

BLAENHONDDAN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Annual Report 2024

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Introduction

Welcome to this Annual Report

I hope that you will enjoy reading about the work of Blaenhonddan Community Council and the people we serve. This Annual Report describes some of the ways in which we are working to deliver well-being for future generations of Blaenhonddan residents.

The Council works as a corporate body. As Chair, I am pleased with the way that the elected Members and Officers of the Council have worked collectively and closely together this year, to ensure that we deliver services which benefit both our residents and visitors, and thank them publicly for their endeavours in this respect. The Council's operational activities are now "back to normal" following the difficulties everyone experienced during the pandemic. The cost of living is, unfortunately, having an impact on many residents and has also impacted on the Council, with its budget for the 2024/25 under significant pressure. We are, however, determined to continue improving the facilities that we provide for our local communities. There have been a number of changes in Member representation during the last 12 months, and Council Members work in tandem with the Council's staff to benefit the communities that we serve.

I would also like to thank the individuals and organisations who have worked with us to improve the wellbeing of the communities in Blaenhonddan, as the Council cannot work alone and relies on their effort and support to make a real difference.

Councillor Helen W Harry

Chair

Blaenhonddan Community Council

April 2024

Rhagarweiniad

Croeso i'r Adroddiad Blynyddol

Gobeithio y byddwch yn mwynhau darllen am waith Cyngor Cymuned Blaenhonddan wrth i ni wasanaethu'r trigolion lleol. Mae'r adroddiad blynyddol hyn yn disgrifio nifer o ffyrdd yr ydym yn gweithio dros les tymor hir trigolion Blaenhonddan.

Mae'r Cyngor yn gweithredu fel corff corfforaethol. Fel Cadeirydd, yr wyf yn hapus iawn ar y ffordd mae Aelodau etholedig a Swyddogion y Cyngor wedi cydweithio'n agos y flwyddyn hon i sicrhau'r gwasanaethau sydd o fudd i drigolion ac ymwelwyr. Hoffwn ddiolch o galon yn gyhoeddus iddynt am eu hymdrechion a'u llwyddiannau. Mae gweithgareddau'r Cyngor wedi dychwelyd at "fywyd normal" ar ol holl bryderon y pandemig. Yn anffodus, mae costau bywyd yn cael effaith ar sawl un yn ein cymunedau, ac ar waith y Cyngor hefyd, a bydd y cyllideb o dan bwys sylweddol yn 2024/25 eto. Serch hynny, 'rydym yn benderfynnol o gario mlaen a'r Gwaith o wella'r hyn a ddarperwn ar gyfer ein cymunedau. Bu nifer o newidiadau ymhlith y cynghorwyr dros y 12 mis diwethaf, ac mae'r Aelodau yn dal i fod yn weithgar iawn gyda Staff y Cyngor er budd ein cymunedau.

Hoffwn hefyd ddiolch i'r unigolion a'r sefydliadau a weithiodd gyda ni i wella lles cymunedau Blaenhonddan. Ni all y Cyngor weithio ar ei ben ei hun ac y mae'n dibynnu ar yr ymdrechion a'r gefnogaeth hyn i lwyddo i wneud gwahaniaeth i'n cymunedau.

Cynghorydd Helen W Harry

Cadeirydd

Cyngor Cymuned Blaenhonddan

Ebrill 2024

About this Report

This report describes how Blaenhonddan Community Council is contributing to the economic, social and environmental well-being of Blaenhonddan, using principles of sustainability set out within the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which came into effect in 2016. Under the Act, Councils such as Blaenhonddan are required to produce an Annual Report detailing the progress that has been made in meeting objectives contained in the local well-being plan by the Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board. The Plan was published in 2018 and an Annual Report is published each year making reference to the Annual Reports of relevant Town and Community Councils, including Blaenhonddan Community Council.

The Community Council has adapted the well-being goals within the Act to describe its own activities and set objectives. This provides an opportunity to firmly set the Council's achievements and objectives within a sustainability framework. It allows the Council to re-affirm its key objectives, which will help set the direction of its future policy. Individual projects can be tested against these principles to ensure that sustainability is embedded within the Council's decisions and actions. This overarching framework should ensure that Council adopts a way of working that reflects long term thinking, problem prevention, integration, collaboration and public involvement.

This Annual Report covers the Chair of the Council's year of office which commenced on the date of the Annual Meeting of Council in May 2023 and ran for 12 months. The Council's activities and those of our customers have now resumed after the pandemic, but are subject, however, to an increasingly challenging financial position for the Council and the residents of Blaenhonddan.

