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Bridgend County Borough Council



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Rhowch wybod i ni os mai Cymraeg yw eich
dewis iaith.*

*We welcome correspondence in Welsh. Please
let us know if your language choice is Welsh.*



Cyfarwyddiaeth y Prif Weithredwr / Chief Executive's Directorate

Deialu uniongyrchol / Direct line /: 01656 643148 /
643147 / 643694

Gofynnwch am / Ask for:

Ein cyf / Our ref:

Eich cyf / Your ref:

Dyddiad/Date: Tuesday, 7 November 2023

Dear Councillor,

TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM

A meeting of the Town & Community Council Forum will be held remotely - via Microsoft Teams on
Monday, 13 November 2023 at 16:00.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence
To receive apologies for absence from Members.
2. Declarations of Interest
To receive declarations of personal and prejudicial interest (if any) from Members/Officers in accordance with the provisions of the Members' Code of Conduct adopted by Council from 1 September 2008.
3. Approval of Minutes 3 - 12
To receive for approval the Minutes of 29/08/2023
4. Update on Bridgend County Borough Council Public Rights of Way 13 - 20
5. Engagement and Participation Strategy 21 - 36
6. Budget Update 37 - 72
7. Urgent Items
To consider any other item(s) of business in respect of which notice has been given in accordance with Rule 4 of the Council Procedure Rules and which the person presiding at the meeting is of the opinion should by reason of special circumstances be transacted at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

Note: Members and Officers will be attending remotely via Microsoft Teams. The meeting will be recorded for subsequent transmission via the Council's internet site which will be available as soon as practicable after the meeting. If you have any queries regarding this, please contact cabinet_committee@bridgend.gov.uk or tel. 01656 643148 / 643694 / 643513 / 643696

By receiving this Agenda Pack electronically you will save the Authority approx. £1.44 in printing costs

Yours faithfully

K Watson

Chief Officer, Legal and Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy

Councillors:

H T Bennett
HJ David
C Davies
CLC Davies
S Easterbrook
M J Evans
R J Smith

Councillors

P Ford
J Gebbie
RM Granville
P W Jenkins
M R John
M Jones
I M Spiller

Councillors

J H Tildesley MBE
MJ Williams
R Williams
E D Winstanley
T Wood

To include a representative from each Town and Community Council

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWN & COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB ON TUESDAY, 29 AUGUST 2023 AT 16:00

Present

Councillor HJ David – Chairperson

H T Bennett	E L P Caparros	C Davies	C L C Davies
B Doughty	M J Evans	P Ford	J Gebbie
RM Granville	J Holmes	P W Jenkins	M R John
S Parker	Pratt	I M Spiller	Unwin
Y Walton-Davies	MJ Williams	R Williams	E D Winstanley
T Wood			

Apologies for Absence

G Chappell

Officers:

Nimi Chandrasena	Democratic Services Officer - Support
Mark Galvin	Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Jonathan Parsons	Group Manager Development
Alex Rawlin	Corporate Policy & Public Affairs Manager
Zak Shell	Head of Neighbourhood Services

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- Cllr Melanie Evans declared a personal interest as a Pencoed Town Councillor in relation to Item 4 - Planning Update – 20 Minute Neighbourhoods
- Cllr Yvonne Walton-Davies declared a personal interest in relation to Item 4 - Planning Update – 20 Minute Neighbourhoods due to the fact that she had restricted mobility and was an Active Travel and Wellbeing advocate.

17. PLANNING UPDATE - 20 MINUTE NEIGHBOURHOODS

This report was presented by The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services, the purpose of which was to provide a briefing on the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods, which has been incorporated into the Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP).

He stated that the 20 minute neighbourhoods were designed to allow people to have access to facilities such as schools, shops, recreation space, health facilities, generally within a 20 minute walk or cycle ride from their homes. He stated that the concept was well established in urban planning and was widely seen as a key component to what is described as good place making and good environments.

He added that it was not an new concept. Historically, it had been seen that there was an increased personal mobility in mid 20th century, where traditional neighbourhoods in the UK provided a range of local services that could easily be accessed on foot. Even with the large post war, urban expansion of social housing, shops, schools, health facilities, recreation areas, open space were all built into the fabric of these developments.

He went on to say that the difference was that during the latter part of the 20th century, early 21st century, housing schemes were being developed around increased road infrastructure with travel by motor vehicles prioritised and this had sometimes proven to be at the expense of non-car travel options.

In other examples, not necessarily in Bridgend, there had been entire housing estates equipped with new on-site facilities and could only be accessed safely by the use of car. Such developments were undertaken in line with the planning policies or the deregulated planning policies over the time.

National Planning policy aims to change the approach that had been prevalent over the last 20 years by providing more emphasis on prioritising active travel and public transport options over car-based solution. Part of this is the concept of the 20 minute neighbourhood.

There has been also a great awareness on climate change and a compelling need to reduce dependency on carbon based modes of transport. The Welsh government and local authorities have declared a climate crisis.

The pandemic had a profound social impact on people's environments and the lockdowns provided an opportunity to examine the relationship with the local environment and the need for more local based amenity and open space.

He stated that the quality of the locality is a fundamental part of good quality based placemaking.

In Bridgend, the areas were located on the edge or close to established settlements as this allowed for easy access to existing facilities by active travel.

Also, within these new developments, there should be a provision of facilities including primary schools, open space, green infrastructure as this forms part of the an important aspect of any new development and these facilities will be promoted and controlled through the local development planning process.

The Group Manager stated that the concept should not be treated as a panacea to all problems and was not designed to stop all car-based journeys. He stated that it would take time and had to be supported by good quality public transport infrastructure. The Concept would still require the public to travel to get to work.

He stated that the government was working towards building better and moving away from car dependency for short local journeys thereby reducing the need to travel where it was not absolutely necessary. He stressed that it was not about locking people in their localities or restricting movement but about more about improving the quality of their environment.

A member enquired what the Council were doing to assist Community Councils and tackle rumours, causing suspicion and fear, spread by way of leaflet drops.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services responded that while he was not personally aware of the leaflet drops by various organisations in the borough, he was hopeful that the presentation within the forum would correct misconceptions of the concept. He invited individual community councils to direct any queries/concerns to the Planning department.

He assured the forum that there was no intention to introduce the concept in the borough in its entirety but there were new developments coming forward and these developments were going to be built in accordance with the new National planning policies and the development plan policies, with a view to reducing the need for travel unless necessary.

The Chairperson added that there was a communication sent out in response to the rumours caused.

Another member had a two-part question:

- How much input was received from the Health Board in relation to the concept and
- In relation to affordable housing, would people be able to afford to buy a home within a 20 minute neighbourhood.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services responded that one of the fundamental principles when preparing a long-term plan is that there is significant engagement with outside agencies. The Health Board was one of the key consultees and they were fully informed and fully part of the of the process.

He stated that on wider national scale, there was widespread support for increased active travel as a health benefit.

He stated that he appreciated that the Concept would not apply to everyone. However, there were health benefits associated with increased active travel and the aim of the new residential and the new strategic sites can be implemented through that infrastructure so that residents had a choice. The new sites were on the edge of settlements and therefore not that far removed from the town centres. If and when required, residents would have access public transport hubs and employment within those town centres or within the surrounding areas via the usage of active travel.

In relation to the question on Affordable Housing within the 20 minute neighbourhoods, the Group Manager, Planning and Development Services responded that it was not directly part of the 20 minute neighbourhood principle. Housing in planning terms, specifically affordable housing in the context of planning was controlled through the land use planning system.

He suggested that it could be a mix of RSL Properties rented, assisted purchase schemes.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services explained that Planning could not control house prices, they provide the infrastructure ie. the land and the mechanisms to secure the degree of an affordable house. He stated the role of the planning system was to allocate the sites, and within that, it could allocate a percentage of those properties to be RSL or assisted purchase. He stated that the controls mentioned were outside Planning and lie with the housing team who work with the RSLs.

The same member asked, in relation to the Group Manager's response, how much input was received from the Health Board, she cited examples to qualify her question.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services explained that the Health board were consultees and they provided input into the development plan. He stated that while Planning could provide the land use designations and sites, it was up to the health board how they wished to operate.

A member expressed his gratitude to the Leader for addressing the issue of spreading false information on social media in relation to the concept of the 20 minute neighbourhoods.

He praised the concept and stated he was looking for reassurance that what is finally delivered would be aligned to the purpose of the concept. He went on to cite examples and queried :

- The possibility of holding Property Developers accountable when critical parts of development plans are not delivered in practice.
- and
- Asked how the Council were going to use that opportunity to upgrade existing communities.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services responded that there were challenges in holding Property Developers accountable, they were however learning how to develop larger sites and there were better national planning policies to help secure that. In addition to this, the department were exploring stricter Section 106 agreements. He mentioned that historically, land had been made available for health facilities, however Health professionals such doctors and dentist surgeries had not come forward to provide their services and the local authority were reliant on Health Boards and other Development Boards when in relation to upgrading facilities.

A member cited an example of an area within his borough and asked how the authority would guarantee the safety of the active travel routes by ensuring that trees and park areas in unadopted land are maintained.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services responded saying he understood the concerns raised and was only able to comment on aspects related to his service area and would not be able to advise on other service areas and processes.

The Head of Operations, Community Services added that examples relating to specific areas can be taken offline and discussed. He explained that once an area has gone through the adoption process and the developer has met the requirements, the service area take over the maintenance of pathways and routes.

A member asked the possibility of subsidising bus travel.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development Services responded that, while theoretically Section 106 can be utilised to subsidise bus travel under the current LDP, this had not been raised before. The normal practice would be to utilise Section 106 towards Highway infrastructure improvements, provision of education, provision of affordable homes.

A member asked what had been done to improve the bus services in line with 20 minute towns and the concept of active travel.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development stated bus services were a national issue rather than an agency specific issue. The authority can build on the basis that there will be bus services therefore all of the new sites will have bus infrastructure. He also stated while they can provide the infrastructure, the Authority had no control over how buses are funded and how services operate.

A member raised concerns about active travel routes and asked that there is consideration for those who were less mobile who would have challenges to get through the designated routes.

The Head of Operations, Community Services and the Chairperson both gave their assurance that the multi million pound active travel programme was fully funded by Welsh Government and key to that active travel programme is a requirement, for example, for dropped kerbs and other measures that make it easier for people to walk and cycle. The route is not developed in isolation and need to be part of a network, as they would be costly and limited to implement.

A member asked if the Council would be analysing the potential of single-track network of country lanes which are already in place. As the lanes have been in existence for many hundreds of years can they be brought in to the active travel network with very little extra investment, if required, if they were brought in under the quiet lanes programme

The Group Manager, Planning and Development responded that the concept was not widely promoted through Wales and he did not think it had progressed towards national planning policy stage. He mentioned that it should not be taken for granted that a route is always suitable as they are reliant on segregation. If there was to be development of quiet lanes for active travel and funding was required, then there was an expectation that the routes are made wider to allow traffic and progression. Once the routes are made wider they become more highway-like rather than a lane. He stated that with that came issues such as land ownership issues and drainage.

He stated that the funding received from Welsh Government was restricted in what the Authority could actually do but assured the member that that did not mean it was not possible in the future and could be treated as an alternative.

A member drew the committee's attention to page 39 of the report in relation to good transport links and cited an example of the land east of Pencoed, where there appeared to be an uneven spread of public transport links. She queried what plans were in place to provide public transport links for those far-reaching residents in a community.

The Group Manager, Planning and Development responded that the new sites themselves will have that infrastructure built in, for example bus stops. However, the wider issue of public transport provisions rested outside the authority and outside the development plan process.

A member asked, in relation to previous mentions about Land use and planning, about the additional pupil places awarded by Pencoed Primary school as 60 new places will result in congestion around the school area. The Member inquired if there would be an implementation of school streets to help children access the school safely, promote active travel and reduce pollution.

The Head of Operations, Community Services stated that he saw the positives of the concept, however, there were places where it would practically not work. For example, if the school was on a main road, resulting in traffic caused by people moving to and from work, the scheme would not be suitable. There are schools in the borough where it could

be suitable. The benefit of the school street concept would need to be compared against the investment required to implement such a scheme.

RESOLVED: That the Town and Community Council Forum noted the report.

18. **UNITED KINGDOM SHARED PROSPERITY FUND**

This report was presented by The Head of Operations, Community Services, the purpose of which was to update the Town and Community Council Forum on the United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund and a series of grant funds available as part of the delivery programme for Bridgend's Local Investment Plan through the United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund.

He stated that it was a brief background to the delivery programme for Bridgend's element at the UK Shared Prosperity Fund programme, specifically outlining a number of grant funds that will be made available. He brought the Forum's attention to a number of implications, the UK's withdrawal from the EU on the 31st of January 2020, loss of access to funding programmes, including the European Structural Investment Funds following Brexit.

He also brought to Forum's attention the UK Government's commitment to replacement of lost European funding opportunities to level up opportunity. The creation of the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) was one of the main results of that promise with 2.6 billion having been allocated for local investment by March 25 across the UK.

He stated that the report outlined the development steps of the Bridgend Borough Local investment plan for SPF (Appendix 1 to the report referred)

The Head of Operations, Community Services stated that section 2 highlighted how it was being created in alignment with investment priorities and with the themes of the Shared Prosperity fund, along with the Authority's economic strategy and investment plans.

He stated that the authority free main themes of community and place, supporting local businesses and people, in skills being the main crux of the investment plan.

The plans submitted to UK government were made on a regional basis for SE Wales authorities where Rhondda Cynon Taff acted as the lead authority.

Section 3 of the report highlighted how investment areas within the plan can be delivered in several ways and included in-house delivery, commissioning, procurement and focuses on the allocation of grant funds.

He stated that the report highlighted individual grant fund streams and the values set up or being set up to deliver Bridgend's element of the Shared prosperity fund. The grant schemes were brought before and approved by Cabinet in June of this year. Set out in the main body of the report from pages 58 through to 61 the Grant Schemes are Bridgend Valley's Placemaking Property Improvement Grant , The Empty Property Survey Grant the Community Feasibility Fund, The Business Development Grant, The Business Feasibility Grant and finally The Tourism Events Support Grant.

The Placemaking Property Improvement Grant and the Empty Property Survey grant could be found on the Council's website, with guidance on application forms. The business development grant and business feasibility grant were also on the website along with the guidance documents.

A member queried when other grants will be available and what the deadlines would be, she also inquired about promotions that have been done to educate the public of the schemes.

