developing a culture that supports digital improvement and a seamless customer experience;
   - Principle Two: improving collaboration to make the best use of knowledge and expertise to create better services;
   - Priority One: to be a customer focussed organisation;
   - Priority Two: to be a digitally enabled Borough;
   - Priority Three: to maximise the use of our resources and technology.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**
5.1 *Impact on Budget (short- and long-term impact)*
There are no new or anticipated budgetary implications for the Councils to deliver the strategy. The funding provided from WG through the Hwb EdTech programme has supported the improvement in digital infrastructure and equipment over the last 5 years and is anticipated to continue as the Authority moves on to Wave 5 of the Hwb Ed Tech programme (Audio Visual Equipment). However, as part of the sustainability of the investment Welsh

Government has made into device replacement, schools are required to contribute a 20% commitment year on year for replacing devices going forward.

5.2 *Risk including Mitigating Actions*
There is a risk of non-compliance of the adoption of the strategy. Failure to comply with the ambitions of the strategy will impact on the delivery and transformation of Digital in Education in Blaenau Gwent. This is largely mitigated as there is regular communication via the ICT Strategy group and the monthly School Digital leads group.

5.3 *Legal*
There are no direct legal implications associated with the strategy.

5.4 *Human Resources*
There are no direct Human Resources implications associated with this strategy.

5.5 *Health and Safety*
There are no direct Health and Safety implications associated with this strategy.

6. **Supporting Evidence**
6.1 *Performance Information and Data*

6.1.1 A joint Digital Thematic review was undertaken by ESTYN and Welsh Government in January 2023 **(Appendix 2).** Overall, the review highlighted the positive work that has already been done in Blaenau Gwent with the transformation of Digital services in Education. The key observations were:

- There is a reliance on SRS as the SLA provider. High trust from the LA and growing trust from schools in SRS relationship.
- Blaenau Gwent is considering the impact of sustainability plans on schools and intends to provide updated plans to the Welsh Government. Schools are encouraged to spend their own funding and Welsh Government funding on devices. Conversations about sustainability are collaborative involving heads, the LA and SRS and start with the premise – what do you want to achieve?
- Schools are placing greater emphasis on developing computational thinking skills. Staff training is being provided to enable teachers to work with learners in developing these skills. Cluster-based professional learning offers are being utilised to assess the placement and development of learner skills.
- Blaenau Gwent is actively addressing digital exclusion by considering the cost-of-living crisis and ensuring access to digital learning for all learners. Efforts are being made to monitor engagement and identify learners who require access to digital equipment at home. Additionally, alternative options such as libraries are being promoted for learners without digital access.
- LA provided comprehensive evidence to Welsh Government which was appreciated.

There are 3 areas of recommendation which are currently being addressed:

1. Blaenau Gwent to work with schools to re-focus on utilising 360 Safe Cymru tool.
   The Education team has been liaising with the Safeguarding Officer in Blaenau Gwent to create a monitoring report. The report indicates when schools have accessed or updated the portal. The report is analysed on a termly basis and any schools who haven't accessed the portal within the last 2 terms are contacted as a reminder and to offer additional support.

2. Provide finalised Digital Strategy to Welsh Government once consultation is completed.
   The Digital Strategy will be shared with Welsh Government once approved by Cabinet.

3. Welsh Government to support Blaenau Gwent with planned Hwb email migration and further Hwb adoption across the LA.
   The Hwb email migration is in the early stages of planning with aspirations to complete the migration by the end of 2024. The migration to Hwb is one of the key priorities in the Education Digital strategy.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**
The strategy aims to secure the development of a digitally skilled pupil population in the use of technologies, whilst preparing them for future progression routes and career pathways.

6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**
Stakeholder, end user needs and engagement are a key focus of the strategy, along with its implementation, monitoring, evaluation, learning and future strategic approach. The strategy has and will continually be subject to consultation, which will be used to inform development, delivery, progression, and learning.

6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**
By identifying the resources required to facilitate effective infrastructure, connectivity, and approaches to learning via the use of digital technologies, the strategy serves as a roadmap for schools to navigate the continuous integration of digital in education.

Technology is essential for future generations and is an integral part of their lives, it is how they access and participate in education, work, and society. Therefore, it is vital that education embraces technology as a strategic and transformative force that can enhance learning outcomes and prepare learners for the future.

6.5 **Preventative focus**
The digital strategy recognises that technology is not a static or fixed entity, but a dynamic and evolving one that requires constant adaptation and innovation. Technology creates new challenges and risks that need to be

anticipated and addressed in a timely and effective manner. Therefore, the digital strategy adopts a proactive rather than a reactive approach to digital services.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**
The strategy has been developed in partnership with members of the established Digital Strategy group, which includes representation from schools, the Digital team, SRS and EAS.

6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**
The strategy has been developed by members of the Digital Strategy group which includes dedicated officers from key service areas (Education, Digital team, SRS, and selected schools). It will ultimately be progressed and managed by the Education team, with members from the Strategy group being consulted throughout.

6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**
Digital services in Education contribute to decarbonisation by promoting the use of digital resources and materials, rather than paper-based ones. Digital resources, such as e-books, videos, podcasts, and interactive simulations, can provide rich and engaging learning experiences, while also saving paper, ink, and energy.

6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)**
An Integrated Impact Assessment is considered for each Digital project individually as part of business case submissions.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**
7.1 Project monitoring is carried out via the Project Group, Programme Board and the Digital Strategy Group, along with regular reporting to Welsh Government. The Education Directorates established Digital Strategy group has a strategic oversight for the programme, in line with the requirements of the Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) good practice guidelines. The Education Transformation team manager reports to Education Department Leadership Teams (DLT) and Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). The People Scrutiny Committee / Cabinet monitor progress via their forward work programmes.

Background Documents /Electronic Links
- *Appendix 1- Education Digital Strategy*

- *Appendix 2- Blaenau Gwent Thematic Review*

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Education Digital Strategy 2024

March 2024

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

Contents

Education Digital Strategy 2024

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, the integration of Digital in Education has become imperative. The use of Digital in schools has the potential to transform traditional teaching and learning methods, enhance pupil engagement, and prepare learners for the digital age.

This Education Digital Strategy has been aligned with the Blaenau Gwent Council Digital Transformation Strategy 2023-2027 and will support the delivery of the priorities set out in the Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan 2022/2027.

The purpose of this strategy is to highlight the Council and its schools' aspirations to the digital learner journey in Blaenau Gwent and outline the key aims, objectives, and priorities to achieve our vision for digital services. It will serve as a roadmap for schools to navigate continuous integration of Digital in Education by identifying the resources required to facilitate effective infrastructure, connectivity, and approaches to learning via the use of digital technologies and ultimately shaping a future-ready generation. Our priorities will enable us to improve our customers' experience.

This will mean involvement in ambitious projects to ensure those who are able to use the internet can access information and services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We will be working hard to ensure Blaenau Gwent is a place where people can connect, communicate and access the services they need quickly and efficiently.

Our vision for Digital in Education

To secure continued development ensuring that all learners regardless of age or demographic have continued safe access to a blend of digital resources, hardware and cloud-based learning throughout the course of their education.

The delivery of this vison for digital in Education in Blaenau Gwent will support the priorities of the Welsh Government National Mission.

> Create a safe teaching and learning environment fit for the digital age.
> Effectively engage practitioners in seeking to improve and enhance the quality of Teaching and Learning.
> Secure continued access to high quality devices both in and outside of the classroom.
> Encourage and develop the use of technology in the classroom to facilitate improved learner outcomes in line with the Digital Competency Framework.
> Use and incorporate new technologies to inspire learners to become digitally skilled and enabled citizens.
> Facilitate effective connectivity for all learners, with the delivery of flexible blended learning, both inside and outside of the classroom setting.
> Establish a secure and sustainable approach to school-based infrastructure.
> Create structured data management processes ensuring maximum data Security.
> Provide effective management information systems to ensure consistency of the transfer and sharing of data information, throughout the learner journey.
> Create a continual professional learning journey which reflects on national, regional, and local priorities, through monitoring, reviewing and effective collaboration.
> Develop collaborations with key partners and neighbouring authorities to inform localised developments, opportunities and create a regional strategic overview which is aligned to national priorities and associated policies.

Priorities

In order to effectively achieve the above aims and objectives, the following 7 priority areas have been identified. These priorities are the most critical areas to delivering the Digital Competency Framework and moreover the Curriculum for Wales.

1. **Infrastruture and Connectivity**

2. **Device & Equipment Sustainability**

3. **Hwb EdTech**

4. **Migration to and use of Hwb**

5. **Online Safety**

6. **Support for Schools, Training and Development**

7. **Education Management Information Systems**

4.1 Infrastructure and Connectivity

Infrastructure sustainability is a critical aspect of modern-day technology in Education. The central infrastructure/servers within the school estate are covered under the Shared Resource Service SLA arrangement. The school-based Infrastructure will be maintained on an end-of-life basis.

The infrastructure and connectivity strategy implemented in schools focusses on the technology requirements to ensure the following:

> Enhance learner outcomes by enabling wide ranging access to content and digital resources.

> Support ancillary staff with the day to day running of the school such as back office administration.

> Enable the use of digital learning across the curriculum and in all areas of learning across schools.

> Allow practitioners to deliver a curriculum that is enhanced with digital tools and resources in and out of the classroom setting.

4.1.1 Educational Digital Standards

The Educational Digital Standards set out a future proofed concept that schools and their respective Digital support partners should seek to attain over time, with Local Authority support.

The SRS Education Service uses the standards to guide decision making and project management processes when examining current issues in schools and identifying improvements to services or designing new installations such as new school builds, extensions, refurbishments, and Sustainable Communities for Learning Projects (formally known as 21st Century school Projects).

The standards applicable to Infrastructure and Connectivity include:

> **Connectivity** - PSBA is the primary broadband provision for all schools, providing an unlimited, symmetrical, and uncontended fibre optic service that has been designed to provide maximum value for the Welsh public sector. The ICP sought to ensure that each school had sufficient bandwidth in place using the PSBA and going forward SRS will monitor these connections on behalf of all our schools to ensure this continues to be the case.

> **Data Network Cabinets** - Network cabinets in schools provide a location to house network equipment efficiently. The installation of new cabinets will be compliant with specifications outlined the Digital Standards and in the Infrastructure Brief. In many cases the installations will need to span multiple professional groups which may include electricians, cabling and installation engineers and architects. SRS will advise these groups on behalf of schools and the LA to ensure adequate and safe provision. Existing cabinets are connected together effectively, and these links are monitored to assist in the detection and timely remedy of faults. The contents of cabinets and their topologies are also documented. Where existing cabinets need to be changed, either for maintenance, failure, or a school request this will be managed on a case-by-case basis to ensure the standards are met and that downtime is managed effectively.

> **Router and Switches** - The internet connection running through PSBA will be provided to schools via an appropriate and dedicated piece of networking equipment that is specified by PSBA. While SRS do not own manage or supply this equipment, we do monitor it to ensure that we can be as responsive as possible in cases of failure. If this equipment fails, it means the site goes down and so we treat these issues with the highest priority. The topology that has been designed and installed for schools aims to make sure that end user devices have the shortest possible path out to the internet, with a minimal number of "hops" (a hop is a jump from one device to another). There are systems in place ensure that the infrastructure supporting schools is able to support lessons in the classroom which need to integrate ICT seamlessly into the curriculum. The backbone, or main connection points in schools use switches that will be able to provide the recommended speeds in schools, and the connectors and cabling will also support these speeds to ensure a strong and sufficient connection.

> **Cabling** - Networking equipment will not function correctly unless the cabling used is also of the correct type and specification. Copper installations are a minimum of CAT6, and new fibre installations will be a minimum of OM4, with cabling testing requested at point of installation. Appropriate cabling management must be used depending on the location and environment, for example external cable runs, ACM and non-ACM schools will all have differing containment needs. Cabling and connections must be documented and labelled sufficiently.

> **Wireless Networking** - The wireless network provided to schools makes use of a combination of WAPS (Wireless Access Points) that are positioned in schools and (WLCs) Wireless Lan Controllers that are installed in a data centre. These systems combine to provide a scalable and managed wireless environment to suit learners, staff and visitors who use a range of devices that may be school owned and managed (using our core secure certificate based wireless networks) or personal and unmanaged (using guest and BYOD wireless networks). WAPS have been placed to ensure maximum coverage across schools and minimum interference from external sources and comply to standards required to support modern desktop devices and provide a high standard of connectivity for devices.

4.2 Device & Equipment Sustainability

The Local Authority has worked intensively with schools to establish their device sustainability within the classroom for the next 5 years, working with Welsh government and SRS, the following processes are followed to create a 5-year device replacement schedule.

Equipment Audits

Education and SRS continue to work with schools to maintain up to date device audits on an annual basis. Equipment audited includes (but is not limited to):
> Windows desktops
> Windows Laptops
> iPads
> MacOS devices
> Chromebooks

Audio visual devices (interactive panels, screens, digital signage, projectors). The audits will be used to help inform schools their device and infrastructure lifespan and to identify where equipment renewal is required in line with annual sustainability review and budget planning processes.

Cost formula for schools 5-year Device replacement schedule

Having identified the cost of devices, the PDR and replacement frequency as key components to designing a replacement shcedule, this allows for a formula to be created which would set out a budget figure combining all of these elements.

End of Life (EOL) Equipment Renewal

A key component of a sustainability plan is a replacement schedule, providing an indication of how long a piece of equipment should be in service before replacement.

A replacement schedule of 20% per annum allows a budget to be set and a plan to be made, with flexibility built in so as not to create unnecessary work and waste. Effectively, aiming and planning to replace approximately 20% of equipment annually means that after 5 years everything that needs to be, has been replaced.

Potential Costs to the School

As described above, a combination of the school vision for Pupil Device Ratios, and the projected pupil numbers will also help to inform the budget to ensure an adequate number of devices to provide a range of technology in schools.

The final aspect that needs to be incorporated with the plan to identify costs would be the frequency of hardware renewal and as discussed above this plan suggests an initial starting point of aiming to replace 20% of equipment annually.

Pupil Device Ratios

The default working pupil device ratio is 3:1, some schools may prefer to increase or decrease this and have the flexibility to do so. In the context of a sustainability plan where replacing these devices needs to be considered on a regular basis, it is important to note that a higher ratio will be more expensive to maintain.

SRS will work with the Education Directorate and schools to understand existing device ratios and to explore the aspirations in each school to understand individual future technology requirements. This will assist with designing a road map through which the end user device estate will be transformed over a 5-year period, ensuring appropriate learner practitioner hardware is available to deliver order to deliver the National Curriculum for Wales.

4.2.1 Educational Digital Standards

End user hardware in the field generally needs to be maintained in order to remain under support and it is critical to ensure the delivery of updates to devices in order for technology to remain secure. The differing types of devices in schools will require differing maintenance schedules and different manufacturers will suggest differing replacement timelines. As a rough guide, and at the time of writing:

> Windows devices will be built at the beginning of their life with an up-to-date Operating System (OS), but will need a major OS update at least once, and possibly twice, before the end of their expected 5 year service. The SRS plan to identify the most efficient way of completing this to minimise disruption to schools.

> Chromebooks are sold with a date describing when automatic updates will apply (Auto Update Expiry, AUE). Whilst updates are applied over the air through SRS Infrastructure and the process is automatic, Google will only release updates for Chromebooks for a finite amount of time (defined by the AUE date) after which point the devices will no longer be considered secure and the devices may need to be prioritised for replacement. It is important to note the AUE date when purchasing Chromebooks to ensure a longer supported period.

> iPads, like Chromebooks, are also only supported by their manufacturer for a finite amount of time, although the dates are usually not known at the point of purchase. Again, iPads are deployed over the air using a combination of SRS infrastructure and the SRS supported Mobile Device Management (MDM).

For other devices, perhaps not available through EdTech, or bespoke devices not in use across schools in general, advice is obtained from SRS to ascertain what support is available and inform sustainability plans.

4.2.2 Audio Visual equipment renewal cycle

Wave 5 of the EdTech programme considers teaching and learning audio Visual (AV) tools such as interactive panels and projectors. The sustainability requirement will still apply to this type of equipment also. In practise, this means that an audit needs to be carried out, a replacement schedule decided and a location for costs to be agreed. This will combine with any aspirations that schools may have.

4.3 Hwb EdTech

The Hwb EdTech programme, funded by WG, provides funding to LAs in order to provide sufficient infrastructure and technology in schools to further enhance digital provision across the curriculum and enable access to cloud learning environments in the classroom.

Funding must be allocated to waves sequentially, signing off the previous wave before being able to move onto the next wave.

