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**Date: 13th October 2022**

To Whom It May Concern,

A multi-locational meeting of the **Cabinet** will be held in Penallta House, and via Microsoft Teams on **Wednesday, 19th October, 2022 at 1.00 pm** to consider the matters contained in the following agenda. 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 on request.

Members of the public or Press may attend in person at Penallta House or may view the meeting live via the following link: <https://civico.net/caerphilly>

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Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chrissy'.

**Christina Harrhy**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

## A G E N D A

1 To receive apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of Interest.

Councillors and Officers are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and/or prejudicial interest(s) in respect of any item of business on the agenda in accordance

**A greener place Man gwyrdach**



with the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Code of Conduct for both Councillors and Officers.

To approve and sign the following minutes: -

- |   |                                      |        |
|---|--------------------------------------|--------|
| 3 | Cabinet held on 26th September 2022. | 1 - 8  |
| 4 | Cabinet held on 5th October 2022.    | 9 - 16 |

To note the Cabinet Forward Work Programme.

- |   |                                 |         |
|---|---------------------------------|---------|
| 5 | Cabinet Forward Work Programme. | 17 - 22 |
|---|---------------------------------|---------|

To receive and consider the following reports on which executive decisions are required: -

- |    |   |           |
|----|---|-----------|
| 6  | Bryn Community Engagement Proposal.   | 23 - 30   |
| 7  | Regeneration Board - Project Proposals.   | 31 - 40   |
| 8  | Final Report from the Task and Finish Group on Tackling Potential Mental Health Issues Post Pandemic. | 41 - 126  |
| 9  | Annual Report on Corporate Complaints Received for the Period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.      | 127 - 192 |
| 10 | Interim Joint Protocol for Mileage Rates in Local Authorities.  | 193 - 200 |
| 11 | Foundation Living Wage 2022.  | 201 - 204 |
| 12 | Workforce Capacity and Associated Challenges.   | 205 - 220 |

#### **Circulation:**

Councillors C. Andrews, S. Cook, E. Forehead, N. George, P. Leonard, S. Morgan, C. Morgan, J. Pritchard, J. Simmonds and E. Stenner

And Appropriate Officers

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# Agenda Item 3



## CABINET

### MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY, 26<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 2PM

#### PRESENT:

Councillor S. Morgan – Chair

#### Councillors:

J. Pritchard (Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration & Climate Change), C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education & Communities), N. George (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Property), S. Cook (Cabinet Member for Housing), P. Leonard (Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection) and C. Morgan (Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure & Green Spaces), Cllr. J. Simmonds (Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation).

#### Together with:

C. Harrhy (Chief Executive), M. S. Williams (Corporate Director – Economy and Environment) and R. Edmunds (Corporate Director – Education and Corporate Services).

#### Also in Attendance:

R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), L. Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), N. Taylor-Williams (Head of Housing), S. Harris (Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer), R. Kyte (Head of Planning and Regeneration), P. Hudson (Business Enterprise Renewal Team Leader), T. McMahon (Community Regeneration Manager), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager) and E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer).

## RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Leader reminded those present that the meeting was being live streamed, and a recording would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click Here To View](#).

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from E. Forehead (Cabinet Member for Social Care), and D. Street (Corporate Director for Social Services and Housing)

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

**3. CABINET – 7<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2022**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2022 be approved as a correct record.

**4. CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – TO NOTE**

Cabinet was provided with the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, which detailed the scheduled reports until 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022.

Members were reminded that the Cabinet Forward Work Programme is a working document and thus subject to change. The Leader thanked Officers for populating the forward work programme so far in advance and Cabinet accepted that as a live document it would be subject to change.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the Forward Work Programme be noted. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

**5. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL CAR PARKS TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Consideration was given to the report which sought to inform Cabinet of the recommendations from a joint meeting of the Environment and Sustainability and the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Committees held on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 2022 on the findings of the Caerphilly County Borough Council Car Parks Task and Finish Group.

Cabinet noted that the Task and Finish Group reviewed the town centre car parking charges in view of the effects of the pandemic on the high street economy and concentrated on the 6 main town centres of Bargoed, Blackwood, Caerphilly, Newbridge, Risca and Ystrad Mynach.

Options for future charging were referenced and the range of options reviewed noted along with the Groups overall recommendation. Cabinet referred to Section 10 of the Officers report and the comments of the Joint Scrutiny Committee held on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 2022.

The Leader referenced representations he had received from Blackwood Town Council, Councillor A. Farina-Childs and a Blackwood business in relation to the report and the findings of the Task and Finish Group. He asked Cabinet to note that 3 Independent Members were part of the Task and Finish membership which had included full cross-party representation and as such they would have contributed fully to the recommendations presented for consideration. Reference was then made to a request from Councillor K. Etheridge to speak at Cabinet on this report and Leader advised that Councillor Etheridge had previously spoken at the Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting and his comments there had been fully noted.

Members noted that the Task and Finish Group, Joint Scrutiny Committee and now Cabinet would be considering what was best for all Town Centres as a whole and assurances were given that Cabinet had listened to the findings of the Task and Finish Group and the recommendations of the Joint Scrutiny Committee.

It was moved and seconded that subject to the inclusion of 2 additional recommendations at 3.5 and 3.6 of the Officers report to read that (1) the implementation of the new charges be delayed until Monday 2nd January 2023 to allow the 8 – 10 weeks for the charging machine and software amendments to be made, and that (2) the £150,000 lost income from the Highways budget for the 3 months from October 2022 to January 2023 be funded from the earmarked Covid Reserve the recommendations contained in the Officers report be approved and by way of verbal confirmation and Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report: -

1. To reduce the initial hourly charge at Caerphilly County Borough Council car parks to the First hour at 40p with subsequent hours at the existing tariff be endorsed.
2. The continued suspension of car parking charges until the car park ticket machine software can be amended, and to allow sufficient time for this to be undertaken, to agree that the re-introduction of charges in accordance with above be implemented from January 2023 be endorsed.
3. Additional funding for the Highway Services budget to meet the shortfall as outlined in the Financial Implications based on the estimated annual income loss of £83k be endorsed.
4. An impact report be provided to Scrutiny 12 months after the implementation of the changes be approved.
5. The implementation of the new charges be delayed until Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2023 to allow the 8-10 weeks for the charging machines and software amendments to be made be approved.
6. The £150,000 lost income from the Highways Budget for the 3 months from October 2022 to January 2023 be funded from the earmarked Covid Reserve.

With the approval of the Chair, Agenda Item No. 8 – Provisional Revenue Budget Outturn for 2021/22 report was brought forward for discussion.

## **8. PROVISIONAL REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN FOR 2021/22**

Consideration was given to the report which sought to provide Cabinet with details of the provisional revenue budget outturn for the 2021/22 financial year prior to the completion of the annual external audit of the accounts by Audit Wales.

Cabinet noted that in advance of the 2021/22 Financial Statements audit being completed by Audit Wales and presented to Governance and Audit Committee and Council the report provided an overview of the Council's performance against the revenue budget for the 2021/22 financial year. The report also detailed a range of proposals for the use of surplus General Fund balances and the use of service reserves.

Cabinet was advised that the Authority continued to incur significant additional costs during the 2021/22 financial year due to the Covid 19 pandemic and has also lost income in several key areas. However Welsh Government continued to provide substantial funding to Local Authorities to offset additional costs and income losses through the Covid 19 Hardship Fund, which allocated £19.025m to Caerphilly County Borough Council during that financial year. In addition Welsh Government also provided specific grant funding to Local Authorities to assist with a range of other financial pressure that included £878k to help mitigate a reduction in Council Tax collection rates, £2.576m for Track, Trace and Protect, £4.036m for the Social Care Recovery Fund and £1.017m for Education and Life Long Learning.

As was the case in 2020/21 financial year, the level of underspends for 2021/22 was significantly higher than in previous years, reflecting the ongoing impact of the pandemic on changes in working practices and the scale of financial support provided, large elements of

which were not received until the latter part of the financial year. The more significant budget variation for each service area were detailed and noted.

Cabinet was referred to section 5.10 of the Officers report which detailed in the impact on the General Fund and to Appendix C which listed the use of reserves approved by Officers using delegated powers.

Reference was made to the in-year impact of the 2022/23 Pay Awards and the Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer confirmed that the figure reflected the latest pay offer for National Joint Council Staff and Teaching Staff, with an increase of £1,925 on all pay points from April 2022, with teachers pay being increased by 5% from September 2022. This had resulted in an additional funding requirement of £6.860m for the current financial year.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft forms and verbal confirmation this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report: -

1. The provisional 2021/22 revenue budget outturn position be noted.
2. That the £878k Council Tax Collection grant received from the Welsh Government (WG) in 2021/22 be set aside in an earmarked reserve to help mitigate the financial impact of a potential further shortfall in Council Tax collection rates in the 2022/23 financial year be agreed.
3. A recommendation to Council to maintain the General Fund balance at £11.852m, representing 3% of the 2022/23 net revenue budget be endorsed.
4. The proposed use of the surplus General Fund balances totalling £14.333m as detailed in section 5.10 of the report, prior to consideration by Council on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2022 be endorsed.
5. The use of service reserves totally £2.414m that have been agreed by Officers using delegated powers as detailed in Appendix C be noted.
6. The proposed use of service reserves totalling £3.498m as set out in section 5.11 of the report be approved.

## **6. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH – RESPONSE TO THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS**

Consideration was given to the report which sought to update Cabinet on the work being undertaken in response of the cost-of-living crisis, to illustrate the range and extent of the support being provided. Cabinet agreement was also being sought on an initial response to assist communities and some of its most vulnerable residents in terms of the current cost-of-living crisis.

Cabinet noted that the concept of the Council assisting residents in financial difficulties is not new and with inflation at its highest level for over 30 years, energy prices rising at the fastest rate in living memory, there is no doubt that many people will be facing some hugely difficult choices when trying to care for themselves and their families as the winter progresses. At the same time in real terms earnings are falling, interest rates are rising, and these challenges will need to be responded to. As in the pandemic support will need to be prioritised and resourced utilising collaboration across services, strong networks and effective communication.

Current key support was outlined and the work done by Caerphilly Cares, Housing Rents, Supporting People, Council Tax, Catering Services, Housing Benefits and Education was detailed. Further proposals for targeted support were summarised and Cabinet noted that suggestions had been submitted by staff and Councillors.

Reference was made to section 5.12 of the Officer's report and the update on Welsh Government Cost of Living Support Scheme and the package of measures contained therein. Cabinet noted the significant demand this crisis would place on the authority particularly as there is no indication on the duration of the crisis or the extent of the severity likely to be experienced by most of the citizens of the county borough.

Clarification was sought as the kind of support that would be provided to food bank/food share initiatives and Officers confirmed that there was a wide range of support available both financially and via staffing support. Reference was made to food poverty grant funding, and it was noted that this funding could be accessed through a straightforward application process.

Cabinet noted the support already being provided by the Council and the Chief Executive provided an outline of the initiatives including Caerphilly Cares and how residents would be able to access everything that is available to aid them during the crisis, working with partners and streamlining and refining service provision would be vital going forward, but this would not completely negate the impact on individuals as the crisis deepens.

Clarification was then sought of the level of response to the Cost-of-Living Roadshows and the Officer confirmed that they were running everyday throughout September, using a variety of venues both in town centres and smaller community facilities. It was noted that the town centre venues had proven to be the best attended with 86 residents supported to date. The main concerns raised at the events were centred on energy bills, benefit entitlement and accessing food banks. Cabinet was advised that the roadshows would also be utilising a mobile set up to reach smaller communities and the upcoming Christmas Fairs would be used as an additional opportunity to engage with residents.

Cabinet was please to note that the webpage was up and running and that as much communication and engagement as possible with residents was taking place. The role of Councillors in terms of signposting and assisting resident to make contact was discussed and it was noted that all front-line staff were being trained to signpost and that this training could be made available to all Councillors.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms and verbal confirmation this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report : -

1. An amendment to the previously approved discretionary element of the WG Cost of Living Support Scheme which will allow Post Office vouchers to be issued to those households that have not registered for payments under the Main Scheme be approved.
2. The recommendation in the 2021/22 Provisional Revenue Budget Outturn Report to set aside one-off funding of £3m from surplus General Fund balances to create a Cost-of-Living Hardship Fund to support a range of initiatives that will assist our communities be noted.
3. Decisions with regard to the use of to the Cost-of-Living Hardship Fund be delegated to the Corporate Director for Social Services & Housing in conjunction with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Education and Communities.

## 7. UK GOVERNMENT SHARED PROSPERITY FUND – CAERPHILLY LOCAL INVESTMENT PLAN

Consideration was given to the report which sought to update Cabinet on the submission by Rhondda Cynon Taf of the Cardiff Capital Region Investment Plan to the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund as part of the UK Government's Levelling Up Programme. The report also sought the endorsement of Cabinet for the Local Investment Plan comprising an overview of the Caerphilly Specific Proposed SPF Interventions as detailed in Appendix 2 and 3 of the Officer's report.

Cabinet noted that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK Government's ambitious Levelling Up agenda and is a significant component of its support for places across the UK. It provides £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment with all areas of the UK which was allocated from the Fund via a funding formula rather than a competition.

The Levelling Up objectives were outlined and Cabinet noted its primary goal was to build pride in a place and increase life chances across the UK. Cabinet was advised that Caerphilly County Borough had a conditional allocation of £28,272,298 and this funding would be used to invest in buildings, make digital improvements including Wi-Fi connectivity and offer support to local business via the Caerphilly Enterprise Fund. Town centre cleansing, better accessibility would also benefit as would the development of community, cultural and heritage venues to be more inclusive and accessible for all abilities and ages and this would inevitably increase footfall. Reference was made to the long-term aspirations for tackling unemployment and economic inactivity particularly around marginalised groups and Cabinet welcomed this vital opportunity for local positive interventions.

In relation to the event programme, Cabinet sought clarification as to what could be achieved and the Officer confirmed that this would be a great opportunity to launch an exciting events programme building on from recent successes, thinking creatively to capture a broad audience range and so reenergising the return to cultural, heritage, theatrical and creative activities.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the exciting possibilities of the programme, but was also mindful of the need to be realistic in terms of deliverability when set against the current cost-of-living crisis.

Members welcomed the opportunity to develop further retail and night-time economy and sought clarification on how this could be advanced. The Officer advised that business capacity would be a focus and explained the increased interest in utilising outdoor areas, that began during the pandemic, could now be taken forward to increase business which could be critical for business sustainability and the drive to increase footfall into town centre. However cultural activity should not just be a night-time consideration but ongoing throughout the day.

Cabinet noted the proposed investment for economically inactive people and sought further information in this regard. Officers confirmed that a lot of work was already happening within this space, the SPF would look at issues on a regional and well as local footprint and would enable work to be done with individuals to identify the barriers to sustainable employment and introduce timely and tailored interventions to secure positive outcomes. Whether this be in terms of skills support, mentoring or digital access, support would be streamlined to a programme that is fleet of foot in terms of its ability to respond to changing needs.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report : -



1. The detail of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the opportunities for the Funds to contribute significantly to the Council's own Place Shaping, Community resilience, Transformation and Regeneration agendas be considered.
2. That the CCR Investment Plan has been submitted to UK Government for consideration by RCT be noted.
3. The Caerphilly Local Investment Plan comprising an overview of the Caerphilly Specific Proposed SPF interventions attached at Appendices 2 and 3 be considered and endorsed.

## **9. BRYN CARNO**

Consideration was given to the report which sought to inform Cabinet of the current progress with securing funding for the failed external wall insulation scheme on 86 properties at the Bryn Carno estate Rhymney and also sought Cabinet approval for the match funding that Caerphilly would contribute towards the project costs from the Housing Revenue Account.

Cabinet welcomed the report and its recommendations that would assist the residents of Bryn Carno, particularly in term of their health and wellbeing and resolve issues with the defective wall insulation and the significant water ingress into their homes.

Clarification was sought as to a possible timeline for completion and Officers advised that given the nature of the works, in all probability completion would be in the latter quarter of 2025.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report:-

1. The business plan funding bid to Welsh Government be noted.
2. The revised scheme, costs, delivery timeline and match funding contribution from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in respect of Council owned properties, to deliver the tenure neutral scheme by Caerphilly Homes be approved.

## **10. TRANSITIONAL ACCOMMODATION CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

Consideration was given to the report which sought to inform Cabinet of the new Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme which provided funding to deliver the new draft Transitional Accommodation Strategy as set out by Welsh Government. The report also set out the projects and schemes which formed the bid to Welsh Government and the level of contribution required from the Housing Revenue Account to deliver this accommodation increasing the Caerphilly Homes housing stock.

Cabinet noted the need to provide transitional accommodation as a priority to enable people to move from temporary accommodation, including welcome centres and other short-term accommodation, while continuing to meet existing housing need.

Clarification was sought on Local Member involvement, should the bid be successful, and Officers confirmed that they would be involved as soon as possible with separate meetings organise with them to look at sites. However, Members needed to be mindful that there was still a lot of due diligence to take place, including statutory planning processes before any project would come to fruition.

Clarification was then sought as to the number of homes that would be provided and an further explanation on the structure and quality of the 'modular homes' outlined in the report. The Officer confirmed that it was anticipated that 75 homes would be generated across the total of the TACP proposals, again subject to Welsh Government and Planning approval and market opportunities. In terms of quality of the modular homes, Cabinet noted that they would be precision manufactured homes to the highest quality standard and would meeting the highest energy and performance requirements.

Cabinet welcomed this suite of provisions that sought to increase transitional accommodation and the ability to respond to the challenges of homelessness in a more agile way, whether that be through new build or converting existing properties.

Cabinet noted the pressures on housing lists and the forthcoming legislative changes that would place additional pressures on the private housing sector and potential impact that the cost-of-living crisis would have in terms of potential rent arrears, loss of tenancy and the numbers presenting as homeless.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report:-

1. The bids submitted under the TACP acknowledging the timelines for delivery be noted and the indicative level of contribution from the HRA be agreed. It be noted that none of the submissions have been formally agreed and could change.
2. That, if the funding bid is successful, that the block of commercial and residential accommodation at 1 to 6 The Grove, Fochriw, be refurbished and the residential brought back into use, rather than demolished, as previously agreed by Cabinet in 2018.
3. Delegation to the Corporate Director of Social Services and Housing and Head of Financial Services/S151 Officer in consultation with the lead Cabinet Member for Housing. As Welsh Government make decisions on existing submissions that may require variation and encourage additional bids under the fund this year and into next financial year, this enables autonomy of decision making acting quickly, up to a financial threshold, particularly where there are market opportunities be approved.
4. The total combined funding envelope and threshold for which the delegation may not exceed is £4,447,031 all be which comes from the Housing Revenue Account be approved.

The meeting closed at 15.04pm.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2022.

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CHAIR

# Agenda Item 4



## CABINET

### MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2022 AT 1PM

#### PRESENT:

Councillor S. Morgan – Chair

#### Councillors:

J. Pritchard (Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration & Climate Change), C. Andrews (Cabinet Member for Education & Communities), E. Forehead (Cabinet Member for Social Care), N. George (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Property), S. Cook (Cabinet Member for Housing), P. Leonard (Cabinet Member for Planning & Public Protection) and C. Morgan (Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure & Green Spaces), Cllr. J. Simmonds (Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation).

#### Together with:

C. Harray (Chief Executive) and R. Edmunds (Corporate Director – Education and Corporate Services).

#### Also in Attendance:

R. Tranter (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), L. Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), R. Hartshorn (Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services), L. Donovan (Head of People Services), J. Morgan (Trading Standards Manager), A. Lewis (Transformation Officer), A. West (21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy) and E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer).

## RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Leader reminded those present that the meeting was being live streamed, and a recording would be made available to view via the Council's website, except for discussions involving confidential or exempt items. [Click Here To View](#).

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from D. Street (Corporate Director Social Services and Housing) and M.S. Williams (Corporate Director Economy and Environment)

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

During the course of debate Councillor S. Morgan and E. Stenner as they are both Landlords and Councillor E. Forehead as her partner is a Landlord declared a personal interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 8 - Amendments to Authorisation of Officers within the Public Protection Division and Approval of Reciprocal Arrangements for Enforcement between Newport City Council and Caerphilly County Borough Council

As this was a personal interest only there was no requirement for them to leave the meeting and they could take full part in the debate and vote.

### **3. CABINET FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – TO NOTE**

Cabinet was provided with the Cabinet Forward Work Programme, which detailed the scheduled reports until 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

Members were reminded that the Cabinet Forward Work Programme is a working document and thus subject to change. The Leader thanked Officers for populating the forward work programme so far in advance and Cabinet accepted that as a live document it would be subject to change.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the Forward Work Programme be noted. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

### **4. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FOR LEARNING PROGRAMME – TRINITY FIELDS SCHOOL EXPANSION REPORT**

Cabinet noted that the report had been presented to the Education Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

Consideration was given to the report which sought to update Cabinet on a proposed amendment to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme Band B for the expansion of the Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre and also sought to amend the previously endorsed decision by Cabinet on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 2021 to expand the school on to the Council owned sports pitch adjacent to the existing school site.

Cabinet noted that the proposal in its original form would enable the school to provide first class learning facilities for existing learners, as well a creating a wide range of additional facilities for an extra 80 pupils. The school provides vital services to our most vulnerable learners, many of whom have a wide range of learning difficulties and physical and medical needs. As the school's reputation had grown so too had the demand for places and although the strategies to cope with this additional demand were already being deployed, something more significant needed to be done to address this demand as soon as possible.

Cabinet was advised that without this additional capacity being made available, there was a risk that vulnerable children would not be able to have their needs met locally and out of county provision might be required.

Cabinet noted the significant community opposition to the original scheme which had focused on the loss of green space and the loss of the adjacent sport pitch. It was confirmed that the project had been on hold for a year and the school is facing acute pressures and a proposal now needs to progress at pace. Based on the urgent demand and the community opposition a compromise solution is now being proposed that would enable the addition of 80 places whilst addressing the community concerns.

The revised proposal would see the development of a two-storey extension on part of the school's car park creating 10 additional classrooms without the loss of the sports pitch, which would therefore be more likely to be acceptable to the community. Cabinet was advised that designs for the proposal were continuing to be refined but had received unanimous support from the school and its governing body and Welsh Government had also verified that no further consultation for this proposal would be required for it to progress.

Cabinet welcomed the revised proposal which addressed both community concerns and the needs of vulnerable learners.

Clarification was sought on the drainage issues at the Sue Noakes site and Officers confirmed that this had been a concern for some time, regardless of the expansion and advised that they had been working closely with Welsh Water who have worked incredibly hard to get this resolved. It was noted that it appeared that 2 of the sewer lengths below Sue Noakes towards the combined sewer overflow, were 50% blocked up with silt and so during periods of inclement weather, water that should be getting to the overflow wasn't getting there and with Sue Noakes being at the low point of the sewer it was breaching at this position. The silt has now been removed and Welsh Water are confident that the problem has been resolved.

Cabinet referenced the Band C proposals and if there was any progress identifying prospective development sites. The Officer confirmed that Band C proposals would be the subject of a future report to Cabinet, potential sites would be investigated at some point in the latter stages of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme and brought to Members for decision.

Assurances were sought that Parents would be regularly updated on the progress of the development and Officers confirmed that there would be regular communication with parents and a letter was about to go out from the Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services and the School to set out exactly what the proposal entails and the next steps for the development and how they would be kept informed of progress.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report: -

1. The information contained in the report be considered.
2. The recommendation to expand Trinity Fields School and Resource Centre via a two storey extension on part of the School Car Park be approved.
3. Officers to investigate a longer-term option to create a 2nd Special School in the Borough under Band C of the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme.

## **5. CWM IFOR SOLAR FARM**

Consideration was given to the report which sought Cabinet approval for an outline business case to develop a solar farm at Cwm lfor in Penyrheol, Caerphilly.

Cabinet noted that the potential development of a 20MW Solar Farm would, if approved, be the largest public authority owned solar farm in Wales. It was anticipated that the development would cost between £12-16m, would have a lifespan of 35 years and an expected Investment Rate of Return (IRR) of 4.52% annually. The project would also generate between £669,000PA and £892,000PA during its lifetime with payback in approximately 18 years, although with prices of energy rising so much recently, this could reduce significantly.

Cabinet further noted that the proposal would generate 40 'green jobs' and would during its lifetime produce CO2 savings circa 55,300t CO2 or approximately 1,580t CO2 per year this would be enough to power approximately 6000 homes.

It was explained that the project had been classified as a 'Development of National Significance' and Cabinet sought clarification as to what this meant in terms of the planning process. The Officer confirmed that Welsh Government would determine any planning application, however the Council would be a consultee.

Cabinet welcomed the proposal as part of the Authority's commitment to being Net Carbon Zero by 2030 and a vital step forward for renewable energy targets and sought clarification as to how community benefits would be brought forward locally. Officers explained that they would be working extensively with communities to identify ideas for investment, support, and development.

Cabinet emphasised the important role that Local Ward Members would have in this space and Officers confirmed that Ward Members had been engaged with throughout the project development and had visited the site along with the Leader and Cabinet Members.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report: -

1. The outline business case attached at Appendix 1 be approved.
2. The submission of the planning application to Planning and Environmental Decisions Wales (PEDW) be agreed.
3. Authority be delegated to the Head of Legal Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member to sign the option agreement and lease with the landowner for the land at the solar farm.
4. On approval of the planning application the Council will obtain full costings through a full procurement process to prepare the Full Business Case for consideration by Cabinet be agreed.

## **6. UPDATE ON AGILE WORKING**

Cabinet noted that the report had been considered by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

Consideration was given to the report which sought update Cabinet on the progress that has been made in respect of the embedding Agile Working principles across the organisations and to outline the steps necessary to formalise these practices.

Cabinet noted that recent staff surveys had included specific questions on agile working with 80% of staff preferring to 'mostly' work from home or split themselves equally between work and home. In terms of attendance levels, it was further noted that following the relaxations on staff access the Council's buildings there had only been a small increase in numbers attending buildings. With the attendance level at Penallta House peaking at around 22%, which clearly demonstrated that many administrative jobs can be delivered from a range of locations, if suitable tools and connectivity are available. A further capacity planning exercise asked Heads of Service to work with staff to establish working patterns and capacity requirements against the needs of our service users and this once again confirmed the surplus capacity being experienced at most of the buildings would likely continue moving forward. This surplus capacity provides a range of opportunities for the Council in terms of its overall requirements for premises, its operating expenditure, service resilience, its position as an employer of choice, its carbon footprint and capital receipts. Therefore, before a broader

rollout across all Council buildings the establishment of the an Agile Hub at Ty Penallta was being proposed.

It was noted that conversations were ongoing with staff and projects and work streams would be reviewed and developed as the potential benefits are formalised and all the necessary policies and practices of agile working are formally embedded as a core principle of Council service delivery.

Cabinet welcomed the report and the benefits that agile working would bring not only in terms of work/life balance but also productivity, the environment and health and wellbeing. Reference was made to continuing recruitment and retention issues, and it was hoped that agile working would also benefit this area, particularly as the private sector were already moving into this space.

Following consideration and discussion it was moved and seconded that subject to the inclusion of an additional recommendation at 3.1(5) to read that Cabinet note that the Council will continue to consult with the Trade Unions and Staff throughout the process going forward and by way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report: -

1. The progress of the Agile Working Corporate Review to date be noted.
2. The strategic intent and proposed Outcomes for the Agile Working Corporate Review be noted.
3. Comments be received and noted on the intention to develop Ty Penallta as an Agile Working Hub.
4. The progress against the workstreams to support this development be noted.
5. That the Council would continue to consult with the Trade Unions and staff throughout the process going forward be noted.

## **7. SHAPING THE POLICY ON CASH COLLECTION**

Cabinet noted that the report had been considered by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

Consideration was given to the report which sought to update Cabinet on the payment methods currently utilised by residents and sought Cabinet approval of the future policy on cash payments.

Cabinet noted that Covid-19 had made a significant impact on the various methods available to residents to make payments to the Council, which had seen a shift away from cash payments to alternative payment methods. As a result, it was proposed that this change to alternative methods should be maintained and encouraged in the longer term. Cabinet was referred to section 5.11 of the Officers report and were advised that cash payments would continue to be accepted in Tourism Venues, Leisure Centres, Libraries and Social Services establishments but this would be subject to review and where opportunities arise to move to cashless approaches be considered.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report : -

1. Due to the move to alternative payment methods experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, it be agreed that cash payments will not be re-introduced in Customer Services Offices.
2. That cash payments will continue to be accepted in Schools, Tourism Venues, Leisure Centres, Libraries and Social Services establishments be noted, and that opportunities to move to alternative payment mechanisms will be fully explored wherever possible.

**8. AMENDMENTS TO AUTHORISATION OF OFFICERS WITHIN THE PUBLIC PROTECTION DIVISION AND APPROVAL OF RECIPROCAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR ENFORCEMENT BETWEEN NEWPORT CITY COUNCIL AND CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

During the course of debate Councillor S. Morgan and E. Stenner as they are both Landlords and Councillor E. Forehead as her partner is a Landlord declared a personal interest in respect of this report. As this was a personal interest only there was no requirement for them to leave the meeting and they could take full part in the debate and vote.

Consideration was given to the report which sought to inform Cabinet of the new legislation for regulatory services. Cabinet noted that Officers within the Public Protection Division require additional authorisation in order to carry out their duties, namely the Offensive Weapons Act 2019, the Medicine and Medical Devices Act 2021, Energy Act 2011 and the Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Act 2022. It was noted that the Energy Performance of Buildings (England and Wales) Regulations 2021 also requires that local Weights and Measures authorities transfer enforcement duties for local authority owned buildings or controlled buildings to another local Weights and Measures authority which is why the report sought the approval of reciprocal arrangements with Newport City Council and Caerphilly County Borough Council Weights and Measures Authorities.

Reference was made to section 5.4 of the report and Landlord compliance with the minimum energy efficiency requirements for domestic and non-domestic properties and whether this requirement would be met through enforcement or on a help and advice basis. The Officer confirmed that non-compliance would be dealt with on a proportional basis with help and advice provided in the first instance. Should the Landlord refuse or ignore the advice then there were avenues open to Officers for enforcement action. Cabinet was reassured that Landlords would be given ample time to bring about any improvements.

Reference was then made to section 5.6 of the report in relation to the collection of peppercorn rents and enforcement. Officers confirmed there were a series of penalties that can be applied if there is sufficient evidence of a breach of the act including financial penalties.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report : -

1. That the Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services be authorised under the legislation detailed in this report, so that relevant officers within the division can utilise delegated powers to carry out their duties.
2. That the Council's Monitoring Officer make the necessary amendments to the Constitution.



The establishment of reciprocal transfer agreements for enforcement of the Energy Performance of Buildings (England and Wales) Regulations 2012 as amended between Caerphilly and Newport City Council's Weights and Measures authorities be approved.

## **9. SAFER CAERPHILLY COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP**

Consideration was given to the report which sought to inform Cabinet of the work of the Safer Caerphilly Community Safety Partnership and to seek their endorsement of the updated Terms of Reference and approval for the Cabinet Member with responsibility for community safety, currently the Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection, as the voting representative for Caerphilly Council on the Safer Caerphilly Community Safety Partnership.

Cabinet noted that responsible authorities, including the Council are required to work together as a Community Safety Partnership to address crime and disorder, the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances and to reduce reoffending.

Cabinet noted the various initiatives developed by the Community Safety Partnership and noted that the Gwent Public Services Board has established a working group to conduct its own review of community safety in the region.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved and by way of Microsoft Forms this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons contained in the Officer's report : -

1. The work of the Safer Caerphilly Community Safety Partnership be noted.
2. The updated Terms of Reference of the Safer Caerphilly Community Safety Partnership be endorsed.
3. The Cabinet Member with responsibility for community safety, currently the Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection be approved as the voting representative for Caerphilly Council on the Safer Caerphilly Community Safety Partnership.

The meeting closed at 1.45pm.

Approved and signed as a correct record subject to any corrections made at the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2022.

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CHAIR

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**Cabinet Forward Work Programme – 12th October 2022**

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Report title:</b>	<b>Purpose of report:</b>	<b>Presenting officer:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member:</b>
19/10/2022 13:00	Workforce capacity and associated challenges	For members to consider the recruitment and retention challenges	Lynne Donovan	Cllr. Nigel George
19/10/2022 13:10	Bryn Community Engagement Proposal	To propose a terms of reference for a Community Group to be established.	Mark S Williams	Cllr. Philippa Leonard
19/10/2022 13:20	Regeneration Board - Project Proposals	To recommend the allocation of funding from the Regeneration Project Board Development Fund and Community Infrastructure Levy towards four recently endorsed and evaluated project proposals	Rhian Kyte	Cllr. James Pritchard
19/10/2022 13:30	Joint Mileage Protocol	To seek Cabinet agreement to adopt a Joint Mileage Protocol to introduce a measure that provides for a temporary increase in mileage reimbursement costs in the short term to address current market volatility in fuel rates	Lynne Donovan	Cllr. Nigel George
19/10/2022 13:40	Foundation Living Wage	To seek Cabinet agreement for additional funding to implement the Foundation Living Wage rate for 2022	Lynne Donovan	Cllr. Nigel George

**Cabinet Forward Work Programme – 12th October 2022**

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Report title:</b>	<b>Purpose of report:</b>	<b>Presenting officer:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member:</b>
19/10/2022 14:00	Annual Corporate Complaints Report	To provide Cabinet with an overview of the complaints dealt with under the Corporate Complaints policy for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 together with the outcomes and lessons learned	Lisa Lane	Cllr. Nigel George
19/10/2022 13:50	Final report from the Task and Finish Group on Tackling Potential Mental Health Issues Post Pandemic	This report seeks to inform Members of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee of the findings of the task and finish group that was established to review how Caerphilly County Borough Council works with partners to tackle any potential mental health issues post-pandemic	Mark Jacques	Cllr. Elaine Forehead
02/11/2022 13:00	No items currently scheduled			
16/11/2022 13:00	Street lighting	To review the current street lighting part night lighting policy in view of increasing carbon reduction targets and the declared climate emergency	Marcus Lloyd	Cllr. Julian Simmonds

**Cabinet Forward Work Programme – 12th October 2022**

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Report title:</b>	<b>Purpose of report:</b>	<b>Presenting officer:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member:</b>
16/11/2022 13:00	The Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty Ecosystem Resilience Duty	To consider and approve a report on the actions taken to help maintain and enhance biodiversity prior to publication in accordance with the biodiversity duty under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016	Rob Hartshorn/Philip Griffiths	Cllr. Chris Morgan
16/11/2022 13:00	Notice of Motion - Wyllie Bends	For Cabinet to consider the proposals put forward by Cllr. Janine Reed/Cllr. Jan Jones	Emma Sullivan	Cllr Janine Reed/Cllr. Jan Jones
30/11/2022 13:15	Electric Vehicle Update & Policies	For Cabinet to receive an update and consider the Electric Vehicle Policies	Paul Cooke	Cllr. James Pritchard
30/11/2022 13:20	Cyber Security Strategy	To recommend endorsement and implementation of the Strategy	Liz Lucas/Ian Evans	Cllr. Nigel George
30/11/2022 13:30	Programme for Procurement	To extend the Council’s existing Programme for Procurement, which is due to expire in May 2023 for a period of up to 12 months to consider and where applicable incorporate aspects of the UK Procurement Bill and Social Partnership & Public Procurement (Wales) Bill in the Council’s new Procurement Strategy (the new Procurement Strategy will replace the existing Programme for Procurement).	Liz Lucas/Ian Evans	Cllr. Nigel George
14/12/2022 13:00	Redevelopment of the former Oakdale Comprehensive School site by Caerphilly Homes	For Cabinet to approve the contract, cost plan, design and environmental credentials of the scheme, along with continuation of the SCAPE framework agreement, social value plan and sales & marketing strategy	Nick Taylor-Williams/Jane Roberts-Waite	

**Cabinet Forward Work Programme – 12th October 2022**

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Report title:</b>	<b>Purpose of report:</b>	<b>Presenting officer:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member:</b>
14/12/2022 13:10	Redevelopment of the former Ty Darran Care Home by Caerphilly Homes	For Cabinet to approve the contract, cost plan, procurement, design and environmental credentials of the scheme	Nick Taylor-Williams/Jane Roberts-Waite	Cllr. Shayne Cook
14/12/2022 13:20	Caerphilly Homes (Development) Forward Work Programme	To discuss the next set of sites that will be brought forward as part of the Caerphilly Homes development programme and Caerphilly Homes governance arrangements	Nick Taylor-Williams. Jane Roberts-Waite	Cllr. Shayne Cook
14/12/2022 13:40	Low Cost Home Ownership (Decision)	The LCHO (Low Cost Home Ownership) report will document the formulation, implementation and the publication of a new policy which governs the process by which the Council will sell homes to people living and/or working in the borough wanting to access homeownership but cannot afford to do so without some form of public subsidy	Nick Taylor-Williams/Jane Roberts-Waite	Cllr. Shayne Cook
14/12/2022 13:00	HRA Charges (Rent Increase) (Dec)	Members to agree the level of rent increase for council tenants effective from April 2023	Nick Taylor-Williams/Lesley Allen	Cllr. Shayne Cook

**Cabinet Forward Work Programme – 12th October 2022**

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Report title:</b>	<b>Purpose of report:</b>	<b>Presenting officer:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member:</b>
14/12/2022 13:10	Local Housing Market Assessment	The Delivery Plan sits underneath the Local housing Strategy which was approved in October 2021. It is designed to be a collaborative document that contains a number of key actions designed to take forward the objectives of the strategy.	Jane Roberts-Waite	Cllr. Shayne Cook
14/12/2022 13:20	Updated Welsh Government Prospectus (Decision)	Cabinet are asked to approve the principle of residential development on identified sites (subject to viability) and acquisition policy, the principle of package deals and new governance arrangements to underpin the development programme.	Jane Roberts-Waite	Cllr. Shayne Cook
18/01/2023 13:00	Day Services Report	To consider the report from HICO independent consultants regarding a model of day services for the future.	Jo Williams	Cllr. Elaine Forehead
18/01/2023 13:10	23/24 Draft Budget MTFP	To present Cabinet with details of the draft budget proposals for the 2023/24 financial year and an updated MTFP, to allow for a period of consultation prior to final decision by Council on the 28th February 2023.	Stephen Harris	Cllr. Eluned Stenner

**Cabinet Forward Work Programme – 12th October 2022**

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Report title:</b>	<b>Purpose of report:</b>	<b>Presenting officer:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member:</b>
25/01/2022 13:00	No items currently scheduled			





## **CABINET – 19TH OCTOBER 2022**

**SUBJECT: BRYN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROPOSAL**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To propose the establishment of a Liaison Group to promote effective engagement between Bryn Group, local residents, and other stakeholders in addition to a number of other community engagement interventions.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 The Council operated a formal Bryn Compost Liaison Group from 2010 to 2018. The Bryn Compost Liaison Group was established to address complaints of odour associated with In Vessel Composting (IVC) of food waste. The IVC plant was replaced by an Anaerobic Digestion Plant (AD) at the site removing the source of the food waste odours and the Liaison Group was disbanded.
- 2.2 As well as waste transfer and treatment operations, the company, Bryn Group, also operate a dairy farm and a quarry at the site. In view of ongoing complaints from the community regarding operations at the site it is proposed that a formal Liaison Group be re-established. The proposed Terms of Reference are at Appendix 1.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 Cabinet approve the establishment of a Bryn Liaison Group with the Terms of Reference at Appendix 1, but in doing so is asked to consider the comments received from the MS and 2 of the local ward members.
- 3.2 Cabinet approve the other interventions as set out in section 5.5 below.

### **4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 To promote effective engagement between the Bryn Group, local residents, and other stakeholders.

### **5. THE REPORT**

- 5.1 The Council operated a formal Bryn Compost Liaison Group from 2010 to 2018. The Bryn Compost Liaison Group was established to address complaints of odour associated with In Vessel Composting (IVC) of food waste. The IVC plant was replaced by an Anaerobic Digestion Plant (AD) at the site removing the source of the food waste odours and the Liaison Group was disbanded.
- 5.2 As well as waste transfer and treatment operations (the company take in green waste and skip waste as well as food waste, for example), the Bryn Group also operate a dairy farm and a quarry at the site. The formal group was replaced by an informal group to discuss impacts on the community including odour, dust, and noise from these other activities. The informal group held a number of meetings, the last being 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020.
- 5.3 Complaints continue to be received from the local community and from local elected representatives on their behalf. The site is complex with multiple operations and activities which are in part regulated by the Council's Environmental Health and Planning teams and partly by Natural Resources Wales, as detailed in the table below. Consequently, it is proposed to re-establish a Liaison Group to promote effective communication between Bryn Group, local residents, elected representatives, the Council and other agencies.

Process	Complaint type	Regulator	Hours of Operation
Quarry	Dust from mobile plant	Rhondda Cynnon Taff County Borough Council	As per planning permission
	Noise	Env Health CCBC	
	Blasting vibration	Planning CCBC	
Anaerobic Digestion (AD) plant	Permit	NRW	As per planning permission
Farm/digestate & slurry spreading	Odour	Env Health CCBC	Unrestricted
	Noise	Env Health CCBC	
Small waste incineration plants	Noise	Env Health CCBC	Unrestricted
	Smoke/odour	Env Health CCBC	
	Permit	Env Health CCBC	
Waste Transfer Station	Permit	NRW	As per planning permission
	Dust	NRW	
	Noise	NRW	
Compost Production	Permit	NRW	As per planning permission
	Odour	NRW	

- 5.4 The proposed Terms of Reference for the Liaison Group are at Appendix 1. It is intended that membership will include local residents, local Members, relevant Cabinet Members, the Member of the Senedd, Officers of the Council, Natural Resources Wales, Public Health Wales (corresponding members with attendance when appropriate), and representatives of Bryn Group. It is proposed that the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Property will Chair the meetings and that Committee Services will support with meeting arrangements and minutes.

