

Team Caerphilly

BETTER TOGETHER

Draft Self-Assessment Report

2023/24



Self-assessment Report 2023/24

| | | |
|------------|---|----|
| Section 1: | Foreword from the Leader | 1 |
| Section 2: | Introduction | 2 |
| Section 3: | Our approach to carrying out self-assessment | 3 |
| Section 4: | Monitoring Progress | 4 |
| Section 5: | Strategic Summary for 2023/24 | 6 |
| | Our Key Learning from 2023/24 | 9 |
| Section 6: | 6.1 Corporate Planning | 10 |
| | 6.2 Financial Planning | 13 |
| | 6.3 Workforce Planning | 18 |
| | 6.4 Procurement and Information Technology | 24 |
| | 6.5 Assets | 29 |
| | 6.6 Risk Management | 36 |
| | 6.7 Performance Management | 40 |
| | Other Key Council Health Checks | 44 |
| Section 7: | 7.1 Equalities and Welsh Language | 44 |
| | 7.2 Decarbonisation | 48 |
| | 7.3 Consultation and Engagement | 52 |
| | 7.4 Good Governance - how good is the council's governance? | 55 |
| | 7.5 Regulator Feedback | 58 |
| Section 8: | How to contact us | 59 |

Section 1: Foreword from the Leader

Local authorities across Wales have faced significant challenges over recent years, including a global pandemic, an ongoing cost-of-living crisis and, most recently, the effects of far-reaching reductions to our council budgets.

Whilst we have experienced austerity in the past, the scale of the challenges we are currently facing is unprecedented and that is why self-assessment plays a vital role in ensuring that we are working effectively and efficiently across all parts of the organisation.

The landscape across local government is sure to change over the coming years as we strive to deliver balanced budgets. It is clear we cannot continue to do things the way we have in the past and we know we must adapt to meet the challenges ahead. We must become more flexible and find different ways to meet the ever increasing and complex needs of our communities.

We are taking a proactive approach to shape what the future of Caerphilly will look like in terms of service delivery. We have developed a transformation programme that has captured a 'single view of change' for the whole authority. We will take a more holistic approach to identifying opportunities for saving money, collaboration and investment, with the Corporate Plan objectives in mind.

We have already seen significant progress in identifying areas for service transformation, which will result in significant savings over the coming years, but more importantly we can see opportunities to improve the customer journey for residents who access our services.

That being said, changes on such a large scale for an organisation our size can be hugely challenging, and we are keen to ensure that we learn lessons as we embed the change framework in all corners of the authority.

Caerphilly will look different in the future, we will have fewer buildings and service delivery will have to change, but the community voice will play a vital role in the decision-making process and I am sure by working together, we can create a better future for all our residents.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Morgan', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Cllr Sean Morgan
Leader of the Council

Section 2: Introduction

Welcome to Caerphilly County Borough Council's third annual self-assessment.

In 2021 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act came into law and set out a new approach for how a Council assesses and reports on their organisational effectiveness.

The intention of the legislation is for councils to be proactive in considering how internal processes and procedures can improve, to enable more effective planning, delivery, and decision-making to drive better outcomes.

In the Act, there is a duty to keep under review, the extent to which the Council is fulfilling its performance requirements, which reflects on the extent to which the Council:

- is exercising its functions effectively.
- is using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively.
- has effective governance in place for securing the above.

The Council publishes a Self-Assessment Report once in every financial period, which considers the main learning points, and what it will do to improve upon them. The Self-Assessment Report is a way of critically reviewing the current position, to make decisions on how to secure improvement for the future. This Self-Assessment Report replaces the former Annual Performance Report.

This report can be viewed as the Council's assessment of its organisational effectiveness and its plan for improving its current approach.

The key messages are framed around the core set of activities that are common to the corporate governance of public bodies as outlined in the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015 \('the Act'\) Guidance](#), and more information can be found from this link.

Section 3: Our approach to self-assessment

The intention of self-assessment is to provide and act on organisational learning and provide an ongoing process of review about how good our performance is, and where it could be better. From this learning the Council produces a Self-Assessment Report. The Council has chosen a range of information to use that will be used to evidence our conclusions, such as performance data, complaints, and finance data. Where possible, the Council aims to use existing sources of information to provide a joined-up approach.

Self-assessment is achieved by using intelligence in an insightful way, reflecting on how the Council is operating and identifying improvement actions. To inform the Council's self-assessment it is important to know the following:

- What went well and why?
- What did not go well and why?
- What difference have we made?
- What have we learned?
- What actions do we intend to take in the next period to ensure that we are meeting our performance requirements?

An important tool in the assessment of our performance is the use of a '**Corporate Performance Assessment**', or CPA. The CPA is a high-level strategic dashboard that includes a range of information to that offers a 'snapshot' of performance across the Council as a whole. The CPA is compiled from key data reported in several **Directorate Performance Assessments** (DPAs).

Every directorate within the Council provides a range of information through the DPAs that enables progress to be kept under review, provide insight and intelligence, manage resources, mitigate risks and enable senior leaders to answer the question: what are we learning? and what are we doing about that learning?

This year we have reviewed the process and are re-designing the DPA's to be smaller and to build a stronger CPA with the addition of a more detailed members scorecard and there is more about this under the 'Performance Management' Section.

Using a variety of data sets across a range of dashboards helps the Council better understand potential cause and effect correlations and ensure that data is not viewed in isolation. The dashboards provide us with a more rounded and balanced view of performance and impact across the Council. Other sources of information included are:

- Annual Equality and Welsh Language Reports
- The Annual Governance Statement
- Complaints Data
- The Council's Director of Social Service's Annual Report
- Evidence from in year inspection and regulatory sources, including reports from Estyn, Audit Wales, and Care Inspectorate Wales, and other public interest reports where appropriate, although this list is not exhaustive.
- Consultation Responses

The Council has a large pool of evidence supporting its performance. Publishing all that data would be problematic and inaccessible. This annual self-assessment seeks, therefore, to provide a higher-level summary statement and some summative judgements of our performance in a balanced way.

Section 4: Monitoring Progress

The Council makes a draft of our Self-assessment Report available to its Governance and Audit committee. The committee will review the draft report and may make recommendations for changes to the conclusions or actions. Details of the Governance and Audit committee's role is in page 41 of the constitution and can be accessed on the hyperlink below.

[psh \(caerphilly.gov.uk\)](https://psh.caerphilly.gov.uk)

The Governance and Audit function is to gain assurance that processes are in place and are effective. They can challenge and suggest changes to the conclusions, for example if they believe there is further learning that should have been included. The committee can also suggest different actions to address an area of improvement and review if these are the right actions for effectiveness. The Self-Assessment then goes forward to Joint Scrutiny for a broader challenge session prior to going to Cabinet.

Changes to 2023/24 Self-Assessment

Improving the monitoring and reporting of the Council's Self-Assessment is a continuous improvement process in its own right. Last year, the Council said it intended to introduce an overall evaluative and summative judgement for each of the sections. The scale below is based on the five potential judgements and is now embedded throughout Caerphilly's Self-Assessment:

1. Highly Effective
2. Effective
3. Adequate
4. Less Effective
5. Urgent Improvement Required

A more detailed description of the judgements can be found on page 9.

Section 5: Our Strategic Overview of 2023/24

Overall Summary from our Deputy Chief Executive

2023/24 has been another extremely challenging year for everyone who lives and works in Caerphilly County Borough Council. Although the Covid pandemic is now hopefully behind us, its impact continues to be felt in terms of demand for the Council's services and the need for us to evolve the way we provide those services. Financial challenges faced across the public sector continue to increase and the Council is not exempt from these pressures. We anticipate that for us to remain within our allocated budget, the Council will need to make savings/efficiencies of £45.213m over the next 2 years.

We have deliberately avoided the temptation to "salami slice" our budget in favour of a Transformation Programme which seeks not only to provide the savings required but offers us an opportunity to change the way we provide services to ensure they are fit for purpose. The Programme is focusing on designing services that aim to meet the needs of our communities, but not the wants, and is called Mobilising Team Caerphilly (MTC).

Whilst it would be very easy for the Council to simply focus on the challenge of savings, we are also pressing ahead with our ambitious Place Shaping Programme. This centres on the Council's Capital Investment Programme and includes projects such as:

- New secondary, primary and Welsh medium schools
- New build energy efficient social housing
- A new respite care centre for children and adults
- A centre for vulnerable learners
- Community hubs that provide a variety of services and information out of existing council buildings
- Town centre regeneration projects

Pressing ahead with our Place Shaping Programme at the time of significant financial challenge is no easy undertaking and will require priorities to be identified and difficult choices to be made, particularly as our existing and ageing infrastructure such as our highway network, structures and drainage infrastructure is adversely affected by climate change.

As previously stated, the financial challenges faced in 2023/24 have been significant but despite this the Authority has managed to stay within its allocated budget for the year.

In terms of performance there has been some key achievements including:

- Attendance rates have improved/increased for both primary and secondary schools.
- The number of pupils Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETS) has reduced.
- An additional £1.5m of additional income has been generated for local residents.
- Along with our housing association partners, we have delivered 188 new affordable homes in the county borough.
- The Empty Property team have been extremely successful by returning 104 previously empty properties back to into use. This has also improved the visual appearance of our communities.
- The Council has successfully implemented the new Universal Free School Meals Offer.
- The number of children on the Child Protection Register has declined on a quarter-by-quarter basis - an overall reduction of 48 children during 2023/24.
- There has been an increase in the amount of food waste being recycled and also an increase in awareness of the importance of recycling more and wasting less.
- Investment in town centres has continued with free Wi-fi being introduced in 7 town centres.
- A new web platform has been purchased for the Council that will support the MTC programme and provide the opportunity for residents to receive end to end digital services.
- The number of Electric Vehicle (EV) chargers available has increased improving the attractiveness of using electric vehicles.

Naturally we also have key challenges that we need to address moving forward including:

- Demand for housing and increased incidences of homelessness.
- Increased demand and complexity from people requiring social care services.
- Recycling performance must improve significantly to meet the national targets.
- The number of exclusions from schools need to reduce.
- The authority's performance regarding council house repairs must improve.

The Authority's Corporate Plan for 2023-28 was agreed by Council on the 29 November 2023. This sets out 5 Well-being Objectives we aim to deliver through this period. These are:

1. Enabling our Children to Succeed in Education
2. Enabling our Residents to Thrive
3. Enabling our Communities to Thrive
4. Enabling our Economy to Grow
5. Enabling our Environment to be Greener

In summary, in the current economic climate, we are not going to be able to succeed in delivering our priorities and objectives by working alone. Working in partnership with our key stakeholders will be key. We will work closely with the Public Service Board and Regional Partnership Board to ensure successful delivery at a very challenging time.

The following year will bring about challenges which will require the Council and the public to come to terms with delivering services in a very different way. Our MTC approach will deliver the financial savings and efficiencies we require by changing the way we deliver services, inevitably meaning a smaller Council employing less staff, using less buildings and making the most of new technology to deliver services in a way that is sustainable during the most difficult financial period that the public sector has seen.

The challenge is significant, but I strongly believe that if we follow our current direction of travel, we can continue to develop our Council that is high performing and able to live within its means.



D.M. Street
Dave Street
Deputy Chief Executive

Section 6: Introduction to the details of the Self-Assessment

As referenced, Self-Assessment is an ongoing process of continuous improvement. Last year the Council said it would introduce an overall rating to give the reader an understanding of the Council's effectiveness against the 7 organisational activities.

The scale is set out below with a description that summarises each of the ratings and provides the basis of the Council's judgement.

| Level | Rating | Description |
|-------|-----------------------------|---|
| 1 | Highly Effective | Major Strengths – All or significant majority of actions have been achieved or are on track. The weight of evidence shows that any identified areas for improvement are making the better best. |
| 2 | Effective | Important Strengths with a few areas for improvement – the weight of evidence shows successes are greater than areas that have not been achieved. Minor areas for improvement to make the good better. |
| 3 | Adequate | Strengths just outweigh weaknesses – the evidence of success marginally outweighs areas that are not on track. Some actions are behind schedule and data shows this is falling short of planned achievement. Areas for improvement identified |
| 4 | Less Effective | Weaknesses just outweigh strengths – The weight of evidence shows weaknesses marginally outweigh areas that are on track. Some actions are behind schedule and some measures are falling short of planned achievement. Several areas for improvement needed |
| 5 | Urgent Improvement Required | Important weaknesses – the weight of evidence and actions have not been achieved in most areas. Performance is assessed as moving in the wrong direction. Needs urgent improvement |

Below is the key we use to monitor the action plan that we use to review improvement.

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Not yet started or too early to report any progress (achievements/changes) | Black |
| Started but did not progress well – limited or no progress | Red |
| Started with reasonable progress achieved | Amber |
| Going well with good progress | Green |
| Completed | Blue |

6.1 Corporate Planning – reflecting the financial year 2023/24

General Summary

The Council judges corporate planning to be **effective** because Corporate Planning is well embedded within the organisation, and the Council has a history of planning well in readiness for any new legislative changes.

The new Corporate Plan 2023-2028 was received by Joint Scrutiny in October and endorsed by Cabinet in November 2023. The way in which the Council set its new Well-being Objectives, using the sustainable development principle, received positive feedback from Audit Wales.

However, there is more to do in improving performance reporting mechanisms, and this is set out within the Performance Management section of this report.

Other legislative or planning works the Council has undertaken this year:

- The Draft Financial Accounts approval in April 2024 followed by certification by the Auditor General for Wales.
- The rules governing public procurement in Wales are being reformed through The Procurement Act 2023 which comes into force in October 2024.
- Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 comes into force in October 2025.
- The Health Service Procurement (Wales) Act 2024, the date of which it comes into force to be confirmed in the Autumn 2024.
- The Council is currently working with the other 9 Local Authorities within the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) as well as the CCR staff in transitioning the CCR to the South East Wales (SEW) Corporate Joint Committee which will have 3 main legal duties: economic well-being, spatial planning and regional transport planning. The SEW Corporate Joint Committee will help to formalise the region's role and impact through giving it corporate legal identity status, but this new legal entity is not about competing with local services or eroding democratic legitimacy – it's about being complementary and understanding which organisations are best placed to deliver at local, regional and national levels.

As referenced, the Council has also introduced an overall summative judgement scale of effectiveness for each element of the Self-Assessment process. The Council's performance against its newly defined Well-being Objectives, which are our contribution towards the national well-being goals, is set out in the second part of this document, along with the newly included summative judgements.

