

# Public Document Pack

## Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr

### Bridgend County Borough Council



Swyddfeydd Dinesig, Stryd yr Angel, Pen-y-bont, CF31 4WB / Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB

*Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg.  
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 / 643694 / 643513

Gofynnwch am / Ask for: Democratic Services

Ein cyf / Our ref:

Eich cyf / Your ref:

**Dyddiad/Date:** Wednesday, 8 May 2024

Dear Councillor,

#### **CABINET**

A meeting of the Cabinet will be held Hybrid in the Council Chamber - Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB on **Tuesday, 14 May 2024 at 14:30.**

#### **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 - 16  
To receive for approval the Minutes of 12/03/2024
4. Outcome of the Consultation on the Draft Strategic Equality Plan Objectives 2024 - 2028 17 - 52
5. Fees and Charges Policy 53 - 80
6. Renewal of the Regional Internal Audit Service Partnership Agreement 81 - 86
7. Terms Of Reference For Standing Advisory Council On Religious Education (SACRE)/Standing Advisory Council (On Religion Value And Ethics) (SAC) 87 - 94
8. Proposed Changes In Council Requirements Regarding Cultural Services 95 - 106
9. Proposed Dates for meetings of Cabinet, Cabinet Committee Equalities and Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting 107 - 110

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10. Urgent Items

To consider any items of business that by reason of special circumstances the chairperson is of the opinion should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency in accordance with paragraph 2.4 (e) of the Cabinet Procedure Rules within the Constitution.

Note: This will be a Hybrid meeting and Members and Officers will be attending in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Angel Street Bridgend / 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](mailto:cabinet_committee@bridgend.gov.uk) or tel. 01656 643148 / 643694 / 643513 / 643696

Yours faithfully

**K Watson**

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

Councillors:

JC Spanswick  
N Farr  
W R Goode

Councillors

J Gebbie  
HJ David  
HM Williams

Councillors

JPD Blundell

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD HYBRID IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2 AND 3 - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB ON TUESDAY, 12 MARCH 2024 AT 14:30**

Present

Councillor HJ David – Chairperson

JC Spanswick  
HM Williams

N Farr  
JPD Blundell

W R Goode

J Gebbie

Officers:

Carys Lord  
Claire Marchant  
Janine Nightingale  
Kelly Watson  
Julie Ellams  
Mark Shephard  
Lindsay Harvey  
Michael Pitman  
Anya Richards

Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change  
Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing  
Corporate Director - Communities  
Chief Officer Legal, HR and Regulatory Services  
Democratic Services Officer - Committees  
Chief Executive  
Corporate Director Education and Family Support  
Technical Support Officer – Democratic Services  
Interim Group Manager Communications and Public Affairs

Declarations of Interest

Cllr Neelo Farr declared a personal interest in item 13, Home to School/College Transport Policy

**301. Approval of Minutes**

Decision Made	<u>RESOLVED:</u> The minutes of the 20/02/2024 were approved as a true and accurate record.
Date Decision Made	12 March 2024

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**302. Outcome of the Consultation on the Draft Participation and Engagement Strategy**

Decision Made	<p>The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change presented a report which informed Cabinet of the outcome of the draft Participation and Engagement Strategy consultation and approve the Strategy for publication.</p> <p>She explained that the aims set out in section 3 of the report were developed to ensure our residents and other key stakeholders were involved in key strategic decisions. The full consultation results were at Appendix A to the report.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Wellbeing asked with regards to the GovDelivery emailing system, do we have any statistics on how many of the communication emails were opened.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Wellbeing asked how did we provide the information to the public on the face to face engagement sessions, as it states in the report it was advertised on social media, but not everyone uses it.</p> <p>The Consultation, Engagement and Equalities Manager explained that the information was advertised on social media for those who used it, but for those who did not, the information was fed through Town &amp; Community Councils in order for them to advertise at local meetings, websites and physical advertising. Unfortunately the face to face engagement sessions were not greatly attended, however the conversations that were had were very meaningful.</p> <p><b><u>RESOLVED:</u></b> Cabinet noted the outcome of the consultation and approved the Engagement and Participation Strategy attached as Appendix B to the report for publication</p>
Date Decision Made	12 March 2024

**303. Housing And Homelessness Position Statement**

Decision Made	<p>The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change presented a report which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updated Cabinet as to the key pieces of work currently being taken forward to address pressures</li> </ul>
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on housing and homelessness services;

- Sought approval from Cabinet for the acquisition of Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) style properties which are within the Council's approved capital estimates for the purpose of providing temporary accommodation, subject to all reasonable due diligence and legal advice;
- Sought approval from Cabinet to suspend the relevant parts of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs) with regards to the requirement to tender for a contract and delegate authority to the Head of Partnerships and Housing to enter into Service Level Agreements with existing accommodation providers for a period of 'up to' 12 months in order to continue the provision of additional temporary accommodation as necessary to meet the Council's statutory duties.

The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change provided background to the report as detailed in section 2 of the report. She advised that the temporary accommodation costs were stark, and these were highlighted in the table at section 2.7 of the report, which showed the increases year on year. She stated that on 19 December 2023 Cabinet approved a Housing Support Programme Strategy and Action Plan for 2022-2026. Section 3 outlined some key pieces of work which were being taken forward to meet the challenges faced in Bridgend.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Planning & Regeneration stated that we recognize that homelessness is a national crisis and its important to note the requirement of the Local Authorities to provide cheaper and better accommodation, which Bridgend has been no different in.

The Deputy Leader echoed these comments and stated that it was important to approve this report to ensure that the risk of people becoming homeless was mitigated. She asked what happened in 2018-19 as the costs were significantly low that year compared with other years. The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change explained that during this year the number of people coming forward seeking help had actually dropped from the previous year, other services were often provided as well and so many people did not require temporary accommodation. The following years saw a significant increase and this was largely due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

RESOLVED: Cabinet:

- noted the contents of the report;
- approved the acquisition of Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) style properties which were

	<p>within the Council's approved capital estimates for the purpose of providing temporary accommodation subject to all reasonable due diligence and legal advice;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• agreed to suspend the relevant parts of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs) with regards to the requirement to tender for a contract and delegated authority to the Head of Partnerships and Housing to enter into Service Level Agreements with existing accommodation providers for a period of 'up to' 12 months in order to continue the provision of additional temporary accommodation as necessary to meet the Council's statutory duties;</li> <li>• delegated authority to the Head of Partnerships and Housing to approve the final terms of the Service Level Agreements on behalf of the Council and to arrange execution of the agreements on behalf of the Council in consultation with the Chief Officer – Legal and Regulatory, HR and Corporate Policy;</li> <li>• noted that a further report will be presented to Cabinet to update on the position regarding temporary accommodation.</li> <li>• requested that a further report on the Social Housing Grant be submitted to Cabinet.</li> </ul>
Date Decision Made	12 March 2024

**304. Local Housing Market Assessment 2024**

Decision Made	<p>The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change presented a report which sought Cabinet approval of the statutory Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) 2024 for submission to Welsh Government.</p> <p>She explained that the LHMA had analyzed household projections alongside key socio-economic, demographic and property market data in order to calculate housing need estimates for Bridgend County Borough. This analysis was attached at Appendix 1.</p> <p>The Principal Strategic Planning Policy Officer provided further background to the Assessment and the data gathered. He explained that the information will be used in a tangible way to inform the Social Housing Grant prospectus and also housing mixes on planning applications. He stressed that this was a strategic guide to boost the affordable housing provision, but all proposals will need to take the local context in to account.</p>
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	<p>The Leader was pleased to see that we did not need to use external consultants and have relied on our own inhouse expertise which has also saved the Council money.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Housing, Planning &amp; Regeneration welcomed the report and thanked Officers for the immense work that had been put into it. This is an important piece of work that shapes the decisions for the future housing market and ensuring that we are able to provide the housing where it's needed. He asked that this report goes to the Public Services Board and the Regional Partnership board to ensure that all of our partners get an early insight where there will be larger housing areas and communities and therefore they can plan ahead of what they need to provide.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED:</b> Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• approved the LHMA 2024 (Appendix 1 to the report) for submission to Welsh Government.</li> <li>• requested an update on the progress of the submission, to a future meeting.</li> </ul>
Date Decision Made	12 March 2024

**305. Non-Domestic Rates: Discretionary Relief: Retail, Leisure And Hospitality Rates Relief Scheme 2024-25**

Decision Made	<p>The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change presented a report which sought approval from Cabinet to adopt the Welsh Government’s Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief Scheme 2024-25.</p> <p>She explained that the total amount of relief available is £110,000 across all properties occupied by the same business. It is estimated that due to this limit there will be in the region of 888 eligible ratepayers across the borough that could potentially benefit from having to pay only 40% of their rates bill for the 2024-25 financial year under this Scheme. If this Council adopts the Scheme, application forms will be made available on Bridgend County Borough Council’s website for all qualifying ratepayers to apply</p> <p>The Cabinet Member Finance, Resources &amp; Legal welcomed the report and stated that it was an important scheme for businesses in Bridgend. He highlighted however that while BCBC collect the rates, it was Welsh Government that set the rates.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Education mentioned that there may be many businesses in Bridgend who are unaware that they are eligible for this scheme, nor how to apply to it. He asked how were we going to promote this.</p> <p>The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change explained that the comms team have already been</p>
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	<p>notified of this and were ready to provide this information on the Councils website as well as social media should it be approved. The application link would also be provided from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, in order for businesses to start the process early.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Education asked if it were possible for us to write out to businesses to let them know it was available.</p> <p>The Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change stated that once the application process went live, there will be an expected number of businesses applying for the scheme. After a short while if no correspondence has been received from the expected businesses, we would do some follow up work then.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED:</b> That Cabinet adopted the Non-Domestic Rates Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Rates Relief Scheme for 2024- 25 as detailed within Appendix A of the report.</p>
Date Decision Made	12 March 2024

**306. Proposed Use Of Land Transaction Transfer Protocol With Cardiff Capital Region for Land At Brynmenyn & Bryncethin**

Decision Made	<p>The Corporate Director Communities presented a report which outlined the proposed use of an Options Agreement arrangement with the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCR), under the Land Transaction Transfer Protocol. If agreed, this will enable CCR to have an option to purchase surplus local authority owned land at Brynmenyn and Bryncethin, subject to conditions and red book land valuation.</p> <p>She stated that in September 2023, the Cabinet made the difficult decision to withdraw from the Hybont Green Hydrogen Project with CCR, Welsh Government and Marubeni Europower Limited (MEL). This was due to the Council’s challenging Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and inability to meet the significant financial commitments required to complete due diligence, including financial, technical and legal also an inability to meet the timescale for the project.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Communities explained that this report, if approved, will enable CCR to have an option to purchase surplus local authority owned land, subject to conditions and an agreed red book valuation. She provided details on the land as per section 3 of the report.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member Climate Change and the Environment welcomed the report but highlighted the point</p>
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	<p>that this was relating to the land itself, and is separate from the previously discussed Hybont project. He stated that while this proposal was to transfer the land ownership, he believed it was important that it remained in the public ownership and interest. He highlighted point 4 of the recommendation that if the land did not get used for the project, it would return to the Council for the agreed value at which it was disposed.</p> <p>He asked if there were timescales on when this land would be returned to us should a project not go forward.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Communities explained that at this stage it was proposed that the CJC will report their full business case to their meeting in June and this will provide the information of the capital funding in place for the land option agreement, so this will allow ourselves to draw up this subject to the red book agreed valuation. The option can be drawn up however it will be determined on having a favorable planning application which is a separate statutory process.</p> <p><b><u>RESOLVED:</u></b> that Cabinet:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Noted the contents of this report and the statutory requirements for planning consent and various licences and permits, that sat outside of the Land Transaction Transfer Protocol.</li> <li>2. Delegated authority to Corporate Director – Communities, in consultation with the Chief Officer - Legal &amp; Regulatory Services, HR &amp; Corporate Policy and the Chief Officer, Finance, Housing &amp; Change, to draft and enter into the Option Agreement with the CCR/CJC based on the principles set out in this report, and agreed the valuation of the land and conditions.</li> <li>3. Agreed that any capital receipt received by the Council, is afforded a ring-fenced protection until such time as it is clear that the project will proceed, to ensure that there are funds available should the land be returned to the Councils ownership.</li> <li>4. Agreed that a subsequent report will be brought back to Cabinet should the Option Agreement or project not proceed, in order the land can be returned to the Council for the agreed value at which it was disposed and that a decision on the future of the two parcels of land can be agreed.</li> </ol>
Date Decision Made	12 March 2024

**307. Welsh Public Library Standards**

Decision Made	The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing presented a report which provided Cabinet with the Council’s performance against the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) sixth framework for the periods
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	<p>2021-22 and 2022-23.</p> <p>She explained that Appendix 1 was the 2021-22 summary report received from Welsh Government although during this period libraries across Wales were rebuilding usage following the pandemic. BCBC did not receive this report until 2023. During this period, the service saw a 23% increase in active borrowers with growth evidenced across both children’s and adult’s issues.</p> <p>Appendix 2 is the 2022-23 report from Welsh Government in response to the library self-assessment return regarding Welsh Public Library Standards.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Wellbeing welcomed the report and said that it was pleasing to see that Bridgend were providing this library service to a very high standard.</p> <p>The Deputy Leader congratulated AWEN for gaining alternative funding. She added that Welsh Government had requested that any cuts that may need to be made by Local Authorities to library services that they were not disproportionate to other cuts which was an important point to understand. It was also important that we listened to the public consultation and take on the views of residents and what they want and don’t want, to ensure our decisions were inclusive in this.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u> Cabinet considered and noted the content of the report and Appendices 1 and 2, recognizing the positive work that Bridgend’s library services had delivered to date in regard to the Welsh Public Library Standards.</p>
Date Decision Made	12 March 2024

**308. Procedure for the Appointment and Removal of Local Authority Governors**

Decision Made	<p>The Corporate Director for Education and Family Support presented a report which</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sought Cabinet approval for the procedure for the appointment and removal of local authority governors (at Appendix A); and</li> <li>• sought authorization for an amendment to the Scheme of Delegation of Functions</li> </ul>
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	<p>The current procedure for the appointment and removal of local authority governors was approved by Cabinet in 2008. While the current procedure requires Cabinet to approve the appointment of local authority governors (based on the recommendation of officers), the proposed replacement procedure no longer requires such approval by Cabinet. This is because such appointments are operational and, therefore, the new procedure will allow for appointments to be made on the basis of evidenced levels of relevant knowledge, skills and experience.</p> <p>The Corporate Director for Education and Family Support stated that it was proposed that the following new function is delegated to the Corporate Director – Education and Family Support at Scheme B2 of the Scheme of Delegation of Functions. Further information was at section 3 of the report.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Education welcomed the report and stated that the change will improve the efficiency of the process of appointing Local Authority Governors. An appointment can currently take a few weeks while the report is drafted, it gets approved by the cabinet Member and then comes before Cabinet, so the change is welcomed and will help fill vacancies more quickly.</p> <p><b><u>RESOLVED:</u></b> Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• approved the procedure for the appointment and removal of local authority governors as summarised in paragraphs 3.1-3.5 and detailed in Appendix A to the report</li> <li>• approved the amendment to the Scheme of Delegation of Functions as detailed in paragraph 3.6.</li> <li>• agreed that details of the applicants should be anonymised.</li> </ul>
Date Decision Made	12 March 2024

**309. Appointment Of Local Authority Governors**

Decision Made	<p>The Corporate Director for Education and Family Support presented a report which sought approval from Cabinet for the appointment of local authority governors to the school governing bodies listed at paragraph 3.1.</p> <p>He advised that the applicants met the approved criteria for appointment as a local authority governor and there was no competition for the vacancies.</p>
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	<b><u>RESOLVED:</u></b> Cabinet approved the appointments detailed at paragraph 3.1of the report.
Date Decision Made	12 March 2024

**310. Schools Admissions Policy 2025-2026**

Decision Made	<p>The Corporate Director for Education and Family Support presented a report which sought Cabinet approval for the School Admissions Policy 2025-2026 at Appendix A.</p> <p>He explained that the Bridgend Admissions Forum agreed the draft School Admissions Policy for 2025-2026, as per the requirements under the Code, in October 2023. The aforementioned consultation (details set out in section 2 of the report on the 2025-2026 policy took place with all parties between 8 January 2024 and 2 February 2024. Details on the responses were set out in section 3 of the report.</p> <p>The Deputy Leader asked for information on why the Policy comes into action next year and not this year. The Corporate Director provided this information for the record.</p> <p><b><u>RESOLVED:</u></b> Cabinet approved the Schools Admissions Policy 2025-2026 at Appendix A to the report.</p>
Date Decision Made	12 March 2024

**311. Home-To-School/College Transport Policy**

Decision Made	<p>The Corporate Director for Education and Family Support presented a report which sought Cabinet approval to begin a public consultation on proposed changes to the local authority's Home-to-School/College Transport Policy.</p> <p>He explained that the final MTFS 2024-25 to 2027-28, presented to Council on 28 February 2024, included a saving of £792k for 2025-26 in respect of the current Home-to-School/College Transport Policy. Although there have been significant savings following the policy change approved by Cabinet in September 2015, changes in demographics and demand, especially post-pandemic, have meant that additional budget growth has been necessary to support the learner transport budget.</p>
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	<p>The Corporate Director for Education and Family Support outlined details of the previous consultations that had taken place over the last few years and the changes that were made following these. The proposed consultation would also take into account the legislative context as set out in section 3 of the report.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Housing, Planning &amp; Regeneration asked in relation to the changes being proposed, has any impact assessment been carried out on people from lower income backgrounds and different socioeconomic backgrounds. An in-depth response was provided by the Corporate Director for Education and Family Support.</p> <p>The Deputy Leader made the point of ensuring that parents also take equal responsibility in ensuring that they can get their child to school and are using mobility assistance appropriately. There are a number of aids that available for pupils with mobility needs etc, however as parents it's important to ensure they do their part. Mobility assistants that are for their child need to be used for their child only.</p> <p><b><u>RESOLVED:</u></b> Cabinet approved a 12-week consultation on the following proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrawal of legacy transport for all learners benefitting from an identified and available (safe) walking route to school, to fall in line with the statutory distances of two miles for primary school-age pupils and three miles for secondary school-age pupils.</li> <li>• Removal of legacy 'sibling' protection for pupils.</li> <li>• Removal of all transport for nursery pupils (excluding pupils attending their nearest suitable Welsh-medium or faith school).</li> <li>• Removal of all Post-16 transport excluding pupils attending the following schools:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd;</li> <li>o Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School; and</li> <li>o The Bishop of Llandaff Church in Wales High School.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The offer to parents/carers of pupils with ALN the option of a 'personal transport budget' providing a mileage allowance of 45p per mile.</li> </ul>
Date Decision Made	12 March 2024

**312. Information Report for Noting**

Decision Made	<p>The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy presented a report to inform Cabinet of the Information Report for noting that has been published since its last scheduled meeting.</p> <p>Details of this were at section 3.1 of the report. To note, this report had already been through the scrutiny process and was provided to Cabinet today for noting.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u> Cabinet acknowledged the publication of the report referred to in paragraph 3.1 of the report.</p>
Date Decision Made	12 March 2024

**313. Cabinet, Council And Overview And Scrutiny Committees Forward Work Programmes**

Decision Made	<p>The Chief Officer Legal and Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy presented which sought Cabinet approval for items to be included on the Cabinet Forward Work Programme for the period 1 March 2024 to 30 June 2024 and for Cabinet to note the Council and Overview and Scrutiny Committees' Forward Work Programmes for the same period.</p> <p>She explained that the proposed Forward Work Programmes for the above period are appended to the report, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet - Appendix 1</li> <li>• Council - Appendix 2</li> <li>• Overview and Scrutiny Committees - Appendix 3</li> </ul> <p>The Deputy Leader pointed out the length of many of the reports can be considerable and asked that due consideration was given to ensure that reports are made more concise for the benefit Members as well as the residents of Bridgend.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u> Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approved the Cabinet Forward Work Programme for the period 1 March 2024 to 30 June 2024 at Appendix 1;</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Noted the Council and Overview and Scrutiny Committees' Forward Work Programmes for the same period, as shown at Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 of the report, respectively.</li></ul>
Date Decision Made	12 March 2024

**314. Urgent Items**

Decision Made	None
Date Decision Made	12 March 2024

To observe further debate that took place on the above items, please click [this link](#)

The meeting closed at 17:44.

