



Blaenau Gwent

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

THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND

4th March 2025

Dear Sir/Madam

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Place Scrutiny Committee will be held in via MS Teams (if you wish to view this meeting please contact michelle.hicks@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk) on Tuesday, 11th March, 2025 at 9.30 am.

Yours faithfully

Stephen Vickers
Joint 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.
3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & DISPENSATIONS**
To receive.
4. **PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** 5 - 8
To consider the decisions of Place Scrutiny Committee held on 28th January, 2025.
5. **ACTION SHEET** 9 - 10
To receive
6. **REVIEW OF GREEN WASTE BAG CHARGES AND OPENING DAYS OF THE HWRCs** 11 - 40
To consider the report of the Service Manager - Neighbourhood Services.
7. **VISITOR LEVY** 41 - 46
To consider the report of the Destination Management Officer.
8. **BLAENAU GWENT EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY** 47 - 112
To consider the report of the Service Manager - Public Protection.
9. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 29TH APRIL 2025** 113 - 116
To receive

To: Councillor M. Cross (Chair)
Councillor R. Leadbeater (Vice-Chair)
Councillor S. Behr
Councillor K. Chaplin
Councillor G. A. Davies
Councillor J. Gardner
Councillor W. Hodgins
Councillor L. Parsons
Councillor D. Rowberry
Councillor J. Millard

All other Members (for information)

Joint Chief Executive
Chief Officers

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 28TH JANUARY, 2025

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR M. CROSS (CHAIR)

Councillors R. Leadbeater
S. Behr
K. Chaplin
G.A. Davies
J. Gardner
W. Hodgins
J. Millard
L. Parsons
D. Rowberry

WITH: Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services
Service Manager – Estates & Strategic Asset Management
Service Manager – Business & Regeneration
Team Manager – Housing Solutions
Team Manager – Regeneration Operations
Communications & Marketing Officer
Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was reported that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation.

<p>No. 2</p>	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>The following apologies for absence were received:-</p> <p>Head of Community Services Service Manager Neighbourhood Services Service Manager – Public Protection</p>
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATION OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>No declarations of interest or dispensations were reported.</p>
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the decisions of the meeting held on 22nd October, 2024.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the decisions be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>ACTION SHEET</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Action Sheet.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.</p>
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 11TH MARCH, 2025</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Scrutiny and Democratic Officer.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and made amendments to the topics scheduled for the meeting on the 11th March, 2025; suggested any additional invitees that the committee requires to fully consider the reports; and requested any additional information to be included with regards to the topics to be discussed (Option 2).</p>

No. 7

PROPOSED ACQUISITION

To receive and consider the following report which in the opinion of the proper officer was an exempt item taking into account consideration of the public interest test and that the press and public should be excluded from the meeting (the reason for the decision for the exemptions was available on a schedule maintained by the proper officer).

Having regard to the views expressed by the Proper Officer regarding the public interest test, that on balance, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information and that the report should be exempt.

RESOLVED that the public be excluded whilst this item of business is transacted as it is likely there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration & Community Services.

The Committee AGREED that the report which contained information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) be accepted and Option 3 be endorsed.

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Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Action Sheet - Place Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting Action Identified	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
05.12.23	Solar Car Parking: Members to receive feedback on the findings of the research once available.	Amy Taylor	Funding has been secured to undertake a feasibility study into the possible installation of solar car ports in Blaenau Gwent. This will be commissioned as soon as possible. Action Update: 03.04.24
16.01.24	Provide an update on the desktop study and the pros and cons of different sites and brands.	Amy Taylor	
10.09.24	An update on the desktop study to be provided, including funding details and the study's progress.	Amy Taylor	

Date of Meeting Action Identified	Action to be Taken	By Whom	Action Taken
			specification and any potential project will need to go through a procurement process. Action Update: 23.01.2025
28.01.25	Item 6 – Forward Work Programme: Member Briefing Sessions to be arranged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New depot at Marine Colliery including feasibility study results • Box Works project, to include current issues and progress. 	Scrutiny and Democratic Officer	To be included in the new Forward Work Programme 2025/26. Action Complete: Included in draft FWP.

Agenda Item 6

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Place Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **11th March 2025**

Report Subject: **Review of Green Waste Bag Charges and Opening Days of the HWRCs**

Portfolio Holder: **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member Place & Environment**

Report Submitted by: **Service Manager Neighbourhood Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
14/01/25	12/02/25	03.03.25			11/03/25	09.04.25		

1. Purpose of the Report

To provide the Members of the Place Scrutiny Committee with a review of the Green Waste Bag charges and the opening days of the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs).

2. Scope and Background

2.1 Review of Green Waste Bag charges

2.1.1 Blaenau Gwent issues recycling bags and boxes to residents free of charge. As part of the Council's income generation strategy for 2024/25, a trial was introduced to charge residents an administration and delivery fee for new and replacement green waste recycling bags.

2.1.2 To combat the rising costs of waste and recycling receptacles and to bring services in line with other Welsh local authorities who are charging residents for replacement bins and green waste collections, BG proposed options of this potential revenue generating practice. The option to charge residents for green waste recycling bags was taken forward for 2024/25 on a trial basis and residents were subsequently charged £2 per green waste bag for the 2024 green waste collection season.

2.1.3 Analysis of customer service data for 2024 has shown the following from a total number of 632 customer service enquiries:

Complaint regarding green bag charges	7	Residents complained that they pay enough council tax and were not willing to pay for bags to recycle their green waste.
Bags blown away/missing following collection	46	Residents complained about crews not returning the green waste bags following collection and residents were not prepared to pay for replacement bags. In response

		CCTV on vehicles is checked before providing replacement bags free of charge.
Green waste placed out in blue/white bags and not collected	17	Residents complained that we would not collect green waste in blue or white bags because they were not willing to pay the £2 charge for the green waste bags.
Other	143	Majority of calls were to complain about repeated missed collections and requested a manager call back.
Reporting a missed collection	419	

2.2 **Review of HWRC Reduced Opening**

- 2.2.1 Blaenau Gwent operates two Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) at Roseheyworth (RH) in Abertillery and New Vale (NV) in Ebbw Vale respectively.
- 2.2.2 As part of the Council's cost saving strategy for 2024/25, Members resolved to trial further partial closures at NV and RH HWRCs. The agreed trial reduced opening from 6 to 5 days per week at both HWRCs, whilst retaining availability of at least one of the HWRCs 7 days per week.
- 2.2.3 Following a Consultation Period with the Joint Trade Unions, the trial partial closures were implemented on 24th June 2024 and are forecast to return a saving of approximately £25,500 (based on 9 months to March 2025) plus the associated savings in employer oncosts.
- 2.2.4 Currently, RH HWRC is closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays, whilst NV HWRC is closed Thursdays and Fridays.
- 2.2.5 Initially the trial closures were not well received by the public. Reports received from the HWRCs suggested several face-to-face complaints were made daily, taking a period of around 5 to 6 weeks to settle down.
- 2.2.6 In contrast, a small number of formally registered complaints and queries were received by the call centre comprising a single corporate complaint along with three general enquiries. A number of negative comments and observations were also noted on social media.

- 2.2.7 Putting the initial 6 weeks aside, then overall it would appear that the public has adjusted to the changes. This may have been alleviated by the continued availability of at least one HWRC 7 days per week.
- 2.2.8 The changes were implemented without any job losses to the permanent workforce, with impact on Agency assignments limited to a small reduction in the number of shifts worked.
- 2.2.9 Reducing the weekly opening hours has caused a conflation in daily traffic i.e. 7 days traffic is now being received over 5 days, which has contributed to sustained peak periods and longer queues especially during the busier summer months. Unfortunately, when these factors combine it causes labour resources to become stretched which may cause service levels / standards to dilute accordingly. This in turn, increases the likelihood of service complaints and places the Attendants at greater risk of verbal abuse from site users.
- 2.2.10 A comparative analysis of tonnage inputs at the HWRCs for Quarters 2 2023 and 2024 is shown below.

Site	Jul to Sep 2023	Jul to Sep 2024
New Vale HWRC	1,098.62	1,135.85
Roseheyworth HWRC	688.68	862.23

- 2.2.11 Tonnage input data since the trial was implemented, is limited and the dataset is perhaps too small to draw any conclusions in respect of the closures.
- 2.2.12 However, the figures as they stand reveal a marginal uplift in tonnage at NV HWRC 37.23 tonnes (3.4% uplift) with a higher increase at RH HWRC of 173.55 tonnes (25.2% uplift).
- 2.2.13 The tonnage uplift at RH HWRC can be partly explained by the implementation of the trade waste recycling scheme in October 2023 which has certainly introduced more tonnage to the site. Other factors such as RH HWRC not being as established as its sister site, but is gaining in popularity, are likely to account for the increased footfall, rather than impact of the closures per se.
- 2.2.14 It is also very likely that demand for the HWRC service is naturally increasing, due to a number of sizeable new build housing estates within the Borough over the last 5 years or so.
- 2.2.15 In addition, since the closures were implemented:
- There has been no increase in flytipping activity at or around the sites.
 - There has been no increase in demand for pest control services at the sites.
 - Intruder trespass at the HWRCs has not significantly increased on the additional days of site closure.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Review of Green Waste Bag charges**

Option 1 - Adopt the charge to residents for green waste recycling bags on a permanent basis. The £2 charge will be included on the fees and charges register and increase in line with Council policy each year. The charge will continue to support the administration and delivery of the green waste bags to residents (Preferred option).

Option 2 – Revert to supplying all recycling bags free of charge.

3.2 **HWRC Reduced Opening**

Option 1 - Give permanence to the decision implemented in June 2024 to trial the closure of the HWRCs for an additional day each during the week (Preferred option).

Option 2 - Reverse the decision implemented in June 2024 to trial the closure of the HWRCs for an additional day each during the week and return to 6 days per week operating at both HWRCs.

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

Waste and recycling services support the Council Priority to ‘Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable Connected communities’ in particular ‘to increase rates of recycling to enable us to achieve national targets’.

Statutory Responsibilities

Local Authorities in Wales have been set statutory recycling targets through the Wales Waste Measure 2010, and failure to meet the targets will result in a financial penalty from Welsh Government.

Gwent Well-being Plan

Waste and recycling services support the Well-being objective ‘where the natural environment is protected and enhanced’ by using our resources in a fair and sustainable way.

5. **Implications Against Each option**

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

Review of Green Waste Bag charges

5.1.1 Income generated in 2024 is outlined below:

	Total requests	Total number bags	Total income
Apr-24	149	342	£ 684.00
May-24	274	655	£ 1,310.00
Jun-24	209	511	£ 1,022.00
Jul-24	165	418	£ 836.00
Aug-24	143	335	£ 670.00
Sep-24	74	164	£ 328.00
Oct-24	27	67	£134.00
totals		2492	£ 4,984.00

- 5.1.2 **HWRC Reduced Opening**
Option 1 ensures the savings budgeted for 2024/25 are retained at approximately £34k per year plus the associated savings in employer's oncosts.
- Option 2 reverts to 2023/24 operating hours and would negate the savings offered and would result in a £34k budget pressure.
- 5.2 **Risk including Mitigating Actions**
There is a risk that the Local Authority will continue to face financial penalties from the Welsh Government if it fails to achieve the statutory recycling targets.
- 5.3 **Legal**
There are no legal implications associated with this report.
- 5.4 **Human Resources**
There are no human resources implications associated with this report.
- 5.5 **Health and Safety**
There are no Health and Safety implications associated with this report.
6. **Supporting Evidence**
- 6.1 **Performance Information and Data**
Performance information has been included in the main body of the report.
- 6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**
Continued efficient and effective kerbside waste and recycling collections and continued public access to at least one HWRC across seven days.
- 6.3 **Involvement** (*consultation, engagement, participation*)
The proposals were introduced for a trial period which has allowed the service to analyse feedback from residents during this time.
- 6.4 **Thinking for the Long term** (*forward planning*)
Charging for green waste sacks will support the financing of a discretionary service and ensures this service can continue to be delivered to residents.
- 6.5 **Preventative focus**
Effective waste management at a local and national level can help reduce our Ecological footprint, greenhouse gas emissions and climate change impact, therefore preventing problems from getting worse.
- 6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**
Waste Services continue to work closely with the Welsh Government through Local Partnerships and Wrap to further develop and improve the service to achieve future targets.
- 6.7 **Integration**
n/a

6.8 **Decarbonisation and reducing Carbon Emissions**

n/a

6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)**

Attached at Appendix 1.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Customer service requests, complaints, fly tipping incidents at sites, pest control activities at sites and frequency of intruder trespass at sites will continue to be monitored regularly.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council - Integrated Impact Assessment

All decisions, policy reviews or policy implementation will now require a completed Integrated Impact Assessment.

- Section 1-Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011
- Section 2-Socio-economic Duty – Sections 1 to 3 of the Equality Act 2010
- Section 3-Corporate Plan
- Section 4-Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Section 5-Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011
- Section 6-Children’s Right “The Right Way”
- Section 7-Community Safety
- Section 8 Armed Forces
- Section 9-Data
- Section 10-Consultations Statutory Consultation Doctrine of Legitimate Expectation and Gunning Principles
- Section 11-Monitoring
- Section 12-Decision of proposal

Lead Officer	Head of Service	Service Area & Department	Date
Lisa Jones/Noel Chard	Matthew Stent	Waste Operations, Neighbourhood Services	February 2025

Briefly outline the proposal indicating what change or decision is to be made, also provide any documentation that may be used to support this.

What is the proposal that needs to be assessed?

Blaenau Gwent issues recycling bags and boxes to residents free of charge. As part of the Council’s income generation strategy for 2024/25, a trial was introduced to charge residents an administration and delivery fee for new and replacement green waste recycling bags. The proposal is to adopt the charge for the bags on a permanent basis. The charge will be included on the fees and charges register and increase in line with Council policy each year. The charge will continue to support the administration and delivery of the green waste bags to residents

Blaenau Gwent operates two Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) at Roseheyworth (RH) in Abertillery and New Vale (NV) in Ebbw Vale respectively. As part of the Council’s cost saving strategy for 2024/25, Members resolved to trial further partial closures at NV and RH HWRCs. The agreed trial reduced opening from 6 to 5 days per week at both HWRCs, whilst retaining availability of at least one of the HWRCs 7 days per week. The proposal is to adopt the additional day closures on a permanent basis.

Section 1
Outline how the proposal will impact on any people or groups of people with protected characteristics, please refer to the Equalities Act 2010 (Wales) for further information [Equality Act 2010: guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk) and the EHRC guidance [The Essential Guide to the Public Sector Equality Duty: EHRC](#)
Briefly outline below if there will be any positive or negative impacts as a result of the proposal being considered.

Protected characteristics	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on those with a protected characteristics?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on those with a protected characteristics?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
Age (<i>people of all ages</i>)	No	Yes	There will be a financial impact on residents by charging for green waste sacks. This service is discretionary and residents have the option to not procure the service offered. There is an inconvenience to residents having to by pass their local HWRC when it is closed to make use of the open sisiter site, thereby incurringadditioanl travel time.
Disability (<i>people with disabilities/ long term conditions</i>)	No	Yes	As above
Gender Reassignment (<i>anybody who's gender identity or gender expression is different to the sex they were assigned at birth</i>)	No	Yes	As above




Marriage or Civil Partnership (<i>people who are married or in a civil partnership</i>)	No	Yes	As above
Pregnancy and Maternity (<i>women who are pregnant and/or on maternity leave</i>)	No	Yes	As above
Race (<i>people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and different racial backgrounds</i>)	No	Yes	As above
Religion or Belief (<i>people with different religions and beliefs including people with no beliefs</i>)	No	Yes	As above
Sex (<i>women and men, girls and boys and those who self-identify their gender</i>)	No	Yes	As above
Sexual Orientation (<i>lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, other</i>)	No	Yes	As above



NOTE: Section 2 only needs to be completed if proposals are of a strategic nature or when reviewing previous strategic decisions. See page 6 of the Preparing for the Commencement of the Socio-economic Duty Welsh Government Guidance.

