



CABINET

**IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, 5 JANUARY 2022**

REMOTELY VIA TEAMS

**ALL MOBILE TELEPHONES TO BE SWITCHED TO SILENT FOR THE
DURATION OF THE MEETING**

Part 1

1. Appointment of Chairperson
2. Welcome and Roll Call
3. Chairpersons Announcement/s
4. Declarations of Interest
5. Corporate Plan 2022-2027 - Recover, Reset, Renew
(Pages 3 - 172)
6. Draft Budget for Consultation 2022-23 (Pages 173 - 188)
7. Urgent Items
Any urgent items (whether public or exempt) at the discretion of the Chairperson pursuant to Section 100b (4)(B) of the Local Government Act 1972

K.Jones
Chief Executive

Civic Centre
Port Talbot

Thursday, 30 December 2021

Cabinet Members:

Councillors. E.V.Latham, L.Jones, A.R.Lockyer, A.Wingrave,
C.Clement-Williams, D.Jones, M.Harvey, P.A.Rees and
P.D.Richards

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cabinet

5th January 2022

Report of the Corporate Directors Group

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All Wards

Corporate Plan 2022-2027 – Recover, Reset, Renew

Purpose of Report

1. To seek approval to consult on an updated Corporate Plan for the period 2022-2027.

Executive Summary

2. The draft Corporate Plan for 2022-2027 (attached at Appendix 1) sets out how we will approach recovery in the short, medium and longer term and has been informed by many people – residents, employees, elected members, community organisations, businesses and other partners. A considerable amount of evidence has also been used to understand how things have changed as a result of the pandemic including wider influences, like climate change, digital disruption and government policy. All of this information has been brought together to reset and renew the Council's well-being objectives, priorities, vision, values and relationships which is documented in the Strategic Change Programme (annex to the draft Plan).

Background

3. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires the Council to set well-being objectives which seek to maximise the Council's contribution to the national well-being goals, whilst also embracing the sustainable development principle. The Council's current three well-being objectives were agreed by this administration in 2017.
4. The Act requires the Council to consider whether its current well-being objectives remain relevant or whether changes to those well-being objectives should be considered when preparing its Annual Report. This requirement was acknowledged during the preparation of the Council's last Annual Report which was published in October 2021 and it was noted in the Cabinet Report (22nd September 2021):

“In preparing this Annual Report for 2020/2021, the Council is required to consider whether the current well-being objectives remain relevant or whether changes to those objectives should be considered. This consideration is currently underway as part of the preparation of the Council's Corporate Recovery Plan which will be published in 2022”.

Reset & Renew

5. The past 20 months has had an extensive impact on our communities, our local economy and the way we work as a Council. This has provided us with an opportunity to reset and renew our well-being objectives, priorities, vision, values and relationships taking into account:
 - what matters to local people, businesses and our staff;
 - the impact that we know Covid-19 has had on our communities, our local economy and wider stakeholders;
 - the lessons we have learned from our pandemic response and from elsewhere; and
 - other anticipated changes in our external environment (e.g. climate change, digital disruption, financial settlements and government policy).

The above evidence has informed the development of the following four draft well-being objectives for this Council:

- **Best Start in Life** - All children have the best start in life
- **Communities are thriving and sustainable** - People live healthy, long and fulfilled lives in thriving and sustainable communities where people get along together and support one another
- **Our local environment, culture and heritage can be enjoyed by future generations** - Natural processes are restored and they mitigate and have developed greater resilience to climate change. People actively conserve, improve and enjoy our stunning natural environment, treasure the Welsh language and are actively engaged with the rich sporting, cultural and industrial heritage of the area.
- **Jobs and Skills** - Working with our partners we create the conditions for more secure, well paid and green work in the area and help local people acquire the skills they need to access those jobs.

6. What we plan to achieve over the next 12 months under each of the above draft well-being objectives is set out in the draft Plan. A more detailed strategic change programme is set out in the annexe - which will be initiated to ensure we are embracing a “one council” strategic approach to achieving the vision. The Programme describes the changes we aim to make over the next 12 months, the next 5 years and the longer term. It will evolve over time and will be reviewed and evaluated on an ongoing basis via a revised Corporate Performance Management Framework.

Enabling Programme

7. It is acknowledged significant organisational change is needed to deliver the revised well-being objectives, the required cultural change

and the associated programmes of work to bring about sustainable changes to economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing.

A summary of a programme of organisational development which will be delivered to develop the capacity and capability of the Council over a 3-5 year period is provided in the Strategic Change Programme. This will be further refined as the programme is defined and initiated.

Next Phase of Consultation

8. The next phase of consultation will test we have captured what is important to people now and in the future in terms of the changes we aim to make over the next 12 months, the next 5 years and the longer term. The consultation will run for 4 weeks (5th January – 1st February 2022). “A Plan on a Page” will be made available during the consultation period. The feedback from the consultation will inform a final Corporate Plan which will be presented to Cabinet on 28th February 2022 for approval and Council on 1st March for adoption.

Financial Appraisal

9. The priorities described for the next 12 months will be reflected in the revenue and capital budgets set for 2022/23. In early 2022 a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) will be developed which will be the means through which the revenue and capital resources likely to be available over the term of the new administration from May 2022 will be aligned with the longer term actions set out in the Strategic Change Programme and the priorities of the new council.

Integrated Impact Assessment

10. A first stage impact assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016). The first stage impact assessment has indicated that a more in-depth assessment was required.

It is essential that Members read the initial Integrated Impact Assessment, which is attached to the report at Appendix 2, for the purposes of the meeting.

The IIA will be revisited in light of responses to the consultation and a final impact assessment will accompany the final decision report in due course.

Valleys Communities Impact

11. The draft Plan has been informed by feedback from valley communities including the findings of online focus groups and in-depth interviews with residents of the Afan, Amman, Dulais, Neath and Swansea Valleys.

Workforce Impact

12. The programme of organisational development will deliver the workforce changes needed in the short, medium and long term to implement the Corporate Plan. Work is underway on the development and implementation of the Council's Future of Work Strategy which aims to ensure employees can be the best they can be, doing the right thing, in the right place, at the right time and in the right way.

Legal Impact

13. The publication of the final Plan will meet the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 by setting out our well-being objectives and the steps we will take to achieve them and how we will measure progress.

Risk Management

14. The Council's Corporate Risk Register will be updated with any risks associated with the delivery of the work outlined in the Plan following its approval and adoption by Council in March 2022.

Consultation

15. The draft Plan and Strategic Change Programme have been informed by the Let's Talk campaign which was undertaken between July and September 2021.

Recommendations

16. Having had due regard to the Integrated Impact Assessment it is recommended that:
 - i. Cabinet approve the draft Corporate Plan 2022-2027 and the Strategic Change Programme (contained in the annexe) be published for a 4 week consultation period (5th January 2022 – 1st February 2022.)

Reason for Proposed Decision

17. To enable the publication of a final Corporate Plan which will ensure the Council meets legal duties set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 as they relate to council corporate planning activities.

18. Implementation of Decision

The decision is proposed for immediate implementation

Appendices

19. Appendix 1 – Corporate Plan 2022-2027 (including the Strategic Change Programme)
20. Appendix 2 – Integrated Impact Assessment
21. Appendix 3 – Let's Talk – Questionnaire Report
22. Appendix 4 – Let's Talk – Deliberative Report
23. Appendix 5 – Secondary Research Report

List of Background Papers

24. Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

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Corporate Plan 2022-2027

Recover, Reset, Renew

Introduction

Covid-19 is having an enormous impact on us all.

We have worked together over the course of the pandemic- council, communities, businesses and partners to support vulnerable residents, protect our NHS and to keep essential services running. This spirit of working together is the foundation on which we want to base the work we need to do as we learn to live with Covid-19 and begin to recover from the pandemic.

This plan sets out our thinking on how we will approach recovery in the short, medium and longer term. It has been informed by a lot of people – residents, employees, elected members, community organisations, businesses and other partners. We have also used a considerable amount of evidence to understand how things have changed as a result of the pandemic and looked at wider influences, like climate change, digital disruption and government policy. We have brought all of this information together to assess what this might mean for our future priorities. Of course, the pandemic is not over yet so there is a good deal of uncertainty that poses challenges to our planning. Neath Port Talbot residents will also elect a new council in May 2022. This means that our plan will need to be flexible so we can adapt as we move forward.

A key feature of this plan is the emphasis on working together to help the county borough recover and make Neath Port Talbot a place we are all proud of. We have learned through the pandemic that when we come together we can achieve remarkable things. This plan is the basis on which we can further develop that spirit of collaboration to create a place where everyone can live a fulfilled life.

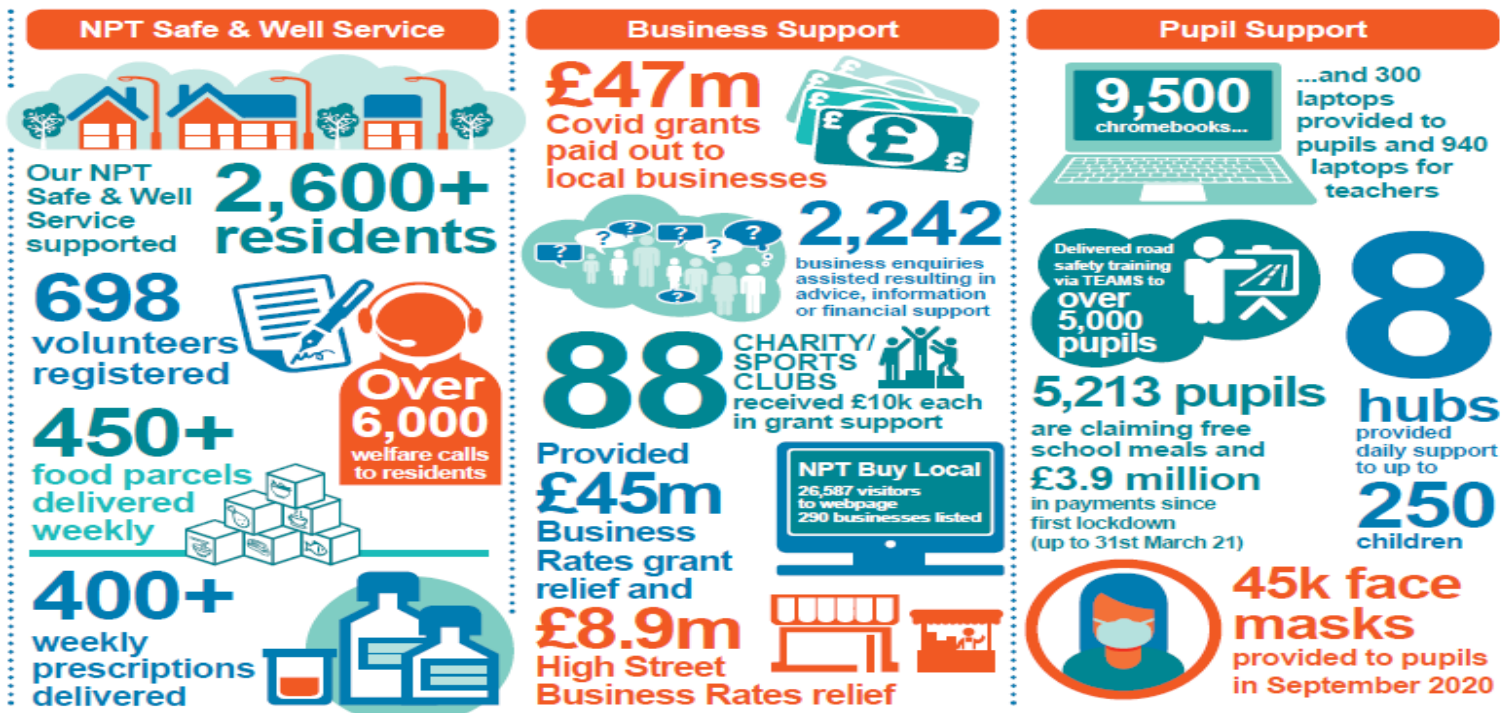
Cllr E V Latham
Leader of Council

Mrs K Jones
Chief Executive

1. Covid-19 Response

In the middle of March 2020, the Council mobilised an emergency response to the developing COVID-19 national emergency situation. There was an immense effort to ensure the Council responded in step with the policy decisions taken by the Welsh Government and the UK Government. At all times, our approach we have worked with and in support of government policy, striving to protect our NHS, to support our communities and to save lives. The infographics below and over the page provide a visual summary of some of the work we carried out in the first year of response whilst also keeping essential services running– they are achievements we are very proud of.

Council response during the pandemic



Council response during the pandemic

NPT Staff Support

1st council in England and Wales to introduce a "safe leave" policy for victims of domestic abuse working for the council who can take up to five days of paid "safe leave" to access support



OVER 700
laptops provided to staff enabling homeworking

85
online employee training courses delivered to 3,809 attendees

800 NPT staff offered to step into different roles to help with COVID-19

Other Support

470 jobs created/safeguarded as a result of financial support by the council



£19.4m Council Tax support to 17,389 households



Permanent accommodation secured for 258 homeless individuals or households

Accessible cycle routes increased by **6.6km** (during 2019/20 and 2020/21)



113,888 COVID-19 webpage views

Homecare Staff; 200+ COVID trained and 10,700+ monthly visits to service users

50 playgrounds were made COVID safe



Working with Partners

Project managed construction of 340-bed field hospital at Llandarcy



Margam Orangery used as a Mass Vaccination Centre



NPT Test, Trace and Protect Service contacted **31,079** people up to 31st March 2021



As we moved into the second year of the pandemic, our response was greatly assisted by the availability of the Covid-19 vaccines.

We were pleased to be able to offer further support to our NHS, converting facilities at Margam Orangery for use as a mass vaccination centre and modifying a mobile library for use as a mobile vaccination centre. The mobile vaccination centre enabled the vaccine programme to be accessed by those hardest to reach. We also made facilities available for the rapid expansion of Covid-19 testing at various locations across the county borough.

We continued to administer government financial support programmes. This enabled financial support to be provided quickly to local businesses and also to individual residents – for example, residents required to self-isolate and those who had children eligible for free school meals.

By August 2021, sufficient progress had been made across Wales in vaccinating the population and bringing the virus under control to enable the Welsh Government to move to Level Zero where most restrictions on daily life were lifted. However, the course of the pandemic continues to be uncertain with the UK facing a fourth wave following the emergence of the Omicron variant. As we think about recovery from the pandemic and our future plans, we need to ensure our plans are flexible and capable of being adapted quickly to anticipate and respond to new issues as they emerge. The framework we have adopted is set out below:

- [A Re-opening and Recovery Phase](#) – supporting the safe restarting of activity as restrictions are lifted, whilst continuing to respond to the immediate demands of the pandemic; building confidence, supporting residents, businesses and employees as government removes support and restrictions;
- [A Reset and Renewal Phase](#) – where activities and policies to support long term plans are put in place to deliver sustainable improvements in services and in social, economic and environmental outcomes

2. Summary of Covid-19 Impacts

The impact of Covid-19 has been extensive. This once in a generation global public health crisis has impacted everyone in our community and disrupted our local economy. People have endured many months without contact with family and friends. 533 residents have sadly lost their lives due to Covid-19 and many families across our county borough are coming to terms with their loss. There are also many other residents who have had their physical and mental health impacted by the disease.

Local Economy Impacts

Many local businesses had to shut their doors for extended periods of time (some permanently) with workers furloughed and many reliant on government financial support. Retail, tourism, hospitality and close contact services have been hit hard, disproportionately affecting women, young people and workers from BME backgrounds. While our towns have not experienced the level of devastation seen in some of the big cities, we have seen an increase in anti-social behaviour in these spaces and footfall is still well below pre-pandemic levels – the continued policy to work from home and a sharp increase in use of on-line shopping is likely to continue to disrupt our high streets, particularly in the short term.

For others, Covid-19 has presented new business opportunities. We have seen an expansion of employment in some existing businesses as they diversified to exploit new market opportunities and we have also seen an increase in inward investment interest from companies of varying sizes bringing much welcome new, quality employment opportunities into the county borough. The business cases for our City Deal programmes were also signed off by the UK and Welsh governments during the pandemic period – the programmes have a strong focus on decarbonisation of industry and residential homes and are expected to stimulate growth in new green jobs across the county borough and the wider city region. Local economic prospects have been further boosted with conditional planning permission granted for a Global Centre for Rail Excellence at Onllwyn in the Dulais Valley and the development of a high quality adventure resort – Wildfox Resort-Afan Valley – at Croeserw. Taken together, these latter two developments represent £0.5 billion investment and some 1,200 new jobs.

Local Community Impacts

The time spent at home has seen many people reconnect with their local community and the environment around them. It is evident that there is a new appreciation of the importance of local parks, trails, play facilities and local attractions and with this comes an increased demand for investment in our local infrastructure to help people sustainably access and enjoy what is on their doorstep. However, for others the pandemic has left them lonely and isolated. The importance of being connected

to family, friends and neighbours is unquestionably shared across all age groups and all backgrounds. The pandemic was the first time that some residents had volunteered their time to help those around them and this has enabled many residents to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of community. The impact of Covid-19 on community and voluntary organisations as a whole, however, has been mixed with some groups operating through the pandemic, some re-starting as restrictions lifted and others unable to resume.

Whilst children and young people were mostly not clinically vulnerable to Covid-19, the disruption to education has had a very significant impact on the routines and mental health of young people. For some young people, family stresses have increased during the several periods of lockdown with higher incidences of domestic violence and substance use experienced. Over 1,400 young people living in the county borough, identified as vulnerable, required targeted support by our education, youth services, children's social services and wider partners throughout the pandemic period. Support for unpaid carers and disabled people has also seen some disruption, particularly during the early part of the pandemic period. As we move into recovery, it is important to ensure that those needing care and support and carers are able to access the services they need.

Council Impacts

The first year of the pandemic saw a huge disruption to normal council services. A number of services were stopped and staff, assets and financial resources re-purposed to mobilise the emergency response required by the UK and Welsh governments as part of the national effort to protect the NHS, save lives and maintain essential services.

Many staff found themselves working from home -virtually overnight – with rapid expansion of digital technology across the workforce to enable the Council to function. There has been radical innovation as services were forced to operate on an entirely new basis with a range of control measures applied to ensure staff and service users were protected against the disease. Communication and engagement has also transformed using new channels, data science and multi-media approaches to reach all sections of our community. New employment practices have been introduced at pace to support the Council workforce as we adapted to the changing situation. Over the summer of 2021, an extensive lessons learned exercise took place to inform our recovery planning and this has identified opportunities for further service transformation through digital approaches, deeper integration of services designed around the needs of our citizens and businesses, continued empowerment of the workforce and a permanent move to a hybrid model in place of traditional office work patterns.

The policy to work from home has also had a profound impact on our democratic arrangements. Face to face meetings were replaced by remote meetings. An unexpected benefit of remote meetings has been a greater participation in those meetings by local people. Whilst some face to face meetings will resume when safe to do so, the majority of serving councillors believe that greater use of remote meetings should be retained into the future to support greater diversity in the membership of the council and to facilitate better public access.

Demand for council services is changing as a result of the pandemic. In some services, we have backlogs of work that accrued during the periods where services have been required to stop. For example, many regulatory functions carried out by environmental health officers were suspended for those professionals to concentrate on supporting Public Health Wales in protecting the public health; neighbourhood management services were severely curtailed in order to maintain refuse and recycling services; care and support services for disabled people and unpaid carers were temporarily disrupted to protect the NHS; and there are many issues presenting across our schools and wider services for children and young people as the impact on children and young people's wellbeing becomes apparent.

Additional demand is also being seen in many other services. For example, many residents used the additional time spent at home to have a good clear out, increasing demand on waste services; there has been a sharp increase in planning applications as residents re-purpose holiday budgets for home improvements; the move to an 'all-in' policy has significantly increased the demands on Council homelessness services - this will be a permanent change in policy; the impact of the restrictions on daily living has also resulted in an increase in the number of people with complex needs, particularly in relation to the impact restrictions have had on people's mental health.

These increased demands are occurring at a time when the local labour market has bounced back much more strongly than initially anticipated. There are more jobs available in the economy and consequently more competition amongst employers seeing to fill vacancies. The combination of increased demand and greater competition for labour means that pressures are acute across many council services. A service resilience framework has been approved by the Cabinet to respond to these increased demands.

Impact on Inequality

The evidence demonstrates that the poorest areas have experienced the greatest impact both in terms of health and financial impacts. Those who faced the greatest disadvantage prior to the pandemic have been hardest hit and as a

consequence inequalities across Neath Port Talbot have widened. Addressing these inequalities will be a cross cutting theme across all of the recovery actions we propose to take in the short, medium and longer term.

3. Re-open and Recover

Since the Welsh Government moved to Level Zero in August 2021, we have been focused on the re-opening and recovery phases. The increase in social mixing since Wales moved to Level Zero triggered a third wave of the virus and at the time of writing, a new variant of concern – Omicron – had been identified and a fourth wave was underway. We continued to support our NHS through this re-open and recover period, flexing our Test, Trace, Protect response as community transmission spread whilst also continuing to offer practical assistance through use of our premises and other facilities. Over this period, we have also started to more fully understand the deeper impact of the pandemic, with more people coming forward for services, often with more complex needs, whilst also giving attention to the backlog of work in those services that were re-purposed earlier in the pandemic as we resourced the first phase of response.

Our priorities during this phase are summarised below:

Supporting our NHS	Keeping Essential Services Running	Helping our Communities and our Economy to Recover
Continue to adapt our Test, Trace, Protect Service to help stop the spread of the virus	Social care – Trem-y-glyn care home contract extended for 12 months to retain capacity in the system; 10% uplift in fees to external providers to aid recruitment and retention of carers; recruitment task force to increase the pool of available carers	Community Support - Additional £640,000 investment to improve community infrastructure eg upgrades to play facilities, support to sports clubs etc

<p>Continue to amplify the key public health messages issued by the Government and ensure those hardest to reach get and understand important public health advice.</p>	<p>Streetscene – additional investment to ‘catch up, clean up, green up’ neighbourhoods across the county borough and increase resilience for drainage works</p>	<p>Early Intervention and Prevention - Additional £250,000 grant support to third sector organisations to develop new preventative services in communities with a particular focus on people who are lonely and isolated. As part of this we have also expanded the number of Local Area Co-ordinators and integrated their work with NPT Safe and Well.</p>
<p>Continue to make buildings and other facilities available to support the mass vaccination and testing efforts</p>	<p>Engineering, planning, transport and regeneration – additional investment to respond to the increased number of planning applications; inward investment enquiries; business enquiries and grant opportunities</p>	<p>Town Centres - Two assistant town centre managers have been employed to work with traders and other town centre stakeholders to help the towns recover. Town centre forums are in place in Neath, Port Talbot and Pontardawe - programmes of events are being co-ordinated across partners to Christmas 2021 and then on a rolling programme basis</p>
<p>Continue to apply the policy of work from home where possible and ensure Government advice is adhered to in all Council controlled settings.</p>	<p>Schools – support to school leaders to support continuity of learning; recruitment campaign to increase the number of catering and cleaning staff</p>	<p>Town Centre anti-social behaviour – this has been significantly reduced in Neath and Port Talbot town centres through the work of the NPT Community Safety Partnership</p>
<p>Increased investment in Emergency Planning core team to maintain and adjust emergency preparedness</p>	<p>Environmental Health – additional investment to begin to catch up on paused inspection activity</p>	<p>Business Support – A small business grant scheme established by the council to support local businesses ineligible for WG financial support. Grants of up to £20k will be available from early 2022.</p>

	<p>Digital Services – additional investment to support the rapid expansion of digital technologies</p>	<p>Town Centres - Free parking for part of the summer and Christmas periods to encourage greater footfall to town centres</p>
	<p>Homelessness – increased capacity to support the ‘all-in’ policy introduced by the Welsh Government</p>	<p>Improvements have been made in key tourism locations to help with the management of visitors e.g. Glynneath; Afan Valley</p>
		<p>Increased number of opportunities for young people to take up employment within the council, including engagement with the Government’s Kickstart programme</p>
		<p>A programme of events across the country parks and Council theatres has been established</p>
		<p>A programme of events for children and young people facing the greatest disadvantage has been delivered as part of the Summer of Fun</p>
		<p>Business Support – The council has continued to administer financial support to businesses and eligible individuals</p>
		<p>Hardship Support – the council is administering Welsh Government hardship schemes e.g. self-isolation payments, free school meal payments etc.</p>
		<p>Food Poverty – the council is working with local organisations to increase help and support for those experiencing food poverty</p>

4. Reset and Renew

The remainder of this Plan describes how we will approach the Reset and Renewal Phase as we move into 2022. It is grounded in what matters to local people, businesses, community organisations and wider stakeholders. It takes account of the new Welsh Government's Programme for Government, the associated Co-operation Agreement and other developments we anticipate will shape our future priorities such as climate change, the continued digital disruption and likely financial settlements. It also complements and can be integrated into local partnership plans and other regional or wider area work, including the revision of the Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board's Wellbeing Plan.

Covid-19 – ongoing response

The availability of vaccines and improved treatments is already have a beneficial impact however, the course of the pandemic remains far from certain and we will need to sustain and adapt our Covid-19 response for the foreseeable future. Key areas of focus will continue to be:

- **Helping to protect the public health** – we will do this through our Test, Trace, Protect Service and through the work we continue to lead regionally to warn and inform our residents and businesses about the steps they need to take to keep themselves and others safe and well;
- **Supporting and Protecting our NHS** – we will continue to offer facilities and other help to support testing and vaccination programmes. We will also work through our Regional Partnership Board to ensure there are joined up arrangements between primary care; hospitals, our social services and wider community services and support.
- **Implementing Government Policy** - we will provide advice and guidance to ensure people and businesses comply with any government COVID-19 regulations in force and we will continue to provide assistance to government, for example, administering financial hardship payments to local businesses and residents.
- **Maintaining essential services** – we will ensure we remain prepared to respond to changing circumstances, adjusting our service delivery with a focus on maintaining essential services that our local businesses and residents rely upon.

The next sections summarise the evidence we have used to develop the four well-being objectives that provide a framework for our reset and renew phase.

Let's Talk

Over the summer 2021, we ran a campaign to engage people from all backgrounds and of all ages with a view to testing our understanding of how the pandemic has impacted on different parts of our county borough and to also understand what matters most to local people as we take forward our recovery work. Almost 1,800 people engaged with the campaign with a mix of on-line and off-line surveys completed and supplemented by focus groups in our five valleys.

Capturing the views and opinions of local businesses and residents at an early stage in our planning has enabled us to shape our four well-being objectives and associated actions on what matters locally. The summer campaign sought views at a much earlier point in the planning process than is usual. It is our firm intention to continue to engage with people as we move into implementation and as we review and refine the plan over the coming years. This change in approach reflects a renewed commitment to working with our communities, local businesses and partners and it is also enshrined in our new values.

There is a separate, comprehensive report that describes what people said as part of our Let's Talk campaign. The main themes are summarised below:

What matters to you now?

The ten responses most frequently mentioned were as follows:

1. Friends and family (including pets)	6. Health/wellbeing/mental health
2. Returning to normality (easing restrictions)	7. Investing in and protecting the economy/jobs/local businesses
3. Health (mine and my family, friends, neighbours)	8. Leisure/hobbies recreation
4. Staying/keeping safe	9. Community relations/spirit/bringing people together/volunteering
5. Education/keeping open	10. Socialising

In the words of respondents...

'Family, health, friends and making memories'

'That children are given more opportunity to grow, learn and be confident to know they are valuable in our communities and they ALL have strengths'

'Helping people recover from the mental and physical impacts of the pandemic. Particularly social anxiety'

'Heritage and its preservation now matters to me. The past must be cared for'

'There needs to be a concerted effort to eradicate this virus from taking any more lives.'

'Seeing my friends and family. Ensuring our important local green spaces are improved for nature and are protected/managed for people to continue to use. Doing my best to deliver and push for positive action to address the climate and nature emergencies.'

'People get back to some sort of way of life, communities get much needed support to revamp parks/ gardens and fields with benches where people can go and sit and meet friends neighbours outdoors'

'The area needs a clean-up. The town centre and surrounding areas need attention'

'Supporting local businesses by helping them become far more resilient.'

'Safe streets, people's behaviour'

'A safe future for my children, with equal opportunities for the children living up in the valleys as to those in towns'

'Keeping my business open and having more family time events etc locally to attend'

'Keeping covid under control working towards the cessation of global warming'

'Reducing the council tax'

What matters to you in the future?

The ten responses most frequently mentioned were as follows:

1. Friends and family (including pets)	6. Returning to normality (easing restrictions)
2. Investing in and protecting the economy/jobs/local businesses	7. Work-life balance, working from home, office environment
3. Education/keeping open	8. Community relations/spirit/bringing people together/volunteering
4. Environment, climate crisis, recycling, maintaining green spaces	9. Staying/keeping safe
5. Health and wellbeing/mental health	10. Health (mine and my family, friends, neighbours)

In the words of respondents...

'The facilities in the village are enhanced.'

'My child's education she has missed'

'That Port Talbot gets cleaned up and a great place to go'

'Health, Crime rates, Policing'

'Opportunities/activities for teenagers within the town. Continuing a slower pace of life. Reconnecting with friends.'

'Having services starting to re-open again and looking at what services are needed for people in the community'

'I would like to see that community feeling that we had in the beginning. I feel as though we appreciate the our natural environment and want to see more focus on looking after what we have'

'Helping my children catch up on things they've lost. Concentrating on ensuring their mental health has not been adversely affected, striking a real balance between work and free time.'

'NHS at local and wider area response. Help for community centres.'

'The education of my children without continual disruption. The school experience for my children i.e. concerts, activities. The ability for my children to interact in groups and activities outside of school. Building on the work/life balance offered by working from home. The development of towns and high streets The parks and open spaces'

'Things are put in place to prevent future lockdowns, Neath Port Talbot continues to redevelop and invest in order to continue to improve for all that live there.'

'Capitalising on the agile working acceleration covid created and a thriving community'

'Concerned about what the future will be like, with all services diminishing less things being done to keep the areas clean and tidy, I understand about lack of money and staff shortages but every street looks dreadful, grass, weeds and littering. I wish that something could be done about the current anti-social behaviour in the community but more in the towns, if this could be addressed and acted upon with fines that suit the crimes as otherwise not going to be a very bright future.'

Our elderly neighbours feel safe, small steps. Our groups all get back together.

Valley Areas – Focus Groups

To ensure the Let's Talk campaign included all sections of the county borough, a number of focus groups were also held in valley areas. Residents in valley areas held many similar views to those who completed questionnaires. Additional issues raised in the focus groups highlighted the importance of transport; having greater levels of engagement with the council and concern about council tax levels.

In the words of the people who took part in the focus groups:

'It is assumed that you can get to a leisure centre or get to where the resources are put. It's not necessarily recognised that in the more rural areas, public transport is more difficult to get there,'

'I want transport for our children to do the extracurricular activities. If they're down the comprehensive in Port Talbot, I want to make sure they can do after school clubs, sports teams and training after school hours. I want them to have exactly the same start as the children all the way down from Cwmafan.'