4.3.1 Waves 1-3

Waves 1 – 3 focussed on infrastructure in schools, including internet connections, ICT network cabinets, switching, routing and Wi-Fi. The pace at which we were able to support schools in Blaenau Gwent was hugely accelerated by the ICP and meant that the Local Authority were able to sign off Waves 1 -3 very quickly. The EdTech funding provided a continuation of the improvements already made and allowed improvement of areas which were not targeted by the ICP but did form part of the Hwb Education Digital Standards.

The replacement of outdated switches provided an excellent backbone across schools, supporting optimal connectivity for end user devices and allowing the shortest route possible to the internet.

The installation of new fibre cabling between all cabinets in secondary schools where required would have also contributed to this. The use of OM4 cabling created a 10G backbone across these schools and deployed a resilient network topology, minimising the impact of equipment failure and ensuring we provide the very best infrastructure to meet the needs of a digital curriculum.

4.3.2 Wave 4

Building on the successes of previous Waves and the ICP project, the local authority moved on to wave 4 of the EdTech Project in 2020. This wave focusses on the replacement of end user devices such as laptops, desktops, iPads, and Chromebooks.

The SRS has been vital in the roll out of a large number of devices. Due to the current economic climate and political influences, deliveries have been periodically delayed, and the availability of equipment has been impacted. The SRS Education Service role is of huge importance as they process and distribute devices as soon as they are made available, to ensure that the needs of practitioners and learners can be met.

The wave 4 funding enabled Blaenau Gwent purchase approx. 4,800 devices across the school estate.

Blaenau Gwent's focus has been to remove outdated equipment that is no longer fit for purpose or nearing end of life and replace with new technology, whilst ensuring that schools are able to satisfy their sustainability commitments under the EdTech programme.

Blaenau Gwent worked closely with the schools and SRS to identify the factors that need to be considered with a sustainability plan, such as device ratios, equipment types and cost to assist in creating specific plans tailored to the needs of individual schools.

4.3.3 Wave 5

Wave 5 of the EdTech programme is to support the implementation of audio-visual tools and resources within schools across the board. The schools will be able to use any allocated funding to purchase the following;

> Interactive white boards
> Speakers
> Projectors
> Headsets

The same principle applies to Wave 5 as the previous waves, i.e., Current equipment will be assessed on condition and suitability, professional recommendations from SRS will be offered to schools and sustainability plans drafted to consider a replacement schedule.

The Local Authority is excited to work with the schools on this wave of the programme and will provide further updates on funding and equipment that is available to schools, as soon as they become available.

4.4 Migration to and use of Hwb

The Authority continues to promote Hwb as a first approach and signposts schools to the platform for all software, teaching resources, training opportunities and guidance. Hwb, the digital platform for learning and teaching in Wales both in and out of school, provides learners and teachers with access to a range of bilingual, digital tools, and resources. It is the Welsh Government's strategic digital channel to support the delivery of the curriculum in Wales.

To achieve our aims, we need to identify the technology that is needed, the resources that will support this and the skills teachers need to deliver this.

The Local Authority aims to achieve the following.
> Promote the use of Hwb through Hwb collaborations across schools and learners.
> Migrate all school-based staff from corporate licences to Hwb accounts.
> Continue to link school based Hwb Champions/Digital leads to corporate Digital Champions to further develop collaboration opportunities.
> Continue to liaise with the EAS to provide training events to enhance the digital skills of teachers and pupils.

We want all schools to deliver the Digital Competence Framework with confidence. As a digital city we are ambitious to ensure that our schools, teachers, and learners can benefit from digital technology and the use of Hwb. This will help us improve attainment, skills, and opportunities for all.

4.5 Online Safety

As an authority we ensure schools understand the function of Smoothwall (Websafe) and support schools to use the 360 Degree Safe Cymru - online Safety resources and evaluation tools. The Local Authority carries out periodic reviews of the effectiveness of firewalls and online security.

The requirement to ensure that learners are able to use the internet and related communications technologies appropriately and safely is part of a school's wider duty of care. The 360 Degree Safe Cymru Online Safety Policy is provided by Southwest Grid for Learning (SWGfL) in partnership with Welsh Government. The Online Safety Policy is intended to help schools produce a suitable online safety policy document, which will consider all current and relevant issues in a whole school context.

The following actions have already been implemented and will continue to be a focus to promote digital safety in Education.
> Safeguarding is promoted as a responsibility to respond to both online and offline behaviours – this is contained within the LGES Local Government Education Services Safeguarding Policy.
> Schools have their own safeguarding and online safety policies.
> Schools participate in the school police liaison programme.
> The 360-degree safe policy has been adopted by the Council – the policy and accompanying templates are accessible to schools via Hwb.
> All schools have registered with the 360-degree safe tool. – further work required to promote on-going use.
> Education will monitor the use of the 360-degree safe tool using the usage reports provided by Hwb.
> Online safety is included in the safeguarding FADE and progress updates on the use of the 360-degree safe Cymru tool is included.

- > Keeping safe online is discussed during safeguarding visits to schools as part of QA process - this is included also in the discussion that takes place with learners.
- > The Local Authority promotes Keeping Safe Online via the safeguarding bulletin and actively promotes the resources available on Hwb to support this.
- > The local Authority circulates information in relation to Cyber security training and awareness.
- > Education and Safeguarding Officers will continue to promote the 360-degree safe tool via Digital lead meetings and Digital strategy group meetings.

4.6 Support for schools, training & development

Schools in Blaenau Gwent receive a high level of support from both the Local Authority and the Shared resource Service during all operational hours and in case of emergency during out of hours also. The EAS run a digital network meeting half termly, with updates on the professional learning offer.

4.6.1 Local Authority Support

The main platform of support from the Local Authority is the established Digital Strategy group which is led by the Education transformation team service manager and includes selected school leads from each school cluster, Corporate digital team, SRS officers, EAS, BG safeguarding officer and the GDPR officer.

The role of the Education Digital Strategy Group is to oversee, prioritise and monitor the delivery and investment of Digital services in schools. The group aspires to achieve the following.
- > Monitor the Service Level Agreement and defining future service levels and requirements.
- > Building confidence and understanding around the Digital Competency Framework

- > Promote the use of Hwb through Hwb collaborations across schools and pupils.
- > Link school based Digital Leads to corporate Digital Champions to explore collaboration opportunities.
- > Liaise with the EAS to provide training events to enhance the digital skills of teachers and pupils.
- > Provide updates of upcoming/ongoing corporate projects
- > Update members on position within the Edtech programme

The Schools Digital strategy representatives attend termly meetings and share information discussed via the cluster groups.

A monthly Digital lead meeting has also been established, where there is a main agenda point discussed each month. This ensures that key messages from the main strategy group are being shared widely with schools.

The local authority also runs Head Teacher meetings periodically where any specific topics that need to be discussed imminently are raised.

Regular digital meetings with Individual Schools are conducted by the Education team, where the quality of provision is discussed, and future plans around devices are made. Here, the Local Authority ensures there is appropriate Infrastructure and device availability to support learners etc.

4.6.2 Shared Resource Service Support

The SRS Education Service aims to provide a comprehensive and all-inclusive offering that caters for the needs of the school and is underpinned by the SLA agreement between schools and the SRS. The SLA covers the following:

> Management and monitoring of the Digital infrastructure and hardware in schools such as switches, access points and caching servers.
> Management and monitoring of the central Digital infrastructure.
> Day to day technical support, school visits and end user device management.
> High quality technical advice, project planning and problem resolution.

The key interests to delivering this service are:

> Safeguarding schools against cyber threats.
> Maintaining the integrity of systems.
> Ensuring the platform and service provided is relevant to school's needs.

The service has changed over the last 3 years, reshaping to continue to deliver a high-quality service. Furthermore, SRS have supported Blaenau Gwent schools with the delivery of the Hwb Edtech programme which included a large number of devices being rolled out across the school estate.

4.7 Education Management Information Systems (MIS)

Management information systems are computer-based systems that are used to manage data. These systems are designed to gather data from various sources, process and store it to provide information tailored to the user's needs.

4.7.1 School based MIS

All schools in Blaenau Gwent use SIMS as their MIS. SIMS has recently been sold by its previous owner, Capita, to a private equity firm called ESS, which also owns ParentPay. The SIMS system is currently hosted for all schools by SRS on behalf of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, although this is due to change in Spring 2024. Owing to contract changes, at that time ESS will take on all SIMS hosting as part of their SIMS Connected model. This move to ESS hosting will trigger a new 3-year ESS contract for schools.

Schools are supported in all aspects of SIMS, including the key area of pupil assessment and statutory returns. Work is ongoing to establish the pupil assessment needs of schools as the new Welsh Curriculum is rolled out and embedded. Following the recent sale of SIMS to ESS, the company has announced plans to begin a phased move to a fully cloud-native system called SIMS Next Gen, which will ultimately replace the current version of the software. At the current time little is known about the functionality and nature of SIMS Next Gen.

There is an ever-increasing variety of third-party products which extract data from SIMS in order to perform various tasks or to provide tools. While these are often beneficial to schools, it is vital to ensure GDPR compliance at all stages of their configuration and deployment. Local Authority support for these products is generally limited to setup and configuration only.

4.7.2 Local Authority MIS

Capita One is the Management Information System (MIS) adopted by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. It is a central system, into which data flows from each and all of the schools' SIMS systems. The Capita One system is customisable in various ways, some of which involve the purchase of additional modules. The primary purpose of Capita One is to provide a centralised reporting and performance monitoring system across a range of council departments.

In early 2020 the Capita One contract was significantly overhauled in order to realise better value for money. The new contract will exist for five years as opposed to the previous annual 'rolling' contract, but there has not been any significant increase in the annual cost when compared to the original contract. The new contract included a move to cloud hosting with Capita, which took place in 2020.

As part of the contract renegotiation process with Capita, the Local Authority secured several additional modules. At the current time, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is involved in a joint project with Capita to effectively roll out these out across the Local Authority. One of these modules is Online Admissions (via the Capita 'Citizen Portal'), and the first admissions round conducted using the software saved a significant amount of time for staff; both within the Local Authority and in schools. Other modules rolled out include IYSS for the Youth Service, and a 'CSS' module which is proving to be of significant benefit in the areas of CME (Children Missing Education), EHE (Elective Home Education), Child Employment, Ethnic Minorities, Child Performances and Operation Encompass.

Capita is currently designing a new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) solution following legislative changes to the ALN Code for Wales 2021, and a high proportion of Welsh Local Authorities (including Blaenau Gwent) were participating in regular collaborative workshops with Capita as this product was being developed. Although the system is currently still in development it is hoped that it will be fit for purpose early in 2024.

5. Timeline

Below is a timeline of how we plan to work with schools over the next three academic years, for each of our priority areas within our Strategy plan:

	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026
Infrastructure and Connectivity	> Confirm strategy and funding models for infrastructure sustainability plans. > 1 switch to be replaced within School estate. > Analyse WAP models in schools and understand EOL dates.	> Continue to implement the sustainability plans for infrastructure. > 19 switches to replace across the school estate.	> Continue to implement the sustainability plans for infrastructure. > Work with SRS to understand longevity of 2802 WAPs and requirements for any changes.
Device Sustainability	> Work with schools to establish their individual 2023/2024 device replacement schedule.	> Work with schools to establish their individual 2024/2025 device replacement schedule.	> Work with schools to establish their individual 2025/2026 device replacement schedule.
Hwb EdTech	> Work with Schools, SRS and Welsh government to implement Wave 5 of the Hwb EdTech programme – Audio Visual replacement.	> Continuation of Wave 5 implementation in line with any streams of funding made available. > Work with schools to establish their individual 2024/2025 AV equipment replacement schedule.	> Completion of Wave 5 in order to move into Wave 6.
Migration to and use of Hwb	> Finalise strategy for the migration to Hwb for all schools. > Look to implement the First stage of migration to Hwb i.e. Email accounts.	> Continue to work with schools and EAS to implement Hwb migration strategy. > Subject to strategy, look to implement stage 2 of migration i.e. Files.	> Subject to strategy, finalise Hwb Migration.
Online Safety	> Ensure inclusion of online safety discussions within Digital strategy working group and digital lead meetings moving forward. > Work with schools and Safeguarding officer to look at information distribution systems. > Review and monitor reports from Hwb to establish which schools are proactively using 360-degree safe tool and those that need support.	> Ensure inclusion of online safety discussions within Digital strategy working group and digital lead meetings moving forward. > Work with schools and Safeguarding officer to look at information distribution systems. > Review and monitor reports from Hwb to establish which schools are proactively using 360-degree safe tool and those that need support.	> Ensure inclusion of online safety discussions within Digital strategy working group and digital lead meetings moving forward. > Work with schools and Safeguarding officer to look at information distribution systems. > Review and monitor reports from Hwb to establish which schools are proactively using 360-degree safe tool and those that need support.
Support for schools training and development	> Continue to Support links with EAS and distribute any new communications/training invitations. > Ensure a representative is available for each Digital strategy group session. > Continue Digital leads meetings to share digital updates more widely.	> Continue to Support links with EAS and distribute any new communications/training invitations. > Ensure a representative is available for each Digital strategy group session. > Continue Digital leads meetings to share digital updates more widely.	> Continue to Support links with EAS and distribute any new communications/training invitations. > Ensure a representative is available for each Digital strategy group session. > Continue Digital leads meetings to share digital updates more widely.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
The General Offices
Steelworks Road
Ebbw Vale
NP23 6DN

Tel: 01495 311556
Website: www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

Blaenau Gwent – Estyn/Welsh Government Joint Digital Focus Summary – 19 January 2023

Education Digital Standards

- Evidence of good collaboration with SRS and EAS covering technical support and school improvement.
- Confidence that schools adhere to the EDS through the SLA with SRS. SRS has an infrastructure brief aligned to the EDS and know when things are coming end of life. Blaenau Gwent would be sooner than most other LAs.
- EdTech funding accelerated an existing LA funding programme to future proof their infrastructure.
- Blaenau Gwent provides guidance but don't dictate on devices. Belief that schools will prioritise budget sustainability for devices going forward.
- Head teachers understand and value the conversations with the LA about sustainability and buy in.
- Blaenau Gwent trust SRS on infrastructure intelligence for refresh and SRS trust Blaenau Gwent on devices and that they will manage devices going out of support.
- Schools feel that they are best placed to decide what equipment they need for teaching and learning.

Quality and impact of online provision for schools

- EAS supports digital learning, practice and professional learning.
- More schools are including digital in school development plans.
- LA has a long running and embedded ICT strategy group.
- More schools are engaging with EAS digital leaders course - vision for digital in each school is crucial.
- LA not convincing when asked about continuity of learning through access to devices for all learners in the case of school closures etc.
- LA has the data on Free School Meals but it's schools that hold the information on their digitally excluded learners.
- School view that teachers' digital skills and confidence are improving, and that digital has become more mainstream. More focus now on how the technology/device can be best utilised for teaching and learning as opposed to just the technology.

Hwb Approach and Other platforms

- Blaenau Gwent continues to encourage Hwb first approach.
- LA Digital strategy is drafted ready to go out for consultation.
- There is appetite for migration but there are perceived barriers in terms of control, the migration process and the effort involved.
- Secondary reticence to migration and perception that Hwb doesn't cater as well for them as primaries.
- 18/25 schools use Hwb as their main platform, the other schools have a Google Edu domain (more common to secondaries).
- Most schools use Hwb alongside other applications such as Purple Mash, Class Dojo and Seesaw, particularly to engage younger learners.
- LA delayed Hwb migration due to PSBA issues. There are plans to migrate email to Hwb with files to follow shortly after.

Digital Resilience

- Online safety is included and referenced throughout the Safeguarding policy – all staff have the responsibility for online and offline elements.
- Schools utilise 360 Safe Cymru template online safety policy and use 360 Safe tool.
- Covid slowed the momentum of engagement with 360 Safe, LA committed to re-focusing on this.
- There are some questions from schools around which elements of online safety are the responsibility of the ICT lead in school and which is safeguarding lead.
- Schools utilise Community Engagement Officers on parental engagement.
- More digital safety issues are bleeding into schools, younger and younger learners at primary. The role of parents here is key and engaging with them is hard.
- Reporting mechanisms into children's service, utilising MyConcern which is a work in progress. They have a consistent set of categories agreed from last term which require further refinement.

Key Observations

- High reliance on SRS as the SLA provider. High trust from the LA and growing trust from schools in SRS relationship.
- Blaenau Gwent is considering the impact of sustainability plans on schools and intends to provide updated plans to the Welsh Government. Schools are encouraged to spend their own funding and Welsh Government funding on devices. Conversations about sustainability are collaborative involving heads, the LA and SRS and start with the premise – what do you want to achieve.
- Schools are placing greater emphasis on developing computational thinking skills. Staff training is being provided to enable teachers to work with learners in developing these skills. Cluster-based professional learning offers are being utilised to assess the placement and development of learner skills.
- Blaenau Gwent is actively addressing digital exclusion by considering the cost-of-living crisis and ensuring access to digital learning for all learners. Efforts are being made to monitor engagement and identify learners

who require access to digital equipment at home but further clarification rquired. Additionally, alternative options such as libraries are being promoted for learners without digital access.
• LA provided comprehensive evidence to Welsh Government which was appreciated.
Key Actions and Follow Ups
• Blaenau Gwent to work with schools to re-focus on utilising 360 Safe Cymru tool.
• Provide finalised Digital Strategy to Welsh Government once consultation is completed.
• Welsh Government to support Blaenau Gwent with planned Hwb email migration and further Hwb adoption across the LA.