The Head of Operations, Community Services responded that the report was taken to Cabinet in June 2023 and this coincided with a number of media pieces highlighting the contents of the Cabinet report. Publicity was also developed in conjunction with the Business Forum. He said he was concerned that the members were not aware of the schemes and gave them the assurance that the team will do more promotional work to increase such awareness. He also stated that he would provide the members of the forum with a framework of opening, closing and spend by dates for the schemes offered.

A member asked if there was anything within the programme that looked at the amount of money that was available through The Authority to the Town and Community Councils to facilitate open areas, and prepare them, in readiness for walking and active travel.

The Head of Operations, Community Services stated that the report they were referring to dealt grants that going to be made available. However, in the broader shared prosperity fund, there were a number of activities in relation to green spaces, some of them were set to improve and make accessible, relating to the Great Glamorgan route as well.

He referred to a presentation conducted by the Climate Change Response Manager, to the Town and Community Council Clerks, which would have been made available to all Community Councillors, where it alerted all of the town community councils to the work being conducted in particular areas. He stated that while it did not specifically provide Grant Funding to the town and community councils themselves, it alerted them to the work that the Authority was carrying out.

A member asked if the Authority could write specifically to Town and Community councils with what grants they can apply for.

The Chairperson agreed with the Head of Operations, Community Services that this can be done.

A member stated that Porthcawl Town Council had received an e-mail on the 25th of August asking for ideas of where the demand is strong as seen by the Town and Community Council Capital Grant Scheme from the Authority. The details of potential projects were to be returned by the 8th of September and Porthcawl Town Council has had to arrange a special meeting to discuss this. The Member inquired the possibility of the Authority providing more notice for potential projects for town and community councils, especially during recess.

The Head of Operations, Community Services stated the town Community council grants scheme was normally sent out much earlier in the year and decisions had already been made on the funding for 2023 with appropriate notice given. He stated he felt that the email referred to by the member related specifically to a review of the criteria against which approvals are made for the town and Community council grant schemes. He stated he believed that the email was sent out to get an idea of schemes town and community councils may have, in order to inform the review process for the scheme.

There was a discussion between members as to the receipt of emails from Town and Community councils and there was advice given on checking if email addresses were valid and also if emails were filtering through appropriately.

RESOLVED: It was recommended that the Town and Community Council Forum noted the report.

19. **CORPORATE SELF ASSESSMENT 2022-2023**

This report was presented by the Policy and Performance Manager the purpose of which was to provide an update on the Council's second corporate self-assessment report and judgements, and to seek comments on the draft report within Appendix 1 of the report.

She stated that the self-assessment was the same as 2022 and aimed to demonstrate 3 things. Namely that the Authority were performing well, improving outcomes and utilising resources as well.

She stated that the process was a bit different in 2023 because it was the authorities second year. Performance had been reviewed as part of the regular annual performance process.

Use of resource templates had been completed and governance had been reviewed as part of the regular annual governance statement. The Policy and Performance Manager stated they had used internal and external evidence, heads of service and member challenges. She mentioned a CPA challenge session in June which was for cabinet members, scrutiny chairs and group managers. She also mentioned that a more formal consultation that had gone out the week before the meeting.

The Policy and Performance Manager stated the report included three wellbeing objectives derived from the old corporate plan.

- Well-being Objective 1 was judged to be good,
- Well-being Objective 2 as adequate and
- Well-being Objective 3 as good.

She pointed out that the scores were the same as the scores in 2022 and explained that this was not because performance has been exactly the same but because other scores have fluctuated.

The Policy and Performance Manager concluded that day-to-day management of resources is good, same as in 2022, utilising clear working models and strong relationships. She stated that the use of resources overall was only adequate, and improvements were happening particularly on workforce planning, asset management and performance management.

She stated that there were detailed improvement plans that followed the judgments received from audit Wales in the regulatory reviews of 2022. She further stated that the authority were keen to implement those recommendations.

She advised that there were still some vacancies and capacity issues in corporate teams and the senior managers who work alongside them and while there was much to improve, such improvements were underway.

The Policy and Performance Manager invited thoughts, ideas and suggestions from the forum around context in the report asking if there was a need to provide additional information.

A Member asked what process was followed in bringing empty properties back into use and asked how the Authority would benefit financially for the efforts in bringing the properties back into use.

The Chairperson responded that, in relation to Valleys to Coast properties, there was a specific agreement in place where the Authority brought properties that had a significant backlog of repairs and required significant modernisation back into use. The properties were then secured for nominations by the Authority from the common housing register. People having the greatest housing need would be housed thereby bringing the property back into use.

He stated that there was a range of different grants and loans available, however, they all had conditions that needed to have been satisfied. When they were brought back into use, the properties have been made available for rent as a form of social housing. It is therefore protected and the grant or loan that has been made would result in a benefit because the authority would be helping to house a person/persons who are in a housing need or indeed homeless.

He stated that quite often that requirement is from the Welsh Government, and there is a partnership arrangement with Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC who administer this on behalf of Welsh Government.

A member suggested including a mention of the positive link with the town and community councils within the report.

The Chairperson agreed with The Policy and Performance Manager that while it is a challenge, when producing such a report, to ensure that the report is succinct and comprehensive, sometimes, assumptions were made and information was taken for granted. He however accepted the suggestion made as a vital one and suggested that it was included in the report for the following year. The Policy and Performance Manager agreed that there was scope to include the suggestion for the current year and that this would be incorporated accordingly.

A member suggested that Council and Public finance were placed on the next agenda because any impact on public finance not only had an impact on the authority as local government, but on all Community councils and town councils. She also suggested that it may be useful to have discussions with all community councillors about an expectation of the borough's residents because there needed to be an understanding of expectations for all public services and responsibilities.

The Chairperson concluded by inviting contributions that members may want to make outside the meeting. He stated that the authority were keen to make the process effective as it could be. He stressed the importance of town and community councils as being the voices of the communities and reminded members that if they wished to place an item on the agenda, then they should submit details prior to the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report and the debate generated from this, be noted

20. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were none.

The meeting closed at 18:02

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Meeting of:	TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM
Date of Meeting:	13 NOVEMBER 2023
Report Title:	UPDATE ON BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES
Responsible Officer:	KEVIN MULCAHY - GROUP MANAGER HIGHWAYS & GREEN SPACES
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	The report content has no direct effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules.
Executive Summary:	<p style="text-align: center;">The report outlines the Council’s position regarding its Public Rights of Way network as identified in its Definitive Map.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Rights of Way network is comprised of routes that exist in both urban and rural locations and require the assistance of differing agencies to assist in its maintenance and availability.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The value of the network was most recently exemplified during the pandemic which saw a threefold increase in its use.</p>

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise on the current status of the public rights of way network.

2. Background

- 2.1 Bridgend County Borough Council has overall responsibility for the maintenance of the Public Rights of Way network (RoW) and also has a duty to protect the rights of the public to use that network and to prevent routes from being stopped up or obstructed. However, landowners also have a responsibility in that they are generally responsible for the maintenance of structures i.e. stiles, kissing gates, field gates, etc. on routes, although they can recover some costs from the Council for this.

- 2.2 All Public Rights of Way are required by law to be recorded on the Definitive Map and Statement, which is the legal record of those rights recorded on it. This document, was last updated in 2005, recording 741 individual rights of way with a total length of just over 585 Km. Since that date, 105 Legal Event Orders have been processed to a conclusion meaning that there are now 805 individual Public Rights of Way within the County Borough with a total network length of 614.59 Km. The most up to date alignments of all the routes are indicated on a map which the Rights of Way Team refer to as the 'Working Copy' of the Definitive Map.
- 2.3 There are four different types of routes recorded as public rights of way, differing from each other only in the type of traffic entitled to use them. They are:
- Public Footpath – public have a right of way on foot only.
 - Public Bridleway – public have a right of way on foot and on horseback and the right to lead a horse. They can also ride a bicycle on a bridleway by virtue of the Countryside Act 1968.
 - Restricted Byway – the public have a right of way on foot, on horseback, a right to lead a horse and a right of way for vehicles other than mechanically propelled vehicles.
 - Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT)– a right of way for vehicular traffic, but one used mainly for the purposes for which footpaths and bridleways are used i.e. by walkers and horse-riders.
- 2.4 In terms of the current network as shown on the 'Working Copy' of the Definitive Map this shows Public Footpaths making up 84.1% of the network (516.64 Km), Public Bridleways 14.5% (or 89.57 Km), Restricted Byways 0.1% (or 0.6 Km) and BOAT's 1.3% (or 7.78 Km).
- 2.5 Through the Wales Programme for Improvement the Council used to report annually on the condition of the public rights of way network using a nationally adopted Performance Indicator, namely 'Paths that are easy to use'. This Indicator stopped being reported nationally approximately 11 years ago, although it was reported internally for a number of years after that with the last 5% random sample survey being carried out in 2016.
- 2.6 In addition to the maintenance and protection of the rights of way network the Council, as both the Highway Authority and Surveying Authority, has various statutory duties including preparing, maintaining and reviewing the Definitive Map and Statement; investigating and determining applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders; signposting routes where they leave the metalled highway; preparing and reviewing the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP); administering and providing the secretariat role in respect of the Bridgend Local Access Forum; processing applications for Temporary Closures; and responding to statutory property searches.

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 Whilst the last sampling of the RoW network took place in 2016, inspections and reviews of the network have continued to take place. This provides a view on the current state of the asset which comprises circa 2,465 items of furniture and structures:

- Stiles – 548
- Kissing gates – 332
- Pedestrian/Bridle gates – 246
- Field gates – 670
- Bridges – 142
- Steps – 166
- Boardwalks – 32
- Drains – 329

Additionally, there are a further 684 roadside signs and 642 waymarks/other signs installed along the routes.

3.2 The condition of the above assets, and the routes themselves, can impact on a route being available or not, which can include the following issues.

- Cross Path (fences, hedges, barbed wire, unbridged watercourses)
- Vegetation obstructing the route.
- Issues with/missing Gates
- Issues with/missing Stiles
- Land Use (buildings, forestry, crops,)
- Terrain (muddy, waterlogged)
- Issues with Roadside signs (legible/orientation)

3.3 There are requests for additional improvements to routes including surfacing, structures, and signage and, whilst all are worthy of consideration, these need to be prioritised against the maintenance of the existing assets. The Rights of Way Section is aware of circa 900 individual assets that require some form of attention excluding signage maintenance.

3.4 The rural nature of the majority of the RoW network makes it impossible to say at any one time that a route is available as it is, by its very nature, ever changing. A path that may be considered as being passable one day may, for a variety of reasons, be unusable the next due to growth of vegetation, effect of weather on ground conditions/structures even for only a short time. Typically, BOATS, and Restricted Byways are not impacted in such a way, however footpaths and bridleways are impacted by the above issues and as many as 30% of those routes could be viewed as 'unavailable' at any one time for a variety of reasons.

3.5 Interventions/maintenance are ongoing through our maintenance officer and landowners in addressing obstructions and replacement of features, but this remains challenging within constraints of limited staff and budgets.

- 3.6 As indicated, apart from its maintenance duties the RoW Section has also to deliver other various statutory duties and as such the team comprises of 4 permanent full-time officers and 1 permanent part-time officer, namely, the RoW Manager, Maintenance Officer, RoW Officer, Definitive Map Officer and RoW Search Officer respectively.
- 3.7 The RoW Manager oversees the overall service delivery, as well as being involved across all aspects of the service provision. The Maintenance officer deals with all day-to-day issues on the network as well the implementation of any maintenance or improvement works on the ground. The RoW officer is responsible for processing all Public Path Orders and Temporary Closures, as well as liaising with developers and responding to any planning applications affected by public Rights of Way. The Definitive Map officer has been in post since 2020, and processes the Definitive Map Modification Orders and addressing the backlog (48 orders), as well as maintaining and updating the Definitive Map and Statement as well as investigating the 119 existing various anomalies that exist on the network. The RoW Search Officer is responsible for responding to received property searches within the team and any other general enquiries about the rights of way network.
- 3.8 During the pandemic there was an average threefold increase in the use of the RoW network with some popular routes seeing 5 and 6 times as many people using them. This, in turn, led to a fourfold increase in the number of queries/service requests the RoW team received over the same period. As a result, the team received additional Public Realm revenue support towards the end of 2020 which enabled the previously part-time role of the maintenance officer to become full-time. This also enabled the Council to increase the Agency Agreement funding to Town and Community Councils from £44/Km to £59/Km and for the appointment of the Definitive Map Officer.
- 3.9 In addition to the increase in revenue funding to manage pressures of an upsurge in usage, the ROW team have, over the past few years, been provided with £40k of Communities Minor Capital Works funding per year which is used to purchase structures such as kissing gates, bridleway gates, field gates, etc. and to carry larger improvement schemes such as surface improvements, replacement of smaller footbridges, etc.
- 3.10 Funding bids are also made to Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales for the maintenance of the Wales Coast Path through Bridgend and also for access improvements to assist with the replacement of stiles with kissing or pedestrian gates, small scale surface improvements, signing, etc.
- 3.11 Even with improved revenue and capital support, recent inflationary increases have meant that cost rises impact on the amount of work that is delivered on the network within available budgets. Furthermore, with the continuing economic difficulties the situation is unlikely to change.

3.12 However, any issues advised to the Rights of Way team whilst not necessarily able to be dealt with immediately are resolved and routes reopened as soon as possible. The Council does value the partnership working it has, not only with the Town and Community Council's that have Agency Agreements with the Council to remove vegetation, but also the work it does with landowners to remove obstructions and repair structures. The increase in the number of issues which have, and continue to be, reported to the team are unfortunately resulting in a backlog which the team are trying to work through as soon as practicable.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment Template has been completed and a summary of the implications from the assessment relating to the five ways of working is below:

- **Long-term:** Management of the Rights of Way Network benefits the provision of sustainable travel through protection of 'local traffic free' walking routes for the long-term benefit of the public
- **Prevention:** Planned annual maintenance takes place on the public rights of way network to maintain availability of routes and working in partnership with many of the Town and Community Councils in maintaining as best as possible the integrity of the RoW network.
- **Integration:** In carrying out maintenance and improvement works and by promoting the network through circular walks which highlight the areas historical, cultural and rich biodiversity this allows for an attractive and diverse economy to encourage more people to use the network during their daily routine.
- **Collaboration:** Different aspects of the Council's statutory duty to manage, maintain and improve the RoW network involve working together with partners at different times. These include but are not limited to town and community councils,

Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, user groups, landowners and land managers.

