

**Bridgend County Borough Council Corporate Self-Assessment 2024/25****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 2024 to 5 April 2025.

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

Our self-assessment also acts as our annual report, our wellbeing report and for the first time this year as our social partnership duty report.

**2. The changing world for local government**

The world is changing fast, and this is having a big impact on the way the Council works. Some of the hardest things we have been dealing with are -

- The ongoing cost-of-living crisis causing increased energy costs, changes to the cost and availability of goods and services, and impacts on residents that add demand to our services. Long term council funding is not increasing at the same rate so our funding can't keep up with our outgoings.
- Political changes both at home and abroad, including a new UK Labour Government. This means a changing financial situation and changing priorities and expectations of the council, for example increases to employer National Insurance Contributions likely to add significant costs for councils and our partners.
- New and far-reaching legislation from UK and Welsh Governments on issues including social partnerships, immigration, elimination of profit from social care, employment rights and procurement that affect large parts of our organisation.
- Exceptional demands across some of our key service areas including support for children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), older people's care, complex children's placements and homelessness. Changing patterns of need in other service areas, for example behaviour in schools and attendance. And services struggling to meet expectations due to capacity / resilience issues following years of budget cuts.

**Our progress against last year's areas for improvement**

In our 2023/24 Annual Self-Assessment we identified a series of areas that needed specific improvements in 2024/25. 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 2024/25 –

**Wellbeing Objective One**

- Mandatory E-Learning modules for staff have been reviewed and an updated process will be used going forward.

- We have significantly reduced the backlog of historical Disabled Facilities Grants. There are now 83 individual historic cases (2020/2023) awaiting allocation, compared to 268 cases at the end of 23/24.
- The Family Support Service has been reviewed. Integrated Family Support Service and family group conferencing is in place.
- Prevention and Wellbeing Service have given support for 72 new young carers in primary school and 106 in secondary /higher education. Also provided support through 167 new young carers accessing a young carer ID card, 282 new young carers with a halo membership card (and 377 new household members).
- Brought in 'what matters' conversations and proportionate carers assessments. These can reduce the need for a full carer assessment through social workers.
- A young carers network event was held to get young carers meeting each other, sharing information, and getting away from responsibilities, caring and school.
- The children's services action plan was regularly reviewed, and good progress has been made on the priorities.
- The Adult Services 3-year strategic plan has been developed and adopted and implementation is underway.
- The future operating model for Children's Services is now in place and the underpinning processes and panels have been established.
- A 4-day training programme for strength-based practice to front-line social care staff has been developed and delivered. We are also working to support our partners to understand the Signs of Safety model.
- A draft Children and Families Placement Commissioning Strategy has been developed and submitted to Welsh Government. There has also been a review of daytime opportunities in Bridgend which has been approved by Cabinet.
- The Corporate Safeguarding Board continues to oversee safeguarding practice across the Council. A reasonable assurance of corporate safeguarding arrangements has been given by internal audit.
- We have made good progress implementing the action plan from the Housing Support Programme Strategy, including mobilisation of Leasing Scheme Wales and development of additional accommodation models, including the Council purchasing Homes of Multiple Occupation (HMO) style accommodation. A review of social housing allocation is now complete but will be signed off in 2025/26.
- We have provided regular safeguarding training to school governors both online and on a face-to-face basis.
- A Regional Strategy for Safeguarding and Exploitation has been signed off and local plans developed for implementation in the Council.

## **Wellbeing Objective Two**

- The Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) programme has been delivered successfully in 2024/25 with 37 businesses receiving funding.
- The employability offer for people with care and support needs has signed up 1,778 participants in 2024/25. We have worked with partners to support with training, volunteering and employment. The Marketing and Engagement Team is well established and successful with promoting employability.

- We are helping people with support needs overcome barriers to work. Bridgend Employability Network holds monthly meetings with partner organisations to inform and develop referral pathways and collaborative opportunities.
- The Transforming Towns Programme has awarded £340,307 to five schemes which contribute towards regenerating our town centres.
- A new procurement contract (to reflect the Procurement Act 2023) has been developed, published on the intranet for staff and shared with suppliers.
- We have run focus groups to better understand the results of the 2024 staff survey and developed plans to address the issues and run staff surveys differently.
- We have identified seven additional Real Living Wage Employers in 2024/25 that were awarded contracts, taking the total to 257. We have included a question in our tender documentation to help us identify Real Living Wage Employers more easily.
- Learning and development to support social workers includes an introduction to the practice model, 2-day introductory training, 5-day advanced training, partnership workshops, manager workshops, practice intensive workshops for specific teams and the development of e-learning (awareness level) package.

### **Wellbeing Objective Three**

- Consultation on the Placemaking Plan for Maesteg has been completed and the Plan is now ready for formal approval.
- The Commercial Property Enhancement Grant paid out £168,280 against seven properties to enhance and consolidate the high street in commercial areas across our valley areas. This fund was supported by SPF.
- The Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Programme encountered challenges, and we only completed two transfers against a target of ten, partly due to staffing issues.
- The development of 180 new homes is continuing on the Ewenny Road site. Sale of the former Ewenny Road Industrial Estate to a housing developer is being finalised.
- The Valley Regeneration Strategy is in final draft form. Once is formally adopted, we will use this as a tool to develop potential funding bids
- The Green Spaces Enhancement Project has been completed.
- We continue to work with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), Welsh Government and other partners to resolve issues affecting the delivery of new affordable housing sites in the valleys.
- We have secured funding for a feasibility study for new facilities for people with learning disabilities at Wood-B and B-Leaf.
- Capital investment via Sport Wales and SPF has added value to Ogmere Life Centre with the extension of the studio to allow the growth of older adult's activities.
- HALO Leisure have been working with schools and community groups to promote the use of the upgraded library facilities in Ogmere Life Centre.
- Feel Good for Life wellbeing programme has supported 600 attendances. Super - Agers community wellbeing activities have supported 163 individuals (2061 attendances and 126 opportunities). The National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS) has supported 1331 new referrals.
- The tender process for the Bettws Welsh-medium childcare facility has concluded and a preferred provider has accepted the opportunity. The tender process for the Blackmill provision will run through May 2025.

**Wellbeing Objective Four**

- We have implemented the mandatory requirements of the Curriculum for Wales in all Bridgend County Borough schools.
- The Trauma Recovery Model has been implemented, and we are creating a range of trauma interventions for Bridgend services and partners, adopting the trauma-based practice model with children.
- The Prevention and Diversion Panel has input from a range of stakeholders (including South Wales Police and Bridgend College), to help plan exit strategies from the earliest point possible. It also enables allocation of referrals that may not be suitable for support from Bridgend Youth Justice Service.
- Youth Support Services held a multi-agency panel to review Year 11 pupils with less than 50% attendance and discuss support. The number of Year 11 leavers presenting as not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Bridgend remain below the Wales average.
- The 'Your Voice' digital forum has concluded and had 790 participants. Staff from the Children's Rights and Participation Team will work with Youth Councillors to identify the themes and issues raised.
- A governor skills audit was conducted in summer 2024, to collect information on the profession learning and skills training needs for school governors. Feedback has been used to identify areas of professional development needed.
- A total of 67 governors attended safeguarding training (Group A Safeguarding, Group B Safeguarding and Child Protection) between April 2024 and March 2025 either in-person sessions or online.
- Schools have had additional digital learning training on topics such as, online safety, the use of the Digital Competence Framework 'Planning for Progression' resource, Adobe Express. Teachers and practitioners are now well-prepared to integrate these digital tools and frameworks into their curriculum.
- We are redeveloping the youth-led website. Youth Support Services are awaiting the outcome of a business proposal to trial for a corporate TikTok account.
- Our Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) communication and engagement plan has been finalised, with a vision, messaging and promotion of Welsh-medium education. The 'Comms Cymraeg Schedule' is finalised, which is a plan for targeted communication over the year. We also launched a Facebook campaign to promote Welsh-medium education.
- The school design for Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Ogwr has been progressed and Council approved extra capital funding needed. Ecological issues continue to affect the Ffordd Cadfan site. This has impacted on the timing of a site investigation.
- Cabinet Secretary for Education gave approval to proceed the Heronsbridge School project to Full Business Case stage. Council approved the extra capital funding needed and a tender process is underway.
- The planning application for the replacement Mynydd Cynffig Primary School was submitted and the detailed design and contract preliminaries have been progressed. The Cabinet Secretary for Education gave approval to proceed to Full Business Case stage.

- Cabinet approval has been received to transition the Bridgend West scheme from Mutual Investment Model (MIM) funding to capital and the planning application has been submitted. The tender process started in February 2025.
- The Education Engagement Team have scheduled 'drop-in' sessions with the Care Experienced Children Team to ensure that our teams become aware of care-experienced children at the earliest opportunity to ensure smooth transitions into education and appropriate support is given.
- Performance framework and action plans have been developed on support for care-experienced children so the Corporate Parenting Board can hold partners to account on progress against the priorities they set.
- A Regional Accommodation Strategy for people with a Learning Disability and a Regional Report on transition for children with a Learning Disability have been completed. An accommodation-based review has been completed in the Council.

### **Wellbeing Objective Five**

- Work has begun on the development of a fleet transition strategy review.
- There are currently six electric vehicles in the Support at Home Service, Mobile Response Team, and at Trem-Y-Mor, the base for our integrated community resource team staff. Charging points are in operation.
- The final Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) was approved by cabinet and submitted to Welsh Government in April 2024.
- We have completed energy efficiency improvements for council buildings including installing solar panels.
- Planning have successfully updated their website to include additional information and guidance about the new Local Development Plan (LDP).
- The Local Nature Partnership (LNP) continues to be supported by the Climate Change Response Team. The team are developing projects with partners and community groups to include in our Local Places for Nature 2025/27 application. A section has also been added to the staff Corporate Induction e-learning module on the Biodiversity Duty, what it is and what it means for Council employees.
- A decision was made at Cabinet to bring waste services in house. A Waste Transition Board meets fortnightly.
- The recycling centre at Tythegston has now been decommissioned following the opening of the new centre in Pyle.

### **Wellbeing Objective Six**

- The Strategic Equalities Plan (SEP) 2024-2028 Action Plan has now been completed and signed-off by Cabinet Committee Equalities. It has been published on our website.
- Three staff network groups have been established for Menopause, Disability and LGBTQ+. Terms of reference have been agreed and information on staff networks is promoted with staff. A Welsh Language Forum for staff of all proficiency levels has been established.
- A Participation and Engagement Strategy has been implemented and published.
- The National Residents Survey was actively promoted and closed with over 3,000 responses. Results are being analysed.

- A draft Net Zero Strategy was completed in March 2025, feedback from officers and Scrutiny Committee has been provided to Carbon Trust and the revised strategy anticipated to be completed in May 2025. It will then be subject to a 12-week public consultation before formal adoption.
- We undertook a pilot in 2024 in Garw and Ogmore Valley libraries to provide extra support for residents in libraries. Demand was extremely low and a decision has been made to focus on how we improve performance across all the customer channels to improve the way we deal with customer demand.
- Community Navigators are based in BAVO, supported by Regional Integrated Fund Investment (RIF). BAVO are sustaining a range of community-based networks as part of a prevention and wellbeing within communities' approach.
- We work closely with Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) partners and third sector organisations, including the CTM WISE project, working on streamlining health services and social prescribing pathways. Support has been made to increase community resilience in dementia services. We celebrated Older Persons Week with free activities including art workshops, cinema screenings and a silent disco run by our cultural trust Awen.

**Wellbeing Objective Seven**

- The Metrolink bus facility in Porthcawl opened in November 2024.
- A tender process to award the contract for the construction work for Porthcawl Grand Pavilion Redevelopment has been completed.
- Twenty-two play area refurbishments were completed and handed back to the community.
- Over £13 million was allocated through Social Housing Grant and Transitional Capital Programme Grant to deliver 108 houses.
- Active leisure membership has increased within Garw Valley Life Centre at just over 320 live members. Ogmore Valley Life Centre capital works will be finished soon allowing more structured use of facilities and extra investment to change the main entrance and upgrade the sports hall have been secured.
- External support has been commissioned to help us develop a long-term Active Bridgend Plan and Leisure Strategy and engagement has taken place. Discussions have taken place to address key policy areas including community focused schools, community asset transfer, active travel, play sufficiency and the population needs assessment.
- We have developed a draft play sufficiency assessment and action plan with a focus on policy and implementation across the whole council.
- Universal Primary Free School Meals roll out has finished so free school meals are now available for all Bridgend primary school pupils.
- There has been a small Welsh Government-funded expansion in Flying Start (26 additional places). Five new providers have been recruited to support the ongoing delivery of the Flying Start childcare programme.
- We have a new operating model for the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) which includes a screening and triage function based on urgency of need.

## How is the council performing in 2024/25?

Every five years the council publishes a new Corporate Plan. A new Corporate Plan was published in April 2023. It describes the council's priorities, why they are important and how progress will be measured. The priorities, or well-being objectives (WBO), show our commitments to residents and our contribution to Wales' 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 and the sustainable development principle, when we developed this 5-year 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.