In addition to the new Council's Corporate Plan, a range of other key plans are currently under development. The Caerphilly Town Place Making Plan 2035 has several projects and there is more information about the outcomes in our Well-being Objective update. Place Plans for Blackwood and Bargoed Town are nearing completion and will be the catalyst for accessing Welsh Government 'transforming towns' funding going forward.

The Local Development Plan (LDP) is the overarching document which governs land use planning decisions in the County Borough. It can have a significant impact on future development which is of particular relevance to future generations for future housing provision, schools and leisure facilities. The LDP is also a key policy document in terms of the economic prosperity as it will ultimately determine land allocations for economic development purposes which impacts on the availability of employment opportunities for future generations. It is essential for our strategic planning but there have been delays in progressing the current Local Development Plan Process in accordance with the delivery agreement between the Council and Welsh Government (WG).

Recent correspondence from WG will require further regional work (including the CCR) on growth assumptions. The Council agreed on 4th July 2023 to pause progress while regional work is completed on growth scenarios and the regional level Strategic Development Plan (SDP). Consultants have been appointed to undertake regional (SDP) work over next few months and work will recommence on the LDP after this is completed.

In common with other public service organisations across Wales, Caerphilly is facing significant financial challenges to deliver a balanced budget. In an effort to avoid the salami slicing of budgets and protect critical service delivery, an exciting and challenging change programme called Mobilising Team Caerphilly (MTC) has been developed. The MTC Transformation programme has created a change framework with two component programmes: Service Transformation and Place Shaping.

A fundamental part of the Programme was to create and maintain a single view of change, ensuring that change, savings and investments are considered holistically across the authority and not in isolation. This level of visibility ensures that change is appropriately managed, resourced and supported by the Portfolio Management Office.

The programme has already identified a significant amount of savings and seeks to create a roadmap to support the authority to reach the savings target of £45.213m in the next two financial years.

There is more information on Mobilising Team Caerphilly within our Financial Planning section of this self-assessment.

Our workforce development area of activity has rolled out a toolkit to help managers plan what skills they would need to meet their priorities as set out in their service planning.

Action Update from 2023/24

| Last year we said we would | By when | Progress | Status |
|---|--------------------|---|---------------|
| Publish the new Council Corporate Plan in 2022/23 | | The Corporate Plan was endorsed by Cabinet Nov 2023 | Completed |
| Launch a new intranet which will aid staff in accessing plans and strategies. | Oct 2023- Feb 2024 | | Completed |
| Develop a Performance Framework and reporting for the new Corporate Plan. | June 2024 | Work is taking place to report on the first year of the Council's new Well-being Objectives from Sept 2024. | Good progress |

New actions to enhance the Planning process for effectiveness for 2024/25

| New Actions | By When |
|--|----------------|
| Build reporting dashboards for the Well-being Objectives to aid monitoring of progress. | Dec 2024 |
| Update the Performance Management Guidance book to reflect the changes in the framework. | Jan 2025 |

6.2 Financial Planning – reflecting the financial year 2023/24

General Summary

We judge the performance of our Financial Planning and Management to be **adequate**. This judgement reflects the fact that the Council has a strong track record of delivering balanced budgets and has a clear strategic approach to improve its financial sustainability through the Mobilising Team Caerphilly transformation programme. However, whilst a range of savings proposals to address the financial shortfall facing the Council are under development, these will need to be approved and delivered at pace to ensure that the Council continues to remain financially resilient moving forward.

2023/24 Revenue Budget Outturn

For the 2023/24 financial year the Council reported a net overall underspend against its revenue budget of £8.834m. This includes schools and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and is summarised in the table below:

| Service Area | Underspend / (Overspend) £m |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Schools | (6.007) |
| Housing Revenue Account (HRA) | 1.313 |
| Education & Lifelong Learning | 1.134 |
| Social Services | 5.116 |
| Economy & Environment | 0.110 |
| Corporate Services | 2.201 |
| Miscellaneous Finance | 4.274 |
| Council Tax Surplus | 0.691 |
| Net Overall Underspend | 8.834 |

The schools overspend of £6.007m is ring-fenced, consequently school balances have reduced from £11.3m as of 31 March 2023 to £5.3m as of 31 March 2024. At the end of the 2022/23 financial year, there were 5 Primary Schools with a collective deficit of £0.151m and 3 Secondary Schools with a collective deficit of £0.949m. As of 31 March 2024, there are 15 Primary Schools with a collective deficit of £0.559m and 6 Secondary Schools with a collective deficit of £2.9m. This will need to be kept under close review during the 2024/25 financial year with a number of schools setting deficit budgets underpinned by recovery plans.

The underspend of £1.313m on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is also ring-fenced and results in HRA working balances as of 31 March 2024 being £23.868m. These balances have been fully committed within the 2024/25 HRA Business Plan that was approved by Cabinet on 03 April 2024.

For all other services there is a net underspend of £13.528m, which results in the forecast General Fund reserve balance being £21.722m as of 31 March 2025. It is usually recommended by the Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer that the minimum balance on the General Fund should be 3% of the Council's net revenue budget, which equates to £13.476m for the 2024/25 financial year. This means that there is a projected

surplus General Fund balance of £8.246m and proposals for the use of this surplus were approved by Council at its meeting on 24 July 2024.

The most significant proposal approved by Council was to set-aside £5.266m of the surplus General Fund balance to establish a Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) contingency of £5.266m. This will be used to support the delivery of an anticipated savings requirement of £45.213m facing the Council for the two-year period 2025/26 to 2026/27.

Future Financial Outlook

The 2023/24 financial year continued to present challenges for the Council, in particular the ongoing impact of the cost-of-living crisis. The cost-of-living crisis has impacted on Council budgets with financial pressures being experienced across all areas, in particular energy, fuel, food and drink, and construction/contractor costs. Despite this, the provisional revenue budget outturn position for 2023/24 shows a net underspend of £8.834m across all service areas (including schools and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)).

However, the financial position remains extremely challenging moving forward. The 2024/25 revenue budget approved by Council on 27 February 2024 included cost pressures of £56.464m. These pressures are being funded through an increase in the Welsh Government Financial Settlement of £8.904m, permanent savings of £19.552m, temporary savings of £11.449m, the one-off use of reserves totalling £10.624m, and £5.935m from a 6.9% increase in Council Tax. The £22.1m of temporary measures for 2024/25 are contributing to an overall anticipated savings requirement of £45.213m for the two-year period 2025/26 to 2026/27.

Due to the unprecedented levels of inflation experienced in recent years, the current economic outlook, and the range of temporary budgetary measures that were approved for the 2024/25 financial year, the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) has been updated based on a range of assumptions, resulting in a potential savings requirement of £45.213m for the two-year period 2025/26 to 2026/27.

Given the scale of the challenge that we collectively face, a financial strategy that seeks to continuously salami slice our services and deplete our reserves is not a sustainable or an appropriate approach, especially when the demands upon our services are far higher than ever. To ensure that we can meet the needs of our communities, whilst operating with reduced finances, a whole Council and a whole county borough holistic approach is needed.

The Council will require new approaches to service delivery, and this is being led by the Chief Executive, Leader, Corporate Management Team, and Cabinet and is being co-ordinated through our Mobilising Team Caerphilly transformation programme and our Place Shaping Programme. It is vital that the required changes are developed at pace and that key decisions are made early to ensure that the projected savings requirement for 2025/26 and 2026/27 can be delivered.

During the last twelve months significant work has been undertaken through the 'discovery phase' of Mobilising Team Caerphilly to identify a wide range of projects that will help the Council balance its budget moving forward. We are now moving into the delivery stage with numerous projects being defined in detail, and a range of proposals will be presented for scrutiny and decision throughout the 2024/25 financial year.

When delivering transformation, the Council will:

- focus on flexibility and finding different ways to deliver what our communities need, when they need it.
- engage with our communities to understand the needs of our residents and provide the right support to meet those needs as simply as possible.
- deliver channel shift across our council services moving from more expensive face-to-face or telephone channels to online services where appropriate.
- explore alternative delivery models when it makes sense to do so.
- look at voluntary departure options and as colleagues move on to new opportunities or retire, carefully assess how roles can be managed going forward.
- use our reserves to help balance the budget in the short-term whilst change programmes are fully developed and implemented; and
- use our reserves on an invest to save basis to fund one-off costs to deliver changes where required.

The Council's Place Shaping Programme is progressing well with a full review of the Capital Programme, projects requiring additional funding, and new capital bids having been undertaken. The Place Shaping Board has subsequently prioritised all known works with a view to maximising the use of available funding.

As of 01 June 2024, £16.413m of unallocated capital funding was identified. At its meeting on 24 July 2024, Cabinet agreed to set aside £7.202m of this sum as a contingency to manage any unexpected in-year priorities or unmanageable cost escalations within the Capital Programme. This left a balance of £9.211m which Cabinet agreed to allocate to the following priority capital schemes:

- Plasyfelin Primary School (£2.580m).
- Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhymney Primary School (£1.232m).
- Llancaeath Junior School/Llanfabon Infant School (£2.674m).
- Caerphilly 2035 Multi-Disciplinary Team support (£0.480m).
- Bargoed Placemaking Plan (£0.450m).
- Blackwood Placemaking Plan (£0.450m).
- Caerphilly 2035 Hotel and Leisure Quarter workstream (£0.150m).
- Edward Street, Ystrad Mynach – Flood Alleviation (£0.177m).
- Van Road – Flood alleviation (£0.375m).
- Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (£0.644m).

These investments of £9.211m will lever in additional external match-funding of £27.820m. Moving forward the Capital Programme will be overseen by the Place Shaping Board.

Action Update from 2023/24

| Last year we said we would | By when | Progress | Status |
|--|----------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Updated Medium-Term Financial Plan aligned to the Corporate Plan and 'Mobilising Team Caerphilly' Transformation Programme to be presented to Council. | Spring 2024 | <p>Significant work has been carried out in the last twelve months through the 'discovery phase' of the council's Mobilising Team Caerphilly Transformation Programme to identify a range of projects to help balance the budget moving forward. We are now moving into the 'delivery phase' of the Programme with numerous projects being defined in detail and a range of proposals will be presented for scrutiny and decision making throughout the 2024/25 financial year.</p> <p><i>This action has been carried forward to the 2024/25 financial year.</i></p> | Reasonable progress |
| Updated Financial Regulations to be presented to the Governance & Audit Committee for endorsement prior to Council approval. | April 2024 | <p>The updated Financial Regulations are due to be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee on the 8 October 2024.</p> <p><i>This action has been carried forward to the 2024/25 financial year.</i></p> | Reasonable progress |
| Undertake a review of the Council Reserves Strategy | Carried forward April 2024 | <p>The Reserves Strategy will be updated following approval of the updated Financial Regulations.</p> <p><i>This action has been carried forward to the 2024/25 financial year.</i></p> | Reasonable progress |
| Training for budget holders is to be rolled out as part of the "Mobilising Team Caerphilly" programme | To be agreed across 2024 | <p>Training programme has been prepared. Training dates to be agreed.</p> <p><i>This action has been carried forward to the 2024/25 financial year.</i></p> | Reasonable progress |

| | | | |
|---|---------|--|---------------|
| Seek to progress the Council's Well-being and Place Shaping Programme at pace | Ongoing | Good progress has been made on the new Place Shaping Programme with Cabinet agreeing to invest £9.211m of unallocated capital funding into a range of priority capital schemes that will lever in additional external match-funding of £27.820m. | Good progress |
|---|---------|--|---------------|

New actions to enhance financial management effectiveness for 2024/25

** Including actions carried forward from 2023/24*

| New Actions | By when |
|---|---|
| Updated Medium-Term Financial Plan aligned to the Corporate Plan and 'Mobilising Team Caerphilly' Transformation Programme to be presented to Council * | The updated Medium-Term Financial Plan will be presented to Council on 27 February 2025 alongside the Budget Proposals for 2025/26. |
| Updated Financial Regulations to be presented to the Governance & Audit Committee for endorsement prior to Council approval * | December 2024 |
| Undertake a review of the Council Reserves Strategy * | December 2024 |
| Training for budget holders is to be rolled out as part of the "Mobilising Team Caerphilly" programme * | The training has been prepared and will be rolled-out during autumn 2024. |

6.3 Workforce Planning – reflecting the financial year 2023/24

General Summary

We judge workforce planning to be **adequate**. Much work has been done to provide support, guidance and information to managers to assist them with workforce planning. Whilst improvement has been made, more work needs to be done to better support vacancy management. HR are currently undertaking a project with Financial Services to include budgeted hours information in the Council's HR/Payroll system in order to provide this vacancy management information in a single dashboard. The development of this information has been more complex than envisaged, however, with significant work having been undertaken to refine structure information to support this work. It is now in the advanced stage of development.

The focus of workforce planning has also naturally moved to concentrate more on the work flowing from Mobilising Team Caerphilly (MTC).

Data on of our workforce is shown below:

| Date | Employee Headcount | Employee Full time Equivalent (FTE) |
|----------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 31.03.22 | 8348 | 6245.04 |
| 31.03.23 | 8535 | 6409.36 |
| 31.03.24 | 8670 | 6542.91 |

Whilst there have been and continue to be national recruitment challenges, this year our employee numbers have increased slightly in comparison to 31 March 2023 as per the table above.

The Council has appointed a Recruitment Team to support the Council to address the national recruitment challenges. Further work is in an advanced stage of development to improve the recruitment module and new 'Onboarding' module to improve the customer experience of applying for job opportunities with the Council.