- **Involvement:** Different aspects of the Council's statutory duty to manage and maintain the rights of way network involve at different times co-operation and engagement with different stakeholders. Such engagement involves local members, community councils, landowners, local residents, Bridgend Local Access Forum, as well as statutory consultees.

5.2 The rights of way provision will contribute to the following elements of the Bridgend County Borough Council Delivering Together Corporate Plan 2023-28:

- **Wellbeing objective 3:** 'A county borough with thriving valleys communities. Improving community facilities and making them more accessible.' The RoW network extends and links communities as such preserves the connectivity and accessibility of the valley communities to the county borough.
- **Wellbeing objective 7:** 'A county borough where we support people to live healthy and happy lives, improving active travel routes and facilities so people can walk and cycle.' The RoW network provides valuable opportunities for residents to access local routes as well as enjoy access to the countryside which helps support wellbeing.

6. Climate Change Implications

6.1 Bridgend County Borough Council's 2030 Net Zero Carbon Strategy states that "To achieve our carbon neutral goal, we need to improve air quality, protect, and enhance our thriving green spaces, support sustainable travel, and continue to create energy efficient, good quality places to live and work to make the county borough a healthier and happier place to live." The rights of way network promotes and supports sustainable travel and benefits the wellbeing of its residents, making the county borough a healthier and happier place to live.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 There are no Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications arising from this report.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 The report is for noting with current duties and powers carried out by the Rights of Way team within existing budgets.

9. Recommendation

9.1 That the Town and Community Council Forum notes the report.

Background documents
None

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Meeting of:	TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM
Date of Meeting:	13 NOVEMBER 2023
Report Title:	ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION STRATEGY
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CHIEF OFFICER, FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE
Responsible Officer:	ZOE EDWARDS, CONSULTATION, ENGAGEMENT AND EQUALITIES MANAGER
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules.
Executive Summary:	<p>There is a commitment to engage effectively and this is underpinned by a range of legislation including the:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 2. Equality Act 2010 3. Welsh Language Measure 2011 4. Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 <p>The Engagement and Participation Strategy will set out the Council's corporate approach to engagement with the citizens of Bridgend.</p>

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Bridgend County Borough Council has a duty to engage effectively with the citizens of Bridgend, and believes that good engagement is the responsibility of everyone who works for the Council. Communication is two-way and it is important that, as well as giving out clear information, the public are heard. The draft Engagement and Participation Strategy sets out how this will be done.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to update the Town and Community Council Forum on the current situation and to let them know that a public consultation has commenced to seek views on the proposed Strategy which they can support by promoting within their local communities.

2. Background

- 2.1 Part 3 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 focuses on promoting access to local government. The Act establishes a duty to encourage local people to participate in decision-making and a requirement that local authorities publish, consult on, and regularly review a public participation strategy.

The Act stipulates that the strategy must address:

- Promoting awareness of council's functions
- Promoting awareness of how to become a councillor
- Facilitating access to decisions made or to be made
- Promoting and facilitating processes for local people to make representations to the Council about a decision

- 2.2 A draft Engagement and Participation Strategy, attached as **Appendix 1**, has therefore been produced to identify how the Council will meet its legislative requirements under the Act and to set out how it will improve public participation for citizens within the county borough.
- 2.3 Additionally, there is a commitment to engage effectively and this is underpinned by a range of legislation including the:
1. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
 2. Equality Act 2010
 3. Welsh Language Measure 2011
- 2.4 Best practice and national standards will also be followed, for example the Children and Young People's National Participation Standards and the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales. This Strategy will set out the Council's corporate approach to engagement with the citizens of Bridgend.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 The Strategy covers the need to engage with key stakeholders across a variety of areas:
- Geographical communities - all relevant communities of interest where people have a shared characteristic, experience, or interest for example carers, or those with specific expertise
 - Protected characteristics by the Equality Act 2010 – capturing communities' lived experiences to better inform the impact of the Council's actions
 - Equality Impact Assessments – to consider the impact any policy change will have on citizens
 - Accessibility – ensuring all residents in Bridgend can access information and have an opportunity to share their views
 - Stakeholder analysis – help identify key stakeholders and their levels of influence, ensuring that engagement is inclusive across the diverse make up of all communities
 - Engagement with Elected Members – leaders within their communities and provides important links to engage with a wide range of people.
 - Engagement with staff – wide base of experience and background diversity
 - Evaluation, Feedback, Drawing Conclusions and Making Recommendations
 - Equality and Inclusion Team – supporting and advising all council services on engagement and participation

- Digital Platforms – developing the integration of the two platforms, i.e. GovDelivery (communication) and EngagementHQ (engagement), to create a cohesive series of engagement using key tools i.e. surveys, ideas sharing, forums, quick polls etc.
- Measuring Success by developing key indicators i.e. site hits, number of responses, top projects etc.
- Timescales for feedback – publishing feedback in a suitable place within a suitable timescale, including publishing of reports, providing direct feedback.

3.2 A full public consultation will be undertaken for the duration of 12 weeks to seek the views of citizens and stakeholders on the proposed Strategy. An engagement plan has been developed to support this.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 It enables the effective implementation of the Council's statutory duties in relation to promoting access to local government as set out in Part 3 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

4.2 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. The following is a summary to show how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been used to formulate the recommendations within this report:

Long-term – Ensuring that the Council is encouraging local people to participate in the making of decisions by the Council now and in the future.

Prevention – Public participation and engagement can be used to prevent discrimination, promote equity and address any social injustices.

Integration – Integrating people from diverse backgrounds is a key aspect of building inclusive communities and organizations. An Engagement and Participation Strategy can also be utilised to promote integration.

Collaboration - Partnership working assists the Council in collaborative decision-making: By Involving individuals from different backgrounds, with different needs in decision-making processes and encourages their input and perspectives.

Involvement - Publication of the Strategy ensures that the public and stakeholders can review the work that has been undertaken. Involving residents in decision-making, encourages their active participation and fosters a sense of ownership and pride in their cultural background.

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 There is a commitment to engage effectively with local communities to help protect and sustain the environment over the long term and in line with our climate change ambitions.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 Where there is a safeguarding concern, all engagement will be managed under Bridgend County Borough Council's Safeguarding Policy. This will safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children, young people and adults at risk of abuse or neglect and to ensure that effective practices are in place throughout the Council and its commissioned services.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 The development of a strategy and the public consultation will be met from within existing resources.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Town and Community Council Forum notes the development of this Engagement and Participation Strategy and promotes the public consultation within their local communities to encourage their residents to provide feedback ahead of final approval by Cabinet.

Background documents

None

Bridgend County Borough Council

Engagement and Participation Strategy

This document is also available in Welsh.

Foreword

We recognise that local people should be involved in decisions about public services and policies that affect their lives.

Our Participation and Engagement Strategy 2023 has been developed to outline the steps we will take as a Council to keep people well-informed about our services.

With a wide selection of channels available to us, we want to ensure that we offer the best opportunity to listen and respond to people's views and engage with all members of our community around the services we deliver for the people of Bridgend County Borough.

We know that by working with citizens and involving them in the decision-making process, by addressing their concerns through consultation and involving them early in the process, we will be in a much better position to make key decisions about changes that can affect them.

We want to build trusting relationships within our local communities and improve our accessibility and accountability to local people.

As we have set out in our 'Delivering Together' Corporate Plan 2023–28, we have committed to consulting with the public on an annual basis and publishing our self-assessment of how we have done in the previous year.

We want to achieve more than this though, by ensuring that public engagement and participation is an integral part of our planning and decision making process. This strategy will ensure that by regular engagement with local people, we are in a stronger position to develop services that meet the needs and improve outcomes for our local communities.

This strategy will not only look to improve existing engagement methods but will also identify new and emerging ways to engage with as many people in our communities as possible.

Mark Shephard, Chief Executive

Council Leader, Huw David

Introduction

Bridgend County Borough Council has a duty to engage effectively with the people of Bridgend. We believe that good engagement is the responsibility of everyone who works for the Council. Communication is two-way and it is important that we listen to and take on ideas from the public as well as giving out clear information. This strategy sets out how we will do this.

We are committed to engage effectively and this is underpinned by a range of legislation including:

- The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- The Equality Act 2010,
- The Welsh Language Measure 2011
- Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

We will also follow best practice and national standards, for example the Children and Young People's National Participation Standards and the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales. This strategy sets out our corporate approach to engagement with the people of Bridgend County Borough.

The principle of this strategy is to promote choice, independence and collaborative working. Bridgend County Borough Council wants to listen, to understand people's needs and work with them to fulfil those needs.

The council engages with all key stakeholders of Bridgend County Borough.

The area we cover

Bridgend county borough covers around 100 square miles with a population of 145,760 in the 2021 census. In our population –

- 50.6% are female and 49.4% are male.
- 1.48% of people identify as Asian, 0.29% identify as black, 1.16% identify as mixed race, 96.78% identify as white and 0.29% identify as other ethnic group.
- 17.9% of people are aged 0-15, 61.4% are 16-64 and 20.7% are 65+.
- 22.64% of our population have reported disabilities that limit their day-to-day activities a little or a lot.
- 91.03% of people are straight, 1.35% are gay or lesbian, 0.95% are bisexual and 0.20% are other. 6.47% did not answer that question
- 94.4% of people are the same gender as registered at birth, 5.33% didn't answer the question
- 0.12% have a different gender identity to that registered at birth: 0.06% are trans women, 0.05% are trans men, 0.02% are non-binary and 0.02% are other sexual orientations

Our Participation Duties

As a Local Authority we have statutory duties to involve communities in shaping our services. However, our principal reason for involving communities in our processes is because we see the value communities add to discussions, and the great improvements in council services that come from having people involved in planning and decision-making processes.

Feedback suggests we could be more consistent in inviting and enabling participation and engagement, improve how we share learning and experiences to make the most of our collective community resource, as well as improve communication and feedback on engagement processes to demonstrate impact.

This feedback has informed the key strands of our strategy.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 places a number of duties on local authorities regarding participation. These are to:

1. Promote awareness of the functions the Council carries out for local residents, businesses and visitors.
2. Share information about how to go about becoming an elected Member, or Councillor, and what the role of Councillor involves.
3. Provide greater access to information about decisions that have been made, or that will be made by the Council.
4. Provide and promote opportunities for residents to provide feedback to the Council, including comments, complaints, and other types of representations.

Engagement Principles

We have signed up to **The National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales**

which gives guidance for best practice on citizens engagement. This ensures information provided is jargon free, appropriate, and understandable.

- Participation: People being actively involved with strategy makers and service planners from an early stage of policy and service planning and review
- Consultation: A formal process by which policy makers and service providers ask for the views of interested groups and individuals
- Engagement: An active and participative process by which people can influence and shape policy and services that includes a wide range of different methods and techniques
- Co-production: An asset-based approach to public services that enables people providing and people receiving services to share power and responsibility, and to work together in equal, reciprocal, and caring relationships.
- Involvement: requires organisations to be open to influence from citizens and stakeholders, moving to a culture of “working with” rather than “doing to” and being supported to remain involved through the process.

Engagement and Participation methods

It is important that our communities have a clear understanding about the purpose of any activity that is designed to involve them, so that it is clear to them whether, and to what extent, they can influence decisions being made.

We currently use a range of different methods to encourage residents and businesses across the County Borough to get involved in key council decisions. Current methods are detailed below:

Methods	
Bridgend County Borough Council website	Contains the latest information about what's going on, the services we provide and how you can get involved.
Citizens Panel	Made up of a group of people who live in Bridgend County Borough and are regularly consulted on services run by the council by signing up here: https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/my-council/consultations/citizens-panel/
Digital communication platform	Residents can subscribe to choose the news or updates they want to receive.
Digital engagement platform	An opportunity for residents and others to contribute to decision making by taking part in consultations. These are available on the website during the consultation period and advertised via our social media platforms.
My Account	Reporting issues to the Council using our online forms Managing your council tax account online Managing your housing benefit account online Request pest control visit (domestic properties only) Apply for school admissions and free school meals
Social Media	A presence on social media sites Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube
Chatbot	Conduct an online chat conversation via text or text-to-speech, finding answers to a wide variety of queries instantly.
In person	Residents and businesses can get involved with engagement and participation activities by attending our Civic offices, local libraries and community-based consultation events.
Petitions	An ePetition is a petition which collects signatures online.

Methods	
	<p>Anyone who lives, works or studies in the area can submit or sign an ePetition.</p> <p>ePetitions are part of the Council's ongoing commitment to listening to and acting on the views of the public.</p> <p>Details relating to ePetitions can be found under the Council's Petition Scheme</p>
Out-of-hours Customer Services	Emergency issues such as homelessness, highways and more
Concerns and formal complaints policy	<p>Opportunities to feedback any concerns or complaints you may have about our services.</p> <p>Information can be found on Bridgend Council's website</p>
Bridgend Public Services Board	Brings together public bodies who deliver services locally to improve the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of Bridgend.
Webcasting	Join Committee meetings live or playback, as well as accessing meeting agendas and reports and the ability to contribute to certain meeting such as Development Control Committee.
Contacting your Councillor	A full list of Councillors' contact details by ward are available on Bridgend County Borough's website, for residents to discuss issues or concerns within their ward.
Council public meetings	Members of the public are able to attend Civic Offices to view public meetings in person, live online, as well as ask questions in line with section 4.18 of Bridgend County Borough Council's Constitution .
Watching / Getting involved in council meetings	The majority of council meetings are recorded and streamed live online for residents to watch, as well as being stored in the archive for residents to refer to at a later time.
Overview and Scrutiny Committees	<p>The public and other stakeholders can get involved in scrutiny by providing evidence to a committee, suggesting an items for scrutiny by completing a request form, or by speaking at a committee as a representative. Further information can be found on https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/my-council/democracy-and-elections/overview-and-scrutiny-committees/.</p>
Becoming a member of the council	Anyone who meets certain qualifying criteria, can stand at the next Local Elections in May 2027 to represent their community as a Councillor in the Council and have their say in how things

Methods	
	<p>are run in Bridgend. ‘Be a Councillor’ awareness sessions are run about 6 months prior to the elections. https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/my-council/democracy-and-elections/have-you-thought-about-becoming-a-councillor/</p>
Engaging with Town and Community Councils	<p>Town and Community Councils contact information is available on the Council’s website. https://democratic.bridgend.gov.uk/mgParishCouncilDetailsList.aspx</p>

Your Council’s 7 Wellbeing Objectives

Your Council has 7 wellbeing objectives in place and this Strategy has been developed in line with these to ensure all key stakeholders across Bridgend County Borough are involved in key strategic decision. The Council’s wellbeing objectives are:

- A County Borough where we protect our most vulnerable
- A County Borough with fair work, skilled, high-quality jobs and thriving towns
- A County Borough with thriving valleys communities
- A County Borough where we help people meet their potential
- A County Borough that is responding to the climate and nature emergency
- A County Borough where people feel valued, heard and part of a community.