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: 25.03.24

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: 25.03.24

Committee:	**Cabinet**
Date of meeting:	**10th April 2024**
Report Subject:	**Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education 2025/26**
Portfolio Holder:	**Cllr Sue Edmunds, Cabinet Member People & Education**
Report Submitted by:	**Joanne Watts, Service Manager Education Transformation and Business Change**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	**Corporate Leadership Team**	**Portfolio Holder / Chair**	**Governance Audit Committee**	**Democratic Services Committee**	**Scrutiny Committee**	**Cabinet**	**Council**	**Other (please state)**
x	07.03.24	22.03.24			19/3/24	10.04.24		

1. **Purpose of the Report**

1.1 The purpose of the report is to outline the outcome of the annual consultation process, in line with the revised draft of the Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education 2025/26. The Cabinet is asked to provide their views and comments on the document in preparation for the 2025/26 admission round, prior to its determination and publication on the 15th April 2024.

2. **Scope and Background**

2.1 The Welsh Government's School Admissions Code (2013) dictates that Councils must review their admissions policies annually for consultation and publication by April 15th in the academic year preceding the admissions round. Blaenau Gwent's School Admissions Policy outlines the arrangements, criteria and relevant legislation that underpin school admission processes and methodology and has been drafted in line with the aforementioned Code, along with the Admissions Appeals Code (2013). The Admissions Authority must ensure that the following information is provided during the consultation process:

- The admission numbers for each school
- Application procedures and the timetable for the admission process
- The criteria to be applied to applications in the event that there are more applications than places for a school
- Arrangements for waiting lists and how they operate
- Arrangements for the processing of late applications
- Details of how parents will be notified of a decision on their application, as well as appeal procedures should their application be unsuccessful

2.2 The primary changes to the policy document for the 2025/26 academic session are as follows:

- Updated consultation and application details.

- A review of the nursery, primary and secondary admission numbers in line with the annual capacity review process has been undertaken. This process is carried out in line with the Welsh Government's Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales Guidance (2011). The final agreed capacity calculations are then used to inform admission numbers detailed with the policy document.
- A review of the dates for the admission round(s), associated processing and offer deadlines.
- Changes to the application process for applicants residing in neighbouring authorities.
- Allocation of school places at Brynmawr Foundation School.
- Updates as requested by consultees (detailed below).

2.3 The draft Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education 2025/26 (please refer to **Appendix 1** for the policy document), was distributed to relevant consultees as outlined within Welsh Government's School Admissions Code (2013, pages 6-7) and detailed on page 2 of the appended policy consultation document. The consultation period commenced on Tuesday 6th February 2024 and concluded on Thursday 29th February 2024. During the consultation period, 2 responses were received as follows:

- Torfaen County Borough Council requested that the policy be updated to include all applicants who require a place in a Torfaen school to apply directly to them, rather than through another admission authority.
- Glanhowy Primary requested clarification around an appropriate evidence base that suggests the chronological year group is not able to meet the needs of the child in real terms.

3. **Options for Recommendation**
3.1 The People Scrutiny Committee supported Option 1, at its meeting on 19th March 2024.

3.2 **Option 1:** That Cabinet considers and accepts the policy document; or

3.3 **Option 2:** That Cabinet considers the policy document and provides comments relating to improvements that can be made in consideration of the publication date (15th April 2024).

4. **Evidence of how this topic support the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
4.1 In accordance with the Welsh Government's School Admissions and Admission Appeals Code (2013), there is a statutory requirement upon the Council to determine and publish their admission's arrangements annually by the 15th April, the year preceding the admissions round to which they apply.

4.2 Education is a priority in the Council's Corporate Plan of which the planning of school places, is an essential component.

5.   **Implications Against Each Option**
5.1 **Impact on Budget (short- and long-term impact)**
     There are no direct budget implications associated with this report.

5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**
     There is a risk that Council will not be compliant with the Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013) if the policy is not approved and published by the 15th April 2024. The timeline for approval takes account of the publication requirements and dates.

5.3 **Legal**
     The Council are legally required to prepare, implement and update accessibility strategies for all schools for which they are the responsible body.

5.4 **Human Resources**
5.4.1 There are no direct implications associated with this report.
     The Education Directorate Management Team along with Wider Corporate Leadership Team, have a key role to play in ensuring that the policy is effectively implemented and reviewed in accordance with relevant strategy, policy and regulatory frameworks.

5.5 **Health & Safety**
     There are no direct Health and Safety implications associated with this strategy.

6.   **Supporting Evidence**
6.1 **Performance Information and Data**
     Please refer to **Appendix 2**, for a summary of the 2023/24 Admissions Round. The Council are presently implementing the 2024/25 policy.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**
     The public can expect a fair and equitable admissions process for all pupils in accessing education, and where possible place allocation in line with parent/pupil preference.

6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**
     Stakeholders and end user needs and engagement are of paramount importance and a key focus of both the policy development, and ongoing admissions process. The Policy is subject to consultation on an annual basis, in line with the Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013). Due to sufficiency issues anticipated in a number of secondary schools, the Education Directorate are planning to undertake a catchment area review and consult on this during the 2024/25 academic session.

6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**
     The admissions process contributes to effective pupil place planning and management, ensuring that there are sufficient pupil places and promoting access to education for all Blaenau Gwent pupils.

6.5 **Preventative focus**
The admissions process prevents oversubscription of schools and inequality in line with access to education.

6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**
The Admissions Authority works with other internal admission authorities i.e. the faith and foundation schools, along with external admission authorities within the region and partners such as Social Services, to ensure that there are sufficient arrangements and pupil places for Blaenau Gwent Schools. Also, supporting effective appeal, capacity assessment, childcare offer and other associated processes. The Blaenau Gwent Admission Forum which is comprised of school, council, governor and other service representatives; oversee the application of the policy, procedures and compliance with the Welsh Government School Admissions and Admission Appeals Codes (2013).

6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**
The Blaenau Gwent School Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education is aligned to early year's education, pupil place planning, school organisation, the work of social services, planning in line with housing developments etc. Service integration is essential to ensure effective policy implementation, whilst also securing appropriate access to education for current and prospective pupils. The Admissions process is monitored and assured by the Admissions Forum.

6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**
Any physical works planned and undertaken within education settings are planned in order to take account of decarbonisation and reducing carbon emissions.

6.9 *Integrated Impact Assessment*
An Equality Impact Screening Assessment (EQIA) has been completed in line with the policy, which determined that there is no negative impact upon the protected characteristics. The policy promotes equality of opportunity for all, with regards to accessing education.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**
7.1 The Admissions Authority monitors the development and delivery admission round(s) and processes on a weekly basis; reporting the Blaenau Gwent Admissions Forum twice yearly, providing monthly data analysis and undertaking annual appraisals, which are reported via the Councils political processes.

Background Documents /Electronic Links
Appendix 1 – Draft Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education (2025/26)

Appendix 2 – Annual Admissions Analysis 2023/24

2025/26

Blaenau Gwent Admission Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

Consultation Process

In accordance with the Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013) Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council consults upon its admission arrangements on an annual basis, attempting where possible to mirror the admission round timescales of neighbouring admission authorities. The coordinated admission arrangements will determine the date at which application forms are sent to parents as well as the publication of an agreed closing date (For more information please refer to page 13).

Consultation will commence on Tuesday 6th February 2024 and conclude at 5pm on Thursday 29th February 2024. The admission arrangements will then be published on 15th April 2024, the year preceding the 2025/2026 admissions round. The Local Authority will ensure that the following information is provided during the consultation process:

      i) Admission numbers for each school

      ii) Application procedures and the timetable for the admission process

      iii) The criteria to be applied to applications in the event that there are more applications than places for a School

      iv) Arrangements for waiting lists and how they operate

      v) Arrangements for the processing of late applications

      vi) Details of how parents will be notified of a decision on their application, as well as appeal procedures should their application be unsuccessful.

The Local Authority will consult with the following parties on its admission arrangements:

Headteachers of relevant Schools:	All headteachers of community Schools in Blaenau Gwent
Governing body of relevant Schools:	All governing bodies of community Schools in Blaenau Gwent
All neighbouring Local Authorities within the area:	Caerphilly County Borough Council Torfaen County Borough Council Monmouthshire County Borough Council Newport City Council
Admission Authorities for all other schools in the area:	All headteachers of voluntary aided schools in Blaenau Gwent All governing bodies of voluntary aided schools in Blaenau Gwent Brynmawr Foundation School All Saints RC Primary School St Marys Church in Wales Primary School St Marys RC Primary School St Joseph's RC Primary School

2

Blaenau Gwent Proposed Admission Policy for Statutory Education 2025/26

1.   **Introduction/ Purpose**

There is a requirement upon Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council as a directive from Welsh Government, to develop, review and consult upon the Blaenau Gwent School Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education, on an annual basis. The purpose of the policy in question is to guide and inform the statutory admissions function within Blaenau Gwent, ensuring equality of opportunity for all current and prospective pupils. ***Please note that the following non-maintained schools and non-maintained early year's education providers are responsible for the development of and governed by their own individual Admissions Policies:**

- Acorns Nursery
- All Saints Roman Catholic Primary School
- Brynmawr Foundation School
- Cylch Meithrin Brynithel
- Tiggys Day Care
- St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School
- St Mary's Church in Wales Primary School
- St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School

The Blaenau Gwent Admissions Policy for Nursery (non-statutory) and Statutory Education has been updated in line with confirmed admission numbers and the dates from the 2024/25 admission round. All other content remains the same. The policy is fully compliant with the Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013) and School Admissions Appeal Code (2013). This document outlines requirements associated with and guidance relating to pupil admissions and in-year transfers/admissions for nursery, primary, and secondary school place allocation within Blaenau Gwent.

The Welsh Minister for Education and Skills in 2013 outlined the following key considerations in relation to how pupil place allocation in respect of admissions should ensure equality of opportunity:

"The process of starting or transferring between schools can be a time of uncertainty or anxiety; therefore, it is essential that the principles of fairness and openness are applied to all aspects of school admissions. A properly functioning admissions system, that reflects this, can play a vital part in helping to minimise concerns. It is crucial in delivering equality of opportunity."

Minister for Education and Skills (2013)

2. **Admission Types**

2.1 Nursery Education

The Council provides free part-time nursery education to every child and every child is entitled to a 'rising 3' place from the start of the term following their third birthday, at either school nursery provision or a quality assured early years education provider.

- Nursery places are in the main offered on a part time basis (am and/or pm sessions which vary in each school throughout the year). Children start attending nursery classes at the age of 3 or 4 years.

- There are three intakes for rising 3 pupils per year as follows:

  - **January**
  - **April**
  - **September**

  *Please note that the specific dates for intake change on an annual basis linked to school term dates. These dates are communicated within the Starting Schools Booklet and on nursery application forms, in line with the admission rounds for nursery, reception and secondary school places.

- Some governing bodies offer full-time provision, which is funded directly from the school budget. The nursery entitlement within Blaenau Gwent is part-time which equates to 12.5 hours per/week (2.5 hours per/day), other than the following nursery provisions, which offer:

  - Blaen y Cwm Primary School - full time rising 3 and nursery places
  - Coed y Garn Primary School - full time nursery places
  - Rhos y Fedwen Primary School - full time rising 3 and nursery places
  - St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School – full time rising 3 and nursery places
  - St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School - part-time rising 3 places and full-time nursery places
  - Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg & Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar – full time rising 3 and nursery places

- The regulations pertaining to nursery education are specific and confirm that: **attending a nursery class does <u>NOT</u> give a child priority for a place in the reception year group. A separate application is required for this purpose.**

4

2.2 Admission to Primary Education

Children are eligible for admission to school at the start of the school year in which their fifth birthday falls (i.e. 1st September to 31st August inclusive).

It is against the law to prevent your child from accessing education at the start of the school year in which their fifth birthday falls.

The Council must provide education places for the admission of all children in the September following their fifth birthday; however, parents/ guardians or carers have the right to:

a. request that the date their child is admitted to school is deferred until the term after the child's fifth birthday; or,

b. request that their child takes up the place part-time until the term after their fifth birthday.

2.2.1 Allocation of Primary School Places at Abertillery Learning Community

In the case of Abertillery Learning Community Primary Phase, the admission authority (Blaenau Gwent Council) is responsible for placing pupils at the Learning Community. These pupils are then allocated a site within the Learning Community by Abertillery Learning Community Leadership team and Governing Body in line with the following criteria:

1. Siblings in the campus already
2. Catchment area
3. Ensuring each session stays within the agreed teacher to learner ratio

Once the site has been confirmed the notification process is then administered by the admissions authority. This process has been established in accordance with the Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013) point 2.51 which states:

"Where split site schools are in operation, the admission authority **should** in most cases, apply the admission arrangements as if the school were a single unit. They **should** make it clear to parents that admission applications are made to the school as a whole and not to a particular site. The site that children attend is a matter for the internal organisation of the school. Appeals **cannot** be made against the site allocated".

The Council's School Organisation Policy (2015), advocates having the right schools, of the right size, in the right places. All school organisation proposals are assessed in line with the Council's admissions and pupil place planning arrangements, to ensure that there is sufficient capacity within Blaenau Gwent Schools to accommodate local pupils.

2.2.2 **Allocation of School Places at Ysgol Gymraeg Brohelyg**

In the case of Welsh Medium Education, the admission authority (Blaenau Gwent Council) is responsible for placing pupils at the federation of Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg and Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar. These pupils are then allocated a place at either the Blaina or Tredegar Campus by Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg Leadership team and Governing Body.
Parents should clearly note their preference when completing the admission form for Welsh-medium education.

2.3 **Admission to Secondary School**

Children/ young people transfer from primary school to secondary school at the beginning of the school year, following their eleventh birthday.

2.3.1 **Allocation of Secondary School Places 3-16 at Middle Schools**

In the case of both Ebbw Fawr Learning Community and Abertillery Learning Community, **pupils who are on roll in Year 6** at the primary phase will automatically transfer to/ be allocated a place at the secondary phase. In this instance a separate admission application is **not** required. ***Please note all other secondary settings require an application to be made in order for a place to be allocated**. **When making an application for an alternative secondary school automatic place allocation will be removed from the secondary phase.**

2.3.2 **Allocation of School Places at Brynmawr Foundation School**

In the case of Brynmawr Foundation School, the admission authority (Blaenau Gwent Council) is responsible for placing pupils within the school on behalf of the Brynmawr Foundation School Leadership team and Governing Body.

2.4 **In-Year Transfers (admission that is requested outside of the normal admission round)**

In-year transfer/ admission refers to applications made in-year (during and not prior to the academic year commencing), and outside of the normal admission round, i.e. pupils moving into the borough, wishing to change schools etc. All In-year transfers are dealt with in date order of receipt. Where there are a greater number of applications received than the number of places available, the Council will apply their oversubscription criteria (see page 12) in order to determine place allocation and/or refusal.

Applications are processed within 7-15 working days of receipt, confirmation of a place is proved by the Council, and confirmation of a start date is provided by the school. Where possible the start date provided by the school is within 10 days of place allocation being confirmed.

6

In the following circumstances pupil allocation will be managed differently to that of a standard transfer request:

- **Hard to place pupils**– applicants who are considered hard to place, fall into one or more of the categories presented below. The 14 categories cover circumstances and/or needs which would deem or contribute to a learner being considered as hard to place:

  o Children who were permanently excluded from their last maintained school placement and are able / ready to integrate to an alternative school;
  o Children returning from the criminal justice system (secure estate);
  o Child victims of serious crimes (child cruelty, kidnapping, sexual or violent crime, FGM);
  o Children who are CLA;
  o Children who have been out of education for longer than two months;
  o Children with below 50% attendance;
  o Children with disabilities or medical conditions which have already impacted on their attendance or participation at school;
  o Children of carers, Gypsies, Roma, Travellers, children whose parents offend, asylum seekers and refugees who have been in the UK less than two years and need a supported entry to school;
  o Homeless children who have been placed in temporary housing;
  o Children who are in a refuge due to domestic violence;
  o Children of UK service personnel where a change of location ordered by the service leads to a need for a change of school and will have experienced multiple moves;
  o Children who have received 10 day exclusions in the last twelve months; and/or,
  o Children on the child protection register.