Section 2 Socio-economic Duty (Strategic Decisions Only) <i>The Welsh Governments Socio-economic Duty provides a framework in order to ensure tackling inequality is at the forefront of decision making.</i>			
.Please consider the below vulnerable groups and consider how the proposal could affect them:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Single parents and vulnerable families ➢ People with low literacy/numeracy ➢ Pensioners ➢ Looked after children ➢ Homeless people ➢ Carers ➢ Armed Forces Community ➢ Students ➢ Single adult households ➢ People misusing substances ➢ People who have experienced the asylum system ➢ People of all ages leaving a care setting ➢ People living in the most deprived areas in Wales (WIMD) ➢ People involved in the criminal justice system 			
Socio Economic disadvantage definitions.	Will the proposal have a positive, negative or neutral impacts on the below?	How could you mitigate the negative impacts outlined?	Please highlight any evidence that has been considered.
Low Income / Income Poverty <i>(cannot afford to maintain regular payments such as bills, food, clothing, transport etc.)</i>	Yes – by charging for green waste sacks this could have an impact upon an individual’s ability to pay for and access this service	The charge relates to a discretionary service which the resident can choose not to receive.	
Low and/or No Wealth <i>(enough money to meet basic living costs and pay bills but have no savings</i>	As above	As above	

<i>to deal with any unexpected spends and no provisions for the future)</i>			
Material Deprivation (<i>unable to access basic goods and services i.e. financial products like life insurance, repair/replace broken electrical goods, warm home, hobbies etc.</i>)	As above	As above	
Area Deprivation (<i>where you live (rural areas), where you work (accessibility of public transport) Impact on the environment?</i>)	n/a		
Socio-economic Background (<i>social class i.e. parents education, employment and income</i>)	As above	As above	
Socio-economic Disadvantage (<i>What cumulative impact will the proposal have on people or groups because of their protected characteristic(s) or vulnerability or because they are already disadvantaged</i>)	As above	As above	

Section 3-Corporate Plan <i>Please outline any Corporate Plan linkages of the proposal -BG Corporate Plan 22-27</i>	
Priority 1 - Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent	
Priority 2 - Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities	
Priority 3 - An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place	Income from charges support the Council's budget providing support for the delivery of statutory and discretionary services
Priority 4 - Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient	

Section 4-Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – The Five Ways of Working (ICLIP)	
<i>Sustainable development principles. The WBFG Act requires the Council to consider how any proposal improves the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales using the five ways of working as a baseline)</i>	
Five Ways of Working	How have you used the Sustainable Development Principles in forming the proposal?
<p>Long Tern</p> 	<p>Consider the long-term impact of the proposal on the ability of communities to secure their well-being.</p> <p>The proposal will support the financing of a discretionary service and ensures this service can continue to be delivered to residents.</p>
<p>Prevention</p> 	<p>Consider how the proposal is preventing problems from occurring or getting worse</p> <p>n/a</p>
<p>Integration</p> 	<p>Consider how your proposal will impact on other services provided in our communities (these might be Council services or services delivered by other organisations or groups)</p> <p>n/a</p>

<p>Collaboration</p> 	<p>Consider how you are working with Council services or services delivered by other organisations or groups in our communities.</p> <p>n/a</p>
<p>Involvement</p> 	<p>Consider how you involve people who have an interest in this proposal and ensure that they represent the diversity of our communities.</p> <p>The proposals were introduced for a trial period which has allowed the service to analyse feedback from residents during this time.</p>

How does your proposal link to the Welsh Governments Priorities for Wales? Please indicate below.

1. **A PROSPEROUS WALES** ... an innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.

n/a


2. **A RESILIENT WALES** ... a nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change). Think about how your activity will have regard to protecting and enhancing biodiversity.

n/a

3. **A HEALTHIER WALES** ... a society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.

n/a
4. A MORE EQUAL WALES ... A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances).
n/a
5. A WALES OF COHESIVE COMMUNITIES ... attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.
n/a
6. A WALES OF VIBRANT CULTURE AND THRIVING ... a society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.
n/a
7. A GLOBALLY RESPONSIBLE WALES ... a nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.

n/a

Section 5-Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and Welsh Language Standards <i>(The Welsh Language Measure 2011 and the Welsh Language Standards require the Council to have 'due regard' for the positive or negative impact that any proposal may have on opportunities to use the Welsh language. Welsh Language Standards)</i>			
Requirement	Does the proposal have any positive, negative or neutral impacts in regards to the below?	What can be done to mitigate any negative impacts?	Please demonstrate any evidence used to form this opinion.
Compliance with the Welsh Language Standards. <i>Specifically Standards 88 - 93</i>	No		
What opportunities are there to promote the Welsh Language? <i>e.g. status, use of Welsh language services, use of Welsh in everyday life in work / community</i>	No		
What opportunities are there for a person or person to use the Welsh	No		

Language? <i>e.g. staff, residents and visitors</i>			
Has the Welsh Language been considered in order to treat the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?	No		

Section 6 – Children’s Rights Approach - [The Right Way](#)

The Children’s Rights Approach – The Right Way is a framework for working with children, grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It places the UNCRC at the core of planning and service delivery and integrates children’s rights into every aspect of decision-making, policy and practice. The Right Way focuses on three main them Participation, Provision and Protection.

Protected characteristics	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on the Children’s Rights Approach?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on the Children’s Rights Approach?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
Participation (child or young person as someone who actively contributes to society as a citizen)	Yes	No	The closure days at RH HWRC will be utilised to accommodate school children visits at the education centre and allow school children to be given educational tours of the site itself in a safe environment when the site is not operational.

Provision (the basic rights of children and young people to survive and develop)	No	No	
Protection (children and young people are protected against exploitation, abuse or discrimination)	No	No	

Section 7– Community Safety			
Duty to Consider Crime and Disorder Implications			
Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a duty on the local authority to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder, anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment, the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances, re-offending and serious violence.			
Impacts	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on crime and disorder?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on crime and disorder?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
Crime	No	No	During the trial period of the additional day closure of the HWRCs intruder trespass has not significantly increased at the sites.

(consider impact on each: victims, offenders and neighbourhoods)			
Anti-Social Behaviour and behaviour adversely affecting the local environment (consider impact on each: victims, offenders, neighbourhoods and green spaces)	No	No	During the trial period of the additional day closure of the HWRCs there has been no increase in flytipping at or around the sites and no increase in the demand for pest control services at the sites.
Misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances (Think vulnerable children, adults, families and communities)	No	No	
Re-offending (Think young people and adults, victims, families, communities)	No	No	
Serious Violence (Think vulnerable young people, vulnerable adults, victims, families, communities)	No	No	

Counter Terrorism (People and places that are vulnerable to terrorism or violent extremism)	No	No	
Community Cohesion (Asylum seekers, Migrants, Victims or Hate Crime, Community tensions)	No	No	

Section 8- Armed Forces Covenant Duty AFC Draft Statutory Guidance - Final.pdf			
Impacts	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on the armed forces community?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on the armed forces community?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of services • Planning and funding • Co-operation between bodies and professionals 	No	No	

<p>These healthcare functions are within scope of the Duty in the following settings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NHS Primary Care services, including general practice, community pharmacies, NHS dental, NHS optometry services and public health screening services. • NHS Secondary Care services, including urgent and emergency care, hospital and community services, specialist care, mental health services, and additional needs services (as applicable). • Local authority-delivered healthcare services, including sexual health services and drug and alcohol misuse services 			
<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions • Educational attainment and curriculum • Child wellbeing 	<p>No</p>	<p>No</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport • Attendance • Additional needs support • Use of Service Pupil Premium funding (England only) <p>These education functions are within scope of the Duty in compulsory education settings, that is, primary, secondary, and, for England only, compulsory further education. The Duty does not cover nursery (early years education), higher education, or other voluntary adult education settings</p>			
<p>Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocations policy for social housing • Tenancy strategies (England only) • Homelessness • Disabled Facilities Grants 	No	No	

Section 9-Data-Please outline any data or evidence that has been used to develop the proposal, this can be previous consultations, local/national data, pilot projects, reports, feedback from clients etc.

Data/evidence –What data/evidence was used? - provide any links.	What were the key findings?	How has the data/evidence informed this proposal?
Both proposals were introduced for a trial period	The main findings have been included in the main body of the report	Findings have supported the proposal to adopt both proposals on a permanent basis

Are there any data or information gaps and if so what are they and how do you intend to address them?

Section 10-Consultation. Please provide details of consultation undertaken to support the proposal. Please consider the Gunning Principles: -

Principle 1: Consultation must take place when the proposals are still at a formative stage. You must not have already made up your mind.

Principle 2: Sufficient reasons must be put forward to allow for intelligent consideration and response. Have people been given the information and opportunity to influence?

Principle 3: Adequate time must be given for consideration and response. Is the consultation long enough bearing in mind the circumstances?

Principle 4: The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account when finalising the decision

Briefly describe any planned consultations or consultations that have been carried out to date. Please consider the above principles.

Please consider the following questions; -

- 1. Who did you consult?**
- 2. When did the consultation take place and was adequate time given for a response?**
- 3. Was there enough information provided to respond effectively?**
- 4. What were the findings?**
- 5. Have the findings been considered in regards to the decision?**



Dyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council




Section 11-Monitoring and Review	
How will the implementation of the proposal be monitored, including the impacts or changes made?	Customer service requests, complaints, fly tipping incidents at sites, pest control activities at sites and frequency of intruder trespass at sites will continue to be monitored regularly
What monitoring tools will be used?	My Council Service, HWRC site diaries
How will the results be used for future development?	Outcomes will inform the impact of the proposals
How and when will it be reviewed?	Annually
Who is responsible for ensuring this happens?	Waste Operations/Silent Valley

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Section 12 - Decision		
<i>Using the information you have gathered from sections 1-9 please state in the table below whether you are able to proceed with the proposal.</i>		
Continue with the proposal in its current form	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Continue with proposal but take into account reasonable steps to mitigate any negative impacts of the proposal	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Name of person completing the IIA	
Name:	Lisa Jones/ Noel Chard
Job Title:	Team Manager Neighbourhood Services/Technical Manager Silent Valley
Date:	28/02/25

Head of Service Approval			
Name:	Matthew Stent		
Job Title:	Service Manager – Neighbourhood Services		
Signature:		Date:	03/03/25

Please contact Policy & Partnerships should you require any further advice or guidance on completing your assessment via lissa.friel@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk or kate.james@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

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Agenda Item 7

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Place Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **11th March 2025**
Report Subject: **Visitor Levy**
Portfolio Holder: **Cabinet Member – Place and Regeneration and Economic Development**
Report Submitted by: **Destination Management Officer**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
		03.03.25			11.03.25			

1. Purpose of the Report

The Council is looking to undertake local trade consultation on the Visitor Levy, and as part of that process Place Scrutiny Committee members are being to provide their views.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The report will provide a detailed background on the Visitor Levy, an update on the current situation and outline what needs to be considered prior to making a decision on the implementation.
- 2.2 The consideration of the introduction of a Tourism Tax in Wales was first put forward in 2010 as an output from the commission that considered opportunities for tax devolution for Wales. It was included in the 2021-26 programme for Government and the consultation commenced in 2022. The consultation considered impacts and operational issues.
- 2.3 The detailed consultation considered a broad introduction looking at other models, establishing liability, rates, payment collection, record keeping, enforcement, exemptions and mitigations, hypothecation, behavioural impacts, communications, consultation design and final proposals.
- 2.4 The consultation was considered by the Blaenau Gwent Destination Management Partnership in October 2022 and a full response was submitted to Welsh Government.
- 2.5 The process realised that to deliver the levy, a full register of accommodation providers would be required, and the consultation and implementation of statutory registration scheme ran concurrently with the Visitor Levy and form part of a sister bill.
- 2.6 Visitor Accommodation (Register and Levy) Etc. (Wales) Bill- was published on 25th November 2024 and the bill is now progressing through the Senedd.

- 2.7 The Bill gives local authorities the choice to introduce a levy on overnight stays in visitor accommodation in their area. It also establishes a register of visitor accommodation providers operating in Wales.
- 2.8 If a local authority decides to introduce a visitor levy, they must consult with their communities before doing so.
- 2.9 The Levy will be a per person per night charge. It will apply to overnight stays in visitor accommodation in Wales where the local authority has decided to introduce a visitor levy. The levy would apply to all visitors regardless of where they have travelled from.
- 2.10 The Bill also establishes a register of visitor accommodation providers operating in Wales. The register will include the type of visitor accommodation and location of the premises they operate across Wales. All visitor accommodation providers will be required to register. This is regardless of whether the local authority area they are operating in, has chosen to introduce a visitor levy.
- 2.11 The Bill gives local authorities the ability to generate new money. This money can be invested into local services and infrastructure to support tourism in their area. Visitor levies are based on the principle of fairness. They aim to share the costs of tourism between residents and visitors more evenly. It is Welsh Government's ambition is to grow tourism by supporting local communities in a way that is sustainable.
- 2.12 The levy rate is a per person per night charge on overnight accommodation, set as:
- £0.75 per person per night for those staying at campsites (pitches) and hostels.
 - £1.25 per person per night for those staying in all other visitor accommodation types.
- 2.13 The rate will be set nationally to ensure consistency. Providers will be responsible for paying the levy. It is likely they will pass this charge on to visitors as an 'indirect tax.' It will be collected and managed by the Welsh Revenue Authority (WRA).
- 2.14 The levy will not be payable for stays in visitor accommodation where the:
- Stay is longer than thirty-one days.
 - Stay is at an individual's sole or main residence.
- The stay is for emergency or temporary housing arranged by the local authority if a stay is due to an emergency, visitors may be able to seek a refund from the Welsh Revenue Authority. For instance, if a visitor's home is uninhabitable due to fire or flood.
- 2.15 Disabled people who pay additional levy costs when accompanied by a carer will also be able to claim a refund.

- 2.16 If all local authorities in Wales introduced a levy, it could generate up to £33 million a year across Wales. It is envisaged that registration will cost £1-2m and it will cost the WRA £1-2m to collect the levy.
- 2.17 Money raised from the levy can help communities respond to the costs associated with tourism such as street cleaning, waste collection, maintaining toilets, and preserving natural and cultural attractions for everyone to enjoy. This will benefit both visitors and residents in improving facilities and reducing the burden on local authorities.
- 2.18 Yet, there is some data outstanding before a decision can be made. Officers should report back when this information is available. In the intervening time, consultation with the local trade will be made to help inform the decision. The closing date for any submissions regarding the bill is 10th January 2025. However, there is ongoing dialogue with local government officers and Welsh Government.
- 2.19 Extensive research has been undertaken on behalf of Welsh Government into the possible economic impact of introducing a visitor levy. There is minimal evidence to indicate that visitor levies have an adverse economic impact and there is limited research concerning displacement effects. The research commissioned by the Welsh Government didn't find any displacement evidence, however, it is acknowledged that this is challenging to model as identifying those who chose not to visit a destination due to a levy is near impossible.

3. **Recommendation**

- 3.1 The Place Scrutiny Committee members are asked to provide their views on the introduction of a visitor levy in Blaenau Gwent, in order for officers to evaluate the cost and benefit to the local authority on the introduction of a visitor levy in Blaenau Gwent. This will enable officers to evaluate the response from both Scrutiny members and traders. The results of which will be brought back to scrutiny for consideration and then for final approval by Cabinet.

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

- 4.1 This topic supports the Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan 2022/27 in Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent, and resilient by supporting the Council to make Blaenau Gwent a welcoming, diverse, and thriving place to live and visit.
- 4.2 It supports the Blaenau Gwent Well Being objectives. The BGDMP is identified as a key supporting strategy to Create a better, enhanced environment and infrastructure that will benefit our communities, businesses, and visitors.

- 4.3 It supports the Blaenau Gwent Destination Management Plan 2020-25 specifically the key themes of
- Business Development
 - Challenging and changing perceptions
 - Partnership Working

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

There is no impact on budget at this stage but there will be options to increase revenue in future reports.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There are no risks, as they are delivered by internal staff and within existing budgets.

5.3 ***Legal***

There are no legal implications in the preferred choice.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

There are no HR implications arising from the recommendations in this report as all the activities are delivered within the existing staff structure.

5.5 ***Health and Safety***

There are no Health and Safety implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

There is no data available at this stage however, the consultation will provide information to inform future decisions.

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

There will be no impact on the public at this time.

