

CONTACT



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

Newspaper for the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil

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Council's
financial position
update – **see page 2**
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recycling info –
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Welcome to the Christmas Issue of Contact, which I must say is packed with information.

Since the last issue it's been an autumn of awards for our new £12m state-of-the-art bus interchange, with awards for sustainability and client of the year. This is a great achievement for, what is, a truly 21st Century building.

I'm delighted that Ysgol Y Graig Primary School in Cefn Coed opened its doors at the start of the new term in September. This was a project close to my heart and I'm delighted to see it finally come to fruition, providing a 21st Century School to the pupils and staff there. You can read about the school on page 3.

At the beginning of October, I had the privilege of meeting the eight new Board Members appointed to the Cyfarthfa Foundation, which has been set up to develop Cyfarthfa Castle, Park and Blast Furnaces into a major tourist destination. I look forward to sharing more information on this in future editions.

In November, we were excited to share some fantastic news about the YMCA refurbishment programme, which will see £8.6m-funded investment for this long-awaited project. I am looking forward to seeing this Grade II Listed building being transformed in the near future. Read more on page 5.

Are you ready for winter? With the colder weather already here, we've put together some useful information on page 6, including emergency telephone numbers and where you can find the most up-to-date information in the event of an emergency.

On page 7, you can read how the repair works following Storm Dennis are coming along and see some pictures of the completed works so far.

It's the time of year where we're asking residents how we should prioritise Council services and set the Council Tax for the current financial year. Read how you can have your say in the article opposite.

There are so many exciting things happening in Merthyr Tydfil at the moment, including the opening of new bars and restaurants. Read about a popular South Wales restaurant branching out in to Merthyr Tydfil, with the opening of The Mine at CF47 on page 4.

It would be amiss of me to let this issue go by without paying tribute to Howard Barrett, my fellow Ward Councillor, who sadly passed away on 31 October 2021. Howard will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Finally, I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a wonderful and prosperous 2022.

Lisa Mytton

Councillor Lisa Mytton
Leader

Katy Richards to join Youth Mayor Samee Fureed as Deputy Mayor elect

In October 2021, Katy Richards was selected as the Deputy Youth Mayor elect and joins Youth Mayor elect Samee Fureed and Andrew Miller the current Youth Mayor as the lead young people representatives of the County Borough.

The Youth Mayor role is an important role in the borough and allows for the Youth Mayors to really get to the heart of what matters to the children and young people of Merthyr Tydfil. Katy has expressed her excitement in taking on the

role and said:

"I am excited to be elected as the Deputy Youth Mayor and look forward to taking up my role formally next May and work with Samee as Youth Mayor, there are many challenges ahead for young people and I know that we can help to make a difference, thank you to everyone who voted for me."

Our Youth forum want to tackle a lot of problems stemming from the Covid pandemic, such as an increase in mental

health in children and young people. Samee has already expressed his ambition to address children and young people's mental health including looking at hate crime and bullying. He said: *"I very much look forward to becoming Youth Mayor and delivering on what young people of Merthyr Tydfil elected me to deliver. I am excited to be working with Katy as the Deputy Youth Mayor and seeing the new ideas and perspectives she will bring to the roll."*



Top experts join team to steer development of Cyfarthfa Plan

A former Chair of the National Trust who also edited The Times newspaper is among eight new board members appointed to the Cyfarthfa Foundation, which has been set up to develop Cyfarthfa Castle and Park into a major tourist destination.

Sir Simon Jenkins - whose father came from Dowlais - is a leading writer and journalist, a former Deputy Chair of English Heritage and currently a columnist for The Guardian.

The other new members are:

- Hanif Kara, co-founder of AKT II, one of world's leading structural and civil engineering practices.
- Ewan Jones, a partner with architects Grimshaw, the practice that designed the Eden Project in Cornwall.
- Geoff Hunt, Chief Operating Officer for Arup across the UK, India, Middle East and Africa and a former Chair of Groundworks Wales
- Sara Turnbull, a chartered environmentalist, social entrepreneur and expert on sustainability
- Dr Carol Bell, Vice President of National Museum Wales and Vice Chair of the Wales Millennium Centre.
- Marion Loeffler, a German-born historian and specialist in Welsh industrial history, who is currently Reader in Welsh history at Cardiff University and has presented history programmes for S4C
- Robert Rummey, a landscape architect specialising in re-purposing historic assets for regeneration, tourism, educational and environmental benefit.

They join existing board members: Chair Geraint Talfan Davies, former Controller of BBC Wales and former Chair of Welsh National Opera, the Arts Council of Wales and the Institute of Welsh Affairs; Deputy Chair Rowland Davies, a lawyer and property specialist; Council Leader Cllr Lisa Mytton; Deputy Leader Cllr Geraint Thomas; Merthyr Tydfil-born Helen Protheroe, Director of Development and Alumni Relations at London's Royal College of Art.

"It speaks volumes for this imaginative plan that so many people who are leaders in their field have wanted to play a part in making it happen. The quality of this board should give confidence both to potential funders and to government," said Foundation Chair, Geraint Talfan Davies.

Merthyr Tydfil Council funded the development of a masterplan for Cyfarthfa and, following its publication, the Welsh Government has given £1.2m of development funding for the project.

Residents invited to have their say on Council budget

Merthyr Tydfil residents are being asked for their opinions on how the Council should spend its 2022/23 budget.

A public consultation exercise is currently underway and over the next few months the Council's Cabinet will be out and about across Merthyr Tydfil asking you, our residents, what services should be prioritised, as well as how you think Council Tax should be set for the coming year. Cabinet Members will be available to listen to and answer questions and will take your suggestions back to colleagues

for discussion.

At the time of print details of the face-to-face roadshows were being finalised. For the latest information on these please visit our website and social media pages.

An online survey is available at smartsurvey.co.uk/s/MTCBCBudget22-23. Alternatively, you can request a paper copy by calling 01685 725000 or emailing: Corporate.Communications@merthyr.gov.uk. The survey will close at Midnight on Wednesday 9th February 2022.

Financial position



An update from Councillor Andrew Barry, Cabinet Member for Governance and Resource:

I wanted to give you an update on our financial position following the Audit Wales assessment of the annual accounts for the last Financial Year.

Back in 2016/17 our financial forecast predicted a deficit of around £20m by 2019/20.

The audited accounts now show this Authority to be in a much stronger financial position than it has been for years. This has been achieved during some of the most challenging times, with Storm Dennis, Brexit and the COVID 19 pandemic.