'They always say we haven't got the money. We have one of the highest tax rates in Wales, where is the money going?'

'More of a partnership approach to service delivery with the wider third sector and local authority'

'...To actually listen to the needs of the community and the people that live in the communities and act upon them. Not a guess of what people need or do what they call a 'best interest'. Actually listen to the needs of the people and the communities. Each community is completely different.'

'There are no early buses at 6:30 for people working in factories or construction. There are no buses, to my knowledge, after 7:30 at night, so if you work shifts then you can't get home. Our bus service has gone to one every two hours.'

Megatrends

Whilst Covid-19 is a major consideration within our forward planning, there are also other important factors that need to be taken into account:

Megatrends	Key Issues
Poverty, deprivation and inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural inequalities were evident across the population prior to the pandemic. These structural issues have been accentuated as a result of the pandemic

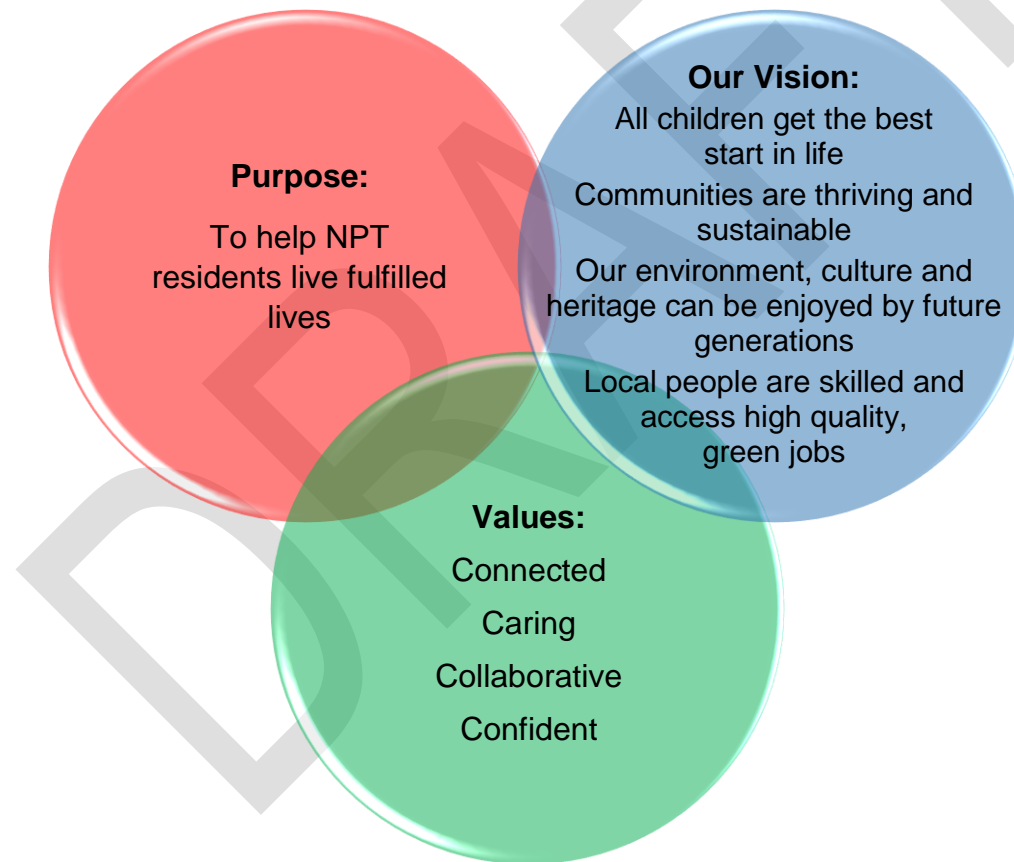
Public finances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The demand for greater spending on health and social care may squeeze spending on other services – many of which are highly valued by the public • Costs of dealing with the consequences of Covid-19 including impact on income generation • Uncertain public spending outlook including uncertainty over replacement EU funding
Green recovery and decarbonisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Society has more appetite for clean, sustainable growth • Government has signalled new policy and service responses needed to deliver on this agenda at pace • Residents have become more engaged with their local environment, heritage and culture
Digitisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covid-19 has accelerated the growth of the digital economy, bringing changes to working patterns and skills requirements • Adds to inequalities challenges but also brings new strategic risks – eg cyberthreat • Growth in on-line shopping likely to result in permanent changes to the use of town centres • The growth in data sciences offers new opportunities but also requires new ethical frameworks
Demographic change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NPT has a relatively older population • NPT has a relatively high proportion of unpaid carers and people living with life limiting conditions • NPT has a relatively deprived population using the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation
Future of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees likely to want a better work-life balance permanently • Shift to home working on a significant scale likely to continue with consequential impacts on the amount and type of office accommodation needed, the importance of appropriate digital infrastructure and consequential impacts on our main town centres • Working practices will need to permanently change to embed the health protection behaviours that will be needed on a long term basis to protect the public health

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater competition for labour in a very competitive labour market
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People have reconnected with their local environment, neighbourhoods and outdoor spaces• Social contact is the single biggest issue that matters to people. Opportunities for bringing people together are a priority for people of all ages
Government Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Welsh Government has published an ambitious programme for government and an accompanying Co-operation Agreement. There is a strong emphasis on reducing inequality, alleviating poverty and important commitments to put the provision of social care on a sustainable footing, with parity of esteem and terms and conditions with the NHS• There is a continued growth in complexity in governance arrangements with an increase in regional, pan-regional and local partnership arrangements

5. Resetting and Renewing our purpose, vision and values

The Council's vision, values, relationships and priorities has been reset and renewed taking into account:

- what matters to local people, businesses and our staff
- the impact that we know Covid-19 has had on our communities, our local economy and wider stakeholders;
- the lessons we have learned from our pandemic response and from elsewhere; and
- other anticipated changes in our external environment.



6. Achieving Our Vision

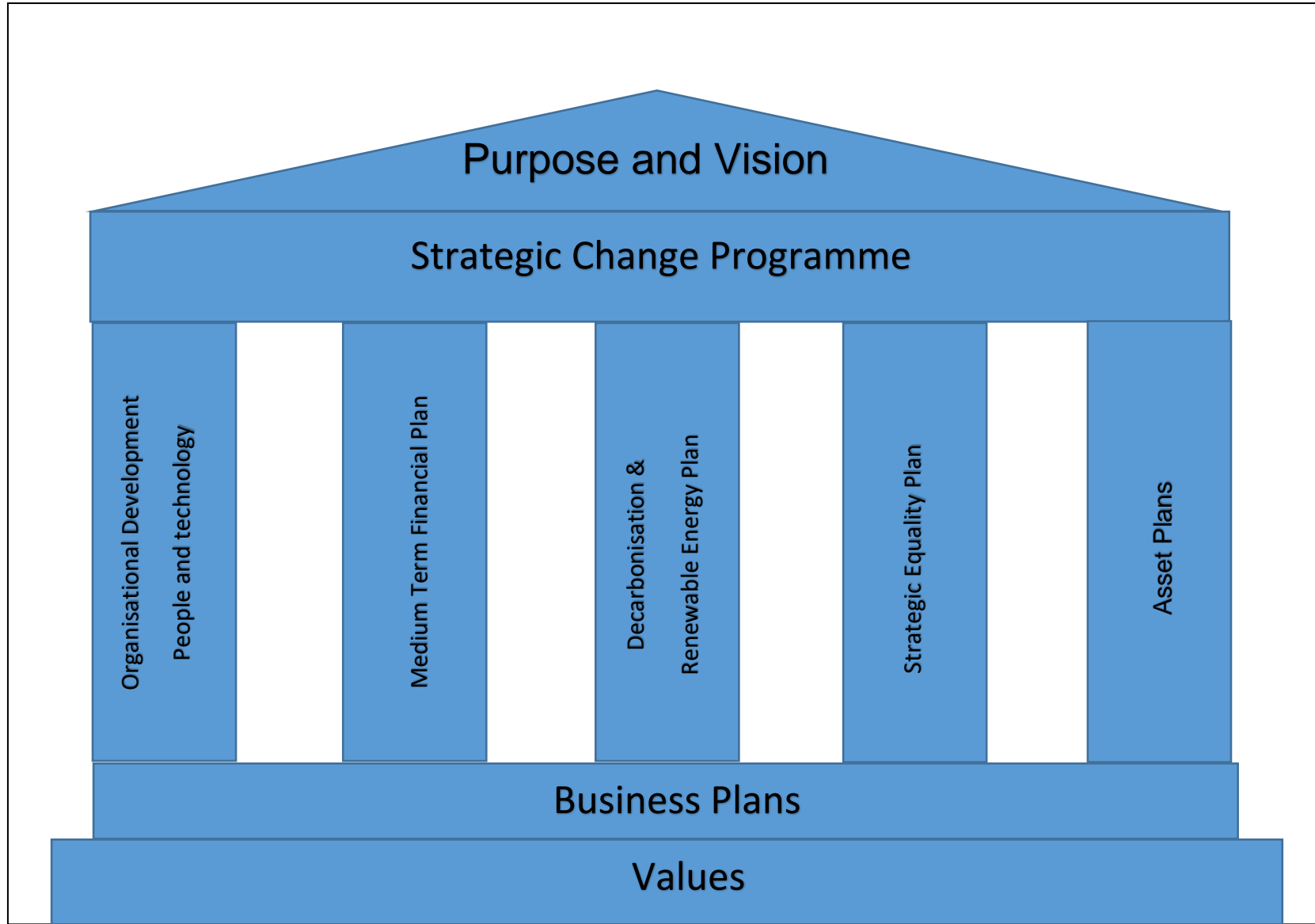
The work we will do to achieve our vision is organised at three levels:

Strategic Level - We will initiate a strategic change programme to ensure we are embracing a 'one council' strategic approach to achieving the vision. The key wellbeing objectives will initially include:

- All children get the best start in life
- Communities are thriving and sustainable
- Our environment, heritage and culture can be enjoyed by future generations
- Local people are skilled and can access high quality, green jobs
- Enabling Programme - Organisational Development

Corporate Level - corporate strategies will be realigned to support the achievement of the vision and the delivery of the strategic change programme.

Operational Level - Every service and function within the Council will align their service plans to maximise their contribution to achieving the vision that we have set.



7. Strategic Change Programme – Initial Focus

Our strategic change programme describes the changes we aim to make over the next 12 months, the next 5 years and the longer term. It will evolve over time but its initial focus will be as set out below. Further detail is contained in Annex 1:

Best Start in Life

All children have the best start in life

Next 12 months...

- Support our school leaders to keep schools open and help children and young people recover;
- Enhance play and leisure opportunities for children and young people;
- Make sure it is clear how early help and support can be accessed by those children and families who need it;
- Make sure 'what matters' to children and families is at the centre of the way we plan and provide our services;
- Work with the Welsh Government to increase access to free school meals and childcare;
- Make sure all those children in need of protection are safeguarded and they can grow up in a loving and stable family;
- Make sure it is clear for young people leaving full-time education how they move on to further training or education or work;
- Increase the number of work experience and apprenticeship opportunities offered by the Council to young people;
- Work with partners to refocus the Children and Young People's Partnership so that all services for children and families are easy to identify and use, meet people's needs and that our communities are child friendly;
- Finalise our Welsh in Education Strategic Plan to further strengthen our commitment to the Welsh Language, our traditions and culture;
- Establish new joint planning and commissioning arrangements for children who have additional needs

Communities are thriving and sustainable

People live healthy, long and fulfilled lives in thriving and sustainable communities where people get along together and support one another

Next 12 months...

- Further develop our work at neighbourhood level, mapping local assets (what's strong about each community) and mapping community vulnerabilities. Work with the community and other partners to identify opportunities for additional informal care and support networks to be developed.
- Expand the number of local area co-ordinators and bring greater consistency to the way they work across the county borough. Increase the number of people helped to connect with local informal care and support networks.
- Create a network of neighbourhood forums to increase opportunities for local people to participate in decisions that affect them and provide greater support for the work of local councillors in their ward.
- Provide seed funding for community and voluntary initiatives that strengthen early intervention and prevention support at the neighbourhood level.
- Work alongside the Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Service to encourage and further develop community and voluntary groups across the county borough.
- Introduce a corporate policy to encourage and support council staff to volunteer.
- Strengthen our neighbourhood management services and introduce a county borough wide programme to catch up, clean up and green up our neighbourhoods.
- Continue to promote and develop our 'Buy Local' initiative, encouraging local people to support their local businesses;
- Bring forward proposals to strengthen our housing strategy function;
- Begin to take the actions that will implement our commitment to the place making charter.

Our local environment, culture and heritage can be enjoyed by future generations

Natural processes are restored and they mitigate and have developed greater resilience to climate change.

People actively conserve, improve and enjoy our stunning natural environment, treasure the Welsh language and are actively engaged with the rich sporting, cultural and industrial heritage of the area.

Next 12 months...

- Establish a small grants scheme to help community groups and societies to recover from the pandemic;
- Introduce a community recognition initiative, led by the Mayor, to celebrate the important work being done by volunteers and community groups to enable future generations to appreciate, understand and enjoy our local environment, heritage and culture;
- Help to promote the work done by local groups, making it easier for others to appreciate, understand and enjoy our local environment, heritage and culture;
- Support and encourage volunteering including at council-owned nature sites;
- Establish a programme of training and development to enable our workforce to contribute to the conservation and enjoyment of our local environment, heritage and culture;
- Further develop and implement our Welsh language promotional strategy;
- Provide refresher training for officers responsible for carrying out impact assessments when undertaking policy and service change;
- Extend opportunities for children and young people to learn about their local environment, heritage and culture;
- Work with the community, local partners, funders and other stakeholders to set a new strategic direction for heritage and culture and for tourism/destination management;
- Refresh the council's decarbonisation and renewable energy plan and ensure there is increased momentum to implement measures to decarbonise the council's vehicle fleet and property portfolio;
- Seek external funding opportunities to conserve and enhance the local environment, culture and heritage;
- Strengthen planning and partnership arrangements so that greater weight is given to conserving and improving the local environment, heritage and culture.

Jobs and Skills

Working with our partners we create the conditions for more secure, well paid and green work in the area and help local people acquire the skills they need to access those jobs.

The next 12 months...

Skills and Training

- Review our training offer to help people adjust to the changing labour market;
- Create a 'single front door' to our employability services so that those seeking training and/or work find it easy to access the help and support that they need;
- Work with local employers to increase the number of quality apprenticeship opportunities and ensure these opportunities are seen as attractive to those seeking work;
- Further develop council procurement arrangements to ensure that the money spent by the council supports the employment of local people and the development of local businesses to the maximum extent possible;
- Develop clear pathways for local people interested in working in the council and further develop the council's employment 'offer' to attract, retain and develop a high performing public service that is rooted in its communities;
- Strengthen the council's business support team to help local businesses recruit skilled people and to help local learning providers to adapt learning provision to keep pace with the changing needs of employers;
- Initiate a local skills audit to identify the future work requirement of local employers and any shortfalls in the local learning provision.

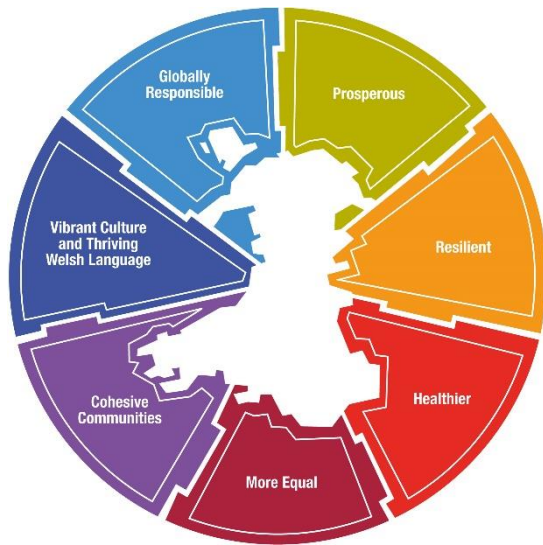
Jobs

- Launch the 'Invest in NPT' website to place business opportunities in NPT front and centre in Wales;
- Target businesses seeking to grow or expand within the decarbonisation and renewable energy sectors and encourage them to focus their growth plans within the county borough;
- Support local businesses in their recovery, providing financial support when available and helping businesses to diversify so that they are more resilient to future economic shocks;
- Work in areas within Neath Port Talbot where there is the greatest economic inactivity to target business support;
- Establish a manufacturing/engineering forum to improve networking opportunities within this sector and to provide improved opportunities for businesses to inform future plans and funding programmes;

- Develop an investment programme to enable the expansion of sites and premises across the county borough that can support the development and growth of local businesses;
- Develop a plan to create new transport hubs that improve connections between the places where people live and the places where people work, learn and enjoy their leisure time.

8. Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Our revised, purpose, vision, values and associated wellbeing objectives will contribute to achieving the wellbeing goals enshrined in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) act 2015, in working towards our vision we will adopt the five ways of working set out in the Act:



- Balancing short-term needs with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs
- Acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse
- Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of our own organisation) that could help us meet our well-being objectives
- Involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area we serve
- Considering how our well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, or on the objectives of other public bodies

9. Resetting Relationships – #TeamNPT

Over the course of the pandemic we have seen a transformation in relationships between the Council, our communities, businesses and wider partners, a transformation that we want to build on, putting our partnership working on an even stronger footing.

We have encapsulated the way we want to reset and renew our relationship with our residents and with our business community below. Over the next 12 months will undertake further work to reset and renew relationships with our local third sector and wider partners.

Resetting relationships with our residents

<u>OUR PART</u>	<u>YOUR PART</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be ambitious - believe in our county borough • Create the best opportunities for all of our children and young people • Build services around what matters to people • Encourage communities to be places where people get along together and support each other • Support the local economy to grow • Protect and support our natural environment and our rich heritage • Seek out new investment and provide value for money • Keep the Council Tax as low as possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be ambitious - believe in our county borough • Help protect and support children, young people and vulnerable residents • Use our on-line services • Tell us what matters to you and let us know if we get things wrong • Get involved in your community • Support local businesses • Be healthy and be active • Re-use items and re-cycle more • Enjoy and help protect our natural environment

Resetting our relationships with our business community

<u>OUR PART</u>	<u>YOUR PART</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create vibrant town centres for everyone to access and enjoy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use your town centre and buy local. Keep your town centres clean and tidy by not dropping litter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in more events, festivals and other initiatives that help people to come together and help local businesses to prosper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend events and help to organise them where you can
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote our area to investors so we can create good jobs for local people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be confident and access the help and support you need to help you start a business or take advantage of new jobs in the area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen our business support team to help people start new businesses and to help existing businesses to grow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy from local businesses where you can
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help residents to get the skills they need and help them find work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you run a business, take on an apprentice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay the living wage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are an employer, pay the living wage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy goods and services from local businesses where this is possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you run a business, learn how to bid for goods and services that are being procured by public services

10. How we will measure success and monitor progress

Our corporate performance management framework will measure the success of the delivery of this plan. It will include a range of measures and indicators that, taken together, will provide a picture of the difference / impact the work set out in this plan is making and how it is enabling people to live fulfilled lives.

The framework could include, but not limited to:

- Case studies that describe the difference this plan is making
- The experiences of residents via our ongoing Let's Talk conversation
- A set of specific, measurable output and outcome measures
- Data visualisation tools to better communicate the impact of this Plan

11. How will we resource the Plan

The priorities described for the next 12 months will be reflected in the revenue and capital budgets set for 2022/23. In early 2022 we will develop a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for discussion with the new council elected in May 2022. The MTFP will be the means through which the revenue and capital resources likely to be available over the term of the new council will be aligned with the longer term actions set out in Annex 1 and the priorities of the new council.

12. What happens next

The Council will undertake formal consultation on this plan for a four week period commencing 5th January 2022. The feedback from the consultation will be used to finalise the proposals with a view to the plan being approved by Council in early March 2022.

Recover, Reset, Renew
Strategic Change Programme

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Foreword

This document sets out the detail of the strategic change programme that will be initiated to enable the Council to achieve its revised purpose and vision. It is intended to be read alongside the Corporate Plan 2022-2027.

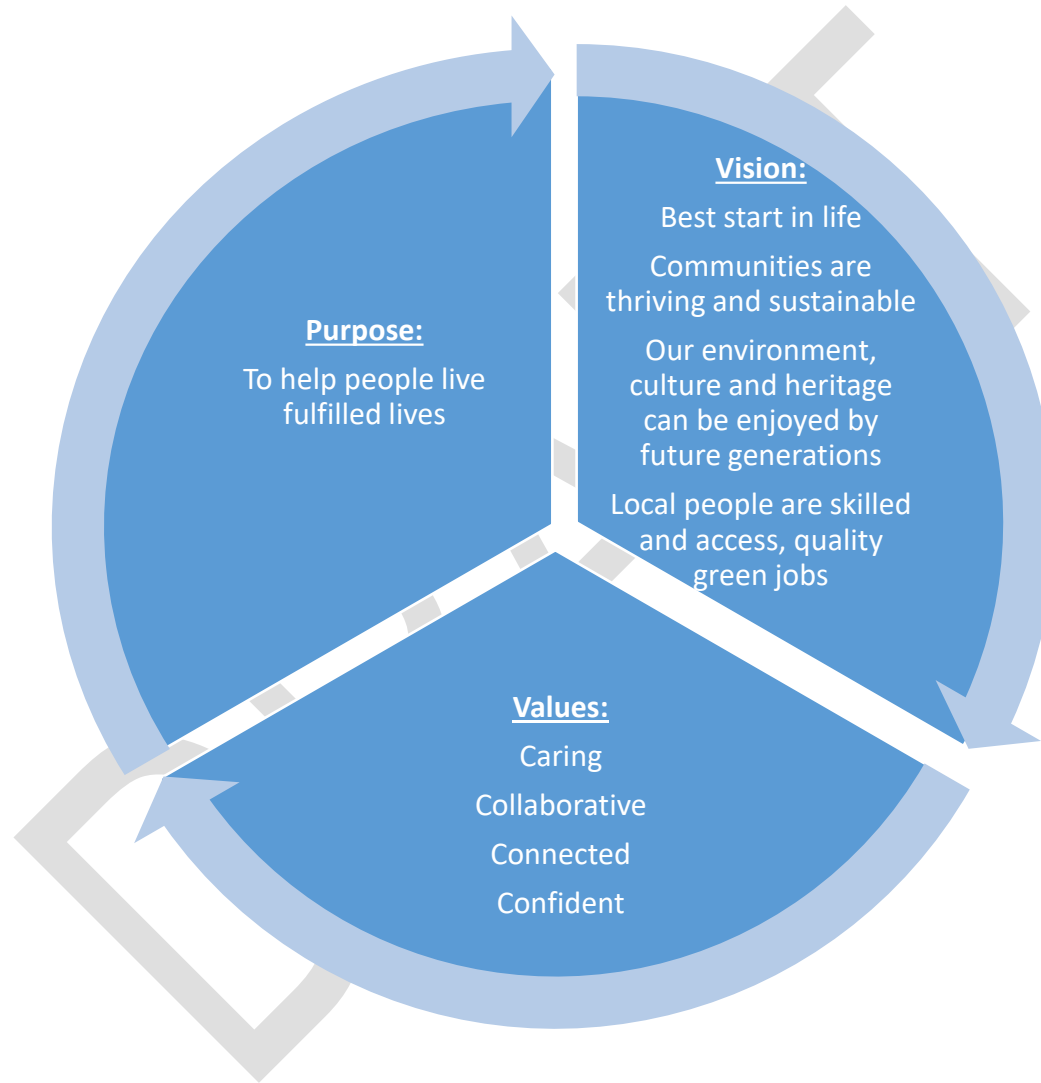
The programme will be built on the Council's revised values and will be adapted, where needed.

There are a number of specific actions to be taken in 2022/23 which have evolved from the analysis of how Covid-19 has impacted across Neath Port Talbot. The programme also takes account of the new Programme for Government, associated Co-operation Agreement and wider factors. It will be adjusted, as necessary, following the Local Government Election in May 2022 to reflect the incoming Administration's priorities.

Cllr E V Latham
Leader of Council

Mrs K Jones
Chief Executive

Purpose, Vision and Values



People live fulfilled lives

Best Start in Life

Thriving, sustainable communities

Sustaining environment, heritage & culture

Jobs and Skills

Organisational Development

Workforce development | Digital transformation | data sciences
Deeper intergration of services which are user centred | Hybrid working

Caring

Connected

Confident

Collaborative

Draft Well-being Objective 1

Every child has the best start in life.

In 20 years' time...

- All children and young people will be:
 - ▶ ambitious, capable learners;
 - ▶ enterprising, creative contributors;
 - ▶ ethical, informed citizens; and
 - ▶ healthy, confident individuals.
- There will be a shared culture across the county borough that supports aspiration and ambition for all children and young people;
- Inequalities in health, education and economic outcomes will have reduced;
- All families in need will have access to high quality early help and support services and these are ensuring children are ready for learning when they start school and families are being helped to move out of poverty;
- We will have completed a programme of school reorganisation and have the right schools in the right place and all children and young people are accessing the schools that are right for them, first time, every time;
- The Council will be systematically removing the barriers to learning and aspiration by convening and working in partnership with other services and agencies that touch the lives of children and young people;
- We will have created an environment that secures access to learning and opportunities for all children, young people and adults in order that they reach their potential and their ambition;
- We will be championing the needs of all learners, particularly our vulnerable and disadvantaged, and building strong relationships with families, schools and communities;

- We will have created environments where learning is a safe, nurturing and fulfilling experience in all settings, where there is respect and due regard to equality, diversity and inclusion; and
- We will be working in partnership to ensure that schools and other providers meet the learning needs of all their pupils and students, building professional capital and collective responsibility throughout the system and ensuring that literacy and numeracy are at the heart of learners' development.

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Why is this important?

Covid-19 has had a significant, adverse impact on children and young people, with disruption to their learning and consequences for their social development and physical and mental wellbeing;

35% of children aged 7-24 live in the 20% most deprived wards in Wales;

84% of children entered nursery without the appropriate literacy, language and communication skills to access the curriculum;

27% of pupils of school age are entitled to free school meals;

Flying Start offers support for approximately 1,800 children per year having approximately 79% of pupils lie outside Flying Start areas which results in inequality of support;

A significant percentage of pupils finish statutory education without the expected levels in language, mathematics and science;

Over half of the pupils who are eligible for free school meals do not achieve a grade C or above in either language or mathematics;

Too many children and young people are being excluded from schools on a fixed term and permanent basis;

At least a quarter of children in our schools have a known or identified additional learning need;

2,237 young people aged 16-24 are economically inactive in Neath Port Talbot – some of these consider themselves unfit for work due to mental health issues; and

The Welsh Government has set a target that 1 million people will speak Welsh by 2050 and we need to play our part in helping to achieve this.

What matters to children and young people?

325 children and young people took part in the Let's Talk campaign and expressed their views about what mattered to them now and what mattered to them as they thought about their futures. There were clear themes from their responses:

- Being safe;
- Being happy;
- Having a stable home life;
- Spending time with family, friends and pets;
- School – getting a good education;
- Growing up to be strong and healthy;
- Having good quality parks, sports facilities and other youth services;
- Having enough money;
- Being able to get a job and being able to afford to live in decent accommodation; and
- Affordable buses to access services.

Moving Forward

In the next 12 months...

- Support our school leaders to keep schools open and help children and young people recover;
- We will make sure it is clear how early help and support can be accessed by those children and families who need it;
- 'What matters' to children and families will be at the centre of the way we plan and provide our services;
- We will work with the Welsh Government to increase access to free school meals and childcare;
- All those children in need of protection are safeguarded and they can grow up in a loving and stable family;
- Young people leaving full-time education will be helped to move on to further training or education or work;
- We will build on our role as corporate parents and help young people leaving care to have appropriate support and accommodation;
- We will increase the number of work experience and apprenticeship opportunities offered by the Council to young people;
- We will work with partners to refocus the Children and Young People's Partnership so that all services for children and families are easy to identify and use, meet people's needs and that our communities are child friendly;
- Our Welsh in Education Strategic Plan will be finalised, further strengthening our commitment to the Welsh Language, our traditions and culture;
- New joint planning and commissioning arrangements for children who have additional needs will be established.

In the next 5 years...

- More children are better prepared to learn when they start school;
- Arrangements for supporting young people when they finish their statutory education will improve with all children going on to training, education or work;

- Education reforms related to the curriculum and support for pupils with additional learning needs will be embedded and these changes are raising standards across our education system;
- We will progress our Strategic Schools Improvement Programme increasing the number of 21st Century learning and teaching environments available for children and young people;
- We will increase the number of Welsh medium school places in line with our targets within the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan;
- More young people will have registered to vote and will be using their vote in Welsh elections;
- The number of children and young people excluded from school will have reduced;
- Play and leisure services will have improved and youth services will have been enhanced;
- All children know and understand their rights and responsibilities; and
- Services for children and young people are aligned across sectors so that the needs of children and families are identified early and support is joined up across agencies and improving people's life changes and outcomes.

Making a Difference - Measuring Progress

We want to work with partners and stakeholders to consider the best ways to measure the difference we make.

Measures to be developed:

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Linked Plans and Partnership

Plans

- NPT Public Services Board Wellbeing Plan
- NPT Local Development Plan
- NPT Welsh Language Promotion Strategy
- NPT Active Travel Plan
- NPT Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
- NPT Strategic Equality Plan

Partnerships

- Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board
- NPT Think Family Partnership
- NPT Adult Learning Network
- NPT District Sports Council
- Partneriaeth – regional education consortium
- South West Wales Regional Skills and Learning Partnership

Draft Well-being Objective 2

People live healthy, long and fulfilled lives in thriving and sustainable communities where people get along together and support one another

In 20 years' time...

- Every community is thriving;
- Inequalities in health, economic and social outcomes have reduced;
- People are involved in decisions that affect them, more people are involved in community life;
- People are welcoming of newcomers and treat each other with respect; every individual is included and has an equal voice;
- People can access good quality, affordable, low carbon housing in their community;
- People are connected within their community; communities are connected to each other and the wider world through good quality digital services and transport networks;
- People are resilient; they respect and take care of their environment and they can come together and act at times of crisis;
- Communities are age and disability friendly;
- Communities are pleasant, clean, safe and green;
- Vulnerable people are supported in their community through a range of informal and formal care and support networks;
- Communities can access a range of quality services necessary for daily living; and
- Communities benefit from a high quality of design that reflects the unique heritage and characteristics of each place.

Why is this important?

Covid-19 has had an adverse impact on many people with more people becoming lonely and isolated. There has been a disproportionate impact on young people, women and people from BME backgrounds;

There were 144,000 people living in NPT in 2021. This is expected to grow to 147,000 by the mid-2030s;

The population is aging – the number of people retired is growing but the number of young people is declining;

People are living for longer and living healthier lives but life expectancy and health life expectancy is below the rest of Wales and the gap between those who are best and worst off is significant;

GVA (Gross Added Value) is lower than the Welsh average;

23.8% of children are eligible for free school meals;

There are estimated to be over 20,000 unpaid carers in the county borough;

There is a need for more affordable housing of a good quality; and

We expect to see a 35% increase in those aged 65+ who will be living alone by 2035.