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<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>14 MAY 2024</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN OBJECTIVES 2024 - 2028</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CHIEF OFFICER - FINANCE, HOUSING AND CHANGE</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>ZOE EDWARDS - CONSULTATION, ENGAGEMENT AND EQUALITIES MANAGER</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There is no impact on the policy framework or procedure rules.</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<b>To inform Cabinet on the outcome of the draft Strategic Equality Plan objectives 2024-2028 consultation and to seek approval of the Strategy for publication. The consultation was undertaken over an 8-week period between 4<sup>th</sup> January 2024 to 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024 and received 400 responses.</b>

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the outcome of the draft Strategic Equality Plan objectives 2024-2028 consultation and to seek approval of the Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives 2024-2028 for publication.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives 2024-2028 have been developed to demonstrate the Council's commitment to meeting the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011, which came into force on 6 April 2011. This Strategy (attached as **Appendix B**) sets out how Bridgend County Borough Council will achieve this.
- 2.2 Within the Equality Act 2010, public bodies have an additional responsibility to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty. These are outlined below:

### **Public Sector Equality Duty The General Duty**

When making decisions and delivering services we must have due regard to:

- Eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Act.
- Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it (protected characteristics are explained later in this report).
- Fostering good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and peoples who do not share it.

### 3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 To develop the equality objectives we have engaged with our residents, stakeholders and our workforce and used relevant information, including Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) reports, Welsh Government reports and internal strategies. In addition to this we have also:

- Reviewed our Strategic Equality Plan 2020 – 2024 and our action plan for this period and considered our achievements to date;
- Used the Council’s corporate plan which outlines the five ways of working and the seven well-being objectives identified to underpin our equality goals;
- Given further consideration to each of the nine [protected characteristics](#) covered by the three main aims of the general duty and the requirement to eliminate discrimination, harassment and other actions prohibited in the Equality Act 2010;
- Considered national and local issues such as developing an Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP), along with an LGBTQ+ action plan;
- Assessed what we have learnt from regional networks and partnerships such as domestic abuse, violence against men and women and sexual violence and hate crime;
- Looked at a number of the Council’s existing plans and strategies as well as the consultations which took place to inform their development;
- Used feedback that we regularly get from local equality and diversity groups and via the Bridgend Community Cohesion and Equality Forum such as how accessible our services are and how we can help support, promote and raise awareness of issues such as hate crime and LGBTQ History Month;
- Established a corporate equality group made up of key officers from a variety of directorates to discuss and agree key priorities and objectives; and
- Carried out engagement and equality sessions with local school children to encourage them to share their views on what they feel is important to them.

3.2 We have set our objectives in line with the findings of the EHRC Is Wales Fairer report and the public consultation. The following overarching objectives have been developed following the consultation to reflect the views of residents and stakeholders from across the county borough:

- **Access to services**
- **Protecting the most vulnerable**
- **Living standards**
- **Participation and Engagement**

- **Learning**
- **Employment**

3.3 A public survey was available to complete online through a link on the consultation page of the Council's website. Paper copies of the consultation were also available, which could be sent directly to residents upon request. The consultation was sent out to our Citizen Panel, shared with Town and Community Councils and public engagement events were also held throughout the consultation period. Surveys were available in Welsh and English Language; alternative copies were available upon request. The content of the page remains online. Respondents could choose to answer all or some questions. All survey responses offered the option of anonymity.

3.4 In total, there were **400 responses** to the public consultation, including online and paper completions.

3.5 The attached consultation report (**Appendix A**) sets out in detail the views expressed by those who participated. BCBC consulted on six proposed equality objectives to demonstrate how we will promote equal opportunities for all and make a real difference to the lives of those living and working in Bridgend County Borough. Overall, the majority of respondents provided positive feedback on the proposed objectives. Comments and suggestions made throughout the consultation were considered when developing the strategic equality action plan (Appendix B).

### 3.6 Social Media

The Council currently has 14,766 followers on its English Twitter account and 369 on its Welsh Twitter account; 20,087 followers on its English Facebook page and 262 on the Welsh Facebook page; 3,335 followers on Instagram and 7,298 followers on LinkedIn and 209 subscribers on YouTube. Details of the success of the social media and website campaigns can be found in the full consultation report at **Appendix A**.

### 3.7 govDelivery

govDelivery is a digital communications platform that was introduced by the local authority in June 2020 to improve communication. It is currently used to issue Council updates directly to residents' email inboxes in the language of their choice. There are currently 35,158 English language and 280 Welsh language users who have subscribed to receive the Council's weekly update emails.

govDelivery is also used to distribute notification of consultation to members of the Citizen panel who have subscribed to email correspondence.

Weekly staff bulletin messages including details of the consultation are sent out to staff via govDelivery. Details of click through links to the consultation can be found in **Appendix A**.

### 3.8 Media and publicity

A press release was issued to coincide with the start of the consultation, to raise awareness and encourage participation. This was released on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2023 <https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/news/consultation-launched-to-shape-council-s-new-engagement-and-participation-strategy/> . A last chance reminder of the Engagement and Participation consultation was included in news round-up on 19 January 2024. The Leader of the Council also shared in his regular update emails to his list of contacts which include local councillors, MP's, MS's.

### 3.9 Promotional materials

- Staff Bulletin
- Details of the engagement and participation survey were included in our weekly staff bulletin, which included links to the survey and strategy.

### 3.10 Throughout the consultation period there six in-person engagement events, including public drop-in sessions, to encourage residents and members to share their views on the strategy. Details of the events were shared via the Council's social media. In-person events were held at:

- ❖ The Bridge
- ❖ Town and Community Council Forum
- ❖ Corporate overview and scrutiny committee
- ❖ Pyle Life Centre
- ❖ Ogmore Life Centre
- ❖ Garw Valley Life Centre

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

### 4.1 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, or 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. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

## 6. **Climate Change Implications**

### 6.1 There are no Climate Change Implications from this report.

## 7. **Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

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

## 8. **Financial Implications**

### 8.1 The costs of carrying out the consultation were met from existing budgets.

**9. Recommendation**

- 9.1 Cabinet is recommended to note the outcome of the consultation and approve the Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives 2024-2028 attached as **Appendix B** for publication.

**Background documents**

None

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# Strategic Equality Objectives Consultation Findings Report

**Date of issue:** April 2024

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## 1. Overview

Bridgend County Borough Council has proposed six draft equality objectives to drive how we will promote equal opportunities for all and make a real difference to the lives of those living and working in Bridgend County Borough. Feedback of the proposed six objectives will be used to shape the Strategic Equality Action Plan.

To ensure our objectives reflect citizens' priorities, a public consultation was undertaken over an 8-week period, between 4 January 2024 to 29 February 2024.

In total, there were **400 responses**, including online completions, paper completions and ideas submitted to our online ideas board.

## 2. Consultation Process

The consultation consisted of a public survey that was available to complete online through a link on the consultation page of the council's website. Paper copies of the consultation were also available, which could be sent directly to residents upon request. The consultation was sent out to our Citizen Panel, and shared with Town and Community Councils, and the Youth Council. In-person public engagement events were also held throughout the consultation period.

The data collection methods, which include the online survey and a paper survey were developed using plain English to maximise understanding. An easy-read version of the survey was also available to download from the consultation project page. These response methods were designed to give a consistency to the survey across multiple platforms. Respondents could choose to answer all or some questions. All survey responses offered the option of anonymity.

## 3. Marketing and engagement methods

This section details methods used to raise the profile of the consultation and encourage participation.

### 3.1. Social media

The public consultation was posted bilingually to the council's corporate Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn channels throughout the consultation period, to raise awareness of the consultation and to encourage citizens to share their views on the strategy.

The council currently has over 20K Facebook followers and 14.7K followers on its English X (Twitter) account, and 369 on its Welsh X (Twitter) account.

The below table shows engagement rates with social media posts promoting the strategic equality objectives throughout the consultation period.

	<b>Impressions</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Shares</b>	<b>Link clicks</b>
<b>English</b>	11216	8	15	62
<b>Welsh</b>	176	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,392</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>62</b>

### 3.2. Engagement HQ

Engagement HQ is a digital engagement platform that supports the council's online consultation and engagement activities. The platform is available in both English and Welsh Language.

The online survey was published using Engagement HQ, with the link available on the consultation page of the council's website.

The following graph provides an overview of visitors to the strategic equality objectives project page on Engagement HQ.

# Visitors Summary

Be involved, Bridgend from 04 Jan'24 to 29 Feb'24



The table below highlights visits to the Engagement HQ project page for the strategic equality objectives consultation.

<b>Aware visitors</b>	1,075
<b>Informed visitors</b>	529
<b>Engaged visitors</b>	372
<b>Visits referred from social media</b>	50
<b>Visits referred from council's website</b>	239
<b>Visitors from search engine</b>	5
<b>Direct</b>	381

**Aware visitors:** A visitor that has made at least one single visit to the site or project page, and is therefore 'aware' of the project, but has not clicked anything or participated in the survey.

**Informed visitors:** An informed visitor has taken the 'next step' from being aware and clicked on something, for example, viewed key dates, a document, or clicked on the survey.

**Engaged visitors:** These are visitors that have engaged with the project by submitting a response to the Strategic equality objectives survey.

### 3.3. GovDelivery

GovDelivery is a digital communications tool that is used by the council, to send messages directly to residents' and staff email inboxes in the language of their choice.

#### 3.3.1. Weekly Residents bulletin:

There are currently 35,143 English language subscribers and 283 Welsh language subscribers from Bridgend County Borough to the weekly Residents' Bulletin.

Throughout the consultation period details of the consultation on the strategic equality objectives were included in GovDelivery resident bulletins which contains 10 weekly news stories and updates. Residents then have the opportunity to click through to the online survey to become an engaged visitor.

Three resident bulletins were sent out about the consultation on the strategic equality objectives, which included links to the strategy and online survey.

The weekly news roundup generated a total of 125 link clicks to the strategic equality objective survey (124 English, 1 Welsh).

#### 3.3.2. Staff Bulletin

There are currently 5,233 staff signed up to our staff bulletin.

Details of the Strategic equality objectives survey was shared in our weekly staff bulletin five times throughout the period of the consultation, which included links to the survey and strategy.

The staff bulletin generated a total of 51 link clicks to the strategic equality objective survey.

#### 3.3.3. Citizen Panel

At the beginning of the consultation period, members of the Citizen panel were sent the strategic equality objective survey. Members received emails via GovDelivery, and those who chose to receive paper copies received them through the post.

The citizen panel email generated a total of 193 link clicks to the strategic equality objective survey.

A total of 237 letters were sent to Citizen panel members by post. 29 completed paper copies of the survey were before the consultation closing date.

### 3.4. Media and Publicity

The consultation was promoted to the media as part of the Bridgend County Borough news round-up on:

- 12 January
- 16 February
- 23 February

Media included: Wales Online, Glamorgan Gazette newspaper, Glamorgan Star Newspaper, Sky News, Channel 4 news, ITV Wales, BBC Wales, Bridge FM, Heart Radio, Swansea Bay News and S4C.

The release was also shared promoted by the Leader of the council (Cllr Huw David) in his regular updates to members and key community contacts.

### 3.5. Engagement Events

Throughout the consultation period six in-person engagement events were held around the county, including public drop-in sessions, to encourage residents and members to share their views on the draft objectives.

Details of the events were shared via the council's social media.

The public consultation events took place in the following venues:

- Town and Community Council Forum
- Corporate overview and scrutiny committee
- Pyle Life Centre
- Ogmore Life Centre
- Garw Life Centre
- Brynteg Comprehensive School

## 4. Response Rate

There were **400** responses in total to the survey, 371 responses were submitted through the online survey, and **29** responses were submitted as paper copies.

Engagement events were used to inform citizens and raise awareness of the consultation. The sessions provided an opportunity for individuals to gain further information regarding the objectives and consultation, and also receive additional support to complete the survey. Citizens were given the option to fill out a paper copy of the survey or through the link. These responses are included in the overall figure.

## 5. Questions and analysis - consultation Survey

Feedback received from the consultation will be used to inform the development of the objectives within the Strategic Equality Plan.

### 5.1. Language used to complete the survey.

Respondents to the consultation survey were initially asked in which language they would like to complete the survey. Overall, 99.5% of respondents selected English with 0.5% selecting Welsh.

Language	#	%
English	<b>398</b>	<b>99.5%</b>
Welsh	2	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100.0</b>

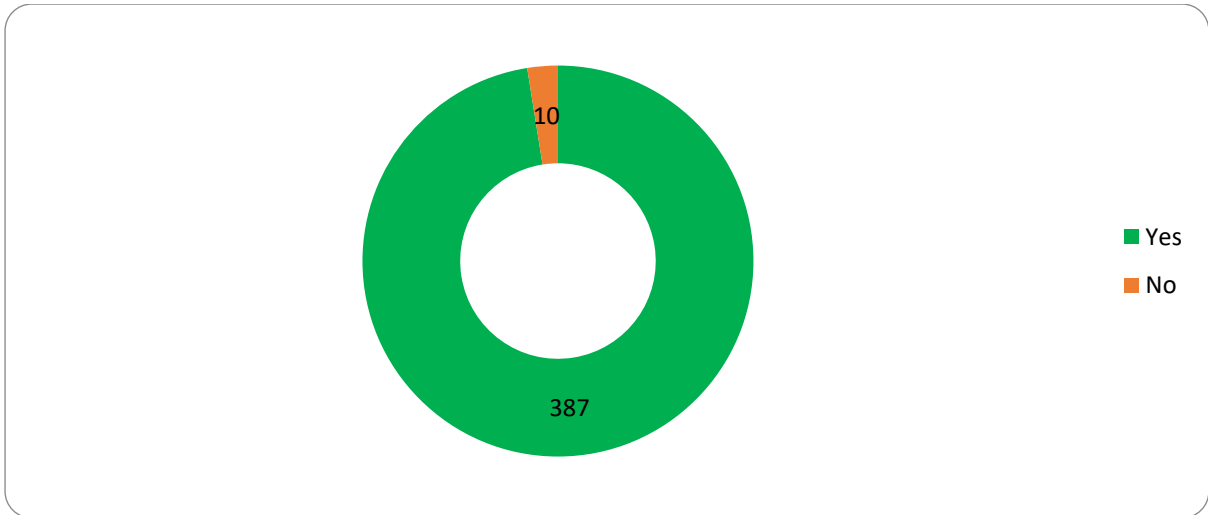
## 6. Survey Questions and Analysis:

This section outlines and analyses the questions asked in the survey. All questions were optional, so participants could choose to answer all or some questions.

### Objective 1: Access to Services

Improve the experience and outcomes for our customers, ensuring that every resident has equity of access to the services that they need.

