

Bridgend County Borough Council Corporate Self-Assessment 2023/24

1. The purpose of this report

In January 2021, the Welsh Parliament passed a new law that changed the way councils work. Every year, we must publish a self-assessment report. This report covers 6 April 2023 to 5 April 2024.

We want the report to assure Welsh Government that we are performing well. We also want it to tell them that we are using our money and other resources properly and making decisions in a sensible, open way. Most importantly, the report must tell local residents, businesses and all stakeholders how we are doing.

Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association published guidance that told us how to develop our self-assessment and what evidence to use to judge ourselves.

2. The changing world for local government

The world has changed a lot since the pandemic, and it is having a big impact on the way the Council works. The cost-of-living crisis is making things difficult for you as residents and businesses, and it is making it harder for the Council to manage too. Some of the challenges your Council faces are –

- Increasing energy costs for community centres, leisure centres and schools
- Increasing fuel costs for school transport, home carers and recycling vehicles
- Changes to the cost and availability of goods like food for residential homes and building materials for new schools
- Pay rises for our staff who provide indispensable services
- Government asking us to run more services e.g. distribute cost-of-living payments
- Impacts on residents that add demand to services, including increased homelessness and safeguarding referrals
- Funding for the Council not increasing at the same rate as prices.

3. Our progress against last year's areas for improvement

In our 2022/23 Annual Self-Assessment we identified a series of areas that needed specific improvements in the 2023/24 year. Below is an update on the work we have undertaken in these areas. More detail is provided on actions to date, and those that are still planned in each detailed section of this report. In 2023/24 we have –

Priority One

- Using the Post-16 Improvement Plan (PIP), we've developed a consistent approach to post-16 education across our 9 secondary schools, with a hybrid approach to A-level subjects to improve subject choice.
- Developed an action plan with schools and an exclusions task and finish group to tackle the use of fixed term and permanent exclusions.
- Developed Welsh Medium webpages and improved communications to promote Welsh Language education.

- Increased Adult Community Learning (ACL) enrolment numbers through more promotion of the service, more face-to-face sessions, including accredited courses, one-off taster sessions and digital drop-ins. 53 face-to-face sessions were delivered to communities.
- The Bridgend Business Forum has delivered 6 large events, attended by a total of 293 people from the business community.
- We are procuring an Integrated Works Management System (IWMS) to improve the speed of work instructions and real time statutory compliance data. This will be in place in 2025, later than anticipated due to our requirements changing.

Priority Two

- We hoped we could increase adult basic education provision by 50% in 2023/24. But the adult community learning service was cut as part of the council's medium term financial strategy savings, so this proposal was not achieved.
- We have been working to provide Welsh-medium childcare in Bettws and in the Ogmores Valley by September 2023, but a delay in receiving the lease documentation has slowed progress. Work continues into 2024/25.
- We are on track with all of the actions in the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Implementation Plan.
- We have worked with ALN coordinators and headteachers to give training on ALN reform.
- Developed Welsh-medium childcare in Bettws and in the Ogmores Valley, although timescales have slipped to November 2024 for opening.
- Made universal free school meals available for nursery, Year 1 and Year 2 pupils.
- Completed the merger of the community safety partnerships.
- Developed and published a new homelessness strategy.
- Worked with Welsh Government and other authorities on our approach to housing refugees (including Ukrainian refugees)
- Improved our work with Registered Social Landlords to improve housing options.
- Improved learning and development for newly qualified social workers.
- Embedded the Signs of safety model in social care.
- Launched our Strength Based, Outcome-Focussed model of social work practice.
- Opened our new children's residential care service and brought in enhanced therapeutic support for all our residential care and inhouse fostering services.
- Published our new Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- We have worked with the NHS on admission avoidance and discharge services to reduce delays in people receiving care. Beds in Bryn y Cae Reablement Unit can now be booked by community services to avoid hospital admissions. We have got a new operating model for social workers in the hospital which will support more timely discharges.
- We have developed our community based services to increase our reablement services which has helped people where appropriate to retain or regain independent living skills.
- Coproduced the new Bridgend carer's wellbeing service with unpaid carers.
- Supported 237 people via community co-ordinators, 111 via community navigators.

- Developed a learning disability transformation programme.
- Raised awareness of the Bridgend Biodiversity Duty through newsletters.
- Completed 7 Community Asset Transfers.

Priority Three

- A nine-year Sustainable Learning for Communities Programme has been established which includes projects to deliver five new schools.
- Developed and implemented a Strategic workforce Plan.
- Improved the way we manage performance.
- Embedded our new Corporate Plan, Delivery Plan and Performance Framework.
- Improved the way we manage our assets and reduced our maintenance backlog.
- Improved our Statutory Building Compliance, with Big-5 Compliance now at 94%.
- Embedded our updated Corporate Risk Management approach.
- Developed longer-term and multi-year savings options.
- Reviewed and updated the council's hybrid working policy.
- Made progress on building rationalisation with teams being transferred to the Civic Offices. Ravens Court will then become available for disposal or lease.
- Reviewed several HR protocols including on redundancy and redeployment.
- Made good progress on the action plan for communications following the LGA peer review, following difficulties recruiting to the group manager role. We are developing a corporate narrative, have agreed a new media protocol, and are developing a team restructure.
- We have been working with HMLR to migrate all local authority land charges data to a central register to streamline the homebuying process. Work in 2023/24 included extraction of data from current digital systems, data preparation, providing updates to the register and resolving any queries. Data extract problems has caused a delay but the project will go live in early 2025.
- The Regional Food Framework (lead on by Caerphilly Council) was awarded with a start date of April 2024, slightly later than the December date planned.
- Put in place a further 59 electric vehicle charging sockets.
- We still need to develop a Corporate Fleet Transition Plan to accelerate move to ULEV. It will need to reflect the changed financial circumstances of the council.

4. How is the council performing in 2023/24?

Every 5 years the council publishes a new Corporate Plan. A new Corporate Plan was published in April 2023 to cover a 5-year period. It describes the council's priorities, why they are important and how progress will be measured. The priorities, or well-being objectives, show our commitments to citizens and our contribution to Wales's seven well-being goals –

National Well-being Goal	Your Council's Well-being Objectives						
	Protecting our most vulnerable	Fair work, skilled, jobs and thriving towns	Creating thriving Valleys communities	Helping people meet their potential	Responding to the climate and nature emergency	Making people feel valued, heard and connected	Supporting people to be healthy and happy
A prosperous Wales							
A resilient Wales							
A healthier Wales							
A more equal Wales							
A Wales of cohesive communities							
Vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language							
A globally responsible Wales							

In line with the Future Generations Act, when we developed this corporate plan, we thought hard about how we could work differently to respond to short- and medium-term issues, like the financial crisis, while protecting our natural environment and helping young people meet their potential for the long-term. We have a process for measuring how we are doing on these priorities. We use –

- performance indicators,
- evidence on delivery of our projects,
- feedback from residents, businesses, and partners, and
- the views of our regulators and auditors.

Each part of the council pulls this information together and presents it to councillors who look at the data, check it and ask questions. This was done for the year 2023-24 in June 2024. We use this information to make a judgement using this scale -

EXCELLENT	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
GOOD	Strong features, minor aspects may need improvement
ADEQUATE	Needs improvement. Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects need improvement
UNSATISFACTORY	Needs urgent improvement. Weaknesses outweigh strengths.

Performance Overview

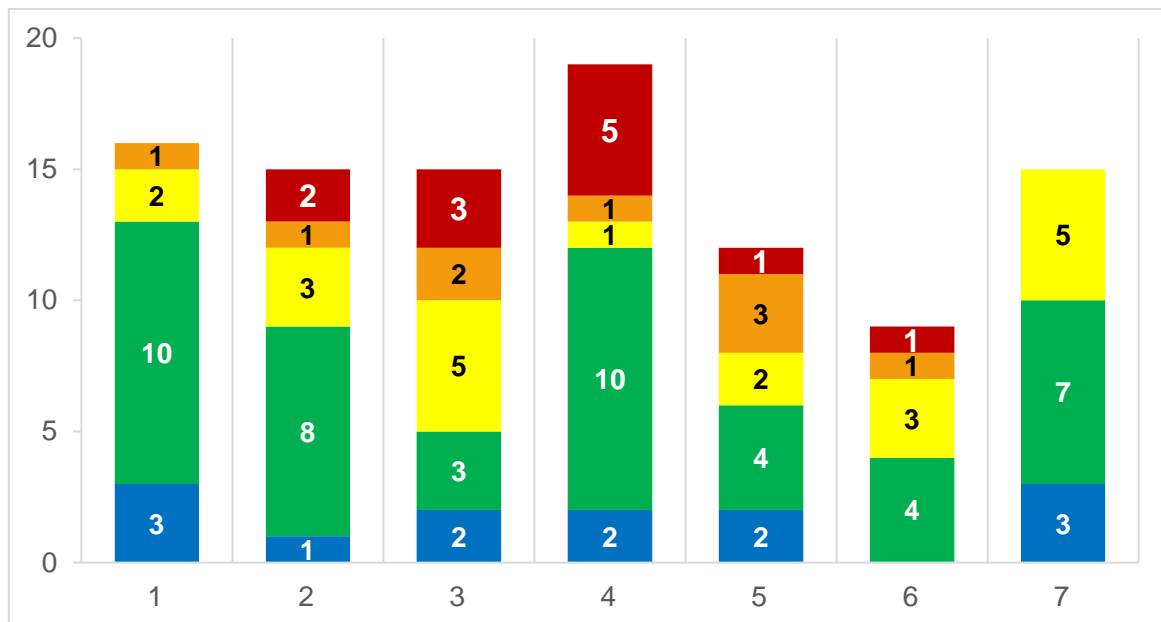
To support the new, 5-year Corporate Plan, we developed a 1-year delivery plan for 2023/24. The plan includes –

- 101 commitments (projects) the council will do to help us achieve our aims, for example, opening a new recycling centre at Pyle.
- a list of 99 performance indicators to measure our day to day activities, for example, collecting and recycling your household waste.

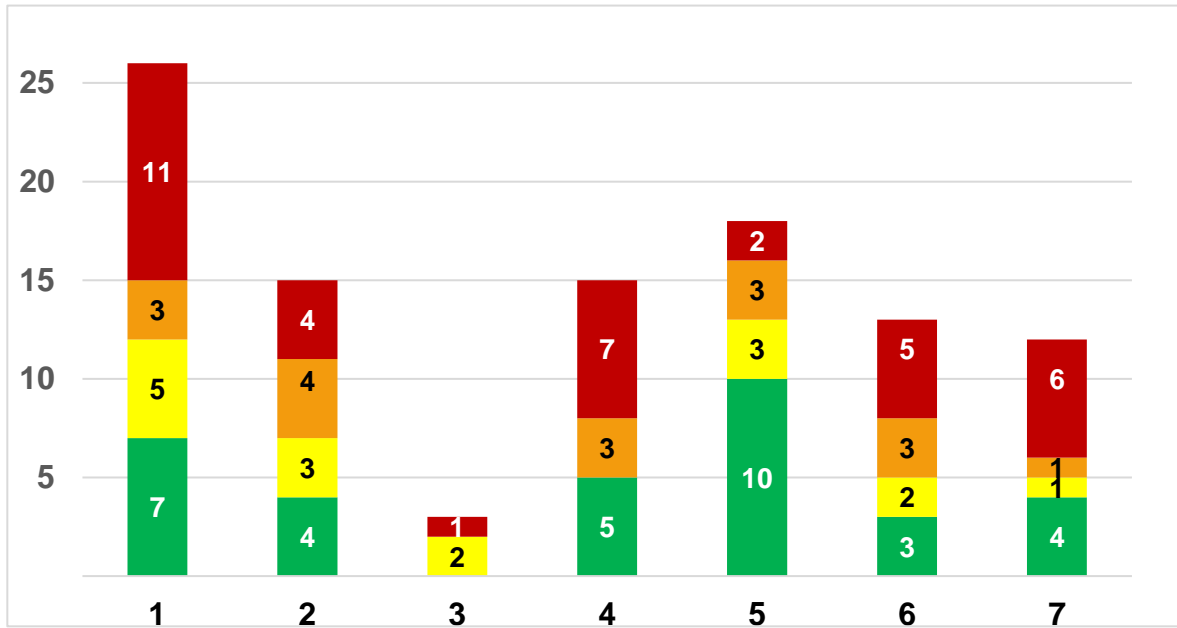
Each one of these has been given a blue, red, amber or green rating to show you whether they are completed, on target or if we are struggling to achieve them, and the two graphs below summarise these.