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

There will be engagement with the relevant trade sector.

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

This report highlights the need to prepare for a future report that may have long term impacts on the tourism sector and the wider community.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working.***

There will be no partnership arrangements at present, but the relevant officers will work with WG/WRA in the future on the visitor accommodation Register.

6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

There will be close integration with the S151 Officer on future reports.

6.8 **Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

N/A

6.9 **Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)**

N/A

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The work will be monitored through the BG DMP and the S151 Officer.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- [*The Visitor Accommodation \(Register and Levy\) Etc. \(Wales\) Bill*](#)
- *Bill* (<https://senedd.wales/media/qlungcta/pri-ld16812-e.pdf>)
- *Explanatory Memorandum* (<https://senedd.wales/media/g5jpwwwh/pri-ld16812-em-e.pdf>)

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Agenda Item 8

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Place Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **11th March 2025**
Report Subject: **Blaenau Gwent Empty Property Strategy**
Portfolio Holder: **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Place & Environment.**
Report Submitted by: **Service Manager – Public Protection**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
11.2.25		03.03.25			11.3.25	9.4.25		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To report the outcomes of public consultation in relation to the Draft Blaenau Gwent Empty Property Strategy and to seek approval for the adoption of the strategy.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 Bringing empty properties back into use is a key priority for the Council Empty Properties are a waste. They can cause nuisance and environmental problems. They can be the focus for increased levels of crime, including drug abuse and represent a significant loss of revenue for the Council that could be spent on public services.
- 2.2 Empty properties make no sense to the public, neighbours, those in need of homes and in many cases, the owners themselves. In prioritising the tackling of empty properties, the Council can help to address Blaenau Gwent's current and projected housing needs by providing accommodation for owner occupation or renting whilst at the same time reducing the risk of nuisance and environmental problems. In some cases, demolishing and clearing unwanted and worn-out old buildings may be the best course of action.
- 2.3 Empty space above commercial units is also a wasted resource, particularly in town centres. Void spaces above shops and offices can be converted into residential units where this need can be demonstrated. This will also be a driving force to help the Council's aim of revitalising town centres.
- 2.4 Extensive academic research has shown that poor quality housing is a key determinant of poor health. Tackling empty homes and bringing them up to standard will play an important role in promoting and contributing to positive health and well-being for the residents of Blaenau Gwent, a key priority of a Marmot Council.

- 2.5 Dealing with Empty properties is a key Welsh Government priority, and the Council supports their focus in this respect. This Authority has a high number of empties and last year we adopted a new Council Tax Premium Policy relating to empty properties and second homes, which will be implemented from April 2025 onwards. As part of this approach, additional permanent staffing was approved, tasked with proactively working with owners of privately owned empty properties. This work also needs to be a key priority for all relevant Council departments and managers.
- 2.6 The refreshed Blaenau Gwent Empty Property Strategy (Appendix 1) sets out the range of initiatives available to the Council to help owners bring their empty homes back into use. The strategy document outlines the Authority's understanding of the current landscape, how properties become empty and the barriers to bringing them back into use. It aims to work proactively with empty property owners, providing relevant advice, support and incentives. Enforcement action, whilst necessary in many cases, will be a last resort. The Action Plan (Annex 1 of the strategy) is informed by the 3 key objectives of the strategy, namely:
1. To Promote and Educate Empty Homeowners and Stakeholders
 2. To undertake a Prioritised and Targeted Approach to Tackling Empty Properties
 3. To take appropriate enforcement action to effectively deal with empty properties.
- 2.7 Prior to finalisation, the strategy has been subject to Public Consultation during the second half 2024 and this report outlines the outcomes of that consultation.
- 2.7.1 **Public consultation.** This took place between 23 October and 18 November 2024 and consisted of general promotion via the Council's website and social media channels along with direct targeting of empty property owners, sourced from our Council Tax records. To this end, 296 emails were sent and 247 hard copy letters. The consultation consisted of an online questionnaire with the ability for questionnaires to be returned hard copy by mail.
- 2.7.2 The consultation consisted of 18 questions requesting views on matters including the clarity of the strategy, the aims and objectives, elements of the action plan, likely effectiveness and resources. 48 responses were received. In general, the document was well received and supported with strong support for the various actions to promote, educate and support empty property owners with the majority agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposed measures. Respondents generally agreed with a targeted approach and there was support for using enforcement powers for non-complaint homeowners and providing support during early intervention to prevent property deterioration.

2.7.3 A further summary of the main points from the survey is as follows:

1. Clarity and Priority:

- 85% of respondents found the strategy clear and easy to understand.
- 67% felt the strategy clearly explained why empty properties are a priority.

2. Effectiveness and Agreement:

- 59% believe the strategy will be effective or very effective in tackling empty homes.
- 85% agree with the overall aim to bring empty properties back into use.

3. Broad Actions:

- Support for initiatives to help empty homeowners: 79% agree or strongly agree.
- Proactive engagement with owners: 76% agree or strongly agree.
- Financial assistance schemes: 70% agree or strongly agree.

4. Targeted Approach:

- Using data to identify empty homes: 68% agree or strongly agree.
- Effective use of resources: 79% agree or strongly agree.
- Community reporting: 76% agree or strongly agree.

5. Two-Pronged Approach:

- Early intervention and support: 69% agree or strongly agree.
- Use of enforcement powers: 62% agree or strongly agree.

2.7.4 Question 11 of the survey invited some general comments on the draft strategy. A summary of the key themes from those comments is as follows:

1. Shortages of affordable housing:

- Criticism of Tai Calon for not building new houses.
- Utilisation of empties to add to the affordable housing stock

2. Support for Property Owners:

- Suggestions for more flexible and supportive measures for property owners.
- Calls for a helpline for anonymous complaints to avoid retaliation.

3. Challenges with Renovations:

- Difficulties in finding reliable builders and repair companies.
- Issues with the grant and loan schemes taking too long to process.

4. Impact on Neighbours:

- Empty properties negatively affecting neighbouring homes.
- Reports of empty properties attracting crime and devaluing neighbourhoods.

5. Enforcement and Legal Measures:

- Support for legal proactive measures to address long-term empty properties.
- Mixed opinions on the use of enforcement powers, with some preferring early intervention and support.
- Shortage of Council resources to deliver the strategy

6. Tenant and Landlord Issues:

- Concerns about the Welsh government's changes favouring tenants over landlords.
- Experiences of landlords struggling with problematic tenants and lengthy eviction processes.

2.7.5 74% (34) of respondents were residents of Blaenau Gwent with over half of these from Ebbw Vale. 35% (16) of the respondents were empty property owners with 13 of these stating that their property was awaiting repair and 2 For Sale.

2.7.6 The detailed report on the survey outcomes is available at Appendix 2

2.7.7 Member consultation. All elected members were initially written to and invited to comment on the draft strategy during July and August 2024. No comments relating to the strategy were received. Members were provided with a further opportunity to comment as part of the public consultation outlined above.

2.7.8 Officer consultation. Internal professional officers were consulted. Comments were received which led to changes in the wording of the strategy and the action plan. One comment received related to the risk associated with points 24 and 25 on the action plan and the limited legal support resources available to support these actions. Consideration should be given to increasing the legal capacity on a permanent basis with tackling empty properties being seen as a priority.

2.7.9 Partner consultation. The Registered Social Landlord (RSLs) partners and Estate/Letting Agents were contacted during October and November 2024 and invited to comment on the strategy. There were no responses from the 4 RSLs in relation to the content of the strategy albeit regular dialogue at operational level continues in relation to specific projects/cases, as necessary. There were no direct or identifiable responses from Estate/Letting Agents (11 were contacted).

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 Option 1 (Preferred) – That Members comment on the consultation outcomes and supports the adoption of the Blaenau Gwent Empty Property Strategy.

3.2 Option 2 – That Members comment on the consultation outcomes, does not support the adoption of the Blaenau Gwent Empty Property Strategy and advises on changes/amendments to the strategy.

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

4.1 The Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan (2022/27) is a requirement of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and aligns to this legislation along with the Gwent Public Service Board (PSB) well-being plan and the eight Marmot principles. It identifies four priorities, known as well-being Objectives, which set out the direction for the Authority. Tackling Empty

Properties specifically feed into the themes are 3 of the Plan priorities, namely:

- **Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities.** Dealing with empty properties will assist in reducing carbon emissions, providing modernised energy efficient homes and supporting growth and well-being and connects communities.
- **An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place.** In dealing with empty properties, the Authority will work in partnership to provide high quality services to meet local circumstances in dealing with empty properties and improve the quality of life and well-being within the community by contributing to meeting housing need.
- **Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient.** Dealing with empty properties will contribute to a reduction in community safety problems. This will increase the resilience of Communities, where more people are welcome and safe, and it will minimise dependency and maximise independence.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

The adoption of this strategy do not have any direct budgetary implications.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There are no direct risks resulting from the adoption of this strategy

5.3 ***Legal***

There are no direct legal implications relating to the adoption of this strategy.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

There are no direct implications resulting from the adoption of this strategy. Officers from Public Protection (Environmental Health & Housing Solutions), Planning, Estates, Regeneration, Council Tax and Resources have contributed to the development of this strategy. At the time of writing, and Empty Property Environmental Health Officer Post has been recruited following an internal advert and take up their post in May 2025.

5.5 ***Health and Safety***

No direct implications.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

According to the BGCBC council tax data on the 1st of April 2024, the number of properties that had been empty for 6 months or more was 854. Monitoring performance is a key feature of the strategy document (section 3.3).

6.1.1 The latest performance information is outlined in Appendix 3.

- 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***
Reduction in local nuisance, environmental problems, crime anti-social behaviour, loss of Council tax income. Increase in the supply of good quality affordable housing.
- 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***
As outlined in the report and appendices.
- 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
The strategy looks long-term with a view to increasing the supply of good quality affordable housing.
- 6.5 ***Preventative focus***
As outlined in the strategy document – relating to preventing properties from becoming long term empty. See also paragraph 6.2, above.
- 6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
The strategy relies on partnership working with property owners, registered social landlords and relevant others
- 6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***
See also Paragraph 5.4, above. The Action Plan to the strategy relies on continued cross- departmental working with the common goal of dealing with empty properties.
- 6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***
Wherever possible, property improvements resulting from the work outlined as part of this strategy will contribute to the decarbonisation agenda.
- 6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***
See Appendix 4

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 Reports as required to Scrutiny, Cabinet, Council and Executive Leadership, as necessary.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

[Empty Properties \(senedd.wales\)](https://www.senedd.wales).

[Reporting an Empty Property | Blaenau Gwent CBC](#)

[Landlord Loans | Blaenau Gwent CBC](#)

[Housing Standards | Blaenau Gwent CBC](#)

[National Empty Homes Grants - Blaenau Gwent](#)

List of Appendices

1. Draft Empty Property Strategy (including Annexes)
2. Consultation outcomes
3. Performance Information
4. IIA

Blaenau Gwent Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2025-2030

DRAFT

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Foreword



The Strategy voices our dedication to prevent and deal with empty homes...

Cllr Helen Cunningham, Deputy Leader of the Council / Cabinet Member Place and Environment

This strategy sets out our commitment to prevent and tackle empty homes in Blaenau Gwent. Empty homes not only attract anti-social behaviour, but also waste valuable resources when there is a growing demand for housing. This strategy shows our dedication to prevent and deal with empty homes, by helping owners to make them useful again. We also understand, however, that sometimes we need to take enforcement action to resolve some properties. Formal enforcement action is always a last option, and this document explains when and how we will do this.

This Empty Homes Strategy has been created together with a number of other housing strategies and policies that, collectively, express our vision to ensure everyone can access a safe, secure home in sustainable communities where people want to live.

1. Introduction and Overview

This strategy sets out the Council's plans to tackle the high number of empty homes in the county borough. It also sets out the range of initiatives available to the Council to help owners bring their empty homes back into use. This strategy only refers to private sector empty homes and does not extend to empty homes owned by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

Private sector empty homes represent a wasted resource, an ongoing financial expense, and in many cases a missed opportunity to provide much-needed affordable housing. They can also cause blight to communities and distress to residents affected by their unsightly appearance if the property has been left in a poor state of repair. They can attract vandals, squatters, unauthorised occupiers, and other crime and anti-social behaviour. They can impact on the value of neighbouring properties and incur significant costs to the Council, Police, Fire Authority, and Community Safety Partnerships dealing with the associated problems.

Extensive academic research has shown that poor quality housing is a key determinant of poor health. Tackling empty homes and bringing them up to standard will play an important role in promoting and contributing to positive health and well-being for the residents of Blaenau Gwent, a key priority of the

Council. Blaenau Gwent's Empty Property Officers are committed to working with empty property owners and prospective owners to encourage them to bring their properties back into beneficial use and where possible, prevent properties from becoming empty in the first instance.

According to the BGCBC council tax data on the 1st of April 2024, the number of properties that had been empty for 6 months or more was 854.

In response to addressing this Welsh Government priority and the high number of empty homes in the county borough, the Council accepts that it needs to provide additional staffing resources tasked with proactively working with owners of privately owned empty properties.

If an owner is uncooperative or obstructive the Council will consider using the wide range of formal enforcement action available to bring the property back into beneficial use.

Formal enforcement action is always a last resort, but the Council believes that leaving properties stand empty for long periods when there is a shortage of housing in the County Borough to meet the needs of our communities is not acceptable.

The main objective of this strategy is to maximise the number of empty homes brought back into use.

Therefore, doing nothing is not an option.

2. National and Local Context

2.1 National Priorities

Welsh Government acknowledges the benefits of returning empty homes to use. In October 2019, it responded to a report from the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee on Empty Properties, 2019, committing to tackling empty properties. The Empty Property paper contained a number of recommendations. The Paper set a target of bringing 5,000 empty homes back into occupation across Wales during the fifth Assembly term. Link to Welsh Government website - [Empty Properties \(senedd.wales\)](https://www.senedd.wales).

The Council supports Welsh Government's focus on returning empty homes back into beneficial use and have developed an action plan. The action plan sets out the aims and objectives of how the Council will implement some of Welsh Government's recommendations and tackle empty properties within the Borough. The action plan supports the implementation of this strategy.

The actions set out within this strategy will assist in helping the Council achieve the goals set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015. The seven key goals are as follows:

- **A Prosperous Wales:** bringing empty homes back into use will be financially beneficial to the community as a whole.
- **A Resilient Wales:** bringing empty homes back into use will help promote and support social and economic resilience.
- **A More Equal Wales:** the beneficial use of empty homes can help tackle homelessness issues and provide good quality housing for vulnerable persons.
- **A Healthier Wales:** poor quality housing is a key determinant of poor health. Improving the housing stock will have a positive effect on health and well-being.

- **A Wales of Cohesive Communities:** tackling empty homes will positively impact the community as a whole in terms of helping to reduce anti-social behaviour and improving the general amenity of an area.
- **A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language:** tackling empty homes will assist in improving and maintaining the cultural heritage of Blaenau Gwent. The production of bilingual documentation associated with empty homes will help to promote and further the Welsh language.
- **A Globally Responsible Wales:** Whilst empty homes in Wales don't directly impact on the global scale tackling them and making use of a wasted resource will improve the area as a whole and potentially lead to investment in schemes and projects designed to make a positive contribution to global wellbeing.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 also sets out 5 ways of working that should be adhered to. These are as follows:

- **Long-Term:** Housing is a long-term asset. The return to beneficial use of empty homes will have significant long-term benefits to individuals and communities, safeguarding the ability of future generations to meet their long-term needs.
- **Integration:** Empty homes negatively affect economic and social health and wellbeing so tackling this issue will help improve these key issues in a wider context. The strategy looks to integrate property and community improvements that will benefit and transform lives and communities, bringing together a variety of stakeholders to deliver long term sustainable benefits for lives and communities.
- **Involvement:** This strategy identifies how the Council will work in unison with stakeholders and members of the community to tackle empty homes and will aim to help meet the needs of specific communities.
- **Collaboration:** This strategy sets out a plan of how the Council will work with stakeholders and other bodies to achieve its aims and objectives.
- **Prevention:** This strategy aims to tackle the current issues associated with empty homes, prevent further issues from developing and make significant improvements for the benefit of the residents of Blaenau Gwent. Implementation of the strategy will result in significant visual improvements to housing and their surrounding environments (improved look and feel) helping to prevent anti-social behaviour and enviro-crime.