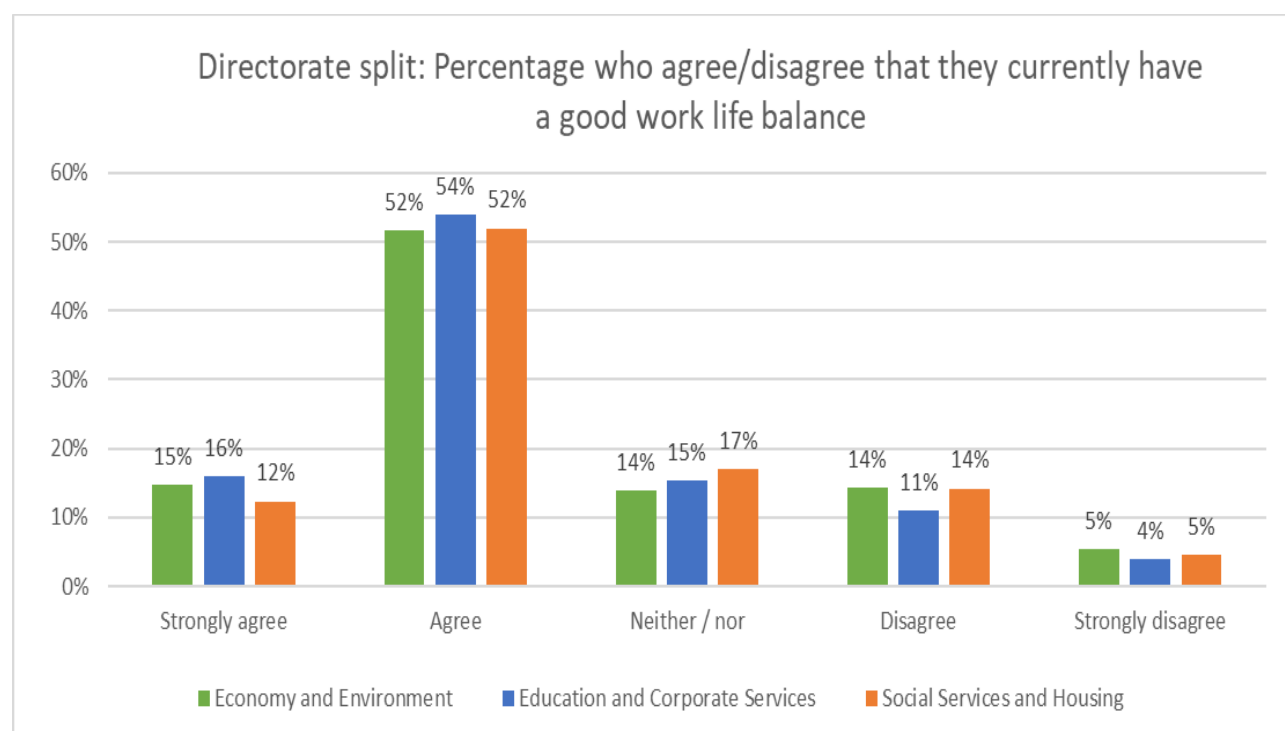
The turnover of staff between 2021/22 and 2023/24 is provided below:

| | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/2024 |
|--|---------|---------|-----------|
| External joiners to the Council | 864 | 1091 | 1040 |
| Leavers | 765 | 898 | 858 |

A Workforce Development Strategy 2021–24 and an Employee Well-being Strategy 2021-24 are well developed and now nearing replacement. Both have an action plan which are reported in accordance with the agreed governance. These strategies have helped to shape the Council's service delivery and priorities over the last three years and significant progress has been made.

The Council has developed a dedicated resource on the intranet in relation to external well-being support that staff can access. This will be further developed with support from the Communications Team when the new digital workspace is introduced.

One of the areas covered in an independent survey of staff undertaken in the Autumn of 2023 by external consultants was 'work life balance'. The graph below shows the response split per Directorate.



For those who agreed they had a good work life balance, agile and flexible working were welcomed. Those who disagreed were mostly staff who are unable to work in an agile way due to the nature of the role.

The tables below provide a breakdown of the sex and age range of the workforce as of 31 March 2023, and 2024 so a 2-year trend can be shown:

| | 31.03.23 | 31.03.23 | 31.03.24 | 31.03.24 |
|--------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| | Headcount | FTE | Headcount | FTE |
| Female | 6210 | 4485.18 | 6258 | 4538.14 |
| Male | 2324 | 1924.18 | 2411 | 2004.77 |
| Unspecified | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

| Date | 31.03.23 | 31.03.23 | 31.03.23 | 31.03.24 | 31.03.24 | 31.03.24 |
|-----------|----------|----------|---------------|----------|----------|---------------|
| Age Range | Female | Male | Council Total | Female | Male | Council Total |
| 16-22 | 131 | 119 | 250 | 144 | 120 | 264 |
| 21-30 | 771 | 383 | 1154 | 761 | 399 | 1160 |
| 31-40 | 1500 | 430 | 1930 | 1522 | 465 | 1987 |
| 41-50 | 1624 | 512 | 2136 | 1589 | 518 | 2107 |
| 51-60 | 1610 | 608 | 2219 | 1638 | 617 | 2255 |
| 61-65 | 411 | 199 | 610 | 437 | 208 | 645 |
| 65+ | 163 | 73 | 236 | 167 | 84 | 251 |

It is important to note that the Council's gender pay gap does not stem from paying male and female employees differently for the same or equivalent work, but is the result of roles in which male and females currently work and the salaries that these roles attract. The Council's Gender Pay Gap statement can be found on the Council's website. [Caerphilly cbc gender pay gap statement 2023](#).

Sickness absence

The percentage absence levels for the Council and each Directorate as of 31 March 2023 and 2024 are also detailed below:

| Directorate | % Absence level 2022/23 | % Absence level 2023/24 |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Economy & Environment | 5.97 | 6.07 |
| Education & Corporate Services (excluding Schools) | 4.40 | 4.48 |
| Schools | 4.64 | 4.47 |
| Social Services & Housing | 6.83 | 7.22 |
| Council Total | 5.36 | 5.42 |

The top 10 absences for 2022/23 and 2023/24 are shown below:

| Ranking | Total Authority Absence Reasons 2022/23 | FTE Days Lost 2022/23 |
|---------|---|-----------------------|
| 1 | Stress; depression; anxiety; neurasthenia; mental health; fatigue | 23095.62 |
| 2 | Other musculo-skeletal problems | 10448.24 |
| 3 | Coronavirus | 9202.96 |
| 4 | Stomach; liver; kidney and digestion inc. gastroenteritis | 8154.56 |
| 5 | Infections inc. colds & flu | 7393.97 |
| 6 | Injury | 5015.00 |
| 7 | Chest and respiratory inc. chest infections | 4594.08 |
| 8 | Back and neck problems | 3424.02 |
| 9 | Neurological including headaches & migraines | 2997.69 |
| 10 | Work related stress | 2488.34 |

| Ranking | Total Authority Absence Reasons 2023/24 | FTE Days Lost 2023/24 |
|---------|---|-----------------------|
| 1 | Stress; depression; anxiety; neurasthenia; mental health; fatigue | 26015.67 |
| 2 | Other Musculo-skeletal problems | 10124.03 |
| 3 | Stomach; liver; kidney and digestion inc. gastroenteritis | 8729.68 |
| 4 | Infections inc. colds & flu | 7267.50 |
| 5 | Injury | 5174.97 |
| 6 | Chest and respiratory inc. chest infections | 4634.66 |
| 7 | Back and neck problems | 3475.52 |
| 8 | Work related stress | 3224.44 |
| 9 | Coronavirus | 3189.66 |
| 10 | Genito-urinary inc. menstrual problems | 2988.05 |

Action Update from 2023/24

| Last year we said we would | By when | Progress | Status |
|--|----------|---|---------------------------------|
| Appoint a recruitment team | 31.10.23 | Recruitment Team has been appointed enabling us to review and improve our recruitment offer. Benefits realised include an upturn in applications for key roles through more targeted recruitment. | Completed |
| Develop a Recruitment Strategy | 31.06.24 | The work being undertaken within mobilising ream Caerphilly will be fundamental to the strategy as this will help to determine the strategic future direction within which the Council will be operating. <i>This action has been carried forward to the 2024/25 financial year.</i> | Good progress |
| Review relevant HR policies | 31.03.24 | The council HR policies are at various states of review and will continue on a cyclical basis | Ongoing |
| Undertake a staff survey in relation to agile working, caring responsibilities, and well-being | 31.03.24 | A survey was undertaken in Autumn 2023 which picked up on some of these aspects. A further survey will be undertaken in Autumn 2024. <i>This action has been carried forward to the 2024/25 financial year.</i> | Good progress Part completed |
| Introduce the new digital workspace | 31.10.23 | A new digital workspace launched in October 2023 that continues to be refined with service areas. Schools also now have access to it with usage and feedback very positive. Completed in 2024. | Completed |
| Migrate the HR / Payroll system to the cloud and develop new modules for recruitment, onboarding & induction | 31.03.24 | The system migration is completed. The recruitment, onboarding, and induction module will be in place Autumn 2024. <i>This action has been carried forward to the 2024/25 financial year.</i> | Good progress Ongoing |

| | | | |
|---|----------|--|--------------------------|
| Introduce the new flexi system in line with the Agile Working Policies | 30.09.23 | The new system was rolled out successfully in Autumn 2023. | Completed |
| Develop and introduce employee service data via the HR / Payroll system | 31.03.24 | <p>This is due to be completed Autumn 2024.</p> <p>The development of this information has been more complex than envisaged to include budgeted hours accurately, however, significant work has been undertaken to refine structure information to support this work and it is now in the advanced stage of development.</p> <p><i>This action has been carried forward to the 2024/25 financial year.</i></p> | Good progress Ongoing |
| Finalise and roll out the Workforce Planning Toolkit | 31.01.24 | A Workforce Planning Toolkit has been developed and pilots undertaken in Autumn 2023. Feedback from the pilots has been taken on board and the Toolkit can now be used across the Council and will support the work leading from Mobilising Team Caerphilly and training has taken place. | Completed |
| Introduce a new learner experience and management system | 31.03.24 | <p>A new Learning Management System (LMS) 'Thingy' will be introduced in Summer 2024. This is a collaborative project with other Welsh LAs which will enable improved learning and development opportunities.</p> <p>The timescales slipped a little due to competing demands but the introduction of Thingy is now at an advanced stage and it will be launched in Autumn 2024.</p> <p><i>This action has been carried forward to the 2024/25 financial year.</i></p> | Good progress Ongoing |

New actions to enhance Workforce effectiveness for 2024/25

** Including actions carried forward from 2023/24*

| New Actions | By when |
|--|----------------|
| Develop a Recruitment Strategy * | March 2025 |
| Review relevant HR policies – this is now part of an ongoing cycle so will be removed for 2024/25. | Ongoing |
| Undertake a staff survey in relation to agile working, caring responsibilities, and well-being * | Autumn 2024 |
| Develop new modules for recruitment, onboarding & induction * | Autumn 2024 |
| Develop and introduce employee service data via the HR / Payroll system * (vacancy management information) | Autumn 2024 |
| Introduce a new learner experience and management system * (launch Thingi) | Autumn 2024 |
| Implement a new management training programme | Autumn 2024 |
| Launch a new L&D Bulletin. | Autumn 2024 |

6.4 Procurement and Information Technology – reflecting the financial year 2023/24

General Summary

The Council judges Procurement and Information Technology to be **effective** because on the basis that the service provided has important strengths with a few areas for improvement and some minor areas for improvement to make the good, better. Although Information Technology is not one of the seven organisational areas in the Well-being of Future Generations Act, because of its importance to the effectiveness of the Council it is considered as part of our self-assessment.

Procurement

The Procurement Service continues to progress significant programmes of work supporting small and medium-term businesses (SME's). To give the reader some scope of our spend and procurement activity for the financial year of 2023/24:

| Title | Financial Year | | |
|--|----------------|-------|-------|
| | 21/22 | 22/23 | 23/24 |
| Total Spend (<i>source Spikes Cavell</i>) | £251m | £271m | £299m |
| Total spend with Caerphilly based Suppliers | £59m | £66m | £70m |
| Total spend with 'City Deal' based Suppliers | £124m | £145m | £159m |
| Total spend with Suppliers across Wales | £138m | £162m | £174m |

The total number of invoices paid during 2023/24 was 160,272, of these 148,165 were paid within 30 days, which is 92.45% (the quicker we pay our invoices the quicker we put cash flow back into our SME's).

The implementation of the procurement reform across the Council due to the Procurement Act 2023, Social Public Procurement Partnership (Wales) Act 2023 and Health Service Procurement (Wales) Act 2024, comes into force on 28 October 2024. To prepare for this we have undertaken considerable work, we have held Procurement Team sessions held with Welsh Government representatives covering Procurement Reform in Wales, in Caerphilly CBC on 30 January 2024.

We have developed a 'Getting Ready Action Plan which has identified key areas and progress to date to make sure we are ready for implementation of the new legislation.

Updates are being circulated within the Council for example, a series of Knowledge Drops issued via Communications Unit and the update on the reform agenda presented to our Corporate & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee May 2024 covering the three Acts and the

Council's approach via our 'getting ready action plan'. There have also been presentations to senior management teams in all directorates.

The Procurement Team is undertaking learning and development via the UK government Commercial College Training Course and also actively contributing to Welsh Government's eLearning Modules which are due for release in June 2024.

This year the Council has worked on a project of deployment of a new Food Contract. The Welsh Public Sector Collaborative Food Group (WPSCFG) Food Framework lead by the Council is now live. It included **149** commodity lots across the **20** public sector bodies who were initially involved. The framework awarded **22** suppliers on to the various lots, and this includes **19** Welsh based suppliers.

The Framework was split into smaller lots to allow for smaller suppliers to bid, with lots in Caerphilly as small as 5 sites in some areas. Other participants were also encouraged to split their commodity lots to encourage SME participation. There was the inclusion of an All Wales Lot and also specific lots for Welsh Products to promote Welsh food as part of increasing the Wellbeing of Future Generations (WBFGE) and the foundational economy of Wales.

The WBFGE Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. To ensure that the framework providers could help the public bodies taking part achieve the requirements of the Act, commitments from the Size of Wales, (a deforestation free charity in Cardiff), Procurement Tool Kit along with Environmental considerations and social value were included in the tender specifications.

These included but are not limited to:

- Avoid using processed beef products from South America that are associated with high-risk deforestation and / or social issues.
- Only using fish that is Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Certified or using only farmed fish that is Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) certified.
- Only using palm oil certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)
- To use Fairtrade products where possible.
- To try to increase plant-based proteins and include a diverse variety of fruit, vegetables, nuts and seeds in the products supplied.
- To increase the amount of local, seasonal, and sustainably sourced ingredients.
- Targets from the Welsh Governments Towards Zero waste strategy were included to highlight the need to reduce packaging and food waste.
- Schemes to divert waste food were included to divert nearly out of date food to community food banks or any other schemes available but never to landfill.
- There was also an option to sign up to The Courtauld Commitment which is a voluntary arrangement aimed at improving resource efficiency and reducing waste within the UK grocery sector.