### Do you agree with objective 1?



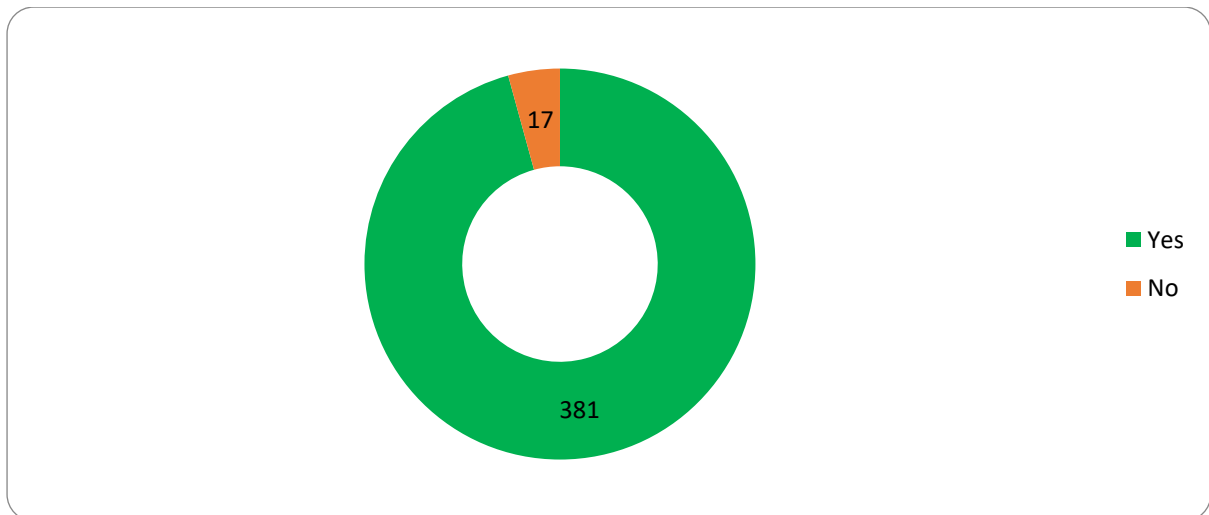
As shown above, 97.5% of respondents (387) agree with objective 1. Whereas 2.5% respondents (10) disagree with the objective.

Those who disagreed with the objective questioned the affordability of the objective in practice and the financial implications of implementing the objective. Some expressed concern that specific council services do not comply with the objective e.g., no access to disabled toilets in Bridgend town centre. Others suggested changes to the wording of the objective to 'Equality' rather than 'Equity.'

### **Objective 2: Protecting the most vulnerable.**

Establish comprehensive policies and procedures that effectively safeguard and support the rights and well-being of our most vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, people with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness or poverty and those that access care and support from Social Services.

### **Do you agree with objective 2?**



As shown above, 95.7% of respondents (381) agree with objective 2. However, 4.3% of respondents (17) disagree with the objective.

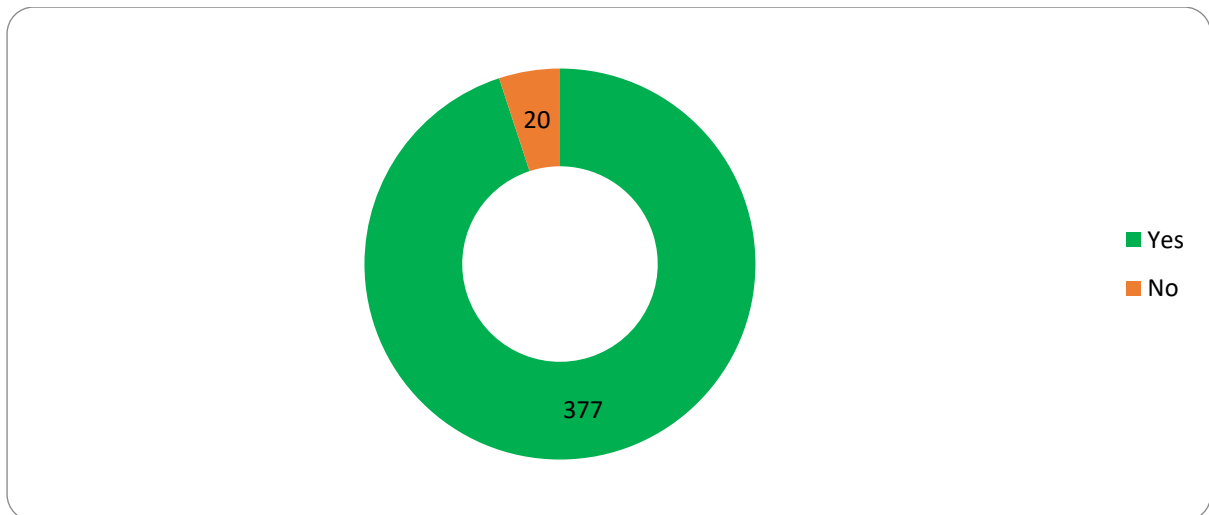
Some respondents disagreed because they felt everyone in the county required support and protection, not only the most vulnerable people. Others disagreed with the objective because they felt that existing policies provided protections but were not sufficiently implemented and should be reviewed. Some expressed the concern that the objective could result in people becoming too dependent on council services. One comment expressed they agree with this objective provided it is implemented in line with the Equality Act 2010, which grants women and girls the right to carers who are of the same sex.

### **Objective 3: Living Standards**

Tackle poverty and support independent living by considering the impact of any policy changes or decisions under the socio-economic duty. Consideration to vital services such as Housing and homelessness, cost of living crisis and the adverse effects on individuals.

**Do you agree with objective 3?**





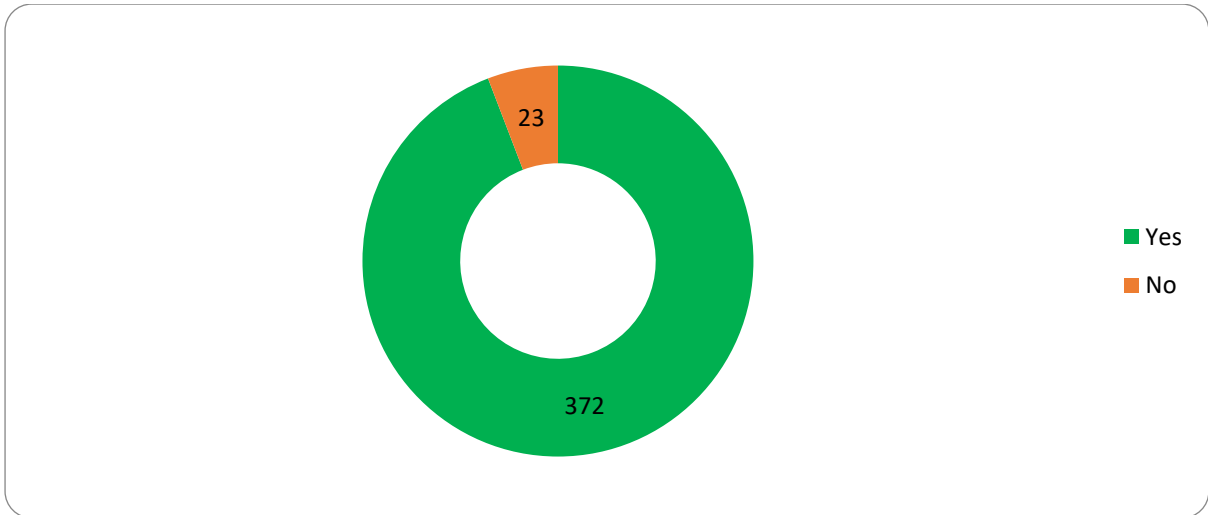
As shown above, 95% of respondents agree with Objective 3, and 5% of respondents (20) disagree with the objective.

Of those who disagreed, there are various concerns about the financial viability of measures to support the objective. Others expressed that independent living is not suitable for all, as every individual's situation is unique. There is a view that the objective should emphasise meaningful action rather than limiting it to 'considering the impact of...' as this does not give the impression that this objective will actively address the changes necessary to tackle poverty and support independent living. One of the comments expressed the concern there is failure to accommodate for disabled people.

#### **Objective 4: Participation and Engagement**

Encourage people and communities to take part and engage in issues that are important to them and influence the decisions that affect their lives. Building and increasing quality relationships with communities to ensure a focus on what matters to them.

**Do you agree with objective 4?**



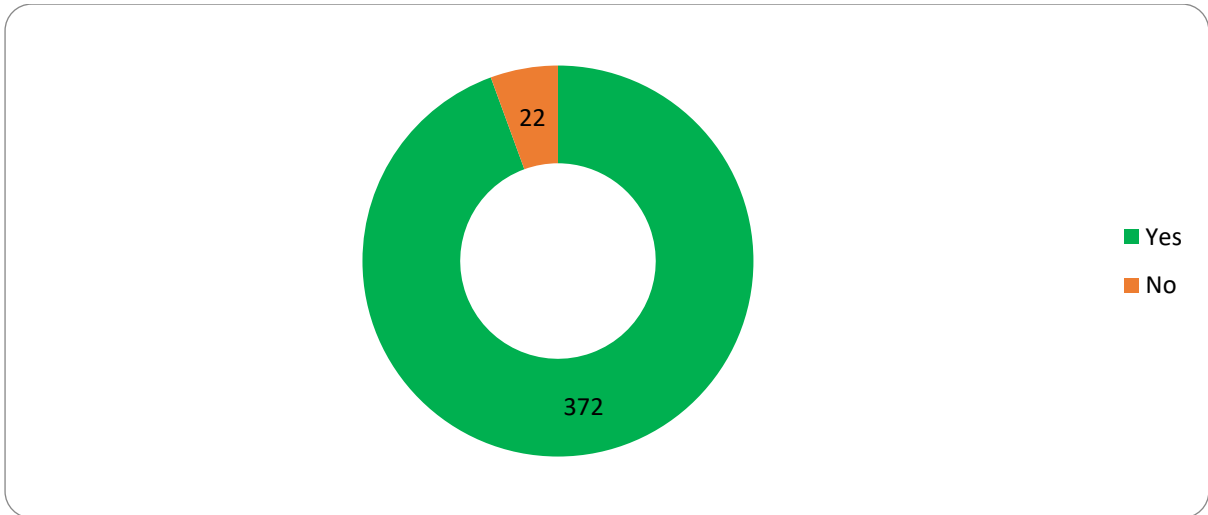
As shown above, 94.2% of respondents (372) agree with objective 4, whereas 5.8% of respondents (23) disagree with the objective.

Respondents who disagreed were divided in their opinions; some believed the council was disingenuous in its approach to participation and involvement with the public and that complaints are not taken seriously, or action is not taken to resolve them. There is also a view that the objective is very vague and needs further clarification. Whereas other respondents felt this objective is not the council's responsibility and individuals ought to take ownership of their actions and cease relying on council services so much.

### **Objective 5: Learning**

Promote equal access to quality learning for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, abilities, age, or ethnic background. Support diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Do you agree with objective 5?**



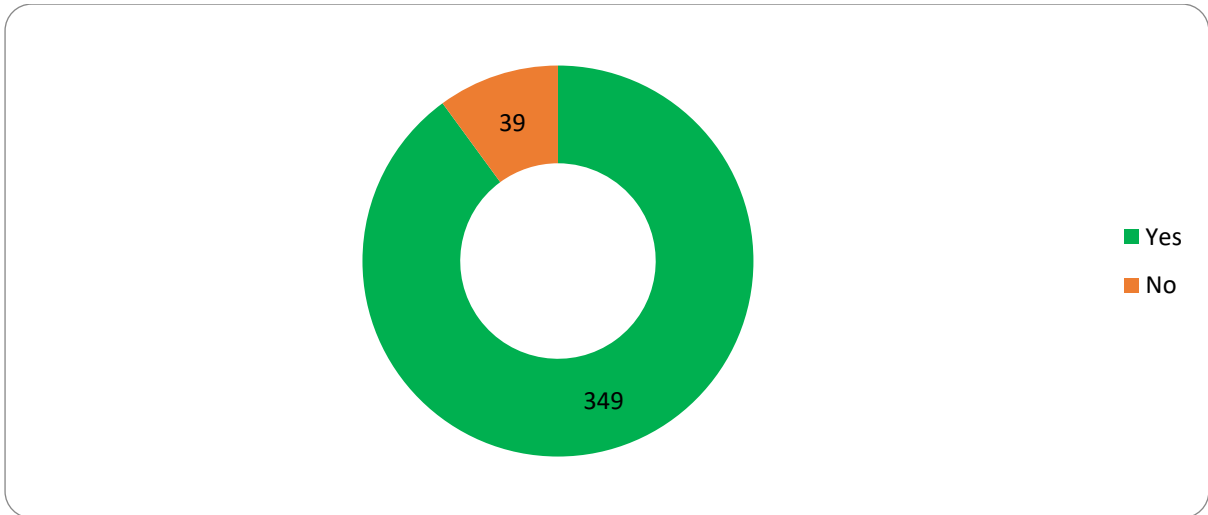
As shown above, 94.4% of respondents (372) agree with objective 5, whereas 5.6% of respondents (22) disagree with the objective.

Of the respondents that disagree, some feel that focusing on diversity, equity and inclusion often creates a sense of inequality and exclusion. There is a view that the objective should focus more on improving learning to make it better suited to the demands of current and future generations. It is suggested that the wording of 'equitable access' is preferable to 'equal access' since no two people start with the same opportunities and this should therefore offer a means of effectively addressing those disparities. There are shared concerns that Welsh medium education receives more support and budget than English medium education.

### **Objective 6: Employment**

Promote a more inclusive workforce and improve the participation, well-being, and opportunities for development for those with protected characteristics.

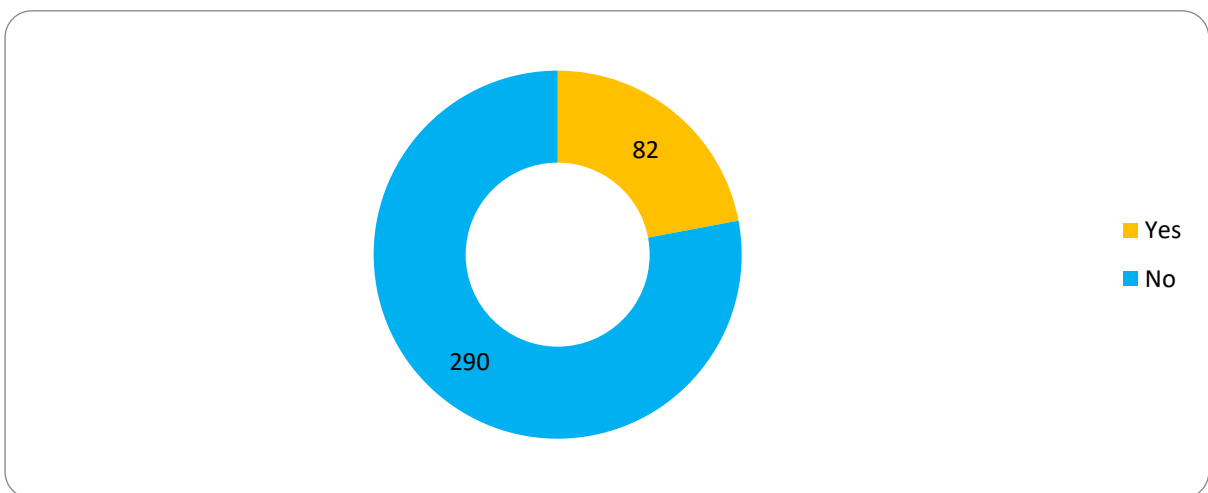
**Do you agree with objective 6?**



As shown above, 89.9% of respondents agree with objective 6, whereas 10.1% of respondents disagree with the objective.

Of the respondents that disagreed, most commented they felt it should always be the best person for the job, and people should not be appointed on the basis of protected characteristics. Whereas some shared the concern there are fewer employment opportunities for people with protected characteristics. Another comment proposes that the objective should be to promote participation, wellbeing, and opportunities for everyone.

**Are there any objectives you think should be added?**



As shown above, 78% of respondents (290) believe there are no other objectives to be added. 22% of respondents (82) think there should be other objectives added.

Those respondents that felt additional objectives should be added suggested the following subjects:

- Tackle bullying, hate and discrimination.
- Promoting active and healthy lifestyles.
- An objective to address violence against women and domestic violence victims.
- Recognise local differences in health and standard of living while addressing the negative impacts on underprivileged people and communities.
- Addressing isolation and loneliness.
- Training for school staff to support children with special needs, and signposts for special need assessments.
- Promote neurodiversity, raise awareness of challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals.
- Provide support to LGBTQ+ students.

### **Do you have any further comments regarding proposed Equality Objectives for 2024-2028.**

89 respondents left a comment saying no further comment or nothing. Of the others who left a response there are worries that proposed service reductions would conflict with these intended objectives, and it is suggested that SMART objectives should be created alongside each objective for credibility. It is suggested that community members should have access to more accessible and in-person services, with information written in a simpler and easy to read manner.

## 7. Conclusion

Bridgend County Borough Council consulted on six proposed equality objectives to demonstrate how we will promote equal opportunities for all and make a real difference to the lives of those living and working in Bridgend County Borough.

During the eight-week consultation period, the engagement team consulted with multiple community groups, to receive collective responses. The face-to-face events provided opportunity to interact with hard-to-reach groups.

Overall, the majority of respondents provided positive feedback on the proposed objectives. Comments and suggestions made throughout the consultation will be considered when developing our strategic equality action plan. Further to this, comments will also be considered when developing our strategic equality action plan.

### 7.1. Equality Impact Assessment

An initial Equality Impact Screening assessment was completed to identify any negative impacts of the strategic equality objectives and was presented to cabinet alongside the strategy.

This is an information report; therefore, it is not necessary to carry out an EIA 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.

# Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives 2024 – 2028

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## 1. Introduction and background

Welcome to Bridgend County Borough Council's fourth Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) and Objectives, which is intended to cover the next four years (2024 to 2028).

We are pleased to present this SEP which outlines our six strategic equality objectives. These will be used to form an action plan during this period to ensure that equality, equity, and fairness remain firmly at the heart of how the council plans, provides, and delivers important services to the people of Bridgend County Borough.

Our objectives are based on the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) research ["Is Wales Fairer 2018?"](#) which sets out key inequalities in Wales.

The new objectives set out how we will deliver our equalities commitments whilst continuing to be an inclusive and effective organisation that is representative of its communities and does not tolerate discrimination of any kind.