2.2 Local Strategic Context

The Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan (2022/27) is a requirement of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and aligns to this legislation along with the Gwent Public Service Board (PSB) well-being plan and the eight Marmot principles. It identifies four priorities, known as well-being Objectives, which set out the direction for the Authority. Tackling Empty Properties specifically feed into the themes are 3 of the Plan priorities, namely:

- **Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities.** Dealing with empty properties will assist in reducing carbon emissions, providing modernised energy efficient homes and supporting growth and well-being and connects communities.
- **An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place.** In dealing with empty properties, the Authority will work in partnership to provide high

quality services to meet local circumstances in dealing with empty properties, and improve the quality of life and well-being within the community by contributing to meeting housing need.

- **Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient.** Dealing with empty properties will contribute to a reduction in community safety problems. This will increase the resilience of Communities, where more people are welcome and safe, and it will minimise dependency and maximise independence.

This strategy is also consistent with the following local authority strategic and policy documents.

- Local Housing Strategy
- Local Development Plan
- Regeneration Strategy
- Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy.
- Public Protection and Environmental Enforcement Policy.

2.3 Local Delivery Context

The Council wants to explore a range of alternative models for empty property owners who either want to repair, privately rent or sell their property. This will include working with property owners in the private sector along with registered social landlords who may wish to purchase empties from private owners to help meet local affordable housing need.

By targeting empty homes and bringing them back into use we aim to:

- Improve the environment around the empty homes and reduce associated incidences of anti-social behaviour.
- Increase the supply of housing and the affordability of housing.
- Improve housing conditions in the private sector; and
- Assist in the promotion of the good health and wellbeing of people living in the private sector.

A detailed action plan has been developed to support the successful delivery of this strategy's priorities (Annex1).

2.4 Housing Needs within Blaenau Gwent

The Council recognises the difficulties residents face when trying to find a good quality, affordable home. There is extreme pressure on the housing market throughout the Borough from increased demand on the homelessness team, a long waiting list on the Common Housing Register, unaffordable private sector housing, and a shortage of affordable housing, especially for those most in need such as first-time buyers.

This has been exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis, changes to the asylum dispersal arrangements and the war in the Ukraine.

We know from analysing key data sources and from monitoring access to Council services that many people continue to struggle to access good quality, affordable accommodation throughout the borough. The cost of owning or privately renting a home continues to increase year on year, exacerbating the affordability issues further.

As at 1st April 2024, there were approximately 2,700 applications on the Council's Common Housing Register from people requiring social housing. There also been a significant increase in the number of people seeking homelessness assistance from the Council and requiring temporary accommodation to alleviate their situation.

Increasing the supply of accommodation in the borough by returning empty homes back into use will help the Council mitigate some of these housing pressures.

3. Understanding Empty Properties

3.1 Why Properties Become Empty

We know from supporting empty property owners that their homes may become empty for a variety of different reasons including:

- The normal process of buying, selling, and letting properties (market churn).
- A property that is difficult to rent or sell due to its physical state, requiring renovation beyond the budget of the owner.
- A property that is difficult to rent or sell due to location, poor facilities, infrastructure, etc.
- When the property has been abandoned by an untraceable owner.
- When there is an issue of unresolved ownership, often as a result of the previous owner's death. Resolving ownership can be a lengthy legal process, during which time the property may remain empty.
- Property holding, when a property is left empty due to speculative investment, through acquiring property through inheritance, or where partners co-habit leaving the second property empty. Where the property is adjoined to a business and the owner does not wish to sell or let it.
- Due to an aging population, older property owners may move into alternative older person's accommodation for care or support needs. They may choose not to sell the property which can result in it remaining empty for the short or long term.

3.2 Defining Empty Properties

A long-term empty property is defined as private sector residential properties that are liable for Council Tax and have been unoccupied for 6 months or more on the 1st of April. The definition is taken from the Data Cymru's revised set of national performance measures. See below.

3.3 Monitoring Performance

Information collected by Data Cymru in relation to the above pi's is very important to enable local authorities to give an account of their performance to the public. The Council's performance regarding empty homes is currently measured using two parameters:

- **EMH001 - the percentage of empty private properties brought back into use during the year through direct action by the local authority.** This is defined as an empty property that is liable for Council Tax, which has been unoccupied for a period of 6 months or more.

- **EMH002 - the percentage of empty private properties brought back into use during the year through direct action by the local authority.** This is defined as an empty property that is liable for Council Tax, which has been unoccupied for a period of 12 months or more.

It is important to also recognise the value in providing additional dwellings through conversion has on increasing the housing stock within Blaenau Gwent. As such, the Authority will continue to measure:

- **BG-EMH (PAM45)** - the number of additional dwellings created in a year where properties are converted/sub-divided into additional dwellings to bring them back into use as a result of local authority action.

3.4 Problematic Empty Properties that are out of Valuation.

Some empty properties can have their Council Tax band deleted by the Valuation Office Agency under certain circumstances i.e. where a property is truly derelict or under major renovation (visit [Council Tax: renovations and repairs – Valuation Office Agency](#)). Such properties are not included in the Council Tax service's empty property data set (see Section 6.4, below). Such properties will be dealt with by Officers as they arise, in accordance with risk and the Authority's enforcement policy, with a view to bringing them back into use and valuation for Council tax purposes.

3.5 Increasing Supply

Increasing housing supply is a key priority of the Council. This not only includes bringing an existing property back into use as a home but also maximising the potential of the property in providing additional homes. Empty Property Officers will offer support and work with other relevant departments such as regeneration, planning and building control to support the residential element of any mixed-use development or any change of use from commercial to residential to provide additional homes.

3.6 Challenges with Bringing Empty Properties Back To Use

There are many challenges involved with bringing empty homes back into use including:

- Being unable to cover the cost of making the property habitable or saleable.
- Inheriting the property but the new owner not having the resources, time, or motivation to deal with it.
- Property is up for sale or being repaired.
- Inherited the property but have not decided what to do with it.
- Some empty properties are left completely abandoned by the owner. These properties will remain empty until the authority intervenes.

Tackling empty properties can be extremely resource intensive. Although there may be some quick wins, through building rapport, reputation and momentum in offering incentives and taking meaningful enforcement action. However, some difficult cases can take several years to resolve.

4. Bringing Empty Properties Back Into Use

4.1 Empty Property Action Plan

The overall aim of the Empty Property Action Plan (Annex 1) is to maximise the return to beneficial use of empty properties within Blaenau Gwent thereby increasing the number of homes available to both rent and own, improving the built environment, decreasing the number of both vacant and underutilised sites as well as supporting diversification of town centres.

The Empty Property Action Plan identifies key actions required to meet the 3 objectives to achieve the Council's aim:

Objective 1: Promote, educate and support empty property owners and prospective purchasers/ developers.

Objective 2: Prioritisation and targeted approach in addressing empty properties.

Objective 3: Take appropriate enforcement action to effectively deal with empty properties.

4.2 Empty Property Officers - Environmental Health

Having specialist officers focusing on bringing empty properties back into use is an essential aspect of achieving the Action Plan's ambitious aim and meet the Council's priorities, as outlined in section 1.

The benefits of specialist officers include:

- Maximisation of the return of empty properties back into beneficial use thereby increasing the supply and quality of accommodation within the borough.
- Dedicated staff resources to progress empty homes work programme - including both proactive and reactive work.
- Increasing opportunities to address unmet housing need, including homelessness and demand.
- Addressing the strategic objectives identified in the Council's Local Housing Strategy and other strategic documents as they relate to empty properties.
- Delivering financial support to empty homeowners in accordance with the Authority's Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy, in relation to local grants/ loans as well as national products, such as the Valleys Taskforce (VTF) - links to supporting employment regarding contractors etc.
- Delivering on Welsh Government's 5 year Empty Property Enforcement Agenda.
- Financial benefit to the authority in recovering existing debt already owed through unpaid council taxes, social service intervention and/or works in default.
- Ensuring Council Tax/rates are payable for the property going forward.
- Assisting council tax department to keep accurate data and find liable persons ensuring they maximise their revenue.
- Assisting other departments with empty property engagement and finding ownership details, carry out works in default and ensure a long-term solution to avoid the need for their long-term involvement.
- Helping economic growth of an area by increasing population spending in local shops, attending education and as such helping regenerate areas.

- Reducing waste of resources and cost to the authority when officers from various departments attending site to deal with antisocial behaviours and problematic empties.
- Improving community cohesion, and general visual amenity.
- Co-production, co-ordination and joint implementation of strategies and initiatives, with internal and external partners, for the return to beneficial use of empty homes and non-residential properties.
- Development of relevant partnerships and initiatives to enable sustainable solutions for empty property owners, including working proactively with internal departments such as Council Tax, Legal and Planning as well as external organisations such as the Police and Registered Social landlords working closely with regeneration officers to enable empty residential and non-residential properties to be brought back into use, as part of strategic town centre improvements and for other key regeneration initiatives.
- Full utilisation of grant and loan funding streams. Maximising financial investment opportunities in the Borough.
- Provision of centralised support, advice, and assistance to anyone involved with empty properties.

5. Promote and Educate Empty Home Owners and Stakeholders

5.1 Maximise Every Opportunity for Support

Providing initiatives that offer empty homeowners various options to bring their properties back into use is vital. Officers will work closely and assist where necessary to ensure every initiative and funding opportunity provided by Welsh Government, the Council and third-party organisations is maximised. The team will also signpost owners effectively to access any funding or opportunities available or assist them if they wish to sell their empty properties.

5.2 Proactive Engagement

It is vitally important that the empty property officers work with owners and stakeholders providing as much help, assistance, and education as possible to encourage owners to bring their properties back into use informally. Officers will continue to develop strong branding to promote their works in bringing empty back into use, which will be used to promote the service and encourage owners to engage.

Other actions to be undertaken by the Council to help increase the number of empty homes returned to use include:

- Review and Relaunch the Authority's Empty Property Information Pack to inform and support empty property owners.
- Review and Re-launch the dedicated pages on the Council's Websites.
- Officers will regularly present at Landlord forum meetings to keep landlords updated.
- Social media campaigns to promote Empty Property work to raise awareness around empty properties.
- Engage with stakeholders including local estate agents and auction houses property investors and landlords.
- Collaborative working with other council departments.
- Technical support and advice to landlords.
- Partnership working with key stakeholders.

- Working with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

5.3 Incentivising Owners

The Council's Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy provides details of all the forms of financial assistance available locally (subject to funding sources being available). This includes support for empty property owners, as follows:

- Loans to Let (maximum £35,000 per unit of accommodation)
- Loans to Sell – max £35,000 per unit
- Owner Occupier Loans – Max £35,000
- National (Valley's Task Force) Empty Homes Grants (Owner-Occupiers) – Max £25,000 per unit
- Private Sector Leasing Scheme – Grants available for renovating properties where landlords agree to lease their properties back to the Council for affordable (social) housing lettings (subject to conditions).

Officers will also actively seek to maximise innovative financial and other solutions in partnership with other stakeholders, for example with Regeneration colleagues, in relation to town centre mixed-use (commercial/residential), Housing Associations and others, to help owners with repairing and bringing empty properties back into use.

6. Prioritisation and Targeted Approach To Tackling Empty Properties

6.1 Evidence Based Approach

Officers will use Council Tax data to identify properties that have been vacant for 6 months or more from the 1st of April each year. The data is cleansed to remove the properties that are exempt under the Data Cymru performance indicator definition. Using the list ensures a strategic approach to the targeting of empty homes for intervention.

6.2 Effective Use of Resources

A two-pronged approach is used by Officers to ensure the most effective use of resources:

1. Support and encourage recently empty homes back into use, preventing them from becoming problematic empty properties:

- Properties that are recently empty, less than 24 months.

2. Tackle problematic empty properties:

- Properties that have been empty the longest: 10 years +, 5-10 years, and 2-5 years.
- Properties that are problematic and subject to complaints.
- Properties with the largest debt owing to the authority including works in default debt and council tax debt.
- Properties without ownership details under council tax.
- Properties that are subject to escheat (ownerless) in conjunction with the Crown solicitors

- The Council is mindful of fluctuations in the housing market and the need for the prioritisation criteria to be flexible to adapt over the life of the strategy to address changes in priorities, local needs, and Welsh Government financial products.

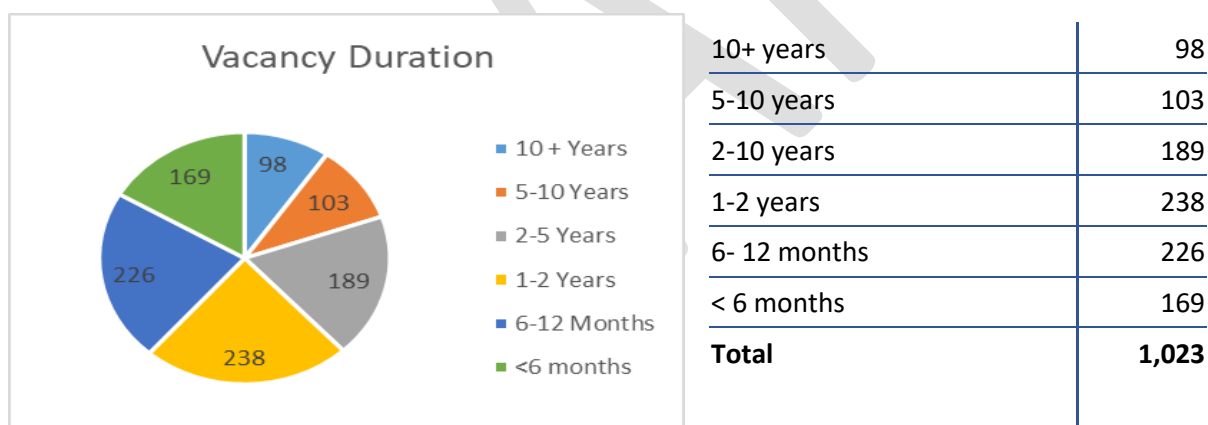
6.3 Mapping Empty Properties

Going forward the empty homes data will be ‘GPS mapped’ making it easier to identify patterns/trends or concentrated areas where more empty properties may be situated. Mapping will allow the team to analyse this data to further develop the prioritisation system.

6.4 Current Breakdown of Empty Homes Within Blaenau Gwent

Understanding the empty home data is vital when deciding the prioritisation criteria for targeting properties. As shown below over half of our empties have been empty for 2 years or less. Therefore, it is vital that these are considered swiftly to establish whether they are being actively addressed through the market and to prevent them from becoming long-term, problematic empties. Some properties within the 10+ year category have been empty for several decades. It is very unlikely that these empty properties will be returned to use without intervention from the Council and will therefore likely require enforcement action.

Number Of Years an Empty Home Has Been Empty



(Blaenau Gwent council tax data April 2024)

N.B Empty property council tax data includes dwellings entitled to statutory exemptions

6.5 Empty Property Complaints

The Council must encourage the community and neighbours of empty homes to report any concerns or problems any empty home is causing. The aim is to make it easy to report concerns using a ‘complaint about empties’ enquiry form on the dedicated website that will be created.

In addition to receiving direct complaints, the empty property officers will carry out joint investigations with other Specialist Environmental Health colleagues to investigate complaints from neighbours of empty homes who are experiencing issues such as dampness, mould, defecting guttering, or

overgrown gardens. Officers will also offer support to other departments dealing with an empty property, such as Building Control. When investigating a complaint, Officers will not only address the immediate issue subject to the complaint, but also use the service request as an opportunity to engage with the owners to find a long-term solution to bring the property back into use. Any owners unwilling to work informally to resolve issues will be subject to enforcement action where applicable.

7. A Two-Pronged Approach to Tackling Empty Homes

7.1 Preventing Properties from Becoming Problematic Empty Homes

Over half of the empty homes within Blaenau Gwent have been empty for less than 24 months. Empty property officers recognise the benefit of early intervention to support and encourage owners of properties that have only recently become empty. This will help ensure the property is not left to deteriorate, becoming a problematic empty. The owners of these properties will be contacted by Officers giving them the advice pack and asking them to contact us to confirm their intentions in bringing the property back into use. Officers will take the opportunity to discuss the support and options available to help the owner. Where appropriate, Officers will also agree a reasonable timeframe with the owner for action to be taken.