It may not be possible to process complex and hard to place admissions within the target timeframe outlined above. In such cases, the applicant would be informed of any increases to the processing timescales with regards to their application, and the process through which the application will be managed. The Additional Learning Needs Panel and Vulnerable Learner Panel would be responsible for manging applications as outlined above (please refer to section 2.6 below for further information on the panel's).

As part of the transfer allocation process, the Council will contact the child or young person's current school to obtain information in order to support and ensure a smooth transition. This information will then be shared with the recipient school in order to make sure that they are equipped to meet the pupils' educational, learning and any other identified needs upon transfer.

7

It is the responsibility of the parent/ guardian or carer to notify the Admissions Officer if they no longer wish to transfer their child to the newly allocated school, as confirmed within the offer letter.

*Please note:

The admissions authority does not encourage transfers from one local school to another, due to the potential disruption that it causes to all parties. However, it does recognise that this process may be required in putting the needs of the child and/ or young person first.

Previous research has determined that the transfer process can impinge upon a pupil's educational achievement and success, unless there are exceptional circumstances, such as the transfer being in the best interest of the child/ young person. Transfers are also dependent (as with general admissions), upon place availability at the preferred school. Parents will be encouraged to discuss at length their reasons for wanting to change schools with the school and admissions authority.

Parents should also consider prior to making a transfer request, differences in curriculum offer available at the child's current school and requested recipient school, i.e. the schools may not offer the same subjects at GCSE level.

2.5   Requests for Admission Outside of Chronological Year Group

It is the Council's policy that children are admitted into their chronological year group. It is only in exceptional circumstances that the Council will support admission into a year group that is not within the chronological year. For example, where there is an appropriate evidence base that suggests the chronological year group is not able to meet the needs of the child e.g. on medical grounds, due to ill health, additional learning needs and/ or if a pupil is new to the UK. Evidence of the placement being 'essential' will be required should a placement of this nature be requested.

Applicants submitting requests for admission into a year group that is not the chronological year for the child/ young person, will be given the opportunity to share their reasons for the application with the Council. The headteacher of the preferred school will be consulted during the processing of the application, and their views considered as part of the decision making process.

Parents, guardians or carers who have been refused a place at the preferred school will have a statutory right of appeal against the decision that has been made; however, there is no right of appeal against a decision to refuse a place into a non-chronological year group.

2.6 <u>**Managed Moves, Resource Bases, Special School and Complex Placements**</u>

The Council has a policy in place which ensures that children and young people who may benefit from what is called a 'managed move' are able to move schools in an organised and coordinated way, ensuring that their needs are appropriately met. This policy is called the Managed Move policy and is implemented via the Vulnerable Learner Panel. Where appropriate the Admissions Officer will consider the individual circumstances in line with the Welsh Government Admissions Code (2013), and if the school is over subscribed, utilise and implement 'excepted pupil' status (for more information please see the aforementioned Welsh Government School Admissions Code, 2013, page 27), in order to admit the pupil.

The Vulnerable Learner Panel consists of the following representatives:

- Senior Education Welfare Officer – Chair ((in the Senior Education Welfare Officers absence the Service Manager for Inclusion will attend)
- School Admissions Officer;
- Youth Service; and,
- Headteachers/ Senior Leaders and school ALNCOs as well as other professionals/officers as and when required.

The Council has a number of Resource Base provisions throughout Blaenau Gwent to meet the needs of pupils with ALN including: Cognition and Learning Difficulties, or autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). A resource base will be considered by the ALN panel where it is felt that the mainstream setting cannot meet the needs of the child/young person.

The Council also has two special schools:

- Pen-Y-Cwm Special School, which caters for children and young people with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties throughout the 3-19 age range.
- River Centre 3-16 Learning Community which caters for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

All placements into resource base and special school provision are agreed and managed by the Additional Learning Needs Panel, which is comprised of the below representatives:

- ALN Manager – Chair (in the ALN Managers absence the Service Manager for Inclusion will attend)
- Educational Psychologist
- Education Welfare Officer
- Headteachers
- ALNCOs as well as other professionals/officers, or specialist services as and when required.

If the application is for Ty Afon then this will be determined by the Vulnerable Learner Panel.

Ty Afon is a Provision within the River Centre 3-16 Learning Community. This provision is for learners who present with difficulties related to high levels of anxiety. Admission must be via a referral to the Vulnerable Learners Panel:
It is expected that referrals are supported by:

- Clear evidence of mental health difficulty and reported on from senior CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) professionals

- Evidence of ongoing intervention from CAMHS

- Information regarding work already carried out by the school, including the impact of advice/strategies implemented following Educational Psychologist involvement

- Clear evidence that the home school has tried EVERY possible approach to re-engage the learner and has evaluated the impact that these approaches have had.

- A consensus amongst involved professionals that a referral to Ty Afon is likely to be the most effective way forward

- The learner must not have any evidence of disruptive or aggressive behaviours or incidents of exclusions.

Decisions are made based upon strict criteria to ensure placements are appropriate. Processes are managed by the ALN team to ensure that pupils with additional learning needs are admitted in a timely manner, whilst ensuring that all of their identified needs can be met by the recipient school. All processes are carried out in consultation with the Admissions Officer in order to inform the allocation and planning of school places.

Where an application is received for a pupil in receipt of either a Statement of Educational Need or a Local Authority Individual Development Plan (IDP), the application is shared with the ALN team. Based on need identified in the IDP ALN Panel will determine placement.

The Welsh Government admission code states there are certain categories of children where schools **must** admit and without delay as follows:

- Children with Statements of SEN; and
- Children with a Local Authority IDP

In general, the admission of children with statements of SEN is covered by the Education Act 1996. Guidance on the admission of children with statements is provided in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales. Consequently, the admissions provisions in the 1998 Act do not generally

apply to children with statements of SEN. Section 324 of the Education Act 1996 requires a maintained school that is named in a statement of SEN to admit the child. Schools cannot refuse to admit even if by doing so they would exceed their admission number.

If a LA has provided a statement for a child with SEN it is responsible for ensuring that the special educational provision is made for the child. The LA may identify a particular school which it considers to be suitable for the child's needs, and name the school in the statement. Admission authorities must be mindful of their duties with regards to Equalities Legislation and guidance on improving the accessibility of schools. If the parent of a child with a statement of SEN wishes to appeal against the school named in the statement, or the fact that no school has been named, the appeal is to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales, not to the admission appeal panel.

In certain cases, pupils may be granted excepted pupil status in compliance with the School Admissions Code, which determines that:

Where certain types of children ("excepted pupils") cannot be provided with education at the school in another infant class in which the limit is not exceeded without relevant measures being taken which would prejudice efficient education or the efficient use of resources, those children are not to be counted for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not the limit of 30 pupils is exceeded. Excepted children are:

- *Children whose statements of SEN specify that they should be educated at the school concerned, and who were admitted to the school outside a normal admission round.*
- *Children who are looked after by local authorities (looked after children), or who have ceased to be looked after (previously looked after children) as a result of being adopted or being placed with a family or given a special guardian and are admitted to the school outside a normal admission round.*
- *Children initially refused admission to a school, but subsequently offered a place outside a normal admission round by direction of an admission appeal panel, or because the person responsible for making the original decision recognises that an error was made in implementing the school's admission arrangements.*
- *Children admitted outside the normal admission round who:*
  - *the maintaining local authority confirmed cannot gain a place at any other suitable school within a reasonable distance of their home because they have moved into the area outside a normal admission round, or*
- *Children who were admitted to the school outside the normal admission round after which the school has arranged its classes, and after the first day of the school year, the effect of which would mean that the school would have to take a relevant measure if such children were not excepted pupils.*
- *Children of armed forces personnel who are admitted outside the normal admission round.*

- *Children whose twin or other sibling from a multiple birth are admitted as non-excepted pupils, as the final pupil(s) allocated a place before the admission number is reached.*
- *Children who are registered pupils at special schools, but who receive part of their education at a mainstream school.*
- *Children with SEN who are normally educated in a special unit in a mainstream school, who receive part of their lessons in a non-special class*
- *Children who are issued with a school attendance order:*
  - *If it appears to the local authority that a child of compulsory school age is not receiving a suitable education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise, then they must begin procedures for issuing a School Attendance Order. The order will require the child's parents to register their child at a named school. If they fail to comply with the order the parent can be prosecuted.*

    Section 437 of the Education Act 1996 states the local education authority is responsible for identifying the school to be named. The local education authority is responsible for ensuring that the naming of the school is compliant with legislation and statutory guidance i.e., it must be the school named in any Statement/IDP the child holds, otherwise, the catchment, or nearest local school will be named. If there are known exceptional circumstances why naming the catchment school, or nearest school, would not be in the child's best interest the local education authority will name the next nearest school.

    A school attendance order once issued will remain in force until the child ceases statutory education or the local authority revokes it. Section 439 of the Education Act 1996 also allows for children to be admitted into a school, where they would exceed the fixed pupil numbers.

*Excepted pupils will remain so, once admitted, for the remainder of their time in an infant class or until class numbers fall back and they can be organised to comply with the infant class size limit. For example, because a non-excepted child leaves the class, an additional infant class is created, or an additional teacher is appointed, then that child ceases to be an excepted pupil. Classes **must** be organised so as to comply with the limit wherever possible.*

A complex admission is characterised by the child or young person's needs and or circumstances, being unable to be met within the normal admissions round and general admissions arrangements. Cases characterised as complex often require careful consideration and involvement from a wider network of partners, in order to ensure that the child's educational needs can be met within an appropriate school setting/ placement. Where there is a complex admissions case outside of the remit of the Managed Move policy and Vulnerable Learner panel the Admissions Officer will coordinate the development of a working group aligned to the needs of the pupil, in

considering the prospective pupil's circumstances and ensuring appropriate school placement. Complex admissions will be managed and processed in accordance with the School Admissions Code (2013). Where appropriate Welsh Government advice may be sought in line with the decision making process.

3.   **School Admission Criteria**

The determination of school admissions differs between Local Authority maintained and non-maintained schools. The faith schools, foundation school, and non-maintained early year's education providers within Blaenau Gwent, maintain their own policies and criteria. These differ to the standardised criteria of the Council. The faith and foundation schools are also responsible for administering their own transfer and appeal procedures. Applications for pupils where a faith school is a first preference, should only be submitted to the Councils' Education Transformation team in respect of second and third preference schools that are maintained by Blaenau Gwent. ***Please note that the Council are unable to allocate pupil places within the following non-maintained faith schools and non-maintained early year's education providers:**

- Acorns Nursery
- All Saints Roman Catholic Primary School
- Cylch Meithrin Brynithel
- Tiggys Day Care
- St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School
- St Mary's Church in Wales Primary School
- St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School

Additionally, the Council cannot allocate pupil places within schools outside of Blaenau Gwent. Out of county school admissions and placements are managed by the admission authority of the Borough within which they reside, and/ or the schools themselves, when they are not maintained by the Council.

The Council works jointly with the faith, foundation schools and non-maintained early year's education providers; to ensure that all pupils applying either via the schools/settings directly or the Councils processes are allocated a place. Joint monitoring also takes place around transfers and appeals.

Each school has a limit to the number of children that it can accommodate per year group. This limit is called the published admission number (please refer to **Appendix 1** of this document for more information). The admission number takes into account the physical space within the school building relevant to each age group, as determined by the Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales Guidance (2011). There are two figures derived from this formula for primary school admissions, the admission number for nursery and the admission number for reception. The nursery area includes the available space for all pupils who are eligible to attend nursery, which includes rising

13

threes (as detailed within the nursery section above). For those schools that run both morning and afternoon sessions, the admission number is applied to each session, and so can be doubled. For secondary the figure derived indicates the admission number for all year groups. Schools are asked on an annual basis each autumn-term, to confirm their sessional plans etc. for the admission round and capacity calculations, which are then presented within the admissions policy, two years preceding the academic year to which it applies. Schools will then be bound by the admission numbers for primary and secondary school places. In the case of non-statutory nursery admissions, the capacity calculation is advisory based on the guidance detailed above.

In the event of school reorganisation taking place, the admission arrangements will be determined and confirmed as part of the statutory consultation and transition process.

4. **How to apply for a School Place in Blaenau Gwent (excluding the Faith Schools and non-maintained early year's education providers)**

Parents/carers are required to make an application for a school place. Completed forms with supporting evidence are to be returned by the closing date as detailed in Section 6 (below). In order to process an application linked to allocation of a school place, only **one** of the following types of evidence within each category below will be required for submission with the application form:

- Proof of Residency **(copies of one of the following)**
    - Valid driving licence including paper licence
    - Council tax bill (for the 2023/24 year)
    - Recent child benefit / child tax credit notification, naming the child for whom the application has been made
    - Utility bills (within the last three months)
    - NHS Medical card
- Proof of Date of birth **(copies of one of the following)**
    - Child's birth certificate
    - NHS medical card
    - Valid passport which displays your child date of birth

Applications to the Council should be made online via the following link:

https://citizenportal.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/CitizenPortal/en

In making an online application, applicants will receive immediate confirmation that their application has been submitted, then confirmation of pupil placement will be sent on the offer date. Alternatively, parents can request an application pack from the Admissions team on (01495) 355340 or via the following email address: schooladmissions@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

As previously outlined the faith schools within Blaenau Gwent have additional criteria linked to their independent status, which needs to be fulfilled in line

with the child securing a place. Applications to non-maintained early year's education providers are dealt with directly by the providers concerned.

Where a parent/ guardian or carer does not provide the relevant evidence, the application will be treated as **incomplete** until such time all supporting evidence is received. Consequently, should the supporting information be received after the closing date of the relevant admissions round, then this will render the application **as a 'late' submission**. If the information is not provided upon initial request, the Council will then attempt to chase the parent/ guardian or carer for the information a further **three times only**.

In the case of a double allocation as a result of an administrative error, the Council would need to ensure that adequate places are available and follow the School Admissions Code and oversubscription criteria, in order to meet the 1st preference requested.

In instances where fraud is suspected, or accusations of fraudulent claims have been made, an investigation will take place. Places may be withdrawn if it is discovered that parents/ guardians or carers have knowingly provided false information in order to obtain the advantage of a particular school place.

Information provided within the application in respect of additional learning needs, will require further consultation with the SEN team. This will ensure effective, suitable provision and placement in line with additional educational needs and/ or a successful transition for the pupil.

5. **Oversubscription Nursery, Primary and Secondary Criteria for the Normal Round of Admissions**

The admissions authority will consider each individual application received by the published closing date. If the number of applications for an individual school is greater than the admission number, the allocation of places will be carried out using the following criteria, which are listed in order of priority below:

i) **Children Looked After**

Priority to be given to children looked after/previously looked after (children under Local Authority care); following consultation on the appropriateness of the named school.

Children in care means children who are in care of a Local Authority in accordance with Section 22 Children Act 1989.

ii) **Catchment School**

Children who live in the catchment area of the school on or before the published closing date.

15

iii)   **Social/Medical**

Children who the Authority accepts have an exceptional medical or social need for a place at one specific school. Applications will only be considered under this category if they are supported by a medical consultant's report. The information must specify the medical advantage of the child attending the preferred school. Please note that reports from family doctors are NOT accepted for this purpose.

iv)   **Brother or Sister**

Children who will have a brother or sister at the school to which the parent is applying, after the date of admission, will be given a higher priority than those who do not. Please note however, that having a sibling at the school does not guarantee admission for any other children in the family. Where there is more than one such case, priority will be given to those children closest in age to the sibling already attending the preferred school as of the admission date. Brothers and sisters whether half, full, step or foster will be considered relevant where living in the same household

v)   **Distance**

Children living closest to the preferred school measured by the shortest recognised permitted walking route between the pupils' front door of the home and school gate using a digital mapping system (GGP which is a geographic information system).

It should be noted that a child with a statement of special educational need or equivalent (i.e. individual development plan) which names a specific school, will be admitted in accordance with Section 343 of the Education Act 1996.

6.   **Deciding Factors associated with prioritising Admissions**

In the event of oversubscription and/or the requirement to prioritise admission based on distance, places will be allocated on the basis of distance between the shortest recognised walking route between the pupils' front door of the home and the main school gate. Distance is calculated using a digital mapping system. Children living closest to the school are given the highest priority.

7.   **Shared residency**

In the event that the residency of a child is shared between two parents, the address where the child concerned resides for the majority of the school week will be used for allocation purposes. This is the address that should be declared on the application.

However, if the residency with both parents during the school week is equal, the address for where the child benefit is paid will be used for allocation purposes.

8.   **Person making the application form**

Only persons holding parental responsibility for the named child are able to make an application and they will be required to make a declaration to this effect as part of the application process. Ordinarily it is expected that this person resides at the same address as the child and is referred to as the parent for admission purposes.

Where parental responsibility is equally shared, the Council will ask the child's parents to determine which parent should submit the application.

It is expected that parents will also agree on school preferences for a child before an application is made. The Council is not in a position to intervene in disputes between parents over school applications and will request that these are resolved privately.