Each year, we allocate resources through the development of an annual budget. This is set in line with the priorities in the Corporate Plan. Alongside this, we publish a detailed delivery plan that sets out the specific priorities for the year and how we will measure them.

We have a process for measuring how we are doing on our 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 2024/25 in June and July 2025.

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We use all of this information to come to overall judgements on progress against each of our aims and wellbeing objectives using this scale -

	<b>What does this Status mean?</b>		
	<b>Overall / self-assessment performance</b>	<b>Commitments, projects or improvement plans</b>	<b>Performance Indicators</b>
<b>COMPLETE (BLUE)</b>	Not applicable	Project is completed	Not applicable
<b>EXCELLENT (GREEN)</b>	Very strong, sustained performance and practice	As planned - within timescales, on budget, achieving outcomes	On target and performance has improved / is at maximum
<b>GOOD (YELLOW)</b>	Strong features, minor aspects may need improvement	Minor issues. One of the following applies - deadlines show slippage, project is going over budget or risk score increases	On target
<b>ADEQUATE (AMBER)</b>	Needs improvement. Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects need improvement	Issues – More than one of the following applies - deadlines show slippage, project is going over budget or risk score increases	Off target (within 10% of target)
<b>UNSATISFACTORY (RED)</b>	Needs urgent improvement. Weaknesses outweigh strengths	Significant issues – deadlines breached, project over budget, risk score up to critical or worse	Off target (target missed by 10%+)



## Performance Overview

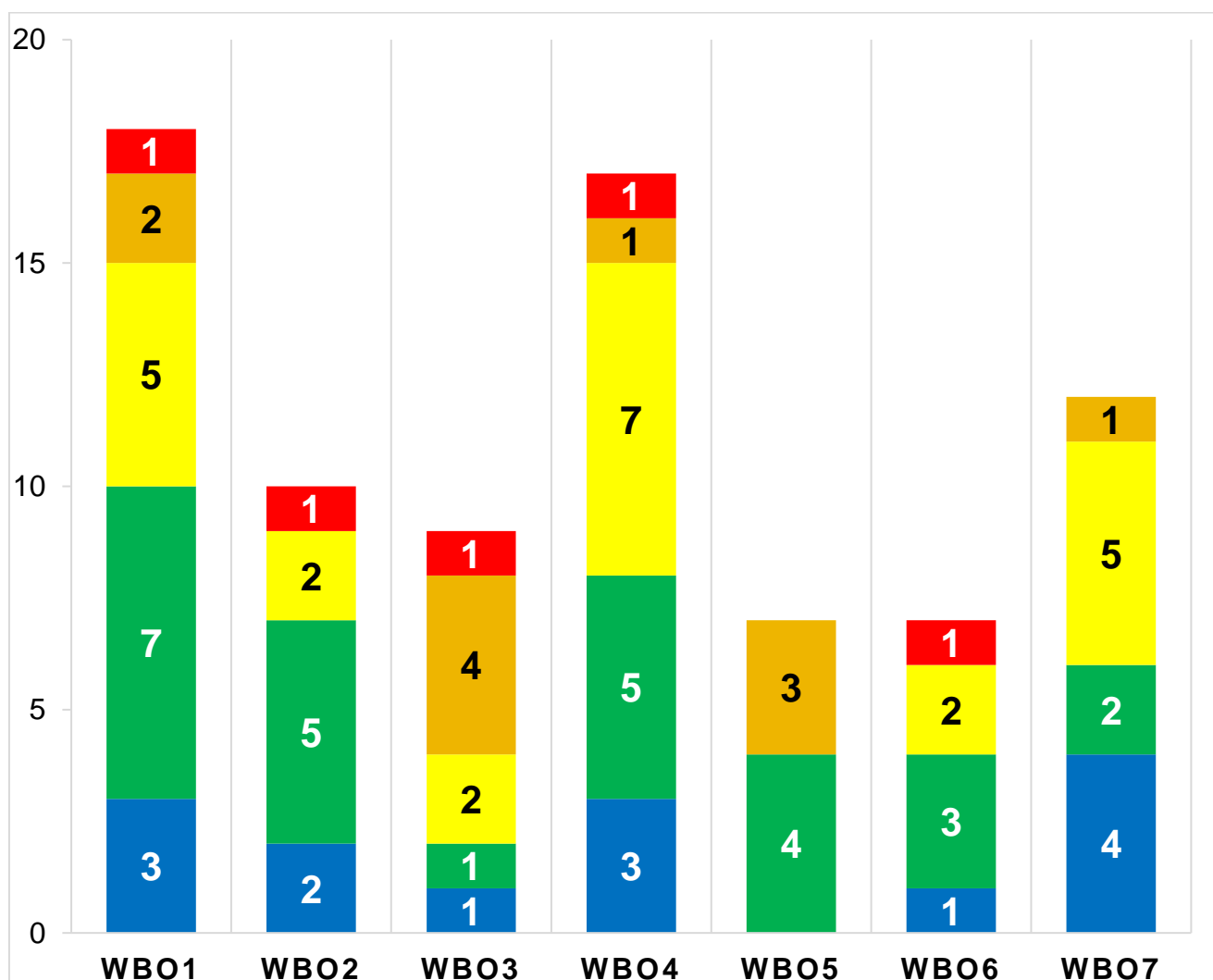
To support the new, five-year Corporate Plan, we developed a one-year delivery plan for 2024/25. The plan included 7 wellbeing objectives supported by 41 aims. We measure progress against these by looking at -

- 80 commitments that measure our projects and initiatives, for example, opening a new metrolink bus facility in Porthcawl.
- 108 performance indicators or PIs to measure our day-to-day activities, for example, collecting and recycling your household waste.

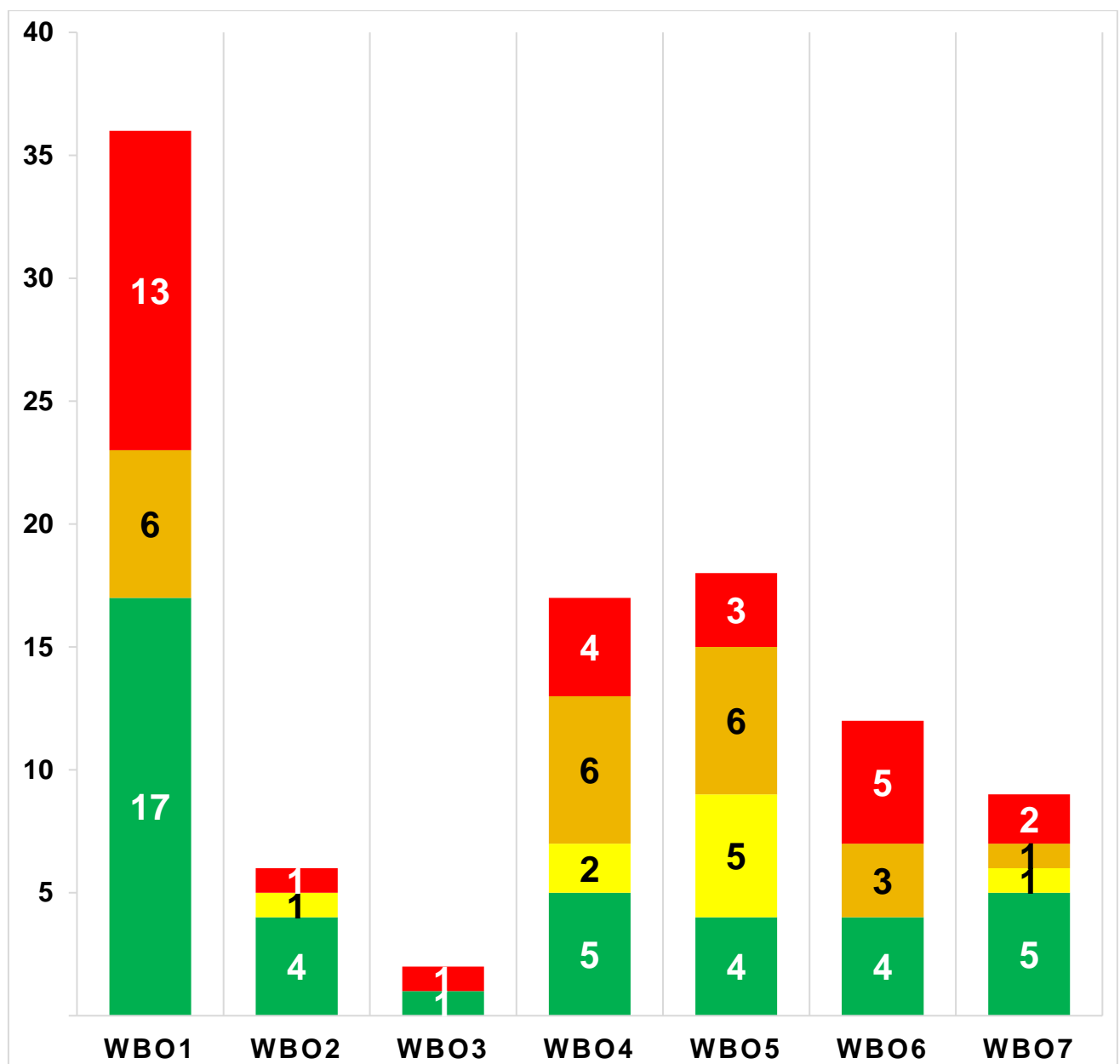
Each one of these has been given a blue, red, amber, yellow or green rating to show you whether we are doing well or struggling to achieve them, and the two graphs below summarise these.

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

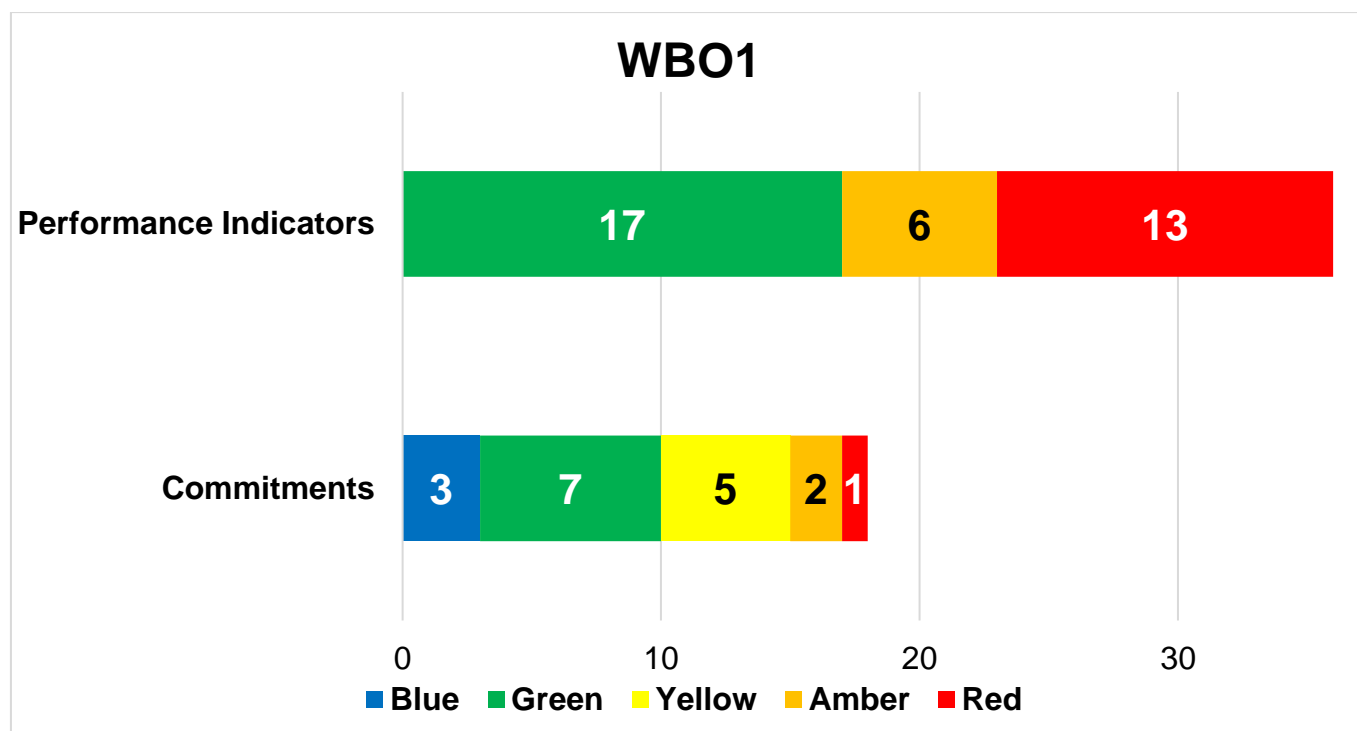
**Graph 1 – How we are doing on our commitments / projects**



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



Wellbeing Objective	Score
<b>1 - A County Borough where we protect our most vulnerable</b>	<b>Good</b>



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	<b>Good</b>	<p>Social Services continues to make good progress in delivering our priorities and commitments.</p> <p>We have a clear 3-year strategic plan for Children and Family Services, a significantly improved position in the children's workforce and reduction in the agency workforce. The Signs of Safety model of practice is being embedded. 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 further improvements in the timeliness of visits to children who are care-experienced and on the child protection register. We have some performance challenges with care-experienced children, placements and in-house fostering. The children's placement spend is much higher than the budget allocated for the service. There have been positive regulatory inspections of children's residential care homes. Our biggest challenge is availability of fostering and residential placements which has led to a small number of children</p>