This has been made possible by the hard work and dedication of all Council staff who have identified savings and found ways to work more efficiently.

With a current surplus, the authority has been able to reinvest:

- Over £700,000 for Social Services
- Almost £800,000 to fund full time nursery places in 2 of our schools over the next 4 years
- £800,000 to support the Council's Recovery, Transformation and Improvement plans
- £200,000 to support Council Apprenticeships

How satisfied are you as a resident in Merthyr Tydfil?

Let us know and be in with a chance to win £100 Tesco vouchers.

As a user of public services in Merthyr Tydfil, the Council invites you to take part in our Residents' Survey. We want to get your views on a wide range of issues and services relevant to Merthyr Tydfil, including education, social care, and waste management.

The online survey can be found at smartsurvey.co.uk/s/ResidentsSurvey2021

If you have any questions, would like help completing the form or would like a copy of the questionnaire in another format or language, e-mail corporate.communications@merthyr.gov.uk or phone (01685) 725000.

All Councils have a legal obligation to maintain healthy reserve balances; the General Reserves, for the council to respond to unforeseen or unexpected liabilities; and the Earmarked Reserves to meet known or predicted future requirements across Council services. We are now able to place over £600,000 to increase our general reserves to £5.33m.

This will set us in good stead for the years to come.

With that being said, I want to reassure you that we will not take our foot off the gas. There are lots of things going on behind the scenes to ensure that we provide value for money services for our residents in the future.

I'd like to thank all those who, through the worst of times, have performed so diligently to put this Council in a better position for the future.

To our Staff, Elected Members, volunteers and most importantly our communities.

It truly has been a Team Merthyr Tydfil effort.

Thank you.

Now available in
Merthyr Tydfil!

paybyphone

Pupils from school councils quiz Councillors on environmental issues

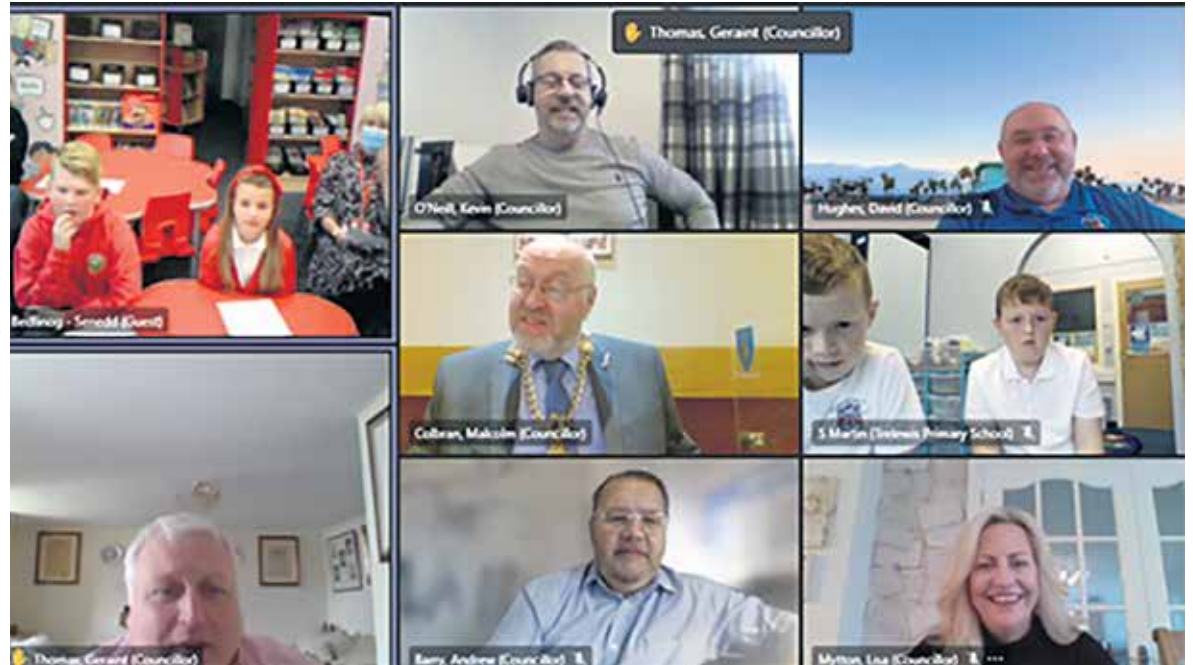
In October, Councillors held a virtual meeting session with school council pupils from Bedlinog Community Primary School and Trelewis Primary School. The pupils pressed for answers on what could be done regarding environmental issues in the area.

Issues were raised by Trelewis Primary School pupils regarding the litter affecting a nearby stream that the children must cross to get to school, and Bedlinog Primary School pupils spoke about issues on their route to school such as broken fences and dog mess.

Cllr Malcolm Colbran, Mayor of Merthyr Tydfil and Bedlinog Councillor, said:

"I think it's very important for Councillors to engage with young people and listen to their opinions. I could tell that the pupils had put a lot of work into their research, and they asked us some excellent questions. We all thoroughly enjoyed the meeting, and it was fantastic to see the students taking such a keen interest in local affairs."

The virtual meeting was an excellent experience for the students to learn about how the council works, but also allowed the Councillors to understand the issues better by listening to these pupils' experiences from the frontline.



WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS PICKING UP STEAM THROUGHOUT THE BOROUGH



The Council and Education sector in Merthyr Tydfil have been busy meeting its Welsh language standards over the past few months with success across the board. In October, the yearly Shwmae Su'mae event took place in the Aberfan Community Centre and Cyfarthfa Castle which saw Welsh language performances from local schools who performed a variety of musical items.

In November, children from Pen Y Dre pupils were also praised by Councillors for their great success at the Rhondda and National Eisteddfod where they won a variety of awards for their Welsh language talents ranging from singing, prose and acting. In July, pupils from the Afon Taf cluster schools used their Welsh language skills outside the classroom where they took part in two events at the John Sellwood running

track aimed to give them confidence in using the language in a fun way.

Since the Council received its final compliance notice from the Welsh commissioner in 2015, Merthyr Tydfil Council have gone above and beyond to ensure that the Welsh language strategy is embedded within the culture, education, and communications across the borough to provide equality and its certainly picking up steam.