If parents cannot agree and neither has obtained a court order stating who should be making the application/what the preference should be, the Council will accept an application from the parent in receipt of Child Benefit for the child.

9.   **Multiple births**

In the case of multiple births relating to a single family, if only one place is available at the school and the second child who qualifies for a place is a sibling, the school will exceed their published admission number to accommodate both pupils.

10.   **Timeframe for Processing Admissions as Part of the 2025/26 Admission Round**

Nursery

For places to be allocated in spring summer and autumn term of 2024;

Admission round commences on	7th September 2024
Closing date for applications	5pm on 18th October 2024
Offer date	22nd November 2024

Reception

Admission round commences on	6th January 2025
Closing date for applications	5pm on 21st February 2025
Offer date	16th April 2025

Secondary

17

Admission round commences on   23rd September 2024
Closing date for applications   5pm on 15th November 2024
Offer date   3rd March 2025

11. Arrangements with Neighbouring Admissions Authorities and Neighbouring Local Authorities

Where parents wish to apply for their child to attend a school in another admission authority (i.e. Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Powys, or Caerphilly), you are required to apply via the relevant admission authority in accordance with their admission arrangements.

Applicants living in other authority (council) areas who want their children to go to a Blaenau Gwent school should apply via Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council in accordance with the agreed timescales.

12. Late Applications

Applications received '**after the closing date'** will be classed as late. These will be considered as a secondary priority to applications received on time. Incomplete applications and those without relevant supporting evidence will also be considered as late, if the information requested is not received by the closing date for admission round to which the application relates.

Late applicants are unlikely to be offered a place at their preferred school, due to places being allocated to on-time applicants, particularly where there are high levels of demand.

13. Change of Preferences

Should a parent/guardian or carer wish to change their preference, they will need to do so in writing. Letters expressing a change of preference are to be directed to the admission authority. Any request of a change in preference received after the closing date will be treated as a late application.

14. Waiting Lists

Following the allocation of places during the normal admission round, children will remain on the waiting list for their preferred school until 30th September the following academic year. Thereafter, parents/ guardians or carers will be required to make a new application for admission. If additional places become available, they will be allocated to children on the waiting list on the basis of the published oversubscription criteria. **Waiting lists do not give priority to children based on the date the application was added to the list.**

15. Children of UK Service Personnel and other Crown Servants (including diplomats).

Families of UK personnel and other Crown Servants are subject to frequent movement within the UK and from abroad, often at relatively short notice. School places should be allocated to children and their families in advance of the approaching school year if accompanied by an official Ministry of Defence(MOD) or Foreign or Commonwealth Office (FCO) letter declaring a return date and confirmation of the new address wherever possible.

16. **Children Housed via Domestic Violence Services and Organisations**

Children temporarily housed under the protection of approved Domestic Violence agencies will be admitted as a priority to the catchment school if the application form is accompanied by an official letter from the relevant agency.

17. **Gypsy and Traveller Children**

The Council is obliged, by statute, to ensure that all children of compulsory school age receive education that is appropriate to their age, abilities and any special educational needs, and promotes high standards in the provision of education and the welfare of children. These obligations apply to all children whether they are permanent residents in the area.

18. **Notifying Parents, Guardians or Carers of the Outcome of the Application**

The Council will inform parents/ guardians or carers of the outcome of their application on the published offer date (please refer to pages 13 and 14 for more information). If the application is rejected, parents will receive written confirmation informing them of the outcome and will also be provided with the 'Appeals Guidance for Parents' document, which provides details of the appeals procedure. As part of the refusal letter the Council will allocate a place at the 2nd or 3rd preference school, if a 2nd and/or 3rd preference has been indicated within the application. A place will be allocated at the next nearest available school, should all preferences be unavailable or if an alternative preference has not been specified.

19. **Admission Appeals for Primary and Secondary School Places**

In accordance with the School Admissions Code of Practice 2013 and the School Admission Appeals Code of Practice 2013, the Local Authority will make arrangements to enable the parent of a child to appeal against a decision to refuse a place at the preferred school.

The appeal will be determined by an appeals panel established in accordance with School Admission Appeals Code 2013. The panel must consist of three to five members appointed by the Local Authority from the following categories:

- People who are eligible to be lay members (persons without personal experience in the management of a school or the provision of education in

any school, disregarding experience as a governor or in any other voluntary capacity).

- People who have experience in education; who are familiar with educational conditions in the LA's area or who are parents of registered children at a school (other than the school at which the appeal is made).

Independent Appeal Panels must consider each case individually on its merits and they cannot limit themselves, in advance, to the admission of any particular number of pupils.

Consideration by an Appeal Panel should be in two distinct stages:

a)   The Factual Stage, where the panel decides as a matter of fact whether there was a lawful reason to refuse admission; if there was not, the child must be admitted; if there was, the committee must move on to:

b)   The Balancing Stage, where the panel exercises its judgement to balance the degree of prejudice to efficient education which would result from admitting the child, and the strength of the parents' case, so as to arrive at a decision which is binding on the admissions authority.

The decision of the appeal panel will be binding on the Local Authority.

Parents will receive a letter refusing admission and will be advised of their right of appeal. The decision to appeal does not prevent the parent / carer accepting a place at an alternative school whilst the hearing is convened, as the panel will determine the appeal on the basis of application. Appeal Hearings are convened by the Council's Legal team and will be heard within 30 School days of the date of application for appeal.

20.   Home to School and Post 16 Transports

Blaenau Gwent Council will provide free transport for children attending their nearest suitable school, where the distance from home to school is over the specified walking distance detailed below:
- more than 1.5 miles from home for children aged under 8 years but of statutory school age; and,
- more than 2 miles from home for children aged 8 years and over.

Distances are measured by using the Council's Digital Information Mapping System, to determine the shortest available safe walking route between the home address and the main gate of the school to be attended.

Parents are able to choose an English-medium, Welsh-medium or a denominational school for their child. The child will qualify for home to school transport to the appropriate catchment area of the school. When the catchment area school is full and unable to admit a pupil, free transport will be provided to the next nearest available school that has room to take the child,

20

as long as the home is 1.5 miles or more away from the school for pupils under the age of 8 years, or 2 miles for pupils aged 8 and over.

The provision of free school transport will be arranged to coincide with the start and end of the normal school day and shall be provided during the school term time. Home to School transport is not provided for breakfast clubs, after school clubs or summer schools. Transport will be provided from pick-up points at approved bus stops on the nearest public transport route to the learner's home, where possible.

21. **Post 16 Travel**

All students living in Blaenau Gwent will be provided with a discounted bus ticket or travel grant to the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone, Ebbw Vale Campus as their designated Post 16 provider; or, the nearest institution where their course is available depending on the following criteria:

- students must be between the ages of 16 to 19 (under 19 prior to the 1st September of the commencement of their course) to qualify;
- students shall reside in the County Borough of Blaenau Gwent;
- students must reside 2 miles or over (nearest walking distance) from their nearest college campus; and, the students should attend a full time course which requires attendance of 16 or more hours per week or a minimum 4 days attendance per week at the institution.

Students and pupils aged 19 or over at the commencement of the course are not eligible for travel assistance from the Council and in these circumstances they are advised to contact their respective college for details of any available transport provision.

All transport for Post 16 pupils including those with additional learning needs is provided based on strict criteria as set out in the Home to School Transport Policy. The Council may provide transport up to a maximum of three years until the pupil's 19th Birthday.

22. **Travel Grant**

The Council's present policy is to provide travel assistance to those who meet the criteria up to a maximum of £150 per academic session. This will be paid termly as follows: £50 autumn, £50 spring and £50 summer.

23. **Welsh Medium / Faith Education**

Pupils who wish to undertake their Post 16 studies via the medium of Welsh or attend a Faith school are required to travel further distances for their education, with no direct public service bus routes. These students have the opportunity to utilise the existing contract bus provision in lieu of the Travel Grant, if appropriate.

21

All awarded transport will be reviewed periodically. For more detailed information on home to school and post 16 transport, along with details on how to apply, please refer to the Blaenau Gwent Home to School and Post 16 Transport Policy (2021/22) via the following link: https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/resident/schools-learning/school-transport/

Appendix 1 – Published Admission Numbers

*Please note in order to apply for a place in one of the following schools/early years' education providers, an application will need to be made directly to the school of your choice:

- **Acorns Nursery**
- **All Saints Roman Catholic Primary School**
- **Cylch Meithrin Brynithel**
- **Tiggys Day Care**
- **St Joseph's Roman Catholic Primary School**
- **St Mary's Church in Wales Primary School**
- **St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School**

Published Admission Numbers for 2024/25

School *The school highlighted in **red** are responsible for their own admission arrangements and as such, applications need to be submitted directly to the school.	Nursery Admission Number	Session	Statutory Admission Number (Reception or Year 7)
All Saints R.C. Primary School	30	am	26
Beaufort Hill Primary School	30	am	30
Blaen y Cwm Primary School	26	full time	38
Brynbach Primary School	30	am	30
Coed y Garn Primary School	30	full time	30
Cwm Primary School	52	am	

22

	52	pm	30
Deighton Primary School	30	am	30
	30	pm	
Georgetown Primary School	23	am	60
	23	pm	
Glanhowy Primary School	65	am	42
	65	pm	
Glyncoed Primary School	52	am	45
	52	pm	
Rhos y Fedwen Primary School	26	full time	25
St. Illtyd's Primary School	30	am	30
St. Joseph's R.C. Primary School	41	full time	15
St. Mary's Church-in-Wales Primary School	30	am	30
St. Mary's R.C Primary School	53	Full time	30
Soffryd Primary School	19	am	23
	19	pm	
Willowtown Primary School	30	am	60
	30	pm	
Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg	60	full time	30
Ystruth Primary School	37	am	42
	37	pm	

	Nursery Admission Number	Session	Statutory Admission Number (Reception or Year 7)
Secondary School			
Brynmawr Foundation School			151
Tredegar Comprehensive School			152
Middle School			
Abertillery Learning Community – Primary Phase	141		140
Abertillery Learning Community – Secondary Phase			150
Ebbw Fawr Learning Community -	47	am	38

23

Primary Phase		
Ebbw Fawr Learning Community - Secondary Phase		**207**

Appendix 2 - Blaenau Gwent Schools Catchment Area Overview Map

26

Admissions

Analysis:

School Admissions – 2023/24 Admissions Round Analysis

The Admissions team have successfully implemented the School Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education 2022/23, which is evidenced by the following assessment:

- 100% of applications were processed within 48 hours and 100% of standard in-year transfer requests were processed within 15 days of receipt in accordance with the WG School Admissions Code (2013) and Blaenau Gwent's School Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education.

- Transfer rates have remained steady over the last 5 academic sessions, from 354 in 2018/19 and then a decrease of 229 in 2019/20 these figures were much lower due to covid. The transfer rates increased slightly in 2020/2021 to 295 with the primary reason for in-year transfer being inward migration of families into the Blaenau Gwent area, the rate then decreased slightly for 2021/2022 to 136, there has been a significant increase for 2022/23 to 255 this is primarily due to inward migration.

- Complex transfers were received on a weekly basis and referred to the Senior Education Welfare Officer for consideration of placement at the Vulnerable Learner Panel.

- Transfers for pupils with an additional learning need or an EHCP were received on a weekly basis and referred to the SEN team for consideration at ALN Panel.

- The admissions officer has attended all VLP meeting and/or liaised directly with the Senior Education Welfare Officer on pupil placement.

- The admissions officer has attended all ALN Panel meetings and/ or liaised directly with the SEN team on pupil placement.

- Two admission appeals were held for the reception admission round during the summer period. Both appeals were upheld in favour of the admissions authority due to them being class size appeals.

- The numbers of in-time applications received for pupils who applied for a school place for the 2023/24 admission round, remained consistent for nursery, reception and secondary when compared to 2022/23. Please refer to Figure 1 below for the in-time percentage comparisons:

Figure 1: In-time Application (%)

Percentage of In-time Applications 2020/21	Percentage of In-time Applications 2021/22	Percentage of In-time Applications 2022/23	Percentage of In-time Applications 2023/24
Nursery – 60%	Nursery – 71%	Nursery – 75%	Nursery – 75%
Reception – 75%	Reception – 83%	Reception – 85%	Reception – 85%
Secondary – 79%	Secondary – 80%	Secondary – 85%	Secondary – 85%

- The Council were able to sustain 100% of parental first preferences for a 4 year period in respect of secondary place allocation, and 99% of first preferences were met for the nursery and reception year groups, (please refer to **Figure 2** below). This is attributable to the effective monitoring and management of school capacities and pupil places along with the continued achievement of surplus place reduction, whereby school admission numbers for primary schools with a high surplus have been reduced over the last year and in turn the admission number has also been reduced.

Figure 2: First Preferences Met %

% of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2020/21	% of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2021/22	% of First Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2022/23	% of first Preferences Met for In-time Applications 2023/24
Nursery – 100%	Nursery – 100%	Nursery – 100%	Nursery – 99%
Reception – 99%	Reception - 100%	Reception – 99%	Reception – 99%
Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%	Secondary – 100%

The Welsh Government School Admissions Code (2013) dictates that Councils must review their admissions policies annually for consultation and publication by April 15th in the academic year preceding the admissions round. Blaenau Gwent School Admissions Policy outlines the arrangements, criteria and relevant legislation that underpin school admission processes and methodology. The primary changes to the policy document for the 2023/24 academic session were as follows:

- A review of the nursery, primary and secondary admission numbers in line with the annual capacity review. This is an annual process which reviews changes to school plans and physical space within the school, which affect the provision of teaching and learning. This is carried out in line with the Welsh Government Measuring the Capacity of Schools in Wales Guidance (2011). The final agreed capacity calculations are then used to inform admission numbers.
- A review of the dates for the admission round(s), associated processing and offer deadlines.

The Admissions Policy for 2024/25 was consulted upon and published in line with the Welsh Government's deadline (April 2023).

The Admissions team have fully migrated to online admissions with the use of Capita One Online and ABAVUS (My council services) – with parents being fully supported by the team in their application process and submission.

The Admissions Forum met once over the last year (September 2022 – August 2023).

The Forum has sustained a good level of attendance at each meeting. The Forum has worked closely with the Education Transformation team in order to:

- improve school and Council awareness and partnership approaches in respect of the implementation and monitoring of the admissions round;
- improve tracking processes from live birth to secondary education (whilst ensuring alignment with Inclusion);
- address issues i.e. ensure that when in-year transfers are allocated a place a start date is offered within 10 days; and,
- explore a wider ranging data set i.e. Flying Start, placement outside of the chronological year group, home tuition and attendance data etc. Ensuring that there is a holistic approach to the management of pupil places.

This page is intentionally left blank

Committee: **Cabinet**

Date of meeting: **10th April 2024**

Report Subject: **Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) Annual Return 2022/23**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Sue Edmunds, Cabinet Member People and Education**

Report Submitted by: **Jo Sims, Service Manager – Young People and Partnerships**
Tracy Jones, Aneurin Leisure Trust

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	12.02.24	22.03.24			22.02.24	10.04.24		

1. **Purpose of the Report**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the report submitted to the Culture Division of Welsh Government with respect to the sixth year of the Sixth Assessment Framework for the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) return 2022/23. The sixth framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 'Connected and Ambitious Libraries' was set to expire in 2020 and a new framework created. However, due to the impact of the pandemic the development of the seventh framework has been delayed and the sixth framework is being extended until 2025.

2. **Scope and Background**

2.1 Aneurin Leisure Trust has been commissioned by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to deliver the Library Service as part of their general operations since 2014. In April 2020, the client function for the Leisure Trust moved to the Education Directorate. This is the fourth year that this report has been submitted since this arrangement and the first to the Partnership Scrutiny. Public libraries are a statutory service as laid out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. Since 2002, the Welsh Government has implemented successive assessment frameworks which have helped bring a more consistent level of public library provision across Wales.

2.2 Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 it is a statutory duty for every library authority (Local Authorities) in Wales to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof'.

2.3 This report has been prepared based on information provided by Blaenau Gwent's annual return, case studies and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of Welsh Government in June 2023. This was submitted through the Aneurin Leisure Trust.

2.4   The sixth framework of Welsh public library standards builds on the developments in the fifth framework. It comprises 12 core entitlements and 16 quality indicators to monitor how well library services realise these benefits for the local community and the people of Wales. For this return, only one impact statement was required, as opposed to four case studies in previous years. It was also the return of full reporting of all data relating to quality indicators, since the pandemic.

2.5   Blaenau Gwent's Library annual return highlights the following performance against the WPLS:

- Blaenau Gwent continues to achieve all 12 core entitlements.

- The service achieved 7 quality indicators in full and 2 in part. The remaining target was not met.

