**Overall Pro****gress of the Well-being Goals**

A Prosperous Wales

**How Well We Are Doing and How Do We Know:**

Data shows that the highest rates of child poverty in Wales are seen in Blaenau Gwent at 30.3% in 2021/22 which equates to 4,124 children. Blaenau Gwent has seen a rise in the proportion of children living in poverty since 2015. The impact of poverty on children is well documented, with children from low-income families more likely to experience worse physical and mental health; do less well in school; and have fewer opportunities in the future. 74% of children in poverty in Blaenau Gwent were living in working families, this equates to 2,872 children. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) captures the extent of deprivation as a proportion of residents living in each lower super output area (LSOA). The eight considerations of the WIMD are: income; employment; health; education, skills and training; geographical access to services; housing; physical environment; and community safety. Blaenau Gwent has the highest percentage of LSOAs in the most deprived areas across Wales at 10%, for income (19.1%), education (27.7%), and community safety (23.4%) <https://www.data.cymru/dashboards/viewofpoverty>

The authority established a cost of living cross party group in September 2022 which is supported by an operation group responsible for implementation of an action plan. The action plan focuses on support for residents, local businesses and promotes partnership working. Providing more joined-up working and holistic interventions are required to ensure those who are socio-economically disadvantaged are provided the right support at the right time now, and in the future. The work on the cost of living crisis is inextricably linked with the poverty agenda.

Our Community Hubs, which operate across seven accessible locations across the borough, work with the Citizens Advice Bureau to offer support and to provide advice regarding schemes such as discretionary payments for cost of living, and housing payments. Specific support is also available for pensioners and those with a disability. Assistance with council tax discounts or reductions is also provided for those with mental or physical disabilities, carers or those on low income. Support for families with children is also offered with a specific focus on free school meals and uniform grants. Furthermore, advice and support for utility bills continues to be offered as people suffer as a consequence of the energy crisis, with opportunities for support and schemes provided for fuel support, winter fuel payments for older people, and warm home discounts.

The Council plays a crucial role with its partners in supporting the Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership, which aims to build a local food system that is healthy, affordable, resilient, and fair. It has supported communities in the borough with community growing projects, food organisations and a shop local network. In supporting people through the cost of living crisis, there is currently a focus on providing opportunities for people who are struggling to get access to food through a number of food bank or food support providers. In 2022/23 the Council provided support through overseeing the Food Distribution Support Grant with over £80,000 being available to groups.

Some specific support provided by the Council to support those impacted by the cost of living crisis includes:

Warm Hubs -The Council received £28,566 funding from Welsh Government to support Warm Hubs as safe and warm places within the local community. Via an application process, Blaenau Gwent supported 30 warm hubs and

in late March 2023, additional funding became available from the Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme that resulted in all warm hubs receiving further funding to extend their provision for a further three months.

Food Distribution - As part of the Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme £70,000 was allocated enabling existing and new organisations to apply for funding to support residents with supplying emergency food provision for those in need. The application process opened in December 2022 and organisations could apply for a grant up to £5,000. Additional funding became available in late March 2023, resulting in a further £89,850 being awarded to original applicants to extend their provision.

Trussel Trust Support provided:

* 191 deliveries to families comprising 309 adults and 186 children in December 2022;
* 188 deliveries to families comprising 304 adults and 152 children in January 2023; and
* 174 deliveries to families comprising 273 adults and 146 children in February 2023.

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) – Funding was allocated through Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme to enhance service provision. From December 2022, a member of staff from CAB worked within the Community Hubs to provide support to residents with the following outreach:

* 22 people supported in December 2022;
* 91 people supported in January 2023; and
* 79 people supported in February 2023.

Stability and sustainability of our domiciliary care and care home market is a significant priority for our teams due to the impact of Covid, early indications of the impact of the rise in fuel and utility costs, and severe staffing pressures. Many providers, including our own in house services, have, during 2022/23, reported high levels of staff vacancies which impact on their ability to provide support. Our commissioning team has continued to work with providers in relation to the introduction to the real living wage and also by scoping the potential support that can be given to our domiciliary care workers to increase wages to compensate them for the increased costs of fuel. The rapidly increasing fuel prices caused concern amongst the domiciliary care market. To address this, the Council acted swiftly and provided additional funding to staff to support the increase in fuel costs during the early part of the year.

Due to the cost of Living Crisis the Supporting People Team were able to fund additional Home Sustainment Packs to support people when moving into their own accommodation to assist with the cost of living.

Work continues to support a reduction in the impact of poverty and homelessness by providing innovative and effective Housing Support Grant (HSG) services, and a new hybrid model of support is now fully embedded across Provider Services. However, the future of the HSG funding remains a significant concern. Support Providers are indicating their costs are rising considerably and their current contractual value no longer covers the costs of providing the service. This will impact not only on current services but also the future commissioning of services. This is being closely monitored by the Supporting People Team.