A New Chapter for Anti-Bullying in the Borough

MTCBC is supporting an anti-bullying campaign together with the children and young people of the county borough. The campaign will refresh the existing strategy which was revised in 2020 following Welsh Government guidance, with new and proportionate safeguards that will improve pupil wellbeing even more.

Since the Council published its first anti-bullying strategy in 2011/12, research has found that there has been an increase in the number of incidents reported for physical and gender bullying, although other forms of bullying such as racial bullying have decreased.

Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Learning, Cllr Lisa Mytton, said: *"Our aim is to support schools to develop an environment where children feel happy and safe, diversity is respected, and healthy debate is encouraged. We also aim to have reduced numbers of bullying incidents reported across all schools, and for all schools to have*

access to a range of strategies to support young people.

"The Council has produced statutory anti-bullying guidance to provide advice to enable the values of respect, tolerance, and kindness to be embedded in our schools and across the wider community. It is only by working together that we can achieve this and truly make a difference."



Troedyrhiw Primary build an Eco-Friendly Garden

Earlier this year, Troedyrhiw Primary pupils took on the construction of an eco-friendly garden where they are growing vegetables. This is a part of the school's initiative to become sustainable and eco-friendly. The project will grow vegetables for the local community and teach pupils about the importance of being

sustainable but will also offer additional physical and mental health wellbeing in the process.



Ysgol Y Graig Opens its Doors

In September, the new two-storey state-of-the-art Ysgol Y Graig opened its doors in Cefn Coed for pupils and staff. The new school on the former Vaynor & Penderyn School site replaces the existing ageing building. The school is highly sustainable with automatic control systems, carbon neutral cooling and LED lighting throughout the building.

Headteacher Mr Anstee has been very happy with the new school and

said: *"The facilities and opportunities that our incredible new building provides will support and enhance our curriculum and provision, enabling a 21st century learning experience for our learners and the wider community. These are exciting times for education and learning in Wales and the new possibilities that this building brings are significant. Most importantly, our children love their new school, with*

one child commenting that "It is the best thing I have ever seen – everyone should have a school like this!". Whilst learning is far more than the building that you occupy, there is no doubt that this will enable us to be a beacon in our local community and help us to provide the exciting, engaging curriculum that our learners deserve".



Self-isolate and get a test if you have any of the following - a new continuous cough; high temperature; loss of or change to sense of smell or taste.



#KeepWalesSafe





Bus interchange wins national construction awards

The new bus interchange won two prestigious national construction awards within the space of a month this autumn.

The project was announced winner of the 'Sustainability' category in the 2021 Constructing Excellence in Wales Awards, and the Council was presented with the inaugural Client of the Year accolade at the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) Awards in London.

The Sustainability Award is given for 'high environmental and climate performance in construction to meet present day needs for housing, working environments and infrastructure without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs in times to come'.

Funded by Welsh Government,

Wales's first fully electric transport hub is the only one that allows for the charging of electric vehicles on site, has no gas or other fossil fuel supplies and a rainwater harvesting tank for the public toilets.

Main contractor Morgan Sindall sourced robust natural materials with long lifespans, and the building was constructed in layers in line with key 'Circular Economy' principles, each layer able to be separated and refurbished or replaced.

The County Borough Council was also shortlisted as 'Best Client' by Morgan Sindall for its collaborative work, and the interchange has been shortlisted for the RTPi (Royal Town Planning Institute) Cymru Awards for Planning Excellence 2021.

Learn the history of Merthyr Tydfil place names

Some of Merthyr Tydfil's best-loved places and landscapes feature in a series of podcasts and webinars produced in an effort to preserve original Welsh place names.

Following the success of a public survey to understand places and landscapes of significance and the subsequent delivery of an online and interactive story map (www.culturalconnections.wales), 10 podcasts and two webinars have been published by the #CulturalConnections project.

The podcasts can be found on all major platforms, including Spotify <https://spoti.fi/2YOR19K>, Apple Podcasts and Google podcast by searching for #CulturalConnections.

The webinars have been targeted at teachers, introducing a range of opportunities to use the project

during lessons – these will be shared with schools and are available by searching for #CulturalConnections on YouTube.

#CulturalConnections has been commissioned by Rural Action Cwm Taf - the Rural Development Programme in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf - and funded by the European Union's LEADER programme.

It is part of the Wales Rural Development Plan 2014-2020 which is funded by the European Union fund for Rural development and Welsh Government.

The project's delivery has been led by Cardiff based environmental consultancy TACP (UK) Ltd alongside a team comprising Black Mountains Archaeology, GeoArch, Jack Pulman-Slater and To the Blue Group.

Town centre CCTV helping fight crime

The Council's Safer Streets-funded security overhaul is already proving a success, having assisted the police in investigating a number of criminal incidents.

'Project Penderyn' received more than £500,000 from the Home Office's Safer Streets Fund, which is running across England and Wales to support initiatives aimed at preventing crime and other offences having an impact on the community.

State-of-the-art CCTV cameras now cover the town centre, the car parks have been made safer with improved street lighting, and gates have been

installed at alleys where there have been issues with drug taking, drinking and fly tipping.

The funding was secured after a successful joint bid from the County Borough Council, South Wales Police, Police Crime Commissioner Alun Michael and Merthyr Tydfil's Community Safety Partnership.

"Our CCTV staff have been busy assisting South Wales Police in the identification and arrest of individuals suspected of involvement in a town centre robbery," said County Borough Council Cabinet Member for Public Protection, Cllr Kevin O'Neill.

"We are already seeing the benefits of our new upgraded camera system. Working with the police, businesses and the public, we aim to make our town centre a safe place for our residents and visitors."



Green light for Active Travel improvements

The Council has started work on a series of walking and cycling improvement projects as part of its Welsh Government-funded Active Travel programme.

- Upgrading the existing crossing point on Victoria Street to a zebra crossing should be completed by Christmas.
- A shared route for pedestrians and cyclists running alongside Bethesda Street will take until 31 March 2022.
- A shared route for pedestrians and

cyclists running alongside Avenue de Clichy from Caedraw roundabout up to the gyratory system (31 March).

Work will begin on the following in January 2022:

- Improvements at the Tesco roundabout to make crossing the road safer for pedestrians – this will take until mid-February.
- In mid-February, we will be:
- Introducing a signalised crossing point on Lower High Street between

the car park and the shops (until 31 March).

