



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

Case Studies

Examples of our activities and the impact it is having

Qualitative case studies: 2021-2022

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg / This document is available in Welsh

Contents

1	Pen y Dre High School Wins Cymraeg Campus Gold Award
2	Schools Council Pupils Challenge Councillors over the Environment
3	Food and Fun (School Holiday Enrichment Programme)
4	School Meal Cost Freeze 2021-2022
5	Aspire Apprenticeship Scheme
6	Bringing Affordable Homes to Merthyr Tydfil County Borough
7	Responding to Challenge: Consultation & Engagement
8	Town Centre safer following £500,000 security boost
9	Merthyr Tydfil's Award-Winning Bus Interchange
10	Food Safety Labelling – Natasha's Law
11	Supporting Local Business & Community Groups to Access Grants
12	Safeguarding the Future: MTCBC begins roll-out of Electric Vehicles
13	Merthyr Tydfil's City Status Bid
14	Merthyr Tydfil named among the Country's Best Green Spaces
15	Solar Panels: the Circular Economy Fund

16	Shaping Landscapes for Wildlife and Well-being
17	Nature's Gift Garden
18	Scrutiny offers feedback to support refocus of Key National Strategy
19	Royal Visit to Engine House, Dowlais to thank Volunteers
20	Developing Merthyr Tydfil's 15-year Economic Vision
21	Ongoing Development of the Data Dashboard
22	Updating Procurement Rules to support achievement of better value for money
23	Refocusing the Asset management Plan
24	National Apprenticeship Week – February 2022
25	Pathways to Work
26	Tŷ Enfys Dementia Care Centre
27	Care Home Leisure Scheme
28	Improving Audit Response Monitoring

Pen y Dre High School Wins Cymraeg Campus Gold Award

In May 2021, Pen y Dre High School received the Cymraeg Campus Gold Award. This is an incredible achievement.

Cymraeg Campus is part of the Language Charter which supports Welsh Government's strategy: A Million Welsh Speakers by 2050. Cymraeg Campus aims to increase the use of Welsh within and outside of the classroom.

Usually, to get the gold award a school must first achieve the bronze and silver award, however when assessed for the bronze award, the standards at Pen y Dre High were so high that they were awarded outright with the Campus Gold Award.

During the visit, representatives from Central South Consortium were thrilled with the use of Welsh across the school. It is an integral part of each department, and every member of staff contributes to the work. The Chief Officer of Education commented 'the development of Welsh at Pen y Dre is a whole school strategy and testament must go to the passion and commitment of all senior leaders, especially the Head of Welsh, and also the pupils through their Ciriw Cymraeg.

Cllr Geraint Thomas, the council's Welsh Champion at the time, added 'Congratulations to everyone at Pen y Dre for this fantastic achievement, a well-deserved tribute to the hard work of all at the school'.



Schools Council Pupils Challenge Councillors over the Environment

In October 2021; Councillors held a virtual meeting session with School Council members from Bedlinog Community Primary School and Trelewis Primary School. Jacob, Rhys, Charlie and Lacey questioned Cabinet members on environmental issues in their school area and pressed for answers on what could be done. The meeting also had a question and answer session where Councillors were asked about their roles and what they did.

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 so myself and members of the MTCBC Cabinet recently held a virtual meeting with members of both Bedlinog & Trelewis School Councils. 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."

Issues were raised by Trelewis Primary School regarding the litter affecting a nearby stream which the children must cross to get to school. Also, Bedlinog Primary School spoke about issues on their route to school such as broken fences and dog mess. Cllr David Hughes, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside said "he would be meeting with the chief officer to speak about potentially putting a safe pathway in this area and would also do everything he can to deal with the litter problem."



The Councillors in the meeting were very impressed with the quality of questions asked by the children and strongly agreed that the pupils had every right to speak about these issues and they agreed an urgent visit would be needed. Cllr Lisa Mytton, Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Education, said: "I really love and welcome the chance to talk to our school councils and the children really put us on the spot asking some of the toughest questions, it's an enjoyable part of the role and allows us the opportunity to take on board their requests and hopefully act because of the meetings"

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



Food and Fun (School Holiday Enrichment Programme)

The pupils of Goetre Primary, St Aloysius RC, St Mary's RC and St Illtyd's RC Primary Schools enjoyed healthy meals, education on nutrition; and physical activity sessions as part of the "Food and Fun" School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP).

SHEP has been running from Goetre Primary school for four years; and 2021 was the first year that St Aloysius have hosted the SHEP programme, which is being offered to the pupils of all three catholic primary schools, and staffed by pupils across each of the schools.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's School Meals service also gave up a chunk of their holidays and worked closely with other teams/organisations including Active Merthyr Tydfil, on delivering the programme to the schools. Running for 12 days over 3 weeks at the beginning of the summer break, the free sessions begin with breakfast, and conclude with lunch, ending at 1.30pm.

"The school summer holidays are a crunch point for low-income families," said Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Learning, Cllr Lisa Mytton. "Children who benefit from free school meals often miss meals and go hungry once their school shuts for the holidays, while the lack of free play schemes and sports activities impacts most on disadvantaged children."



"A sedentary lifestyle and reduced access to nutritious meals in the school holidays reinforces existing health inequalities and undermines the success of free school breakfast and lunch policies," she added. "This is a fabulous initiative, and I am so proud that we have this programme in Merthyr Tydfil."



School Meal Costs Frozen for 2021-2022

A meeting of the Full County Borough Council has agreed to a price freeze for 2021/22 for the second year in a row. The price was most recently increased in April 2019, by 20p, to £2.30 in primary schools and £2.70 in secondary schools.

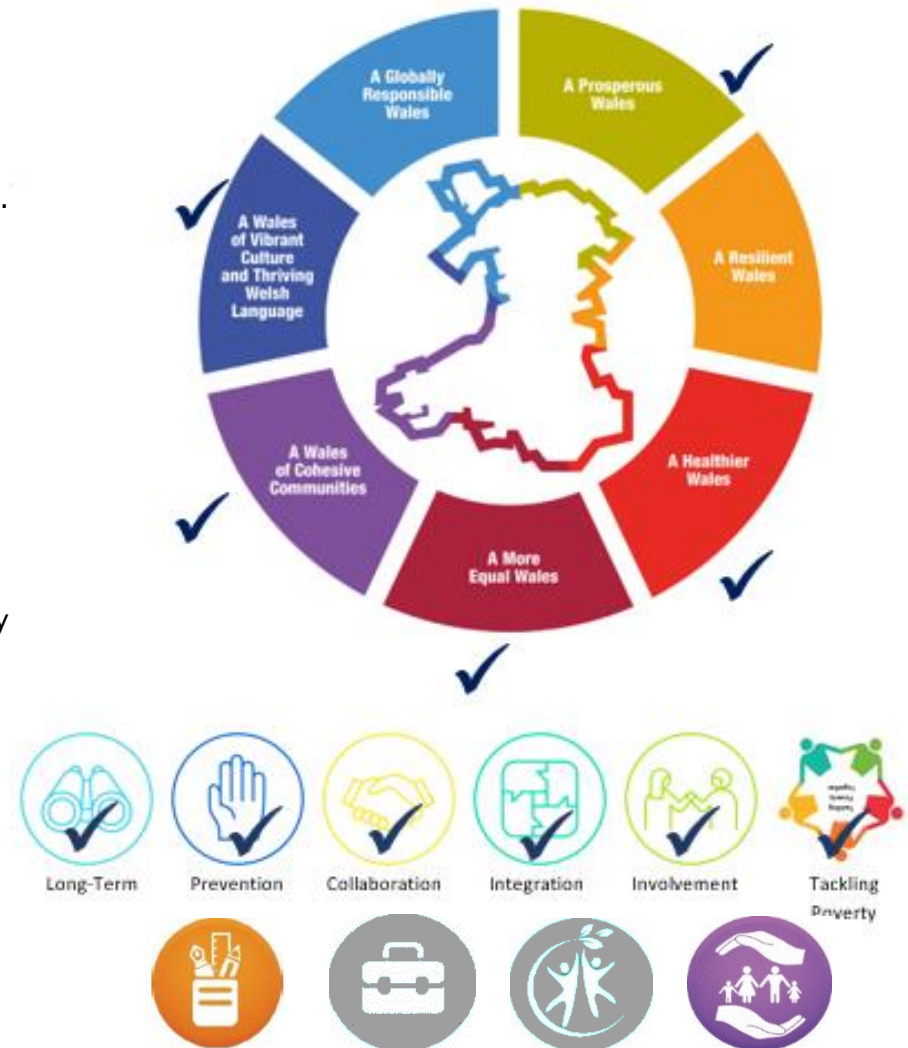
Local Councillors heard that no rise was considered last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the anticipated interruption to the service delivery. No school meals were provided during the summer term 2020; with a reduced menu offered when reintroduced in the autumn term.