The professional body for social value is Social Value UK, which offers a clear definition of what social value is and why it is important. *"Social Value is a broader understanding of value. It moves beyond using money as the main indicator of value, instead putting the emphasis on engaging people to understand the impact of decisions on their lives. The people's perspective is critical."*

We have been involved in creating social value from our Procurement activities for some years. This year Officers from Procurement Services have been involved in a Case Study with Cardiff University and the Wales Centre for Public Policy to highlight the ways in which the Framework tried to embed social value in the Procurement process – the case study and video interviews can be found on this link [Embedding social value in procurement | WCPP](#). The report gives seven exemplary case examples to demonstrate how social, environmental, economic and cultural wellbeing (social value) outcomes can be delivered and embedded through procurement practices.

The Council has upgraded the e-procurement system into cloud provision. Enhanced integrations between applications have been developed which creates innovation and automation eradicating manual intervention and tasks whilst creating greater efficiencies. Future enhancements will take into account the UK Public Procurement Act and Social Public Procurement Partnership (Wales) Act to further improve the procurement process from sourcing to pay. This supports our direction of travel of IT security and supports the Mobilising Team Caerphilly (MTC) programme and financial management.

Information Technology

Digital technology is key to delivering a wide range of council services in a more economic, efficient and effective way, is also an important means of councils delivering their objectives. We continue to simplify and modernise and streamline the service including infrastructure, AI (Artificial Intelligence) and software applications. The service was one of the first Mobilising Team Caerphilly (MTC) projects to undertake a discovery phase in early 2024. This included investigating if migration from our data centre to Microsoft Azure could make savings. It was concluded that the Council would be best placed to continue operating in a hybrid cloud provision where some applications continue to reside in the Data Centre and others operate in a Software as a Service (SaaS) cloud service with application providers.

The Team also looked at developing Digital Personas as the ability to use different Microsoft licence options will enable continued functionality in each role and reduce costs associated with licences based on like for like with current licensing. The potential of this is currently being analysed. Reduction in licensing requirements will minimise the effects of price hikes by reducing our licences and doing more with less with new hardware.

A discovery of the current printing was undertaken to review printing quantities and rationalise where possible. Our printer stock is an ageing printer estate, one which is becoming increasingly hard to maintain and support; and is also becoming unreliable.

An analysis of the printing, scanning and copying quantities was carried out in 2023, this allowed any peaks and troughs in requirements throughout the year to be included. In addition, printing requirements have continued to reduce so rationalisation is possible. Based on quantities for 2023, and ensuring resilience at each site, the Council will be able to make savings in 2024/25 by rationalising the printing function.

The use of the Data Centre was also reviewed and, positively, our Data Centre digital footprint has been reduced from 70% capacity to 20% allowing us to lower our carbon footprint significantly.

In 2023/24 Audit Wales held a review of the Councils Digital Strategy. The focus was the Council's strategic approach to digital had been developed in accordance with the sustainable development principle and that it will help to secure value for money in the use of the Council's resources. Audit Wales made the following recommendations: '*Develop a strategic approach to digital*' by 'ensuring that the Council's strategic approach to digital demonstrates that it has proper arrangements to secure value for money and that the strategic approach to digital is based on a good understanding of current and future trends.

We are already carrying out the following work performed as part of the Mobilising Team Caerphilly, to develop a Digital Vision 2027. The Digital Vision covers the areas noted in the digital strategy review and is focused on 6 areas including, customers and users, skills and resources and resources and sustainable and ethical computing so already addresses the recommendation from Audit Wales.

Action Update from 2023/24

| Last year we said we would | By when | Progress | Status |
|--|-------------|--|---|
| The procurement function is currently upgrading the e-procurement system which will provide opportunities for innovation and automation within the procurement process. | Spring 2024 | Migration to Proactis P2P Cloud is complete. The cloud-based solution will create greater financial rigour and control with full audit trail and transparency. | Completed |
| Implementation of the UK Public Procurement Act and Social Public Procurement Partnership (Wales) Act and undertake procurement reform in line with new legislation as and when statutory guidance comes into force. | Autumn 2024 | We have a range of communications booked to brief employees and Councillors Seminars. Regular meetings with Welsh Government representatives are being included within Mobilising Team Caerphilly programme by the Improved Financial Management project. The Go-Live date is – 28 October 2024. | Implementation will take place when new legislation is live |
| Deployment of new All Wales Food Contract | Spring 2024 | Good progress is being made in this area, and the food framework is now live. | Completed |

New Actions to enhance Procurement and IT effectiveness for 2024/25

| New Actions | By When |
|--|----------------|
| Deploy UK Public Procurement Act | October 2024 |
| Develop collaboration opportunities with organisations on commercial footings (e.g. EdTech) | During 2024/25 |
| Continue to pilot the SimplyDo system with CCBC local supply base. Further development to be implemented throughout 2024/25 | During 2024/25 |
| Complete and deploy the Digital Strategy | During 2024/25 |
| Digital Platform – Complete the procurement and start implementation of the Digital Platform in line with MTC | During 2024/25 |
| Continue to develop Digital Vision 2027 | |
| Continue replacing old analogue technology with fibre and moving to a more cost effective and faster network connectivity, decommissioning of this copper technology | |

6.5 Assets – reflecting the financial year 2023/2024

General Summary

The Council judges the way in which it manages its assets to be **adequate** as we have made progress in several areas but there is still room for improvement. The Council has successfully reduced the corporate portfolio, relocated office functions to its central campus and increased utilisation across these buildings and at other key corporate sites. Some assets have been enhanced to support further service delivery functions, with several sites now available for alternative use or disposal. The office relocation process was successful thanks to a collaborative approach with our IT colleagues.

Repurposing one site has supported an alternative service delivery requirement and fulfilled the needs of a partner organisation. This option will also serve to generate a rental income.

The disposal of one site identified as surplus is currently on hold due to supporting a temporary internal use requirement which has delayed the decommissioning and disposal process. However, thanks to the rationalisation and agile exercise, the building could be offered as the interim solution with the disposal process resuming once the interim use is concluded. The review exercise has successfully delivered a more streamlined portfolio which is now operating at or near capacity. Moving into phase 2 the Council will continue to progress the decommissioning and disposal work and fully realise the savings and rental income opportunities. There is also scope for further reviews to rationalise and consider commercial opportunities at some sites.

Performance has been affected by delays in extracting building data from our Asset Management system and the start of the condition survey contract. This information is crucial for the Mobilising Team Caerphilly service reviews and the Council's asset management review programme. Now that system access has been regained, the necessary information can be provided. The data systems review that is underway will help identify an effective data management system and evaluate the data held. As the condition survey contract progresses, the Council will gain access to current condition data to aid option appraisal and decision making.

Detailed information

Continuous assessment of the estate, encompassing land and buildings, is the key component of the Council's Asset Management Strategy. The process ensures that the Council assets are evaluated and considered for retention, remodelling, disposal or potentially being classed as surplus.

The corporate office portfolio includes accommodation that combines office and service delivery functions. Depending on the occupying service, each site may feature office space, service user visits, contact centres, conference facilities and meeting spaces. Initial efforts have focused on maximising usage at the Tredomen Campus (Ty Penallta and Ty Tredomen) to consolidate services from other locations. The adoption of agile and new working methods by CCBC has created opportunities to provide more capacity to optimise

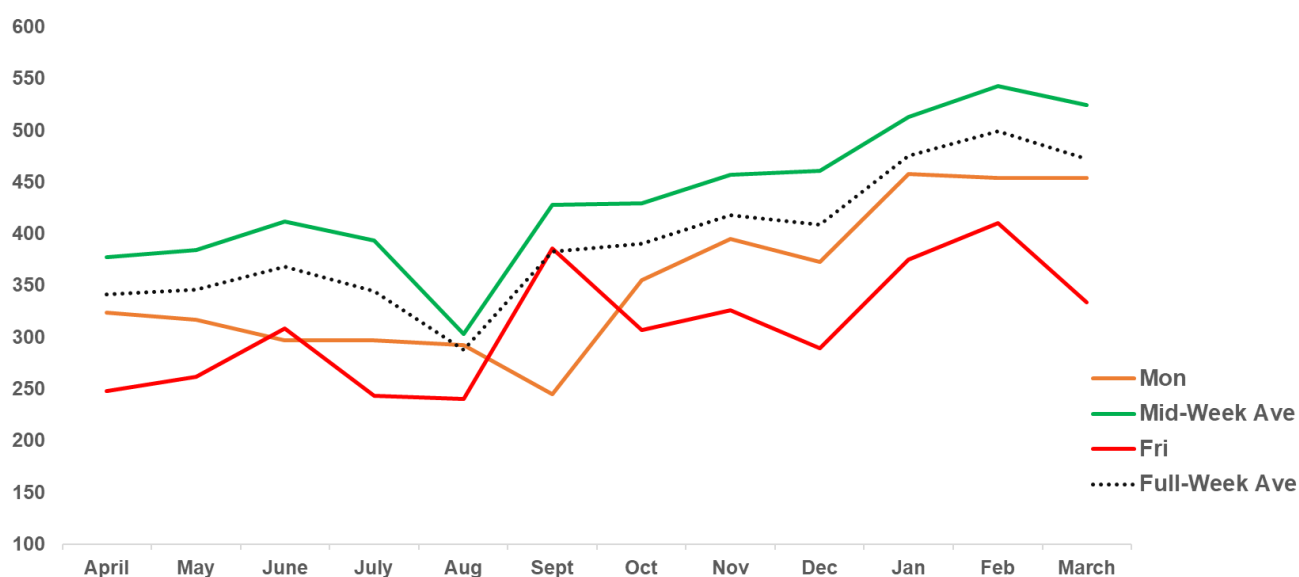
space and accommodate additional service areas, providing the opportunity to rationalise the estate elsewhere.

At Ty Penallta, our goal has been to maximise usage and develop accommodation to support the new agile working policies. During Phase 1 of the review, we have:

- Created a dedicated agile space on the first floor.
- Developed café style facilities on the ground floor and agile service zones on floor 2, 3 & 4 with open plan space to each floor.

As part of the rationalisation and agile exercise an increase in usage at Ty Penallta was anticipated between April 2023 – April 24 as officers relocated from other corporate buildings. The findings are illustrated below:

Ty Penallta Annual usage figures May 2023 – April 2024



The above table displays usage figures from May 2023 to April 2024 and highlighting a notable increase in attendance particularly for Monday to Thursday. The midweek increase in attendance is 44%.

The reconfiguration of Ty Penallta to increase capacity and usage is facilitating the reorganisation and rationalisation of the wider corporate office portfolio. The review has revealed that while much of the office use can be accommodated at the Tredomen Campus, service user requirements for conferencing and contact facilities will still need to be met in some locations. Therefore, the phase 1 review has considered:

- Whether the asset positively contributes to service delivery.
- Whether there are longer term strategic regeneration or redevelopment plans associated with the asset.
- Whether there are more cost-effective solutions for service delivery.
- Whether there are alternative service delivery requirements for the asset (with available budget).

At some locations, works have been undertaken to enhance facilities to aid increased usage and support relocation from other sites. The table below outlines the high-level considerations of Phase 1 and the status of buildings within the corporate portfolio. The process to finalise the decommissioning of surplus sites and advance through the disposal process is ongoing.

Some of the main property activities this year:

- We maximised the use at Ty Penallta, Ty Tredomen and Ty Bargoed.
- Facilities have been remodelled or re-focused to accommodate increased use supporting service delivery requirements such as conferencing and meeting spaces.
- Where feasible, reducing the number of sites by relocating service delivery functions to alternative corporate sites, considering geographical location.
- Consider remodelling key assets if it will support increased usage, service delivery and closure of other sites. Two locations have been remodelled to enhance usage, provide additional conferencing, and contact facilities
- Ty Gilfach (building and associated land) will be declared surplus with potential for residential development. An internal use requirement has been identified so before proceeding with disposal, the building will support this internal use for approximately 12 months.
- For our sole occupancy Ty Risca has been repurposed to support an internal use and partner requirements, generating a rental income.

As part of the appraisal, we review the conditions of buildings and manage planned and reactive maintenance programmes. The condition of the Council's buildings are regularly monitored with the latest round of building condition surveys completed around 2019.

The new survey contract covering a total of 348 sites began in 2023 to complete within the contract period. To date 89 sites have been surveyed, representing 26% of the contracted sites. The contract spans a 4-year period with the option of an additional year if required.

Due to issues with renewing the Licence (called K2) for our Asset Management software, we have been unable to download any surveys into our system, consequently it is not possible to provide any new condition data, across the portfolio at this stage. This means the data below whilst slightly out of date is the most current data.

| | A Good | B Satisfactory | C Operational Bad | D Bad |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Corporate Offices | 4.51% | 86.90% | 8.30% | 0.28% |
| Libraries | 7.77% | 85.97% | 5.51% | 0.69% |
| Leisure Centres | 9.71% | 77.60% | 12.22% | 0.47% |
| Other Operational Buildings | 4.49% | 84.30% | 9.47% | 1.08% |
| Schools | 6.99% | 80.03% | 12.46% | 0.26% |
| Total all buildings | 5.99% | 81.50% | 11.21% | 0.54% |

The ratings above are based on WG guidance using the Faithful and Gould method of calculation which includes new grades C+ and C-.

Below illustrates the estimated cost of the backlog maintenance based on previous survey information.

| Category | Priority 1 (Urgent) | Priority 2 (Essential) | Priority 3 (Desirable) |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Corporate Offices | £8,103 | £793,826 | £2,092,079 |
| Leisure Centres | £54,648 | £1,222,325 | £2,654,598 |
| Libraries | £5,057 | £135,027 | £337,044 |
| Other Operational Buildings | £389,291 | £6,337,519 | £7,112,028 |
| Schools | £384,934 | £13,920,616 | £20,688,458 |
| Total for all sites | £842,033 | £22,409,313 | £32,884,207 |

Phase 1 of the corporate office review has identified several buildings for closure, remodelling and re-use. Many buildings within the corporate portfolio are now operating at or near maximum capacity. Ongoing work aims to identify further adjustments needed to maintain optimal building performance. The disposal of the surplus assets and decommissioning element following Phase 1 are being progressed. With any relocation and disposal there are costs associated with reconfiguration of alternative spaces and venues to facilitate the service delivery requirements, holding costs for surplus buildings and disposal costs. Once the disposal work is complete, we anticipate annual revenue savings and rental incomes.