Our aim is to deliver good quality services to our residents, while considering their differing needs and ensuring that no one experiences disadvantage or discrimination due to their background or identity.

We recognise that sustained change takes time and cannot be achieved in isolation, this is why we are working in partnership with other public sector organisations in the county borough to strive towards our vision to become a fairer county borough, promoting opportunities for all and making real and tangible differences to the lives of the people in our communities.

By producing this this plan and objectives, we will meet our statutory Public Sector Equality Duties under the Equality Act 2010 to advance equality, eliminate unlawful discrimination, victimisation, and harassment, and foster good community relations in our employment, policy, procurement, and service delivery functions.

The objectives build on the progress we have made through previous plans, by nurturing an environment that recognizes and respects the diversity and uniqueness of individuals, regardless of their characteristics or backgrounds.

Our Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives will not be implemented in isolation. They have been developed and will be delivered alongside our Participation and Engagement Strategy and Welsh Language Standards which sets out our commitment to achieving a more inclusive and equal future for all. The objectives are also linked to our [Corporate Plan 2023-28](#).

We value the contributions from everyone who has participated in the development of this set of objectives.

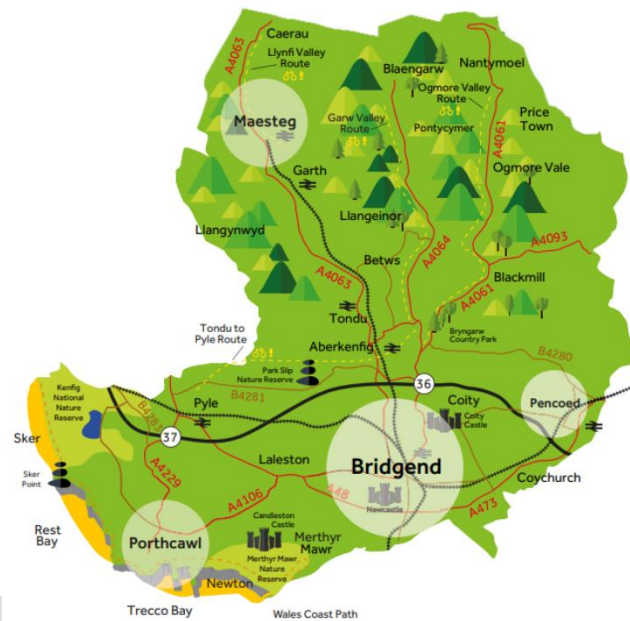
If you would like to become involved and contribute to continuing to review our priorities that will reduce inequalities in Bridgend County Borough, please contact us (see page 15 for details).

Council Leader Huw David  
Chief Executive Mark Shephard

DRAFT

## 2. About us

- 2.1 Bridgend County Borough is a diverse and vibrant area with 145,760 residents and over three million annual visitors. As one of the county borough's largest employers and service providers we recognise our unique role and influential position within the area and the contribution we can make to the development of inclusive and confident communities.



- 2.2 We recognise as public service providers that we have a key role to play in making a real difference to people's lives. Therefore, we will continue to strive to meet our vision which is to function as "One council working together to improve lives". Achieving this will improve the quality of life of all those living and working in the county borough, as outlined in our [Corporate Plan](#).
- 2.3 Our new strategic equality objectives identify how we will strengthen and advance equality across Bridgend County over the next four years. For example, we will continue to embed equality throughout our organisation to ensure meaningful change is achieved. In order to support our staff achieve this, we provide corporate equality awareness training, which is mandatory not just for new starters but all members of the authority. In addition, Bridgend Council is committed to the 'Disability confident employer scheme', which encourages employers to think differently about disability and take action to improve recruitment and retention of disabled people, as well as developing them in the workplace.

*We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has been involved in the engagement processes to develop our objectives and we look forward in continuing this journey with you throughout their delivery.*

### 3. Purpose of the Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives

- 3.1 Under the Equalities Act 2010, the Council has a statutory duty to prepare and publish a Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives every four years which must show how the Council can contribute to a fairer society by advancing equality and good relations in our day-to-day activities.
- 3.2 The Equality Act provides protection against discrimination for nine protected characteristic groups as follows:

#### **Age**

A person belonging to a particular age group (so 38-year-olds would be an age group) or an age range (for example 16-24 year olds).

#### **Disability**

A person that has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantive and long-term effect on their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

#### **Gender Reassignment**

The process in which a person transitions from one gender to another. This can be in any way they choose and does not need to involve medical intervention as it is a personal process. A reference to a transsexual person is a reference to a person who has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment.

#### **Marriage and Civil Partnership**

Marriage is a formally recognised union between two people, this can be a man or a woman or a same-sex couple. Same sex couples can also have their relationship recognised as a civil partnership.

#### **Pregnancy and Maternity**

Pregnancy is defined as the condition or period of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after birth.

#### **Race**

Race includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins. In relation to the protected characteristic or race, this refers to a person who is of a particular racial group or to persons of the same racial group.

#### **Religion or belief**

Religion refers to any religion or lack of religion. Belief refers to any religious or philosophical belief or lack of belief. In order to constitute a belief it should

affect the way that you live your life. The characteristic refers to a person of a particular religion or belief or to persons who are of the same religion or belief.

### **Sex**

This can refer to either male or female, or groups of men and women.

### **Sexual Orientation**

Sexual orientation is a person's sexual attraction towards their own sex, the opposite sex, or to both sexes.

- 3.3 The Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives serve as a roadmap for advancing equality, eliminating discrimination, and fostering good relations. It aligns with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and demonstrates our commitment to promoting inclusion as well as serving as a tool for accountability, ensuring that we remain transparent and accountable in our efforts to promote equality and diversity. The SEP will be reviewed annually, to demonstrate progress against actions, incorporate new areas of work for the council, changes to legislation and the development of any new objectives for the duration of the plan.

## **4. Statutory Duties**

The legal framework described in this section serves as the foundation for Bridgend Council's equality aims.

### **4.1 The General Equality Duty**

The aim of the general equality duty is to ensure that we consider the needs of all individuals when carrying out our day-to-day work, in developing policy, in delivering services and in relation to the public and to our workforce.

The commitments of the general duty include:

#### 4.2 Welsh Language Commitment

The promotion and use of the Welsh Language is covered by the requirements of the Welsh Language Measure 2011 rather than the Equality Act. However, in Bridgend Council we consider Welsh Language requirements alongside the protected characteristics of the Equality Act to encourage a co-operative approach to the needs of all communities in designing and delivering services.

#### 4.3 Socio-economic Duty

The socio-economic duty came into force in Wales in 2021. It aims to improve decision making and help those who are socio-economically disadvantaged. Socio-economic disadvantage means having low savings or income compared to others in Wales, making it more difficult to access basic services and opportunities. This can lead to inequality of outcome, for instance lower levels of good health, lower paid work, poorer educational attainment and an increased risk of being a victim of crime. We need to understand how the decisions that we make may increase or reduce opportunities for people who are at socio-economic disadvantage. We do this by carrying out equality impact assessments, every time we create policies, programmes or make decisions that may impact our residents.

#### 4.4 The Specific Public Sector Equality Duties (Wales)

In addition to meeting the general duty, public organisations including the council must meet the following specific duties:

- Setting Equality Objectives and publishing a Strategic Equality Plan.
- Engaging with people in relation to the protected characteristics.
- Collecting and publishing information relevant to compliance with the General Duty.
- Annual publishing of employment monitoring information.
- Ensuring that our workforce know and understand our duty under the Equality Act.
- Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments of relevant policies and practices
- Addressing unfair pay differences.
- Establishing relevant conditions to meet the general duty in procurement processes.
- Reviewing progress on the Strategic Equality Plan and our Equality Objectives.

- The Strategic Equality Objectives will also support the Council in meeting other statutory duties set out within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (see 4.5).

#### 4.5 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

The Act strengthens existing governance arrangements for improving the well-being of Wales to ensure that present needs are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The Act states that public bodies must work to improve the wellbeing of Wales. We have to agree and publish a set of wellbeing objectives to tell you how we will contribute to the national wellbeing goals. To find out more information on our wellbeing objectives see our [Corporate Plan](#).

### 5. Welsh Government reports and data

5.1 A number of Welsh Government strategies, reports and datasets have informed the development of this Strategic Equality Plan and Objectives to reflect what is happening on a national level, including:

- Anti-Racism Wales Action Plan
- LGBTQ+ Action Plan
- Cymraeg 2050 Strategy
- Well-being of Future Generations Act: Essentials Guide
- National Survey for Wales 2022-23
- Local Government Candidates Survey 2022
- Labour Market Overview: December 2023
- Labour Market Statistics (Annual Population Survey) 2022-23
- 'Locked out- liberating disabled people's lives and rights in Wales beyond COVID-19' Report
- Affordable housing provision 2022-23
- VAWDASV Strategy 2022-26
- Is Wales Fairer? 2018 – Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

Data acquired from these have positively influenced our priorities, such as producing an LGBTQ+ action plan as well as an Anti-racist Wales action plan. These will sit under the objective to promote a more inclusive workforce for those with protected characteristics.

## 6. Bridgend Council's Equality Objectives 2024-2028

The development of our objectives was shaped and agreed by our corporate equalities focus group. The purpose of the focus group is to provide strategic oversight for the Council's responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Well-being and Future Generations Act:

### **Equality Objective 1 – Access to services**

Improve the experience and outcomes for our customers, ensuring that every resident has equity of access to the services that they need.

### **Equality Objective 2 – Protecting the most vulnerable**

Establish comprehensive policies and procedures that effectively safeguard and support the rights and well-being of our most vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, people with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness or poverty and those that access care and support from Social Services.

### **Equality Objective 3 - Living Standards**

Tackle poverty and support independent living by considering the impact of any policy changes or decisions under the socio-economic duty. Consideration to vital services such as Housing and homelessness, cost of living crisis and the adverse effects on individuals.

### **Equality Objective 4 – Participation and engagement**

Encourage people and communities to take part and engage in issues that are important to them and influence the decisions that affect their lives. Building and increasing quality relationships with communities to ensure a focus on what matters to them.

### **Equality Objective 5 – Learning**

Promote equal access to quality learning for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, abilities, age or ethnic background. Support diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### **Equality Objective 6 – Employment**

Promote a more inclusive workforce and improve the participation, well-being, and opportunities for development for those with protected characteristics.



## 7. Developing our equality objectives

The council's equality objectives were informed by the legislative and planning framework set out in sections five and six above. In addition to this we:

- 7.1 Conducted a consultation and engagement exercise with the public, partners and equality and diversity groups. We asked for their views on the draft objectives for 2024-2028 and asked them to make comments to help us develop our action plan. During the consultation we engaged with 400 people who shared their views with us. Most respondents agreed with the proposed objectives, which we have now finalised based on this feedback.
- 7.2 Took into account the information that is shared in local equality and diversity groups and via the Bridgend Community Cohesion and Equality Forum. Topics include the accessibility of our services and how we can help support, promote and raise awareness of issues such as hate crime and LGBTQ History Month.
- 7.3 Aligned the equality objectives with the council's [Corporate Plan](#) 2023-28, which already identifies the council's priorities and how we will work alongside local people and partners to provide services over the next five years. The corporate plan sets out the Council's seven Wellbeing Objectives which 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 their community.

This provided us with the opportunity to focus our objectives on priority areas that had already been identified following the corporate plan consultation. This includes protecting our most vulnerable, which was a common theme identified in the feedback from both the corporate plan consultation and the Strategic Equalities Plan objectives consultation.

- 7.4 In addition, we reviewed our Strategic Equality Plan 2020 – 2024 and our action plan for this period and considered our progress to date. This gave us an opportunity to review the positive work that has been carried out to become a more inclusive organisation. This includes:
  - Running regular Hate Crime awareness sessions across the county borough in partnership with South Wales Police.

- Development of an Education and Engagement Team by Education and Family Support that provides integrated support for a range of pupils identified by Estyn as vulnerable or potentially vulnerable.
- Identifying physical wellbeing opportunities, social opportunities and working with Awen libraries to provide creative and wellbeing support.
- Maintained our Disability Confident Employer status.
- Continuously reviewing our internal processes such as staff training. We are committed to recruiting Welsh speakers, disabled people, people who identify as LGBTQ+ and people from minority ethnic backgrounds as part of our commitment to address under-representation across all levels of the organisation.

## 8. Next Steps

- 8.1 We will develop an outcome focussed **Strategic Equality Action Plan** which will outline:
- The actions we are seeking to progress under each of our objectives which will make a positive difference to residents and employees' lives.
  - When we expect to achieve these actions.
  - Who is responsible for taking the actions forward.
  - How we will measure our success.
- 8.2 Building on the work we have carried out in our previous Strategic Equality Plan, we will continue to work with our partners to provide a range of services for people within our communities. We will continue to work with the police to identify and tackle hate crime within our communities, strengthen collection and analysis of data for discriminatory incidents in schools and ensure our residents can participate in consultations through a variety of formats, including face to face interactions.
- 8.3 We will use the information and feedback from the Strategic Equality Objectives consultation to support the development of our action plan. The action plan will be finalised in the summer of 2024 and added to this plan as appendix C.

## 9. Delivery of objectives

- 9.1 Successful delivery of our objectives requires strong leadership which is driven primarily by the Future Generations and Well-being Cabinet Member, our Chief Executive and council Leader.
- 9.2 Progress on our Strategic Equality Plan is regularly reported to the Corporate Equality Network. Our group of Equality Champions was established to ensure that the organisation considers and promotes equality across the board, and it has an important role in monitoring our strategic equality plan and objectives.
- 9.3 Responsibility for operational delivery rests with all service areas and teams within the authority. Each Corporate Director and Head of Service ensures their employees have the appropriate skills and knowledge of equality that are required. Our Cabinet Committee Equalities monitors delivery against the objectives and scrutinises information available to ensure we identify and implement new strategies and objectives appropriately.
- 9.4 Our main area of focus in monitoring progress is to undertake further, regular consultation and engagement with all protected characteristic groups. We are mindful that our most reliable measure of success of our equality objectives is via our residents, service users and employees.

## 10. Assess the impact or potential impact on protected groups?

- 10.1 We are committed to assessing the impact of new and existing policies, practices and procedures on all equality groups by conducting appropriate equality impact assessments. Our Equality Impact Assessment page is available on the council's [Website](#)
- 10.2 We have also produced an Equality Impact Assessment toolkit which is a practical guide for service managers to use to assess the likely impact of their functions, policies and procedures on different groups of people. Additionally, staff are encouraged to undertake the corporate training module.

## 11. How to contact us:

Comments and suggestions to help us improve and best perform as an equal opportunities' organisation can be submitted at any time to the: Equalities and Engagement Team, Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB  
E-mail: [equalities@bridgend.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@bridgend.gov.uk)  
Phone: 01656 643664

## Accessible formats

If you would like this publication in an alternative format and/or language, please contact us. All publications are also available to download and order in a variety of formats from our website.

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.



DRAFT

# Agenda Item 5

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>14 MAY 2024</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>FEES AND CHARGES POLICY</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, HOUSING AND CHANGE</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>DEBORAH EXTON DEPUTY HEAD OF FINANCE</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There is no impact on the policy framework and procedure rules.</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>The latest Fees and Charges Policy was approved by Cabinet in October 2021.</b></li><li>• <b>This report provides an updated Policy to reflect changes in approach to the setting of fees and charges since this date, notably the flexibility around the timing of fees and charges increases, and the Council’s commitment as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to recover the cost of services via fees and charges where it is able to do so.</b></li></ul>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Cabinet for an updated Fees and Charges Policy.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 On 19 October 2021 Cabinet approved a revised Fees and Charges Policy to ensure a consistent approach was being adopted across the Council with regard to the setting of fees and charges, including sections on how and when fees and charges would be set, the method to be used for increasing fees and charges, and processes to follow where it was proposed not to increase fees and charges. Alongside this would be an annual publication on the Council’s webpages outlining all of the Council’s fees and charges for the coming year.

## **3. Current situation / proposal**

- 3.1 Since 2021 the Council’s financial position has become more challenging, and this

was set out in detail in the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-25 to 2027-28, which was approved by Council on 28 February 2024.

3.2 As part of the budget setting process for the years ahead the Council committed to the following principle:

- *The Council will seek to recover the cost of services via fees and charges where it is able to do so.*

As such all services were encouraged to aim for full cost recovery, except where there was a conscious decision not to, consistent with Council priorities.

3.3 The level of inflation has fluctuated widely during the last financial year, with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) changing from 10.1% in March 2023 to 3.2% in March 2024. As a result of these large changes in CPI the Council may need to be more flexible in terms of the dates and frequency with which it reviews its fees and charges, rather than a standard annual review.

3.4 As a result of this more flexible approach to full cost recovery, the Fees and Charges Policy has been updated and a tracked changes version attached at **Appendix A**, with a clean version attached at **Appendix B**.

#### **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 report is an overarching charging policy, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment in the production of this report. Individual service managers will be required to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment if they propose changes to their individual, service specific, charging proposals.

4.2 The overarching policy does require service managers to consider areas where services should be subsidised, including concessions for target groups.

#### **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. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

#### **6. Climate Change Implications**

6.1 There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

#### **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

7.1 There are no safeguarding or corporate parent implications arising from this report.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 This policy clarifies the important role that charging and income generation has in supporting the Medium Term Financial Strategy going forward.

## **9. Recommendation**

- 9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves the updated Fees and Charges Policy at **Appendix B**.

## **Background documents**

None

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**Bridgend County Borough Council**  
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## BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

# FEES AND CHARGES POLICY



~~October 2021~~ May 2024

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Income from fees and charges represent an important source of funds to the Council, and enable it to provide a wider range of services to the County Borough than it would otherwise be able to do so. The decision to charge for local public services impacts upon everyone. Where councils charge for services, users pay directly for some or all of the costs of the services they use. Where no charges are made, or where charges do not recover the full cost of providing a service, council taxpayers subsidise users.
- 1.2 Currently the Council charges for a range of services, the income from which provides a **significant** contribution **of** (around **307%**) to the Council's gross revenue budget. Decisions on whether to charge (and the amount to charge) are not always within the control of the Council. Where they are controlled locally, however, it is important that the implications of the charging decisions being taken are fully understood and that the appropriate information is available to make informed decisions.