5.5 In addition to the proposal to re-establish a Liaison Group a number of other measures are being considered and can be progressed before the end of the year, subject to Cabinet approval. These include:

- A webpage – including who the regulatory bodies for various elements of the site are, and monitoring results, for example.
- A site visit for all CCBC Members to see for themselves the operation at the Bryn Group site.
- The Bryn Group have confirmed they are also very open to further engagement opportunities – including a mechanism for the community to come forward directly with any issues relating to the site, and opportunities for ‘open days’ for members of the public to visit site and gain an understanding of the operation.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

6.1 In conclusion it is considered that the proposals contained within this report including the establishment of a Bryn Liaison Group will serve to improve engagement between Bryn Group, local residents and other stakeholders. It is proposed that the effectiveness of the Liaison Group will be evaluated after it has been operating for a period of 2 years.

## **7. ASSUMPTIONS**

7.1 There are no assumptions associated with this report.

## **8. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

8.1 The group is intended to improve communication and relationships between stakeholders; no strategic decisions will be taken by the group therefore an Integrated Impact Assessment is not required.

## **9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

## **10. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are no direct personnel implications associated with this report.

## **11. CONSULTATIONS**

11.1 On being consulted on the report Hefin David MS suggested that Cabinet consider quarterly meetings to ensure a better evaluation at the end of the two-year term as if an evaluation is undertaken with bi-annual meetings, the evaluation would be after only four meetings.

11.2 Cllr Haydn Pritchard has provided the following comments on the draft Terms of Reference on behalf of himself and Cllr Judith Pritchard:

## **Membership**

**Residents.** 6 local residents. We do not believe they should change for every meeting as this will hamper any continuity. Instead the representatives should be elected by local residents for a term of 1 year. It would be the responsibility of those elected to ensure the information was disseminated to the community as a whole. Representatives should be drawn from local areas to include Gelligaer, Penybryn and Nelson; all of which are affected by the smells and noise generated by the site. It should be the responsibility of the residents to decide on the composition of the representatives.

## **Meetings**

These should be held more frequently than the 6 months suggested in the proposal. They should be held every 3 months as a minimum or more frequently if deemed appropriate by the Chair.

11.3 The views of the other listed consultees have been incorporated into this report.

## **12. STATUTORY POWER**

12.1 The Local Government Act 2000

Author: Rob Hartshorn, Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services

Consultees: Councillor Philippa Leonard, Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection  
Councillor Nigel George, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Property  
Councillor D.T Davies, Chair of Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee  
Councillor Adrian Hussey, Vice Chair of Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee  
Councillor Ann Gair, St Cattwg Ward Member  
Councillor Haydn Pritchard, St Cattwg Ward Member  
Councillor Judith Ann Pritchard, St Cattwg Ward Member  
Hefin David MS, Senedd Constituency Member for Caerphilly  
Christina Harray, Chief Executive  
Mark S Williams, Corporate Director Economy and Environment  
Steve Harris, Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer  
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services  
Rob Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer  
Hayley Lancaster, Transformation Lead – Insights and Intelligence  
Ceri Edwards, Environmental Health Manager  
Ryan Thomas, Planning Services Manager  
Jon Goldsworthy, Operations Manager (South East Wales), Natural Resources Wales  
Dr Sarah Jones, Consultant in Environmental Public Health, Public Health Wales  
Andrew Kibble, Senior Manager, UK Health Security Agency (Wales) / Public Health Wales

Background Papers:

Report to Council 10<sup>th</sup> March 2010 entitled: "Establishment of Gelliargwellt Farm Liaison Group"

Report to Council 10<sup>th</sup> May 2018 entitled: "Proposed Dissolution of the Bryn Compost Liaison Group"

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Bryn Liaison Group Terms of Reference

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## THE BRYN LIAISON GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

### 1. PURPOSE

1. To promote effective engagement between the Bryn Group, the Local Residents, MS, Local Authority Members, Natural Resources Wales, Public Health Wales and Local Authority Officers.
2. To receive and consider operational issues including areas of interest, complaints and concerns regarding operations undertaken by the Bryn Group, Gelligaer (excluding details of ongoing enforcement investigations and matters relating to planning applications pending consideration) and to evaluate responses to these complaints and the resultant remedial action.
3. To be informed of any proposed changes to operations at the site.
4. To receive information about action taken by regulatory, statutory and other bodies in relation to the operation of the Bryn Group, with particular regard to incident reports received.
5. The effectiveness of the Liaison Group will be evaluated after it has been operating for a period of 2 years.

### 2. MEMBERSHIP

**Councillors:** Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Property (Chair), Cabinet member for Planning and Public Protection, Members for the St Cattwg ward.

**Senedd Constituency Member for Caerphilly:** Hefin David MS

**Residents:** 6 local resident representatives. *Resident representatives to change at each meeting in order to ensure maximum community reach.*

**Bryn Group:** Mr. A. Price, Ms J. Price and Mr R. Thomas (or their representatives)

**Public Health Wales:** Dr S. Jones and Mr A. Kibble (corresponding members with attendance when appropriate)

**Natural Resources Wales:** Mr J Goldsworthy and Mr D Griffiths (or their representatives)

**Caerphilly CBC senior staff:** Corporate Director (Economy and Environment) and/or Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services

**Caerphilly CBC Environmental Health:** Miss C Edwards and Mrs. C Davis (or other Environmental Health Officers)

**Caerphilly CBC Planning:** Mr R Thomas (or a representative(s))

**Co-opted members:** as may from time to time be required.

### 3. MEETING SUPPORT

**Chair:** Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Property

**Administrative Support:** Committee Services (meeting arrangement and minutes). Meeting papers will be circulated to attendees electronically.

#### **4. MEETINGS**

Meetings of the Group will be held every 6 months as a minimum or as deemed appropriate by the Chair.

Meetings are not open to the general public (local resident representatives will attend as detailed in Membership above). Meetings will not be webcast.

#### **5. REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS**

Notices of meetings, minutes and other appropriate papers will be circulated to members of the Group. It will be the responsibility of Committee Services to ensure circulation of the minutes to appropriate persons.

The Group will also liaise with other agencies and organisations as deemed appropriate.

Residents attending meetings of the Group will be expected to feedback the key discussion points and outcomes of each meeting to the wider community.





## CABINET – 19TH OCTOBER 2022

**SUBJECT: REGENERATION BOARD – PROJECT PROPOSALS**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To approve the allocation of £561K from the Regeneration Board Development Budget towards the overall cost of the projects outlined in the report. In order to meet the funding request, a further £150K from the Council's place shaping reserve is required.
- 1.2 To further recommend the allocation of £46,985 from the Infrastructure CIL budget towards the costs associated with the re-introduction of a car park in Pontymister.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 At the meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2018, Cabinet agreed that a Regeneration Project Board would be set up with a cross-party political representation of Councillors plus key officers. This group is supported by a Regeneration Assessment Panel consisting of officers from a range of service areas. An initial sum of £300,000 was allocated to the Project Board.
- 2.2 The Regeneration Assessment Panel have met on numerous occasions to consider the prioritised list of capital projects, which have been identified by the Board to move to the Assessment Stage. Following subsequent Cabinet Approvals, since February 2019 numerous projects have been endorsed with financial assistance provided (where necessary) from the Regeneration Project Board Development Funds.
- 2.3 During January 2019 Cabinet resolved to release £1.2m of reserves for the Regeneration Board prioritised projects. This was supplemented in April 2021 when the Cabinet resolved to allocate an additional £1.0m to the Development Fund budget and again on the 7 July 2021 when Cabinet resolved that a further £1.0m should be allocated to the Board for prioritised capital regeneration projects. This decision was approved by Full Council on 13 July 2021. This brings the total allocated Development Fund budget to £3.5M.
- 2.4 In December 2020 Cabinet resolved to allocate £50,000 seed money to the Regeneration Board for 2020/21 to progress concepts and ideas under the 'Licence to

Innovate' Scheme. Due to the success of the initiative, Cabinet on 7 July approved a proposal for a further £200k to be set aside for the scheme. The total funding allocated to the Regeneration Project Board, including 'Licence to Innovate', is therefore £3.75M.

- 2.5 In October 2021 the Council gave delegated powers to the Regeneration Project Board to determine the priorities for the Charging Authority's Community Infrastructure Levy spend in line with the Council's Strategic Priorities and the CIL Regulation 123 List. Priorities for spend will be considered and determined by Cabinet.
- 2.6 This report specifically outlines a request to the Regeneration Board for £561K of Regeneration Board development funding towards the delivery of three key regeneration projects in Caerphilly county borough council. It further request that £150K be identified from the Council's Place shaping reserve to fund the projects. The latter is required as the total request for funding outstrips the monies available in the Regeneration Board development fund.
- 2.7 The report goes onto request £46,985 of CIL Infrastructure funding be identified towards the re-introduction of a council owned car park at Pontymister to help improve the economic vitality of the town.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 That Cabinet:

- i) Approve the allocation of £300K from the Regeneration Project Board Development Fund for the delivery of the Park Lane Market.
- ii) Approve a further £150K from the Council's place-shaping budget towards the Park Lane Market project.
- iii) Approve an allocation of £111K from the Regeneration Project Board Development Fund to act as match towards Transforming Towns funded placemaking projects.
- iv) Approve an allocation of £150K from the Regeneration Project Board Development Fund towards the cost of funding the Caerphilly Multi-disciplinary Team.
- v) Approve an allocation of £46,985 from the CiL Infrastructure fund towards the cost of the Pontymister car park project, design option 2B.

### **4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 To allow a number of key regeneration schemes to progress that will strengthen the local economy in several town centres and help improve the lives of its residents. The funding being sought will help secure external match funding at a favourable intervention rate and will allow projects to progress that would otherwise stall.

### **5. THE REPORT**

- 5.1 On the 30<sup>th</sup> May 2018, Cabinet agreed that Council Officers convene a Regeneration Project Board. The Terms of Reference of the Board were approved by Cabinet at the same meeting.
- 5.2 In January 2019 Cabinet resolved to release £1.2M of reserves for the Regeneration Board to bolster the Regeneration Development fund This has been further

supplemented with two further awards to bring the total allocated Development Fund budget to £3.5M.

- 5.3 In December 2020 Cabinet resolved to allocate £50K seed money to the Board to progress concepts and ideas under the 'Licence to Innovate' Scheme. Due to the success of the initiative, on 7 July Cabinet approved a proposal for a further £200k to be set aside for the scheme. The total funding allocated to the Board, including 'Licence to Innovate', is therefore £3.75M
- 5.4 Since 2019, 11 Waves of funding have been approved, with a total spend to date of £2.924M from the Regeneration Development Fund and £81,639 from the Licence to Innovate Budget.
- 5.5 In summary, the Regeneration Project Board allocation of £3.5 million has permitted the approval of 22 projects. This leaves a residual fund of **£576K**. The Licence to Innovate allocation of £250,000 has funded 5 projects, leaving a residual fund of **£168,361**.
- 5.6 In October 2021 the Council gave delegated powers to the Regeneration Project Board to determine the priorities for the Charging Authority's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) spend in line with the Council's Strategic Priorities and the Council Approved CIL Regulation 123 List. £3.26m has been spent/allocated to infrastructure projects by the Project Board, leaving a residual budget of **£527K**
- 5.7 It has been calculated that the Regeneration Project Board, through its activity, has given the Council the potential to potentially leverage in up to £187.9M of investment to the county borough. It is expected that the Board will continue to stimulate investment through the projects that it recommends to Cabinet.

### **Regeneration Project Board 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

- 5.8 The Regeneration Board meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022 considered the following project proposal. A summary of the projects and the Regeneration Project Board's recommendations are set out below.

#### **Caerphilly Placemaking Plan 2035 – New Market Park Lane**

- 5.9 £810K is required to provide match-funding of £1,89M from Welsh Government's Transforming Towns Fund for a new Market for Caerphilly town centre at a cost of up to £2.7M.
- 5.10 As part of Caerphilly Town 2035, funding has been secured from WG to acquire properties along Pentrebanne Street, including the current Indoor Market, to facilitate development of up to 64 new Net Zero Carbon apartments by Linc Cymru, 50% of which will be affordable. To mitigate the loss of the current Indoor Market, plans have been prepared for the creation of a new Market on land owned by the Council on Park Lane. The final part of the site has recently been cleared following acquisition and demolition of the former Specsavers Unit, with support from WG Transforming Towns funding. In summary it will provide:
- Accommodation for up to 25 new Traders. (This is double the amount of units that currently trade in current indoor market)
  - 4 No new office pods for flexible working (including a new Marketing Suite to support the delivery of the Caerphilly Placemaking Plan)

- Communal seating areas for users of the new bars, restaurants and cafés
- High quality lighting and soft landscaping
- Green roofs and on-site energy generation provided through PV Panels

5.11 The Park Lane site has been previously identified as a possible location for a new Hotel development and the Market was initially considered as a 'meanwhile use' for the site until the Hotel scheme could be delivered. However, recent reports from market specialists, CBRE have advised that Caerphilly should seek to provide a larger Hotel operation (60-80 Rooms) which would be too large for the Park Lane site. CBRE also advise the proposed Leisure Quarter development would be distinctly more favourable to Hotel operators, rather than the Park Lane site.

5.12 Given the above it is now proposed to use the Park Lane for the permanent site of the new Market. A funding application for the Match-funding has been invited by Welsh Government with an expectation of consideration in October 2022. The funding profile due to be submitted is as follows:

WG Transforming Grant request £1.89M  
 CCBC Place shaping reserve - £150K  
 UK Gov Shared Prosperity Fund - £360K  
 CCBC Regeneration Board Development Fund - £300K

#### **RPB Decision: Project Approved**

**The RPB unanimously supported this project, recognising the exciting opportunities it will bring to the town centre. It was recommended that £300K be awarded for this project from the residual development fund and that a further £150k be identified from the Council's Placemaking reserve. The latter is required as the total sum requested for progressing the projects identified in the wider report exceed the amount left in the development fund.**

#### **Transforming Towns Placemaking Projects – Match Funding**

5.13 Funding from the Regeneration Board is requested to match fund projects identified as part of the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns Placemaking programme. Specifically, the match funding is required for:

- i) Public Realm/Green Infrastructure improvements in Bargoed and Blackwood Town Centres, and improvements to Dafydd Williams Park, Caerphilly.
- ii) The strategic acquisition of the former public toilet block, High Street, Blackwood.

5.14 In more detail the component parts of this project are as follows:

- **Bargoed Town Centre.** Royal Square is a principal location in the Town Centre which has become somewhat unappealing. The trees, tree pit and some of the surfaces have failed and need replacing. Granite channels and some areas of sett/flag paving have been removed and replaced with macadam infill, and resin bound surfaces are in poor condition. This detracts markedly from the overall appearance and finish of the site. Landscape architects proposals have been drawn up to radically improve the look and functionality of this area.

- **Caerphilly's Dafydd Williams Park** benefited from the previous round of Transforming Towns funding and will be enhanced further. This will improve the connections between the Town Centre and the castle.
- **A vehicle mitigation scheme** for Caerphilly will see the installation of removable bollards which will facilitate event activity in the Town Centre, such as the Christmas Market and protect pedestrians congregating at these events.
- **Blackwood High Street** is prime for a continued programme of pavement widening which will allow the provision of outdoor seating. This in turn will boost the nighttime economy, especially in the warmer months.
- **Gravel Lane Scheme**, primary pedestrian corridor linking the High Street with the bus station, market square and The Market Place retail centre will be improved with the introduction of a coordinated palette of furniture, lighting and paving. Consideration will be given to wayfinding/signage to ensure clarity of movement and a 'Green Wall' to form an attractive edge and improved outlook along the northern edge of the lane.
- **The former public toilet block in High Street, Blackwood** is a long-term vacant building in a prominent site, in the centre of Blackwood. The current owners of the building have shown no interest in developing it, or the site, and it is in danger of becoming an obvious 'eyesore' given its location. The Council proposes to purchase the property and offer it up for Meanwhile Uses in the short term. Long term use opportunities for the site will be explored through the *Blackwood Placemaking Plan when it is commissioned*.

5.15 The projects listed above have been costed at £370k. WG funding is being sought to fund 70% of the costs with the Council required to identify £111k of match. The breakdown is as follows:

WG Transforming Towns - upto £259K  
CCBC Match - £111K

#### **RPB Decision: Project Approved**

**The RPB supported this project, recognising the impact the improvement would have on the economy of the towns that would benefit from improvements. It was recommended that £111k be awarded for this project from the residual development fund.**

**Since Regeneration Board met, there has been a verbal indication from WG that the CCBC allocation is likely to be only half of that requested. Cabinet are, however, requested to still approve match funding of up to £111K as there may be opportunities in year two and three to draw down additional WG monies should projects in other local authorities not progress.**

#### **Caerphilly Town – Delivery (Continued Funding for Multi-disciplinary Team)**

5.16 Funding from the Regen Board is requested to continue the progress in project design and enable the start of new studies that are required to support the delivery of Caerphilly Town 2035.

- 5.17 Previous funding of £150K was approved at the Regeneration Board in September 2021 to match £150K that was sourced from Welsh Government's Transforming Towns Fund. This funding was used to support the appointment of a multi-disciplinary team.
- 5.18 The consultant team, led by Stride Treglown Architects, were appointed in January 2022 and included the specialisms of Architects, Urban Designers, Development & Valuation Specialists, Engineers, Quantity Surveyors, Ecologists, Energy (Carbon Reduction) specialists, Economic and Financial Management consultants, Public Art and Legal Advisors. The team have supported Council staff and departments to secure essential early momentum in the delivery of the Plan. Progress to-date includes:
- Initial design and viability assessment of development options including the proposed Hotel at the 'Leisure Quarter' redevelopment at Cardiff Road;
  - An Options Appraisal and detailed design to create a new Market on Park Lane which is required to mitigate the effects of the closure of the of the Market Hall on Pentrebanne Street (subject of a separate funding request from Regen Board);
  - Consideration of an Active Travel Plan across and through the town;
  - General support to facilitate the progression of other projects identified within the Plan that have appointed an independent design team (Ness Tar & the Transport Interchange) along with other projects that will contribute to the delivery of the Plan by third parties (private sector, Cadw etc);
  - Creation of a Culture Strategy across the town centre.
  - Progression of the design of public realm interventions identified within the Plan.
  - Incorporation of the feasibility study for the site adjacent to the Transport Interchange
  - Design support for the proposed Wellbeing Centre adjacent to Caerphilly Business Park.
- 5.19 To build on the progress already made further design work will be required to enable project delivery. Officers are in discussion with WG to continue funding the team on a 50/50 basis using Transforming Towns Funding. The financial breakdown is as follows:

WG Transforming Towns - £150K

CCBC Match - £150K

#### **RPB Decision: Project Approved**

**The RPB supported this project, recognising the volume of work the multi-disciplinary team have undertaken to date and the future demands that will be placed on them due to the complexity associated with delivering the key elements of Caerphilly Town 2035. It was recommended that £150k be awarded for this project from the residual development fund.**

#### **Proposed Development of Car Park – Pontymister**

- 5.20 During the pandemic a site meeting was held with local Cllrs and senior officers to review how footfall could be increased in Pontymister. A former car park area was central to discussions and Cllrs were of the view that reopening this car park would

help encourage people to visit Pontymister. The re-opening of the car park would also assist in resolving on street parking issues in the vicinity which in turn would help revitalise the local economy.

- 5.21 The parking area is overgrown and unkept and improving it and bringing it back into beneficial use is seen as a way to encourage more people to visit the area as an existing lack of parking in the area is perceived to be one of the main reasons for people not visiting. At the time of the meeting, it was agreed that the residual Section 106 monies from the Risca Tesco development be utilised for this project. However other projects funded through the S106 monies have seen project costs increase as a result of Covid resulting in a smaller residual S106 pot being available.
- 5.22 The site is in CCBC ownership and will wholly be delivered by CCBC Engineering Projects Team and their Term Service Contractors (TSC's).
- 5.23 Optioneering and Designs have been progressed for 4 different schemes. The Full schemes (options 1) would have a tarmac spine road and bodpave parking areas, whereas the reduced schemes (options 2) has a tarmac spine road and granular sub base material. Parking spaces/areas would have permeable unbound surfaces. In addition to the construction costs above, management fees would be in the order of £22,500. The full costings are as follows:

Scheme	Construction cost	Available funding	Design and survey fees	Regen Board CIL Budget requirement
Option 1a	£165,471.61	£82,967	£22,500.00	£105,004.61
Option 1b	£156,007.00	£82,967	£22,500.00	£95,540.00
Option 2a	£113,891.61	£82,967	£22,500.00	£53,424.61
Option 2b	£107,452.01	£82,967	£22,500.00	£46,985.01

- 5.24 Option 2b is recommended by the Regeneration Board for implementation. The total anticipated cost for bringing this project to fruition is £129,952.
- 5.25 As the table above shows, residual S106 monies (from the Tesco development) stand at £82,967 which is available towards the cost of the project. A request for CIL Infrastructure funding is therefore being made to fund the difference, which stands at £46,985.

### **RPB Decision: Project Approved**

**The RPB supported this project, recognising the benefit that a car park would have for Pontymister and its local businesses and wider community. Regeneration Board Members considered merit in both Option 2A and 2B with there being a split over which should be progressed. The group finally decided to recommend Option 2B because of financial constraints. It was recommended that £46,985 be awarded for this project from the residual development fund.**

### **Conclusion**

- 5.26 If Cabinet are minded to approve the recommendations contained in the Report, the residual funding available to the Regeneration Project Board is:
- Licence to Innovate Fund - £168,361
  - Regeneration Development Fund - £15,000

- CIL - £480,015

5.27 It is worth noting that the first three projects outlined above will be dependent on Welsh Government funding being secured to take them forward

## **6. ASSUMPTIONS**

6.1 This report assumes that the identified projects, will be developed further and where applicable implemented, with assistance from appropriate sourced and secured external funding.

## **7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

7.1 The recommendations contained in the report are likely to have a positive overall impact, however schemes supported through the board will all be subject to their own project based full IIA's and will each have varying degrees of impact.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 An overall project Development Fund of £3.5m has been previously approved and as outlined above a residual budget of £576k remains available. If all projects are approved by Cabinet, there are insufficient resources available. It is therefore recommended that £150k from the place shaping reserve be allocated towards the Caerphilly Park Lane market project as it aligns with the place shaping agenda. If all the projects are approved at Cabinet, the financial request against the Regeneration Board Development Fund is £561K, leaving a residual fund of £15K.

8.2 Likewise there is currently a CiL Infrastructure budget of £527k. If the Pontymister project is approved a residual budget of £480,015 will remain

8.3 No bids have been made against the License to Innovate Fund which stands at £168,361

## **9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There will be a requirement for Officers from different departments within the Authority to dedicate human resources to the project activities outlined in order to progress them, the level of which depends on the status of each project.

## **10. CONSULTATIONS**

10.1 All comments received from consultees have been incorporated into the report.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

11.1 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.



11.2 The Local Government Acts 1998 and 2003.

11.3 Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Author: Allan Dallimore, Regeneration Services Manager

Consultees:

Cllr James Pritchard, Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change (and Chair of the Regeneration Project Board)

Christina Harrhy, Chief Executive

Mark S. Williams, Corporate Director for Economy and Environment

Dave Street, Corporate Director for Social Services and Housing

Richard Edmunds, Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services

Stephen Harris, Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer

Marcus Lloyd, Head of Infrastructure

Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services/Monitoring Officer

Sue Richards, Head of Education Planning and Strategy

Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services

Anwen Cullinane, Senior Policy Officer

Rhian Kyte, Head of Regeneration and Planning

Hamish Munro, Caerphilly Place Making Programme Manager

Paul Hudson, Business, Enterprise and Renewal Team Manager

Chris Adams, Highways Engineering Group Manager

Local Ward Members for Blackwood, Bargoed, Caerphilly and Risca

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## **CABINET – 19TH OCTOBER 2022**

**SUBJECT: FINAL REPORT FROM THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP ON TACKLING POTENTIAL MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES POST PANDEMIC**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report seeks to inform Cabinet Members of the findings of the task and finish group that was established to review how Caerphilly County Borough Council works with partners to tackle any potential mental health issues post-pandemic. Cabinet Members are asked to consider the recommendations of this review group of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations of the Task and Finish group established to review how the Council works with partners to tackle any potential mental health issues post-pandemic. It charts the process that led to the group concluding that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of the population was immense and that action is now needed locally in mitigation.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 That Cabinet Members consider the content of this report and appendices, and support the following recommendations:
- 3.1.1 Caerphilly County Borough Council prioritises the provision of bereavement counselling across the County Borough during future meetings with Health and Wellbeing partners.
- 3.1.2 Caerphilly County Borough Council uses its influence within the WLGA to recognise the importance of the role played by Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners and recommends a collective appeal from all Welsh Councils for additional funding from the Welsh Government for this vital service within GP surgeries.

- 3.1.3 Council communications platforms are actively used to promote community health and wellbeing activities such as Bereavement Cafes organised via the Integrated Wellbeing Network.
- 3.1.4 Caerphilly County Borough Council liaises closely with partners in order to explore ways of allowing increased community self-determination for post-COVID wellbeing recovery through processes such as Participatory Budgeting.
- 3.1.5 Caerphilly County Borough Council actively encourages CCBC staff and Members to undertake Gwent Connect 5 training in order to help improve population mental wellbeing.
- 3.1.6 Caerphilly County Borough Council works with Health and Wellbeing partners to develop a “Tool Kit” outlining some of the key symptoms of Mental Health issues and signposting users to the range of help available such as the Melo website.

#### **4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 These recommendations have been suggested as it is believed that implementation would significantly mitigate against some of the key mental health issues identified during the course of the Task and Finish review.

#### **5. THE REPORT**

- 5.1 At the Social Services Scrutiny Committee pre-meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 Members raised news reports of a “Mental Health Timebomb” during their discussions on the Committee’s Forward Work Programme. Media coverage was suggesting that there was potential for a considerable increase in mental health cases and therefore an increased demand for services as a result of Covid-19 restrictions. During the Social Services Scrutiny Committee meeting afterwards Cllr Carmen Bezzina suggested a Task and Finish inquiry into preparations for a potential increase in demand for mental health services post-pandemic. This proposal moved by Cllr Bezzina was unanimously endorsed by Committee Members when the Forward Work Programme was discussed.
- 5.2 The terms of reference for this Task and Finish Group are: To determine the likelihood of a rise in demand for mental health services due to the restrictions placed on society because of the Covid-19 pandemic. To then establish if Caerphilly County Borough Council is as best placed as possible to work with partners in order to tackle potential mental health issues as restrictions are relaxed.
- 5.3 The Task and Finish Group on Tackling Potential Mental Health Issues Post Pandemic met for the first time on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2021 and agreed the terms of reference and Inquiry Plan set out in the review’s Scoping Document. The Task and Finish Group was made up of the following Members:

Councillor C Bezzina – Chair (until the Council elections in May 2022)  
 Councillor C Bishop  
 Councillor D Cushing  
 Councillor K Etheridge  
 Councillor M Evans  
 Ms M Jones – Vice Chair (until her retirement from the Parent Network in December 2021).

- 5.4 Prior to the second meeting of the Task and Finish Group a selection of online articles on Mental Health and the Pandemic was circulated to Members. These included information on the Welsh Government's Mental Health Delivery Plan 2019 – 2022, Public Health Wales' Covid-19 Wellbeing Campaign, tips from the charity MIND on coping with Mental Health Issues during the Pandemic and also several articles from leading UK news agencies.
- 5.5 The second Task Group meeting was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021 and focussed on an overview of the current situation. The key witness at this meeting was Karen Morris, Service Manager in Adult Services with responsibility for both mental health services and drug and alcohol services at Caerphilly County Borough Council.
- 5.6 Members heard how there were two Community Mental Health Teams (CMHT) responding to GP referrals for the north and south of the County Borough. Both teams consisted of a range of professionals including Consultant Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Community Psychiatric Nurses, Occupational Therapists and Social Workers. The Teams are a blend of Health Board and Caerphilly County Borough Council (Social Workers) staff. The Service Manager outlined how she met regularly with her counterpart from the Health Board to manage the teams.
- 5.7 The Chair asked if there had been a significant increase in CMHT workload during the pandemic. The Service Manager advised that there had been an increase in general referrals but not to the extent that would necessitate the need for additional staff and that the volume was currently being managed well by the teams. The Service Manager advised that should this situation change in the future she is well placed to request additional resources and continues to review the volume of referrals.
- 5.8 The Service Manager outlined groups that she was a Member of alongside colleagues from Public Health Wales and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board. The first one highlighted was the Foundation Tier Steering Group which focussed on prevention. Members heard how the MELO website and "Gwent Connect 5" workforce training programme were developed as a result of meetings by this group. The Service Manager also represented CCBC at Suicide Prevention and Self-Harm workshops and at meetings of the Integrated Wellbeing Network.
- 5.9 Group Members heard how good relationships had been developed with Primary Care Mental Health Specialist Services (PCMHSS). The Service Manager advised that GPs were the first point of contact and then it would be decided if an individual required Primary Care (which operated within GP surgeries) or if the case would be better treated at CMHT level i.e., secondary care. Primary Care Services would deal initially with low-level conditions such as anxiety and depression. The Group also heard about the development of Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner (PWP) roles in some surgeries. PWPs are non-registered practitioners who are trained to assess common mental health disorders.
- 5.10 Task Group Members were given a synopsis of the collaborative working which was taking place across all agencies including other Gwent Local Authorities. Mental Health Crisis Concordat meetings were held on a regular basis. Attendees at these meetings included Service Managers from each Local Authority, Gwent Police, Welsh Ambulance Service and Senior Managers from the Health Board. These meetings discussed the future development of mental health services in the Gwent region.

- 5.11 At the second Task Group meeting Members were also told about Mental Health Implementation Group meetings which focussed on issues pertaining to the adherence of the Mental Health Act.
- 5.12 At this meeting it was stressed that currently Caerphilly County Borough Council was equipped to deal with the demand for mental health services, but this situation was constantly being monitored by managers.
- 5.13 The third Task Group meeting was held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021 and focussed on testimony from leading mental health charities. The key witnesses were Jenny Burns, Associate Director (Wales) of the Mental Health Foundation and Jill Lawton, Director of Caerphilly Borough MIND.
- 5.14 Jenny Burns highlighted the Mental Health Foundation's longitudinal study of mental health during the pandemic. It found that the mental health of people with inequalities, such as those from ethnically diverse backgrounds, single parents and people with long-term conditions, had worsened during the pandemic.
- 5.15 A report on the impact of the pandemic on the elderly was also highlighted. It found that the impact was largely minimal but that those with long-term conditions had been impacted due to factors such as increased isolation.
- 5.16 Another study by the Mental Health Foundation focussed on resilience across the UK during the pandemic. This showed that the majority (64%) coped well with the stress of the pandemic but of those that did experience stress 9 in 10 used at least one coping strategy. Some of these strategies were positive such as the use of green spaces and staying connected with others, but negative strategies such as increased alcohol consumption, substance misuse and overeating were also identified. The report recommended that whilst every nation had made mental health literacy resources available, greater policy and investment could be targeted at those that lacked resilience.
- 5.17 Jenny Burns also highlighted an article in medical journal The Lancet which showed that 75% of respondents to a secondary schools' survey knew how to access help in their school, but that only 28% responded that they would do so. The conclusion was that counselling services should receive wider consultation prior to implementation.
- 5.18 On the issue of participation Jenny Burns outlined how it was key to involve stakeholders including youth groups in the design of services, but that there were challenges around resources at the beginning of the process.
- 5.19 The Service Manager highlighted the importance of joined up working within organisations. Members heard how an example of this practice at Caerphilly County Borough Council was the "Caerphilly Cares" initiative which linked service areas such as Social Services in order to aid community access to services. Similar processes were also developing within the Health Board in order to better signpost the services available
- 5.20 Jill Lawton outlined some of the key projects such as Supporting People and Active Monitoring, and Members heard how MIND in the Caerphilly region was providing a counselling service for the primary mental health teams.
- 5.21 Jill Lawton highlighted the importance of ensuring that services signposted on websites such as Melo are still active. Members heard about the frustration experienced when people tried to access services that have been closed.

- 5.22 At the third meeting Jill Lawton also highlighted the lack of specific bereavement counselling across the borough as an issue. One Member agreed and asked why general counsellors were unable to provide bereavement counselling as part of the package of care they provided. Jill advised that Caerphilly Borough MIND offered mental health counsellors and that specific advice on dealing with bereavement was a specialism.
- 5.23 The fourth Task Group meeting was held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022 and focussed on evidence from healthcare professionals. The key witnesses were Dr Chris O'Connor, Divisional Director for Mental Health and Learning Disabilities at Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Dr David Llewellyn, Service Development Lead for the Integrated Wellbeing Networks of the Gwent Public Health Team.
- 5.24 Dr Chris O'Connor highlighted to Group Members that the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the population had been immense. Dr O'Connor outlined to Group Members how research and studies over the last two years showed that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the population. Group Members then heard how this was also the conclusion of research Dr O'Connor carried out along with Cardiff University and Swansea University (*The Influence of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Mental Wellbeing and Psychological Distress: A Comparison Across Time – 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021*).
- 5.25 This research found that key groups within our communities were particularly impacted by the pandemic and were therefore at greater risk of developing mental health difficulties. Examples given by Dr O'Connor were people who have had a severe Covid illness, those experiencing financial difficulties, people who have experienced significant relationship difficulties, people experiencing domestic abuse, people feeling socially isolated, those with previous mental health difficulties, and people working in the health and social care arena.
- 5.26 Dr O'Connor also brought to the attention of Panel Members data and research carried out by the Centre for Mental Health on the future need for Mental Health Support. Modelling throughout the pandemic showed that within the next 3-5 years their prediction is that capacity within NHS Mental Health Services will need to grow between twofold and threefold in order to deal with the increased demand.
- 5.27 At the fourth meeting the issue of referrals to mental health services in the Caerphilly County Borough was discussed. The inquiry heard how despite a reduction in referrals during the first lockdown for older people with functional mental health difficulties such as depression and anxiety, there was now significantly more referrals than was the case pre-pandemic.
- 5.28 The number of people going to see their GP about mental health difficulties was then raised by Dr O'Connor. The Task Group Members heard that demand within the Primary Care arena had gone up massively during the pandemic.
- 5.29 One Member asked about GP timeframes for referring a patient to a consultant. Dr O'Connor highlighted to the Task Group that waiting times for counselling and interventions were now increasing.
- 5.30 At the fourth meeting the inquiry heard how Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners had been introduced within GP practices in order to provide a more effective service. Dr David Llewellyn advised that there were 12 Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners currently in place across the County Borough and that feedback from patients was

very positive.

- 5.31 Dr Llewellyn outlined the challenge of ensuring that Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners were aware of the full range of services and activities available within the community and gave the example of Bereavement Cafes which were being planned by the Integrated Wellbeing Networks. Dr Llewellyn also agreed with a point made about the need for greater connectivity between mental health service providers and he stressed that this would ensure activities complimented each other and that users were signposted in the right direction.
- 5.32 Dr Llewellyn highlighted a community study by the Integrated Wellbeing Networks at the end of 2020 which found that the Pandemic had exacerbated existing difficulties (*Sustaining and Strengthening Community Wellbeing Together in the Covid Era – August 2020*). Dr Llewellyn also drew the Task Group's attention to the support available via the Melo website and the Gwent Connect 5 training programme. Dr O'Connor reiterated praise for the training provided by Public Health Wales via the Connect 5 programme.
- 5.33 At the fourth Task Group meeting one Member asked what more Caerphilly County Borough Council could do and specifically enquired if lobbying the Welsh Government for additional resources for more Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners would be beneficial. Dr O'Connor welcomed any lobbying for additional resources as he advised that historically mental health had been underfunded when compared with funding for physical health services.
- 5.34 Dr Llewellyn advised Task Group Members that talks were taking place about the implementation of Participatory Budgeting within Caerphilly County Borough. He outlined how the ambition was to empower communities to implement the services they required themselves and highlighted how Third Sector organisations could bid for funding under this process. Dr Llewellyn also raised plans for an online Wellbeing Index which would accumulate anonymised data at a community level on the key issues and suggested solutions in terms of community mental health and wellbeing. It was suggested that this would then feed into the Participatory Budgeting process and allow effective monitoring of impact.
- 5.35 At a meeting of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2022, Members considered this report and supported the recommendations outlined earlier (3.1.1 – 3.1.6).

5.36 **Conclusion**

The Task and Finish Group have been meeting regularly since July 2021 and have received evidence from key witnesses ranging from the Consultant Clinical Psychologist responsible for the delivery of mental health services across the Gwent region, to the Director of the Mental Health Foundation in Wales. Group Members have also considered a range of written material and gained a good understanding of the current situation in terms of how mental health services are delivered within the County Borough. The conclusion reached is that the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of the population is immense and that action is now needed locally in mitigation against the resulting issues. After due deliberation the Task and Finish Group have made several recommendations for Cabinet consideration on the action required. These recommendations are outlined in Section 3 of this report.



## **6. ASSUMPTIONS**

6.1 No assumptions are necessary.

## **7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

7.1 As this report is for information only an Integrated Impact Assessment is not necessary.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are no specific financial implications arising as a result of this report.

## **9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no personnel implications with respect to this report.

## **10. CONSULTATIONS**

10.1 All responses from the consultations have been incorporated in the report.

10.2 At their meeting held on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2022, Members of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee considered the final report from the Task and Finish Group which was introduced by the Scrutiny Officer in the absence of the Task Group Chair. Discussion then ensued. One Member observed that that the report did not mention how stress from physical pain and delayed operations could affect mental health. The Scrutiny Officer acknowledged that the stress and pain from procedures that had been delayed because of the pandemic would be very concerning, however this aspect was not considered when the remit of the inquiry was discussed by the Group Members. The Member stated that they would have liked it to have been acknowledged in the report.

Following consideration of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations be approved for recommendation to Cabinet. By way of Microsoft Forms (and noting there were 8 for, 0 against and 1 Abstention) this was carried.

It was therefore RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that recommendations 3.1.1 – 3.1.6 be considered and supported.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

11.1 The Local Government Act 2000.

Author: Mark Jacques, Scrutiny Officer – jacqu@caerphilly.gov.uk

Consultees: Dave Street, Corporate Director for Social Services and Housing  
Richard Edmunds, Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services  
Jo Williams, Assistant Director Adult Services

Karen Morris, Service Manager (Mental Health Services/ Drug and Alcohol Services)  
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services/ Monitoring Officer  
Lisa Lane, Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer, Legal Services  
Councillor Elaine Forehead, Cabinet Member for Social Care  
Councillor Donna Cushing, Chair of Social Services Scrutiny Committee  
Councillor Marina Chacon-Dawson, Vice Chair of Social Services Scrutiny Committee

Appendices:

- Appendix 1 The Influence of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Mental Wellbeing and Psychological Distress: A Comparison Across Time – 15th July 2021.
- Appendix 2 Sustaining and Strengthening Community Wellbeing Together in the Covid Era – August 2020.
- Appendix 3 Information gathered at Task Review meetings since July 2021.

# COVID-19 Research: 2020 - 2021

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THE INFLUENCE OF THE COVID-19  
PANDEMIC ON MENTAL WELLBEING  
AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS: A  
COMPARISON ACROSS TIME

15<sup>th</sup> July 2021

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Authored by: Chris O'Connor, James Knowles,  
Nicola S. Gray, Jennifer Pink, Nicola Simkiss &  
Robert J. Snowden



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# Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused profound physical, social and economic changes across the world. Ongoing difficulties such as financial uncertainty, unemployment, health anxiety, social and physical isolation are likely to have negatively impacted the mental health and wellbeing of populations worldwide. Research monitoring the mental health and wellbeing of the population is essential in providing the understanding necessary to plan for a successful recovery process.

This research administered a series of online surveys to the Welsh population to examine levels of psychological wellbeing and the prevalence of clinically significant mental distress in the Welsh population. The first survey took place between the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2020 to the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2020 (11-16 weeks into the Welsh lockdown) and the second survey took place between the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2021 to the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2021 (4-11 weeks into the second Welsh lockdown). This data was also compared to data from April 2018-March 2019 gathered by the National Survey for Wales (ONS, 2019) to evaluate how wellbeing levels compared to pre-pandemic levels. Psychological wellbeing was indexed via the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), and psychological distress was indexed via the K10. The second survey also attempted to identify the factors driving psychological distress, along with the factors protecting individuals from poor wellbeing and psychological distress over the course of the pandemic.