Alongside the self-assessment, we have published a separate, short performance document that details our progress against each PI and commitment.

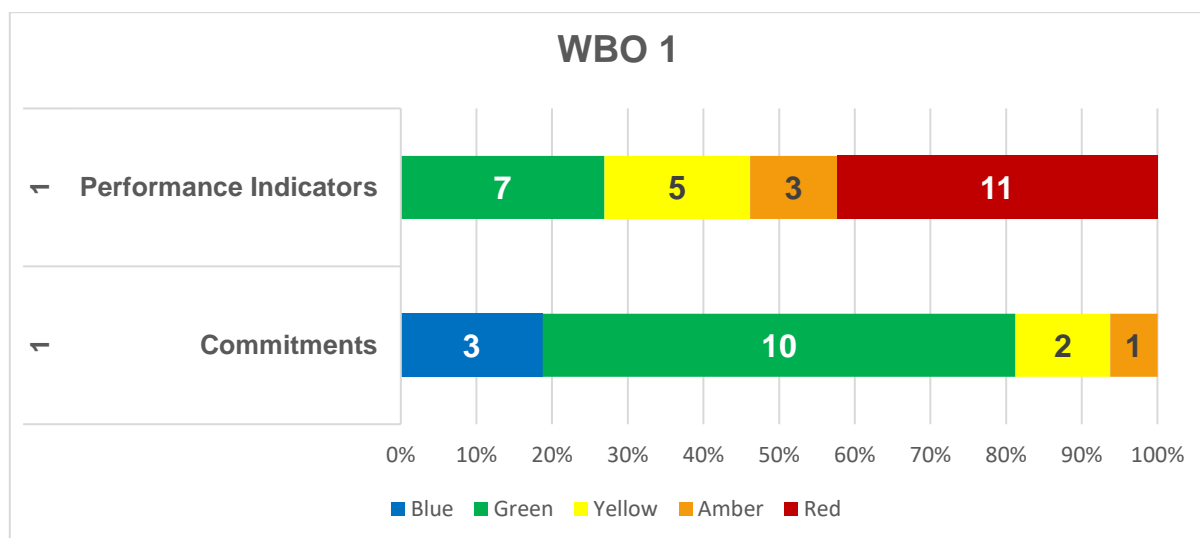
Graph 1 – How we are doing on our commitments / projects



Graph 2 – How we are doing on our performance indicators.



Wellbeing Objective	Score
1 - A County Borough where we protect our most vulnerable	Good



The information below gives you more detail on how we are doing on each aim under this wellbeing objective

Aim	Status	Description
Providing high-quality children's and adults social services and early help services to people who need them	Good	<p>There have been some significant successes in social services this year. We are making good progress against the 3-year children's services strategic plan, including development of an engagement framework, workforce plan, commissioning strategy, signs of safety model of social work practice, corporate parenting board and improvements to data and information. The number of children on the child protection register has steadily reduced and is on target. We have achieved a safe reduction in the number of care experienced children. 100% of carers (in children's services) have been offered a carer's assessment. There have been improvements of the timeliness of visits to children who are care experienced and on the child protection register.</p> <p>We are making good progress in developing a 3-year plan for sustainable care and support for adults. We are embedding the new practice model. There have been several training sessions on strengths based, outcome focused practice. 377 reablement packages have been completed, supporting people to retain or regain their independence, although the percentage that mitigated the need for support has got slightly worse. Community coordinators have supported 395 people and</p>

		<p>community navigators supported 517 people to develop confidence and connect them to community-based support.</p> <p>The new carer's wellbeing service provides information, advice and assistance, and signpost to support services as well as specialist support for young carers.</p> <p>Numbers of people accessing independent advocacy both in children's and adult's social care is well below target and we are working to better promote and record interventions.</p> <p>We have completed more team around the family support plans and the percentage of plans closing with a successful outcome has increased to 83%.</p>
Supporting people in poverty to get the support they need / help they are entitled to	Excellent	<p>We are supporting some people with direct financial support, for example through the Energy Bill Support Scheme which ended earlier in the year, for which all payments have been made. Our Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) is efficient, with applications dealt with promptly. We also provide advice and support through our financial advice and assistance service (FASS). This service provides advice and support in managing or reducing household debt to 93% of the people who have contacted it. It is also helping people access benefits and allowances, and 92% of people using the service saw an increased income through claims for additional / increased benefits and allowances. We also work closely with citizens advice bureau (CAB) who have developed an outreach and drop in service, raising awareness of the support on offer.</p>
Supporting people facing homelessness to find a place to live	Unsatisfactory	<p>We have developed a new homelessness strategy, which outlines our priorities, objectives and what we will do with partners over the next 4 years to tackle homelessness. Changes to Welsh Government legislation means there is a crisis of housing supply and demand across Wales. Demand is very high for homelessness services and our supply of accommodation (particularly specific types of accommodation like large homes and accessible homes) is very low. This means we aren't able to help people as quickly as we should, and we are relying on temporary accommodation more than we would like.</p>
Supporting children with additional learning needs to get the best from	Adequate	<p>All schools have additional learning needs (ALN) practice embedded in their teaching and learning policies. Headteachers and ALN coordinators (ALNCo) in all schools have had detailed training on ALN reform.</p> <p>Support and training are available from the Central South Consortium, with support material on Hwb.</p>

their education		<p>Training and information help make sure there is support available for children with additional learning needs.</p> <p>But significant cuts to service delivery, especially in respect of managing challenging pupil behaviour, have impacted on the level of support available. This has resulted in significant waiting lists for specialist provision across all areas. There has been a substantial increase in requests for support and specialist placements as a result of exclusions and behavioural challenges in mainstream settings.</p> <p>Early years settings are requiring a higher level of support for children with increasingly complex medical needs. Similarly, there are pressures on the availability of specialist home-to-school transport to meet the needs of learners.</p>
Safeguarding and protecting people who are at risk of harm	Good	<p>We have a regular, corporate safeguarding board. Our Annual Corporate Safeguarding Report was approved in January.</p> <p>Almost all children's safeguarding referrals decisions are made within the 24-hour target. 78% of child protection investigations are completed within required timescales.</p> <p>Average waiting time on the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) waiting list has reduced to 16 days now we have got rid of the waiting list backlog. The percentage of adult safeguarding inquiries which receive initial response within 7 working days is slightly below target.</p> <p>Not all staff are using the safeguarding e-learning module, but we are changing the system to recognise prior learning.</p>
Help people to live safely at home through changes to their homes	Unsatisfactory	<p>We are still clearing a backlog of historical disabled facility grants, so the waiting times are still long. But the total number of jobs completed is high, we have spent all of our budget, streamlined the process for applying for a DFG and improved payment to contractors and budget management. A new DFG Caseworker will help coordinate progress and improve communication with the applicant. We now expect waiting times to start to reduce. All residents receiving a service were satisfied with the adaptations made to their homes and felt they helped them to remain in their own home independently and safely.</p>
Support partners to keep	Adequate	<p>Safer streets funding has been used to install new fixed CCTV cameras, re-deployable CCTV cameras and new signs, to deter bad behaviour, provide evidence and</p>

<p>communities safe</p>		<p>reassure communities The council's CCTV system and operatives have reported 944 incidents to South Wales Police to help them deal with incidents and keep the public safe.</p> <p>We are working with partners to identify children who need support to reduce offending behaviour in a multi-agency prevention panel. A new prevention assessment tool has been created by the Youth Justice Board to help us understand the needs of children at risk of entering criminal justice services.</p> <p>Women's self-defence classes have been delivered to individuals and Independent Domestic Violence Advisors. Around 75% of council staff have completed Violence Against Women training, but this is below target.</p>
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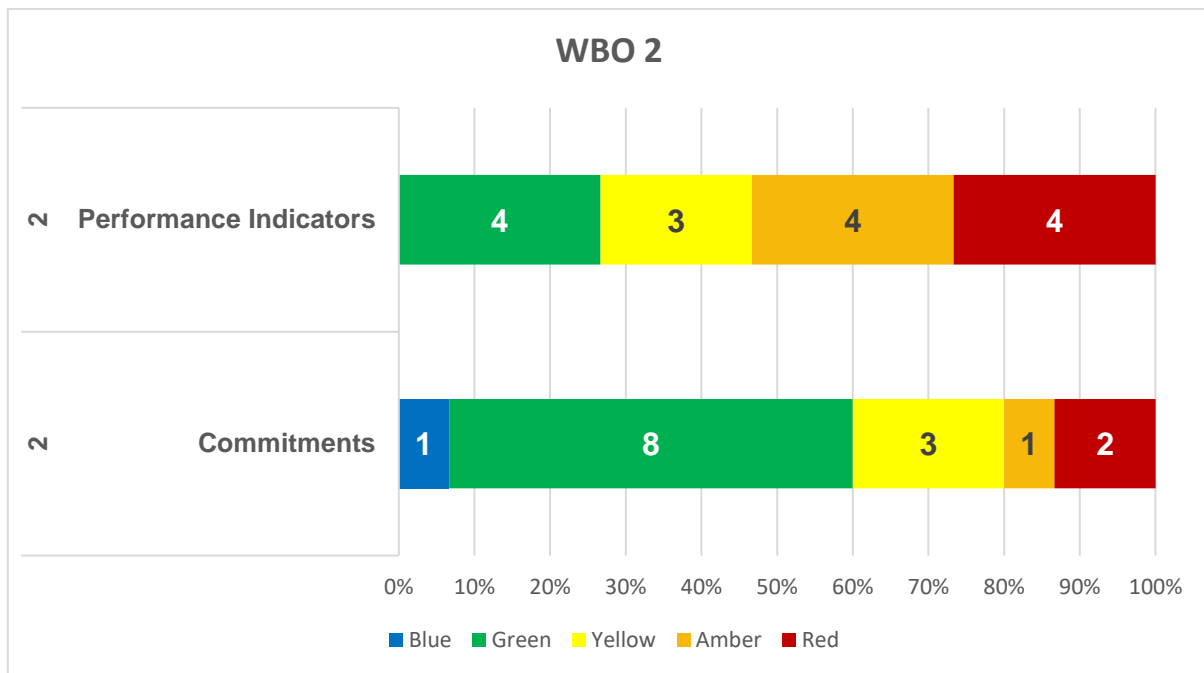
What will we do to improve?

- Restructure the family support service
- Prevention and wellbeing service will work with an extra 380 young carers
- Bring in 'what matters' conversations and proportionate carers assessments
- Develop a young carers network group
- Review the children's services 3-year strategic plan and deliver the year 2 objectives
- Finalise and implement the adult services 3-year strategic plan
- Develop working groups on the future operating model for children's services
- Widen training for strength-based practice to front line social care staff.
- Work with corporate procurement to deliver the actions in the commissioning plans.
- Implement the action plan from the housing support programme strategy.
- Undertake directorate self-evaluations on safeguarding competencies.
- Additional signs of safety / safeguarding training for school governors.
- Review mandatory eLearning modules for staff.
- Work with partners to develop a regional model for safeguarding and exploitation.
- Reducing the backlog of historical disabled facilities grants.