A Local Housing Market Assessment is underway in order to inform a revised Housing Strategy and Local Development Plan. A cross cutting Housing Strategy Group has recently been set up to take forward the revised Housing Strategy.

The Ebbw Valley Railway (EVR), a branch line of the Great Western Main Line, has had a significant regeneration impact in Blaenau Gwent, increasing connectivity and accessibility since its re-opening to passengers more than a decade ago. EVR’s success was demonstrated with passenger usage numbers far exceeding initial estimates, and the planned new line extension to Abertillery, including a park-and-ride facility for 100 vehicles, will further increase accessibility and connectivity for the Abertillery region. The success of the EVR is supported with evidence from local employers who altered shift patterns for employees travelling by train and has opened up new options for local residents in terms of employment opportunities and access to services and facilities, both within Blaenau Gwent and the region. The extension to Abertillery will increase these benefits further and has the potential to increase footfall in the town centre and create retail growth. Further work on the train lines will be the increasing in frequency of the train to two trains per hour from Ebbw Vale and improvements to the infrastructure and signalling along the Ebbw Vale line.

A Resilient Wales

**How Well We Are Doing and How Do We Know:**

The Council has approved for the Ciner Glass Factory to be developed on the industrial site in the Rassau. This is a positive position for Blaenau Gwent and it is hoped that the factory will create 650 jobs and provide economic benefits to future generations. The intention is for the site to act as a catalyst to provide further innovation and investment into the area.

The UK Government has announced funding as part of the Shared Prosperity Scheme. Blaenau Gwent is working both regionally and locally to ensure that the area is able to access as much money as possible in order to provide funding to the areas that require the most support. Some of the work to date includes working with the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRCD) and northern valleys to support transport projects at a regional level.

Circa £2M has been utilised to provide ICT facilities across all schools in Blaenau Gwent as part of the hwb tech initiative. This Welsh Government initiative is looking to provide suitable infrastructure, services and resources across school estates to support the needs of schools in accessing and using digital services. The approach looks to enable maintained schools in Wales to consistently exploit the transformational benefits which digital technology can have on education. The initiative provides a range of digital services to inspire teachers and learners to confidently embed digital practices, whilst developing a digital culture, competencies, skills and knowledge.

Blaenau Gwent Council is working with the CCRCD and the nine other local authorities in the region to offer opportunities to businesses and new graduates. The Venture Graduate Scheme aims to enhance productivity, innovation and economic growth by linking talented graduates with ambitious businesses in the CCRCD. The scheme offers businesses a range of free services to overcome barriers to recruitment, while graduates on the scheme get to participate in a coherent scheme and complete a fully funded internationally recognised ILM qualification. More information can be found here: <https://www.venturewales.org>

A More Equal Wales

**How Well We Are Doing and How Do We Know:**

The Council is committed to implementing the Equality Act 2010 and is currently working on the development of a new Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) to cover the years 2024/28, with the current plan due to end in 2024. The key activity that will take place to develop the new plan includes:

* Undertaking research to understand strategic equality position;
* The mapping of existing service delivery contributions;
* Undertaking briefings on strategic equality policy development provided for service areas, senior management teams and elected members;
* Organisation-wide quarterly corporate Policy & Performance workshops to be established to raise awareness and support the implementation of key statutory policy areas (e.g., Equality, Welsh, Climate Change etc.);
* The setting up of an Equality Stakeholder Reference Group as a mechanism for capturing the lived experiences of people protected by the Act to support policy development and performance monitor implementation, with opportunity to include elected member and specialist agencies / organisation representation;
* The on-going involvement / consultation via established engagement networks, key groups and staff with protected characteristics covered by the Act; and
* Considering training requirements for staff, senior management, and Members on key statutory areas such as Equality, Welsh, and Participation & Engagement\* etc.

\* *Development of the Council’s Participation and Engagement Strategy 2023/26 (as per Local Government (Wales) Act 2010) is aligned to this work to maximise use of resources.*

The new Plan will also include a number of new Welsh Government Policy areas including:

* [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan](https://www.gov.wales/anti-racist-wales-action-plan)
* [Public commemoration in Wales](https://www.gov.wales/public-commemoration-wales-guidance-public-bodies-html)
* [LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales](https://www.gov.wales/lgbtq-action-plan-wales)

The Equalities Plan aims to put fairness and equality at the heart of everything the Council does, and this is central to maximising well-being outcomes for residents, local communities, staff and visitors, now and in the future. As public service providers it is recognised that there is a key role to play in making a real difference to people’s lives.

The Council has identified an Elected Member Equality Champion who represents the organisation on the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Members Equality Network, and the Council is also represented at various National and Regional Equality Network meetings to collaborate and share good practice and learning. As an organisation we continue to pledge our support towards national equality campaigns and emerging policies, such as Zero Racism Wales; Welsh Government’s vision of an Anti-Racist Wales by 2030 and LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales.