Levels of wellbeing were lower in the second survey (2021) compared to the first survey (2020), which were already low compared to pre-pandemic data (2019). Rates of clinically significant psychological distress were found in 40.4% of the 2021 sample representing a 9.8% increase in prevalence from the first survey. As found in the first survey, mental health continues to be worse in women, young adults and individuals living in deprived areas and the gap in mental health and wellbeing between young and old adults continues to broaden. The second survey also identified that food insecurity, domestic abuse, prior history of mental health problems, social isolation, financial problems, and difficulties accessing necessary healthcare were the factors most strongly associated with psychological distress. Analysis of protective factors found that hope, resilience, and social connectedness were the most

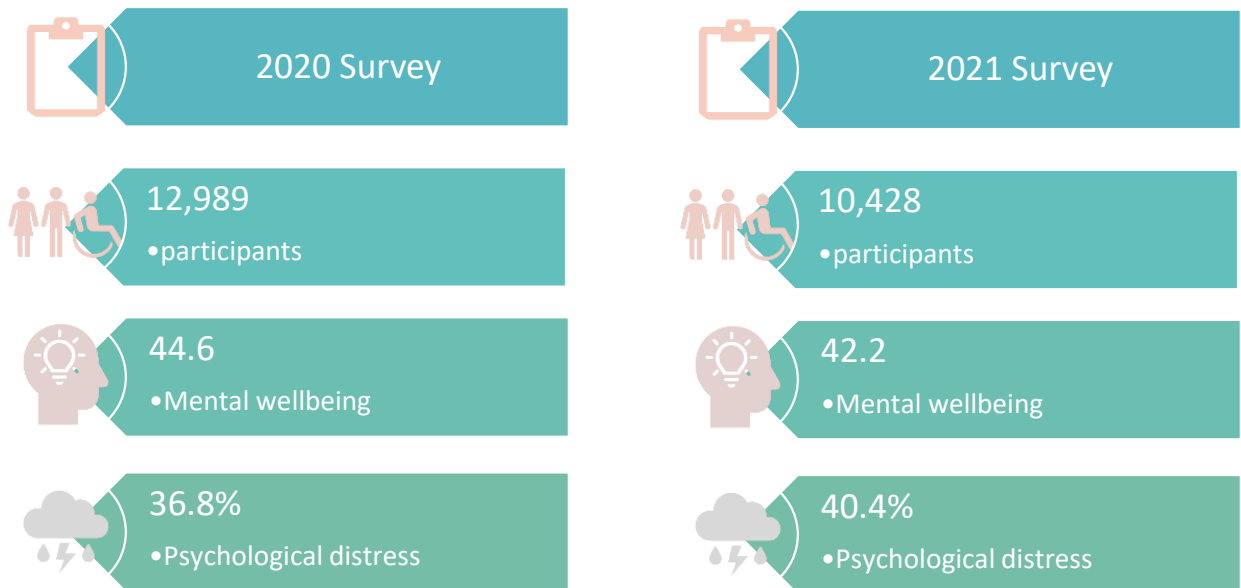
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important factors in protecting against poor wellbeing and psychological distress during the pandemic.

Organisations with responsibility for supporting the wellbeing of the population throughout the pandemic, need to be aware of the increasing mental health difficulties experienced within the population. Extra consideration should also be given to (1) how younger adults can be supported, (2) how we can prevent exposure to the factors driving psychological distress and provide support to individuals experiencing these difficulties and, (3) how we can instill hope, build resilience, and keep individuals socially connected over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Key points:

- Population mental wellbeing scores dropped from an average of 44.6 points (out of 70) in the 2020 survey, to 42.2 points in the 2021 survey.
- Rates of clinically significant psychological distress were found in 36.8% of the 2020 sample and 40.4% of the 2021 sample.





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# Acknowledgements

We want to acknowledge the help and support we received from Joy Garfitt, Richard Jones, Philip Lewis, David Roberts, Alberto Salmoiraghi, and Ian Wile, who (along with Chris O'Connor) acted as the Principal Investigators in each of the seven Health Boards in Wales. Their hard work ensured we could disseminate the survey to local populations in all Health Boards across Wales. We would also like to thank Stuart Williams for his help in building the survey website and for setting up the social media accounts for Wales Wellbeing. We are grateful to Jo Jordan, who at the time of the survey was the National Programme Director for Mental Health (NHS Wales). Thank you to all members of the All Wales Health Boards COVID-19 Mental Health Leads meeting, for their assistance and support with this research. We would like to say thank you to Chris Norman at the Portfolio Team at Health Care Research Wales for facilitation of research governance underpinning this survey and we are also grateful to all the individuals and the many statutory, third sector and private organisations who disseminated the survey across Wales. Finally, we would like to say a big thank you to everyone who took part in our surveys, particularly those who volunteered to take part in future studies that will help us to track the course of changes in mental health and wellbeing as the COVID-19 pandemic progresses.

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# Background

## Purpose and aims

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused profound social and economic changes across the world. It has caused a wide range of problems ranging from fear for one's own safety, the loss of loved ones, economic uncertainty, and the challenging effects of physical and social isolation, all of which are likely to negatively impact the mental health and wellbeing of populations worldwide. This research used data from the first and second national lockdown periods<sup>1</sup> to:

1. Monitor the mental health and wellbeing of the Welsh population.
2. Build an understanding of the factors affecting mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic.
3. Identify factors that protected individuals against the stressful effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## The COVID-19 pandemic in Wales

The aim of the present research was to monitor the mental health and wellbeing of the Welsh population from the first and second lockdown periods<sup>1</sup>. This research administered two surveys to the Welsh population. The first survey took place during the first national lockdown, from the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2020 to the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2020 (more details on the lockdown restrictions during the first survey can be found in [our previous report](#)). The second survey took place between the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2021 to the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2021. At the start of the first survey (9<sup>th</sup> of June 2020) Wales was under the UK wide lockdown implemented from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020, with all people required to stay at home except for very limited purposes. By

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this report, the 'first' lockdown refers to the lockdown implemented across Wales from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020 until the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2020 and the 'second' lockdown refers lockdown restrictions implemented across Wales from the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 2020 until the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2021 (Senedd Research, 2021). This does not include the "fire-break" lockdown that occurred across Wales from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October until the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2020.

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the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2020, some lockdown restrictions were eased in Wales, with non-essential retail business, childcare facilities, and the housing market re-opening. By the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2020, Welsh schools began to re-open and by the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2020, lockdown restrictions were further eased across Wales, with people allowed to travel more than 5 miles from their home, although the other restrictions remained in place. At the start of the second survey (18<sup>th</sup> of January 2021), Wales was under another period of lockdown restrictions that had been put in place from the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 2021, with all people required to stay at home except for very limited purposes. These lockdown restrictions were in place until the end of the survey (7<sup>th</sup> March 2021). During the period of the second survey, the Welsh Government was starting to roll out Wales' vaccination programme (Senedd Research, 2021).

## **Previous UK studies**

### **Literature on population wellbeing after disasters**

Previous research into community mental health recovery after acute, chronic, natural and human-caused disasters has demonstrated that recovery is not a straightforward process and the effects of disasters can last several years (The King's Fund, 2020; DeWolfe, 2000). Traditional models of recovery (DeWolfe, 2000) suggest that there is often a sharp decrease in emotional wellbeing immediately after the onset of a disaster (impact phase), followed by a temporary period of increased wellbeing and altruistic optimism as communities pull together (heroic and honeymoon phases). This is typically followed by a time where individuals recognise the scale and reality of the disaster, fatigue sets in and wellbeing declines (disillusionment phase), before a period where wellbeing is slowly reconstructed over a period of many years (reconstruction phase). Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has been an ongoing, multifaceted and unpredictable series of events rather than one single event, drawing on past research into population recovery from disasters, can help us make sense of the patterns displayed in current research investigating how the mental health and wellbeing of populations have been affected over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Initial response**

During the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, reports indicated an increase in the prevalence of population psychological distress. During April 2020, one month after the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic (11<sup>th</sup> March 2020; WHO, 2020) investigations

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across the UK (Pierce et al., 2020) reported large increases in the rates of clinically significant psychological distress compared to levels prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar findings during the initial months of the pandemic have been replicated across the world. Xiong et al., (2020) found that high rates of anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, psychological distress and stress had been reported in general populations in China, Spain, Italy, Iran, America, Turkey, Nepal and Denmark, with young people (<40), women, presence of chronic and psychiatric illness, students and unemployed individuals amongst the most negatively impacted.

Our first survey investigated the mental health and wellbeing of the Welsh population during the first national lockdown and compared it to population-based data collected in 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Gray et al., 2020). The research revealed a large decrease in population wellbeing, with wellbeing levels across the population decreasing from an average of 51.2 (out of 70) in 2019, to 44.6 in 2020, a decrease of 6.6 points. The research also observed an increase in psychological distress, with women, young people and those living in deprived areas the most adversely affected. This sharp decline in population mental health and wellbeing following the onset of the pandemic is consistent with the “impact phase” trajectory outlined in traditional models of post-disaster population recovery (DeWolfe, 2000).

### **After the initial response**

Further research has examined the mental health and wellbeing of the UK population in the months following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fancourt et al. (2020) found that the highest levels of depression and anxiety occurred in the early stages of lockdown, with symptoms steadily improving from March 2020 to August 2020. Shevlin et al., (2021) conducted a longitudinal survey of UK adults measuring anxiety and depression levels, in March 2020 (Time 1), April 2020 (Time 2) and July 2020 (Time 3). They found that the prevalence of anxiety and depression remained stable across the three time points. Pierce et al., (2021) also reported that by October 2020 the mental health of most UK adults returned to pre-pandemic levels. Studies in Korea (Choi et al., 2021) and Australia (Pieh et al., 2021) have also demonstrated similar effects, with population wellbeing showing signs of improvement in the months after the onset of the pandemic. This research indicates that after the initial decline in population mental health and wellbeing during March and April

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2020, the mental health of the population has either stabilised or started to improve. This pattern of stabilising and improving mental health in the months after the onset of the pandemic is consistent with the ‘heroic’ and ‘honeymoon phases’ outlined in traditional disaster recovery models (DeWolfe, 2000), where population wellbeing temporarily increases as communities pull together after the onset of a crisis.

Whilst this research paints an optimistic picture, there are still reasons to be concerned for the wellbeing of the population over the course of the pandemic. Firstly, since August 2020, within the UK there has been a second surge in COVID-19 cases and deaths, the introduction of COVID-19 variants, and a prolonged period of lockdown restrictions (Senedd Research, 2021), resulting in increased feelings of uncertainty, economic difficulties, continued health anxiety, and increased loneliness. Therefore, it seems likely that the second set of lockdown restrictions announced in December 2020 will have had a detrimental impact on population wellbeing. Secondly, post-disaster wellbeing recovery models (DeWolfe, 2000) indicate that a period of recovery after the initial onset of the disaster is typically followed by a time where the reality of the disaster sets in and wellbeing declines (disillusionment phase). Considering this model, it may be short-sighted to interpret the recovery demonstrated in the UK population between April and October 2020 (Pierce et al., 2021) as evidence of a completed recovery path. Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic is unpredictable in many ways, it is likely that the impact on the mental health of the population will endure for many years and the recovery will not be a straight-forward or linear process.

## **The Present Study**

### **Monitoring the mental health and wellbeing of the population**

Given the unpredictable and ongoing difficulties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that research continues to monitor the wellbeing of the population. A comprehensive understanding of the wellbeing needs of the population facilitates the development of effective interventions and recovery strategies (The King’s Fund, 2020). Whilst a great deal of research examined the wellbeing of the population in the initial weeks and months after the onset of the pandemic, less research has focused on how population wellbeing has progressed one year later. This project aimed to understand the mental health and wellbeing of the Welsh population using data from the first UK lockdown the second UK lockdown.

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Previous research has focused primarily on mental health difficulties experienced in populations throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there is a growing emphasis in the mental health literature that mental wellness is not simply the absence of mental illness (Suldo & Shaffer, 2008). Mental health difficulties can be defined as “a pattern of behaving, thinking, and feeling that causes a person significant distress or impairment of functioning”, whereas mental wellbeing is a construct that represents happiness and a sense of purpose which can remain even in the presence of distress, or suffering (Weich et al., 2011). This research acknowledges the importance of both decreasing mental health difficulties and promoting positive mental wellbeing in the population. Therefore, this project places focus on measuring both mental health difficulties and mental wellbeing.

In addition to examining the overall wellbeing of the population throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, it is also vital to understand the wellbeing of different groups within the population. Identifying the groups most adversely affected by the pandemic can help authorities develop targeted interventions that provide help to those who need it most. Prior research has indicated that factors such as gender (Xiong et al., 2020), age (Gray et al., 2020), and socioeconomic deprivation (Pierce et al., 2020) have influenced the degree to which individuals were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study will also investigate the effects of gender, age, and socioeconomic deprivation on mental health and wellbeing throughout the pandemic. Moreover, as different regions across Wales have been differently impacted by rates of COVID-19 and COVID-19 restrictions, we will also examine the levels of wellbeing and psychological distress across the seven Health Board regions in Wales.

### **Identifying factors causing psychological distress**

As well as understanding the mental health of the population, it is also vital to build an understanding of the factors driving any changes in mental health. If we can identify specific aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic that are causing mental health difficulties in the population, we can work towards preventing them and better protecting the mental health of our communities.

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There are many aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic that are likely to have negatively impacted the mental health of the population. These factors include the increases in job insecurity and job losses (Sher, 2020); people experiencing bereavement (Verdery et al., 2020); financial difficulties (Prime et al., 2020); school closures and home-schooling (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020); food insecurity (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020); increased domestic abuse (Mahase, 2020); worsening physical health (Bo et al., 2020); increased health anxiety (Jungmann et al., 2020) and social isolation (Groarke et al., 2020). Therefore, this study will also investigate the extent to which these stressors have impacted the mental health of the population.

### **Identifying protective factors**

Understanding the factors that are causing distress in the population is important. However, it is not possible to eliminate all stressors during a global pandemic. Having large portions of the population experience adversity is an unfortunate reality of a pandemic. Nonetheless, not all individuals that undergo adversity experience mental health difficulties (PeConga et al., 2020). There are many individuals who maintain their wellbeing and mental health during periods of severe adversity. In fact, some research has indicated that resilience is the most common human response to adversity (Shevlin et al., 2021; PeConga et al., 2020). This means that when people experience extreme stressors, such as first responders to the 9/11 world trade centre attacks (Pietrzak et al., 2014) or health care workers in China during the SARS outbreak (Wu et al., 2009), most do not go on to experience or develop clinically significant mental health difficulties (PeConga et al., 2020).

Therefore, it is important to identify factors that help our communities withstand the stressful events caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. If we can understand the factors that help buffer against the stressful effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, we can develop strategies that help build resilience in our communities throughout the pandemic and beyond. Past research has indicated that psychological resilience (Smith et al., 2008), hope for the future (Gallagher et al., 2020), social connectedness (Nitschke et al., 2021), stress immunity (Pink et al., 2021), and reality acceptance (McCracken & Vowles 2006) all help protect individuals who experience adversity from developing mental health difficulties. Therefore, this project also investigated whether these protective factors help individuals maintain their mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.



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## Key study aims

This project aimed to use data from the first and second Welsh lockdown periods to:

1. Monitor the mental health and wellbeing of the overall Welsh population. This also includes an examination the effects of gender, age, socioeconomic deprivation, Health Board and Local Authority region on mental health and wellbeing.
2. Build an understanding of the factors driving poor wellbeing and psychological distress in the population.
3. Identify the factors that help individuals maintain their mental health and wellbeing during the stressful events of the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Research Methods

## Ethics

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the College of Health and Human Sciences, Swansea University. The project is registered with ISRCTN ref: 21598625.

The study protocol is published at:

[http://psy.swansea.ac.uk/staff/gray/Protocol\\_Impact\\_of\\_COVID19\\_on\\_Mental\\_Health\\_July2020.pdf](http://psy.swansea.ac.uk/staff/gray/Protocol_Impact_of_COVID19_on_Mental_Health_July2020.pdf)

## Participants

Participants were recruited via two online surveys. The first survey took place in between June and July 2020 and the second survey took place between January and March 2021. The recruitment methods for each survey are described below.

### 2020 survey

The participant recruitment procedures for the 2021 survey were the same as the 2020 survey described below. More details on the 2020 survey participant recruitment procedures can also be found in [our previous report](#). In total, 15,469 participants started the 2020 survey. Of these, 2,417 did not complete over 50% of the survey and were excluded from further

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analysis. The median survey completion time was 647 seconds (IQR: 510 – 863). Individuals who completed the survey in under 240 seconds were excluded from the analysis (n = 63) as we did not believe participants could provide accurate answers at such quick speeds. Our final sample for the 2020 survey consisted of 12,989 individuals.

## **2021 survey**

Participants for the 2021 survey were recruited via online snowball sampling. The survey was advertised via a series of social media advertisements and emails designed to cover the population of Wales. This included emails and tweets being sent to organisations across Wales asking them to publicise the existence of the survey giving the URL of the survey website for participants to be able to access the survey. Many organisations agreed to support the research and to advertise and disseminate the survey. This included all seven Health Boards in Wales; the four police forces in Wales; the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust; the three Fire & Rescue services in Wales; many large employers across Wales, including large government organisations; care homes; homelessness organisations; GPs; the Welsh Farmers' Union; sporting organisations and third sector organisations (e.g., charitable organisations supporting specific sectors of the community). The survey was also advertised via newspapers, radio broadcasts, and celebrity tweets.

To make sure the survey recruited individuals from all areas across Wales, we ensured that a minimum number of participants (n = 250) were recruited from each of the 22 Local Authorities across Wales (Merthyr Tydfil (n = 176) and Wrexham (n = 180) were the only exceptions to this). The survey was open from the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2021 to the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2021. During this period, Wales was in a period of “lockdown”, with individuals instructed not to leave their homes other than for essential reasons.

In total, 13,283 participants took part in the survey. Of these, 2,767 did not complete over 50% of the survey and were excluded from further analysis. Analysis of the time taken to complete the survey found the median completion time was 829s (IQR: 653–1103) and people (n = 26) who completed the survey in under 240s were excluded from the survey as such fast completion times were not commensurate with carefully answering the questions. Participants who reported that they did not currently live in Wales were also excluded (n =

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62) to ensure all participants were under the same lockdown conditions. Our final sample for the '2021 survey' consisted of 10,428 participants.

## Measures

The survey was administered online (Qualtrics software, Version June 2020, Provo, UT, USA, Copyright © 2020Version) for the vast majority of participants (> 99%) and was available in both English and Welsh language versions. We also had a dedicated telephone line that was widely advertised so sectors of the population with limited access to the internet could request a paper-based survey (with stamped addressed envelope) and thus were able to engage with the survey. The survey was designed to take around 10 minutes to complete.

The 2020 and 2021 survey were largely the same. All measures described below appeared in both surveys, unless stated otherwise. The first section contained an information sheet and a consent form. The second section asked for demographic information that included questions on participants' age, gender, ethnicity and postcode (used to calculate the deprivation index). The third section included questions related to levels of wellbeing and psychological distress. The fourth section asked about the COVID-19 related stressors that participants were experiencing, and the final section enquired about participants levels of hope for the future, psychological resilience, social connectedness, stress immunity and reality acceptance.

### Wellbeing

Current mental wellbeing (over the past two weeks) was assessed via the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2007). The WEMWBS contained 14 items covering issues such as positive affect, level of functioning, and relationships over the past two weeks. Items are answered on a five-point Likert scale with respect to frequency (from "none of the time" to "all of the time") to give a score ranging from 14 to 70, with greater scores indicating greater wellbeing. The internal consistency of the WEMWBS was high in the 2021 sample (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.94$ ).

### Psychological distress

Current level of psychological distress was assessed by the Kessler Distress Scale (K10; Kessler, et al., 2002). The standard K10 asks people to rate their distress over the past 30 days.

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However, we chose to amend this to over the past two weeks to match the time period of the WEMWBS. The K10 contains 10 items measuring current psychological distress and, in particular, symptoms of anxiety and depression. Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale with respect to frequency (from “none of the time” to “all of the time”) to give a score from 10 to 50, with greater scores indicating greater levels of psychological distress. The internal consistency of the K10 was high in the 2021 sample (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.93$ ).

### **Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation**

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) is produced by the Welsh Government (2019) and is a measure of relative deprivation for 1,909 areas of Wales (1 = most deprived, 1909 = least deprived), with each area containing an average of 1,600 people. It defines deprivation as “the lack of access to opportunities and resources which we might expect in our society”, p 14). Participants’ WIMD rank was calculated using their postcode information.

### **COVID-19 stressors**

This set of questions aimed to understand the COVID-19 related stressors that participants had experienced. This section provided participants with a list of potential stressors they may have experienced since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were asked to tick the box next to the listed stressor if they had experienced that stressor since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The list of stressors included experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, experiencing financial problems, being made redundant, experiencing food insecurity (defined as not having enough nutritious food for one’s needs, or one’s family’s needs), experiencing a bereavement, having responsibility to home-school a child, experiencing social isolation (defined as complete, or near complete, lack of contact with other people), being unable to stay in contact with loved ones, experiencing relationship problems, experiencing domestic abuse, having to cancel important upcoming events<sup>2</sup>, experiencing increased difficulties in caring for someone<sup>2</sup> and

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<sup>2</sup> This was only asked about in the 2021 survey.

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being unable to access necessary healthcare<sup>2</sup>. Similar measures utilising “Yes/No” responses to a list of stressors has previously demonstrated good test-retest reliability and convergent validity (Kujawa et al., 2020).

## Hope<sup>2</sup>

Participants’ levels of hope were assessed via 4 statements taken from Beck’s Hopelessness Scale (Beck et al., 1979). Participants were asked to rate whether the following statements were true or false: *“In the future I expect to succeed in what concerns me most”*, *“My future seems dark to me”*, *“I just don’t get the breaks and there is no reason to believe I will in the future”* and *“I have great faith in the future”*. Participants answers to these questions were calculated to give a score ranging from 0 (very hopeless) to 4 (very hopeful). Past research has demonstrated that participants’ answers on these four items were very highly correlated with their total scores on the full 20-item Beck’s Hopelessness Scale (Aish et al., 2001), a widely used clinical tool used to assess clinical levels of hopelessness. The internal consistency for the hope questionnaire was high in the 2021 sample (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.80$ ).

## Resilience<sup>2</sup>

Participants’ resilience was measured using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) developed by Smith et al., (2008). The BRS asks people to rate a series of six statements such as *“I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times”* on a five-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Responses on the 6 BRS items are totalled up to give a score ranging from 6 (low resilience) to 30 (high resilience). The BRS has previously proven to be a valid and reliable measure of resilience (Smith et al., 2008). The internal consistency of the BRS was high in the 2021 sample (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.90$ ).

## Stress Immunity

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<sup>2</sup> This was only asked about in the 2021 survey. **Page 67**

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This set of questions looked to examine participants levels of stress-immunity, i.e., the extent to which they could withstand stressful occurrences. The stress immunity sub-scale from the Triarchic Psychopathy Measure (TriPM; Patrick, 2010) was used to assess levels of stress immunity. The six questions within the sub scale asked participants to rate a series of statements on a four-point Likert scale from “true” to “mostly true”, to “mostly false” to “false”. Participants responses on the 6 items are totalled up to give a score ranging from 4 (low stress immunity) to 24 (high stress immunity). The six items in the questionnaire assessed levels of fear, self-confidence, embarrassment and overcoming trauma. This six-item scale indexes a stable personality trait measuring how immune the individual is to stress and trauma. The internal consistency of the TriPM Stress Immunity Subscale was good in the 2021 sample (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.77$ ).

### **Social Connectedness<sup>2</sup>**

Social connectedness was measured using the UCLA Three-Item Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996). The UCLA Three-Item Loneliness Scale asks participants 3 questions that measure relational connectedness: “*How often do you feel that you lack companionship?*”, social connectedness: “*How often do you feel left out?*” and self-perceived isolation “*How often do you feel isolated from others?*”. Participants respond to each question on a scale of 1 “Hardly ever” to 3 “Often”. The scores for each individual question are then added together to give a possible range of scores from 3 to 9. The UCLA Three-Item Loneliness scale has previously been shown to be a valid and reliable measure of social connectedness (Russell, 1996). The internal consistency of the UCLA Three-Item Loneliness Scale was high in the 2021 sample (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

### **Reality Acceptance<sup>2</sup>**

This set of questions aimed to measure the degree to which participants had accepted the reality of the current COVID-19 pandemic. The Reality Acceptance Questionnaire (RAQ) asks participants to rate a series of six statements such as “*I have accepted the changes that COVID-19 has had on my life*” or “*I accept that the Covid-19 pandemic is a real threat to many*”

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<sup>2</sup> This was only asked about in the 2021 survey.

people’s health” on a five-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The scores for each individual question are then added together to give a possible range of scores from 6 (low reality acceptance) to 30 (high reality acceptance). The internal consistency for the Reality Acceptance Questionnaire was acceptable in the 2021 sample (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.69$ ).

## Research Findings

### Demographics

Demographic from the 2020 survey and the 2021 survey are displayed in Table 1. Relative to the demographics of the population of Wales (ONS, 2011) the current sample underrepresented men, young individuals (aged 16-24) and older individuals (aged 75+). Therefore, all statistical analyses were stratified by gender and by age, so that any differences due to gender or age would not affect the results reported.

Table 1: Demographic information for the 2020 and the 2021 sample

		2020 sample (%)	2021 sample (%)
<b>Total</b>		12,989 (100.0)	10,428 (100.0)
<b>Gender</b>	<i>Male</i>	2,490 (19.2)	1460 (14.0)
	<i>Female</i>	10,391 (80.0)	7893 (75.7)
	<i>Other</i>	25 (0.2)	17 (0.2)
	<i>Prefer not to say/no response</i>	83 (0.6)	1058 (10.1)
<b>Age</b>	<i>16-24</i>	703 (5.4)	506 (4.9)
	<i>25-34</i>	1870 (14.4)	1359 (13.0)
	<i>35-44</i>	2647 (20.4)	2055 (19.7)
	<i>45-54</i>	3254 (25.1)	2498 (24.0)
	<i>55-64</i>	2761 (21.3)	2381 (22.8)
	<i>65-74</i>	1356 (10.4)	1302 (12.5)
	<i>75+</i>	398 (3.1)	327 (3.1)
<b>Deprivation Rank</b>	<i>1 (most deprived)</i>	1994 (15.4)	1575 (15.1)
	<i>2</i>	1998 (15.4)	1515 (14.5)

	<b>3</b>	2015 (15.5)	1480 (14.2)
	<b>4</b>	2004 (15.4)	1531 (14.7)
	<b>5 (least deprived)</b>	2006 (15.4)	1655 (15.9)
	<b>Prefer not to say/no response</b>	2972 (22.9)	2672 (25.6)
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>White - any</b>	12,553 (96.6)	10110 (96.9)
	<b>Asian - any</b>	130 (1.0)	62 (0.6)
	<b>Black - any</b>	16 (0.1)	16 (0.2)
	<b>Mixed - any</b>	110 (0.8)	79 (0.8)
	<b>Other</b>	74 (0.6)	57 (0.5)
	<b>Prefer not to say/no response</b>	106 (0.8)	104 (1.0)
<b>Relationship status</b>	<b>Single</b>	1847 (14.2)	1435 (13.8)
	<b>Married/civil partnership</b>	7101 (54.7)	5830 (55.9)
	<b>Co-habiting with partner</b>	1880 (14.5)	1418 (13.6)
	<b>Partner non-cohabiting</b>	753 (5.8)	539 (5.2)
	<b>Separated</b>	198 (1.5)	173 (1.7)
	<b>Divorced</b>	652 (5.0)	534 (5.1)
	<b>Widowed</b>	406 (3.1)	343 (3.3)
	<b>Other</b>	69 (0.5)	63 (0.6)
	<b>Prefer not to say/no response</b>	83 (0.6)	93 (0.9)
<b>Employment*</b>	<b>Paid employment</b>	8533	6332
	<b>Self-employed</b>	502	444
	<b>Student</b>	480	607
	<b>Apprentice</b>	31	10
	<b>Unemployed</b>	149	108
	<b>Long term sick/disability</b>	413	405
	<b>Retired</b>	1945	1955
	<b>Furloughed</b>	574	300
	<b>Stay at home parent</b>	228	214
	<b>Full time carer</b>	42	163
	<b>Other</b>	2	305
	<b>Prefer not to say/no response</b>	90	38



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*\* Percentages not given for the employment demographics as participants could select multiple options.*

## **2021 survey**

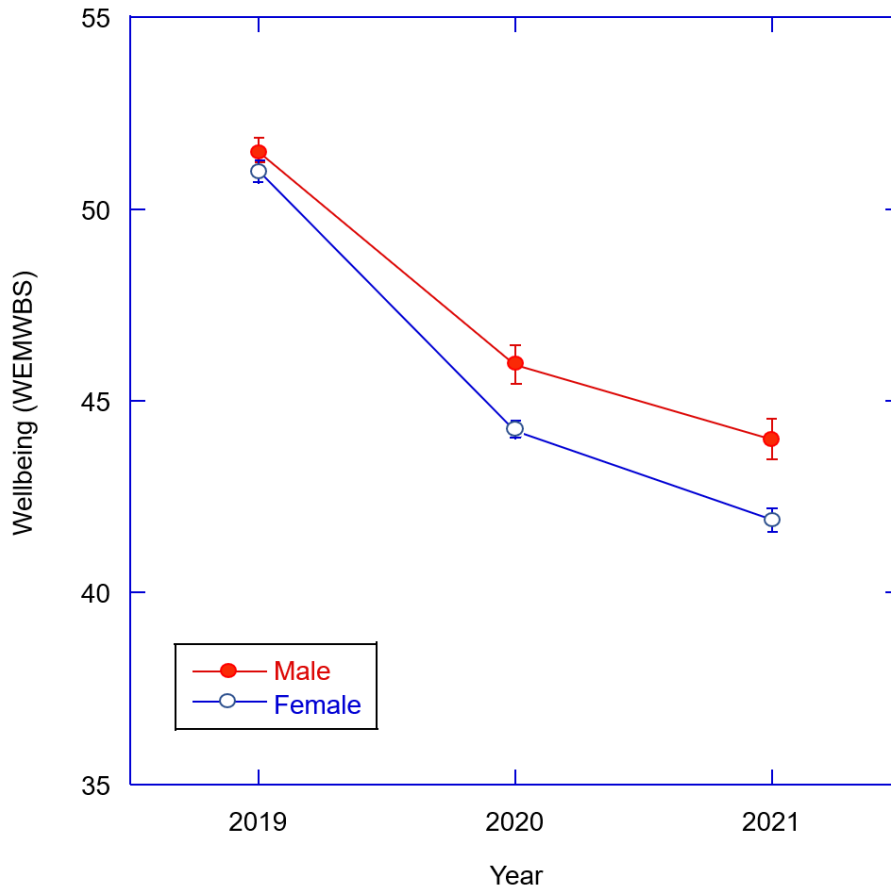
An examination of the data from the 2021 survey showed a similar pattern of results to the 2020 survey (see Table S1 in supplementary materials). Levels of mental wellbeing were lower in women, younger people, and in those from the more deprived areas (all  $ps < .001$ ). Levels of psychological distress (see Table S2 in supplementary materials) were also greatest in women, younger people, and those from more deprived areas (all  $ps < .001$ ).

**Conclusion: Across both the 2020 survey and the 2021 survey, wellbeing was lower and psychological distress was higher for women, young adults, and individuals from deprived areas.**

## **Comparison of the 2020 and 2021 surveys: Wellbeing**

Figure 1 compares the mean scores on the wellbeing measure (WEMWBS) for the 2020 sample and the 2021 sample, it also includes national wellbeing data from the 2018-2019 National Survey for Wales (ONS, 2019) for comparison purposes. Descriptive statistics are also displayed in Table S1 (supplementary materials). Participants' wellbeing scores were significantly lower during the 2021 survey ( $M = 42.2$ ), compared to the 2020 survey ( $M = 44.6$ ),  $t(23399) = 17.70$ ,  $p < .001$ , representing a 2.4 points reduction or an effect size of  $d = 0.23$ . It should be noted that this decrease in wellbeing is on top of the detriment of the 6.6 points reduction from 2019 to 2020.

Figure 1. Mean scores for men and women on the WEMWBS for the 2020 sample and the 2021 sample.



To understand if this reduction in mental wellbeing was influenced by gender, age or socioeconomic deprivation, a series of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were performed examining each of these factors.

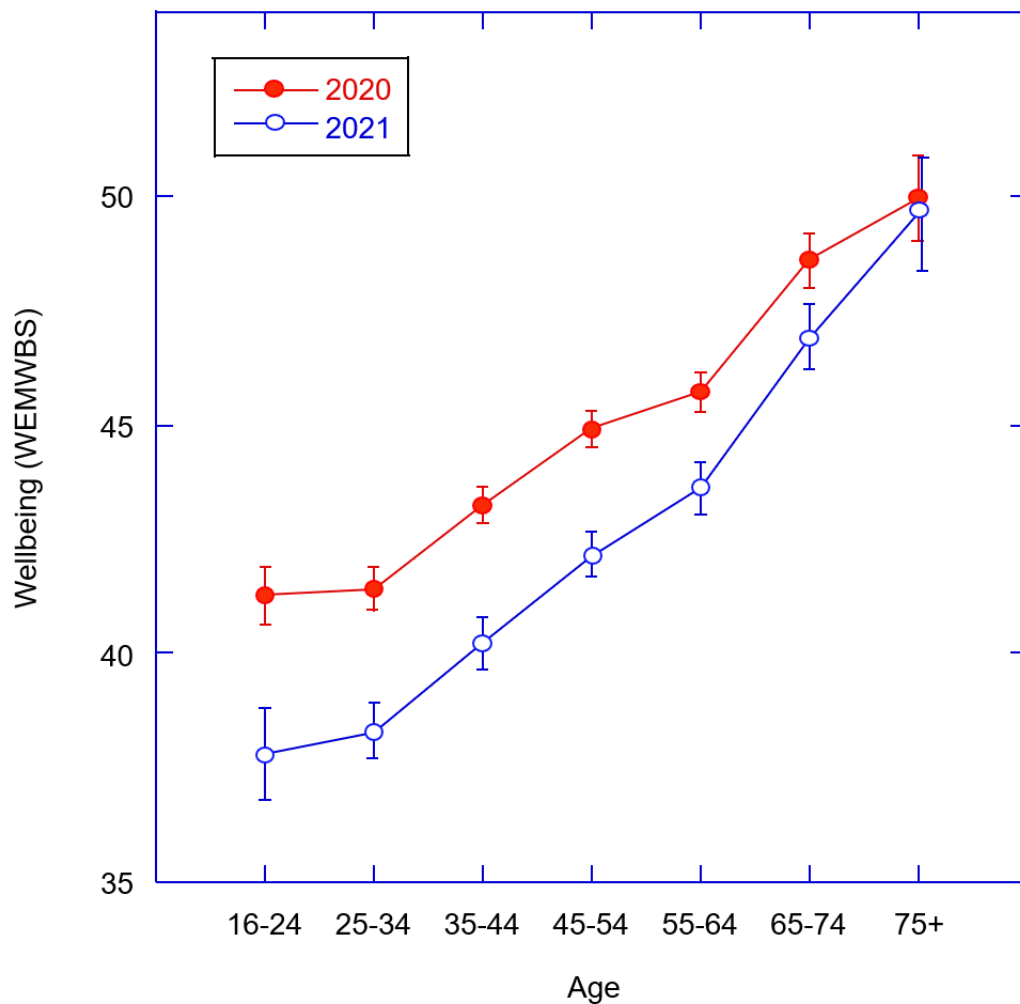
### Gender

There were no gender differences in the change in wellbeing over time, with both men and women experiencing a similar decrease in wellbeing from the 2020 survey to the 2021 survey. On average, scores on the WEMWBS decreased by 2.0 points for men and 2.4 points for women, from the 2020 survey to the 2021 survey. Whilst it appears the reduction in wellbeing may have been slightly larger for women compared to men, this effect was not statistically significant.

## Age

We found that age did influence change in wellbeing over time  $F(1, 23387) = 4.24, p < .001, \eta p^2 = .001$ . Follow up tests revealed that younger age groups showed a more pronounced decline in wellbeing from the 2020 survey to the 2021 survey (see Table S1 in supplementary materials & Figure 2 below). For the youngest age group (16-24), WEMWBS scores reduced by 3.5 points on average from the 2020 survey to the 2021 survey, whereas for the older group (75+) WEMWBS scores only reduced by 0.3 points.

Figure 2. Mean scores for each age group on the WEMWBS (wellbeing) for the 2020 sample and the 2021 sample.



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## Socioeconomic Deprivation

There was no difference in the change in wellbeing over time between the five deprivation groups. All of the different deprivation groups experienced a similar decrease in wellbeing from the 2020 survey to the 2021 survey. On average, scores on the WEMWBS reduced by 2.8 points for the most deprived group and 2.1 for the least deprived group, from the 2020 survey to the 2021 survey. Whilst it appears the reduction in wellbeing may have been slightly larger for the most deprived group, this effect was not statistically significant.

**Conclusion: Levels of wellbeing have reduced significantly from the 2020 survey to the 2021 survey. This reduction in wellbeing was steeper for younger individuals relative to older individuals. The drop in wellbeing was the same across genders and across different socioeconomic deprivation groups.**

## Health Board

Table S3 (supplementary materials) shows the average wellbeing scores for each of the seven Health Boards across Wales in both the 2020 and 2021 survey. Most Health Boards experienced a significant decline in population wellbeing from the 2020 to 2021 survey. Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Powys Teaching Health Board were the only exceptions to this, with no statistically significant reduction in population wellbeing occurring between the 2020 and 2021 surveys. Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (decrease of 4.2 points) and Cardiff & Vale University Health Board (decrease of 3.5 points) experienced the largest decline in population wellbeing from the 2020 to the 2021 survey. During the 2021 survey, the highest levels of wellbeing were observed in Powys Teaching Health Board<sup>3</sup> (44.6) and Hywel Dda Health Board (43.3) and the lowest levels of wellbeing were observed in Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (41.1) and Cardiff & Vale University Health Board (41.9).

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<sup>3</sup> Only 251 participants from Powys took part in the survey. This is quite a small number and therefore we are less confident that this number accurately captures population wellbeing in Powys.

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**Conclusion: Most Health Boards and Local Authorities experienced a decrease in population wellbeing. Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Cardiff & Vale University Health Board experienced the sharpest decline in population wellbeing and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Powys Teaching Health Board were the only Health Boards to have no significant decline in population wellbeing.**

## **Local Authority**

An examination of the wellbeing within each of the 22 Local Authorities within Wales shows that the mental health of certain areas within Wales were more affected than others during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from the 22 Local Authorities are listed in Table S4 (supplementary materials). It shows that most Local Authorities experienced a significant reduction in population wellbeing, with Caerphilly (-4.5 points), Monmouthshire (-4.5 points), Torfaen (-4.5 points), Bridgend (-3.9 points), Newport (-3.7 points), Cardiff (-3.6 points), Vale of Glamorgan (-3.4 points) and Ceredigion (-3.3 points) experiencing the sharpest decline in population wellbeing.

The only Local Authorities that saw an improvement in population wellbeing was Anglesey (+1.6 points), Gwynedd (+1.4 points) and Pembrokeshire (+0.2 points), though these improvements were not statistically significant. Conwy showed no change in population wellbeing from the 2020 survey to the 2021 survey. During the 2021 survey, the highest levels of wellbeing were observed in Pembrokeshire (44.7), Powys (44.6), Gwynedd, Carmarthenshire and Anglesey (all 43.8). The lowest levels of population wellbeing were observed in Caerphilly (40.3), Blaenau Gwent (40.5) and Newport (40.8). When analysing these findings, it is important to acknowledge that the number of participants within some of the Local Authorities were quite small and therefore the results must be interpreted with some degree of caution.

**Conclusion: Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, and Torfaen were the Local Authorities to experience the sharpest decline in population wellbeing. The only Local Authorities not to experience a decline in population wellbeing were Anglesey, Gwynedd, Pembrokeshire, and Conwy.**

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## Comparison of the 2020 and 2021 surveys: Psychological Distress

The K10 was included in this study because of its well-established ability to categorise people in terms of clinically significant levels of mental distress. The K10 can be used to classify people as “psychologically well (0-19)”, “mild mental distress (20-24)”, “moderate mental distress (25-29)”, and “severe mental distress (30+)”. For the purposes of analysing levels of distress in the population, we used the cut-off of 25 or more to define people who had a “moderate or severe level of mental distress”. Past research has demonstrated that individuals scoring above 25 on the K10 have a 69.4% chance of meeting the criteria for a DSM-IV mental disorder in the past year (Andrews & Slade, 2001).

Overall, 40.4% of the sample were suffering from moderate to severe distress in the 2021 sample, compared to 36.8% in the 2020 sample, an increase of 3.6 percentage points representing a 9.8% increase in prevalence. This was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1) = 30.53, p < .001$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .002$ .  $\beta = 0.15, SE = 0.03, Wald = 30.5, p < .001, Exp(B) = 1.16$ .

To understand if this increase in rates of psychological distress was influenced by gender, age or socioeconomic deprivation, a series of logistic regressions examined which demographic factors influenced increases in rates of psychological distress. Table S2 (supplementary materials) displays the rates of moderate to severe psychological distress for each demographic group during the 2020 and the 2021 survey.

### Gender

In terms of *change* in psychological distress from the 2020 to the 2021 survey, there were no differences between men and women. Rates of moderate to severe psychological distress increased equally for both genders from the 2020 to the 2021 survey.