The Council's Strategic Plan, which includes the Council's Statement of Well-Being, was reviewed in 2023 and approved by Blaenhonddan Community Council at its Meeting in October. This Annual Report for 2024 is consistent with the Strategic Plan currently in place and reflects its aspirations.

Rowland Lanchbury - Clerk to Blaenhonddan Community Council

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About Blaenhonddan Community Council

The Council as a Corporate Body

A Community Council is a corporate body with a legal existence of its own which is quite separate from that of its Members. Its lawful acts, assets and liabilities are its own and not those of its individual Members. Any decisions taken by the Community Council are the responsibility of the whole body, and it is irrelevant if any particular Member agreed or disagreed with any particular proposal. A Community Council can legally raise money through the Precept – a levy which its residents pay through the Council Tax. It also has a range of powers which allows it to spend this public money on the services which it provides. These may include the provision of Playing Fields, Playgrounds, Public Parks, and Community Centres. Parish/Town Councils were established in 1894 by an Act of Parliament and were further reformed into Community Councils by the Local Government Act 1972, when Wales was divided into communities. The Community Council has a duty to ensure that the rules for the administration of the Council are followed - the Council must appoint a Chair, appoint a Clerk, appoint a Responsible Financial Officer, appoint an independent and competent internal auditor, hold an Annual Meeting of the Council and keep records of all decisions related to Council business.

Council meetings are held once a month on the third Monday, except for August when the Council is in recess, and in December when the meeting is held on the second Monday. These are now held as hybrid meetings allowing participation in person or online. There are also Committee meetings held on an ad hoc basis – Council currently operates a Resources, a Festivals and an Environment Committee, with other ad hoc requirements facilitated if needed.

The Community Council is an elected tier of local government. There are eighteen Community Councillors elected or co-opted as Members of Council to represent around 11,000 residents and they manage a budget of approximately £290,000. Unlike County Borough Councillors, they receive no direct salary, and are only able to accept limited remuneration or expenses. Blaenhonddan councillors have generally opted to forego remuneration and effectively give their services free to the residents they represent.

Blaenhonddan is split into 5 wards - Aberdulais, Cilfrew, Cadoxton, Bryncoch South and Bryncoch North.

Councillors as Individuals

Community Councillors are elected by the electors of the community under Section 16 (2) of the Local Government Act 1972 every 5 years. A Councillor can also be returned by local by-election or co-option. Anyone elected as a councillor cannot act as a councillor until they have signed the formal declaration of acceptance of office. This includes an undertaking to abide by the Code of Conduct that has been adopted by the Council. Members are also required to declare any interests which they have, for example, in any associations or affiliations with groups, bodies or individuals. It is the individual Councillor's duty to declare an interest and leave a meeting if any issue being discussed could be perceived as securing any type of advantage to the Member. Councillors have a duty to act properly and responsibly in their role as a councillor, both in person and when corresponding through social media or other means, and a responsibility to attend community council meetings when summoned to do so.

When summoned to a meeting, Councillors will have been provided with an agenda, minutes and reports. This allows them to prepare for the meeting and ensure that they are properly informed on the matters to be discussed. They have a responsibility to act on behalf of the whole electorate, take an interest in all issues equally, and represent the views of the wider community in the discussions.

The Chair

The Chair is elected by the Members at the Council's Annual Meeting and serves for 12 months. The Chair is in a position of authority in presiding at meetings of a community council. With the advice of the Clerk, the Chair is responsible for ensuring that effective and lawful decisions are taken at the meetings of the Council. There are several aspects to being a good Chair including a commitment to the role, a willingness to appreciate the views and experiences of others and the ability to manage meetings in an orderly manner. It is important that there is mutual respect between the Chair and the Clerk and between the Chair and the other Members. The Chair has a casting vote in the event of a tied vote. No single individual councillor (including the Chair) can make a decision on behalf of the Council. The Chair is responsible for involving all councillors in discussion and for ensuring that Members keep to the point. The Chair is often the public face of the Council and, in this respect, will be expected to convey the corporate view and not his/her personal view.

The Clerk

The Clerk is employed by the Council to provide administrative and professional support for the Council's activities. Any other members of staff employed by the Council are responsible to the Clerk who is their line manager. The Clerk's primary responsibility is to advise the Council on whether its decisions are lawful and to recommend ways in which discussions can be progressed. The Clerk takes their instruction from the Council and not from any individual Councillor. It is the Clerk's duty to implement the decisions taken by the Council, although certain actions can be delegated by the Council, so that the Clerk may act on their behalf. The Clerk may also be the Council's Responsible Financial Officer. The role involves a broad spectrum of work and responsibilities, including financial management, personnel management, administration, estates management, project management, and health and safety. Whilst it is good practice for the Clerk to consult on the content of an Agenda with the Chair, the Clerk has the final say as the Council's "proper officer" and legal signatory of the agenda. All correspondence for the Council should be addressed to the Clerk.