7.2 Tackling Problematic Empty Properties

It is important to recognise that taking enforcement action is very time-consuming and will require significant resourcing. Therefore, it is important to choose the most problematic properties to take forward for formal action such as enforcement. This will be done by carrying out a risk assessment of all priority properties.

7.3 Risk Assessments

A Risk Assessment Inspection approach has been developed to prioritise which properties are escalated for enforcement consideration. Properties will be assessed against their complaint/enforcement history, current conditions and appearance, anti-social/community impact, length of time vacant etc. The risk assessment will provide a scoring of high, medium, and low. The highest priority empty homes will be proactively addressed initially. Local Housing Need may also be a factor in deciding whether to act. All properties that have scored high will be considered for enforcement action. It is important to recognise that due to the complexity of taking enforcement action the numbers will be low.

7.4 Initial Engagement

In the first instance, the empty homeowner will be approached and offered advice, encouragement, support, and education on ways to bring their properties back into use. However, this strategy is clear that 'doing nothing is not an option'.

Where owners refuse to cooperate or cannot be traced, the Council will consider the most appropriate enforcement powers available (Annex 2). This may include the use of powers to carry out works in default and recover the debt.

7.5 Tracing Owners

One of the main problems encountered when dealing with empty properties is property ownership. In cases where the property owner cannot be traced there are various options available to attempt to trace the owner for example:

- Checking various data sources such as Council Tax data, Land Registry search and Probate search.
- Engaging with neighbours, councillors, the local community and other stakeholders
- Placing posters on the empty property and/or utilising social media asking for contact to be made.

Officers will carry out all reasonable enquires to trace the owner or the person responsible for the property such as the next of kin. However, when the owner is untraceable all correspondence will be attached to the empty property.

8. Potential Legal Remedies

8.1 Deciding on The Best Course Of Action

When deciding to formally act to deal with an empty home, it is important to consider the wider context of bringing the property back into use and the mechanisms in place to recover the debt.

Certain legislation is more appropriate when considering enforced sales proceedings under the Law of Property Act 1925. Details of the Enforcement Action available is listed in Annex 2.

Some high-priority empty homes are in poor repair but may have an owner that ensures the property does not cause ongoing public health issues or pays off any small to medium debt register against the property. This type of situation makes it very difficult to find a long-term solution. It's important that this doesn't discourage the Council from dealing proactively with this type of property, but the risk of challenge and complexity involved should be acknowledged. If the owner is unwilling to engage or is untraceable, a legal warrant might be required to facilitate a housing inspection and to allow access for works in default if permitted via the legislation.

End

Version: /2/25

Mae'r dogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

This document is available in Welsh

Annex 1: Action Plan

1. OVERALL AIM OF PLAN

To maximise the return to beneficial use of empty properties within Blaenau Gwent County Borough thereby increasing the number of homes available to both rent and owner occupy,

improving the built environment, decreasing the number of both vacant and underutilised sites as well as supporting diversification of town centres.

2. OBJECTIVES OF PLAN AND ASSOCIATED ACTIONS

Objective 1: Promote, educate and support empty property owners and prospective purchasers/developers

Action What are we going to do?	What we will do How are we going to do it?	By whom	By when	Monitoring Measure Target
1) Ensure up to date advice and information relating to empty properties is readily available on the Council's webpages.	Overhaul existing webpages and develop revised webpages to provide comprehensive information including advice and financial assistance available to assist in bringing empty properties back into beneficial use. The website will have links to signpost interested parties to relevant services. A 'contact me' function will also be built into the web page to encourage engagement. (Special rules will apply if the building is listed)	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Housing IT web specialist Planning Officers	Initial scoping exercise to understand web site and online form development to be held by November 2024. Forward work programme to be provided thereafter.	Scoping exercise to fully understand web site and online form development. Translation of web site content into Welsh language. Revision of webpages. The number of visits to the website per month. The number of enquires received via the contact us function.
2) Empty Residential Property Information Pack.	Revise and update the Authority's 'Empty Residential Property Information Pack' with key information including advice and financial assistance available to assist in bringing empty properties back into beneficial use for owner occupation, rental etc. including VAT information, loans, grants, leasing and selling advice.	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	September 2025	Production of Empty residential Property Information Pack. Number of Empty Residential Property Packs issued. Number of Packs downloaded from the website.
3) Media releases engagements and promotion	Regular media releases such as news articles, social media posts to promote the empty properties work including the support available and the empty property pack.	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Communications Officers	Regular intervals	

Action What are we going to do?	What we will do How are we going to do it?	By whom	By when	Monitoring Measure Target
4) Maximise financial investment opportunities and utilise all available capital funding streams.	<p>Continue to offer, deliver and promote financial assistance to owners in respect of the interest-free loans.</p> <p>Explore and regularly review any other available funding streams such as external grant programmes when offered by Welsh Government.</p> <p>Publish all information relating to the availability of financial assistance on the 'Blaenau Gwent Homes website' and update/amend Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy as necessary.</p> <p>Regeneration Officers will continue to bid for WG funding (such as Transforming Towns, through Town Centre Placemaking Grants) to bring long-term empty town centre properties back into beneficial use.</p> <p>Funding has been secured in the 2024/25 financial year for a town centre grant scheme aimed at town centre property improvements. This funding is now fully subscribed. Details of any successor programmes are currently not known at this stage.</p> <p>The Regeneration team will also use BGCBC's core-funded Blaenau Gwent Enterprise Fund grant scheme to assist with town centre property improvements, although the scheme is very popular and is accessible to businesses/properties across the County Borough.</p> <p>Consider use of other capital funding such as Social Housing Grant / Transitional Capital Accommodation to assist with the return to beneficial use of empty properties.</p> <p>Listed Buildings – Check on funding streams available as heritage grants and update relevant officer with information for the website.</p>	<p>Specialist EHO (Empty Properties)</p> <p>Team Manager – Housing Solutions</p> <p>Housing IT Specialist</p> <p>Team Leader - Regeneration Opportunities</p> <p>Residential Development Officer</p> <p>Planning Officers</p>	Regular reviews throughout the timeframe	<p>Number of enquiries for financial assistance annually.</p> <p>Number of formal completions relating to financial assistance annually.</p> <p>Number of properties returned to beneficial use annually.</p>
5) To deliver National (VTF) Empty Homes Grants..	Continue to deliver the National Empty Homes Grant Scheme for owner-occupiers. Ensure all associated properties are bought back into beneficial use.	Housing Grants Surveyors Team Manager – Housing Solutions	Ongoing	<p>Number of completed national empty homes grants.</p> <p>Number of properties that received national empty homes funding that are returned to beneficial use.</p>
6) Developers list of people who are interested in buying empty properties.	To continue to hold and maintain a list of developers, landlords and investors who are interested in purchasing empty properties. This will enable introductions between sellers and purchasers with a view to purchase, redevelopment and/or re-occupation of empty properties.	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	Ongoing	<p>Continuation of developers list.</p> <p>Number of introductions enabled.</p>
7) Work with local estate agencies and auction houses to offer discount products.	Engage with local auction houses and estate agents to negotiate a discount fee and favorable conditions for empty properties owners referred via LA.	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	September 2025	Number of referrals made.
8) Offer technical support and advice on bringing an empty residential property back into use, including producing schedules of works for grant/loan works, estimate costings and general technical advice.	<p>Visit to give property specific advice on the work required to bring the property to a reasonable standard and the estimated cost of the works.</p> <p>Special advice will be required if the building is listed.</p>	<p>Housing Grants Surveyors</p> <p>Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer</p> <p>Planning Officers</p>	Ongoing	<p>Number of advice visits made.</p> <p>Grant/Loan works completed with technical assistance</p>

<p>9) Engage with Social Housing Stakeholders to discuss potential joint working schemes</p>	<p>Meet with all social housing providers working in Blaenau Gwent County Borough to discuss ways to work together on projects to bring empty properties back into use. This will include Listed Buildings (where applicable).</p>	<p>Team Manager – Housing Solutions Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Planning Officers</p>	<p>Initial meeting by February 2025 Ongoing</p>	<p>Ongoing meeting programme.</p>
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Objective 2: Prioritisation and targeted approach in addressing empty properties

Action What are we going to do?	What we will do How are we going to do it?	By whom	By when	Monitoring Measure Target
10) Submit a report to potentially increase council tax premium on properties that have been empty for over 12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather intelligence on the actual number of properties that the council would be eligible to charge a premium. Carry out an Equality Impact Assessment. Produce a report outlining the rationale for increasing the council tax premium and initiate a public consultation on the proposal. This will include the outcome of public consultation. Seek approval for additional staffing resources for Revenues and Public Protection to assist with the implementation of this strategy. 	Service Manager – Revenues and Charging Assessments Chief Finance Officer	July 2024	Number of properties charged a premium following adoption/ implementation of new policy.
11) Analyse the council tax and other data to fully understand the extent of the empty homes problem within the borough.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a comprehensive list of all empty homes within the Borough looking at several categorisations such as location, level of relevant debts, housing need and number of years home has been empty. Complementary surveys to be undertaken as necessary. Spatially map the data to assist with a strategic targeted approach moving forward. 	Service Manager – Revenues and Charging Assessments Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	July 2025	Development of comprehensive list of empty homes within the Borough. Spatially mapping of data Identification of properties having negative impact.
12) Agree prioritisation criteria of empty properties.	Agree on the criteria used to prioritise empty properties and the risk assessment template	Service Manager – Public Protection Team Manager – Housing Solutions Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Regeneration Officers	July 2025	Agreed Prioritisation tool.
13) Establish a priority list of properties to target proactively	Identify high priority empty dwellings to target to bring back to beneficial use	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	September 2025	Identification / list of target properties for both residential and mixed (commercial and residential use).
14) Proactively target the priority empty properties identified in action 13.	Use the information collected to send initial letters, questionnaires and empty property packs. Target a manageable number of 20-30 per month working down the priority list. Follow up letters to be sent to any that don't respond before escalating to the officer for further intervention.	Business Support Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	Ongoing from September 2025	Response to questionnaire. Engagement and number of properties returned back to use.

15) Target properties that have recently fallen into the empty property criteria to prevent them becoming long term empties.	Soft approach mail drop with Empty Property Pack to all empty property owners within in the 6-12-month empty bracket to prevent them becoming long term empty Information and advice action only.	Business Support Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	March 2025	Number of letters sent. Number of engagements.
16) Principal Town Centre Empty Property Lists	Undertake/update town centre vacancy surveys that will be used to monitor/identify/assess long-term vacant commercial/mixed use properties.	Regeneration Officers Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	December 2025	Regular monitoring of the town centres will take place, with properties added or removed from the list as required.
17) Principal Town Centre Vacancy Action Plan	Owners and/or agents of priority properties to be targeted to bring the properties back into beneficial use through grant schemes (where possible) or by assisting in identifying a tenant or meanwhile use. Where applicable, notices may be served when the building is in an extremely poor or dangerous condition.	Regeneration Officers Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Planning/Building Control Officers	Owners will be contacted/notices served in Q4 25/26	Number of grants administered to long-term vacant property owners. Number of properties brought back into beneficial use through targeted intervention.
18) Partnership working with Private Sector Landlords to offer tenant/owner matching scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a pool of accessible quality, affordable private rented accommodation and to provide a long-term housing solution for homeless applicants. This should enable the Council to meet its obligations under part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to discharge the homeless duty by offering this accommodation to homeless or potentially homeless people. To develop a user-friendly website for landlords. To continue to work alongside Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Council Private Landlord Forum, and to provide a platform between PRS and BGCBC. 	Team Manager - Housing Solutions IT Housing Specialist Tenancy Sustainability Officer	On going	Target 2 properties per month. January 2025 September 2024 ongoing.
19) To review the Private Sector accommodation Pathway to meet the needs of those presenting to the Housing Solution Team.	Include within homelessness update report to DMT/CLT and Scrutiny current progress with the WG leasing scheme.	Team Manager - Housing Solutions	Annual	Decision regarding the outcome of the report
20) Ensure a corporate approach to bring empties back into use. Co-ordinate relevant activity of the Local Authority across all departments to ensure that there is a unified and effective approach to deal with the empty properties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet all relevant departments within the authority to highlight the work ongoing in the empty property team. Promoting what the team can do to assist them, highlighting the benefits of bringing an empty property back into use on the whole community including how it can help their specific area of work. Establish a Blaenau Gwent Empty Property Group with all internal stakeholder to ensure continual engagement. 	Service Manager – Public Protection Team manager – Housing Solutions Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Regeneration officers Planning Officers	July 2025- Continually every 3 months	Establishment of corporate Empty Property working group.
21) Ensure engagement and input from external stakeholders.	Establish an external working group with relevant third sector stakeholders such as police and fire authority.	Team Manager - Housing Solutions Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer	Date of initial meeting July 2025 Continually - every 4 months	Establishment of external working group.

Objective 3: Take appropriate enforcement action to effectively deal with empty properties

Action What are we going to do?	What we will do How are we going to do it?	By whom	By when	Monitoring Measure Target
22) Carrot and stick approach with any owners that fail to engage informally with the proactive contact are escalated to a more direct action. Targeted intervention on long-term vacant commercial properties,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that all owners that fail to respond to the initial contact letters are escalated for further intervention - such as site visits to assess any action that can be taken under the relevant legislation. Case conference approach, as necessary, with colleagues to identify most appropriate type of enforcement intervention. Take a risk assessment approach to prioritise enforcement action. Serving urgent enforcement notices where properties in a particularly dangerous condition/ruinous and dilapidated or causing statutory nuisance. 	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Environmental Health Technician (Environmental Protection) Other EHOs Planning Officers Building Control Officers	As required/ necessary	Number of site visits completed. Number of notices served. Enforcement Action taken.
23) Investigate all reactive complaints received regarding empty properties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate all complaints received regarding empty properties and take every opportunity to work with the owner to address the ongoing concerns and agree a way of bringing the property back into use where appropriate on a case conference approach. Identify the most appropriate type of intervention. Complaints in relation to commercial properties are assessed initially as to whether the building is dangerous and if notices should be served or emergency work done in default. Officers will attempt to work with the owner to bring them back into beneficial use. 	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer EHO Planning & Regeneration officers Building Control Officers Environmental Health Officers Environmental Health Technician (Environmental Protection)s	As required	No of complaints received regarding empty homes.
24) Engage with all departments to ensure all enforcement action on empty properties is highlighted and debts recovered.	Ensure that any engagement or work in default taken on an empty property is reported to the empty property team to ensure the debt recovery. Consider enforced sale for any that fail to pay.	Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer Solicitor Revenues Other	Ongoing	Meet with all relevant department to discuss working practice. All WID highlighted to Empty Property Office. Request information on empty properties with outstanding debts every four months. Number of cases where debts are recovered informally.
25) Ensure effective debt recovering mechanism for all work in default via Enforce Sale route.	Implement the Enforce Sale policy and procedure to recover outstanding debt via the enforce sale.	Principal Housing Officer Planning Officers Legal Officers	As required	Identification of properties with relevant debt to move forward with enforced sale procedure. Number of successful enforce sales. Amount of debt recovered.

Action What are we going to do?	What we will do How are we going to do it?	By whom	By when	Monitoring Measure Target
26) Promote all successful enforcement action to highlight the authority position on empty properties.	Work with the authority's communication department to ensure that success stories are highlighted through various media outlets.	Principal Housing officer - Communities Specialist Environmental Health (Empty Properties) Officer EHO Communication Officer	Regular intervals	Number of articles and cases to promote.

End

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Annex 2: Enforcement Options Available to Tackle Empty Properties

The main legislation used to deal with empty homes through enforcement action is as follows:

Environmental Protection Act 1990

Abatement Notices can be served under section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in respect of statutory nuisances caused by a property's structure or associated land.

Prevention Of Damage By Pests Act 1949

Section 4 of the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 enables the Council to serve Notices on the owner or occupier of the land to ensure the premises are free from rodents.

Building Act 1984

The Building Act 1984 can be used to deal with several different situations where there is a building defect, danger or where a property is in a ruinous or dilapidated condition that is seriously detrimental to the amenities of the neighbourhood.