### Age

Our analysis showed that age influenced the increase in rates of psychological distress from the 2020 to the 2021 survey,  $\beta = -0.04, SE = 0.01, Wald = 6.15, p < .05, Exp(B) = 1.04$ . Our analysis showed that the younger age groups showed a larger increase in psychological distress compared to the older groups. Indeed, in the 2020 sample, an individual aged 16-24 was 6.7 times more likely to experience moderate to severe psychological distress compared

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to an individual aged 75 or older, but this has risen to 10 times more likely in the 2021 sample (see Table S2 in supplementary materials).

### **Socioeconomic deprivation**

In terms of *change* in psychological distress from the 2020 to the 2021 survey, there were no differences between the five deprivation groups, with the rates of moderate to severe psychological distress increasing equally for all groups.

**Conclusion: Rates of moderate to severe psychological distress have risen significantly from the 2020 survey to the 2021 survey. This increase in psychological distress was larger for younger individuals relative to older individuals. The increase in rates of psychological distress was the same across genders and across different socioeconomic deprivation groups.**

### **Health Board**

Table S5 (supplementary materials) shows the proportion of participants experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress for each of the seven Health Boards across Wales in both the 2020 and 2021 survey.

Most Health Boards experienced some degree of increase in population psychological distress from the 2020 to 2021 survey. The only exceptions to this were Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Swansea Bay University Health Board, who saw decreases in the rates of moderate to severe psychological distress of 13.0% and 4.7% respectively. The largest increases in rates of moderate to severe psychological distress were seen in Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (29.9% increase) and in Cardiff & Vale University Health Board (27.0% increase). Increases in rates of psychological distress were also observed in Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board (15.3% increase), Powys Teaching Health Board (1.9% increase) and Hywel Dda Health Board (2.0% increase).

During the 2021 survey, the highest rates of moderate to severe psychological distress were observed in Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (44.7%) and Cardiff & Vale University Health Board (26.6%), and the lowest rates of distress were found in Powys Teaching Health

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Board<sup>3</sup> (32.1%), Hywel Dda Health Board (36.1%) and Swansea Bay University Health Board (36.3%).

**Conclusion: Most Health Boards experienced an increase in rates of moderate to severe psychological distress. Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Cardiff & Vale University Health Board experienced the sharpest increase in population psychological distress and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Swansea Bay University Health Board were the only Health Boards to observe a decrease in rates of psychological distress.**

### Local Authority

An examination of the rates of psychological distress within each of the 22 Local Authorities within Wales, shows that the mental health of certain areas within Wales were more affected than others during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from the 22 Local Authorities are listed in Table S6 (supplementary materials). It shows that Monmouthshire, Cardiff, Ceredigion, Caerphilly, Newport, Torfaen and the Vale of Glamorgan all experienced significant increases in rates of psychological distress from the 2020 to the 2021 survey. Pembrokeshire, Gwynedd and Anglesey were the only Local Authorities to observe a significant decline in rates of psychological distress from the 2020 to the 2021 survey.

During the 2021 survey, the highest rates of psychological distress were observed in Blaenau Gwent (49.1%), Caerphilly (48.2%), Torfaen (46.8%), Ceredigion (46.2%) and Newport (44.8%). The lowest rates of psychological distress were observed in Carmarthenshire (33.7%), Monmouthshire (34.9%), Gwynedd (36.1%), Anglesey (36.2%) and Conwy (36.3%). When analysing these findings, it is important to acknowledge that the number of participants within some of the Local Authorities were quite small and therefore the results must be interpreted with some degree of caution.

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<sup>3</sup> Only 251 participants from Powys took part in the survey. This is quite a small number and therefore we are less confident that this number accurately captures population psychological distress in Powys.



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**Conclusion: Monmouthshire, Torfaen, the Vale of Glamorgan and Ceredigion were the Local Authorities to experience the sharpest increase in rates of clinically significant psychological distress from the 2020 to the 2021 survey. Pembrokeshire, Gwynedd and Anglesey were the only Local Authorities to observe a significant decline in rates of psychological distress from the 2020 to the 2021 survey.**

## Factors increasing psychological distress

In our previous Wales Wellbeing report (O'Connor et al., 2020), we described how factors such as living alone, experiencing mental health difficulties, being a key worker, experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and having financial problems influenced the likelihood of someone experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress. Please refer to our previous report ([O'Connor et al., 2020](#)) to read about the factors that increased psychological distress within our 2020 sample.

The analysis below refers to the 2021 sample only. We wanted to understand how factors such as living alone, having previous mental health difficulties, being a key worker, COVID-19 symptoms, financial problems, being made redundant, food insecurity, bereavement, home-schooling a child, social isolation, being unable to stay in contact with loved ones, relationship problems, domestic abuse having to cancel important upcoming events, increased difficulties in caring for someone and being unable to access necessary healthcare, influenced the likelihood of someone experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress in the 2021 sample.

To examine whether the presence of each of these risk factors increased the chances of an individual experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress, we calculated odds ratio(s) for each risk factor (see Table 2 below). An odds ratio of 1 means there was no difference between the groups, and hence the exposure to that factor had no effect on the likelihood of experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress. An odds ratio of 1.30 can be seen as a 30% increase in the odds of being mentally distressed due to this exposure, whilst an odds ratio of 2 means there was a 100% increase in the odds of an individual experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress given exposure to that factor (essentially doubling of the odds of experiencing distress). When we calculated the odds ratios, we also factored in

other key predictors. For each odds ratio calculated, we adjusted them to account for the effects of age, gender, and deprivation index. These adjusted odds ratios can be seen as the effect of exposure to each risk factor, after considering the influence of the other covariates (age, gender, and deprivation).

Along with the adjusted odds ratios, we also present the 95% confidence interval. When we calculate the odds ratio for each risk factor, we are making an ‘estimate’ based on the data we collected, and there is always a degree of error involved in this process. The 95% confidence interval represents the range in which we are 95% sure the ‘true value’ lies. For example, if the odds ratio for the risk factor of ‘experiencing financial problems’ was 3.0 with a 95% confidence interval of 2.6 – 3.4, this would mean that we are 95% sure that the ‘true value’ for the odds ratio lies between 2.6 and 3.4.

Table 2. Odds ratios for each risk factor in the 2021 survey.

<b>Risk Factor</b>	<b>N exposed to risk factor (Out of 10428)</b>	<b>Adjusted Odds Ratio (95% CI)</b>
<b>Food insecurity</b>	353	3.7 (2.7 – 4.9)**
<b>Domestic abuse</b>	212	3.4 (2.3 – 5.0)**
<b>History of mental health difficulties</b>	3129	3.2 (2.9 - 3.6 )**
<b>Social isolation</b>	3796	2.8 (2.5 – 3.1)**
<b>Relationship problems</b>	2035	2.6 (2.3 – 2.9)**
<b>Financial problems</b>	1593	2.3 (2.0 – 2.7)**

Difficulty Accessing Necessary Healthcare	1645	2.3 (2.0 – 2.6)**
Increased Caring Difficulties	1460	1.9 (1.7 – 2.2)**
Major COVID-19 symptoms	382	1.7 (1.3 – 2.2)**
Being Unable to Stay in Contact with Loved Ones	5706	1.6 (1.4 – 1.8)**
Living alone	1524	1.3 (1.1 - 1.5)**
Bereavement	2398	1.2 (1.1 – 1.4)**
Redundancy	232	1.2 (0.9 – 1.7)
Cancellation of important upcoming events	3600	1.0 (0.9 – 1.1)
Responsibility for home- schooling a child	2853	1.0 (0.9 – 1.1)
Key worker status	4330	0.9 (0.9 - 1.0)*

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

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**Conclusion: Most of the risk factors explored here significantly increased the chances of someone experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress. Of all the factors we explored, food insecurity, prior history of mental health difficulties, domestic abuse, relationship problems, social isolation, financial problems and difficulty accessing necessary healthcare were the most highly associated with psychological distress.**

## **Protective factors**

This analysis aims to look at the factors that protect against the negative impact of the pandemic. To examine the extent to which each protective factor ‘protected’ against poor wellbeing, we conducted a series of correlations that looked at the relationship between wellbeing scores and scores on each of the protective factors (hope, resilience, stress immunity, social connectedness and reality acceptance). If the factor protected against poor wellbeing, we would hope to see a positive relationship between the protective factors and wellbeing.

To examine the extent to which each protective factor ‘protected’ against the development of moderate to severe psychological distress, we split participants into two groups based on their score on each protective factor. For example, when we examined the protective factor of hope, participants who reported high hope were put into the ‘high hope’ group and participants who reported low hope were put in the ‘low hope’ group. We then examined whether the ‘low hope’ group had more of a chance at experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress compared to the ‘high hope’ group. We then calculated the odds ratios for this (described previously). This analysis was completed for each protective factor. Table 3 below describes how each protective factor was related to participant’s wellbeing along with the degree to which that protective factor protected individuals from experiencing psychological distress.

Table 3. Protective factors relationships with wellbeing and psychological distress in the 2021 survey.

Protective Factor	Relationship with Wellbeing (Correlation Coefficient: <i>r</i> )	Adjusted Odds Ratio for Psychological Distress (95% CI)	What it Means
Hope	.61*	7.8 (7.0 – 8.9)*	The more hope someone had, the higher their wellbeing. People with low levels of hope were 7.8 times more likely to experience moderate to severe psychological distress.
Resilience	.56*	4.8 (4.3 – 5.3)*	The more resilience someone had, the higher their wellbeing. People with low levels of resilience were 4.8 times more likely to experience moderate to severe psychological distress.
Stress immunity	.42*	2.7 (2.4 – 3.0)*	The higher a person’s stress immunity, the higher their wellbeing. People with low levels of stress immunity were 2.7 times more likely to experience moderate to severe psychological distress.
Social connectedness	.58*	5.7 (5.1 – 6.4)*	The more social connectedness someone had, the higher their wellbeing. People with low levels of social connectedness were 5.7 times more likely to experience moderate to severe psychological distress.
Reality acceptance	.37*	2.2 (2.0 – 2.5)*	The more accepting of reality someone was, the higher their wellbeing. People with low levels of reality acceptance

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			were 2.2 times more likely to experience moderate to severe psychological distress.
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\*  $p < .01$

**Conclusion: All protective factors were positively correlated with wellbeing levels and were linked to smaller rates of psychological distress. Levels of hope, resilience and social connectedness appeared to be the most powerful factors for maintaining good mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

# Summary and Conclusions

## General summary

The major findings from this survey are that the Welsh population has experienced a further reduction in mental wellbeing from the first survey (June-July 2020) to the second survey (January-March 2021). This is on top of the large decline in population that was observed between pre-pandemic levels and the first lockdown period (Gray et al., 2020). Rates of clinically significant psychological distress were found in 40.4% of the 2021 sample representing a 9.8% increase in prevalence from the first survey. Overall, population wellbeing was lower, and rates of clinically significant psychological distress were higher in the 2021 sample compared to the 2020 sample.

## Population mental health and wellbeing

In the 2021 survey, the mental wellbeing of the population was 2.4 points lower than the 2020 survey. This is on top of the 6.6 reduction in population wellbeing that was observed between pre-pandemic wellbeing levels and the 2020 survey. When viewed altogether, this displays a pattern of continually declining population wellbeing as lockdown restrictions persist. As found in the first survey, wellbeing continues to be lower in women, young adults and individuals living in deprived areas. When examining the change in wellbeing over time,

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we found that the decline in wellbeing was steeper for the younger age groups compared to the older age groups. In terms of wellbeing by region, the largest decline in wellbeing from 2020 to 2021 was observed in Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Cardiff & Vale University Health Board.

The findings relating to psychological distress tell a similar story. In the 2021 survey, rates of clinically significant psychological distress had increased by 9.8% compared to the 2020 survey, with 40.4% of the population experiencing clinically significant psychological distress. This suggests that rates of mental health difficulties in the populations have increased between the 2020 survey (June-July 2020) and the 2021 survey (January-March). Rates of psychological distress were higher for women, younger people and those from deprived areas and the increase in rates of psychological distress was much steeper for the younger age groups relative to the older age groups, with 66.3% of younger individuals (16-24) experiencing psychological distress in the 2021 survey compared to 16.4% in the oldest age group (75+).

Alongside this survey, other groups across the UK have also conducted research into the mental health of UK populations over the course of the pandemic. Research immediately after the onset of the pandemic showed a sharp, immediate decline in population mental health (Pierce et al., 2020; Gray et al., 2020). Research in the months after the onset of the pandemic, but prior to the second lockdown period, suggested that the mental health of the UK population was improving and recovering (Fancourt et al., 2020; Pierce et al., 2021). Our research adds to this picture and suggests that, whilst population mental health was recovering prior to the second set of lockdown restrictions, population mental health and wellbeing has decreased following the second surge in COVID-19 cases, increased number of deaths, and associated lockdown restrictions. These findings are also corroborated by recent research from Public Health Wales (2021) who reported that the number of adults worried about their mental health increased and the proportion of adults feeling happy in Wales decreased during the second period of lockdown restrictions in January 2021. This trajectory of mental health and wellbeing aligns with the disaster recover model outlined by DeWolfe (2000) in the sense that recovery from disasters is not a straightforward linear process and can take many years.

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**Recommendation: These findings indicate that the wellbeing of the Welsh population has decreased from the first to the second lockdown period. The rates of psychological distress in the 2021 sample relative to the 2020 sample, suggests there will be an increase in the number of people in the population experiencing mental health difficulties. Policy makers and those responsible for the planning and delivery of mental health and wellbeing support should anticipate a rise in the number of individuals in need of new, or additional, support for their mental health. Special consideration should be given towards the growing number of young people experiencing clinically significant levels of psychological distress.**

## **Geographical influences on wellbeing and psychological distress**

We also examined the levels of wellbeing and psychological distress within each of the seven Health Boards across Wales in both the 2020 and 2021 survey. We found that the majority of Health Boards experienced a decrease in population wellbeing, with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Cardiff & Vale University Health Board experiencing the sharpest decline in population wellbeing. Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Powys Teaching Health Board were the only Health Boards to have no significant decline in population wellbeing levels. With regards to psychological distress, our findings showed that most Health Boards experienced an increase in rates of psychological distress. We found that Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Cardiff & Vale University Health Board experienced the sharpest increase in population psychological distress. Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Swansea Bay University Health Board were the only Health Boards to observe a decrease in rates of psychological distress.

The finding that predominantly urban geographic areas such as Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Cardiff & Vale University Health Board experienced a decline in population mental health and wellbeing, whilst more rural geographic areas such as Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Powys Teaching Health Board saw no decline or a slight increase in mental health and wellbeing, may suggest that the local environment has an important impact on population wellbeing. It is possible that individuals living in more rural areas have increased access to environments (beaches, mountains, countryside) and activities that are more beneficial for wellbeing.



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The variation in population wellbeing in each of the seven Welsh Health Boards across both the 2020 and 2021 survey demonstrated that the COVID-19 pandemic has not impacted all regions of Wales in the same manner. This emphasises the importance of continuing to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on different geographic areas within Wales. An in depth understanding of the mental health and wellbeing in each of the seven Welsh Health Boards can help facilitate the development of population interventions and support structures that target the specific needs of each population. Future research must continue to monitor the mental health and wellbeing across the different regions within Wales, and COVID-19 recovery plans must take a community-specific approach.

**Recommendation: Whilst most regions within Wales have experienced a decline in population mental health and wellbeing, there is a lot of variation in the mental health and wellbeing of different regions within Wales. We recommend that organisations with responsibility for supporting the wellbeing of the population throughout the pandemic engage in conversations with the different communities across Wales, along with the groups and agencies who support those communities, and co-design recovery plans that target the specific needs identified within each community.**

## **Factors driving psychological distress**

In the 2021 survey, we looked at whether specific aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic increased the chances of an individual experiencing clinically significant psychological distress. We found that prior history of mental health difficulties, being a key worker, experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, financial problems, redundancy, food insecurity, bereavement, home-schooling, social isolation, being unable to stay in close contact with loved ones, relationship problems, domestic abuse, increased caring difficulties, cancelling important events and difficulties accessing necessary healthcare were all linked with an increased risk of experiencing clinically significant psychological distress. Amongst these factors, we found that food insecurity (OR = 3.7), domestic abuse (OR = 3.4), prior history of mental health difficulties (OR = 3.2), relationship problems (OR = 2.6), social isolation (OR = 2.8), financial problems (OR = 2.3) and difficulty accessing necessary healthcare (OR = 2.3) were the factors most highly associated with rates of psychological distress.

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**Recommendation: Careful consideration should be given to both (1) how we can prevent exposure to the stressors listed above as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, as well as (2) how we can provide additional support to individuals experiencing these difficulties.**

## Protective factors

Our research into protective factors examined how factors like hope, resilience, social connectedness, stress immunity and reality acceptance could protect individuals from poor wellbeing or psychological distress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our findings showed that all of these protective factors were linked to improved wellbeing levels and lower rates of psychological distress. Of particular note, levels of hope, social connectedness, and resilience were especially associated with improved mental health and wellbeing.

**Recommendation: Individuals with high levels of hope, resilience and feelings of social connectedness were much less likely to experience mental health and wellbeing difficulties. Policy makers and those responsible for the planning and delivery of mental health and wellbeing support should consider ways in which we can instill hope, build resilience, and keep individuals socially connected in order to protect our communities from the negative psychological effects from the pandemic.**

## Limitations

It is important that this research is considered in light of its limitations. Firstly, as the 2020 survey took place in the summer months and the 2021 survey took place in winter/spring months, there is a chance that seasonality could explain some of the observed reduction in mental wellbeing. Whilst previous research has indicated that seasonality affects mood, with rates of depression slightly higher in winter relative to summer (Harmatz et al., 2000), other studies have found no effect of seasonality on mood (Winthorst et al., 2020). To investigate the possible effect of seasonality on our results, we examined the database for a very similar sample (ONS, 2019) taken during 2019. There was a small, decrease of around 0.5 wellbeing points (50.9 to 51.4) from January-February to June-July on the WEMWBS scores, which is

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roughly a quarter of the difference (of 2.4 points) found in the present study. Hence, it is unlikely that seasonality effects could fully explain the magnitude of the present findings.

Secondly, due to the methods used in this study, it is that it is likely that some members of the community, such as people with a significant learning disability or individuals with significant dementia, would have found it very difficult to participate. We were also unable to recruit participants under the age of 16 due to ethical considerations. We recommend, therefore, that further research is undertaken to explore the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health within these populations.

Thirdly, participants in both waves of the study were recruited using online convenience sampling methods. Whilst this method facilitated the recruitment of many participants, this sampling method often attracts volunteers who are already engaged with and interested in the topic and excludes those with difficulty accessing the internet, which means that the sample cannot be considered to be fully representative of the Welsh population (Pierce et al., 2020). Relative to the demographics of the population of Wales (ONS, 2011) the current sample underrepresented men, young individuals (aged 16-24) and older individuals (aged 75+). However, these characteristics were present in both the 2020 and 2021 samples. Thus, the findings of a further decline (and the moderating effects of age) in mental wellbeing alongside an increase in psychological distress, cannot be attributed to the sampling method.

## Conclusion

The present data indicate there has been a further reduction in the mental health and wellbeing of the Welsh population during the second national lockdown as compared to the first, with younger age groups continuing to be more adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall picture aligns with the disaster recovery model proposed by DeWolfe (2000) in the sense that recovery from such disasters is not a straightforward linear process and can take many years. Our findings also demonstrated that food insecurity, domestic abuse, prior history of mental health problems, social isolation, financial problems, and difficulties accessing necessary healthcare were the factors most strongly associated with psychological distress. Our analysis of protective factors found that hope, resilience, and

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social connectedness were the most important factors in protecting against poor wellbeing and psychological distress during the pandemic.

Continual monitoring of population wellbeing and psychological distress levels, alongside investigations into the causes of poor mental wellbeing is required to inform the development of effective interventions and recovery strategies. Individuals responsible for the planning and delivery of mental health and wellbeing support will need to prepare for an increased number of individuals in need of new, or additional, support for their mental health. Special consideration should also be given to (1) how younger adults can be supported, (2) how we can prevent exposure to the factors driving psychological distress and provide support to individuals experiencing these difficulties and, (3) how we can instill hope, build resilience, and keep individuals socially connected over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

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# Supplementary Materials

Table S1. Mean scores on the WEMWBS (wellbeing measure) for the 2020 and 2021 samples.

Sample		2020 Sample [95% CI]	2021 Sample [95% CI]	Decrease from 2020 to 2021 sample
All		44.6 [44.4 – 44.8]	42.2 [42.0 – 42.4]	2.4 *
Gender	Male	46.0 [45.5 – 46.4]	44.0 [43.4 – 44.6]	2.0 *
	Female	44.2 [44.0 – 44.4]	41.9 [41.6 – 42.1]	2.4 *
Age	16-24	41.3 [40.6 – 42.0]	37.8 [37.0 – 38.6]	3.5 *
	25-34	41.4 [41.0 – 41.8]	38.3 [37.8 – 38.8]	3.1 *
	35-44	43.2 [42.9 – 43.6]	40.2 [39.8 – 40.6]	3.0 *
	45-54	44.9 [44.6 – 45.3]	42.1 [41.8 – 42.5]	2.8 *
	55-64	45.7 [45.3 – 46.1]	43.6 [43.2 – 44.0]	2.1 *
	65-74	48.6 [48.1 – 49.1]	46.9 [46.3 – 47.5]	1.7*
	75+	49.9	49.6	0.3

		[49.0– 50.9]	[48.4 – 50.8]	
<b>WIMD Rank</b>	<b>1 (most deprived)</b>	43.5 [43.0 – 43.9]	40.7 [40.2 – 41.2]	2.8 *
	<b>2</b>	44.7 [44.2 – 45.1]	42.5 [42.0 – 43.0]	2.2 *
	<b>3</b>	45.2 [44.8 – 45.7]	43.4 [42.9 – 43.9]	1.8 *
	<b>4</b>	45.4 [45.0 – 45.9]	43.3 [42.8 – 43.8]	2.1 *
	<b>5 (least deprived)</b>	46.3 [45.9 – 46.7]	44.2 [43.7 – 44.7]	2.1 *

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\* < .01

Table S2. Prevalence of low to mild psychological distress (K10 ≤ 24) and moderate to severe psychological distress (K10 ≥ 25) in the 2020 and 2021 samples.

		2020 Sample			2021 Sample		
		K10 ≤ 24 (%)	K10 ≥ 25 (%)	Odds ratio	K10 ≤ 24 (%)	K10 ≥ 25 (%)	Odds ratio
<b>Overall Sample</b>		63.2	36.8	-	59.6	40.4	-
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	70.1	29.9	1.00	65.2	34.8	1.00
	<b>Female</b>	61.5	38.5	1.47	58.5	41.5	1.33
<b>Age</b>	<b>16-24</b>	43.1	56.9	6.67	33.7	66.3	10.00
	<b>25-34</b>	47.8	52.2	5.52	42.8	57.2	6.76
	<b>35-44</b>	59.9	40.1	3.38	53.9	46.1	4.33
	<b>45-54</b>	66.1	33.9	2.59	59.9	40.1	3.38
	<b>55-64</b>	68.0	32.0	2.38	67.4	32.6	2.44
	<b>65-74</b>	78.2	21.8	1.41	75.5	24.5	1.64
	<b>75+</b>	83.6	16.4	1.00	83.3	16.7	1.00

<b>WIMD</b>	<b>1 (most deprived)</b>	59.2	40.8	1.63	52.0	48.0	2.18
	<b>2</b>	64.2	35.8	1.32	60.1	39.9	1.56
	<b>3</b>	64.4	35.6	1.30	64.4	35.6	1.30
	<b>4</b>	65.2	34.8	1.25	65.8	34.2	1.22
	<b>5 (least deprived)</b>	72.1	27.9	1.00	67.8	32.2	1.00

Table S3. Average WEMWBS scores for each of the Health Boards across the 2020 and 2021 surveys.

Health Board	Number of Participants	Average WEMWBS 2020	Average WEMWBS 2021	Decrease from 2020 to 2021
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board	2020: 2439 2021: 3526	45.3 [44.9 – 45.6]	41.1 [40.8 – 41.5]	-4.2*
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	2020: 2455 2021: 1833	42.9 [42.5 – 43.3]	42.8 [42.3 – 43.3]	-0.1
Cardiff & Vale University Health Board	2020: 1601 2021: 1201	45.4 [45.0 – 45.9]	41.9 [41.3 – 42.5]	-3.5*
Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board	2020: 905 2021: 781	45.1 [44.4 – 45.7]	42.5 [41.8 – 43.2]	-2.6*
Hywel Dda Health Board	2020: 2921 2021: 1533	44.8 [44.5 – 45.2]	43.3 [42.7 – 43.8]	-1.5*

<b>Powys Teaching Health Board</b>	<b>2020: 308</b>	45.7	44.6	-1.1
	<b>2021: 251</b>	[44.7 – 46.8]	[43.3 – 45.9]	
<b>Swansea Bay University Health Board</b>	<b>2020: 1871</b>	44.3	42.9	-1.4*
	<b>2021: 1206</b>	[43.8 – 44.7]	[42.3 – 43.4]	

$p < .01$



Table S4. Wellbeing in each of the 22 Welsh Local Authorities in the 2020 and 2021 survey

Local Authority	2020 Survey		2021 Survey		Change from 2020 to 2021
	N	Wellbeing Score	N	Wellbeing Score	
Anglesey	305	42.2	315	43.8	Increase of 1.6
Blaenau Gwent	301	42.5	397	40.5	Decrease of 2.0**
Bridgend	308	46.5	286	42.6	Decrease of 3.9**
Caerphilly	544	44.8	909	40.3	Decrease of 4.5**
Cardiff	1189	45.0	869	41.4	Decrease of 3.6**
Carmarthenshire	1352	45.2	736	43.8	Decrease of 1.4**
Ceredigion	597	44.5	441	41.2	Decrease of 3.3**
Conwy	492	43.4	346	43.4	No change
Denbighshire	439	43.7	359	42.3	Decrease of 1.4
Flintshire	404	43.1	309	41.4	Decrease of 1.7*

Gwynedd	489	42.4	324	43.8	Increase of 1.4
Merthyr Tydfil	268	44.8	176	43.2	Decrease of 1.6
Monmouthshire	504	47.7	683	43.2	Decrease of 4.5**
Neath Port Talbot	498	42.8	324	41.8	Decrease of 1.0
Newport	489	44.5	770	40.8	Decrease of 3.7**
Pembrokeshire	972	44.5	356	44.7	Increase of 0.2
Powys	308	45.7	251	44.6	Decrease of 1.1
Rhondda Cynon Taf	637	45.2	605	42.3	Decrease of 2.9**
Swansea	1065	44.3	644	43.5	Decrease of 0.8
Torfaen	601	45.6	767	41.1	Decrease of 4.5**
Vale of Glamorgan	412	46.6	332	43.2	Decrease of 3.4**
Wrexham	326	42.1	180	41.4	Decrease of 0.7

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

Table S5. Percentage of participants experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress for each of the seven Health Boards across both the 2020 and 2021 survey.

Health Board	Number of Participants	Percentage experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress		Percent increase/decrease
		2020 Survey	2021 Survey	
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board	2020: 2470 2021: 3486	34.4%	44.7%	29.9% increase in prevalence*
Gwynedd Iestri Cadwaladr University Health Board	2020: 2464 2021: 1817	44.2%	39.1%	13.0% decrease in prevalence*
Cardiff & Vale University Health Board	2020: 1625 2021: 1187	32.6%	41.4%	27.0% increase in prevalence*

<b>Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board</b>	<b>2020: 903</b> <b>2021: 777</b>	33.9%	39.1%	15.3% increase in prevalence*
<b>Hywel Dda Health Board</b>	<b>2020: 2937</b> <b>2021: 1523</b>	35.4%	36.1%	2.0% increase in prevalence*
<b>Powys Teaching Health Board</b>	<b>2020: 312</b> <b>2021: 249</b>	31.5%	32.1%	1.9% increase in prevalence*
<b>Swansea Bay University Health Board</b>	<b>2020: 1881</b> <b>2021: 1194</b>	38.0%	36.3%	4.7% decrease in prevalence*

\*  $p < .01$

Table S6. Rates of psychological distress in each of the 22 Welsh Local Authorities in the 2020 and 2021 survey.

Local Authority	2020 Survey		2021 Survey		Change from 2020 to 2021
	N	% Psychological Distress	N	% Psychological Distress	
Anglesey	298	46.6	312	36.2	28.8% decrease in prevalence**
Blaenau Gwent	307	43.0	391	49.1	14.2% increase in prevalence
Bridgend	300	31.0	282	36.5	17.7% increase in prevalence
Caerphilly	539	37.8	901	48.4	28.0% increase in prevalence**

<b>Cardiff</b>	<b>1174</b>	34.6	856	42.8	23.7% increase in prevalence**
<b>Carmarthenshire</b>	<b>1331</b>	35.1	733	33.7	4.2% decrease in prevalence
<b>Ceredigion</b>	<b>597</b>	34.7	437	46.2	33.1% increase in prevalence**
<b>Conwy</b>	<b>487</b>	40.5	344	36.3	11.2% decrease in prevalence
<b>Denbighshire</b>	<b>434</b>	43.5	358	41.3	5.3% decrease in prevalence
<b>Flintshire</b>	<b>402</b>	38.3	307	44.0	14.9% increase in prevalence

<b>Gwynedd</b>	<b>475</b>	48.0	319	36.1	33.0% decrease in prevalence**
<b>Merthyr Tydfil</b>	<b>262</b>	33.2	176	39.8	19.9% increase in prevalence
<b>Monmouthshire</b>	<b>495</b>	23.4	674	34.9	49.1% increase in prevalence**
<b>Neath Port Talbot</b>	<b>489</b>	44.6	320	39.4	13.2% decrease in prevalence
<b>Newport</b>	<b>477</b>	38.6	763	44.8	16.1% increase in prevalence*
<b>Pembrokeshire</b>	<b>959</b>	36.4	353	28.6	27.3% decrease in prevalence**

Powys	308	31.8	249	32.1	0.9% increase in prevalence
Rhondda Cynon Taf	626	34.7	601	38.9	12.1% increase in prevalence
Swansea	1057	36.7	639	34.7	5.8% decrease in prevalence
Ynys Môn	597	32.0	757	46.8	46.3% increase in prevalence**
Vale of Glamorgan	414	26.8	331	37.8	41.0% increase in prevalence**
Wrexham	324	50.6	177	41.8	21.1% decrease in prevalence

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$





**SUSTAINING AND STRENGTHENING  
COMMUNITY WELLBEING  
TOGETHER IN THE COVID ERA**



**IWN Caerphilly  
Community Discussions Summary  
AUGUST 2020**



**David Llewellyn  
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## INTRODUCTION

*'It is recognised that post pandemic recovery is a complex and long running process that will involve many agencies and participants. The manner in which recovery processes are undertaken is critical to their success. **Recovery is best achieved when the affected community is able to exercise a high degree of self-determination.**'<sup>1</sup>*

In late July and August 2020, the Integrated Wellbeing Network (IWN) in Caerphilly facilitated a series of online Zoom meetings with community organisations and services based in Risca, Rhymney, New Tredegar and Bargoed. The aim was to explore how we might best work collectively to sustain and strengthen wellbeing in the post COVID era and to understand how IWNs can help support that.

The meetings were facilitated to be interactive and collective with all attendees actively encouraged to participate. Verbatim transcripts were gathered whilst the chat box was used by participants for additional information and comments

Individual reports from each meeting have gone out to participants. This report summarises the main findings from those meetings (based on their thematic structure), as well as integrating some key points from other discussions with agencies and organisations that took place over the same period. The aim is to stimulate further discussions and actions.

## IWN BACKGROUND

In the Caerphilly CBC area, the IWN focus prior to COVID-19 outbreak was on the Neighbourhood Care Network (NCN) north, primarily the upper Rhymney valley with place-based wellbeing collectives in development in Rhymney, New Tredegar and Bargoed. Through these, wellbeing assets maps were created in Rhymney, New Tredegar and Bargoed during IWN development up to February 2020, with nascent plans for agreed collective wellbeing initiatives - see [www.cwtsh.wales](http://www.cwtsh.wales) for details.

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the focus of the IWN programme switched in mid-March 2020 to work with Aneurin Bevan Health Board Public Health on its COVID response. This initially focused upon community information and mobilisation, followed by development and delivery of the Test, Trace, Protect programme with partners. The original IWN work in Caerphilly restarted in late July beginning with the discussions here. Through the COVID specific work undertaken, it is clear there is a need to extend the activities to the other NCNs in the Caerphilly CBC areas as appropriate and we that has commenced with support in the Risca area.

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<sup>1</sup> Recovering from Emergencies; UK Government 2010

## **Thematic structure of the meetings**

1. How well positioned are the localities for (post-COVID) wellbeing recovery?
2. Understanding health and wellbeing challenges in the area due to COVID pandemic and restrictions
3. Creating and taking opportunities together to sustain and strengthen wellbeing in the COVID era
4. How do we build collectively on the positive activities in the local areas? What additional services and support might be needed?
5. The next practical steps to recover confidence and enhance wellbeing in the local areas including a successful test, trace, protect programme

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

### **Are areas well-positioned for (post-COVID) wellbeing recovery?**

- Many of the services and activities indicated on the wellbeing assets maps (see Bargoed example in Appendix 1) in the areas have been affected critically during the pandemic and lockdown.
- Some have continued to operate, albeit often in a different capacity or using different operating models, but many have not been in operation.
- Despite the awful situation and the adversity encountered, there are nevertheless clear opportunities that have emerged, and the task will be to build on those effectively.

### **Understanding health and wellbeing challenges in the area resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown measures and restrictions**

- There were obvious wellbeing issues and inequalities before the pandemic - it and the lockdown has exacerbated those
- Mental health and wellbeing issues were undoubtedly exacerbated; mental health support services in various sectors often had to work online which made it difficult for organisations and clients.
- Conversely, the lockdown also resulted in *some* cases in strengthening of resilience, both individually and collectively.
- Some areas saw increased support needed for issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, and domestic abuse.
- It has been difficult for some sectors of the population to access services and information, which has increased isolation and exacerbated issues.
- GP and primary services had to reconfigure the way they operated – this approach has been welcomed but considered to exclude some people who lack the facilities (IT for example) to be able to avail themselves of the services.
- Some have been reluctant to visit GPs –need to ensure messages to community that they should visit GP if necessary

- Physical wellbeing also suffered; however, there was online activity whilst people 'discovered' and used their local green spaces for walking
- There has been a lack of understanding sometimes amongst some locally about regulations and advice - sometimes a lack of clarity of where to obtain information.
- Bereavement from COVID could be a major issue for families affected especially around Christmas.
- Unemployment is a very worrying prospect. The coming months could be exceedingly difficult indeed especially after furlough ends.
- There may be stigmatisation of those who have tested CV positive – lack of support financially or logistically means it is tempting not to isolate for those individuals.
- There is a distinct lack of confidence in some sectors of the community over re-engaging with the community. This can be exacerbated by a lack of clear messaging over what is permissible together with the lack of safe facilities to support reintegration, especially as community centres continue to be inactive e.g. some elderly people have been vulnerable and frightened to go out since lockdown.
- There were concerns about (public) transport links and the restrictions – has impacted people accessing work and services especially in more deprived and isolated areas
- There is a danger that some community activities will not recommence and continue - some community activities have already closed for good.
- Young people were unclear where they could find support

**Creating and taking opportunities together to sustain and strengthen wellbeing in the COVID era - How do we build collectively on the positive activities in the local areas? What additional services and support might be needed?**

- There has been a lot of excellent working to support vulnerable and shielding individuals, e.g. Caerphilly buddying scheme and community mutual-aid type support such as Risca CV19 volunteers. This should be continued through Community Regeneration, GAVO and the community organisations
- There are clear opportunities to develop and use creative approaches to support wellbeing – online and actual.
- Physical activity - many people have greater appreciation of local greenspaces they have used for walks and activities. Support better use of our greenspaces – opportunities.
- Enhanced mental health and wellbeing support is needed - ensure new resources such as ABUHB Foundation Tier is developed whilst support given to third sector too and the new primary care mental health activities are used.

- Local activities are vital to supporting wellbeing. Some communities saw increased friends and neighbour activities whilst existing and emerging organised groups played major roles in some, e.g. Risca CV19 volunteers, St Gwladys, Parent Network groups. Support of these is crucial going forward. Some places such as Philipstown and New Tredegar were able to put in place small financial support schemes for people, which were invaluable.
- There are opportunities to build on positives/strengths – a lot of people and community groups have stepped up to help in the pandemic. They have been empowered through proactive attitudes. People can see that they have coped - need to build on this.
- Recognition of what has been achieved by communities in the lockdown and restrictions would be welcome
- Opportunities to get different sort of volunteering; work with GAVO on this in place-based approaches and online
- Work with appropriate services and organisations such as Digital Communities Wales and others to ensure digital exclusion is not an issue
- Need to enhance work with DWP/Supporting People/Community Regeneration/Communities 4 Work/CAB etc to ensure support as far as possible for people – note that a lot of people affected are unused to the situation re. benefits etc.
- Community Wellbeing Champions programme run from the IWN programme was successful in relaying messages and engaging key people in the community as was the IWN FB social media channel.

### **The practical steps to recover confidence and enhance wellbeing in the local areas including a successful test, trace, protect programme**

- There is acceptance that TTP is necessary and vital to dealing with the COVID pandemic. However, this must be clear advice and guidance available. There is a need to avoid stigmatisation and, crucially, enhanced financial and logistical support is needed for those who self-isolate.
- There is a need to ensure that GPs and primary care (and other health and wellbeing) services are accessible to all with relevant information is available more widely – for example, clear messages and access re. COVID, but also Flu vaccination and other health provision and services especially in the winter months
- Verifiable, properly targeted community information around COVID is still key (especially moving forward); there is still confusion over what was/is permissible. We need to continue online routes through social media and enhance work with libraries (and community groups) to ensure they continue to act as information portals for people.

- There is a need to ensure wider digital access so that people can access information and address isolation – many activities took place online during the lockdown.
- Support for young people especially those whose life chances appear to have been affected is crucial - need to liaise with youth services, work agencies and others (schools)
- With shielding at an end, there is a need to continue support wellbeing for vulnerable people. Support has created some ‘dependency’, but with guidance and support, people can get used to “new normal”. We need to support activities around this, indoors and outdoors
- Community centres need to recommence wellbeing activities, which are vital to their area. The window of opportunity is quite short with autumn approaching and darker evenings. Support is needed to enable this **safely**. A clear need to ensure advice and logistical/financial support is available. Facilitate local centres and activities to support each other in the coming weeks through peer-to-peer networking.
- Support local place-based wellbeing activities and continue to network these together with services
- Work with Caerphilly Countryside, Parks, NRW and specific groups to support outdoor social distanced activities. Opportunities for formal GP connections in those respects?
- Create and develop creative approaches to support sustain wellbeing (real and online) as we approach the winter months: wellbeing events and festival?
- Develop Bereavement support projects such as that proposed by Head4Arts

## **BRIEF CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

The above findings are clearly not exhaustive since the number of communities and groups involved in discussions to date has been necessarily limited.

However, often messages were common across the discussions, and the findings capture many of the main elements of what happened during the pandemic lockdown and the impacts and opportunities as we seek to move forward.

There are opportunities to re-examine how services and activities are provided and this will be crucial in the event of further restrictions, particularly as we reach the winter months. There has been tremendous work in adapting and providing services across sectors under difficult circumstances; the challenge will be to ensure they are as inclusive as possible, especially to reach the most vulnerable in our communities.

Services will undoubtedly be a mix of real and online. Digital exclusion has been a problem and addressing that and helping community and other centres which provide wellbeing services and advice to recommence those safely is crucial.