Director of Education Sue Walker said: "Whilst schools hopefully settle down to some more normal services, and while we need to monitor the impact of any supplier price changes - either due to Brexit or the impact of the pandemic - it would not be the right time to consider a price increase".



The pandemic had an impact on all areas of our communities; with many being placed on furlough, impacting on the children, young people and their families. The Council has made a firm commitment to tackle poverty through the services and activities

Sue Walker continued "It was proposed and agreed by members that during this period of uncertainty the cost of school meals remain at current prices, with a further review as part of budget setting for the financial year 2022/23. Councillors recognised that children who benefit from free school meals could be particularly hard hit if costs were to rise.



Aspire Apprenticeship Scheme

Apprenticeship Awards Cymru recognises and celebrates the contribution of work-based learning practitioners, apprentices, outstanding achievers and dedicated employers who have excelled on the Welsh Government's Apprenticeship and Traineeship Programmes. The Aspire Merthyr Tydfil Shared Apprenticeship Programme Team, along with partner Blaenau Gwent Aspire were selected as finalists in the Apprenticeship Awards Cymru, a virtual event taking place on 29 April and the highlight of the work-based learning calendar.

Aspire Blaenau Gwent & Merthyr Tydfil

Winner



Aspire Merthyr Tydfil and Aspire Blaenau Gwent were chosen in the category of 'Large and Macro Employer of The Year'.

This award celebrates the employers' commitment to developing their workforces through apprenticeships, while supporting their employees during training.

The other finalists in the category of Large and Macro Employer of the Year are Heddlu Dyfed-Powys Police; DOW; Rhondda Cynon Taf Council and Swansea Bay University Health Board.

The Aspire project team specialise in providing local manufacturing and engineering businesses with apprentices. To date, they boast an impressive 100% record of apprentices being employed through the programme. Over the past four years, more than 30 young Merthyr Tydfil people have been placed with host employer companies while studying at the College Merthyr Tydfil, Coleg Y Cymoedd and Cardiff and Vale College.

The apprentices are employed by the County Borough Council, trained by the colleges and Tydfil Training and placed with a local firm for two to three years, depending on the length of their apprenticeship course. Aspire applicants have to be aged between 16 and 24 years; possess five GCSEs grades A-C including STEM subjects and an A level pass in STEM subjects – especially maths and science; and either be starting VRQ, or have completed the Enhanced Engineering Programme or Pathways to Apprenticeships, or completed VRQ at college.



Bringing Affordable Homes to Merthyr Tydfil County Borough

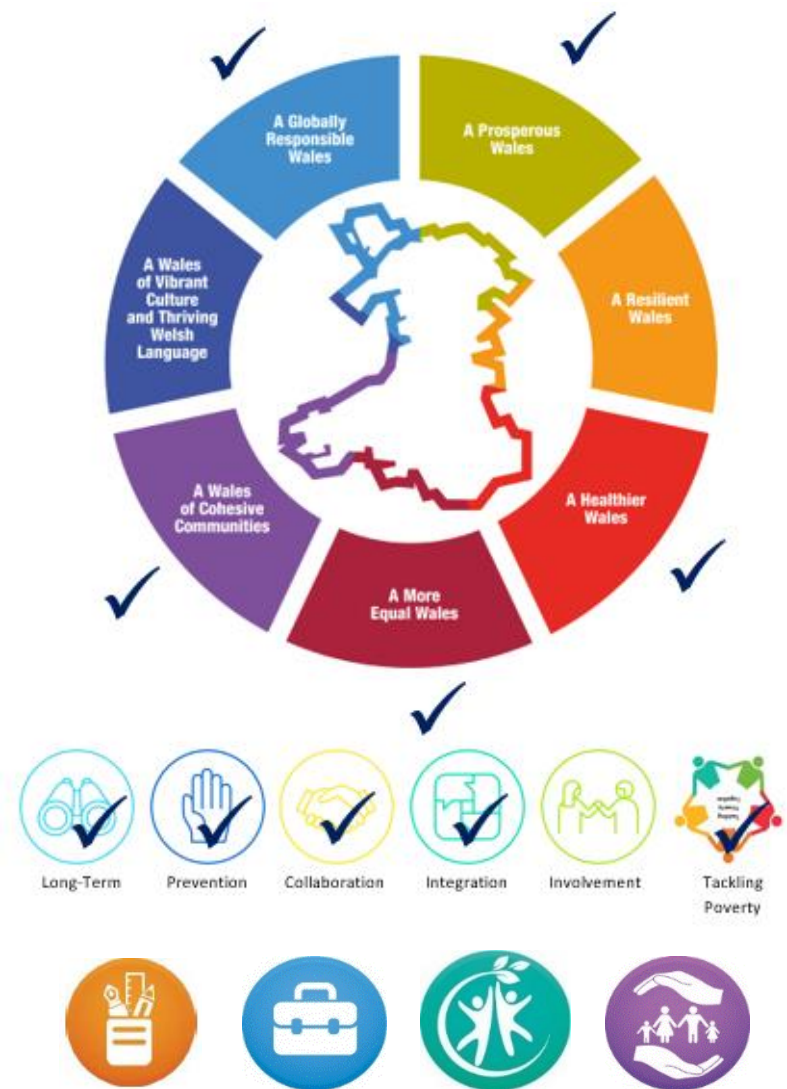
In July 2021; work began on the construction of 31 'high quality' new homes for rent as part of a £4.4million development in a rural part of Merthyr Tydfil. The Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association (MTHA) project at Bryniau Road, Pant is being partly funded by Welsh Government Social Housing Grant awarded through the County Borough Council.

Local contractor Holbrook Homes will build 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 also plans to work with nearby Pantysgallog Primary School on a range of projects in and around the school.



The 'first sod' at the development was cut yesterday by Council Leader Cllr Lisa Mytton and Karen Courts, Chief Executive of Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association. Along with the Social Housing Grant allocation of £2.6m, MTHA sourced private finance of £1.8m. The Social Housing Grant is an annual budget allocated to local authorities in Wales every year to fund housing schemes that meet local housing need and priorities.