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982

Section 29 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 enables the Council to undertake work on an unoccupied property to secure it against unauthorised entry.

Town And Country Planning Act 1990

Where an owner fails to maintain their property and its condition is considered to be detrimental to the amenities of the neighbourhood, the Local Authority can serve a Notice on the owner requiring work to be carried out to improve its appearance.

Housing Act 2004, Part 1: The Housing, Health And Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

The Housing Act 2004 stipulates the requirement of a housing inspection and completing an HHSRS which is a risk assessment of 29 defined hazards that may be found in a property.

The Law Of Property Act 1925: Enforced Sale

Where there is a financial charge of over £500 owed for works in default of certain legal notices detailed above and recorded on the Local Land Charges Register; the Local Authority can take action under the Law of Property Act 1925 to enforce the sale to recover our debts.

Housing Act 1985: Compulsory Purchase Orders

Section 17 of the Housing Act 1985 enables Local Authorities to compulsorily purchase a property for the provision of a housing accommodation.

Housing Act 1985: Demolition Orders

Section 265 of the Housing Act 1985 allows the Local Authority to make a demolition order.

Housing Act 2004: Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)

Part 4, Chapter 2 of the Housing Act 2004 allows the Local Authority, on approval by an Independent Residential Property Tribunal, to take over the day-to-day management of a property with the view to taking steps to ensure the property becomes, and continues to be, occupied. An Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) gives the Local Authority possession of the property without taking ownership.

DRAFT

Empty Properties

This report was generated on 07/01/25. Overall 48 respondents completed this questionnaire. The report has been filtered to show the responses for 'All Respondents'. A total of 48 cases fall into this category.

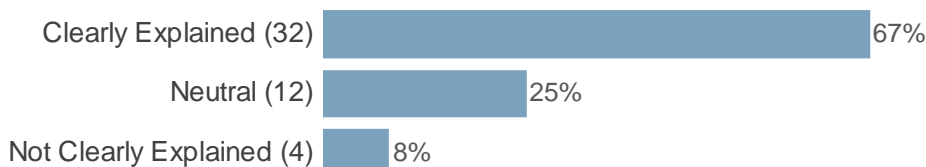
The following charts are restricted to the top 12 codes. Lists are restricted to the most recent 100 rows.

Is the strategy written in plain language that is clear and easy to understand?

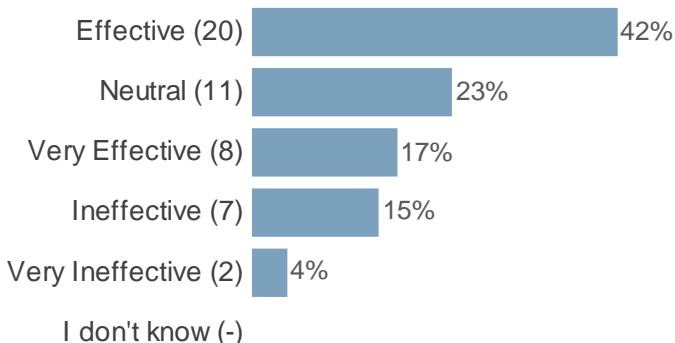
Select one (Is the strategy written in plain language that is clear a...)



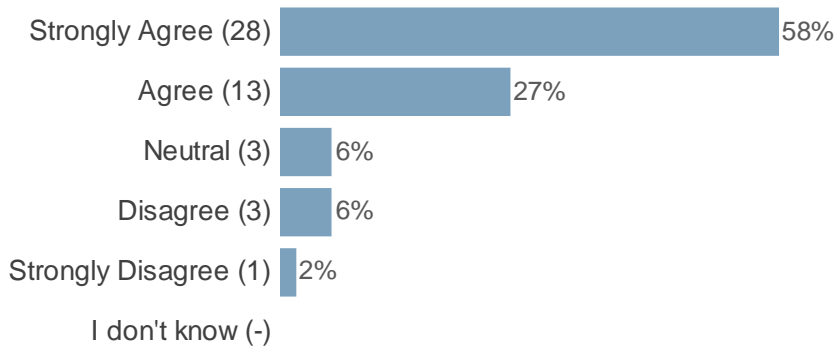
Does the strategy clearly explain why empty properties are a priority for the council? **Select one**



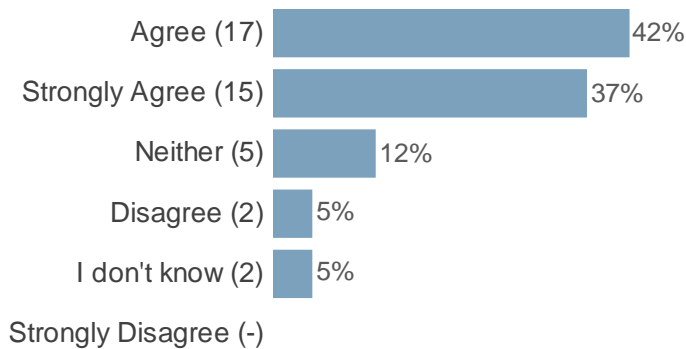
Overall, how effective do you think this strategy will be in tackling the high number of empty homes in Blaenau Gwent? **Select one** (Overall, how effective do you think this strategy will b...)



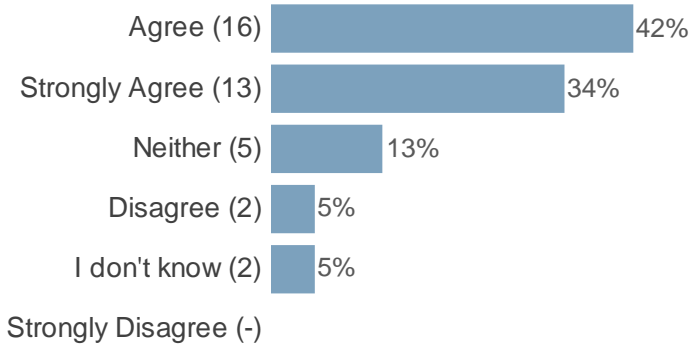
Overall, do you agree or disagree with the overall aim of the action plan to bring empty properties back into use? *Select one (Overall, do you agree or disagree with the overall aim of...)*



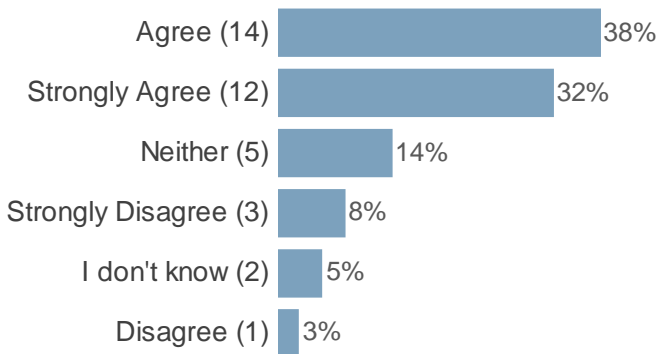
Do you agree or disagree with the following broad actions to help deliver the objective to promote, educate and support empty property owners and prospective purchasers / developers? *Select one for each statement (Maximise Every Opportunity for Support by providing initiatives that offer empty homeowners options)*



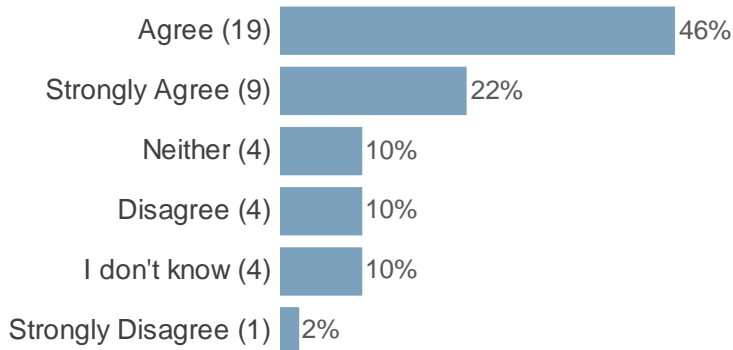
Do you agree or disagree with the following broad actions to help deliver the objective to promote, educate and support empty property owners and prospective purchasers / developers? *Select one for each statement*
(Proactive Engagement with owners and stakeholder providing help and assistance)



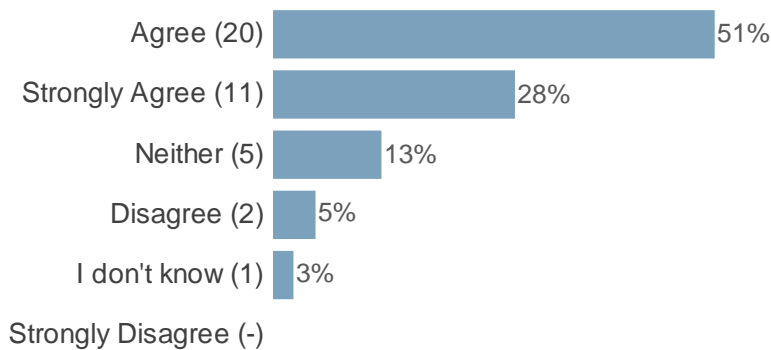
Do you agree or disagree with the following broad actions to help deliver the objective to promote, educate and support empty property owners and prospective purchasers / developers? *Select one for each statement*
(Incentivising Owners through financial assistances schemes)



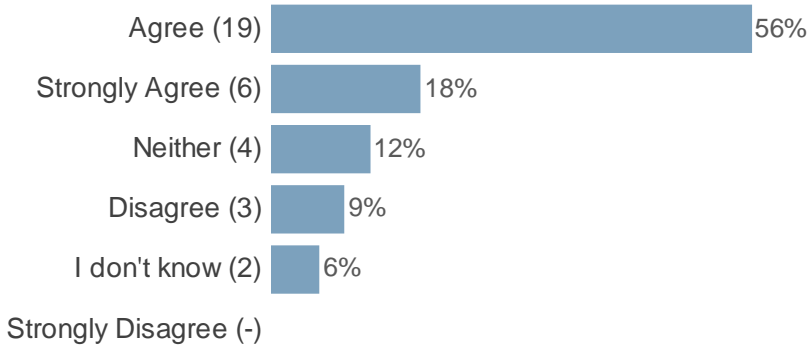
Do you agree or disagree with the following broad actions to prioritise and have a targeted approach to tackling empty properties? Select one for each statement (Use evidence approach to identify empty homes for intervention via Council Tax data)



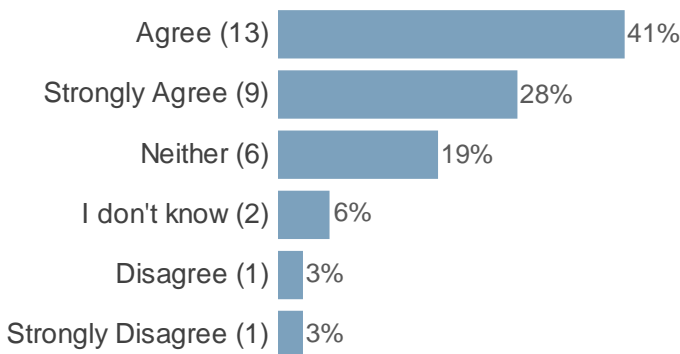
Do you agree or disagree with the following broad actions to prioritise and have a targeted approach to tackling empty properties? Select one for each statement (Effective use of Resources through a two-pronged approach to support and encourage recently empty homes back into use and tackle problematic cases)



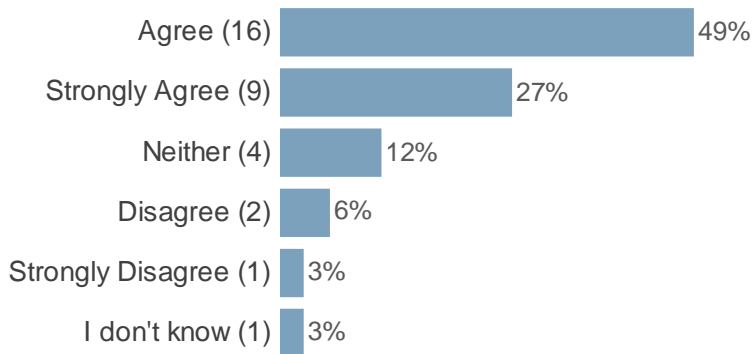
Do you agree or disagree with the following broad actions to prioritise and have a targeted approach to tackling empty properties? *Select one for each statement (Use mapping data to identify patterns and trends to develop the prioritisation system)*



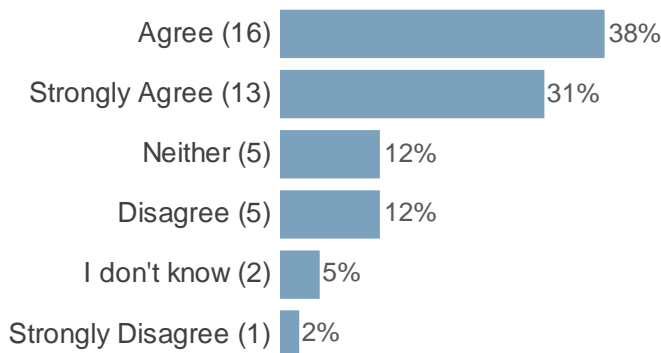
Do you agree or disagree with the following broad actions to prioritise and have a targeted approach to tackling empty properties? *Select one for each statement (Swift consideration and prioritisation of properties that have been empty for 2 years or less)*



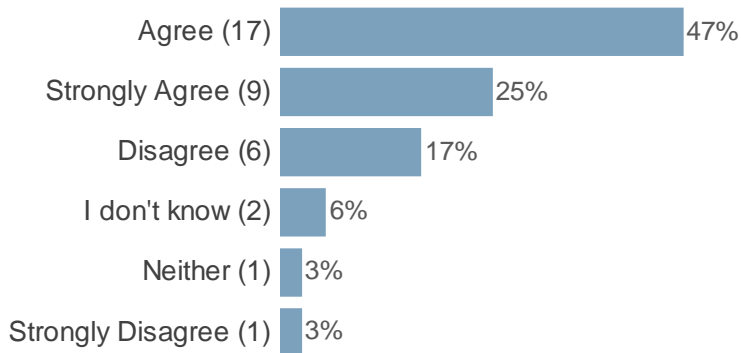
Do you agree or disagree with the following broad actions to prioritise and have a targeted approach to tackling empty properties? *Select one for each statement* (**Encouraging the community to report concerns** using a ‘complaint about empties’ enquiry form prompting joint investigations)



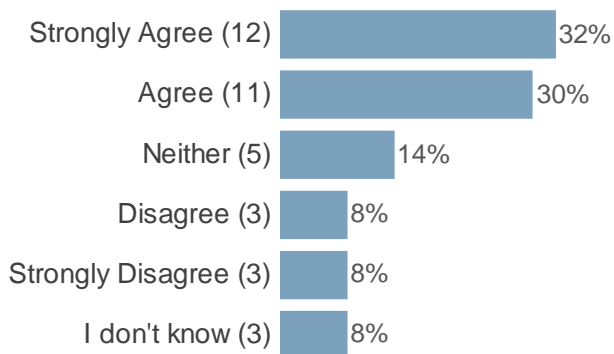
Do you agree or disagree with the following broad actions to incorporate a two-pronged approach to tackling empty homes? (**Supporting owners during early intervention**; preventing deterioration by providing advice packs that aim to bring the property back into use)



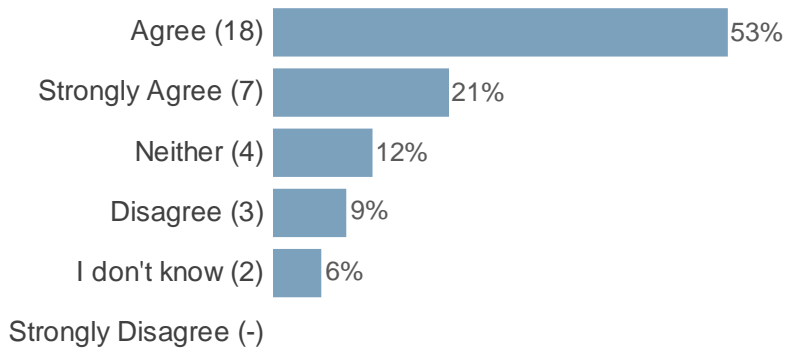
Do you agree or disagree with the following broad actions to incorporate a two-pronged approach to tackling empty homes? (Risk assessment inspections used to prioritise the most problematic properties to take forward for formal action)



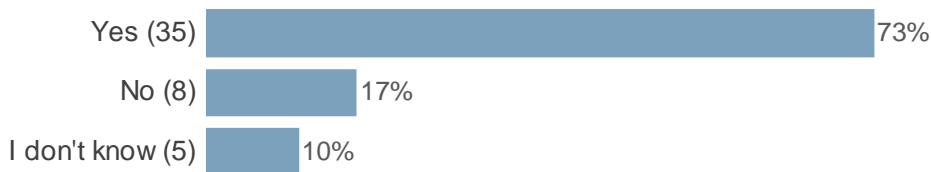
Do you agree or disagree with the following broad actions to incorporate a two-pronged approach to tackling empty homes? (Use of enforcement powers for non-responsive/compliant empty homeowners including the use of powers to carry out works in default and recover debt)



Do you agree or disagree with the following broad actions to incorporate a two-pronged approach to tackling empty homes? (Reasonable enquiries carried out for untraceable owners including checking various data sources, engaging with community and stakeholders, and placing posters or using social media)

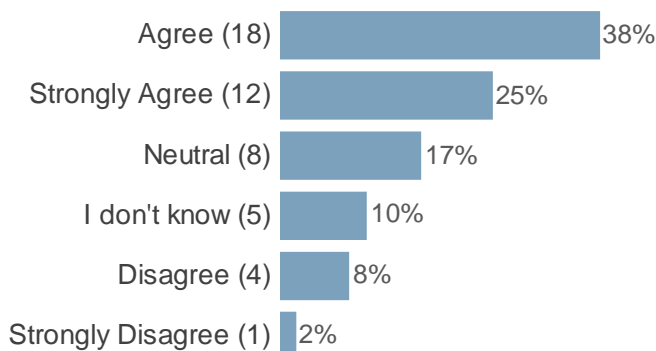


Do you support the Council's decision to have specialist officers to take forward the action plan focusing on bringing empty properties back into use? Select one (Do you support the Council's decision to have specialist ...)