Clear advice and practical support are undoubtedly needed in many cases regarding the latter. The regulations and their communication have been very confusing for many community groups and organisations. Moreover, those centres often depend on volunteers many of whom in some cases have been vulnerable. Practical steps with effective support to support community facilities become functional are needed now before the winter onset

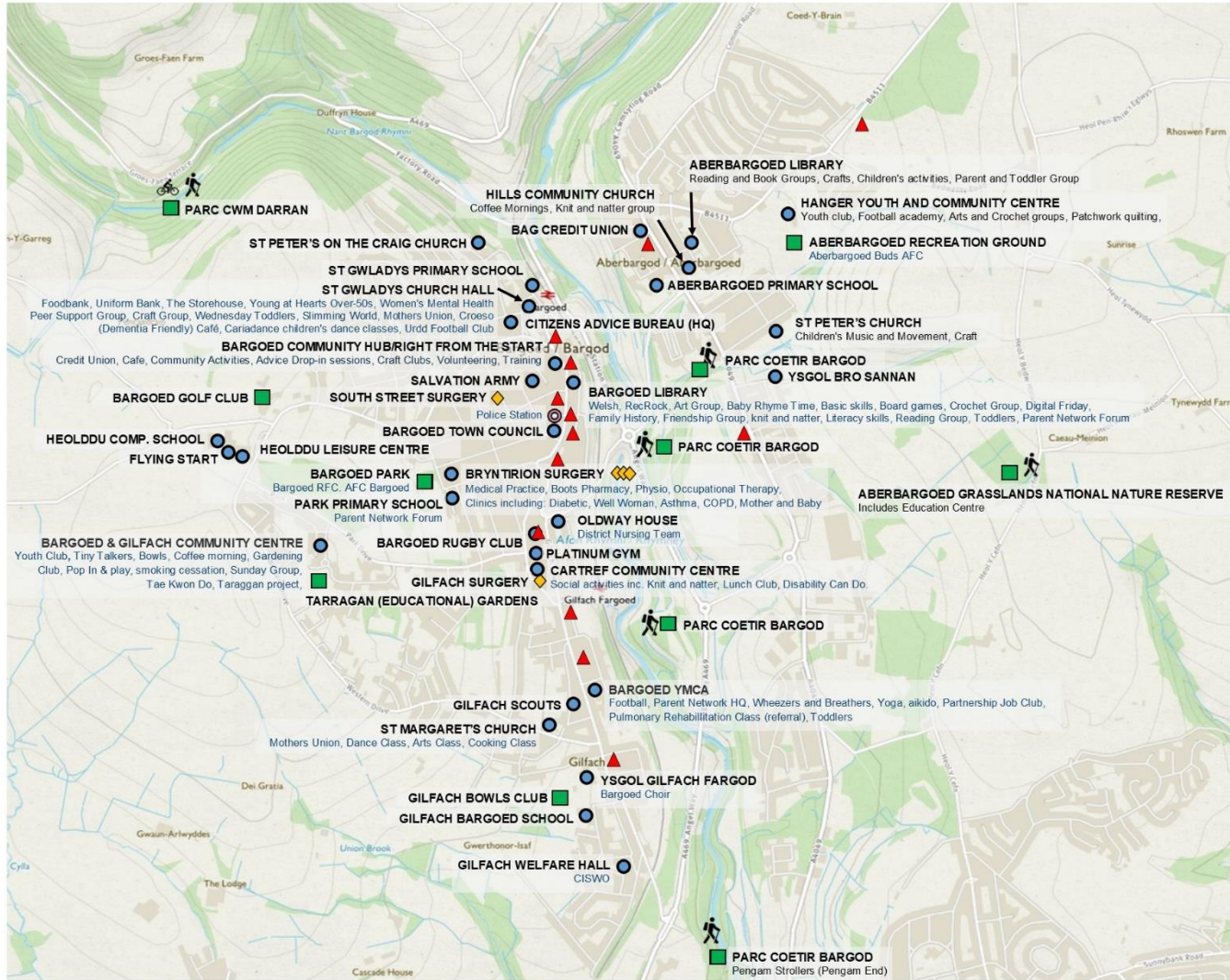
Mental health and wellbeing services will be crucial whilst better working with employment and support agencies will be hugely important as the economic impacts of the pandemic worsen. Isolation especially amongst older people in our communities remains an issue. The pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated **existing** wellbeing inequalities and challenges.

The IWN assets-based approach to enabling wellbeing collaboration in localities should help address those and maximising opportunities, through participatory budgeting to realise initiatives for example, will be vital. However, there are some undeniable constraints in that the IWN will have continue to work largely online, which can exclude key groups. Moreover, the need and desire to extend IWN activities across Caerphilly CBC area, as opposed to the initial NCN north area, will stretch resources. In those respects, ensuring enhanced working across partners and developing an effective Community Wellbeing Champions network will be crucial.

The pandemic crucially highlighted the need for place-based approaches to wellbeing and support for community groups and organisations involved in wellbeing activities in their areas will be crucial going forward, ensuring they work appropriately and effectively with services.

**Finally, an effective TTP programme is clearly vital to addressing the pandemic and there is acceptance of that in the discussions to date.** TTP communications will need to be clear and support for testing, and those undertaking isolation where needed, must be similarly clear. Certain sectors of our communities will continue to need targeted, effective approaches aimed at for example young people, older members, the BAME community. Indeed, clear effective messaging and communication to support wellbeing more widely, especially in the post COVID era, is vital.

## Appendix – example of Wellbeing Assets Map



Integrated Wellbeing Network

### KEY

- Community 'Hub' or Amenity
- ▲ Cafes, Pubs, Restaurants
- Green Space or Outdoor Activities
- ◆ Primary Care Services
- ⊙ Other

**BARGOD - BARGOED : GILFACH : ABERBARGOD - ABERBARGOED**



## Information gathered at Task Review meetings since July 2021.

KEY ISSUES	EVIDENCE RECEIVED
<p>The impact of the pandemic on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the population.</p>	<p>Jenny Burns (Director, Mental Health Foundation) highlighted the Mental Health Foundation’s longitudinal study of mental health during the pandemic. It found that the mental health of people with inequalities, such as those from ethnically diverse backgrounds, single parents and people with long-term conditions, had worsened during the pandemic. Jenny also highlighted a report on the impact of the pandemic on the elderly. It found that the impact was largely minimal but that those with long-term conditions had been impacted due to factors such as increased isolation. <b>(Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021).</b></p> <p>Dr Chris O’Connor highlighted to Group Members that the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the population had been immense. <b>(Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022).</b></p> <p>Research showed that key groups within our communities were particularly impacted by the pandemic and were therefore at greater risk of developing mental health difficulties. Examples given by Dr O’Connor were: people who have had a severe Covid illness, those experiencing financial difficulties, people who have experienced significant relationship difficulties, people experiencing domestic abuse, people feeling socially isolated, those with previous mental health difficulties, people working in health and social care and the general impact on the wellbeing of carers. <b>(Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022).</b></p> <p>Dr David Llewellyn highlighted a community study by the Integrated Wellbeing Networks at the end of 2020 which found that the pandemic had exacerbated existing difficulties. <b>(Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022).</b></p> <p>The number of people going to see their GP about mental health difficulties was then raised by Dr O’Connor. The Group heard that demand</p>

	<p>within the Primary Care arena had gone up massively during the pandemic. <b>(Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022).</b></p> <p>Isolation especially amongst older people in our communities remains an issue. The pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated existing wellbeing inequalities and challenges. <b>(Sustaining and Strengthening Community Wellbeing Together in the Covid Era – August 2020 p.7).</b></p> <p>The present data indicate there has been a further reduction in the mental health and wellbeing of the Welsh population during the second national lockdown as compared to the first, with younger age groups continuing to be more adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. <b>(The Influence of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Mental Wellbeing and Psychological Distress: A Comparison Across Time – 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021 p.40).</b></p> <p>Rates of clinically significant psychological distress were found in 40.4% of the 2021 sample representing a 9.8% increase in prevalence from the first survey. Overall, population wellbeing was lower, and rates of clinically significant psychological distress were higher in the 2021 sample compared to the 2020 sample. <b>First Survey June-July 2020/ Second Survey January-March 2021. (The Influence of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Mental Wellbeing and Psychological Distress: A Comparison Across Time – 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021 p.35).</b></p>
<p>How are Caerphilly County Borough Council currently working with partners to deliver services?</p>	<p>Members heard how there were two Community Mental Health Teams (CMHT) responding to GP referrals for the north and south of the County Borough. Both teams consisted of a range of professionals including Consultant Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Community Psychiatric Nurses, Occupational Therapists and Social Workers. The Teams are a blend of Health Board and Caerphilly County Borough Council (Social Workers) staff. The Service Manager outlined how she met regularly with her counterpart from the Health Board to manage the teams. <b>(Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021).</b></p>

	<p>The Service Manager then moved on to external working relationships in relation to the provision of mental health services. The first group highlighted was the Foundation Tier Steering Group which focussed on prevention. Members heard how the MELO website was developed as a result of meetings by this group. <b>(Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021).</b></p> <p>The Task Group also heard about the links established with the North Caerphilly Integrated Wellbeing Network. <b>(Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021).</b></p> <p>Task Group Members were then given a synopsis of the collaborative working which was taking place across all agencies including other Gwent Local Authorities. Every couple of weeks Mental Health Crisis Concordat meetings were held. Attendees at these meetings are Service Managers from each Local Authority, Gwent Police, Welsh Ambulance Service and Senior Managers from the Health Board. These meetings discuss the future development of mental health services in Gwent. <b>(Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021).</b></p> <p>Members were also told about Mental Health Implementation Group meetings which focussed on issues pertaining to the adherence of the Mental Health Act. <b>(Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021).</b></p> <p>The Service Manager highlighted the importance of joined up working within organisations. An example of this practice at Caerphilly County Borough Council was the Caerphilly Cares initiative which linked service areas such as Social Services in order to aid community access to services. <b>(Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021).</b></p>
<p>Issues / Challenges identified.</p>	<p>Jill Lawton (Director, Caerphilly Borough MIND) highlighted the lack of specific bereavement counselling across the borough as an issue. One Member agreed and asked why general counsellors were unable to provide bereavement counselling as part of the package of care they provided. Jill advised that Caerphilly Borough MIND offered mental health</p>

	<p>counsellors and that specific advice on dealing with bereavement was a specialism. <b>(Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021).</b></p> <p>Jenny Burns (Director, Mental Health Foundation) highlighted an article in The Lancet which showed that 75% of respondents to a secondary schools' survey knew how to access help in their school, but that only 28% responded that they would do so. The conclusion was that counselling services should receive wider consultation prior to implementation. <b>(Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021).</b></p> <p>On the issue of participation Jenny outlined how it was key to involve stakeholders including youth groups in the design of services, but that there were challenges around resources at the beginning of the process. Proper engagement with public groups to determine what is needed. <b>(Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021).</b></p> <p>Jill Lawton highlighted the importance of ensuring that services signposted on websites such as Melo are still active. Members heard about the frustration experienced when people tried to access services that have been closed. <b>(Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021).</b></p> <p>Dr Chris O'Connor brought to the attention of Panel Members data and research carried out by the Centre for Mental Health on the future need for Mental Health Support. Modelling throughout the pandemic showed that within the next 3-5 years their prediction is that capacity within NHS Mental Health Services will need to grow between twofold and threefold in order to deal with the increased demand. <b>(Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022).</b></p> <p>The Group heard how despite a reduction in referrals initially during the first lockdown, there were now significantly more referrals for older people with functional mental health difficulties such as depression and anxiety than was the case pre-pandemic. <b>(Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022).</b></p>
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	<p>It was highlighted to the Task Group that waiting times for counselling and interventions were now increasing. <b>(Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022).</b></p> <p>Dr David Llewellyn outlined the challenge of ensuring that Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners were aware of the full range of services and activities available within the community and gave the example of Bereavement Cafes which were being planned by the Integrated Wellbeing Networks. Greater connectivity between mental health service providers. <b>(Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022).</b></p> <p>Dr O’Connor welcomed any lobbying for additional resources as he advised that historically mental health had been underfunded when compared with physical health services. <b>(Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022).</b></p> <p>Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, and Torfaen were the Local Authorities to experience the sharpest decline in population wellbeing. <b>(The Influence of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Mental Wellbeing and Psychological Distress: A Comparison Across Time – 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021 p.26).</b></p>
<p>An understanding of services/ help available.</p>	<p>Members heard how the Service Manager represented Social Services at Suicide Prevention and Self-Harm Workshops, which were multi-agency and had helped to design an Action Plan for the Gwent region. <b>(Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021).</b></p> <p>The Group heard about the development of Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner (PWP) roles in some surgeries, which are non-registered practitioners who are trained to assess common mental health disorders. <b>(Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021).</b></p> <p>The presentation concluded with details of the support available to Caerphilly County Borough Council staff and included information on advice from Care First and Mindfulness courses</p>

	<p>run by Primary Care. <b>(Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021).</b></p> <p>Members heard how MIND in the Caerphilly region was providing a counselling service for the primary mental health teams. Jill Lawton also highlighted the Supporting People, Active Monitoring and My Whole Life projects. <b>(Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021).</b></p> <p>Members also heard that Caerphilly Borough MIND were delivering Connect 5 training and was also taking the lead on the Public Health Wales funded suicide prevention training. <b>(Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021).</b></p> <p>Dr Chris O'Connor reiterated praise for the training provided by Public Health Wales via the Connect 5 programme. <b>(Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022).</b></p>
<p>How is Caerphilly County Borough Council currently coping with the demand for Mental Health Services?</p>	<p>The Chair asked if there had been a significant increase in Community Mental Health Team workload during the pandemic. The Service Manager advised that there had been an increase in general referrals but not to the extent that would necessitate the need for additional staff and that the volume was currently being managed well by the teams. <b>(Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021).</b></p> <p>It was stressed that currently Caerphilly County Borough Council was equipped to deal with demand, but this situation is constantly being monitored. <b>(Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021).</b></p>
<p>The future plans for Community Services.</p>	<p>Dr David Llewellyn advised Task Group Members that talks were taking place about the implementation of Participatory Budgeting within Caerphilly County Borough. He outlined how the ambition was to empower communities to implement the services they required themselves and highlighted how Third Sector organisations could bid for funding under this process. Dr Llewellyn also raised plans for an online Wellbeing Index which would accumulate anonymised data at a community level on the key issues and suggested solutions in terms of community</p>

	<p>mental health and wellbeing. It was suggested that this would then feed into the Participatory Budgeting process and allow the monitoring of impact. <b>(Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022).</b></p> <p>Recovery is best achieved when the affected community is able to exercise a high degree of self-determination. <b><i>(Sustaining and Strengthening Community Wellbeing Together in the Covid Era – August 2020 p.2).</i></b></p>
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## CABINET – 19TH OCTOBER 2022

**SUBJECT:** ANNUAL REPORT ON CORPORATE COMPLAINTS RECEIVED  
FOR THE PERIOD 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2021 TO 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2022

**REPORT BY:** HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND DEPUTY MONITORING  
OFFICER

### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Cabinet with an overview of the complaints dealt with under the Corporate Complaints Policy for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 together with the outcomes and lessons learned. The report will also be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2022.

### 2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of the complaints dealt with under the Corporate Complaints Policy for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, the outcomes and lessons learned.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to note the complaints data contained in this report and to review and assess the effectiveness of complaints handling for the annual period 2021/2022.

### 4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The guidance from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales requires the complaints data to be reviewed by Cabinet.
- 4.2 In addition the Local Government and Elections Wales Act 2021 sets out provisions for the Governance and Audit Committee to "review and assess the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively and to make reports and recommendations in relation to the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively".

## **5. THE REPORT**

- 5.1 By way of background, on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021 the Audit committee considered a report regarding the implementation of a new Corporate Complaints Policy based on guidance from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The Committee provided comments on the draft policy which were considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021 who adopted the new Policy along with an updated policy dealing with unacceptable and unreasonable actions by complainants under the complaints Policy. The new Policy became effective on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 and is included within the background papers for information.
- 5.2 The Policy deals with corporate complaints only. There are separate complaints processes for dealing with social services complaints and school-based complaints. The Social Services Complaints Procedure Wales Regulations 2014 outlines the procedure for handling complaints from persons receiving a service from social services and school-based complaints are dealt with by the School and Governing Body. In addition, Freedom of Information complaints and complaints about Data Protection matters are within the remit of the Information Commissioner.
- 5.3 The Policy is not dissimilar to the previous policy in that it consists of an internal two stage process with the right for a complainant to refer the complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales should they be dissatisfied with the response.
- 5.4 In conjunction with the adoption of the new policy, complaints officers within the directorates have raised awareness amongst their respective staff of the importance of recognising complaints and dealing with them in accordance with the policy. This step change has resulted in more contacts being recorded under the policy when compared to recent years. Whilst the figures recorded for 2020/21 were lower than the previous year and stood at 177, this was due in part to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic. The year prior 2019/20 saw a figure of 274 complaints recorded. One of the benefits of recording complaints more effectively is that we can recognise trends more readily and take steps to put things right and learn from any issues identified within the relevant directorate and beyond where appropriate.
- 5.5 Members will recall that to support the new policy over 80 officers were trained by the Ombudsman in complaints handling last year and contact has been made with the Ombudsman's office to request further training. Two training dates have been scheduled for April next year which is the earliest available date. It is the intention to build on the staff training already undertaken with specific focus on managing difficult behaviours and expectations and complaints investigation skills.
- 5.6 More recently complaints officers within their respective directorates have rolled out training to service areas which has been well attended and received by officers who have been supportive and engaging. In addition these individual officers maintain their directorates complaints data and continue to provide advice and support to their respective service areas, whilst the overall complaints database is maintained by the Corporate Complaints Officer based within Legal Services who is also the contact officer for the Ombudsman's office.
- 5.7 The work is continuing with the complaints officers and representatives from Digital and Customer Services on the development of a new complaints system which will help to both streamline controls and improve data records within the complaints process. Whilst it was anticipated that the system would have been ready for trial within the early part of 2022 additional functionality has been included as part of the system which did not form part of the original specification and so resulted in further

redesign and development work. This work has now been completed and trials will take place with complaints officers in September 2022 with a view to rolling out the system in October. The new system in the longer term will improve data mining options and facilities to enable and secure appropriate management information reporting improvements, utilising the built in Complaints Dashboard for reporting key statistics. This will mitigate the need for multiple data systems held across each directorate, that require much administration and manual interrogation in order to produce meaningful intelligence and learning.

5.8 To support the work of complaints officers and each directorate, officers have a long established Learning from Complaints Group (“the Group”) comprising Complaints Officers from each directorate, the Corporate Complaints Officer, the Council’s Senior Policy Officer (Equalities Welsh Language and Consultation), representatives from the Council’s Corporate Policy Unit and a representative from the Council’s Internal Audit Section. These meetings are chaired by the deputy Monitoring Officer and meet at least quarterly to discuss complaints data and the reporting mechanisms.

5.9 These meetings have resulted in the establishment of a formal template for use by each Directorate, which provides more in depth information and analysis on all aspects of the complaints data and its relevancy to the service areas within the directorates. However members views and feedback would be welcomed on this new reporting structure which will be fed back to the Group in subsequent meetings. It is also timely to provide members with a fresh overview of the service areas within each Directorate given that a number of changes have occurred over recent years.

5.10 **General Overview**

The total number of complaints dealt with during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 under the Corporate Complaints policy is **549** and is broken down as follows

Stage 1	<b>431</b>
Stage 2	<b>34</b>
Escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2	<b>84</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>549</b>

The Outcomes are as follows

Total Upheld complaints	<b>161</b>
Total Not upheld complaints	<b>383</b>
*withdrawn complaints*	<b>5</b>

**Ombudsman referrals**

During this period **48** complaints were referred to the Ombudsman; there were **4** early resolutions, **1** in Housing, **1** in Social Services, **2** in Economy and Environment, **1** not known, which was not investigated and the remainder were not investigated. A full detailed breakdown of the 48 complaints referred to the Ombudsman are set out at the end of each Appendix, however in terms of early resolutions the outcomes were as follows

Housing

The Ombudsman investigated one case relating to a decision not to undertake adaptations to a property following OT assessments and costings. The assessments undertaken established the required adaptations were not feasible for the property

nor the resident and the OT's final recommendation was to suggest the resident move to a suitably adapted property. The support worker for the family challenged this decision and the Ombudsman considered the complaint. The Ombudsman recommended an early resolution which was accepted and the following actions agreed; to make a one-off payment of £500 for inconvenience, a letter of apology for our failures in relation to communication and record keeping and a new OT assessment to be carried out on the resident at their property.

#### Social Services

The Ombudsman investigated one case and the early resolution was for social services within 1 month of the Ombudsman's decision to provide a written apology to the complainant for not addressing complaints under the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations ("the Regulations") in the first instance, and for failing to advise of statutory right to progress concerns to the Independent Stage 2 Investigation under the Regulations. To offer complainant redress in the sum of £125 for time and trouble in pursuing concerns under the Regulations. To appoint an Independent Investigator to progress concerns under Stage 2 of the Regulations. To provide Ombudsman with a copy of the Stage 2 investigation report within one month of its completion. The above recommendations were agreed and completed.

#### Economy and Environment

The Ombudsman investigated one complaint in relation to a planning matter and proposed an early resolution of an apology and the provision of a response, which had already been actioned prior to receiving the Ombudsman's recommendation.

The second early resolution related to a property matter. The Ombudsman proposed an early resolution of an apology and to waive the fee for completion of legal documentation. This was accepted with an apology provided and fee waived

### 5.11 Detailed Data broken down by Directorate

The data is broken down in more detail per Directorate in the following Appendices which are attached to this report.

Economy and Environment	Appendix 1
Housing	Appendix 2
Education and Libraries	Appendix 3
Corporate Services	Appendix 4
Social Services (Corporate only)	Appendix 5

5.12 In addition to the data included in this report, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales via her Complaints Standards Authority has been collecting information from all local authorities on the complaints dealt with and outcomes and the figures from April 2021 to March 2022 have been reported on her website via the following link <https://www.ombudsman.wales/published-statistics/>. Officers are continuing to provide this information on a quarterly basis.

5.13 Members will note from the data set out in the Appendices, that the Council is responding to complaints received in accordance with the provisions of the Complaints Policy but there is always room for improvement. A key area being developed is our ability to record and monitor the implementation of the lessons learned and ensure that

lessons which would benefit the whole authority are shared as appropriate. To this end the report Templates provide a more holistic view of the trends and lessons learned. The Learning from Complaints Group will continue to develop and improve its processes for monitoring complaints outcomes.

#### 5.14 **Conclusion**

Members are asked to consider and note the information contained in this report and Appendices.

### 6. **ASSUMPTIONS**

6.1 No assumptions are necessary as the content of the report is based on data collected and analysed.

### 7. **SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

As the report is for information only an Integrated Impact Assessment is not required.

### 8. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report

### 9. **PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no specific personnel implications arising from this report, however it is anticipated that the work being developed in paragraph 5.7 to centralise the whole authority complaints data system will improve our data collections and reporting efficiencies across the directorates.

### 10. **CONSULTATIONS**

10.1 The report has been circulated to the consultees listed below and any comments have been incorporated into this report.

### 11. **STATUTORY POWER**

11.1 Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019

Author: Lisa Lane Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Consultees: Corporate Management Team  
Cllr Nigel George Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Property  
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring officer  
Gemma Hoare, Senior Housing Officer (Customer Services)  
Gareth Jones Housing Officer (Customer Services)  
Karen Williams, Customer Services Digital Hub Manager  
Rob Waggett, Customer Services Development Officer  
Liam Miles, Customer Services/Complaints Officer  
Nicola Broom, Complaints and Information Manager Social Services

Michelle Moore, Social Services Complaints and Information Officer  
Ros Roberts, Business Improvement Manager  
Andrea Jones, Corporate Complaints Officer  
Anwen Cullinane, Senior Policy Officer (Equalities, Welsh Language and Consultation)  
Deborah Gronow, Audit Group Manager  
Karen L Williams, PA to Chief Executive  
Leigh Brook, PA to the Director of Social Services and Housing  
Lianne Fry, PA to Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services  
Sian Wilkes, PA to the Interim Corporate Director of Communities  
James Penfold, Transformation Manager  
Ian Raymond, Business Improvement Officer

## Appendices

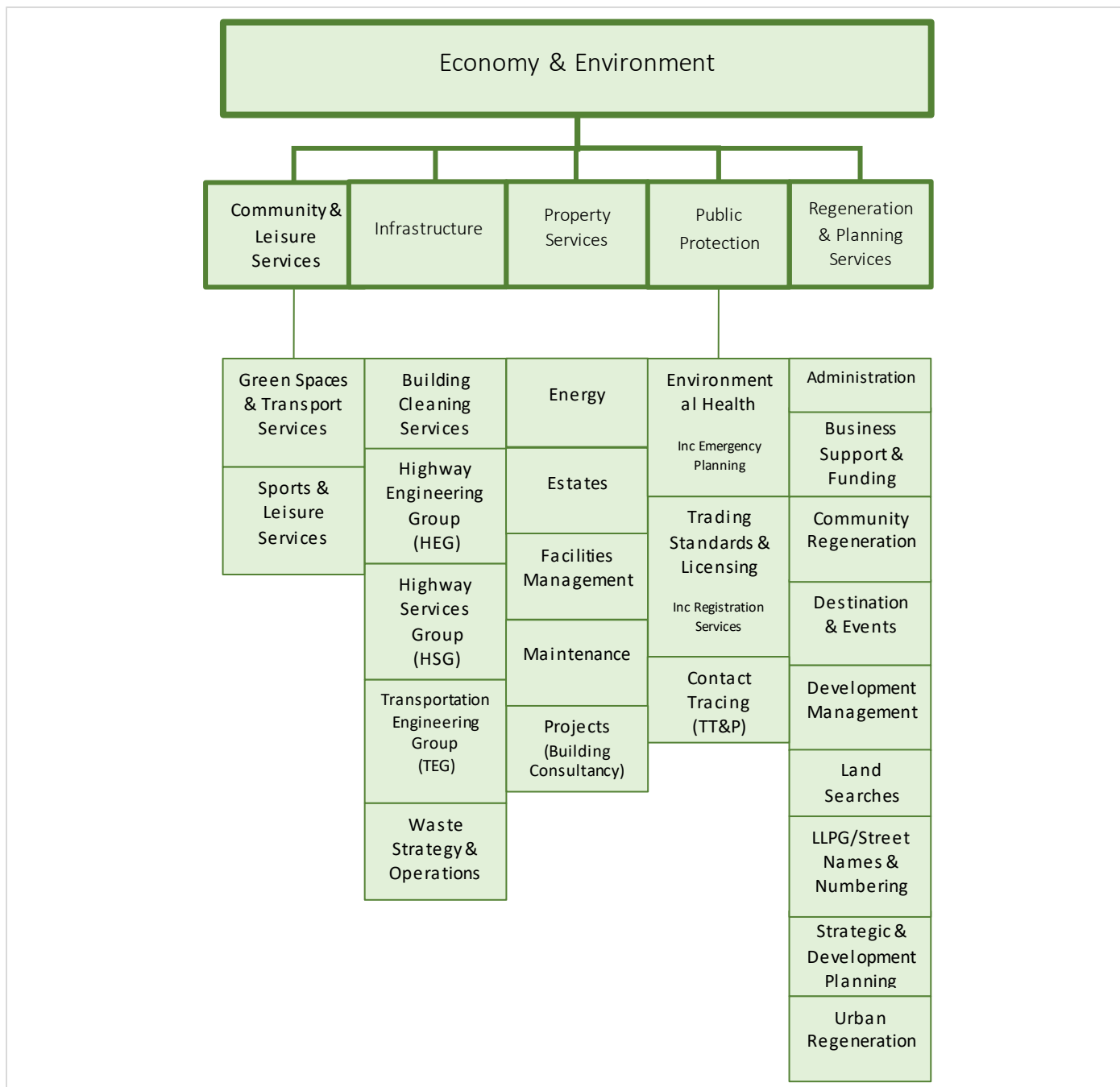
Appendix 1 Economy & Environment  
Appendix 2 Housing  
Appendix 3 Education and Libraries  
Appendix 4 Corporate Services  
Appendix 5 Social Services (Corporate complaints only)

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[Report To Audit Committee 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021](#)

[Corporate Complaints Policy](#)

Diagram of Directorate and Service Framework



**Brief description of Directorate and Service Framework**

There are: 5 Key Services, 24 Service Departments, 58 Service Groups/Teams delivering ~83 Service Provisions which has approximately 334 Core Service Functions, 2075 Staff Headcount (1152 FTEs) and approximately £44M Nett Revenue Budget

## 2. Number of complaints by Stage Type, Service, and Targets Met

Table showing summary of complaints by stage type reference

Stage Type	Count	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Stage 1	231	201	87.01%
Stage 2	20	17	85.00%
Escalated Stage 1 to 2	48	46	95.83%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>88.29%</b>

Table showing how the complaints were received

By source	Count Stage 1	Count Stage 2	Count Escalated Stage 1 to Stage 2
Contact Centre	3	0	0
Email	123	18	37
Letter	2	0	3
On-line	90	1	5
Other	1	0	0
Telephone	12	1	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>48</b>

Tables showing summary of complaints by service, for each stage type

Service	Count Stage 1	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Community & Leisure	136	123	90.44%
Infrastructure	62	53	85.48%
Property	1	0	0%
Public Protection	19	15	78.95%
Regeneration & Planning	11	8	75.00%
Other - Combined	2	2	100%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>87.01%</b>

Service	Count Stage 2	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Community & Leisure	2	2	100%
Infrastructure	1	1	100%
Property	0	0	N/A
Public Protection	3	3	100%
Regeneration & Planning	14	11	78.57%
Other - Combined	0	0	N/A
<b>Totals</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>85.00%</b>



<b>Service</b>	<b>Count Escalated Stage 1 to Stage 2</b>	<b>Count Completed in Target Times</b>	<b>Percentage Completed in Target Times</b>
Community & Leisure	24	24	100%
Infrastructure	14	14	100%
Property	1	1	100%
Public Protection	5	4	80.00%
Regeneration & Planning	4	3	75.00%
Other - Combined	0	0	N/A
<b>Totals</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>95.83%</b>

More detailed information on the above corporate complaints data, is currently maintained, by the Directors Secretary on a dedicated database.

Where target response times were not met, it has been identified that generally, it was due to lack of resources, some miscommunication amongst staff, diversion or redeployment of officers due to Covid constraints, and overall workload pressures amongst staff.

The Director's PA is providing training to all staff which covers a wide range of topics. One of which will be in relation to compliance procedures and ways to avoid missing the deadline dates. It is anticipated that after this training is rolled out the compliance target times will improve.

### 3. Key complaints - identified by type or theme

List of key specific types, or themes, of repetitive, or pertinent complaints received during this reporting period.

Between April 2021 & March 2022.

Most to least complaints -

- Refuse-Recycling-Green Waste-Missed Collections
- Refuse-Recycling-Green Waste-Other
- Other matters
- Parking
- Highway maintenance works
- Planning-General
- Cleansing
- General Weed Control-Grounds Maintenance
- CA Sites
- Anti-social behaviours- Neighbours
- Trees
- Delays in responses
- Delays in service delivery
- Illicit Tipping
- Poor communications
- Bulky Waste
- Drains-Flooding
- Footpath Quality
- Street Lighting
- Dog Bins
- Park maintenance-cleanliness
- Grass Cutting
- Litter Bins
- Dog Fouling
- Road Closures-Traffic Lights

The type or themes identified above, have been extracted from the following table which shows the incoming number of complaints by specific service sectors or teams during this reporting period.

Service Group or Team	Count Stage 1, Stage 2 & Escalated 1 to 2
Green Spaces and Transport Services	34
Sport & Leisure Services	2
Waste Strategy & Operations	125
Engineering Projects Group	3
Highways Operations Group	55
Transportation Engineering	18
Building Consultancy	0
Corporate Property	3
Facilities Management	0
Divisional Support Unit	0
Environmental Health	26
Trading Standards & Licensing	1
Building Control	0
Business Support and Funding	0
Community Regeneration	0

Destination and Events	1
Development Control	0
Planning Administration	28
Strategic Planning	0
Urban Renewal	0
Other - Combined	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>299</b>

## IDENTIFICATION OF TRENDS - INFRASTRUCTURE

<b>TRENDS</b>
<b>Parking Issues incl. Illegal/Dangerous Parking, Parking Permits - 17 in total of which 3 progressed to Stage 2.</b>
<b>Examples</b>
<b>Stage 1</b> Illegal Parking at the side of property. The complainant has requested assistance with this by means of bollards to be erected.
<b>Stage 1 &amp; Stage 2</b> Parking along Rosemont Avenue during school hours - complained several times before
<b>Stage 1</b> Regular misuse of permit parking bay in residential areas in Caerphilly Town Centre
<b>Stage 1</b> Parking and blocking off a turn point
<b>Stage 1</b> Bargoed Town parking ongoing issues with parking and parking tickets
<b>Stage 1</b> Parking Issues - Lisburn Road, Ystrad Mynach
<b>Stage 1</b> Volume of traffic parking in street at drop off and pick up times for the two local schools
<b>Stage 1</b> Dangerous parking in street.

Action Taken to prevent re-occurrence: We will continue to enforce the residents bays in Ystrad Mynach. However, we cannot issue penalty charge notices to vehicles displaying a 'visitors permit' as we are unable to prove whom they may or may not be visiting.

## IDENTIFICATION OF TRENDS - PLANNING & REGENERATION

<b>TRENDS</b>
<p>The Complaints received for Planning &amp; Regeneration are harder to define as they cover a very broad area and are categorised on spreadsheet as Planning-General. However, queries regarding Planning Applications/Objections/Building Regs are common and I have listed some examples received. It is worth noting that some complaints cross over Planning Enforcement Complaints that have been submitted/or are subsequently dealt with as Planning Enforcement Complaints which follows a separate process.</p>
<b>Examples</b>
St 2 Developer may not have built bungalow in accordance with planning or buildings regs.
St 2 Objection to planning permission granted for a new build adjacent to home.
St 1 and escalated to St 2 Planning permission for decking and now receiving threatening enforcement notice regarding the removal of the decking
St 1 Chartered Architect appointed to assist with Planning Applications to resolve issue at premises

## IDENTIFICATION OF TRENDS – WASTE STRATEGY & OPERATIONS

<b>TRENDS</b>
<p>Missed waste collections - 3 progressed to Stage 2 However, queries regarding missed collections are common within the service area and I have listed some examples received. Waste Operations service near 80,000 properties within the borough on fortnightly collections for refuse and weekly collections for recycling, organic food and waste. It is worth noting that whilst some complaints may seem repetitive, in relation to the percentage of properties serviced this is an extremely small percentage. In terms of the remedial actions undertaken, investigations are undertaken for each instance and judged on their merits. Any staff failings are identified, the staff spoken to and if found at fault they would be given a verbal notification. Further failings would be addressed in a stepped process such as written note for file, followed by disciplinary steps for repeated failings. Investigation would be carried out in relation to accessibility as a common theme for complaint turns out to be inability to access areas due to indiscriminate parking or other access issues. Again these are treated on a case by case basis and any identification of failings on behalf of the Driver or team are addressed in a similar process as described.</p>
<b>Examples</b>
Stage 1 - Rubbish bin not being taken by the crew as it's not in the correct location. The complainant had his bin stolen on a couple of occasions from the rear so now puts his bin out with the neighbour's bin opposite

Stage 1 - Poor service on a regular basis in respect of garden waste and also recycling. Also a lack of response regarding a tree query and not receiving a response until it was chased a couple of times
Stage 1 escalated to Stage 2 CHI13933 - Continuous non collection of green waste
Stage 1 escalated to Stage 2 CHI14505 - Non collection of assisted refuse and recycling on numerous occasions
Stage1 escalated to Stage 2 CHI13861 - Continuous non collection of recycling - driver refuses to drive up street
Stage 1 - missed refuse collection - continuous non collection of refuse - report several times

## IDENTIFICATION OF TRENDS - GREEN SPACES & TRANSPORT SERVICES

Perhaps line up and box each matter off so that they don't get mixed up

Trends Identified	Total Number of Complaints	Examples	Actions put in place to prevent reoccurrence
Delays in responses	5	<p>Lack of due care and attention to the children's play area and numerous emails been ignored regarding this</p> <p>Contact CRM service on 26th April 2021 and yet to receive contact from relevant team. Sent numerous follow up emails and every time get a response saying its been passed to the tree cutting team. Waiting almost 4 months</p> <p>No update received on rights of way service requests and phone queries about disabled right of way access x 2</p> <p>Lack of response from tree surgeon in connection with a beech tree</p>	<p>Delay in service provision</p> <p>Holding response carried out via telephone - visit was carried out - written response was required as logged as a Stage 1 complaint</p> <p>Inspection of the site was required, also inspection of hardcopy file held in the council offices at Bargoed. Attempts to combine site visits where possible to be efficient with time, this took a little time on top of other investigations which were ongoing through legal route. This was systemic issue requiring action plan</p> <p>Complaint withdrawn as local Councillor obtained the information on behalf of complainant.</p>

Other matters	6	<p>Funeral Service</p> <p>Ongoing issues with allotment behaviour</p> <p>Bedwellty Cemetery -</p> <p>Trespass on the Sanctuary Wildlife reserve, particularly by representatives of the Local Authority CCBC</p>	<p>Staff advised that they must strictly adhere to policies to ensure a consistent level of service and to avoid a reoccurrence.</p> <p>Clarity / accuracy / timeliness of information</p> <p>All staff advised that they must strictly adhere to policies to ensure a consistent level of service and to avoid a reoccurrence.</p>
Trees	15	<p>Foliage overgrowth - overgrown tree hitting slates off the roof</p> <p>Overhanging trees and branches falling off into back garden</p> <p>Tree outside property causing pavement to lift x 2 - Reported previously - no response sent for the stage 1 and escalated to stage 2.</p> <p>Tree branches needing to be cut as overhanging preventing ambulance etc to get through x 2</p> <p>Trees - need to be cut back</p> <p>Trees adjacent to the property - dangerous - bee complaining since May and no inspection or response</p> <p>Trees on council land next to complainant property and the damage they are causing x 2 - complained numerous times</p> <p>Trees at Heol Ysgubor not being</p>	<p>Officers to ensure target times are strictly adhered to prevent a reoccurrence albeit - member of staff spoke to complainant and works were completed in timely manner to resolve the complaint, it was the follow up formal response that was delayed.</p> <p>Delay in service provision - during covid</p> <p>Officers to ensure complainants are to be kept updated should works be delayed - More robust system in place now in terms of monitoring complaints and ensuring they are completed within compliance dates</p> <p>Trees are pending re-inspection. Prioritise Stage 1 complaints as soon as practicable / Officers to chase land holding departments when quotes for works are provided for works to ensure they are completed by the target date</p> <p>Delay in service provision - during covid</p> <p>Due to number of priority enquiries sometimes being beyond our currently available resources</p> <p>Issues taking precedence and the number of priority enquiries</p>

		cut  Complainant upset and distressed following damage to a family members headstone in Gelligaer Cemetery from the trees in the recent storm.	sometimes being beyond our currently available resources  Received a high volume of enquiries concerning trees on council held land in recent times and have quite limited resources available to respond to those queries in a timely manner.  Office / Contractors conduct with public including sensitivity / empathy of staff / Politeness
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During 2021/22 34 complaints were recorded in relation to Green Spaces services, of which 12 (35%) were upheld. 2 complaints were upheld in relation to funeral/cemetery services and staff were reminded that they must strictly adhere to policies to ensure a consistent level of service and to avoid a recurrence. The topic that attracted the highest number of complaints was trees (15), of which 4 were upheld. In the main these complaints related to delay in service provision, this being a consequence of the number of priority enquiries sometimes being beyond available resources, with Covid absences having an impact as well. In response to lessons learned from the upheld complaints Officers are to ensure complainants are to be kept updated should works be delayed. Additionally, a more robust system is in place now in terms of monitoring complaints and ensuring they are completed within compliance dates. The service is also exploring allocating a Technical Officer post to assist with the management and monitoring of service requests.

#### IDENTIFICATION OF TRENDS – PUBLIC PROTECTION

Trends Identified	Total Number of Complaints	Examples	Actions put in place to prevent reoccurrence
Other matters	5	Complaint about Environmental Health Officer  New build houses being built - contractors burning items making toxic fumes  Quality of work - Officer failed to secure drain lid causing a dog to get his let stuck  Several complaints made regarding next door neighbour - noise, lighting etc x 2 - same complainant	Staff conduct with public - sensitivity /empathy of staff / politeness  Staff conduct with public - sensitivity /empathy of staff / politeness  Officer reminded to check drain lids are put back safely after treatment  Officer had missed deadline due to misreading the compliance date - Council policies to be followed. We now have a more robust system in place when monitoring complaints, ensuring they are followed up in a timely manner and responded to within the compliance date

<p>Poor communication</p>	<p>6</p>	<p>Covid test incorrectly communicated positive to a resident due to a light house lab error on the test result</p> <p>TTP - Conflicting information regarding self-isolation</p> <p>Information rights concern - we acted on a written complaint received however it was not made by the citizen Not dealing with personal information correctly</p> <p>Length of time taken to respond to issues raised re noise complaint</p> <p>Track &amp; Trace phone call</p>	<p>Lessons learnt around the need for staff to ensure they check the CRM for multiple cases and merge when found before contacting the citizen. Staff to investigate thoroughly using various pieces of information from the citizen before any contact is made</p> <p>Extremely busy period with COVID</p> <p>Based around call handling with difficult citizens feedback has been given and training arranged for the advisor involved in this case. All staff to receive refresher training around handling difficult calls. A working group has been set up to look into adding more prompts and tools to the teams call handbook.</p>
<p>Illicit tipping</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>Illicit tipping</p> <p>Fly Tipping / complaint against member of staff not doing enough to prevent fly tipping / rubbish dumped outside property causing rats</p> <p>Residents in street dropping cigarette ends - letters already sent but still happening</p>	<p>Area of land belonged to a third party who have apologised and now looking to action.</p> <p>Letter issued / more like a repeat service request so no lessons learned</p>
<p>Anti-social behaviours neighbours</p>	<p>6</p>	<p>Dog walked without lead and is approaching all dogs it passes menacingly x 2</p> <p>Noise Complaint / Noise and parking around licensed hospitality venues</p> <p>Poor management of odour / noise from residents</p> <p>History of environmental issues - smoke - harassment etc</p>	<p>Policies / relevant legislation followed</p> <p>Policies / relevant legislation followed</p>



During 2021/22 27 complaints were recorded in relation to Public Protection services, of which 7 (26%) were upheld. Poor communication was a feature of 6 complaints, of which 2 were upheld and these both related to Contact Tracing. Lessons learned as a consequence included reminders to staff regarding the need to ensure that they check the database for multiple cases before contacting the citizen, and provision of refresher training around handling difficult calls. In terms of topic of complaint, the most complaints (6) were received about anti-social behaviour/nuisance neighbours, but none of these were upheld, perhaps reflecting the challenges of meeting complainants' expectations in such cases.

#### 4. Number of complaints by Category

Table showing complaints by category.