A building with purple lights

Description automatically generatedA particularly good example of supporting national equality campaigns was the recognition given to International Holocaust Memorial Day via an event held on Friday 27th January 2023. It was a chance to honour the survivors of regimes of hatred and take the opportunity to reflect on the ways in which we live our lives today and bring our communities together to create a safer, better future. On 26th January 2023, Council agreed to award Eva Clarke the Freedom of the Borough, the highest accolade the Council can bestow. Eva Clarke was born in a concentration camp and was one of only three babies that survived. Eva has worked hard over the years to ensure the stories of those survivors have been told, ensuring their memories live on and what they endured is never forgotten. Eva has strong links with South Wales, and Blaenau Gwent particularly. The award ceremony took place in March 2023.

We continue to be part of the Proud Council’s network which has currently expanded over the last year to include a further two local authorities in Wales. Being part of the network allows us to work collaboratively to attend Pride events and work together on LGBTQ+ history month. By uniting and working together we can achieve a greater impact.

A review of the Equality Impact Assessment process has been undertaken and approved by Cabinet. This process is now called an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) and is for both new and existing policies and practices (when reviewed). The IIA also includes the Socio Economic Duty which is to be considered when a decision may have a substantial negative impact on the socio economic outlook of the area. IIAs are undertaken against all relevant proposals, and included within the Council’s reporting template and strategic business reviews. As part of the IIA review work, we are looking to develop a research library to provide accessible data and intelligence to support anyone carrying out an IIA and the delivery of actions associated to our Strategic Equality Plan. The research library includes case studies, census data, other local data, regional and national evidence and reports relating to equality and diversity, as well as examples of lived experiences from peoples covered by protected characteristics.

The Annual Report to the Equality and Human Rights Commission was published and submitted within the appropriate timescales. The Report was included on the Council website in March 2023.

The Gender Pay Gap information, required under the statutory requirements of the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017, is presented and published through the Council’s Pay Policy Statement 2022/2023. We annually consider the issue of gender pay in order to help us understand the difference in average earnings between women and men. The Council is confident that men and women are paid equally for doing equivalent jobs across the Council. Our assessment shows that women and men are paid equally for doing equivalent jobs across the Council, with a predominantly female workforce (77.3% female, 22.7% male), occupying a high percentage of jobs across all four pay quartiles. In comparison, the UK gender pay gap was 12.1%, in 2022. Men earned 10.9% more on average than women in Wales in 2022. This indicates that in 2022, the average gross weekly earnings in pounds for male and female full-time employees excluding overtime were £603.50 and £537.50 respectively so men earned £66.00 per week more. However, the pay gap in Blaenau Gwent is significantly lower than the national average and has further improved. In seeking to address gender pay there is a suite of policies in place that promote equalities throughout the workforce and data for this year is also being reviewed. As a result of this work, actions and measures required to further address gender pay differences will be incorporated into existing Equality plans.

In 2022/23 Organisational Development reviewed and updated a series of workforce policies which supports equality and diversity within the workplace. A few examples are highlighted below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Pay Policy | Mar-22 |
| Adverse Weather Guidance | Jun-22 |
| Adoption/Surrogacy Leave | Oct-22 |
| Maternity Leave | Oct-22 |
| Paternity/Maternity Support Leave | Oct-22 |
| Parental Leave | Oct-22 |

We believe regularly monitoring, reviewing, and implementing these policies allows us to maintain policy effectiveness and strengthens equality of opportunity. A good example of where policy development for our staff has made a difference is when the Council agreed to sign up to the Trade Union Congress (TUC) policy “Dying to Work Charter” in December 2022. Our Critical Illness and Working Guidelines and the Attendance Management Policy have also been updated.

Providing opportunities to become a more diverse Council can lead to better engagement with individuals and communities, in turn leading to greater levels of confidence, trust and better decision which is informed by a wider range of perspectives and lived experiences. On 29th July 2021, Council signed up to becoming a ‘Diverse Council’. There are a number of expectations on Councils, as part of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, to support diversity in the democratic process and also for political parties to support the process of becoming a councillor and support once elected. As part of this, a Diverse Council Action Plan has been approved by Council which includes 30 actions, of which, 19 are completed and 11 are in progress with full implementation scheduled by March 2024.

A Wales of Cohesive Communities

**How Well We Are Doing and How Do We Know:**

A main objective of the current Strategic Equality Plan 2020/24 is to promote and support safe, friendly and cohesive communities. Working in partnership with the West Gwent Community Cohesion Programme and local Community Safety Partnership, the Council continues to deliver a range of projects and initiatives which promote increased awareness and understanding; encourages and celebrates diversity; and brings people and local communities together to strengthen community spirit and resilience.

The Council has successfully raised awareness and understanding of numerous International and National Equality and Cohesion Campaigns via social media, as well as delivering on specific initiatives with staff, communities and stakeholders (for example, the Youth Forum, Citizen Panel etc.). Examples of the campaigns supported includes Holocaust Memorial Day, Show Racism the Red Card, LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer +) History Month, Pride, White Ribbon Day (campaign to end domestic violence), Black History Month and International Children’s Day.