In addition to the Clerk, Blaenhonddan Community Council also employs 2 Assistant Clerks and 13 others in various capacities. All employees work part time.

Functions carried out by the Council

The Council is responsible for six Community Centres at Aberdulais, Cilfrew, Cadoxton, Caewern, Owain Glyndwr in Waunceirch and at Bryncoch. All are available for hire and bookings are made through the Council's Office in Cadoxton. The Council is also responsible for six playgrounds in those villages and the two sites in Cilfrew and Cadoxton are set within larger parks. Playing field facilities are managed at Cilfrew and Waunceirch. The Council also has an interest in some grazing land, allotments and woodlands which it maintains.

Festival events are normally run by the Council each year. Arrangements are all made by the Council and the "not for profit" events are free. Local charities and groups are encouraged to participate to raise much needed funds and various activities take place.

The Council takes its representative role on behalf of the community seriously and is often consulted by Welsh Government and other public bodies on its views in relation to their policies and activities.

1 A Prosperous Blaenhonddan

This Council has engaged with local business where appropriate and provided opportunities for them to advertise their services to the local community, for example, in the Family Fun Day brochure. Commercial activities are also accommodated at the Council's community centres where appropriate.

Through the provision of small grants, Blaenhonddan Community Council has supported a number of local groups and organisations who requested assistance and who meet or support residents in the Council's area, and is keen to encourage more to apply. During the 2023/24 financial year, the following were awarded grants –

- SSAFA – The Armed Forces Charity, Wales Region
- Green Footprints Neath
- Cilfrew Primary School PTA
- Catwg Primary School PTA
- In It Together NPT
- Ainon Baptist Church
- Caewern Community Connections
- Bryncoch Community Association
- Three Senior Citizens Clubs, who are awarded grants each year.

The Council sets its hire charges at a subsidised level to allow hirers to generate a degree of sustainability in their existence, recognising that many do not have access to significant funds and may not be particularly prosperous.

2 A Resilient Blaenhonddan

Blaenhonddan Community Council continues to offer training opportunities to staff and councillors to ensure that best possible service is provided to the public. A significant commitment was made in 2023/24, particularly in ensuring that new staff and Members received

appropriate training. Members adopted and published a Training Plan in November 2022, in accordance with Welsh Government legislation, and a number of Members have continued to express their wishes with regard to appropriate training courses. In addition, staff training opportunities have been defined. The Training Plan has formalised training to ensure that the Council makes informed decisions contributing towards its resilience and that of its communities, and the Council's training budget has been enhanced for to meet the demand expressed.

The Council retains active membership of One Voice Wales. This ensures that Blaenhonddan has the opportunity to express its views and be represented when policy decisions that may or do affect services provided to the public are being taken by government. Advice and guidance on legislation and procedures is regularly sought to ensure that the Clerk is properly informed on current and new legislation to ensure compliance and advise Council accordingly.

The Council nominates representatives to the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Community Councils Liaison Forum.

Council completed much needed improvements to Cilfrew Community Centre. The improvements have upgraded the building, modernised the facilities, improved their appearance and sustainability and created a much-improved ambience that will help to retain and attract other groups to the Centre.

3 A Healthier Blaenhonddan

The Council is very aware of the importance of play to the physical, mental, emotional and social well-being of children, and the development of life skills. Within the last financial year, Blaenhonddan Community Council has ensured that the condition of all of its playgrounds is regularly monitored, with repairs and maintenance carried out as soon as possible.

The Council's overall provision of 6 playgrounds and 2 playing fields are constantly monitored, improved and maintained. The playing fields accommodate 6-10 teams for both football and rugby at various stages of the season.

The community centres provide accommodation for dance classes, ballet, line dancing, fitness classes, indoor rugby and diet plan clubs, as well as sports courses run by NPT CBC. Centres are also accommodating well-being activities through a variety of groups

and warm hub initiatives have occurred at Cadoxton and Caewern. A number of activities are accommodated for vulnerable groups in the community and those requiring ongoing medical support.

The Council is responsible for four defibrillators located at its community centres in Cilfrew, Cadoxton, Bryncoch and Owain Glyndwr Community Centre which, in conjunction with those provided by other parties, ensure that there is significant coverage across the Blaenhonddan area.