Category	Count Stage 1, Stage 2 & Escalated 1 to 2
1 Collaborative Working	6
2 Decision Making	17
3 Delay in Service Provision	118
4 Officer/Contractors Conduct with public (including sensitivity/empathy of staff/politeness)	17
5a Following Council Policies	43
5b Following relevant Legislation	-
6 Accessibility of Services	13
7 Clarity/Accuracy/Timeliness of information	10
8 Quality of Work	75
9 Openness/ Fairness and Honesty	0
10 Compliance with Complaints procedure	0
11. Combination of Categories (Non-specific)	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>299</b>

## 5. Number of complaints by outcome and lessons learned

Table showing complaints by outcome.

Outcome Data	Count Stage 1, Stage 2 & Escalated 1 to 2
Upheld	100
Not Upheld	199
<b>Totals</b>	<b>299</b>

The following tables shows more information regarding the complaints counts above, that were, Upheld, Not Upheld, by Stage and by Service Area.

Services – Stage 1	Upheld	Not Upheld
Community & Leisure	58	78
Infrastructure	16	46
Property	0	1
Public Protection	7	12
Regeneration & Planning	1	10
Other - Combined	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>148</b>

Services – Stage 2	Upheld	Not Upheld
Community & Leisure	0	2
Infrastructure	0	1
Property	0	0
Public Protection	0	3
Regeneration & Planning	0	14
Other - Combined	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20</b>

Service – Stage 1 escalated to Stage 2	Upheld	Not Upheld
Community & Leisure	10	14
Infrastructure	6	8
Property	1	0
Public Protection	0	5
Regeneration & Planning	0	4
Other - Combined	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>31</b>

Main area is Community and Leisure with 58 Stage 1 and 10 Esc 1 to 2 complaints upheld – any themes trends analysis of action to be taken going forward together with monitoring

List of lessons learned. The table below comments on key findings resulting from the complaints in this reporting period, that may help curtail, prevent, or impede future repeats.

\*Please note, below is a table showing some examples of 'Lessons Learned' that has been fed-back from services and the complaint respondents, during 2021/22.

There is currently no formal process in place to feedback this information to the central administrators for 'lessons learned' by the service providers. However, through numerous service management structures and reporting arrangements, any specific issues, or matters that need executive decisions, policy, practice, or service delivery changes, these are dealt with through those respective service areas and their respective forums, and not through the central complaints administration.

Nature of complaint	Lessons learned	Category
Overgrown tree hitting slates off the roof	Officers to ensure target times are strictly adhered to prevent a reoccurrence albeit the complainant was contacted verbally and we undertook works in a timely manner to resolve the complaint – it was the follow up with a formal response that was unfortunately delayed. Officers were reminded to ensure target times are strictly adhered to prevent a reoccurrence.	8 Quality of Work
Complaint that Test Trace and Protect gave conflicting information regarding self-isolation to an individual and family	It was identified that staff need to ensure they check the CRM for multiple cases and merge when found before contacting the citizen. Staff need to investigate thoroughly using various pieces of information from the citizen before any contact is made.	1 Collaborative Working
Resurfacing of walkways in Hanbury Street, Glan-y-Nant, and proposals to develop BRU school, Hanbury Street which includes changes to play park and field (not currently part of the BRU).	Greater clarity on the maps issued to residents. Briefings between staff should include details of the scheme and wider details, so that the information can be given to residents.	2 Decision Making
Family member was receiving palliative care and not receiving collections for assisted collection service	To continue to fulfil our duty to empty bins regularly and deliver ancillary elements of the service where resources are available noting that we are also endeavouring to recruit staff to supplement present workforce numbers.	3 Delay in Service Provision
Continuous non collection of recycling.	Commit to further service improvement given the resources available and endeavour to get support from other service areas noting that we have requested support from civil enforcement on this occasion.	8 Quality of Work
Lack of street cleansing	Site inspections of the area need to be conducted more often by Supervisor. Problems with the operatives work previously. Meeting with operative in the near future following her return to work. Of at present with COVID. Meeting will be	3 Delay in Service Provision

	looked at frequency she is in certain problem areas.	
Highway safety - request for signpost to be removed as blocking driveway	ensure that the information required to make informed decisions is gathered by Officers prior to providing information to the public.	3 Delay in Service Provision
Service provided by schools transport very poor and would like to discuss with someone	We will review the information available to parents on the Council's website.	8 Quality of Work
Parking Issues - Lisburn Road, Ystrad Mynach	we will continue to enforce the residents permit parking bays in Ystrad Mynach. However, we cannot issue penalty charge notices to vehicles displaying a 'visitors permit' as we are unable to prove whom they may or may not be visiting.	5 Following Council Policies/relevant Legislation
Missed refuse collections - reported many times and complaints are getting ignored and not resolved	Enhance communications with the workforce and continue to deliver service improvement.	3 Delay in Service Provision
Missed food waste and uncollected recycling.	Staff to thoroughly check all cul-de-sacs and parking areas for bins obscured by parked cars.	3 Delay in Service Provision

At present, staff focus, and prioritisation, is to 'respond to and resolving incoming complaints and any opportunities to change or improve service delivery to prevent reoccurrences, is, wherever possible, dealt with through normal business operations.

Current complaints data collection, monitoring, and general reporting, is operated through a central administration process, capturing only limited intelligence. Whereas the actual complaints are dealt with at service level, by a multitude of officers, and it is currently reliant on the services themselves, to learn from the incoming complaints and take appropriate action as deemed necessary thereafter.

## 6. Identified relationships to Equalities or Welsh Language

Table showing a count and list of findings resulting from the complaints in this reporting period, that specifically relate to the Equalities or Welsh Language protected characteristics.

Characteristic Strand	Count Stage 1, Stage 2 & Escalated 1 to 2
Age	0
Disability	11
Gender Reassignment	0
Marriage and Civil Partnership	0
Pregnancy and Maternity	0
Race	0
Religion/Belief or Non-belief	0
Sex	0
Sexual Orientation	0
Welsh Language	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>11</b>

Examples of Disability Complaints are

Details of Complaint	Service Area	Lessons Learned?	Does the Complaint relate to Equalities or the Welsh Language?
Crew blocking road with returned bins - resident unable to park and is disabled. Complained in 2018 and also had a recent stage 1.	Community & Leisure		Disability
Dispute regarding accessibility for disabled access on national cycle network routes	Infrastructure		Disability
complaint related , planning conditions, health & safety and staff conduct	Regeneration & Planning	Virtual Meetings audible in the background of calls with the public can be perceived as unprofessional. However, staff advised not to take external calls when attending virtual meetings.	Disability
Missed waste collections for over a year, residents leaving waste bags in rear lane he is disabled and needs access to rear gate.	Community & Leisure	missed collections and wrong information given to complainant from the Contact Centre	Disability
Dispute regarding accessibility for disabled access on national cycle network routes	Infrastructure		Disability
Treatment she received from a member of staff when visiting to use a Civic Amenity Site	Community & Leisure		Disability
Problems with assisted collection service	Community & Leisure	strive for continuous service improvement and ensure that statutory obligations are met whilst endeavouring to maintain ancillary elements of the service at this most challenging of times.	Disability
had to go 4 houses down to retrieve my Wheelie Bin, this a regular occurrence but today one of the boys employed by your council laughed and said look at her she don't look happy. I'm disabled and have difficulties walking and I felt totally humiliated by these young lads	Community & Leisure		Disability

<p>Planning conditions, health &amp; safety and conduct of a member of staff</p>	<p>Regeneration &amp; Planning</p>	<p>Virtual Meetings audible in the background of calls with the public can be perceived as unprofessional. However Staff advised not to take external calls when attending virtual meetings.</p>	<p>Disability</p>
<p>Disabled car parking in Heolddu Leisure Centre - Residents using spaces displaying no badge using up all the spaces</p>	<p>Community &amp; Leisure</p>		<p>Disability</p>

## 7. Annex – Referrals to Ombudsman, complaints resulting from appeals and examples of relevant items (points to note) specific to this reporting period

Identify how many referrals to the Ombudsman and list and append any relevant supplementary information here, namely, points to note, or an example data set.

Reference/Service Area	Outcome/Decision	Details of Early Resolution/recommendation
OMB1 – CCTV	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB2 – Environment	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB3 – Planning	Premature - Not Investigating	Complaint was referred, back to Council to investigate
OMB4 – Planning	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB5 – Planning	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB6 – Property	Premature - Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB7 – Engineers	Premature Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB8 – Planning	Not Investigating	Early Resolution – To provide response and apologise. This was already done prior to receiving the ombudsman's recommendation
OMB9 – Planning	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB10 – Transport	Not Investigating	Complaint was referred, back to Council to investigate
OMB11 – Planning	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB12 – Planning	Premature - Not Investigating	Complaint was referred, back to Council to investigate
OMB13 – Highways	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB14 – Waste	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB15 – Waste	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB16 – Highways	Premature – Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB17 – Highways	Premature – Not Investigating Out of Time & Out of Jurisdiction	No Further Action
OMB18 – Planning	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB19 – Waste	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB20 – Planning	Not Investigating Partly out of time	No Further Action
OMB21 – Planning	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB22 - Property	Premature – Not Investigating	Complaint was referred, back to Council to investigate as stage 2 complaint
OMB23 – Environment	Premature – Not Investigating	Complaint was referred, back to Council to investigate
OMB24 – Parks	Premature – Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB25 – Planning	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB26 – Planning	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB27 – Traffic	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB28 – Property	Not Investigating	Early Resolution – Apologise for delay and waive fee for preparation of lease. The Early Resolution was accepted and an apology was provided and fee waived

## **8. Directors Summary – Overall Assessment and Evaluation.**

### **Summary of Findings.**

During this reporting year, it has become more noticeable of the challenges facing our services with regards to the directorate's complexity of frontline service deliveries, its aging and deteriorating community infrastructure, some aging vehicles, plant and equipment, as well as the difficulties with maintaining appropriate staffing compliments (the workforce).

The organisation is still in the throes of the Covid pandemic recovery period, whereby many safety constraints were imposed over the past two years, which, also hindered expected service delivery performance levels. However, generally, services have performed well given those circumstances.

Legislation and public awareness, are and have in recent years, been placing higher expectations and pressures on our local authority, despite having had approximately 12 years of austerity and many medium-term plan financial cuts to services (~£14M budget reductions).

Although the directorate, by nature of its frontline facing and direct contact with the public continues to strive for quality and effective service delivery, our resources and infrastructure limitations will always create 'stumbling blocks'. For example, our maintenance requirements for waste collection vehicles being hindered by recruitment and retention difficulties in the HGV maintenance sector across local authorities and the private sector. Another example is the clarity of and difference between statutory versus non-statutory functions that the public expect to be delivered.

Each service area within the directorate currently has established Divisional Management Team (DMT's) structures, as well as a Senior Management Team (SMT) whereby the content and issues faced by such intelligence as the complaints system and other direct contact public intelligence, can readily be discussed, and follow up decisions and actions can be addressed. This would include any changes to working practices, staff awareness sessions, disciplines and consideration of any policy reviews as needed.

It should be noted, that when reading statistics in this type of report, proportionality and complexities must also be a considered factor, to ensure the appropriate perspective and messages are understood (see Section 1 and Section 2). Notable examples include the fact that the Council performs circa 9.75 million waste and recycling collections every year and the number of missed collections is an extremely small percentage of this total. In addition, several complaints relate to objections to decisions taken in accordance with Council policy (E.G. Planning). However, that is not to say that the Directorate isn't keen to learn from its complaints and complaint trend data.

The biggest challenges faced by our services, is, clarity and full understanding of public concerns, issues, and expected outcomes, whereby, we can then respond swiftly and take every opportunity to put in place appropriate actions to curtail repeat complaints, which is somewhat challenging at times, within legislative controls and limiting resources. Our new model of complaint capture (see final bullet point below) will also enable more accurate trend analysis and allow the Directorate senior management team to focus on areas that are identified by this trend analysis.

Most resolutions are expected to be addressed at and within the respective service delivery area, whereby escalations of more complex situations are expected to be brought to the senior executive panels for further consideration in a timely manner.

An extract from the overall Annual Directorate Performance Assessment states:

### **What have we learned?**

- Despite all the challenges faced by our communities our front-line service staff have been exemplary in seamlessly continuing to deliver their services throughout the pandemic.
- Staff are our most valuable-asset and retaining good, experienced staff while being able to recruit when required is one of the most significant risks currently faced by the organisation.



- The recruitment and retention matters caused by market conditions and disparity in pay grades is now affecting the ability of many services to deliver and maintain services at previous, expected levels and prioritisation therefore must take place.
- Central Government grant funding and other initiatives with relatively short turn round times are causing greater pressures in the system making prioritisation more important.
- Despite challenging conditions linked to resources and market conditions, expectation levels of the public and certain members remain challenging and, in some cases, unrealistic.
- The positives relating to flexible, agile, hybrid and blended approaches to operational service delivery will be maintained going forward.
- The capture of service requests and complaints is in the process of being improved linked to streamlined "one front door" access to Council services and evaluation of this new model will be critical over the next 12 months.

**For further information, please contact**

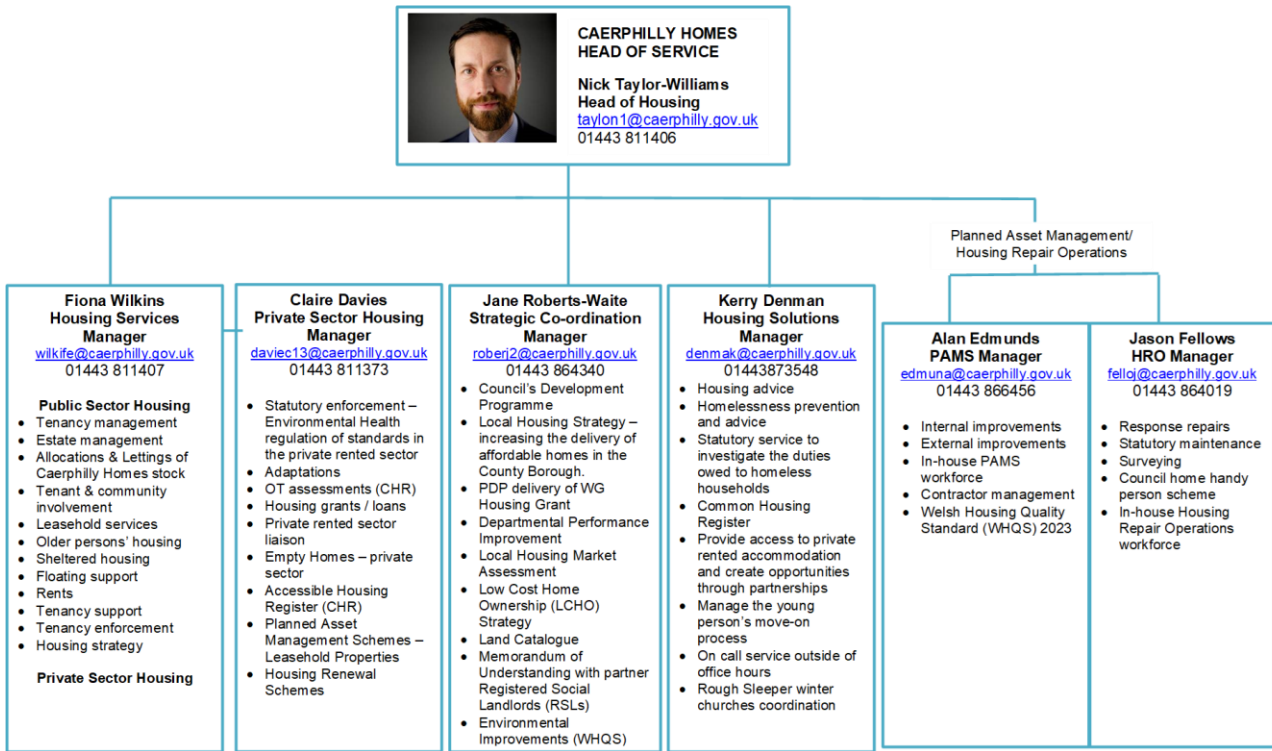
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Diagram of Directorate and Service Framework



Brief description of Directorate and Service Framework

Caerphilly Homes is the brand name for the council's housing division. Some of the services delivered by Caerphilly Homes include: Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS), Estate Management, Tenancy Enforcement, Rents and Tenancy Support, Tenant and Community Involvement, Older Persons' Housing, Housing Repair Operations, Housing Advice, Homeless Prevention and Common Housing Register, Private Sector Housing, Grants and Loans, Housing Strategy, Affordable Housing and Adaptations

2. Number of complaints by stage type, service, and targets met

Table showing summary of complaints by stage type reference

Stage Type	Count	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Stage 1	113	93	82.3%
Stage 2	6	5	83.3%
Escalated from Stage 1 to 2	21	19	90.5%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>83.6%</b>

Tables showing summary of complaints by service, for each stage type

Service	Count Stage 1	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Adaptations	1	1	100.0%
Allocations	13	11	84.6%
Antisocial Behaviour	6	6	100.0%
Energy Works	4	4	100.0%
Grants	2	2	100.0%
Homelessness	2	2	100.0%
Housing Management	35	24	68.6%
Leaseholder	3	3	100.0%
Heating	2	2	100.0%
Private Landlord	4	3	75.0%
Rents	3	3	100.0%
Response Repairs	24	20	83.3%
Sheltered Housing	2	2	100.0%
WHQS External	8	7	87.5%
WHQS Internal	4	3	75.0%
Totals	<b>113</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>82.3%</b>

Service	Count Stage 2	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Adaptations	1	1	100.0%
Allocations	3	3	100.0%
Antisocial Behaviour	3	2	66.7%
Energy Works	1	1	100.0%
Grants	2	2	100.0%
Homelessness	1	1	100.0%
Housing Management	7	5	71.4%
Leaseholder	1	1	100.0%
Heating	1	1	100.0%
Response Repairs	5	5	100.0%
WHQS External	2	2	100.0%
Totals	<b>27</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>88.9%</b>

Where target response times were not met, it has been identified that generally it was due to awaiting further information from other officers, other departments, or the complainants themselves. Constraints on officers to carry out their investigations in a timely manner due to Welsh Government regulations in response to Covid-19 also impacted on response times during this period. The Head of Housing – Nick Taylor Williams has been undertaking a review of all Stage 1 and Stage 2 responses to ensure consistency and customer focus. Due to the number of responses requiring review and redrafting, this has impacted negatively on the target rates however it is anticipated undertaking this exercise will have a positive impact on customer service, quality of complaint investigations and ultimately reducing escalation of complaints. Going forward, data will be provided monthly to managers and directors who attend SMB and HMT to discuss cases which fall short of meeting the target deadlines and to establish if trends can be identified in this area. Key members of the Housing Management team have also been involved in the planning and implementation of the changes required for Caerphilly Homes to successfully introduce the Renting Homes Act 2016. This was initially due to be completed by the 15th of July 2022 however this has been postponed until the 1st December 2022. The introduction of this legislation is paramount and therefore has taken priority over some other duties. The Housing Department has also commissioned a new computer system called CX. Managers and officers have been involved with the building and testing

of the system via workshops and group meetings, this new system is due to go live in October 2022. Managers/Officers will be provided with a list of open cases for their section on a fortnightly bases which will include brief details of the case when it was received and the target date for closure. This approach will be monitored to see if this has a positive impact on our target time percentages.

### Table showing how the complaints were received.

By source	Count Stage 1	Count Stage 2	Count Escalated Stage 1 to Stage 2
Telephone	38	1	4
Email	59	3	15
Letter	5	2	0
On-line	11	0	2
Contact Centre	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21</b>

### 3. Key complaints - identified by type or theme

- Residents unhappy with delay in starting/completing Welsh Housing Quality Standards works.
- Waiting time to be allocated a property/unhappy with banding.
- Residents requesting new wooden fences or gates for their gardens.
- Former tenant arrears.
- Leaseholders unhappy with quality of repairs/maintenance works carried out on their properties or blocks.
- Operatives not attending pre-arranged appointments or turning up without pre-arranged appointments.
- Residents unhappy with the installation of new ground source heating system and the associated works within their properties.
- CCBC operatives or contractors not parking with consideration when working on properties.
- Delay in adaptations to property.
- Time taken to end a tenancy following tenant moving into a nursing home.
- Concerns raised regarding joint liability for repair costs.
- Poor relet conditions of property.
- Overgrown hedges protruding onto public pathways and occupiers' gardens.

### 4. Number by Category (Commissioner Case Type)

Table showing complaints by Commissioner Case Type, for prescribed Categories

Category	Count Stage 1, Stage 2 & Escalated 1 to 2
1 Collaborative Working	0

2 Decision Making	28
3 Delay in Service Provision	29
4 Officer/Contractors Conduct with public (including sensitivity/empathy of staff/politeness)	6
5a Following Council Policies	2
5b Following relevant Legislation	3
6 Accessibility of Services	0
7 Clarity/Accuracy/Timeliness of information	10
8 Quality of Work	62
9 Openness/ Fairness and Honesty	0
10 Compliance with Complaints procedure	0
11 Combination	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>140</b>

## 5. Number by Outcome and lessons learned comments

Table showing complaints by Outcome Data sets as categorised by the Complaints Standards Authority.

Outcome Data	Count Stage 1, Stage 2 & Escalated 1 to 2
Upheld	45
Not upheld	94
Withdrawn	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>140</b>

The following table shows more information regarding the complaints counts above, that were upheld or not upheld broken down by service area.

### Stage 1 Complaints

Service	Upheld	Not Upheld
<b>Adaptations</b>	1	0
<b>Allocations</b>	3	10
<b>Energy Works</b>	4	0
<b>Grants</b>	1	1
<b>Housing Management</b>	19	16
<b>Leaseholder</b>	2	1
<b>Private Landlord</b>	1	2
<b>Rents</b>	1	2
<b>Response Repairs</b>	8	16
<b>Sheltered Housing</b>	0	2

<b>WHQS External</b>	2	6
<b>WHQS Internal</b>	0	4
<b>Heating</b>	1	1
<b>Antisocial Behaviour</b>	0	6
<b>Homeless Prevention</b>	0	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>69</b>

## Stage 2 Complaints

<b>Service</b>	<b>Upheld</b>	<b>Not Upheld</b>
<b>Adaptations</b>	0	1
<b>Allocations</b>	0	3
<b>Energy Works</b>	1	0
<b>Grants</b>	0	2
<b>Housing Management</b>	0	7
<b>Leaseholder</b>	0	1
<b>Private Landlord</b>	0	0
<b>Rents</b>	0	0
<b>Response Repairs</b>	0	5
<b>Sheltered Housing</b>	0	0
<b>WHQS External</b>	1	1
<b>WHQS Internal</b>	0	0
<b>Heating</b>	0	1
<b>Antisocial Behaviour</b>	0	3
<b>Homeless Prevention</b>	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>25</b>

**List of lessons learned. Comment on key findings resulting from the complaints in this reporting period, that may help curtail, prevent, or impede future repeats.**

The later part of this reporting period identified a trend with complaints relating to the relet standard of Caerphilly Homes properties. Initially each complaint is reviewed on its own merits and two common themes were identified. It was established our customers were unhappy with the standard of cleanliness of the property when they received the keys and some customers felt essential repairs were not undertaken (or to a poor standard) when the property was void, resulting in inhibiting our customers from either moving in or decorating the property immediately. This information has been passed to the Area Housing Manager and Landlord Services Manager to investigate and discuss a solution. Following an initial review of the complaints, the Higher Management Team met to discuss the current standard requirements with the Housing Repair Operations Manager and Surveyors to ensure a consistent approach is taken when agreeing to sign properties as suitable for relet. The meetings and discussions have taken place, enabling standards to be reviewed

and changed however this area will be monitored in line with the requirements for the Renting Homes Act 2016.

<b>Details of Case</b>	<b>Lessons Learned</b>	<b>Category</b>
Tenant unhappy with the mess left after the heating system installation - tenant thought they were having patios but then told they were not	Improvements needed to ensure regular updates are provided to communicate any decisions or delays with tenant – this was a pilot scheme so the changes will be considered when installations of this nature are considered going forward.	8 Quality of work
Possible data breach as aunt of Housing Applicant called and obtained information on behalf of applicant without verifications being asked.	Housing Solutions Manager has requested and completed refresher training for all staff within the team as a reminder of the verification process that we employ within the service area.	5b Following relevant Legislation
Sub-contractor called on a Sunday without prior notice.	Contact has been made with all contractors connected to the contract to remind them of their responsibilities within the terms and conditions.	4 Officer/Contractors Conduct with public
Leaseholder unhappy with the quality of paint work carried out on the railings and fencing	We now issue letters at the end of each contract to ask if leaseholders are satisfied with the completed works so that any issues can be dealt with in a timely manner.	8 Quality of work
Unhappy with works associated with ground source heating installation – letter regarding these works were illegible.	Make sure all correspondence is of a decent quality before leaving the office and that tenants are consulted with, and records held documenting this at all stages.	8 Quality of work
Stress and damage caused whilst installing the new heating system	Ensure tenants are consulted with and records held documenting this at all stages along with finishing works thoroughly checked going forward.	8 Quality of work
Wife recently passed away, but he received an arrears Letter from the Rents Section stating “following the sad death of Mr A”	Letter sent to tenant with deceased’s name as addressee. We have taken three steps to prevent this issue arising again: 1. Held a meeting with the administration assistant who sent the letter in error and discussed the distress this has caused the tenant. Expressed the importance of ensuring accuracy when sending such letters. Consequently, we have	7 Clarity/Accuracy/Timeliness of information



	<p>agreed to put further training in place.</p> <p>2. We have changed the procedure in relation to deceased tenants, a letter now must be produced manually and populated by a staff member.</p> <p>3. We have added a further checkpoint, whereby the letter content is checked by another member of staff prior to mailing.</p>	
Tenant was told a mutual exchange could go through but after spending money clearing the rent and prepared property for inspection, has been told the exchange cannot go ahead due to overcrowding	Changes have been made to ensure that whilst advice is given during the process of applying for an exchange that it is made clear to all parties that until formal approval has been given, it cannot be assumed that permission will be granted.	7 Clarity/Accuracy/Timeliness of information
Executor unhappy with the lack of correspondence he has received from Housing Office and has now received a rent arrears charge for over £600	Procedures being changed to ensure that wherever possible, we will telephone and speak to next of kin supplied in the 'Tell us Once' and that following this conversation, letters will be sent confirming the conversation and any advice that was discussed.	7 Clarity/Accuracy/Timeliness of information
Tenant moved into a new property and unaware when required adaptations will be undertaken – feel there has been a delay	More comprehensive file notes from calls taken and meetings held to ensure we are aware of new tenants needs.	7 Clarity/Accuracy/Timeliness of information
Relative unhappy with the time taken to end mother's tenancy, incurring further charges.	Area Housing Manager arranging meeting with social services to talk through with them the implications of tenancies and how they can't end them without following the correct legal requirements.	3 Delay in Service Provision
Relative of owner occupier concerned as they cannot afford to pay towards the cost of repairing the shared drive.	Due to lack of consultation or notification of financial obligations provided by the conveyancing solicitor at the time of purchase, the process of shared responsibility will be reviewed to find ways of improving our service.	8 Quality of Work/Service
Tenant has lived at property since 2018 and has spent a considerable amount of money there due to the poor relet standard	To communicate better and spend time listening to our customers to discuss if they are happy with the standard of accommodation.	8 Quality of Work/Service

Tenant raised concerns with the District Environmental Health Officer regarding the relet condition of the property when they accepted it.	Encourage tenants to report issues with property including quality of cleanliness and outstanding repairs	8 Quality of Work/Service
Owner Occupier unhappy with the service received after receiving a joint responsibility letter.	Did not give due diligence in this case and sent a letter to someone who had nothing to do with the issue because we made assumptions, we need to look at the Joint Responsibility procedure and in particular the tone of letters, all of which is happening as a result of Renting Homes Wales. This will be completed in time for the implementation of the new legislation – initially 15 <sup>th</sup> July 2022 but postponed until 1 <sup>st</sup> December 2022. Housing staff will receive training on a number of changes including joint responsibility.	8 Quality of Work/Service
Tenant advised nothing is being done about damaged fence, mould, electrical wiring problems with the boiler and back door and windows.	Officers will be reminded of the importance of listening to our customers and remain focussed on their needs.	8 Quality of Work/Service
overgrown section of pavement. The hedge causing the obstructions belong to 2 properties one is privately owned and the other is a council owned	Due to the covid pandemic no routine inspections or walking the estate have been undertaken, with restrictions lifted these inspections have recommenced.	3 Delay in Service Provision
Outstanding issues regarding shower and conservatory following delay in loan application.	Principle Housing Officer reviewing the loan procedure to ensure resilience going forward. Guidance is in the process of being produced to ensure that the applicants are aware of the criteria, process and timeframes involved with the loan going forward. In addition, admin support will be implemented to ensure key stages are scheduled for response and that applicants are kept informed regular during the process.	3 Delay in Service Provision

Following a recent review of all Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaint responses, we recognise the quality and tone of our responses are not in keeping with the good quality customer service mentality that we should be known for. The quality of draft responses will continue to be reviewed and guidance provided to investigating Officer's/Managers.

## 6. Identified relationships to Equalities or Welsh Language

Table showing a count and list of findings resulting from the complaints in this reporting period, that specifically relate to the Equalities or Welsh Language protected characteristics.

Characteristic Strand	Count Stage 1, Stage 2 & Escalated 1 to 2
Age	0
Disability	7
Gender Reassignment	0
Marriage and Civil Partnership	0
Pregnancy and Maternity	1
Race	0
Religion/Belief or Non-belief	0
Sex	0
Sexual Orientation	0
Welsh Language	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>8</b>

### Extracts from cases linked to the Disability characteristic:

- Sister contacting on applicant's behalf as applicant has been in band 2 for 5 years and is still waiting for a property despite supporting letters from doctors.
- Unhappy by the way housing application has been handled and it's affecting the mental health of the applicant.
- Applicant offered a house and as soon as additional cost was involved the offer was taken away – applicant feels disability is being used against them.
- Advocate for applicant questioning why we are not carrying out adaptations to their property rather than suggesting the residents move.
- Applicant felt the adaptations should have been planned before they moved into property.
- Grant application delayed and applicant feels this was unnecessary.
- Tenant reporting alleged harassment from neighbour for a number of years.

### Extraction from the case linked to the Pregnancy and Maternity characteristic:

- When tenancy began the property had a shower, not a bath and the tenant was heavily pregnant and requested a bath be fitted as soon as possible. Tenant now advises after months of waiting her baby has now outgrown the baby bath and there is not a job booked in on the Housing Repairs system to fit a bath in her property in the near future.

## **7. Annex – Referrals to Ombudsman, complaints resulting from appeals and examples of relevant items (points to note) specific to this reporting period**

**Identify how many referrals to the Ombudsman and list and append any relevant supplementary information here, namely, points to note, or an example data set.**

Thirteen cases were referred to the Ombudsman for Housing in this reporting period. The Ombudsman decided not to investigate twelve cases due to Caerphilly Homes undertaking properly made decisions, the customer presenting their complaint to the Ombudsman prematurely or because the issue raised is not for the Ombudsman to investigate and subsequently closed their records. The Ombudsman investigated one case relating to a decision not to undertake adaptations to a property following OT assessments and costings. The assessments undertaken established the required adaptations were not feasible for the property nor the resident and the OT's final recommendation was to suggest the resident move to a suitably adapted property. The support worker for the family challenged this decision and the Ombudsman considered the complaint. The Ombudsman recommended an early resolution and Caerphilly Homes accepted this option which involved a one-off payment of £500 for inconvenience, a letter of apology for our failures in relation to communication and record keeping and a new OT assessment to be carried out on the resident at their property.

Caerphilly Homes recognised the problems largely arose due to the lockdown restrictions coming into force when this case was under active consideration and the sudden transition to home working. This significantly impacted on what was, at that time, a paper-based process and inadequate IT resources were available to staff for an extended period to enable them to work effectively from home. Lessons learned related to the recognition that our traditional record keeping processes worked less effectively under pandemic restrictions, that staff needed access to adequate IT facilities to enable them to work effectively from home and staff needed to improve record keeping of conversations with customers and colleagues and their communication of decisions to customers. Relying on a conversation to advise the customer that their application for assistance was refused and the reasons for that decision, rather than providing a reasoned decision letter, was inadequate.

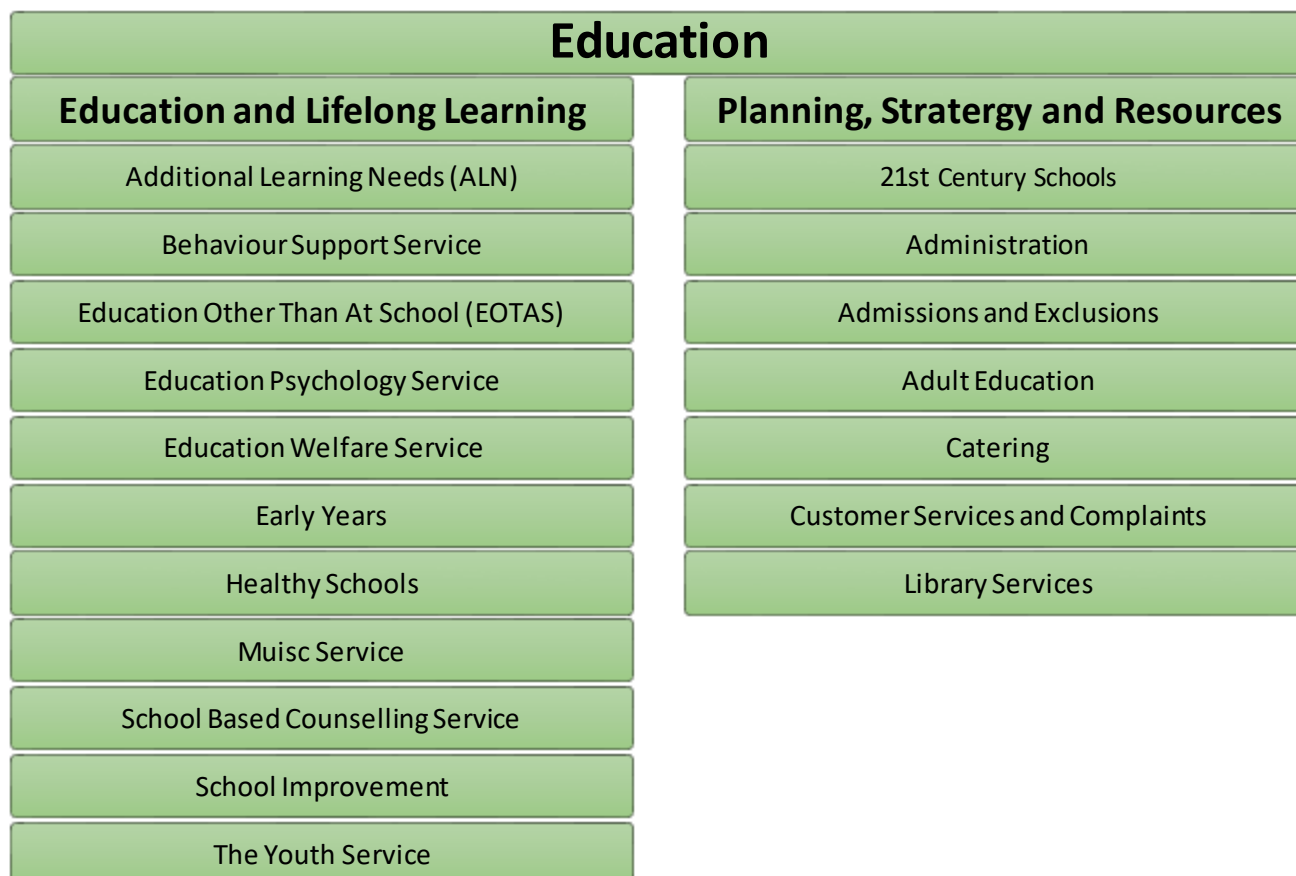
Since that time staff have been provided with IT devices and been reminded that a digital or paper record must be kept of all conversations and decisions related to a case. A reasoned decision letter is now provided to applicants whose application for major works of adaptation is refused, for clarification and to enable them to understand the reasons for this decision being taken.



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1. Directorate and Services identified in-scope for this report

**Diagram of Directorate and Service Framework**



**Brief description of Directorate and Service Framework**

There are: 2 Key Services, with 18 Service Departments. Head of service for Education and Lifelong Learning - Keri Cole. Head of service for Head of Education Planning, Strategy and Resource - Sue Richards.

## 2. Number of complaints by stage type, service, and targets met

### Summary of complaints by stage type reference

Stage Type	Count	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Stage 1	7	5	71.43
Stage 2	2	2	100
Escalated Stage 1 to 2	1	1	100
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>80.00</b>

### Summary of complaints by service, for each stage type

Service	Count Stage 1	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Administration	1	1	100
Catering	1	0	0
Youth Service	2	1	50
ALN and Inclusions Services (ALN)	1	1	100
Early Years	1	1	100
ALN and Inclusions Services (ALN) and Early Years	1	1	100
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>71.43</b>

Service	Count Stage 2	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Scrutiny Meeting	1	1	100
School Admissions	1	1	100
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100</b>

Service	Count Escalated Stage 1 to Stage 2	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Administration	1	1	100
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>100</b>



## How the complaints were received

By source	Count Stage 1	Count Stage 2	Count Escalated Stage 1 to Stage 2
Telephone	0	0	0
Email	6	2	0
Letter	1	1	1
On-line	0	0	0
Contact Centre	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

More detailed information on the above corporate complaints data, is currently maintained, by the Education Customer Service and Complaints officer on a dedicated database.

Where target response times were not met, it has been identified that in one case this was due to the relevant dept. making numerous attempts to contact parent for further information to assist with the investigation (email, telephone, and voicemail). Parent failed to make contact and as a result, the response was issued after 11 working days, not the standard 10-day response timescale for a Stage 1 complaint. In the second case, this was due to the member of staff required to provide information for the investigation was on annual leave. Unfortunately, the member of staff did not use the 'Out of Office' facility within Outlook.

### 3. Key complaints - identified by type or theme

Schools have their own complaints policy/process that must be dealt with by the school. However, the L.A may provide advice and guidance on the School based policy but direct complainants back to the school for response.

All governing bodies are required by law to have a procedure in place for dealing with complaints from parents, pupils, members of staff, governors, members of the local community and others in relation to matters for which the governing body has statutory responsibility.

In terms of corporate complaints we received complaints regarding the following

- Catering – Lack of school meals
- Scrutiny meeting – Role of LA officers attending
- School admissions – Notification to new school following successful transfer request
- Administration – Disagreed with the outcome of a Stage C school-based complaint
- Youth Service – Inappropriate content shared by email and treatment of two members of staff
- ALN and Inclusion Service – Information provided by a member of staff following a Subject Access Request (SAR)
- Early Years - Discrimination and unfair treatment
- Early Years and ALN/Inclusion Services – Child to continue attending current Early Year setting and Matrix report used by ALN/Inclusion Services

#### 4. Number by Category (Commissioner Case Type)

##### Complaints by Commissioner Case Type, for prescribed Categories

Category	Count Stage 1, Stage 2 & Escalated 1 to 2
1 Collaborative Working	0
2 Decision Making	1
3 Delay in Service Provision	0
4 Officer/Contractors Conduct with public (including sensitivity/empathy of staff/politeness)	2
5a Following Council Policies	0
5b Following relevant Legislation	0
6 Accessibility of Services	1
7 Clarity/Accuracy/Timeliness of information	0
8 Quality of Work	0
9 Openness/ Fairness and Honesty	1
10 Compliance with Complaints procedure	2
11 Combination of categories	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10</b>

#### 5. Number by Outcome and lessons learned comments

##### Complaints by Outcome Data sets as categorised by the Complaints Standards Authority.

Service	Upheld	Not Upheld
Catering	0	1
Scrutiny function	0	1
Schools Admission	1	0
Administration	0	2
Youth Service	0	2
ALN and Inclusions Services (ALN)	0	1
Early Years	0	1
Early Years and ALN/Inclusion Services	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>

### **Stage 1 Complaint - Category 6 (Accessibility of Services). No access to school meal provision**

Complaint received from parent regarding school running out of meals at lunch time. The parent explained that the child received free school meals but because the school ran out of meals for a period of 3 days, the parent has now provided a packed lunch. The Parent states she is aware that her child is not the only one going hungry due to food shortages.

In response the Cook In Charge confirmed the kitchen has never ran out of food, and could it be that the child may not have liked the food choices remaining.

The Cook/team of catering staff always encourage pupils to approach them first thing in the morning so they can pre-order the choice for that day, which allows the staff to prepare and store these items until the pupil approaches the counter for service. The investigating officer apologised if the child was not aware of this.

The deadline for our response was 24th September. The catering dept. made numerous attempts to contact parent for further information to assist with the investigation (email, telephone, and voicemail) but were unsuccessful and so the final response was then issued on 27th September.

#### **Complaint not upheld**

**Actions** - While there was no further action taken with this complaint, staff have been reminded of the importance to adhere to the response timescales, and the importance of notifying the complainant if we expect to exceed these.

**Monitoring** - Ensure all responses are sent via the Education Complaints Officer. This enables an improved/centralised monitoring of timescales. The complaints officer plays an active role to ensure timescales are met and will remind staff the importance of a timely response. Where it is not possible to complete the investigation within timescale, staff are encouraged to use the "extension of time letter" extending the deadline. This ensures the complainant is updated throughout the process of the investigation and the reason(s) why additional time is required.