A County Borough where we support people to live healthy and happy lives to achieve these objectives whilst ensuring effective engagement and participation, we aim to do the following:

	<u>Aim</u>	<u>Method</u>
Inform	<p>Providing appropriate (balanced and objective) information about services, policies, and decisions to highlight the issues or problems to be solved, and the solutions being considered</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Collecting or using existing information about the views and needs of local people to inform services, policies, and decisions</p>	<p>By using the appropriate communication and engagement methods to keep communities informed and by keeping information about the views and needs of local people accurate and updated to best inform the decision-making process across services</p>
Consult	<p>Offering an appropriate (one-off or time limited) opportunity to have a say about a service, policy, or decision</p>	<p>By keeping communities informed, offering timely opportunities to raise concerns and provide feedback, and by demonstrating the impact of engagement on decisions made</p>
Involve	<p>Providing opportunities to have a say and get involved in activities in a more influential and timely way (on an ongoing basis)</p>	<p>By collaborating with communities to ensure their concerns and their ambitions directly influence the options considered, and by demonstrating the impact of engagement on decisions made</p>
Collaborate	<p>Working in partnership in each aspect of the decision-making process, including developing and selecting the preferred solutions to issues or problems</p>	<p>By actively seeking advice and innovative ideas from communities to develop options for consideration and by incorporating that advice and those ideas into the final decisions taken</p>
Empower	<p>Where appropriate, empowering partners to lead decision making processes and/or placing the final decision in the hands of the community or relevant stakeholders</p>	<p>By listening to what those empowered have to say, accepting constructive feedback and comments and implementing what those empowered to drive decision making decide or recommend</p>

Geographical communities

We will engage with citizens in specific locations as well as across the County Borough as a whole. This engagement will take place in our towns and the wider rural setting. We will also make sure that we engage with relevant communities of interest. This is where people have a shared characteristic, experience, or interest, for example carers, or those with specific expertise.

Equality Impact Assessments

When we make plans to create a new policy or change the way we do things, we must consider the impact this will have on our citizens, including those who have protected characteristics.

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) brings together the relevant legislations and sets out how we will take due regard, (give appropriate weight), to making decisions. Appendix A explains more about 'due regard'. When we carry out an EIA:

- We are considering relevant evidence to understand the likely or actual effects of policies or practices on those who are vulnerable within our communities, including those who are experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
- We are thinking about where we might be able to reduce negative impacts.
- We are identifying missed opportunities and capitalising on positive impacts.
- We are considering the rights of the child.

These are characteristics that are protected by the Equality Act 2010. It is essential that we reach out to these communities so that we can capture their lived experiences, which will better inform our understanding of the impact of our actions and decisions. This feeds into our requirement to carry out Equality Impact Assessments. These characteristics are :

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race – including ethnic or national origin, colour, or nationality
- Religion or belief – including lack of belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership' (in terms of discrimination in employment).

Stakeholders

Carrying out a stakeholder analysis will help to identify key stakeholders and their levels of influence. We will also ensure that engagement is inclusive across the diverse make up of our communities. We will include people with protected characteristics and marginalised or seldom heard people and communities in our engagement.

Engagement with Elected Members

Elected Members are leaders within their communities and can provide important links to engage with a wide range of people. In addition to matters of interest to their wards, Elected Members may sit on several different Committees and will attend full Council meetings.

We will ensure Elected Members have the right information at the right time to enable them to engage with their constituents.

Engagement with Staff

We employ around 6,000 people. Our staff have a very wide base of experience and come from a diversity of backgrounds. We engage with our staff by several different means including staff news bulletins, e-mails, and surveys. We are in the process of developing a new staff portal for our staff to use, which will increase staff involvement, engagement, and communication. Human Resources directly engage with staff and unions on employment matters.

Engagement with Children and Young people

All children and young people have numerous rights. The right to have their views taken seriously, to freedom of expression, to have access to appropriate information, to have dignity, independence, and active participation in their community. These rights are protected under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Meaningful engagement with children and young people across Bridgend will lead to services and policies being more relevant and appropriate to their needs.

Bridgend Youth Council are a diverse group of young people aged between 11-25 years. They actively work in partnership with Bridgend Council and other organisations to make positive changes for young people. We hold monthly meetings to discuss current issues faced by young people in Bridgend and how we can work towards resolving them.

Digital Engagement Platform

We will improve engagement through the development of a digital engagement platform specifically for consultation to give us the ability to create a cohesive series of engagement activities. The digital platform will enable us to organise engagement across the council services. Some examples of tools that can be utilised in a digital platform are:

- Surveys
- Quick polls

- Story walls
- Ideas sharing
- Timeline of engagement

It is hoped that through utilising these tools we can improve our engagement with citizens in Bridgend County Borough.

Evaluation, Feedback, Drawing Conclusions and Making Recommendations

We will feedback the results of our consultation and engagement activities in a variety of ways, such as publishing reports on our website and providing direct feedback to groups or organisations involved in our engagement. The feedback will summarise an evaluation of our engagement and also demonstrate how the engagement influenced and was considered with our decision making.

Our aims and ambitions

We want to ensure our residents and other key stakeholders are involved in key strategic decisions. The following aims have therefore been developed to ensure we achieve this.

Aim 1	Bring all the Council’s consultation, engagement, and participation activities together into a single, easily accessible online hub, with the long-term objective of developing a portal that joins together all pathways for participation in Bridgend County Borough
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Aim 2	Ensure effective engagement and participation across Bridgend County Borough
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Aim 3	Keep up to date with the latest and best methods of engaging with residents of Bridgend County Borough
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How will this be achieved

To achieve these aims, we will:

- Further develop our new digital consultation and engagement platform across a range of consultation/engagement activities
- Embrace the use of digital discussions, such as forums, social media live streams, webinar to further improve levels of engagement with Bridgend residents
- Maintain non-digital methods of community engagements to improve the overall levels of engagement across the county borough
- Make sure all council consultation and engagement activities are published in fully accessible formats,

- Improve levels of engagement with residents who have protected characteristics
- Ensure timely feedback is given on the outcomes from all consultation and engagement activities
- Continually review this Strategy to ensure it is kept up to date with the latest engagement developments
- Update the staff engagement toolkit to ensure consistency across all consultation and engagement activities
- Liaise with key partners across Wales to share methods of best practice
- Review feedback from residents and other key stakeholders to monitor and measure effectiveness
- Review and improve the way we inform people about the Council's responsibilities.
- Ensure that consultations with children and young people are more frequent, engaging and age appropriate.

Measuring Success

To measure the outcome of the implementation of this strategy, we will monitor:

- Site hits and registrations on both our digital engagement and communication platforms
- The number of responses and levels of engagement we receive to public engagement exercises
- Engagement levels with both the Scrutiny process and petitions.
- National Survey for Wales questions regarding Local Democracy
- Review how the consultation has impacted on policy development and service delivery
- Liaise with children and young people to ensure feedback has been given to them and actioned where appropriate.

Agenda Item 6

Meeting of:	TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM
Date of Meeting:	13 NOVEMBER 2023
Report Title:	BUDGET UPDATE
Report Owner/ Corporate Director:	CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE
Responsible Officer:	JOANNE NORMAN GROUP MANAGER – BUDGET MANAGEMENT
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	As required by section 3 (budgetary control) of the Financial Procedure Rules; Chief Officers in consultation with the appropriate Cabinet Member are expected to manage their services within the approved cash limited budget and to provide the Chief Finance Officer with such information as is required to facilitate and monitor budgetary control.
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The net revenue budget for 2023-24 is £342.334 million. The overall projected position at 30th September 2023 is a net over spend of £10.932 million.• The projected over spend is primarily due to ongoing pressures within the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate and on the Home to School Transport budget.• The budget approved for 2023-24 included budget reduction proposals totalling £2.608 million. The current position is a projected shortfall on the savings target of £200,000, or 7.67% of the overall reduction target.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a briefing on the current budget position for Bridgend County Borough Council as at 30th September 2023.

2. Background

- 2.1 The net revenue budget for Bridgend County Borough Council in 2023-24 is £342.334 million. A report was presented to Cabinet on 17th October providing a detailed overview of the Council's financial position against that budget at 30th September.
- 2.2 As part of the Performance Management Framework, budget projections are reviewed regularly and reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis. The delivery of agreed budget reductions is also kept under review and reported to Cabinet as part of this process.

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 Summary financial position at 30th September 2023

- 3.1.1 The Council's net revenue budget and projected outturn for 2023-24 is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1- Comparison of budget against projected outturn at 30th September 2023

Directorate/Budget Area	Original Budget 2023-24 £'000	Revised Budget 2023-24 £'000	Projected Year end spend Q2 2023-24 £'000	Projected Over / (Under) Spend 2023-24 £'000	Projected Over / (Under) Spend Qtr 1 2023-24 £'000
Directorate					
Education and Family Support	137,488	139,032	140,778	1,746	1,699
Social Services and Wellbeing	92,791	96,630	109,320	12,690	11,065
Communities	30,545	32,832	33,432	600	122
Chief Executive's	24,003	24,200	24,448	248	(98)
Total Directorate Budgets	284,827	292,694	307,978	15,284	12,788
Council Wide Budgets					
Capital Financing	7,203	7,203	4,605	(2,598)	(2,125)
Levies	9,189	9,189	9,170	(19)	0
Apprenticeship Levy	650	750	769	19	0
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	16,054	16,054	15,841	(213)	(262)
Insurance Premiums	1,363	1,363	1,261	(102)	0
Repairs & Maintenance	670	670	630	(40)	0
Pension Related Costs	430	430	430	0	0
Other Council Wide Budgets	21,948	13,981	12,582	(1,399)	(674)
Total Council Wide Budgets	57,507	49,640	45,288	(4,352)	(3,061)
Total	342,334	342,334	353,266	10,932	9,727

- 3.1.2 The overall projected position at 30th September 2023 is a net over spend of £10.932 million comprising £15.284 million net over spend on directorates and a net under spend of £4.352 million on Council wide budgets. A detailed analysis of the more significant projected under and over spends was considered by Cabinet and that report is contained in Appendix A of this report.

- 3.1.3 The main financial pressures are in the service areas of Social Services and Wellbeing (SSWB) and Home to School Transport (HtST). Whilst budget growth of £8.174 million was approved for SSWB by Council as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2023-24, the Directorate continues to see an increase in demand and the budget growth confirmed is currently insufficient to meet the increase in demand with current projections showing a £12.690 million over spend in 2023-24. A 3 year sustainability plan to improve outcomes for Children and Family Services in Bridgend was approved by Council on the 20th September 2023, with a permanent budget virement of £1 million from unallocated growth approved for Children's services and the additional use of up to £2.5 million of earmarked reserves whilst a more permanent funding solution is sought.
- 3.1.4 There is a projected over spend on Home to School Transport of £1.158 million which has reduced from the projected over spend at quarter 1 of £1.316 million, but is still significant.
- 3.1.5 Work is ongoing to determine a realistic projection for the likely amount of council tax income for 2023-24. It is difficult to currently project whether the Council is likely to see a reduction in council tax income due to changing personal circumstances of individuals and changes to those receiving council tax support.
- 3.1.6 The net budget for the financial year has been set assuming full implementation of the current year budget reduction requirements across the Council's budget, which amount to £2.608 million. Where proposals to meet this requirement have been delayed or are not achievable directorates have been tasked with identifying alternative proposals to meet their requirements such as vacancy management, or bringing forward alternative budget reduction proposals.
- 3.1.7 In March 2023 Council approved the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2023-24 to 2026-27. This identified the need to develop recurrent budget reduction proposals, based on the most likely scenario, amounting to £17.165 million over the next four years. However, it has become evident in recent months that the position going forward is likely to be even more challenging than this, with recurrent in-year over spends needing to be mitigated, along with additional pay and price pressures due to ongoing high levels of inflation. Against that background it is essential that expenditure is kept within the overall approved budget as far as possible, and that longer term proposals continue to be developed so that the Council has as much flexibility as possible to meet the challenges which lie ahead. Likewise, any opportunities to reduce spend in-year will be taken to try and improve the year end position.

3.2 Review of Earmarked Reserves

- 3.2.1 A thorough review of earmarked reserves was undertaken by Corporate Management Board during quarter 1 of 2023-24, which included an assessment of the draw down profile and re-profiling of existing earmarked reserves.
- 3.2.2 The review in quarter 1 identified £3.067 million of reserves to be unwound in order to fund emerging risks for the Council as a whole during 2023-24 and a further £733,000 to be repurposed for similar schemes. On 20th September Council

approved the use of £2.5 million of the unwound reserves to support the deliverability of the 3 year sustainability plan, to improve outcomes for Children and Family Services in Bridgend, whilst a more permanent funding solution is sought.

3.2.3 The cumulative draw down by directorates in 2023-24 is £4.251 million as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2 – Usable Earmarked Reserves (Excluding Council Fund) – Quarter 2

Opening Balance 01 Apr 23	Reserve	Net Additions/ Reclassification	Draw-down	Unwound	Closing Balance 30 Sept 23
£		£	£	£	£
	Corporate Reserves:				
(25,801)	Education & Family Support	-	3	-	(25,798)
(1,870)	Social Services & Wellbeing	-	-	290	(1,580)
(15,624)	Communities	(330)	175	74	(15,705)
(10,650)	Chief Executives	(167)	154	393	(10,270)
(7,380)	Non-Directorate	142	2,263	474	(4,501)
(61,325)	Total Corporate Reserves	(355)	2,595	1,231	(57,854)
	Directorate Earmarked Reserves:				
(693)	Education & Family Support	(78)	34	76	(661)
(6,076)	Social Services & Wellbeing	(2,500)	958	-	(7,618)
(9,310)	Communities	(130)	76	69	(9,295)
(3,102)	Chief Executives	(154)	538	166	(2,552)
(19,181)	Total Directorate Reserves	(2,862)	1,606	311	(20,126)
	Equalisation & Grant Earmarked Reserves:				
(2,074)	Education & Family Support	78	50	580	(1,366)
(436)	Social Services & Wellbeing	-	-	350	(86)
(2,847)	Communities	-	-	595	(2,252)
(346)	Chief Executives	154	-	-	(192)
	Non-Directorate	-	-	-	-
(5,703)	Total Equalisation Reserves	232	50	1,525	(3,896)
	School Balances				
(6,898)		-	-	-	(6,898)
(93,107)	Total Usable Reserves	(2,985)	4,251	3,067	(88,774)

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act 2010, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 The Act provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with 5 ways of working to guide how public services should work to deliver for people. The well-being objectives are designed to complement each other and are part of an integrated way of working to improve well-being for the people of Bridgend. The allocation of budget determines the extent to which the Council's well-being objectives can be delivered. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of the well-being goals or objectives as a result of this report.