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		<p>being supported in operating without registration (OWR) arrangements. A new Placement Commissioning Strategy has been developed to address this.</p> <p>Adult Social Care also has a clear 3-year Strategic Plan. There have been positive regulatory inspections in adult social care. 509 reablement packages have been completed, supporting people to retain or regain their independence, although the percentage that mitigated the need for support has got worse. There are positive outcomes in tier 1 and tier 2 services but more challenges in tier 3 specialist services, particularly the community learning disability team where workforce challenges are impacting on practice and performance. There have been some improvements in performance but still higher than Welsh average delayed pathways of care. There has been good progress in the commissioning with complex care project to undertake in depth reviews of care packages and commissioning arrangements. There have been detailed service reviews of regulated accommodation (care homes, extra care and supported living) and daytime opportunities. The percentage of enquiries to the Adult Social Care front door which result in information and advice only has increased again and met our target.</p> <p>Numbers of people accessing independent advocacy both in Children's and Adult Social Care is well below target and we are working to improve capacity and provision.</p> <p>We have completed more team around the family support plans and the percentage of plans closing with a successful outcome is similar to last year at 82% There has been a 67% reduction in the number of cases stepping up to statutory services, a key outcome that highlights the effectiveness of our preventative work.</p>
Supporting people in poverty to get the support they need / help they are entitled to	<b>Excellent</b>	<p>Our Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) is efficient, with applications dealt with promptly. The average time taken to process a new claim for CTR is 19 days.</p> <p>We 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 94% of the people who have contacted it. It is also helping people access benefits and allowances, and 96% of people using the service saw an increased income through claims for additional or increased benefits and allowances, a total of £1.7 million in income gains this year.</p>
Supporting people facing homelessness	<b>Adequate</b>	<p>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</p>

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to find a place to live		<p>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. But a complex housing scheme was commissioned and is now operational. We have increased the use of, and built relationships, in the private rented sector by the adoption of the Welsh Government Leasing Scheme and are proactively bringing empty properties back into use. We have purchased accommodation to use as a more suitable form of temporary accommodation for those that are homeless. There has been a further 12% increase in homeless presentations in 2024/25 compared to last year. Homelessness prevention has improved and we have met our target for the year. This is a result of the introduction of longer notice periods in the Renting Homes Act and work with RSL's to prevent homelessness by ensuring those who are facing homelessness are given priority for housing.</p>
Supporting children with additional learning needs to get the best from their education	<b>Adequate</b>	<p>The number of pupils on the waiting lists for specialist provision is a lot higher than our target. This includes previous referrals where support in mainstream schools has not been successful. This has resulted in a further increase in the number of pupils needing specialist placements. We have produced a five-year plan to meet increasing demand on ALN support services, specialist provision and schools. Extra finances have been found to meet demand for ALN places, and we are developing three new learning resource centres.</p> <p>We are bringing in an online Individual Development Plan (IDP) system, but it has been delayed due to issues found in testing. It is likely to be in place early in 2025/26.</p> <p>To comply with the ALN Code for Wales, all (100%) year 9 pupils with Additional Learning Needs with a transition plan in place, should have had an annual review by 31 March of each current school year. We haven't hit this target, we have achieved 74.3% due to non-attendance of key stakeholders, rescheduling and ALN Coordinator (ALNCo) capacity.</p> <p>Estyn has inspected Heronsbridge School and The Bridge and both have resulted in excellent outcomes. We have used the Welsh Government ALN Capital Grant effectively to improve provision (including sensory rooms and outdoor play areas) across schools and specialist settings.</p>
Safeguarding and protecting people who are at risk of harm	<b>Good</b>	<p>A regional safeguarding strategy has been agreed and we have a local plan that reflects it.</p> <p>The Corporate Safeguarding Board continues to oversee safeguarding practice across the Council. A reasonable</p>

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		<p>assurance of corporate safeguarding arrangements has been given by internal audit.</p> <p>Almost all children's safeguarding referrals decisions are made within the 24-hour target, but our target is 100%. 84% of child protection investigations are completed within required timescales, so we have met this year's target. Average waiting time on the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) waiting list has reduced again to 10 days and we are now meeting our target.</p> <p>But the percentage of adult safeguarding inquiries which receive initial response within 7 working days has improved but is below target. We have introduced a weekly monitoring system so we can escalate issues as needed. Not all staff are using the safeguarding e-learning module, although completion has increased to 88%, but we are changing the system to recognise prior learning.</p>
Help people to live safely at home through changes to their homes	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	<p>The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) process was taken in-house in 2021. Historical cases with agents have now been cleared (often after many years) so this has had an impact on the average time to complete a DFG. Demand is still higher than we can manage within existing budgets. But the DFG procurement framework is now live, the budget was fully spent and an extra £90k was secured from the Regional Partnership Board, which allowed us to adapt a further 15 homes. A total of 238 adaptations were completed, a 5% rise on the previous year.</p> <p>99% of those receiving a service were satisfied with the adaptations to their homes and felt they helped them to remain in their own home independently and safely.</p>
Support partners to keep communities safe	<b>Good</b>	<p>The council's CCTV system and operatives have reported over 1,000 incidents to South Wales Police to help them deal with incidents and keep the public safe.</p> <p>The Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership (CTMCSP) has been established; Terms of Reference have been developed; and the partnership has met.</p> <p>Almost all (99%) of Assia domestic abuse service users report increased feelings of safety at their exit evaluation. 100% of high-risk domestic abuse victims and public protection notices received by the service were contacted within 48 hours, and 100% of medium risk domestic abuse victims and public protection notices were contacted within 72 hours.</p> <p>Bridgend Youth Justice Service (BYJS) has done presentations to schools, Early Help Teams and Pupil Support Services to raise awareness of their prevention offer. Various activities have been held and played a role in diverting children who offend from being criminalised, significantly reducing the number of first-time entrants into the criminal justice system.</p>

		Around 76% of council staff have completed Violence Against Women training, which is below our target.
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### What will we do to improve?

- Continue implementation of the Children's and Adult Services three-year strategic plans.
- Implement the Early Help Commissioning Strategy.
- Create a Strategic Carers Group to ensure unpaid carers' views are heard.
- Take part in Welsh Government's Local Authority Benefit Take-up Pilot to identify residents who are missing out on entitlements to financial support and undertake targeted campaigns to help them.
- Develop and consult on a new social housing allocation policy.
- Maximise the budget for DFGs so that we can complete as many projects as possible in 2025/26
- Identify schools to host three new learning resource centres – a Foundation Phase Observation Class, a Foundation Phase Nurture Class for pupils with Emotional, Social and Behavioural Difficulties (ESBD) and a Secondary Communication, Autism Resource Education (CARE) base. Open these provisions in September 2025.
- We are on track to meet the ALN commencement orders by 31 August 2025.
- Host a session on the online IDP system for ALNCos at the next forum in May, testing the system before rollout in schools.
- Complete actions from Day Opportunities and Accommodation Based Service reviews.
- Complete a deep dive into Adult Safeguarding.

### Case study – Early Help



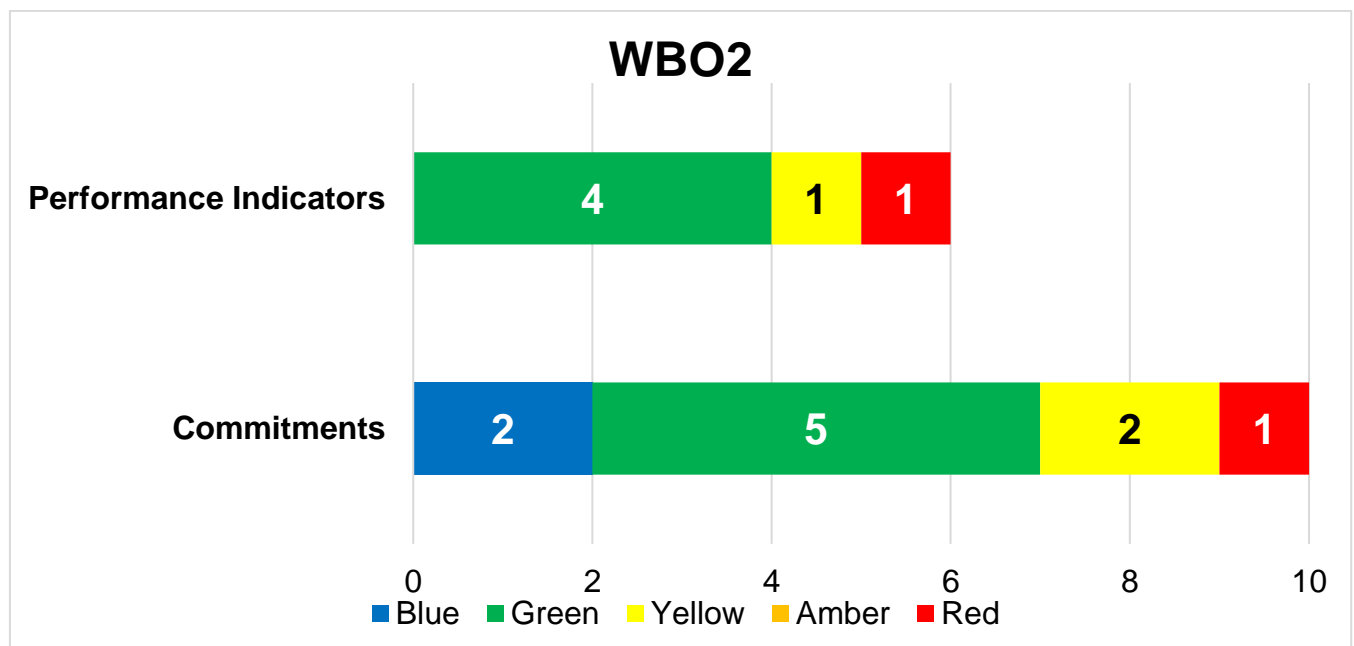
In 2024/25 we integrated our Early Help Services in our Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate. Demand and referrals for Early Help have been increasing significantly. We have worked hard to strengthen the early help offer and improve outcomes for families. New front door arrangements have helped us with early identification of risk,

allowing teams to intervene before needs escalate. A mapping pilot in the North Hub has been rolled out, helping us understand family needs and coordinating support. We have worked with partner agencies, and health services, to make sure families receive timely and appropriate support. Earlier identification has allowed teams to undertake preventative work rather than reacting to crises. As a result of all of this, there has been a 67% reduction in the number of cases stepping up to statutory services, which highlights the effectiveness of this early and preventative work. Impact measures have

shown that 96% of families reported feeling more able to make positive lifestyle and behaviour changes, and 94% of families reported improved family resilience.



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



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	<b>Excellent</b>	<p>Employability Bridgend provides support to unemployed people, and those in work but struggling with low skills or in-work poverty. This year, 453 participants (above the target of 233) of the Employability Bridgend programme went into employment. Over the course of the year 1,778 participants were signed up into the programme. We have worked with partners such as other Council departments, particularly the neurodivergence team in January for the Pathways conference, to support with training, volunteering and employment. We signpost as appropriate and collaborate with other services and projects as appropriate. The Marketing and Engagement Team is well established and successful in promoting Employability.</p> <p>The Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) programme was completed in line with funder requirements and over 95% of targets were exceeded, overseen by the Economic Programme Board. All projects finished on time, but the programme had an 11% underspend.</p>
Making sure our young people find jobs, or are	<b>Adequate</b>	678 participants in the Employability Bridgend programme have been supported into education or training (against a target of 409).