Case study - Financial Advice and Support Service (FASS)

This service helps people living in poverty, or at risk of living in poverty, with managing their money, budgeting, debt advice, claiming benefits and maximising their income. In partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau, we have supported 580 people, through one-to-one support, outreach and a drop-in service. 93% of the people contacting the services received support in managing or reducing household debt and 92% of people saw an increased income through claims for additional or increased benefits and allowances. The drop-in service was increased from one day to two days per week out in the community, for people experiencing challenging circumstances with debt, after Christmas.

Wellbeing Objective	Score
2 - A County Borough with fair work, skilled, high-quality jobs and thriving towns	Good



The information below gives you more detail on how we are doing on each aim under this wellbeing objective.

Aim	RAYG	Performance this year
Helping our residents get the skills they need for work	Good	Employability Bridgend provides support to unemployed people, and those in work but struggling with low skills or in-work poverty. This year, 366 people (above the target of 350) from the Employability Bridgend programme went into employment and 93 people (just below the target of 100) improved their Labour market position. A number of grant schemes have been launched successfully, and we continue to work in partnership with public and third sector groups to deliver the employability programme, including Careers Wales, BAVO, DWP and Bridgend Employability Network. 213 people have been referred to the employment service in Assisting Recovery in the Community (ARC) for support with mental health issues.
Making sure our young people find jobs, or are in education or training	Good	76 young people on the Employability Bridgend programme have been supported into education or training (against a target of 727), as we are just starting new projects and funding eligibility criteria and dealing with staff capacity issues. A marketing campaign has been developed for young people, to raise awareness of employment and training opportunities.

		<p>The percentage of year 11 school leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET) is better than the Wales average, 4th in Wales and better than last year at 1.4%.</p> <p>The Council's vacancy issues have been addressed through grow your own schemes, flexible working, and leadership development. We have got 8 social work trainees into posts.</p>
<p>Improving town centres, making them safer and more attractive</p>	<p>Adequate</p>	<p>We have developed two placemaking plans – for Maesteg and Porthcawl – engaging with local people and businesses to reflect their priorities.</p> <p>The £8m refurbishment project on Maesteg Town Hall is near completion, with this listed building being restored and extended to provide a community hub and arts and cultural centre for the Llynfi Valley.</p> <p>A number of grants from Welsh Governments Transforming Towns Schemes, have been awarded to businesses in Maesteg and Bridgend and have brought 8 properties back into use, including restaurants in Bridgend Town Centre.</p> <p>The £3m redevelopment of Cosy Corner in Porthcawl was completed, with a new glass and stone building providing a home to local shops and restaurants, new public toilet facilities and changing places space, improved harbour berth holders' facilities and a landscaped open space with canopy and picnic tables.</p> <p>Two commitments under this aim have not been able to progress due to lack of funding. This has had an impact on achievement against the aim as a whole. There is no progress on Penprysg Bridge as we did not receive funding from UK government. There is no progress on Bridgend Central Station improvements, but we will keep looking for sources of funding.</p>
<p>Attracting investment and supporting new and existing local businesses</p>	<p>Good</p>	<p>219 business startups (compared with a target of 52) have been supported through advice, grant bids, web material, face to face networking and event opportunities. 25 businesses have received support through the shared prosperity fund, which is a higher demand than we expected.</p> <p>The Council has done more of its purchasing and contracts under £100,000 through local businesses.</p> <p>Work continues on the Supplier Relation Management [SRM] project to help local businesses tender for public sector work. A new webpage has been developed but has not been promoted and supplier workshops have not yet taken place due to staffing issues.</p>

		There has been regional engagement with Cardiff Capital Region [CCR] to monitor developments, disseminate information and progress grant funding schemes including the Metrolink and Ewenny Road, Maesteg.
Making the council an attractive place to work	Adequate	<p>We have renewed staff policies, implemented the real living wage and continued to promote health, wellbeing and self-care.</p> <p>A new Employee Assistance Programme was launched in December 2023. Work continues on the menopause and carers protocol. Further positive progress continues with the "Grow your Own" programme. We continue to promote savings that come from Brivilege rewards to help with the Cost of Living.</p> <p>Our staff survey took place in Feb/March 2024 but had a poor response rate of only 24%. Responses were slightly less positive than in 2023 for most of the tracker questions. We will run focus groups to get underneath the headline figures and poor response rate.</p>
Ensuring employment is fair, equitable and pays the real living wage	Excellent	We have worked with our supply chain, encouraging employers to offer training and working with our suppliers to find out if they are real living wage employers. 250 employers in the Borough are Real Living Wage accredited.

What will we do to improve?

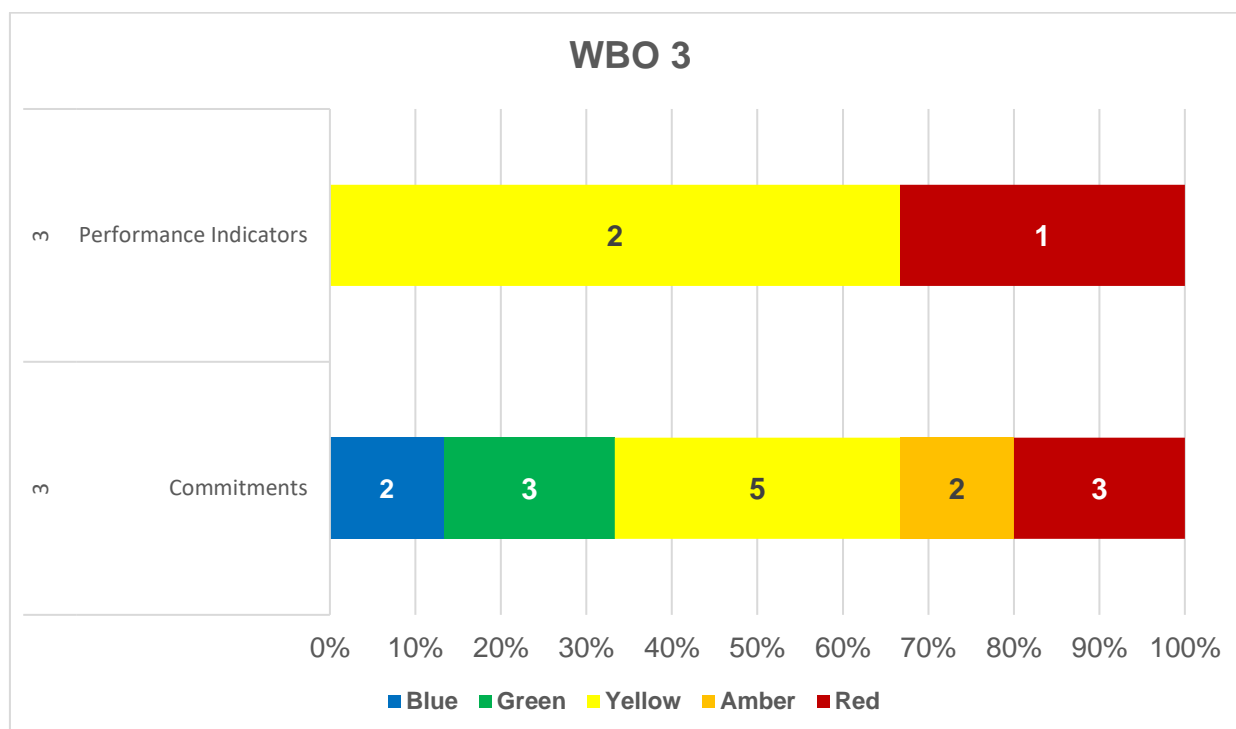
- Deliver the 2024/25 shared prosperity fund programme.
- Improve the employability offer to people with care and support needs.
- Develop a local and regional plan to help people with support needs overcome barriers to work.
- Learning and development training to support newly qualified social workers.
- Run the transforming town grant funding scheme.
- Work with Transport for Wales, Network Rail and Welsh Government to assess funding options for the Penprysg road bridge, Pencoed level crossing and Central Station redevelopment.
- Update our procurement strategy, action plan and CPRs based on the new UK government legislation.
- Run focus groups to better understand the results of the staff survey and develop an action plan to address them.
- Encourage our suppliers to become real living wage employers

Case study - Employability

Employability Bridgend provides support to unemployed people, and those in work but struggling with low skills or in-work poverty. This year we helped 366 people into employment and helped 93 people get better jobs. We work in partnership with public

and third sector groups to deliver the employability programme, including Careers Wales, Bridgend Association of Volunteer Organisations (BAVO), Department for Work and Pensions and Bridgend Employability Network. We have also referred 213 people to the employment service in Assisting Recovery in the Community (ARC) for support with mental health issues.

Wellbeing Objective	Score
3 - A County Borough with thriving valleys communities	Good



The information below gives you more detail on how we are doing on each aim under this wellbeing objective.

Aim	Status	Description
Investing in town centres, including Maesteg town centre	Good	A Placemaking Plan for Maesteg has been developed and consulted on. It will guide investment and policy decisions which will shape the town's future. The Commercial Property Enhancement Grant has been developed and marketed. 1 project is underway and we have already helped 4 commercial properties through the enhancement grant scheme.
Creating more jobs in the Valleys	Adequate	We have bid for a large grant from the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) Northern Valley's Initiative. If successful we will be able to develop a range of industrial premises in the Valleys. We are working with Awen to provide new facilities for supported training for people with learning disabilities at Wood B and B-Leaf in Bryngarw. The tender was awarded and design work is progressing.
Improving community facilities and making	Good	Only 3 Community Asset Transfers (CATs) of our target of 5 were finalised (Bettws, Llangynwyd & Garth Park, Maesteg). The number of transfers were impacted by property issues and staff capacity issues.

<p>them more accessible</p>		<p>£296,662 has been invested with Community Asset Transfers (CATs) in Valleys.</p> <p>There has been significant progress on the redevelopment of the Ewenny Road site, with planning permission granted for a mixed-use development, (including new and affordable homes, an enterprise hub, open space and green infrastructure) and the site being marketed for sale.</p> <p>There have been 353,782 visits to Maesteg Town Hall, Garw and Ogmore Valley Life Centre, Maesteg Swimming Pool and Maesteg Sports Centre. We are increasingly trying to focus on actions that build social connections / mental wellbeing and reduce loneliness and isolation. There is a digital development plan in 5 community venues, identifying how staff / volunteers can use digital approaches including streaming activities.</p>
<p>Improving education and skills in the Valleys</p>	<p>Adequate</p>	<p>Flying Start Nurseries at Pontycymmer, Nantymoel and Ogmore Vale are now operating morning and afternoon sessions with a total of 60 children.</p> <p>There is interest from childcare providers at the Bettws and Blaengarw settings, but the lease documentation is not complete, so neither can yet be opened to tender.</p>
<p>Investing in our parks and green spaces and supporting tourism to the valleys</p>	<p>Excellent</p>	<p>There has been good progress in developing the Valley Regeneration Strategy, with engagement throughout the 3 valley areas. A draft strategy is being prepared for consultation.</p> <p>The Cwm Taf Nature Network (CTNN) completed its delivery during 23/24 and the evaluation report demonstrates the project has been a success.</p>
<p>Encourage the development of new affordable homes in the valleys</p>	<p>Unsatisfactory</p>	<p>The Council meets Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and Welsh Government regularly to promote and encourage the development of new social housing in the valleys. A funnel of opportunities is being developed.</p> <p>Only 2 (against a target of 20) additional affordable homes have been provided by Registered Social Landlords in the Valleys this year. There have been external factors affecting the delivery of new sites, including NRW objections which we haven't been able to resolve within the year.</p> <p>There has been no progress on encouraging the development of self-build homes on infill plots, to increase the range of housing, as there are no resources or funding available.</p>

What will we do to improve?