## 2. PURPOSE

- 2.1 This policy exists to clarify the important role that charging and income generation has in supporting the Medium Term Financial Strategy. It provides a clear and consistent approach to charging across the Council. Its key aims are:
  - to create a consistent and coordinated approach to charging, that is applied across services;
  - to set out a clear framework within which fees and charges levied by the Council are agreed and regularly reviewed.
  - to outline the key principles for charging by Bridgend County Borough Council;
  - to set out the **annual**-review process for all discretionary charges.
- 2.2 This policy also provides guidance to managers on how to cost services, the annual inflation increases, concessions and exemptions, and the processes to be followed for reviewing, approving and publishing of the fees and charges.

## 3. KEY PRINCIPLES

- 3.1 For some services charges are mandatory, and the fee is set nationally, whilst for other services the Council is expressly prohibited from charging. Therefore, a basic assumption is that the Council will apply and collect statutory charges as appropriate and further consideration is therefore outside of the scope of this document.
- 3.2 However discretionary fees and charges represent an important source of revenue, providing finance for activity that is designed to achieve the Council's

objectives. Nevertheless, there is a potential conflict between raising revenue, promoting access and the usage of services whilst considering the challenges of poverty and social exclusion that exist within the Borough and also the effects on local taxpayers.

3.3 This is particularly important with the ~~new~~ Socio-Economic Duty, which came into force on 31 March 2021 and which requires specified public bodies, when making strategic decisions such as deciding priorities and setting objectives, to consider how their decisions might help reduce the inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage.

3.4 A consistent and informed approach to charging across the different services of the Council will enable this conflict to be reconciled and managed in the interests of achieving the Council's objectives. All discretionary charges will be covered by this policy.

3.5 One of the budget principles being applied when setting the budget for the Council is:

*The Council will seek to recover the cost of services via fees and charges where it is able to do so.*

*By generating additional revenue, where the Council is able to do so, and from those who can afford to pay for the services, the Council is able to continue to provide a wider range of services to residents of the county borough.*

3.65 The Local Government Act 2003 gave local authorities the general power to charge for discretionary services. Discretionary services are those services that an authority has the power but not a duty to provide. This covers those services which are not covered by any other legislation with the following restrictions:

- the income from charges for a service should not exceed the cost of providing that service (over a "reasonable" but unspecified period, e.g. 3 years);
- the recipient of the service must have agreed to its provision and agreed to pay for it;
- different people and/or organisations may, where it is fair to do so, be charged different amounts.

3.76 As well as discretionary services, there are also statutory services that the Council has to provide, for which the Council is allowed to generate income, in particular where there are additions or enhancements to such statutory services above the level or standard that an authority has a duty to provide.

3.78 Specific decisions and charging policies should support delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), along with other local strategies and service objectives. Charging decisions will take account of the council's corporate well-being objectives and have regard for the potential impact on other service areas.

#### 4. WHEN TO CHARGE

4.1 Whenever future consideration is given to funding sources for specific services, it will be expected that the Council will charge for services, except where a clear decision is taken not to do so for one of the reasons given below. In particular, charges should be levied to support Council corporate well-being objectives and to encourage behaviour change of our customers.

4.2 Reasons for not charging are:

- a. There is a legal or statutory reason forbidding the levy of charges.
- b. The Council has entered into other contractual arrangements which prevent the levy of charges.
- c. The costs incurred as a result of collecting a charge would be greater than the income generated.
- d. The potential risks to the Council incurred as a result of charging outweigh the benefits. Introducing a charge would result in a high risk that:
  - There would be a significant fall in demand and as a result the Council would not achieve one or more of its corporate well-being objectives as defined in the Corporate Plan or the cost of doing so would become prohibitively expensive.
  - The reputation of the Council would be significantly damaged.
  - Charging would change behaviour of customers resulting in a high likelihood that costs would be incurred elsewhere in the **business Council** which would be greater than the income generated.

#### 5. SETTING OF FEES AND CHARGES

5.1 Charges should be set using clear and transparent evidence and knowledge to support the level of charge. Each fee or charge (or group of similar charges) should be linked to one of the charging strategies set out in Table 1 below and the appropriate charging strategy adopted in establishing and reviewing charging rates for that particular service or activity.

5.2 In all cases, in determining an appropriate charging strategy proper consideration should be given to the wider equality implications that could affect accessibility of Council services to any groups.

5.3 The objectives of different charging strategies are as follows:

Table 1: Charging Strategies

Charging Strategy	Objective
Full Commercial Charges	The Council will aim to cover the cost of providing the service and make a surplus <b>that can be</b> used to fund other priority services.

	The full cost of the service, including an element for capital financing costs, support services and corporate overheads, will be the starting point for calculating charges.
Full Commercial with Discounts	As above, but with discounted concessions being given to enable disadvantaged groups to access the service.
Full Cost Recovery	In this instance, the Council wishes to make the service generally available but does not wish to allocate its own resources to the service.  The eCouncil will aim to recover the costs of providing this service from those who use it. The full cost of the service, including an element for capital financing costs ( <u>where appropriate</u> ), support services and corporate overheads, will be the starting point for calculating charges.
Cost Recovery with Discounts	As above, but the eCouncil is prepared to subsidise the service to ensure disadvantaged groups have access to the service.
Subsidised	Council policy is to make the service widely accessible, but believe users of the service should make some contribution from their own resources.  This might be to meet a service objective or allow competition with other providers.
Free	The Council may choose to make the service available at no charge to meet a service objective - cost of service will then met by all Council Tax payers.
Statutory	Charges will be determined in line with legal requirements

5.4 Where new charges are being introduced or changes in charging strategy are proposed, the charging strategy should be made clear as part of the decision making process. However, when determining specific charges, it is appropriate to take into account some or all of the following:

- Encouraging specific activities and use of certain services;
- Discouraging some undesired activities and frivolous demands for a service;
- Ensuring regulatory compliance;
- Whether the Council wishes to act as a supplier of last resort;
- Contributing to long-term sustainability of some activities or services;
- Local market factors;
- Consideration of charges for similar services raised by other local authorities or private sector competitors;
- Whether in some cases reduced charges should be available to some groups to promote inclusion;
- Whether discounts (for example age related charges) or promotion (for example seasonal charges) will be offered;
- Whether scope exists to increase take-up through more effective marketing and publicity and the form that this might take.

5.5 Some of the specific issues that need to be considered for each of the charging strategies are set out in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Charging Strategy Considerations

Charging Strategy	Strategy Considerations
Full Commercial Charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the charges high enough for the service to be profitable? If not, consider whether the service should be provided.</li> <li>• Are competitors charging similar prices?</li> <li>• Does the eCouncil offer any premium in terms of service levels that customers would be prepared to pay more for?</li> <li>• How would changes in pricing structures affect demand for the service and potentially its profitability?</li> <li>• How does the proposed fee structure fit in with the long term business plan for the service?</li> </ul>
Full Cost Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do charges recover the full costs, including overheads, capital <u>financing</u> charges and <u>corporate</u> recharges?</li> <li>• Is it possible to charge on a full commercial basis and if so has the loss of income from not charging on a full commercial basis been evaluated?</li> <li>• Are Members aware of the effect on demand for this service from this charging policy?</li> <li>• What would be the effect of changing the policy to a different one e.g. subsidised?</li> </ul>
Subsidised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the cost of the subsidy been evaluated?</li> <li>• What has been the impact on demand and on service levels from adopting this approach?</li> <li>• Does this approach fit in with the requirements of other funding streams i.e. grants?</li> <li>• Is this approach legally required?</li> <li>• Is there a potential problem from frivolous use of the service?</li> </ul>
Free	
Statutory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are charges in line with statutory requirements?</li> <li>• Are they set at the maximum permitted levels?</li> </ul>

5.6 If the income from a service does not meet its costs, this should be as a result of a conscious decision, consistent with eCouncil well-being objectives. The service will then be subsidised by Council Tax payers.

## 6. SUBSIDIES AND CONCESSIONS

6.1 It may be appropriate to consider subsidising some services, particularly if this helps to achieve corporate objectives and supports local strategies and policies. Some of the main reasons for charging less than full cost include:

- The desire to encourage particular sections of the community to use specific services and they could not afford, or might otherwise be deterred by, full cost charges.
- Use of the service is sensitive to a change in price – an increase in charges reduces demand and income.
- The eCouncil incurs higher costs than other providers because the service is provided in a way that is appropriate and accessible for all sectors of the



community.

- 6.2 Charges should be set at a level that is fair to service users and Council Tax payers. Concessions may be available to those determined to be unable to pay the full charge. The impact on service users of charging increases should be considered, particularly where they may impact disproportionately on particular groups of Council Tax payers. Impact assessments will be carried out to assess changes and where this is significant steps should be taken to minimise them.
- 6.3 Charges for similar services should be consistent across the Council. Concessions for target groups should be applied consistently across the Council, where concessions are not mandatory (see below).
- 6.4 There are two types of concessions:
- mandatory concessions as determined by statute; and
  - discretionary concessions which are wholly within the power of the Council.
- 6.5 The principle of recovering full costs through charging for all services wherever it is possible to do so applies to concessions. Therefore, concessions will not be provided unless:
- There is a legal or statutory reason expressly stating the need to provide a concession. These mandatory concessions will be provided in line with national guidelines.
  - The cost of the concession can be estimated and can be accommodated within the Council's budget, making it affordable.
  - Target groups (e.g. those in receipt of means-tested benefits) would be disadvantaged or would not be able to access the service without a concession, and as a result the Council would not achieve its corporate well-being objectives as defined in the Corporate Plan.
- 6.6 It is recognised that in some circumstances concessions may not be appropriate and that, in all cases, it will be necessary to carefully consider the impact on income before introducing discounts or concessions to service areas which do not currently offer them.

## 7. REVIEWING FEES AND CHARGES

- 7.1 Charges will be reviewed annually as a minimum, as an integral part of the MTFs and budget and service planning processes. However, charges can also be reviewed on a more frequent basis, should circumstances change e.g. increase in cost to provide the service.
- 7.2 The ~~annual~~-review process will take into account the following:
- Costs increases, inflationary or otherwise, to ensure these are adequately



reflected in the charges. The general assumption will be that the value of fees and charges should be maintained in real terms over time, and increased ~~annually~~ in line with estimated inflation.

***This means that, in general, charges should be increased by the Consumer Price Index (CPI).***

*(For annual increases ~~the~~ the appropriate CPI increase date will be that for ~~December~~ November prior to the start of the financial year, as set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. CPI increases at other times during the year may be used where the increase is not being implemented at the start of the financial year)*

- Benchmarks from comparator authorities.
- Legislative changes, either restricting or providing new flexibility or freedom to charge.
- Change in Council policy or priorities as determined in the MTFS where charges –or concessions could be introduced, varied or removed to support these priorities.
- Change in service provision or level of provision, which may result in additional or increased charges.
- New and improved methods of collecting payments reducing the cost and increasing the effectiveness of doing so.
- Changes to any reasons not to charge.
- Changes to any reasons for a decision taken not to recover the full costs of a service through charges or the provision of concessions.
- Other new or changed social, community, economic or environmental pressures that will affect charging or individuals' and groups' ability to pay.
- The level of income raised in previous years.
- Changes in user demand and the impact of this on service levels.

7.3 Under the Council's Delegated Powers Scheme (Scheme A, paragraph 1.6) each Cabinet Member has the authority:

To approve, subject to the budget process:

- (i) Fees and charges for new services in accordance with any relevant charging policy approved by the Cabinet; and
- (ii) All fees and charges which are in accordance with any relevant charging policy approved by the Cabinet and which are necessary to reflect either inflation or other increases in costs.

7.4 Where a service manager proposes **not to** increase charges for a particular service for a financial year, then they should set out the reasons why they should not be increased and seek approval from their Director and the Section 151 Officer prior to the start of the financial year.

7.5 Where increases in fees and charges, or new charges, support MTFS savings proposals, this will be made clear in the MTFS report presented to Cabinet and Council prior to the start of the financial year. Individual service managers will

be responsible for undertaking equality impact assessments in respect of new or changed fees and charges, not in line with the Fees and Charging Policy, and presenting reports to Cabinet or Council as appropriate.

- 7.6 Where charges will not be made for a service or are set below the full cost recovery level, the reasons should be reconsidered annually as part of the annual Medium Term Financial Strategy process to ensure that they remain valid and that significant income is not being foregone. The eCouncil recognises that, for some services, the costs may have been historically under-recovered and a period of adjustment towards full cost recovery may be required.

## 8. ADMINISTRATION OF FEES AND CHARGES

- 8.1 The Council will use simple, practical and efficient methods of collecting charges. The basic principles for administering fees and charges will be:

- Charges should be simple to understand and administer;
- Charges should be well promoted so that service users can clearly understand the charging structure and methods of payment before they become liable to pay;
- Where possible methods of payment should be flexible, convenient and take into account the needs of disadvantaged/vulnerable groups in the community; wherever possible online payment should be encouraged;
- Where possible and practicable payment should be made prior to the service being received or at the point of delivery;
- Invoices should be issued promptly and appropriate collection and recovery procedures followed;
- Documentation should be retained to substantiate that the customer accepted liability of the charge to support any debt recovery action required should payment not be received.

- 8.2 The Council will take a fair but firm stance on debt recovery. Service users and Council Tax payers should not expect to subsidise services whilst others avoid paying. Service managers should ensure that the Council's debt recovery policy is properly followed and enforced.

## 9. PUBLICATION OF FEES AND CHARGES

- 9.1 Each service should maintain a schedule of fees and charges levied, ~~in a format agreed by the S151 Officer~~. This schedule should include, but identify separately, those charges where there are national / external procedures or other specific procedures for determining and reviewing rates of charge. They should be widely published, including through the Council's website, which will display an amalgamated version of all fees and charges for the Council.

- 9.2 ~~In g~~Generally the Council's fees and charges should be set prior to the start of each financial year. ~~They should be widely published, including through the~~

~~Council's website.~~ However, this can be done more frequently or at different times during the year where required, and in line with the Fees and Charges Policy.

- 9.3 Reasonable notice should be given to service users before any decisions to amend or introduce new fees and charges are implemented, together with clear advice on VAT, and information on any discounts or concessions available. In the absence of any specific requirements, reasonable notice is defined broadly as one calendar month.

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**Bridgend County Borough Council**  
Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr



## BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

# FEES AND CHARGES POLICY



May 2024

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Income from fees and charges represent an important source of funds to the Council, and enable it to provide a wider range of services to the County Borough than it would otherwise be able to do so. The decision to charge for local public services impacts upon everyone. Where councils charge for services, users pay directly for some or all of the costs of the services they use. Where no charges are made, or where charges do not recover the full cost of providing a service, council taxpayers subsidise users.
- 1.2 Currently the Council charges for a range of services, the income from which provides a contribution of around 7% to the Council's gross revenue budget. Decisions on whether to charge (and the amount to charge) are not always within the control of the Council. Where they are controlled locally, however, it is important that the implications of the charging decisions being taken are fully understood and that the appropriate information is available to make informed decisions.

## **2. PURPOSE**

- 2.1 This policy exists to clarify the important role that charging and income generation has in supporting the Medium Term Financial Strategy. It provides a clear and consistent approach to charging across the Council. Its key aims are:
  - to create a consistent and coordinated approach to charging, that is applied across services;
  - to set out a clear framework within which fees and charges levied by the Council are agreed and regularly reviewed.
  - to outline the key principles for charging by Bridgend County Borough Council;
  - to set out the review process for all discretionary charges.
- 2.2 This policy also provides guidance to managers on how to cost services, the annual inflation increases, concessions and exemptions, and the processes to be followed for reviewing, approving and publishing of the fees and charges.

## **3. KEY PRINCIPLES**

- 3.1 For some services charges are mandatory, and the fee is set nationally, whilst for other services the Council is expressly prohibited from charging. Therefore, a basic assumption is that the Council will apply and collect statutory charges as appropriate and further consideration is therefore outside of the scope of this document.
- 3.2 However discretionary fees and charges represent an important source of revenue, providing finance for activity that is designed to achieve the Council's

objectives. Nevertheless, there is a potential conflict between raising revenue, promoting access and the usage of services whilst considering the challenges of poverty and social exclusion that exist within the Borough and also the effects on local taxpayers.

- 3.3 This is particularly important with the Socio-Economic Duty, which came into force on 31 March 2021 and which requires specified public bodies, when making strategic decisions such as deciding priorities and setting objectives, to consider how their decisions might help reduce the inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage.
- 3.4 A consistent and informed approach to charging across the different services of the Council will enable this conflict to be reconciled and managed in the interests of achieving the Council's objectives. All discretionary charges will be covered by this policy.

- 3.5 One of the budget principles being applied when setting the budget for the Council is:

*The Council will seek to recover the cost of services via fees and charges where it is able to do so.*

By generating additional revenue, where the Council is able to do so, and from those who can afford to pay for the services, the Council is able to continue to provide a wider range of services to residents of the county borough.

- 3.6 The Local Government Act 2003 gave local authorities the general power to charge for discretionary services. Discretionary services are those services that an authority has the power but not a duty to provide. This covers those services which are not covered by any other legislation with the following restrictions:

- the income from charges for a service should not exceed the cost of providing that service (over a "reasonable" but unspecified period, e.g. 3 years);
- the recipient of the service must have agreed to its provision and agreed to pay for it;
- different people and/or organisations may, where it is fair to do so, be charged different amounts.

- 3.7 As well as discretionary services, there are also statutory services that the Council has to provide, for which the Council is allowed to generate income, in particular where there are additions or enhancements to such statutory services above the level or standard that an authority has a duty to provide.