### **Stage 1 Complaint – Category 4 (Officers Conduct with Public). Inappropriate content shared by email**

The complaint states that an offensive email was shared by a member of staff from the Youth Service

The officer confirmed that during the first lockdown weekly motivational/funny videos were sent to parents in an effort to increase morale. The video the complainant received was part of this effort. The officer confirmed that all videos were checked prior to distribution and deemed those sent to be suitable. The officer also confirmed that in no way would the video have been deliberately shared if they believed this could cause upset/distress. The videos chosen were based on the officer's knowledge of the young people and parents. For example, if someone had a dislike of cats, the officer would ensure that videos of/including cats were not sent to parents. The YouTube video in question was viewed as part of the investigation and at no point were the alleged images visible.

#### **Complaint not upheld**

**Stage 1 Complaint – Category 4 (Officers Conduct with Public). Information provided by a member of staff following a Subject Access Request (SAR) and information withheld following the SAR.**

The complainant alleged that a member of CCBC staff provided falsified documentation which was then used by the school to confirm a meeting that never actually took place on 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2018 where a Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF) referral form was completed in the presence of the complainant's mother

As the meeting took place over 4 years ago, the officer could not agree or disagree that she was present during the JAFF referral meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018. However, as this meeting was in relation to a JAFF referral, this would have been arranged and recorded by the school.

The recording system used by the school (CORE-NET), confirms the JAFF referral was received by the Child Protection designate (deputy headteacher) on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March and a meeting with the designated officer and parent was arranged for the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2018. The CORE-NET record dated 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018 confirms the meeting went ahead and the JAFF referral was completed.

As the meeting was arranged by the school, the deputy headteacher was able to provide further details/evidence of the meeting. This evidence placed the CCBC officer, deputy headteacher and complainant's mother at the meeting.

The complainant alleges the same member of CCBC staff was withholding documents requested as part of the SAR relating to a one-to-one meeting with the complainant on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March.

The member of staff confirmed all information relating to this meeting was previously supplied as part of the SAR. The officer was also able to provide the page numbers of documents supplied relating specifically to the meeting that took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2018.

**Complaint not upheld**

Please note – Advice was sought from Legal Services regarding the serious allegation of falsified documentation. As such, the following sentence was included within our response:

*This is a serious allegation against an employee of the Local Authority and based on the evidence available and lack of evidence from you to support this part of your complaint. I am satisfied XXXX XXXX was present during the JAFF referral meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018.*

**Stage 1 Complaint – Category 11 Combination of categories. Discrimination and unfair treatment**

The complainant raised a number of concerns in relation to LA and external services. The complainant raised concerns regarding Health Visitors, Speech and Language Therapy – Early intervention, ISCAN (integrated service for children with additional needs), School Admissions, Early Years, Family Information Service, Assisted Placement, pre-school nursery? . The investigation was conducted into the LA provided services only. The external organisations conducted their own investigation and issued their response separately. In terms of the issues relevant to the local authority they were thoroughly investigated. **Complaint not upheld.**

- Why was there a delay in replying to queries?
- Why wasn't contact made regarding a possible care coordinator?
- Why is parent not informed of an update after every panel meeting?

- Why was the parent provided with an out-of-date list of assisted and funded places framework?
- Why does the admission process for schools not work during half term time?
- Parent states her child was removed out of a school on good faith and verbal reassurance everything was in hand for them to be able to be in a placement close by, to then be told that there is no funding.
- Why is there no funding for children with additional needs in the pre-school nursery?

**Stage 1 Complaint – Category 11 combination of categories. Child to continue attending current Early Year setting and Matrix report used by ALN/Inclusion Services**

The first element of the complaint was in relation to the request for the complainant's child to continue attending his current setting on the grounds that they do not become school statutory age until March 2023. Complainant also made a request for her child to stay in their current setting with the appropriate funding to be granted.

The first element of the complaint was investigated with our Early Years Service and Welsh Government (WG). While the child was not legally required to attend their statutory school placement until the term after they turn 5 years (April 2023). The reception placement is offered from the September in the academic year in which the child turns 5 (Sept 2022). For clarification, the query was raised with WG. The response from WG confirms the Childcare Offer would not be eligible after August 2022 should they chose not to accept the reception place offered for the child:

*At the start of the school term when a child is eligible to receive a full-time education place, the child will no longer be eligible to access the Offer. In the majority of local authorities, children will be offered a full-time education place from the September after they turn 4. Where a school offers a staggered start to the term, parents will not be eligible to use the Offer for these term-time day(s) / week(s) when their child is not actually in the school.*

The second element of the complaint was in relation to the ALN Matrix document designed for children/young people aged 3-19yrs on roll at Local Authority and Grant Maintained Schools and Referral Units. The complainant believes the Matrix document is a tick box exercise and not specific to XXXX needs. As such, how can it be used to write an Individual Development Plan (IDP) for XXXX. The complainant made a request that CCBC overhaul their policies & procedures to offer a truly person-centred approach to ALN.

The Matrix document is the first edition and the South East Wales Consortia (SEWC) are continuing to develop the Matrix for different interfaces. Comments relating to Early Years will be considered as part of future developments. The LA confirmed that the Matrix has been developed as an 'online' tool. The purpose of the Matrix is not to categorise or diagnose, but to identify the barriers to learning a pupil may be experiencing. The ALN Assessment Matrix is a pupil centred tool, which identifies the complexity and interrelationship of difficulties, which require Additional Learning Provision (ALP). The ALN policies and procedures have been produced regionally in line with the ALN Code and follow a person-centred approach to ALN. **Complaint not upheld.**

### **Stage 1 Complaint – Category 4 (Officers Conduct with Public). Treatment by two members of staff**

The complainant provided a number of concerns raised between November 2021 and March 2022 in relation to the treatment she received from two members of staff at a group setting. Each concern was individually investigated, and the appropriate evidence obtained. The information provided by the two officers, managers and daily logs confirmed there was no evidence to substantiate the complaint.

The deadline for our response was Friday the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 2022. Further information was requested on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, but the officer required to provide this information was on leave. Unfortunately, the officer did not use the 'out of office' function within Outlook and as a result, the complaints officer was awaiting a response to complete the investigation and respond within timescale. **Complaint not upheld.**

**Due to the number of concerns raised – further information regarding this complaint can be provided upon request from the Education Complaints Officer Liam Miles (Contact details on Page 9 of this report).**

**Actions** - While there was no further action taken with this complaint, staff have been reminded to use the 'out of office' function within Outlook when taking a period of leave.

**Monitoring** – If information has been requested on the deadline date and this has not been supplied by the end of the working day. The complaints officer will use the "extension of time letter"

### **Stage 2 Complaint - Category 2 Decision Making (Scrutiny Meeting). Investigation conducted by Lisa Lane (Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer)**

The complainant states that it is their understanding the role of Officers attending a scrutiny committee meeting is not to inform members how they must vote or express personal views, but rather to support the decision-making process by answering questions when asked by members. The complaint raised concerns about the number of questions asked by members that were avoided or left unanswered during the meeting, but of most alarm was the officer's involvement at the end of the Trinity Field expansion discussion when a motion was tabled to explore options for a new build on a brownfield site.

Despite a motion being tabled and the Chair having closed the debate, 3 officers intervened at this point and informed the members that they should not be voting on this or against the report.

The planning officer was correct in their comments as they related to the role of the Local Planning Authority in its consideration of the mitigation as part of the planning process and the consideration of the Planning Application. The setting aside of the sum of money referred to in the second recommendation (i.e the funding only) in the report was a function of Cabinet. The Scrutiny Committee's role in this matter was to make recommendations to Cabinet, it is not the final decision maker. In terms of the decision made by Cabinet on 7th April, it was noted the detailed minutes on the Council's website which culminated in its decision to support the recommendations in the report. **Complaint not upheld**

**Stage 2 Complaint – Category 11 Combination of categories. Late application by parents and human error as staff failed to email school confirming placement.**

Unfortunately, this child's application form was received after the closing date for school placement. All places available were allocated in the first round of admissions. As such, the child's name was not included on this list of children allocated a place.

The family appealed and the hearing took place during the summer holidays, schools are unfortunately not available for contact during this time. Emails are sent to schools during the holidays advising of any further pupils, however, they will not open these until the first day of term. Schools then normally make contact with parents to arrange a start date. In this child's case, an email was not sent due to human error, however, when the family arrived at the school with their child, contact was made with the admissions team and the matter was resolved quickly, with the school admitting the child immediately.

This was an unusual case as the admissions officer originally dealing with the case was on maternity leave. The officer responsible for taking over the case was unaware the new school had not been notified of the placement and as result, this caused confusion when the child attended her new school in September. **Complaint upheld**

**Actions** - The admission team has taken note of this human error and staff have been reminded that there must always be an effective line of communication to ensure instances like this do not happen again.

**Monitoring** - Handover meetings are undertaken when staff take a planned period of leave. Workload is discussed and officers are informed of any outstanding cases that require action/follow-up.

**Stage 1/2 Complaint - Category 10 Compliance with Complaints procedure.**

The complainant made a request for an independent investigation into the decision of a school's complaint committee (members from the Governing Body) and LA complaints staff following a Stage C hearing (final process of a school-based complaint).

Stage 1 - Parent unhappy with the outcome reached by governors following a Stage C hearing. Parent made a request for the LA to investigate.

The complaints officer at the time addressed the points raised within the correspondence but explained that the LA was unable to proceed with the request to conduct an independent review of the governor's decision as there is no appeal to the Governing Body's decision; Welsh Government circular 011/2012 Complaints procedure for school governing bodies Wales, page 31 paragraph 6.20: '*the governing body complaints committee is the final arbiter of complaints*'. **The complaint was not upheld** on the grounds that the complaints officer carried out an appropriate investigation within the realms of their responsibility as an Education Officer and in line with WG procedure details stated above '*the governing body complaints committee is the final arbiter of complaints*'.

Stage 2 – Parent remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 1 complaint and wished to progress to Stage 2 on the grounds that the LA failed to intervene with the complaint against the complaints committee. Decision was not upheld on the grounds that all local authority officers have responded to the parent appropriately and within their remit. **Complaint not upheld**



I can report that the use of the “extension of time letter” has been fully embraced by staff and is working effectively as and when required.

## 6. Identified relationships to Equalities or Welsh Language

### Complaints that relate to the Equalities or Welsh Language protected characteristics

Characteristic Strand	Count Stage 1, Stage 2 & Escalated 1 to 2	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Age	0	0	0
Disability	0	0	0
Gender Reassignment	0	0	0
Marriage and Civil Partnership	0	0	0
Pregnancy and Maternity	0	0	0
Race	0	0	0
Religion/Belief or Non-belief	0	0	0
Sex	0	0	0
Sexual Orientation	0	0	0
Welsh Language	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

No specific characteristics links have been identified for this reporting period

## 7. Annex – Referrals to Ombudsman, complaints resulting from appeals and examples of relevant items (points to note) specific to this reporting period

No complaints were referred to the Ombudsman for the April 2021 to March 2022 period.

**For further information, please contact**

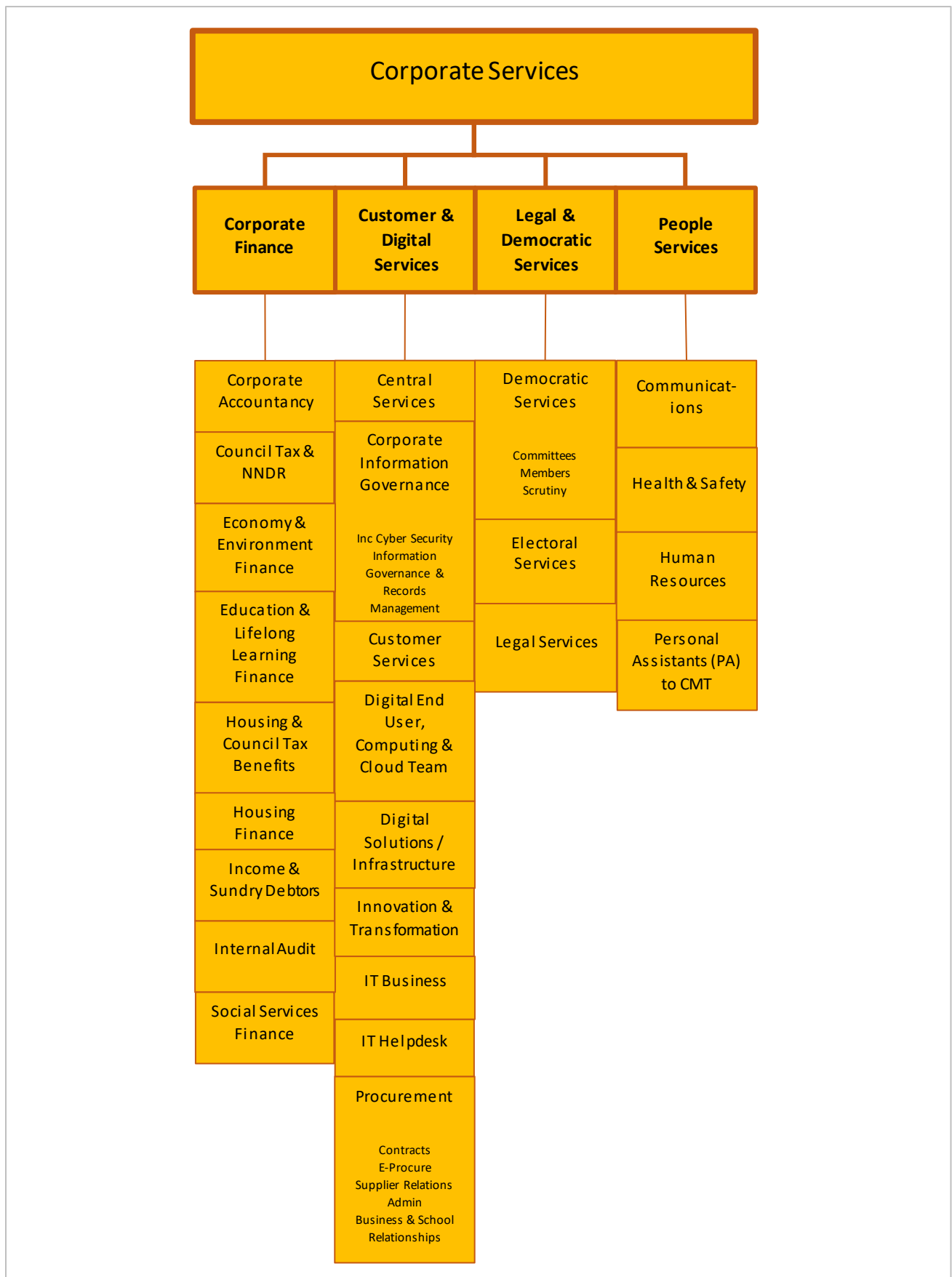
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Diagram of Directorate and Service Framework



## 2. Number of complaints by Stage Type, Service, and Targets Met

Table showing summary of complaints by stage type reference

Stage Type	Count	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Stage 1	17	12	66.67%
Stage 2	5	4	100%
Escalated Stage 1 to 2	5	5	100%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>77.77%</b>

Table showing how the complaints were received

By source	Count Stage 1	Count Stage 2	Count Escalated Stage 1 to Stage 2
Telephone	2	2	1
Email	8	2	4
Letter	4	0	0
On-line	3	1	0
Contact Centre	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>

Tables showing summary of complaints by service, for each stage type

Service	Count Stage 1	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Legal Services/Electoral Services	1	1	100%
Customer Services	1	1	100%
Corporate Finance	15	10	66.67%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>70.58%</b>

Service	Count Stage 2	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Legal Services/Electoral Services	2	1	50%
Customer Services	1	1	100%
Corporate Finance	2	2	100%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>80%</b>

Service	Count Escalated Stage 1 to Stage 2	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Legal Services & Electoral Services	0	0	0
Customer Services	1	1	100%
Corporate Finance	4	4	100%

<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100%</b>
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Corporate Services complaints which are not Corporate Finance comprises 3 complaints for Legal Services/Electoral Services which was a Stage 1 and two stage 2 complaints, There were 3 complaints for Customer Services which was two stage 1 complaints of which one escalated to stage 2.

The target was not met on the complaint for Legal Services as further investigations were necessary, but the complainant would not agree to an extension of time.

In relation to Corporate Finance, unfortunately target dates were not met for 5 stage 1's due to the following reasons:-

- Council Tax – the correspondence had been passed around various departments before reaching council tax
- Housing Benefits - due to an increase in workloads.
- NNDR - delay partially due to the annual billing processes being undertaken and the business rate system being unavailable for a period of a week.
- Corporate Finance Combined - misunderstanding with corporate complaints responses times and Christmas period.
- Council Tax/Env Health - grants work, Ingress 11 upgrade – is this a systems upgrade? and other service pressures.

### 3. Key complaints - Identified by Type or Theme

**List of key specific types, or themes, of repetitive, or pertinent complaints received during this reporting period.**

There have been no trends identified within corporate services and the complaints cover a range of issues including the following:-

Correspondence issued in English only, complaints via the telephone in Welsh and the information on the website regarding complaints

Procedural matters regarding an item considered at a scrutiny committee which were investigated and not upheld.

The process regarding a bulky waste collection and the refunds policy which was not upheld.

There were no particular themes of repetitive or pertinent complaints received in relation to Corporate Finance.

### 4. Number by of Complaints by Category

**Table showing complaints by Commissioner Case Type, for prescribed Categories**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Count Stage 1, Stage 2 &amp; Escalated 1 to 2</b>
1 Collaborative Working	0
2 Decision Making	2

3 Delay in Service Provision	1
4 Officer/Contractors Conduct with public (including sensitivity/empathy of staff/politeness)	2
5a Following Council Policies	4
5b Following relevant Legislation	1
6 Accessibility of Services	1
7 Clarity/Accuracy/Timeliness of information	6
8 Quality of Work	0
9 Openness/ Fairness and Honesty	0
10 Compliance with Complaints procedure	0
11 Combination of categories	10
<b>Totals</b>	<b>27</b>

## 5. Number of Complaints by Outcome and Lessons Learned

**Table showing number of complaints Upheld and Not Upheld**

Service	Upheld	Not Upheld
Customer Services	0	3
Corporate Finance	8	13
Legal services/Electoral Services	1	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>18</b>

The following table shows examples of lessons learned, with comments on key findings, resulting from the complaints in this reporting period, that may help curtail, prevent, or impede future repeats.

Nature of Complaint	Lessons Learned	Category
Stage1: Council Tax – The complainant was being asked to pay council tax but had already spoken to an officer previously who advised that the account was clear.	To use the points raised in this complaint for staff training and development namely as follows. Currently staff are instructed to enter a note on the Council Tax computer system, however this is not always done if the telephone enquiry is routine in nature. Having call recording in order to listen back to the full telephone conversation would have allowed the Manager to listen to the full telephone conversation and the advice given during the call. This would help with staff training and development which in turn should lead to better customer service. Secondly the complainant was advised to put complaint in writing but this could have been registered over the telephone. Staff have been reminded of this element of the Council's complaint procedure. Thirdly, the complainant was advised that calls are not recorded because of payment details and	7 Clarity/ Accuracy/ Timeliness of information

	sensitive information. This is incorrect and again staff made aware of this so that they don't mislead customers. The Council is working towards introducing call recording as a priority	
Stages 1 & 2: Social Services Finance - The complaint related to homecare charges and the way in which payments are collected.	The complaint highlighted that it could be made clearer to service users and their representatives when completing a Direct Debit Mandate that any services invoiced against an individual's account will be collected through the same mandate and it is not specific to the one service. As a result, we will take steps to make this clearer in the future.	7 Clarity/ Accuracy/ Timeliness of information
Stage 1: Council Tax – The complaint related to a request for a council tax refund on a deceased relative's property and a request for information which had already been provided in an earlier email.	The staff member who dealt with second email should have checked and searched the inbox for the first email before contacting complainant again.	3 Delay in Service Provision  4 Officer/ Contractors Conduct with public (including sensitivity/ empathy of staff/ politeness)
Stage 1: Council Tax - Complainant rang council tax to set up a direct debit on her account. Ms M was asked for her account number and upon giving this information was read back her name and address without being asked to complete data protection.	Remind all staff that they must request the above information before disclosing any Council Tax account details.	5a Following Council Policies
Stage 1: Housing Benefits - Advice not given by the HB Section in respect of claiming universal credit which has now left her in substantial arrears of rent.	Training has been provided with regards to issues raised. To be raised in team leader meeting to increase awareness with staff	3 Delay in Service Provision  7 Clarity/ Accuracy/ Timeliness of information
Esc 1 to 2: Housing Benefits - Complaint from Citizens Advice on behalf of HB claimants re. Housing benefits and loss of earnings.	All Housing Benefits staff have been made aware of this case. It is difficult in these circumstances for Benefits Assessors to give the best advice when not all the facts are available at the time and any delay will have a detrimental effect. But if they are mindful of the consequences of this type of issue it can be prevented from happening again.	2 Decision Making

<p>Stage 1: NNDR - Withdrawal of the Retail, Leisure &amp; Hospitality grant from their business rates account and how it was withdrawn leaving the small business with a very large bill. Requested bill be put on hold whilst resolving the matter.</p>	<p>Going forward there will be procedures in place to check that the ratepayer continues to satisfy the eligibility criteria for the award of this particular rate relief at intervals throughout the financial year. This check will enable more timely contact to be made with the ratepayer where they do not advise the business rate team of a change in circumstance.</p>	<p>7 Clarity/ Accuracy/ Timeliness of information</p>
<p>Stage 1 : Legal Services/Electoral Services</p> <p>A complaint identified a number of issues including the electoral registration process in the medium of Welsh, dealing with complaints in Welsh and the information available on the council's website relating to the complaints process..</p>	<p>It was acknowledged that the registration letter should have contained the web address of the Welsh Language response service.</p> <p>Electoral services have appointed a member of staff who is Welsh speaking and able to deal with contacts in Welsh, however if that staff member is unavailable a call back will be arranged.</p> <p>The information regarding the complaints process was updated to make it clearer how to complain.</p> <p>The development of the Chatbot will continue and will be trained on complaints. Where it doesn't recognise certain words it will give a number to call.</p>	<p>7 Clarity/ Accuracy/ Timeliness of information</p>

## 6. Identified relationships to Equalities or Welsh Language

Table showing a count and list of findings resulting from the complaints in this reporting period, that specifically relate to the Equalities or Welsh Language protected characteristics.

Characteristic Strand	Count Stage 1, Stage 2
-----------------------	---------------------------



	<b>&amp; Escalated 1 to 2</b>
Age	0
Disability	0
Gender Reassignment	0
Marriage and Civil Partnership	0
Pregnancy and Maternity	0
Race	0
Religion/Belief or Non-belief	0
Sex	0
Sexual Orientation	0
Welsh Language	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1</b>

## 7. Annex – Referrals to Ombudsman, complaints resulting from appeals and examples of relevant items (points to note) specific to this reporting period

Reference/Service Area	Outcome/Decision	Details of Early Resolution/recommendation
OMB1 – Finance	Premature – Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB2 – Customer Services	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB3 – Council Tax	Not Investigating	No Further Action

### For further information, please contact

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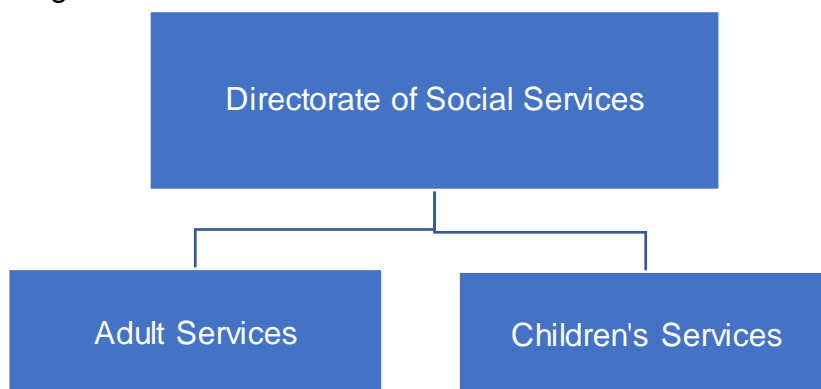
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## 1. Directorate and Services

Diagram of Directorate and Service Framework.



### Brief description of Directorate and Service Framework

There are 2 key services, these being Adult Services and Children's Services.

Adult Services provide a wide range of specialist services to members of the community over eighteen years of age, who experience difficulties on a day to day basis due to problems ranging from mental health, physical or sensory disability to drug and alcohol misuse.

Children's Services provide a range of services to children, young people, and their families, in partnership with many other agencies and voluntary organisations. The overall aim is to support children and young people to remain living with their own families wherever this is safe to do so.

## 2. Number of Complaints by Stage Type, Service, and Targets Met

Stage Type	Count	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Stage 1	63	57	95%
Stage 2	1	0	0
Escalated Stage 1 to 2	9	8	100%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>89%</b>

Of the 63 stage 1 complaints 3 were withdrawn and so the percentage completed in target times are based on the 60 complaints responded to. 1 complaint went straight to stage 2 and this was completed 2 days over timescale. Of the 9 that escalated from Stage 1 to 2, 1 was withdrawn and so the percentage completed in target time is based on the 8 responded to overall at Stage 2. The total number of complaints responded to was 69, of these 99% were completed in target times.

**Table showing how the complaints were received.**

By source	Count Stage 1	Count Stage 2	Count Escalated Stage 1 to Stage 2
Telephone	19	0	4
Email	35	1	5
Letter	4	0	0
On-line	5	0	0
Contact Centre	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>

**Tables showing summary of complaints by service, for each stage type**

Service	Count Stage 1	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Adult Services	35	34	97%
Children's Services	28	23	82%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>90%</b>

Of the 35 adult stage 1 complaints 1 was withdrawn which has reduced the percentage completed in target times. Of the 34 that were responded to 100% were completed in target times.

Of the 28 children's stage 1 complaints 2 were withdrawn which has reduced the percentage completed in target times. Of the 26 that were responded to 88.46% were completed in target times.

Service	Count Stage 2	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Adult Services	1	0	0%
Children's Services	0	0	0%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>

The adult's complaint that proceeded straight to stage 2 was completed 2 days over timescale.

Service	Count Escalated Stage 1 to Stage 2	Count Completed in Target Times	Percentage Completed in Target Times
Adult Services	4	3	75%
Children's Services	5	5	100%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>89%</b>

Of the 4 adult's complaints that escalated from stage 1 to stage 2, 1 was withdrawn which has reduced the percentage completed in target times. Of the 3 that were responded to 100% were completed in target times.

More detailed information on the above corporate complaints data in respect of Social Services, is currently maintained, by the Social Services Complaints and Information Team on an Excel matrix. A report is also provided to Scrutiny Committee which includes detail of Social Services and Corporate complaints.

Where the target times were not met, this was due to the number of issues raised by one complainant and the different teams involved in the complaint and the Covid-19 situation.

### **3. Key Complaints - Identified by Type or Theme**

**List of key specific types, or themes, of repetitive, or pertinent complaints received during this reporting period.**

Level of Day Services and requests for day centres to re-open – 6 complaints referred to this matter

Contact stopped with grandchild

Address disclosed and feels at risk

Not being kept informed about grandchildren

Incorrect information used and outcome of assessment

Professionalism in way case was handled

Discrepancy with invoice

Staff attitude

Hassling family

Non-factual information provided to Court

Care home fees

Safeguarding process not followed

Parking outside residents' property

Monitoring care package not sufficient

Residential Care not sufficient

Careline difficulties

Not treated with dignity and respect

Council fees for self-funding

Back payment of direct payments rejected

Disabled Person Parking Place form inadequate

Care not being assessed holistically

Child Protection investigation being handled insensitively given conflicting information

Contents of report untrue and opinionated

Care Package reduced

Care call cancelled at short notice

Length of time waiting for a care package

The type or themes identified above, have been extracted from the following table which shows the incoming number of complaints by specific service sectors or teams during this reporting period.

Service Group or Team	Count Stage 1, Stage 2 & Escalated 1 to 2
Adult Services	40
Children's Services	33
<b>Totals</b>	<b>73</b>

#### 4. Number of Complaints by Category

Table showing complaints by category.

Category	Count Stage 1, Stage 2 & Escalated 1 to 2
1 Collaborative Working	0
2 Decision Making	23
3 Delay in Service Provision	3
4 Officer/Contractors Conduct with public (including sensitivity/empathy of staff/politeness)	9
5a Following Council Policies	0
5b Following relevant Legislation	0
6 Accessibility of Services	4
7 Clarity/Accuracy/Timeliness of information	4
8 Quality of Work	16
9 Openness/ Fairness and Honesty	2
10 Compliance with Complaints procedure	0
11. Combination of Categories (Non-specific)	12
<b>Totals</b>	<b>73</b>

#### 5. Number of Complaints by Outcome and Lessons Learned

Service	Upheld	Not Upheld
Adult Services	4	34
Children's Services	2	29
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>63</b>

Of the 69 complaints responded to 91% were not upheld and 9% were upheld.

**List of lessons learned. Comments on key findings resulting from the complaints in this reporting period, that may help curtail, prevent, or impede future repeats.**

The lessons learnt below relate to the 6 complaints referred to in table 5 above that were upheld.

Nature of Complaint	Lessons Learnt	Category
<p>Feels family have been put at risk following her address being provided in report to her partner's ex-partner and her boyfriend.</p>	<p>Staff to remove address when asked to keep it confidential.</p>	<p>8 Quality of Work</p>
<p>Carers supporting a vulnerable neighbour are parking outside complainant's property and blocking driveway. Also subjected to verbal confrontation by a carer who was blocking his driveway.</p>	<p>Staff reminded of appropriate parking and notes have been added to carers handheld devices that they do not park in this area. All existing staff and new will see this notification and will prevent this from happening again.</p>	<p>4 Officer /Contractors Conduct with public (including sensitivity/empathy of staff/politeness)</p>
<p>Discrepancy occurred with invoices relating to Aunt's care. Refund completed and further discrepancy occurred. Complainant spoke to Finance Team and team member was offensive and ignored her request to investigate the discrepancy.</p>	<p>A full investigation has been carried out and the whole of the account checked which determined that inaccuracies had been made and these were rectified.</p> <p>As a way forward it was agreed with the complainant that invoicing be done on a step-by-step process so that these could be checked and agreed before progressing with each stage.</p> <p>An apology was provided for any offence that may have been caused by the officer, however the Directorate was unable to look into this matter further without the name of the officer involved or more detail regarding this.</p>	<p>7. Clarity/Accuracy/Timeliness of information</p>
<p>Complainant unhappy with the contents of an email received from the Complaints and Information Team.</p>	<p>Given the level of detail in the complainant's emails it was not felt appropriate to send a basic acknowledgement and the specific issues were acknowledged. A sincere apology was provided to complainant.</p>	<p>4 Officer/Contractors Conduct with public (including sensitivity/empathy of staff/politeness)</p>

<p>Complainant unhappy that grandfather's evening support call has been cancelled at short notice and no one made her aware. wants the evening visit reinstated.</p>	<p>Apology provided.</p> <p>Owing to the crisis in social care, a panel has been set up with the SS Directorate to consider all requests for domiciliary care.</p>	<p>6 Accessibility of Services</p>
<p>Feels the loophole in the system of a patient in the Medical Assessment Unit not belonging to a hospital discharge team needs to be looked at, especially in the current climate.</p> <p>Told she was being transferred, then finding said social worker was not even in work.</p> <p>Mother is in need now and leaving the situation as it is into a 6th week is totally unacceptable.</p>	<p>When an individual is admitted to the MAU, those that need admission to hospital for further care would normally be moved to one of the wards. But due to the challenges of Covid 19 has resulted in a shortage of beds and unfortunately mother remained in the MAU.</p> <p>It is CCBC Social services' process to support patients once they are referred to us by the hospital. This process can be hindered if we do not get notification via the referral system that someone needs care.</p> <p>Apology given. Remedial action taken to remind staff about effective communication.</p> <p>Apology given for delay in responding to the assessment request. Owing to the current crisis in social care that the Team had a waiting list for assessments. When case was allocated, there was lack of response due to circumstances beyond the worker's control and sincere apologies provided as this is not the standard of service that we expect.</p>	<p>11 (3. Delay in service provision 4. Officer conduct with public)</p>

The Directorate is committed to learning from complaints received in order to influence positive change. Information from complaints is an invaluable source of user feedback. The Directorate makes the best use of this information about complaints and uses the results to inform policy and ensure that practice is changed in response to highlighted areas of concern, this is done in discussion with Senior Management to agree an action plan to address the issues.

## 6. Identified relationships to Equalities or Welsh Language

Table showing a count and list of findings resulting from the complaints in this reporting period, that specifically relate to the Equalities or Welsh Language protected characteristics.

Characteristic Strand	Count Stage 1, Stage 2 & Escalated 1 to 2
Age	0
Disability	0



Gender Reassignment	0
Marriage and Civil Partnership	0
Pregnancy and Maternity	0
Race	0
Religion/Belief or Non-belief	0
Sex	0
Sexual Orientation	0
Welsh Language	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>

## 7. Annex – Referrals to Ombudsman, complaints resulting from appeals and examples of relevant items (points to note) specific to this reporting period

Identify how many referrals to the Ombudsman and list and append any relevant supplementary information here, namely, points to note, or an example data set.

3 referrals were made to the Ombudsman relating to Corporate/Social Services complaints. Of the 3 Corporate/Social Services complaints in the table below the decision was made not to investigate matters in 2 of these cases and in the remaining 1 case an early resolution was made as outlined in the table.

<u>Reference</u>	<u>Outcome</u>	<u>Details of Early Resolution/recommendations</u>
OMB01	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB09	Not Investigating	No Further Action
OMB12	Early Resolution	<p>Within 1 month of the Ombudsman’s decision:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To provide a written apology to complainant for not addressing complaints under the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations (“the Regulations”) in the first instance, and for failing to advise of statutory right to progress concerns to the Independent Stage 2 Investigation under the Regulations.</li> <li>2. To offer complainant redress in the sum of £125 for time and trouble in pursuing concerns under the Regulations.</li> <li>3. To appoint an Independent Investigator to progress concerns under Stage 2 of the Regulations.</li> <li>4. To provide Ombudsman with a copy of the Stage 2 investigation report within one month of its completion</li> </ol> <p>The above recommendations were agreed and completed.</p>

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## CABINET – 19TH OCTOBER 2022

**SUBJECT: INTERIM JOINT PROTOCOL FOR MILEAGE RATES IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES**

### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet approval to adopt the 'Joint Protocol Mileage Rates in Local Authorities in Wales' to provide a temporary increase in mileage reimbursements costs in the short term to address current market volatility in fuel rates.

### 2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Welsh Local Authorities have acknowledged the impact of the current cost of living crisis on the workforce and the immediate pressures presented as a consequence of unprecedented increases in fuel costs.
- 2.2 The Joint Protocol attached at Appendix 1 was drafted by WLGA on behalf of Leaders and it is for each Local Authority to decide whether they wish to adopt it.
- 2.3 The Joint Protocol enables those eligible through existing Local Authority policies to claim an additional agreed sum per mile up to an agreed maximum, to mitigate against the impact of sustained high fuel costs

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Cabinet are asked to adopt the 'Joint Protocol Mileage Rates in Local Authorities in Wales' attached at Appendix 1 and apply its provisions as a temporary arrangement within the Council's Mileage Scheme.

### 4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Joint Protocol is recommended to Cabinet to assist employees during this cost of living crisis by temporarily increasing the reimbursement for the mileage rate in accordance with an agreed threshold.

## 5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 Cabinet will be aware that the UK has been experiencing a cost of living crisis since late 2021, caused predominantly by high inflation outstripping wage and benefit increases, which has been further exacerbated by recent tax increases, resulting in the fall in disposable incomes.
- 5.2 This crisis is acutely affecting our communities and the need for targeted additional Council support is paramount. A report was presented to Cabinet on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and the Council on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2022, which set out the Council's proposed package of additional support in order to guide and help our communities through these difficult financial conditions.
- 5.3 The cost of living crisis is also affecting all of our employees financially in one way or another, as highlighted in the 'Workforce Capacity and Associated Challenges' report presented to Policy and Resources Scrutiny on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and also at Cabinet today.
- 5.4 The Council is naturally being asked by the Trade Unions to offer support to employees. The Council is looking at possible options but has to take account of national conditions of service and pay negotiating bodies, financial regulations and work being considered by national committees. The Joint Protocol at Appendix 1 provides such an opportunity.
- 5.5 The agreed rate of reimbursement for mileage rates for Local Government Employees is determined locally by each Local Authority and the majority of Local Authorities in Wales, including Caerphilly CBC, adopt the HMRC Approved Mileage Allowance Payments (AMAP) rates. The HMRC AMAP rate provides approved rates for the reimbursement of mileage without incurring tax or national insurance. The current rates are detailed below:

Type of Vehicle	First 10,000 miles	Above 10,000 miles
Car	45p	25p
Motorcycle	24p	24p

- 5.6 These rates have remained static since 2011/12.
- 5.7 The Heads of HR in Wales have written to HMRC and the Local Government Association (LGA) has written to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, urging them to review the HMRC AMAP rate, to no avail.
- 5.8 Further to a request from Leaders at the WLGA Executive Board on 17 July 2022, the attached Joint Protocol was prepared and the content approved by Group Leaders on behalf of the WLGA Executive Board. The Joint Protocol has also been shared with the Joint Council for Wales (JCW) Executive and the Trade Unions have formally agreed the proposal and requested its implementation.
- 5.9 This protocol does not replace current local arrangements but offers, through mutual agreement between Local Government Employers and Trade Unions in Wales, a temporary arrangement that is triggered by an increase in fuel rates that exceed an agreed threshold, the arrangement is similarly removed when fuel rates reduce below that same threshold.

- 5.10 The arrangement, once triggered and until removed, will enable those eligible through existing Local Authority policies to claim an additional agreed sum per mile up to an agreed maximum, to mitigate against the impact of sustained high fuel costs. The additional payment will be subject to tax and national insurance.
- 5.11 The Joint Protocol provides the agreed sum for reimbursement; the threshold at which an increase would come into force; an independent reference point to guide decision making; the point at which the threshold would need to be breached to trigger an increase or the point at which it would be removed and a summary of the threshold, reference point and rate for reimbursement.
- 5.12 The Joint Protocol provides the ability to claim an additional payment of 5 pence per mile where tax and NI are paid and 3 pence per mile where tax and NI are not paid, with reimbursement up to a maximum of 50 pence per mile, when an agreed threshold is breached. The ability to claim the additional payment will be withdrawn when the HMRC advisory fuel rate assessment returns below this threshold.
- 5.13 For Council employees, this would provide a mileage rate of 50p per mile for the first 10,000 miles claimed and 30p per mile for any claims above 10,000 miles when the agreed threshold of £1.50 per litre or 15.2 pence per mile is reached.
- 5.14 This interim Joint Protocol will take effect from 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and will expire on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. It is subject to review and can be amended by joint agreement. This includes the opportunity to reconsider the threshold as a part of any review.

## **Conclusion**

- 5.15 The interim Joint Protocol provides the Council with an opportunity to offer support to employees at this time of a cost of living crisis, which is making fuel rates very volatile, in accordance with recognised national committees.

## **6. ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 No assumptions have been made in this report.

## **7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment has not been completed as this report recommends the adoption of the 'Joint Protocol Mileage Rates in Local Authorities in Wales' attached at Appendix 1 to provide a temporary arrangement within the Council's Mileage Scheme.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Based on mileage claims to date for the 2022/23 financial year the additional cost of the increased rates in the Joint Protocol would be circa £8k per month. This increase can be funded within existing Directorate revenue budgets.

## 9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The personnel implications are included in the report.

## 10. CONSULTATIONS

10.1 The consultation responses have been incorporated in the report.

## 11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Act 1972

Author: Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services

Consultees: Christina Harray, Chief Executive  
David Street, Corporate Director Social Services and Housing  
Mark S. Williams, Corporate Director Economy and Environment  
Cllr Sean Morgan, Leader of Council  
Cllr Nigel George, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Property Services  
Stephen Harris, Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer  
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services & Monitoring Officer  
Nicola Chapman, HR Service Manager  
Lisa Downey, HR Service Manager  
Trade Unions – GMB, UNISON, Unite

Background Papers: Report to Council

Report to Council ['CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL - RESPONSE TO THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS' 4<sup>th</sup> October 2022](#)

Report to Cabinet ['WORKFORCE CAPACITY AND ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES' 19<sup>th</sup> October 2022](#)

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Joint Protocol

APPROVED

02 September 2022

Version 3

## **Joint Protocol**

### **Mileage Rates in Local Authorities in Wales**

This is a joint protocol between Leaders of local authorities in Wales, facilitated through the WLGA Executive Board and the trades unions of the Joint Council for Wales, to introduce a measure that provides for a temporary increase in mileage reimbursements costs in the short term to address current market volatility in fuel rates.

The protocol is intended to cover staff directly employed by local authorities in accordance with local policies and is a temporary arrangement through to 31 March 2023 or until there is an increase in the HMRC determined AMAP rate, whichever is the sooner. This protocol will be automatically superseded by any increase in the HMRC AMAP rate.

#### **Introduction**

Both employers and trades unions recognise the impact of the current cost of living crisis on the workforce and the immediate pressures presented as a consequence of unprecedented increases in fuel costs.