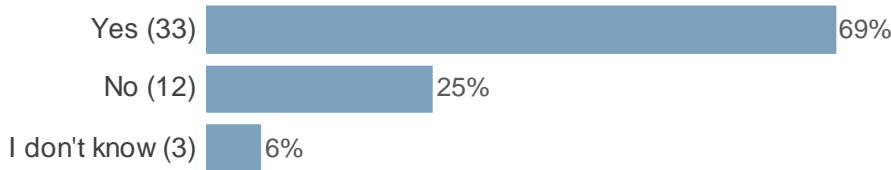
Do you agree with the outlined Performance Measures for the strategy to monitor progress?

Select one (Do you agree with the outlined Performance Measures for t...)



Is the use of enforcement action appropriate to deliver the strategy?

Select one (If individuals are uncooperative or obstructive the Council...)



Please provide any general comments on the draft strategy in the box:
Type below (Please provide any general comments on the draft strategy...)

Empty properties impact on their neighbours homes too.

Due to the chronic shortage of affordable homes, empty properties need to be utilised and kept up. This will benefit everyone.

Council and Tai Calon had plenty of empty houses and knocked a big part of them down. Now you want to make other people pay for your past mistakes. Tai Calon has been in existence for 14 years and hasn't built a single completed house yet, when their 30 year business plan said they would build after their first 5 years, why hasn't the council held them to account

Give owners a time period by which to fill or renovate their properties to acceptable standards if they haven't been empty for long.

We are in this position because of mis management of funds and resources by the council I have approached the council for help with grants etc To many obstacles put in my way. This badly managed council that's why we have these problems you blame somebody else for your mistakes

Having lived next to an empty property with my property having suffered as a result I am fully in favour of legal proactive measures activated in a timely manner ie 18mths unless being active upgraded work being done

The strategy should include support for landlords that are struggling to repair properties due to unreliable builders/repair companies. We had a tenant move out of one of our properties in October 2023. We then could not find anyone that was willing to undertake the required works to bring the property back to a reasonable state. The whole process took a year before the property was repaired and then sold. Reliable Builders/renovation companies seem to be hard to come by in Wales.

Great that this is being prioritised, but this is a big task which will likely be limited by funds and lack of enforcement powers.

A simpler survey for the general public would be much more beneficial

One size does not fit all. Different approaches are needed for long term empties as opposed to short term

You have failed to address what is for me a real issue. My property has been empty for an extended period because I can't find contractors to carry out the works. The council has the capacity to employ contractors and could work with property owners in this way to bring property back into use.

It's my property and I should be able to choose what I want to do with it plus there are loads of housing association properties empty

Many small landlords simply do not have the funds to bring property to use. Going in with enforcement will not help them afford works. It will just make it more expensive and drive them to default on further debt

**Please provide any general comments on the draft strategy in the box:
Type below (Please provide any general comments on the draft strategy...)**

I own a property that is currently being renovated as a first time buyer. I am not a private business or landlord looking to profit from the property. I believe this strategy negatively impacts individuals such as myself trying to renovate a property in the area to move into. By applying more financial pressures it is more likely that the property will sit empty for longer as the increased premiums make saving more difficult. From the moment we purchased the property we've paid full council tax and there is no assistance to first time buyers in the area. I believe this strategy will mean more properties fall into ownership of private landlords, which i personally feel is damaging for the area as rents increase to cover the costs of and create profits for private landlords.

I have been homeless for over 6 months and there is a empty tai calon house in cwm its a 3 bedroom that would be perfect for my family and it as been empty for 12 months now

You may be ticking a box by producing a strategy but you know full well that you do not have Environmental Health officers and support staff to put this strategy into operation

Enforcement should only be used if individuals are clearly obstructive or uncooperative. Enforcement should not be a go to option if there is a genuine or valid disagreement or opinion between the homeowner and local authority.

There is an empty property st the end of my street that is an eyesore. The garden is overgrown and is used by flytippers. It could be a lovely home for a young family.

Please allow a helpline for anonymous complaints as some neighbours of unoccupied property fear retaliation and have been subjected to abuse. Empty properties attract crime and devalue the neighbourhood. Addresses being used to access facilities not entitled to when living elsewhere. Council tax maybe paid for the property but putting unnecessary strain on area, unfair to others in surrounding neighbourhood impacting wellbeing.

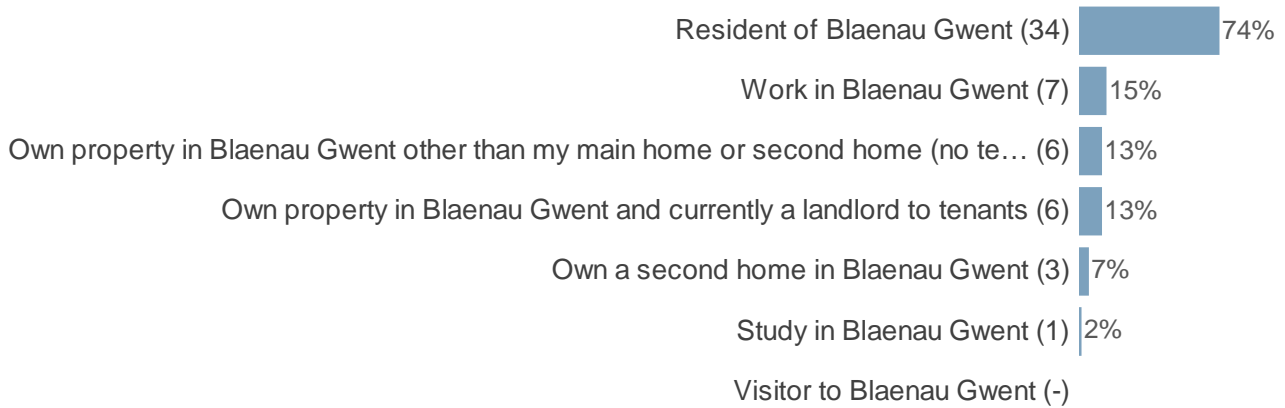
The grant scheme to enable property owners to renovate their properties, is majorly flawed as it takes far to long from applying to receiving the money. It disincentivises owners from using it. Also the changes that the Welsh government have made in the last few years to favour the tenant over the landlord are also a MAJOR disincentive to continuing being a landlord in Wales. I have had experiences of appalling tenants who have caused a lot of damage to my properties and I am powerless to be able to evict them efficiently. The 6 month notice period is a joke. I am struggle to find quality tenants that are not on benefits and that will respect the property. I am in the process of renovating one property that I had planned to rent out, but have now decided to sell as being a landlord in Wales is now too stressful. The Council do not support Landlords everything is geared towards prioritising the tenant.

There are empty properties in the area, which though visited regularly aren't lived in. Example property in a cul de sac near Beaufort Hill (overlooking New Church Road) not lived in , suitable for large family but used to store materials. Been empty many years and was broken into last year, residents are unhappy and worried about situation but unable to do anything, property scaffolding up so long it has become a permanent feature and near power lines.

Would have liked more time to restore property

Would have liked more time to restore property

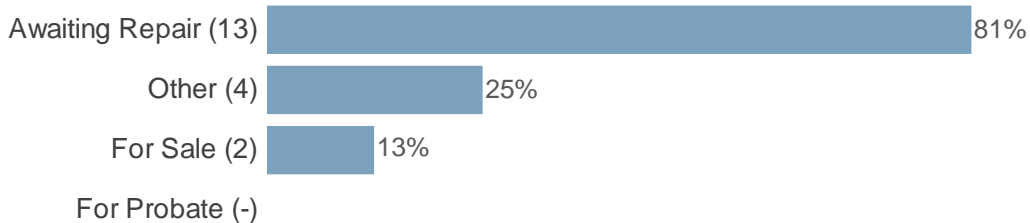
Which of these applies to you? *(Select all that apply)*



Do you currently have an empty home? *Select one*



If yes, which category does it fall into? *Select all that apply* (If yes, which category does it fall into? Select all that...)



Please specify: *Type below*

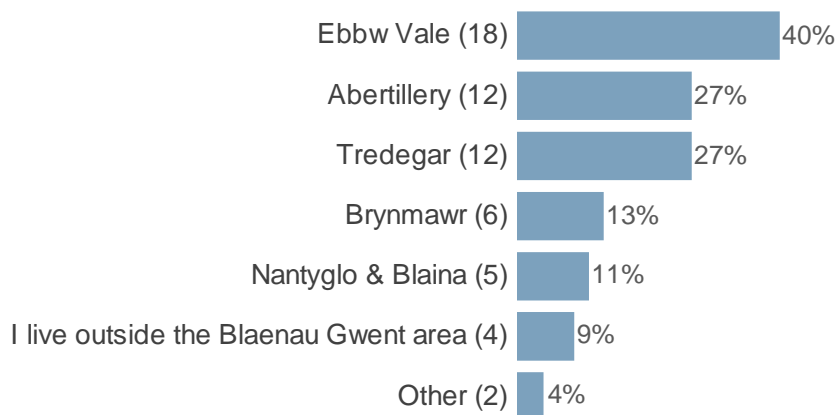
I am doing it up

Currently being decorated and waiting to hear about the council housing scheme

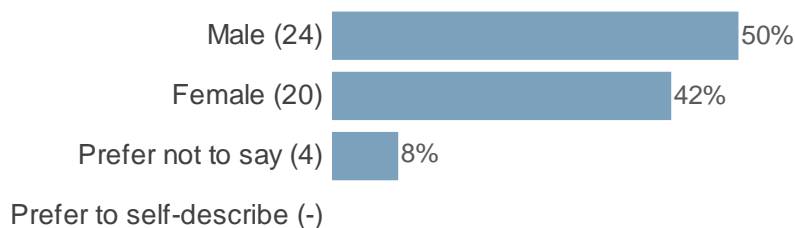
Deceased family member

In which of these broad areas in Blaenau Gwent do you live or own property?

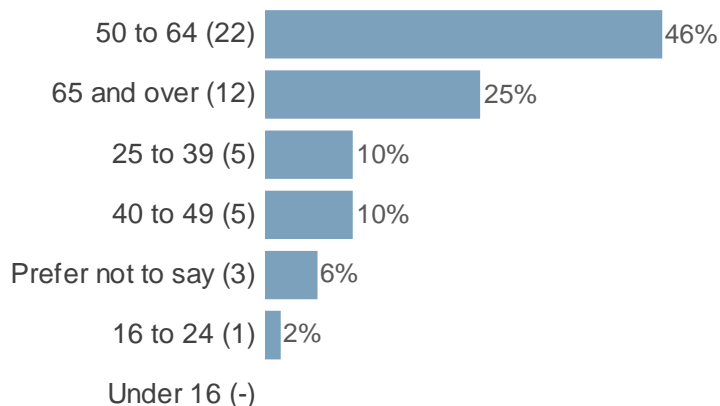
(Select all that apply) (In which of these broad areas in Blaenau Gwent do you live...)



Are you:



Which of the following age groups do you fall into?



Appendix 3 – Empty Property Performance Information Snapshot

Houses to Homes - Interest Free Recyclable loan fund - (2013 to 2030) *

Scheme	Number of loans issued to date	Total Funding Awarded £	Loans issued £	Loans Repaid £
Owner Occupier (Home Improvement Loan)	15		161,532.00	71,619.72
Landlord**	90		2,997,789.58	2,420,840.23
Total	105	1,365,465.45	3,159,321.58***	2,492,459.95

*The majority of the loan fund (@£900k) is repayable to Welsh Government in 2030

** All the landlord loans have been issued for empty properties

*** As at end February 2024, there are 9 Landlord applications in progress – all relating to empties.

The Loan fund has been lent 1.5 times over.

<https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/resident/environmental-health/private-sector-housing/landlord-loans/>

Empty Property Grants – (for owner-occupation)

Valleys Taskforce 2020-23

- 58 Completions
- Total value of grant assistance = £790k

National Empty Homes Scheme 2023-25/26

- 11 x Completed
- 20 x Works being undertaken
- 25 x Applications awaiting approval
- Total estimated value of grant assistance = £1.3 million

<https://www.blaenaugwenthomes.org.uk/content/HousingSupportandAdvice/NationalEmptyHomesGrants>

Enforced Sales (Law of Property Act 1925)

Legal action instigated where there are excessive local land charges - 11 properties pursued in total – (6 completed and sold, 4 debt paid and sold privately, 1 ongoing – delayed in Land Registry)

Ownerless Properties

1 property in Syffryd purchased from the Crown and Sold at Auction – currently being renovated for private rental. 1 property in Ebbw Vale is being purchased from the Crown by Registered Social Landlord – facilitated by the local Authority. Work ongoing in relation to 2 other ownerless properties.

Empty Property Enquiries/Service Requests

Since April 2021 – 144 service requests relating to empty properties – relating to overgrown gardens, filthy and verminous, refuse accumulations, dampness, defective drainage and other and other defects affecting neighbouring properties, anti-social behaviour. These complaints result in letters to owners requesting remediation works, offering support and financial assistance to being the property back into use and statutory enforcement notices.

Open (insecure) to Unauthorised Entry

Since April 2021 – 71 empty properties have been reported as being insecure/open to access warranting enforcement action by Environmental Health

<u>National Performance Indicators</u>	22/23	23/24	24/25
The percentage of private sector dwellings that had been vacant for more than 6 months at 1 April that were returned to occupation during the year through direct action by the local authority	5.7%	2.1%	TBA
Number of empty homes brought back into use via action by the local authority (annual indicator)	33 (46 units)	10	TBA

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council - Integrated Impact Assessment

All decisions, policy reviews or policy implementation will now require a completed Integrated Impact Assessment.

- Section 1-Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011
- Section 2-Socio-economic Duty – Sections 1 to 3 of the Equality Act 2010
- Section 3-Corporate Plan
- Section 4-Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Section 5-Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011
- Section 6-Children’s Right “The Right Way”
- Section 7-Community Safety
- Section 8 Armed Forces
- Section 9-Data
- Section 10-Consultations Statutory Consultation Doctrine of Legitimate Expectation and Gunning Principles
- Section 11-Monitoring
- Section 12-Decision of proposal

Lead Officer	Head of Service	Service Area & Department	Date
David Thompson	David Thompson	Public Protection	3/2/25

Briefly outline the proposal indicating what change or decision is to be made, also provide any documentation that may be used to support this.
What is the proposal that needs to be assessed?