Since 2016, Blaenau Gwent Council has supported the UK’s Resettlement Scheme Programme, working in partnership with a wide range of public, third sector and private sector organisations, to deliver a holistic package of support.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Resettlement Scheme** | **LA Involvement** | **Where are we?** |
| UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) | Voluntary | * Blaenau Gwent Council agreed to participate in the UKRS in 2019.  However, due to the disruption in global resettlement, as a result of the pandemic, refugee resettlement was largely paused until 2021. * Blaenau Gwent has yet to receive any cases via the UKRS (due in part to the local focus centering on the Ukraine response) but we remain an active participant in the scheme. |
| Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and Afghan Citizens’ Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) | Voluntary | * In June 2021, Blaenau Gwent Council consulted elected members on the potential role the authority could play in supporting Afghan nationals via ARAP and later ACRS. * It was agreed that because the authority’s commitment to the UK Resettlement Scheme was in place Blaenau Gwent would pledge to resettle up to 4 cases from Afghanistan. * To date, we have resettled 2 families into the borough – (9 individuals).  We have also supported a spontaneous Afghan arrival (a family of 3). * We continue to engage with housing partners with the intension of supporting 2 additional cases via the ACRS/ARAP scheme in during the remainder of 2023, honoring the existing pledge BGCBC made in 2021. |
| Homes for Ukraine Scheme | Expected (WG) | * In May 2022, all local authorities and the Welsh Government agreed the  [Homes for Ukraine Accommodation Framework](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.wales%2Fhomes-ukraine-framework-accommodation-html%23%3A~%3Atext%3DHomes%2520for%2520Ukraine%253A%2520framework%2520for%2520accommodation%25201%2520Financial%2COffer%252C%2520move-on%2520and%2520support%2520in%2520new%2520home%2520&data=05%7C01%7CGemma.Wasley%40blaenau-gwent.gov.uk%7C72e249cf28124f1b45a008db7d3c7313%7C2c4d0079c52c4bb3b3cad8eaf1b6b7d5%7C0%7C0%7C638241470798937134%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=6x%2FUG7q7IByw073xK30QIcLAmF8Da8%2B%2B7tf%2Fp4gzWdE%3D&reserved=0). This set out how Ukrainians, who arrive via the Welsh Government Super Sponsor route, and who are accommodated at Welcome Centres, would be dispersed across Wales. * As part of this, every local authority agreed a **population share** of Ukrainian arrivals (under the Super Sponsor route) that they would support into longer term accommodation as part of a *Team Wales approach*. * The population share for Blaenau Gwent is 77 refugees to be resettled into the borough. * To date, 57 guests (74% of expected population share) have been resettled into the borough. * As an aside to arrivals relocated under our population share, all LAs are continuing to support Ukrainian arrivals who have been sponsored by an individual (i.e. community member) those arrivals are hosted and are supported alongside those who have been relocated under the population share. |
| Asylum Dispersal | Mandatory (UKG) | * In June 2022, the UKG introduced a full Dispersal model for Asylum Dispersal – the rationale of this policy is to provide a more equitable distribution of asylum dispersal across the UK, a full Dispersal model means all local authority areas in England, Scotland and Wales will be expected to participate in the scheme and will be welcoming asylum seekers into their area. * For Blaenau Gwent, the target figure is 55 newly bedspaces (to be established in 2023). * To date, 33 bedspaces have now been established/occupied (60% of ‘target’ for 2023) |

The Council is also supporting two Government schemes to help those fleeing the war in Ukraine. The Homes for Ukraine Scheme was launched on 14th March 2022 by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The scheme was established to support Ukrainian nationals who lived in Ukraine before 1st January 2022, and to their immediate family members who may be other nationalities. The scheme allowed them to be sponsored to come to the UK for at least a six-month period. The Welsh Government issued approximately 4,600 visas issued through the scheme whereby applicants were initially placed into Welcome Centres across Wales before medium to longer term accommodation could be sought.

In Blaenau Gwent, the Level Inn was initially identified as the Welcome Centre with the Llanhilleth Hotel added in August 2022. Each applicant was supported by a dedicated team which could include the Council, ABUHB, DWP, Education, Adult Education, Aneurin Leisure, GAVO and Remploy. Both Welcome Centres have now been closed owing to the successful move on rates with the Blaenau Gwent process being identified as good practice.

To date, almost 100 Ukrainians have been supported with initial accommodation. Several residents have secured employment locally and all school aged children are now enrolled into local schools. A number of residents are exploring private rental options, particularly the larger families where there are no hosting options available.

Since October 2022, 11 community groups received monies from the Household Support Fund / Cost of Living Food Distribution Support Grant to provide direct help to local communities in need, and 21 community groups received monies from the Loneliness and Isolation Grant.

In December 2021, the Gwent PSB agreed to commission a comprehensive governance review of community safety arrangements across Gwent who mandated that the regional Safer Gwent Partnership group would lead the governance review; and further mandated the re-establishment of the five local authority-area statutory Community Safety Partnerships. In March 2023, Safer Blaenau Gwent Community Safety Partnership was re-established.