What matters to people?

We heard from over 1,800 people during our Let's Talk campaign. During periods of lockdown, people have rediscovered the importance of their family, friends and wider community. What they said matters to them now and as we look further into the future is captured below:

- Contact and being able to spend time with family, friends and pets;
- Being safe;
- Being healthy and making sure family and friends are healthy; good access to health services;
- Having a secure job and a good work-life balance;
- Children have access to good education and schools stay open;
- Having good relationships within the community and having events that bring people together;
- The arts, our culture and heritage;
- Better bus services;
- Cleaner and better maintained streets and green spaces;
- More and cheaper outdoor leisure facilities;
- More support and facilities for young people;
- Ensuring elderly and vulnerable people are supported; and
- Better interaction with the council.

Moving Forward

In the next 12 months...

- Further develop our work at neighbourhood level, mapping local assets (what's strong about each community) and mapping community vulnerabilities. Work with the community and other partners to identify opportunities for additional informal care and support networks to be developed;
- Expand the number of local area co-ordinators and bring greater consistency to the way they work across the county borough. Increase the number of people helped to connect with local informal care and support networks;
- Create a network of neighbourhood forums to increase opportunities for local people to participate in decisions that affect them and provide greater support for the work of local councillors in their ward;
- Provide seed funding for community and voluntary initiatives that strengthen early intervention and prevention support at the neighbourhood level;
- Work alongside the Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Service to encourage and further develop community and voluntary groups across the county borough;
- Introduce a corporate policy to encourage and support council staff to volunteer;
- Strengthen our neighbourhood management services and introduce a county borough wide programme to catch up, clean up and green up our neighbourhoods;
- Continue to promote and develop our 'Buy Local' initiative, encouraging local people to support their local businesses;
- Continue to work through our community safety partnership to address the problems posed by alcohol, illegal drugs, domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour;
- Bring forward proposals to strengthen our housing strategy function; and
- Begin to take the actions that will implement our commitment to the place making charter.

In the next 5 years...

- Work with communities to develop a clear and detailed understanding of what is strong about each community and what communities want to achieve for the future;
- Complete detailed mapping of community assets and hot spots;
- Deliver training to council staff so they understand the principles of community development and have the skills and confidence to put those principles into practice;
- Support the development of more community groups and greater numbers of volunteers;
- Work with the community to prevent problems from happening or getting worse;
- Improve connectivity, both digital and transport;
- Improve the range and quality of informal and formal support for elderly and vulnerable residents;
- Seek out funding to improve the quality of the public realm; help to sustain and develop community hubs;
- Improve facilities and services for young people;
- Work with developers to increase the supply of quality, affordable and low carbon housing; help residents to reduce the carbon emissions of their homes; and
- Use our place making charter to ensure community developments bring out the characteristics of what is distinctive about each place.

Making a Difference - Measuring Progress

We want to work with partners and stakeholders to consider the best ways to measure the difference we make.

Measures might include:

- Poverty indicators
- Life expectancy and health indicators
- Social mobility and educational indicators
- Crime and disorder indicators
- Level of service interventions to families within the area
- Measures of how the local people feel

Linked Plans and Partnership

Plans

- NPT Public Services Board Wellbeing Plan
- NPT Local Development Plan
- NPT Welsh Language Promotion Strategy
- NPT Active Travel Plan
- NPT Strategic Equality Plan
- West Glamorgan Area Plan

Partnerships

- Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board
- NPT Think Family Partnership
- West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Board

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Draft Well-being Objective 3

Natural processes are restored and they mitigate and have developed greater resilience to climate change. People actively conserve, improve and enjoy our stunning natural environment, treasure the Welsh language and are actively engaged with the rich sporting, cultural and industrial heritage of the area.

In 20 years' time...

- More people speak the Welsh language and Welsh is an integral part of everyday life;
- People will value and cherish our local natural environment and have reversed the decline in our wildlife; our most precious sites will be in improved condition and connected via a network of green corridors;
- People will have restored natural processes to mitigate and develop greater resilience to the effects of climate change;
- Our urban areas will embrace and include space for nature that can be enjoyed by everyone;
- Residents of all ages across Neath Port Talbot will talk about the local environment, culture, sports and heritage with pride and confidence and more people will be actively involved in the conservation of our environment, culture and heritage;
- Local culture and heritage will be visible, brought to life through high quality, sustainable design that celebrates the past and connects it to the county borough's ambitions for the future;
- The area will be a destination of choice for people to live, work and spend their leisure time. The area will have built a reputation for excellence in the way it promotes a strong sense of belonging through heritage, the arts, sport and culture and supports everyone to connect to the natural environment and to enjoy a high quality of wellbeing; and
- We will increase the appeal of our area as a visitor destination by building upon our sense of place and encouraging sustainable development. Visitors will be encouraged to act responsibly for the benefit of our communities and local environment.'

Why is this important?

Heritage is integral to our culture, people's sense of identity and sense of belonging which in turn impacts on people's health, wellbeing and social inclusion. Heritage and culture also contributes to the economy, supporting paid employment, helping to attract inward investment and generating value through voluntary action – part of our wider place shaping agenda.

The Welsh language is a very important part of our heritage and culture. We support the Welsh Government's Cymraeg 2050 ambition to achieve a million people able to enjoy speaking Welsh by 2050.

The importance of protecting our natural environment has, of course, never been so prominent. The Welsh Government officially declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and a Nature Emergency in 2021, recognising the significance of these two interrelated challenges and the urgency in tackling them. . The natural environment is vital to our communities and provides us with all our basic needs. It gives us all a better quality of life and opportunities to enjoy the outdoors and Wales' natural beauty and heritage. People come from far and wide to experience our environment and it is intrinsically linked with Welsh culture and language.

While the area has many strengths, it also experiences relatively high levels of poverty, deprivation, ill-health and disability. There is a strong focus on encouraging people of all ages and from all backgrounds to adopt active lifestyles to improve physical and emotional wellbeing. There is also a need to grow more quality jobs in the local leisure and tourism industry and to continue the long tradition of fostering local talent to achieve success as elite athletes and to perform on the world stage.

What Matters to Local People

Through our Let's Talk campaign, local people have told us that their local environment, the Welsh Language and our heritage and culture matters to them. They want us to:

- Keep the past alive, promoting and celebrating our heritage to strengthen our sense of identity and sense of belonging ;
- Help to protect, preserve and maintain our historic and heritage sites for present and future generations;
- Promote our Welsh language, traditions and culture;
- Help all generations to connect with our natural environment, heritage and culture;
- Improve facilities for walking and cycling;and
- Help our community and voluntary groups to sustain and further develop their important work.

Without a clear commitment to action, there is a risk that we will see irreversible, further damage to our natural environment, a further decline in the use of the Welsh language and our traditions, culture and important heritage sites will be lost to future generations.

With the right actions, we can reverse the changes we have seen in our natural environment, increase the use of the Welsh language and preserve and build upon our traditions and heritage to make a positive impact on economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing positioning Neath Port Talbot as place where people want to live, work, learn and spend their leisure time.

Moving Forward

In the next 12 months...

- Establish a small grants scheme to help community groups and societies to recover from the pandemic;
- Introduce a community recognition initiative, led by the Mayor, to celebrate the important work being done by volunteers and community groups to enable future generations to appreciate, understand and enjoy our local environment, heritage and culture;
- Help to promote the work done by local groups, making it easier for others to appreciate, understand and enjoy our local environment, heritage and culture;
- Support and encourage volunteering at council-owned nature sites;
- Establish a programme of training and development to enable our workforce to contribute to the conservation and enjoyment of our local environment, heritage and culture;
- Further develop and implement our Welsh language promotional strategy;
- Provide refresher training for officers responsible for carrying out impact assessments when undertaking policy and service change;
- Extend opportunities for children and young people to learn about their local environment, heritage and culture;
- Work with the community, local partners, funders and other stakeholders to set a new strategic direction for heritage and culture and for tourism/destination management;
- Refresh the council's decarbonisation and renewable energy plan and ensure there is increased momentum to implement measures to decarbonise the council's vehicle fleet and property portfolio;
- Seek external funding opportunities to conserve and enhance the local environment, culture and heritage;
- Strengthen planning and partnership arrangements so that greater weight is given to conserving and improving the local environment, heritage and culture;
- Deliver our planned programme of projects and service changes to improve access to local sport, leisure, culture and heritage; deliver planned projects to conserve our local environment:

In the next 5 years...

- Work with our community groups, partners and stakeholders to define a programme of flagship heritage and culture projects for the county borough; begin to deliver the new culture strategy;
- Work with our community groups, partners and stakeholders to extend our work to help nature recover and to improve the quality of and access to our natural environment; further implement our biodiversity plan;
- Extend our active travel network and improve public rights of way to reduce reliance on private vehicles and encourage more people to walk and cycle;
- Implement our new leisure strategy to improve access to high quality leisure and recreational opportunities;
- Work with partners to further develop flood and pollution mitigation measures;
- Work with partners to establish the county borough's brand as a destination of choice across the UK and internationally; implement our destination management plan;
- Develop a clear understanding of how the environment, heritage, sport and culture can contribute to a stronger, more sustainable economy;
- Work with communities and partners to engender a greater sense of stewardship, encouraging them to take a more active role in the ongoing management and improvement of their local environment.
- Embed the history of the local environment, heritage and nature into the curriculum and ensure all schools have access to environmental and outdoor learning opportunities
- Continue to work with partners to facilitate the transition from traditional energy sources to more sustainable energy sources with an emphasis on the delivery of the City Deal programme and the opportunities created through the establishment of the Swansea Bay Corporate Joint Committee to decarbonise industry, housing and transport; implement our revised decarbonisation and renewable energy plan;
- Increase the proportion of the Council's budget spent on greener alternatives for goods and services and which are sourced locally and within the region, strengthening our foundational and circular economy.
- Promote the benefits of buying local to residents, businesses and partners.

Making a Difference - Measuring Progress

We want to work with partners and stakeholders to consider the best ways to measure the difference we make.

Measures might include:

- Increased public participation in heritage and culture, sports and other recreational activities
- Wider access to the local environment, heritage and culture activities and extended reach
- Increased investment in Neath Port Talbot's creative talent, product and profile
- Successful funding bids
- Number and scope of new or expanded collaborative projects
- Media coverage, marketing, promotion and publicity
- Increased visitor numbers and spend
- Increased number of stakeholders/ businesses/ partners supported to deliver new or proposed tourism developments
- Reduced levels of CO2 emissions
- Increased participation in reduce, re-use and recycling activity
- Increased proportion of Council spend in local and regional supply chains

- Improvements in air quality
- Increased environmental volunteering
- Increased area of council owned land used as green space, local nature reserves
- Increased area of council owned land supporting habitats/species populations in favourable condition.

Linked Plans and Partnership

Plans

- NPT Public Services Board Wellbeing Plan
- National Resources Wales: Area Statement
- NPT Decarbonisation and Renewable Energy Strategy (DARE)
- NPT Biodiversity Plan
- NPT Destination Management Plan
- NPT Local Development Plan
- NPT Welsh Language Promotion Strategy
- NPT Active Travel Plan
- Gnoll Masterplan
- Afan Forest Park Masterplan
- NPT Strategic Equality Plan

Partnerships

- Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board
- NPT District Sports Council
- NPT Destination Management Plan Steering Group
- Afan Forest Park Tourism Group
- NPT Heritage Forum
- NPT Nature Partnership
- Lost Peatlands Steering Group
- Connecting Green Infrastructure Group
- NPT Public Services Board
- Swansea Bay City Region Joint Committee/Corporate Joint Committee

Draft Well-being Objective 4

Jobs and Skills

Working with our partners we create the conditions for more secure, well paid and green work in the area and support local people into those jobs

In 20 years' time...

There is a strong and diverse SME base in the county borough which benefits from well-co-ordinated support, premises and finance;

Transformation of major sites at Port Talbot, Baglan Energy Park, the Global Centre for Rail Excellence will be complete;

Significant, new economic benefits have been delivered through the decarbonisation of industry, housing and transport; the area is an exemplar for renewable, clean energy;

Town centres and communities are thriving;

We have made the most of our natural environment, heritage and cultural assets and have a significant, sustainable visitor economy;

There is much improved connectivity to work, learning and services;

There is a skilled and resilient local workforce with rates of workless households or economically inactive people at or below the Welsh average; and

There is a strong partnership between the council, the business community, local people and wider stakeholders.

Why is this important?

The world of work is changing rapidly, disrupted by the explosion in digital technology advances and now by the response to the climate emergency;

Covid-19 has caused an economic shock across the economy. Businesses have been affected in very different ways;

NPT has a distinctive industrial base which includes the UK's largest steel producer and a wide range of SME manufacturers;

NPT has a number of strategic employment sites and there are many opportunities for economic growth including new green jobs as industry and society decarbonises; the area is well served by rail, road and the deep water harbour is a strategic asset;

The local economy is reliant to a large extent on the activities of a small number of key industries;

88% of local businesses employ less than ten employees;

Start-up rates and business survival rates are on a par with the Welsh average;

There are significant numbers of people commuting into the county borough – possibly for the high quality of jobs; there are also significant number of people community out of the county borough for jobs of more modest value;

There are over 2,000 young people claiming Universal Credit in the county borough;

23,900 people of working age are economically inactive and there are approximately 9,000 households where there is no-one in paid work;

Over 17,000 households are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction Scheme discounts as a result of having a low family income;

Qualification levels are low across each level compared with the Welsh average;

European funding programmes will soon finish and the nature and timing of replacement funding is still uncertain;

What matters to local businesses?

- Being able to generate enough money to stay in business and have a good standard of living;
- Being able to adapt as markets change;
- Financial support to mitigate the impact of Covid-19;s
- Addressing anti-social behaviour, particularly in the towns;
- Creating employment and being a good employer;
- Transport – affects ability to employ people and customer volumes;
- Managing growth;
- Help with recruitment and with training;
- Maintaining and growing the customer base, business profile and marketing;
- Price and stability in the supply chain; energy costs;
- Digital connectivity and digital skills; and
- Help with sites and premises.

Moving Forward

In the next 12 months...

Skills and Training

- Review our training offer to help people adjust to the changing labour market;
- Create a 'single front door' to our employability services so that those seeking training and/or work find it easy to access the help and support that they need;
- Work with local employers to increase the number of quality apprenticeship opportunities and ensure these opportunities are seen as attractive to those seeking work;
- Further develop council procurement arrangements to ensure that the money spent by the council supports the employment of local people and the development of local businesses to the maximum extent possible;
- Develop clear pathways for local people interested in working in the council and further develop the council's employment 'offer' to attract, retain and develop a high performing public service that is rooted in its communities;
- Strengthen the council's business support team to help local businesses recruit skilled people and to help local learning providers to adapt learning provision to keep pace with the changing needs of employers;
- Initiate a local skills audit to identify the future work requirement of local employers and any shortfalls in the local learning provision.

Jobs

- Launch the 'Invest in NPT' website to place business opportunities in NPT front and centre in Wales;
- Target businesses seeking to grow or expand within the decarbonisation and renewable energy sectors and encourage them to focus their growth plans within the county borough;
- Support local businesses in their recovery, providing financial support when available and helping businesses to diversify so that they are more resilient to future economic shocks;
- Work in areas within Neath Port Talbot where there is the greatest economic inactivity to target business support;
- Establish a manufacturing/engineering forum to improve networking opportunities within this sector and to provide improved opportunities for businesses to inform future plans and funding programmes;

- Develop an investment programme to enable the expansion of sites and premises across the county borough that can support the development and growth of local businesses;
- Develop a plan to create new transport hubs that improve connections between the places where people live and the places where people work, learn and enjoy their leisure time.

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In the next 5 years...

Skills and Training

- Traineeship and apprenticeship programmes expand across the county borough; the council will offer a larger number of quality traineeship and apprenticeship opportunities;
- Employability programme are further strengthened ensuring that all those needing help to find work can access it, including those who are hardest to reach;
- Targeted programmes are developed to enable local people to benefit from the new employment created through inward investment;
- More young people will access opportunities to achieve a recognised qualification following completion of their statutory education;
- Partnership working to upskill those already in work or who wish to return to work will improve; more local people will hold qualifications at Level 4+ and are supported into local quality jobs; and
- The council's learning and development offer will be strengthened ensuring that all employees are supported to access lifelong learning opportunities and develop the confidence to advance their careers within the council.

Jobs

- Establish a strong gateway to business support increasing resilience to future economic shocks and helping to grow existing businesses and establish new businesses;
- Work with local businesses to increase access to public service contracts and new inward investment;
- Improve access to sites and premises – especially in the valley areas;
- Work with partners to take forward the major opportunities at Port Talbot Waterfront, Baglan Energy Park, Global Centre for Rail Excellence, Port Talbot Port and through the Council's Decarbonisation and Renewable Energy Strategy;
- Invest and attract investment into our principal towns, district centres and wider communities; respond to the demand for more flexible work spaces;
- Promote the visitor economy and unlock the potential of the natural environment, heritage and culture;

- Develop community based transport schemes to support access to work;
- Strengthen partnership arrangements at the local level to develop the economy ensuring business and communities have a strong voice in shaping future plans;
- Work through the new Corporate Joint Committee to deliver the Regional Economic Development Strategy;
- Increase capacity within the economic development, business support and regeneration teams to better position the council to bid for funding and develop the local economy;
- Assess the impact of the changes made to the Council's operating model and bring forward proposals to re-purpose assets that are surplus to requirements; this could include shared workspace hubs, hybrid office and research and development workspaces, starter units etc; and
- Improve digital connectivity.

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Making a Difference - Measuring Progress

We want to work with partners and stakeholders to consider the best ways to measure the difference we make.

Measures might include:

- Firm creation and survival - new business starts and survival rates over time
- Firm expansion – additional turnover or employment as a result of business expansion
- GVA – additional gross value added
- Private investment – private investment levered
- Additional floor space – sqm commercial space added
- Access to employment – additional people accessing employment
- Carbon savings – carbon emission savings delivered
- Skills – additional people gaining qualifications, especially Level 4+

Linked Plans and Partnership

Plans

- NPT Public Services Board Wellbeing Plan
- National Resources Wales: Area Statement
- South West Wales Regional Economic Development Strategy
- South West Wales Renewable Energy Strategy
- South West Wales Transport Plan
- NPT Decarbonisation and Renewable Energy Strategy (DARE)
- NPT Destination Management Plan
- NPT Local Development Plan
- NPT Welsh Language Promotion Strategy
- NPT Active Travel Plan
- Gnoll Masterplan
- Afan Forest Park Masterplan
- NPT Strategic Equality Plan

Partnerships

- Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board
- Swansea Bay City Deal
- South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee
- NPT Destination Management Plan Steering Group
- Afan Forest Park Tourism Group
- NPT Heritage Forum
- NPT Nature Partnership
- Port Talbot Waterfront – Enterprise Zone Partnership
- NPT Adult Learning Network

Enabling Programme

Significant organisational change is needed to deliver the well-being objectives, cultural change and associated programmes of work and bring about sustainable changes to economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing.



A programme of organisational development will be delivered to develop the capacity and capability of the Council over a 3-5 year period. The scope of the programme is summarised below and will be further refined as the programme is defined and initiated:

- **People** – we believe people make the difference. We will ensure our people are well-led, supported, trusted and recognised for the contribution they make. People will be treated fairly and with respect and also encouraged to bring forward ideas about how we can improve what we do. We will develop a workforce which is representative of its communities and people will have equal opportunity to progress in our organisation. We will develop a culture where people are accountable for and recognised for what they do and how they do it.
- **Digital** – we will become smart and connected as a council and as a place. We will join up and use the data we hold to improve our understanding of what matters to our citizens. We will create new digital services designed around the needs of our citizens which are safe, easy and convenient to use. We will upskill our workforce so that everyone has the digital skills and tools to do their jobs and we will work to remove the barriers that some citizens who are not on-line face so they can enjoy the same benefits as those who are already on-line.
- **Governance** – we will adjust our risk appetite to encourage responsible innovation and invest in building a strong corporate culture where people are responsible and accountable for what they do, where people challenge behaviours that are unacceptable and where people continuously learn and improve. We will systematically replace unnecessary red tape with more modern approaches. We will continue to foster a culture of mutual trust and respect between councillors and officers with each clear about their respective roles and responsibilities and we will provide more opportunities for citizens to take part in our democratic processes.
- **Delivering value for money and ensuring financial sustainability:**
 - We will encourage the Welsh Government to replace Council Tax with a fairer method of funding local government and in the short term we will work to minimise the financial burden on council tax payers. In our community leadership role we will seek to influence the investment programmes of our partners and inward investors for the benefits of all of our citizens. We will encourage the community and voluntary sector to seek funding for activity that supports the wellbeing of our citizens and to extend programmes that provide early help and support. We will encourage people to take part in community life and promote the benefits of volunteering. We will work to increase the amount of public money spent in local and regional supply chains.

- We will take a 'whole system' approach to the way we manage our own financial resources, focusing on 'what matters', systematically removing failure demand, reducing duplication and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of service operations. We will collaborate across the Council and with external partners to make it easier for citizens to get the services they need and we will integrate service planning, commissioning and delivery where this improves access to services and value for money.
- We will maximise available income through the further development of our commercial strategy, prioritising services where there are established market opportunities. We will invest in capacity to maximise external grant income and consider whether fees and charges are proportionate to the cost of services and regulatory activity.
- We will change the way we approach our revenue budget, placing more responsibility and accountability with service managers to find ways of mitigating service pressures. We will develop an invest to save culture to support this change in emphasis, making funds and support available to facilitate service change based on solid business cases.
- We will improve alignment between asset management, our capital programme planning and the new vision, values and priorities.
- **Engagement - a council in touch with its communities:**
 - We will further develop 'Let's Talk' so that we have continuous feedback from our residents, our staff, our businesses and partners and increase participation in the Council's work
 - We will revise the tone, channels and forms of communication to reinforce the new vision, values and priorities – this will include using case studies and other engaging ways of demonstrating 'what good looks and feels like'
 - We will make sure people know what the Council is doing to help people live fulfilled lives and empower people in our workforce to communicate what we do and the difference we are making
- **Assets**
 - We will review our asset plans to ensure that our physical infrastructure supports the revised purpose and vision and enables the achievement of the changes we are setting out to make.

Our Design Principles

In delivering the strategic change programme we will adopt the following design principles:

- One Council
- Leadership and Teamwork
- Trust and Empowerment
- Fairness and Equality
- Accountability
- Value for Money
- Agile and innovative
- Sustainable

<p>One Council</p> <p>The whole council will focus on doing ‘what matters’ to our residents, local businesses and investors so we can achieve our purpose.</p>	<p>photo</p>
<p>Leadership and Teamwork</p> <p>Our leaders and managers have a tremendous impact on the council’s culture and through our leaders we want to provide a sense of vision, purpose and inspiration to our employees. Creating Team NPT will enable us to learn from one another, build organisational confidence, lead to innovation and improve outcomes for the people who live and work in Neath Port Talbot.</p>	<p>photo</p>
<p>Trust and Empowerment</p>	

<p>We trust and believe in our colleagues. We will make sure they are trained, supported and authorised to do the things that matter so we impact positively upon people's lives</p>	<p>photo</p>
<p>Fairness and Equality We will recruit and develop a workforce that is representative of our communities. We will treat Welsh and English on the basis of equality and we will work to reduce poverty. We will celebrate diversity, ensure our services and places are accessible to everyone and root out discrimination in all of its forms.</p>	<p>photo</p>
<p>Accountability We will make it easy for people to access information and the meetings of the council. We will explain whether we have done what we said we would do.</p>	<p>photo</p>
<p>Value for Money We will use public money wisely and work hard to secure new sources of income and influence the investment decisions of our partners with the aim of achieving our purpose and vision.</p>	<p>photo</p>
<p>Innovative and Responsive We will take a user-centred approach to the way we design policies, services and places. We will encourage new ideas and creative thinking to challenge the status quo and improve what we do and how we do it. We will anticipate challenges before they arise and take proactive measures to face them, quickly reacting to new challenges and circumstances.</p>	<p>photo</p>

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Sustainable	Photo
We will play our part in responding to the climate and nature emergencies. We will increase the amount of Council expenditure spent in the local and regional economy and encourage local people to buy local. We will balance the actions we need to take in the short term with the long term impact those actions may have on future generations.	

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Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)

This Integrated Impact Assessment considers the duties and requirements of the following legislation in order to inform and ensure effective decision making and compliance:

- Equality Act 2010
- Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015
- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- Environment (Wales) Act 2016

Version Control

Version	Author	Job title	Date
Version 1			14/12/21

1. Details of the initiative

	Title of the Initiative: Corporate Plan 2022-2027
1a	Service Area: Corporate Policy
1b	Directorate: Chief Executive's
1c	Summary of the initiative: The Corporate Plan provides the framework for the Council's services and functions whilst discharging duties set out in various legislation, but in particular the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council exists to serve and represent the interests of its citizens and communities. We strive to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of all of our people. We want our county borough to be a place where everyone has an equal chance to get on in life – a place where people want to live, work and bring up their family. We want our beautiful natural environment, and our rich cultural and industrial heritage to be appreciated and protected for many future generations to enjoy. We also want to pursue new and existing opportunities for economic growth so we can sustain our diverse communities for many years to come.

1d	<p>Is this a ‘strategic decision’? Yes, the draft plan sets out our short, medium and long-term approach to recovery.</p>														
1e	<p>Who will be directly affected by this initiative? Everyone who lives, works and/or visits Neath Port Talbot</p>														
1f	<p>When and how were people consulted?</p> <p>Summer 2021 – Let’s Talk campaign Over the summer 2021 we ran the Let’s Talk campaign to engage people from all backgrounds and of all ages with a view to testing our understanding of how the pandemic has impacted on different parts of our county borough and to also understand what matters most to local people as we take forward our recovery work. Almost 1,800 people engaged with the campaign with a mix of off and on-line surveys completed.</p> <p>January- February 2022 – formal consultation A formal consultation will take place in January 2022 on the content of the draft plan.</p>														
1g	<p>What were the outcomes of the consultation?</p> <p>Summer 2021 – Let’s Talk campaign The ten responses most frequently mentioned were:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="353 995 2040 1385"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="353 995 1196 1050">What matters to you now?</th> <th data-bbox="1196 995 2040 1050">What matters to you in the future?</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="353 1050 1196 1098">1. Friends and family (including pets)</td> <td data-bbox="1196 1050 2040 1098">1. Friends and family (including pets)</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="353 1098 1196 1171">2. Returning to normality (easing restrictions)</td> <td data-bbox="1196 1098 2040 1171">2. Investing in and protecting the economy/jobs/local businesses</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="353 1171 1196 1219">3. Health (mine and my family, friends, neighbours)</td> <td data-bbox="1196 1171 2040 1219">3. Education/keeping open</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="353 1219 1196 1292">4. Staying/keeping safe</td> <td data-bbox="1196 1219 2040 1292">4. Environment, climate crisis, recycling, maintaining green spaces</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="353 1292 1196 1340">5. Education/keeping open</td> <td data-bbox="1196 1292 2040 1340">5. Health and wellbeing/mental health</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="353 1340 1196 1385">6. Health/wellbeing/mental health</td> <td data-bbox="1196 1340 2040 1385">6. Returning to normality (easing restrictions)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	What matters to you now?	What matters to you in the future?	1. Friends and family (including pets)	1. Friends and family (including pets)	2. Returning to normality (easing restrictions)	2. Investing in and protecting the economy/jobs/local businesses	3. Health (mine and my family, friends, neighbours)	3. Education/keeping open	4. Staying/keeping safe	4. Environment, climate crisis, recycling, maintaining green spaces	5. Education/keeping open	5. Health and wellbeing/mental health	6. Health/wellbeing/mental health	6. Returning to normality (easing restrictions)
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7. Investing in and protecting the economy/ jobs/local businesses	7. Work-life balance, working from home, office environment
8. Leisure/hobbies recreation	8. Community relations/spirit/bringing people together/volunteering
9. Community relations/spirit/bringing people together/volunteering	9. Staying/keeping safe
10. Socialising	10. Health (mine and my family, friends, neighbours)

Using this feedback, along with other pieces of evidence we have developed the wellbeing objectives and the strategic actions that sit underneath

January- February 2022 – formal consultation
The full final public consultation on the draft plan will not close until February 2022 so the outcomes are not yet known.

2. Evidence

What evidence was used in assessing the initiative?

This plan sets out our thinking on how we will approach recovery in the short, medium and longer term. It has been informed by a lot of people – residents, employees, elected members, community organisations, businesses and other partners through our Let's Talk engagement activity during the summer of 2021. We have also used a considerable amount of evidence to understand how things have changed as a result of the pandemic and looked at wider influences, like climate change, digital disruption and government policy. We have synthesised this information to assess what this might mean for our future priorities. Of course, the pandemic is not over yet so there is a good deal of uncertainty that poses challenges to our planning. Neath Port Talbot residents will also elect a new council in May 2022. This means that our plan will need to be flexible so we can adapt as we move forward.

A key feature of this plan is the emphasis on working together to help the county borough recover and make Neath Port Talbot a place we are all proud of. We have learned through the pandemic that when we come together we can achieve remarkable things. This plan is the basis on which we can further develop that spirit of collaboration to create a place where everyone can live a fulfilled life.

3. Equalities

a) How does the initiative impact on people who share a **protected characteristic**?

Protected Characteristic	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this impact?
Age			+/-	The Corporate Plan specifically sets out how the Council intends to improve the well-being of children and their families in the Best Start in Life objective. However, the impacts on older age groups are unknown at this time but will be tested during extensive consultation which will be undertaken during January 2022.
Disability			+/-	Many studies over the last 18 months have identified the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on disabled people and the more recent Let's Talk survey responses have elicited responses on 'promoting equality and fair treatment for all' and 'to improve the area for people who have disabilities. Thus, the Corporate Plan has identified actions that will potentially have a positive impact on those with a disability: for example, improved range of care and support networks, greater opportunities for participation, improvements to public rights of way.
Gender reassignment			+/-	Impacts on this group is unknown at this time but will be tested during extensive consultation which will be undertaken during January 2022.
Marriage & civil partnership			+/-	Impacts on this group is unknown at this time but will be tested during extensive consultation which will be undertaken during January 2022.
Pregnancy and maternity	+			The Corporate Plan features specific changes planned to support children and the parents/carers of children in their early years. Including, making sure it is clear how early help and support can be accessed by those children and families who need it, refocussing our partnerships so that all services for children and families are easy to identify and use, they meet people's needs and our communities are child friendly.
Race	+			Many studies over the last 18 months have identified the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on people from BME communities BME and the more recent Let's Talk survey responses have elicited responses on 'promoting equality and fair treatment for all'. Thus, the Corporate Plan has identified actions that will potentially

			have a positive impact on people from this group and all our communities; for example, the new curriculum, cynefin, and cultural and heritage awareness.
Religion or belief		+/-	Impacts on this group is unknown at this time but will be tested during extensive consultation which will be undertaken during January 2022.
Sex		+/-	Impacts on this group is unknown at this time but will be tested during extensive consultation which will be undertaken during January 2022.
Sexual orientation		+/-	Impacts on this group is unknown at this time but will be tested during extensive consultation which will be undertaken during January 2022.

