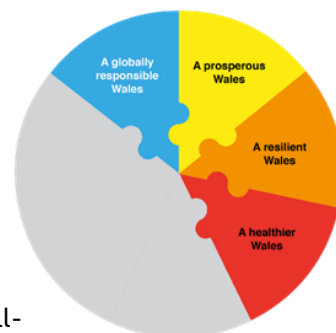


Well-being Objective 2

Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities

Why This Is Important as an Area of Focus:

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



What We Aim to Achieve – For Blaenau Gwent Council to greatly reduce its carbon emissions, and provides an environment which supports growth and well-being and connects communities.

The following narrative provides an evaluative reflection of the activity, undertaken throughout 2023/24, across service areas that directly support this Well-being Objective. The narrative reflects what has gone well but also, and more importantly, where we are experiencing challenges. These challenges have then been collated together at the end of each section. These areas will be identified as areas of focus moving forward and will be reported as part of our next Self-Assessment, as well as performance monitoring throughout the year.

Waste and Recycling

Between 2019/20 to 2022/23, Blaenau Gwent exceeded the Welsh Government statutory recycling target of 64%, achieving

- 2019/20 – 65.31%
- 2020/21 – 64.29%
- 2021/22 - 64.94%
- 2022/23 - 66.78%.

For 2023/24, that success has been maintained and the target of 64% has again been exceeded, attaining 66.18%. Achieving the Welsh Government target of 70% by the end of 2024/25 is going to be a huge challenge; the aim being to reduce the amount of residual [black bag] waste being collected, and increasing recycling participation across the Borough. Assuming the total municipal waste remains constant, to achieve 70%, the Council would need to reduce residual waste and increase recycling by 1,218.56 tonnes. For every 1% increase there would be a need to divert 319.01 tonnes from the residual tonnages to recycling/composting tonnages. This is made more difficult by things like smaller gardens in the area overall so green waste figures are generally lower than other areas. It is imperative that the Council maintains and improves its recycling targets as there is a financial penalty imposed by Welsh Government if these are not met. The current fine for not achieving the target is £200 per tonne for every tonne below the required amount to achieve the target. Therefore, if the current recycling rate of 66.18% remains the same in 2024/25 there are potential fines of £243,712 to be incurred by Blaenau Gwent.

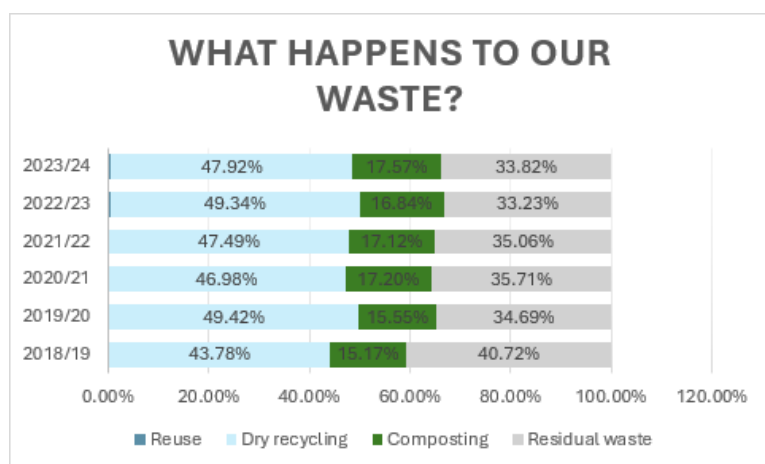


We are currently working with Welsh Government, through Local Partnerships and Wrap, to develop a new Waste Strategy which will set out the challenges we face and the strategic actions we will need to take to increase our recycling rate to 70% and beyond and reduce our overall waste.

Breakdown of 2023/24 Performance		
Quarter	2022/23	2023/24
Quarter 1 (April – June)	67.76%	70.11%
Quarter 2 (July – Sept)	68.29%	66.99%
Quarter 3 (Oct – Dec)	64.66%	61.91%
Quarter 4 (Jan – March)	66.32%	65.42%
Annual (as at 31st March not yet verified by Natural Resources Wales)	66.78%	66.18%

When looking at the breakdown of tonnage figures for 2023/24, compared to 2022/23, it shows residual waste, food waste and HWRC waste has increased, while Garden waste and kerbside recycling has decreased.