The Home Office introduced the new Serious Violence Duty with the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. Whilst the duty is upon the local Safer Blaenau Gwent Community Safety Partnership, regionally it has been agreed to implement the requirements of the duty through a Gwent Serious Violence Partnership, led by the Gwent Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. A Serious Violence Strategic Needs Assessment will need to be developed, which will be used to inform the agreed Partnership Strategy and Delivery Plan expected January 2024.

There are well-established Gwent regional strategic governance arrangements in place to deliver the local statutory duties relating to VAWDASV. The second VAWDASV Strategy(2023-2026) was published for public consultation in early April 2023 [**here**](https://www.gwentsafeguarding.org.uk/assets/en-documents/VAWDASV/Gwent-Regional-VAWDASV-Strategy-2023-2026-DRAFT-for-Consultation.pdf). The draft Strategy noted a proposal to align the Wales National Strategy, and therefore adopt objectives, mapped to the three aims of the Act: Prevention, Protection and Provision of Support.

The UK Counter Terrorism Strategy CONTEST aims to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism. In Gwent, strategic governance for counter terrorism is provided by the Gwent CONTEST Board, which oversees related regional and local structural delivery arrangements.

The Home Office introduced a new Protect Duty (Martyn’s Law), which is yet to come into effect. Blaenau Gwent has a well-established Protective Security and Preparedness Group that ensures the Council, and its partners are aware of the impending duty, and will support its implementation in due course. Following self-assessment of compliance (2022-23) with Prevent and Channel Statutory Guidance requirements, Blaenau Gwent was marked as having the highest compliance rate across the region.

The Home Office provided grant funding aimed at tackling neighbourhood crime, anti-social behaviour and violence against women and girls. Two areas in Blaenau Gwent were prioritised given the crime evidence-base, that of Tredegar and Brynmawr. There were a range of initiatives funded which included a Youth Shelter, home safety and fire security measures for repeat vulnerable victims. The most vulnerable victims were also offered residential CCTV (doorbells) and indoor lighting-timers and dusk to dawn external security lighting. Some local commercial, retail and other Businesses, also benefitted from target hardening support. A local Neighbourhood Watch Officer was supported to encourage volunteering and co-production opportunities.

Blaenau Gwent has been selected to participate in the national Home Office funded pilot **‘**Project Clean Streets’which will work with people on probation who areserving Community Payback sentence to rapidly clean up high-profile instances of anti-social behaviour, such as graffiti and litter, within 48 hours of notification.

A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language

**Welsh Language Strategy**

The aims of the Blaenau Gwent’s Welsh Language Strategy are linked with the Welsh Government’s vision to create a million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050. In order to meet a target of a 44% increase of Welsh speakers by 2050, Blaenau Gwent would need to gain an additional 2,324 Welsh speakers against the 2011 Census where the Blaenau Gwent baseline is 5,284 (data from the 2021 Census in relation to Welsh language is yet to be released). Therefore, this represents an average annual increase of 70 additional Welsh speakers, i.e., 3% of the target figure of an additional 2,324 in Blaenau Gwent for the next 33 years.

The council has in place a Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2021/22 and has identified the following three Welsh Language Promotion objectives:

* To promote and encourage the use of the Welsh language within families and the community;
* To increase the provision of Welsh language education and informal activities for children and young people and to increase their awareness of the value of the language; and
* To increase opportunities for people to use Welsh in the workplace.

The outcomes of the Strategy are:

* More people engage with the Welsh language;
* More people attain fluency in the Welsh language;
* More Council employees are able to use Welsh Language Monitoring Arrangements;
* Welsh Language Promotion Strategy Action Plan in place;
* Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan in place; and
* Welsh Language Annual Monitoring Report undertaken.

Welsh Language Investigation

In November 2021, the Welsh Language Commissioners Office (WLCO) opened an investigation with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council following concerns raised during a direct verification assessment of whether the Council was compliant with the Welsh Language Standards in terms of providing a Welsh language telephone service.

In April 2022, the Council provided an initial response to the investigation, which, in turn, raised further compliance concerns with regards to promoting services, assessing the language skills of staff, providing training opportunities and assessing the language needs of posts. This led to the terms of reference for the investigation being widened to include a number of additional operational standards.

In September 2022, a final determination of the investigation, in accordance with Section 77 of the Welsh Language (Wales) 2011 Measure was provided to the Council. The determination outlined the steps required to reach compliance and expected delivery timeframes. It also requested the Council take forward an organisational approach (including clear accountability and governance framework) to develop an Action Plan, with a deadline 31 January 2023.

A decision was made by the Council’s Leadership Team to establish an organisation wide Core Officer Group (CS092) with responsibility for preparing and implementing an Action Plan. This Action Plan is currently being embedded with the intention for all actions to be fully embedded by March 2024. The Action Plan is being monitored by the Core Officer Group, which is Chaired by the Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships.