Rationalisation will be a key focus of the broader review underway as part of the Mobilising Team Caerphilly (MTC) process. The Corporate Portfolio Review and subsequent wider reviews align with the Medium-Term Financial Plan savings principles. The Team Caerphilly Better together operating model remains crucial in ensuring the Council's financial resilience moving forward. We anticipate opportunities to streamline the estate and explore disposal routes including Community Asset Transfer opportunities.

The delay in extracting data from our Asset Management system has hindered our input into several of the MTC service reviews and during our asset management review process. Now that we are regaining access, we hope to provide information to aid decision making. Additionally, an asset system review is underway as part of the MTC process to identify the most efficient system to support our requirements. As part of our ongoing work, we will review the data held and required. The current condition contract will also provide up to date information, which we can use to inform the review process as it becomes available.

Action Update from 2023/24

| Last year we said we would | By when | Progress | Status |
|--|------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Finalise the draft Asset Management Strategy for approval in the beginning of 2024. | Early 2024 | <p>The preparation of draft document has been delayed accommodating the on-going service reviews as part of the Mobilising Team Caerphilly (MTC) programme to account for more thorough stakeholder engagement and initial service reviews in Libraries and Leisure for the MTC programmes. The draft will be ready for circulation for the end of December 2024.</p> <p><i>This action has been carried forward to the 2024/25 financial year.</i></p> | Progress but timeline delayed. |
| Evaluate the benefits of partnership working for a longer-term approach to a single public estate. | Ongoing | <p>This work is ongoing, member of the Public Services Board and new 5-year period objectives to be set. Also working with partner organisations in relation to their asset rationalisation plans and potential shared use of assets and community hub discussions. For example, we are seeking discussions regarding local authority approaches to Community Asset Transfer (CAT) as opportunities to learn and understand their approaches.</p> | Reasonable progress |
| Develop an appropriate Corporate Landlord Model | 2023-2025 | <p>Corporate Landlord workstream remains part of Mobilising Team Caerphilly with resource requirements highlighted as a risk to delivery. New procedures and policies were delayed allowing for service reviews in other areas to fully develop, this allows the new policy, resourcing, approach to account for the scale and pace required.</p> | Reasonable progress |

| | | | |
|--|---|---|---------------|
| | | | |
| Review the operational estate to identify opportunities for rationalisation | Phase 1 complete, moving into phase 2 2024/25 review period | Phase 1 involved consolidating the corporate estate and that is now complete. Ongoing efforts are focused on further reviewing the Tredomen Campus and space within Ty Penallta with potential to further maximise usage of all within Ty Penallta. As a result of the review, we are also remodelling and improving facilities at other corporate sites to increase usage and facilitate closures elsewhere. We are progressing with this work to facilitate the disposal of surplus sites. Further reviews will be conducted to continue reducing the portfolio where feasible. | Good progress |
| Review opportunities across the estate for additional commercial opportunities | Ongoing | This work is ongoing as rationalisation of the corporate estate has created opportunities to lease buildings on commercial terms. Additionally, opportunities arising from the MTC service reviews such as the lease of Café Vista are being progressed. | Good progress |
| Review our approach to Community Asset Transfer. | Dec 24 | <p>We reviewed the Community Asset Transfer Policy which was been presented to Cabinet May 2024. The refreshed approach to Community Asset Transfer will take account of the economic outlook and the need to reduce overheads, however it will focus on the positives of releasing the asset to the community and the opportunities to enrich and empower the community. The refreshed policy is currently in draft form.</p> <p>A CAT working group is established, and as we build the framework, we will seek guidance from CMT and Members.</p> | Good progress |

The service reviews within the MTC process will also focus on identifying rationalisation opportunities. We will support these reviews by providing data and assisting with option appraisal work

The Council is developing a user-friendly approach to support the process, ensuring a consistent yet flexible framework, which is now 'joined up' with the MTC programme.

The need for an additional resource, in the form of a CAT officer, has been identified. The resource will play a crucial role in managing the process and supporting community groups.

New actions to enhance Assets effectiveness for 2023/24

** Including actions carried forward from 2023/24*

| New Actions | By When |
|---|----------------|
| Develop an acquisition and disposal policy. | December 24 |
| Develop a decarbonisation approach for buildings. | December 24 |
| Recruit a CAT Officer to progress the Community Asset Transfer option | |
| Target surplus properties and development of disposal opportunities. | On-going |
| Review Surplus Asset process and workflow. | December 24 |
| Finalise the draft Asset Management Strategy for approval in the beginning of 2024. * | December 24 |

6.6 Risk Management – for the financial year 2023/24

General Summary

The Council judges the way it manages its risks to be **adequate** on our self-assessment scale. The Council has taken positive actions to improve both the process and awareness raising of effective risk management and delivered a range of training to improve scrutiny of risk. There are, however, a couple of main tasks that still need to be completed to ensure we move up the scale in the 2024/25 assessment.

The Council arranged for CIPFA to deliver training to councillors in December 2023 and the risk body, ALARM, delivered training to members of our Governance and Audit Committee in early 2024. A range of training has been delivered to our Governance and Audit Committee, such as complaints, risk data, and understanding and financial statements to help committees scrutinise our work.

Caerphilly joined the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Risk All Wales Group who provided the ALARM training free of charge as this was identified as a training need.

The Council's risk management monitoring has an improved frequency and is monitored monthly by our Corporate Management Team (CMT) and greater frequency of Directorate risk monitoring as it aligns to the high-level register.

Caerphilly has launched a new Intranet, with a risk section for people to access resources and registers. Included in this update is a new risk identification form. Should any employee wish to raise a risk, they can do so through this mechanism with the Business Improvement Team then monitoring and co-ordinate the risk and any mitigating actions required. This does not replace raising a risk with a department or manager but does increase the number of ways that officers can identify and highlight potential risks.

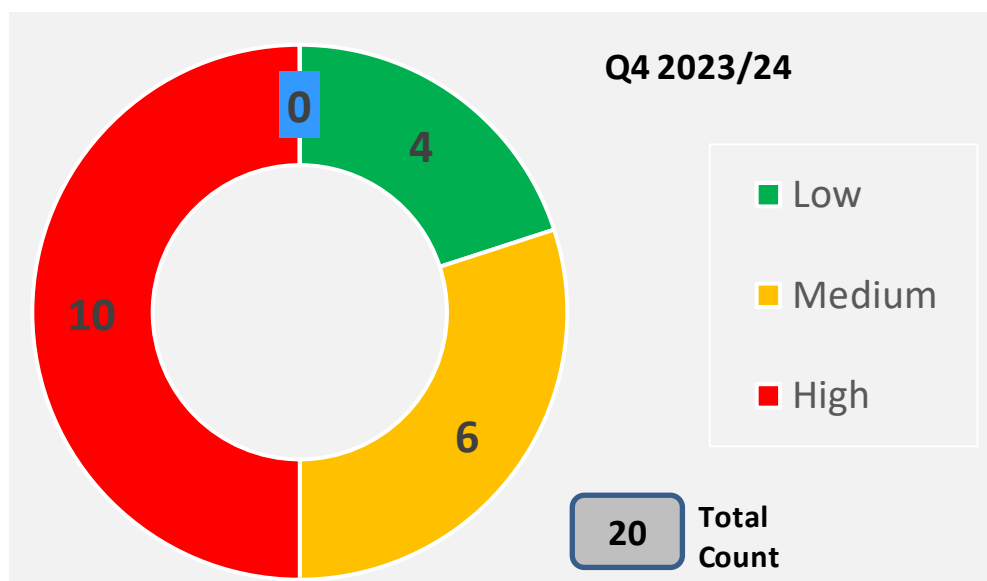
The Council is currently rebuilding the Corporate Performance Dashboard which includes the risk register summary to make it visually easier to understand.

The risk management judgement of adequate is based largely on the need to update the Risk Management Strategy and guidance which has been delayed. This is due to improvements we are making and the changes to the element of the Performance Framework. This would have meant updating the strategy and guidance two or three times. In addition, our Internal Audit service are carrying out a review of the council's risk management processes so this may add some further improvements.

The updating of our Risk Strategy will also identify further options in respect of 'categorising and promoting the risk appetite' and reflecting that into the guidance.

Once the Risk Management Strategy and Guidance are updated, we would expect to re-categorise this as effective for 2024-2025.

At the end of 2023/24 the high-level whole authority or 'Corporate Risk Register was summarised as follows:



The risk register is reported via the Corporate Performance Assessment to both Cabinet and Joint Scrutiny. At the year-end 2023/24 the **10** high level risks (not numbered in order of priority) were:

1. The cost of living and the impact to our residents
2. The Medium Financial Plan and the current economic situation
3. Pressure on social care and social care capacity
4. Recruitment and staffing capacity
5. Providing a compliant fleet service (the current rating is now medium)
6. Complying with the Welsh Government statutory recycling targets
7. Lack of housing supply
8. Increased homelessness
9. Connecting Care – the replacement of social cares national health database (WCCIS)
10. Renting (Wales) Home Act, compliance of electrical testing with potential rent recovery.

Each risk above has actions as noted in the directory which aim to mitigate the risk level.

Our focus for 2024/25, as part of the updated Performance Management Framework, is to increase the frequency and quality of directorate risk updates. This will ensure a better flow between the levels of risk and provide the opportunity for directorate risks to be escalated to the Corporate Register or de-escalated from the Corporate Register more efficiently.

The Council has launched a tripartite group to better connect the aspects of Insurance Risk, Internal Audit Risk and Business Improvement Risks.

Internal Audit

Our Internal Audit Section carries out programmes of system and compliance audits at an operational level, to ensure good probity and compliance with internal control processes in the Council's service areas and operational establishments. A risk based Internal Audit Plan is prepared and presented to the Governance and Audit Committee annually. This plan considers the inherent risks within a system, process or establishment as well as other factors such as previous findings, in order to prioritise the audit work performed. The plan is flexed if new or emerging risks are identified.

The findings of individual audits are reported to the service or location managers and escalated to a more senior level where serious weaknesses are noted. Service managers are requested to identify actions required to address the weaknesses noted, identifying a responsible person and a date by which the actions are to be implemented. Progress on these agreed actions is recorded and tracked by Internal Audit, to ensure actions / improved controls are implemented within agreed timelines. Progress on implementation of agreed actions is reported to Governance and Audit Committee on a regular basis.

An annual report is produced for the Governance and Audit Committee in which the overall opinion on the internal control system is reported, and this is also included in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS). Both the Internal Audit annual report and Draft AGS were reported to the Committee in June 2024 and are available online or linked below

[Annual Internal Audit Report 202324..pdf](#)

[Draft Annual Governance Statement 202324..pdf](#)

The Internal Audit Service conducted its own self-assessment in relation to compliance with the PSIAS (Public Sector Internal Audit Standards) in 2023/24 and the external assessment was performed in April 2024 and will be reported to Governance and Audit later in the 2024/25 reporting year.

[Update on PSIAS Self-Assessment..pdf](#) (Feb 24)

Overall, it is clear that the risk process does provide learning about our organisation and the challenges we face, but more needs to be done to align the flow of the different risk levels (from services to directorates to the Corporate Register) and to continue to promote awareness of the risk management process, including the risk appetite. Our various self-assessments are embedded to help us learn as noted above.

Action Update from 2022/23

| Last year we said we would | By when | Progress | Status |
|--|--|--|---------------------|
| Finalise and submit for adoption, the revised Risk Management Strategy and new Risk Framework following a review of the risks processes. | June 2024 Carried forward Dec 2024 | The Risk Management Strategy update has been delayed due to some changes in the risk process that are more about enhancements to the strategy. <i>This action has been carried forward to the 2024/25 financial year.</i> | Delayed |
| Following the above to update the supplemental risk guidance. | Jan 2024 | Guidance is sound, but enhancements will follow from the strategy. <i>This action has been carried forward to the 2024/25 financial year.</i> | Delayed |
| Support risk training in project management as part of the Mobilising Team Caerphilly project. | Jan 2024 - Jan 2025 | Help supplied as requested. | Reasonable progress |
| Training for members on basic risk understandings. | Dec – Feb 2024 | Formal training completed 2023. | Completed |

New actions to improve Risk Management effectiveness for 2024/25

* Including actions carried forward from 2023/24

| New Actions | By When |
|--|-------------------|
| Internal Audit Services Annual Audit Plan for 2024/25, will undertake a full system audit of Risk Management. | Oct 2024 |
| Review and develop actions to address any areas for improvement that come from the above internal audit of Risk Management. | To be set |
| Formalise the Directorate Risk Register frequency of update aligning with the Corporate Risk Register. | Sept 2024 onwards |
| A range of training for members is now ongoing as identified. | Ongoing |
| Finalise and submit for adoption, the revised Risk Management Strategy and new Risk Framework following a review of the risks processes. * | December 2024 |
| Following the above to update the supplemental risk guidance. * | December 2024 |

6.7 Performance Management– for the financial year 2023/24

General Summary

The Council judges the way it manages its performance to be **effective** because the Council has a multitude of established effective performance management arrangements in place, which helps it monitor, report, and scrutinise performance across such matters as:

- progress against Council priorities and strategic objectives
- performance against key indicators
- resource management, including people, finance, and other assets.
- customer insight, including complaints and compliments.
- and risk management

Caerphilly reports performance to its Joint Scrutiny twice a year (as well as Cabinet) and the annual Council Performance for 2023/24 was reported on 18 July 2024. This provides members and co-opted members the ability to scrutinise the performance of different directorates as well as the organisation as a whole.

The Council aims to continuously improve its approach to performance management. This year it has run a member's survey to gain councillors perspective on current performance reporting arrangements as well as understanding the type of performance information that members wish to monitor. This will enable the Council to develop reporting dashboards aligned specifically with Members performance reporting needs. At present the results are being analysed and will form part of a refreshed reporting approach in October 2024. The revised reporting will have a new 'look and feel' to make performance information visually easier to review.

Caerphilly is also building the performance reporting mechanisms for the new Well-being Objectives 2023-28, and this is nearing completion. The important part of performance management is to show information so that we can take action to make things better than they would otherwise be. As such the Council has launched additional resources on the intranet to help officers with a range of performance aspects. Caerphilly has also joined the DataCymru Strategic Data Leads network enabling us to work collaboratively on a range of data improvements, including an overall data vision as well as sharing good practice and challenges.