The councils are responsible for choosing housing association partners to develop, own and manage the housing. Local contractor Holbrook Homes will build 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 also plans to work 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. Karen Courts (MTHA) said "With the support of the local authority; grant funding from Welsh Government and private finance from MTHA, this scheme will provide 31 new homes that will be available on affordable rent - we are delighted to be working with Holbrook Homes on this exciting new development".



Responding to Challenge: Consultation & Engagement

Following the roll out of the consultation exercise; a number of challenges were received by the Council from citizens around the way in which the consultation was being undertaken. In direct response to this public feedback, the Transformation scrutiny committee requested a report be prepared to explore the situation; Committee Members were keen to understand the Council's current standard consultation approach and to explore the reasons why recent consultation has received a significant amount of public challenge.



The initial report drafted by officers was not accepted by the Committee who felt that they were unable to scrutinise the process as they felt they needed further information on the topic. The requested report was scheduled to appear at the next scrutiny meeting

On the second occasion the report was presented; once again; Committee Members felt the brief they had offered officers had not fully been fulfilled; again requesting supplementary information so they had a complete 'picture' of the process and its application. Again, the report was rescheduled for the next meeting.

In March 2022; the report was scrutinised by Committee Members. Through this process; a number of key findings were highlighted which indicated some work was required to strengthen the process.

It was acknowledged that some issues had been experienced when delivering public consultation during the pandemic due to the unique challenges this had presented; the restrictions in place meant that face to face consultation had not been possible. Paper copies of the consultation questions which would normally have been available in Council offices were also not available as a result of the required closure of business premises during this period. Capacity was also identified as an issue which had impacted on the running of consultation; this included issues where staff were required to self-isolate.

A number of alternative approaches would need to be considered to ensure the issues encountered would not be repeated (e.g.) looking at alternative digital options; increase in direct mail recipients; and the review of business continuity plans to ensure they continued to be fit for purpose.



Town Centre Safer following £500,000 security boost

Crime and anti-social behaviour is a major issue for many towns and cities across the country and with greater demands placed upon police services, it can be challenging in addressing issues. Joint-working between various partners and stakeholders is essential in tackling the core issues relating to crime and anti-social behaviour, particularly with early intervention and diversion strategies, and the need for responsive strategies to help tackle problems as they occur.

There has been concern voiced by the public about anti-social behaviour; especially within the town centre, and to help combat this, partnership working between Merthyr Tydfil CBC and South Wales Police has seen a security overhaul of the town centre which aims to make residents feel safe at any time, day or night.

As part of '**Project Penderyn**', more than £500,000 was received 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.



The funding was secured as a result of a successful bid from the County Borough Council, South Wales Police, Police and Crime Commissioner Alun Michael and Merthyr Tydfil's Community Safety Partnership. The funding has been used to ensure state-of-the-art CCTV, including both fixed and mobile cameras, monitors the town centre and car parks around the clock. The funding also resulted in improved street lighting, and gates have been installed at alleys where there have been issues with drinking, drug taking and fly-tipping.

On the back of public concerns, partnership work between South Wales Police, the town centre security team and the Council's Community Safety department ensure that the public's concerns about safety continue to be addressed whilst aligning with Council's own vision and well-being goals. The funding was secured as a result of a successful bid from the County Borough Council, South Wales Police, Police and Crime Commissioner Alun Michael and Merthyr Tydfil's Community Safety Partnership. "This is a fantastic boost for Merthyr Tydfil and wonderful news for the area" stated Alun Michael, Police and Crime Commissioner for the South Wales region. "We have awarded a total of £513,410 which will be invested in the installation of alley gates, improves street lighting and CCTV provisions as well as new signage. We will also be enhancing community engagement with community clean-up days and information leafleting to residents and local businesses".



Merthyr Tydfil's Award Winning Bus Interchange

The improvement of Merthyr Tydfil bus station has been a long standing goal of the Council – the design of the former bus station was found to be inefficient operationally; and the poor building layout meant that it attracted antisocial behaviour.

Work undertaken at the site meant that the new sustainably built Bus Interchange opened on 13th June 2021. Since the opening of this new, state of the art bus interchange has been successful in providing a purpose built facility for travellers to access bus travel across the County Borough and beyond.

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



The careful and considered approach to planning this resource has led to the Bus Station receiving several national awards. Most recently, the bus station was announced as the winner of the Building Project of the Year in the annual Constructing Excellence in Wales (CEW) Award. This is the second time it has been recognised by CEW in 12 months.

In recent months, it has also won the 'Sustainability' category in the 2021 Constructing Excellence in Wales Awards, the RTPI Cymru (Royal Town Planning Institute in Wales) Awards for Planning Excellence and the Council also winning 'Client of the Year' accolade at the 2021 Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) Awards in London. "The transport interchange is a state of the art and stunning transport facility that sets itself apart while catering for the public transport needs of Merthyr Tydfil and the Region"



stated the Judges "The building is a visually striking and innovative celebration of the modern face of public transport: a model for others to follow".

Food Safety Labelling - Introducing Natasha's Law

On 1 October 2021, an amendment was made to the Food Safety Act 1990 which saw the law on allergen labelling for Pre-Packaged for Direct Sale (PPDS) foods changed. This was in response to an incident where a teenager died due to an allergic reaction caused by a packaged baguette which, at the time, did not require allergen labelling. A swift response was introduced to prevent similar incidents occurring and protect people's health and well-being. The change was known as '**Natasha's Law**'.

Clear and honest labelling is essential for those who suffer allergies to foods such as nuts, dairy or wheat, and to those with medical conditions requiring strict regulation of diet. Natasha's Law meant that any food business selling PPDS foods would have to include full ingredients on the product label with allergenic ingredients emphasised within that list.

To help support businesses, the Food Standards Agency launched a PPDS hub which featured information including new labelling guidance for PPDS foods; and sector guides for business such as bakeries, butchers and fast-food outlets, which would give each practical information on PPDS and how these changes could impact a food business.

It was recognised that businesses would need to time to adapt to these changes and despite extra pressures relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, the food safety officers of the Environmental Health team were key in helping businesses prepare for these changes.

During the implementation stage, the officers worked with food businesses throughout the County Borough, making them aware of the changes and consulting with them to ensure that they knew what was expected under the new law and the labelling requirements placed on them as part of the changes. Officers continue to work with businesses at part of their responsibilities for official controls relating to allergen rules, keeping the public and those with specific



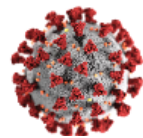
allergies safe by knowing what ingredients food products contain.

Supporting Local Business & Community Group to Access Grants

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has launched a grants programme to help social enterprises, community groups, tourism businesses and sports clubs pay for capital projects. The Social Enterprise, Tourism & Sport (SETS) Capital Grant will support applicants in carrying out building and infrastructure work, and making large purchases to help them expand their existing services and activities. After talking to a range of businesses and groups, the Council has committed £250,000 to the programme over the coming financial year and awards of up to £25,000 are being made available.

"The Council recognises there's a definite need to support all types of social enterprises and groups, tourism businesses and sports clubs with capital funding," said Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Transformation and Commercialisation Cllr Geraint Thomas. "This is particularly the case in the aftermath of the pandemic, where many organisations lost income and were unable to invest in maintenance or plans for growth. The grant is designed to give them a helping hand to do that."