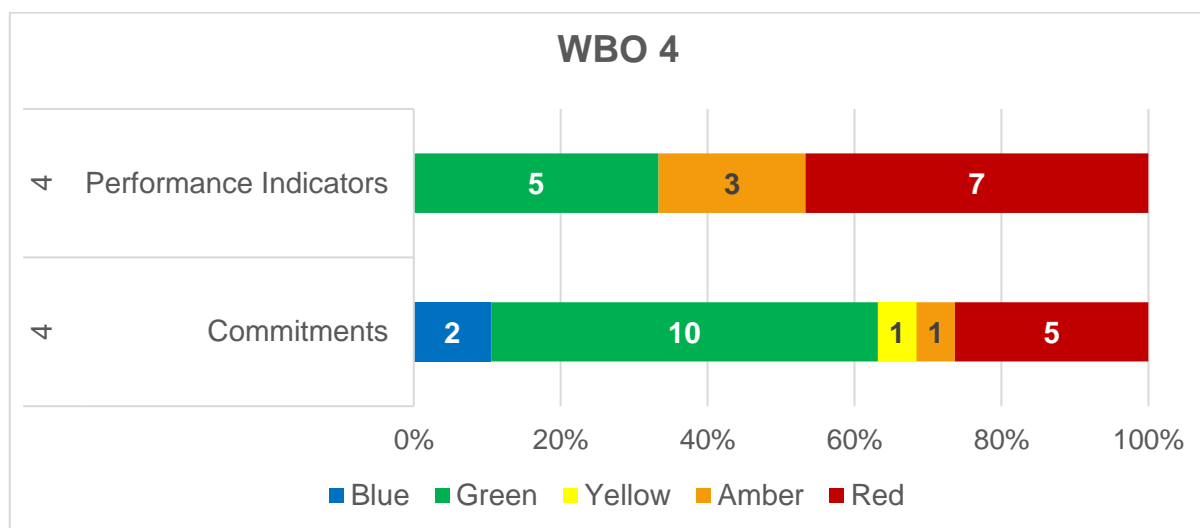
- Complete and publish the placemaking plan for Maesteg.
- Improve marketing for the commercial property enhancement grant.
- Bid for funding to bring premises and land forward for business growth in the Valleys
- Work with Awen to progress the new facilities for people with learning disabilities at wood-B and B-leaf.
- Increase investment in Community Asset Transfers in the Valleys.
- Sell the Ewenny Road site for a mixed-use development including new and affordable homes, an enterprise hub, open space and green infrastructure.
- Deliver additional activities in community venues in the Valleys.
- Develop and promote library use in Valleys communities.
- Implement the digital development project in 5 community venues.
- Invest in programmes that focus on social connections / mental wellbeing and reduce loneliness and isolation.
- Complete the lease document for Bettws and Blaengarw childcare facilities so they are operational in November 20224.
- Consult on a regeneration strategy for the Valleys in summer 2024.
- Implement the green spaces enhancement project.
- Work with RSLs, Welsh Government and other partners to resolve external factors affecting the delivery of new affordable housing sites in the Valleys.

Case study - Cwm Taf nature network

The Cwm Taf Nature Network (CTNN) brought together different organisations to help reconnect people with nature. There were a range of activities in parks and green spaces, including litter picks, tree planting, bug hunting, guided walks and storytelling. There were also volunteering and training opportunities. Improvements were made to help people access green spaces, including new signs, steps, paths, and bins. The project also improved green spaces, producing landscape management plans, tree surveys, clearance, planting of wildflower meadows and storytelling areas and raised awareness about invasive species control through a balsam bashing silent disco. The project also included the Bridgend Green Gathering, at Bryngarw Country Park.



Wellbeing Objective	Score
4 - A County Borough where we help people meet their potential	Adequate



The information below gives you more detail on how we are doing on each aim under this wellbeing objective.

Aim	Status	Description
Providing safe, supportive schools with high quality teaching	Adequate	Schools have been given tools to help improve Estyn inspection outcomes, including self-evaluation toolkits, reviewed school development plans, and support with post inspection actions. All schools have completed safeguarding audits, with 95% rated as “green”. Three schools rated amber with areas of improvement to address. Additional digital learning opportunities have been available to schools via Central South Consortium, including digital competency training, google classroom and digital platform training, Curriculum for Wales skills mapping, and online safety training (also provided to governors). The Young Editors Group have co-developed website content for an interactive youth-led website. Our social media channels have proved an excellent way to engage with young people. Engagement with young people has identified that “Tik Tok” is the preferred social media platform, which Bridgend Youth Support will trial in the coming months.
Improving employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities	Adequate	We are doing a review of day opportunities to give young adults with learning disabilities a chance to try activities, gain new skills and fulfil their potential. Links with our Employability Team are in development, and there have been a small number of volunteering opportunities in the Day Service.

		<p>A regional working group has been established for Neuro Diversity and Learning Disability, with a stakeholder meeting held in February 2024 to identify current provision and networks between providers.</p>
<p>Expanding Welsh medium education opportunities</p>	<p>Unsatisfactory</p>	<p>There are a variety of groups, projects and initiatives in place to increase opportunities for children to use the Welsh language, but targets we have set have not been achieved in all areas. The percentage of year 1 learners taught through the medium of Welsh is 8.56% and continues to show an improving trend, but the percentage of learners studying for assessed qualifications through the medium of Welsh at the end of Key Stage 4 has fallen slightly to 6.62%, indicating a smaller proportion of children studying at a Welsh-medium secondary school. The number of students who were entered for an A level examination in Welsh second language remains the same as last year, although is almost double those that sat A level Welsh first language.</p> <p>The Welsh Language Promotion Strategy is on target – we have developed Welsh-medium webpages and have been planning the promotion of Welsh-medium education.</p>
<p>Modernising our school buildings</p>	<p>Unsatisfactory</p>	<p>Each of the five schemes are in design / development phases and have experienced delays throughout 2023-2024, including significant increases in projected costs, with a big impact on project timescales, consideration of options and decision making.</p> <p>The replacement Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Ogwr timescales have been impacted due to a review of the car park and school transport parking design layout (to ensure pupil/user safety) as well as ecological issues at the new, Ffordd Cadfan site. A strategy for undertaking the work is being developed with input from the ecologist.</p> <p>The replacement Heronsbridge School has seen significant cost increases and a delayed decision in terms of the preferred option, which has impacted on the timescale for delivery of the project.</p> <p>The replacement Mynydd Cynffig Primary School planning application is yet to be submitted, as the preferred option for the highway infrastructure needs to be confirmed.</p> <p>The PAC process for Bridgend West (the replacement Ysgol y Ferch o'r Sgêr and the new English-medium school) has concluded and a cost plan developed, reviewed in conjunction with Welsh Government / Welsh Education Partnership Company (WEPCo), and value engineering has been undertaken. Welsh Government reviews have impacted on timescales for delivery.</p>

<p>Attract and retain young people into BCBC employment</p>	<p>Excellent</p>	<p>We have engaged with schools through the termly Director Reports and have attended jobs fairs, options and careers events at comprehensive schools to promote the apprenticeship offer, delivering workshops on applying for apprenticeship jobs and improving interview skills.</p> <p>The number of apprentices employed by the council has increased from 36 in 22-23 to 46 in 23-24, with 90% of those concluding their apprenticeships in 23-24 going on to obtain a non-apprentice role.</p>
<p>Offering youth services and school holiday programmes for our young people</p>	<p>Excellent</p>	<p>130 children took part in the me, where children attended 12 sessions to support their physical health and emotional wellbeing and received a healthy breakfast and lunch.</p> <p>19,659 children in the County Borough took part in the national free-swimming initiative for 16 and under.</p> <p>Discovery programmes supported around 50 families with young people with higher levels of additional needs, with activities for the young people and respite for the families.</p> <p>22 families have been referred and 70 individuals supported in our “step up and step down” approach for low level social care.</p> <p>Programmes have been delivered with halo and community groups with youth activities for more vulnerable young people.</p> <p>Using funding from Town and Community Councils / Welsh Government there has been free holiday activity programmes for 8-11 year olds in 8 locations including leisure centres, secondary school sites and community settings.</p> <p>357 people with additional or diverse needs have taken part in targeted activities including Summer of Fun / Winter of Wellbeing.</p>
<p>Work with people to design and develop services</p>	<p>Excellent</p>	<p>The Feel Good for Life programme delivered by Halo Leisure has used peer review panels to engage with service users to plan for improvements. A dementia planning working group has been established to share insight and opportunities to collaborate between partner organisations.</p> <p>We work with Cwmpas and carers to make improvements to how they can access the information they need, and how use of a range of short breaks could improve their resilience to care.</p>
<p>Supporting and encouraging lifelong learning</p>	<p>Adequate</p>	<p>There were a number of promotional exercises to engage with residents about the Adult Community Learning (ACL) service. 53 face-to-face courses/sessions delivered, including accredited courses, one-off taster sessions and regular digital drop-ins. A successful partnership has developed with a</p>

		<p>number of primary schools and effective recruitment campaigns were run. This year has seen increased enrolment numbers compared to previous years however we did not reach our target as active engagement campaigns ended due to the approved proposal to deprioritise ACL funding in February 2024.</p>
<p>Being the best parents we can to our care experienced children</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Good</p>	<p>Joint working in the 16+ team has led to a fall in the number of care leavers who experience homelessness. Social Services and Housing are working together to provide care leavers with the skills needed for independent living.</p> <p>The number of care leavers completing 12 months consecutive employment, education or training (EET) since leaving care is improved to 68.97%, but there is a slight decrease in those completing 13-24 months. There has been a notable decline since the Basic Income Pilot was introduced.</p> <p>We have published our new Corporate Parenting Strategy with board member agencies now asked to sign up to the Welsh Government Corporate Parenting Pledge.</p> <p>We have set up a fundraising page for an awards event for care experienced children, young people and care leavers aged 5-21.</p> <p>Care experience will now be recognised as a protected characteristic to make sure their needs are taken into account in all our decision making.</p>

What will we do to improve?

- Support schools (working with Central South Consortium) to implement Curriculum for Wales and assessment, encouraging high-quality teaching and learning.
- Implement the Trauma-Recovery Model (TRM) of practice across the Youth Justice Service to better support children and their families.
- Ensure children are diverted from the criminal justice system through appropriate interventions at the earliest opportunity (working with the police and courts).
- Streamline youth justice referrals, through Prevention and Diversion Panel, ensuring smooth handoffs to other agencies for cases where criminalisation can be avoided.
- Increase education, training and employment support to children not in education, employment, or training (NEET) or with reduced timetables.
- Develop and implement a digital platform to capture the voice of young people, especially those who have been in receipt of services.
- Complete a governor skills audit to inform their self-evaluation process.
- Organise additional safeguarding training for school staff and governors.
- Provide schools with additional digital learning training.
- Launch the new website and tiktok account to keep young people informed.
- Develop a local and regional plan for young people with learning disabilities.
- Enact the communications plan for Welsh-medium education.

- Complete the review of the car park and school transport parking design layout at the replacement Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Ogwr and develop a strategy for accessing the site and undertaking the work with input from the ecologist.
- Proceed with work on the replacement Heronsbridge School 'do maximum option (that is, school and the school's residential provision) plus a swimming pool' following Cabinet approval of the way forward in March 2024.
- Submit the planning application for the replacement Mynydd Cynffig Primary School.
- Await Welsh Government signoff for the Mutual Investment Model (that is, revenue funded) scheme for the PAC process for Bridgend West (that is, the replacement Ysgol y Ferch o'r Sgêr and the new English-medium school).
- Review the action plan on support for care experienced children through corporate safeguarding board.
- Education and Engagement team / Social Services will continue to work closely to provide care-experienced children with support and put personal education plans in place as soon as possible.