In terms of an external perspective, the Council received a report from Audit Wales called "Use of performance information: Service User perspective and Outcomes", issued in February 2024. This national study assessed how service users' perspective was considered within Council performance management arrangements. Unfortunately, the picture across Wales was not particularly positive concluding that *"The Council provides limited performance information to enable senior leaders to understand the perspective of service users and the outcomes of its activities and thus, effectively manage its performance"*.

Audit Wales accepted that they did not “*undertake a full review of the Council’s performance management arrangements or an in-depth review of the quality of the data that the Council collects. Neither did the review focus on engagement with service users on specific service changes or the development of policies and strategies*” and made 3 recommendations for improvement. 15 out of 18 Authorities who had published outputs had the same 3 recommendations, so the Council was able to compare and contrast what the remaining authorities did who had not received these recommendations.

Some improvement to these areas were already in progress, however some additional actions have taken place, for example:

- The Business Improvement Team now attend the Council Engagement group so we can make 2-way connections between service user perspectives and performance, an example is the results of the housing residents survey results are now in the directorate performance reporting with actions to improve.
- We have set up training with 20 officers for DataCymru to train in aspects of data including accuracy.
- We have set up a Performance Indicator (PI) programme to test priority data and will report in the next Self-Assessment the results of that testing.
- We have built an Intranet portal with resources to help officers design measures and support accuracy.
- Meeting with Internal Audit in terms of areas for testing of any data concerns.
- Data Cymru provided training on how to use and present data statistics for members and staff alike.

The remaining actions are being monitored by the ‘regulator tracker’ that is scrutinised by our Governance and Audit Committee. To build on improvement and the way we deliver performance management, the Council has reviewed its current framework and the suggested changes for 2024/25 are being reported to members. The Council intends to strengthen the corporate performance assessment reporting as a result, adding more service user content where possible within a member’s dashboard, and improving the presentation of information. The directorate reporting process will be paired back to cover the essentials as a minimum, as the current process is quite detailed and time consuming to produce. This will also encourage better ownership of directorate performance enabling strategic information and more operational information to be targeted at the right levels.

A future activity of note for 2025 will be implementation of the Panel Performance Assessment (PPA) to be carried out in 2025, although the timing is not confirmed at this stage. The Local Elections (Wales) Act 2021 requires Councils to have a ‘Panel Assessment’ once in an election cycle. This requires us to make arrangements for an independent panel, appointed by the council, to assess the extent to which the council is meeting the performance requirements in the Act.

The purpose is to take an overview as to whether a Council is meeting its performance requirements and the extent to which we are:

- exercising our functions effectively.
- using resources economically, efficiently and effectively.
- and have effective governance in place for securing the above.

This is a new activity for local government and will require consideration and planning. The ‘thinking’ behind the assessment is that an effective PPA can inform the council’s improvement journey, building on the annual self-assessment, supporting it to look to the future through a different lens. The panel assessment should provide different perspectives; some independent, objective external challenge; and an opportunity to test thinking with impartial expert peers. The guidance explains this is not about checklists, it is not a form of inspection, and it is not an audit, but about supporting the council to achieve its aspirations. There will be more communications and briefings on this aspect in the coming year.

Action Update from 2023/24

| Last year we said we would | By when | Progress | Status |
|---|-------------------|---|--|
| Develop performance reporting framework for each new Well-being Objectives | June 2024 | The baselines are completed, we need to finalise the reporting for Oct 2024 | Good progress |
| Develop, with the Decarbonisation Team, the inclusion of decarbonisation data reporting building annual reports on progress against the agreed Decarbonisation Action Plan. | May 2024 | The decarb data will now move into the Corporate Performance Assessment to reflect its strategic nature. | We will now use the Decarbonisation Annual Report and this action will come out. |
| Review the system for reporting the DPA’s to members, and to reintroduce DPA’s back to scrutiny to help manage volume of information. | April 2024 | This specific action has been superseded by the changes to the performance framework that covers this action. | Completed |
| Research further opportunities for members to take up data training. | April 24-March 25 | Specific training is completed but now becomes ongoing. | Completed |
| Review the purpose and plan for potential power BI and data automation. | Sept 24 | This is not due to be completed at the time of this publication | Not started |

New actions to improve Performance Management effectiveness for 2024/25

| New Actions | By when |
|---|---------------------|
| Build new Corporate Performance Assessment Dashboard including a new members dashboard, Well-being Objective Dashboard and user perspectives measures where possible. | Oct 2024 |
| Implement a relevant data testing programme of priority data | Aug 2024 – Jan 2025 |
| Planning the management of the Council 'Panel Performance Assessment' | 2024-2026 |

Section 7: Other Key Council Health Checks

7.1 Equalities and Welsh Language

The Council continues to deliver against the actions set in the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024, focussing on making services as accessible as possible and to engage more with our residents.

The Council's [Integrated Impact Assessment](#) Template is used to ensure that services understand and consider the impact any proposals have on protected characteristics, the Welsh language, the Socio-economic Duty, and the Future Generations Act. The assessment is linked to their respective committee reports so that decision-makers are informed and able to understand the impacts of any proposals when it comes to our decision-making.

Last year in our self-assessment we said that Elected Members would benefit from extra support in understanding the purpose of impact assessments and to ensure that they are adequately scrutinised as part of the decision-making process, however learning and development in this area has been delayed and we need to promote this further over 2024/25.

The Strategic Equalities Annual Report for 2023/24 is being developed at this time, but some of the highlights for 2023/24 include:

- Pride Caerffili 2023 – the first and only council-led Pride event in Wales.
- Development of the 'Communicating with Residents Good Practice Guide' for staff
- The Autism Bus visit
- Hosting a Menopause Webinar + Unison's Menopause Café
- Ongoing delivery of equalities training for staff and elected members
- The team delivered stereotyping sessions at YG Cwm Rhymni
- Development of Thingi new e-learning platform for the council
- Awareness Raising days, such as Black History Month, Hate Crime Awareness Week, Holocaust Memorial Day.

We drafted and consulted on our new [Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028](#), where respondents were asked their views on whether the objectives outlined will help the Council to reduce inequalities in the workforce and assist service access and delivery. Overall, 68 respondents completed the questionnaire online. Of these, almost a third were aged under 50 which gives a more balanced response by age compared to the previous plan consultation.

It was recognised by those who responded to the consultation that equalities needs to be a high priority for the Council. Whilst not statistically valid due to the small number of responses, there was agreement amongst those who did respond, that the objectives outlined are relevant.

The Council implemented its second [Five Year Welsh Language Strategy 2022-2027](#). The document sets out a range of actions that will help promote the Welsh language, facilitate the use of the Welsh language, and increase the number of Welsh speakers in the county borough by working in partnership. The strategy can be viewed on the website along with all supporting documentation.

The [Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2023/24](#) explains the steps taken to ensure that the Council provides services for the public in Welsh and operates in Welsh. It also includes how the council promotes and celebrates the Welsh language across the county borough.

During the reporting year 2023/24 the Council didn't receive any complaints or investigations about the Welsh language. This is the fifth consecutive year that the Council hasn't been subject to a Welsh Language Commissioner investigation for non-compliance.

You can view the [Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2023/24 \(HTML\)](#) on our website.

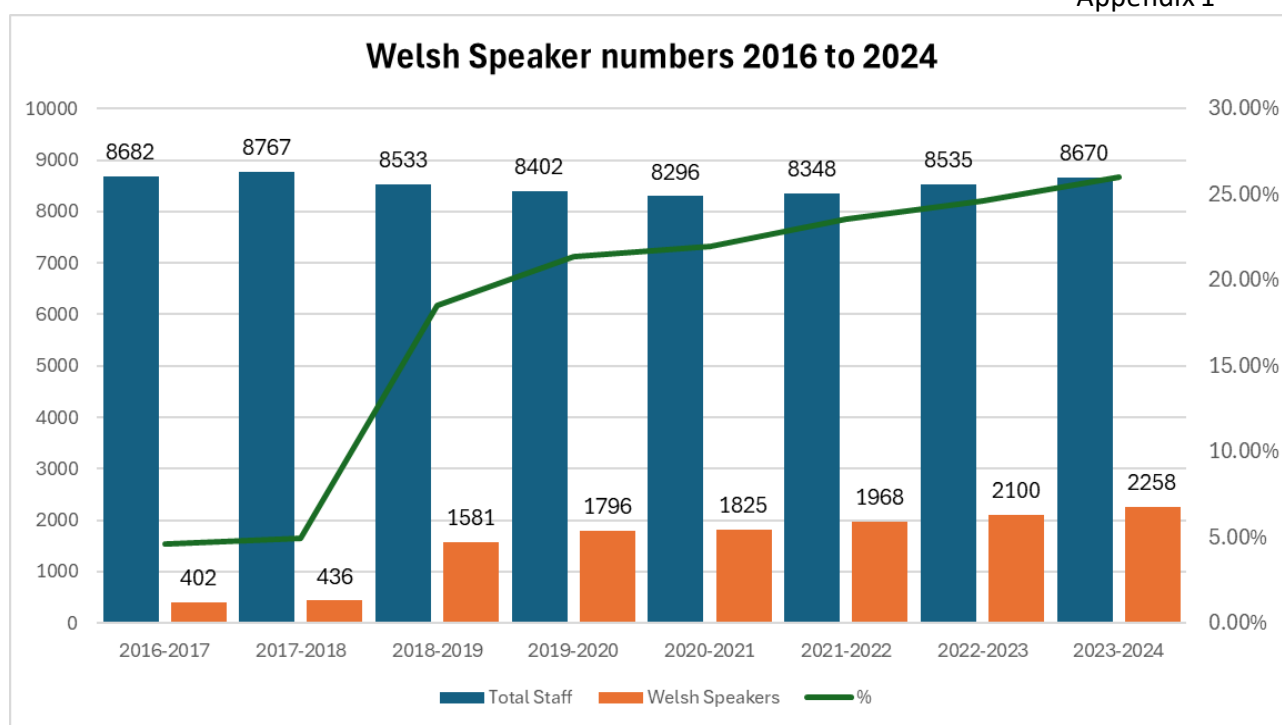
The number of staff learning Welsh increased again during this financial year to **96**. We have changed the process of registering on courses, which is much more streamlined. The Council has also been working more closely with service areas, particularly the Employability Team, who have all attended a Welsh course and are a great example of how to embed Welsh language into everyday work.

The number of Welsh Speaking recorded on our HR system has increased for 2023/24.

The table below shows a breakdown across directorates:

| Directorate Breakdown 2022/23 | Total Staff | Welsh Speakers | % |
|------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|
| Economy & Environment | 2149 | 355 | 16.51% |
| Education & Corporate Services | 4851 | 1461 | 30.11% |
| Social Services & Caerphilly Homes | 1929 | 330 | 17.10% |
| Council Total | 8535 | 2100 | 24.60% |

| Council Totals for 2022/23 | | | Council Totals for 2023/24 | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|-------------|----------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Total Staff | Welsh Speakers | % | Total Staff | Welsh Speakers | % |
| 8535 | 2100 | 24.6 | 8670 | 2258 | 26.04 |
| | | | | | |



Overall, we have had steady growth across the organisation as seen above on the trends between 2016-2024.

The Council's Translation Team translated **over 2 million words** this financial year. That's over 700,000 words more than last year, thanks to the additional capacity in the team. Some of the promotion activities included:

- Diwrnod Shwmae – staff and residents of Tŷ Iscoed residential home got involved with a Welsh language course.
- Welsh Language Rights Day – we promoted Welsh language services and encouraged members of the public to access services in Welsh.
- We continued our work supporting Careers Wales with talks at Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni, St Martins School, Islwyn High, and St Cenydd Comprehensive. The talks were delivered to pupils in Years 10 and 11 regarding career and apprenticeship opportunities with the Council, and emphasis on how important Welsh language skills are to employers.

Partnership working with Careers Wales and schools in the county borough earned us a nomination and shortlisted as finalists in the Careers Wales Valued Partner Awards. Although we did not win the award, it was a great achievement for the Council to be recognised for the work that has been done over the years and will continue to do in a number of schools in the county borough.

Future focus for 2024/25

The Council had planned to undertake a Welsh Language Skills Audit in 2023/24. However, due to time constraints and the capacity to deliver the audit, the work needed to be delayed until April 2024 when the skills audit was rolled out by our Management Network. Survey responses are currently being chased up so the audit can be closed down in August 2024. The responses will then be reported upon in the next Self-Assessment for 2024/25.

In addition to the work on our Strategic Equality Plan there is still ongoing work to improve our recruitment practices to ensure that we are complying with the relevant Welsh Language Standards. A recent report commissioned by the Welsh Language Commissioner identified several areas where improvement is required, and the Council is currently taking steps to address the recommendations of that report.

Accessibility

The Council is committed to making its website accessible and has a legal responsibility to ensure that our online communication both web and mobile meet the WCAG 2.2 AA standard. This ensures that people with temporary or permanent disabilities can access our content and not be excluded from any information or service.

Our website has an accessibility statement, and the Council continues to check the level of compliance. Caerphilly.gov.uk was last tested on 9 November 2023. The test was carried out by **Silktide**. A sample of 125 pages of the website were tested.

We have scored **96/100** for accessibility, **96.3%** is compliant for level A WCAG 2.2 checks, 95.9% is compliant for level AA WCAG 2.2 checks and 95.6% is compliant for level AAA WCAG 2.2 checks. Some examples of where the Council was non compliant were:

- Ensure links explain their purpose (i.e. where will it take the reader too)
- Identify the purpose of fields programmatically - WCAG AA 1.3.5
- Avoid using the same link text for different destinations WCAG A 2.4.4
- Add headers to tables WCAG A 1.3.1

There are other technical fixes which we aim to repair such as the above points by August 2024. In addition, there has been enhancements to the WCAG guidance which means more will need to be done to meet the standard required. The Council aims to complete this by fixing technical compliances also by August 2024.

Most of PDFs and Word documents don't meet accessibility standards – for example, they may not be marked up so they're accessible to a screen reader. There are several thousand PDFs and Word Documents on our website such as reports, strategies, meetings documents and more. This requires training, learning and development and awareness for authors who write for the web.

We are now looking at training provision as provided through the WLGA for our employees who write for the web and mobile and will be able to report on the skill expansion in the next self-assessment. This will become more important when the Council's replacement Internet site is developed old and inaccessible content should not be made available.