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Commercialisation Cllr Geraint Thomas said: **"It's fantastic that we've obtained Welsh Government funding to deliver these improvements for pedestrians and cyclists in the town centre. So please bear with us while the work is ongoing."**

Please email any comments to active.travel@merthyr.gov.uk

Merthyr Tydfil gets a 21st century Mine!

A hugely popular South Wales restaurant attracting diners from across the UK has branched out into Merthyr Tydfil.

The Council's Employability Team, along with Tydfil Training, supported The Mine with the interview process by providing the interview venues over a period of three days. It has also supported local people with the aspiration of securing employment with the new business venture.

The restaurant is also helping the local economy by having created 25 jobs. The Council's Employability Team, along with Tydfil Training, supported The Mine with the interview process by providing the interview venues over a period of three days. It has also supported local people with the aspiration of securing employment with the new business venture.

The new restaurant looks very much like the original in Cwmgwrach near Glynneath. The décor is colliery-themed with large cable reels as tables, dishes served on shovels, toilets called 'The Pits', sheet metal wall decorations and a miners' memory wall, where customers hang pictures of their ancestors who worked in the mines.

The Merthyr Tydfil restaurant is at Bowen's Court, Pontmorlais, a derelict building that has in

the past been a pub, a butcher's and opticians. It is the 12th building to have undergone major redevelopment as part of the Council's Pontmorlais Townscape Heritage Scheme since its launch in 2011.

It is now owned by local company Murphy Corke Developments, which received funding from the Townscape Heritage Scheme, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Cadw and the Council itself. Murphy Corke Developments also received Targeted Regeneration Investment (TRI) Thematic funding from Welsh Government's Transforming Towns programme.

Managing Director of The Mine Stuart James thanked the Council for helping him find the premises, agree the rent with the landlord and find his staff. **"Merthyr Council's support has been unreal," he added. "We are absolutely delighted with what the teams have done for us."**

Award-winning Head Chef and co-owner Marius Castelany started his career with the French Foreign Legion more than 25 years ago. Marius is also a qualified



cooking teacher and completed his scholarship with 'Godfather of Italian cuisine' Antonio Carluccio.

The Mine at CF47 is the latest business to benefit from the County Borough Council's Meanwhile scheme, which supports new enterprises to open premises in vacant buildings in the town centre.

Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Transformation and Commercialisation Cllr Geraint Thomas said: **"We are so pleased to see another great restaurant opening in the town centre, and we're sure The Mine will be just as popular here as it is in Cwmgwrach."**

- If you would like some support from the Meanwhile scheme, please contact Merthyr Tydfil Enterprise Centre on 01685 727509.



Plastics recycling plant would create more than 100 jobs

The Pre-Application Consultation exercise seeking residents' comments and views on a proposed plastics recycling and processing facility on land off Goat Mill Road has now ended.

The applicant, UK plastics recycling market-leader Jayplas, will now consider the comments received and update the project website with a FAQ section relating to the queries raised during the consultation period.

In addition, Jayplas are in discussions with the Merthyr Tydfil Youth Forum to present information on the proposal, and hope to meet with local Councillors to answer any queries.

It is anticipated that the planning application will be submitted in the new year. The Council will conduct its

own public consultation exercise once the planning application is formally submitted.

Established in 1975, Jayplas operates nine recycling and recycled product manufacturing sites across the UK, specialising in a 'unique' plastic type and recycling process.

The proposed facility would be built on land which is zoned for employment and waste management uses, to the east of Goat Mill Road and to the west of the A4060 within an established industrial area.

Two individual warehouse units would house specific plastic washing and processing plant and machinery equipment and final products would be stored externally in 'bales' prior to onward removal.

'Masterplan' work to begin in earnest

The coming 12 months will continue to see work progressing on an abundance of new projects as part of the Council's ambitious long-term plans to help Merthyr Tydfil 'buck the national trend of high street decline' and transform into a thriving town centre.

In 2022 a team of urban designers, commercial property experts and engineering specialists providing transport advice have drawn up a 15-year Town Centre Masterplan.

The 'placemaking' plan envisages that by 2035, the centre will have high quality residential, office, leisure and retail, new plazas, green spaces and 'an active riverside'. It says the aim is to create a centre 'with inviting streets, squares and routes, where people feel safe, welcomed and uplifted'.

The document was commissioned by the Council, Welsh Government and Transport for Wales - which was set up

by Welsh Government to improve public transport across the country - and is described as being based on 'a shared ambition for the town and its role within the Capital City Region'.

It was produced by design, planning and landscape architecture company The Urbanists, along with engineering consultancy Mott MacDonald and commercial property consultants Alder King.

Two key signature projects were identified to kick-start the transformation of the town centre: regeneration of the Glebeland Site (the former bus station site) and the Railway Station. The Council is currently looking at options for the Glebeland site, and will continue to consult town centre businesses and residents, taxi drivers, shoppers and the wider community to help shape developments.

"We're very excited about the

masterplan delivery, which will complement Merthyr Tydfil's unique assets with high quality properties and services and attractive public spaces," said Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Transformation and Commercialisation Cllr Geraint Thomas.

Among the proposals are:

- Redevelopment of the railway station to create a welcoming and pleasant gateway and connect to High Street and the new bus interchange.
- Revival of the traditional townscape, with specific focus on prominent Listed Buildings of social, historic and/or architectural merit.
- Changing uses to increase the number of town centre homes, hotels and workspaces.
- Better pedestrian and cycle routes and a new footbridge to establish 'an active, connected and vibrant riverside'.



Join us for 'wellbeing walks'

Among the many support service the local Bridges into Work 2 programme is currently offering unemployed people over 25 is 'wellbeing walks'.

The weekly walks are included alongside one to one support with CVs, job applications and bespoke training to improve skills.

Based at the Neighbourhood Learning Centre, Gurnos, there are training facilities for construction skills, IT and retail/customer service skills (just a few examples of the training available) and staff also come out into the community to support you where you live.

The benefits of 'mindful walking'

include improvements to immune system function, cardiovascular system, respiratory system, mood, depression and anxiety and mental relaxation.

It is scientifically proven the more active we are, the lower the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, type 2 diabetes, colon and breast cancer, and hip or vertebral fracture

The walks are around Cyfarthfa Park each Wednesday at 11am. Please call to confirm a place on 01685 727099, email: nlc.enquiries@merthyr.gov.uk, or see our Facebook page.



The war memorial at Troedryhiw Park has received a 100th birthday facelift, thanks to funding from the War Memorial Trust and the Ffos-y-Fran Intermediate Grants Scheme.