The Blaenau Gwent Welsh Network, an external partnership group facilitated by Menter Iaith BGTM, was re-established in the past 12 months. The network is made up of local Welsh language organisations and agencies along with the Blaenau Gwent Council service areas whose work directly centres on promoting the use of the Welsh language across the Authority. The purpose of this group is to work collectively to help support the delivery and monitoring of the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022/27 our Welsh Language Compliance Notice and to share resources, learning, and good practice. The group will also work alongside the Council’s Corporate Equality Welsh Network.

Partnership working is key to the delivery of Objective 1. Below is an example of what our local Welsh language partners have delivered during the reporting period to support it.

Established in 1971, Mudiad Meithrin is a voluntary organisation passionate about celebrating and encouraging the use of the Welsh language. The organisation offers numerous Welsh-medium play and learning experiences for children from birth to school-age. Cylch Meithrin Brynithel has held a series of activities with families this year to generate interest in Welsh and Welsh Education including Welsh courses for parents; a Martyn Geraint Show at Abertillery’s Metropole Theatre and a free trip to the Dewin and Doti Festival. In July 2022 working with Blaenau Gwent Welsh-medium primary Ysgol Bro Helyg, Mudiad Meithrin published a video regarding transport to the school. The video ‘My journey to School’ shows the journey for local children on a bus to school, which aims to reassure parents who have been worried about sending their young children on a bus to travel to school. The video was promoted on the Council’s social media pages and website and is used to encourage families who send their children to Cylch Meithrin in Brynithel to continue their Welsh-medium education by sending them to this local Welsh School after they leave the cylch.

Opportunities to learn Welsh across the Council have been extensively promoted during the past 12 months. Blaenau Gwent staff are actively encouraged to engage in the Welsh language. Training opportunities are regularly advertised through newsletters. One example is the collection of online taster courses, run by Dysgu Cymraeg (Learn Welsh), that are tailored for the workplace. 18 members of staff enrolled on a total of 28 courses with 7 of those members enrolling on more than one course. This compares favourably to the previous year which had 11 staff enrolled on a total of 15 courses. More training has been undertaken during 2022-23, with an average of 4.7 modules completed per learner this year compared to 3.2 last year.

The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022-2032 is a 10-year plan. Blaenau Gwent has an ambitious target of increasing the Year 1 cohort (750 pupils) taught via the medium of Welsh to 75 pupils -10% by 2032 (baseline as per plasc 2021 data 29 pupils - 4%).

As part of this plan, Blaenau Gwent will open a 210 place Welsh Medium Seedling Primary School on the Chartist Way Site, in the Tredegar/Sirhowy Valley. The school will be developed via a seedling growth model from September 2023. The Council are currently in the process of letting the contract for the new build and it is anticipated that the contractor will be appointed Spring 2023. It is anticipated, the new school building will be completed for occupation by September 2024. The school will open initially in its temporary location of Bedwellty House, Tredegar for nursery and reception pupils, with a new year group being added each year. Initial governance arrangements will be under Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg with a view to reviewing this after an initial 2/3-year period. Education Transformation are currently working with the Welsh in Education Forum (WEF) and Rhag in order to promote the new provision.

In order to support the seedling provision and develop increased capacity across childcare and early years’ settings, a further 2 Welsh medium childcare settings are being established – at the Glyncoed Primary new build site, and in the new Tredegar seedling school provision. Currently there are 2 well established childcare provisions located in Brynithel and at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg.

The Social Services department continues to monitor compliance with our responsibilities within More Than Just Words and the Active Offer. We continue to ensure that when citizens contact both our Adult and Children Services Departments, that they are offered the opportunity to communicate in the language of their choice. Our assessment tools within our social care system, WCCIS, specifically asks the question “Do you require this conversation / assessment to be carried out in Welsh?” The form is then attached to the person’s referral. The More Than Just Words action plan has progressed, there is liaison with the local Welsh language champions and promoting the wide resources and opportunities available is now standard. Our commissioned providers work in partnership with us to promote the Welsh Language and this is reflected in our contracts and service level agreements.

A Globally Responsible Wales

**How Well We Are Doing and How Do We Know:**

Our Decarbonisation approach is based on Welsh Government's two Net Zero targets: Net Zero 2030 for the Welsh Public Sector (organisational emissions), and Net Zero 2050 for all of Wales (territorial emissions). Our organisational emissions are the carbon emissions produced by delivering our services, while Blaenau Gwent's territorial emissions include all the carbon emissions released within the borough, from homes, transport and businesses etc.