- Residual waste has increased by 300.91 tonnes (2.52%)
- Food waste has increased by 26.24 tonnes (0.73%)
- Kerbside recycling has decreased by 389.27 tonnes (7.24%)
- Garden waste has decreased by 198.54 tonnes (11.79%)
- HWRC recycling has increased by 1103.79 tonnes (24.06%)



Side Waste Enforcement – By utilising ‘in cab’ devices, refuse and recycling crews are now electronically recording excess side waste and recycling contamination issues for referral to the Authority’s Enforcement Wardens, who are following up these referrals with enforcement action or advice visits as appropriate. This is freeing up officer time to allow for more proactive initiatives to be conducted such as the current ‘Keeping Up With The Joneses’, and the Food Campaign.

Keeping Up With The Joneses (KUWTJ) – The campaign, which looks to reduce the amount of recyclable material placed out by householders in their residual waste, has been completed in 2023/24 meaning that all domestic properties in the County Borough, over 30,000 homes, have been visited since the campaigns inception. The Frontline Enforcement Team are now programmed to complete revisits in 2024/25, using the KUWTJ campaign, to over 6000 homes that have shown historical non-compliance with the recycling rules of the Authority.

Food Campaign - Following a recent waste analysis exercise, which identified that 23% of the contents of black refuse bags during the sampling period was food waste, the Authority is conducting a monitoring and engagement exercise across the 14 recycling rounds to identify those households which don’t currently place food waste out for recycling. Those households are receiving a visit by an officer to ensure they have the appropriate recycling receptacles and



understand the service offered by the Authority to encourage increased participation. During 2023/24 this pre-monitoring, engagement and post monitoring exercise has been completed across 12 rounds, a total of 28,824 properties, and has seen a 15.4% increase in those homes that are participating in food waste recycling. The campaign is programmed to be completed in early 2024/25.

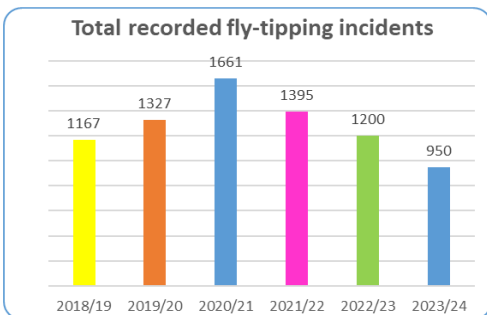
Repair Café – Due to the success of the first repair café in Ebbw Vale, which launched in February 2023, a further repair café opened in January 2024 at the Rassau resource centre. Both centres combined have repaired over 200 items for residents and continue to offer a repair service once a month.

Reuse Shop - Wastesavers manage the reuse shop that is based at Roseheyworth HWRC and, to date, have reused 106 tonnes of various items. To promote and encourage reuse, regular social media posts have been created in order to incentivise donations and purchases. In addition, school uniform reuse and Christmas toy donations were available free to families.



Reusable Nappies – Wastesavers have placed reusable nappies in all libraries throughout the Borough, and they are available free of charge. They all come with printed washing instructions and a QR code for more information. Initially, approximately 30 reusable nappies were distributed to libraries and the uptake was successful, which has resulted in further cloth reusable nappies being distributed to the libraries. Once a month at the Education Centre at Roseheyworth, drop-in sessions have been arranged to show individuals how to use the reusable nappies correctly.

Fly Tipping and Street Cleansing



Deployment of CCTV units across Blaenau Gwent continues to target highway lay-bys and rural locations subject to prolific fly tipping. Blaenau Gwent issued the third highest numbers of fly tipping fixed penalty notices (FPN) in Wales during 2022/23, with 79 FPN's issued and have exceeded this number this year, with 110 FPN issued

between April 2023 to March 2024.

During the year, a total of 50 £300 Commercial duty of care FPNs were issued to businesses who did not

2023/2024	Number recorded
Number of Fly tipping incidents	950
No of Litter Fixed penalty notices issued	316
No of Dog Control fixed penalty notices issued	65
Commercial Duty of care	50

have appropriate waste disposal arrangements in place and 9 individuals were prosecuted for a total of 43 waste offences which resulted in £25,639 issued in fines and costs by the Courts. Compared to last year, there has been a 21% reduction in fly tipping incidents for 2023/2024.