- WPLSQ1 1 and 2 Customer Surveys:
  The service performs well in this area and customer service feed-back remains consistently high.
  100% of adults experience the library as a safe and inclusive place.
  The average rating out of 10 awarded by children using the library is 10.

- WPLSQ1 3 Support for Individual Development :
  This is a target indicator, which has been met in full. This relates to the provision of a wide range of support services in all libraries, e.g ICT provision, training opportunities and reader development activities.

- WPLSQ1 4 Support for Health and Wellbeing:
  This is a target indicator which has been met in full and the service is clearly making efforts to support customers' wellbeing through a variety of activities and other provision.

- WPLSQ1 5 User Training:
  98% of attendees said that that attendance helped them achieve their goals. This year has seen an increasing number of new partners using libraries to engage with the community. This has enabled the service to deliver new activities to new audiences.

- WPLSQI 6 User Attendances at Library Events:
  1,629 events were delivered over 22/23.

- WPLSQ1 7 Location of Service Points:
  This is a target indicator and has been fully met.
  98% of the population of Blaenau Gwent are within 2.5 miles of their nearest library. This demonstrates that the service has excellent reach into local communities.

- WPLSQI 8 Library Use:
  There has been a 32% increase in adult book borrowing.
  There has been a 115% increase in junior book borrowing.

There has been a 33% in BorrowBox usage, which is the highest increase in Wales (e-books and e-audio)

- WPLSQ1 9 Up to date and Appropriate Reading Materials:
  This target indicator has not been met. Only 12 services across Wales met this target. Despite not meeting this target, 90% of customers think the choice of books is very good.   The total spend on book stock was £64,144 with an increase in spend on Welsh and Junior. The spend for 21/22 was £63,921. To meet this target the service would need to spend approx. £147,000

- WPLSQI 10 Welsh Language Resources:
  The target indicator has been met with 6% of the book fund being spent on Welsh materials.

- WPLSQI 11 On-line Access:
  This target indicator has been met in full. The service has 64 public access machines, with 11,352 hours of usage over 22/23.

- WPLSQI 12 Supply of Requests
  This target has been partially met. This is due to requests from the regional inter lending scheme, Books4U not being included. If the Books4U requests were included, the service reports that the target of 15 days would have been met. It should also be noted that this quality indicator has been removed for future reporting. We met the 7 days target, with 67% of titles being supplied within 7 days. Only narrowly missed the target for 15 days, with 77% of titles being supplied within that timeframe.

- WPLSQI 13 Staffing Levels and Qualifications:
  This target has been partially met. The service has 14.4 FTE, to meet the staffing target, the service would need 25 FTE. However, the service meets the target relating to staff training and has a suitably qualified head of library services. It should be noted that no service in Wales met this target in full.

- WPLSQI 14 Operational Expenditure:
  The service's operational expenditure is above the median for Wales.

- WPLSQI 15 Cost per Visit:
  The cost per visit is £4.28. This compares with the highest being £6.22 and the lowest 0.41p. It should be noted this indicator has been removed for future reporting.

- WPLSQI 16 Opening Hours:
  The service did not report any unstaffed opening hours, unplanned closures of static service points or missed home delivery visits.

2.6 Library services in Blaenau Gwent are delivered by the Aneurin Leisure Trust on behalf of the local authority and are a key component in both the Local Authority and Trust's service delivery plans.

2.7 The continued partnership work with key organisations remains a strength of the service and enables Blaenau Gwent to support the needs within communities and deliver appropriate activities e.g. the Community Hubs provision.

2.8 Importantly, the return indicates that overall Blaenau Gwent has improved its performance in relation to performance and spend on stock.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The Partnership Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 22nd February 2024, recommended Option 1.

3.2 Option 1 – Members are asked to consider and accept the information detailed within the report.

3.3 Option 2 – Members do not accept the report and contribute by making appropriate recommendations.

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

4.1 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 sets out the statutory duties of the public library authorities to 'provide a comprehensive and efficient library service' to their communities.

4.2 The Library Service fully supports Blaenau Gwent's Well-being Plan and also acts as an agency for economic wellbeing in our local communities through supporting learning at all stages of life helping with illiteracy, lack of skills and the digital divide. The Library Service also contributes to a range of Welsh Government outcomes such as literacy, skills and learning, digital inclusion, poverty, health and well-being. Library provision spans these outcomes, offering a range of services which often support two or more of the outcomes simultaneously.

4.3 The Library Service is seen as a key partner in tackling the problems of social isolation, inequality, disadvantage, fractured communities and ill health.

4.4 The library service acts as a single point of contact for local people to access public services and also gain information on local health issues, providing space for local voluntary organisations to provide advice and information on health and other matters

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 There are no current implications associated with the options proposed in section 3 above.

5.1.1 During the review of the Leisure Trust, the Trust committed to increasing the book fund from £27,000 to circa £43,000 in 2018/19 and be reviewed year on year in order to achieve a more appropriate budget going forward. In 2022/23 the Trust spent £64,144 a further increase exceeding the original agreement.

5.1.2   Furthermore, the Trust continues to invest on a pan Wales level in Borrow box to increase the availability of e-books and e-audio.   This includes spend on Welsh Language books to meet that target.

5.2   *Risk including Mitigating Actions*
There are no risks associated with this report. Regular dialogue through established governance arrangements ensures that collectively, between the Council and the Trust, the library service is supported to meet the standards required.

5.3   *Legal*
There are no legal issues associated with this report.

5.4   *Human Resources*
5.4.1   There are no direct staffing issues with respect to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council in relation to this report. However, the report highlights concern about the level of staffing within the library service.

5.4.2   This will be an area of discussion and monitoring through the governance arrangements between the Council and the Leisure Trust.

6.   **Supporting Evidence**
6.1   *Performance Information and Data*
6.1.1   Blaenau Gwent continues to meet all of the 12 core entitlements in full.

The return has highlighted that overall Blaenau Gwent has improved its performance in this sixth year of the sixth framework. Key highlights include:
- Customer feedback remains consistently high. Customers of Blaenau Gwent Libraries clearly value their service.
- The continued partnership work with key organisations remains a strength of the service and enables Blaenau Gwent to support the needs within communities and deliver appropriate activities. The service clearly makes efforts to engage with communities in innovative ways to respond to changing needs.
- The service is carrying no vacancies, for the first time in many years, this is viewed as hugely positive by Welsh Government
- The service has a strong digital offer. There are good levels of IT provision, above the median for Wales. IT usage has increased month on month. The launch of the data sim scheme has enhanced the service to digitally excluded residents.
- The service has adapted to the needs of local communities. By delivering a more holistic service, the social value and community support role has been clearly demonstrated through a comprehensive narrative and impact statement.
- The service has demonstrated impact in supporting users through the cost- of- living crisis. The warm spaces campaign continues to be popular, new partners, e.g CAB and many new anti-poverty initiatives have been delivered.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***
To be able to continue to access a fully accessible and professional library service within the local community.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***
Local people, groups/agencies and volunteers are engaged through regular customer surveys, in line with the Welsh Public Library Standards (WLPS).

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
The library standards will help establish a sustainable model for the Library Service going forward.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***
Libraries provide support with many key preventative approaches, such as improving literacy levels for children and young people through early intervention within communities.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
Partnership working with a number of agencies/organisations is embedded in the ethos of the Library Service.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***
The library service has evolved to become the 'go-to' community venue for a wide range of services. Over the year, there has been an increasing number of partner organisations accessing libraries, to engage with the community. The service is viewed as the public face of the council, through the successful establishment of the community hubs. There are also close working links with all other council departments, particularly Education, Social Services and Regeneration.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***
N/a

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment***
N/A

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**
Performance reports related to the Leisure Trust are monitored through the Leisure and Libraries Strategic Group, Partnership Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Background Documents / Electronic Links
- *Appendix 1 –Welsh Govt. Assessment report 22/23*
- *Appendix 2 – Welsh Public Library Standards Data 22/23*
- *Appendix 3 – Impact Statement, Narrative and Future Direction 22/23*

Welsh Public Library Standards Sixth Framework: Blaenau Gwent (Aneurin Leisure Trust)

Annual Assessment Report 2022/2023

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Blaenau Gwent's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

1. Executive summary

Blaenau Gwent met all of the 12 core entitlements in full. Of the 10 quality indicators which have targets, Blaenau Gwent achieved 7 in full and 2 in part. The remaining target was not met.

Customers of Blaenau Gwent Libraries clearly value their service; customer satisfaction is above the median for most indicators. The continued partnership work with key organisations remains a strength of the service and enables Blaenau Gwent to support the needs within communities and deliver appropriate activities.
The service clearly makes efforts to engage with communities in innovative ways to respond to changing needs. The service is aware of the need to address issues around active membership and footfall and has funding for two new library development officers to help target this.

The service's annual report highlights several changes in the ways that members of the local community are engaging with libraries, in part likely related to the designation of libraries as 'community hubs'. Specifically, an increasing number of people spending longer periods of time in the library in response to the cost-of-living crisis, and changes in patterns of IT use with more customers bringing their own devices to use in the library.

Whilst the service meets the target for proportional Welsh language spend, the overall level of materials spend is a concern, especially as this has been an ongoing issue for Blaenau Gwent over a number of years. The fact that, for the first time in many years, the service is carrying no vacancies is hugely positive, although it is acknowledged that the service is still unable to meet the per capita staffing and qualified staff targets.

- 100% of adults surveyed said they experience the library as an enjoyable safe and inclusive space (QI1).
- There is a good level of IT provision; Blaenau Gwent is above the median for the number of computer devices available to the public (QI11).
- Although staff per capita remains below the target, for the first time in many years the service is carrying no vacancies (QI13).
- Blaenau Gwent did not report any unstaffed opening hours, unplanned closures of static service points or missed home deliveries (QI16).

2. Performance against the standards

The standards framework comprises of core entitlements, quality indicators with targets, quality indicators with benchmarks and impact measures. Section 2 summarises achievements against these areas. A narrative assessment of the authority's performance is provided in Section 3.

2.1. Core entitlements

Blaenau Gwent reported meeting all of the 12 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment, providing detailed and helpful commentary where this varied from previous years. The independent assessor accepts the self-assessment based on assessments made in previous years.

2.2. Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which 10 have constituent targets. Of these, Blaenau Gwent is achieving 7 in full and 2 in part. The remaining target was not met.

Quality Indicator	Met?	
QI 3 Support for individual development:		Met in full
a) ICT support	√	
b) Information literacy and skills training	√	
c) E-government support	√	
d) Reader development	√	
QI 4 (a) Support for health and well-being		Met in full
i) Book Prescription Wales scheme	√	
ii) Better with Books/Reading Well scheme	√	
iii) Designated health & well-being collection	√	
iv) Information about healthy lifestyles and behaviours	√	
v) Signposting to health & well-being services	√	
QI 6 all static service points offer events/activities for users with special requirements	√	Met in full
QI 7 Location of service points	√	Met in full
QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material		Not met
Acquisitions per capita	x	
or Materials spend per capita	x	
QI 10 Welsh Language Resources		Met in full
% of material budget spent on Welsh	√	
or Spend on Welsh per capita	-	
QI 11 Online access:		Met in full
a) i) Public access to Internet	√	
ii) Wi-Fi provision	√	
QI 12 Supply of requests		Partially met
a) % of requests satisfied within 7 days	√	
b) % of requests satisfied within 15 days	x	

Quality Indicator		Met?
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications:		Partially met
i) Staff per capita	x	
ii) Qualified staff per capita	x	
iii) Head of service qualification/training	√	
iv) CPD percentage	√	
QI 16 Opening hours per capita	√	Met in full

2.3. Impact measures

The framework includes three indicators aimed at assessing the impact of library use on people's lives. These indicators do not have targets, and authorities were only required to carry out user surveys for QI1 once over the original three-year period of the framework (2017-20). The summary figures (lowest, median and highest) are based on all authorities providing data in the 2022-23 return. Rankings reflect the numbers of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority. However, it is important to bear in mind that some authorities have conducted surveys since 2020, whilst others report survey data from before the Covid pandemic. Some responses therefore reflect the situation several years ago, whilst others may have been affected by disruption during the pandemic period. As a result, there are limitations on the extent to which these data might be considered comparable.

Blaenau Gwent completed its adult user survey in March 2023 and its children's user survey in February 2023.

Performance indicator		*Rank*	Lowest	Median	Highest
QI 1 Making a difference					
b) % of young people who think that the library helps them learn and find things out:	94%	4/16	58%	90%	98%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	96%	1/16	41%	86.5%	96%
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals:	98%	=7/17	82%	96%	100%

Authorities are also asked to provide an impact statement describing the impact which the library service has had on an individual or on a group of individuals during the year.

Blaenau Gwent provided an impact statement which referred to the value customers derived from the Warm Spaces initiative and the associated activities which launched in October 2022. Customers struggling to pay their bills valued having a warm, safe and welcoming place to go which fostered companionship and well-being. They also enjoyed participating in activities such as Knit and Natter and Cuppa and Company sessions and benefitted from free access to WiFi and computers. One customer who had lost his job reported that, as well as valuing the warm space, the support he received from the library had contributed to him getting a new job and accommodation and reflected that "*without the library I think I would have ended up on the streets*".

2.4. Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor and benchmark their performance over time, in comparison with other authorities. The following table summarises Blaenau Gwent's position for 2022-23. Ranks are included out of 22, where 1 is the highest, and 22 the lowest scoring authority, unless stated otherwise. Indicators where fewer than 22 authorities supplied data are those where relevant data was not available from some authorities. Indicators 'per capita' are calculated per 1,000 population unless otherwise noted.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
QI 1 Making a difference					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	70%	8/16	24%	69.5%	90%
c) health and well-being	44%	=12/16	35%	66.5%	94%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	100%	=1/16	93%	97%	100%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	90%	11/16	80%	91%	99%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	99%	=2/17	92%	98%	100%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	85%	9/16	65%	86%	99%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	97%	=10/17	94%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.0	=12/16	8.0	9.3	9.7
QI 5 User training					
a) attendances per capita	7	=13/22	1	10.5	222
c) informal training per capita	131	10/19	5	131	424
QI 6 attendances at events per capita	161	13/22	13	165	559
QI 8 Library use					
a) visits per capita	2,084	13/21	781	2,106	4,814
b) virtual visits per capita	175	20/22	124	537.5	7,979
c) active borrowers per capita	79	18/22	43	106.5	167
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita	37	19/22	13	53	864
QI 11 Online access					
a) Computers per 10,000	9.55	6/22	3.32	7.99	16.99
b) % of available time used by the public	11%	=9/19	7%	11%	77%
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications[1]					
(v) a) total volunteers	9	-	0	8	256
b) volunteer hours	745	-	0	583.5	14,014
QI 14 Operational expenditure					
a) total expenditure per capita	£10,093	13/21	£6,726	£11,476	£27,330
b) % on staff,	70%	=5/21	46%	64%	78%
% on information resources	9%	=16/21	5%	12%	21%
% on equipment and buildings	3%	=11/21	1%	3%	29%
% on other operational costs;	17%	10/21	1%	15%	35%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£0	=12/21	-£479	£145	£2,865

[1] *Following discussion with the peer review group it was decided not to include rankings for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
QI 15 Net cost per visit[2]	£4.28	17/19	£0.41	£2.76	£6.22
QI 16 Opening hours[3]					
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0%	=1/22	0%	0.05%	0.95%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	0%	=1/20	0%	0%	3.74%

3. Analysis of performance

The core entitlements and quality indicators can be divided into four key areas. This section of the report outlines performance under these areas.

3.1. Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5)

The service performs well with regard to Making a Difference (QI1), with responses above the median for most measures. For Customer Satisfaction (QI2), the service is at or around the median for most measures. Blaenau Gwent reports changing use over the year in response to the cost-of-living crisis, with an increasing number of people spending long periods of time in the library, saving money on energy bills and accessing free services, including refreshments. Although the QI1 indicator for adults finding helpful information for health and wellbeing is below the median, QI4 is met in full and the service is clearly making efforts to support customers' wellbeing through a variety of activities and other provision. Brynmawr and Tredegar Libraries are designated as well-being hubs, and the service provides Cuppa and Company sessions and working in partnership with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board to promote health and well-being activities. This year has seen an increasing number of new partners using libraries to engage with the community. This has enabled the service to deliver new activities to new audiences, including working with 'Business in Focus' to deliver live music workshops.

3.2. Access and use (QI 6-8)

Although Blaenau Gwent is below the median for library visits and active borrowers per capita (QI8), footfall and issues are increasing, indicating that customers are returning following the pandemic. The service notes a trend towards users who may not be active members accessing libraries for information, activities, social events, warm spaces etc. Attendance per capita at events was close to the median (QI6). There was also an increase in the number of community loans and visits to residential homes over the year, as well as an extension of home delivery services. Whilst both adults' and children's issues per capita are below the median for Welsh authorities, over 22/23 the number of BorrowBox borrowers increased by one third. Although virtual visits per capita is below the median (QI8), Blaenau Gwent reports strong engagement with the library's social media presence, particularly Facebook.