Offering this additional funding to support organisations based in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough clearly aligns to a number of the Council's well-being objectives; and actively supports local groups/organisations as they work to recover from the impact of the pandemic.



SUPPORTING
COVID
RECOVERY

Treharris Athletic Mini and Western Mini and Juniors FC are one local sports club which has benefitted from the SETS Capital Grant and from support from the sports development team. With an aim of developing the future of the club and improve facilities at their sports ground, our Sports Development team has assisted the club in assets such as the Athletic ground being transferred.

As well as work on the ground to improve the quality of their pitch, other improved facilities are key to their future. As part of this, the aim was for new changing rooms to be installed at their home ground, at a cost of over £140,000. Despite funding from the FAW, huge increases in material costs and other services this meant there was a shortfall to cover their expenditures. Including support with planning applications and other funding options, the Sports Development team also



helped the club with an application for the SETS Grant, which was approved and awarded £25,000 which was enough to cover the remaining costs of the new changing rooms.

Safeguarding the Future: MTCBC Begins Rollout of Electric Vehicles

Transport is a fundamental requirement of modern life and is essential in the delivery of many Council services, but the traditional combustion engine is quickly becoming outdated. Petrol or diesel vehicles are highly polluting and are being quickly replaced by fully electric vehicles. Fully electric vehicles (EV) have zero tailpipe emissions and are much better for the environment.

An electric vehicle (EV) is powered by electricity, via an electrically charged battery pack that powers the motor to turn the wheels, unlike petrol or diesel-powered vehicles, which run off a traditional internal combustion engine.

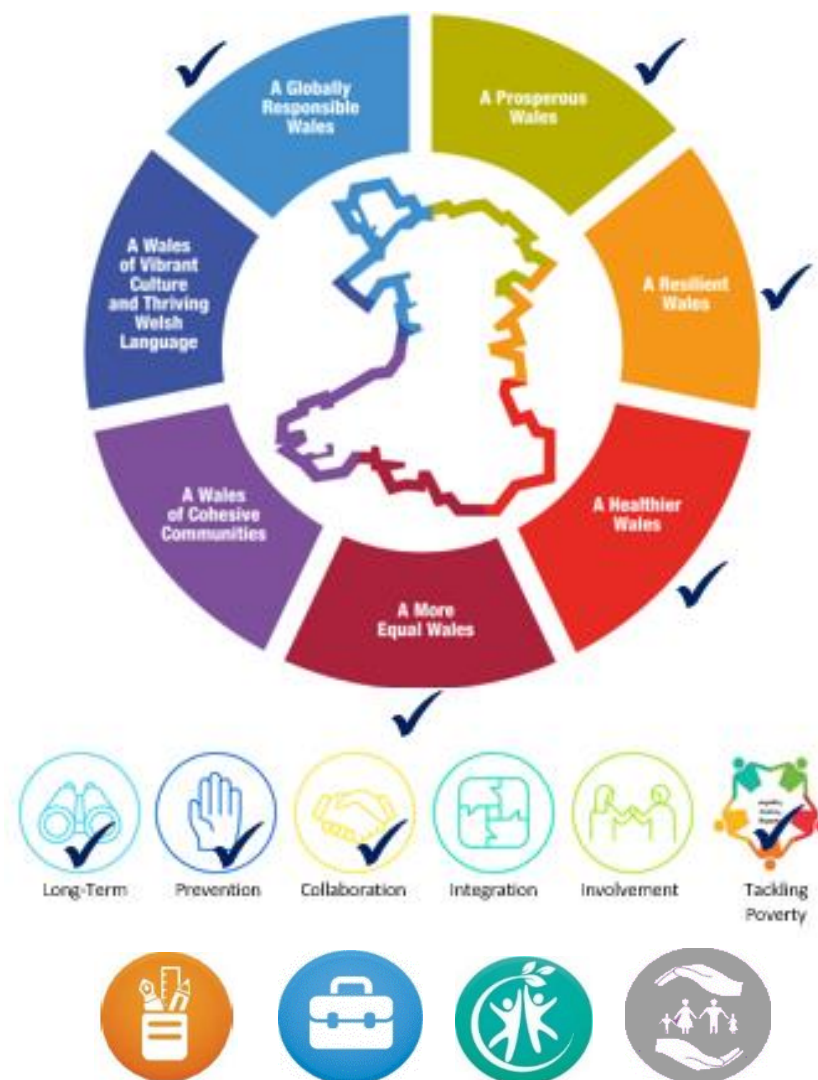
With the Council's aim of being Carbon Neutral by 2030, our fleet operations team have purchased 8 electric vehicles, with a further 8 electric vehicles expected to be delivered later in 2022.

Most of the new electric vehicles are used with our Neighbourhood Services, including by our Waste & Recycling Wardens, and will not only produce less CO2 compared to a diesel equivalent, but will also provide a financial saving for the Local Authority. It is estimated that each vehicle replaced will save around £2,000 on diesel costs.



"I take great pride in driving an EV with zero emission while doing my daily job of helping residents recycle efficiently. It feels like I'm doing something worthwhile for the environment and the community"

Chris Evans, Waste & Recycling Warden



Merthyr Tydfil's City Status Bid

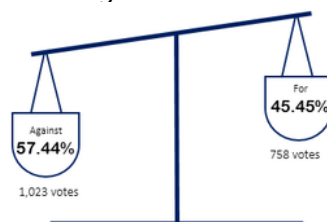
To mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee; an opportunity arose for places across the UK to apply to become a City. City status is officially granted by the Monarch on the advice of government ministers. There is no set criteria for becoming a city, and city status does not come with any particular rights, though it does infer a sense of prestige and pride.



At a Full Council meeting in September 2021, Merthyr Tydfil CBC welcomed a proposal to bid for City status as part of the Queen's Jubilee Celebrations. Members heard how becoming a City would help attract inward investment, new businesses and skilled employees, boosting economic and social development in Merthyr Tydfil and surrounding areas. This would all align to the Council's own Vision and well-being objectives.

Following the Full Council meeting, the public were asked for their views on the bid with a poll running up until December 2021. This generated huge debate within the town amongst residents and on social media, with a mix of views being raised. Some respondents to the survey were excited by the process; whilst some were concerned about whether Merthyr Tydfil was suited for City status at this time, issues such as bidding costs and what benefits would actually be realised being raised.

Following completion of the consultation, a special meeting of the Council was held to review the findings and to discuss applying for City status. Members were told in a report that the survey run on the Council website and social media platforms resulted in a combined overall total of **45.45%**.



A lengthy debate took place to review the feedback gathered, and give consideration of the key concerns raised by the people who responded. This led to Councillors voting 21-10 against pressing ahead with an application. A key lesson learned here was to involve stakeholders earlier in the process so key messages could be discussed more fully, and issues explored so as to generate more evidence to support decisions.



Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Transformation & Commercialisation (2021) Councillor Geraint Thomas stated "I'm very disappointed with the decision, but on this occasion, the Council has voted not to submit an application for City status. However, Members have been listening to residents' feedback and feel that now is not the appropriate time. We're aware we have challenges to address, but we still have aspirations to apply again in the future"

Merthyr Tydfil Named Among the Country's Best Green Spaces

Green spaces provide multiple benefits to local communities and the wider society and allow people to reap the benefits of the natural world. Evidence shows that living in a greener environment can promote and protect good health, aid in recovery from illness, improve mental health and improve quality of life for adults and children

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



Keep Wales Tidy has unveiled this year's Green Flag Award winners of 248 parks and green spaces across the country that have received the prestigious Green Flag Award and Green Flag Community Award, flags will be flying at 3 parks and 1 cemetery within



Merthyr Tydfil; Cyfarthfa 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. This is a great achievement for Merthyr Tydfil Council and all the volunteers who work tirelessly to maintain these beautiful spaces. With the addition of Garwnant Forest Centre, which is managed by Natural Resources Wales, Merthyr Tydfil now boasts five full Green Flag Awards.

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. The 11 community awards were presented to Cilsanws Nature Reserve, Dowlais Community Centre, Dowlais Infants School & Community Garden, Gurnos Men's 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.

Solar Panels: the Circular Economy Fund

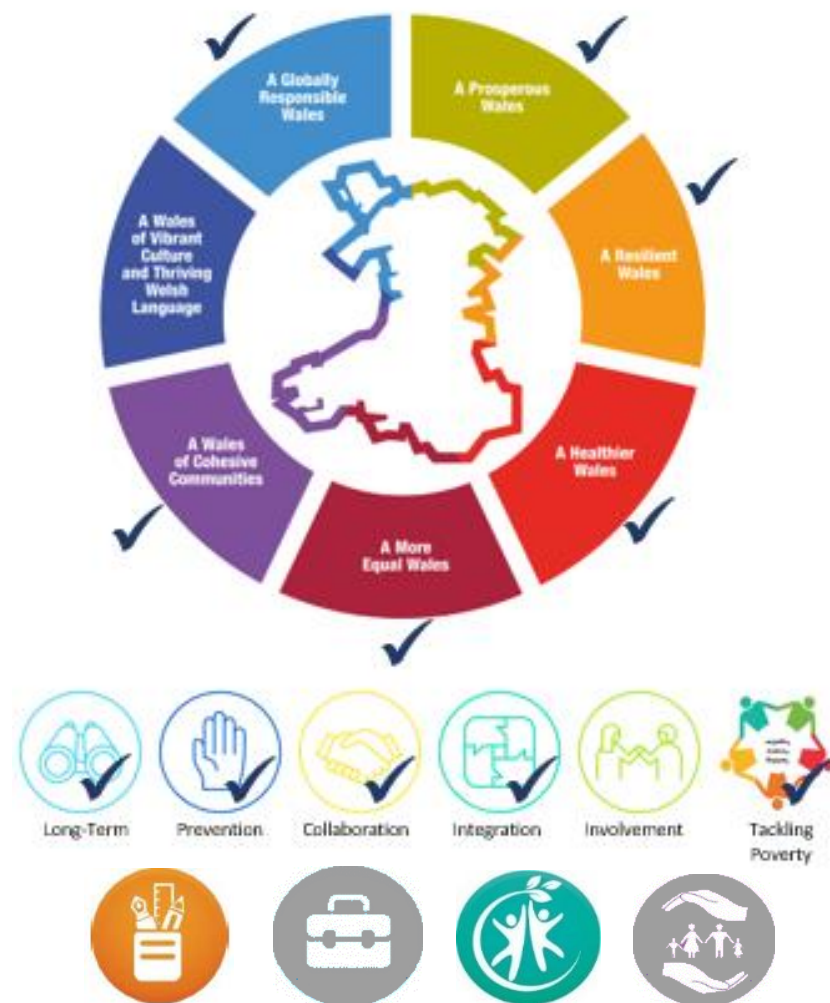
Traditional electricity relies heavily on fossil fuels such as coal and natural gas. Not only are they bad for the environment, but they are also limited resources. This translates into a volatile market, in which energy prices alter throughout the day. In addition to this, electricity needs to be transported from big power plants to end consumers via extensive networks. Long distance transmissions equal power losses.

There are many reasons to install solar photovoltaic electricity, from reducing your carbon footprint as well as annual electricity bills, to minimising the impact of ever increasing energy costs and generating a tax-free income for the next 20 years. No greenhouse gas emissions are released into the atmosphere when you use solar panels to create electricity and because the sun provides more energy than we'll ever need, electricity from solar power is a very important energy source in the move to clean energy production.

As part of the council's well-being objectives and ambition to decarbonise, we were successful in securing £30,000 worth of funding via the Circular Economy Fund from Welsh Government for Solar PV installations at our recycling centres.

Benefits of having these installations means that a 30KW Solar PV System similar to what we have on some of our schools costs £25,000-£30,000 and approximately saving £5,000 per year. The system will also generate for approximately 25-30 years so you could potentially save £110,000 over the life of the system and multiplied over numerous buildings, you potentially are making millions of pounds worth of savings. However, cost savings are becoming less important as we are in a climate crisis and the need to reduce carbon as much as possible and solar PV will help us do this.

The installations at both Dowlais and Aberfan Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRC) were completed, on time and within budget, in May 2021 and since their installation approximately 777kg of carbon has been saved so far on the Dowlais site and 409kg of carbon at the Aberfan site. 3200Kwh of energy has been generated allowing a saving of £480 whilst also reducing other costs of



running the two centres and help offset and minimise our carbon emissions.

Shaping Landscapes for Wildlife & Well-being

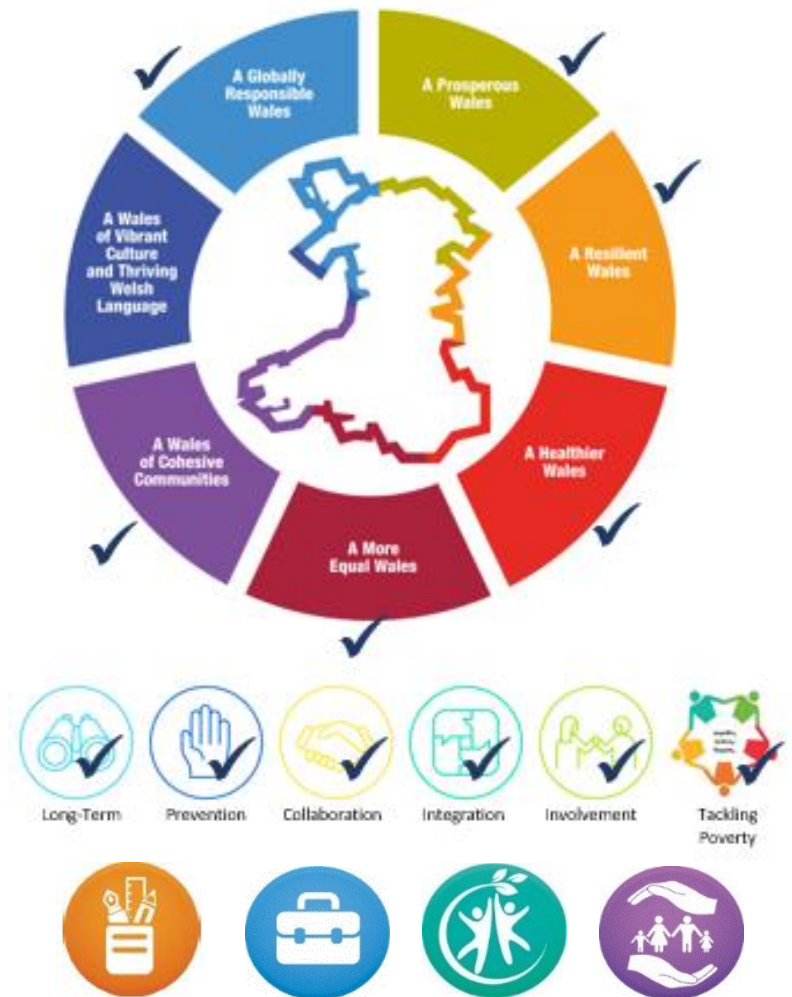
The purpose of the project was to bring people closer to nature and enhance the opportunities for wildlife within the Gurnos ward, which is urban in character and located just north of Merthyr Tydfil town centre. Given the site size and its potential and strategic location, the development addresses pent up demand by providing a wider opportunity for local people, users of the hospital as a public service, and staff for recreational benefit. Identified as a Priority Open Space within the Merthyr Tydfil Open Space Strategy Action Plan, this open space was put forward in a bid for the Welsh Government - Local Nature Partnership Challenge Fund.