Decarbonisation

The Council is dedicated to driving decarbonisation efforts throughout Blaenau Gwent and is actively working to contribute to the Welsh Government's goal of making the Welsh Public Sector Net Zero by 2030, as well as achieving Net Zero for all of Wales by 2050. To support these objectives, the Council has developed a 10-year Decarbonisation plan. The Council's journey towards these Net Zero targets are overseen by our Climate Group, who's core membership includes the Cabinet Member and Climate Champion, three members of our

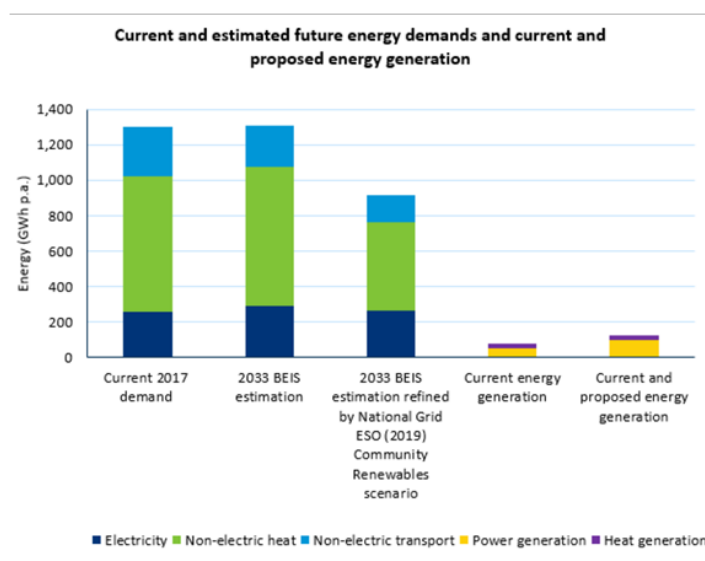


senior leadership team and a trade union representative. The group meets every six weeks with an alternating focus on Net Zero 2030 at one meeting and Net Zero 2050 at the next.

We have made some progress to achieving Net Zero 2030 during the year, including a 3% fall in our direct emissions last year, and a cumulative 19% fall over the last four years from our 2019/20 baseline.

tonnes CO2e/year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Change from Base Year	Change from Last Year
Direct Carbon Emissions	14,783	11,818	13,100	12,353	11,949	-19%	-3%

During the year, the Council was awarded specific funding to help overcome non-technical systemic barriers to the scaling and adoption of net zero solutions, some of this funding was utilised to work with residents on a small-scale street charging trial. An event was held that invited solution providers to evidence what solutions they had to overcome these barriers. Two of these solutions were used in the trial which saw thirteen properties across the Borough take part. We have strengthened our efforts towards Net Zero 2050 through our Net Zero 2050 Framework and Local Area Energy Plan, which sets out what Blaenau Gwent needs to do to reach Net Zero. Although small scale projects help to make a small difference for reaching targets, Blaenau Gwent cannot reach Net Zero solely through local initiatives; we also rely on broader efforts, additional resources, and external support to meet these goals.



Blaenau Gwent Council’s commitment to increasing the number of Electric Vehicle (EV) charge points throughout the Borough is well underway. We are seeing a steady increase in ultra-low emission vehicles licensed across Blaenau Gwent and funding has been confirmed for the second phase of the delivery plan. The full list of Electric Vehicle charging points across Blaenau Gwent can be found [here](#)

Effective integrated working has enabled the Social Services Community Meals service to become more sustainable, supporting the council’s strategy to reduce carbon emissions, during the reporting period, the launch of the rebranded Community Meals Service took place. This included the unveiling of their new electric vehicles which were funded in part through Welsh Government grant funding. [Greenhouse gas emissions in Blaenau Gwent fall – as new Government ramps up action towards net zero \(msn.com\)](#)

Commissioning and Procurement

We are working with Wales Government and the WLGA via the National Procurement Network in developing a common approach to using Carbon Reduction Plans within our procurement processes. This approach has been developed by 10 Councils across the Southeast Wales Procurement Network, to ensure that a consistent approach for requesting Carbon Reduction Plans across the region, and to support the achievement of our respective 2030 Net Zero targets.



Carbon reduction is considered in all individual sourcing strategies. Depending upon the nature and scope of each requirement, this may relate to product specifications, operating methodologies and/or supplier carbon footprints, whereby companies provide organisational Carbon Reduction Plans as part of their tender submissions.