Future focus for 2024/25

The Council will be looking across 2024-2026 to provide greater training, learning and awareness opportunities. WLGA have set up a pilot in training in aspects of accessibility learning, for example how to make word documents accessible and how to write for the internet which is a different type of writing. This training will be funded by WLGA, but we need to do more to roll this out more widely across the organisation.

7.2 Decarbonisation

The Council is committed to making Caerphilly County Borough Council a net zero carbon organisation by 2030. A Decarbonisation Strategy and accompanying Action Plan, containing 122 actions was approved and in June 2023. Cabinet approved 10 recommendations to implement the Decarbonisation Strategy and Action Plan. These recommendations included the establishment of working groups, establishment of baselines for each Service Area, commitments to include carbon considerations in all major decision making and procurement processes, the development of a programme of skills development and a continuation of the work to develop specific renewable energy and offsetting projects.

The reviews of the Action Plan the number of actions has reduced from **122** to **76**. Updates have been provided for each of the new actions, and an assessment of progress against each action has been undertaken. Of the 76 actions:

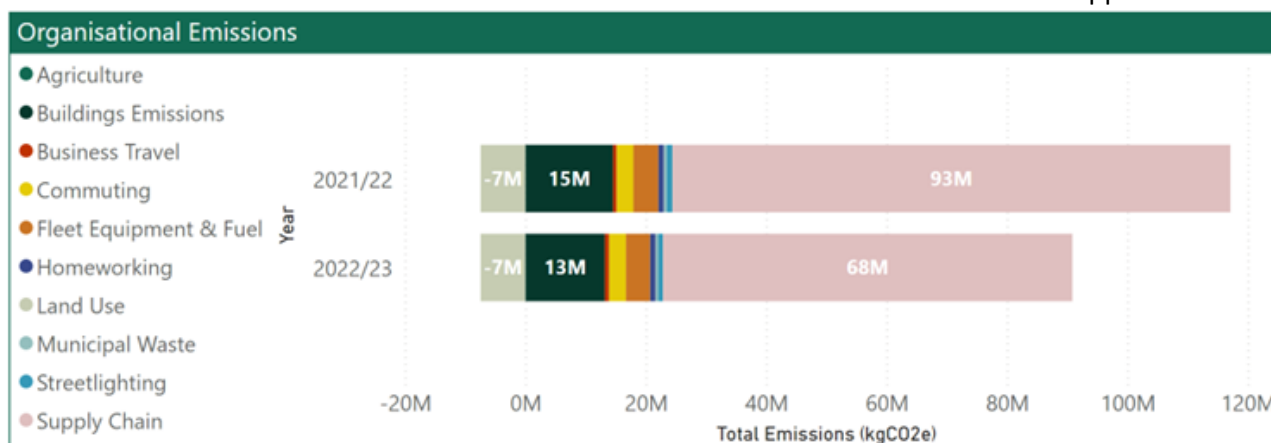
- 12 have been completed,
- 31 are making good progress,
- 26 are making reasonable progress,
- 7 have not yet started.

The most current data is based on the reporting year 2023/24 where we reported an emissions total of 98,632,058 kgCO₂e (10,713,360 kgCO₂e operational emissions plus 75,481,201 kgCO₂e supply chain emissions). This was offset by -7,386,283 kgCO₂e through our land use, giving a submitted carbon emissions figure of **98,632,058** kgCO₂e (or 98,632 tCO₂e).

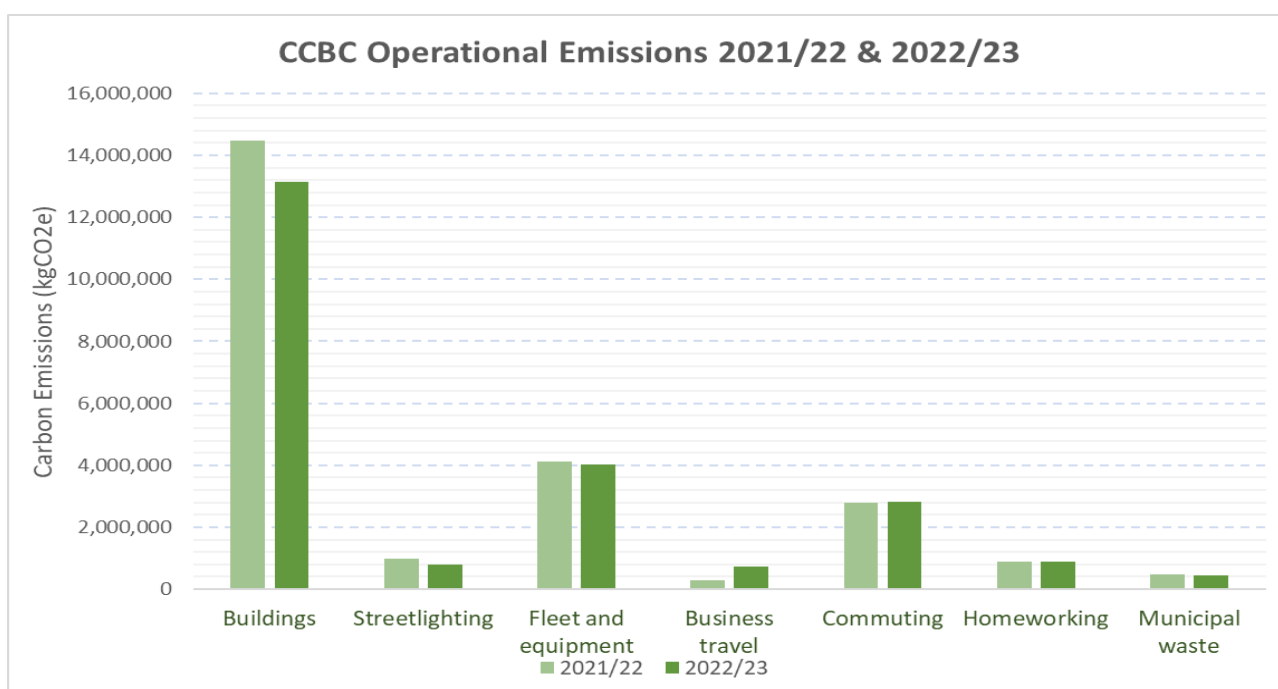
The reported emissions for 2023/24 had an increase of 2,737,564 kgCO₂e or **1.74%**. The overall increase was in part driven by an increase in third party spend of £31.1 million which resulted in an increase in supply chain emissions of 2,080,108 kgCO₂e or 2.63%.

Operational emissions decreased by 449,714 kgCO₂e or 2% because of reductions in streetlighting, buildings and waste emissions. Emissions from business travel (grey fleet) and commuting increased due to improvements in data collection. Reporting on F-gases was included for the first time resulting in a 9,187 kgCO₂e increase.

The Decarbonisation Team produced emissions baselines and footprints for each Directorate and Service Area, for 2021/22 and 2022/23 so comparisons can be visualised using Power BI reports to enable understanding of these emissions presentations. The graphs are 22/23 comparators and will be updated as we currently analyse the 23/24 data that is just arriving as we go to print on this years self-assessment.



In analysing the 2022/23 supply chain data for the development of service area footprints and in the advance of actions under the Buy pillar, amendments to the reported emissions were able to be made. This resulted in supply chain emissions reducing from 81,197,694 kgCO2e to 68,007,753 kgCO2e, with an organisational total of 83,447,171 kgCO2e. This is an organisational reduction of 10,810,131 kgCO2e or **11.5%**. This was driven by updates to the emissions factors for supply chain and was a reduction noticeable across the public sector. Lessons learned through the deeper analysis of the supply chain data will be applied to the reporting for 2023/24 to ensure accuracy.



Healthy Schools have organised and funded 12 schools to attend Carbon Literacy for Educators training via Keep Wales Tidy, and a further 3 schools were funded by Keep Wales Tidy. An initial cohort of **39** officers have completed Carbon Literacy training accredited by the Carbon Literacy Project and delivered by Cynnal Cymru.

The council has already installed Photovoltaic (PV's) panels on the roofs of **63** of its buildings. In some instances, these are small demonstration arrays on schools, but we have also installed larger arrays to good effect and are currently investigating our collective non-domestic roof space for medium sized PV arrays. In total **594,863** kWhrs of renewable energy is generated from these schemes.

The Cwm Ifor solar farm project, a 20MW solar farm development, received planning permission in May 2024. Options are now being considered for the next phase of the project.

Funding has been received through grant opportunities to examine the potential for Hydrogen in the borough using Coed Top Reed Bed Facility as an ethical water source. Early high-level feasibility has shown the project to be viable and further funding is being sought to take the project forward. There is potential to produce 10MW of hydrogen to fuel larger fleet vehicles owned by CCBC and other Councils within the region as well as the potential to supply to a nearby injection point owned by WWU.

The authority has undertaken a review of its capacity to generate hydroelectricity from rivers and streams on Council owned land. To date there is limited opportunity to progress projects although Cwmcarn Forest has been identified as offering some opportunity to generate electricity for onsite use at the visitor centre. An assessment has been commissioned to determine costs and potential payback for the scheme. It is estimated that a 27kW turbine could be installed onsite, which would produce at least half of the visitor's centre annual electricity requirements.

The original Decarbonisation Strategy identified that the Council has local arrangements in place at Bryn Quarry where Council collected food waste is converted into green energy via an Anaerobic Digester. Discussions have begun with the Bryn Group to identify opportunities, with an initial study being initiated to review options and to develop an outline business case. This has included assessing the best route for any hardware, to identify any land studies or further ecological studies that may be required. As part of understanding the viability of the project, negotiations have begun on Heads of Terms and the principles of any potential power purchase agreements.

A Cabinet commitment was given to "set a target of planting 300,000 trees by 2030, where land availability allows". An additional 24,350 trees were planted over the 2023/24 planting season; 3,000 of these were planted by volunteers across two sites in Wyllie and Parc Cwm Darran. To date a total of 105,350 trees have been planted since the Decarbonisation Strategy was approved.

Looking Forward – Proposed approach to decarbonisation

In April 2024, two Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) funded officers were appointed with a remit to engage with and support residents and businesses within the borough to understand and act on decarbonisation. Over the 12 months of the posts, a local steering group will be established alongside a wider programme of engagement to support the development of a borough wide decarbonisation strategy in support of the Net Zero Wales 2050 target set by Welsh Government.

The approach to decarbonisation within the Council will continue to be based on the 4 pillars of reduce, produce, offset and buy as set out in the Decarbonisation Strategy which you can read more about here [Caerphilly - Caerphilly County Borough](#)

In 2022/23, around **25%** of our emissions were 'operational' emissions. Whilst these emissions did decrease from 2021/22, further focus is needed, with increasing action taken to tackle these emissions to become net zero in operation.

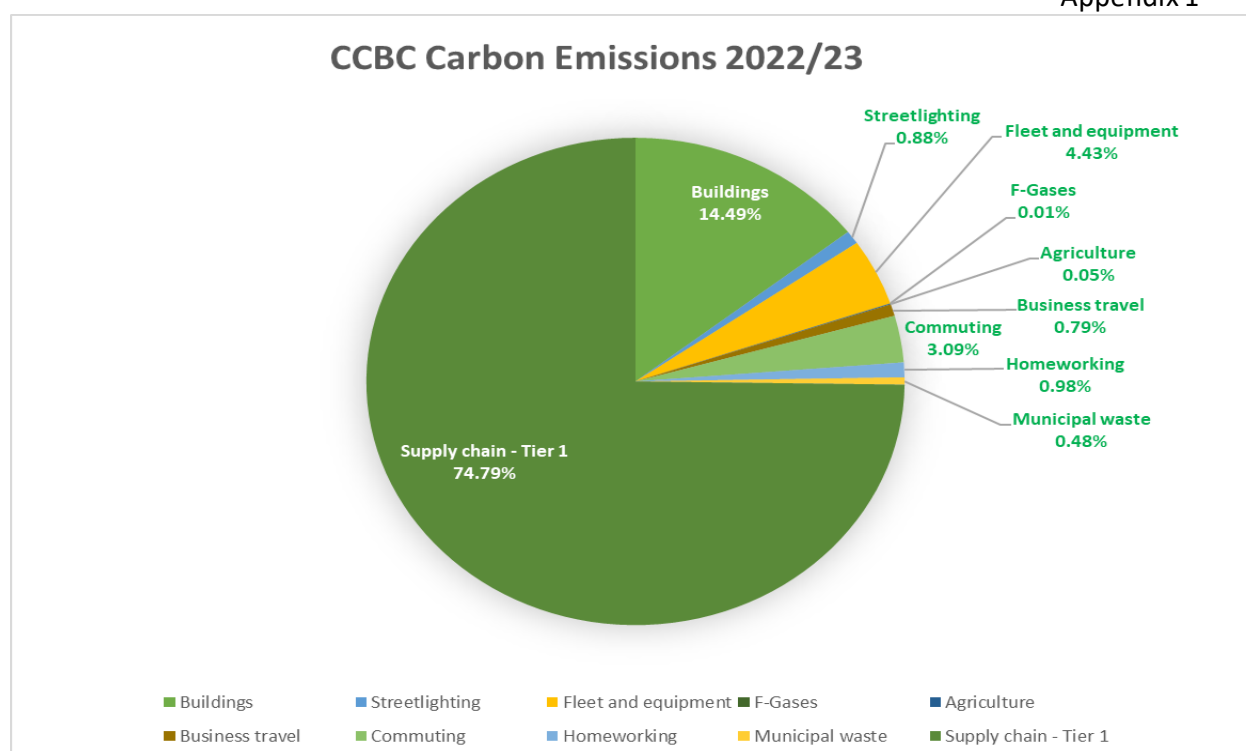
Through the Mobilising Team Caerphilly transformation programme, decarbonisation has begun to be woven into business cases for decision making, with assessments of emissions included within the proposals for new initiatives. Projects within this programme are identifying opportunities for transforming services including Fleet, Home to School Transport, Leisure Centres and the wider asset management and third party spend of the organisation. By including decarbonisation considerations in these projects, we will be able to directly influence the areas of our organisational footprint that account for our operational emissions and the largest areas of our supply chain emissions.

We are working on the development of a vehicle replacement strategy which will facilitate the transition of the fleet to ULEV (ultra-low emission vehicle). Ongoing projects in partnership with Optrak and Cardiff University are continuing to analyse fleet vehicle data, funded by the CCR Challenge Fund. This project has just begun work analysing idling patterns and business mileage to further identify opportunities for reducing emissions from Council use of vehicles.