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

Consultation is required to identify actual impact, particularly in relation to the protected characteristics of older adults, religion/ belief, sex, sexual orientation, disability, Marriage & Civil Partnership and gender reassignment, and to explore potential mitigating actions for consideration.

b) How will the initiative assist or inhibit the ability to meet the **Public Sector Equality Duty?**

Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this impact?
To eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation	+			Through the development of the draft Corporate Plan we also took the opportunity to reset and renew the purpose, vision and values of the organisation, by considering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what matters to local people, businesses and our staff • the impact that we know Covid-19 has had on our communities, our local economy and wider stakeholders; • the lessons we have learned from our pandemic response and from elsewhere; and
To advance equality of opportunity between different groups	+			

<p>To foster good relations between different groups</p>	<p>+</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • other anticipated changes in our external environment. <p>Recognition of these things has helped us consider how we will work to reduce inequalities across a range of different groups, not just in relation to protected characteristics but other characteristics such as poverty.</p> <p>There are a number of proposed actions to strengthen community cohesion and in particular the way the Council works with communities and with other agencies in empowering and developing community capacity.</p>
--	----------	--	--	--

<p>What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?</p>
<p></p>

4. Socio Economic Duty

<p>What is the impact</p>	<p>Why will it have this impact?</p>
<p>Positive</p>	<p>Structural inequalities were evident across the population prior to, and have been accentuated as a result of, the pandemic. Evidence demonstrates that the poorest areas have experienced the greatest impact both in terms of health and financial impacts. Those who faced the greatest disadvantage prior to the pandemic have been hardest hit and consequently inequality across Neath Port Talbot have widened. Addressing these inequalities will be a cross cutting theme across all of the recovery actions we propose to take in the short, medium and longer term.</p>

	<p>Our wellbeing objectives aim to help address these inequalities in the short term and longer term. The alleviation of immediate hardship through hardship support schemes, increasing help and support to those experiencing food poverty, protecting and safeguarding young people supporting young people and families, work in areas with the greatest economic inactivity etc.; while looking towards longer term solutions to provide opportunities, support and pathways into education, training and employment from an early age, helping build confidence and pride both as individuals and as communities as well as opportunities to greater participation in society, sport, environment, heritage and culture to help improve wellbeing and health.</p> <p>The aim of the plan is to have a positive effect by improving people's opportunities and experiences, reducing and wherever possible eliminating inequalities faced by many, thereby improving people's health and wellbeing, their life chances and the communities in which they live and work.</p> <p>We are mindful of the role intersectionality plays in our society and full consideration will be given to this as we progress the plan.</p>
Negative	
Neutral	

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

Feedback from the formal consultation will further inform this section.

5. Community Cohesion/Social Exclusion/Poverty

	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this impact?
Community Cohesion	+			<p>There are a number of proposed actions to strengthen community cohesion and in particular the way the Council works with communities and with other agencies in empowering and developing community capacity. Thriving sustainable communities which are welcoming, accepting and supportive are key. A range of initiatives to help realise this such as neighbourhood forums, Local Area Coordinators, funding and support for community groups and events, improvements to the support and facilities for young people and vulnerable people have been identified, but most importantly is working with communities to realise what is important to them.</p> <p>It is anticipated that the wellbeing objectives, individually and combined, will have a positive impact for individuals and communities alike; increasing social and cultural interaction, participation and economic improvement /stability.</p>
Social Exclusion	+			
Poverty	+			

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

--

6. Welsh

	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this effect?

<p>What effect does the initiative have on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - people's opportunities to use the Welsh language 	+			<p>There are specific actions set out in the corporate plan to promote Welsh Language and culture. In particular, the measures the Council proposes to take to increase the education and learning provision to grow the number of Welsh speakers in the area.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - treating the Welsh and English languages equally 	+			<p>Efforts are made to ensure that the five-year Welsh Language Promotion Strategy is informed by and integrated with the Corporate Plan.</p> <p>The Welsh Language Strategy action plan is also developed in collaboration by a cross party task and finish group with the assistance of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council staff and a representative of Menter Iaith Castell-nedd Port Talbot (Menter Iaith CNPT) (Neath Port Talbot Language Initiative).</p>

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

During the latter part of 2020-2021 we started a review of our compliance with and promotion of the Welsh language which will continue over the coming year, to help ensure we can provide a more effective and responsive service going forward.

The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022-2032 is out for public consultation until the 7th January 2022. Following this we will further develop our Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, so that we increase opportunities for more of our children and young people to be educated through the medium of Welsh and for pupils to become more proficient in speaking Welsh.

7. Biodiversity

How will the initiative assist or inhibit the ability to meet the **Biodiversity Duty**?

Biodiversity Duty	+	-	+/-	Why will it have this impact?
To maintain and enhance biodiversity	+			The Corporate Recovery Plan includes a wellbeing objective that specifically targets the conservation and improvement of our natural environment, including

			<p>biodiversity. It also sets a vision that includes valuing and cherishing our environment and reversing the decline in wildlife. The importance of our natural environment and biodiversity for both its intrinsic value and its value to local people is clearly recognised. Measures to encourage and deliver positive action either through supporting others or through direct action are set out, these will connect people to nature alongside conserving and enhancing our biodiversity resource and embedding biodiversity benefits into the way the Council works. The plan will steer positive action for the short and long term, ensuring the Council will delivery our Biodiversity Duty as well as other commitments under the Edinburgh Declaration and contribute towards addressing the Climate and Nature Emergencies.</p>
<p>To promote the resilience of ecosystems, i.e. supporting protection of the wider environment, such as air quality, flood alleviation, etc.</p>	+		<p>The Corporate Recovery Plan includes a wellbeing objective and vision that aims to restore natural processes to mitigate and develop greater resilience to climate change. The importance of our natural environment (which includes ecosystems), it's connectivity and the services that it provides us is clearly recognised. Measures to encourage and deliver positive action either through supporting others or through direct action to improve our natural environment are set out, these will ensure that the services that people gain from the natural environment will be improved and natural solutions to issues will be delivered through green infrastructure approaches. The plan will steer positive action and promote ecosystem resilience, ensuring the council will delivery our Biodiversity Duty as well as other commitments under the Edinburgh Declaration and contribute towards addressing the Climate and Nature Emergencies.</p>

What action will be taken to improve positive or mitigate negative impacts?

The corporate plan will steer positive action for the short and long term, delivering the conservation and improvement of our biodiversity resources and ecosystem resilience. In turn this will deliver benefits for local communities through the provision of services, such as improvements to wellbeing, local air quality and flooding. The plan will ensure the council delivers our Biodiversity Duty as well as other commitments under the Edinburgh Declaration and contribute towards addressing the Climate and Nature Emergencies. The plan will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that the measures are up to date, relevant and based on current evidence, this will ensure that priorities for action will be able to deliver the most positive outcomes for biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.

8. Well-being of Future Generations

How have the five ways of working been applied in the development of the initiative?

Ways of Working	Details
i. Long term – looking at least 10 years (and up to 25 years) ahead	<p>The Corporate Plan is reviewed and published every year to outline the Council’s priorities and how we are changing the way we do things to ensure we continue to improve the services we deliver to support our communities. Although this seems like short-term planning a number of the priorities in the plan embrace current challenges whilst considering the impact these efforts will have on the future. Sustainability plays a key role in the plan, particularly in terms of the natural environment. Current work to reduce the council’s carbon footprint, if successful, will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the future environment of the area and the well-being of its residents.</p>
ii. Prevention – preventing problems occurring or getting worse	<p>We have prioritised providing additional financial support to the third sector to develop new preventative services in communities with a particular focus on people who are lonely and isolated. As part of this we have also expanded the number of Local Area Co-ordinators and integrated their work with NPT Safe and Well.</p> <p>The priorities described for the next 12 months will be reflected in the revenue and capital budgets set for 2022/23. To set longer term priorities and to facilitate early intervention and preventative actions to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of people living in Neath Port Talbot work will be undertaken early in 2022 to develop a Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for discussion with the new council elected in May 2022.</p>
iii. Collaboration – working with other services internal or external	<p>The draft well-being objectives show the Council’s contribution to the social, economic, cultural and environmental well-being of Neath Port Talbot but the Council would be unable to make these improvements without collaboration.</p> <p>The Council is a statutory partner of a number of multi-agency partnerships locally, regionally and across Wales including: the Public Services Board, Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum, Regional Partnership Board and West Glamorgan Safeguarding Board.</p>

<p>iv. Involvement – involving people, ensuring they reflect the diversity of the population</p>	<p>During 2021/2022 we will continue to develop our arrangements to ensure we comply with the requirements contained in Chapter 2 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 – Public Participation in Local Government which commence in May 2022. The focus of Chapter 2 is for Council’s to encourage local people to participate in the making of decisions by the Council and during 2021/2022 we will prepare and consult on a public participation strategy which will set out how we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote awareness of the Council’s functions and how to become a Member of the authority; • Facilitate access to information about decisions made, or to be made by the Council; • Promote and facilitate processes by which local people may make representations to the Council about a decision before, and after, it is made; • Set out the arrangements for bringing views of the public to the attention of scrutiny committees; and • Promote awareness among Members of the benefits of using social media to communicate with local people. <p>During 2021/2022 we will also prepare and publish a petition scheme which is also required under Chapter 2. Petitions are a way in which residents can make their concerns known and request that action be taken.</p>
<p>v. Integration – making connections to maximise contribution to:</p>	<p>The contribution each of the four well-being objectives makes to each of the seven national well-being goals will be detailed in the final plan which will be published early in 2022.</p>
<p>Council’s draft well-being objectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All children have the best start in life • Communities are thriving and sustainable • Our local environment, culture and heritage can be enjoyed by future generations • Local people are skilled and access high quality, green jobs
<p>Other public bodies objectives</p>	<p>Public Services Board priorities</p>

	<p>The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in sections 37- 38 sets out the duty of Public Services Boards to prepare and publish an assessment of the state of the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being in its area.</p> <p>The next Local Assessment of Well-being is due to be published in May 2022, in light of the assessment the well-being objectives will be reviewed and revised for publication in the 2023-2028 Well-being Plan. Until 2023, the PSB's well-being objectives are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support children in their early years, especially children at risk of adverse childhood experiences. ▪ Create safe, confident and resilient communities, focussing on vulnerable people ▪ Encourage Ageing Well ▪ Promote well-being through and in the workplace ▪ Recognise and promote green infrastructure, how green infrastructure can support the economic, social and cultural well-being of the people of Neath Port Talbot
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9. Monitoring Arrangements

Provide information on the monitoring arrangements to:

Monitor the impact of the initiative on Equalities, Community Cohesion, the Welsh Measure, Biodiversity Duty and the Wellbeing Objectives.

Monitoring at service level will be considered in line with the Council's governance arrangements and any modification of services will be considered accordingly. An Annual Report will be produced each year which will consider whether the well-being objectives remain appropriate. Where necessary, the well-being objectives and improvement priorities will be revised.

The annual report will be published on the Council's web pages and will also be widely communicated throughout the county borough using a range of different media and by the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee.

The detailed steps, set out in the Plan, will be monitored through service recovery plan reporting arrangements and through individual appraisal arrangements. The impact of the wellbeing objectives on people who share a protected characteristic will be monitored during the life of the plan.

10. Assessment Conclusions

Please provide details of the conclusions reached in relation to each element of the assessment:

	Conclusion
Equalities	The IIA will be revisited in light of responses to the consultation in January 2022, conclusions to the assessment will be reached and included in the next version of the IIA.
Socio Economic Disadvantage	
Community Cohesion/ Social Exclusion/Poverty	
Welsh	
Biodiversity	
Well-being of Future Generations	

Overall Conclusion

Please indicate the conclusion reached:

- **Continue** - as planned as no problems and all opportunities have been maximised

- **Make adjustments** - as potential problems/missed opportunities/negative impacts have been identified along with mitigating actions
- **Justification** - for continuing with the initiative even though there is a potential for negative impacts or missed opportunities
- **STOP** - redraft the initiative as actual or potential unlawful discrimination has been identified

Please provide details of the overall conclusion reached in relation to the initiative

11. Actions

What actions are required in relation to obtaining further data/information, to reduce or remove negative impacts or improve positive impacts?

Action	Who will be responsible for seeing it is done?	When will it be done by?	How will we know we have achieved our objective?
Between 5 th January and 1st February 2022, we will undertake an extensive programme of consultation on the draft plan with all stakeholders.	The Corporate Policy Team will work with Communications and Marketing to plan and undertake the consultation programme.	February 2022	We will have undertaken a comprehensive engagement exercise, fully considering all responses to continue to refine the draft plan.
A new performance management framework will be developed to measure the success of the delivery of the plan. It will include a range of	A multi-directorate approach will be adopted.	March 2022	A new, comprehensive performance management framework is developed and implemented across services

measures and indicators that, taken together, will provide a picture of the difference / impact the work set out in this plan is making and how it is enabling people to live fulfilled lives.			to ensure ongoing monitoring of the impact of the plan.

12. Sign off

	Name	Position	Signature	Date
Completed by				
Signed off by		Head of Service/Director		



Neath Port Talbot Council

‘Let’s Talk’

Report of findings (Questionnaire)

Opinion Research Services

November 2021

Neath Port Talbot Council: 'Let's Talk'

Report of findings (Questionnaire)

Opinion Research Services

Date: November 2021

Opinion Research Services

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As with all our studies, findings from this report are subject to Opinion Research Services' Standard Terms and Conditions of Contract.

Any press release or publication of the findings of this report requires the advance approval of ORS. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation

This study was conducted in accordance with ISO 20252:2015 and ISO 9001:2015.

This version of the report will be deemed to have been accepted by the client if ORS has not been informed of any amendments within a reasonable period of time (1 month)

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Contents

1. Executive Summary	5
Summary of main findings	5
Questionnaire findings	5
2. The Consultation Process.....	7
Background to the Let’s Talk Consultation	7
The commission	7
The report	7
3. Main Quantitative Findings.....	8
Findings from the online questionnaire	8
Questionnaire approach	8
Response profile	8
Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on you	10
Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on your community	14
Things that matter: now and in the future	17
Changes in community spirit	31
Ways to improve life for residents	31

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1. Executive Summary

Summary of main findings

Questionnaire findings

This report summarises the findings from the online questionnaire designed and hosted by the Council. In total, the questionnaire received **1,694 responses**.

What questionnaire respondents said about the impact of the pandemic

- 1.1 Most respondents (65%) reported that they had *personally* experienced a ‘mixed’ (i.e. both good and bad) personal impact as a result of the pandemic. Around a quarter (24%) described the impact as ‘bad’, and only a small proportion (6%) answered ‘good’ (the remaining 6% did not know).
- 1.2 Over half (54%) felt the pandemic had had a mixed impact on their *community*, with just over a fifth (22%) answering ‘bad’ and fewer (6%) answering ‘good’, while nearly a fifth (18%) did not know.
- 1.3 Some of the main negative impacts of the pandemic identified by respondents were as follows: feelings of loneliness/isolation and being unable to meet with others; a decline in mental health; disruptions to education/schooling; difficult conditions for businesses, shops and high streets; and financial worries, concerns about jobs etc.
- 1.4 In general, questionnaire respondents identified more examples of negative impacts than of positive ones. However, some respondents did identify ways in which they or their community had benefited since the pandemic, such as: more time with family/friends, and getting to know neighbours; increased community spirit and opportunities for ‘getting involved’ - with people supporting and looking out for one another, etc; and benefits due to working from home (e.g. less commuting).

What questionnaire respondents said matters to them: now and in the future

- 1.5 Around a third of those who provided comments about what matters to them *now*, mentioned friends/family; this was also the most mentioned theme in relation to what matters *for the future* (20%).
- 1.6 Many respondents’ immediate priorities related to the pandemic and returning to a more familiar way of life, for example: a return to normality/easing restrictions, health (of oneself, or one’s family/friends), staying/keeping safe and education/schooling (including schools remaining open) among the others biggest priorities for now.
- 1.7 When asked to think about what matters for the future, respondents placed slightly more emphasis on the economy (including local jobs/businesses) and environmental issues (such as climate change, recycling, and maintaining green spaces), while education and schools were again widely mentioned.

What questionnaire respondents said about levels of community spirit

- 1.8 More than half of respondents (54%) felt there had been more community spirit in their immediate neighbourhood as a result of the pandemic, compared with just over a third (36%) across the wider local area, and just over a quarter (28%) across the whole county borough (that said, close to a third – 31% – were unable to give a view on levels of community spirit across the entire county borough).

What questionnaire respondents said could be done in the community to improve residents’ lives

- 1.9 When respondents were asked to identify things that could be done to improve life for residents, the most common themes included: more funding for the community e.g. to support community events/projects; cleaner and better-maintained streets, green spaces, beaches etc; measures to address crime and ASB; investing in and/or providing more, or cheaper, outdoor facilities, and more support for young people.

2. The Consultation Process

Background to the Let’s Talk Consultation

- 2.1 2020-21 has been a time of unprecedented change and uncertainty. The economic and social impacts of COVID-19 have been significant, with many people’s sense of isolation and loneliness increasing as a result of several lockdowns. However, the increased time spent at home has also had more positive impacts, with many people feeling better connected to their families and local areas as a result.
- 2.2 It has been widely suggested that the effects of the pandemic on the British public presents a potential opportunity to re-evaluate what is important to people in their day-to-day lives. Neath Port Talbot County Council (NPTCBC) ran the ‘Let’s Talk’ project reported here to capitalise on this opportunity.
- 2.3 ‘Let’s Talk’ is an open-ended consultation, acting as an opportunity for the public to talk about what matters to them. The aim of the consultation has been to understand what residents feel is important to and how the Council can equip the communities of Neath Port Talbot to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic as positively as possible.

The commission

- 2.4 Opinion Research Services (ORS) - a spin-out company from Swansea University with a UK-wide reputation for social research - was appointed to analyse and report the findings of an online questionnaire which was designed, setup and hosted by NPTCBC.
- 2.5 This consisted of a small number of closed questions (asking about the impact of the pandemic on individuals and their communities; as well as how levels of community spirit had been impacted in the immediate neighbourhood, wider local area, and across the county borough) and also open-ended questions designed to elicit views on what matters to respondents (both now and in terms of the future) and ways in which life could be improved for residents. In total, the questionnaire received 1,694 responses.

The report

- 2.6 This report summarises the findings from the online questionnaire designed and hosted by the Council.

3. Main Quantitative Findings

Findings from the online questionnaire

Questionnaire approach

- 3.1 The ‘Let’s Talk’ questionnaire was designed by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and was made available to complete online via the Council’s website between 19 July 2021 and 30 September 2021. Printed copies were also made available via libraries and outreach work, and despite the constraints of the ongoing pandemic, 328 paper responses were received. Following the closure of the questionnaire, the dataset was transferred securely to ORS for analysis and reporting. A total of 1,694 questionnaires were completed.
- 3.2 The purpose of the questionnaire was to find out about what matters to people living and working in Neath Port Talbot. The feedback will be used to develop a recovery plan based for the county borough. The consultation was promoted online (via: regular social media activity on corporate and service accounts, email marketing, internal council channels, and customer touch points); offline (via: radio, press releases, posters, leaflets, ‘Let’s Talk/Sgwrsio’ large letters and selfie boards, and exhibition displays/roll ups in locations with higher footfall); and by outreach activity via NPT Community of Practice on Involvement and Engagement (e.g. SHEP programme, Your Voice - Cadaxton Community Centre and Ponty Friends branches, Young Parents’ Group, Libraries, Welsh Language Youth Club etc.)

Response profile

- 3.3 The response profile to the questionnaire is summarised below (please note that due to low numbers, some very small categories have been grouped together; more detail has been provided in the footnotes).

Table 1: Summary of respondent demographics, including Welsh language ability and area lived in

Characteristic	All Responses		
	Number of Responses	%	
BY AGE	Under 16	239	15%
	16 to 24	86	5%
	25 to 29	70	4%
	30 to 39	282	17%
	40 to 49	322	20%
	50 to 59	332	21%
	60 to 69	163	10%
	70 to 74	76	5%
	75 or over	45	3%
	Total	1,615	100%
<i>Not known</i>	79	-	
BY GENDER	Male	506	32%
	Female	1,074	68%

	Other ¹	7	
	Total	1,580	100%
	<i>Not known</i>	107	-
BY DISABILITY	Has a disability	212	22%
	No disability	746	78%
	Total	958	100%
	<i>Not known</i>	736	-
BY ETHNIC GROUP	White British	952	96%
	Other ²	39	4%
	Total	991	100%
	<i>Not known</i>	703	-
BY RELIGION	Christian	479	50%
	Other religion ³	20	2%
	No religion	467	48%
	Total	966	100%
	<i>Not known</i>	728	-
BY PREGNANT / PROVIDING MATERNITY CARE	Yes	27	3%
	No	942	97%
	Total	969	100%
	<i>Not known</i>	725	-
BY SEXUAL ORIENTATION	Heterosexual	869	94%
	Gay	16	2%
	Lesbian	19	2%
	Bisexual	19	2%
	Other	4	*
	Total	927	100%
	<i>Not known</i>	767	-
BY WELSH LANGUAGE ABILITY	Fluent or fairly fluent speaker & writer	74	8%
	Fluent or fairly fluent speaker	52	5%
	Learner	213	22%
	Little or no knowledge	644	66%
	Total	983	100%
	<i>Not known</i>	711	-
BY AREA LIVED IN	Afan Valley	146	9%
	Amman Valley	27	2%

¹ Including 1 respondent identifying as transgender, and 6 answering ‘other’ (of which two responses were from a male and a female submitting a joint response as a couple).

² Including 12 respondents from Gypsy and Traveller communities, 9 from a mixed background (4 White and Asian, 3 White and Black African, 2 White and Black Caribbean), 4 White Irish, 4 from Asian backgrounds (1 Indian, 1 Bangladeshi, 1 Pakistani and 1 Filipino), and 10 ‘others’ (mainly other White backgrounds)

³ Including 3 respondents who were Buddhist, 2 Hindu and 2 Muslim respondents, and a further 13 answering ‘other religion’

	Dulais Valley	37	2%
	Neath	519	31%
	Neath Valley	88	5%
	Port Talbot	484	29%
	Swansea Valley	168	10%
	Outside of Neath Port Talbot	190	11%
	Total	1,659	100%
	<i>Not known</i>	35	-

Table 2: Summary of the ways in which respondents described themselves and their relationship to NPT (NB respondents could choose more than one option, so percentages will sum to more than 100 per cent; not all respondents answered).

Characteristic		All Responses	
		Number of Responses	%
RESPONDENT TYPES...	A resident of NPT	926	66%
	Work for NPT Council	526	38%
	Use services provided by NPT Council	293	21%
	Work in NPT	254	18%
	Retired	187	13%
	A volunteer in NPT	102	7%
	An unpaid carer	76	5%
	Own or run a business in NPT	60	4%
	Unemployed	52	4%
	College or university student	38	3%
	Work for a 3rd sector/voluntary org in NPT	33	2%
	An Armed Forces veteran	23	2%
	A NPTCBC elected member, community cllr, MP/AS	15	1%
	A member of the Armed Forces	4	*
	Other	58	4%
	Total respondents answering	1,397	100%
<i>Not answered</i>	297	-	

Interpretation of the Data

3.4 Graphics are used extensively in this report to make it as user friendly as possible. The pie charts and other graphics show the proportions (percentages) of respondents making relevant responses. Where possible, the colours of the charts have been standardised with a ‘traffic light’ system in which:

- Green shades represent positive responses
- Yellow or beige represents neither positive nor negative responses
- Red shades represent negative responses

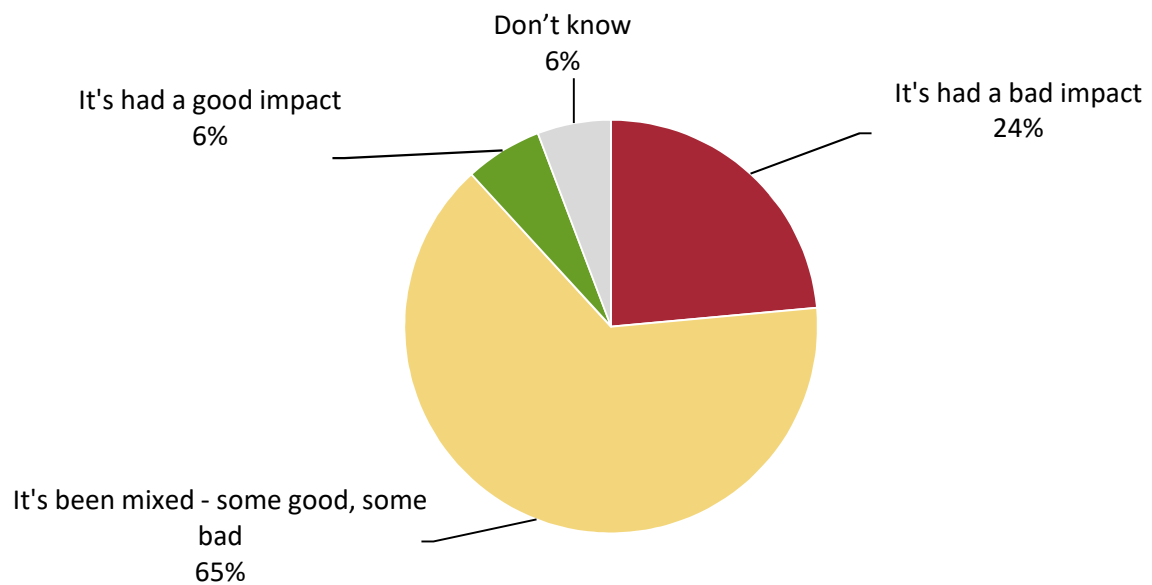
3.5 Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of “don’t know” categories, or multiple answers.

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on you

How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted you?

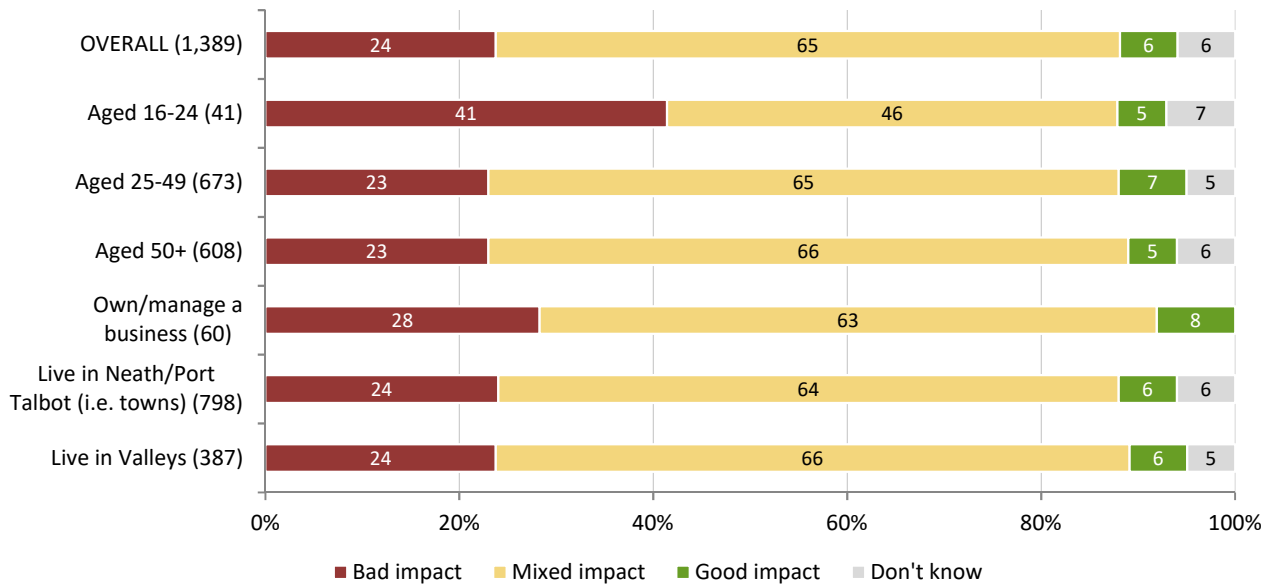
- 3.6 Close to two thirds of respondents (65%) reported that they had experienced a mixed impact (i.e. both good and bad) due to the pandemic.
- 3.7 Around a quarter (24%) felt the impact had been bad, while just over one-in-twenty thought it had been good (6%), and the same proportion (6%) did not know.

Figure 1: Responses to the question asking about the personal impact of the pandemic. Base: 1,389



- 3.8 Figure 2 shows the results to the question about the personal impact of the pandemic, by selected sub-groups. Overall, there was a good deal of similarity in views between the groups; however it is worth noting that a higher proportion of younger people aged 16-24 (41%, compared with 24% overall) stated that there had been a negative impact.

Figure 2: Responses to the question asking how the pandemic has impacted on you personally, by selected sub-groups.



Text comments about the personal impacts of the pandemic

Can you tell us the reasons why the Covid-19 Pandemic has had a [bad/mixed/good] impact on you?