3.3. Facilities and services (QI 9-12)

Blaenau Gwent is below the median for materials spend and number of acquisitions per capita, and does not meet the target for this indicator (QI9). However, the service

---

[2] *Rankings here have been reversed, so that 1 is the lowest scoring (best performing) authority.*

[3] *Rankings here have been reversed, so that 1 is the lowest scoring (best performing) authority.*

has improved performance against the Welsh language spend target (QI10) over 22/23; this includes Welsh language learning materials such as board games and study aids. It is anticipated that this will help the service to increase the number of Welsh issues per capita. Although the target for Supply of Requests (QI12) was only partially met, this is due to requests from the regional inter lending scheme, Books4U not being included. If the Books4U requests were included, the service reports that the target of 15 days would have been met.

Blaenau Gwent is above the median for the number of computer devices available to the public (QI11) and the service reports that, during 22/23, IT usage has been increasing month on month. However, there has been a change in usage patterns: the number of users has increased, but time spent on PCs is considerably lower as users are accessing machines for different purposes, e.g. checking emails, printing. There is also a marked increase in the number of users bringing in their own devices. Furthermore, the promotion of IT services outside of the building has been extended, including a partnership with the National Databank through the Good Things Foundation to distribute free data sims to people in need. A review of ICT facilities and services is planned for 23/24.

3.4.   Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)

Although the figure for both overall and qualified staff per capita remain below the target (QI13), for the first time in many years the service is carrying no vacancies. The proportion of operational expenditure allocated to staffing is above the median (QI14). Five new members of staff were appointed to permanent positions, with some libraries having a complete new team. Blaenau Gwent reports this has had a positive impact on performance and customer service. Blaenau Gwent did not report any unstaffed opening hours, unplanned closures of static service points or missed home deliveries (QI16).

4. Strategic context

As part of the return, authorities are asked to report on how the library service is contributing to wider Welsh Government priorities and strategic goals. Blaenau Gwent reports on a range of services relevant to the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, including cohesive communities, health, prosperity, equality and environmental issues. Supporting local residents with the cost-of-living crisis has been a key priority for Blaenau Gwent. With the closure of the main council offices (Civic Centre) and the transition to all face-to-face council enquiries now being delivered at libraries, through the provision of community hubs, library buildings are increasingly seen as the 'go-to' venue for anyone in need, including food bank referrals, fuel vouchers, cost of living advice, period products and warm packs.

Other activities have included a new Citizens Advice Service was with weekly drop-in sessions being delivered in all libraries and the roll-out of the Warm Spaces campaign in all libraries. Support for jobseekers has continued to be a core aspect of library service provision, working closely with colleagues in Adult Community Learning. The service's sim card project, working with The Good Things Foundation and the National Data Bank, helps bridge the digital divide and prevent data poverty within the community.

5. Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Blaenau Gwent intends to build upon the success of community hub provision to expand its approach to partnership work. The plan to re-locate Abertillery Library to a new town centre location will be a main focus for the coming year. The service is working closely with the regeneration department to secure additional funding which, if successful, will transform Trinity Chapel, into a modern, vibrant library and community adult education centre. Funding has been secured to recruit two new library development officers from the Skills Priority Funding stream to help target active membership and footfall. In addition, a review of the ICT provision is planned for 23/24, specifically an improved Wi-Fi solution to meet the diverse needs of the community, including streaming, video conferencing etc.

6. Conclusion

Customers of Blaenau Gwent Libraries clearly value their service; customer satisfaction is above the median for most indicators. The continued partnership work with key organisations remains a strength of the service and enables Blaenau Gwent to support the needs within communities and deliver appropriate activities.
The service clearly makes efforts to engage with communities in innovative ways to respond to changing needs. The service is aware of the need to address issues around active membership and footfall and has funding for two new library development officers to help target this.

The service's annual report highlights several changes in the ways that members of the local community are engaging with libraries, in part likely related to the designation of libraries as 'community hubs'. Specifically, an increasing number of people spending longer periods of time in the library in response to the cost-of-living crisis, and changes in patterns of IT use with more customers bringing their own devices to use in the library.

Whilst the service meets the target for proportional Welsh language spend, the overall level of materials spend is a concern, especially as this has been an ongoing issue for Blaenau Gwent over a number of years. The fact that, for the first time in many years, the service is carrying no vacancies is hugely positive, although it is acknowledged that the service is still unable to meet the per capita staffing and qualified staff targets.

This page is intentionally left blank

WPLSQI 1 Making a difference — Framework 6

Percentage of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	70%
Percentage of adults who have found helpful information for health and well-being at the library	44%
Percentage of adults who experience the library as an enjoyable safe and inclusive place	100%
Percentage of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives	96%
Survey dates (month & year)	Mar-23

Authority comment:

There was a total of 780 returns for the adult survery. The Making a Difference QI continues to consistently remain at a high customer satisifaction level. The 100% rating of customers experiencing the library as a place, is partly the result of customers appreciating our Warm Spaces campaign, with many positive comments received from the surverys. Customers have commented on how having a warm, welcoming space h living crisis. These comments have demonstrated the changing use over the year, with an increasing number of people spending long periods of time in the library, saving money on energy bills and accessing free s

Percentage of children aged 7-16 who think that the library helps them learn and find things out	94%
Survey dates (month & year)	Feb-23

Authority comment:

There was a total of 250 returns for the Children's survey. A number of surveys were conducted via school visits and during children's activities.

WPLSQI 2 Customer satisfaction — Framework 6

Percentage of adults who think that the choice of books is 'very good' or 'good'	90%
Percentage of adults who think that the standard of customer care is 'very good' or 'good'	99%
Percentage of adults who think that the IT facilities provided are 'very good' or 'good'	85%
Percentage of adults who think that the library is 'very good' or 'good' overall	97%
Survey dates (month & year)	Mar-23

Authority comment:

Overall, the customer satisfaction remains consistently high. There has been a high number of personal comments made on the surveys, giving powerful, qualitative evidence to demonstrate the impact of libraries. number of commnents regarding poor Wi-Fi connectivity, at times, and as a result we are investigating options to improve the service.

Average overall rating out of ten awarded by users aged 7-16 for the library they use	9.0
Survey dates (month & year)	Feb-23

Authority comment:

WPLSQI 3 Support for individual development (Comment on any change to provision since 2018-19)	2022-23	% of total
Number of static service points open for 10 hours per week or more providing:		
Basic support in the use of ICT infrastructure provided (including Wi-Fi) and in accessing the range of electronic information resources available.	6	100%
Training to improve literacy, numeracy, information literacy and digital skills.	6	100%
Support for users to access local and national e-government resources.	6	100%
Reader development programmes/activities for both adults and children	6	100%

This target has been met.

WPLSQI 4 Support for health & wellbeing (comment on any change to provision since 2018-19)	2022-23	% of total
Number of static service points open for 10 hours per week or more providing:		
Books Prescription Wales scheme	6	100%
Better with Books scheme	6	100%
Designated health & wellbeing collection	6	100%
Information about healthy lifestyles & behaviours	6	100%
Signposting to health & wellbeing services	6	

Number of static service points open for 10 hours per week or more providing:	
Shared Reading groups	1
Book clubs	3
Health information partnerships	6
Dementia friendly champions and services	6
Mental health awareness activities	6

Authority comment:

WPLSQI 5 User training

	2022-23	Per 1,000 pop'n	
Total number of attendances at pre-arranged user training sessions organised by the library	500	7	per 1000 pop'n
Percentage of attendees who said that attendance helped them to achieve their goals	98%		%
Please indicate the method used to calculate this figure	Representative sample		
Approximate number of feedback forms distributed	200		
Number of feedback forms included in the calculation	150		
Number of customers helped by means of informal training during the year	8,788	131	

Authority comment (including note on the method used to calculate the results):

A sample survey was conducted. Surveys were distrubuted at a variety of pre-arranged training sessions, including library tours, inductions, family history sessions demonstrating Ancestry and Findmypast, and digi

WPLSQI 6 User attendances at library events

	2022-23	per 1000 pop'n	
Total number of attendances at events and activities organised by the library	10,776	161	per 1000 pop'n
Number of static service points open for 10 hours per week or more providing events or activities for users with special requirements	6	100%	

This target has been met.

Authority comment, including examples of events:

1,629 events were delivered over 22/23. A wide range of evernts and activites were delivered, including Creative Writing, Baby Yoga. STEM activiities, craft sessions, Baby Rhyme Time, Family History, Knit and Na
Lego Club, Coffee mornings etc. All libraries have provided events and activites for users with special requirements, including visually impaired users, Ukrainian groups, adults with learning disabilities, pupils from sp

WPLSQI 7 Location of service points

	2022-23	
Population density (persons per hectare)	6.4	
% of households within 2.5 miles (or 10 minutes travelling time by public transport) of a static service point, or within ¼ mile of a mobile library stop	98%	%

This target has been met.

WPLSQI 8 Library use

	2022-23	Per 1,000 pop'n
Total number of visits to library premises during the year	139,638	2,084
Please indicate the method used for calculation	Full year count	
Total number of external visits to the library's web site during the year	11,744	175
Total number of active borrowers during the year	5,310	79
Total number of library members	30,231	451
Total number of adult book issues	61,068	912

	2022-23	Per 1,000 pop'n
Total number of children's book issues	14,224	**212**
Total number of audio-visual issues	3,204	**48**
Total number of electronic downloads	17,408	**260**

Authority comment (include names of any shared service points with shared counting mechanisms and date of last membership data cleanse; please also provide a note of any statistics collected on social media us

All libraries have electronic people counters. Two libraries are in shared builings with Community Adult Education (Brynmawr and Tredegar) Both libraries share a people counter as there is no way to differentiate f Community Hubs are based in all libraries, in full-time libraries the hubs operate every open week day, in part-time libraries, the hub is in operation one day a week. Over 22/23 there has been a total footfall of 6,13 included in the total number of visits to library premises. Facebook continues to be the most popular social media platform, with a reach of 62,446. There has been an increase of 103% compared to 21/22. We hav number of Facebook users, 151% increase compared to last year. We have also seen an increase in our reach for our Twitter account, with a 47% increase. A membership data cleanse was completed in March 2(increased 709% compared to 21/22, demonstrating that customers are returning in high numbers. Issue statisics are also steadily increasing month on month, with adult issues showing a 32% increase and children compared to last year. We had the highest increase in usage of Borrowbox compared to all Welsh authorities at 33% increase. Over 22/23 we increased our BorrowBox borrowers by one third and the number of n month was 33% higher than it was the previous year, showing a very positive upwards trend. The authority would also like it acknowledged that the active membership figure does not include a high percentage of c

WPLSQI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material	**2022-23**	**Per 1,000 pop'n**
Total number of items acquired	5,714	**85**
Total materials expenditure (from WPLSQI 14)	£64,144	**£957**

This target has not been met. Please add any comments below:

Please note no e-magazines have been included in the total number of items acquired. (not suppiled by WG)

	2022-23	
Total expenditure on material purchased for children	£11,268	
Does this figure include expenditure on a Schools Library Service?	No	
Percentage of materials expenditure for children	**18%**	**%**
Authority comment		

WPLSQI 10 Welsh language resources	**2022-23**	**Per 1,000 pop'n**
Total expenditure on materials in the Welsh language	£3,599	
Percentage of materials expenditure on materials in the Welsh language	6%	**%**
Spend per 1,000 Welsh-speaking resident population		**£**

This target has been met.

	2022-23	Per 1,000 pop'n
Total number of isues of Welsh language material	2,473	**37**
Authority comment		

WPLSQI 11 Online access (comment on any change to provision since 2018-19)	**2022-23**	**Per 10,000 pop'n**
Do all libraries provide a minimum of one device giving public access to the Internet and networked digital content?	**Yes**	

This target has been met.

Do all static service points provide Wi-Fi access for the public using their own devices? | **Yes**

This target has been met.

Total number of devices giving public access to the Internet: | 64 | **9.55** | **per 10,000 pop'n**

Available in static libraries | 64

Available in mobile libraries |

Authority comment:

Number of hours available for use of public access ICT facilities during the year | 99,050

Number of hours recorded for use of public access ICT facilities during the year | 11,352 | **11%** | **%**

Authority comment:

Over 22/23 IT usage has been increasing month on month. It should be noted that there has been a change in pattern of usage over 22/23. Although the usage of the People's Network machines is low compared users have increased, but time spent on PCs is considerably lower. This demonstates users are accessing machines for different uses, e.g checking emails, printing etc.in short sessions.   There is also a marked i bringing in their own devices to access our Wi-Fi and support.   We are currently unable to record accurate Wi-fi usage time. All partners accessing libraries also make use of the public wi-fi. As a service we would 11% statistic is not a true reflection of the online access we provide. On a typical day the number of partners and 'agile' IT users far exceed users accesing desktop PCs through the People's Network. A review of IC planned for 23/24

WPLSQI 12 Supply of requests	2022-23	%
Total number of requests for specific items made during the year	1,732	
Number of requests which are notified to the user as being available within 7 calendar days of the request being made	1,165	**67%**

This target has been met.

| Number of requests which are notified to the user as being available within 15 calendar days of the request being made | 1,337 | **77%** |

This target has not been met. Please add any comments below:

In addition to the total number of requests reported, (from data from the LMS) 1,573 requests were made from the regional inter lending scheme, Books4U. These requests are not placed on the LMS and are there majority of the requests made via Books4U are supplied within 10 days. As per guidance we have taken the data only from the LMS, which excludes Books4U requests.   If the Books4U requests were included we

WPLSQI 13 Staffing levels & qualifications	2022-23	Per 10,000 pop'n
Total number of staff (FTE)	14.4	**2.15**

This target has not been met. Please add any comments below:

Authority comment (including information about shared staff):

The service is currently carrying no vacancies. Five new members of staff were appointed to permanent positions, with some libraries having a complete new team. This has had a positive impact on performance service continues to work closely with our colleagues in Adult Community Education. There are approximately 37 hours per week of staffing support in Tredegar and Brynmawr Libraries, which is not included in ou

| Number of staff holding recognised library related qualifications (FTE) (including cognate areas) | 2.0 | **0.30** |

This target has not been met. Please add any comments below:

Number of staff holding qualifications in cognate areas (FTE)	0.0	
Number of posts which require a library qualification	2.0	
Number of staff with library qualifications in posts which do not require a library qualification (FTE)	1.0	

Authority comment:

Two posts within the service require a library qualification. (Library Services Manager and Library Team Leader) The Library Team Leader is currently working towards Chartership. One Library Assistant is a Charte

Does the designated operational manager of library services hold a formal qualification in librarianship or information science or information management?	Yes	
Please give details of current qualifications held:		MCLIP

This target has been met.

Where does this post sit within the local authority management structure?	The library service in Blaenau Gwent is managed by Aneurin Leisure Trust and not the local authority. Funding Manager within the Trust, holds responsibility for the library service. This officer is a membe of the trust. The Library Services Manager is line managed by the Contracts, Parternships and Fundi
What is the post held by the most senior professional librarian (if different from the above)?	
Where does the post held by the most senior professional librarian sit within the local authority management structure (if different from the above)?	
Total staff working hours during the year	27,742
Number of staff hours spent in training & personal/professional development	280
% of time spent in training & personal/professional development	1.0%

This target has been met.

Total number of volunteers active during the year	9
Total number of volunteer working hours during the year	745
Do you have Investors in Volunteers acreditation relating to the NOS?	No

Briefly describe the training and support offered to volunteers.

Volunteers are managed and supported by a designated officer within the library establishment.   They are included in training, when appropriate and all have a speciic 'role descriptions' . They have regular one-to updated with relevant communication, when appropiate. The Trust has a Volunteer Policy which is adhered to. All volunteer roles provide 'added value' to the service and do not replace any paid library roles. All vo

Authority comment:

WPLSQI 14 Operational expenditure	2022-23	% of total
Expenditure on staff	£473,750	70%
Total materials expenditure	£64,144	9%

Expenditure on maintenance, repair & replacement of equipment & buildings	£21,893	*3%*	
Total other operational costs	£116,371	*17%*	
Total revenue expenditure	£676,158	*100%*	
Total revenue expenditure per 1,000 population	**£10,093**		
Total capital expenditure			
Total capital expenditure per 1,000 population			
Authority comment:			

WPLSQI 15 Cost per visit	2022-23	Ratio	
Total revenue expenditure on staff & materials	£ 676,158.00		
Total income generated	£28,621.00		**Income**
Total number of visits to library premises during the year	139,638		
Total number of external visits to the library's web site during the year	11,744	**£4.28**	**Cost per visit**
Authority comment:			

WPLSQI 16 Opening hours (Comment on any change to provision since 2018-19)	2022-23	Per 1,000 pop'n	
Aggregate annual opening hours for all service points	10,075	**150**	
This target has been met.			
Total number of unstaffed opening hours for all service points	0		
Authority comment:			

		% of total	
Total hours of unplanned and emergency closure of static service points as a result of building failure or staff unavailability	0		
Total planned opening hours of all static service points	8,900	**0.00%**	
Total number of missed mobile library stops and home deliveries as a result of vehicle failure or staff unavailability	0		
Total planned mobile library stops and home deliveries	3,150	**0.00%**	
Authority comment:			

a enjoyable, safe and inclusive
as helped them with the cost of
services, including refreshments.