Supplier engagement has begun, initially with our main food suppliers, to understand their emissions and how the Council can support them in working to reduce them. Initial engagement has also begun with some social care providers within the borough. This project looks to work with the providers to enable them to begin to measure and understand their emissions so that, not only can better data be used in Council carbon reporting, but also targeted support can be given to these providers to enable them to make reductions.

Service area baselines have been developed and the proposed next stage is to use the baseline data to allocate a 'carbon budget' for each service area, in the same way that as a financial budget. The purpose is to empower each service area to take ownership of their carbon emissions and to develop action plans to reduce emissions.

Following on from the success of the initial Carbon Literacy training, two courses to be accredited by the Carbon Literacy project, are in development. Each course will have a focus on numeracy within Carbon Literacy and will support residents and Council officers in understanding the impact of their actions and decision making on their emissions. Emissions which cannot be eliminated will need to be offset.



The Annual Decarbonisation Report will be prepared and reported on each November. Below is the link to the last report [insert link]

7.3 Consultation and Engagement

Effective engagement is central to the Council's decision-making processes and is key in helping to determine how we deliver our services and best support our communities across our county borough. Robust consultation and stakeholder engagement has remained central to the council's decision-making processes this year, while also playing a strategic role in the Mobilising Team Caerphilly transformation programme.

All consultation and engagement activity are developed in line with the council's Consultation and Engagement Framework 2020-2025, which sets out our approach for a common understanding to further improve engagement process across the organisation, while ensuring robust and fully transparent consultation practices.

The document can be found here: [consultation-and-engagement-framework.aspx \(caerphilly.gov.uk\)](https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/consultation-and-engagement-framework.aspx)

Within the context of reduced budgets, effective consultation and engagement is proving more important than ever, particularly:

- In helping shape the council's Mobilising Team Caerphilly transformation programme and associated projects, and
- In empowering communities to become more involved in services and areas that matter most to them and boosting community resilience through greater access to community-based services.

Focussing on the latter, an example of this is the development of the Rhymney Hub (formerly Rhymney Library), which provides a central point of contact for face-to-face council services, community-based support and a venue for partners to operate from, in addition to the traditional offering of a library setting. The 'Hub' model, using an existing facility on Rhymney High Street, is helping strengthen relationships with communities and delivering services that best meet residents' needs.

Another example is the continued success of the Caerphilly Cares service, part of which aims to enhance community resilience by providing support and guidance to community groups across the county borough. It is acknowledged that the council may not always be best placed to deliver some very localised services; the support in community development, encouraging volunteers and more practical guidance is helping ensure community groups are well placed to play their part in developing community-based services.

The council's Community Asset Transfer policy has also been updated, and a plan to expedite expressions of interest from community groups taking on council owned assets is currently being progressed at pace. With asset rationalisation also a key element of the Mobilising Team Caerphilly transformation programme, the council's approach to community asset transfer will be central to this work, while continuing to enhance community engagement, strengthen relations and work together with our communities.

Effective engagement and consultation have been demonstrated across a number of projects delivered under the Mobilising Team Caerphilly banner to date, including ongoing Trade Union engagement, staff engagement, ongoing engagement with elected members and consultation/engagement with residents and community groups. At the time of writing, views are being sought on a number of far-reaching consultations on topics including the future of the Meals Direct Service, Llancaiach Fawr, Blackwood Miners' Institute and the Hive Restaurant at Penallta House.

In March 2023, a participation strategy and accompanying action plan was also endorsed by Cabinet in 2023 to highlight the council's continued compliance with participation duty within the Local Government and Elections Act.

Consultation and engagement, appropriately planned and delivered, will continue to be central to all strategic council activity and service planning going forward.

More generally, the council's digital engagement platform Engagement HQ, which was launched in 2022 is now the premier vehicle for consultation and engagement activity. The platform provides opportunities for stakeholders to engage with 'live' consultations, as well as providing access to feedback on all previous consultations, ensuring we are able to 'close the loop' in how people's views have helped shape decisions and subsequent outcomes.

A link to the digital engagement platform 'The Caerphilly Conversation' can be found here: <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/>

While the premier engagement vehicle, we continue to take a mixed method approach to engagement, which helps ensure those who are not digitally enabled can easily get involved if they wish to do so.

For example, recent consultation activity on the council's budget setting and on the draft waste and recycling strategy saw face to face drop-in sessions held at libraries and other community venues in almost every town/village across the county borough. For all far-reaching consultations, hard copy surveys are also always available from any of Caerphilly's libraries. Our stakeholder lists for those representing people with protected characteristics and other seldom heard communities also continues to expand, ensuring a proactive approach to engagement where all residents have an opportunity to be involved.

A cross-directorate engagement 'champions' working group internally has helped ensure the council's engagement/consultation activity is streamlined and aligned to organisational objectives, with an enhanced focus on sharing of data, insight and outcomes from these. This group are also helping ensure this data and insight is shared consistently with senior leaders across the council directorates. This group also continue to be an excellent source of sharing best practice, coordinating activity and developing effective approaches to engagement and consultation across the wider organisation.

Within the business community, the Caerphilly Business Club supports local businesses by providing a space to encourage innovation, networking, and opportunities to learn. We have continued to see its membership increase significantly as local businesses recognise the value of association with the club, with an increase to over 700 as of summer 2024. In partnership with the council, the club have also launched industry specific events designed to support local businesses and increase B2B collaboration, mentoring opportunities, advice, consultation, and guidance from leaders in their specific fields of expertise. The Caerphilly Business Club hosts an Expo event, bi-monthly breakfast meetings and an annual awards ceremony.

The CCBC business team regularly visit and engage with many different companies around the borough providing advice and guidance from Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Start-Ups through to our large well-established businesses. This includes help with funding and grants, international trade, recruitment, marketing, and advertising as well as planning, inward investment, and relocation advice.

To give some context of the support (through the UK Government's UKSPF fund) we have been able to offer local businesses up to £25,000 in capital and revenue grants to improve their businesses. Since the fund was launched in the financial year 2022-2023, grants awarded to businesses exceeded £2,000,000. We have also administered over 20 Start-up Grants, of £5000, that have supported embryonic and fledgling enterprises.

7.4 Good Governance - how good is the council's governance?

Corporate governance is about doing the right things in the right way. Good governance demonstrates accountability and transparency in the actions and decisions taken by a Council and affects all residents. Good corporate governance within public services requires robust systems and processes, effective leadership and high standards of behaviour, a culture based on openness and honesty and an external focus on the needs of service users and the public.

This is the second year that the Council has included a specific section on governance within its Self-Assessment. While the Self-Assessment as a whole can be considered an evaluation of the Council's governance arrangements, there were a number of additional factors not previously referenced that the Council felt should be part of this Assessment moving forward.

7.4.1 Decision making

Our governance arrangements can be considered as **effective**. The Council's Policy Framework, Code of Corporate Governance, Performance Management Framework and Constitution explain how we work, how we are accountable and how decisions are made. These documents are complemented by the Member and Officer Codes of Conduct, Officer Member Protocol, Standards Committee and Internal and External Audit arrangements ensure the Council operates with integrity, ethical values and within its legal powers. Governance arrangements are reviewed each year by the Council's Corporate Management, Senior Leadership Team, and Corporate Governance Panel to update the Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The AGS is considered and approved by the Governance and Audit Committee.

Key governance issues and considerations have been identified in the Council's 2023-24 AGS. In the past year, the Council has made improvements including:

- Embedding and monitoring the impact of the new arrangements set out within the report to the Council AGM, May 2023 (which included a reduction to three Scrutiny Committees and more regular use of Joint Scrutiny meetings for shaping key policy)
- Designing and implementing specific governance arrangements to support the progression of the Mobilising Team Caerphilly Programme, underpinned by the Council's existing Constitution.
- Continuing the review of our Financial Regulations and Code of Corporate Governance to ensure they are improved and remain appropriate.
- Continuing to refine and improve the hybrid meeting technology to support Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny and Regulatory Committee meetings virtually and making recordings available on the Council's website.
- Continuing the implementation of an extensive training and development programme for elected Members
- Continuing to revise and update the Council's constitution to enhance and improve decision-making arrangements across the Council.
- Designing responses to a wide range of Audit Wales studies and monitoring the implementation of the associated recommendations
- Strengthening the Corporate Risk Management arrangements in consultation with the Governance and Audit Committee

7.4.2 Involvement in decision-making

The Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act, 2023 is the result of many years of progress establishing social partnership as a better way of working in Wales, with the role of trade unions now deeply embedded.

Public Bodies covered by the legislation, which came into force on 1st April 2024, will need to seek consensus or compromise with recognised trade unions when developing their well-being objectives or making decisions of a strategic nature about the steps they intend to take to deliver the objectives.

At present local and regional trade union representatives meet HR officers at least monthly with other officers brought in as necessary. The relevant Cabinet members also attend trade union meetings so that representatives can talk to them directly on operational matters which may affect the staff they represent.

All HR policy reviews are done in full consultation with the trade unions. The relationships between HR Officers and local representatives are well established and robust.

However, as an Authority we recognise that we will need to look more closely at how we engage with our Trade Unions on a more strategic level to align ourselves with the Social Partnership Act. We will look to make progress on this over the year ahead to ensure that our trade unions remain a key partner in decision making and organisational change, and that the different ideas and perspectives they offer are considered and included

The Council's engagement with its regulators is strong and systematic. Regular engagement meetings take place between regulators and senior officers in the Council to discuss regulators' work and the council's improvement plans. An annual Audit and Risk Assurance workshop is also held with the Councils Regulators, Cabinet and Corporate Management Team.

What will we do to improve?

Our last self-assessment we said we would carry out these actions to improve, below is a progress update:

| Last year we said we would | By when | Progress | Status |
|---|------------|--|-----------|
| Seek to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of decision-making by refining the Council's approach to Scrutiny, procedures for handling Notices of Motion, the number of Questions that can be asked verbally at full Council Meetings and the introduction of a Ward Protocol for Members | March 2025 | Following a decision of Council at AGM in May 2023, a number of changes have been introduced to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of decision-making. One year in, the approaches seem to be embedded and working well. | Completed |

| Last year we said we would | By when | Progress | Status |
|---|------------|---|---------------------------|
| Continue to improve the use of Hybrid Meeting technology in Committee Rooms outside of the Council Chamber as well as the capability to Live Stream from meetings beyond the Chamber. | March 2025 | Work continues with suppliers of both the audio and video aspects of Hybrid Meeting technology, but platform stability remains questionable. | Reasonable Progress |
| Undertake bespoke training for new Members to help improve their understanding of the Constitution and its role in decision-making as well as improve meeting conduct. | March 2025 | A range of induction training was implemented following the LG election in 2022. A specific session to strengthen meeting conduct was also delivered. | Good progress but ongoing |
| Continue to enhance the Council's online engagement platform The Caerphilly Conversation. | March 2025 | Engagement HQ is now live and supports the wide range of key Council consultation and engagement exercises. | Completed |
| Monitoring the challenges facing our services (including outsourced services) because of rising prices, supply chain issues and staffing issues. | March 2025 | Key supplier and partner engagement meetings take place on an ongoing basis. | Ongoing |

New actions to improve involvement and decision-making effectiveness for 2024/25

| New Actions (or carried over) | By when |
|---|------------|
| Continue to improve the use of Hybrid Meeting technology in Committee Rooms outside of the Council Chamber as well as the capability to Live Stream from meetings beyond the Chamber. | March 2025 |
| Set up a series of regular Strategy Meetings between the TUs and CMT. | Oct 2024 |

7.5 Regulator Feedback

Each year our regulator Audit Wales, sets out their programme of work following a mutual workshop called the Assurance, Risk and Audit workshop with the leaders of the Council and other regulators for Education and Social Services.

The Assurance and Risk Assessment (ARA) identifies the level of audit assurance and/or where further audit work may be required in future years in relation to risks to the Council putting in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of resources and acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle. This determines their work programme for the year.

For the year of 2023/24 the following output for the work has been received. Some of the outputs are from audit year 2022/23 but were received in 2023/24:

- Examination of the setting of Well-being Objectives
- Digital Strategy Report (January 2024) Draft
- Waste Management Review (August 2023)
- Performance Information - Use of Service User perspective (February 2024)

Work by Audit Wales scheduled in Audit Year 2023/24 that are coming through in 2024/25 are:

- Counter Fraud
- Cyber Security
- Financial Sustainability
- Arrangements for Commissioning Services

When an output has been agreed and signed off and actions to address areas for improvement have been placed on the 'regulator tracker' and are now formally monitored the report will go on the intranet under the Business Improvement web page.

Alternatively, all Audit Wales outputs, projects and reports for both local and national works are available at:

[Publication | Audit Wales](#) or at their homepage here; [Homepage | Audit Wales](#)

Work and reports relating to Care Inspectorate Wales can be found here:

[Home | Care Inspectorate Wales](#)

Estyn, the Inspection body for Education settings can be found here;

[Latest inspection reports | Estyn \(gov.wales\)](#)

Section 8: How to contact us

Your views and opinions on the content of our reports and plans are important to us. We welcome your input so that we can continue to provide meaningful information that helps inform you of the service focus, ensuring that we are working on the things that are important to making a difference to you, our citizens, and our communities.

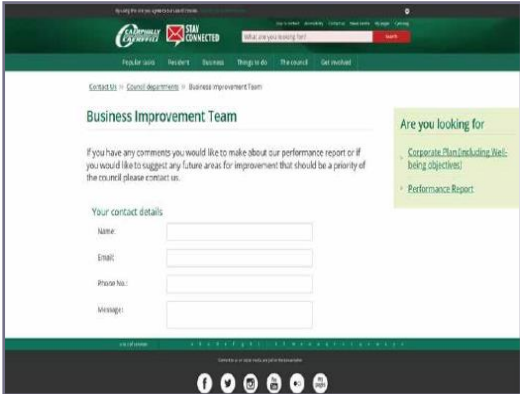
You can contact us by:

Email: BIT@caerphilly.gov.uk or via the Council Performance webpage and follow the instructions on screen.

Alternatively, please contact:

ROS ROBERTS
Business Improvement Manager
Caerphilly County Borough Council
Penallta House
Ystrad Mynach
Hengoed
CF82 7PG

Tel: 01443 864238
E-mail: roberr@caerphilly.gov.uk



You can contact us via social media.



This document is also available in different languages and formats upon request.

Further information can also be found on our website: www.caerphilly.gov.uk