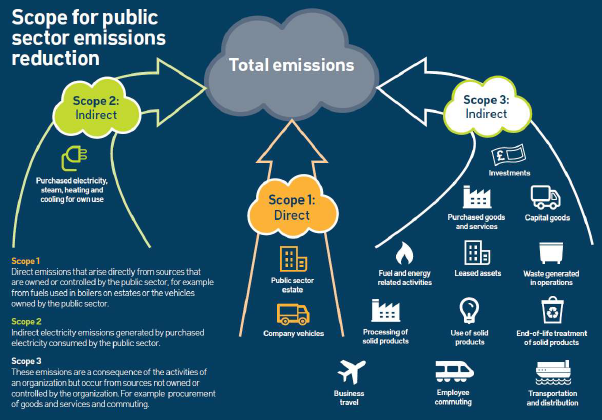
Our Decarbonisation Plan was adopted in September 2020, and at the same time we declared a Climate Emergency. The plan addresses our organisational emissions with the aim of making our full contribution to the ambition of a Net Zero Public Sector in Wales by 2030.

We have adopted a data driven approach, based on identifying from our carbon footprint, eight transitions we have to undertake to reach Net Zero. Each of these transitions represents a coherent area of action with its own distinct low carbon technologies, business models and infrastructure. Each of these transitions has its own detailed actions to deliver it. Our approach is based on mainstreaming decarbonisation into our operations, rather than establishing separate decarbonisation projects and budgets. With a cross-organisation climate group providing corporate overview.

Overview of our Transitions

1. A screenshot of a graph

   Description automatically generated**Transport:** Travel by our staff in corporate or their own vehicles, includes fleet, commuting and staff travel within work.
2. **Nature Based Solutions:** Absorption of carbon on land we own and manage, largely associated with woodland, urban trees and peatland.
3. **Procurement: Goods** which covers what we purchase as an organisation and includes key items such as clothing, food, IT, machinery, equipment and furniture.
4. **Procurement: Services** which covers the services we procure to deliver our functions such as schools and social services. This also includes investments such as pension schemes.
5. **Procurement: Works** which includes all construction and maintenance of our buildings and infrastructure.
6. **Electricity:** Covers the electricity we purchase to run all our services. It includes key things such as street lighting, running our corporate buildings and schools. It also includes our use of renewable technologies.
7. **Heat:** Includes our heating (and cooling) of our buildings.
8. **Waste:** Covers the carbon impacts of our treatment of municipal waste, whether recycling, landfill or waste to power.



Our carbon footprint is divided in to three scopes (*see diagram to the right*). Our footprint includes all emissions from assets, such as buildings and vehicles, that we have day-to day operational control of, whether we own or lease them (Scope 1 and 2 emissions) and emissions which are the result of our procurement and other organisations delivering services on our behalf (Scope 3 emissions).

**2022/23 Carbon Emissions**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2019/20** | **2020/21** | **2021/22** | **2022/23** | **Change from Base Year** | **Change from Last Year** |
| Direct Carbon Emissions  **tonnes CO2e/year** | 14,750 | 11,793 | 13,087 | 12,332 | -16%\* | -6%\* |

*\*Provisional Figures*

Net Zero 2050 relates to production based territorial emissions, these include all the carbon emissions released in Blaenau Gwent, and released to produce energy that is used within Blaenau Gwent. It does not include consumption based territorial emissions, which are the emissions associated with making products that were made elsewhere and consumed in Blaenau Gwent.

We have much less direct control of territorial emissions, actions to reduce these emissions mainly sit in areas C through F of the *diagram to the right*, and actions to reduce organisational emissions, which largely sit in areas A and B. As a result, partnership working, regional and national strategies have a far greater role to play in Net Zero 2050 than Net Zero 2030 and will also require much more public action. The local authority cannot deliver territorial Net Zero 2050 alone, but we are the organisation that is best positioned to produce a local overview, particularly due to our role in place shaping.

Territorial emissions in Blaenau Gwent have fallen 33% between 2005 and a 2019 baseline, compared to 29% for Wales as a whole. 71% of these reductions in emissions are associated with electricity consumption, while some of these reductions will be due to actions taken locally to improve energy efficiency, a majority will be due to decarbonisation of the National Grid.

In March 2021, 44 residents of Blaenau Gwent came together online to discuss the question *'how can we tackle climate change in Blaenau Gwent in a way that is fair and improves living standards for everyone?'* The 44 Assembly Members were chosen at random to be representative of people in Blaenau Gwent (in terms of age, gender, where they live, type of housing etc.) The [Climate Assembly](https://cynnalcymru.com/blaenau-gwent-climate-assembly/) met for a total of 23 hours online, hearing evidence from over 20 experts (from academics to local residents), and voted on recommendations they created themselves, five of which received the 80% support needed to become official recommendations. Through the Blaenau Gwent Mitigation Steering Group partners developed a set of proposed actions that we could take in response to the Climate Assembly at the Blaenau Gwent level (recognising that some elements of recommendations will take action at regional or national scale). We agreed to lead for four of these priorities.

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The Council is working closely with partners at both a local Blaenau Gwent level, through the newly formed Well-being Partnership Group, the Regional Gwent PSB and Climate Ready Gwent in order to work together to tackle climate change. Regional projects have included:

* Electrical Vehicle Charging Project where 63 new dual electric vehicle 22kw fast charging units have been installed at 34 sites across Gwent;
* Gwent Green Grid Partnership, where funding has been secured by Gwent partners for a three-year programme of work in support of woodland creation and management, green space cycle ways and the enhancement of vital habitats. Involving communities in the management of their local parks and woodlands has been shown to improve community cohesion and reduce antisocial behaviour; and
* Contributing to the development of Cardiff Capital Region Energy Strategy.