3.9 Figure 3: Can you tell us the reasons why the Covid-19 Pandemic has had a [bad/mixed/good] impact on you?

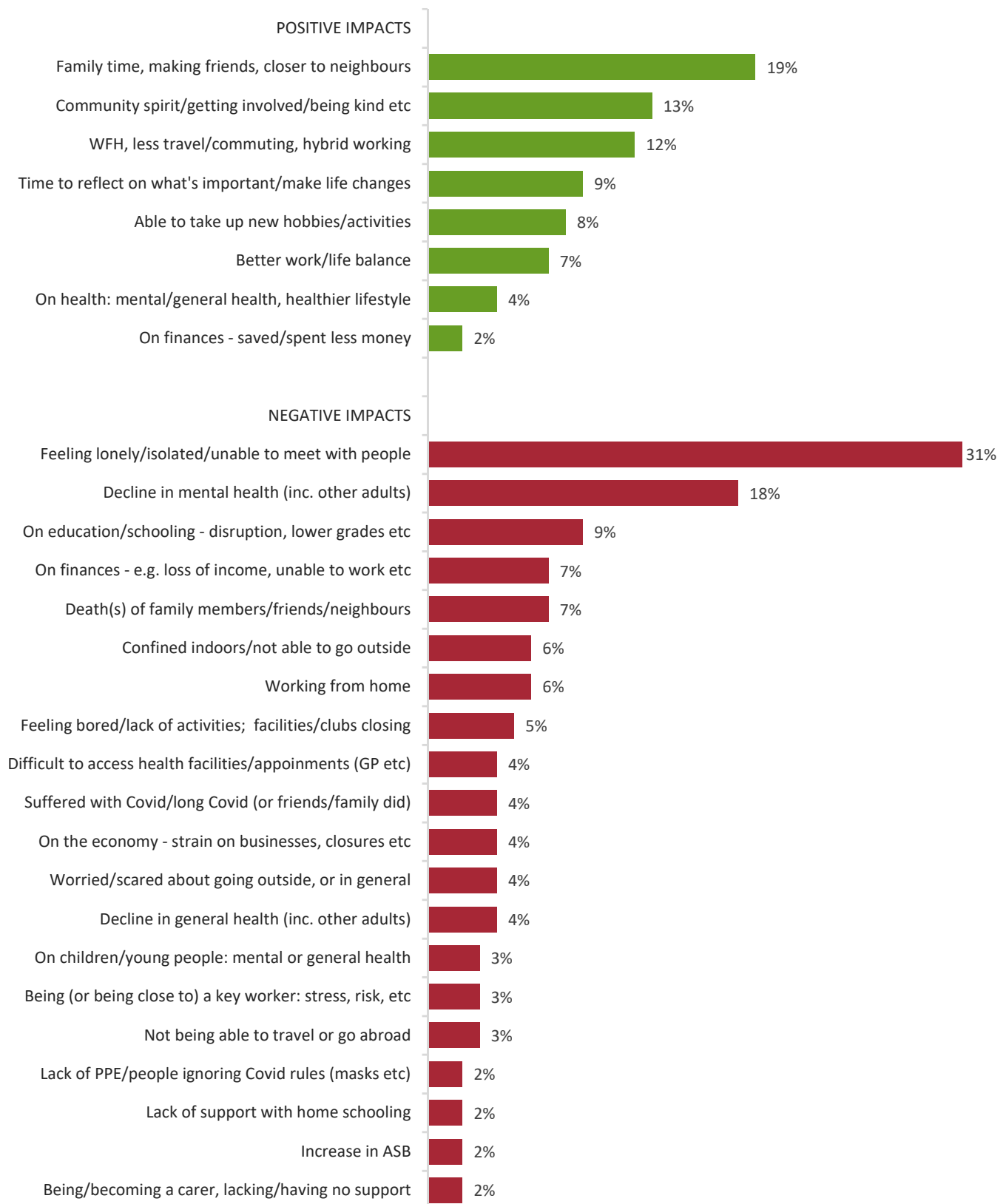
Base: All respondents who stated the pandemic had had a bad, mixed or good impact and provided comments (1,041)

NB – themes raised by fewer than 2% of respondents have been excluded from chart

- 3.10 Figure 3 overleaf summarises the main themes mentioned when respondents were asked to explain why the pandemic had had either a good, bad or mixed impact on them.
- 3.11 In general, far more negative impacts were identified than positive ones. The main negative, or 'bad' impacts were loneliness, isolation and being unable to meet with people (31%) and a decline in mental health (18%). These were followed by negative impacts on education/schooling (9%), on finances (7%), and as a result of the death(s) of loved ones (7%).
- 3.12 However, around a fifth of those who commented felt there had been a 'good' impact due to increased family time and/or opportunities to make new friends and get to know neighbours better (19%), while around a tenth or more made comments about increased community spirit/opportunities to 'get involved' and 'be kind' etc (13%), a reduction in travel and commuting due to working from home (12%) and having more time to reflect and/or make changes or decisions (9%).
- 3.13 Due to lack of space, some themes raised by smaller numbers of respondents (i.e. 1% or less) have been excluded from the chart, these include:

Negative impacts: lack of support with mental health/pandemic issues in general (1%); reduced cleanliness in the area (e.g. overflowing bins, more rubbish, poorer upkeep of parks and open spaces) (1%); being unable to attend important events such as funerals, weddings and birthdays, and/or having to cancel events (1%); an increase in drug-related issues locally (1%); and impacts on personal relationships (arguments, break-ups etc) (<1%).

Figure 3: Can you tell us the reasons why the Covid-19 Pandemic has had a [bad/mixed/good] impact on you?
Base: All respondents who stated the pandemic had had a bad, mixed or good impact and provided comments (1,041)
NB – themes raised by fewer than 2% of respondents have been excluded from chart

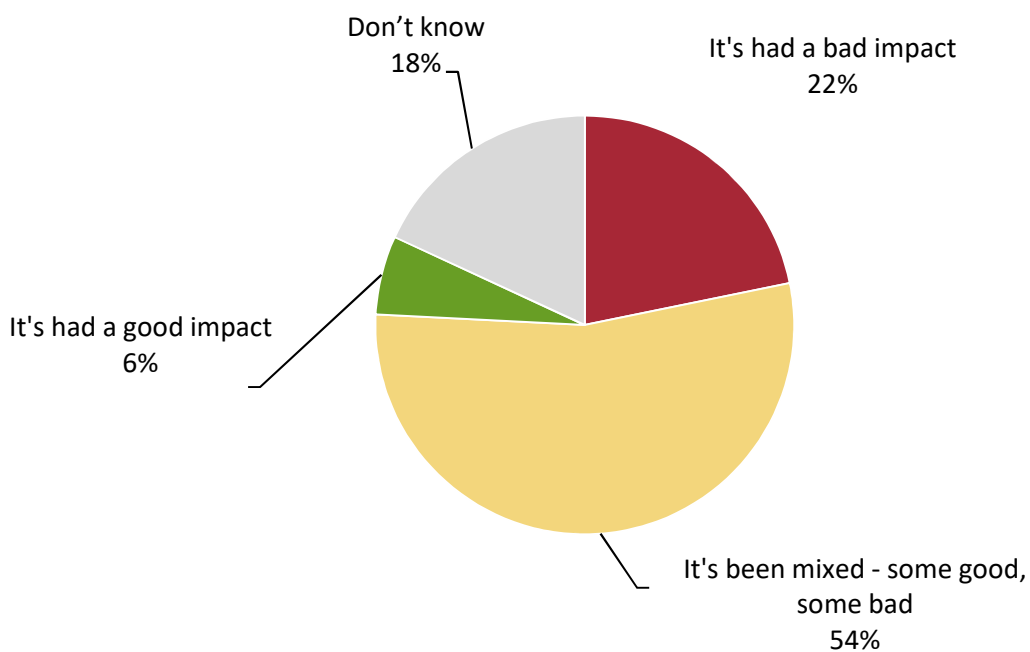


Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on your community

How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted your community?

- 3.14 Over half of respondents (54%) felt the impact of Covid-19 on their community had been a mixed one.
- 3.15 More than a fifth (22%) felt the impact had been bad, while just over one-in-twenty thought it had been good (6%).
- 3.16 However close to a fifth of respondents (18%) stated that they did not know what impact the pandemic had had on their community.

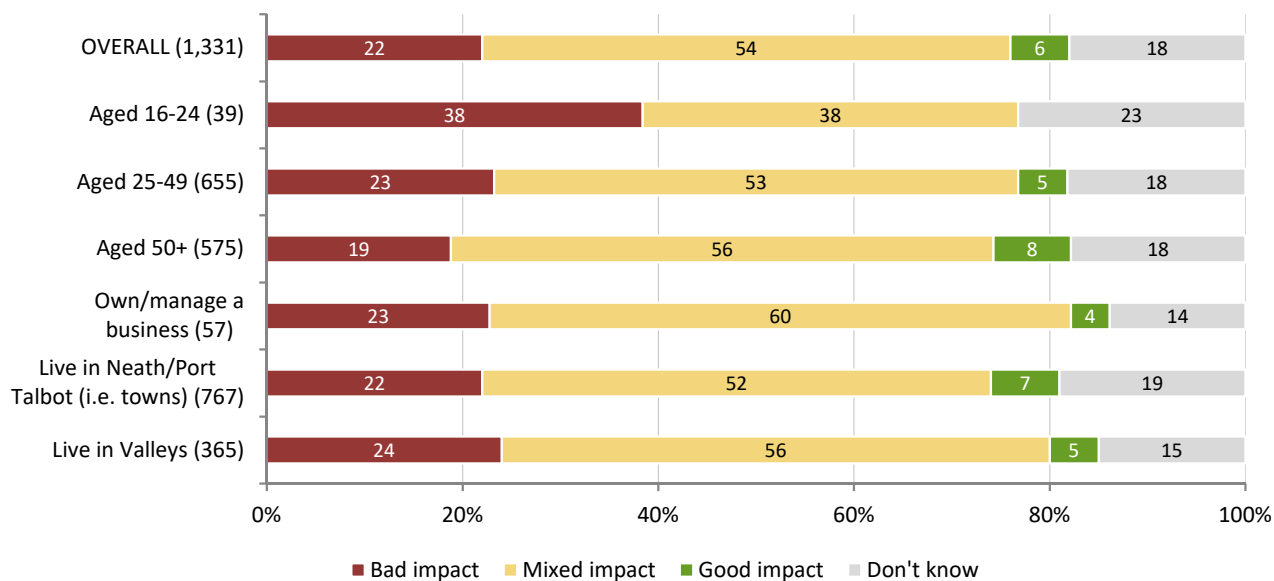
Figure 4: Responses to the question asking how the pandemic has impacted on the community. Base: 1,331



3.17

3.18 Figure 5 overleaf shows that A higher proportion of younger residents (aged 16 to 24) stated that there had been a bad impact on their community as a result of Covid (38%, compared with 22% overall); none of these respondents felt the impact had been a good one.

Figure 5: Responses to the question asking how the pandemic has impacted on the community, by selected sub-groups.



Text comments about the impacts of the pandemic on the community

Can you tell us the reasons why the Covid-19 Pandemic has had a [bad/mixed/good] impact on your community?

Figure 3: Can you tell us the reasons why the Covid-19 Pandemic has had a [bad/mixed/good] impact on you?

Base: All respondents who stated the pandemic had had a bad, mixed or good impact and provided comments (1,041)

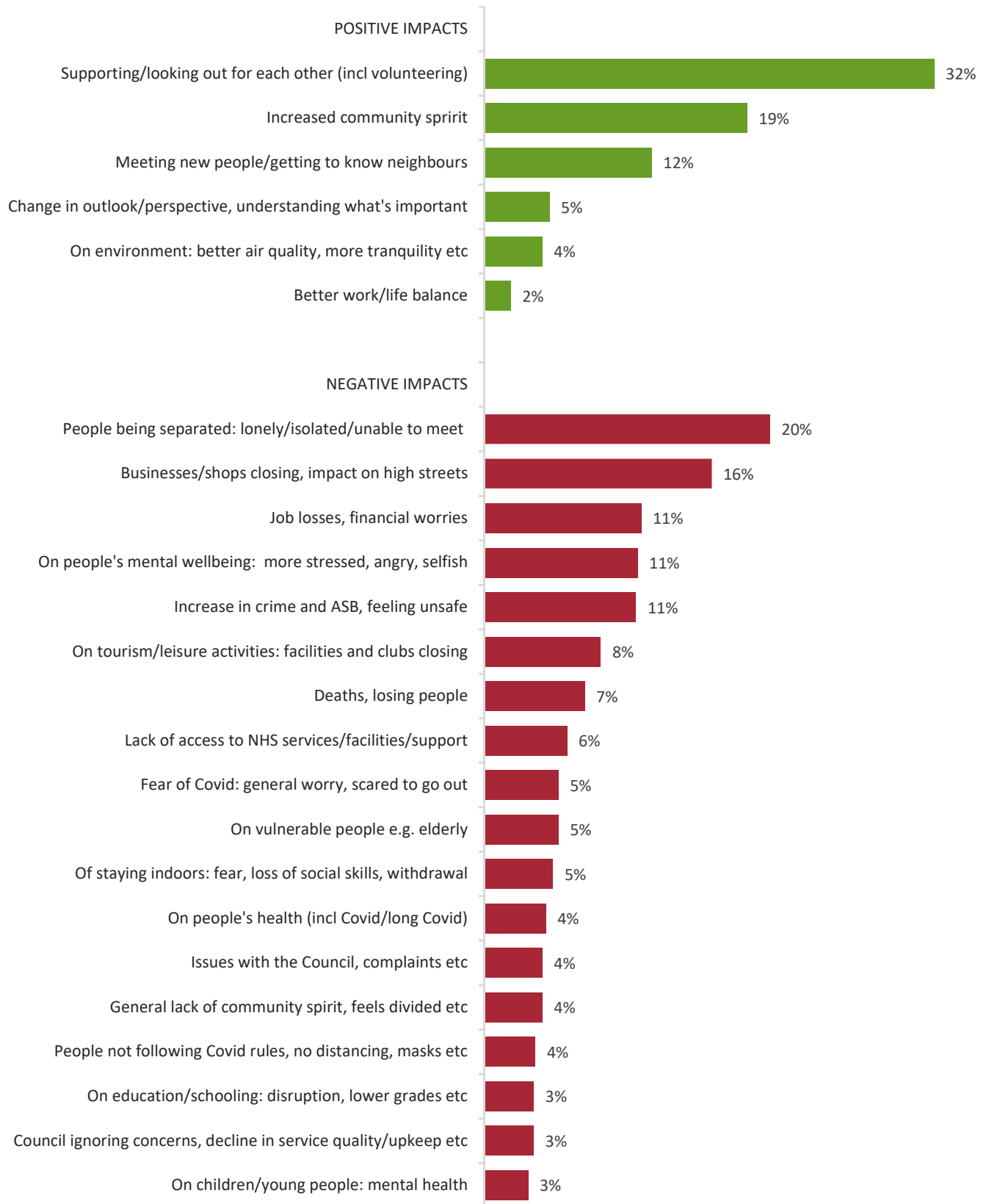
NB – themes raised by fewer than 2% of respondents have been excluded from chart

- 3.19 Figure 6 overleaf summarises the main themes mentioned when respondents were asked to explain why the pandemic had had either a good, bad or mixed impact on their community.
- 3.20 Again, more negative (or 'bad') impacts were identified than positive (or 'good') ones, with the main negative impacts relating to: people being separated, lonely or isolated etc (20%); businesses and shops closing, or a negative impact on high streets (16%); job losses and financial worries (11%); impacts on personal wellbeing e.g. stress and/or people behaving more angrily or selfishly (11%); and feeling the community is more unsafe e.g. perceiving that levels of crime/ASB have increased (11%).
- 3.21 However, around a third of those who commented felt there had been a positive impact due to members of the community supporting and looking out for one another (32%), while several respondents commented on an increase in community spirit (19%) or opportunities to meet new people or get to know neighbours (12%).
- 3.22 Due to lack of space, some themes raised by smaller numbers of respondents (i.e. 1% or less) have again been excluded from the chart, these include:

Positive impact: improvements in hygiene levels (handwashing etc) (1%);

Negative impacts: On public transport (1%), due to council tax being high (1%), inability to travel or go on holiday abroad (1%), increases in homelessness/begging (<1%) and issues with the emergency services (e.g. slower response times, less presence etc) (<1%).

Figure 6: Can you tell us the reasons why the Covid-19 Pandemic has had a [bad/mixed/good] impact on your community?
Base: All respondents who stated the pandemic had had a bad, mixed or good impact and provided comments (803)
NB – themes raised by fewer than 2% of respondents have been excluded from charts



Things that matter: now and in the future

What matters to you now?

What matters to you for the future?

- 3.23 Respondents were asked two open-ended questions about the things that matter to them now, and the things that matter to them for the future – the themes that were raised by at least 2% of those who commented are summarised in Figure 7 and Figure 8.
- 3.24 Around a third mentioned that friends/family matter to them *now* (32%); this was also the most commonly mentioned theme in relation to what matters *for the future* (20%).
- 3.25 Many respondents' priorities in the immediate term related to the pandemic and returning to a more familiar way of life: a return to normality/easing restrictions (18%), health (of oneself, or one's family/friends) (15%), staying/keeping safe (14%) and education/schooling (including schools remaining open) (14%) were the next biggest priorities for *now*.
- 3.26 When asked to think about what matters *for the future*, respondents placed slightly more emphasis on the economy (including local jobs/businesses) (18%) and environmental issues (such as climate change, recycling, and maintaining green spaces) (12%), while education and schools were again widely mentioned (13%).

Figure 7: What matters to you now? Base: All respondents who provided comments (1,456)
NB – themes raised by fewer than 2% of respondents have been excluded from charts

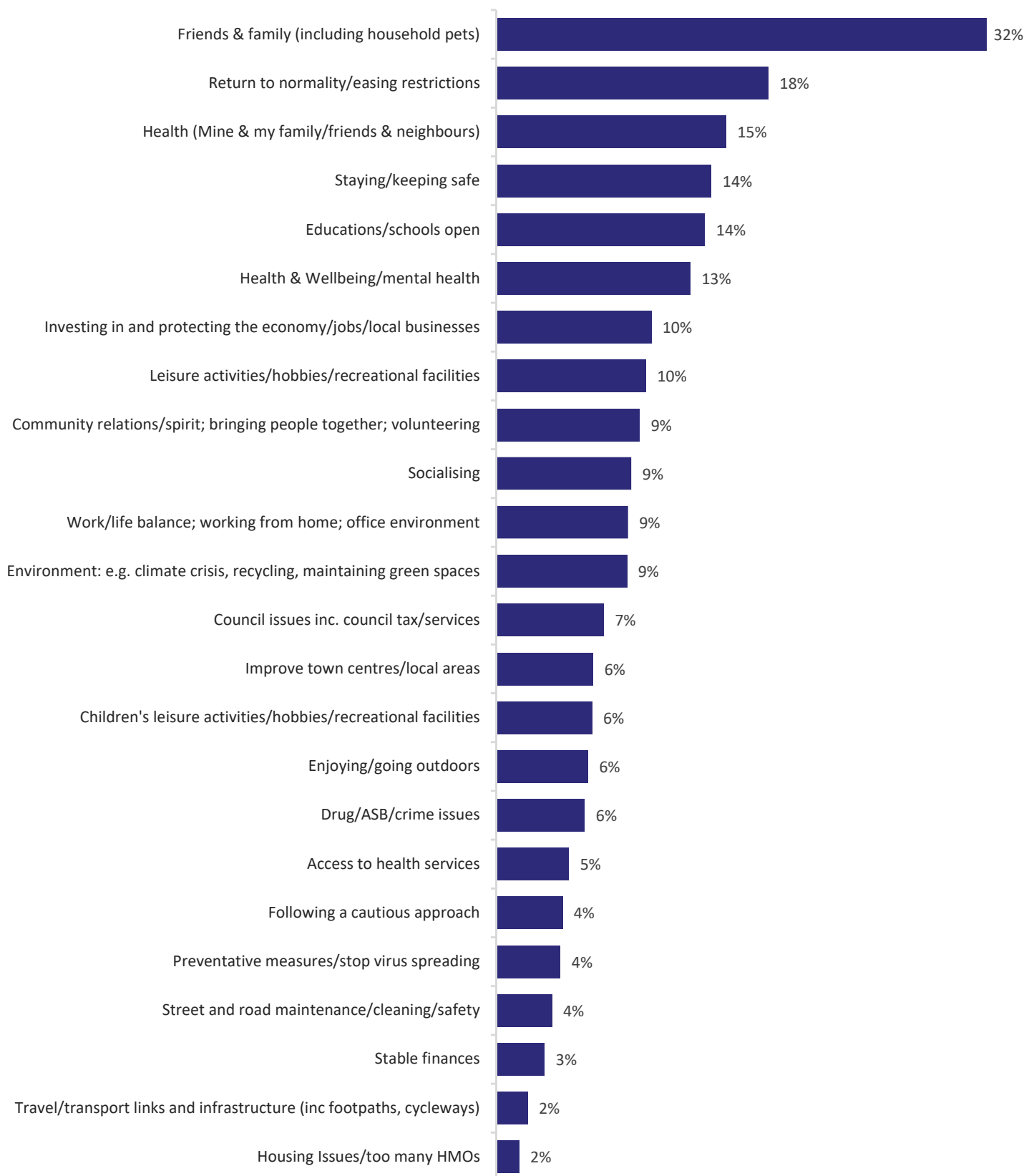
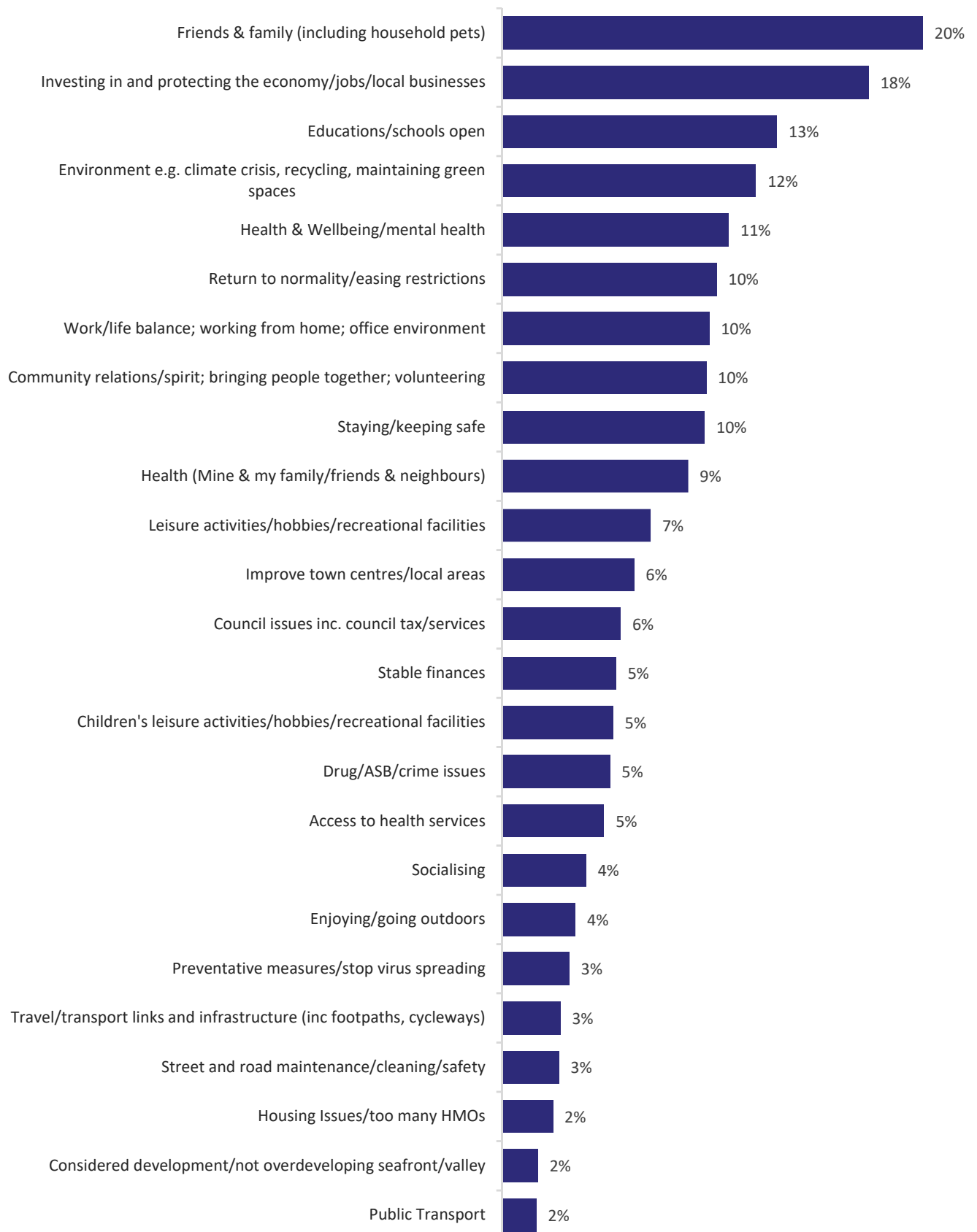


Figure 8: What matters to you for the future? Base: All respondents who provided comments (1,391)
NB – themes raised by fewer than 2% of respondents have been excluded from charts



- 3.27 Some themes were raised by smaller numbers of respondents (i.e. less than 2%), and these have not been included in the figures above for space reasons.

For the first question (i.e. what matters **now**) these themes were: considered development of/not overdeveloping areas (1%); protecting local heritage/historical sites (1%); more, free or cheaper parking (1%); better public transport (1%); improving infrastructure and access for people with disabilities (1%); addressing issues around homelessness (<1%), and issues relating to flooding (<1%) – in addition, around 6% of respondents made other, more miscellaneous comments.

For the second question (i.e. what matters **for the future**) they were: maintaining a cautious approach (1%), protecting local heritage/historical sites (1%); more, free or cheaper parking (1%); improving infrastructure and access for people with disabilities (1%); addressing issues around homelessness (<1%) and issues relating to flooding (<1%) – in addition, around 15% of respondents made other, more miscellaneous comments.

Sub-group differences

- 3.28 To better understand the priorities of particular demographic groups or different areas, Table 3 overleaf provides a summary of the themes that were most commonly raised by: different age groups (including younger people, defined here as aged under 25; and older people, defined as aged 50 or above), business owners and representatives, residents of the main towns in the county borough (i.e. Neath and Port Talbot), residents of the valleys/other parts of the county borough (i.e. the Afan, Amman, Dulais, Neath and Swansea Valleys), NPTCBC service users, NPTCBC members of staff, and respondents who work in the county borough.
- 3.29 Only those themes raised by at least a tenth of respondents who commented are shown in the table.
- 3.30 Overall, there was a good deal of commonality between the groups: friends and family were very common priorities, along with issues such as education/schooling and protecting the economy.
- 3.31 Younger people were somewhat more likely to mention issues such as leisure activities and facilities (including those intended for children), and socialising, while physical and mental health and wellbeing issues were important for the 50+ age group.
- 3.32 Business owners and representatives (perhaps understandably) placed highest importance on protecting the economy. They were also likely to mention environmental issues (including recycling and green area maintenance) and town centre or other local area improvements.
- 3.33 Several respondents who were members of staff working for NPTCBC made comments about work-life balance, and around home working etc.

Table 3: Things that matter now/in the future, by sub-group (only shows themes mentioned by at least a tenth of respondents in the sub-group)

Sub-group	Matters now	Matters for the future
Young people (aged under 25) (Base sizes: 313, 291)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends/family (incl pets) (69%) • Education/schools open (31%) • Leisure/recreation facilities (20%) • Socialising (15%) • Children's leisure activities/facilities (13%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends & family (incl pets) (38%) • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (31%) • Educations/schools open (27%) • Stable finances (12%) • Leisure/recreation facilities (10%) • Work/life balance; working from home; office environment (10%)
People aged 25-49 (Base sizes: 586, 567)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends & family (incl pets) (26%) • Return to normality/easing restrictions (17%) • Health (mine & family/friends) (17%) • Wellbeing/mental health (16%) • Staying/keeping safe (14%) • Work/life balance; working from home; office environment (13%) • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (13%) • Education/schools open (12%) • Environmental matters (11%) • Community relations/spirit; bringing people together (10%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends & family (incl pets) (21%) • Environmental matters (15%) • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (13%) • Wellbeing/mental health (13%) • Education/schools open (13%) • Work/life balance; working from home; office environment (12%) • Staying/keeping safe (11%) • Community relations/spirit; bringing people together (10%)
Older people (aged 50+) (Base sizes: 500, 479)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return to normality/easing restrictions (27%) • Staying/keeping safe (20%) • Friends & family (incl pets) (17%) • Health (mine & family/friends) (17%) • Community relations/spirit; bringing people together (12%) • Wellbeing/mental health (11%) • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (11%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return to normality/easing restrictions (18%) • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (15%) • Environmental matters (13%) • Staying/keeping safe (13%) • Community relations/spirit; bringing people together (12%) • Wellbeing/mental health (12%) • Health (mine & family/friends) (11%) • Friends & family (incl pets) (10%)
Own or run a business in NPT (Base sizes: 58, 56)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting/Investing economy/jobs/local business (28%) • Friends/family (incl pets) (19%) • Environmental matters (17%) • Drug/ASB/Crime (16%) • Improving town centres/local areas (14%) • Health (mine & family/friends) (14%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (25%) • Environmental matters (21%) • Council issues e.g. council tax/services (16%) • Community relations/spirit; bringing people together (16%) • Improve town centres/local areas (14%)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoying/going outdoors (12%) • Education/schools open (12%) • Leisure/recreation facilities (12%) • Staying/keeping safe (12%) • Work/life balance; working from home; office environment (12%) • Community relations/spirit; bringing people together (10%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying/keeping safe (13%) • Leisure/recreation facilities (13%) • Return to normality/easing restrictions (11%) • Transport links and infrastructure (11%) • Education/schools open (11%) • Health (mine & family/friends) (11%)
<p>Live in Neath or Port Talbot towns</p> <p>(Base sizes: 897, 850)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends/family (incl pets) (33%) • Return to normality/easing restrictions (17%) • Health (mine & family/friends & neighbours) (16%) • Staying/keeping safe (14%) • Educations/schools open (14%) • Wellbeing/mental health (12%) • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (10%) • Leisure activities/recreation facilities (10%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends/family (incl pets) (21%) • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (18%) • Educations/schools open (14%) • Environmental matters (12%) • Staying/keeping safe (10%) • Wellbeing/mental health (10%) • Return to normality/easing restrictions (10%)
<p>Live in the Valleys</p> <p>(Base sizes: 397, 383)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends/family (incl pets) (32%) • Return to normality/easing restrictions (19%) • Educations/schools open (14%) • Community relations/spirit; bringing people together (13%) • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (12%) • Wellbeing/mental health (12%) • Staying/keeping safe (11%) • Health (mine & family/friends) (11%) • Leisure/recreation facilities (11%) • Environmental matters (10%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (20%) • Friends/family (incl pets) (19%) • Education/schools open (15%) • Environmental matters (13%) • Community relations/spirit; bringing people together (11%) • Wellbeing/mental health (10%)
<p>Use NPTCBC services</p> <p>(Base sizes: 273, 263)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends & family (incl pets) (25%) • Return to normality/easing restrictions (23%) • Wellbeing/mental health (17%) • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (15%) • Health (mine & family/friends) (15%) • Environmental matters (14%) • Community relations/spirit; bringing people together (14%) • Staying/keeping safe (13%) • Council issues inc. Council tax/services (11%) • Education/schools open (11%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (18%) • Environmental matters (18%) • Community relations/spirit; bringing people together (15%) • Friends & family (incl pets) (14%) • Return to normality/easing restrictions (13%) • Improve Town centre/local areas (12%) • Wellbeing/mental health (11%) • Staying/keeping safe (10%) • Education/schools open (10%) • Council issues inc. council tax/services (10%)

<p>Work for NPTCBC</p> <p>(Base sizes: 398, 387)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoying/going outdoors (10%) • Return to normality/easing restrictions (25%) • Friends & family (incl pets) (25%) • Staying/keeping safe (24%) • Work/life balance; working from home; office environment (24%) • Health (mine & family/friends) (21%) • Wellbeing/mental health (20%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work/life balance; working from home; office environment (20%) • Return to normality/easing restrictions (18%) • Wellbeing/mental health (18%) • Friends & family (incl pets) (17%) • Health (mine & family/friends) (12%) • Staying/keeping safe (12%) • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (10%)
<p>Work in NPT</p> <p>(Base sizes: 236, 231)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends & family (incl pets) (27%) • Staying/keeping safe (19%) • Return to normality/easing restrictions (19%) • Wellbeing/mental health (17%) • Health (mine & family/friends & neighbours) (17%) • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (15%) • Environmental matters (14%) • Community relations/spirit; bringing people together (12%) • Enjoying/going outdoors (10%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental matters (23%) • Protecting/Investing in the economy/jobs/local business (16%) • Friends & family (incl pets) (15%) • Return to normality/easing restrictions (12%) • Wellbeing/mental health (11%) • Community relations/spirit; bringing people together (11%) • Work/life balance; working from home; office environment (11%) • Staying/keeping safe (10%) • Education/schools open (10%)

Other comments/illustrative quotations

- 3.34 A few respondents spoke about a need to promote equality and fair treatment for all, as being among the things that mattered either now or in the future. Specifically, there was some discussion about how to improve the area for people who have disabilities:

The happiness of my child and that they get accepted for who they are and have the ability to express themselves freely without judgement or bullying.