The performance of our Carbon Footprint, associated with the Council's Commissioning and Procurement activities, is circa 75% - 80%, which is consistent across other Welsh local authorities.

Air Quality

An air quality management is declared when there is an exceedance of air quality standards, and the local authority must take legal steps to improve the situation. In Blaenau Gwent we have good levels of air quality, so we have not declared any air quality management areas.

Housing and Energy

All four partner registered social landlords in Blaenau Gwent (Tai Calon, Linc Cymru, United Welsh and Melin)

continue to deliver housing schemes supported by the funding award allocation from Welsh Government to deliver phased activity of the Optimised Retrofit Programme. The main theme of the programme is affordable warmth and decarbonisation achieved through the best path for each individual home.

90% of the current Welsh housing stock is predicted to remain in use by 2050. The main challenge will be retrofitting our existing housing stock, which is particularly old; one third of Welsh homes were built before 1919 while just 6% were built in the last 30 years. A whole fabric approach to retrofit is devised with the aim of ensuring that a property operates in as energy-efficient a manner as possible, with all aspects of the building complementing each other. Retrofit largely has to take place locally. This is both a significant challenge and opportunity for Blaenau Gwent. The skills and supply chain requirements of retrofit at the scale required by Net Zero 2050 are far beyond current capacities both locally and nationally. However, they also present large-scale opportunities for jobs and businesses that have to be located in Blaenau Gwent, and there is significant potential for these benefits to be retained in local businesses and communities. Cabinet has endorsed its participation in a regional scheme aimed at improving energy efficiency in the homes of the most fuel poor residents in the borough.

The Council will work in partnership with the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) and energy supplier EDF, as part of the Energy Company Obligation Scheme (ECO4 Flex), to identify domestic properties in need of energy improvement measures. Qualifying homes will be retrofitted with a range of insulation and energy improving measures as part of a 'whole house' approach. A previous scheme saw 134 households in Blaenau Gwent benefit from measures including replacement of boilers, cavity wall, internal wall and loft insulation, first time central heating, upgrading electrical heaters and solar panel installation. A flexible element of the new scheme enables councils to tailor energy efficiency schemes to their area. Under ECO4 Flex, councils can refer private tenure households that it considers to be living in fuel poverty or on a low income and vulnerable to the effects of living in a cold home.

Decarbonisation of the electricity system has made strong progress, emissions from electricity have fallen by 50% since 2013 and 64% since 1990, and the UK Government has a good chance



of meeting its commitment to decarbonise the electricity supply by 2035. But this was largely achieved by a small number of national organisations. Emissions reductions in other areas are going to require action by far wider range of organisations, including at the local level.

Local Area Energy Plan (LEAP)

Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) is a whole energy system, looking at energy from the Domestic, Industrial, Commercial, Public, Agriculture and Transport Sector across the whole local authority area. It is data driven and focuses on local energy assets and energy demand trends across Blaenau Gwent. Scenario modelling is also undertaken, mapping out expected energy demand, up until 2050, focusing on local energy assets and energy demand trends, considering local, regional and national targets and conditions to achieve Net Zero. The LAEP is led by the Council but involves stakeholders and Council's across boundaries to gain buy in and commitment in order to bring success. The LAEP will be funded by the Welsh Government and will contain:

- Route Map - Will identify the most effective route for the local area to contribute to energy net zero by 2050 considering future energy demand;
- Action Plan – describes the actions required over the next five years – to meet future energy demand by the different renewable energy sources and technologies; and
- Outcome: A costed, spatial plan that identifies the change needed to the local energy system and built environment, detailing what, where, when and by whom. It provides the level of detail for an area that is equivalent to an outline design or master plan, additional detailed design work is required for identified projects to progress to implementation.

We are continuing to investigate opportunities around zero carbon within the Corporate Landlord portfolio and supporting others in development of energy schemes. Work around developing Energy Projects continue with

progress being made on the Silent Valley Wind Turbine. This now has planning permission and will be progressed to procurement when the case for investment is re-determined. Work is continuing on development of infrastructure for Blaenau Gwent fleet, schools and Council buildings.