The monument, which was originally unveiled to the community on 28 September 1921, had its rifle stolen a few years ago. The total £7,347.60 support was used to reinstate the rifle and replicate the original marble design.

The funding also paid for the repainting of the faded inscriptions of those lost during both World Wars, the repointing of the memorial construction joints and a realignment of displaced steps and a stone cleanse.

Troedryhiw Ex-Servicemen's & Institute Club Grant made the grant applications, and the work was carried out by Mossfords Memorial Masons.

Ex-Servicemen's Club Secretary Barrie Broad said: "The memorial is the centre piece of Troedryhiw Park and the work will add to the aesthetic value and attractiveness of the park."

"The club works in partnership with 6th Merthyr Scout Group, Troedryhiw and St John Baptist Church to arrange the annual Remembrance Day service at the park, where the War Memorial is the focal point."

Ward member Cllr Gareth Lewis said: "I would like to express my sincere thanks to committee members at



Troedryhiw Ex-Servicemen's Cub for their help and support throughout this renovation project.

"I'm really pleased that grant funding has been approved for this project. War memorials are touchstones to our past and preserving them maintains the link between those who have made the ultimate sacrifice and later generations who benefit from the freedoms for which they fought."

"War memorials also remind us of the full cost of war so we can hopefully learn the lessons which help us avoid conflict, and further loss, in future."

The Ffos-y-fran Community Benefit

YMCA saved in £8.6m-funded refurbishment programme

The landmark former YMCA building is set to undergo a transformation into 'an inspirational hub for economic and social activity in the heart of Merthyr Tydfil'.

The Grade II Listed building, which has been derelict for more than a decade, is to receive investment of £8.6m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Heritage Enterprise Programme, Welsh Government's Building for the Future and Transforming Towns programmes and the County Borough Council.

The project aims to turn the YMCA into 10 separate letting units in 'high

quality commercial space in a uniquely historic setting', bringing the building back into use for businesses and the local community.

"This development will create an innovative and collaborative workspace to attract new and existing businesses into the town centre," said Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Transformation and Commercialisation Cllr Geraint Thomas.

"The YMCA was originally conceived as a centre of social advancement and personal improvement and has become

a symbol of Merthyr Tydfil striving for regeneration," he added.

"Its loss would have created a void in the town centre's distinctive heritage and signalled a continuation of decline. It will now be conserved to the highest standard, preserving the striking exterior."

The four-storey, terracotta-faced structure is a 'prominent building of international significance, dominant still in the modern townscape', and was created by leading Welsh architect Sir Percy Thomas in 1911.

John Weaver (Contractors) has been successful in winning the contract for the redevelopment work. The company has a building conservation arm focused on ensuring existing landmarks and heritage buildings - which form the backbone of a significant portion of the Welsh tourism industry - are kept safe, usable and aesthetically correct.



Funding boost to renovate and conserve war memorial at Troedryhiw Park

Fund programme was established by the County Borough Council in collaboration with local mining company Merthyr (South Wales) Limited.

Merthyr Tydfil continues to achieve Welsh Government Re-use, Recycling and Composting targets

Figures recently published for 2020/21 show Merthyr Tydfil to be recycling 67% of the municipal waste generated.

This is 1.6% higher than the Wales average for last year.

Councillor David Hughes, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services, said: *"We were one of 18 out of the 22 Welsh Local Authorities to achieve this target and it's only with the support of you, our residents, that we are able to do this year on year, steadily improving our recycling rates towards the 2024/25 target of 70%. Thank you."*

The full Welsh Government article, including the report, can be found here: gov.wales/local-authority-municipal-waste-management-april-2020-march-2021



Your household waste and recycling will be collected on your normal collection day over this Christmas and New Year period

Recycle this Christmas

Top tip!

It is important all materials are kept clean and free of contaminants to ensure they can be recycled.



Blue bag



Black box / Green box



NON-RECYCLABLE ITEMS

Keep up with the Joneses by recycling your rubbish

Please separate all waste you create over the festive period and place recyclable materials into containers provided and non-recyclable materials including Christmas wrapping paper, plastic wrapping and carrier bags, crisp packets, pet waste etc into black bins



Food waste

Food waste including Christmas turkey bones, peelings and left overs to be placed in food bin



Textiles and small electricals



Batteries

Please place clean textiles and small electrical items in separate clear plastic bags. Place batteries inside the purple battery bags provided

Real Christmas trees will be collected on request only please call 01685 725000 to book a collection

Collection days

Wednesday 5th January 2022 - Upper Valley

Thursday 6th January 2022 - Lower Valley

Christmas Wrapping paper will need to be placed in the black bin or taken to the HWRCs. HWRCs are open 9am-4.30pm (last entry 4.20pm) every day except Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day when sites are closed.



BE WINTER READY

Are you winter ready?

As the nights get colder and darker, the chances of severe weather increase.

Contingency plans have been put in place by the Council, Welsh Government and other agencies to deal with emergencies, if and when they happen, but storms, flooding and extreme weather can still cause damage and disruption so it's important that we are all prepared.

- **Know your free emergency numbers** - in a power cut dial 105 or, for a gas emergency dial 0800 111999.
- **Prepare your home** - keep a torch handy and get your appliances serviced by a Gas Safe registered engineer to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Vulnerable households can get extra support by signing up to the Priority Services Register. Contact your gas or electricity network to find

out more.

- **Protect your property** - if you think there may be a risk of flooding you should take every precaution to protect your property. Sandbags are not available upon request and will only be issued in the event of a flooding emergency.
- **Keep your eyes open** - keep an eye on the weather forecast and, if you have a power cut or a gas emergency, check on your neighbours.
- **Keep up-to-date** - The council's most up-to-date information can be found on our social media pages:
 - facebook.com/merthyrtydfilcbc
 - twitter.com/merthyrCBC
 - instagram.com/merthyrtydfilcbc

For regularly updated alerts, warnings, forecasts and advice visit Metoffice.gov.uk or Naturalresources.wales

In the event of adverse weather:

Clearing snow and ice - If you notice a grit bin that needs filling, please use our online form to request a refill. To find out where your nearest grit bin visit the council's website.

School information - Can be found by visiting schoolclosures.merthyr.gov.uk. In adverse weather conditions, each school is responsible for updating the status of their school and will let you know of any important information specific to that school.

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

Social Care & Welfare Services - If you have an urgent or emergency issue, you can contact the Council's Emergency Duty Team 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week on 01443 425011.