Case study - Food and Fun Programme

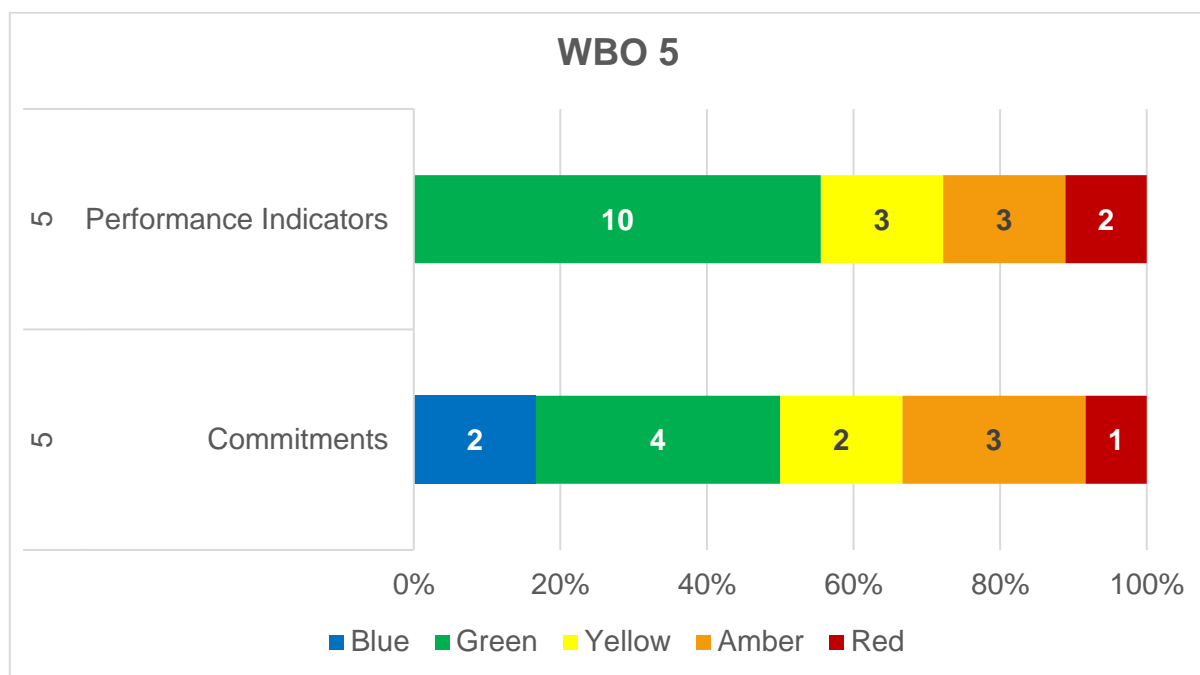
The Food and Fun Programme has been delivered since 2018, initially in one primary school. In 2023 it ran in four schools: three primaries and one secondary. The programme provides a healthy breakfast and lunch, physical activities, and nutritional education over 12 days of the summer holidays. Schools and the Early Years and Childcare Team have worked together to increase numbers of children accessing the schemes each year. In 2023, 131 children attended the scheme, which has consistently positive feedback from parents.

Care Experienced Youth Forum

We have worked with the care experienced Youth Forum to organise a workshop for young people in care (ages 11+) to share their foster care experiences. With guidance from Connor Allen, the former Welsh Children's Poet Laureate, they created a poem to amplify their voices and challenge misconceptions. In Autumn 2023, the youth forum took part in workshops as part of a national campaign, with Foster Wales, to dispel misconceptions about young people in care and create a mural in Brackla.



Wellbeing Objective	Score
5 - A County Borough that is responding to the climate and nature emergency	Good



The information below gives you more detail on how we are doing on each aim under this wellbeing objective.

Aim	Status	Description
Moving towards net zero carbon, and improving our energy efficiency	Adequate	Overall, a 4.3% reduction in emissions was achieved in 23-24, slightly less than our 5% target but a positive step in our 2030 obligations, with reductions in electricity and gas consumption and CO2 related energy consumption across our buildings. There are significant cost barriers to moving fleet vehicles from traditional petrol/diesel to Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV), but we have used Welsh Government funding to procure 6 electric vehicles, used by the Social Services Support at Home Service. The average nitrogen dioxide level in Park Street, Bridgend has improved. Measures in the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) have developed and refined, which will reduce levels further once implemented. Modelling now forecasts the likely year of compliance as 2026 with all measures in place.
Protecting our landscapes and open spaces and planting more trees	Good	The Local Places for Nature project successfully delivered its 23/24 work programme which included biodiversity enhancement schemes at Heol Y Cyw Playing Fields and land behind Pyle Swimming Pool and habitat connectivity schemes at Sarn, Brynmenyn, Newbridge Fields, Cefn Glas, Aberkenfig, Bryntirion and Newcastle.

		<p>The Cwm Taf Nature Network (CTNN) project completed its delivery during 23-24 and the evaluation report demonstrated the project had been a success, improving access to green spaces for local people, improving the quality of the environment of those green spaces, and connecting up green spaces.</p> <p>Our commitment to plant a further 10,000 trees could not be achieved. Feasibility work for the schemes was completed, but further investigation of the preferred site option is needed and funding must be secured before this can progress further. 3 beaches at Rest Bay, Trecco Bay and Porthcawl Marina retained their blue flag status, and 3 parks at Bryn Garw Country Park, Coychurch Crematorium and Maesteg Welfare Park maintained their status as green flag parks / green spaces.</p>
Improve the quality of the public realm and built environment through good placemaking principles	Good	<p>The Local Development Plan (LDP) was adopted in March 2024 after an extensive examination in public in Spring 2023 by a Welsh Government Appointed Inspector. We will now progress work on the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) which enhances the policies in the LDP.</p> <p>The Planning Department have implemented a restructure during this year resulting in new posts being created, and an improvement in the percentage of planning appeals dismissed from 64% to 87% and planning applications determined with 8 weeks from 64% to 68%, however this is still lower than target.</p>
Reducing, reusing or recycling as much of our waste as possible	Excellent	<p>Our high standards in recycling have continued, with the percentage of street cleansing waste being recycled increased to 41.12%, the percentage of municipal waste collected that is prepared for re-use, recycled, or biowaste that is composted increased to 71.94% and the amount of residual waste generated has decreased further to 119.8 kg per person.</p> <p>The percentage of highways land found to be of acceptable or high level of cleanliness also improved to 99.97%.</p> <p>Work has begun on our future waste services model, engaging an industry expert to outline our options based on analysis of data from our current model – potential future options.</p> <p>The new Community Recycling Centre (CRC) opened in Pyle on 14th March 2024.</p>
Improving flood defences and schemes to reduce flooding of our homes	Excellent	<p>New flood prevention and culvert schemes have been completed in Station Street, Nantymoel, and Queen street, Blaengarw and monitored for effectiveness over the winter period. Bids for Welsh Government funding have been approved for schemes identified for 2024/25. There was additional gully clearance work targeted at historical flooding locations, and ditch cleaning operations to improve flood risk in rural areas. More culverts have been added to monitoring</p>

and businesses		regime, with more frequent inspections of the high-risk culverts, and replacement/upgrading of warning sensors at some locations. Improvements have been made to the statutory sustainable drainage systems (SUDs) application process, with 100% of applications being processed within 7 weeks.
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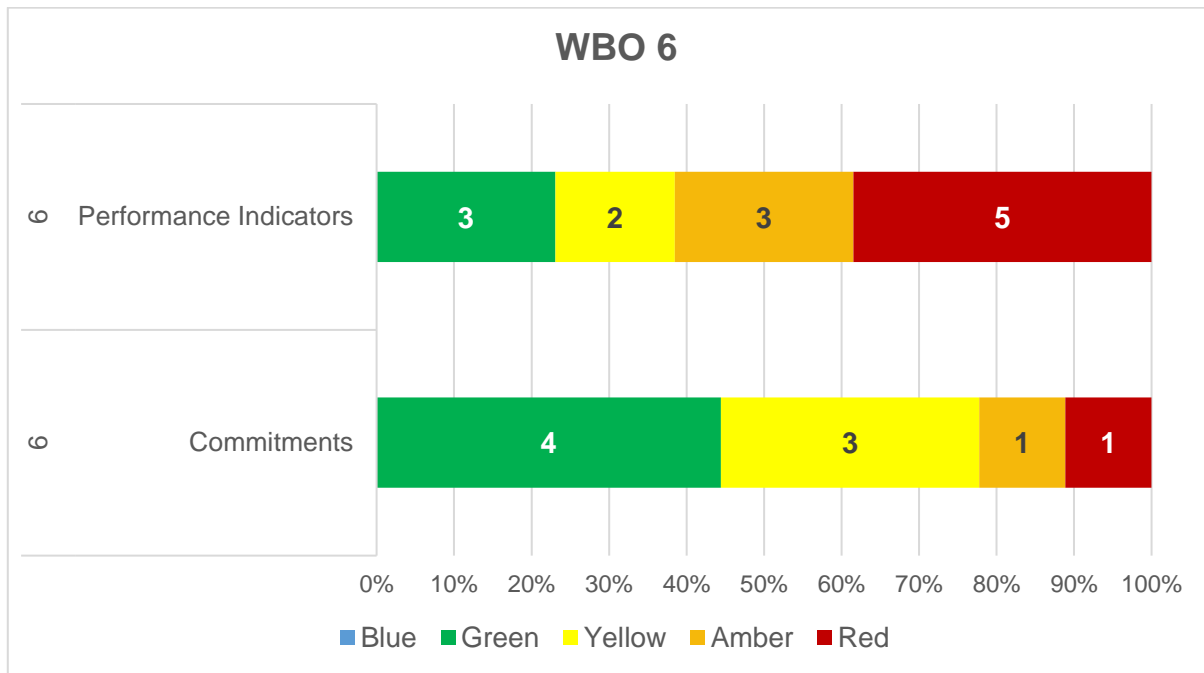
What will we do to improve?

- Review our fleet transition strategy to meet the target of 2035 for net zero
- Agree and publish the final air quality action plan (AQAP).
- Install electric car charging points at the social services support at home base
- Develop and explore funding for energy efficiency improvements for council buildings.
- Develop supplementary planning guidance to support our new LDP
- Further improvements to our landscapes and green spaces through the new Green Spaces Enhancement project.
- Further work on the future waste model and a decision on new model will be made in 2024/25.
- Decommission the outdated CRC at Tythegston.

Case study – Local Development Plan (LDP)

This year, the council adopted a new local development plan (LDP), which will shape development up to 2033. This includes having enough land available to support population increases, the creation of 7,500 new jobs and the construction of 7,575 homes. This will include 1,700 affordable homes, some of which have already been built. It will bring in approximately £116 million funding from major housing developments. Developments include five new primary schools, and improved transport facilities such as park and ride. Our LDP is the first new development plan adopted since the pandemic putting Bridgend at the forefront of planning in Wales.

Wellbeing Objective	Score
6 - A County Borough where people feel valued, heard and part of their community	Adequate



The information below gives you more detail on how we are doing on each aim under this wellbeing objective.