6. Climate Change Implications

6.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 These are reflected in the body of the report.

9. Recommendation

9.1 Town and Community Council Forum is recommended to note the financial position of the Council.

Background documents

None

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Meeting of:	CABINET
Date of Meeting:	17 OCTOBER 2023
Report Title:	BUDGET MONITORING 2023-24 – QUARTER 2 REVENUE FORECAST
Report Owner/ Corporate Director:	CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE
Responsible Officer:	JOANNE NORMAN GROUP MANAGER – BUDGET MANAGEMENT
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	As required by section 3 (budgetary control) of the Financial Procedure Rules; Chief Officers in consultation with the appropriate Cabinet Member are expected to manage their services within the approved cash limited budget and to provide the Chief Finance Officer with such information as is required to facilitate and monitor budgetary control.
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The net revenue budget for 2023-24 is £342.334 million. The overall projected position at 30th September 2023 is a net over spend of £10.932 million. • The projected over spend is primarily due to ongoing pressures within the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate and on the Home to School Transport budget. • The budget approved for 2023-24 included budget reduction proposals totalling £2.608 million. The current position is a projected shortfall on the savings target of £200,000, or 7.67% of the overall reduction target.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with an update on the Council's revenue financial position as at 30th September 2023 and to seek approval for any virements over £100,000 which require approval by Cabinet as required by the Council's Financial Procedure Rules.

2. Background

2.1 On 1st March 2023, Council approved a net revenue budget of £342.047 million for 2023-24 based on the provisional local government settlement received from Welsh Government in December 2022. The Welsh Government announced its final settlement on the 28th February 2023 which included an increase in the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) for the Council of £287,106, increasing the net revenue budget for 2022-23 to £342.334 million. The reasons for this increase were outlined in a report to Council on 15th March, but were mainly in respect of the transfer into the final local government settlement of the Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) Scape grant.

2.2 As part of the Performance Management Framework, budget projections are reviewed regularly and reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis. The delivery of agreed budget reductions is also kept under review and reported to Cabinet as part of this process.

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 Summary financial position at 30th September 2023

3.1.1 The Council's net revenue budget and projected outturn for 2023-24 is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1- Comparison of budget against projected outturn at 30th September 2023

Directorate/Budget Area	Original Budget 2023-24 £'000	Revised Budget 2023-24 £'000	Projected Year end spend Q2 2023-24 £'000	Projected Over / (Under) Spend 2023-24 £'000	Projected Over / (Under) Spend Qtr 1 2023-24 £'000
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Communities	30,545	32,832	33,432	600	122
Chief Executive's	24,003	24,200	24,448	248	(98)
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Pension Related Costs	430	430	430	0	0
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Total Council Wide Budgets	57,507	49,640	45,288	(4,352)	(3,061)
Total	342,334	342,334	353,266	10,932	9,727

- 3.1.2 The overall projected position at 30th September 2023 is a net over spend of £10.932 million comprising £15.284 million net over spend on directorates and a net under spend of £4.352 million on Council wide budgets. A detailed analysis of the more significant projected under and over spends is set out in section 3.3.
- 3.1.3 The main financial pressures are in the service areas of Social Services and Wellbeing (SSWB) and Home to School Transport (HtST). In 2022-23, the SSWB Directorate experienced pressures of work to meet statutory duties against a backdrop of an exponential increase in demand in children's social care, and an increase in the number of independent residential placements in Children's Services, along with pressures in learning disabilities and older persons' residential placements. Whilst budget growth of £8.174 million was approved by Council as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2023-24, the Directorate continues to see an increase in demand and the budget growth confirmed is currently insufficient to meet the increase in demand with current projections showing a £12.690 million over spend in 2023-24. The quarter 1 revenue monitoring report highlighted that further consideration needed to be given by Council to the sustainable resource required specifically in Children's Services to improve the quality of outcomes for children and families in Bridgend. A 3 year sustainability plan to improve outcomes for Children and Family Services in Bridgend was approved by Council on the 20th September 2023, with a budget virement of £1 million approved for Children's services (see 3.1.5) and the additional use of up to £2.5 million of earmarked reserves (see 3.4.2) whilst a more permanent funding solution is sought
- 3.1.4 There is a projected over spend on Home to School Transport of £1.158 million which has reduced from the projected over spend at quarter 1 of £1.316 million. Several retendering exercises on HtST took place in 2022-23 with market conditions not being favourable, due to high levels of inflation and shortage of drivers and escorts, with procurement exercises resulting in generally higher costs across many contracts.

Budget virements/technical adjustments

- 3.1.5 There have been a number of budget virements and technical adjustments between budgets since the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was approved by Council in March 2023. The budget position is reported on the assumption that these virements will be approved.

As noted in 3.1.3 Council approved a budget virement of £1 million for Children's Services to support a 3 year sustainability plan.

- 3.1.6 The other main virements and technical adjustments in quarter 2 are outlined below:

Budget Virements

Service vired from / to	Amount
Transfer of funding from Directorate print budgets to ICT to reflect reduced print activity due to staff working from home and ICT being unable to recover the fixed costs of printers and photocopiers through the re-charge to service departments.	£125,000
One-off contribution from Corporate Contingency to fund demolition works at Brackla car park.	£400,000

Technical Adjustments

Service vired from / to	Amount
Transfer of inflationary uplifts not confirmed when the Medium Term Financial Strategy was agreed that are held centrally until evidence of the uplift is provided by the service areas (detailed in paragraph 3.1.7).	£2,092,352

Pay/Price Inflation

- 3.1.7 When the budget for 2023-24 was set, very little funding was allocated to directorates for pay and price inflation, as most had not been determined for the forthcoming year. The majority of the provision was retained centrally within Council wide budgets, to be allocated as further information was known about specific contractual price increases. Amounts released during quarter 2 are shown in 3.1.6 and include £1.874 million energy uplift for corporate and leisure services buildings and £0.128 million management fee uplift on the leisure services contract in line with CPI.
- 3.1.8 Inflationary pressures include increases in staffing costs arising from the above inflation increases in the National Living Wage and the implementation of the Real Living Wage. In addition, there are ongoing discussions regarding pay claims for Teachers' pay from September 2023 onwards and National Joint Council (NJC) workers for 2023-24. Even a variance of 1% on the pay settlement of NJC staff alone can result in a swing in required funding of over £1 million per annum.
- 3.1.9 In addition, the Council has experienced additional costs as a result of increases in inflation not seen for over a decade, and the impact of the war in the Ukraine.
- 3.1.10 There is a risk that there may not be sufficient funding available within these budgets for any unexpected major pay/price inflation increases. Inflation rates have also continued to remain high since the budget was set with CPI at 6.7% in August 2023. With these uncertainties the budget will need to be monitored closely during the remainder of the year as there is a risk that the provision will be insufficient.

Budget Reduction Proposals

- 3.1.11 The net budget for the financial year has been set assuming full implementation of the current year budget reduction requirements across the Council's budget, which amount to £2.608 million. Where proposals to meet this requirement have been delayed or are not achievable directorates have been tasked with identifying alternative proposals to meet their requirements such as vacancy management, or bringing forward alternative budget reduction proposals.
- 3.1.12 In March 2023 Council approved the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2023-24 to 2026-27. This identified the need to develop recurrent budget reduction proposals, based on the most likely scenario, amounting to £17.165 million over the next four years. However, it has become evident in recent months that the position going forward is likely to be even more challenging than this, with recurrent in-year over spends needing to be mitigated, along with additional pay and price pressures. Against that background it is essential that expenditure is kept within the overall approved budget as far as possible, and that longer term proposals continue to be developed so that the Council has as much flexibility as possible to meet the challenges which lie ahead. Likewise, any opportunities to reduce spend in-year will be taken to try and improve the year end position.
- 3.1.13 At year end consideration will be given to any budget over spends to determine whether these should be carried forward as a first call on the directorate budget for the following year. Similarly, consideration will be given to requests from directors to carry forward any planned directorate under spends for specific purposes into the following year, in line with the Council's Reserves and Balances Protocol, only as long as these can be met from within the Council's cash limited budget for 2023-24. This is in line with the reports to Cabinet and Council on the MTFs, and the Council's Financial Procedure Rules.

3.2 Monitoring of Budget Reduction Proposals

Prior Year Budget Reductions

- 3.2.1 A report was presented to Cabinet on 20th June 2023 on the Revenue Budget Outturn 2022-23. In the report it was highlighted that, for 2017-18 to 2021-22, there were £179,000 of budget reduction proposals that were not met in full, with a total outstanding balance to be met of £60,000. In addition, of the 2022-23 budget reduction proposals of £631,000, it was reported that there was a total outstanding balance to be met of £176,000. Directors have been asked to identify if any of these proposals are still not likely to be achieved in full during the 2023-24 financial year, and to identify mitigating actions that will be undertaken to achieve them. All remaining outstanding prior year budget reductions are summarised in **Appendix 1** with a summary per directorate provided in Table 2.

Table 2 – Outstanding Prior Year Budget Reductions

	Total Budget Reductions Required	Total Budget Reductions Likely to be Achieved	Shortfall
DIRECTORATE /BUDGET REDUCTION AREA	£'000	£'000	£'000
Social Services and Wellbeing	115	115	0
Communities	165	35	130
TOTAL	280	150	130

Note: The total budget reductions required in Table 2 represents the full original budget reduction targets.

3.2.2 Table 2 shows that of the £280,000 outstanding reductions, £150,000 is likely to be achieved in 2023-24 leaving a shortfall of £130,000. Proposals still not likely to be achieved, and therefore which will have to be met through alternative one-off efficiencies in 2023-24 in order to deliver a balanced budget position, include:

- COM 2 – Re-location of Community Recycling Centre from Tythegston to Pyle (£60,000 shortfall). The new site in Pyle is anticipated to open in the second half of 2023-24, with both sites being maintained until the new site is fully operational, therefore the saving will not be achieved in full until 2024-25.
- COM 3 – change the composition of household food waste bags (£35,000 shortfall). Budget reduction proposal has been delayed due to ongoing national research and debate surrounding composition of household food waste bags, to ensure any potential changes in legislation do not impact on the proposal.
- COM 4 – remove Business in Focus from running Enterprise Centres in Bridgend (£10,000 shortfall). The review of the Business in Focus operating model is ongoing to identify operating efficiencies.
- COM 5 – commercially let a wing of Ravens Court to a partner organisation of business (£25,000 shortfall). Delay in progressing budget reduction proposal whilst the Future Service Delivery model is being developed.

3.2.3 As outlined in the MTFS reports to Cabinet and Council, MTFS Principle 7 states that *“Savings proposals are fully developed and include realistic delivery timescales prior to inclusion in the annual budget. An MTFS Budget Reduction Contingency Reserve will be maintained to mitigate against unforeseen delays”*. An MTFS Budget Reduction Contingency reserve was established in 2016-17. This reserve has been used to meet specific budget reduction proposals in previous years on a one-off basis pending alternative measures. During the financial year, the Section 151 Officer will consider applications from Directorates to the MTFS Budget Reduction Contingency reserve to mitigate some of the shortfalls.

Budget Reductions 2023-24

3.2.4 The budget approved for 2023-24 included budget reduction proposals totalling £2.608 million, which is broken down in **Appendix 2** and summarised in Table 3 below. The current position is that £2.358 million has been achieved to date with an additional £50,000 likely to be achieved by year end, leading to an overall projected shortfall on the savings target by year end of £200,000, or 7.67% of the overall reduction target.

Table 3 – Monitoring of Budget Reductions 2023-24

	Total Budget Reductions Required	Total Budget Reductions Achieved to date	Total Budget Reductions Likely to be Achieved	Shortfall
DIRECTORATE /BUDGET REDUCTION AREA	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Education and Family Support	40	0	0	40
Schools	2,118	2,118	2,118	0
Social Services and Wellbeing	0	0	0	0
Communities	375	165	215	160
Chief Executive's	75	75	75	0
TOTAL	2,608	2,358	2,408	200

3.2.5 The most significant budget reduction proposals unlikely to be achieved in full are:-

- EDFS1 – Delegation of school transport responsibilities to The Bridge Pupil Referral Unit (£40,000 shortfall). Officers are continuing to investigate the practicalities and implications of this bespoke transport arrangement.
- COM1 – closure of each of the Community Recycling Centre sites for one weekday per week (£50,000 shortfall). Public Consultation has been undertaken, the outcome of which will be reported back to Cabinet in due course.
- COM 2 – Charging Blue Badge Holders for parking (£40,000 shortfall). The traffic management team have been engaged in the introduction of the national speed limit in built up areas, and therefore the saving proposal is unlikely to be achieved in 2023-24 due to the resource required to introduce this change first.
- COM5 – commercially let a wing of Ravens Court to a partner organisation or business (£70,000 shortfall) – delay in progressing budget reduction proposal whilst the Future Service Delivery model is being developed.

3.2.6 **Appendix 2** identifies the projected amount of saving against these proposals in detail and action to be taken by the directorate to mitigate the shortfall. Directors continue to work with their staff to deliver their proposals or alternatives and this is reflected in the forecast outturn for the year. During the financial year the Section 151 Officer will also consider applications from directorates to the MTFs Budget Reduction Contingency reserve to mitigate some of the shortfalls.

3.2.7 In the longer term, these proposals must be realised or must be met through alternative budget reduction proposals in order to deliver a balanced budget position.

3.3 Commentary on the financial position at 30th September 2023

Financial position at 30th September 2023

A summary of the financial position for each main service area is attached in **Appendix 3** to this report and comments on the most significant variances are provided below.

3.3.1 Education and Family Support Directorate

The net budget for the Education and Family Support Directorate, including school delegated budgets, for 2023-24 is £139.032 million. Current projections indicate an over spend of £1.746 million at year end. The main variances are:

EDUCATION & FAMILY SUPPORT DIRECTORATE	Net Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance Over/(under) budget	% Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	
Learner Support	6,697	7,207	510	7.6%
Family Support	3,430	3,150	(280)	-8.2%
Home to School Transport	8,008	9,166	1,158	14.5%
Catering Services	1,542	1,932	390	25.3%
Corporate health and safety	397	361	(36)	-9.1%

Schools' delegated budgets

Total funding currently delegated to schools in 2023-24 is £111.063 million.