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in education or training		<p>The percentage of year 11 school leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET) is better than the Wales average, 5th in Wales, but slightly worse than last year at 1.9%.</p> <p>Social Services staff have attended college careers events and open days and had input in Health and Social Care Diploma programmes, giving presentations on working in social care, also provision of information on work pathways, apprenticeship programmes and careers in social care.</p>
Improving town centres, making them safer and more attractive	<b>Good</b>	<p>The £8 million refurbishment project on Maesteg Town Hall has been completed and the building was opened in November 2024. This listed building was restored and extended to provide a community hub and arts and cultural centre for the Llynfi Valley.</p> <p>Five projects have been awarded grants totalling over £340k from Welsh Government's Transforming Towns Schemes, to contribute towards regenerating our town centres. The availability of Commercial Property Grants has been marketed, with some feasibility finance available for projects in the valley areas available throughout.</p> <p>Significant consultation has been undertaken on the new Placemaking Strategies and marketing continues on availability of funding.</p>
Attracting investment and supporting new and existing local businesses	<b>Excellent</b>	<p>94 business start-ups (compared with a target of 53) have been supported through advice, grant bids, web material, face to face networking and event opportunities. 37 businesses (compared with a target of 21) have received support through the SPF, which is a higher demand than we expected.</p> <p>68 Start-up Grants were awarded in 2024/25. Support has been provided from UK Steel Enterprises to enhance the Start-up Grant and it is expected that it will be of interest to former TATA, and TATA supply chain, employees. 27 Business Development Grants and 10 Business Feasibility Grants were supported in the year.</p> <p>The Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) has been formed. A draft Delivery Agreement for Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) was completed by September 2024, monitored by the Economic Directors Forum. Work with the CJC to produce a Regional Transport Plan was completed in December 2024.</p>
Making the council an attractive place to work	<b>Good</b>	<p>This year we have been awarded the Disability Confident - Leader status. We continue to pay the Real Living Wage and promote a range of benefits such as staff discounts, our health and wellbeing platform and flexible employment options.</p>

		<p>The number of apprentices employed across the organisation during 2024/25 was 22. A workforce planning e-learning module has been written, and a toolkit for managers is being developed.</p> <p>The response rate to last year's staff survey was low. We have held staff focus groups to find out why and look at their concerns. We will use these to change the way we engage with staff. New communications channels have been introduced including a Chief Executive's quarterly message, a monthly managers' briefing note and managers forum.</p>
Ensuring employment is fair, equitable and pays the real living wage	<b>Excellent</b>	<p>We have worked with our supply chain, encouraging employers to offer more training and to find out if they are Real Living Wage Employers. We have identified 257 employers in the Borough are Real Living Wage accredited.</p> <p>We have implemented new contract procedure rules in line with the UK Procurement Act. Social value and carbon reduction have been strengthened as a consideration in our tenders. Contractor Safeguarding Protocol has also been included to ensure suppliers are aware of their duties for safeguarding vulnerable people. We have developed an external website for tenders and procurement, including a Corporate Contracts Register and a new 'Selling to the Council' guide to support suppliers to do business with us. We have developed and implemented a Modern Slavery Statement and standard terms and conditions for use across the council.</p>

### What will we do to improve?

- Continue our comprehensive Employability Programme.
- Award grants from Welsh Government's Transforming Towns Scheme, to contribute towards regenerating our town centres.
- Further develop plans for the Porthcawl waterfront regeneration area
- We are running Business Start-up Grants and a series of engagement events through Bridgend Business Forum.
- Provide opportunities for short-term, test trading through 'For a Limited Time Only'.
- Execute the package of Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) activities for the transition year, 2025-26, as agreed by Cabinet in January 2025.
- Bridgend Music Service will further develop links with partners to broaden the learning offer including members of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales visiting Bridgend in May 2025 to deliver two concerts to pupils.
- Complete the change to a biannual staff survey supported by surveys tailored to frontline staff at different times of the year.

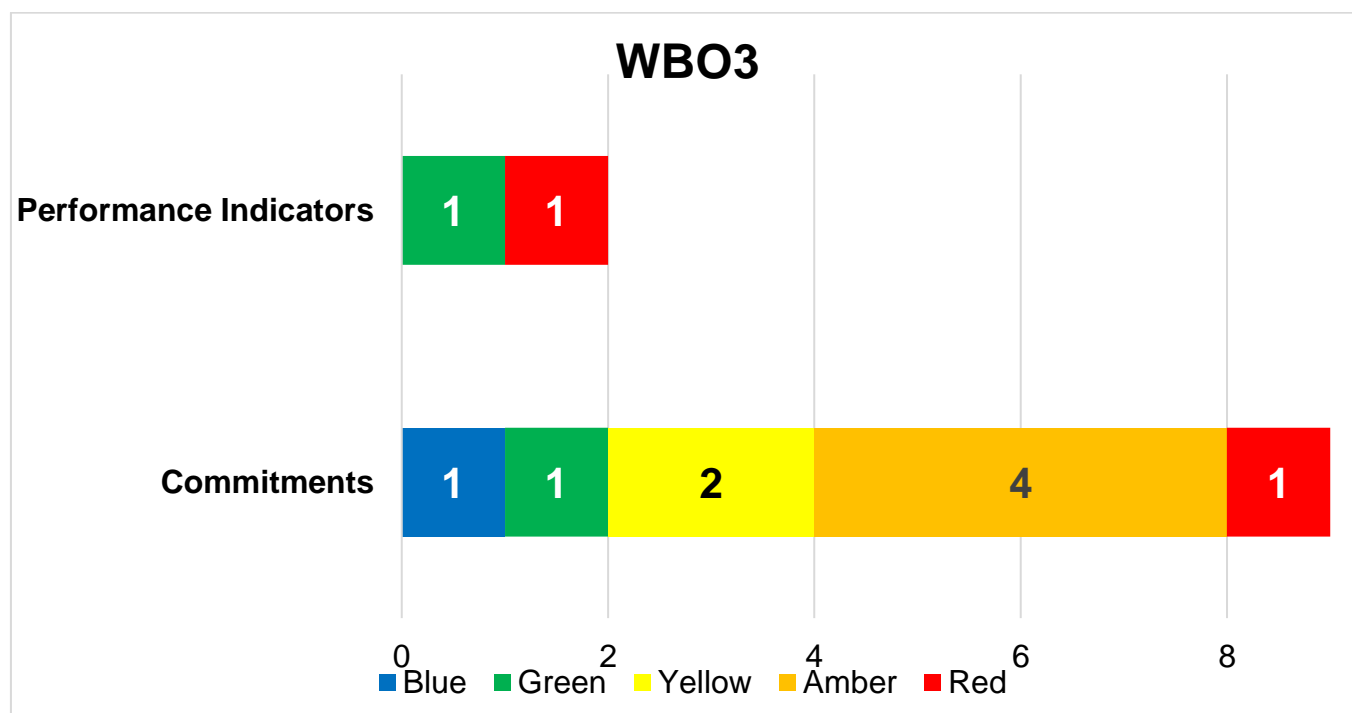
**Case study – Reducing our agency workforce in Social Services**



In 2024/25 we have used international recruitment and 'grow our own' to reduce our agency workforce. We have promoted careers in social care through schools and colleges, Careers Wales, job centres and our own Employability Programme.

We have defined and improved progression routes, including work placements and apprenticeships, training and development opportunities, and a social work degree. We have also recruited 13 international social workers, winning a prestigious Social Care Wales Accolade for 'Developing and inspiring the workforce'. Together this work has seen us reduce our agency social worker workforce from over 40% in March 2023 to 9% in March 2025, as well as helping us retain staff and improve the experience of our workforce.

Wellbeing Objective	Score
<b>3 - A County Borough with thriving valleys communities</b>	<b>Adequate</b>



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	<b>Excellent</b>	<p>A Placemaking Plan for Maesteg has been developed and consulted on and is ready for approval. It will guide investment and policy decisions which will shape the town's future. It will support applications for project funding and demonstrate need and opportunities for activity to support the town centre.</p> <p>The Commercial Property Enhancement Grant is underway with over £168k paid out against seven properties to enhance and consolidate the high street in commercial areas across our valley areas. Grants were awarded in Ogmores Vale, Garw, Llynfi, Pencoed and Pyle. Examples include Ogmores Valley Family Dental, and Ogmores Boxing Club; where support was given to maintain active frontages on the high street and retaining health services and benefits in the valley.</p>
Creating more jobs in the Valleys	<b>Adequate</b>	<p>Good progress has been made on the development of the Valley Regeneration Strategy. It is now in final draft form to be circulated for completion. Once formally adopted, we can use this as a tool to develop funding bids.</p> <p>Discussions are still ongoing about the Northern Valleys Gateway Initiative (NVI) nearly two years after starting.</p>

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		Funding still has not been released to develop much needed business units in the valleys.
Improving education and skills in the Valleys	<b>Adequate</b>	<p>Flying Start Nurseries at Pontcymmer, Nantymoel and Ogmere Vale are now operating.</p> <p>The tender process for the opportunity to open a Welsh-medium childcare provision in Bettws has concluded and a preferred provider has been identified. The tender process for the Blackmill provision has been delayed and will run to May 2025.</p>
Investing in green spaces and supporting tourism to the valleys	<b>Good</b>	<p>Good progress has been made on the development of the Valley Regeneration Strategy. It is now in final draft form to be circulated for completion. Once formally adopted, we can use this as a tool to develop funding bids.</p> <p>We have invested in parks in the valleys with five refurbished children's play areas with accessible facilities. There has also been significant investment in refurbishing tennis courts in partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association including at Maesteg Welfare Park and Caedu Park.</p>
Encourage the development of new affordable homes in the valleys	<b>Adequate</b>	<p>We meet Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) regularly to encourage new social housing in the valleys. Valley areas are considered in line with the Local Housing Market Assessment; valley sites feature in the programme of development and future pipeline development.</p> <p>Only two (against a target of 20) additional affordable homes have been provided by RSLs in the valleys this year, although 13 have been built or acquired and will soon be ready for occupation.</p> <p>The development of 180 new homes on the former Ewenny Road Industrial Estate site is continuing, but progress is slower than planned. The sale of the land to a housing developer is being finalised.</p>

### **What will we do to improve?**

- Approve and adopt the Placemaking Plan for Maesteg.
- Continue to award Commercial Property Enhancement Grants to enhance and consolidate high street in commercial areas across our valley areas.
- Complete and adopt the Valleys Regeneration Strategy.
- Keep working on the release of funds for business units in the valleys through the Northern Valleys Initiative (NVI).
- Implement the proposed delivery plan for the universal expansion of Flying Start childcare (phase three) from April 2025.
- Complete the tender process for Welsh-medium childcare provision in Blackmill.
- Complete the sale of the Ewenny Road site to a housing developer.



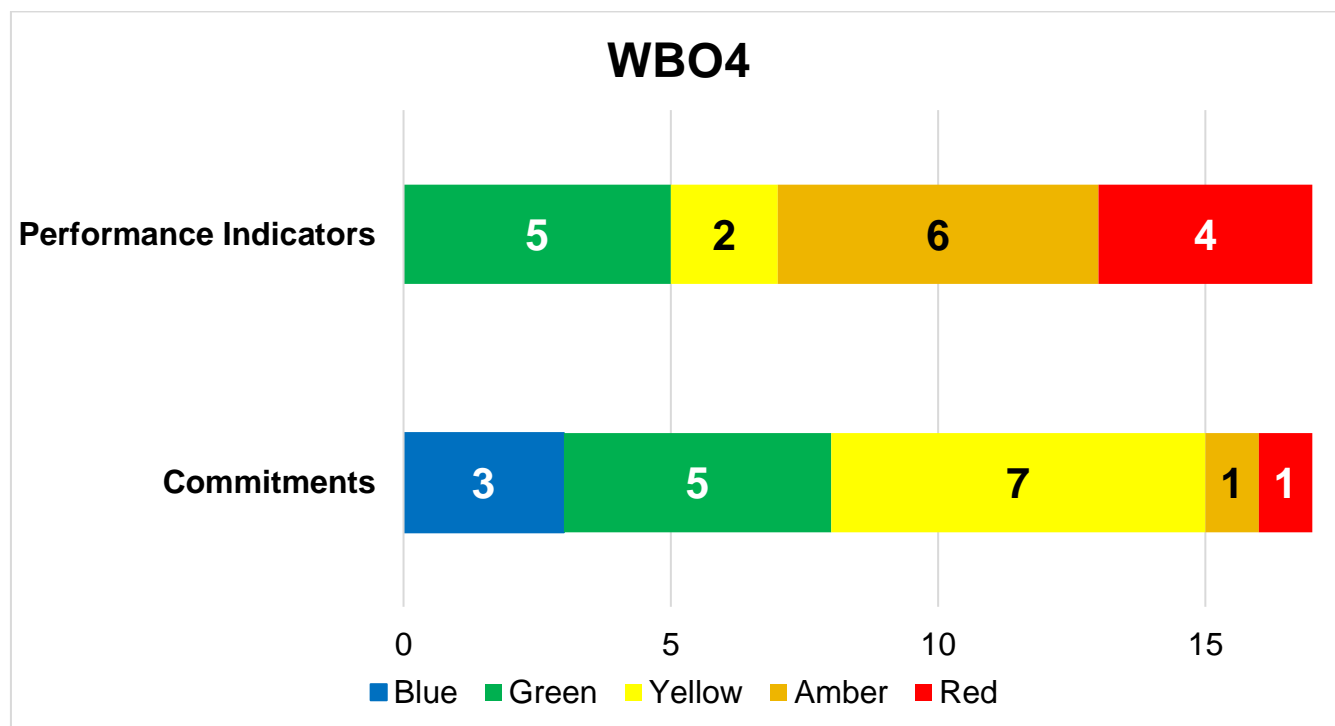
## **Case study – Maesteg Town Hall**



On 20 November 2024 Maesteg Town Hall opened its doors to the public, following multi-million-pound redevelopment project delivered by the Council and our partners at Awen Cultural Trust. The 140-year-old building has been returned to its former glory, but now boasts a new glass atrium, library and heritage centre, studio theatre and cinema space, café and mezzanine bar. The main auditorium is a multi-functional performing arts venue with a stage lift, dressing rooms and a bar. The balcony has been retained and refurbished. Historic paintings from Christopher Williams have been restored and are on display. We now have one of the finest cultural venues in Wales in the Llynfi Valley. The project was funded by

the Council, the European Regional Development Fund, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Welsh Government including CADW, Awen Cultural Trust, Maesteg Town Council, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Davies Trust, and the Pilgrim Trust.