- 3.8 Specific decisions and charging policies should support delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), along with other local strategies and service objectives. Charging decisions will take account of the council's corporate well-being objectives and have regard for the potential impact on other service areas.



#### 4. WHEN TO CHARGE

4.1 Whenever future consideration is given to funding sources for specific services, it will be expected that the Council will charge for services, except where a clear decision is taken not to do so for one of the reasons given below. In particular, charges should be levied to support Council corporate well-being objectives and to encourage behaviour change of our customers.

4.2 Reasons for not charging are:

- a. There is a legal or statutory reason forbidding the levy of charges.
- b. The Council has entered into other contractual arrangements which prevent the levy of charges.
- c. The costs incurred as a result of collecting a charge would be greater than the income generated.
- d. The potential risks to the Council incurred as a result of charging outweigh the benefits. Introducing a charge would result in a high risk that:
  - There would be a significant fall in demand and as a result the Council would not achieve one or more of its corporate well-being objectives as defined in the Corporate Plan or the cost of doing so would become prohibitively expensive.
  - The reputation of the Council would be significantly damaged.
  - Charging would change behaviour of customers resulting in a high likelihood that costs would be incurred elsewhere in the Council which would be greater than the income generated.

#### 5. SETTING OF FEES AND CHARGES

5.1 Charges should be set using clear and transparent evidence and knowledge to support the level of charge. Each fee or charge (or group of similar charges) should be linked to one of the charging strategies set out in Table 1 below and the appropriate charging strategy adopted in establishing and reviewing charging rates for that particular service or activity.

5.2 In all cases, in determining an appropriate charging strategy proper consideration should be given to the wider equality implications that could affect accessibility of Council services to any groups.

5.3 The objectives of different charging strategies are as follows:

Table 1: Charging Strategies

<b>Charging Strategy</b>	<b>Objective</b>
Full Commercial Charges	The Council will aim to cover the cost of providing the service and make a surplus that can be used to fund other priority services.

	The full cost of the service, including an element for capital financing costs, support services and corporate overheads, will be the starting point for calculating charges.
Full Commercial with Discounts	As above, but with discounted concessions being given to enable disadvantaged groups to access the service.
Full Cost Recovery	In this instance, the Council wishes to make the service generally available but does not wish to allocate its own resources to the service.  The Council will aim to recover the costs of providing this service from those who use it. The full cost of the service, including an element for capital financing costs (where appropriate), support services and corporate overheads, will be the starting point for calculating charges.
Cost Recovery with Discounts	As above, but the Council is prepared to subsidise the service to ensure disadvantaged groups have access to the service.
Subsidised	Council policy is to make the service widely accessible, but believe users of the service should make some contribution from their own resources.  This might be to meet a service objective or allow competition with other providers.
Free	The Council may choose to make the service available at no charge to meet a service objective - cost of service will then met by all Council Tax payers.
Statutory	Charges will be determined in line with legal requirements

5.4 Where new charges are being introduced or changes in charging strategy are proposed, the charging strategy should be made clear as part of the decision making process. However, when determining specific charges, it is appropriate to take into account some or all of the following:

- Encouraging specific activities and use of certain services;
- Discouraging some undesired activities and frivolous demands for a service;
- Ensuring regulatory compliance;
- Whether the Council wishes to act as a supplier of last resort;
- Contributing to long-term sustainability of some activities or services;
- Local market factors;
- Consideration of charges for similar services raised by other local authorities or private sector competitors;
- Whether in some cases reduced charges should be available to some groups to promote inclusion;
- Whether discounts (for example age related charges) or promotion (for example seasonal charges) will be offered;
- Whether scope exists to increase take-up through more effective marketing and publicity and the form that this might take.

5.5 Some of the specific issues that need to be considered for each of the charging strategies are set out in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Charging Strategy Considerations

Charging Strategy	Strategy Considerations
Full Commercial Charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the charges high enough for the service to be profitable? If not, consider whether the service should be provided.</li> <li>• Are competitors charging similar prices?</li> <li>• Does the Council offer any premium in terms of service levels that customers would be prepared to pay more for?</li> <li>• How would changes in pricing structures affect demand for the service and potentially its profitability?</li> <li>• How does the proposed fee structure fit in with the long term business plan for the service?</li> </ul>
Full Cost Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do charges recover the full costs, including overheads, capital financing charges and corporate recharges?</li> <li>• Is it possible to charge on a full commercial basis and if so has the loss of income from not charging on a full commercial basis been evaluated?</li> <li>• Are Members aware of the effect on demand for this service from this charging policy?</li> <li>• What would be the effect of changing the policy to a different one e.g. subsidised?</li> </ul>
Subsidised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the cost of the subsidy been evaluated?</li> <li>• What has been the impact on demand and on service levels from adopting this approach?</li> </ul>
Free	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does this approach fit in with the requirements of other funding streams i.e. grants?</li> <li>• Is this approach legally required?</li> <li>• Is there a potential problem from frivolous use of the service?</li> </ul>
Statutory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are charges in line with statutory requirements?</li> <li>• Are they set at the maximum permitted levels?</li> </ul>

5.6 If the income from a service does not meet its costs, this should be as a result of a conscious decision, consistent with Council well-being objectives. The service will then be subsidised by Council Tax payers.

## 6. SUBSIDIES AND CONCESSIONS

6.1 It may be appropriate to consider subsidising some services, particularly if this helps to achieve corporate objectives and supports local strategies and policies. Some of the main reasons for charging less than full cost include:

- The desire to encourage particular sections of the community to use specific services and they could not afford, or might otherwise be deterred by, full cost charges.
- Use of the service is sensitive to a change in price – an increase in charges reduces demand and income.

- The Council incurs higher costs than other providers because the service is provided in a way that is appropriate and accessible for all sectors of the community.
- 6.2 Charges should be set at a level that is fair to service users and Council Tax payers. Concessions may be available to those determined to be unable to pay the full charge. The impact on service users of charging increases should be considered, particularly where they may impact disproportionately on particular groups of Council Tax payers. Impact assessments will be carried out to assess changes and where this is significant steps should be taken to minimise them.
- 6.3 Charges for similar services should be consistent across the Council. Concessions for target groups should be applied consistently across the Council, where concessions are not mandatory (see below).
- 6.4 There are two types of concessions:
- mandatory concessions as determined by statute; and
  - discretionary concessions which are wholly within the power of the Council.
- 6.5 The principle of recovering full costs through charging for all services wherever it is possible to do so applies to concessions. Therefore, concessions will not be provided unless:
- There is a legal or statutory reason expressly stating the need to provide a concession. These mandatory concessions will be provided in line with national guidelines.
  - The cost of the concession can be estimated and can be accommodated within the Council's budget, making it affordable.
  - Target groups (e.g. those in receipt of means-tested benefits) would be disadvantaged or would not be able to access the service without a concession, and as a result the Council would not achieve its corporate well-being objectives as defined in the Corporate Plan.
- 6.6 It is recognised that in some circumstances concessions may not be appropriate and that, in all cases, it will be necessary to carefully consider the impact on income before introducing discounts or concessions to service areas which do not currently offer them.

## **7. REVIEWING FEES AND CHARGES**

- 7.1 Charges will be reviewed annually as a minimum, as an integral part of the MTFs and budget and service planning processes. However, charges can also be reviewed on a more frequent basis, should circumstances change e.g. increase in cost to provide the service.
- 7.2 The review process will take into account the following:

- Costs increases, inflationary or otherwise, to ensure these are adequately reflected in the charges. The general assumption will be that the value of fees and charges should be maintained in real terms over time, and increased in line with estimated inflation.

***This means that, in general, charges should be increased by the Consumer Price Index (CPI).***

***(For annual increases the appropriate CPI increase date will be that for November prior to the start of the financial year, as set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. CPI increases at other times during the year may be used where the increase is not being implemented at the start of the financial year)***

- Benchmarks from comparator authorities.
- Legislative changes, either restricting or providing new flexibility or freedom to charge.
- Change in Council policy or priorities as determined in the MTFs where charges or concessions could be introduced, varied or removed to support these priorities.
- Change in service provision or level of provision, which may result in additional or increased charges.
- New and improved methods of collecting payments reducing the cost and increasing the effectiveness of doing so.
- Changes to any reasons not to charge.
- Changes to any reasons for a decision taken not to recover the full costs of a service through charges or the provision of concessions.
- Other new or changed social, community, economic or environmental pressures that will affect charging or individuals' and groups' ability to pay.
- The level of income raised in previous years.
- Changes in user demand and the impact of this on service levels.

7.3 Under the Council's Delegated Powers Scheme (Scheme A, paragraph 1.6) each Cabinet Member has the authority:

To approve, subject to the budget process:

- (i) Fees and charges for new services in accordance with any relevant charging policy approved by the Cabinet; and
- (ii) All fees and charges which are in accordance with any relevant charging policy approved by the Cabinet and which are necessary to reflect either inflation or other increases in costs.

7.4 Where a service manager proposes **not to** increase charges for a particular service for a financial year, then they should set out the reasons why they should not be increased and seek approval from their Director and the Section 151 Officer prior to the start of the financial year.

- 7.5 Where increases in fees and charges, or new charges, support MTFS savings proposals, this will be made clear in the MTFS report presented to Cabinet and Council prior to the start of the financial year. Individual service managers will be responsible for undertaking equality impact assessments in respect of new or changed fees and charges, not in line with the Fees and Charging Policy, and presenting reports to Cabinet or Council as appropriate.
- 7.6 Where charges will not be made for a service or are set below the full cost recovery level, the reasons should be reconsidered annually as part of the annual Medium Term Financial Strategy process to ensure that they remain valid and that significant income is not being foregone. The Council recognises that, for some services, the costs may have been historically under-recovered and a period of adjustment towards full cost recovery may be required.

## **8. ADMINISTRATION OF FEES AND CHARGES**

- 8.1 The Council will use simple, practical and efficient methods of collecting charges. The basic principles for administering fees and charges will be:
- Charges should be simple to understand and administer;
  - Charges should be well promoted so that service users can clearly understand the charging structure and methods of payment before they become liable to pay;
  - Where possible methods of payment should be flexible, convenient and take into account the needs of disadvantaged/vulnerable groups in the community; wherever possible online payment should be encouraged;
  - Where possible and practicable payment should be made prior to the service being received or at the point of delivery;
  - Invoices should be issued promptly and appropriate collection and recovery procedures followed;
  - Documentation should be retained to substantiate that the customer accepted liability of the charge to support any debt recovery action required should payment not be received.
- 8.2 The Council will take a fair but firm stance on debt recovery. Service users and Council Tax payers should not expect to subsidise services whilst others avoid paying. Service managers should ensure that the Council's debt recovery policy is properly followed and enforced.

## **9. PUBLICATION OF FEES AND CHARGES**

- 9.1 Each service should maintain a schedule of fees and charges levied. This schedule should include, but identify separately, those charges where there are national / external procedures or other specific procedures for determining and reviewing rates of charge. They should be widely published, including through the Council's website, which will display an amalgamated version of all fees and charges for the Council

- 9.2 In general the Council's fees and charges should be set prior to the start of each financial year. However, this can be done more frequently or at different times during the year where required, and in line with the Fees and Charges Policy.
- 9.3 Reasonable notice should be given to service users before any decisions to amend or introduce new fees and charges are implemented, together with clear advice on VAT, and information on any discounts or concessions available. In the absence of any specific requirements, reasonable notice is defined broadly as one calendar month.

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# Agenda Item 6

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>14 MAY 2024</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>RENEWAL OF THE REGIONAL INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, HOUSING AND CHANGE</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>CARYS LORD CHIEF OFFICER, FINANCE, HOUSING AND CHANGE</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There is no impact on the policy framework and procedure rules</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<b>The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Cabinet to renew the existing Regional Internal Audit Service (RIAS) Partnership Agreement.</b>

## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Cabinet to the proposal that:

- the existing Regional Internal Audit Service (RIAS) Partnership Agreement should be renewed, with the Vale of Glamorgan Council continuing as host authority to reinforce business resilience.
- three of the original partners continue with the arrangement and sign a new Partnership Agreement - the partners being Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend and Merthyr Tydfil Councils.
- the Partnership Agreement runs continually with a formal partner review built in every five years. Each partner can terminate their involvement with the regional shared service in compliance with the terms outlined in the relevant section of the Partnership Agreement.
- allows additional partners to join the RIAS as equal partners subject to RIAS Board approval.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 Councils have a track record of innovation, of delivering efficiencies and of serving communities well. However, with the all too familiar and long-established increasing need to do more with less, Councils need to respond, showing how they are able to protect communities and the services they value while ensuring the best possible value for money during a continuing period of financial challenge and uncertainty.
- 2.2 Sharing services, where possible, enables Councils to do this by reducing duplication of effort and expenditure, thereby freeing up money from back office processes to be spent on improving front-line services. In recent years, collaborative working activity has increased at pace in response to the challenging financial climate and also in recognition of the value that working in partnership to share skills, expertise and experience can have in tackling increasingly complex issues.
- 2.3 The provision of Internal Audit is recognised by all Councils as core to their effective governance, risk management and control arrangements. The requirement for Councils to maintain appropriate and effective internal audit arrangements is set out in the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2018 and prior to these the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014. As Councils seek to ensure that systems and processes are as efficient as possible, it is imperative that the Internal Audit Service can provide the objective assurances required by elected members and senior officers regarding the effectiveness of the systems of internal control, governance and risk management.
- 2.4 The Bridgend and Vale of Glamorgan Internal Audit Shared Service was fully operational under a formal Partnership Agreement from February 2013, as both Authorities had experienced the advantages of the Shared Service. Since its inception the Shared Service has delivered consistently against the approved annual risk-based audit plans and achieved the necessary coverage in order to issue a robust, evidence based audit opinion at the end of each year as well as fully complying with its statutory requirements under the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). In addition, significant benefits have been realised by bringing the sections together, some of which included effective use of the total audit resource, knowledge sharing and harmonising working practices and systems.
- 2.5 On 1st April 2019 the Regional Internal Audit Service (RIAS) was formed, bringing together the Internal Audit teams from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC), Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) and the existing Shared Internal Audit Service for Bridgend and the Vale of Glamorgan Councils.
- 2.6 The objectives of the RIAS were to:
- Deliver a robust internal audit service that meets the needs of participating Councils and complies with legislative requirements.
  - Provide increased resilience and offer a wider range of internal audit specialisms (IT / contract audits) across the four Local Authorities.

- Develop a commercial emphasis within the Service that is able to tender for work from other organisations.
- Deliver efficiency savings for each Member authority.

2.7 The vision for RIAS is to be the provider of Internal Audit Services of choice to the public sector in South Wales and be a centre of excellence for public sector internal auditing. It is to be a service that is regarded as:

- Professional
- Approachable
- Flexible
- Independent but internal to the organisation – a critical friend.

2.8 A new legal Partnership Agreement was entered into by the four Councils for five years in 2019. The original Partnership Agreement was for partners to sign up for three years with an option to extend to two years at a time. RIAS has now been in operation for five years and the position needs to be reviewed.

### **3. Current situation / proposal**

3.1 The Shared Service has developed well since its inception, is meeting its objectives and continues to move forward to achieve greater effectiveness and efficiencies. The Section 151 (s151) Officers from the four member authorities have been very positive about the internal audit provision and the level and quality of service received, as have the members of each Governance and Audit Committee.

3.2 In January 2024 the host authority, Vale of Glamorgan, was notified by RCTCBC that the Council had decided not to continue in the Partnership from April 2024. The reason given was that, due to the challenges they were facing, it has been agreed it was opportune for the Council to reconsider the position and take the opportunity to take back the service and resource it internally, to align with other key areas of work which they plan to concentrate on over the next few years.

3.3 Despite RCTCBC not being involved with the Partnership moving forward, the management of the service has determined that this will not hinder achieving the Partnership's ambitions and objectives and will continue to strive towards being the provider of Internal Audit Services of choice to the public sector in South Wales and a centre of excellence for public sector internal auditing.

3.4 The remaining s151 Officers have suggested that the Partnership should move forward on a longer term agreement basis and the option considered is a continual agreement to include a formal partner review at least every five years. Each partner will still have the option to opt out of the agreement as specified within the terms of the agreement itself. S151 Officers of the three Councils are comfortable with this proposal and see it as a positive continuation of the collaboration of the internal audit provision between the three partner Councils.

3.5 One aim of the service since its inception has been to expand to provide quality and specialist audit services to other public sector organisations. As the service is now well established, the RIAS Board considers the service is now well placed to consider partnering with other local authorities in the South Wales area. Without canvassing for additional partners to join RIAS, three South Wales local authorities have expressed an interest in joining the existing arrangement with two of those being keen to join during 2024/25. Other public sector organisations have also approached RIAS about providing an internal audit service to them on a contractor / client basis.

3.6 These proposals were discussed and agreed by the Governance and Audit Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

#### **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. 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 goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report. The proposal supports the 5 ways of working under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 as follows:

**Long Term** – the proposal is for the new Partnership Agreement to be on a longer term basis with a partner review built in every 5 years.

**Prevention** – the proposal will help to protect local authorities by ensuring systems and processes are as efficient as possible, risk is mitigated, and the Council's assets are safeguarded.

**Integration** – the Shared Service is involved in, and reviews, all aspects of the Council's activities and enables best practice to be shared across the partner authorities.

**Collaboration** – the proposal recommends the continued collaboration between three partner authorities, with the potential for this to be extended further.

**Involvement** – staff from across the three authorities within the RIAS are involved in auditing the three partner authorities, and will liaise with service managers and staff from across this and the partner organisations to form an opinion on the Council's governance arrangements.