Need to eliminate racism and restore a spirit of mutual support in society. Need to educate our young people to have respect for themselves and ensure that violence against women is prevented

Person centred housing options for disabled people. Further and higher education options for disabled people. Work opportunities for disabled people. Equity and equality for all.

It's impossible for wheelchair users to go out during bin day as most people work, so can't collect their bins off the kerb side for a few hours.... Be more diverse, thoughtful and accepting of those who are less able.

- 3.35 Some responses focused on facilities and opportunities for younger people, including those with additional needs and/or from low-income families:

It is important to me that in the future there are more activities for children and babies under the age of one for families on low income, and also that there are appropriate activities and places to go for teenagers aged 13 and up in my local area, such as a skate park or bike track. I would also like for there to be more educational opportunities for children under the age of 3 that can't attend a Flying Start programme due to not being in the catchment area and [whose families] cannot afford to send them to a crèche.

Opportunities for our young people with additional needs.

- 3.36 Some discussed investing in local infrastructure (including both improvements to existing roads and new active travel routes) and promoting the areas a tourist destination

Investing in local infrastructure (including active travel)

I'd like to see more cycling infrastructure going to the Pontardawe area and increased funding to get rid of potholes that are stupidly deep.

Better roads and resurfacing of the A465 as the pollution from this road is having a huge impact on residents' mental and physical health.

All of the people coming to NPT for the beaches, walks etc. will still come now that the pandemic is easing. I hope NPTCBC recognise this and realise the important improvements required so that locals and tourists can enjoy what NPT has to offer. We need more parking, but not extortionate rates or ticket machines that break down. We need investment in the beachfront, Margam Park, Gnoll Park and Afan Argoed, more cafes, decent food options. Also [there are] no decent electric car facilities in the key attractions.

I want this area to be community-led towards becoming an area of excellence, particularly for mountain biking and similar activities. Afan, Aberavon and the surrounding areas are a marketer's dream as a tourist destination. Where else are you in the mountains and still only 10 minutes from the beach?

- 3.37 Some comments expressed concern about environmental issues, and/or concerns about perceived overdevelopment. While many supported green projects, there were also some reservations about projects like 'Y Bryn' windfarm.

The loss of green space around the county as it gives way to construction. See housing development at Tonna, Rhos and the proposed site at Aberavon beach.

I would like to see large green projects such as the Swansea Lagoon go ahead. I do have very strong reservations about some renewable energy projects that are not so environmentally friendly. I am also becoming very concerned about the overcommitted drive for wind power. We cannot afford to put all eggs in one basket. Projects like Y Bryn being an example of this overcommitment.

- 3.38 Small numbers of comments expressed support for the third sector and the maintenance of community assets. One respondent called for more frequent reviews of service user needs to address some of the burdens currently being faced by those working as carers:

In the future, I want to be a part of ensuring more funding to third sector services in NPT to not only continue the support for those who are struggling, but expand the support to include everybody who needs it.

The ability to keep community assets open

I feel strongly that care provisions are not being reviewed effectively to ensure the right staffing and [that] duration of calls are appropriate to meet identified need. As a result there is an over use of carers where they are not required. Functional needs change quite often particularly after recovery from illness, so regular reviews are needed ...

- 3.39 There were also a few comments opposed to the proposed 'superschool' in Pontardawe, as well as one comment about Welsh medium education:

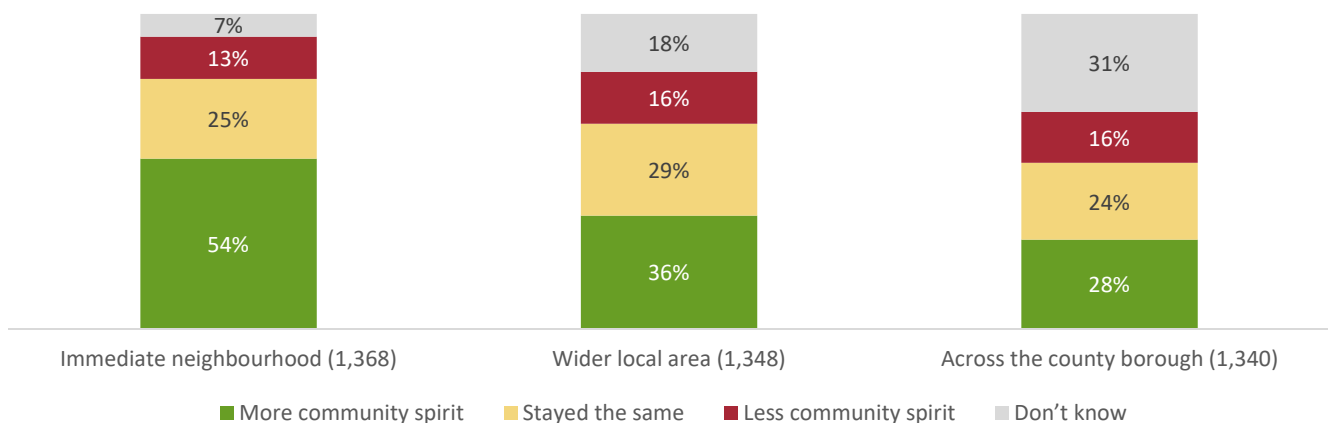
It is also important for us to respond to the problem facing Welsh medium education locally. Because of the pandemic, many families experienced difficulties in maintaining Welsh-medium education for their children, [because] the parents were not Welsh speakers. As a result, many parents have decided to withdraw their children from Welsh-medium schools

Changes in community spirit

Do you feel that there has been a change in the level of community spirit (e.g. the willingness and desire to participate in activities that promote/support a community) as a result of the COVID pandemic in your local area (estate, village, town or the county borough as a whole)?

- 3.40 More than half of respondents (54%) felt that there was more community spirit in their immediate neighbourhood as a result of the pandemic, while a further quarter (25%) felt it had stayed the same.
- 3.41 In general, respondents were more likely to observe a positive impact in their immediate neighbourhood, than they were across a wider area (that said, more than a third – 36% - felt community spirit had improved across the wider local area, and more than a quarter – 28% - felt it had improved across the whole county borough).
- 3.42 Close to a third (31%) were unable to answer about whether there had been a change in community spirit across the whole county borough.

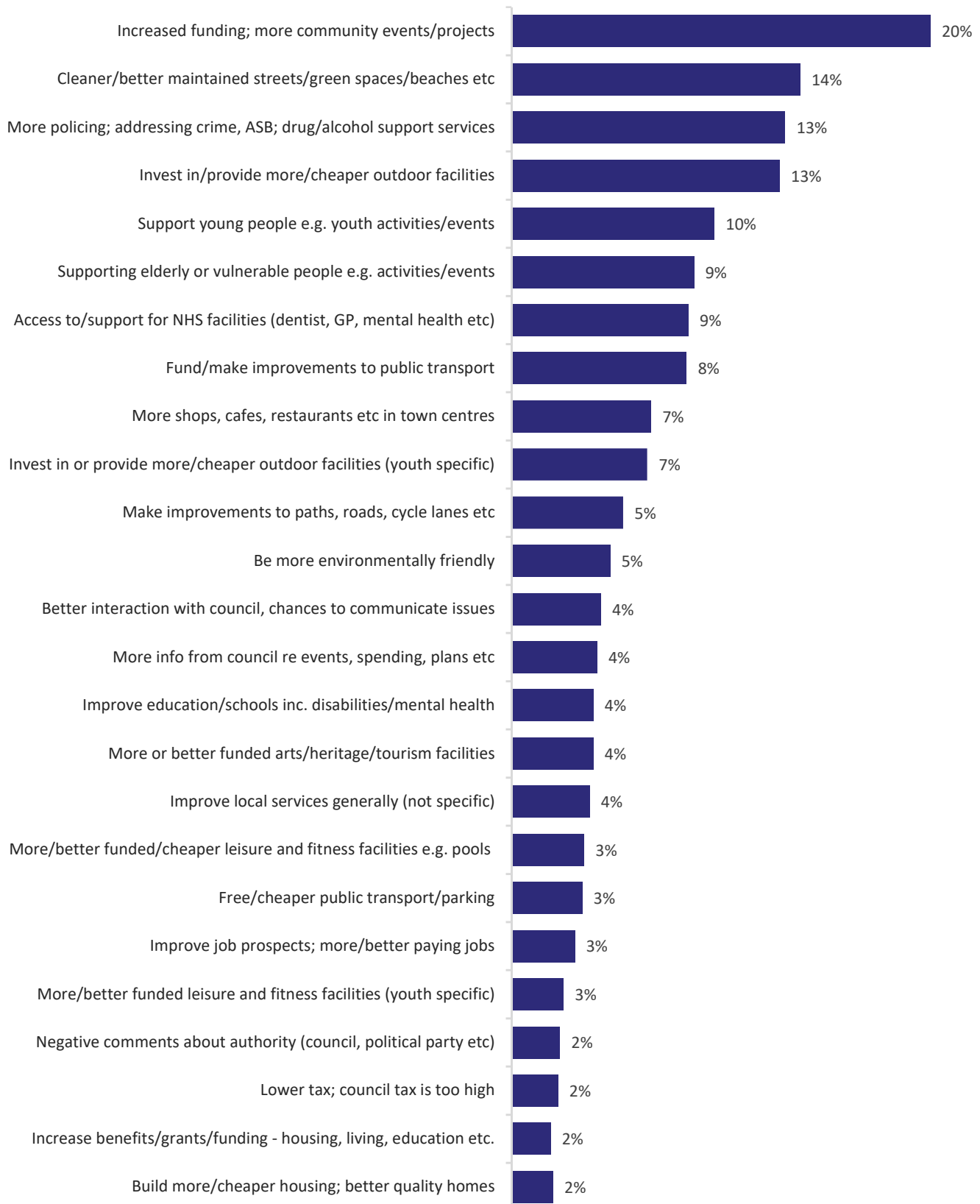
Figure 9: Summary of views around changes in levels of community spirit



Ways to improve life for residents

What could be done in your community to improve life for residents (these could be physical things or services)?

- 3.43 When respondents were asked to identify things that could be done to improve life for residents, the most common themes included:
- More funding for the community e.g. to support community events/projects (20%);
 - Cleaner and better-maintained streets, green spaces, beaches etc (including reductions in litter/fly tipping, and improvements in bin provision, maintenance etc) (14%);
 - Measures to address crime and ASB, including more policing, as well as extra support for drug and alcohol services (13%);
 - Investing in and/or providing more, or cheaper, outdoor facilities (13%);
 - More support for young people e.g. events and activities.

Figure 10: What could be done in your community to improve life for residents (these could be physical things or services)?**Base: All respondents who provided comments (1,117)****NB – themes raised by fewer than 2% of respondents have been excluded from charts**

- 3.44 Other themes raised by fewer respondents (1% or fewer) were as follows: better facilities/access for people with disabilities (e.g. ramps etc) (1%); greater enforcement of Covid-19 prevention measures (1%)⁴; healthy eating/diets, with access to healthy food options, etc (1%); improved educational opportunities (1%); consideration of issues around equalities and protected characteristics e.g. ethnicity, gender, sexuality and so on (1%), and keeping loved ones safe (<1%). In addition, around 10% of respondents made other, more miscellaneous comments.

Other comments/illustrative quotations

- 3.45 There was an emphasis on safeguarding the local area: its green spaces, heritage sites, public buildings and so on:

Maintain, improve and add to the accessible natural green spaces and nature reserves in the area - ensuring people can enjoy them, gain health benefits from them, learn and engage in, participate in volunteering and feel a stewardship for [them]. Generally increase the nature value of all public owned land and buildings.

Places look after people as much as people look after places... I really want the community in Neath to be able to discover their heritage; Covid has led to people wanting to discover their past. A heritage and art centre must be built. NPTCBC holds many artefacts and works of art. Why aren't these displayed to improve people's lives? This place would improve wellness, mental and physical health. Heritage centres are places of peacefulness and serenity, yet they stimulate as well.

Have lots of environmental and rewilding projects, address our heritage.

Bins in parks being emptied more often, more bins [for] recycling, planting more trees and free help for people to grow their own

- 3.46 There was a further emphasis on activities for young people, as well as extending 'Flying Start' for small children:

A better park for the older children. My children are 12 and 9 and there is very little to do in the park on our estate. We need sports clubs and activities to keep our children healthy.

Flying start catchment area to be updated, to be more inclusive as so many children are missing out on this amazing service.

Support youth services in the Amman Valley.

⁴ Though it should also be noted that a couple of respondents advocated the opposite i.e. ending Covid prevention measures

- 3.47 Some respondents' comments related to aspects of community safety (e.g. traffic calming measures, anti-crime measures etc):

Speed bumps or other traffic calming measures on Bryngurnos Street, Bryn.

Put a zebra crossing on Commercial Road, Taibach to make it safer and easier to cross the road and to help slow down traffic. This is a much-needed safety measure and will help support our local shops by making them more accessible it would be good to see police make an occasional appearance! CCTV in areas known to be regular dumping grounds for tipping and to keep our lanes safe during the dark nights.

Deal decisively with anti-social behaviour

- 3.48 There was support for helping businesses (including measures that might be outside the council's remit e.g. reducing taxes and business rates), while some advocated investing in education and skills to help strengthen the local economy and alleviate social issues:

More grants to rebuild. Skilled assistance with technical tasks (planning, development, tourism). Assistance to train people with a view to giving them future jobs (apprentice work, training schemes).

Make greater use of school buildings during half term and holiday closures, one of the most effective ways to get somebody out of poverty is education. Use empty buildings to support the most vulnerable.

- 3.49 There was some support for improving infrastructure, including roads and active travel, while others called for investment in regeneration projects and renewable energies:

Consider supporting the provision of an active travel route down from the Amman valley to Pontardawe. Move forward with the proposals for Coalfield Regeneration Fund business units on the old washery site... ensure appropriate conditions on any planning applications relating to the de registered common land to ensure community issues are dealt with.

Stop asset stripping the valley, improve transport links (including road widening and the depleted bus service), bring the existing roads and pathways up to an acceptable standard for users, take a long-term view for strategic improvements, make better use of the natural resources, find an effective way to use the water in the valley to generate electricity...

- 3.50 There was some support for a community-led approach:

Our community of Cwmavon has been a leading force during the pandemic and I hope this can be sustained.

I wish people would look after 'their patch' more and take responsibility for the way things look - instead of waiting for 'the council' to sort things out...let's appreciate what we have and make the most of it.



Neath Port Talbot Council

‘Let’s Talk’

Draft report of findings (Deliberative)

Opinion Research Services

November 2021

Neath Port Talbot Council: 'Let's Talk'

Draft report of findings (Deliberative)

Opinion Research Services

Date: November 2021

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As with all our studies, findings from this report are subject to Opinion Research Services' Standard Terms and Conditions of Contract.

Any press release or publication of the findings of this report requires the advance approval of ORS. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation

This study was conducted in accordance with ISO 20252:2015 and ISO 9001:2015.

This version of the report will be deemed to have been accepted by the client if ORS has not been informed of any amendments within a reasonable period of time (1 month)

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Contents

1. Executive Summary	4
Summary of main findings	4
Deliberative findings	4
2. The Consultation Process.....	7
Background to the Let’s Talk Consultation	7
The commission	7
The report	9
3. Main Deliberative Findings	10
Findings from five focus groups with residents	10
Introduction	10
What people said they love about their community	10
What people said they would like to change about their community	11
What residents said is important to them	14
The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities	16
Views on the Council’s presence during the pandemic	20
Presence of volunteers and other organisations during the pandemic	22
Views on general services provided by the Council	23
Suggested ideas for future focus	26
Summary of key points from the focus groups	31

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1. Executive Summary

Summary of main findings

Deliberative findings

This report reviews the sentiments and judgements of online focus groups and in-depth interviews with **30 residents** of the Afan, Amman, Dulais, Neath and Swansea Valleys.

What focus group participants said about their communities

- 1.1 Participants mostly spoke very positively about their local areas. Community spirit was generally said to be very strong across all of Neath Port Talbot's Valleys, with residents looking after one another and the provision of many community-led activities such as Christmas events, carnivals, and fundraising sessions at local community-led halls and clubs.
- 1.2 Most participants also spoke warmly about the natural beauty of the area, praising Aberavon Beach, the Brecon Beacons, local forests, and public parks. The 'Welshness' of the area was also celebrated by a small number of participants.
- 1.3 There were also many things participants would like to change about their communities, most commonly the provision of better transport links and mental health support. Other desired improvements were around reductions in antisocial behaviour, substance misuse, unemployment, and general deprivation.

What participants said about the impact of the pandemic on their communities

- 1.4 Most participants agreed that the pandemic had brought their communities closer, with residents being more enthusiastic about looking out for one another and providing for the vulnerable. Additionally, many said they had enjoyed the increased time spent with their families whilst working from home or on furlough.
- 1.5 The pandemic has also had many negative impacts though, an increase in mental health issues and loneliness being seen as the most impactful, compounded by an apparent reduction in mental health support provision. The closure of schools was also said to have had a significantly negative impact on children, with many schoolchildren developing loneliness and anxiety as a result.

What participants said about the Council's impact during the pandemic

- 1.6 Responses to the Council's presence during the pandemic were largely negative: most participants were either dissatisfied with its efforts or unaware of the services it provided. While the intention was applauded, complaints were made about the food deliveries for vulnerable people, which were allegedly late starting, too difficult to apply for, and substandard in terms of variety. However, the Council was praised for its efforts in providing financial assistance and laptops to struggling families with schoolchildren. The Council's support for the 'Street Champions' scheme was also applauded.

What participants said about the impact of other organisations during the pandemic

- 1.7 Participants spoke positively about the volunteers from within their communities who delivered food and provisions to their neighbours and the vulnerable. Additionally, the volunteers and founders of the 'Street Champions' scheme were praised for their efforts.
- 1.8 Local halls and clubs were also spoken of very highly, having provided street entertainment and food provisions during the lockdowns – and local businesses were praised for offering delivery services and allowing staff with underlying health difficulties to shield. Specifically, the Pen Y Cymoedd Windfarm was commended for donating money to community halls to better provide hot meals for the vulnerable and the elderly.

What participants said about Council services in general

- 1.9 Participants clearly valued public facilities such as parks and outdoor areas, swimming pools, community halls and libraries. However, they also voiced significant concern for the funding of such facilities, with numerous participants expressing concern that many may close within the next few years.
- 1.10 Dissatisfaction with travel was the most common issue expressed by participants when discussing services: it was felt that buses should run more often and offer better links to the larger towns in Neath Port Talbot and the surrounding area.
- 1.11 Many participants also stated their belief that the Council misspends money on facilities that are not required by local communities, and that their council tax does not provide value for money.

What participants suggested the Council should focus on in future

- 1.12 Many participants felt that improvements to public transport should be a priority for the council. Suggestions offered included increasing the number of buses serving smaller areas, community transport schemes, and better linking local bus routes to those traveling into Swansea and larger towns in Neath Port Talbot. It was said that improving public transport would encourage residents to find work, allow schoolchildren to attend extracurricular activities, and enable all residents to spend money and leisure time in the likes of Neath, Port Talbot and Pontardawe.
- 1.13 Participants also advocate an increase in transparency and community involvement in decision-making. Indeed, many residents felt that the council should consider a much wider range of views before spending public money on new facilities – and that funding should be concentrated on maintaining existing facilities, such as swimming pools and community centres, rather than on building new ones. Other suggestions included preventing Council tax from rising and ensuring that schools continue to be funded appropriately.

2. The Consultation Process

Background to the Let's Talk Consultation

- 2.1 2020-21 has been a time of unprecedented change and uncertainty. The economic and social impacts of COVID-19 have been significant, with many people's sense of isolation and loneliness increasing as a result of several lockdowns. However, the increased time spent at home has also had more positive impacts, with many people feeling better connected to their families and local areas as a result.
- 2.2 It has been widely suggested that the effects of the pandemic on the British public presents a potential opportunity to re-evaluate what is important to people in their day-to-day lives. Neath Port Talbot County Council (NPTCBC) ran the 'Let's Talk' project reported here to capitalise on this opportunity.
- 2.3 'Let's Talk' is an open-ended consultation, acting as an opportunity for the public to talk about what matters to them. The aim of the consultation has been to understand what residents feel is important to and how the Council can equip the communities of Neath Port Talbot to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic as positively as possible.

The commission

- 2.4 Opinion Research Services (ORS) - a spin-out company from Swansea University with a UK-wide reputation for social research - was asked to convene and facilitate online focus groups and in-depth interviews with residents of the Afan, Amman, Dulais, Neath and Swansea Valleys. Participants were asked to give their views on the following topics:
 - Things they love about their community
 - Things they would like to change about their community
 - The positive impacts of the pandemic on their community and how to maintain them
 - The negative impacts of the pandemic on their community
 - The Council's presence during the pandemic
 - The Presence of other organisations and groups during the pandemic
 - General views on council services
 - Ideas for future focus
- 2.5 The focus groups and the in-depth interviews were held on the online videoconferencing platform, Zoom. Each focus group was attended by two ORS staff members, with one acting as the meeting coordinator and the other as assistant and note-taker. Each group consisted of between 3-5 participants, with a total of 23 participants overall.
- 2.6 A further seven in-depth interviews were then held, where a single participant was interviewed by one ORS staff member. As a result, 30 residents of the Neath Port Talbot area were consulted with and given the opportunity to give their thoughts and feelings on the relevant subjects. The dates and number of attendees to each of the focus group and in-depth interviews are in the table below:

Meeting	Date	Number of Attendees
Swansea Valley	4/10/21	6
Afan Valley Focus Group	5/10/21	3 + 3 depth interviews
Neath Valley Focus Group	7/10/21	4 + 2 depth interviews
Dulais Valley Focus Group	12/10/21	5 + 1 depth interview
Amman Valley Focus Group	13/10/21	5 + 1 depth interview

- 2.7 Around half of participants were recruited via Random Digit Dialling (RDD), and the other half via a list of those who had completed the Let’s Talk questionnaire and indicated that they would like to take part in further research. All those recruited were sent all the necessary details in a confirmation email and telephoned a day or two before the events to confirm their attendance. In recruitment, care was taken to ensure that no potential participants were disqualified or disadvantaged by disabilities or any other factors. The recruitment process was monitored to ensure social diversity in terms of a wide range of criteria including, for example: gender; age; working status; and disability/limiting long-term illness (LLTI).
- 2.8 Recruiting for focus groups of this nature can prove difficult because of the broad nature of the topic under consideration. People linked to specific interest groups and who volunteer in their community are more likely to participate, which we found during this study. The quick turnaround for the research was also a limiting factor but by doing some additional interviews we were able to engage with a wider, more diverse set of people. It was agreed that at least six people from each area would be engaged and as the table shows, this was achieved. As standard good practice, all attendees were offered a gift voucher as a thank you for giving up a significant amount of their time to take part.
- 2.9 Although, like all other forms of qualitative engagement, deliberative focus groups cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the meetings reported here gave diverse members of the public the opportunity to participate actively. Because the meetings were inclusive, the outcomes are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions.

The report

- 2.10 This report reviews the sentiments and judgements of focus group and interview participants on what they like and dislike about their communities, the positive and negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their communities, the presence of the Council, volunteers and other organisations during the pandemic, services provided by the Council in general, and ideas for future focus. Verbatim quotations are used, in indented italics, not because we agree or disagree with them - but for their vividness in capturing recurrent points of view. ORS does not endorse any opinions but seeks only to portray them accurately and clearly. The report is an interpretative summary of the issues raised by participants.

3. Main Deliberative Findings

Findings from five focus groups with residents

Introduction

- 3.1 This chapter reports the views from five online focus groups with residents of the Afan, Amman, Dulais, Neath and Swansea Valleys, which were independently facilitated by ORS.
- 3.2 This is not a verbatim transcript of the five sessions, but an interpretative summary of the issues raised by participants in free-ranging discussions - and as the focus groups did not differ materially in their views, this report combines the findings from all the meetings in a single account while drawing out any differences in opinion.

What people said they love about their community

Community spirit & community-led events

- 3.3 When asked what they love about their area, almost all participants were very positive about the sense of community across the different towns and villages in the Valleys. Participants praised the community spirit where they live and said that they felt their neighbours looked after each other.

“I love my community. I love that its small and I love that all of us, or a lot of us, know each other and are involved in things together” (Neath Valley Focus Group)

“Everybody is so welcoming and lovely, and when my daughter was seriously ill the lady over the road took my son in and looked after him. It’s just like one massive family” (Neath Valley Focus Group)

“Our sense of community is outstanding. We still ask our neighbours if they need anything down the shop if we pass them. We still make sure ‘Oh, Mrs Jones hasn’t opened her curtains this morning, we better go give her a knock’. A very tight-knit community, very proud people. We’re very much brought together.” (Afan Valley)

- 3.4 People also said that community-led events are frequent in their area and that they are important to residents in maintaining a sense of community. Numerous events were mentioned, including carnivals, Christmas events for children, bingo nights and fundraising events for residents with serious illnesses or who are otherwise vulnerable. It was said that these events are an important part of the community and much of the reason why they love where they live.

“We got together and started building community spirit again, it’s been a huge success. We not only arranged the carnival, but we also arranged the Christmas events” (Neath Valley)

The rugby club had fundraiser last month and raised over £10,000 for the kids.” (Afan Valley)

The natural beauty of the area

- 3.5 Most participants said that the geography of the area is very important to them. The natural beauty of Neath Port Talbot was praised, with the Western Brecon Beacons, Aberavon Beach and the many waterfalls in the area being discussed specifically. In addition, it was said that the footpaths, cycle routes, public parks and forests are important places that people can visit to enjoy and feel safe – and that the area benefits from being near Swansea and the coastline, whilst maintaining its “community feel”.

“Aberavon beach, I think is beautiful because you’ve got lovely walks there and that’s accessible for everybody” (Dulais Valley)

“I think we’re pretty lucky living in this area of the world. We’ve got city, country, and coastline all on our doorstep, so we’ve got a pretty good mix. I think I feel sort of protected living in this area. We’re just outside of the big city and there’s more of a community feel in this area than there would be in Swansea” (Dulais Valley)

Welsh language & culture

- 3.6 Some participants expressed a love for the ‘Welshness’ of their community. The presence of the Welsh language was said to be a very positive attribute that Welsh speakers appreciate, as is the general sense of Welsh culture and heritage. Some also said that the presence of the Welsh language alongside English is beneficial for their children’s learning.

“The Welshness of the area has enhanced our children’s education” (Amman Valley Focus Group)

“One of the main things for this area for me ... is the sense of Welshness. Welsh culture, Welsh heritage and Welsh language” (Dulais Valley)

What people said they would like to change about their community

Better transport links

- 3.7 The most common theme that arose when discussing what participants would like to change about their community was the issue of transport. In almost every discussion, participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the transport links in their community and said they would like to see them improved.

“It is assumed that you can get to a leisure centre or get to where the resources are put. It’s not necessarily recognised that in the more rural areas, public transport is more difficult to get there” (Amman Valley)

- 3.8 Rural villages and small towns in all Valleys were said to have poor transport links with schools and larger towns in Neath Port Talbot. It was said that such issues make it difficult for children (particularly in the Afan and Amman Valleys) to attend extracurricular activities after school, which disadvantages them. Links to towns in Neath Port Talbot were also said to be poor, therefore encouraging residents to shop in towns outside the area such as Ammanford and Carmarthen, rather than supporting towns nearer them like Pontardawe. This was said to have a knock-on impact on the local economy and local businesses.

"I want transport for our children to do extracurricular activities. If they're down the comprehensive in Port Talbot, I want to make sure they can do after school clubs, sports teams and training after school hours. I want them to have exactly the same start as the children all the way down from Cwmafan" (Afan Valley)

"There are over 4,000 people living in the villages around here, they're not encouraged in any way to go down to their third largest town behind Neath and Port Talbot, which is Pontardawe. So... they're not encouraged to spend their money down there, but they can jump on a bus and go down to Ammanford and Carmarthenshire" (Amman Valley)

- 3.9 Transport to Swansea was also said to be poor, with bus times starting too late in the morning and ending too early in the evening. The buses were also said to take too long to reach Swansea. Participants said that this discourages people from working as they would not be able to get to a job in Swansea unless they owned a car.

"If I wanted a job in Swansea and I caught the 7:40 bus, I wouldn't get there in time for 9 o'clock. That's an hour and twenty minutes. It takes thirty minutes in the car. Because of the connections you can't get to a job early in Swansea" (Afan Valley)

"They say they want you to go out to work, well where do you work for three hours a day? By the time you get your bus ... you can work three hours and then you've got to get the last bus home. You're never going to sustain that" (Neath Valley)

Better provisions for mental health and the isolated

- 3.10 A significant number of participants said that they would like to see better mental health provisions in their communities for vulnerable residents. People expressed concern that those suffering from depression and other mental health issues were not being cared for appropriately and that people often do not receive help until the situation has reached crisis point.

"There's also a lot of issues about mental health services and how they provide care and support for people who find themselves in these situations. I think we need to help these people more and have places for them to go so that they're not hanging around in the streets drinking and taking drugs, but that they get the support they need to tackle the issues that they've got" (Dulais Valley)

"I've also seen a massive gap in this county borough for mental health issues, and I mean people who are suffering with serious depression, people who are suicidal. I've had first-hand experience of this and there is no help unless you're really, kind of, knocking on deaths door ... there needs to be more money spent on that type of thing" (Dulais Valley)

- 3.11 Participants also voiced concerns that there are people in their villages who are isolated and unable to socialise. It was said that better provision should be made to help these people socialise, with many suggesting that community-run cafes would be suitable, providing they are made accessible to all people.

"I think there are people hidden away in our communities here who are suffering from social exclusion, social isolation, that the communities don't know about, neighbour perhaps don't know about, and it's a ticking time bomb" (Amman Valley)

Reduction in antisocial behaviour / substance misuse

- 3.12 Numerous participants expressed concern about antisocial behaviour on the part of teenagers and young adults. They said that parks have been vandalised multiple times and that drinking and drug-taking are widespread issues in the area that they would like to see an end to.