Wellbeing Objective	Score
<b>4 - A County Borough where we help people meet their potential</b>	<b>Good</b>



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	<b>Adequate</b>	<p>One school has been removed from Estyn 'special measures' category, while another school now requires special measures after an Estyn inspection. The post-inspection action plan was submitted and approved by Estyn in February 2025.</p> <p>All schools have completed safeguarding audits, with 93% rated as "green". Safeguarding will be an agenda item at student council meetings and we aim to increase governor engagement with safeguarding training.</p> <p>Fixed-term school exclusions are increasing due to behavioural changes and an increased complexity of needs, especially in primary schools. A group has been convened to identify trends and themes including areas of best practice to address violence in school.</p> <p>Pupil attendance rates in primary schools continue to increase, but attendance in secondary school remains lower than that of primary pupils, and both remain worse than our target. We are supporting pupil attendance across all schools.</p>



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		<p>The average capped 9 scores for pupils in year 11 (measuring GCSE results or equivalent) are below target but above Wales average, placing Bridgend in 9th compared to other local authorities in Wales.</p> <p>Throughout this year, schools have been supported with a variety of digital professional learning and skills training, and a Schools' Digital Learning Strategy 2025/28 has been developed.</p> <p>The youth support social media presence is growing but we await the outcome of a proposal for a trial for a corporate TikTok account. Your Voice digital forum is completed and had 790 participants.</p>
Expanding Welsh medium education opportunities	<b>Good</b>	<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.</p> <p>The percentage of year 1 learners taught through the medium of Welsh is 8.83% and continues to show an improving trend, and the percentage of learners studying for assessed qualifications through the medium of Welsh at the end of Key Stage 4 has also improved to 7.23%, indicating a higher proportion of children studying at a Welsh medium secondary school. The number of students who were entered for an A Level examination in Welsh as a second language has reduced since last year and the target has been missed.</p> <p>There has been significant progress in delivering the actions in the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). These include Cymraeg i Blant sessions in Porthcawl to support readiness for the childcare hub and seedling school. Regular groups such as baby massage, baby yoga and Welsh Rhymetime in Maesteg, Y Sarn, Bridgend Town and Pyle, with 152 groups this year, and 1460 parents attending. 100% of schools are now engaged with Siarter Iaith and Siarter Iaith Cymraeg Campus. A communications plan will help celebrate schools that have received awards. A press release has been published to celebrate the Siarter Iaith awards ceremony in March 2025.</p>
Modernising our school buildings	<b>Adequate</b>	<p>Each of the five schemes are in design and development phases and significant progress has been made on their approvals, funding and in some cases tenders. Due to a variety of issues (including ecology issues, delays in Welsh Government reviews, planning approval and funding), the timescales for the five schemes have been impacted.</p> <p>The replacement Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Ogwr school design has been progressed. Cabinet Secretary for Education gave approval to proceed to Full Business Case stage. In November 2024, Council approved the extra capital funding</p>

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		<p>needed for the scheme. Ecological issues continue to affect the site, and this has impacted on the site investigation.</p> <p>The Heronsbridge School has also received approval to proceed to Full Business Case stage. In November 2024, Council approved the extra capital funding needed for the scheme. The tender process commenced in March. A change to the school opening date will be needed.</p> <p>The replacement Mynydd Cynffig Primary School has also received approval to proceed to Full Business Case stage. In November 2024, Council approved the extra capital funding needed for the scheme. The planning application was submitted in November 2024. Challenges and delays mean a revised programme will be considered by Cabinet.</p> <p>Changes to the funding for Bridgend West (the replacement Ysgol y Ferch o'r Sgêr and the new English-medium school) have been approved and the opening date for the school has been changed to September 2026. The planning application has been submitted and the tender process commenced in February 2025.</p> <p>Changes to the funding for the new two-form entry English-medium school to replace the existing Afon Y Felin and Corneli Primary Schools has been approved, and the opening date for the school has been changed to September 2026. The planning application has been submitted and tender process commenced in Feb 2025.</p>
Attract and retain young people into BCBC employment	<b>Adequate</b>	<p>We have engaged with schools through the termly Director Reports and have attended job fairs, options and careers events to promote the apprenticeship offer, including specific roles, e.g. business admin, IT and multi-trade apprentices. Workshops have been delivered on applying for apprenticeship jobs and interview skills as well as "Dragon's Den" events and mock interviews.</p> <p>The number of apprentices employed by the council has reduced from 46 in 2023/24 to 22 in 2024/25, and this year only half of those concluding their apprenticeships have gone on to obtain a non-apprentice role due to budget constraints and the recruitment freeze.</p>
Offering youth services and school holiday programmes for our young people	<b>Excellent</b>	<p>540 young people took part in targeted activities for people with additional or diverse needs. This is much higher than last year, and better than our target.</p> <p>Participation in the national free swimming initiative during school holidays and weekends was over 23,000, which was higher than last year and better than our target. The Healthy Living partnership has supported 119 vulnerable households to learn to swim based on referrals from Children and Families Services.</p> <p>20 families have been referred and 63 individuals supported in our "step up and step down" approach for</p>

		<p>low level social care. The Halo Health and Wellbeing Membership Card in partnership with the Council is supporting 173 foster children, 76 carer leavers, five individuals in a residential setting, 79 youth justice participants, 63 young adults and 142 children and young adults with a disability.</p> <p>Six Food and Fun programmes operated in the summer holidays 2024 with 213 children benefitted from attending.</p>
Work with people to design and develop services	<b>Excellent</b>	<p>The Bridgend Inclusive Network Group (BING) network has supported 20 organisations, creating over 100 community opportunities, and assisting over 211 individuals living with disabilities in the borough.</p> <p>Our partnership with BAVO has supported 272 third sector organisations, supported to develop or deliver prevention opportunities' focusing on "what matters". 137 individuals attending network meetings. 564 people have increased knowledge of the services available to them locally. 587 people report increased social connections.</p>
Being the best parents we can to our care experienced children	<b>Good</b>	<p>The number of care leavers who experience homelessness is higher than last year but still met our target.</p> <p>The number of care leavers completing 12 months consecutive employment, education or training (EET) since leaving care has reduced to 59% and is off target, but those completing 13-24 months has increased to 82% and is on target.</p> <p>The Corporate Parenting Board strengthens partnership work and monitors implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.</p> <p>The Youth Forum meets regularly with support from Tros Gynnal Plant Cymru and their views are taken to Corporate Parenting Board for consideration. We are supporting 178 care-experienced individuals and their households to access health and wellbeing opportunities.</p> <p>We are also supporting care-experienced children to access training and development linked to leadership and volunteering with some sessions already held between services, specifically 16+ Team and Youth Support Services.</p>

### What will we do to improve?

- Work to increase governor engagement with safeguarding training.
- Support the school in 'special measures' to enact the post-inspection action plan.
- Through the 'Weapons-Related Incidents in Bridgend Educational Settings Strategy Group' look at the use of violence and weapons within schools, to identify trends and themes including areas of best practice to address violence in school.
- Support schools to complete attendance audits to identify best practice and development needs.
- Complete work to improve persistent absence levels in primary schools.

- Work with school leaders to improve capped 9 scores by sharing effective practice, the role of improvement partners, brokering support, developing leadership capacity, local authority network groups, evaluating the quality of teaching and judging the impact of teaching on the outcomes for learners.
- Continue to support and promote education through the medium of Welsh, with a variety of groups, projects and initiatives in place to increase opportunities for children to use the Welsh language.
- Continue to progress our plans for School Modernisation
- Prepare an options paper for the Food and Fun Programme to consider how barriers to schools' participation could be reduced.

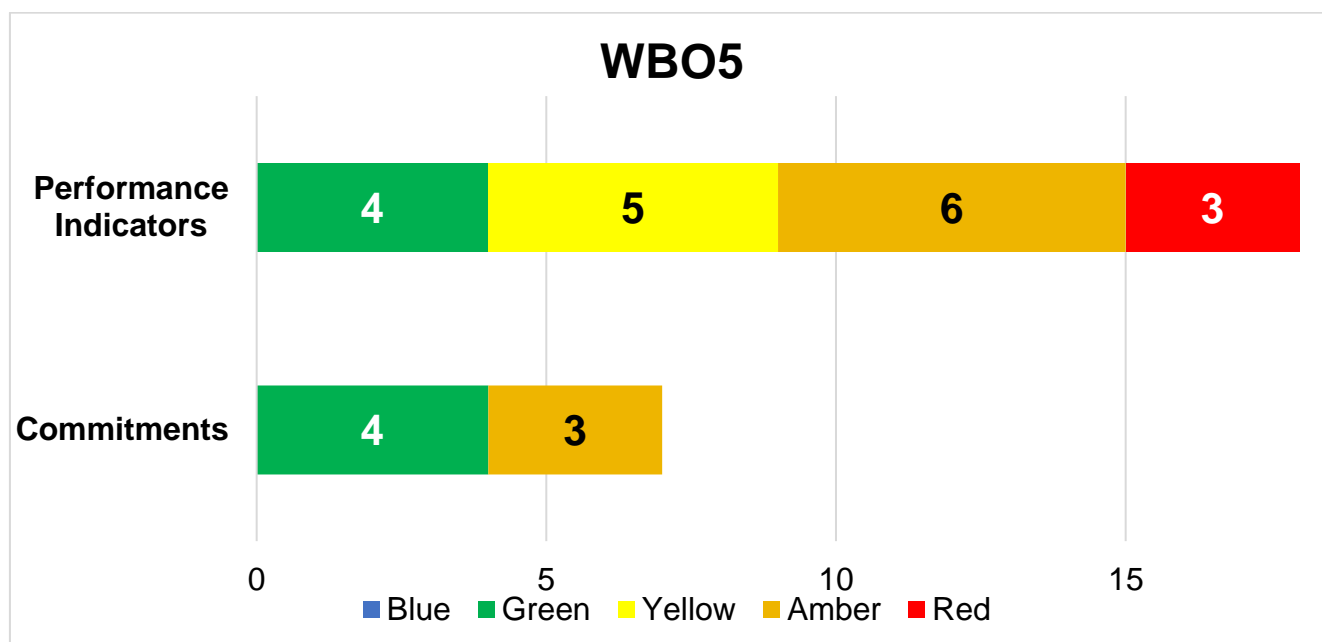
### **Case study - The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) communications strategy**



This year, we have worked hard on promoting, marketing and celebrating our Welsh in Education Strategy Plan (WESP) – developing a communication and engagement plan to support it. To deliver this, the WESP Co-ordinator has worked

closely with the Regional Welsh-medium Education Promotion Champion and members of the Welsh Education Forum (WEF) sub-group. This plan states our vision, messaging and promotion of Welsh-medium education. We have also finalised the 'Comms Cymraeg Schedule', which maps out targeted communication over the year to promote Welsh-medium provisions and education, the use of Welsh in English-medium schools and studying Welsh as a subject at A level. As part of this, we have developed a paid Facebook campaign using videos, posters and links to webpages.

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	<p>Overall, a 1% reduction in emissions was achieved in 2024/25, less than our 5% target but a positive step in our 2030 obligations, with reductions in electricity and gas consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> related energy consumption across our buildings.</p> <p>Funding has been approved for a LED (Light Emitting Diode) replacement programme and solar PV (technology that converts sunlight directly into electricity using semiconductor materials) roll out on sites including schools. 17 buildings have had insulation levels improved and a further five have had new LED lighting to replace less efficient fittings. 220.8kWp of PV has been installed, two buildings have had gas heating systems replaced with more efficient heat pumps.</p> <p>Draft Net Zero Strategy delivered in March 2025, and feedback from officers and Scrutiny Committee has been provided to Carbon Trust.</p> <p>Air quality monitoring along Park Street in the air quality management areas (AQMA) showed reducing NO<sub>2</sub> levels again for 2024, but still exceed the annual average air quality objective set at (40µg/m<sup>3</sup>). The Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) was approved by cabinet in April 2024 and submitted to WG.</p>



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Protecting our landscapes and open spaces and planting more trees	<b>Good</b>	<p>The Local Nature Partnership (LNP) has continued to be supported by the Climate Change Response Team. We have done work to improve awareness and understanding of the LNP through a communication plan and a dedicated LNP webpage on Visit Bridgend.</p> <p>All Local Places for Nature (LPfN) 2024/25 funding has been spent or committed, supporting a number of groups with equipment for surveying, nest boxes, tree planting etc. Biodiversity schemes at Coychurch Playing Fields, Tondy Post Office and Caerau Mens Shed have been developed.</p> <p>Guidance on the Biodiversity Duty has been added to our staff intranet, alongside links to the Bridgend Biodiversity Duty Plan and monitoring templates. A section has also been added to the Corporate Induction e-learning module on the Biodiversity Duty and what it means for staff.</p> <p>Three beaches at Rest Bay, Trecco Bay and Porthcawl Marina retained their Blue Flag status, and Coychurch crematorium and Maesteg Welfare Park maintained their status as Green Flag parks or green spaces.</p>
Improve the public realm / built environment through good placemaking principles	<b>Adequate</b>	<p>Our percentage of planning appeals dismissed is slightly worse than last year (81% compared to 87%) but higher than in other authorities. The number of planning applications determined within eight weeks is around the same as last year (67% compared to 68%) although this is still below target.</p> <p>There are not enough planning officers to deal with the increase of complex and major applications which is being addressed by a restructure and agency staff in the short term, with changes to funding and recruitment in the next 12 months.</p> <p>We have consulted on a range of Supplementary Planning Guidance to support our Local Development Plan that was adopted in 2024. The consultations on affordable housing and retail and commercial development have now closed.</p>
Reducing, reusing or recycling as much of our waste as possible	<b>Good</b>	<p>Our high standards in recycling have continued, with the percentage of street cleansing waste being recycled increased to 41.22%, the percentage of municipal waste collected that is prepared for re-use, recycled, or biowaste that is composted reducing slightly to 70.93% due to issues with processing wood and green waste at the onward destination facility. The amount of residual waste generated has decreased further to 117.8 kg per person.</p> <p>The percentage of highways land found to be of acceptable or high level of cleanliness is around the same at 99.35%.</p>