The Council has prepared a 10 ‐ 15-year Ultra Low Emission Vehicle (ULEV) Fleet Transition Plan. In November 2020 the Council completed a Low Emission Vehicle Fleet Review with Consultants Cenex. The fleet review considered our current fleet, low emission vehicle technology options, performance reviews and infrastructure review. At the time of the review our fleet consisted of 97 vehicles and included passenger cars, light commercial vehicles, large minibuses and a range of trucks. Our fleet contributed 800 tonnes of CO2 annually and 63% of these emissions come from rigid trucks (12‐ 18t). The review found that battery electric vehicles within the light commercial segment represent the best opportunity for Blaenau Gwent CBC to introduce low emission vehicles into the fleet in the short term. Ultra-low emission vehicles are being trialled with frontline services to enable the team to consider the pilot in the fleet replacement programme. Options to progress the decarbonisation of the Council’s fleet still need to be developed. A long term programme of works to reduce the annual carbon emissions and energy costs of our buildings continues to make progress

Blaenau Gwent Council are exploring opportunities to launch Community Energy Bonds as a way for the local community to play a part in raising the funds to support the development of low carbon energy generation infrastructure and technology. As one of a number of UK pilot areas, the Council has the opportunity to use Community Municipal Investment (CMI) to fund low carbon infrastructure for the Council. The Council have signed the Local Climate Bond pledge with the UK Government Green Finance Institute to support us in raising the funds to make investment in low carbon infrastructure and help us on our journey to become net zero by 2030.

We are working closely with businesses and housing providers across Blaenau Gwent to assist with SAB (drainage applications) at planning stage. Last year saw the completion of the Brynmawr food retail park where the team worked closely with the developer and investor to bring the development forward as it had been caught between Welsh Government legislation and needed a retrospective SAB permission.

The Council takes part in regional initiatives like Resilient Greater Gwent which collaborates to support ecology, deal with invasive species, and grow sustainable communities which brings together all the components of environmental resilience. As part of this, the Council received £146k from the Resilient Greater Gwent Grant to support biodiversity projects across the borough. Contributing to the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and ecosystem resilience will help to mitigate and adapt to climate change and provide positive opportunities to maintain and build mental and physical health and well-being.

The Education Directorate aim to ensure that decarbonisation measures are at the forefront of our future planning and teaching. The environment and biodiversity considerations form the basis of all new school buildings and existing school upgrades, and we encourage nature friendly management on school grounds. Effective partnership working enables us to provide advice and guidance to support our children and young people around biodiversity, decarbonisation, equalities, diversity and inclusion. These partnerships with schools and the Children’s Grand Council are very effective and not only inform but support our children and young people to have a voice. We are and will continue to deliver effective sustainable communities for learning which are environmentally friendly and support the delivery of our educated young people who will in the future form our connected communities.

A Healthier Wales

**How Well We Are Doing and How Do We Know:**

Within Gwent, the average life expectancy is below the Welsh average except in Monmouthshire. Between 2017 and 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, average life expectancy in all four of the other local authorities in Gwent fell, including Blaenau Gwent. Life expectancy for women peaked in 2015-17 and for men rose slightly in 2018-20.

Average healthy life expectancy (how long one can expect to live in good health) is also below the Wales average in Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Newport and Torfaen. Average healthy life expectancy for women in Torfaen is 55 years compared to 69 years for women in Monmouthshire. Men in Blaenau Gwent have the worst healthy life expectancy in Gwent, living for 56 years on average, compared to 69 years for men in Monmouthshire. In 2021, the poorest children in Wales started school 10 months behind children from families with more money. Blaenau Gwent is below the Welsh average in the number of seven-year-olds achieving the expected level at the end of the Foundation Phase in 2017.

The Transformation Programme to support the continued development of a ‘seamless system’ of care, support and well-being in Gwent, in response to the Welsh Government’s new long term plan for health and social care, ‘A Healthier Wales’, has seen progress across the four identified programmes with evaluation reports demonstrating both financial efficiencies and improved wellbeing outcomes for citizens have been achieved. Following on from this, the Blaenau Gwent Integrated Services Partnership Board (ISPB) has been established to act as an enabler for embedding a whole system approach that integrates health, local authority and voluntary sector services, and is facilitated by collaboration and consultation.

Compassionate Communities is also part of the Transformation Programme that aims to provide place based services to improve the well-being of people across Gwent. Work includes the development of IAA outreach across the Compassionate Communities within 11 GP practices and also at community and acute hospital sites, where initial positive outcomes have been reported. Compassionate Communities also include Community Connectors actively participating in Multi-Disciplinary Team Discussions and Hospital discharge follow up phone calls.