“Teenagers and young adults are drinking and taking drugs in public, especially in the local park it is an issue” (Dulais Valley)

“I’ve seen more drugs in this village than when I worked in Ibiza ... It’s rife” (Afan Valley)

Reduction in deprivation and unemployment

- 3.13 Widespread deprivation and unemployment was also thought to be an issue in Neath Port Talbot. Numerous participants said that they did not like visiting Neath town because the levels of deprivation and street drinking meant they did not feel safe.

“Neath has just gone to the dogs. There’s nothing in the town anymore. There’s nothing there apart from charity shops, phone shops, and people drinking in the streets. From growing up and going out around Neath all the time and feeling safe, I wouldn’t feel safe going around there anymore” (Dulais Valley)

“Nothing is encouraging. There are no youth training schemes, no industry, there’s no economy, there’s nothing” (Afan Valley)

Collaboration between the community and the Council

- 3.14 Participants said that they would like to see more communication and collaboration between the community and Council. There was a sense that the Council is unaware of the issues faced by residents in small villages.

“Its little stuff like the post office ... in our village has been shut since February. There are others in the valley but if you haven’t got transport how can you access [them]?” (Afan Valley)

- 3.15 In particular, participants said that elderly members of the population who do not use social media are at a disadvantage because they cannot keep track of what services are available to them. Therefore, elderly residents should, it was felt, be made more aware of council services by other means.

“Get more physical information for elderly groups who don’t have access to social media. Get the messages out to the older generation” (Neath Valley)

Increased litter picking in smaller areas

- 3.16 Litter was discussed on occasion during the sessions. Litter picking on the A474 was praised for its success in improving the area, however residents expressed a desire for smaller roads in villages and towns to be targeted also.

“I think with the type of bins that we have with the open bags, there’s an issue with litter around the valley. I think perhaps there needs to be more litter picks on the roads, especially on the roads where there’s a build-up sometimes between Crynant to Neath ... I wish they’d do a few more rounds than they’re doing” (Dulais Valley)

Improved services for young and disabled people

- 3.17 Participants wanted to see more services for children and young people, such as youth clubs and activity groups. Those with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds were particularly thought to be in need of such services.

“It’s the services that they provide. There aren’t enough services, like I said, for the teenagers especially and people with additional needs. There’s nothing in the area ... for my son and other children that are disadvantaged” (Dulais Valley)

What residents said is important to them

General health and wellbeing

- 3.18 Many participants said that their health and wellbeing, as well as that of their family and the community, was the most important thing to them. As a result, many expressed concerns about health services in the area, with residents struggling to receive healthcare and ambulance waiting times increasing.

“Being healthy and safe more than anything” (Afan Valley)

“My grandmother ... she waited four hours for an ambulance, and this is just one out of probably thousands throughout the County Borough and Wales, and by the time it was too late. She’d gone” (Dulais Valley)

Care for the elderly and the vulnerable

- 3.19 Care for the elderly and the vulnerable was said by many to be of great importance to them. Participants felt that it had become more difficult to access such assistance though, and considered improvements in this area to be a priority.

“I think care for the elderly is extremely important. We’re an ageing population, we know a lot of older people around us, and years ago you had the Home Help. Now everything has to be means-tested or paid for and I think lot of people struggle, or are too proud to say they need help ... I think that is a priority for the authority, is care of old people” (Dulais Valley)

Improving services in smaller rural areas

- 3.20 Some participants felt that smaller areas in the valleys have been forgotten by the Council and so improving communication and services in these areas was very important to them. In particular, the Afan and Amman valleys were said to have been neglected and left with poor transport, poor services for young people and the vulnerable, and digital exclusion.

"In my community of Glyncoerrwg and the Upper Afan valley as a whole, I'd like to see extra curriculum activities for under 11s, STEM activities and better access to the digital world ... we are in 21st century poverty" (Afan Valley)

"There was a report that I found written in 2009 written about the Amman Valley ... it mentions social isolation and this was from 2009" (Amman Valley)

Opportunities and education for children

- 3.21 Numerous participants said that their children's education was the most important thing to them. Opportunities for children to attend youth clubs and take part in extracurricular activities were also thought to be essential.

"My daughter's education is what matters most to me at the minute" (Swansea Valley)

"My kids are school age, so education is at the forefront of my mind" (Dulais Valley)

Sense of community and opportunities to socialise

- 3.22 Many residents said that being able to socialise in the community was very important to them as individuals, and in maintaining a sense of community and providing enjoyable experiences for people. Some voiced concerns that many residents cannot afford to attend certain events and have become isolated as a result.

"The light show in Margam park, Illuminate. How inclusive is that? It's quite expensive actually. I'm lucky I can go along and take my kids, not everyone's as fortunate as that" (Afan Valley)

"It feels there are opportunities, but only if you can afford it" (Afan Valley)

Services for residents that live close to county borders

- 3.23 One participant living near the county border with Powys said that accessing services became an important issue for them over the course of the pandemic. They said they had become isolated as a result of not being able to access the services nearest to them as they were 'out of county', suggesting that councils need to look at the provision of cross-border services to ensure this does not happen again in future.

"One of the biggest issues for me, probably because of my location, is cross-border problems. During the pandemic this highlighted cross-border problems. I think we need to open up the borders" (Swansea Valley)

Have the things that matter changed over the last 18 months?

- 3.24 Participants were largely split over whether or not their priorities had changed since the beginning of the pandemic. Many said they had because COVID-19 had made them aware of their sense of community for the first time. Others said it had brought their community much closer and changed their priorities as a result, since they now wanted to make sure that their friends and neighbours were provided for.

"I'd say so. Community spirit is a lot more important now" (Afan Valley)

- 3.25 Others said that their priorities had not changed over the course of the pandemic, because their community had always been important to them. Many of these people suggested that the pandemic had potentially heightened their awareness of just how important certain issues are to them though.

"I wouldn't say I've changed my mind, it just made me more aware" (Afan Valley)

"No, we've been fighting for provisions in Glyncorrwg for the last twenty-five years" (Afan Valley)

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities

Strengthened sense of community

- 3.26 Most participants felt that the pandemic had brought their communities closer together. Indeed, many residents said that they had not tried to get to know their neighbours beforehand, but that they had become close friends of the last two years as a result of the past 18 months. Others said that their existing connection to their community and their neighbours had been strengthened.

"We've all clubbed together over this period, and I've joined all sorts of groups locally ... it's been really lovely, and I've made a lot of new friends which live locally that I've never met before, who I've lived alongside for over a decade. In terms of what I've had out of this, or what I wouldn't want to change ... I would hope that those friendships continue, I would hope that that community feel still exists in five or ten years from now" (Neath Valley)

"It's brought neighbours closer. I live amongst mainly elderly, and it has brought us all closer in helping each other out. We now phone each other regularly if we haven't heard of each other ... I couldn't have even told you what my neighbours' names were before the pandemic" (Dulais Valley)

- 3.27 It was said that neighbours began volunteering to collect food and provisions for those who had to self-isolate. Much of this was said to have been done informally between friends, though some community members have volunteered to deliver provisions for larger numbers of people in their surrounding area.

"I had a neighbour knocking my door seeing if I wanted prescriptions, I had people asking if I needed bread or milk. I sat in my garden and everybody that passed stopped and spoke. It did bring back the fact that I was glad I was back in Glyncorrwg" (Afan Valley)

"During the past 12 months, the community spirit in Resolven has been absolutely amazing. Everyone is with everyone. There's a community group we set up on Facebook to see if anybody needed help or deliveries. It's been fantastic" (Neath Valley)

- 3.28 Whilst the majority felt that the pandemic had enhanced their sense of community, a very small number of participants disagreed – but only because they said it was already fairly strong.

“We know most of the neighbours and most of the neighbours know me. A young couple moved in just pre-COVID, and we got to know them. Just from our street to pass the time of day with people, we’ve got some older neighbours and next-door are checking if they’re okay, but it’s something that as a community I think we did anyway” (Amman Valley)

Increased quality time with family

- 3.29 Many participants said that being on furlough or working from home allowed them to spend more time with their families, which they enjoyed greatly.

“I think it’s given us a bit more flexibility in regards to work/life. Meeting on Zoom, a lot of people working from home. I found that easier with regards to the children ... It doesn’t work for everybody, and there should be an option for people to go into a physical building if they want to, but I know a lot of mums who’ve found that aspect easier going forward, especially with school runs...” (Dulais Valley)

Maintaining the positive impact of the pandemic on the community

- 3.30 Generally, participants said that the positive impacts of the pandemic on their communities would be better maintained by spending money on existing facilities such as village halls and community centres, rather than on brand new facilities. Coffee mornings, youth clubs, evening meal clubs and bingo nights were all suggested as effective means of encouraging community activity. Therefore, participants hoped (but were sceptical) that funding would be provided to existing facilities to allow such events to be held.

“By opening the community centre up. Give it back to the community but give us the funding to keep the building maintained and have the money to pay for professional help to come here” (Afan Valley)

“Ask people what they want. Don’t just build a new park or hall and assume we wanted or needed it” (Neath Valley)

“I think there’s no public money around. My big worry is that I think a lot of the things that were done in COVID were done for the older generation or families. I think for young people, aged 11-25, I don’t see that anybody has the money to spend in supporting them in a way one would want to. I think that’s where there will be challenges” (Amman Valley)

- 3.31 Participants also hoped that they would be able to continue a ‘blended’ approach to work after the pandemic, that would allow them to work from home on certain days. They felt that this would allow them to remain closer to their families in the long-term.

“I think a blended approach helps some ... especially with regards to the workplace ... so with me I can work from home or I can go into the building ... that’s beneficial for me for a number of reasons” (Dulais Valley)

Worsening of mental health issues

- 3.32 In terms of less positive impacts, participants felt that existing mental health issues have been exacerbated by the COVID19 pandemic.

"The pandemic absolutely rocked me to my core. I had to have CBT therapy after it because when I was allowed back out, I couldn't physically open my door. I was so scared" (Afan Valley)

- 3.33 Many felt that mental health services, which were already lacking before the pandemic, 'stood back' during the last two years. This was said to have had a further negative impact on those requiring them. Therefore, participants suggested that mental health services must now begin to resume and increase their activity, regardless of the ongoing situation.

"I think a lot of the health services, and especially the mental health services, have sort of stood back a little bit because of the Covid ... and there's lots of people suffering as a result of that. I think that has to stop now. It has to be improved and people have to be helped" (Dulais Valley)

"We can all go out and sit in restaurants and pubs without facemasks and so if you've been double vaccinated then I don't think there's any excuse really for not coming round and knocking on the door and seeing if people are alright" (Dulais Valley)

- 3.34 Whilst some people praised charities such as 'Mind' for their work during the pandemic, people in the Afan Valley said that they did not have access to such services. As a result, they were forced to see their GP, who simply prescribed antidepressants rather than having the root cause of their illness addressed.

"There isn't somewhere like 'Mind' in the Valleys, so you have to go to the doctors to get antidepressants" (Afan Valley)

"The GP finds it easier to calm you down and shut you up than to identify what the problem is. When you go through the NHS, their route is medication counselling. It's not getting to the route of the problem. It took me to have a psychotic break in March to actually be put under the mental health services ... I'm still waiting to see a psychiatrist" (Afan Valley)

Increased isolation of lonely residents

- 3.35 Many participants feared that the number of socially isolated people had grown due to the pandemic.

"Social isolation has been a big thing for a lot of people. They haven't seen anybody, haven't spoken to anybody for weeks. I think that's really impacted on their health" (Dulais Valley)

"It's divided the haves and have nots. It's divided the people who were isolated and those who were able to get support" (Amman Valley)

- 3.36 Others said that isolation has been an issue in the Valleys long before COVID-19, and that rather than increasing it, the pandemic had simply highlighted the issue.

"That was true before COVID as well. But since then, more and more people obviously are staying in" (Amman Valley)

“It carries on from what I said earlier about people not going out ... it’s that social interaction. But then again, most of that social interaction wasn’t there pre-COVID anyway. So, I don’t see a difference in that I don’t see people out on the streets anyway to discuss things. There’s nobody about. It’s like a ghost town at times” (Amman Valley)

Closure of day services and youth centres

- 3.37 Multiple participants discussed the negative impact on the elderly of the closure of day services during the pandemic. Moreover, the closure of cafes and a lack of transport to towns was said to be a significant issue for elderly people and adults with learning difficulties, who could no longer access means to socialise because they could not go online.

“Everything shut down. There were no buses, there was no day services, all the normal places they would go, they were all shut. Taxis weren’t running” (Neath Valley)

- 3.38 The closure of youth centres throughout Neath Port Talbot was also discussed in relation to the negative impact on children and young people.

“I used to run a youth club in Briton ferry, which is quite a deprived area. You’ve got a Gypsy community there, a Travelling community, etc. and they used to come to that a lot to that youth club and obviously that came to an end. It hasn’t started back ... so it would’ve had a negative impact on children” (Dulais Valley)

“As much as I enjoyed the slowness, there were no groups for my kids to go to. It’s a long day in the house with nowhere to go” (Amman Valley)

School closures and the impact on children

- 3.39 Participants displayed a clear concern for the impact of the pandemic on their children and the degree to which they have been isolated as a result of it.

“We have a baby here that had never seen another baby until restrictions were lifted” (Afan Valley)

- 3.40 Participants said their children had developed anxieties about going to school because they were afraid of giving the virus to their family, and about the impact of not being in school on their isolation and loneliness.

“I think that school is a massive social aspect as well for the parents and for children ... I know there was a lot of children who were anxious going back to school and anxious about being out of school because they weren’t seeing anybody. I know there were some children in my son’s class who were only children, so they didn’t see anybody their age for months ... Obviously all the clubs are off and everything, so I think that’s have a massive impact on the children” (Neath Valley)

“I know with my one, I had to take ten weeks off work because she was feeling so anxious because her routine, her friends, everything was just changed” (Neath Valley)

- 3.41 Some participants said that existing antisocial behaviour had become much worse as a result of the pandemic, with teenagers drinking, taking drugs and vandalising parks when not in school.

“It’s just behaviour in general as well. Because they haven’t been kept in line with the school, it’s like they’ve been let off their leads” (Dulais Valley In-depth Interview)

“Children and young adults, there’s been a great increase in gatherings of people smoking, taking drugs in the area, also drinking. And you’re talking 12/13-year-olds with both drink and drugs in the area. I think it’s an issue of they haven’t been able to spend the money elsewhere like they used to, so they see it as ‘we’ve got money, let’s go do the alternative’” (Dulais Valley)

Views on the Council’s presence during the pandemic

General dissatisfaction and unawareness of services

- 3.42 Some participants questioned what the Council does for their community more widely.

“I think everybody shares the same opinion here that we don’t really know what the Council does for us now. So, for us to be talking about what they’re going to be doing in the next five years is a big question” (Neath Valley)

Food deliveries for the vulnerable

- 3.43 The Council’s food deliveries were discussed by multiple participants, who had mixed views on them. Some were aware of vulnerable people receiving the service and so were glad it existed for them.

“I’m aware of the online, of people who could get in touch. And I’m aware of a close friend who had people offering to go to the shop for her. Unfortunately, she was going through a serious illness and had to self-isolate before COVID struck anyway ... There was help where somebody would do the shopping for her. She had plenty of friends to do it for her, but at least then there was only one person, and she didn’t have one, or two, or three or four people getting things for her” (Amman Valley)

Social provisions for adults with learning difficulties

- 3.44 One participant discussed what they saw as the ineffectiveness of social provisions for adults with learning difficulties, explaining that the Council had been too late getting in touch with them and had not considered their needs and abilities appropriately. As a result, many people were unable to benefit from online social sessions because they did not have access to the internet or appropriate equipment.

“When the day services did make contact with their members, I think it was about month three or four, so it was well into the pandemic. They hadn’t checked on these people, bearing in mind lots of them live entirely on their own. They offered them Teams meetings without even checking that they had the equipment or the internet to do it. So, if you had Teams, if you had that right support or you lived with your parents, chances are that you had a laptop or an iPad or something. But a lot of them that live independently don’t have the internet. They didn’t do anything to put that in place ... they didn’t do a lot of real research, they just provided a token gesture. You know, ‘Oh, we’ll contact you if you can access us’” (Neath Valley)

‘Street Champions’ scheme

- 3.45 Many participants discussed the Street Champions scheme: the Council was praised for funding it, and the scheme itself was widely appreciated by the community. As such, it was suggested that the Council should continue to support the scheme.

“I think they were definitely visible through our County Borough councillor in the Dulais Valley ... I would say that I think it’s important the County Borough Council ensure that they play their part in the continuation of that scheme and funding and supporting of that scheme” (Dulais Valley)

Waste collection and recycling centres

- 3.46 Neath Port Talbot’s waste collection services and recycling centres were highly praised for the way they continued to function throughout the pandemic.

“The bin men and the recycling centres. I think that they played an important role by collecting everyone’s waste efficiently. I think that worked well” (Dulais Valley)

“I think they’re very successful in the recycling rates, and that is something where the workmen have done fantastic work, probably in difficult circumstances with members of staff being away” (Amman Valley)

Provisions for schoolchildren

- 3.47 One participant said that they had seen parents of schoolchildren in receipt of free school meals receive financial support during the pandemic. Whilst they thought there had perhaps been too much bureaucracy in the process preventing some people in need from receiving the aid, they commended the Council for what they considered a positive input. The provision of laptops for children attending school from home during lockdown was also praised.

“One thing, I didn’t access it myself, but I know a lot of people did ... the children with the free school meals, when they couldn’t access that, I know that the parents had money transferred to them ... I know that it really helped people who needed it. And I know the schools got access to computers for the children who didn’t have them” (Neath Valley)

Presence of volunteers and other organisations during the pandemic

Foodbanks and volunteers delivering provisions

- 3.48 Most participants discussed the importance and positive impact of volunteers delivering food to the vulnerable during the pandemic.

“Just local people going ‘I’ll help and drop some food off’. How fantastic is that?” (Afan Valley)

- 3.49 Foodbanks were also praised for their work. Some said that the bureaucracy involved in accessing aid from certain charities prevented people from getting what they needed; as a result, residents set up their own food banks to provide for their communities.

“I’m a volunteer in the food bank there [in Resolven] ... we have a foodbank in the centre ... It was part of the Trussell Trust when the food bank was first set up, but it was a couple of times a year sort of thing. You couldn’t go there if you were in need, and we couldn’t see people go without food. So basically, we set up an independent food bank” (Neath Valley)

- 3.50 Indeed, the general consensus from participants was that local communities had largely provided for themselves during the pandemic, through the work of volunteers.

“I guess the community picked up the slack for that really” (Afan Valley)

Contributions of local businesses

- 3.51 Numerous participants praised the efforts of local businesses in supporting the community during the pandemic. Local shops were said to have offered free deliveries to those who were self-isolating, given staff time off if they had underlying health problems, and closed periodically when COVID rates were at their highest.

“Our local shop did free deliveries. You could ring and ask for what you wanted, and they would deliver it to your door, social distanced” (Neath Valley)

“As a community, we look out for each other. Cases in the village skyrocketed last year. The businesses in the area were taking their own decisions to close shops to contain the spread of it in our own community. It wasn’t part of the Government lockdown or anything like that; businesses were taking their own decision” (Neath Valley)

Donations from Pen Y Cymoedd Windfarm

- 3.52 A few participants mentioned the donations made by the Pen Y Cymoedd Windfarm to the area. This was said to have benefitted local community halls, aiding volunteers to provide for the vulnerable.

“The windfarms donated money that enabled us to have kitchen facilities in the hall. Proper kitchen facilities that allow volunteers to cook and provide hot meals for the vulnerable and the elderly, so I know they donated a bit of money toward that” (Afan Valley)

Community/village halls and rugby clubs

- 3.53 Many participants praised their local community/village halls and rugby clubs for providing services and aid to the community.

“Cwmlllynfell has a community hall and that’s about it. We had a community cafe there before the pandemic, which was doing quite nicely, all ages coming along. Then COVID came along, and the manager decided to keep going with the help of volunteers, which was absolutely amazing. All sorts came to help deliver food to individuals in the community” (Amman Valley)

- 3.54 As well as providing cafes, fundraising and delivering provisions to the vulnerable, village/community halls across the Valleys were said to have provided social opportunities for residents through, for example, street entertainers, live music and fireworks displays.

“The hall, which used to be the miner’s hall, in Glyncorwg ... the owner and his family ... was providing meals, had volunteers delivering the meals, they were free for the vulnerable and people could donate if they wanted to. People were sending stuff in for raffles to keep the kitchen open, he was putting on entertainment ... he had fireworks ... Instead of the carnival this year, he paid for an entertainer to come up and down, singing and dancing and doing stuff for the children. It was amazing” (Afan Valley)

“He brought Easter eggs around for children in the village, we had Santa come round with selection boxes. Anything you can think of he did to help keep us going. Everybody put their hands in their pockets and made sure everybody was looked after” (Afan Valley)

Views on general services provided by the Council

Appreciation of parks and general outdoor areas

- 3.55 Most participants spoke very highly of the parks and outdoor spaces provided by the Council.

“Parks and outdoor spaces are really important, places like the Gnoll and Aberavon Beach” (Neath Valley)

- 3.56 Indeed, the Council’s investment into Aberavon beach was praised by numerous participants. Access to the beach and its facilities were said to be a great benefit for people.

“Some people can’t manage to climb up mountains, but when you go to Aberavon Beach, everyone can access that and walk along the front and have some fresh air and exercise. I think what the County have done with the facilities there is lovely as well for young people and children” (Dulais Valley)

“We also have a lovely beach; they have done a lot of work to that. That is the nicest part” (Afan Valley)

- 3.57 Despite the general appreciation of Neath Port Talbot’s outdoor areas, there was some concern about antisocial behaviour in certain parks, particularly in the Dulais Valley. Residents felt that the Council does not patrol or clean the parks sufficiently, with broken glass being and dog faeces being left on equipment.

“It’s not having the park, it’s just the general outlay and the way that it’s operated. We’ve had dog faeces rubbed all over the equipment” (Dulais Valley)

“It’s been done inappropriately. Obviously not enough thought put into it. The location of the park is out of sight of everyone, so they’re out of sight and they’re out of mind then” (Dulais Valley)

- 3.58 Amman Valley residents also voiced concern over the parks in their area, claiming they are not maintained well enough.

“The park by the school is really outdated now. I’d love to see that come together again. Everything is broken there, there were nails sticking out of the climbing frame last year. The school is right there, kids are guaranteed to use that park every day” (Amman Valley)

Appreciation of public swimming pools and libraries

- 3.59 Many participants were appreciative of the swimming pools and libraries in Neath Port Talbot. Children were said to particularly benefit from the former, and all ages from the latter.

“I think we’re very lucky to have a swimming pool down two miles down the road” (Afan Valley)

“My kids access the swimming pools, they love swimming. We’ve got Vale of Neath pool just across the way” (Neath Valley)

“I think library services are very important. There’s a small library in the centre in Cynant that is run by the community centre, but Neath library has always been something I’ve used, and would like to continue using in the future” (Dulais Valley)

3.60 There were, though, worries about the funding and future sustainability of such facilities.

“It worries me that every community centre, the swimming pool, the gym, and the library, are social enterprises. Every year they have to fight for funding to keep them open and to maintain the building. And that they expect volunteers to run these centres” (Afan Valley In-depth Interview 2)

Dissatisfaction with the Council’s decision-making processes

3.61 The majority of participants were dissatisfied with the council’s engagement and decision-making processes. People largely felt as though they are not listened to and that the Council makes decisions on local areas without learning what residents there want.

3.62 It was said that because the public is not engaged more often in the decision-making process, money is often spent on new facilities that are neither wanted nor needed – and that dissatisfaction with the council’s processes has led to a disconnect between it and the community.

“You always feel that these kind of things, that they don’t broadcast it as widely as they should. I think they keep it to very small groups of people who are going to possibly agree with their agenda or ideas” (Neath Valley)

Value for money

3.63 Many participants noted that while residents in Neath Port Talbot pay some of the highest council tax rates in Wales, there is a great deal of dissatisfaction with Council services (or lack thereof) within Valleys communities. As a result, many questioned how money is being spent, and suggested that the services they receive do not represent value for money.

“Our council tax is the third highest in Wales ... and I think we also, up here, have an extra on top called the community council precept, which is just a talking shop ... I don’t think it’s value for money. What do we get for it?” (Amman Valley)

“They always say ‘we haven’t got the money’. We have one of the highest tax rates in Wales, where is the money going?” (Afan Valley)

“Money’s put in the wrong places here where I am, for definite” (Dulais Valley)

3.64 Again, participants suggested that the Council regularly spends money on new facilities that are not needed, whereas residents would rather money be spent on maintaining existing ones.

“By all the new flats that are being built by the new bus station in Port Talbot, there are all new shops underneath that are all empty. I don’t understand why they’re building new shops when the old ones are empty. It seems to make Port Talbot look even worse” (Afan Valley)

Council connections with the community

- 3.65 Whilst many participants seemed to be unaware of exactly what is provided by the Council, some went further in saying again that it has become disconnected from its communities. This, it was felt, has led to a depletion in the quality of council services for vulnerable people that has resulted in the feeling the residents must volunteer to take care of people themselves.

“I couldn’t tell you anything about Neath Port Talbot Council, apart from they keep whacking up our council tax” (Neath Valley)

Dissatisfaction over transport

- 3.66 Whilst participants were unsure of the extent of the Council’s involvement in public transport, it was widely said to be a significant problem. Participants agreed that public transport is unreliable and expensive, and that buses do not run often enough, leaving people without cars to become isolated from other areas and Council services and facilities.

“Transport is a problem here... If you don’t have a car, you’re basically stuck here” (Neath Valley)

Suggested ideas for future focus

Improve transparency and communication with local organisations

- 3.67 Participants largely agreed that they wanted to see more transparency from the Council in terms of its decisions on funding, goals, and general service provision.

“I want somebody honest and trustworthy to hold an EGM and say, ‘This is what we’ve heard, this is what our objectives are: transport, education and training. Our objective is to achieve this, we project that this will be achieved by this date, and if it’s not, it will be done over the next year’” (Afan Valley)

- 3.68 Some participants said that they want the Council to work more closely with local charities, volunteers and businesses, in order to create and maintain working relationships that benefit from local expertise.

“It’s all back to respecting what’s already there and recognising that there’s people who already have a huge amount of experience and know what the issues are” (Amman Valley Focus Group)
“More of a partnership approach to service delivery with the wider third sector and local authority” (Afan Valley)

Introduce wider community involvement into decision-making processes

- 3.69 Participants also said that they would like to have more say in the decisions the Council makes.

“Just, support would be nice. To actually listen to the needs of the community and the people that live in the communities and to act upon them. Not a guess of what people need or do what they call a ‘best interest’. Actually listen to the needs of the people and the communities. Each community is completely different” (Neath Valley)

- 3.70 One participant discussed the need for asset based community development to be reintroduced so that communities can have more of a say in how their money is spent on services and facilities. It was suggested that this would ensure funding is spent more appropriately to match the needs of residents.

“There used to be community asset management. So, they were looking at what the community were already offering such as the hall and the organisations. I’m not sure where that’s gone, and I think that needs to be resurrected. It recognised the assets” (Amman Valley)

Reduce bureaucracy and ‘box ticking’

- 3.71 Some participants said they would be more willing to seek help from the Council, or be more involved with the council, if the process for doing so was easier.

“You’ve got willingness, but you can’t do it because of legislation” (Amman Valley)

- 3.72 Other participants said that services should be easier to access, more flexible and involve fewer ‘tick boxes’, so that more people can access the help that they need.

“... I get that they need criteria, but when people are in need, they need to look at people as individuals rather than just a piece of paper. Because that’s what we saw a lot ... Yes, they helped a lot of people, but there were a lot of tick boxes and if you didn’t meet that then you didn’t meet it and that was that” (Neath Valley)

Improve Public Transport

- 3.73 Many participants felt that the number of buses that travel through the towns and villages of Neath Port Talbot is substandard and therefore discourages people from visiting the area’s larger towns for work and leisure. As a result, they suggested that the number of buses serving rural areas should be increased. Those in the Afan and Amman Valleys felt particularly affected, but those in the Dulais, Neath and Swansea Valleys also felt similarly.

“There are no early buses at 6:30 for people working in factories or construction. There are no buses, to my knowledge, after 7:30 at night, so if you work shifts then you can’t get home. Our bus service has gone to one every two hours” (Afan Valley)

- 3.74 As well as encouraging people to visit larger towns for work and leisure, it was said that increasing the number of daily buses would provide a better opportunity for children to attend afterschool clubs, extracurricular activities, and local facilities such as swimming pools.
- 3.75 Some participants suggested that a community transport scheme would be effective in resolving some of the transport issues in Neath Port Talbot if increasing the number of buses is not possible.

“Community transport would be nice, I think. You know, we don’t need a double-decker bus coming into the village empty, picking up one person and off it goes again, but there is a need for community transport. It’s used in other areas quite effectively” (Neath Valley)

- 3.76 This, it was felt, would be an effective way of improving public transport opportunities for disabled and elderly people in particular.
- 3.77 Finally with respect to transport, one participant offered a specific suggestion for improving bus links. The participant (from the Amman Valley) felt that the buses connecting the Amman and Afan Valleys with Pontardawe should link far better with those connecting Pontardawe and Swansea. It was said that this would make it far easier for people without cars to not only access shops in Pontardawe and Swansea, but also allow them to reach Morriston and Singleton Hospitals with far more ease.

“Coming back to the X26 bus which goes down twice a day to Swansea and comes back three times a day as well, why don’t they put on that bus to do an hourly service from these villages, down to Pontardawe. And once you’re in Pontardawe you’ve got the X6 going every twenty minutes ... towards Swansea. Then you’ve got access to the hospitals, Morriston and Singleton” (Amman Valley)

Standardise the roles and expectations of Council officers & LACs

- 3.78 Since participants had such mixed experiences with their Council officers and LACs, it was said that the role should be better defined and standardised. This, it was felt, would help ensure that more officers and LACs are visible in their community, and therefore build better working relationships.

“Some of them are really good. Others aren’t ... the LACs in different areas are doing totally different roles and it needs to be standardised” (Neath Valley)

Increase investment in youth infrastructure

- 3.79 Increasing investment in infrastructure, facilities and services for children and young adults was a very common suggestion from participants.

“They need to invest in the infrastructure of these small communities. They need to come down here, they need to talk to us, they need to look at what we’ve got, and they need to invest in us. Especially our young people ... there’s kids out there, I can see kids out my window now with nowhere to go. They’ve not got the infrastructure” (Neath Valley)

“I want transport for our children to do extracurricular activities. If they’re down the comprehensive in Port Talbot, I want to make sure they can do after school clubs, sports teams, training after school hours. I want them to have exactly the same start as the children all the way down from Cwmafon” (Afan Valley)

- 3.80 Youth clubs and groups for younger children such as scouts and guides were suggested to provide more opportunities for children and young people and to break the ‘benefits cycle’.