		Work is underway on our future waste services model, with a Cabinet decision to bring the Waste Service in-house in November 2024. Workstream leads are in place and are feeding into this process with project support agency on board and feeding into Waste Transition Board, which meets fortnightly.
Improving flood defences and schemes to reduce flooding of our homes and businesses	<b>Good</b>	<p>Schemes have been completed in Adare Street, Ogmere Vale and Dinam Street, Nantymoel to repair damaged culvert and mitigate flood risk.</p> <p>Funding has been approved from WG FCERM (Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management) Capital Pipeline funding (feasibility) for a catchment wide study of the Nant Cefn Glas following the Bryntirion flooding event in September 2024.</p> <p>Improvements have been made to the statutory sustainable drainage systems (SUDs) application process, with 100% of applications being processed within seven weeks.</p>

### What will we do to improve?

- Complete and consult on the draft Net Zero Strategy.
- Commence the REFIT2 Scheme in Spring 2025.
- Make a Local Places for Nature 2025/27 application.
- Implement the catchment wide study of the Nant Cefn Glas following the Bryntirion flooding event in September 2024 with funding from WG FCERM (Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management) Capital Pipeline.
- Continue work on Supplementary Planning Guidance to support the LDP.
- Continue work to bring the Waste Service in-house.

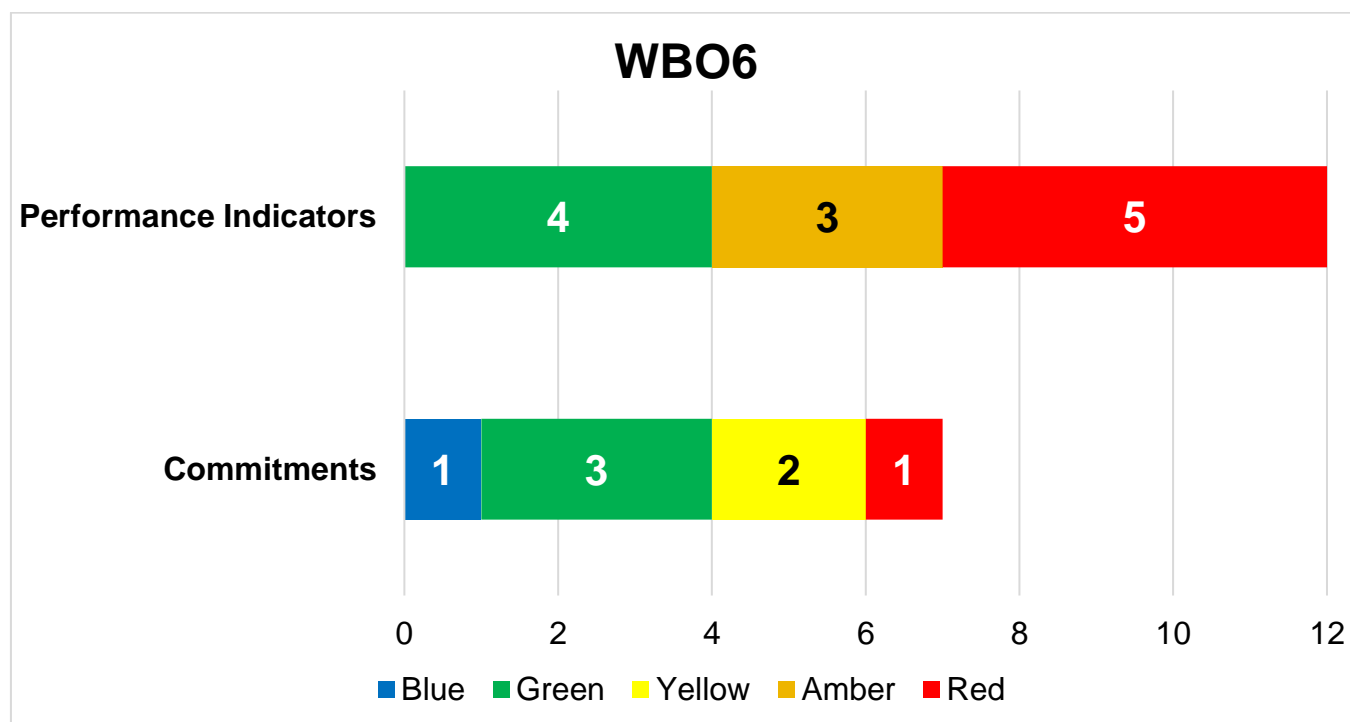
### Case study – We are named top performing local authority in Wales for recycling



In November 2024 Bridgend County Borough was named as the best performing Local Authority in Wales for recycling (based on performance in 2023/24). The top spot with a recycling rate of 73%, statistics revealed that the County Borough increased its performance by 17% over the last decade. In the previous 12 months, we recycled 39,000 tonnes of waste including nearly 5,000 tonnes of glass, 11,000 tonnes of organic waste

and 6,000 tonnes of paper, with over 9,000 tonnes of waste processed at community recycling centres, including the new recycling centre in Pyle that opened in March 2024.

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



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	<b>Good</b>	<p>A new Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) 2024/28 was approved in July 2024 and is published on our website. An Action Plan that shows how we will achieve our aims was agreed in November 2024.</p> <p>64% of council staff have completed Introduction to Equality and Diversity Training, higher than last year but below the target of 100%.</p> <p>There are now three staff network groups: menopause, disability and LGBTQ+. A Welsh Language Forum for staff of all proficiency levels has also been established.</p>
Improving the way we engage with local people, including young people, listening to their views and acting on them.	<b>Adequate</b>	<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 fallen slightly to 44% against a target of 50%.</p> <p>An easy-read version of Budget Consultation 2025 was available on the consultation webpage. Improvements have been made to the online forms for planning consultations.</p> <p>The Participation and Engagement Strategy has been implemented and published.</p> <p>A National Residents Survey was carried out in Autumn 2024. The results of the survey will now be analysed.</p>



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		<p>The level of engagement with residents, using the digital communications platform has increased and the targets have been achieved. But engagement across corporate social media accounts has fallen and the targets have been missed.</p> <p>The level of engagement on corporate consultations has increased but the target has been missed.</p>
Offering more information and advice online, and at local level, and making sure you can talk to us and hear from us in Welsh	<b>Good</b>	<p>We have not quite achieved our targets for first call resolutions but performance has increased compared to last year, to 73%. This shows the number of phone calls handled by the Customer Services Team at the first point of contact without having to transfer the caller on.</p> <p>The number of online transactions using the digital platform has increased and we have achieved our target.</p> <p>The number of hits or views on the council website has dropped compared to 2023/24 and we have missed the target.</p> <p>The percentage of staff with Welsh language speaking skills has increased to 28.36% which achieves our target. 63% 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	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	<p>The Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Programme has encountered numerous challenges in the 2024/25, and we have only completed two CATs this year against a target of ten, partly due to capacity issues. The two successful CAT completions were in Coytrahen Community Centre and Evanstown Welfare Park Bowling Green. Capacity has been addressed and we have made good progress, with three new leases signed and awaiting completion, 23 needing more work within the council, seven awaiting planning outcomes and 13 awaiting club decisions.</p> <p>566 people have been supported to have their needs met in their communities by Local Community Co-ordinators. This is well above target for the new roles.</p>
Becoming an age friendly council	<b>Good</b>	<p>Bridgend is participating in an all-Wales programme supported by Welsh Government. We work closely with Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) partners and third sector organisations, working on streamlining health services and the social prescribing pathways, including National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS) and the 60+ Active Leisure Scheme. Support has been made to increase community resilience in dementia services. Over ten voluntary organisations have been supported through grant applications for community projects active in dementia prevention. We celebrated Older Persons Week with cultural and artistic opportunities including art workshops, cinema screenings and a silent disco run by our cultural trust Awen.</p>

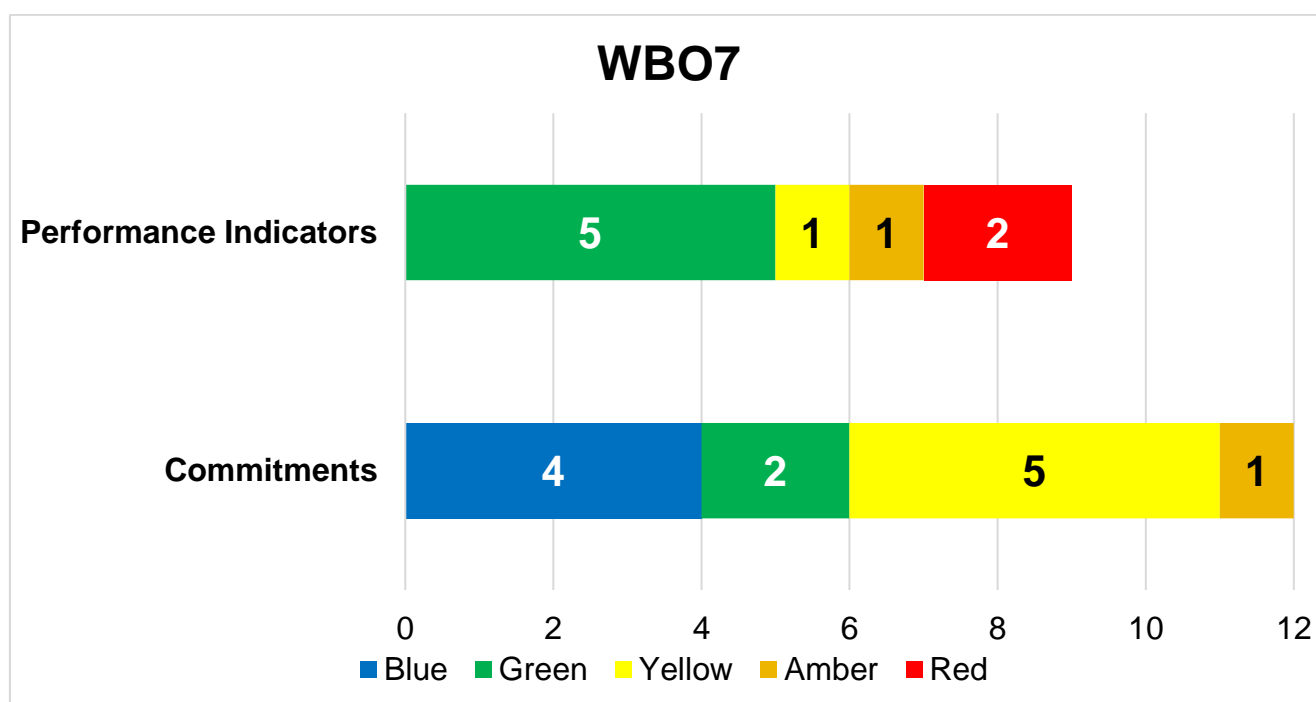
**What will we do to improve?**

- Implement the action plan for the Strategic Equalities Plan.
- Approve and implement our new Digital Strategy.
- Review and improve the corporate front door.
- Reflect on findings from the National Residents Survey and take action to address issues.
- Start tracking Community Asset Transfers that move from short-term leases to longer-term leases.

**Case study - Artificial intelligence (AI) in schools PHOTO**

AI technology is increasingly being introduced to schools in Bridgend County Borough. We have a clear and agreed policy direction which has been communicated to schools with guidance and skills training to support it. Headteacher and practitioner skills training for AI use has been provided. Training has been delivered on topics such as, online safety, the use of the Digital Competence Framework 'Planning for Progression' resource, Microsoft 365, Google for Education, Adobe Express and additional Hwb tools and services. Teachers and practitioners are now well-prepared to integrate these digital tools and frameworks into their curriculum. We also deliver online safety learning events that support parents and carers with their understanding of online safety and the means to better safeguard themselves and their children.