## **6. Climate Change Implications**

6.1 There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

## **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

7.1 There are no safeguarding or corporate parent implications arising from this report.

## **8. Financial Implications**

8.1 RIAS delivers an agreed number of audit days to each partner on an annual basis in order to deliver the internal audit plan and enable the Head of the RIAS to provide an overall annual opinion on the effectiveness and adequacy of the governance arrangements, internal controls and risk management processes in place at each partner. The allocated audit days are based on a full establishment of staff within the service and per partner. The planned days for Bridgend Council in 2023/2024 were 1,101.

8.2 Each partner makes a financial contribution to the total running costs of providing RIAS based on the number of days allocated to them multiplied by the daily charge rate. Where the full number of audit days are not delivered to partners the RIAS Board decides whether to make a refund to each partner or a contribution to RIAS reserves.

8.3 The number of days and the financial contribution was agreed within the original Partnership Agreement for 2019/20. It was agreed that the number of days allocated to each partner would remain static for at least the first three years of operation to ensure the successful delivery of an effective, economic and efficient internal audit service to each partner, which would support achieving the Shared Service's objectives. The audit days allocated to each partner has primarily remained static for the five years of the Shared Service's existence. Any adjustments to the audit days allocated impacts on the financial contribution made by each partner but still needs to cover the overall cost of providing the RIAS.

8.4 Bridgend Council's budget for the RIAS in 2023/2024 was £287,130. The proposed contribution for 2024/2025 is £317,760. However, this does not take into account the agreed saving as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-25 to 2027-28 of £27,000, agreed by Council on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2024, which will likely impact upon the number of planned audit days for Bridgend in 2024/2025. How this will be realised will be subject to discussion by the Section 151 officer and the Head of the Regional Internal Audit Service.

8.5 Moving forward there should be greater efficiencies for all partners through economies of scale with further development of specialist auditors working across all partners.

## **9. Recommendations**

9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves:

- The renewal of the existing Regional Internal Audit Service (RIAS) Partnership Agreement, with the Vale of Glamorgan Council continuing as host authority, to reinforce business resilience.
- That three of the original partners continue with the arrangement and sign a new Partnership Agreement - the partners being Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend and Merthyr Tydfil Councils.
- That the Partnership Agreement runs continually with a formal partner review built in every five years.
- The proposal to allow additional partners to join the RIAS as equal partners subject to RIAS Board approval.
- That the approval of the final terms of agreement for the RIAS is delegated to the Chief Officer – Finance, Housing and Change in consultation with the Chief Officer – Legal and Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy.

**Background documents:** None

# Agenda Item 7

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>14 MAY 2024</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)/STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL (ON RELIGION VALUE AND ETHICS) (SAC)</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>LINDSAY HARVEY CORPORATE DIRECTOR – EDUCATION, EARLY YEARS AND YOUNG PEOPLE</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>SUE ROBERTS GROUP MANAGER SCHOOL SUPPORT</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	This report contains information about the revised terms of reference for the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) to become Standing Advisory Council (on Religion Value and Ethics) (SAC)

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet that ratification is needed for the revised terms of reference for Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)/Standing Advisory Council (on Religion Value and Ethics) (SAC) ((refer to Appendix 1).

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The introduction of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 ('the Act') established the Curriculum for Wales in law and replaced the previous curriculum (which includes, for example, the national and local curricula set out in Part 7 of the Education Act 2002).
- 2.2 The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 Act sets out 'Religion, Values and Ethics' (RVE) as one of the mandatory subjects which spans the 3 to 16 learning continuum.
- 2.3 The subject of RVE forms part of the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience within the new Curriculum for Wales. Subject specific guidance on RVE contained within the Humanities Area of the Curriculum for Wales, is statutory and is

published under section 71 of the Act. The guidance is designed to assist those responsible under the Act for designing the RVE syllabus as part of the school curriculum.

- 2.4 The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 [legislation](#) states some legislative changes for the roles and responsibilities of local authority SACs for RVE.
- 2.5 Until the roll-out of the Curriculum for Wales is completed in all schools and settings, there is a need to have both SACRE and SAC. SACRE will completely cease to exist once the Curriculum for Wales has completed its roll-out. The wording within the terms of reference has been amended to include both the roles and responsibilities for SACRE and SAC.
- 2.6 The inclusion in the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 (the Act), of the appointment of persons to the committee who represent holders of non-religious philosophical beliefs in the same way as they permit the appointment of persons who represent holders of religious beliefs has meant required amendments to the existing SACRE terms of reference wording. It now includes the following:

‘Such Christian and other religious denominations as, in the opinion of the local authority will appropriately reflect the religious traditions in the area and also such persons who represent holders of non-religious beliefs in the same way as they permit the appointment of persons who represent holders of religious beliefs’ (section 390(4)(a) of, and paragraph 4(2)(1) of Schedule 31 to, the 1996 Act and in accordance with the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021).’

### **3. Current situation / proposal**

- 3.1 SACRE and SAC members are recommending that the local authority accept the changes, so they are in line with the legislative changes in the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 (the Act).
- 3.2 SACRE and SAC members are recommending that the local authority agrees the terms of reference (as at Appendix 1).

### **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.  
It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts because 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 provides a comprehensive summary of the outcomes expected from the implementation of the service.

**Long-term** Supports the improvement of standards and outcomes in schools.

**Prevention** Development of the terms of reference for SAC will allow refinement of the delivery of RVE across all schools within the Humanities Area of Learning within the Curriculum for Wales.

**Integration** The local authority will attend SAC meetings to support and advise where necessary.

**Collaboration** The local authority works closely with schools and with Central South Consortium to support the implementation of RVE within the Curriculum for Wales.

**Involvement** Stakeholders included within SAC include religious/non-religious representatives; school leaders; local authority and Central South Consortium representatives along with leaders of RVE in schools.

## **6. Climate Change Implications**

6.1 There are no climate change implications about this information report.

## **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

7.1 There are no safeguarding or corporate parent implications about this information report.

## **8. Financial Implications**

8.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

## **9. Recommendations**

9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet notes the content of this report and ratifies the revised terms of reference.

## **Background documents**

There are no background documents.

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## **Bridgend County Borough Council**

### **Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education/Standing Advisory Council on Religion, Values and Ethics**

**Revised to coincide with the implementation of Curriculum for Wales from 2022-2023 school year onwards.**

The Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) in Bridgend is established in accordance with sections 390-397 of the Education Act 1996 and guidance contained in the Welsh Circular 10/94 as updated. In addition, the Standing Advisory Council on Religion, Values and Ethics (SAC) in Bridgend is established in accordance with the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 (see Annex 1).

#### **Constitution**

##### **Terms of reference**

1. To advise the local authority on matters connected with collective worship in county schools.
2. To advise the local authority on matters connected with religious education, or religion, values and ethics which is given in accordance with the agreed syllabus.
3. To decide when, within the five-year statutory time scale, the local authority should review its agreed syllabus.
4. To consider with the local authority and the Agreed Syllabus Conference any changes required to the agreed syllabus.
5. To consider, with the local authority, the support offered to religious education and religion, values and ethics in its schools, with particular regard to methods of teaching, the choice of teaching materials and the provision of training for teachers.
6. To offer advice on any other matters related to its function as it sees fit.
7. To publish an annual report on its work, which should:
  - specify any matters on which it has advised the local authority;
  - broadly describe the nature of the advice;
  - set out its reasons for offering advice on any matters which were not referred to it in the first place by the local authority; and
  - record the membership of SAC/SACRE and the dates of meetings held.
8. To participate in the local authority's statutory complaints procedures in those instances where the complaints relate to religious education or religion, values and ethics and/or collective worship.

9. To receive and make determinations in respect of applications from headteachers of county schools for the lifting or modifying of the requirements that collective worship in such schools must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.

### **Composition**

10. The council shall comprise three groups representing:
  - such Christian and other religious denominations as, in the opinion of the local authority will appropriately reflect the religious traditions in the area and also such persons who represent holders of non-religious beliefs in the same way as they permit the appointment of persons who represent holders of religious beliefs; (section 390(4)(a) of, and paragraph 4(2)(1) of Schedule 31 to, the 1996 Act and in accordance with the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021);
  - such associations representing teachers as, in the opinion of the local authority, ought to be represented having regard to the circumstances of the area; and
  - the local authority.
11. The Council may also co-opt members.
12. Membership of the Council shall be for a period of four years. Any outgoing members may be re-appointed.
13. Membership of the Council is subject to the condition that the local authority has taken all reasonable steps to assure itself that the persons appointed are representative of the denominations, organisations, associations in question.
14. Members representing associations of teachers must include teachers of religious education and/or religion, values and ethics.
15. Individuals may be removed from the Council if they cease to be representative of the denomination, organisations, association, or of the authority they were appointed to represent.
16. Any member of the Council may at any time resign their office.
17. Any member who fails to attend three consecutive meetings without apology will cease to be a member. An individual who is so disqualified shall not be precluded from being reappointed by the appropriate nominating body.

### **Proceedings**

18. The local will appoint a clerk to SACRE/SAC.
19. The Council meets on, at least, one occasion during each school term.

20. The Council shall elect from its membership a chairperson and vice chairperson at the first meeting in each school year. The chairperson and vice chairperson in any one year shall not be drawn from the same representative group. An outgoing chairperson may be re-appointed.
21. If both the chairperson and the vice-chairperson are absent from a meeting, a person to take the chair for the meeting shall be appointed upon the collective consent of the members present at the meeting. Should the chairperson or vice-chairperson arrive during the rest of the meeting, the appointed substitute will hand over to them as soon as the item under discussion on their arrival is completed.
22. On any question to be decided by the Council only the representative groups on the Council shall be entitled to vote, and each group shall have a single vote. Before a formal vote is taken, opportunity shall be given to each representative group to determine how its vote is to be cast.
23. Co-opted members are not entitled to vote.
24. The agenda for each meeting shall be determined by the chairperson and vice chairperson in consultation with the advisor to SAC/SACRE, clerk to SAC/SACRE, and Local Authority Professional Officer. Any voting member of SAC/SACRE shall be entitled to propose items for an agenda.
25. The SACRE/SAC may, if it so wishes, arrange the attendance at a meeting of a specialist speaker who is not a member of the SACRE/SAC.
26. Each or any of the representative groups may require the attendance of a specialist speaker who is not a member of the SACRE/SAC, but only for the period during which any relevant matter is under consideration and provided that at least ten working days' notice of such requirement is given to the clerk for inclusion in the agenda for the meeting.
27. In the case of any member not being able to attend a Council meeting, a substitute may be nominated by the body which that person represents, provided that the substitute meets the eligibility criteria and the Education and Family Support Directorate is notified in advance of the meeting.
28. A meeting of the Council will be deemed to be quorate if at least one member of each of the three representative groups is present.
29. The validity of proceedings of the Council shall not be affected:
  - by a vacancy in the office of any member of the Council; or
  - on the grounds that a member of the Council appointed to represent any denomination or association does not, at the time of the proceedings, represent the denomination, organisation or association in question.
30. The representative groups on the Council, other than that representing the local authority, may call, at any time, for a review of the agreed syllabus current in the local authority. At such time, an Agreed Syllabus Conference shall be constituted and convened.

31. The Council shall consider its annual report at the first meeting to be held in each academic year. Upon the Council's ratification of the report, it shall proceed to publication.
32. The clerk to the SAC/SACRE shall arrange for copies of the annual report to be published on the local authority website, sent to all schools within the local authority to Welsh Government and such other individuals and institutions as the local authority sees fit.

## **ANNEX 1**

### **The Standing Advisory Council on Religion, Values and Ethics (SAC)**

The constitution, functions and working arrangements of Bridgend SAC shall follow those of Bridgend SACRE, as stated above. The two committees will coexist until 2025 and for the efficiency and integrity of both committees, meetings will be held at the same time, with all business dealt with as appropriate to each committee.

These arrangements will continue until the Curriculum for Wales has been implemented to all relevant year groups, at which time Bridgend SACRE will be dissolved and Bridgend SAC will continue.

# Agenda Item 8

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>14 MAY 2024</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>PROPOSED CHANGES IN COUNCIL REQUIREMENTS REGARDING CULTURAL SERVICES</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES &amp; WELLBEING</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>ANDREW THOMAS GROUP MANAGER- PREVENTION AND WELLBEING</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>THERE ARE NO CHANGES TO POLICY FRAMEWORK AND PROCEDURE RULES</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<p>The report provides information on proposed changes in Council requirements to services that are delivered by Awen on the Councils behalf. This report aligns to the required processes within the partnership agreement whereby, having considered a range of options, the Council submits a notice of change to Awen to identify any implications including cost or financial efficiencies that can be delivered from those changes if implemented. The proposed changes that Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) has put forward include the availability and related investment into library services. This can include opening hours of premises but also investment into resources used to run the service. At a National level the Welsh Public Library Standards are used to review service performance by Welsh Government. The proposals have also considered whether the Books on Wheels service that supports home delivery of resources to more vulnerable residents can be sustained when the Council is faced with current financial challenges. The report identifies other areas of potential savings that include the relocation of supported training for adults known to social care to a single site at Bryngarw Park and also the disinvestment into Bridgend Youth Theatre. Due to the libraries having a statutory function the report requires Cabinet approval to commence consultation on initial reductions to services and also the development of the next library plan recognising that a range of developments and changes have taken place since 2010. There will be a need to report back to Cabinet on any outcomes and to seek approval to implement any subsequent proposals.</p>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The report identifies the proposed reductions in Council investment into a range of cultural services which is delivered through the partnership with Awen Cultural Trust (Awen) and the related reductions in services that will need to be considered in order to achieve the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) budget reduction proposals approved by Council when the budget was approved on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2024.
- 1.2 The report seeks Cabinet approval to progress the immediate legal notices to enact contract changes with Awen and to progress the required public consultation and engagement in relation to these identified immediate proposals as well as longer term changes to library service provision.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 Awen is an independent organisation and registered charity. The partnership between the Council and Awen was established in 2015 along with a legally binding partnership agreement and related conditions on how the partnership should operate. This includes detail on how any changes in requirements would need to be progressed.
- 2.2 The partnership has worked very successfully to date. Services have improved and the financial savings associated with the partnership of over £775,000 have all been implemented and achieved. Since 2015, Awen has established itself as a leading cultural charity and has played a lead role in working with the Council to deliver capital improvements and also to broaden the range of services to reach more people. The Council's approach has been highlighted as best practice and the jointly developed model has been commended by the recent Senedd Committee review of public leisure and library services. Successes include:
  - the delivery of library services that have performed well as evidenced in the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) reviews by Welsh Government achieving the highest customer satisfaction rating in Wales.
  - Awen have progressively gained a number of Welsh Government capital investments to improve local library facilities.
  - redevelopment at Bryngarw Park as part of the Valleys Regional Park with improved facilities and visitor experience
  - a major capital investment programme at Maesteg Town Hall.
  - the proposed redevelopment of the Grand Pavilion is another significant capital project that has secured external investment of £18 million from the Levelling Up Fund .

All of the above and other initiatives have benefited from Awen's ability to attract external funds and re-investing its own resources generated through their business model. Since 2015, Awen has successfully attracted over £1.8m in external funding



and designated a further £400,000 of its own resources to supporting feasibility, design, delivery and the match funding of several projects.

- 2.3 The financial challenges that the Council is now facing has meant that there has been a need for all service areas to identify areas where financial efficiencies can be made, and this has also included cultural services. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024-25 to 2027-28 approved by Council on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2024 identifies a further saving in 2024-25 of £360,000 to be made from the Council's contribution to cultural service costs via its management fee. The need to consider reduced support for cultural services including libraries was included in the Council's budget consultation for 2024-25 and 850 respondents were supportive of reductions in this area. The detail of what this might look like locally and in a performance context requires further consideration as it is for the Council to determine where service reductions, if necessary, would be focused.
- 2.4 Within the partnership agreement it is for the Council to inform Awen where it wishes to seek changes or reductions in its service requirements. A change notice is issued to request further information on any implications that can be identified. This process also sets out to identify any costs that cannot be mitigated that may fall to the Council should such change be implemented – these include but are not limited to income loss, redundancy costs etc. Within the partnership agreement Awen are required to make reasonable endeavours to accommodate any changes requested by the Council within the existing operational budgets and to provide evidence that the trust has used reasonable endeavours to minimise any increase in costs and maximise any reduction in costs. The Council issued a change notice to Awen on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 2024 outlining a range of service reductions and based on responses received from Awen have been considering the implications. There has been ongoing dialogue in accordance with the partnership agreement and in recognition that Awen will have financial pressures of their own beyond the management fee that the Council provides to operate the services within the partnership agreement.
- 2.5 The partnership agreement is specific in regard to responsibilities for library services and recognises that the Council retains a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service with a core library offer that is free at the point of use and open to all. The partnership agreement identifies that the Council also retains statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 to fully consult with the local community in relation to any potential changes to access to library services, with particular regards to location, opening hours and access for people with disabilities.
- 2.6 In relation to the above, the Council acknowledges that it is fully responsible for determining what is a “comprehensive and efficient” library service and for undertaking any consultation requirement arising from any proposed changes in library service. The Welsh Public Library Standards provide a framework of core entitlements and quality indicators to assist such a review. It is for the Council to ensure that this position is clear in relation to all consultation documents and also for the Council to resource any related consultation or engagement requirements. The Welsh Government use the Welsh Public Library Standards as a framework to measure whether local authorities are fulfilling their obligations against the act.

“The framework also enables me [the Minister] to assess provision and performance of Welsh public library services as part of my statutory duty under the Public Libraries

and Museums Act 1964” Connected and Ambitious Libraries: The sixth quality framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020.