“Neath Port Talbot, they spend millions on the beach and it’s fantastic, but what about our children up here who’ve got nothing? No scouts, no guides, no under 11 provisions. What about the children of third generation benefits? It’s a vicious cycle that nobody is prepared to break” (Afan Valley)

“I’m concerned that over a period of time the youth service and opportunities for young people has been scaled back. I think Neath Port Talbot needs to relook at what it can do in partnership with community organisations to support this” (Amman Valley)

Ensure the provision of day services and facilities for all age groups

- 3.81 Although the need for services for children and young people were stressed most often by participants, the provision of day services and facilities for all age groups (particularly the elderly) was also considered essential.

“Provide appropriate groups and facilities for every age group. It’s not just the children, it’s the elderly as well” (Dulais Valley)

Funding for the maintenance of community facilities

- 3.82 Many participants said that they would like to see money spent on the maintenance of existing facilities rather than on building new ones. It was generally felt that this would benefit communities more by allowing them to run their existing provisions more effectively.

“The community centre ... Give it back to the community but give us the funding to keep the building maintained and have the money to pay for professional help to come here” (Afan Valley)

“Fantastic facilities, yes, a swimming pool, a gym and a library two miles down the road, we have a community centre that has old age people down there, bingo, mother and toddler groups, things like that ... but unless someone provides adequate funding, I can’t see them being open in the next eighteen months” (Afan Valley)

Ensure that services are better funded and that council tax is not raised

- 3.83 Many participants urged the Council not to increase council tax or make further cuts to services. There was a strong sense that if it were to do so, the disconnect between Council and community would deepen further.

“Less cuts, no more raises in tax ... that’s a massive thing for me. No more cuts in services and that ties in with everything we’ve said tonight. And more investment in people, in healthcare, social care” (Dulais Valley)

“Don’t rise council tax again. Its causing a lot of bad feeling. I’ve noticed on social media there’s a lot of hate. Its causing a rift between the community and the Council, that needs to be built” (Neath Valley)

Ensure that footpaths & cycle tracks are introduced as per the active travel plan

- 3.84 One participant discussed the Welsh Government’s Active Travel Plan and said that they wanted the Council to ensure an increase in the number of footpaths and cycle tracks throughout the Valleys. It was stressed that whilst the routes would not likely be used for travel to work, they would be enjoyed by residents for leisure.

“It’s needed here. Every place you walk is on a pavement next to a road ... I doubt it very much people would use those routes for work ... but purely as something for active leisure” (Amman Valley)

Ensure that schools continue to receive the funding that they need

- 3.85 Finally, a significant number of participants felt that the most important thing the Council can do is to continue providing adequate funding for schools.

“Education will always be number one for me. Making sure schools are funded appropriately and are funded well enough to get the new curriculum out” (Neath Valley)

Summary of key points from the focus groups

- **What people said they love about their community**
 - Very strong sense of community and togetherness
 - The natural beauty of the area
 - The 'Welshness' of the area; particularly the presence of the Welsh language
- **What people said they would like to change about their community**
 - Improved public transport
 - Improved mental health and loneliness support
 - Reduction in antisocial behaviour and substance misuse
 - Reduction in deprivation and unemployment
 - Increased collaboration and engagement between the Council and communities
 - Increased litter picking in rural areas
 - Improved services for young and disabled people
- **What residents said is important to them**
 - Their general health and wellbeing
 - Care for the elderly and the vulnerable
 - Improving services in rural areas
 - Opportunities and education for children
 - A sense of community and opportunities to socialise
- **Main positive impacts of COVID-19 on communities**
 - Strengthened sense of community
 - Increased quality time with families
- **Main negative impacts of covid-19 on communities**
 - Increase in mental health issues and isolation due to lockdowns and fear of the virus
 - Closure of day services and youth centres, further increasing isolation
 - School closures causing anxiety in schoolchildren and an increase antisocial behaviour among teenagers
- **Views on the Council's presence during the pandemic**
 - Many people were unaware of the services provided by the Council during the pandemic
 - Some appreciated the food parcels the Council had organised, whilst others expressed concern over the quality of the parcels and the difficulty in applying for them
 - Social provisions for adults with learning difficulties were said to be unsatisfactory because their technological abilities and access to technology had not been considered
 - The Council was praised for aiding the Street Champions, who were widely appreciated
 - The Council was also praised for providing funding (in lieu of free school meals) and laptops to vulnerable families while schools were closed
- **Presence of volunteers & other organisations during the pandemic**
 - Residents commended the volunteers who either delivered food and provisions to the vulnerable or who worked in foodbanks during the pandemic
 - Participants also spoke warmly about their local community/village halls for providing provisions to the vulnerable and street entertainment for adults and children
 - The Pen Y Cymoedd Windfarm was praised for donating money to community halls, allowing them to better provide for people

- **Views on general services provided by the Council**
 - General dissatisfaction with public transport across the County Borough
 - Strong praise for the area's public parks and other beauty spots maintained by the Council (Aberavon Beach in particular) – as well as local swimming pools and libraries
 - Inconsistencies in the performances of LACs and Council officers were noted, and there was a sense that the Council has become somewhat distanced from its communities

- **Suggested ideas for future focus**
 - More transparency and community involvement in the Council's decision-making processes
 - Reducing 'box ticking' and bureaucracy for those trying to access services or input into Council matters
 - Improving public transport links across the whole County Borough – and especially between rural valleys and urban centres
 - Standardising the roles and expectations of LACs and Officers
 - Investing in youth infrastructure to provide more opportunities for children and young people
 - Ensuring the long-term sustainability of facilities such as day services/centres, swimming pools and community halls
 - Investing in existing infrastructure rather than building new facilities
 - Minimising council tax increases
 - Continuing to provide adequate provision and funding for local schools.

Appendix 5 - Other Supporting Evidence

1. Introduction

1.1 As part of the 'Let's Talk' initial engagement phase, other supporting evidence and secondary research relevant to what matters to people in Neath Port Talbot was gathered and considered. The purpose was to identify any findings that might support or contradict the themes from 'Let's Talk' feedback and the draft revised wellbeing objectives.

1.2 This drew on a range of sources:

- Canolfan Maerdy Outreach Youth Work Findings 2021 (involving 650 young people in GCG and Lower Brynamman)
- Community Impact Assessment Survey, took place in June 2020 and received 1,259 responses.
- Discussions with people who use the Bspoked service (took place on 14.10.21 with 5 service users)
- 'Let's Talk' Facebook comments (55)
- NPT business questionnaire (20 responses)
- Race Equality Action Plan Report November 2020 (Neath Port Talbot Black Minority Ethnic Community Association), 143 total responses. During 2020 the NPT Black Minority Ethnic Community Association worked in partnership with the NPT Community Safety Team and the Vulnerable Learner's Service (VLS), to produce two surveys, one aimed at adults, the other at young people.

2. Best Start in Life

Every child has the best start in life

2.1 Let's Talk feedback: What matters?

- Being safe;
- Being happy;
- Having a stable home life;
- Spending time with family, friends and pets;
- School – getting a good education;
- Growing up to be strong and healthy;
- Having good quality parks, sports facilities and other youth services;
- Having enough money;
- Being able to get a job and being able to afford to live in decent accommodation; and
- Affordable buses to access services

2.2 Supporting evidence

2.2.1 Canolfan Maerdy Outreach Youth Work:

Included in the findings were that young people are bored; some engage in random acts of destruction/petty crime/lighting fires (linked to boredom, frustration, and being disengaged); they want a dedicated youth space, a skate park, free activities locally, somewhere to legally ride motorbikes locally. This echoes the 'Let's Talk' feedback that having good quality parks, sports facilities and other youth services matters to young people.

Poverty and food shortages was a common theme as was families struggling to feed young people (exasperated by the lockdowns), lending further support to the 'Let's Talk' feedback that having enough money matters to young people.

2.2.2 Community Impact Assessment Survey

Almost half of respondents said they were worried about the impact Covid was having on schools and universities. The main worries were about the affect pandemic disruption could have on the quality of education, uncertainty around exams and the move to home schooling.

2.2.3 'Let's Talk' Facebook comments

Several echoed the need for more facilities and things for children and young people to do. Examples of comments included:

"I would like to see more parks for children";

"There's nothing for the kids";

"Our youth have no where (sic) to go to let off steam, socialise or discover who they are"

2.2.4 NPT business questionnaire

There were two responses that referred to young people in terms of "what matters to you and your business for the future?":

"We can create employment especially for the young people in our local community, is a priority"

"To employ young people, now that we are allowed to open"

2.2.5 Race Equality Action Plan Report 2020

When asked if bullying was a problem in school most of the young people who responded felt that it was not a problem. However, several of the respondents to the said they did not feel safe where they live or at school, citing bullying or racist name calling by their peers or neighbours.

For the children and young people survey, when providing reasons for why they disliked living in the area, responses included:

"it's boring and nothing for kids or teens to do...";

*"boring - no facilities; need more activities like youth club, skate park";
"not many places for young people to hang out without paying money"*

3. Thriving and Sustainable Communities

People live healthy, long and fulfilled lives in thriving and sustainable communities where people get along together and support one another

3.1 Let's Talk feedback: What matters?

- Contact with family, friends and pets;
- Being safe;
- Being healthy; good access to health services;
- Having a secure job and a good work-life balance;
- Children have access to good education and schools stay open;
- Community relations; having events that bring people together;
- The arts, our culture and heritage;
- Better bus services;
- Cleaner and better maintained streets and green spaces;
- More and cheaper outdoor leisure facilities;
- More support and facilities for young people;
- Ensuring elderly and vulnerable people are supported; and
- Better interaction with the council

3.2 Supporting evidence

3.2.1 Canolfan Maerdy Outreach Youth Work

A number of the findings supported the need for community relations (having events that bring people together), more and cheaper outdoor leisure facilities, and more support and facilities for young people. These include that young people are bored; some engage in random acts of destruction/petty crime/lighting fires (linked to boredom, frustration, and being disengaged); they want a dedicated youth space, a skate park, free activities locally, somewhere to legally ride motorbikes locally.

3.2.2 Community Impact Assessment Survey

The importance of the role family, friends and pets have in supporting well-being was clear in the responses, with the majority saying that keeping in touch was their main way of coping with staying at home. Almost three quarters of respondents thought that people were doing more to help others since the start of the pandemic, yet more than half of those who responded felt lonely.

3.2.3 Discussions with people who use the Bspoked service

Ensuring vulnerable people are supported was a strong theme that in this discussion. In particular, participants had missed attending their day services and day centres (although they were highly complementary of the support they had received from Bspoked staff online throughout the pandemic.

Other issues raised were:

- Seeing family and friends was seen as important
- access to health services – face-to-face access has been more difficult since the start of the pandemic and telephone consultations with GPs and dentists were highlighted as something the group thought was bad about the pandemic;
- litter and dog fouling were highlighted as things participants didn't like about where they live;
- taking part in crafts was highlighted as something participants liked about where they live, as was dancing, listening to music, drama, quizzes and bingo; And
- the need for better bus services was also seen as important.

3.2.4 'Let's Talk' Facebook comments

Issues around litter were raised in two comments, examples of comments included:

"Littering needs to be firmly addressed with a robust policy of fining offenders!";

"I would personally like to see something to combat the amount of litter that keeps getting dumped there! Some countries have machines that collect litter in return for money"

The need for improved bus services was also raised by some. Examples of comments included:

"Regular evening bus services between Briton Ferry and Swansea"

"Buses that go from here to Pontardawe"

"Better bus company need buses in the evenings, people can go out then"

3.2.5 Race Equality Action Plan Report 2020

Almost half of those who responded to the adult survey feel very strongly that they are part of the local community in Neath Port Talbot. However, when respondents chose what they believed to be the top 3 issues in the area, unemployment was the highest result, followed by drugs and alcohol then access to services.

4. Ensuring our natural environment, culture and heritage can be enjoyed by future generations

Natural processes are restored and they mitigate and have developed greater resilience to climate change.

People actively conserve, improve and enjoy our stunning natural environment, treasure the Welsh language and are actively engaged with the rich sporting, cultural and industrial heritage of the area

4.1 Let's Talk feedback: What matters?

- Keep the past alive, promoting and celebrating our heritage to strengthen our sense of identity and sense of belonging;
- Help to protect, preserve and maintain our historic and heritage sites for present and future generations;
- Promote our Welsh language, traditions and culture;
- Help all generations to connect with our natural environment, heritage and culture;
- Improve facilities for walking and cycling; and
- Help our community and voluntary groups to sustain and further develop their important work

4.2 Supporting evidence

4.2.1 Community Impact Assessment Survey

Most respondents said they place a higher value on accessible green spaces since the beginning of the pandemic. Others focussed on changes in their behaviour they hope to continue, including driving less but walking and cycling more, spending more time in their gardens or their allotments and recycling more.

4.2.2 Discussions with people who use the Bspoked service

Going for walks was highlighted as something participants liked about where they live, as was going to the rugby club.

4.2.3 Race Equality Action Plan Report 2020

The majority of respondents to both the adult's and the children's surveys said they liked living in Neath Port Talbot, reasons given include:

“because of easy access to places like the beach”
“people around here are very friendly and it is a safe place to live”

Those who said they didn't like living in Neath Port Talbot gave a number of reasons, including:

“not many places for young people to hang out without spending money”
“because of the smoke from the factory”

5. Jobs and Skills

Working with our partners we create the conditions for more secure, well paid and green work in the area and help local people acquire the skills they need to access those jobs

5.1 Let's Talk feedback: What matters?

- Being able to generate enough money to stay in business and have a good standard of living;
- Being able to adapt as markets change;
- Financial support to mitigate the impact of Covid-19;
- Addressing anti-social behaviour, particularly in the towns;
- Creating employment and being a good employer;
- Transport – affects ability to employ people and customer volumes;
- Managing growth;
- Help with recruitment and with training;
- Maintaining and growing the customer base, business profile and marketing;
- Price and stability in the supply chain; energy costs;
- Digital connectivity and digital skills; and
- Help with sites and premises

5.2 Supporting evidence

5.2.1 Canolfan Maerdy Outreach Youth Work

Some of the findings highlighted anti-social behaviour (e.g. *“alcohol is a problem- stolen from parents/guardians; marijuana is a problem- stolen from parents/guardians; food has been stolen from community- mostly from garages and outhouses where they know a separate fridge/larder is kept; random acts of destruction to people’s property, random acts of destruction to business properties”*). However these could be linked to boredom, frustration and feeling disengaged, together with poverty and food shortages / families struggling to feed young people.

5.2.2 Community Impact Assessment Survey

Many of the responses focussed on the loss in household income they have experienced since the start of the pandemic. Whilst others suggested financial support, better awareness of available benefits and more courses for those with caring responsibilities could help alleviate some pressures.

Other respondents identified a number of important things employers could do to help employees feel safe and supported when the lockdown is eased and people return to the workplace, including:

- being supportive and flexible
- Providing clear guidance and communication
- keep listening
- provide job security
- look after the wellbeing of staff

5.2.3 'Let's Talk' Facebook comments

Twelve of the comments echoed the need to address anti-social behaviour. Examples of comments included:

"NO ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR TOLERATED" signs up and more cameras around problem areas';
"Unfortunately there are a lot of people that roam the town drinking, doing drugs and being antisocial";
"Get rid of all the Drugs more police"

5.2.4 NPT business questionnaire

Responses to the business questionnaire generally reflected the feedback on 'what matters' from 'Let's Talk'. Examples of comments in response to "What matters to you and your business for the future?" and "What do you think the council could do to help your business going forward?" included:

"try and get the business back to making a profit rather than a loss each month and to be able to retain our staff"
"More financial and practical support in helping business recover from the pandemic e.g. grants for marketing to reinvigorate custom"
"I have been broken into... I also worry about my personal safety"
"transport is a big a issue"
"Developing our product range and enhancing our current offering. In addition growing the servicing side of our business"
"We are still extremely busy and need more staff to help but they are not forth coming"
"Keep growing and stay afloat"
"Energy Prices - I am a small business and have a higher usage then most (2 kilns) of electricity. I need to understand how this will impact me"

5.2.5 Race Equality Action Plan Report 2020

Respondents were able to choose what they believed to be the top 3 issues in the area. Unemployment was the highest result, followed by drugs and alcohol.

When asked if they felt safe in in the community that they live in, an overwhelming amount of respondents stated that they felt safe (75%), with only 8% feeling that they were unsafe or very unsafe. Encouragingly, 90% of respondents felt safe enough to go out in the community alone

More than half of respondents to the adult survey said as a person from a Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) background it is difficult to find employment. Similarly, half of the respondents believed that there not enough opportunities to progress in their job and that there are fewer opportunities for BAME people to work in the public sector.

Conversely, when asked if BAME people were treated fairly in the workplace 70% stated that they were.

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

5th JANUARY 2022

SECTION A – MATTER FOR DECISION

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

DRAFT BUDGET FOR CONSULTATION 2022/23

1. Purpose of Report

To seek Member approval to consult on the draft budget proposals for 2022/23.

To confirm that consultation will take place to the 1st February 2022 prior to reviewing responses and setting a budget for 2022/23 on 28th February 2022.

2. Executive Summary

Today's report does not seek final decisions from Members. The aim of this report is to seek approval to go out to consultation and listen to the views of our County Borough citizens and stakeholders in relation to the issues set out in this report. Final decisions on setting the Council's 2022/23 Budget will be required to be taken on 28th February 2022.

3. Background

Neath Port Talbot Council's net revenue budget for the current year of 2021/22 amounts to £316.246m and together with grants and income from services results in a gross budget of c£450m which is invested in services across the County Borough.

There is a statutory duty on the Council to set a balanced budget each financial year. Prior to setting the budget the Council has a duty to consult stakeholders on changes to the Budget

4. Current Year's Budget 2021/22

Neath Port Talbot Council approved its 2021/22 budget on the 9th March 2021.

The following table summarises Council's Budget and Funding for 2021/22.

	Budget	Budget
	£m	%
Budget requirement	316.246	
Funded by		
Welsh Government - Aggregate External Finance (AEF)	236.681	75%
Council Tax	79,952	25%
Discretionary rate relief	-0.387	
Total Funding	316.246	

Budget 2021/22	Budget	Budget
	£m	%
Schools	93.314	29%
Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning	27.560	9%
Social Services, Health & Housing	87.276	28%
Environment	41.929	13%
Finance & Corporate Services	19.075	6%
Fire Authority	8.180	3%
Capital Financing	19.667	6%
Council Tax Support	19.834	6%
Other including Contingency	2.511	1%
Use of Reserves	-3.100	-1%
Budget	316.246	100%

5. Provisional Local Government Settlement 2022/23

The Welsh Government's Provisional Local Government Settlement was published on 21st December 2021. On an all Wales basis the total amount of funding has increased by £437m or 9.4%.

Neath Port Talbot has received an increase in funding of £20.78m which equates to 8.8% when compared to the adjusted 2021/22 base. This increase is the 18th lowest of the twenty two Councils in Wales.

The reasons for Neath Port Talbot being towards the bottom of the settlement table are due to data changes which drive some elements of the funding formula, namely:

- Free School Meals – the number of pupils entitled to free school meals has increased but proportionately less than other Councils
- The number of benefit claimants has increased but again proportionately less than most other Councils in Wales.

6. 2022/23 Budget Overview

The table on the following page details the amount of funding needed to run Council Services in 2022/23 and the funding available

It includes unavoidable cost increases of £8.7m, service pressures of £8.7m and a £2.2m budget allocation to support the development of a medium term financial strategy and deal with fluctuations in Welsh Government funding over subsequent financial years.

2022/23 Budget Summary

	£'000	£'000
2021/22 Budget	316,246	
Add: General Reserve used to balance 21/22	3,100	
Total 2021/22		319,346
2022/23 Unavoidable Cost Increases		
Inflation including pay award @ 1.25%	5,847	
Social Care Levy	1,364	
Increased contract costs re: National Living Wage Increase	1,488	
Total Unavoidable Cost Increases		8,699
Service Pressures (see Appendix 1)		8,735
Reduction in Contingency Budgets		-965
Medium Term Financial Strategy – Equalisation Budget		2,200
Total Budget		338,015
Funded by		
Council Tax (2021/22 level with adjusted base)		80,334
Welsh Government funding		258,068
Discretionary rate relief		-387
Total Funding Available		338,015
Budget Gap		0

The above table shows that as a result of the 8.8% increase in funding received through the settlement there is no funding gap in 2022/23.

As a consequence there is no requirement to increase Council Tax levels for 2022/23 and it is recommended that the public be consulted on a 0% Council Tax rise.

7. Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

The above proposals represent a one year budget reflecting the ongoing operational and financial uncertainty resulting from the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Officers will embark on an exercise to develop a medium term financial strategy (MTFS) during the early part of 2022 which will involve assessing the structural impact Covid has had on base budgets. It will also consider the longer term priorities identified in the Corporate Plan and determine how these can be funded. This work will allow a new administration to progress with delivering on the new plan following the local government elections in May 2022.

The Welsh Government Settlement includes indicative funding allocations of 3.5% for 2023/24 and 2.4% for 2024/25. In order to minimise the impact of these less generous settlements it is proposed that £2.2m of the 2022/23 budget be ring-fenced to support the delivery of the MTFS and to provide a means of managing the fluctuations in funding.

8. General Reserves Policy

Due to prudent financial management the Council has healthy balances of both general and specific reserves. As at 31st March 2021 the general reserve balance of £20.036m represented 6.3% of the Council's net revenue budget.

It was previously proposed that £3.1m of this balance would be required to fund a shortfall in the 2021/22 budget however a report approved by the Cabinet on 24th November 2021 noted that this use of general reserves would not be required during 2021/22 due to one-off savings elsewhere in the budget.

There is no prescribed minimum or maximum level of general reserves. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) advises that it is for each local authority to determine the adequacy of reserves based on advice from the Chief Finance Officer.

It is my view; taking into account the strategic, financial and operational risks facing the Council; that general reserves should be maintained at approximately 4% of net revenue budget. Given that the proposed net revenue budget for 2022/23 amounts to £338m a prudent level of general reserves at 4% would be £13.5m.

If the above proposal is approved by Cabinet the general reserve balance will be reduced incrementally down to the 4% level over the period of the medium term financial strategy. The reserve will be used to pump prime investments which can reduce long term revenue costs or generate additional income.

9. One Off Investments to support Covid Recovery

The impact of Covid-19 has been extensive. This once in a generation global public health crisis has impacted everyone in our community and disrupted our local economy.

To support the Council, its residents and businesses recover from the Pandemic a number of one off investment initiatives are included as part of these draft budget proposals. These initiatives will help kick start the delivery of the four wellbeing objectives included in the latest Corporate Plan which will also be consulted on in the new year.

Many of the initiatives detailed below have been developed following feedback received as part of the recent 'Let's talk Campaign'.

The proposals represent the types of initiatives to be delivered and are indicative allocations; **individual project details will be subject to approval by individual Cabinet Boards.**

Best start in life £700k

Proposals will be developed around the following areas:

- Increase in community based and specialist youth service provision

- Early intervention and prevention activities including education, psychology and key worker support for children and young people affected by the Pandemic
- Additional support for children with additional learning needs
- Increase in adult community learning provisions to support people in the journey back to work

Thriving and Sustainable Communities £1.2m

One of the key messages from the 'Let's Talk' campaign was how much our citizens value the environment and neighbourhoods in which they live and work.

Over the course of the pandemic the Council has had to re-prioritise neighbourhood services in order to ensure continuity of priority services such as refuse and recycling collection.

In order to re-address the issue it is proposed that a range of proposals are developed to deliver a county borough wide range of highly visible projects to 'catch up, clean up and green up' our neighbourhoods.

Culture and Heritage / Jobs and Skills - £200k

It is proposed that strategies be developed in relation to both culture and environment, leisure and tourism in order that further proposals can be developed.

In relation to jobs and skills these programmes are funded in the short term. The 2022/23 budget pressure schedule includes for additional long term funding to provide additional support for economic development and regeneration which will be key for supporting existing businesses as well as attracting further inward investment into the county borough.

In order to fund these one off investments it is proposed to re-purpose £2.8m of the current insurance reserve into a Covid recovery reserve. The above indicative allocations total £2.1m which will leave £700k unallocated to support further investments.

In relation to the insurance reserve the above proposal will still leave £4m in the insurance reserve in addition to a provision of £4m set aside to deal with outstanding insurance claims.

10. Organisational Development

Throughout the recent period of austerity the Council has targeted resources on allowing staff to leave the organisation via voluntary redundancy. This strategy was integral in terms of delivering on the Council's forward financial plan savings targets and was instrumental in reducing to an absolute bare minimum the number of compulsory redundancies required. As we move out of austerity it is now vital that we invest in the staff who remain.

This report seeks Cabinet approval to re-purpose the existing ER/VR reserve **during 2021/22** into an organisational development reserve. The reserve can still be called on to meet the cost of any future voluntary redundancies however it is anticipated that these will be few and far between.

If approved this organisational development reserve will be used to fund the resources to deliver the future of work strategy. The team of HR and organisational development specialists, will also be supported by a Communications Internal Engagement Officer, appropriate administrative support, and in line with the council's social partnership with trade unions, we will also be asking the trade unions to nominate a representative to work within the team on a full-time secondment.

The Strategy aims to ensure that the council has the right people, in the right place, doing the right things in the right way, enabling the delivery of the corporate vision, values and priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. The strategy will importantly also deliver the workforce changes needed in the short, medium and long term to implement the Corporate Plan whilst ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of our people:

- Ensuring that our employment framework complies with the latest up-to-date health & Safety guidance issued by Welsh Government and Public Health Wales.

- Reviewing, evaluating and revising the Hybrid Working Framework in partnership with our trade unions and accountable managers.
- Engaging with our workforce, managers and trade unions, to ensure that we develop fit for purpose and future proofed employment policies and processes that support the new hybrid world of work.
- Developing and issuing a new employment contract that reflects new working patterns.
- Working in social partnership with our Trade Unions, to consult, negotiate, and agree new contractual arrangements.
- Reviewing the organisational design of the council to ensure that our activities are appropriately aligned in order to be as effective and efficient as they can be.
- Developing leadership and management development programmes
- Reinforcing behaviours through a robust performance framework
- Embedding values and behaviours through our policies and process, from recruitment through to exit.
- Developing an Employee Recognition Strategy to ensure our employees feel valued and appreciated for what they do and to improve retention create a happier workforce.
- Developing a Recruitment Strategy for the short, medium and long term.
- Developing our Succession Planning Arrangements: Grow Our Own Strategy
- Developing an Internal Communication and Engagement Strategy that ensures that our employees feel listened to, involved and motivated.
- Developing a detailed Strategic Workforce Plan for the period 2022 – 2027.

The funding required in total over a three year period from this reserve will be £1.5m

11. Crime and Disorder Impact

The Council has a legal duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to carry out all its various functions with “due regard to the need to prevent Crime and Disorder in its area”.

Individual proposals are being assessed as to their impact on crime and disorder and should any specific impact be identified these will be identified against individual proposals and summarised in final proposals.

12. Integrated Impact Assessment

The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to “pay due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share it.”

There are no cuts to services proposed requiring individual Impact Assessments.

13. Sustainable Development

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (“the 2015 Act”) requires the Council to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. The 2015 Act imposes a duty on all public bodies in Wales to carry out “sustainable development”, defined as being, “The process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the wellbeing goals.” The action that a public body takes in carrying out sustainable development includes setting and publishing wellbeing objectives, and taking all reasonable steps in exercising its functions to meet those objectives.

As part of the sustainable development principle the Council has a duty to set a balanced budget. Stakeholder consultation on these draft proposals will enable the Council to take account of responses and other relevant information to assist it to finalise its allocation of resources in February 2022.

14. Workforce Impacts

If approved some of the proposals within this reports will create opportunities to join the Council's workforce. None of the proposals should have a detrimental impact on current employees.

15. Consultation

Today will commence the formal consultation with the public and all stakeholders on the draft budget proposals.

Members will note the consultation will commence immediately following Cabinet today and close on 1st February 2022 prior to final decisions being made on 28th February 2022.

16. Recommendation

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- Authorise the Chief Executive to consult with the public on a 0% council tax rise and the other investment proposals contained within this report.
- Approve the re-purposing of the ER/VR Reserve as set out in this report.
- Agree the Chief Finance Officer's recommendation to reduce the general reserve balance incrementally to approximately 4% of the Council's net revenue budget.

17. Reason for Proposed Decision

To commence consultation on the 2022/23 draft budget and to comply with the Council's constitution regarding use of reserves.

18. Implementation of Decision

The decision is proposed for implementation immediately after consultation with the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee.

19. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Revenue Service Pressures
Appendix 2 - Inflation and other Factors

20. Background Papers

Budget working files

21. Officer Contact

For further information on this report item, please contact:

Mr Huw Jones – Chief Finance Officer
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Revenue Service Pressures 2022/23

Service	Details	2022/23
		£000
ELLL - Schools	Schools - Increased provision re Teaching Assistants.	750
ELL - Other	Additional Learning Needs Investment in response to new legislation. £1m invested to date.	500
Social Services, Health and Housing	Uplift in rates paid to domiciliary care, residential care, supported living and direct payments	2,500
Environment	Waste services - increased demands due to higher tonnage.	150
Environment	Highways and Streetcare budget increase - in addition to £350k provided 2021/22.	250
Environment	Decarbonisation measures including staffing and maintenance of recharging points for electric vehicles. In addition to £50k provided in 2021/22.	100
Environment	Reduction of £300k car parking income in 2021/22 base budget due to ongoing impact of Covid. Income recovering over 2 years to original level in 2023/24	-150
Environment	Reduction of £300k rental income in 2021/22 base budget due to ongoing impact of Covid. Income recovering over 2 years to original level in 2023/24	-150
Environment	Loss of red fuel grant to Council following change in legislation	50
Environment	Regeneration, economic development and business support additional capacity. This is in addition to £100k provided in 2021/22	200
Environment	Anti-social behaviour mitigation measures	15

Revenue Service Pressures 2022/23

Service	Details	2022/23
Environment	Review of pest control fees	50
Corporate Services	Digital Services - increased costs of Microsoft licences in 2021. Subject to updating as Digital Services review and work programme finalised.	80
Corporate Services	Digital Services - additional funding required to support over 1,500 employees now working from home.	100
Corporate Services	Emergency Planning Team - Additional capacity to ensure the Council is able to meet its legal obligations.	200
Corporate Services	CCTV – Increase to a 24/7 provision	30
Other - Members Allowances	To meet the cost of increases in Members allowances recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel Wales (IRPW)	150
Other - Corporate Joint Committees	Contribution required towards the cost of administering a Corporate Joint Committee during 2022/23	140
Other – Pay Contingency	Pay contingency of 0.5%.	1,000
Hardship Fund	Will need to cover any additional costs and potential loss of income during 2022/23.	2,500
Capital Financing	Revenue support to fund increased Capital Programme borrowing	270
Total		8,735

Inflation and other Factors

	2022/23
Teachers Pay	1.25%
Non Teachers Pay	1.25%
Property	2.00%
Property - Energy	5.00%
Transport	2.00%
Car Allowances	0.00%
Supplies and Services	2.00%
Food	2.00%
Levy - Fire Authority	3.24%
External Income	2.00%
Welsh Government Funding	8.80%
Council Tax	0.00%