Early consultation was carried out, with a client group formed from the hospital and Merthyr Valley Homes representatives, local ward members and staff from the community hub. A site walkabout with local residents took place in the summer of 2021 and work commenced in February 2022.

Three wetlands were created, two improved access points, and new footpath link that takes in the wet meadows and wetlands, seating area and stone wall entrance features. The site also provides an orchard, small allotment plots, amenity tree planting, native tree and shrub planting and enhanced wildflower plug planting.



Two information panels have been installed and a third telling the history of the site is due to be installed shortly. The entrance feature panel was designed by local artist Andy O'Rourke (Malarky Arts) and students from Pen Y Dre School. The orchard and wildflower plugs were planted with volunteers from the Gurnos Mens Group. The site is substantially complete and ward members have received



much positive feedback from local residents.

Nature's Gift Garden

As a continuation of investment in public parks and gardens, the former disused tennis court in Troedyrhiw Park was identified as a space that offered an opportunity to transform the area from tarmac, to a green oasis of useful plants. Being a well-used public open space, the park lacked floral diversity and educational opportunities. The poor quality of the material beneath the tarmacadam, while not found to be contaminated, contained a mixture of shales, ashes, stone, brick and a degree of domestic refuse in the form of bottles, shoes etc. An application was made to the Welsh Government - Local Nature Partnership Fund in order to fund this project.

Contained beds were created using aluminium edgings and re-cycled green waste was incorporated to provide some organic content for the plants. Soil fungi were added to improve the health of the growing conditions. The area was set out along the lines of a traditional physic garden with a twist and the geometrically designed beds contained plants in the following groupings:

- Medicinal plants
- Culinary herbs
- Edible plants
- Drought tolerant plants
- Colour grouped native wildflowers for pollinators

Seating was introduced to follow the shape of the design, interpretation panels were added and a circular structure incorporated, paid for from the Winter of Well Being (WG) fund Specialist plants were sourced from all over the UK and some were even grown by our own staff from specialist seed companies. Volunteers helped to stone pick, weed, prune and plant the selection of plants.

Children also like to watch the hoverflies on the wild carrots and the bees on the borage and the blackcurrants and raspberries were quickly gobbled up! The scents from a wide range of aromatic herbs is regularly enjoyed by old and young alike. Colour is never far away. The garden is bordered by rosemary and cistus, which under-



plant the pleached hornbeams. We have received countless complimentary comments from local park users. Our challenge remains, to set up a group of interested local people to help look after the space.

Scrutiny offers Feedback to help refocus of Key National Strategy

In December 2021; Welsh Government announced they were seeking views from people and communities as they were scheduled to update the national strategy that aimed to stop violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Members of the Council's Regeneration and Public Protection scrutiny committee recognised that, as the Committee oversees progress made against the Crime & Disorder duty to which the Council must respond, they had an opportunity to provide feedback from a Merthyr Tydfil perspective which could help shape this key national strategy moving forward. Reports had been received by the Committee from key partners Safer Merthyr Tydfil; the third sector organisation which co-ordinates the response and support to victims of domestic violence across the County Borough.



The Committee Chair linked in with all Committee Members advising them of this opportunity and sharing with them with a copy of the relevant consultation document; Members were asked to review the information and offer comments and feedback on Welsh Government's proposed amendments.

Committee Members considered the proposals laid out in the consultation document; and looked at how these proposals would align with the Council's well-being objectives; as well as the broader implications any changes would make on the local approach taken across Cwm Taf Morgannwg.

Through review and discussion, the Committee was able to provide key comments, including:

- The clear links between Merthyr Tydfil CBC's well-being objectives and the priorities set out in Welsh Government's draft strategy;



- A strong agreement with the clearer focus included around tackling male violence, members commented they felt this placed an equalities perspective at the centre of tackling issues; and
- Committee Members proposed the provision of training to schools, youth groups, community connectors and deliver a campaign to raise awareness is critical. Also, as domestic abuse and sexual violence services are delivered regionally; developing a 'toolkit for engagement' to offer a common method to help improve, and supporting good practice in one region of Wales to be picked up in other areas (beginning to connect up this good practice Wales-wide), re-focus process.

Royal Visit to Engine House, Dowlais to Thank Volunteers

In May 2021, HRH Prince Charles visited Dowlais Engine House to hear about the significant amount of work carried out by staff and volunteers across services ranging from food parcel handling to Covid-19 testing. His Royal Highness was met by Lord Lieutenant of Mid Glamorgan Peter Vaughan and Engine House Manager Cllr David Hughes, who took him on a tour of the building, including the donation room where all food donations are received and packed.

Cllr Hughes told him how the Engine House had given out more than 10.5 tonnes of food since day one of the pandemic - as well as delivering for Merthyr Cynon Food Bank - feeding over 2,000 people throughout the County Borough. HRH took time to unveil a plaque to commemorate his visit.

The Engine House has a comprehensive range of facilities and activities such as self-defence, dance and drama and these young people involved gave Prince Charles demonstrations. Pupils from Abercanaid Community School also gave a presentation on their efforts in 'plogging' (picking up litter while jogging).

HRH was also met by Council Leader and community volunteer Cllr Lisa Mytton, who outlined the history of the Engine House and showed HRH photographs of a previous visit by his Grandfather, King George V. His Royal Highness was then introduced to the Engine House Trustees, food delivery volunteers and members of Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil; as well as taking time to speak with Deputy Chief Executive Alyn Owen - who led on the first mass Covid-19 testing pilot programme in Wales - and the testing planning and operational teams, made up of the Military and Council staff.



"The first mass testing centre opened, there was a queue of local residents waiting outside to be tested - a fantastic achievement and recognition of the hard work with the communities. Within the first week, **400** local residents were identified as being asymptomatic. "These were 400 individuals in a close-knit community that were potentially infecting family and friends and accelerating the spread of the virus" Mr Owen added. "The approach taken in Merthyr Tydfil was then replicated by other communities across the UK, including school testing, which was a key element of the Merthyr Tydfil approach. This has since been developed into best practice that is the backbone of current testing in all educational establishments across Wales and more broadly across other parts of the UK."

Developing Merthyr Tydfil's 15-Year Economic Vision

Merthyr Tydfil CBC commissioned two organisations to lead on the development of an Economic Vision for the County Borough. The need for an Economic Vision was confirmed for three main reasons: to respond to the economic need; to align to/co-ordinate regional and local economic opportunities; and to take a holistic approach to planning Merthyr Tydfil's economic growth.