The schools' delegated budget is reported as balanced as any under spend or over spend is automatically carried forward into the new financial year before being considered by the Corporate Director - Education and Family Support in line with the 'Guidance and Procedures on Managing Surplus School Balances'.

Total school balances decreased by £7.330 million during 2022-23, to £6.898 million at year end. At the start of 2023-24, projections indicated an overall surplus balance for school delegated budgets of £221,890 at year end. Quarter 2 projections indicate an overall surplus balance of £72,960 at year end. There are 20 primary schools, 1 secondary school and 2 special schools (39% of all schools) projecting a deficit balance at year end.

Central Education and Family Support Directorate budgets

Learner Support

- There is a projected net over spend of £510,000 in Learner Support budgets. This primarily relates to a projected over spend on the inter-authority recoupment budget due to an increase in demand for Bridgend pupils in out of county placements from 16 in Summer 2022 up to 21 for Summer 2023 (£353,000) as there are insufficient spaces at Heronsbridge and Ysgol Bryn Castell. The balance relates to a projected increase in demand for additional learning needs support at schools, in particular complex medical needs, sensory support and communication and relationship support.

Family Support

- The projected under spend of £280,000 primarily relates to staff vacancies and receipt of additional grant funding. The two additional grants are the Youth Endowment Fund (£262,000 – 18 months from September 2023 to March 2025) and the Turnaround grant (£59,000 – two years, ending March 2025).

Home-to-school transport (HtST)

- The revenue outturn report for 2022-23 highlighted a £1.316 million over spend on the HtST budget. This was primarily as a result of retendering exercises that had taken place, which had been impacted by unfavourable market conditions. This had subsequently resulted in higher costs across many contracts in line with difficulties associated with the aftermath of the pandemic, namely the shortage of drivers and escorts and increased fuel costs internationally.
- The HtST budget is projecting a similar projected over spend for 2023-24 of £1.158 million.

Catering Services

- There is a projected over spend of £390,000 in Catering Services. The fixed price of school meals to paying pupils and the recharge to schools for Free School Meal pupils has once again not been increased in 2023-24 and therefore the projected over spend is mainly due to the service being unable to achieve full cost recovery due to the impact of high inflation on food purchases. Price inflation on food has been particularly volatile, with a recent reduction in food inflationary levels seen, therefore the cost of food purchases will be closely monitored in 2023-24 to determine whether the inflationary pressures in this area continue to impact on cost recovery in this service area.

Corporate Health and Safety Unit

- The projected under spend of £36,000 within the Corporate Health and Safety Unit primarily relates to staff vacancies. The projected under spend has reduced from the £131,000 reported at quarter 1 as the service have successfully appointed to two core funded posts and have appointed agency staff to cover other vacancies within the unit.

3.3.2 Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate

The Directorate's net budget for 2023-24 is £96.630 million. Current projections indicate an over spend of £12.690 million at year end compared with £11.065 million at quarter 1. The outturn for 2022-23 was an over spend of £10.868 million. Council approved budget pressures of £8.74 million in March 2023 as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), including £2.5 million for Real Living Wage for care workers which was included in the settlement by Welsh Government specifically for this purpose. The funded pressures also included inflationary uplifts on commissioned contracts, demographic pressures, Children's Residential and Independent Residential Care, Learning Disabilities, some strengthening of leadership in response to challenging Care Inspectorate Wales inspections, workforce pressures to safeguard and project children in light of significantly increased demand and increased costs of commissioned services, particularly the workforce required in children's social care to safeguard children from harm and the impact of increases in placements to meet the accommodation, care and support needs of children and adults. This growth was not sufficient to address the underlying budget pressures, which had been exacerbated by loss of grant funding. The Directorate has continued in 2023-24 to experience service and financial pressures in meeting statutory duties with a backdrop of a continued exponential increase in demand in Children's social care which impacts on the workforce required and a further increase in the number of independent residential placements in Children's services along with pressures in learning disabilities and older people's services driven by the complexity of need.

As noted in the revenue outturn report for 2022-23, to keep children safe and for the Council to meet statutory duties in respect of safeguarding children, there has been significant engagement of agency workforce to fill vacant posts and to provide additional capacity to ensure caseloads are at an acceptable level – in particular this has placed pressure on the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and Information, Advice and Assistance Services, Safeguarding Localities and the Care Experienced Children's Team.

A 3 year sustainability plan to improve the way that children and families are supported in Bridgend was considered by Council on the 20th September. This plan was informed by a detailed and independent analysis of the evidence base and local data. A £1 million budget virement was approved by Council in September from the centrally held MTFS emerging pressures budget, along with £2.5 million of existing earmarked reserves which have been unwound and repurposed to support Children's Services whilst a more permanent funding solution is sought.

The main budget variances are:

SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING DIRECTORATE	Net Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance Over/(under) budget	% Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	
Adult Social Care	63,911	69,159	5,248	8.2%
Prevention and Wellbeing	7,414	7,242	(172)	-2,3%
Childrens Social Care	25,305	32,919	7,614	30.1%

Adult Social Care

There is projected net over spend of £5.248 million on the Adult Social Care budget. The most significant variances contributing to this projected over spend are:

ADULT SOCIAL CARE	Projected Variance Over/(under) budget £'000
Learning Disabilities Home Care	1,960
Homes For Older People	1,097
Learning Disabilities Residential Care	673
Assessment and Care Management	671
Learning Disabilities Day Opportunities	515
Mental Health Homecare	315
Physical Disability/Sensory Impairment Direct Payments	206
Older People Direct Payments	179
Physical Disability/Sensory Impairment Home Care	152
Equipment & Adaptions	141
Mental Health Residential Care	-76
Learning Disabilities Direct Payments	-84
Mental Health Supported Accommodation	-198
Administration and Central Services	-276

- Learning Disabilities Home Care – the projected over spend of £1.960 million is due to a combination of factors, which are an ongoing pressure from 2022-23. Firstly, the number of hours of care covered by home care services has increased as people have either opted to not return to internal day opportunities or are having a reduced service following a review of their assessed need. Secondly, there has been an increase in the complexity of people’s needs – e.g., waking nights required rather than sleep-in nights which increases the cost of service delivery considerably. Whilst the outturn for 2022-23 was a £1.826 million over spend, maximisation of grant funding mitigated this on a one-off basis by £562,000. Secondly, whilst £1.254 million of budget growth was allocated to this service area in 2023-24 almost £500,000 of this has funded Real Living Wage uplifts. At quarter 1 there was a projected over spend position of £2.098 million, so the projection against this budget is slightly improving due to an individual moving to residential care.
- Homes For Older People – the projected over spend of £1.097 million is mainly due to increased Residential/Nursing placement costs (£946,000). During quarter 2 there were 87 new admissions for older people/older people mental health – of which 24 (27.6%) were from home, 57 (65.5%) were from hospital and 6 (6.9%) were from other residential/nursing homes. There were 72 discharges, of which 5 transferred to nursing care. The projected over spend has increased by £155,000 since quarter 1, mainly due to increased staffing based on current needs of residents within the homes – new social care workers (£136,000) and agency costs (£25,000). There remain significant pressures in the health and social care system

and people delayed in being accommodated in care homes in Bridgend. There are also a number of people who enter residential care where the individual's capital resources fall beneath the threshold for self-funding during any period, which can also impact on the projected outturn.

- Learning Disabilities Residential Care – there is a projected over spend of £673,000 which is primarily due to increased costs for existing placements within the residential and nursing service due to changing needs (£781,000) which is partially offset by under spends on the Breakaway Respite Service (£108,000) due to staff vacancies – these are in the process of being recruited to. The quarter 1 position was a projected over spend of £352,000 with the increase to quarter 2 being primarily due to 3 new placements – one has moved from supported living, one as a result of a court directive and the other individual was a transfer from Children's Services.
- Assessment and Care Management – there is a projected over spend of £671,000 due to the need to have agency cover as a result of the recruitment environment and demands in the system and the need for additional capacity, particularly linked to supporting the acute hospital and timely discharges and the requirement for Court of Protection and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLS) in learning disabilities and the need to minimise assessment delays in the hospital social work team. The projections present the worst-case scenario in having to continue to rely on agency members of staff for the remainder of 2023-24, and the service are endeavouring to appoint to core staffing posts to reduce this projected over spend via a robust agency tracker system.
- Learning Disabilities Day Opportunities – the over spend of £515,000 mainly relates to placement numbers exceeding the available budget for External Day Services (£393,000). Firstly, whilst the learning disabilities home care budget also has an over spend as people have not returned to internal day services, new people are taking up the vacant day services placements. Secondly, as reported in the revenue outturn report for 2022-23 the service is experiencing higher transport costs than normal (£218,000) due to the service having to hire vehicles on a short-term basis as a result of delays in the delivery of new vehicles due to chassis parts being difficult to obtain. There is an issue with suppliers across the public sector.
- Mental Health Home Care – this includes supported living, short breaks, and domiciliary care. The projected over spend of £315,000 is mainly due to increased needs of people with supported living packages of care. Whilst placement numbers have remained similar to 2022-23 there has been an overall reduction in the projected over spend of £101,000, partly due to an increase in Health funding contributions.
- Physical Disability/Sensory Impairment Direct Payments - there is a projected over spend of £206,000. The number of people using the service remains stable at 54 in quarter 2 for 2023-24. However, the projected over spend relates to an increasing complexity of cases that impact on the average cost of direct payments support. There has been a £42,000 improvement since quarter 1 due to account reimbursements, where balances in accounts have exceed the permitted contingency.

- Older People Direct Payments – there is a projected over spend of £179,000 across the Direct Payments budgets in this area. The main reason for this is increasing complexity of cases that impact on the average cost of direct payments support. The projected over spend has reduced by £22,000 since quarter 1 due to account reimbursements where balances in accounts have exceeded the permitted contingency.
- Physical Disability/Sensory Impairment Home Care - there is a projected over spend of £152,000. This has increased from the quarter 1 projected over spend position of £28,000. The reason for this is due to 14 new placements and 6 ending since quarter 1, a net increase of 8 placements. These are individuals who are all new to the service.
- Equipment & Adaptions – the projected over spend of £141,000 has reduced from the quarter 1 projected over spend £162,000. However, this is a fluctuating demand led budget and varies month by month. The over spend position is because of continuing demand for equipment due to the need to support individuals in line with Welsh Government’s rehabilitation and recovery model. The outturn for 2022-23 saw an underlying pressure in this service area of £460,000. A budget pressure of £298,000 was approved by Council as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) budget setting process in March 2023 which has helped alleviate a significant amount of pressure, however this budget will be monitored closely going forward.
- Mental Health Residential Care – the projected under spend of £76,000 has reduced from the quarter 1 projected under spend of £322,000. This is as a result of 3 new placements in quarter 2. Current placement numbers still remain lower than in previous years. Alternative service solutions continue to be provided which benefit individuals and prove beneficial to the financial position. The Directorate will review budgets during quarter 3 and will seek to vire budgets within Mental Health to areas that are experiencing pressures as a result of the medium to long term impact of the pandemic on individuals.
- Learning Disabilities Direct Payments – there is projected under spend of £84,000 which is a decrease on the projected over spend at quarter 1 of £239,000. The number of people in the service have actually increased to 120 in quarter 2 for 2023-24 compared with 110 in quarter 2 2022-23 – these are children which have transferred into Adult Services. There is also an increasing complexity of cases that impact on the average cost of direct payments support. However, the projected year end position has improved due to reimbursements reclaimed from people using the service where balances in accounts have exceeded the permitted contingency.
- Mental Health Supported Accommodation – the projected £198,000 under spend primarily relates to utilisation of Innovation Grant Funding to support staffing budgets in this service area (£262,000).
- Administration and Central Services – the projected under spend of £276,000 is mainly due staffing vacancies.

Prevention and Wellbeing

- The projected under spend of £172,000 is primarily due to the utilisation of grant funding opportunities offsetting salary costs (£122,000 in Prevention and Wellbeing and £25,000 in Playworks). The projected under spend has reduced since quarter 1 by £26,000 due to additional spend relating to casual staff at sports halls and holiday clubs to support increased demand on the Active for Life Schemes through the summer holidays.

Children's Social Care

There is projected net over spend of £7.614 million on the Childrens Social Care Budget. This is compared to a quarter 1 projected over spend of £6.920 million. The most significant variances contributing to this projected over spend are:-

CHILDRENS SOCIAL CARE	Projected Variance Over/(under) Budget – qtr 2 £'000	Projected Variance Over/(under) Budget – qtr 1 £'000
Care Experienced Children	5,142	3,746
Commissioning & Social Work	2,055	2,841
Management & Administration	352	213

- The projected over spend of £5.142 million for Care Experienced Children is due to a combination of factors:-
 - The Independent Residential Care budget has a projected over spend of £4.772 million. This is despite a budget growth being approved by Council for 2023-24 of £650,000 as part of the MTFS and has increased by £1.114 million from the quarter 1 projected over spend of £3.658 million. There are currently 27 care experienced children in out of authority placements, an increase of 2 since quarter 1. Whilst this is only an increase of 2 placements since the 31st May 2023 it is a significant increase compared to the 9 placements at quarter 4 in 2021-22 and the 16 placements at quarter 1 in 2022-23. This is due to a number of factors, including high numbers of care experienced children, insufficient quantum and quality placements to meet needs including foster carers (in-house and independent) and children requiring specialist provision sometimes with high staffing ratios to keep them safe and protected. It should be noted that this budget area can be volatile and small changes in demand can result in relatively high costs being incurred.
 - Children's Residential Services are projecting an under spend of £143,000, compared with the projected under spend position of £434,000 at quarter 1. This is due to increasing use of agency staff since quarter 1 due to unavoidable staff absences. The service area was allocated £684,000 of budget pressures in 2023-24 due to additional staff being required in BCBC residential settings. There is a projected under spend relating to this growth as the posts are being recruited to in 2023-24, along with a delay in the opening of the Golygfa'r Dolydd, a new build children's home. The opening of the new children's home should have a positive impact on the projected over spend noted above on the Independent Residential Care budget. The service area has also benefited from Eliminating Profit grant funding of £397,000.
 - There is an under spend on Independent Fostering Agency placements (£462,000). This has increased since the quarter 1 projected under spend position of £329,000.