The service has acknowledged a

2018-19

tal literacy sessions.

2018-19

atter, Welsh groups, Rummikub,
pecial educational needs unit,

se, and how this data is counted):

otfall per service.   Council
2 to the community hubs which is
ve also seen an increase in the
023. Usage in foofall has
n's issues a 115% increase
ew users we attracted each
our users that access our libraries

to pre Covid times, the number of
ncrease in the amount of users
like it acknowledged that the
CT facilities and services is

fore not included in this QI. The
would meet the standard of 15

and customer service. The
r staffing calculation.   The

ered Librarian.

. The Contracts, Partnerships and
r of the senior management team
ng

-one review sessions and are
olunteers are recruited through a
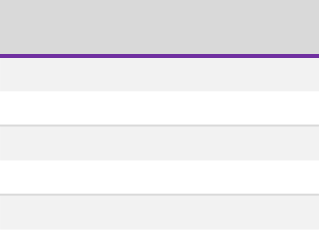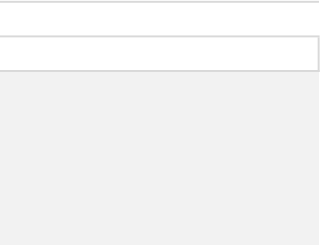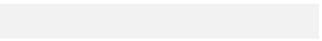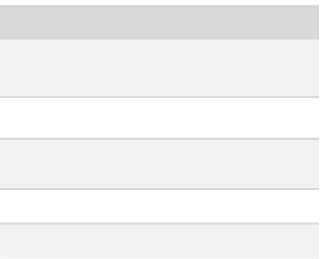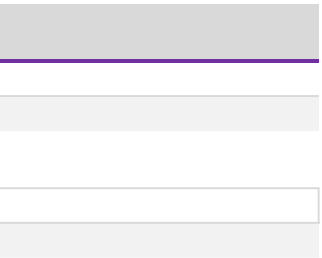
Blaenau Gwent Libraries/Aneurin Leisure Trust

Instead of the case studies previously submitted, authorities are asked to submit one impact statement for their service. Good impact statements are expected to include evidence that the library service has made a positive difference to an individual (or group of individuals). This would normally go beyond a description of services provided and their use, to show the outcome, and may include testimony from the customers concerned provided you have their permission to include this. Individuals should not be named within the impact statement. The impact statement indicative length is 300 words.

-Yes (permission obtained) Names have been altered.

Regular Attendees from Warm Spaces

Our 'Warm Spaces' campaign was launched in Oct 2022, with all six libraries offering the scheme. We delivered it during the full opening hours of all the libraries and in addition to this, we held specific activities to encourage people to attend.

'*The library has saved me so much money over the winter. I visit every day. I live alone, so I cannot afford to put the heating on in the day. Even boiling the kettle, I have to think twice about, so having a free hot drink has been very much appreciated. The library is warm, comfortable and just makes me happier, knowing I can socialise, just like being in a café, but without paying. It really lifts my mood. It provides me with company, stimulation and makes me feel part of whatever is going on. I've participated in craft session, Knit and Natter and Reminiscence sessions. Due to the cost-of-living crisis, I have had to end my Broadband contract, so having free Wi-fi and computers has been invaluable for me. The council hub has helped me claim the correct benefits and helped me with fuel vouchers. The Citizens Advice service in the library has also helped me with form filling. Last week I also had a warm pack given to me, which has been a great help*. – Barbara*

David started attending the Cuppa and Company sessions after losing his wife. He enjoys reading the newspaper, doing the crossword and having a friendly chat.

'I have been suffering with depression since my wife passed away, earlier this year. I lost my purpose and routine in life, after caring for her for many years, I felt lost. A neighbour suggested joining the coffee morning at the library. It has really helped, I pop in most mornings, have a coffee, do the crossword and a chat, and it sets me up for the day. It gets me out of the house, I've made some new friends and has given me back some routine in my life, - and I haven't got to spend a penny! Which is really important, being a pensioner living alone. I have also started reading again, which helps me relax in the evenings' – David.

'I lost my job in December and as a result I couldn't afford the rent on my flat. For a couple of weeks, I was sofa surfing with friends. The library was a sanctuary to me, a safe haven, I could use the wi-fi, have a free coffee, and had lots of support from agencies like Pobl, Llamau and Citizens Advice Bureau. I could stay as long as I liked, without the need to spend money.   I also had help with CV and advice on training and education. Within a few weeks, my life changed completely. I found a new job and affordable flat. Without the library, I think I would have ended up on the streets!' – Jamie

Narrative that demonstrates how the library service is contributing towards wider Welsh Government priorities and strategic goals

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ensures that public bodies across Wales, including local authorities, think about the long-term, work better with communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach.

To achieve this, the Act puts in place 7 well-being goals:

- A globally responsive Wales
- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language

Clearly, the library service contributes to a number of these goals by supporting education and lifelong learning; promoting health and wellbeing; improving digital literacy; and providing access to culture and the Welsh language within some of the most deprived communities in Wales. The seven goals provide a clear vison that links the major themes of the service.

A Wales of Cohesive Communities

Supporting local residents with the cost-of-living crisis has been a key priority for the service over 22/23. This role has become more important over the year, as the effects of the crisis has impacted further on local residents. Library staff attended a number of cost of living events, within the community, raising awareness of how libraries can help. We designed a specific flyer to promote to the community and to share with partners.

A new Citizens Advice Service was launched in Sept 22 with weekly drop-in sessions being delivered in all libraries. This, together with the council community hubs provides a 'one stop shop' approach to support local residents with a wide range of enquiries.

The service supported the Welsh Libraries 'Living Well in Wales' campaign by delivering sessions to bring people together, focusing on connecting and giving people a sense of belonging.

Examples of sessions held –

- Reminiscence sessions
- Coffee mornings
- Coffee Art Sessions
- Family History sessions
- Book launches
- Creative writing sessions

With the roll-out of the new Warm Spaces campaign in all libraries, this linked all our priorities and enabled us to reach out to the most vulnerable members of our communities.

.

A Healthier Wales

As Aneurin Leisure is a health and wellbeing trust, the focus for all sectors within the organisation is to improve health – '*We are a community focussed organisation and believe passionately about making a positive impact to people's lives by not only improving physical health and wellbeing, but also their mental and social wellbeing through our diverse range of services and facilities'*

Combating loneliness and improving health and wellbeing continued to be a priority for the service over 22/23. Feed-back from the community clearly demonstrated the need for physical events and activities. People expressed their need to enjoy the company of others whilst taking part in an engaging session. There has been a marked increase in the number of partner organisations accessing libraries over 22/23. The community support role has been further developed, with our reputation now firmly established as a welcoming space, fully inclusive and the ideal venue to engage with the local community.

Examples of partners accessing the service

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Pobl
- Communities for work
- Gwent Association of voluntary organisations
- Gwent Carers
- Grief Support Cymru
- Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
- Llamau
- Gwent Family History Society
- Cymraeg i Blant
- Cyfannol Women's Aid
- Blaenau Gwent food partnership
- Keep Wales Tidy
- Families First
- Disability Can do
- Volunteering Matters
- Prime Cymru
- DWP
- Gwent De-Fibbers Association
- U3A
- Welsh Water
- Platfform
- Inside Out Art for mental health

Our Sports Library which was launched last year has increased in popularity. A range of sports equipment are available for customers to borrow free of charge and items are issued on the LMS. Ukrainian families have expressed their gratitude of the scheme, with many joining local sports groups as a result.

Various health campaigns have been promoted over the year, for example, Mental Health Awareness Week in May 22.

The Reading well collections are regularly promoted and over the year a number of schools and community organisations have borrowed sets. Empathy Day was promoted in June, with related stock promotions and on-line digital activities.

Brynmawr and Tredegar Libraries are designated well-being hubs. We work in partnership with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board by promoting health and well-being activities and ensuring health information and stock is displayed in conjunction with themed events. Cuppa and Company sessions are held weekly, with the aim of encouraging social interaction and raising awareness of well-being.

A Prosperous Wales

The service has continued to support prosperity across the borough over 22/23. We have continued to develop our partnership work with the regeneration department to increase footfall into town centres, through supporting family events in the high street. We delivered events in libraries to linked to the themes of the events.

A new project was launched in Dec 2022, with the service hosting live music events with the aim of engaging with new audiences to library services. We worked with employability projects and local artists to inspire and motivate young people to embark on a career in the music industry. Library staff enrolled participants to the library and promoting relevant stock to them, including raising awareness of e-resources, e.g., music magazines.

ROCK AT THE LIBRARY
Talks from industry legends
Q&A Session with Experts
Live Performances

Are you a budding musician, sound tech, lighting engineer, film maker or just interested in breaking into the music & creative industries?
This event is for you!

6-8PM - FREE ENTRY
ABERTILLERY & EBBW VALE LIBRARY
MONDAY 5TH & TUESDAY 6TH DECMBER

Support for jobseekers has continued to be a core aspect of library service provision. Our close working links with our colleagues in Adult Community Learning has enabled us to provide a wide range of learning opportunities delivered in their local library.   This ranged for tailored one-to-one support, informal learning and classes. Clear referral routes are in place to signpost learners to more formal learning. Libraries continue to be the 'first port of call' for informal learning, particularly for digital needs. Staff are trained to encourage customers to progress with their learning and work with partners to facilitate this.

A More Equal Wales

A new member of staff from Abertillery Library has represented our service by being a member on the Anti-Racism steering group, commissioned by CILIP Cymru Wales. As a result of this, training will follow for all our library staff and have started reviewing our collections and stock policies. It will demonstrate our commitment to equality and will support our evolving communities. This work will align with the objectives of the WPLS and the Anti Racist Wales Action Plan.

Stock promotion is an important aspect for the service to raise awareness of equality. Pride Month and LGBT History Month was promoted in all libraries, with displays, with relevant titles promoted

To celebrate World Book Day in March 2023, the service worked in partnership with Families First, to provide children with free costumes. The costumes were loaned from local libraries, which worked well, with families joining the library at the same time and borrowing related stock. This scheme was particularly well received by families in need, many parents commenting how it helped them deal with the cost-of-living crisis.

The theme of free activities was a common thread across all our events, schemes and projects.   The 'Summer of Fun, Project Gadgeteers' campaign was delivered alongside the Summer Reading Challenge with a wide range of children's sessions held in all libraries.

Examples of activities

- Diffusion Art
- Slime Workshops
- Weekly STEM Craft sessions
- Balloon Rocket Workshops
- When Science meets art sessions
- Owl visits
- Potion Party
- Louby-Lou Inter-active storytelling
- Huw Davies Author Visit
- Malachy Doyle Author Visit
- Clay Modelling
- Recycling Art Sessions

The service has launched a new sim card project working with The Good Things Foundation and the National Data Bank to help bridge the digital divide.

National Databank - Good Things Foundation

This project supports our cost-of-living help for the community, offering data to those people in need. It links with another digital inclusion project we deliver, the loaning of free tablets. This enables us to provide a solution to those people who have no access to data. This offer has been a major development in the service, over the year, enabling us to prevent data poverty within the community.

A Resilient Wales

The service is committed to building stronger, more connected communities. We are able to adapt to change quickly and be responsive to local needs. As staff noticed an increasing number of users spending long period of time in the library, to avoid putting the heating on at home, the service reacted by providing a wide range of support. For example, we have seen an increase in the number of homeless people, as a result, we worked with partners to arrange weekly drop-in sessions by Pobl, with sessions specifically delivered for residents in need of housing support. Other agencies such as CAB, Council services, Platfform and Llamau also delivered support through drop-in sessions in all libraries.

The MP, MS and the Police held a number of surgeries across all libraries, encouraging people to voice opinions and seek impartial information in safe, welcoming environments.

As Blaenau Gwent is already one of the most deprived areas of Wales, the emphasis on free services has become more important that ever. Being fines free continues to remove barriers to accessing the library. With the closure of the main council offices (Civic Centre) and the transition to all face-to-face council enquiries now being delivered at libraries, through the provision of community hubs, this has encompassed library buildings as being the 'go-to' venue for anyone in need. Residents access libraries for food bank referrals, fuel vouchers and general cost of living advice. The local health board has provided the service with a range of free items to support people in need, for example period products and warm packs. All libraries have a 'free' area, for the community to take, without asking.

A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language

A new Welsh club has been established at Abertillery Library to encourage Welsh learners to practice conversational Welsh. A range of new Welsh language learning resources have been purchased over the year, including Welsh board games.

Welsh Baby Yoga is delivered weekly at Tredegar Library and number of Welsh Baby Rhyme time sessions have been delivered across the service. We have strong links with Cymraeg I Blant, helping us support many families through the medium of Welsh.

We have regularly promoted Welsh language audio books over the year and supported the North Wales Society for the Blind by committing a percentage of our allocated Welsh spend for this area.

There are various groups that use the free library space for cultural sessions. For example, the Blaina Aberystruth History and Archaeological Society holds weekly sessions in Blaina Library. The service has strong partnership links with Gwent Family Society. Volunteers from this organisation deliver regular help desks in all libraries , promoting FindMyPast and Ancestry.com. The Blaenau Gwent Heritage Forum holds monthly meetings at Tredegar Library and utilises the local studies resources based there. Blaina Heritage Centre is based in the same building as Blaina Library, which provides an ideal link to work jointly on shared Welsh cultural activities. Likewise, a community Museum is based in Tredegar Library. Which attracts many visitors researching the birth place of Aneurin Bevan, plus other historical information. Library staff and volunteers from the museum work together to provide a range of information and resources to promote Welsh culture.

The service works closely with the Welsh Books Council, taking advice on new Welsh language titles, including new titles by Welsh authors. Welsh stock is routinely promoted in all libraries and through our on-line platforms.

A Globally Responsive Wales

Over the year we linked with the Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership to deliver the 'Little Veg Library'. Each veg library includes 'pick and mix' pots filled with different seeds as well as envelopes that families can fill with seeds of their choice to take home. The idea is for people to have a go at growing some veg at home in response to the recent food shortages and spiralling food prices.

The service continues to be the main distribution hub for food recycling bags in the borough. The Keep Wales Tidy litter picking scheme, which was launched in 2022, links closely with raising awareness of environmental issues and encourages residents to be responsible for keeping areas free from litter.

The service works closely with all other library authorities in Wales on joint initiatives. The book purchasing consortia, the All Wales Library Management system and regional inter-lending schemes provide considerable cost savings and improves the efficiency of the service. The very basics of book borrowing is an environmentally friendly way of reducing the carbon footprint.

In Jan 2023 all libraries raised awareness of Holocaust Memorial Day. We marked the 'one day' encouraging communities to come together to learn from the holocaust and genocides for a better future.

.

Please provide a short statement about the future direction and plans for the library service (indicative length 200 words).

The plan to re-locate Abertillery Library to a new town centre location will continue to be a main focus for the service over 23/24. We are continuing to work closely with the regeneration department to secure additional funding which if successful, will secure the

plans to transform Trinity Chapel, into a modern, vibrant library and community adult education centre.

Funding has been secured to recruit two new library development officers from the Skills Priority Funding stream. The recruitment process is planned for the summer of 2023. The post holders will have targets to achieve linked to performance in the WPLS, particularly on active membership and footfall.

A review of the ICT provision is planned for 23/24. This is following feed-back from the recent user surveys and an acknowledgment of the changing patterns of usage. The growing trend of BYOD by users and partners requires us to investigate an improved Wi-Fi solution, to meet the diverse needs of the community, including streaming, video conferencing etc.

Priority on the health and wellbeing agenda will encompass the increasing range of services that our libraries will deliver over 23/24. This agenda is strongly endorsed by Aneurin Leisure Trust as the ethos that is common to all elements of service delivery of the Trust. '*We are a community focussed organisation and believe passionately about making a positive impact to people's lives by not only improving physical health and wellbeing, but also their mental and social wellbeing through our diverse range of services and facilities'*.

We will continue to work closely with the local authority, ensuring we prioritise services that contribute to local and national government agendas. We will build upon the success of the community hub provision to expand our pro-active approach to partnership work. We will continue to build upon our storing reputation within the community, that our libraries have emerged from the pandemic, stronger, more resilient, and more pivotal than ever before.

.