The Council aimed to ensure that the communities of the County Borough, other public sector partners (such as Welsh Government) along with potential investors, future business, future visitors and future residents could get a common understanding of the kind of place that the County Borough aims to be in 15 years' time.

A clear process was put in place to produce the Vision and Recovery Plan: where we framed the scope; developing a clear understanding of the economic environment before engaging with stakeholders to secure their views before we prepares a Draft and Final Vision. Significant stakeholder engagement has been undertaken and was key to informing the Vision document concluding with workshops in August 2021 to discuss the final draft. Engagement was held with private companies, community organisations, and key partners. 7 core ambitions for the local economy were identified:



Economic Diversity



Destination Merthyr Tydfil



Education & Skills



Affordable Housing



Transforming Connectivity



Public & Community Services



A Climate Resilient & Low Carbon Economy

The Vision was approved by Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Full Council on 3rd November 2021. One of the outcomes from this work was to determine how Merthyr Tydfil can use its assets and opportunities to position itself positively and proactively during the recovery phase from pandemic and beyond. The Vision provides a bold and purposeful sense of direction that anyone who cares about the future of the County Borough can help to deliver.

Ongoing Development of the Management Data Dashboard

The Council securely holds a huge amount of data and information which it uses to measure Council performance across all of its services and functions. This data was previously managed by the services/teams directly, with opportunities to centralise

When developing the 'Digital Transformation' theme of the Council's Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan; it was agreed there was an opportunity to strengthen how the Council managed, collated and analysed its data to better inform its decision-making process. As part of this work-stream; corporate leaders decided to review the current data reporting frameworks with a view to strengthening these.



Work began to look at opportunities to centralise data in a more consistent way; enabling decision makers to look at corporate performance data in a broader way; providing them with a wider intelligence pool on which to base their decisions. The decision was made to take a phased approach to developing the dashboard; both to maintain the accuracy of

existing data captured there; whilst ensuring that data which was to be introduced underwent a basic process to check its validity. This allowed leaders and key decision-makers to build their knowledge over time; supporting a developed understanding of the connections between different data sources.

A by-product of this approach was that the connected data began to open up different types of conversations around performance; which in turn has begun to lead to a more collaborative approach to corporate planning. It has also led to data becoming more available to support other aspects of the corporate governance process (e.g.) data is available to be extracted from the dashboard to support delivery of the officer challenge process - Quarterly Performance and Improvement Reporting (QPIR).

Officers developing the dashboard benefitted from training and development opportunities;

"I would recommend anyone who's looking for a career change or has just left school to take up an apprenticeship – it's an amazing opportunity to develop skills and knowledge, and a great introduction to a new career"



with the Council's central Data team recruiting an apprentice who had access to practical opportunities not only to learn and gain new skills; but to understand the nature of data and information; and better understand how this is used in a corporate sense. Growing these skills for the future will improve the chances of sustained improvement over the longer-term.

Updating Procurement Rules to support Achievement of Better Value for Money

Procurement is one of the most significant areas of Council business; it directs the tendering and contract processes the Council uses when buying goods, services and works. The rules and guidance ensures buyers across the Council procure effectively and meet the basic requirements of proportionality, equality & transparency.

Merthyr Tydfil CBC reviews its Procurement rules every three years – they do this to ensure they remain valid when viewed against any changes that are having an impact on how the Council works both internally; and as a result to external changes. The review cycle had been disrupted due to the pandemic and the UK's exit from Europe. The main aim of the review of Procurement rules is to support the achievement of value for money for the Council.



When undertaking the review; a number of opportunities were identified to strengthen the rules and guidance (e.g.) more explicit identification of how the rules linked to legislation. During the review, it was decided a refocus to the Procurement rules would be introduced linked to the thresholds for procurement. Previously, tendering thresholds and processes required a minimum of three quotes or tenders.

On review, the decision was taken to include the term 'ring-fenced' in the tendering thresholds and processes. This now includes the opportunity to invite local companies to tender (where possible) to help stimulate local opportunities. Alongside this, the previous lower limit of £5,000 set to demonstrate best value only was raised to £15,000 – this was with a view to stimulating local spend.



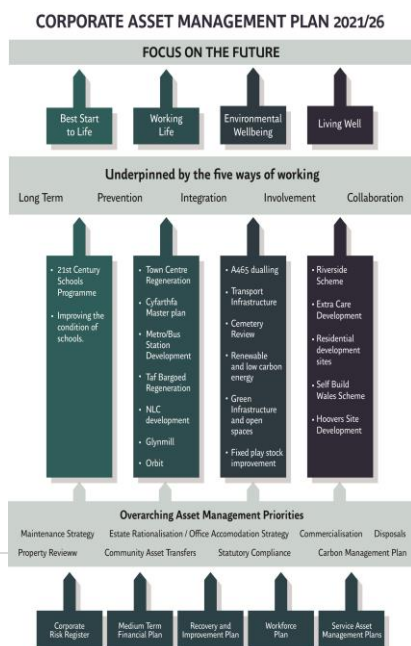
To support the Council's commitments to digital working; manual tendering was removed from the rules (manual processes now only being able to be used in the event of a long-term system outage). With the move to electronic tendering; there was a requirement to check Cyber Essentials added to safeguard those involved in the process. A number of other technical changes were made to the processes to support sustainability of activity.

The updated Procurement rules and guidance were reviewed and challenged by Full Council before receiving approval. The Council has recently rolled out these changes; and is now monitoring the impact the changes have, this is will be overseen by the Council's Governance and Audit Committee.

Refocusing the Asset Management Plan

The Asset Management Plan is an important strategic tool which sets out how the Council will manage its property effectively. Good asset management supports the Council's ability to deliver its corporate well-being objectives: Best Start to Life, Working Life, Environmental Well-being and Living Well.

Having endured a period of extreme challenge resulting from the pandemic; we fully appreciate how important the effective use of our property assets are in supporting our well-being objectives. Looking at how as an organisation we can work smarter and do things differently, making better use of our assets, has never been so important.



It is for this reason that during development of the next iteration of this Plan; a draft of the document was presented to Members of the Regeneration & Public Protection scrutiny committee on 8 March 2022 for review and constructive challenge.

During this meeting; Committee Members explored how the Plan fitted in with other aspects of the Council's governance arrangements – officers confirmed it had been drafted with full consideration of the other Critical governance vehicles (e.g.) Corporate Risk Register; Mid Term Financial Plan; Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan; and the Workforce Plan.



Members confirmed consultation had taken place with groups like Corporate Management Team; Cabinet and the Asset Management Group to further inform and test the developing plan.

This reinforced a positive approach to aligning the governance of the Asset Management Plan. Key findings reflected Committee recommendations that energy efficiency/decarbonisation should feature strongly in the new plan. Additionally; the Plan reflected actions which responded to audit recommendations previously made to the Property Service Team by the Internal Audit department. It was agreed further minor development was needed prior to a final draft of the Plan being taken to Full Council for approval.

National Apprenticeship Week - February 2022

During 'National Apprenticeships Week' (7th – 13th February 2022), Merthyr Tydfil CBC took time to celebrate the value, benefit and opportunities that apprenticeships bring to the Council and the communities it serves. Merthyr Tydfil Council is strongly committed to building the sustainability of our future by supporting apprenticeship programmes. In 2021/2022, **7 apprentices** have joined Merthyr Tydfil CBC, with each specialising in different service areas. Apprentices develop 'on-the-job' skills whilst also studying for a nationally recognised qualification that relates directly to the area they work in.