If you need to contact us - Our Out of Hours and Emergency telephone number is 01685 385231. Our dedicated flooding emergency out of hours number is 01685 384489.

Information on the council's Winter Maintenance Plan can be found on the website.

PARTNERS JOIN FORCES TO TACKLE FLY-TIPPING

A task group made up of representatives from Natural Resources Wales, Fly Tipping Action Wales, Keep Wales Tidy, South Wales Police, Gelligaer & Merthyr Commoners Association, land owners and MTCBC staff has been assembled to tackle fly-tipping on Gelligaer Common, also known as Bogey Road.

The common has been a fly-tipping hot spot for a number of years and has been the subject of many clean-up operations, however as quickly as fly-tipping is being removed, more is being dumped, so the aim of this new group is to tackle the issue once and for all.

Neil Harrison, Fly-tipping Action Wales, Team Leader, said: "Fly-tipping is a serious crime that has unfortunately impacted this area of the common for many years. Fly-tipping causes considerable damage to the environment and poses a risk to both humans and animals. It also brings with it many negative impacts on local communities, damaging the local economy and increasing the likelihood of further anti-social behaviour such as arson. It also increases the risk of flooding, as waste

items such as tyres can enter streams and cause blockages.

"Recent work to address fly-tipping on Gelligaer & Merthyr common is very encouraging, with a number of local projects (such as the Common Connection Project) and community action from local champions turning the tide against fly-tipping and making this area a nicer place for local communities to enjoy and be proud of."

"It's really positive to see that the council has set up this group, bringing together a range of partner organisations to ensure that fly-tipping issues affecting the common are resolved for current and future generations."

"The local community must also play their part, by ensuring that they manage their waste responsibly. If you pay someone to remove any unwanted items or excess rubbish from your home or business, please check that they are a registered waste carrier using the Natural Resources Wales website, or by calling 0300 065 3000."

Highway repairs update

From July to October 2021 our Highways team have carried out:

- 1.6km of carriageway resurfacing in areas including Treharris, Swansea Road and Georgetown.
- 1.7km of carriageway surface dressing in areas including Quakers Yard, Aberfan and Brecon Road.
- 1.4km of footway renewal in areas including Swansea Road, Cefn Coed and Twynyrodyn.

We aim to complete another 1.1km of footway works between November 2021 and March 2022.



Thank you to everyone who supported Operation Santa 2021!

Your generosity has always been exceptional, and once again you didn't disappoint.

You've given presents to children who are otherwise likely to have missed out at Christmas time.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you, and Merry Christmas.

From all the staff in MTCBC's Social Services Department



Residents agree plans to extend average speed cameras



Residents in parts of Merthyr Vale, Plymouth and Treharris Wards have agreed with proposals to extend the planned average speed cameras along the A4054 (Cardiff Road).

The public consultation exercise, which took place August to September 2021, prompted over 1200 responses from residents, road users and members of the wider public, with over 63% of people agreeing with the installation of the cameras.

The consultation was carried out after speed surveys identified 'excessive speeding on a continuous basis' along the road, meaning action was urgently needed to improve road safety. Several options were considered, and average speed cameras were deemed the most effective solution to reduce speeding.

It also followed a similar exercise with

residents of Merthyr Vale and Mount Pleasant in 2020 and earlier in 2021, where 78% agreed with the installation of average speed cameras on the stretch of road running through the villages.

Councillor David Hughes, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood services, said: "We are very grateful to the members of the public who took the time to have their say in this consultation.

"Residents have been voicing their concerns about speeding cars for some time, so we are pleased to now be able to take action with the backing of the majority.

"I sincerely hope that these measures will help residents living along this route feel much safer in their homes.

"Our sole aim during this process has been to make the road safer for everyone and I would like to dismiss any suggestion of this being a money-making exercise for the council – fines that are issued as a result of speeding are NOT paid to councils. The council will be carrying out the installation, then colleagues in the Police will be operating them and carrying out enforcement."

A grant has been secured from Welsh Government's Road Safety Capital Fund and an eight-week tender process has now begun to secure a contractor to carry out the works. It is hoped that installation will begin in early 2022.

Schools, care homes and council buildings switching to energy-saving technology

Over the past five months over 4000 inefficient light fittings have been upgraded to low energy LED lighting and 600 Solar Panels have been installed on MTCBC buildings and schools as part of the council's commitment to Welsh Government's ambition for the public sector to be Carbon Neutral by 2030.

This has all been possible thanks to WG's REFIT Cymru, a project which aims to optimise the energy efficiency of properties, improve the condition of our schools, reduce CO2 emissions and save money.

On top of the savings the buildings will also benefit from electrical and mechanical upgrades, resulting in an improved learning and working environment and more comfortable conditions. Installations include:

- 30 x LED Lighting Upgrades
- 9 x Solar PV systems
- smart heating and hot water systems
- loft insulation

This Project is estimated to save £136,000 per year and reduce Carbon Emissions from buildings by 251 tonnes per year.

In addition to the buildings project, we are piloting the use of electric vehicles and have installed energy efficient streetlights. We are also working with an Energy Specialist to help prepare a Council plan and road map that will enable us to play our role in the 2030 target.

Councillor David Hughes, Portfolio Member for Neighbourhood Services, said: "We all have a part to play in Decarbonisation and preserving our planet for future generations. These may seem like small steps, but they will go a long way to making the council Carbon Neutral and realising Welsh Government's target.

"The additional benefits of improved learning and working conditions means that not only are we doing the right thing for the environment, but our young people and workers will start seeing the benefits of these changes immediately.

"As a council we are committed to Decarbonisation."

For more information visit merthyr.gov.uk/council/decarbonisation

Merthyr Tydfil named among country's best green spaces

Keep Wales Tidy has unveiled this year's Green Flag Award winners – the international mark of a quality park or green space.

The Flags will be flying at Cyfartha Park, Park Taff Bargoed, Thomastown Park and Aberfan Cemetery, in recognition of their excellent visitor facilities, high environmental standards, and commitment to delivering great quality green space.

Councillor David Hughes, Portfolio Member for Neighbourhood Services, said: "I am delighted that three Council-managed parks and one cemetery have been honoured with these awards.

"With the addition of Garwnant Forest Centre, which is managed by Natural Resources Wales, Merthyr Tydfil now boasts five full Green Flag Awards; something we can all be very proud of.