- 2.7 Based on the scale of reduction in financial support being proposed there will be implications for future library services and facilities and as such there will be a need for the Council to progress related public consultation on proposed changes.
- 2.8 The last significant library service review was reported to Cabinet on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2010 although the establishment of the partnership with Awen in 2015 saw a review of the library service specification in terms of service delivery requirements at related facilities. The service has not stood still however and has continued to evolve over the last decade to meet changing local landscapes and customer needs.
- 2.9 The 2010 review had proposed that the physical infrastructure of Bridgend libraries was unfit for purpose and a core statutory model based on 8 static libraries needed to be developed. This would see one library at Bridgend, Porthcawl, Pencoed, Pyle, Ogmere Valley, Garw Valley, Llynfi Valley and Valleys Gateway. The need for improvements in size of some facilities and quality of provision was identified as needed. The categorisation of libraries at the time were primarily based on size as follows – Category 1 (over 1000 sq. m), Category 2 (750-1000 sq. m), Category 3 (500-750 sq. m), Category 4 (250-500 sq. m), Category 5 (100-250 sq. m) and Category 6 (under 100 sq. m). It is generally accepted that the floor space ambitions set out in 2010 are not required to the same scale now as other features will be important in a library setting but the categorisation of libraries may still be useful in any future plan developments.
- 2.10 Since 2010 there have been a number of notable improvements to infrastructure including the relocation of the Bridgend Town Library to enhanced facilities at Bridgend Life Centre, the redevelopment of the new Maesteg library within the renovated Maesteg Town Hall, improvement works at Pencoed, Porthcawl and Pyle libraries supported by Welsh Government, Council and Awen investment, and the relocation of the Pontycymer library to the Garw Valley Leisure Centre. The Ogmere Valley library facility is similarly co-located in the Ogmere Valley Life Centre although the service model differs to the core static libraries.
- 2.11 The Valleys Gateway area was identified as requiring one Category 4 library space and currently has Aberkenfig library (Cat 4) and Sarn library (Cat 6). There is also the Betws library space which is a part time service close by (Cat 6).
- 2.12 The 2010 review identified the potential for extra statutory services to be developed in partnership with local organisations who would be required to provide funding support based on developing related services to meet community needs. This was intended to be promoted to community councils and third sector organisations. To date there has only been St Brides Minor community council that have supported such an arrangement, but this has supported a valued service in a smaller community setting and as part of a broader community hub approach.
- 2.13 Following on from the 2010 review there were library closures at Nantymoel, Blaengarw and Caerau. The mobile library service was curtailed in 2019 following a Cabinet report identifying the high cost of a replacement, purpose-built vehicle. This was replaced by the Books on Wheels service providing home delivery for the more vulnerable. In more recent times, and linked to external funding support, a range of

pop-up library opportunities and related events have also been developing and supporting smaller communities using UK Government Shared Prosperity funding which is short term.

- 2.14 The 2010 review recommended ongoing reinvestment in book stock, ICT provision and also customer service related improvements. The 2022-23 Welsh Government review of library services in Bridgend ranked customer service relating to choice of books, customer care and ICT facilities as first in Wales but with total expenditure per capita on library services ranking 14<sup>th</sup>. We can conclude that the service delivered by Awen is funded as a mid-quartile service but achieving good outcomes and providing good value.
- 2.15 The 2010 review identified the potential to develop digital approaches to library services that could increase their reach and to also be available for 24 hours a day. The need and demand for digital access saw escalation during the pandemic and Awen have continued to invest in digital resources whilst highlighting that the demand for hard copy resources remains. Digital issues of resources have continued to increase but also come at a cost in order to meet demand.
- 2.16 It should be noted that the Council has for some time utilised its library services to act as Council Information Points and these venues are where many people go to for support in terms of digital access to information and to be connected. In recent times the role of libraries as social spaces that help combat isolation and to serve as warm hubs has been more visible also in regard to the more vulnerable. There are regular programmes supporting children, young people and families including after school support and digital access. The increased role of libraries as information and advice points should be considered as part of the decision-making process. Many services (e.g., blue badge applications, housing benefit forms) are now supported by libraries where front facing Council contact centre roles have reduced or moved to digital channels.
- 2.17 Whilst the Council is now needing to review the level of investment it can sustain in regard to libraries and cultural services it should be noted that the progress that has been made over the past 14 years is evident and the service is not one in decline. Any proposed changes start from a positive position.

### **3. Current situation / proposal**

- 3.1 The value of cultural and library services to local communities is recognised and understood but the financial position that the Council is facing means that financial efficiencies are sought across all areas of service. The Council was proactive in its approach to develop a partnership approach to delivering cultural services and this has already successfully delivered previous savings to the Council and also ensured that much of the risk in operating those services sits outside the Council.
- 3.2 When the Council is looking to reduce its subsidy through the management fee, it is recognised that library services will always require a high level of support due to them being free at the point of service and non-income generating. **Table 1** indicates the library service opening hours currently being operated and service usage.

<b>TABLE 1 – Library Opening Hours and Footfall for 2022-23 and 2023-24</b>
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	<b>Weekly Hours</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>
Bridgend	57	106,172	127,492
Maesteg	41	32,852	37,096
Pencoed	41	19,088	26,620
Porthcawl	41	52,966	52,608
Pyle	51	50,965	64,349
Aberkenfig	38	30,956	24,490
Sarn	30*	5,925	6,125
Betws	17	3,050	2,825
Total	275	301,974	341,605

\*Note -Aberkenfig library was closed for an 8-week period for premises works in 2023-24.

\*14 hours funded by St. Brides Minor Community Council.

- 3.3 **Table 2** provides some of the headline performance figures for the past two financial years whilst recognising that our library services deliver more support than the presented indicators below.

<b>TABLE 2 – Headline Performance Indicators*</b>		
	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>
Adult Issues	209,265	207,317
Junior Issues	160,671	154,372
Ebook/Audiobook	51,395	62,200
Adult events attendances	17,551	25,052
Child events attendances	39,401	47,619

\* Aberkenfig library was closed for an 8-week period for premises works in 2023-24 resulting in lower issues for the period

- 3.4 There is a 2024-25 MTFS budget reduction proposal relating to the cultural services being delivered on the Councils behalf but also a recognition that there is a need to develop the next longer term plan for library services as the last review was in 2010 and the related consultation and engagement processes will require time to be conducted properly. Based on recent commitments the Council has made regarding capital investments into cultural assets at Maesteg and Porthcawl, a longer term library plan may contribute to a broader cultural strategy that includes other facilities and services in due course. Welsh Government are consulting on a cultural strategy for Wales which would include library and other cultural services.
- 3.5 The opening hours of libraries has been one area that the Council has been considering but based on the premise of trying to keep every library facility open to some extent. This can be more challenging to realise savings but does allow for potential to increase hours where budgets permit should the economic position improve in subsequent years.

- 3.6 The Council has commissioned the initial support needed to commence a review of what the longer-term strategy to deliver a “comprehensive and efficient” library service may look like and this will be followed by a more in-depth review following initial scoping works. This may take time, but the Council will still need to find savings in 2024-25 and an initial reduction in library opening hours will be required across the library estate whilst the longer term position is determined.
- 3.7 Following initial discussions with Awen, one proposal for the shorter term would be to initially reduce total library opening hours by circa 60 hours per week across the library estate whilst recognising the next phase of the review may see more significant changes needed in terms of opening hours or possibly the number of library facilities that the Council can support. The initial reduction in hours alone will not be sufficient to deliver the levels of savings being requested for 2024-25.
- 3.8 The detail as to the specific number of hours of reduction that would apply to each venue would need to be formalised but the indicative reductions are shown in **Table 3**. The proposal also responds to recent User Survey responses which indicates a preference to include lunchtime opening where historically these would be closed across some libraries. These changes would need to be consulted on in regard to the specific locations in addition to the overall availability of access to a library service across Bridgend. The heritage service at Y Llynfi would also reduce by 3 hours. The initial reduction in hours of libraries would create £60-70k of savings in a full year.

<b>TABLE 3</b>	<b>Current Hours</b>	<b>Proposed Hours</b>
Bridgend	57	41.5
Maesteg	41	36.5
Pencoed	41	34
Porthcawl	41	36.5
Pyle	51	34
Aberkenfig	38	34
Sarn	16	16
Betws	17	17

\* Note-the Ogmore and Garw libraries are integrated in leisure centre operations. At Sarn, the Councils funding only supports a part time service of 16 hours with 14 additional hours funded by St Brides Minor community council.

- 3.9 The Council would be responsible for leading any agreed consultation process and any subsequent decision making for both the above shorter term proposed changes and anything more fundamental to follow.
- 3.10 The book renewal fund is a part of the partnership agreement and this amounted to £172,000 in 2023-24. The Council is proposing to reduce the contribution by £50,000 in 2024-25 although this position would not be sustainable within any longer-term plan. Awen indicate that to actually meet the WPLS book expenditure targets the fund would need to increase to nearer £320,000 which gives context to the short-term nature of the cut. The budget in Bridgend has been more focused on mid-quartile performance to date but rankings could drop further in year. Awen have highlighted that book prices have increased by 24% over a 7-year period and that investing in digital resources is also more costly due to licensing and renewals. This is a short-term saving that Council may need to make in the absence of other options whilst recognising the need for a more sustainable approach. As with all of these changes,

the partnership agreement with Awen would need to be adjusted to reflect a lower performance ambition against the WPLS Framework.

- 3.11 The Council has also been considering whether it can now afford to sustain the Books on Wheels service. This replaced the mobile library service that operated throughout the Borough. This service currently provides home delivery to 345 households over a 5-week rolling period with an average of 100 people per week supported. The majority of visits are single occupant although the service also supports some care and nursing home residents. Service users are generally referred based on being housebound or having limited mobility. The service also produces targeted resources for customers including audio resources for those with sensory impairment.
- 3.12 The complete removal of this service would potentially create a saving of £66,000 but with the majority of the saving relating to staffing costs. Based on the nature of the service and the characteristics of service users the need for public consultation will apply and potentially the need to mitigate any detriment that is identified within a full equalities impact assessment. The availability of this service was used to mitigate the removal of the mobile library service when it was curtailed.
- 3.13 There may be the potential to introduce a charge for this service by the Council which may help to reduce costs or to identify more community led opportunities to support people at home.
- 3.14 There are further areas of savings being discussed with Awen including a joint approach to the remodelling of the successful B-Leaf and Wood-B trainee support service linked to adult social care. This would potentially require capital improvements and relocating all services on a single site. The Council has been supporting feasibility works on the capital aspects. It is likely that external investment would be required to support any capital works that would be required for any larger capital scheme.
- 3.15 Within the change notice to Awen was a consideration to remove the subsidy value within the management fee supporting the Bridgend Youth Theatre (BYT) programme. Over 100 young people currently benefit from BYT, and it has a long history of supporting young people to participate in the performing arts, learning transferable skills with many often going on to successful careers in the media and creative industries. BYT forms part of Awen's wider strategy to engage young people in creative industries opportunities. The Creative Industries are one of Wales', and Bridgend's, fastest growing sectors and Awen featured BYT and its skills programme as part of the recent Council led Creative Expo event that focused on employment opportunities in the creative arts and cultural sector..
- 3.16 This proposal will produce a saving of £15,000. Should the Council disinvest, then Awen would need to attract corporate or private sponsorship or increase income via fees and charges or other means to sustain the current level of activity and ensure access to all is sustained. In the event this is not deemed to be achievable there is a risk the BYT programme would need to be re-structured, reduced or curtailed. The Council would no longer be supporting or involved in Bridgend Youth Theatre. The Council is faced with difficult decisions as to which services it can afford to support via public subsidy and this may be one area that needs to become self-sustaining.

#### **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. Initial screening shows that a full equality impact assessment will be needed for the proposals set out in this report should they proceed following consultation.

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

- 5.1 The provision of cultural services including library and broader wellbeing services contributes to the wellbeing of local people and communities in the following ways:-

Involvement - The engagement of residents and utilising their contributions to help shape services as well as developing the cultural third sector and related participation is a positive feature of the local partnership. This has been recognised in the WPLS reports.

Long Term - Bridgend has been progressing its long-term approach to providing library and cultural services since the establishment of the partnership agreement in 2015. In line with Welsh Government plans there is an opportunity to develop a longer-term cultural strategy for Bridgend.

Prevention - The broad range of cultural venues are connecting people to their communities, supporting information advice and assistance and developing social prescribing opportunities in partnership with communities and stakeholders.

Integration - Through the partnership agreement and service development planning there are connections to health, social care, education and broader third sector and community development.

Collaboration - The partnership supports joint planning and development to achieve population level outcomes. Awen have proven successful in relations with external bodies such as Arts Council, Health Board, Heritage Fund and more.

- 5.2 In regard to the Councils wellbeing objectives the cultural range of services and venues contribute to the following objectives: -

A County Borough where we protect our most vulnerable.

A County Borough with thriving valleys communities.

A County Borough where we help people meet their potential.

A County Borough where people feel heard, valued and part of their community.

A County Borough where we support people to live healthy and happy lives.

#### **6. Climate Change Implications**

- 6.1 There is no impact or link to Bridgend County Borough Council's climate change aspirations as a result of this report.

## **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

- 7.1 The partnership agreement between the Council and Awen ensures that appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of service users and staff.
- 7.2 The services that Awen provide ensure that our more vulnerable residents and those requiring connection to information and assistance can be supported by acting as Council Information Points.
- 7.3 Awen, as the Councils delivery partner of library services, are actively engaged in the corporate parenting strategy and steering group.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 When the partnership with Awen was established in 2015 it delivered early efficiencies of £625,000. The management fee payment was also not index linked for the first three years creating an even greater real terms saving beyond the original £625,000. The savings have been managed to date with little service reduction but a considerable transfer of risk. The current MTFS requirement for 2024-25 is £360,000 and the Council needs to determine the specific areas of reductions in its requirements.
- 8.2 Beyond the £625,000 identified above a further efficiency was agreed with Awen of £150,000 in 2018-19 and related to a community centre hand back, curtailment of the mobile library service, closure of the Ty Ardd reference library and some minor alterations to library hours.
- 8.3 In regard to library hours the Council will need to determine what it can achieve in the short term whilst developing a new plan for a "comprehensive and efficient" library service. The Council's aspiration is to retain all venues to be available in some capacity, but this will restrict the overall savings that can be made due to other fixed costs involved in running buildings. In the budget consultation exercise undertaken as part of the MTFS 2024-25 to 2027-28, the public were in principle supportive of needing to reduce the level of expenditure on library related services. The reduction in hours being proposed in this report would save £60-70,000 in a full year.
- 8.4 In regard to book renewal fund, the Council can request a reduction of £50,000 in expenditure in 2024/25 based on the need to deliver efficiencies in the short term but this is unlikely to be sustainable in the medium term and will need review.
- 8.5 The removal of the books on wheels service would save approximately £65,000 in regard to staffing and vehicle costs but will require consultation with service users and identification of any mitigation that could be considered.



- 8.6 The removal of subsidy in regard to Bridgend Youth Theatre programmes would produce a saving of approximately £15,000 but it may not continue in its current form and potentially need other investments to sustain it and its regional identity.
- 8.7 There are other areas of service that have been reviewed within this report that may be able to be delivered in future financial years, but not in 2024-25, that could contribute to the broader MTFS targets although a more fundamental review of the partnership and the Councils affordability and priorities will be needed in the coming months. An initial exercise has been commissioned to support this process and shaping of the medium to longer term plans and finance position. Awen have committed to evaluating the commercial business cases across its portfolio and how a restructuring of the partnership could enable greater revenue growth linked to longer term management fee stability.
- 8.8 The Council needs to consider the commitments that have been undertaken to invest in Maesteg Town Hall and subsequently the Grand Pavilion and implications regarding the expectations of funders as to how those buildings will operate and levels of subsidy needed to ensure access.. The funding within the current management fee and proposed further reductions may prove challenging.
- 8.9 Once the Council's position is confirmed the change notice will request details of any costs that Awen will incur in delivering the proposals that will need to be evidenced and all efforts made to minimise such costs.
- 8.10 Due to the consultation timeframe, the full £360,000 budget reduction proposal is unlikely to be delivered in full in 2024-25. The Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate will have to identify one-off efficiencies in 2024-25 to mitigate any shortfall in the first instance.

## **9. Recommendations**

- 9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
- approve the consultation exercises that will be required to take forward changes to the library services as required by the Medium-Term financial strategy and note that a further report will be presented to Cabinet to enable the outcome of the exercises be taken into account when finalising any proposed changes to library services.

**Background documents:** None

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<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>14 MAY 2024</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>PROPOSED DATES FOR MEETINGS OF CABINET, CABINET COMMITTEE EQUALITIES AND CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>RACHEL KEEPINS, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules.</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<b>To seek approval of the programme of meetings for Cabinet, Cabinet Committee Equalities and Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting for the municipal year 2024-2025.</b>

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to propose for approval the programme of meeting dates for Cabinet, Cabinet Committee Equalities and Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting for the municipal year 2024–2025.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The approval of the programme of meetings of Council, Cabinet and their Committees is required in accordance with the Council’s Constitution.

## 3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 The proposed programme of meeting dates for Cabinet, Cabinet Committee Equalities and Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting for 2024–2025, is set out below. It should be noted that the date of the Budget Cabinet meeting could be subject to change, depending on the timeline of the Welsh Government Local Government Settlement.

### Cabinet

18 June 2024  
23 July 2024  
24 September 2024  
22 October 2024

14 January 2025  
4 February 2025  
18 February 2025 (Budget)  
11 March 2025

19 November 2024  
10 December 2024

8 April 2025

### **Cabinet Committee Equalities**

17 July 2024  
6 November 2024  
19 February 2025

### **Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting**

8 May 2024  
4 September 2024  
8 January 2025

3.2 Subject to the programme of meeting dates being approved, the meetings will be placed in Members and Officers electronic calendars, in the usual manner.

#### **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. 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. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

#### **6. Climate Change Implications**

6.1 There are no climate change implications associated with this report.

#### **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

7.1 There are no safeguarding implications associated with this report

#### **8. Financial Implications**

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report

**9. Recommendation**

9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approve the programme of meeting dates for Cabinet, Cabinet Committee Equalities and Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting, as outlined in paragraph 3.1 of this report.

**Background documents**

None

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