An emerging priority for the Council is decarbonisation; and **Aminah took up a role as a Carbon & Energy apprentice** to support the Council to address the challenges this brings.



"I've had a wide range of opportunities during my apprenticeship at MTCBC. I've been able to take part in training courses that develop my knowledge and understanding on carbon and energy. I've also been able to build relationships by meeting external contractors and I have helped on a wide range of projects such as LED lighting upgrades and solar PV installation. I have also been able to develop my skills such as team-working, planning, organisational and leadership skills." Aminah continues to work towards achieving a Level 4 NVQ Construction Site Supervision.

Stacey took up a role as a Learning & Development apprentice, and aims to secure a Level 3 certificate in Learning and Development. Stacey commented "The opportunity to work within Merthyr Tydfil CBC as a Learning and Development apprentice has allowed me to gain an understanding of just how important training,



upskilling, and investing in our staff is, not only within the Council but all organisations. Training and developing the skills of your workforce allows for staff to improve and plan their own future, focus on their performance, help build a strong, multi-skilled organisation and most of all job satisfaction.”

The Council’s Chief Executive; Ellis Cooper said, “In 2021’s programme, we recruited 7 new apprentices in a variety of key departments across Merthyr Tydfil CBC – in Data; Building Control; Learning & Development; Communication; Carbon and Energy; and Parks. I think it is important to remember our duty to nurture and help to sustain the Council’s growth by developing new employees through such a fantastic programme! I am overjoyed to see some of the work that is being done in our organisation, it is a very exciting time for Apprenticeships in Merthyr Tydfil Council.”

Pathways to Work

Leaving school can be difficult for all young people but we know for young people who are looked after, there are extra challenges. The experiences they have can stop them reaching their full potential and this creates barriers for them entering work, further/ higher education or training.

Pathway to Work provides employment and mentoring support for young people who are looked after or who were looked after. The appointment of a Children Looked After Employment Mentoring and Support (EMS) Officer allowed focus on developing a range of tailored interventions that increase opportunities for young people looked after or formerly, looked after, to take positive steps towards employment, further or higher education, training and apprenticeship opportunities.

The project was developed with funding from Welsh Government Integrated Care Fund and supports young people to overcome barriers and achieve what they want to achieve, by continuous engagement with those who are or formerly looked after in monthly meetings and partnership working to identify those who may need support from the service.

‘A’ is a 16 year old currently looked after by Merthyr Tydfil Local Authority, who experienced a lot of trauma in their childhood and has a lot of very complex needs. Engagement with the EMS Officer allowed them to have a bespoke package of education, as schools were unable to meet their complex needs.



Despite difficulties during the pandemic, a college course in animal care was sourced and the EMS liaised with other professionals to ensure the understanding of complex needs of 'A'.

Continuous support, and work with various professionals, has empowered 'A' to overcome significant barriers, improving confidence allowing them to build friendships and relationships with colleagues, whilst also helping them work towards a qualification in a field of their interest.

Ty Enfys Dementia Care Centre

In January 2022, Keir Hardie's Tŷ Enfys Dementia Care Unit became the first care unit in the UK to receive the 'Meaningful Care Matters' outstanding accreditation.

The Tŷ Enfys capital project saw Integrated Care Fund capital of £1.6m utilised to completely transform the physical environment of a joint health and social care dementia day service, which aims to provide high quality care to support individuals from the age of 55 years old who have been diagnosed with dementia that is of a moderate or severe nature.

Meaningful Care Matters (MCM) specialise in helping care homes to access a variety of effective and sustainable services in the implementation of person-centred care models. MCM found that the quality of life experienced by day care patients at Tŷ Enfys was at the highest level, with outstanding care provided by loving and engaged staff who really cared deeply for their patients whilst bringing joy, dignity and meaning to their care.

The day centre provides many activities which are designed to encourage individuals to participate in a variety of activities (depending on the level of their condition), whilst providing the best and most effective care possible from highly experienced staff, and assist in helping with memory retention, maintaining independence and assisting patients with their social lifestyle whilst maintaining their dignity through the process. The success of the day centre was a result of the partnership working between Merthyr Tydfil CBC, CTM UHB, the Regional Commissioning Team (with the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership Board) and the Welsh Government and the result of fantastic work of staff and team at the centre.





Tŷ Enfys is an important service that contributes to supporting people with dementia to live at home as long as possible by supporting them, and critically, their carers. The redesign is exceptional but achieving an outstanding accreditation is a testament of the commitment of all involved to ensure the experience people have is equally exceptional”.

Nia McIntosh
Regional Commissioning Officer

Care Home Leisure Scheme

Exercise is one of the most important activities to maintain independence in older adults. Despite this, becoming more sedentary with age is often the reality. Staying fit and healthy for as long as possible can help improve happiness and quality of life, including better cardiovascular health and may assist cognitive function.

Merthyr Tydfil Care Homes are being supported to improve the health and wellbeing of their residents by a new scheme coordinated by Active Merthyr, Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Sport Development department, in partnership with Wellbeing@Merthyr.

The programme, funded through Welsh Government's Over 60's Active Leisure Scheme and the Cwm Taf wide 'Super Agers Over-50' programme, has seen the delivery of a range of physical activity equipment including Table Tennis and Indoor Bowls to care homes. Venues that have needed it have been supported to access online provision with the delivery of HDMI cables, speakers and other IT equipment.

As part of the programme, Wellbeing@Merthyr have now launched new online Armchair Aerobics sessions specifically for care home residents, with care homes joining a live online session on a weekly basis, run by one of Wellbeing@Merthyr's experienced instructors.



Further opportunities are being planned for this year, allowing



care homes to develop their own physical activity programmes in the future, supported by Active Merthyr.

Improving Audit Response Monitoring

Governance Improvement is one of the key focus areas within the Council's Recovery, Transformation and Improvement (RTI) Plan. An area of focus within this area of the Plan was to track the levels of responses to audit recommendations received to ensure positive progress was being made; and the impact could be measured.

To enable the governance improvement project team to monitor this effectively; a Key Performance Indicator was introduced so a data-based assessment of progress could be undertaken. During the first year of the programme; the data captured for the 2019/2020 financial year showed that 34% of recommendations had been completed.

In 2020/2021; when reviewing the data against the measure; it was noted that there had been a reduction in progress noted; data showing a reduction from 34% to 20%. The project team identified this as an area which needed to be explored; though it was acknowledged that it was reasonable to suggest the impact of Covid-19 and the Council's need to prioritise responses to this would be a factor that played a part in this reduction.

The project team agreed this issue should be raised with the Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT) to enable them to identify other factors which could have led to the reduction in performance. On discussing this issue; it was identified that there was a need to refresher training for the officers using the Council's Audit Action Plan data management system.



Training sessions were developed that was delivered not only to CMT members; but also members of the Senior Leadership Team to ensure managers at this level are also aware of the requirements for updating progress at regular intervals. Ad hoc support was also made available for a period to support further advice and re-enforcement as required.

The situation was monitored following the training delivered to identify whether this had had the desired impact and it was noted that the data for the 2021/2022 year showed a significant improvement; with 77% of recommendations be identified as being complete – a 57% improvement on the previous year. This will continue to be monitored moving forward.