Aim	Status	Description
Celebrating and supporting diversity and inclusion and tackling discrimination	Adequate	<p>The new Strategic Equalities Plan (SEP) for 2024-28 has been consulted on and will be approved and published early in 2024/25.</p> <p>Only 48% of council staff have completed introduction to Equality and Diversity training, below the target of 100%.</p> <p>The staff survey has identified interest in staff groups focused on groups including LGBTQ+, mental health and ethnic minority. Groups will commence in 2024.</p>
Improving the way we engage with local people, including young people, listening to their views and acting on them.	Good	<p>The percentage of consultation participants who believe we have been effective at meeting our aim of being citizen-focused over the last 12 months has improved slightly to 49.7% against a target of 50%.</p> <p>The level of engagement with residents, using the digital communications platform and across corporate social media accounts has increased and the targets have been achieved. The level of engagement on corporate consultations has reduced and target has been missed.</p>

		We have not developed the Bridgend County Borough Council Climate Citizens Assembly, as this has been deprioritised.
Offering more information and advice online, and at local level, and making sure you can talk to us and hear from us in Welsh	Unsatisfactory	<p>We have not quite achieved our targets for first call resolutions or number of transactions using the digital platform and performance is down since last year. The number of online transactions decreased in comparison to previous years, due to the previous figures being inflated as they included the online forms that were temporarily made available to residents to apply for various cost of living schemes, especially the Winter Fuel payments. But the number of hits on the corporate website has increased and met the target, with awareness raising communications, new pages and people being directed to using the website for online transactions.</p> <p>Work continues with Awen to extend customer services in local community facilities. A pilot has been undertaken in Garw and Ogmere Valleys' libraries, but it showed that demand for the service was low.</p> <p>Staff with Welsh language speaking skills has increased to 27% but this is still below target. Only 48% of council staff have completed Welsh Language Awareness E-Learning, more than last year but still below target.</p>
Helping clubs and community groups take control of and improve their facilities and protect them for the future	Good	<p>Our progress with community asset transfers (CATs) is mixed. 7 CATs were completed against a target of 15 for the year, as a result of some complicated property issues and staff capacity. But the level of investment in CATs has exceeded our target as we have fully spent our own budget and brought in external funds.</p> <p>395 people have been supported to have their needs met in their communities by local community co-ordinators and community navigators. This is well above target for the new roles. Community network building approaches are being used to bring partners and stakeholders together who support people to understand services / gaps.</p>
Becoming an age friendly council	Adequate	Bridgend is participating in an all-Wales programme supported by Welsh Government. We are developing our baseline assessment and action plan, looking at transport, housing, community support and health services, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information.

What will we do to improve?

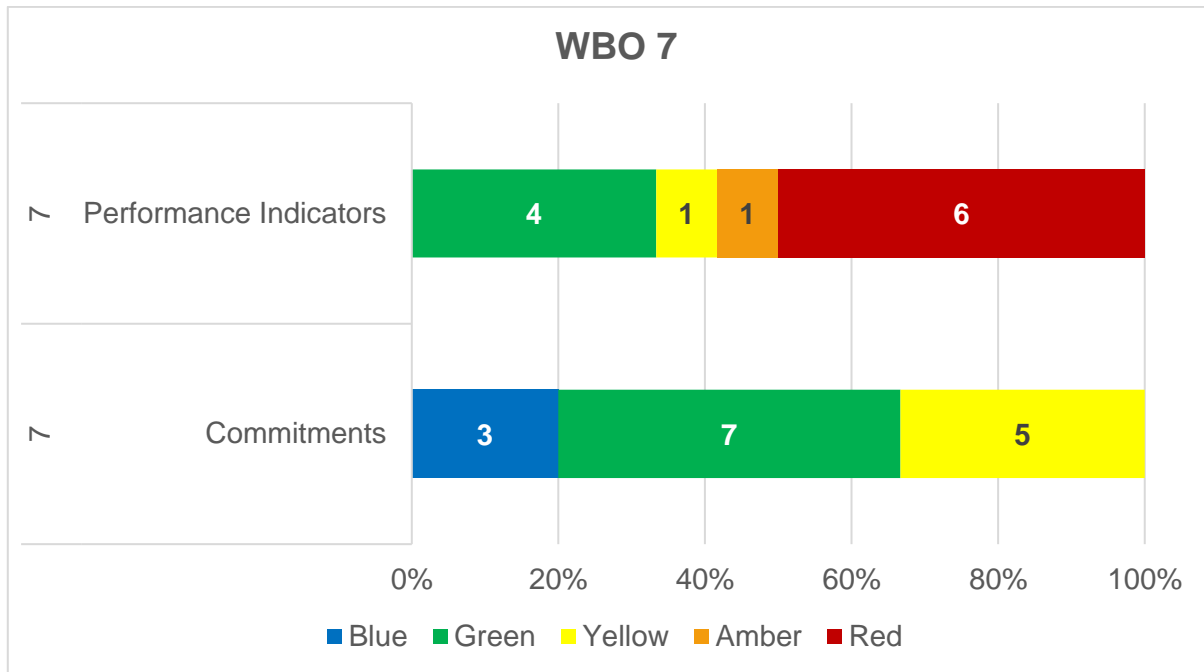
- Publish our new Strategic Equalities Plan
- With our partners, develop an action plan to deliver the Strategic Equalities Plan
- Arrange staff groups for people with protected characteristics.
- Develop a communications plan, corporate narrative and public engagement.
- Engage in the 2030 net carbon agenda.
- Find ways to progress with community support in Garw and Ogmore Valley libraries.
- Continue to build community networks and grow prevention and wellbeing network meetings in partnership with Bavo and the third sector.
- Continue to work with Welsh Government and the Older People's Commissioner network to inform planning and development around age friendly councils.

Case study - Specialist Dementia Unit

A specialist dementia unit has been developed at Bridgend Resource Centre. It is an 'outreach' and community-based service that supports people living with dementia to access the services they need or are likely to need in the future. It helps people avoid admission to hospital or early care home admission. The team can also help support social inclusion; living well with dementia and carer resilience. They can also undertake home visits, working with the carer and the person they care for in their own homes. The Unit can support up to 12 people a day.



Wellbeing Objective	Score
7 - A County Borough where we support people to be healthy and happy	Good



The information below gives you more detail on how we are doing on each aim under this wellbeing objective.

Aim	Status	Description
Improving active travel routes and facilities so people can walk and cycle	Adequate	<p>Construction of the Metrolink bus facility has progressed well throughout the year but has not opened for commercial use within the year as planned.</p> <p>Welsh Government have significantly reduced the money available to implement additional Active Travel Routes, which has had a dramatic impact on schemes achieved, with only 0.4km of new route added.</p> <p>We have also been consulting on future active travel schemes including at Merlin Crescent in Cefn Glas.</p>
Offering attractive leisure and cultural activities	Excellent	<p>The Grand Pavilion refurbishment project is underway, with a specialist project management team and planning and listed building consent in place, and work on designs in progress. The tender process will commence in Summer 2024.</p> <p>Welsh Government and Sport Wales have supported improvements to the active leisure offer for older adults, to improve physical / mental wellbeing. We have promoted use of our leisure facilities and community settings, and activity programmes that benefit older adults.</p>

		<p>The National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS) operated beyond capacity with referrals totalling 1658 across 20,729 sessions. 416 people completed 16-week programmes.</p> <p>Refurbishment of Pencoed library was completed. During 23-24 there have been 26,620 library visits, 2,361 children participated in the summer reading challenge, (slightly below target), and almost 56,000 children participated in children's events in libraries - slightly below previous years.</p>
Improving children's play facilities and opportunities	Adequate	<p>The refurbishment of play areas has not progressed as far as planned, with slow progress during the complex procurement work. Contracts have now been awarded and work has commenced on refurbishing 22 play areas across the borough working with members and Disability Wales.</p> <p>Following successful pilots in Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen and Cynffig Comprehensive School, the "Dare2Explore" project has been rolled out to all secondary schools.</p> <p>Bridgend Music Service developed a new training brass ensemble, senior wind band, and string ensemble and will be recruiting new members.</p>
Providing free school meals and expanding free childcare provision	Good	<p>Universal primary free school meals (UPFSM) were implemented for Year 3, 4 and Nursery pupils.</p> <p>There has been a further increase in children accessing Flying Start funded childcare through the expansion programme, with 272 additional children accessing childcare between in 23-24 and a total of 530 children now registered.</p> <p>The percentage of non-maintained settings judged by Care Inspectorate Wales as at least 'good' was 76.5% which was below the target of 100% we have set.</p>
Integrating our social care services with health services so people are supported seamlessly	Adequate	<p>104 people were delayed on the national pathway of care, which exceeds our target. Implementation of 'Discharge to Recover and Assess' pathways has not led to the improvement anticipated.</p> <p>We have worked closely with the NHS on Dementia mapping and linking needs around the Complex Dementia Day Service and the new Memory Assessment Service. CIW have evaluated this service as 'excellent'.</p> <p>We have successfully mobilised the Age Connect Morgannwg contract with the new Dementia Connector role for Bridgend, and the Alzheimer's Disease contract for the Dementia Link Workers.</p>
Improving the supply of affordable housing	Good	<p>64 additional homes were delivered, over £11.8 million Welsh Government Social Housing Grant was committed and an additional £4 million Transitional Capital secured for the year.</p>

		<p>The Welsh Government Leasing Scheme has been adopted with a small number of units already in use. A housing and support needs assessment was undertaken during the development of the Housing Strategy, and we have engaged with all RSL's and Welsh Government to discuss general housing needs, temporary accommodation and supported housing schemes.</p> <p>The Empty Properties Loan Scheme is nearing completion. 6 empty properties have been brought back into use through local authority intervention. By targeting the Top 20 empty properties - 2 have been sold, 3 are being renovated, and 2 completing probate. Enforcement notices have been served on 2 properties, successful prosecutions on 3 with another prosecution pending, and 1 work in default completed.</p>
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What will we do to improve?

- Open the new metrolink bus facility.
- Start the tender process for Porthcawl Grand Pavilion.
- Improve the active leisure offer in the Valleys for older adults.
- Develop a plan for the long-term active Bridgend plan and leisure strategy.
- Develop a new play sufficiency assessment.
- Deliver phase 3 and 4 of refurbishing 22 play areas across the borough.
- Roll out free school meals for Year 4 pupils (from April 2024) and Year 5 (in June 2024) and Year 6 (in September 2024).
- A delivery plan has been submitted and agreed for a small Welsh Government funded expansion (26 additional Flying Start childcare places) in 24-25.
- Continue to develop network multidisciplinary teams with the NHS
- As part of a much larger 5-year programme, the £11.8 million committed in Social Housing Grant will deliver approximately 119 new homes.
- The £4 million secured through Transitional Accommodation Capital Funding Programme (TACP) will add approximately 33 affordable homes.

Case study - Universal Primary Free School Meals

We started planning the implementation of universal primary free school meals (UPFSM) in September 2021, following Welsh Government's commitment. A lot of work was needed to make sure that the right school kitchen and dining facilities were ready for the first phase from September 2022. Grant funding has been provided by Welsh Government which has been used to support physical upgrades to several schools. UPFSM was brought in for Reception pupils in September 2022 and the remaining year groups of Nursery to Year 6 were implemented gradually from April 2023 to September 2024. This now means that every primary school-age pupil can have a hot, nutritious meal at lunchtime, for free.

Flying Start Programme

The core Flying Start programme involves the delivery of four key elements – enhanced health visiting, parenting support, early language development and a high-quality childcare offer. It has been successfully operating in specific areas since 2008. In line with Welsh Government policy, Flying Start Phase Two – an offer to expand access to childcare – has been extended to a further 19 areas across the county borough. This has created more than 200 extra Flying Start childcare places, taking the total number of places available in March 2024 to 530.



5. How is the council using its resources?

We have always had to report how well we are using our resources. For example, telling Audit Wales about our spending, workforce and buildings. Until recently, we did not have a process for reviewing how we are managing all our different resources. To help us write this report, we developed a process to look at:

- Finances and risk management,
- Commissioning and procurement,
- corporate planning and performance management,
- workforce planning, and
- asset management.