"There are also 11 Community Awards this year for Merthyr Tydfil, all of which would have not been possible without the hard work and commitment of many of our local community groups and volunteers.

"I'd like to congratulate and thank everyone involved in achieving this."

The 11 community awards were presented to Cilsanws Nature Reserve, Dowlais Community Centre, Dowlais Infants School & Community Garden, Gurnos Mens Project Community Garden, Muriel & Blanche Community Nature Garden, Penywern Top Pond and Pitwoods Park, Pontsticill Park, Pontsticill Village,



The Hafod Community Nature Garden and Woodland Walk.

Councillor Declan Sammon, Deputy Mayor & Chair of Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside Scrutiny Committee, said: "The pandemic has shown just how important green spaces are to our communities.

"It is fantastic to see so many small local groups throughout Merthyr Tydfil doing their best to improve their local areas and being rewarded for their hard work by achieving a Keep Wales Tidy Green Flag.

"These sites benefit the whole community, not only as places to enjoy and relax in but they also help with the physical and mental health wellbeing of volunteers."

The Green Flag Award programme is delivered in Wales by environmental charity Keep Wales Tidy, with support from Welsh Government. Independent green space experts volunteered their time in early autumn to judge sites against eight strict criteria, including biodiversity, cleanliness, environmental management, and community involvement.

For more information visit keepwalestidy.cymru

Volunteers clear over 12 tonnes from local beauty spot

In October, 14 volunteers gave up their weekend to clear fly-tipping from a Merthyr beauty spot.

The event, which was organised by MTCBC Neighbourhood Services Apprentice Daniel Lewis, saw people come from as far afield as Wolverhampton to help.

In just four hours on the Saturday morning over 4 tonnes of waste were cleared from Bogey Road, with a further 8 tonnes being cleared from Dowlais Road during Saturday afternoon and throughout Sunday. A total of 6 skips, which were provided by the council, were filled. Waste collected included builder's waste, domestic waste and asbestos.

Daniel said: **"It is our responsibility as Merthyr residents to ensure that our waste is disposed of correctly. There are two Household Waste & Recycling Centres in Merthyr Tydfil which accept and recycle most waste types for FREE. There are also a number of registered waste carriers that are able to correctly dispose of other types of waste.**

"There is NO EXCUSE for fly-tipping and littering. It is a blight on our beauty hotspots and a danger to our environment and local wildlife.

"This project would not have been possible without the full support of our Chief Executive, Ellis Cooper, MTCBC's Neighbourhood Services Department and all the volunteers. I am proud to have worked alongside them."

All waste collected was sent to be sorted and – where possible – recycled.

A huge thank you to members of Wild Campers Against Waste, South East Wales Hang gliding and Paragliding Club, Jess Flag Litter Action Group, The Merthyr & Gelligaer Commoners Association and everyone else who came out to help and offered their support.



Goitre Lane Clean-up a massive success



In October a 600-manhour week-long clean-up operation took place around the Goitre Lane area to tidy up the mess that had been caused by fly-tippers.

Volunteers from the Gurnos Men's Project assisted 25 members of council staff from the neighbourhood services, street cleansing, grounds maintenance and arbo teams on a massive clean-up operation in the area.

Merthyr Valley Homes provided four large skips for waste removal and issued letters to their residents advising them that a clean-up was taking place and asking for their support. They also warned that anyone found to be fly-tipping could be prosecuted.

Seven lorry loads of materials were collected throughout the week, which included green waste and 253 bags of

recyclables that went to the council's HWRC site.

Cllr Lee Davies said: **"Goitre Lane has been a top priority of mine to clear up for some time. It's such a lovely walk for residents and to see the level of fly tipping in the lane is upsetting, especially as it's a route to school for children.**

"Gurnos Ward Councillors would like to thank all the Council staff, Merthyr Valleys Homes staff, Gurnos Men's project and volunteers for all their hard work. We are looking to set up a Friends of Goitre Lane community group that will work with us to maintain the lane, as well as carry out improvements."

Cllr David Hughes, Portfolio Member for Neighbourhood Services, said: **"This was a huge task and I'd like to congratulate my Ward Councillor colleagues and everyone else who was involved. The before and after pictures speak volumes and your efforts have made a huge difference to the area. Thank you."**

Residents were very happy with the results and were stopping by during the clean-up to thank staff and volunteers. Their hope is that everyone will now endeavour to keep the area clean for the community.

Phase 2 of storm repairs well underway

Our Highways and Engineering teams are currently working through the second year of a three-year programme to repair and rebuild the damaged infrastructure that occurred during Storm Dennis in February 2020.

As previously reported 50 projects were identified within Merthyr Tydfil as a result of the storm, with an estimated cost of £8.5m.

The recovery works vary in nature from:

- Culvert repairs
 - Reinstatement of river embankments
 - Installation of trash screens and flood monitors to various culverts
 - Increasing the capacity of watercourses
 - Scour protection of bridges
 - Stabilisation work to landslip areas
- To date 24 schemes have been completed, with 4 schemes currently ongoing onsite in Pentrebach, Bedlinog, Pontsarn and Pant.

Here are some pictures to illustrate some of the works so far.





The only thing better than singing...

...is more singing. So said Ella Fitzgerald. As the members of the Dowlais Male Choir, pictured, know – their regular rehearsals are a time of stress reduction, camaraderie and enjoyment. What they may not know is just why that is, and why doctors in some parts of the country are now prescribing singing in a choir for better health. Our body's 'flight or fight' mode snaps into action when danger is perceived and is largely controlled by the sympathetic nervous system. An effective reaction mechanism when faced with a dangerous animal in days gone by, but today that same mechanism is triggered by stressful jobs, busy commutes and so on. Unlike a sudden danger, these stresses tend to be ongoing and the continuous presence of stress hormones in our bodies can lead to a variety of mental and physical health issues – anxiety, chronic stress, depression, high blood pressure, indigestion to name but a few.

And the good news? We have a second nervous system – the parasympathetic system – which controls our 'rest and digest' mode, allowing the body to function normally and heal itself. A key component of this system is the vagus nerve, which runs to most of the major organs, and as it passes through the thorax it can be stimulated by singing. So there you have it... singing together is not only fun and relaxing but beneficial to both mind and body.