Biodiversity

Section 6 of the Environment Act places a duty on the Local Authority to 'seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity' so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions. In so doing, the Local Authority must also seek to 'promote the resilience of ecosystems'. To help meet this duty the Council has a Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan (2022-2025). The plan has six aims that will help to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems in Blaenau Gwent by 2025. These aims include reducing overall resource use, and increasing the biodiversity and ecosystems understanding amongst staff and Elected Members.

During the year, the Local Places for Nature Capital Grant continued to be utilised to help enhance green spaces across the Borough, including enhancements to allotments, community orchards and Wildflower Meadow creation. Several workshops and events have also been held to engage with the local community and

provide advice, guidance and help the local community to discover nature.



To help promote the creation of pollinator friendly habitats on land owned by the Council, a new Pollinator Policy has been developed and sets out a range of actions. The relationship between biodiversity and decarbonisation is one of mutual reinforcement, where the success of one often advances the success of the other. When planning individual projects, considering the decarbonisation and biodiversity agenda ensures that the benefits to the environment are maximized. Some of these projects for 2023/ 2024 include:

- Refurbishment of old steps leading to Rhiw Wen Car Park in with new installation of new cycle wheeling channel and signage to assist cyclists to transport their bikes up and down the steps to promote active travel;
- Access routes and entrances to the site at Garden City enhancement opening up the reserve to local people and groups; and
- Supporting partners of Pentref Tyleri, to deliver a Wetland Creation Project.

This holistic approach not only addresses immediate environmental concerns but also builds a sustainable framework for future resilience.

Public Transport

Following a £70 million investment through the Council and Welsh Government, Transport for Wales and Network Work Wales are now delivering direct services between Ebbw Vale and Newport, with 2 trains per hour from Ebbw Vale. A total of 60 train services are running per day. The project has also seen a fully accessible footbridge built at Llanhilleth and new platforms at Llanhilleth and Newbridge, meaning there is now step-free access to all platforms on the line.

To allow the services to run, a new 7-mile passing loop has been built between Crosskeys and Aberbeeg alongside new earthworks and drainage, constructed to accommodate the new track. Alongside this work, The Department for Transport and Network Rail have provided a further £17m of funding to deliver the signalling upgrade at the south end of the line.

Highways

Significant progress has been made over the past 10 years on improving the highway network, however, the absence of Welsh Governance funding for 2023/24, and the end of the Prudential Borrowing Programme has curtailed Capital investments in the highway network. The completion and formal adoption of the Highway Asset Management Plan (HAMP) 2023/28 will support and drive the Authority's approach to maintenance over

the next 5 years. The HAMP, approved by Council on 21st September 2023, describes how the Council will maintain the road network under its control. It details the procedures used to plan and execute all works and functions associated with the management, operation and maintenance of the highway asset including how the activities are monitored to ensure compliance with council policies.

The HAMP will guide the Council, acting as the Highway Authority, in the management of the adopted highway network to ensure that:

- All assets continue to deliver a service to the community and highway users at an agreed level;
- There is clear direction for Elected members and Council staff to make informed decisions regarding the adopted highway network;
- Legislative requirements are satisfied;
- Exposure to safety risk is mitigated to agreed and acceptable levels;
- Asset purchases, increases or construction are only approved after whole life costs and benefits are assessed and agreed; and



- Clear and transparent allocation of responsibilities for the management of individual assets is recorded.

The council has been undergoing a trial for an alternative method of repairs to the highway network including materials to fill potholes. A new banding method for sealing patches / potholes has been used with the aim of making the finish look more aesthetically pleasing, but more importantly, prolong the life of the repaired highway and prevent multiple visits. As the product is currently uncertified it cannot currently be used on the classified highway but is being tested on unclassified roads to consider its longevity moving forward.

A copy of the Blaenau Gwent Highway Asset Management Plan 2023/28 can be found here - [CO2309D8 Appendix 1 - Highway Asset Management Plan.pdf \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](#)

Key Challenges Identified for Action in 2024/25

- Implement actions to reduce the amount of residual [black bag] waste being collected and increase kerbside recycling with the aim of meeting the Welsh Government target of 70%. At quarter 1 in 2024/25 we are at 69.4%
- Work to address the number of fly tipping incidents across the borough and target 'hot spot' areas
- Work to identify how partners can support us in reaching Net Zero by 2030
- The carbon footprint associated with the Council's Commissioning and Procurement activities (Tonnes CO2) increased in 2023/24. Continue to work on this area by implementing the Greener Framework to support the Council to reach Net Zero.