To come to our judgements, we used:

- performance indicators e.g. staff vacancy levels and building maintenance,
- evidence on delivery of our projects and improvement plans,
- feedback from customers, staff and trade unions, and
- the views of regulators e.g. Audit Wales report on workforce planning

We asked questions based on the Well-being of Future Generations Act, including:

- Do we focus on prevention, not just putting things right when they go wrong?
- Are we making strong long-term plans?
- Do we share ideas, plans and resources with partner organisations?
- Are we making links and doing things consistently across the council?
- Are we involving the community and customers in key plans and decisions?

We presented findings to councillors who scrutinised them, checked and asked questions, and used the same judgement scale from excellent to unsatisfactory.

Overall judgement

<p>Use of resources</p>	<p>Adequate</p>	<p>For the third year in a row, our use of resources is adequate. Some things have got better – we have implemented our performance management improvement plan, improved our statutory building compliance in asset management, and embedded and communicated the new Corporate Plan, Delivery Plan and Performance Framework.</p> <p>Other things have got worse – due to the increased demand, increased prices and significant financial situation we are facing. We have significantly overspent on our budget and used reserves to balance the budget. The worsening financial situation, and risk to our financial sustainability, has an impact on workforce across corporate teams and staff and managers across all of our directorates, with increasing vacancies and capacity issues. We have brought in a 5-point plan to try and help us save money.</p> <p>We have got strong frameworks and robust processes for the day-to-day management of resources, with clear and agreed working models and strong, working relationships between corporate teams and directorates. But longer-term planning, proactiveness and improvement will be challenging with the resource issues we are facing.</p>
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Theme judgements

Our overall judgement looks at use of resources of all types. We also have a specific judgement for each resource type, to help us with our improvement planning.

<p>Finances</p>	<p>Adequate</p>	<p>Financial Planning is adequate. Judgements from regulators are generally positive, we balance our budget every year, and have unqualified Statements of Accounts from the Auditor General. The council's financial framework is robust, with strong governance arrangements which drive the budget and spending decisions of the Council. The financial position is set out in detail in regular reports. We have a high level of compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code, Principles and Standards. In recent years the Council's financial position has become more challenging, with higher than anticipated pay / price increases and service pressures. This year we have significantly overspent on our budget and used reserves to balance the budget putting the financial sustainability of the Council at risk.</p>
<p>Corporate planning</p>	<p>Good</p>	<p>Corporate planning is good. The new Corporate Plan is becoming more embedded, and forms part of induction and manager training, with communication activities on the plan and priorities taking place in autumn 2023. The Corporate Plan is supported by a 1-year Delivery Plan. It is also supported by Directorate Business Plans which are all accessible on the Council's intranet. An updated performance framework has also been developed. In the staff survey in February 2024, 70% of respondents strongly agree or agree that they are aware of BCBC's priorities, from 68% in 2022.</p>
<p>Risk management</p>	<p>Good</p>	<p>Risk management is good. Our updated Corporate Risk Management Policy has been embedded in the Authority. Reports and the reporting process for risk are straightforward and accessible, including for members. Through a review by internal audit of the Council's Corporate Risk Management, completed in March 2024, a Reasonable Assurance opinion has been given and the recommendations for improvement will be implemented in 2024/2025.</p>
<p>Commissioning and Procurement</p>	<p>Adequate</p>	<p>Commissioning and procurement are adequate. Procurement is good. We have embedded the new Socially Responsible Procurement Strategy, delivery plan and updated Contract Procedure Rules. We have run training sessions to help stakeholders understand responsibilities and requirements. We have embedded the real living wage into our tender process and have a database of accredited suppliers. We have also worked with Cwmpas and suppliers around carbon reduction planning. We have made some changes to our processes including a price cap and authorisations for purchasing card spending. Our judgement is adequate based on the need for an improved and more consistent approach to commissioning.</p>

<p>Performance management</p>	<p>Adequate</p>	<p>Our Performance management approach is adequate but we have made significant improvements in the last 18 months. We have developed a new 5-year corporate plan and 1-year delivery plan and performance framework to support them. We have appointed a new corporate performance manager. We have improved arrangements for data quality and accuracy. Performance reporting to scrutiny has been improved with summaries and graphs. Our overall judgement is adequate as improvements to our challenge culture, roles, responsibilities and timeliness of information, data accuracy and use of service user perspectives still needs improvement.</p>
<p>Workforce planning</p>	<p>Adequate</p>	<p>Workforce planning is adequate. Workforce management is good. Feedback from employees, managers, trade union representatives and internal audits is positive. Managers are assisted to deal effectively with people issues through support from the HR / Organisational Development service. We are developing an increased focus on longer-term workforce planning and engagement and retention activity as well as supporting services who have to identify staff reductions. The overall judgement is assessed as adequate based on the need for added capacity amongst managers and in the HR team, an increased focus on strategic workforce planning across the council which will consider longer range workforce needs and succession planning.</p>
<p>Asset management</p>	<p>Adequate</p>	<p>Asset management is adequate. Asset management policy is good with good engagement from directorates. The asset management strategy is dynamic and undergoes regular reviews with services / partners. The overall judgement is adequate, as we need to address the continued resource challenges that prevent us from planning strategically, and result in a reactive approach. Over the last year we have developed and completed 4 new Net Zero Carbon assets and continued to look at ways to reduce carbon and energy usage across the whole estate. Our management of Statutory Building Compliance has improved, with Big-5 Compliance now at 94%. We have also improved collaboration with public sector partners and continued our work on the Integrated Works Management System (IWMS).</p>

Areas for improvement

- Continue to improve wider understanding, internally and outside of the Council, of the Council’s budget including how it is set, where the funding comes from and how the funding is spent.
- Improve processes for identifying future years savings proposals.
- Wider consultation, improving engagement, to contribute towards the budget setting process.
- Closer monitoring of budget, including deep dives, to target key overspend areas.

- Review working arrangements with, and Terms of Reference of, the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel (BREP).
- Develop an approach to better communicating information about our priorities in the Corporate Plan.
- Support Governance and Audit Committee to scrutinise the Corporate Risk Assessment.
- Standardise risk reporting across directorates and integrate risk reporting with performance and finance across all service areas.
- Consider whether we are overly risk-averse at a corporate level.
- Assess the impact of the procurement price cap and changed authorisations for purchasing card spending.
- Rollout additional procurement training sessions to help stakeholders understand responsibilities and requirements.
- Update our procurement strategy, action plan and CPRs based on the new UK government legislation.
- Develop an improved and more consistent approach to commissioning across directorates, in particular in analysis and review.
- Develop a stronger challenge culture for using performance information.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities around performance information and improve timeliness of reporting.
- Improve data accuracy of performance information through PI audits.
- Enhance our use of service user perspectives to inform decision making.
- Develop Strategic workforce planning supported by the introduction of planning guidance which will support longer term planning, in a consistent manner across the council, aligned to financial planning.
- Tackle capacity issues in senior management and elsewhere and inform national discussion.
- Further development of HR policies and procedures which are co-designed and focus on proactive HR services.
- Continuation of the automation and streamlining of HR processes.
- Introduction of Leadership and Resilience development.
- Support and inform the Welsh Government work on the social care progression framework to tackle divergence in terms and conditions.
- Adopt the new strategic asset management Plan.
- Continue to make improvements in the maintenance backlog and statutory building compliance.
- Procure and implement the IWMS to improve information, data and benchmarking around assets.
- Improve asset management workforce capacity. We will also work closely with the decarbonisation team to enhance our asset management approach.

6. How good is the council's governance?

Organisations that have good governance use clear decision-making processes and communicate openly about what they are doing. They work well with their stakeholders, manage the risks they face, and take responsibility for their assets.

We have always had to report on our governance, to Audit Wales. There is a clear process for developing an 'Annual Governance Statement' (AGS) that has existed for many years. The information below summarises the Council's AGS for 2023/24.

What is our judgement?

Governance	Good
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Our governance arrangements are good, and work well.

Decision making

Our Governance Framework, Code of Corporate Governance explain how we work, how we are accountable and how decisions are made. In 2022 we developed a new constitution with a simple guide to help members of the public understand it. Through these documents (along with the Member's Code of Conduct, Standards Committee and role of Internal Audit) the Council operates with integrity, ethical values and within its legal powers.

Governance arrangements are reviewed each year and included within the Annual Governance Statement (AGS), which is reviewed and approved by the Governance and Audit Committee.

We are committed to ensuring we have good governance principles and management practices. These are used right across the councils to make sure we have the public's trust. The arrangements the Council has for Corporate Governance are set out below.

1	Bridgend County Borough Council Code of Corporate Governance	The Council's Code of Governance provides a public statement that sets out the way in which the Council meets and demonstrates compliance with the CIPFA Governance principles.
2	The Governance Framework	The Council's Code is underpinned by a Governance Framework which comprises the policies, procedures, behaviours and values by which the Council is governed and controlled.
3	The Annual Governance Statement	The Annual Governance Statement provides assurances regarding the Council's Governance arrangements, together with identifying areas of future focus and improvement. The purpose of the Annual Governance Statement is to

		report publicly on the extent to which the Council complies with its Code of Corporate Governance. It identifies those areas which have been identified as needing improvement following self-assessment.
4	Annual Governance Statement Action Plan	The Council continues to review the areas for improvement identified within the Annual Governance Statement which are monitored through the Annual Governance Statement Action Plan.

A number of significant issues were identified in the Council's 2022-23 AGS, to be taken forward during 2023-24, so in the past year we have made improvements including –

- Developing workforce planning activities, some that focus on specific challenge areas, for example social care and school catering. Others are more universal, like looking at new ways of working and developing a new employee assistance programme.
- Improvements to Asset management including work to improve the Council's statutory compliance in the "Big 5" areas of compliance.
- Improvements to the Disabled Facilities Grant service including new procedure guidelines, working with external surveyors to make progress with existing grant applications, the introduction of a new software system and improved tendering processes.
- Improvements to our medium to long-term financial management processes including providing Capital Strategy training for all members, training for schools on the closing of accounts process, regular reviews and reporting on the level of reserves, quarterly budget reporting and monitoring of budget reduction proposals.
- Providing additional training for Members to support their role in ensuring proper financial management of the Council including on Treasury Management and Earmarked Reserves.
- Implementing our performance management improvement plan and embedding the new Corporate Plan, Delivery Plan, Performance Framework and reporting mechanisms. Improvements to data quality and accuracy are ongoing.
- Started a review of the Decarbonisation 2030 strategy in line with Welsh Government changes.

Listening to the views of others

The council provides services to all residents of Bridgend. Some of our services are universal – used by all residents – like roads and pavements, and waste and recycling. When we are developing, reviewing and changing these services, we need to try and talk to the whole population of Bridgend to help us decide what to do. We have a range of different methods for doing this, from formal consultations on major changes, public drop-in sessions and discussions, and the regular, day-to-day engagement from our social media.

Other services are more specialist – and used by smaller numbers of residents – like school transport and services for people with learning disabilities or young people leaving care. When we are developing, reviewing and changing these services, we need to try and talk to the people who rely on those services and their families to help us decide what to do. We have a range of methods for doing this, from consultation and engagement sessions, to coproducing those services directly with the users and their families.

In Spring 2023, Audit Wales reviewed the way we use service user perspectives to inform decision making. The review was published in April 2024 and concluded that, *'The Council's performance information does not enable senior leaders to understand the service user perspective and progress towards intended outcomes, restricting their ability to understand the impact of the Council's services and policies.'* We have a plan to improve this in the coming year working with, and reporting to the Council's Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Over the last year, we have completed a huge range of activities to understand and use service user perspectives, and the opinions of our regulators. The main ones are summarised below.

Consultation and engagement

Corporate consultations are promoted bilingually to the council's social media channels, shared through weekly resident bulletins and weekly staff messages throughout the consultation period. Up to three consultations a year are shared with our citizen panel to raise awareness and encourage participation. Face to face engagement sessions are held where necessary and our Youth council are involved with relevant consultations.