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



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 so people can walk and cycle	<b>Good</b>	The Metrolink bus facility in Porthcawl opened in November 2024. The active travel improvements work planned for the year is now also complete with drop kerb installations added throughout the borough.
Offering attractive leisure and cultural activities	<b>Excellent</b>	The Grand Pavilion refurbishment project is underway and a tender process to award the contract for the construction work has been completed. Enabling works at the site have been completed to prepare the site for the main contract work. The National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS) operated beyond capacity with 1331 new referrals across 24,663 sessions. 473 participants completed a 16-week course. There were 157 referrals for carer support with 35 participants starting the course and 26 participants completing the course. For pulmonary rehabilitation 141 participants started and 117 completed the course. The Feel Good for Life wellbeing programme has supported 600 attendances. Super-Agers community

## **APPENDIX 1**

		<p>wellbeing activities have supported 163 individuals including 2061 attendances across 126 opportunities. Work has begun on a long-term strategy for libraries. A public engagement exercise has been developed for use next year. Library usage is monitored quarterly looking at events, borrowing and digital resources. There have been over 73,000 attendances (supporting nearly 34,000 junior issues and nearly 4,000 ICT sessions).</p>
Improving children's play facilities and opportunities	<b>Excellent</b>	<p>The refurbishment of play areas has progressed as planned. Investment in play areas in 2024/25 has reached over £1.7 million, exceeding the target of £1.6 million. A total of 22 play areas were refurbished and handed over to the community.</p> <p>We are doing a play sufficiency assessment looking at what we have already and what we need for the future. 142 children and young adults with additional needs have had free HALO membership to support health and wellbeing.</p>
Providing free school meals and expanding free childcare provision	<b>Good</b>	<p>The roll out of Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM) has been completed across the County Borough.</p> <p>There has been a further increase in children accessing Flying Start funded childcare with a total of 542 children now registered. This is slightly below target with falling birth rates in Flying Start areas believed to be impacting the numbers.</p> <p>The percentage of non-maintained settings judged by Care Inspectorate Wales as at least 'good' was 83% which was below the target of 100% we have set. We are awaiting reinspection of settings that received less than good judgements dating back to 2019. We provide extensive support to settings to prepare for inspections.</p>
Integrating our social care services with health services so people are supported seamlessly	<b>Good</b>	<p>70 people were delayed on the national pathway of Care at the end of the year, which is much better than last year and slightly better than our target.</p> <p>We have used Welsh Government 50-day challenge grant money to support the remodelling of support at home. We are working with the Health Board around the enhanced community care model. We have fully embedded the strengths-based practice model. This has led to an increase in the overall number of people receiving reablement, and a reduction in the overall domiciliary care hours provided, in line with the Discharge to Recover and Assess model.</p>
Improving the supply of affordable housing	<b>Adequate</b>	<p>Only 77 additional affordable homes have been provided by Registered Social Landlords this year against a target of 110, although 92 have been built or acquired and will soon be ready for occupation.</p>

		<p>The Welsh Government Leasing Scheme has been adopted with a growing portfolio of accommodation already in use and further properties in the pipeline. We have engaged with all RSLs and Welsh Government to discuss general housing needs, temporary accommodation and supported housing schemes.</p> <p>Over the last 12 months we have made progress with the top 20 priority empty properties. five properties have been sold; seven properties have been subject to renovation works; two have been placed up for sale and two have become occupied. Enforcement action has been taken against four of the properties. Five properties have been subject to informal action whereas two properties have received no intervention in this financial year. The Empty Property Loan Scheme is live and is generating interest.</p>
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### **What will we do to improve?**

- Continue the redevelopment of Porthcawl Grand Pavilion.
- Phase three expansion of Flying Start will target new areas in 2025/26.
- Complete the Play Sufficiency Assessment looking at what we have already and what we need for the future.
- Complete engagement on the long-term strategy for libraries.
- Continue to target long-term empty properties.
- Support childcare settings to prepare for Care Inspectorate Wales inspections.

### **Case study - Porthcawl's new Metrolink**



The new Porthcawl Metrolink opened on 18 November 2024. It is a modern transport interchange, located on land in the Porthcawl regeneration area alongside the Portway and Salt Lake. It forms part of the wider Metro Plus programme, improving public transport links across south-east Wales. It will be used by all bus services currently operating within Porthcawl, can accommodate up to four buses at a time, and features a covered shelter and station building, space for a kiosk, outdoor seating areas, an environmentally friendly 'green' roof, and a rain garden. The facility was constructed using money from the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal and UK Government as well as the council's own Porthcawl Regeneration budget.

### **3. 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><b>Use of resources</b></p>	<p><b>Adequate</b></p>	<p>For the fourth year in a row, our use of resources is adequate.</p> <p>Some things have got better; we have implemented almost all of our performance management improvement plan and reviewed our Corporate Plan Delivery Plan. Improvements have been made to the identification, management and reporting of risk and a review by internal audit found there is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. We have improved or automated some of our Human Resources (HR) policies and procedures and reduced our use of agency workers. We have updated our Contract Procedure Rules to reflect new legislation and strengthened consideration of social value and carbon reduction in our tenders. Audit Wales have reviewed our Financial Sustainability and concluded that we ‘understand our financial position with good arrangements to support financial sustainability’. Our Financial Procedure Rules have been updated. We have reduced our asset management maintenance backlog, improved our management of Statutory Building Compliance with Big-5 Compliance at 95%, and made progress with the rationalisation of our estate.</p> <p>Other things have stayed the same or got worse. Budget monitoring and outturn projections have been difficult with a large projected overspend changing to a large underspend within the year. Some agreed budget reductions were not achieved, and some base budget pressures remain. As reserves fall, there is a risk that this will put our financial sustainability at risk. Our financial position overall has become more challenging. Planned improvements on more consistent corporate commissioning, reviewing our performance framework, and workforce planning have not gone ahead as there is limited capacity in corporate teams.</p> <p>We have strong frameworks and robust processes for day-to-day management of resources, with clear and agreed working models and good working relationships between corporate teams and directorates. But longer-term planning, addressing capacity in corporate and directorate teams, improving proactiveness and developing our corporate services to meet changing demands will be difficult with the resource issues we face.</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><b>Finances</b></p>	<p><b>Adequate</b></p>	<p>Financial Planning is adequate. This is based on generally positive judgements from regulators, success in balancing our budget every year, and unqualified Statements of Accounts signed off by the Auditor General for Wales.</p> <p>Budget monitoring and outturn projections have been difficult with a large projected overspend changing to a large underspend within the year. Some agreed budget reductions were not achieved, and some base budget pressures remain. As reserves fall, there is a risk to our financial sustainability. Our financial position has become more challenging, due to pay and price increases and service pressures and greater difficulty in collecting Council Tax. The challenges continue in 2025/26 and beyond. Strong financial planning will be crucial to setting balanced budgets in future.</p> <p>Audit Wales have reviewed our Financial Sustainability and concluded that we ‘understand our financial position with good arrangements to support financial sustainability’. It included two recommendations to strengthen financial sustainability. Our financial framework is robust, with strong governance arrangements which drive the budget, including Financial Procedure Rules which were updated this year, Treasury Management Strategy and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) principles, and budget principles, which drive the budget and spending, and investment and borrowing decisions of the Council. The financial position is set out in regular reports, for members and the public, and we demonstrate a high level of compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code, principles and standards.</p> <p>Areas for improvement include earlier longer-term planning, including work with Welsh Government towards sustainable funding, multi-year settlements, and flexibility around grants. We will focus on early engagement with Members to set a balanced budget for 2026/27 and supporting services to manage their budgets tightly to minimise overspends.</p>
<p><b>Corporate planning</b></p>	<p><b>Good</b></p>	<p>Corporate planning is good. We have reprioritised the corporate plan delivery plan (CPDP) to reflect the ambitions of elected members, staff and partners as well as challenges and limitations. The CPDP was agreed by Council on 9 April 2025 with directorate business plans are to follow.</p> <p>In September 2024, Audit Wales published their review of our setting of wellbeing objectives (in the Corporate Plan), concluding, ‘The Council has applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives, but there are opportunities to build on how it involves citizens and intends to work with partners.’</p> <p>Opportunities for improvement include starting the review process earlier and engaging better with staff / trade unions as part of the social partnership duty.</p>



<p><b>Risk management</b></p>	<p><b>Good</b></p>	<p>Risk management is good.</p> <p>Improvements have been made to the identification, management and reporting of risk in the past year. An updated Corporate Risk Assessment was developed at the start of 2025 and was positively received by Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) in January 2025. Reports and the reporting process for risk are straightforward and accessible, including for members.</p> <p>A review by internal audit of the Council's Corporate Risk Management, completed in March 2024, reported reasonable assurance in relation to risk management.</p> <p>We will continue to support GAC to scrutinise the Corporate Risk Assessment, standardise risk reporting across directorates and integrate risk reporting with performance and finance across all service areas. We will also consider whether we are overly risk-averse at a corporate level.</p>
<p><b>Commissioning and Procurement</b></p>	<p><b>Adequate</b></p>	<p>Procurement and commissioning are adequate.</p> <p>The procurement element is good. A new, UK procurement Act 2023 came into force 24 February 2025 and a Welsh Social Partnership &amp; Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 came into force April 2024. We have implemented new contract procedure rules in line with the UK Act and will develop and run training sessions on these. We are working on the development of a new strategy and delivery plan to reflect these changes. Social value and carbon reduction have been strengthened as a consideration in our tenders. Contractor Safeguarding Protocol has also been included to ensure suppliers are aware of their duties for safeguarding vulnerable people. We have developed a website for tenders and procurement, including a Corporate Contracts Register and a new 'Selling to the Council' guide to support suppliers and contractors to do business with the council.</p> <p>We have developed and implemented a Modern Slavery Statement and standard terms and conditions for use across the council. We made changes to our processes and procedures in light of the Council's financial position in 2023/24 including a price cap and authorisations for purchasing card spending. These have continued as they have proved successful.</p> <p>The overall judgement is assessed as adequate based on the need for improved capacity in the corporate and directorate teams, particularly to focus on supplier relationships and reporting on social value, the need for an improved and more consistent approach to commissioning across directorates.</p>
<p><b>Performance management</b></p>	<p><b>Adequate</b></p>	<p>Performance management is adequate.</p> <p>Since our last self-assessment, we have made progress on our Performance Management Improvement Plan, closed the recommendations of the Audit Wales Review of Performance Management and addressed the remaining recommendations of the internal audit of performance indicators (PIs). Main improvements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More effective review of quarterly performance information through separate reporting to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed a whole council approach to performance reporting, presenting performance data under corporate wellbeing objectives rather than directorates.</li> <li>• Improved our regulatory tracker and better integrated this into our quarterly performance management.</li> <li>• Improved data quality and accuracy through PI audits and better use of supporting evidence.</li> <li>• Supported Group Managers and Performance Champions to improve data quality and reporting timescales.</li> <li>• Developed and implemented a more objective system to make judgements on our performance for self-assessment.</li> <li>• Improved our use of service user perspectives through the National Residents Survey and work with Data Cymru.</li> </ul> <p>Improvements are still needed, including improving challenge and effective use of performance information, building capacity in corporate and directorate teams, reviewing our performance framework and improving resilience of our performance system.</p>
<b>Workforce planning</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<p>Workforce management is good.</p> <p>Feedback from employees, managers, trade union representatives and internal audits is generally positive. Managers are assisted to deal effectively with people issues through appropriate and timely support from the HR and Organisational Development Service. The HR operating model aims to give managers an improved service focused on proactive and preventative HR services and an incremental reduction in the need for and provision of reactive support services.</p> <p>There have been improvements to our Strategic Workforce Planning and further development of HR policies and procedures e.g. automation in the recruitment process. Managers have been supported to manage sickness absence. HR briefings on key workforce topics have provided support for managers. We have focused on reducing use of agency workers with success in social services including international recruitment and grow your own. We continue to focus on organisation wellbeing, supporting employees and managers where needed. We will continue to develop HR processes, where automation will be key. There is still the need for added capacity amongst managers and in the HR team, and an increased focus on strategic workforce planning across the council, including succession planning.</p>
<b>Asset management</b>	<b>Adequate</b>	<p>Asset Management Policy is good with good engagement internally from all directorates. The Asset Management Strategy is dynamic and undergoes annual and bi-annual service, asset and market linked reviews with services and partners. The overall judgement is assessed as adequate, based on the need to address the continued workforce and resource challenges that are impacting on our ability to plan more strategically, and resulting in a continued reactive approach. Over the last year we have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced our maintenance backlog</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved our management of Statutory Building Compliance. Overall compliance is now 78%, Big-5 Compliance at 95% and Legionella compliance 88%.</li><li>• Started procuring an Integrated Works Management System (IWMS) and development of a new plant asset database.</li><li>• Rationalised our estate with the sale of Ravenscourt to South Wales Police and vacating The Innovation Centre for disposal. Supported the move of MASH to Civic Offices.</li><li>• Continued to develop the new Asset Management Plan.</li><li>• Worked on a new condition survey commissioning specification to allow enhanced condition surveys in 2025/26.</li><li>• Completed an external audit of our Major Projects Team to enhance work as we design and construct new schools.</li></ul> <p>But more improvements are still needed, including adopting the new Strategic Asset Management Plan, continuing improvements in the maintenance backlog and Statutory Building Compliance, procuring and implementing the IWMS and focusing on our workforce capacity. We will also work closely with the Decarbonisation Team to enhance our asset management approach.</p>
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#### **4. 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 2024/25.

##### **What is our judgement?**

<b>Governance</b>	<b>Good</b>
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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 Governance Statement which are monitored through the Annual Governance Statement Action Plan.