Blaenau Gwent Empty Property Strategy

Section 1

Outline how the proposal will impact on any people or groups of people with protected characteristics, please refer to the Equalities Act 2010 (Wales) for further information [Equality Act 2010: guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk) and the EHRC guidance [The Essential Guide to the Public Sector Equality Duty: EHRC](#)

Briefly outline below if there will be any positive or negative impacts as a result of the proposal being considered.

Protected characteristics	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on those with a protected characteristics?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on those with a protected characteristics?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
Age (<i>people of all ages</i>)	Yes	No	Reduction in local nuisance, environmental problems, crime anti-social behaviour. Increase in the supply of good quality affordable housing.
Disability (<i>people with disabilities/ long term conditions</i>)	Yes	No	As above
Gender Reassignment (<i>anybody who's gender identity or gender expression is different to the sex they were assigned at birth</i>)	Yes	No	As above
Marriage or Civil Partnership (<i>people who are married or in a civil partnership</i>)	Yes	No	As above

Pregnancy and Maternity (women who are pregnant and/or on maternity leave)	Yes	No	As above
Race (people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and different racial backgrounds)	Yes	No	As above
Religion or Belief (people with different religions and beliefs including people with no beliefs)	Yes	No	As above
Sex (women and men, girls and boys and those who self-identify their gender)	Yes	No	As above
Sexual Orientation (lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, other)	Yes	No	As above

NOTE: Section 2 only needs to be completed if proposals are of a strategic nature or when reviewing previous strategic decisions. See page 6 of the Preparing for the Commencement of the Socio-economic Duty Welsh Government Guidance.

Section 2
Socio-economic Duty (Strategic Decisions Only)
The Welsh Governments [Socio-economic Duty](#) provides a framework in order to ensure tackling inequality is at the forefront of decision making.

.Please consider the below vulnerable groups and consider how the proposal could affect them:

- Single parents and vulnerable families
- People with low literacy/numeracy
- Pensioners
- Looked after children
- Homeless people
- Carers
- Armed Forces Community
- Students
- Single adult households
- People misusing substances
- People who have experienced the asylum system
- People of all ages leaving a care setting
- People living in the most deprived areas in Wales (WIMD)
- People involved in the criminal justice system

Socio Economic disadvantage definitions.	Will the proposal have a positive, negative or neutral impacts on the below?	How could you mitigate the negative impacts outlined?	Please highlight any evidence that has been considered.
<p>Low Income / Income Poverty <i>(cannot afford to maintain regular payments such as bills, food, clothing, transport etc.)</i></p>	<p>Positive</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>The strategy aims to increase the supply of affordable housing</p>
<p>Low and/or No Wealth <i>(enough money to meet basic living costs and pay bills but have no savings to deal with any unexpected spends and no provisions for the future)</i></p>	<p>Positive</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>The strategy aims to increase the supply of affordable housing</p>

<p>Material Deprivation (<i>unable to access basic goods and services i.e. financial products like life insurance, repair/replace broken electrical goods, warm home, hobbies etc.</i>)</p>	<p>Positive</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>The strategy aims to increase the supply of affordable housing</p>
<p>Area Deprivation (<i>where you live (rural areas), where you work (accessibility of public transport) Impact on the environment?</i>)</p>	<p>Positive</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>The strategy aims to increase the supply of affordable housing. Reduction in local nuisance, environmental problems, crime anti-social behaviour.</p>
<p>Socio-economic Background (<i>social class i.e. parents education, employment and income</i>)</p>	<p>Positive</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>The strategy aims to increase the supply of affordable housing.</p>
<p>Socio-economic Disadvantage (<i>What cumulative impact will the proposal have on people or groups because of their protected characteristic(s) or vulnerability or</i></p>	<p>Positive</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>The strategy aims to increase the supply of affordable housing.</p>



<i>because they are already disadvantaged)</i>			
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Section 3-Corporate Plan

Please outline any Corporate Plan linkages of the proposal -[BG Corporate Plan 22-27](#)

Priority 1 - Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent	
Priority 2 - Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities	Dealing with empty properties will assist in reducing carbon emissions, providing modernised energy efficient homes and supporting growth and well-being and connects communities.
Priority 3 - An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place	In dealing with empty properties, the Authority will work in partnership to provide high quality services to meet local circumstances in dealing with empty properties and improve the quality of life and well-being within the community by contributing to meeting housing need.
Priority 4 - Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient	Dealing with empty properties will contribute to a reduction in community safety problems. This will increase the resilience of Communities, where more people are welcome and safe, and it will minimise dependency and maximise independence.

Section 4-Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – The Five Ways of Working (ICLIP)
Sustainable development principles. The WCFG Act requires the Council to consider how any proposal improves the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales using the five ways of working as a baseline)

Five Ways of Working	How have you used the Sustainable Development Principles in forming the proposal?
<p>Long Tern</p> 	<p>Consider the long-term impact of the proposal on the ability of communities to secure their well-being.</p> <p>Reduction in local nuisance, environmental problems, crime anti-social behaviour, loss of Council tax income. Increase in the supply of good quality affordable housing</p>
<p>Prevention</p> 	<p>Consider how the proposal is preventing problems from occurring or getting worse</p> <p>As outlined in the strategy document – relating to preventing properties from becoming long term empty. Reduction in local nuisance, environmental problems, crime anti-social behaviour, loss of Council tax income. Increase in the supply of good quality affordable housing.</p>

<p>Integration</p> 	<p>Consider how your proposal will impact on other services provided in our communities (these might be Council services or services delivered by other organisations or groups)</p> <p>The Action Plan to the strategy relies on continued cross- departmental working with the common goal of dealing with empty properties.</p>
<p>Collaboration</p> 	<p>Consider how you are working with Council services or services delivered by other organisations or groups in our communities.</p> <p>The strategy relies on partnership working with property owners, registered social landlords and relevant other</p>
<p>Involvement</p> 	<p>Consider how you involve people who have an interest in this proposal and ensure that they represent the diversity of our communities.</p> <p>The strategy relies on partnership working with property owners and the concerned local community</p>

How does your proposal link to the Welsh Governments Priorities for Wales? Please indicate below.

1. **A PROSPEROUS WALES** ... an innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.

The strategy aims to utilise existing housing resources to help meet housing need and reduce environmental and antisocial behaviour problems etc. Renovation works resulting from the implementation of the strategy will contribute to the skills and wealth creation agendas. Wherever possible, property improvements resulting from the work outlined as part of this strategy will contribute to the decarbonisation agenda.

2. **A RESILIENT WALES** ... a nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change). Think about how your activity will have regard to protecting and enhancing biodiversity.

No significant contribution to this agenda

3. **A HEALTHIER WALES** ... a society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.

The strategy aims to utilise existing housing resources to help meet housing need and reduce environmental and antisocial behaviour problems etc. The strategy looks long-term with a view to Increasing in the supply of good quality affordable housing which will contribute positive to the health agenda

4. **A MORE EQUAL WALES** ... A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances).

The strategy looks long-term with a view to Increasing in the supply of good quality affordable housing

5. **A WALES OF COHESIVE COMMUNITIES** ... attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.


The strategy aims to utilise existing housing resources to help meet housing need and reduce environmental and antisocial behaviour problems etc.

6. **A WALES OF VIBRANT CULTURE AND THRIVING** ... a society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.

No significant contribution to this agenda

7. **A GLOBALLY RESPONSIBLE WALES** ... a nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.

No significant contribution to this agenda other than the positive impacts specified above

Section 5-Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and Welsh Language Standards			
<i>(The Welsh Language Measure 2011 and the Welsh Language Standards require the Council to have 'due regard' for the positive or negative impact that any proposal may have on opportunities to use the Welsh language. Welsh Language Standards)</i>			
Requirement	Does the proposal have any positive, negative or neutral impacts in regards to the below?	What can be done to mitigate any negative impacts?	Please demonstrate any evidence used to form this opinion.
Compliance with the Welsh Language Standards. <i>Specifically Standards 88 - 93</i>	Neutral		
What opportunities are there to promote the Welsh Language? <i>e.g. status, use of Welsh language services, use of Welsh in everyday life in work / community</i>	Neutral		
What opportunities are there for a person or person to use the Welsh	Neutral		

Language? e.g. staff, residents and visitors			
Has the Welsh Language been considered in order to treat the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?	Yes		

Section 6 – Children’s Rights Approach - [The Right Way](#)

The Children’s Rights Approach – The Right Way is a framework for working with children, grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It places the UNCRC at the core of planning and service delivery and integrates children’s rights into every aspect of decision-making, policy and practice. The Right Way focuses on three main them Participation, Provision and Protection.

Protected characteristics	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on the Children’s Rights Approach?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on the Children’s Rights Approach?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
Participation (child or young person as someone who actively contributes to society as a citizen)	Not applicable		

Provision (the basic rights of children and young people to survive and develop)			
Protection (children and young people are protected against exploitation, abuse or discrimination)			

<p>Section 7– Community Safety</p> <p>Duty to Consider Crime and Disorder Implications</p> <p>Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a duty on the local authority to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder, anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment, the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances, re-offending and serious violence.</p>			
Impacts	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on crime and disorder?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on crime and disorder?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
Crime	Positive		The strategy aims to utilise existing housing resources to help meet housing need and reduce environmental and antisocial behaviour problems etc relating to empties, e.g squatting, trespass, drug use venues etc.

(consider impact on each: victims, offenders and neighbourhoods)			
Anti-Social Behaviour and behaviour adversely affecting the local environment (consider impact on each: victims, offenders, neighbourhoods and green spaces)	Positive		As above
Misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances (Think vulnerable children, adults, families and communities)	Positive		As above
Re-offending (Think young people and adults, victims, families, communities)	Positive		As above
Serious Violence (Think vulnerable young people, vulnerable adults, victims, families, communities)	Positive		As above

Counter Terrorism (People and places that are vulnerable to terrorism or violent extremism)	Neutral		
Community Cohesion (Asylum seekers, Migrants, Victims or Hate Crime, Community tensions)	Neutral		

Section 8- Armed Forces Covenant Duty AFC Draft Statutory Guidance - Final.pdf			
Impacts	Will the proposal have any positive impacts on the armed forces community?	Will the proposal have any negative impacts on the armed forces community?	Outline how the proposal could maximise any positive impacts or minimise any negative impact. Please indicate any views evidence you have that supports this.
Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of services • Planning and funding • Co-operation between bodies and professionals 	Positive		Potential for additional good quality, affordable housing for these clients.

<p>These healthcare functions are within scope of the Duty in the following settings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NHS Primary Care services, including general practice, community pharmacies, NHS dental, NHS optometry services and public health screening services. • NHS Secondary Care services, including urgent and emergency care, hospital and community services, specialist care, mental health services, and additional needs services (as applicable). • Local authority-delivered healthcare services, including sexual health services and drug and alcohol misuse services 			
<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions • Educational attainment and curriculum • Child wellbeing 	<p>Positive</p>		<p>As above</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport • Attendance • Additional needs support • Use of Service Pupil Premium funding (England only) <p>These education functions are within scope of the Duty in compulsory education settings, that is, primary, secondary, and, for England only, compulsory further education. The Duty does not cover nursery (early years education), higher education, or other voluntary adult education settings</p>			
<p>Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocations policy for social housing • Tenancy strategies (England only) • Homelessness • Disabled Facilities Grants 	<p>Positive</p>		<p>Potential for additional good quality, affordable housing for these clients.</p>

Section 9-Data-Please outline any data or evidence that has been used to develop the proposal, this can be previous consultations, local/national data, pilot projects, reports, feedback from clients etc.

Data/evidence –What data/evidence was used? - provide any links.	What were the key findings?	How has the data/evidence informed this proposal?
As outlined in the strategy document	As outlined in the document	Yes

Are there any data or information gaps and if so what are they and how do you intend to address them?

No

Section 10-Consultation. Please provide details of consultation undertaken to support the proposal. Please consider the Gunning Principles: -

Principle 1: Consultation must take place when the proposals are still at a formative stage. You must not have already made up your mind.

Principle 2: Sufficient reasons must be put forward to allow for intelligent consideration and response. Have people been given the information and opportunity to influence?

Principle 3: Adequate time must be given for consideration and response. Is the consultation long enough bearing in mind the circumstances?

Principle 4: The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account when finalising the decision

Briefly describe any planned consultations or consultations that have been carried out to date. Please consider the above principles.

Please consider the following questions; -

- 1. Who did you consult? – Internal colleagues, Members, general public**
- 2. When did the consultation take place and was adequate time given for a response? Yes**
- 3. Was there enough information provided to respond effectively? yes**
- 4. What were the findings? As outlined in the report**
- 5. Have the findings been considered in regards to the decision? Yes**

Section 11-Monitoring and Review	
How will the implementation of the proposal be monitored, including the impacts or changes made?	By way of reports to CLT and Members
What monitoring tools will be used?	Pi's, Outcome reports
How will the results be used for future development?	Results will be used to consider operational plans and resource requirements
How and when will it be reviewed?	The strategy will be reviewed in 5 years at the latest
Who is responsible for ensuring this happens?	Director, Service Manager

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Section 12 - Decision	
<i>Using the information you have gathered from sections 1-9 please state in the table below whether you are able to proceed with the proposal.</i>	
Continue with the proposal in its current form	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Continue with proposal but take into account reasonable steps to mitigate any negative impacts of the proposal	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Name of person completing the IIA	
Name:	David Thompson
Job Title:	Service Manager – Public Protection
Date:	Feb 2025

Head of Service Approval			
Name:	Ellie Fry		
Job Title:	Director of Regeneration & Community Services		
Signature:		Date:	

Please contact Policy & Partnerships should you require any further advice or guidance on completing your assessment via lissa.friel@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk or kate.james@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Agenda Item 9

Cabinet and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

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

Committee: **Place Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **11th March 2025**
Report Subject: **Forward Work Programme: 29th April 2025**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Helen Cunningham, Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member Place and Environment**
Cllr John C Morgan, Cabinet Member Place and Regeneration
Report Submitted by: **Scrutiny and Democratic Officer**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
x	x	03.03.25			11.03.25			

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 To present to Members the Place Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the Meeting on 29th April 2025 for discussion and agreement.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 The Scrutiny Work Programmes are key aspects of the Council's planning and governance arrangements and support the requirements of the Constitution.
 - 2.2 The topics set out in the Forward Work Programme link to the strategic work of the Council as identified by the Council's revised Corporate Plan, corporate documents and supporting business plans.
 - 2.3 Effective work programmes are essential to ensure that the work of scrutiny makes a positive impact upon the Council's delivery of services.
 - 2.4 The Committee's Forward Work Programme was agreed in September 2024, recognising the fluidity of the document to enable the Committee to respond to urgent and emerging issues, and included timescales when reports will be considered by the Committee. The work programme is managed and implemented by the Scrutiny and Democratic Officer under the direction of the Chair and Committee.
 - 2.5 The forward work programme for the forthcoming meeting will be presented to Committee on a 6 weekly cycle in order that Members can consider the programme of work; request information is included within the reports, as appropriate and / or make amendments to the work programme.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1:** The Scrutiny Committee agree the Forward Programme for the meeting 29th April 2025, as presented.

3.2 **Option 2:** The Scrutiny Committee consider the Forward Work Programme for the meeting 29th April 2025, and

- Suggest any invitees that the committee requires to fully consider the reports to be discussed at Appendix 1; and
- Request any additional information to be included in the reports to be discussed at Appendix 1.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Forward Work Programme – Meeting on 29th April 2025

Place Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Dates	Scrutiny Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer	Cabinet / Council
Meeting Date: 29 th April 2025 Deadline: 15 th April 2025	Annual Community Safety Report 2024/25	Performance Monitoring The report will provide a progress update on the activity undertaken throughout 2024/25 and will include the planned future work programme.	Helena Hunt	Cabinet
	End of Year Performance Report	Performance Monitoring To consider the report	Gemma Wasley	Cabinet

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