We consulted on a number of our key strategies and reports, for example the Director of Social Services annual report, Self-assessment, 3 Year Strategic Plan - Childrens Social Care, Housing Strategy Policy, Engagement and Participation Strategy – included face to face engagement drop-in sessions (Citizen Panel included), Strategic Equality Objectives (including public drop-in sessions and focus group with a school) – (Citizen Panel included).

Other key strategies are coproduced with service users and their families. For example, the corporate parenting strategy was co-produced with care experienced children and young people, who also led the launch of the strategy in May 2023. We are now working with Cwmpas to co-produce the carers strategy.

We also consulted on some significant proposed changes to the way the council or our services work. Some of the main consultations in 2023/24 were –

- Our **20mph Scheme** was tested in April 2023, to look at which roads should be exempt from the reduced speed limit. As a result, a small number of roads were added to the speed limit exemptions and a similar number removed, based on the sound reasons given by residents of the Borough.
- **Dog fouling** was the subject of consultation in April 2024, proposing to renew our dog control Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) where dog walkers can be fined

if they fail to pick up after their pets in public areas. There was wide support for the proposals from town councils, residents and groups including the Dogs Trust and the RSPCA, with over 379 survey responses and 77 comments on social media channels. As a result of this positive endorsement the PSPO is now progressing.

- Changes to **Community Recycling Centres** were tested July to September 2023, when the public were asked for their views on CRCs, their use of them and the potential one day a week closure of each site. Feedback from the public was mixed with 56% of the public that responded that they didn't agree that the CRC sites should be closed whilst 44% did agree. Ultimately Cabinet considered the public view alongside the need of the authority to generate the savings and approved the day closure that has since been implemented.
- **Maesteg Town Centre Placemaking Plan** was tested through consultation (including face to face engagement sessions) in September / October 2023, to assess whether the plan was robust enough to reach the town's full economic potential and encompass community well-being and cultural history. Residents and Businesses were positive about the plans and continuing support for business growth and retail improvements through the grant funding and advice. They were all positive about Maesteg Town Hall and welcomed the opening of this refurbished facility. Many asked that heritage information be more prominent to attract tourism to the Llynfi Valley. These comments and others are now being considered.
- The public were asked for their views on the **Valley Regeneration Strategy** and plans for future improvements in the Valleys (included face to face engagement sessions) in January / February 2024. Residents were keen to see improvements to the public realm, including parks, open spaces and car parking. There were conversations about transport links, including active travel and employment opportunities and training. All of this is being considered for inclusion in the Strategy, including how it will be delivered and over what timeframe.
- **Porthcawl Town Centre Placemaking Plan** was the subject of public consultation in March / April 2024 (including face to face engagement sessions). Residents and Businesses were positive about plans for the town centre and regeneration work in Porthcawl. There was some concern over parking, so we have committed to reviewing parking policies. Plans to promote the town centre offer across the waterfront and looking to increase footfall, with the development of the Dock Street Link were also well received.
- Our **Annual Budget consultation** included engagement with the Citizens Panel and face to face engagement sessions in January / February 2024. Respondents were asked about budget principles, reducing / closing services, new charges, asset review, external contracts for leisure services, council tax and citizen focus. Over 80% of respondents agreed with budget principles. Following this consultation and recommendations from scrutiny, a number of budget reduction proposals totalling £2.994 million were removed or amended, including a 3% reduction to schools delegated budgets (from 5%).

Complaints and compliments

We have a clear and agreed two stage process for dealing with complaints -

- **Informal Complaint Stage**

Informal complaints should be dealt with quickly and where possible informally. It advises customers to contact the office responsible for the service to provide an opportunity to solve the problem. Informal complaints are logged in the Corporate Complaints office and we report on them every quarter to the Public Services Ombudsman. In 2023/24 we had the following informal complaints –

	Number	Resolved	Upheld	Discontinued / withdrawn	Ongoing
Adult Social Care	0	0	0	0	0
Benefits Administration	6	5	0	1	0
Children's Social Services	1	0	1	0	0
Community Facilities	15	13	0	2	0
Complaints handling	3	2	1	0	0
Education	23	20	0	3	0
Environment	0	0	0	0	0
Finance & Council Tax	33	29	4	0	0
Housing	22	22	0	0	0
Planning / Building Control	16	16	0	0	0
Roads & Transport	48	41	3	4	0
Various/Other	48	36	7	5	
Waste & Refuse	60	56	3	1	0

- **Formal Complaint Stage**

Formal complaints can be done by email, telephone, letter or online complaint form. All formal complaints with the exception of schools and social services (which have their own statutory procedures) are received, logged and acknowledged centrally by the Information Team within 5 working days. These complaints are sent to a Head of Service who appoints a senior officer e service to investigate the complaint and respond directly within 20 working days. The Information Team is provided with a copy of the response. We monitor numbers of complaints, time to respond, category of complaint, where in the Borough they come from, The Information Team has received, logged, acknowledged and referred a total of 67 formal complaints for the period for 2023/24 –

	Number	Resolved	Upheld	Discontinued / withdrawn	Ongoing
Adult Social Care	0	0	0	0	0
Benefits Administration	1	1	0	0	0
Children's Social Services	1	1	0	0	0
Community Facilities	4	2	2	0	0
Complaints Handling	0	0	0	0	0
Education	8	8	0	0	0
Environment	0	0	0	0	0
Finance & Council Tax	6	6	0	0	0
Housing	14	13	0	1	0
Planning & Building Control	12	12	0	0	0
Roads & Transport	8	8	0	0	0
Various/Other	10	6	3	0	1
Waste & Refuse	4	3	0	1	0

Social services complaints are monitored separately and reported to Cabinet each November / December. The latest report is [here](#).

We don't currently have a way of reviewing all of our corporate complaints to see what impact they have had on our services.

Regulator views

Engagement with regulators is strong and systematic. Regular meetings take place between regulators and senior officers in the Council to discuss regulators' work and the council's improvement plans. We regularly test our progress against the views and recommendations of our regulators, through a regulatory tracker. This is reported to Governance and Audit Committee every January and July. The following new reviews were published in 2023/24.

Audit Wales' review of Service User Perspectives (SUPs), published in January 2024. Summarised above.

In June 2023, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW), and Estyn undertook a Joint Inspection of Child Protection Arrangements (JICPA) in Bridgend. The inspection noted a number of areas of **positive practice** and a number of **areas for improvement**. A **multi-agency action plan** was developed in September 2023. In the Council progress is overseen by the Social Services Improvement Board and the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board (RSB).

Care Inspectorate Wales undertook 8 inspections of regulated services. In Adult Social Care, there were 5 inspections of regulated residential establishments and domiciliary support services. All inspections identified there is a good standard of care and support provided across the services, previous areas of improvement had been addressed and

no priority action notices for 2023/24 were noted. However, 1 area for improvement was identified, which is being addressed.

In Children's Social Care 3 regulatory inspections took place, 2 within residential establishments and 1 with Foster Wales Bridgend. For the residential establishments, key strengths were highlighted and no priority action notices were identified, with only 2 areas for improvement being identified which are being addressed.

In November 2023, Care Inspectorate Wales undertook an inspection of Foster Wales Bridgend. The inspection acknowledged the current context, *'the number of children who are referred to the service, outnumbers foster carers available'* but highlighted a number of key strengths. It noted 8 areas for improvement around the matching of children with complex needs, safe care arrangements, timeliness of responses to allegations and improvements to systems to ensure policies and procedures are evidenced in practice. Action plans are monitored via the fortnightly Children's Social Care Pressures meeting and quarterly performance management meetings.

Staff and Trade Union views

We have positive and constructive social partnership arrangements. We work with recognised Trade Unions (TU's), with clear and regular arrangements for consultation and engagement. Local and regional TU representatives meet HR officers monthly. Other officers are brought in as needed, for example the Chief Executive on future service delivery and the Section 151 Officer on the budget. Two Cabinet members attend bi-monthly so TU representatives can talk to them directly. There are separate meetings for schools. TU representatives play an important role in decision making and organisational change. They contribute different ideas and perspectives and support their members at meetings which focus on the workforce impacts of any changes. All HR policy reviews are done with full consultation with TU's.

As well as regular staff and trade union engagement, we run an annual staff survey. The last one, in February / March 2024 had 707 responses. This is lower than in recent years. The survey contained many questions which repeated previous surveys so we can see how we are doing over time. Overall satisfaction with BCBC as an employer increased in recent years but reduced over the last two years, from 59% in 2018, 66% in 2020, 73% in 2021, 67% in 2022 and 49% in 2024. A detailed feedback report was developed, staff focus groups will be held to better understand the results and then an action plan will be developed to act on issues from the staff survey.

Areas for improvement

- Implement the action plans developed to address areas for improvement in our regulator reviews.
- Develop a small suite of service user perspective performance indicators.
- Develop a new digital strategy for 2024/28
- Make improvements to the way we engage with people, including directing a new group of people to be involved with current consultations through a widget in MyAccount and developing links with organisations to reach protected groups.
- Focus better on schools / young people's voices by establishing links with schools and youth services.

- Improving the way we provide feedback to respondents (and others) following consultation and engagement.
- Respond to the internal audit review of the council's use of complaints information.
- Undertake a climate change risk assessment with the public service board.
- Working with shared regulatory service on an Empty Property Consultation.
- Work with WLGA / Data Cymru on the development and implementation of the National Residents Survey
- Develop a place narrative and communicate it widely.
- Development of staff forum for staff with protected characteristics
- Improvements to medium to long term financial management, reviewing the BREP process and starting budget setting earlier.
- Improvements to recruitment with targeted recruitment in key areas, and bespoke recruitment packages. We continue to work regionally and nationally to develop solutions that will not destabilise the job market.
- Review of the Decarbonisation 2030 strategy.
- Improvements to our use of service user perspectives information in our performance management process.
- Improved financial management including a review of financial procedures and policies, additional training for members and schools, developing budget reduction proposals and improving the reach of the budget consultation.

7. Our Strategic Equality Plan

Our new Strategic Equality Plan has been developed and consulted on and outlines our six strategic equality objectives, which will shape how we plan, provide, and deliver our services to reflect the diversity of our communities. We are developing a Strategic Equality Action Plan which will detail the actions we will take to realise the equality objectives. Progress on the plans is regularly reported to the Corporate Equality Network, and responsibility for operational delivery lies with all service areas and teams. Our Cabinet Committee Equalities monitors and scrutinises delivery against the objectives.

How do we identify and collect relevant information?

We are committed to collecting and using data to identify where some protected characteristic groups experience a disproportionate impact or where we could deliver services in a different way. We collect data on customers and residents via our consultation and engagement activities and on our employees via our own internal systems. We will collect and use the following equality data:

- Employment profile data for all protected characteristics;
- Service user data to understand the characteristics of our service users;
- Job applicants for all protected characteristics.

This data will be published annually as part of our Strategic Equality Plan annual reporting process. In addition we will publish annually:

- The Full Equality Impact Assessments undertaken;
- The Strategic Equality Plan action plan review;
- The Strategic Equality Plan annual report.
- Welsh language standards annual report

How effective are the council's arrangements for identifying and collecting relevant information?

Each year we try to improve the Equality Monitoring Data we hold for employees, revising the data capture to include more characteristics. We encourage employees to update information regularly through communications, appraisals and other methods.

What do our arrangements tell us regarding the equality of access to employment, training and pay?

Every year, we report our 'equalities in the workforce' report to Cabinet Committee Equalities. This tells us about a range of things including the numbers of employees with protected characteristics where declared. It also tells us about pay, recruitment and training of employees with protected characteristics. This is all put together and included in the strategic equality Plan. Areas for development are included in the strategic equality plan action Plan.