A number of significant issues were identified in the Council's 2023/24 AGS, to be taken forward during 2024/25, so in the past year we have made improvements including:

- Improvements to our medium to long-term financial management processes include holding early meetings with political groups so they could comment on budget proposals and two focused meetings with Budget Research and Evaluation Panel (BREP) looking at Education and Schools, and Social Care and Wellbeing.
- Workforce planning activities including grow your own via apprentices and graduates and international recruitment have resulted in continued improvement with the recruitment of Childrens Social Workers. These principles need to be applied in other areas that are experiencing difficulty in recruiting.
- The Carbon Trust reviewed our progress towards the 2030 zero carbon objective, our governance arrangements and to provide approximate implementation costs for the objective. They presented initial findings to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2025. We will review their findings and update Cabinet on the action plan and governance on the 2030 journey.
- We are participating in a Performance Information Community of Practice to help enhance the quality of performance information (particularly focused on responding to the Audit Wales criticisms) and provide opportunities to review performance management arrangements, share best practice, and collaborate on data development. A National Resident Survey (WLGA/Data Cymru) ran in the Autumn.
- Revised Finance Procedure Rules were agreed by Cabinet and noted by Council in January 2025. The budget continues to be closely monitored and reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis. More briefings for members have also been provided. Social media posts were put out in the Autumn to raise awareness of the Council's budget position and explain how the money is spent. This preceded the full budget consultation which was completed in January 2025.
- A new draft Digital Strategy has been developed, reflecting on previous criticisms from Audit Wales and the key priorities for the Council. A consultation process on the document will start in May 2025.

**Listening to the views of others**

The council provides services to all residents of Bridgend County Borough. 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 the Borough 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 accounts.

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.

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 on 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. This year we also took part in the Data Cymru and WLGA supported 'National Residents Survey' from September to November 2024. This comprehensive consultation aimed to improve our understanding of residents' perceptions, priorities, and experiences on themes including quality of life, community safety, satisfaction with council services, and levels of public trust and engagement. We received over 3,000 responses. We are currently analysing the detail of the responses and the information gathered will help us shape our services and communications.

Other strategies and services are coproduced with service users and their families to help us create services that are more responsive, inclusive and effective. This has included the development of key strategies for carers such as the Young Carers Network and the creation of Young Carer Ambassadors, ensuring that young carers influence the development of peer support, educational resources and policies that directly affect them, promoting awareness and engagement across communities.

We also consulted on some significant proposed changes to the way the council or our services work. Some of the main consultations in 2024/25 were –

- Our **Annual Budget Consultation** included engagement with the Citizens' Panel and took place in January 2025. Respondents were asked about budget principles, reducing or closing services, new charges, Council Tax and citizen focus. There were 1,637 interactions with the consultation from survey completions, social media engagement and via the Citizens' Panel. Participants largely opposed reductions in services for vulnerable people, education, and child protection. Lower priority was given to services like leisure facilities or nursery provision. Over 54% of respondents supported Council Tax increases of 4.5% or above.
- A **Childcare Sufficiency Assessment** was carried out in winter 2024 with surveys for parents and providers. The parent survey received a total of 984 responses and the provider received 30. This assessment will help us better understand parents and carers use of childcare, the overall supply of childcare and any issues or changes that might have an impact on the demand of childcare over the next five years.
- A consultation on a new **Assisted Transport Policy** took place August to October 2024. It outlined our approach on the provision of transport for people accessing services meeting an assessed care or support need. The consultation raised concerns which were reflected in an amended policy then agreed by Cabinet.
- On the **Porthcawl Town Centre Placemaking plan** early engagement workshops with local and organisational stakeholders between September and December 2024.
- On the **Regeneration Masterplan for Salt Lake and Sandy Bay** engagement took place over a month between January and February 2025, to gain feedback to help guide the final redevelopment option. Over 900 people attended the public exhibition. In addition feedback was received via email, online feedback forms and hard copies at the exhibitions. This was supported by a project website and numerous stakeholder engagement session in schools and roundtables.
- We consulted on five proposed changes to **Home-to-School Transport** between April and July 2024 including four public consultation sessions and four pupil and youth sessions. In total, there were 1,308 responses to the survey. Responses received were mixed. Between 48 and 70% of respondents opposed each of the proposals, for reasons focused on child safety and wellbeing, environmental concerns, social and economic impact, and the effect on attendance and education. Cabinet reluctantly agreed to four of the five proposals due to the urgent need to save money, saying it has become impossible to offer what was previously one of the most generous levels of provision in Wales. Changes to proposal five which looked at transport for pupils with additional learning needs will be deferred until more research is completed. Starting from September 2025, these changes will be made:
  - Where a safe walking route has been identified, qualifying distances for school transport will change to the statutory limits set by Welsh Government of two miles for primary school pupils, and three miles for secondary school pupils.
  - In future, pupils who have had eligibility for free school transport passed on by an older sibling will no longer be entitled to receive the same provision.



- Free transport for nursery and post-16 learners will no longer be available, but continues for those attending Welsh-medium or faith schools who live beyond qualifying distances.

**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 by our Information Team and we report on them every quarter to the Public Services Ombudsman. In 2024/25 we had the following informal complaints –

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Resolved</b>	<b>Upheld</b>	<b>Discontinued or withdrawn</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>
Adult Social Care	0	0	0	0	0
Benefits Administration	4	2	2	0	0
Children's Social Services	4	4	0	0	0
Community Facilities	18	12	2	3	1
Complaints handling	4	4	0	0	0
Education	25	22	2	1	0
Environment	7	6	0	1	0
Finance & Council Tax	36	31	2	3	0
Housing	29	26	3	0	0
Planning & Building Control	18	15	1	2	0
Roads & Transport	40	37	0	3	0
Various/Other	1	0	0	0	1
Waste & Refuse	3	1	0	2	0

- **Formal Complaint Stage**

Formal complaints can be lodged 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 five working days. These complaints are sent to a Head of Service who appoints a senior officer from the 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 and where in the Borough they come from. The Information Team has

received, logged, acknowledged and referred a total of 39 formal complaints during 2024/25 –

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Resolved</b>	<b>Upheld</b>	<b>Discontinued or withdrawn</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>
Adult Social Care	0	0	0	0	0
Benefits Administration	1	0	1	0	0
Children's Social Services	1	0	1	0	0
Community Facilities	2	2	0	0	0
Complaints Handling	2	0	2	0	0
Education	6	6	0	0	0
Environment	0	0	0	0	0
Finance & Council Tax	4	3	1	0	0
Housing	4	4	0	0	0
Planning & Building Control	4	4	0	0	0
Roads & Transport	5	4	1	0	0
Various/Other	9	8	0	1	0
Waste & Refuse	1	1	0	0	0

There are separate processes for dealing with social services complaints, Elected Member conduct concerns and school-based complaints.

Following an internal audit of the corporate complaints process, and a review of the current complaints system and process, a range of improvements are underway including –

- An e-learning module for all complaint handlers.
- A more consistent way of working to collate, record and report complaints and compliments as well as documenting working procedures to support all officers involved in the complaints process.
- Improving the process for customers to make both complaints and compliments (incorporating stage one and stage two complaints in the same system).
- An improved triage and escalation process.
- Improvements to customer feedback and communication.
- Automating elements of the process where possible to streamline the whole process from beginning to end.

- Developing the process to ensure all feedback is captured and recorded, including whether the complaint was upheld or not, and any steps taken in relation to lessons learnt and allowing complaints data to be analysed as a means of identifying potential areas for improvement, and from this to establish areas for further learning and development.
- Reviewing and developing monitoring reports.

**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 regulatory tracker itself was a response to an Audit Wales recommendation that we needed to improve the way audit, inspection and regulation findings are logged, scrutinised and used to improve the Council's activities. The mechanism was developed to monitor progress against recommendations from all inspections and audits completed by key regulators of local government services. This is reported to Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) in January and July each year. The following new reviews were published in 2024/25.

- An Audit Wales review of our Digital Strategy was published in April 2024. It concluded there are weaknesses in the Council's approach to developing and delivering its Digital Strategy and provided three recommendations. A new Digital Strategy has now been developed and is under consultation.
- An Audit Wales review of Financial Sustainability was published in September 2024. It concluded 'the Council understands its financial position with good arrangements to support its financial sustainability which it flexes and adapts but is at the early stage of developing its long-term approach'. It provided two recommendations. Work is ongoing to ensure that elected members are fully briefed on the financial position of the Council and the BREP process is being reviewed to support longer term financial planning.
- An Audit Wales review of decision-making arrangements was published in October 2024. It concluded 'the Council generally has proper decision-making arrangements in place but weaknesses in forward planning and pre-decision scrutiny are undermining their effectiveness'. It provided five recommendations. Actions were put in place to respond to the recommendations, including publishing a 6-month scrutiny forward work plan, updating our scheme of delegation, scrutiny training and the development of proposals for new scrutiny arrangements including the renaming of the Scrutiny Committees.
- An Audit Wales report on our setting of Well-being Objectives was published in October 2024. It concluded 'the Council has applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives, but there are opportunities to build on how it involves citizens and how it intends to work with partners' and provided three recommendations. One of the recommendations is addressed in this report and the other two will form part of the development of the next Corporate Plan.

Internal Audit is also a statutory requirement in Local Government. The Council's internal audit is undertaken by the Regional Internal Audit Service, a partnership shared service between Bridgend County Borough Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and hosted by the Vale of Glamorgan Council. The Head of Internal Audit's annual opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control for 2024/25 is: "Reasonable Assurance". That means based on the work they have done, no significant cross-cutting control issues have been identified that would impact on the Council's overall control environment. Any weaknesses that have been identified are service specific.

**Staff and Trade Union views - Social Partnership Reporting Duty 2024/25**

Since 1 April 2024 the Council has been subject to the Social Partnership duty under the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023. This means that we have to explain how we have worked with staff and trade unions within the year, and any areas for improvement we have identified.

Relations with the recognised Trade Unions are extremely positive at present and their support is welcomed to ensure we are working in a true social partnership.

**Regular work**

There is a monthly meeting with Trade Unions, where a range of Officers present on a variety of topics, Trade Union colleagues' views are tested and any issues discussed. The Trade Unions involved in these regular meetings are both those for corporate teams – Unison, Unite, and GMB. Our teaching Trade Unions also take part in the monthly meetings – ASCL, NEU, NASUWT, NAHT and UCAC

In 2024/25 we had ten monthly meetings, usually avoiding January, April and August due to school holiday and general availability. The meetings in 2024/25 took place on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 14<sup>th</sup> May, 14<sup>th</sup> June, 14<sup>th</sup> July, 20<sup>th</sup> September, 18<sup>th</sup> October, 15<sup>th</sup> November and 13<sup>th</sup> December 2024, and 7<sup>th</sup> February and 21<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

In addition to these regular meetings, Trade Unions have direct access to HR Officers and there is regular and open communication to work together. Trade Unions are involved regularly in workforce and other related meetings.

All policies, protocols and programmes are shared with the relevant Trade Unions at the earliest opportunity to include their views and thoughts. During the recent appointment of the new Chief Executive a Trade Union Officer sat on one of the stakeholder panels as part of the assessment centre.

**Planning the year ahead**

As part of the annual budget development process, the Chief Officer Finance, Housing and Change attended the regular Trade Union meetings in November 2024 and February 2025. She provided an update on the process, the approach, assumptions made (and later the draft settlement from Welsh Government) and savings proposals.

Trade Unions played an integral part in the development of the Council's 5-year, high level Corporate Plan 2023/28. They were involved at three key points; firstly, developing the approach, then developing, setting and agreeing the wellbeing objectives and finally at the draft report stage. To date, Trade Unions have not been directly involved in the development of the 1-yearly Corporate Plan Delivery Plan.

**Reviewing the year behind**

Each year since its inception, Trade Unions have been involved in the development of the Council's Corporate Self-Assessment. As part of the development of the corporate Self-Assessment 2023/24 the Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, attended the regular Trade Union meeting on 14 July 2024. She presented the key points and judgements from the draft self-assessment and took views, areas for development and

any issues from the Trade Unions in attendance. The draft report itself was also circulated to Trade Unions for review and any additional comments or changes.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Develop a more engaging and interactive process for involving Trade Union colleagues in the self-assessment process
- Develop a clear and agreed role for Trade Union colleagues as part of formal budget consultation.
- Involve Trade Union colleagues in the development and review of the 1-year Corporate Plan Delivery Plan (every year rather than the current involvement every 5 years).
- Providing training or awareness raising to employees and Trade Union representatives on how the Social Partnership Duty is being implemented.
- Working to confirm updated Trade Union facilities time agreements.



## **5. Our Strategic Equality Plan**

Our new Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) was developed and consulted on in early 2024 and outlined our six strategic equality objectives, which will shape how we plan, provide, and deliver our services to reflect the diversity of our communities.

We have developed a Strategic Equality Action Plan for 2024/28 which was approved in July 2024 and has now been published on our website. Work towards achieving these actions will continue over the next 4-year lifespan of the SEP.

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 (which will now include the full equality impact assessments undertaken). In addition we will publish annually:

- 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.