The agreed rate of reimbursement for mileage rates for local government employees is determined locally by each local authority and the majority of local authorities in Wales adopt the HMRC AMAP rates.

The HMRC AMAP rate provides approved rates for the reimbursement of mileage without incurring tax or national insurance. However, the rate has remained static since 2011/12 and an argument has been presented to the Joint Council for Wales that this has not kept pace with current fuel costs.

This protocol does not replace current local arrangements but offers, through mutual agreement between local government employers and trades unions in Wales, a temporary arrangement that is triggered by an increase in fuel rates that exceed an agreed threshold, the arrangement is similarly removed when fuel rates reduce below that same threshold.

The arrangement, once triggered and until removed, will enable those eligible through existing local authority policies to claim an additional agreed sum per mile up to an agreed maximum, to mitigate against the impact of sustained high fuel costs. The additional payment will be subject to tax and national insurance.

02 September 2022

Version 3

## The protocol

The protocol will provide:

1. The agreed sum for reimbursement
2. The threshold at which an increase would come into force
3. An independent reference point to guide decision making
4. The point at which the threshold would need to be breached to trigger an increase or the point at which it would be removed
5. A summary of the threshold, reference point and rate for reimbursement

## The agreed sum for reimbursement

The ability to claim an additional payment of 5 pence per mile where tax and NI are paid and 3 pence per mile where tax and NI are not paid, with reimbursement up to a maximum of 50 pence per mile, when an agreed threshold is breached. The ability to claim the additional payment will be withdrawn when the HMRC advisory fuel rate assessment returns below this threshold.

## Threshold

The agreed threshold is £1.50 per litre or 15.2 pence per mile.

£1.50 per litre or 15.2 pence per mile as determined by the HMRC Advisory Fuel Rate Assessment, is the point at which the ability to claim the additional payment would be triggered and the point below which it would be removed.

## Reference point

The HMRC Advisory Fuel Rates assessment [Advisory fuel rates - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/advisory-fuel-rates) will be used as the reference point.

The HMRC Advisory Fuel rates are different from the AMAP published rates, they are the advisory fuel rates for company car users and are calculated using the prevailing price of fuel on a quarterly basis.

The HMRC Advisory fuel rates are being used in this context as an objective measure to inform the agreed sum for reimbursement, the threshold and trigger points.



02 September 2022

Version 3

### Trigger points

The baseline has been set using the rate of reimbursement applied between 1 June 2021 and 31 August 2021 which was 13 pence per mile for a 1401 – 2000 cc vehicle running at 44.9 mpg. This equates to £5.84 per gallon or £1.28 per litre.

A tolerance level above the baseline of circa 15% provides for an upper level of £6.80 per gallon or £1.50 per litre and this is the point at which the trigger would come in and the point at which it would be removed.

That broadly equates to a 2 pence per mile increase above the AMAP rate. The ability to claim an additional 5 pence per mile at this point would, after 20% tax and NI, provide circa 3.5 pence and this would cover any further increases in the price of fuel as published under the HMRC Advisory Fuel Rates assessment of up to 17.9 pence per mile.

Should HMRC Advisory Fuel Rates Assessment reach or exceed a reimbursement of 18 pence per mile then a further review will be undertaken.

### Summary

Price of fuel pence per litre	pence per mile (ppm)	Reference point – HMRC Advisory Fuel Rate (ppm) – including date of publication	Agreed sum for reimbursement	Net increase
1.30 (baseline)	13.1	13 (06/21)	Up to 45 ppm	AMAP rate no tax or NI
At or above 1.50 (threshold)	15.2	15 (03/22) 17 (06/22)	Up to 50 ppm	Circa 3.5 ppm after tax and NI
		18	Trigger for a review	To be determined

### Application

The increase will apply for all fuel types including electric, hybrid and diesel cars.

02 September 2022

Version 3

### Implementation

Implementation will require local authorities to adopt the protocol and apply its provisions as a temporary arrangement within local policies on mileage rates.

### Term

This interim protocol will take effect from 26 September 2022 and will expire on 31 March 2023.

It is subject to review and can be amended by joint agreement. This includes the opportunity to reconsider the threshold as a part of any review.

### Signed:



**On behalf of the WLGA Executive Board**

Cllr Anthony Hunt

(Workforce Spokesperson and Chair, Joint Council for Wales)



**On behalf of the NJC Trades Unions**

Darron Dupre

(Trade Union Side Joint Secretary, Joint Council for Wales)

**Date: 23 September 2022**



## CABINET – 19TH OCTOBER 2022

**SUBJECT: FOUNDATION LIVING WAGE 2022**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet's decision with regard to the implementation date of the Foundation Living Wage payment for 2022 and to agree a proposal to fund the additional in-year cost for the 2022/23 financial year.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 The Council has paid the Foundation Living Wage rate since 2012 and is committed to continuing to do so.
- 2.2 The rise for 2022 is higher than that budgeted for, so Cabinet is asked to consider and agree the implementation date and associated funding.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to agree the implementation date for the Foundation Living Wage rate as either 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022 or 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022
- 3.2 Cabinet is also asked to agree that the 2022/23 additional cost is funded through the Miscellaneous Finance Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay (RCCO) budget.

### **4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 The recommendation is made to continue the Council's commitment to the Real Living Wage.

### **5. THE REPORT**

- 5.1 As stated, the Council has paid the Foundation Living Wage rate since 2012 and is committed to continuing to do so.

- 5.2 National increases in the rate of pay are usually agreed in November each year and the Council changes the rate of payment from that date
- 5.3 At the Council meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2021 it was agreed that all future nationally agreed increases to the Foundation Living Wage hourly rate be paid automatically. The rate agreed in November 2021 was £9.90.
- 5.4 This year, the Real Living Wage Foundation announced on 22<sup>nd</sup> September that the rate would rise to £10.90 with effect from that date. The rate is to be implemented as soon as possible and no later than 14<sup>th</sup> May 2023.
- 5.5 This increase is the largest in the Foundation's history and exceeds the budget that has been set aside by the council for the 2022/23 financial year. The announcement has been brought forward from November in response to the cost of living crisis.
- 5.6 In previous years the increase has been back-dated to November. However, Cabinet now needs to consider whether this date should also be adopted for 2022/23, or whether the payment should be back-dated to the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022 in line with the earlier announcement made by the Real Living Wage Foundation. The additional costs of the 2 options for the 2022/23 financial year are as follows: -
- Backdating to 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022 - £212k
  - Back-dating to 1st November 2022 - £165k
- 5.7 Payment of the Foundation Living Wage rate has an impact on the grades at the bottom of the Pay and Grading structure, where supervisors in some services are paid the same as staff they manage and the rise this year impacts on more grades. This is reflected in the consultation response from GMB and UNISON.
- 5.8 Cabinet will note that paragraph 5.16.7 of the 'Workforce Capacity and Associated Challenges' report presented to the meeting today refers to a '**Payline Assessment** – exploratory work is underway to assess the pay and grading structure to consider whether the Council's salary ranges are competitive.' This will also take account of the issues at the bottom of the salary range caused by the payment of the Foundation Living Wage.

### **Conclusion**

- 5.9 The recommendations are made to continue the Council's commitment to pay the Foundation Living Wage rate.

## **6. ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 No assumptions have been made in this report.

## **7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment has not been completed on this report as it is an amendment to the Council's NJC pay and grading structure in accordance with agreed processes.
- 7.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken on the revised NJC pay and grading structure implemented with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 and there were no obvious negative impacts on any particular 'protected characteristic' group.
- 7.3 The Council has invested heavily in creating a non-discriminatory, transparent pay and grading structure and conditions of service that fully comply with the Equal Pay Act 1970 and any other anti-discriminatory legislation.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The 2022/23 additional in-year costs of the two options presented in the report are shown in paragraph 5.6.
- 8.2 It is recommended that the 2022/23 additional cost is funded through the Miscellaneous Finance Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay (RCCO) budget.
- 8.3 The full year impact of the increase in the hourly rate will need to be factored into the 2023/24 budget setting process.

## **9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The personnel implications are included in the report.

## **10. CONSULTATIONS**

- 10.1 As part of the consultation, GMB and UNISON provided the comments below:
- 10.2 We welcome Caerphilly Council's decision to again implement the foundation living wage, however, many of our members who are employed in posts above the FLW have been seeing erosion to the differentials in pay. GMB is calling for all local authorities to update and review their single status pay and grading structure that was previously implemented to insure fair pay for fair work.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

- 11.1 Local Government Act 1972.

Author: Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services

Consultees: Christina Harrhy, Chief Executive  
David Street, Corporate Director Social Services and Housing  
Mark S. Williams, Corporate Director Economy and Environment  
Cllr Sean Morgan, Leader of Council  
Cllr Nigel George, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Property

Services

Stephen Harris, Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer

Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer

Nicola Chapman, HR Service Manager

Lisa Downey, HR Service Manager

Trade Unions – GMB, UNISON, Unite

Background Papers:

Report to Cabinet ['WORKFORCE CAPACITY AND ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES' 19<sup>th</sup> October 2022](#)



## CABINET – 19TH OCTOBER 2022

**SUBJECT: WORKFORCE CAPACITY AND ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES**

**REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update of some of the major issues and challenges currently impacting on workforce capacity and to seek support for some initial proposals to provide additional resources into key areas.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Council, its staff and elected members have been attempting to manage a pandemic response, to maintain service delivery, to oversee the introduction of new services such as Caerphilly Cares, and to recover from the pandemic, while also seeking to transform the whole organisation and the communities it serves.

- 2.2 During the pandemic for example, the Council:

- strengthened its Team Caerphilly Transformation Programme by bringing on stream ten Corporate Reviews
- launched a £231m pound PlaceShaping Investment Programme
- introduced a revised Regeneration Strategy
- began the process of introducing five Regeneration Area Master Plans
- introduced an Economic Recovery Framework

- 2.3 Since the pandemic, the Council has also found itself needing to resource and manage:

- the submission of three Levelling Up Fund bids totalling £140m
- the submission of a number of Shared Prosperity Fund bids totalling circa £35m (including Multiply)
- the resettlement pressures associated with the War in the Ukraine
- the impact of the cost of living increases on the Community
- the impact of the cost of living increases on Council staff
- the fragility of the Social Care sector
- the covid recovery across our schools and communities

- 2.4 The sheer breadth and depth of the transformation and regeneration work the Council is now involved in, above and beyond regular service delivery, is proving to be a significant challenge. Add into this the wider challenges associated with global conflict, the impact of rising inflation, the progression of Welsh Government's wide-ranging Programme for Government and the development of a new Corporate Plan and it is clear that the Council's resource base is attempting to deliver against challenges of the size, scale and complexity never previously imagined.
- 2.5 With some of this work being required to provide much needed additional support to our communities as well as other facets having the potential to significantly transform and regenerate the social and economic landscape of Caerphilly and beyond, it cannot simply be parked or put on hold.
- 2.6 The Council has faced further capacity challenges as a result of sickness absence, the loss of experienced staff to retirement; officers thinking differently about their work / home balance; staff moving on to better paid jobs in other organisations as a result of certain skills now attracting greater premiums, as well as the removal of traditional barriers such as long and challenging commutes.
- 2.7 It is unrealistic to believe that the Council can deliver this additional work 'on top of the day job' while also dealing with the ongoing pandemic response and unprecedented workforce capacity issues.
- 2.8 This report seeks to highlight the challenges being faced, sets out the potential impacts of increased expectations and diminished capacity, highlights the work already being done as well as putting forward some specific proposals to bring additional resources into core areas and functions as a foundation upon which to try and address current pressures.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to:
- i) Agree the introduction of additional staffing resource as detailed in 5.19 – 5.41 of the report, consisting of: -
    - the development of an internal recruitment team
    - the proposal to create an additional post and designate as a Deputy Chief Executive
    - the proposal to create an additional post and designate as Deputy Section 151 officer.
  - ii) Endorse the recent appointment of a Cost of Living Co-ordinator as detailed at paragraph 5.51.
  - iii) Endorse the budget to support the new posts as detailed in paragraphs 8.1 – 8.3 and specifically note that the proposals will not result in any additional financial resources being required as they will be fully funded through the virement of existing budgets.



#### **4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 The Council, like all other public sector organisations, is currently facing many challenges which are impacting on the workforce and its overall capacity to meet the expectations placed upon it.
- 4.2 It is important Members are aware of these pressures and what the Council is trying to do to address them in order to ensure that services can continue to be provided to the public.
- 4.3 The views of Members are also being sought on the options available to the Council and specifically proposals to further increase capacity in key areas.

#### **5. THE REPORT**

##### **Recruitment**

- 5.1 The Council is currently facing recruitment and retention challenges across the whole organisation in many service areas and unfortunately, the services affected seem to be under increasing demand in accordance with the national picture. This is by no means a specific challenge to Caerphilly.
- 5.2 In July 2022, the Local Government Associations Head of Workforce, Naomi Cooke, delivered a speech to the LGAs annual conference. In the speech, Naomi referred to “*a crisis of recruitment in local government*” and therefore “*a crisis in capacity*”. According to the LGA, over half of Councils report having insufficient staff to run all services normally.
- 5.3 The LGA also report that over the last ten years every other part of the public sector has grown more than local government, which has, in fact, lost about 40 per cent of its workforce
- 5.4 It isn't just in the local government sector, however. In a survey of 5,700 businesses for its Q2 2022 Quarterly Recruitment Outlook, the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) found that three in five businesses (61%) were currently looking to find staff, while 76% reported recruitment difficulties, dropping just two percentage points from Q1 (78%).
- 5.5 The fact that these challenges are not unique to Caerphilly means that any interventions introduced by the Local Authority to resolve issues it is experiencing will impact on the ability of other Local Authorities to recruit and retain staff. In essence, the more successful the Council is at addressing these challenges, the more acutely those challenges will likely be felt by our partners and neighbours.
- 5.6 Members will be aware that the introduction of Single Status in Local Authorities saw the end of nationally agreed salary ranges for groups of staff, except for Teaching staff who have their own nationally agreed terms and conditions.
- 5.7 Some Council services are also affected by competition from the private sector, for example, I.T., Engineering, Social Care and Construction. The demand for staff in these disciplines has massively increased during and since the pandemic, as have the

salaries that the individuals with these skills can now attract.

5.8 Whilst the opportunities for agile working can assist some Council services, they can also cause problems in others, as people who were perhaps previously unwilling to travel long distances for work can now look further afield for employment without the need to travel at all in some cases.

5.9 For Members information, the headcount as at the close of each of the last five financial years is detailed below:

Date	Headcount	FTE Headcount
31.03.18	8,682	6,318.69
31.03.19	8,533	6,256.64
31.03.20	8,402	6,141.56
31.03.21	8,296	6,124.17
31.03.22	8,348	6,245.04

5.10 The table above shows a reduction over the last five years, in both its overall headcount and “Full Time Equivalent - FTE” headcount. Whilst it firstly appears a relatively small reduction, these staff numbers are heavily supported with the use of agency staff, as a consequence of the difficulties experienced with recruitment at this time. Consideration must also be given to the volume and complexity of the challenges we are now facing and that it is being stretched over a workforce that has not changed significantly over recent years.

5.11 The workforce age profile of the organisation is as follows:

Age Group	Female	Male
Under 20	78	78
21 – 30	759	356
31 – 40	1436	434
41 – 50	1653	507
51 – 60	1613	605
61 – 65	407	190
66 +	162	69
Total	6108	2239

5.12 Despite the perceived difficulty in recruitment and retention, Members can be assured that the Council is still making successful appointments. The details of internal appointments and progression for the previous three financial years is set out below:

	2019 / 20	2020 / 21	2021 / 22
New starters	765	500	864
Internal transfers	1,514	1,040	1,487
<b>Total appointments</b>	<b>2,279</b>	<b>1,540</b>	<b>2,351</b>

Of course, internal transfers, often subsequently create further vacancies which require further recruitment and selection processes. Naturally this places additional pressure on recruiting managers and People Services.

5.13 To complete the picture, the details of the leavers from the Council for the previous three financial years is detailed below:

	2019 / 20	2020 / 21	2021 / 22
Leavers	873	597	765

5.14 Heads of Service have been working proactively with People Services to attempt to overcome some of the challenges within their services by utilising some of the opportunities already available to the Council. These include:

- workforce planning
- the appointment of Apprentices
- considering run through grades
- review of contracts and hours
- introducing market supplements.

5.15 These alone will not, however, help the Council to overcome this national recruitment and retention crisis. It is also worth noting that market supplements are also traditionally only supposed to be used as a temporary measure.

5.16 The Council is reviewing its recruitment processes and has begun to make steps to better position the Council as an employer of choice and also to improve the overall experience for prospective candidates. Listed below are some of the areas of improvement currently being progressed:

5.16.1 **Modernising our recruitment** – new application form and portal designed and launched; new web pages created; videos developed to profile the Council, its service areas and the opportunities available.

5.16.2 **Market position** – the Council is trialling a new approach to social advertising; has procured recruiter membership with market leader LinkedIn; has trialled targeted recruitment campaigns for front line posts; has run and attended community recruitment events.

5.16.3 **Apprentices** – the Council has committed recurrent funding for the ongoing recruitment of apprentices and in many cases Heads of Service are growing the number of apprentices by matching this funding form core budgets; strengthened partnership working with Careers Wales and schools.

5.16.4 **Caerphilly's offer** – HR & the Employment Teams are working together to consider how to provide more placement opportunities across the Council that could lead to employment opportunities.

5.16.5 **Recruitment consultant** – the Council has recently trialled the use of a Recruitment Consultancy for a Head of Service post. The trial has given significant insight into the private sector approaches associated with modern recruitment and selection as well as some of the tools and techniques that increase the likelihood of identifying and ultimately employing high quality candidates. Not only has the Council appointed, where it had failed to do so previously but the experience has also given the Council additional insight into the needs of prospective candidates and the strategies that need to be deployed to positively engage potential recruits.

- 5.16.6 **Exit Survey Process** – the exit survey process has been reviewed and automated in order to increase the number of exit interviews being undertaken, provide trend analysis and benchmarks, as well as provide higher quality insight into why employees are leaving the employment of the Council. Any emerging themes and context can then be used to refine the recruitment, selection and retention processes even further.
- 5.16.7 **Payline Assessment** – exploratory work is underway to assess the pay and grading structure to consider whether the Council's salary ranges are competitive.
- 5.16.8 **HR Policy Refresh** – HR policies are also being reviewed to ensure that our terms and conditions are supportive to recruitment and retention wherever possible. These will be presented in a separate report for consideration.
- 5.17 It is too early in the process to state whether these refinements will make a significant difference but clearly, doing nothing is not an option. The whole matter of recruitment and retention will be subject to continuous review and modernisation and be adaptable to external pressures whilst remaining a safe process.
- 5.18 Members should be aware that it is unlikely that the Council will be able to successfully recruit to all vacant posts and retain all staff due to the national crisis, but it must continue to do all it can to differentiate itself and position itself at the leading edge.

#### **Proposal: Development of an Internal Recruitment Team**

- 5.19 As stated, the Council, along with other public sector bodies across the UK is facing a number of recruitment and retention challenges. More traditional methods of recruitment such as placing job advertisements in relevant trade journals or local newspapers are no longer delivering high numbers of quality candidates and, in some cases, no candidates at all.
- 5.20 It is important from a business continuity perspective that the Council develop a leading edge approach to recruitment and selection that maximises its chances of securing the appointment of high quality candidates into roles, especially critical roles, while keeping the very best interests and values of the Council at the centre of the new approaches.
- 5.21 For the reasons set out above the Council would like to resource and appoint a specialist internal Recruitment Team. The Team would focus on marketing and promoting the organisation to prospective candidates; making use of commercial recruitment tools to identify individuals that meet the Council's needs; reaching out and engaging potential candidates about the benefits of coming to work for Caerphilly, proactively communicating the opportunities that exist within the Council across Social Media and other professional channels, as well as hosting local recruitment events across the Borough on an ongoing basis.
- 5.22 The Team would strengthen further the relationships with key partners such as Careers Wales, our schools, local colleges and Universities to engage and encourage prospective applicants as well as developing tailored opportunities to join the

Council. The Team would also operate a dedicated 'recruitment hotline' where prospective applicants could ring for a chat about possible employment options in the Council rather than just ring about a job that is already advertised.

- 5.23 Beyond this, the Team would further develop and modernise the Council's Recruitment web pages, streamline the application process, be proactive and outward facing in its approach to recruitment as well as mirroring the skills and disciplines typically employed by sector leading recruitment consultants.
- 5.24 With the organisation short of the capacity it needs to deliver even existing services as well as seeking to provide the platform for whole borough regeneration and transformation and the wider global challenges being faced, a dedicated internal recruitment team as referenced above, has the potential to seek out and attract a wide range of skilled and experienced candidates to the organisation.
- 5.25 The Council has recently piloted some of the approaches that would be central to this new team in terms of its recruitment of the Transformation Manager (Commercial and Investment) and a strong field of candidates were available for shortlist and interview with a successful appointment ultimately made.
- 5.26 Initially, the structure that would be required to support this concept, supplemented by existing resources within the HR team to deal with the appointment process, evaluations, etc would be as follows:

Recruitment and Selection Manager x 1	Grade 12
Principal Officer (Recruitment and Selection) x 2	Grade 10
HR Officer (Recruitment and Selection) x 2	Grade 8
HR Assistant (Recruitment and Selection) x 2	Grade 6

- 5.27 The total costs estimated in accordance with existing HR grades and oncosts would circa be £320k to secure this new team. In order to enable the Team to take advantage of commercial recruitment tools, the Team would also require additional budget for LinkedIn Premium, as well as a range of additional options around advertising, recruitment material, events, etc. That would mean a total investment of an additional £358k per annum to establish the Team and also provide the necessary supporting tools.

### **Statutory Capacity**

- 5.28 The Council has three main statutory roles: the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) as well as the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer. Of these three statutory roles, only the Monitoring Officer has an appointed Deputy.
- 5.29 At differing points over the last twelve months, the Council has found itself without two of its Statutory Officers at critical times, and over what proved to be extended periods.
- 5.30 The absence of designated deputy positions for those two key statutory roles have emerged as risks that have been brought into sharp focus during these periods with the officers that would ordinarily act up not having the constituted statutory authority to do so in the absence of the post holders.

### Deputy Chief Executive

- 5.31 Under Section 4 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, it is the role of the Chief Executive, formerly known as the Head of Paid Service, to ensure that all the authority's functions are properly co-ordinated as well as organising staff and appointing appropriate management.
- 5.32 The Chief Executive has the following functions and areas of responsibility, although this list is not exhaustive:
- Overall corporate management and operational responsibility (including overall management responsibility for all officers);
  - Provision of professional advice to all parties in the decision making process;
  - Responsibility for a system of record keeping for all the Council's decisions;
  - Responsibility for promoting and maintaining probity in all of the Council's activities;
  - Representing the Council on partnerships and external bodies as required by Council or by statute;
  - Acting as co-ordinator in Emergencies;
  - Be the Electoral Registration Officer and the Local Government Returning Officer and to be empowered in relation to all electoral matters;
  - Be the proper officer for all statutory purposes unless otherwise determined by this constitution;
  - Be able to exercise all the powers delegated to the Corporate Directors unless there is a legal or professional impediment;
  - Take urgent decisions in respect of either an executive or non- executive function which is considered necessary to protect the interests of or for advancing the business of the Council. In those circumstances, the Chief Executive is authorised to take urgent decisions following consultation with the Leader of the Council and the relevant portfolio holder in respect of executive matters and the Chairman (or Vice Chairman) of Council or the relevant committee in respect of non-executive functions. All urgent decisions will be reported to the next appropriate meeting of Council, Cabinet or the relevant committee;

### **Proposal to Create an Additional Post and designate as a Deputy Chief Executive**

- 5.33 The Council is seeking to appoint a permanent Deputy Chief Executive Officer as an additional post on the establishment. This will enable the Council to address the risk of not being able to meet certain statutory requirements should the appointed statutory officer be unavailable. It will also provide a much needed and dedicated resource that can lead the significant, cross cutting challenges facing the organisation and its surrounding communities at present, such as the cost of living crisis, and climate change.
- 5.34 The total cost of the appointment inclusive of on costs would be subject to agreeing an appropriate set of duties and responsibilities and would need to be agreed by Members. Based on the existing range, it is anticipated that the costs would be circa £189k including on costs.

### Deputy Section 151 Officer

- 5.35 Under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 (c.11), the Council has a duty to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs. The Council

does this by appointing a Section 151 Officer. The Section 151 officer must be a qualified accountant belonging to one of the recognised chartered accountancy bodies.

- 5.36 The Section 151 Officer is a statutory role and has overall responsibility, subject to any instructions given by the Council, for determining the system of accounting control and the form of the published accounts.
- 5.37 The Section 151 Officer has a number of statutory duties, including the duty to report any unlawful financial activity involving the authority (past, present or proposed) or failure to set or keep to a balanced budget.
- 5.38 The Officer appointed under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 also has overall responsibility for providing financial advice on all budgetary and accounting matters affecting the Council's corporate financial affairs. In the case of Caerphilly this officer is also the Head of Financial Services & S151 Officer.
- 5.39 The role and responsibilities of the S151 Officer are extensive and integral to the strategic management of the organisation as a whole. Some of the responsibilities of the S151 Officer cannot be delegated and without an appointed deputy the Council's abilities to meet its statutory requirements can be impacted.

#### **Proposal to Create an Additional Post & designate as Deputy Section 151 Officer**

- 5.40 The Council is seeking to appoint a Deputy Head of Financial Services & Deputy Section 151 Officer as an additional post to address the risk of not being able to meet certain statutory requirements should the Section 151 Officer be unavailable for any reason. This will provide much needed additional capacity to the Financial Services functions and will also support the delivery of the Council's key priorities through the provision of sound strategic financial advice.
- 5.41 The post will need to be evaluated but the total cost of the appointment inclusive of on costs is estimated to be circa £108k p.a.

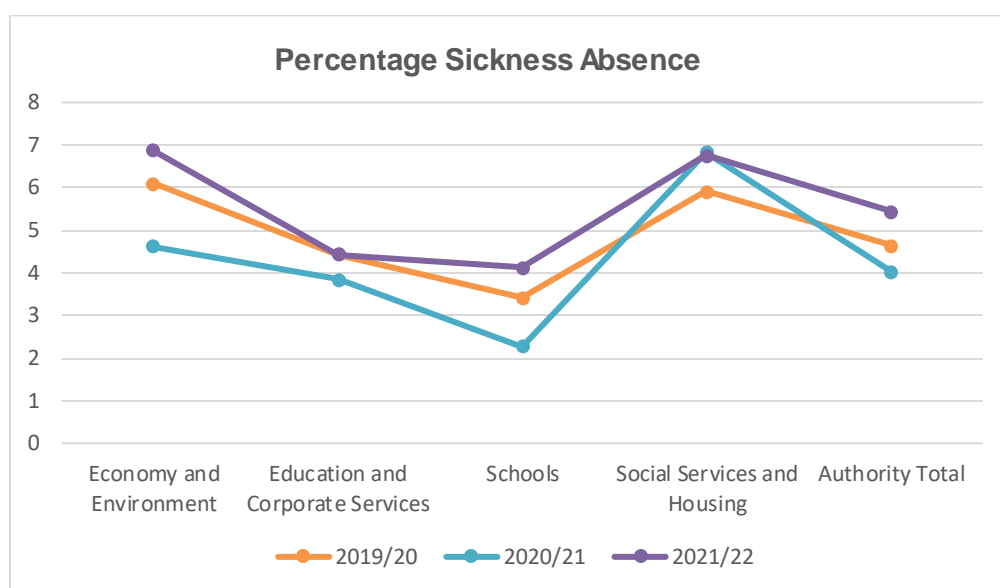
#### **Sickness**

- 5.42 The Council's Managing Sickness Absence Procedure provides a structured framework to allow Managers to effectively manage sickness absence. The Procedure has also been adopted by all Schools. The purpose of the Procedure is to:
- Maximise employee attendance at work.
  - Support employees in returning to work in a timely manner.
  - Have a clear and agreed process for managing the sickness absence of all the Council's employees, which is applicable to all.
- 5.43 The following paragraphs provide an overview of levels of absence within the Council for the previous 3 financial years.
- 5.44 In 2021 / 22 the Council reported 14.12 days lost per full-time equivalent (FTE) Local Authority employee due to sickness absence including schools. The FTE days lost in 2020 / 21 were 10.0 and in 2019 / 20 were 11.98. Reporting Councils across Wales are reporting higher FTEs absence levels this year.

5.45 The table below provides the total percentage absence per Directorate for three financial years. Schools are reported separately for ease of reference for Members.

<b>Directorate</b>	<b>% Sickness Absence</b>		
	2019 / 20	2020 / 21	2021 / 22
Economy and Environment	6.10	4.61	6.86
Education and Corporate Services	4.43	3.85	4.43
Schools	3.42	2.26	4.13
Social Services and Housing	5.91	6.82	6.76
<b>Authority Total</b>	<b>4.63</b>	<b>4.03</b>	<b>5.43</b>

This information is also provided in graph format below for Members.



5.46 The table below provides the top 10 stated reasons for absence across the Council for the previous three financial years.

**Top 10 Reasons of Absence for the Authority**

**Top 10 Ranking**

**2019/20    2020/21    2021/22**

Personal Stress; depression; anxiety; neurasthenia; mental health; fatigue	1	1	1
Other musculo-skeletal problems	2	2	3
Stomach; liver; kidney and digestion inc. gastroenteritis	3	4	4
Infections inc. colds & flu	4	8	5
Injury	5	5	9
Back and neck problems	6	6	6



Chest and respiratory inc. chest infections	7		9	7
Work related stress	8		7	10
Neurological including headaches & migraines	9		N/A	8
Eye; ear; nose & mouth/dental to inc. sinusitis	10		N/A	N/A
Covid	N/A		3	2
Heart, blood pressure and circulation	N/A		10	N/A

- 5.47 Members will note that apart from the introduction of Covid as a reason for absence, the rank order of reasons has remained fairly consistent across the 3 years.
- 5.48 Within People Services, the HR team provides advice and guidance to Managers in relation to all aspects of people management. Listed below are some of the other areas of support that are currently in place:
- 5.48.1 **A dedicated Managing Attendance Team** to support Managers to manage absence effectively and consistently across the Authority.
- 5.48.2 **An Occupational Health Unit**, with Occupational Health Physician, Physiotherapist and Nurse expertise provided to support the management of sickness absence.
- 5.48.3 **A confidential counselling service** offered via Care First that can be accessed by all employees.
- 5.48.4 **An Employee Wellbeing Strategy 2021 – 24** is now in place which supports us to work with our employees to promote and facilitate good health and wellbeing, and to provide excellent services to those who need our support.
- 5.48.5 **A digital ‘Health Wall’** has been established featuring some of the links to organisations that provide expert information and advice for a number of health related issues.
- 5.48.6 **Directorate Performance Assessments** also include sickness information broken down by Directorate and classified as either short term or long term which are kept under review by Senior Management on a cyclical basis.
- 5.49 Managing employee wellbeing remains a priority for Managers, but Members should be aware of the matters below that have resulted from the pandemic:
- Introduction of a new absence reason i.e. Covid and the many variants
  - Vaccinations and staff falling ill afterwards
  - Staff waiting much longer for NHS treatments
  - The fit note process changed for a while where it was 28 days before they were required
  - A Long Covid Protocol was introduced
  - Managers may have had less time to attach to managing absences due to staff shortages and services needing to be provided to residents.

- 5.50 The Council's Managing Sickness Absence Procedure is currently being reviewed and will take account of any learning from the pandemic. Furthermore, officers are exploring an opportunity to bring in some further external assistance, seeking learning and potentially support from neighbouring local authorities where sickness levels are lower than in Caerphilly.

### **Cost of Living**

- 5.51 Members will be aware that the UK has been experiencing a cost of living crisis since late 2021, caused predominantly by high inflation outstripping wage and benefit increases, which has been further exacerbated by recent tax increases, resulting in the fall in disposable incomes. This crisis is acutely affecting our communities and the need for targeted additional Council support is paramount. A separate report was presented to Cabinet on 26<sup>th</sup> September which set out our current position and presented a proposed package of additional support in order to guide and help our communities through these difficult financial conditions. The report also highlights that the corporate Cost of Living package of support, will be led by a recently appointed Cost of Living Co-ordinator. This report is scheduled to be considered by Council on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2022.
- 5.52 The cost of living crisis is also affecting all of our employees financially in one way or another, leading to some making choices to stop working or to reduce their hours, which is impacting on recruitment and retention, which is already proving to be a significant challenge.
- 5.53 The Council is naturally being asked by the Trade Unions to offer support to employees. The Council is looking at possible options but have to take account of national conditions of service and pay negotiating bodies, financial regulations and work being considered by national committees.
- 5.54 The Corporate Director Social Services and Housing is leading on the cost of living crisis for residents and employees and together with the Head of People Services is consulting with the Trade Unions with regard to the latter.

### **Conclusion**

- 5.55 There are many factors affecting the workforce which may impact on the Council's ability to deliver services. Whilst the Council will do what it can to respond to some of these local challenges, it will clearly be unable to influence many of the national and global factors, which have increased the complexity and scale of the challenges being faced by local government and the public sector as a whole.
- 5.56 If the Council is to remain resilient and responsive to these challenges, the acquisition of the additional capacity proposed within this report is required. This will go some way to addressing some of the workforce challenges being faced and provide extra resource to focus on the things that matter most to our communities and our organisation.

## **6. ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 It is assumed that the additional investment being sought will provide the capacity that enables the organisation to meet the expectations currently placed upon it but each

intervention will also be monitored to assess impact and where necessary refine the approach.

## 7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment has not been completed as this report provides Members with an update on matters impacting on the workforce.
- 7.2 The Council has in place policies to support matters such as recruitment, sickness absence, pay and grading and terms and conditions, etc. which would have been assessed at the time of agreement and take Equalities related issues into account.

## 8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The total costs of progressing the proposals set out in paragraphs 5.18 to 5.40 are as follows:

Internal Recruitment Team	£358k
Deputy Chief Executive	£189k
Deputy Section 151 Officer	£108k

**Total: - £655k**

- 8.2 There are currently 3 vacant Head of Service posts within the approved staffing structure as follows: -

Head of Business Improvement Services	£135k
Head of Education Planning & Strategy	£106k
Head of Prosperity	£135k

**Total: - £376k**

- 8.3 It is proposed that the budgets for the above three vacant posts are redirected to part fund the proposals set out in this report. This will leave a balance of £279k to be funded and it is proposed that this is met through a permanent virement from the existing Miscellaneous Finance Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay Budget.
- 8.4 It should be noted that the proposals in the report will not result in any additional resources being required as they will be fully funded through the virement of existing budgets.

## 9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The personnel implications are included in the report.

## 10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The report was presented to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and the comments from the Committee are detailed within paragraphs 10.2 – 10.13.

- 10.2 Following an introduction from the Chief Executive which provided further details on the options listed in the report's recommendations, the UNISON Branch Secretary offered her comments for Committee consideration. The union representative highlighted the reduction in staff numbers at Caerphilly County Borough Council over the 17 years that she had worked for the council. Members heard about the pressures faced by a significant number of employees as some vacancies were not filled due to austerity and vacancy management. It was outlined how an internal recruitment team was fully supported as it was necessary to attract the best candidates for new roles and the union requested regular progress reports on this matter. The Branch Secretary also welcomed how the proposals in the report were to be funded through the virement of existing budgets.
- 10.3 One Member requested a breakdown of the leavers table contained in 5.13 of the report. The Member also asked about the emerging themes of the exit survey process and for details on the current structure of the Council's recruitment team. The Head of People Services advised Members that a breakdown of leavers would be circulated to the Committee outside of the meeting, analysis of the exit survey would need to be collated and then provided when the process had been in place for 3-6 months and that currently there was no specific dedicated recruitment team within Human Resources.
- 10.4 One Member queried the creation of new posts at the higher end of the salary scale whilst cutting front-line services. The Member also questioned the wisdom of not filling the 3 vacant Head of Service posts. The Chief Executive recognised the sensitivities outlined and advised Members that the priorities and pace for implementation set by Councillors and communities demanded greater capacity within the leadership structure. It was also highlighted that within the Council there were three statutory officers and that currently there was only a deputy for one of those positions.
- 10.5 One Member questioned the need to create two new posts to deputise for statutory officers. The Member also sought more information on the specific responsibilities associated with the new positions. The Chief Executive advised that there was not sufficient capacity within the Financial Services Team to designate Deputy Section 151 Officer responsibilities to. It was also outlined that if one of the three Corporate Directors were designated with Deputy Chief Executive duties, there would not be enough capacity at a leadership level to deliver the priorities at the pace demanded. Members were also given comparative details on the Corporate Management structure of other Local Authorities which were higher than the current leadership team at Caerphilly County Borough Council. The Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer advised Members that the role and responsibilities of the Section 151 Officer were set out in sections 5.35 – 5.39 of the report and that the proposed Deputy would provide resilience particularly during periods of absence. Furthermore, Members heard how the Section 151 Officer needed additional support to deliver the Council's agenda at a time of significant financial challenges, and to ensure that sufficient strategic financial capacity was available to support the delivery of the Council's ambitious investment programme.
- 10.6 One Member asked if figures were available so that a comparison could be made between the model of using an external recruitment agency and having an internal team. The Head of People Services outlined how a recruitment agency had been used to fill one post and that the associated costs of using them would be circulated to Members. Members heard how suitable candidates for other posts within the Council would be missed if a recruitment agency was used on a post-by-post basis. The

Member queried the use of only one recruitment agency. The Head of People Services outlined how a procurement process had been undertaken before engaging a recruitment agency and that the procedure had been costly and still required resources from Council staff, which then prompted the plans to develop an internal recruitment team.

- 10.7 One Member asked about the links to local colleges as part of the Workforce Development Strategy. The Head of People Services outlined how there were current links with external providers and that this had proved very beneficial when undertaking the recent recruitment for apprentices. Members heard how the proposed recruitment team would build on these existing links. The Member then asked about offering students work placements. The Head of People Services outlined how this was already happening and would be developed further in the future.
- 10.8 One Member queried why an honorarium could not be paid to officers to act-up and meet the statutory requirements of Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer on a temporary basis as required. The Member claimed that the Council had a shortage of staff at lower salary levels, and he could not support the proposed creation of the two new senior posts. The Chief Executive outlined how it was her professional opinion that additional capacity at a senior level was needed in order to deliver priorities such as positive intervention on the cost-of-living challenges and climate change at the pace demanded by Members. It was outlined how the organisation had not progressed during the recent leadership of an Acting Chief Executive as the Corporate Director given the temporary responsibility also had responsibility for a large Directorate. The Chief Executive advised that this was a choice for Members but outlined how it was her professional opinion that the Council was at risk of not meeting statutory requirements if this additional capacity was not put in place.
- 10.9 One Member thought that the report lacked a reshaped management model so that Committee Members could make a more informed opinion and queried how the associated services would be run in the future if the three vacant Head of Service posts were not filled as their budget had been redirected to fund the proposals under consideration. The Chief Executive gave Members an overview of the current responsibilities of the Corporate Management Team and outlined how priorities would be redistributed in the future if Members were minded to approve the proposed changes.
- 10.10 One Member advised that he could not recall the vacant Heads of Service posts being expressed as savings in previous budget reports but welcomed the virement of associated funding to the creation of the proposed new positions.
- 10.11 One Member raised questions on the part of the report relating to sickness absence. The Member requested a fuller breakdown including comparisons with other Local Authorities and also claimed that the data contained in the sickness/absence chart did not add-up. The Member also requested a breakdown of the oncosts highlighted in the salary range in section 5.34. The Head of Financial Services & Section 151 Officer advised that oncosts of 36% were paid on salary. Members were also informed that If the post is approved, the final salary will be a matter for Full Council to determine. The Head of People Services advised that the figures in the sickness absence chart were not simply calculated in a way that allowed them to add-up to the totals given and that more information would be provided on these calculations outside of the meeting.
- 10.12 One Member sought further information on the proposed recruitment team in regard to how the total number of 7 posts was reached and also the grading structure for these

new positions. The Head of People Services advised that the number of team members was based on the potential workload of the Recruitment Team and that the grading structure reflected the duties and responsibilities for each post which would be set out in the specific job descriptions.

10.13 One Member commented on the impact of managing sickness better on delivering services and also queried the potential role of a Deputy Chief Executive. The Chief Executive outlined how additional capacity was needed to lead on the cost-of-living crisis, the climate change agenda, the Corporate Plan priorities and also helping to oversee the Place Shaping programme, for example. Members also heard how Audit Wales had played a monitoring role and had recognised the risks currently carried and believed that for an organisation the size of Caerphilly County Borough Council deputy statutory officers would be expected.

10.14 Having noted the content of the report, it was moved and seconded that recommendation 3.1 (iii) be forwarded to Cabinet for approval. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 6 for, 3 against and 2 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

### **11.1 Local Government Act 1972**

Author: Christina Harray, Chief Executive

Consultees: Dave Street, Corporate Director Social Care and Housing  
Richard (Ed) Edmunds, Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services  
Mark S Williams, Corporate Director Economy and Environment  
Cllr Sean Morgan, Leader of Council  
Cllr Nigel George, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Property Services  
Cllr Lindsay Whittle, Leader of Plaid Group  
Cllr Kevin Etheridge, Leader of Independent Group  
Stephen Harris, Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer  
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer  
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services  
Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee Members