In these difficult days of Covid, if you sing in the bath, the car or the sports ground, why

not make the most of your music by joining a local choir. Each choir has assessed its own Covid precautions to keep its members safe. Come along to a rehearsal with a mixed, male voice or ladies choir. The Dowlais Male Choir is based in the middle of Merthyr and ready to welcome singers of any age or ability – no experience required nor any need to be able to read music. Find us at dowlaismalechoir.co.uk

Look at the websites of other choirs in the Merthyr area: the Tenovus choir, Ynysowen Male Choir, Con Voce, Cantorion Cyfarfha – so plenty to choose from.

Don't delay, take a step to better health and join a local choir today.

Written by Nick Heuvel – Secretary, Dowlais Male Choir



Council publishes 'Economic Vision'

The Council has published its ambitious 15-year plan to unlock Merthyr Tydfil's 'great economic potential'.

A public consultation carried out earlier this year on the impact of the pandemic provided our economic development team with valuable feedback to help inform the Council's 'Economic Vision' for the best part of the next two decades.

The document has been prepared to respond to the economic need for one, take advantage of regional and local investment opportunities, and to take a holistic approach to strengthening the economy and planning for growth.

It responds to the current economic challenges, trends and identified opportunities and the feedback of businesses, the community and partners.

The aim of the vision is: "To create an environment that supports the growth of our businesses and attracts new businesses to invest; to equip all of our people with the skills and knowledge to have a job or start a business; to support our community organisations to thrive; and, to attract more visitors to enjoy our remarkable county borough."

It will be delivered through the following seven 'core ambitions':

- Economic diversity
- Destination Merthyr
- Education and training
- Modern Homes and Great Places
- Transforming connectivity
- Public and community services
- Natural resources and low carbon economy

The next steps will be to prepare and deliver action plans for each core ambition. Each one will identify priorities, projects, programmes, partners, financial / funding implications and delivery timescales.

Christmas safety campaign

Update from Cabinet Member for Public Protection Cllr Kevin O'Neill

The Council, police and local hospitality businesses are working together to try to ensure residents and visitors have safe nights out in Merthyr Tydfil this Christmas.

Every Christmas, our licensing team works with the night-time economy, promoting the 'Ask for Angela' initiative in pubs - and urging the public to use only licensed taxis.

Last year it was quiet because the night time economy was in lockdown. So we're expecting the festivities to be even busier than usual, with people celebrating after losing the opportunity during the 2020 season.

We're also making a particular effort

in response to recent national coverage of the risk to lone females in this sort of environment.

South Wales Police have been training our pub, club and restaurant staff in how to be aware of people in vulnerable situations.

This 'vulnerability training' is aimed at encouraging hospitality workers to be vigilant in spotting customers and passengers who are upset, injured or uncomfortable.

Council is also asking taxi drivers to look out for signs that domestic abuse has taken place or could occur when couples return home, and for young passengers

being taken to different locations under control of an adult.

The campaign is in addition to our Safer Streets-funded CCTV upgrade across the town centre, which has already been instrumental in helping the police investigate a number of incidents.

We want to promote Merthyr Tydfil as a safe place to visit and in which to socialise this Christmas. By working together, we can ensure it lives up to this billing.



Affordable housing project provides 31 new homes

Work is due to be completed next autumn on the construction of 31 'high quality' new homes for rent as part of a £4.4million development in a rural part of Merthyr Tydfil.

The Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association (MTHA) project at Brynau Road, Pant is being partly funded by Welsh Government Social Housing Grant awarded through the Council. MTHA also sourced private finance of £1.8m.

Local contractor Holbrook Homes is building 15 one-bedroom flats, 12 two-bedroom houses, two three-bedroom houses and two two-bedroom bungalows on an area

of waste ground on the road to Pant.

As part of the contract, Holbrook Homes is providing new job and skills training opportunities both directly and through its supply chain and subcontractors. The company is also working with nearby Pantysgallog Primary School on a range of projects in and around the school.

"The Social Housing Grant investment has been secured through the strong partnership working between the County Borough Council and MTHA to deliver on the needs for new affordable housing in Merthyr Tydfil," said the Council's Deputy Chief Executive Alyn Owen.

"It represents the latest example of the Council and MTHA working together to bring forward new development and regeneration projects, of which there are a number of further examples in the pipeline."

MTHA Chief Executive Karen Courts said: "With the support of the local authority, grant funding from the Welsh Government and private finance from the Association, this scheme will provide 31 new homes that will be available for let at an affordable rent."

The new homes are expected to be completed in September 2022 and their availability will be advertised ahead of that through MTHA.

Are you ready to take the next step in your career?

With the WeCare Wales online learning resource, you can set yourself apart from other candidates when applying for jobs in care. Find out more at WeCare.wales



A Community Council update for residents of Bedlinog and Trelewis:

- Winter plants and bulbs have been planted around the villages.
- This year we have more Christmas lights than ever before.
- Starting in the New Year we will be producing a six-monthly resident's newsletter.
- We are working with Bedlinog Miners Welfare Association to improve the recreational facilities available to the community and hope to have some more news on that soon.
- We have obtained further funding for allotment improvements and continue to make improvements at

Bedlinog allotments. We are currently investigating locations to create new community allotments in Trelewis.

- We have purchased four defibrillators – two for Bedlinog and two for Trelewis, in addition to those already in place.

We are delighted to have been able to support:

- Taf Bargoed Angling Association with a grant towards purchasing equipment for their youth fishing clubs and activities.
- The OAP Welfare Committee with a grant towards the cost of their Christmas meals.
- Bedlinog Community Primary School and Trelewis Primary School with a grant to pay for transport to take the children to a Christmas pantomime.

Our Annual Report for financial year 2020-2021 has been published and is available on our website bedlinogcommunitycouncil.gov.wales



Agorwch eich cartref i ddatgloi eu dyfodol

Dewch yn rhiant maeth ar ran Merthyr Tudful.

merthyrtydfil.fosterwales.gov.wales

Open your home to unlock their future

Become a foster carer for Merthyr Tydfil.

A ydych chi'n gweithio ac yn rhiant i blentyn 3 neu 4 oed?

Gall y rhant fwyaf e rhesi sy'n gweithio ydd a phlant 3 i 4 oed ledled Cymru hawlio arian tuag at gost gofal plant.

Are you a working parent of a 3 or 4 year old?

Most working parents of 3 to 4 year olds across Wales can now claim funds towards the cost of childcare.

Gwnewch gais nawr: www.merthyr.gov.uk/30awr

Apply now: www.merthyr.gov.uk/30hours