This is due to other placement options being utilised, including Special Guardianship Orders which are projecting an over spend of £356,000. The placements reduced from 43 placements at quarter 1 to 36 at quarter 2. These budgets will be monitored closely in 2023-24 and budgets vired as appropriate.

- Commissioning & Social Work – the projected over spend of £2.056 million is mainly due to having to continue to rely on agency staffing across all the children's social work teams due to the ongoing recruitment challenges and the need to operate above establishment to maintain safe caseloads. The projection reflects the ongoing permanent staff recruitment issues and reliance on agency staff for the foreseeable future, although good progress is being made in international recruitment. Agency staff are being utilised where possible to ensure children are safeguarded and protected from harm and ensure that statutory duties are met. The projections present the worst-case scenario in having to continue to rely on agency members of staff for the remainder of 2023-24, and every opportunity is taken to convert agency arrangements into permanent employment where possible, which will have a positive impact on the projected spend. Council approved a £1 million budget virement in 2023-24 which has been allocated to support the costs of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), the Information, Advice and Assistance Service (IAA) and the safeguarding team restructure. Analysis reported to Council shows there is a remaining budget pressure of £2.5 million and the additional use of up to £2.5 million of earmarked reserves has been established to support the new proposed structure whilst a more permanent funding solution is sought. The service have been successful in recruiting to core funded posts, and therefore have reduced spend on agency staff, so there has been a net improvement of £100,000 to the staffing projections. The service area has also maximised the Social Care Workforce grant (£118,000).

Whilst the workforce projections have improved since the projected over spend of £2.841 million that was reported in quarter 1, non-workforce related costs (the majority of which relate to Care Experienced Children and care and support spend such as Court ordered drug testing, assessments, reports, travel and therapy costs), have increased by £440,000. Further detailed analysis of this area of spend is being undertaken.

- Management & Administration – the projected over spend of £352,000 (quarter 1 - £213,000 over spend) relates primarily to staffing costs. There has been a significant increase in children and young people referred for care and support and/or due to safeguarding concerns. In addition to the impact this has on the social work teams being required to discharge their statutory duties, there is also the impact on support officer roles due to the pivotal role they play in ensuring statutory timescales and statutory recording requirements are met.

3.3.3 Communities Directorate

The net budget for the Directorate for 2023-24 is £32.832 million. The current projection is a projected over spend of £600,000. The main variances are:

COMMUNITIES DIRECTORATE	Net Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance Over/(under) budget	% Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	
Development Control	(206)	(312)	(106)	51.5%
Waste Disposal & Collection	9,731	10,104	373	3.8%
Fleet Services	135	366	231	171.1%
Highways Services (DSO)	3,257	3,007	(250)	-7.7%
Engineering Services	101	18	(83)	-82.2%
Corporate Landlord	4,044	4,616	572	14.1%

Planning and Development

- The projected under spend in planning and development of £106,000 is primarily due to a projected upturn in planning application income. Fee income is subject to considerable fluctuations between years, depending on number of types of applications. For example, in 2021-22 the service generated a deficit of £249,000, compared with a surplus of £54,000 in 2022-23.

Waste Disposal and Collection

- There is a net projected over spend on the Waste Disposal and Collection budget of £373,000.
- £60,000 of this is due to the delay in the achievement of the 2022-23 MTFS saving, COM 2 - Re-location of Community Recycling Centre from Tythegston to Pyle resulting in cessation of lease payments at the existing site. The new site in Pyle is anticipated to open in the second half of 2023-24 with both sites being maintained until the new site is fully operational, therefore the saving will not be achieved in full until 2024-25.
- £35,000 is due to the delay in the achievement of the 2022-23 MTFS saving, COM 3 – change the composition of Household Food Waste Bags. The budget reduction proposal has been delayed until the outcome of national research has been completed to ensure any potential changes in legislation do not impact on this proposal.
- £50,000 is due to the delay in the achievement of the 2023-24 MTFS saving, COM 1 – closure of each of the Community Recycling Centre sites for one weekday per week. Public consultation on this proposal has now been completed which will be reported back to Cabinet in due course.
- The remainder of the projected over spend is due to an increase in subscribers for both the Absorbent Hygiene Products (AHP) (£115,000) and Garden Waste (£65,000) collection services. The AHP service has been promoted to further improve the recycling levels achieved in Bridgend which also mitigates the risk of fines imposed by WG if local authorities do not meet their recycling targets. It has seen an increase of 6.2% since the start of the 2022-23 financial year. Garden waste subscriptions have increased by 20% over the last two years with the number of subscribers increasing from 6,249 in 2021-22 to 7,536. An annual subscription

fee is charged for the service, and the garden waste collected also improves the recycling levels achieved in Bridgend, however it is not currently a fully cost-recovering service.

Fleet Services

- There is a projected over spend of £231,000 on Fleet services. The fleet services team operate on a break-even basis with re-charges for work undertaken on directorates', South Wales Police (SWP) and the general public's vehicles, generating income to support staffing and overhead costs. Productivity levels continue to be impacted by long term sickness as well as recruitment and retention difficulties. A report outlining options in respect of the operational model and charging mechanisms is in the final stages of development in mitigating the budget position of fleet services.

Highways Services

- The projected under spend of £250,000 within Highways Services is primarily due to core funded staff being utilised to support work on capital schemes. In these cases, the salary costs can be capitalised, thus generating one-off income for the service area.

Engineering Services

- There is a projected under spend on Engineering Services of £83,000. This is primarily due to an increase in the level of fee earning jobs (grant funded/non grant funded projects) and the differing chargeable rates allowed on the schemes.

Corporate Landlord

- There is a projected over spend of £616,000 against Corporate Landlord. As reported in the 2022-23 outturn report, there are shortfalls in income generated from properties run by the Council that relate to occupancy shortfalls which have continued into 2023-24. It was reported at quarter 1 that there was already an underlying shortfall in income at Bridgend Market of £100,000 which has increased to £198,000 at quarter 2 due to the identification of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) and the closure of the market at the end of September 2023. There is also a shortfall in income of £130,000 for the Innovation Centre and £130,000 on Industrial Units and a strategy is being developed to reduce these income shortfalls in the longer term.
- Corporate Landlord continue to seek to commercially let out wings of Ravens Court to a partner organisation or business. However, at present demand for office space is limited and the re-letting market extremely challenging. As noted in section 3.2.2 and 3.2.5 the £50,000 target for 2022-23 and the £120,000 target for 2023-24 in relation to this MTFS proposal are unlikely to be achieved in full this financial year which represent a further £95,000 pressure on the Corporate Landlord estates budget.
- The projected over spends have been partially offset by staffing vacancies of £148,000.

3.3.4 Chief Executive's

The net budget for the Directorate for 2023-24 is £24.200 million. Current projections anticipate an over spend against this budget of £248,000. This is compared to a projected under spend position of £98,000 at quarter 1. The main variances are:

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S	Net Budget £'000	Projected outturn £'000	Actual Variance Over/(under) budget £'000	% Variance
Housing & Homelessness	4,120	3,598	(522)	-12.7%
ICT	4,126	4,186	60	1.5%
Legal, Democratic & Regulatory	5,869	6,616	747	12.7%

Housing & Homelessness

- There is a projected under spend of £522,000 on Housing & Homelessness.
- Budget growth of £2.192 million was approved by Council as part of the MTFS Budget setting process in February 2021 to continue the commitment to focus support for homeless individuals providing them with accommodation. An additional budget pressure of £700,000 was approved by Council in March 2022 based on increased numbers of households and individuals supported with accommodation. The core accommodation budget for 2023-24 is £2.722 million.
- For 2023-24, Welsh Government (WG) have confirmed grant funding of £898,694 for accommodation under the "No One Left Out" funding stream, and £137,000 under a Discretionary Homelessness Prevention Grant. The total grant funding confirmed for 2023-24 of £1.036 million is significantly lower than the total grant funding of £3.607 million which was received in 2022-23.
- Projected spend on Homelessness accommodation in 2023-24 is £3.9 million. As well as the core budget (£2.722 million), and total WG accommodation grant funding (£1.036 million), the service has also seen an increase in rental income relating to Housing Benefits claimed by tenants who have been supported with homelessness accommodation (£392,000). The net impact is a projected under spend on accommodation of £250,000.
- The projected accommodation spend is based on increased numbers of households and individuals supported, from 220 households and 401 individuals in September 2022 to 276 households and 514 individuals in September 2023. The budget will require close monitoring throughout 2023-24 in line with any further changes in support required for homelessness accommodation.
- The remainder of the projected under spend primarily relates to staff vacancies (£89,000).
- The other significant area of under spend in Housing relates to Homelessness Spend 2 Save Support, which has a predicted under spend of £280,000 primarily due to additional grant funding (Discretionary Homelessness Prevention Grant of £137,000 from No One Left Out funding) and a £100,000 projected under spend relating to the Housing Deposits budget, a fund that is used to support initial set-up costs in temporary accommodation.

ICT

- There is a projected net over spend of £60,000 across ICT budgets. This has improved from the projected net over spend of £185,000 reported in quarter 1. Due to reduced printing activity ICT have been unable to recover the fixed costs of printers and photocopiers through the re-charge to service departments consequently, reduced spend has been incurred on printing budgets across the service departments and the ICT service has received less income. An exercise was undertaken in quarter 2 to re-align print budgets and the position in ICT reflects a £125,000 realignment from service area budgets as referred in 3.1.6.

Legal, Democratic & Regulatory

- There is a net over spend of £747,000 across Legal, Democratic and Regulatory services which is primarily due to legal fees continuing to be a budget pressure. The projected over spend on Legal fees has increased to £637,000 at quarter 2 compared with the quarter 1 projection of £330,000. The pressures experienced in 2022-23 on public and private law childcare cases, along with an increase in volume of complex cases that have required King's Counsel, are continuing into 2023-24. The budget will be closely monitored through the remainder of the financial year, with the projection based on the number and complexity of cases.
- In comparison, the over spend on legal fees for 2022-23 was £417,000, but this was offset by an Earmarked Reserve of £340,000 which was drawn down in full in that financial year.
- There is also a net £145,000 over spend in Regulatory Services (Licencing, Public Health, Pest Control etc) due to under recoupment of income, particularly in Taxi Licencing and Environmental Health.

3.3.5 Council Wide budgets

This section includes budgets, provisions and services which are council wide, and not managed by an individual directorate. The net budget for 2023-24 is £49.640 million. Current projections anticipate an under spend against this budget of £4.352 million. The main variances are:-

COUNCIL WIDE BUDGETS	Net Budget	Projected Outturn	Projected Variance Over/(under) budget	% Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000	
Capital Financing	7,203	4,605	(2,598)	-36.1%
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	16,054	15,841	(213)	-1.33%
Other Council Wide Budgets	14,981	13,582	(1,399)	-9.34%

Capital Financing

- The projected under spend of £2.598 million mainly relates to additional interest from current investments due to the continuing increase in interest rates by the Bank of England. It was noted in the revenue outturn report that the increase to 4.5% in May 2023 was the highest it has been since 2008, but this has further increased to 5% in June 2023 and 5.25% in August 2023, although this was frozen at the latest review in September.
- The under spend is predicated on interest rates being sustained throughout the remainder of 2023-24. It should also be noted that this will not be a recurring under spend as the Council approved new Highways and Children's Playground

refurbishments in the Capital Programme in March 2023 to be funded from a combination of unallocated capital funding and prudential borrowing and this has not been drawn down in full to date.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme

- There is currently a projected under spend of £213,000 on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. This is a demand led budget and take-up is difficult to predict. The projected take-up for 2023-24 is higher than in 2022-23 when the gross spend in this budget area was £14.885 million, although part of this would be as a result of the council tax increase in April 2023. The budget will be closely monitored in 2023-24 as there could be an additional call on the scheme in view of the impact of the cost of living crisis on personal financial circumstances with the potential for an increase in the number of benefit claimants.

Other Council Wide Budgets

- As referred to in paragraph 3.1.8 and 3.1.9, due to the ongoing discussions regarding pay claims and the risk of unexpected major price inflation increases, at this point in the financial year, it is prudent to assume that the majority of Council wide budgets will be fully spent by the year end. However it is anticipated that there will be a reduction in corporate support required to fund potential redundancy costs as, following the better than anticipated WG settlement for 2023-24, fewer budget reduction proposals had to be made.
- In addition, when the 2023-24 budget was approved, a number of recurrent pressures for 2023-24 totalling £9.77 million were agreed with a further £1.3 million being retained centrally to support emerging pressures. At the September meeting of Council, £1 million of this was approved to be allocated to Social Services as part of the 3 year sustainability plan for Children's Services in line with the Financial Procedure Rules. Cabinet have approved the use of the uncommitted funding of £300,000 for emerging budget pressures to be utilised against the increased cost of the annual waste collection service from 2024-25, therefore contributing to the overall projected under spend for other council wide budgets in 2023-24.

3.3.6 Council Tax Collection

It is still early in the financial year to provide a realistic indication of projected council tax income for this financial year, and whether the Council is likely to see a reduction in council tax income over the 2023-24 financial year as more people have suffered financial hardship due to the current cost of living crisis, or whether additional income will be collected from the introduction of council tax premiums on empty properties. Current projections indicate that budgeted council tax income levels will be achieved with the possibility of up to 1% additional income, around £1 million. However, due to changing personal circumstances of individuals, and changes to those receiving council tax support, council tax collection rates will be monitored continuously throughout the year and reported accordingly.

3.4 Review of Earmarked Reserves

- 3.4.1 A thorough review of earmarked reserves was undertaken by Corporate Management Board during quarter 1 of 2023-24, which included an assessment of the draw down profile and re-profiling of existing earmarked reserves.

3.4.2 The review in quarter 1 identified £3.067 million of reserves to be unwound in order to fund emerging risks for the Council as a whole during 2023-24 and a further £733,000 to be repurposed for similar schemes. On 20th September Council approved the use of £2.5 million of the unwound reserves to support the deliverability of the 3 year sustainability plan, to improve outcomes for Children and Family Services in Bridgend, whilst a more permanent funding solution is sought. The other significant earmarked reserve established was £355,000 towards the demolition costs of Brackla Car Park.

3.4.3 The cumulative draw down by directorates in 2023-24 is £4.251 million as shown in Table 4 below. The majority of draw down from earmarked reserves takes place in the later stages of the financial year, especially on capital and grant funded schemes. In addition, school balances are not adjusted until the year end – an overall reduction in year of £6.825 million on school balances is currently projected.

Table 4 – Usable Earmarked Reserves (Excluding Council Fund) – Quarter 2

Opening Balance 01 Apr 23	Reserve	Net Additions/ Reclassification	Draw-down	Unwound	Closing Balance 30 Sept 23
£		£	£	£	£
	Corporate Reserves:				
(25,801)	Education & Family Support	-	3	-	(25,798)
(1,870)	Social Services & Wellbeing	-	-	290	(1,580)
(15,624)	Communities	(330)	175	74	(15,705)
(10,650)	Chief Executives	(167)	154	393	(10,270)
(7,380)	Non-Directorate	142	2,263	474	(4,501)
(61,325)	Total Corporate Reserves	(355)	2,595	1,231	(57,854)
	Directorate Earmarked Reserves:				
(693)	Education & Family Support	(78)	34	76	(661)
(6,076)	Social Services & Wellbeing	(2,500)	958	-	(7,618)
(9,310)	Communities	(130)	76	69	(9,295)
(3,102)	Chief Executives	(154)	538	166	(2,552)
(19,181)	Total Directorate Reserves	(2,862)	1,606	311	(20,126)
	Equalisation & Grant Earmarked Reserves:				
(2,074)	Education & Family Support	78	50	580	(1,366)
(436)	Social Services & Wellbeing	-	-	350	(86)
(2,847)	Communities	-	-	595	(2,252)
(346)	Chief Executives	154	-	-	(192)
	Non-Directorate	-	-	-	-
(5,703)	Total Equalisation Reserves	232	50	1,525	(3,896)
(6,898)	School Balances	-	-	-	(6,898)
(93,107)	Total Usable Reserves	(2,985)	4,251	3,067	(88,774)

3.4.4 The capital programme contribution reserve supplements the funding we receive from WG and via capital receipts to fund our capital programme. Currently, we have a balance of £44.115 million of funding in this reserve which constitutes 49.7%

of our overall earmarked reserves balances. This will be used to fund a wide range of schemes in the capital programme.

3.4.5 The School balances reserve decreased from £14.228 million to £6.898 million at the end of 2022-23. As noted in paragraph 3.3.1, the quarter 2 projections indicate a projected overall surplus balance for school delegated budgets of £72,960 at year end. This will reduce this reserve accordingly by year end.

3.4.6 A further review of earmarked reserves will be undertaken at quarter 3 when there is a clearer picture on pressures and projected year end balances.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act 2010, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 The Act provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with 5 ways of working to guide how public services should work to deliver for people. The well-being objectives are designed to complement each other and are part of an integrated way of working to improve well-being for the people of Bridgend. The allocation of budget determines the extent to which the Council's well-being objectives can be delivered. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of the well-being goals or objectives as a result of this report.

6. Climate Change Implications

6.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 These are reflected in the body of the report.

9. Recommendations

9.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- note the projected revenue position for 2023-24;
- approve the virements over £100,000 as outlined in paragraph 3.1.6.

Background documents: Individual Directorate Monitoring Reports

PRIOR YEAR BUDGET REDUCTIONS CARRIED FORWARD INTO 2023-24

Ref.	Budget Reduction Proposal		Original Reduction and RAG £000	Revised RAG £000	Total amount of saving likely to be achieved by 23-24 £000	Reason why not achievable	Proposed Action in 2023-24 to achieve
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RAG STATUS KEY

RED	Not likely to be achieved at all in this financial year or less than 25%.
AMBER	Reduction not likely to be achieved in full in financial year but greater than 25%
GREEN	Reduction likely to be achieved in full

SOCIAL SERVICES & WELLBEING

SSW 2 (2022-23)	Remodelling day service provision for older people and learning disability services		115		115	As reported in the 2022-23 Revenue outturn report, some efficiencies were identified, however external factors prevented the achievement of the full savings target.	A review of the budgets within Adult Services was undertaken during quarter 2 to identify replacement savings against the £30,000 shortfall reported in quarter 1. Budget virements were actioned from Adult Services Non-residential income. No further action required.
Total Social Services & Wellbeing Directorate			115		115		

COMMUNITIES

COM 2 (2021-22)	Re-location of Community Recycling Centre from Tythegston to Pyle resulting in cessation of lease payments at existing site		60		0	The new site in Pyle is anticipated to open in the second half of 2023-24. Both sites will be maintained until the new site is fully operational, therefore the saving will not be achieved in full until 2024-25.	The service will endeavour saving to meet the saving through alternative one off efficiencies in 2023-24 to deliver a balanced budget position.
COM 3 (2022-23)	Change the composition of Household Food Waste Bags		35		0	Ongoing national research and debate surrounding composition of Household Food Waste Bags. Budget reduction proposal delayed until outcome of review known to ensure any potential changes in legislation do not impact on the proposal.	The service will endeavour saving to meet the saving through alternative one off efficiencies in 2023-24 to deliver a balanced budget position.
COM 4 (2022-23)	Remove Business in Focus from running Enterprise Centres in Bridgend		20		10	Rising costs of utilities, general contractor rates and occupational levels/demand impacting on profitability of Business in Focus units and therefore ability to reduce running costs and deliver saving proposal.	Review of Business in Focus operating model being explored to identify operating efficiencies with a view to restructuring the management agreement with Business in Focus to deliver savings.
COM 5 (2022-23)	Commercially let a wing of Ravens court to a partner organisation or business		50		25	Demand for office space at this time is limited and the re-letting market extremely challenging. Savings delivered mainly through non-occupational savings and a proportion of these will be achievable although impacted by rising utilities and servicing costs.	Marketing agents instructed and discussions ongoing with a Bridgend based employer who are interested in taking over all empty wings. Further operational cost savings to be delivered.
Total Communities Directorate			165		35		

GRAND TOTAL OUTSTANDING REDUCTIONS			280		150		
REDUCTIONS SHORTFALL					130		

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MONITORING OF 2023-24 BUDGET REDUCTIONS

Ref.	Budget Reduction Proposal	Impact, including on 5 Ways of Working as set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act	Proposed 2023-24 £'000	Value achieved to date 2023-24 £'000	Value Likely to be Achieved 2023-24 £'000	Reason why not likely to be achievable
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EDUCATION & FAMILY SUPPORT
CENTRAL EDUCATION & FAMILY SUPPORT

EDFS1	Delegate some school transport responsibilities to The Bridge Pupil Referral Unit under a new delivery model to deliver efficiency savings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal impact anticipated Alternative service model to be implemented to deliver the identified efficiency Increased responsibility for school 	40	0	0	Officers continue to investigate the practicalities and implications of a bespoke transport arrangement for the Bridge Alternative Provision. Until the market has been tested and the school agrees to the arrangements, it will not be known if the saving can be made.
Total Education and Family Support			40	0	0	

SCHOOLS

SCH1	Efficiency savings against School Delegated Budgets - 2% for 2023-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The annual saving represents a 2% efficiency per annum against individual school budgets Risk of increased school deficit positions Implementation will be a matter for individual schools Potential to result in some teacher and other staff redundancies If efficiency is made solely from staffing budgets, this could range from a minimum of one teacher in our large primary schools and to five teachers in our larger secondary schools being made redundant over the MTFS period 	2,118	2,118	2,118	The savings have been implemented and schools budgets reduced accordingly. However, the overall consequential effect on schools is a significant contributory factor in that projected year end balances have fallen from £6.898 million brought forward from 2022-23 to £221,890 projected surplus for 2023-24. There are 23 schools projecting deficit budget situations, many of which will be unlikely to balance their budget by year end.
Total Schools			2,118	2,118	2,118	
Total Education & Family Support Directorate			2,158	2,118	2,118	

MONITORING OF 2023-24 BUDGET REDUCTIONS

Ref.	Budget Reduction Proposal	Impact, including on 5 Ways of Working as set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act	Proposed 2023-24 £'000	Value achieved to date 2023-24 £'000	Value Likely to be Achieved 2023-24 £'000	Reason why not likely to be achievable
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COMMUNITIES

COM1	Closure of each of the Community Recycling Centre sites for one weekday per week	The waste contract related items would require both Contract variation negotiations with Kier to confirm the saving levels proposed along with public consultation regarding the reduced levels of service.	50	0	0	In April 2023, Cabinet approved to formally enter into public consultation for 12 weeks on the potential closure of three Community Recycling Centres (CRC) for one day per week. The outcome of the consultation will be reported back to Cabinet in due course and future monitoring reports will report the outcome of the consultation exercise
COM2	Charging Blue Badge Holders for parking	There are currently a number of measures which assist in providing equitable access, particularly for those who are participants in the Blue Badge Scheme. These include reserved spaces for Blue Badge Holders in Off-Street Car Parks in convenient locations, guidance on the proportion of disabled parking spaces within new parking facilities, some on-street parking provision in town centre locations, the ability to park on double yellow lines for up to 3 hours as long as no obstruction is caused and the Shopmobility scheme operated within Bridgend Town Centre. In providing parking either at ground level or in multi-storey car parks, the Council incurs both capital and ongoing revenue costs which the Council must source from its own funds. The current position is that a concession is applied in Off Street Car Parks for persons displaying a Blue Badge which provides for unlimited parking free of charge.	40	0	0	The traffic management team have been engaged in the introduction of the default national speed limit in built up areas. The saving proposal is unlikely to be achieved this year due to the processes required to introduce any change.
COM3	Commercially let two wings of Ravens court to a partner organisation or business	Savings would be predicated on reduction in utilities from not occupying the space and rental income	120	0	50	Demand for office space at this time is limited and the re-letting market extremely challenging. Savings delivered mainly through non-occupational savings and a proportion of these will be achievable although impacted by rising utilities and servicing costs.
COM4	Use revenue savings accrued as a result of switching street lighting to LED's across the County	The savings are predicated from reduced energy bills in 22/23 as a result of the LED street lighting roll out. This may be diminished in future years by rising energy costs overall	100	100	100	Full saving should be achieved in 2023-24

MONITORING OF 2023-24 BUDGET REDUCTIONS

Ref.	Budget Reduction Proposal	Impact, including on 5 Ways of Working as set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act	Proposed 2023-24 £'000	Value achieved to date 2023-24 £'000	Value Likely to be Achieved 2023-24 £'000	Reason why not likely to be achievable
COM5	Reduction to Highways - Road Marking Budget	This reduction could have an impact on the enforcement of restriction as the remaining funding will be focused on markings that have wider safety implications	10	10	10	Full saving should be achieved in 2023-24
COM6	Increase garden waste subscription cost to £46 per household and £42 for pensioners (Currently £41.01 per household or £36.73 for pensioners)	Potential increase in fly tipping. Loss of subscribers	30	30	30	Full saving should be achieved in 2023-24
COM7	Increase bulky waste charges from £21.42 for 3 items to £25.	Potential increase in fly tipping.	25	25	25	Full saving should be achieved in 2023-24
Total Communities Directorate			375	165	215	

CHIEF EXECUTIVES

CEX1	Reduction of ICT Printing Costs	Due to the increase in working from home across the authority, savings can be found in the ICT Print Strategy area. These savings are in line with the cultural shift towards the paperless office agenda.	40	40	40	Full saving should be achieved in 2023-24
CEX2	Efficiency saving target targeting supplies and services budgets across the Chief Executive's Directorate	Limited impact as review has identified small historic under spends against this budget category	35	35	35	Full saving should be achieved in 2023-24
Total Chief Executive's Directorate			75	75	75	

GRAND TOTAL REDUCTIONS		2,608	2,358	2,408
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REDUCTION SHORTFALL				200
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230	2,358	2,358
260	0	120
2,118	250	130
2,608	2,608	2,608

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BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL	Budget 2023-24			Projected Outturn	Projected Variance Over/(under) budget	% Variance
	Expenditure Budget	Income Budget	Net Budget			
	£'000	£'000	£'000			
EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT						
School Delegated Budgets	132,365	(21,302)	111,063	111,063	-	0.0%
Learner Support	7,913	(1,216)	6,697	7,207	510	7.6%
Family Support	7,819	(4,389)	3,430	3,150	(280)	-8.2%
Business Support	15,181	(4,418)	10,763	12,201	1,438	13.4%
Schools Support	1,515	(837)	678	640	(38)	-5.6%
School Modernisation	3,879	-	3,879	3,944	65	1.7%
Vulnerable Groups Support	838	(96)	742	664	(78)	-10.5%
Other Education and Family Support	1,840	(60)	1,780	1,909	129	7.2%
TOTAL EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT	171,350	(32,318)	139,032	140,778	1,746	1.3%
SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING						
Adult Social Care	86,247	(22,336)	63,911	69,159	5,248	8.2%
Prevention and Wellbeing	8,394	(980)	7,414	7,242	(172)	-2.3%
Childrens Social Care	26,436	(1,131)	25,305	32,919	7,614	30.1%
TOTAL SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING	121,077	(24,447)	96,630	109,320	12,690	13.1%
COMMUNITIES DIRECTORATE						
Planning & Development Services	2,484	(1,819)	665	564	(101)	-15.2%
Strategic Regeneration	2,922	(1,220)	1,702	1,702	-	0.0%
Economy, Natural Resources and Sustainability	4,709	(3,019)	1,690	1,681	(9)	-0.5%
Cleaner Streets and Waste Management	13,841	(1,968)	11,873	12,299	426	3.6%
Highways and Green Spaces	24,854	(12,281)	12,573	12,285	(288)	-2.3%
Director and Head of Operations - Communities	285	-	285	285	-	0.0%
Corporate Landlord	15,337	(11,293)	4,044	4,616	572	14.1%
TOTAL COMMUNITIES	64,432	(31,600)	32,832	33,432	600	1.8%
CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S						
Chief Executive Unit	502	-	502	518	16	3.2%
Finance	46,913	(42,994)	3,919	3,901	(18)	-0.5%
HR/OD	2,495	(398)	2,097	2,019	(78)	-3.7%
Partnerships	3,470	(1,227)	2,243	2,260	17	0.8%
Legal, Democratic & Regulatory	6,838	(969)	5,869	6,616	747	12.7%
Elections	178	-	178	156	(22)	-12.4%
ICT	5,259	(1,133)	4,126	4,186	60	1.5%
Housing & Homelessness	11,979	(7,859)	4,120	3,598	(522)	-12.7%
Business Support	1,257	(111)	1,146	1,194	48	4.2%
TOTAL CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S	78,891	(54,691)	24,200	24,448	248	1.0%
TOTAL DIRECTORATE BUDGETS	435,750	(143,056)	292,694	307,978	15,284	5.2%
Council Wide Budgets	50,614	(974)	49,640	45,288	(4,352)	-8.8%
NET BRIDGEND CBC	486,364	(144,030)	342,334	353,266	10,932	3.2%

NB: Differences due to rounding of £000's

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