4 A More Equal Blaenhonddan

The Council adopted its Equality and Diversity Scheme in July 2017 and strongly supports both equality and diversity in all of its activities

It provides accommodation for various community groups who might not have the opportunity to meet if the Council were not providing a venue for their meetings. These include Senior Citizen Groups, youth activities, carer and toddler groups, along with various fitness, sport and health groups. The Council continues to support the new youth club at Caewern Community Centre and community groups established at Caewern, Bryncoch, Cadoxton and Cilfrew, and also works with third party providers and charities who provide services for disadvantaged groups in the community.

Council held a successful free Community Fun Day in May 2023.

The Council's programme of rolling out building improvements reflects its wish to meet the needs of all groups in the community. Disabled toilet and baby changing facilities have now been provided at all Community Centres, and will be improved where needed. Although significant financial challenges remain as we leave 2023/24, the Council's facilities will be retained and improved, particularly where there is a lack of facilities in the villages or if the condition of present buildings is a cause for concern.

5 A Blaenhonddan of Cohesive Communities

The Community Council arranges its Fun Day as a means of engaging with communities and providing an opportunity for residents to come together at a local venue. Supporting community groups is also fundamental to the work of both Members and staff, and engagement of this nature is ongoing throughout the year. Much of this coincides with the work of the NPT Local Area Coordinator with whom Members and Staff work closely. The Council assists with funding for community Christmas trees at a number of locations and is mindful of the importance of Remembrance Sunday to all sectors of its communities, supporting commemoration events held locally.

Council has established good working relationships with the Police and with the Fire and Rescue Service and engages with local representatives of both to ensure that an exchange of information regarding its communities is maintained. Representatives attend meetings in local community centres and at the Council's office as appropriate, and have responded to concerns about anti-social behaviour and other matters.

The Council website provides up to date information on all Council matters and will be updated later in 2024. Following adoption of a Social Media Policy, Council now has a Facebook page which has increased the level of engagement with communities. It provides greater publicity for Council activities and for activities of third parties which Council has been pleased to publicise. Individual Members are also active in ensuring that they engage with local individuals and groups to ensure that any concerns can be passed on to the relevant authorities

6 A Blaenhonddan of Vibrant Culture & Thriving Welsh Language

The Council adopted its Welsh Language Scheme in July 2017, and is supportive of a range of cultural activities. One of the Council's employees is a fluent Welsh speaker and responds to verbal and written enquiries as necessary.

One of the Council's longstanding community centre users is a Welsh medium play group held in the Owain Glyndwr Community Centre during school term times. Various cultural activities are also accommodated, including one choir, three arts clubs, a number of bands and four Ukelele groups.

Whilst Council is aware that the Welsh language is not the predominant language in the Blaenhonddan area, there are pockets of Welsh language activity and the Council does take its role seriously in promoting and increasing the visibility of the language, in support of Welsh Government aspirations. Following discussions in 2017 regarding the introduction of corporate bilingual signage at Council premises and property, bilingual signs will continue to be rolled out over a period of time. Bilingual development of the Council's website has not made a great deal of progress because of other priorities, but may be revived as website development becomes a priority. Formal public notices arising, for example from elections, are published bilingually at Council premises, and other opportunities may be explored in future, in accordance with the Council's Welsh Language Scheme aspirations.

7 A Globally Responsible Blaenhonddan

The Council has worked with various environmental initiatives to raise awareness of environmental matters and appreciates the work that voluntary groups do in the community. Individual Members support the Craig Gwladus Country Park and Friends of Craig Gwladus publicity is circulated by Council. Council recognises the work of the Bryncoch Environment Group and supports it when requested. Further initiatives have been arranged by Members in Aberdulais and Cilfrew and are supported by Council when requested. Council continues to be a Keep Wales Tidy Litter Hub publicised on its website but use of equipment that volunteers can borrow to undertake occasional litter picking activities has been limited.

Council recognised its statutory responsibility under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Part 1 - Section 6 to exercise its duty in terms of Biodiversity and the Resilience of Ecosystems. To this end, it has established an Environment Committee of the Council, produced a Biodiversity Action Plan and Report in October 2022, and was able to submit its first Section 6 Biodiversity Report to Welsh Government in March 2023. To date, this has resulted in a number of "lower level" initiatives relating to awareness raising and planting projects, but Members are committed to progressing other realistic projects in the Action Plan, potentially with partners. In 2023/24, the Council altered its grounds maintenance regime to support biodiversity measures, and a "meadow cut" has been implemented by the Council's contractors at six suitable locations within the Council's control.

Council's programme of building refurbishment continues and in 2023/24, scoping and design exercises were undertaken for delivering better insulation at Bryncoch Community Centre and both insulation and roof improvements at Caewern Community Centre. Subject to budget these will be pursued in 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The Council recycles its waste and engages with users at community centres regarding waste management. Ink and toner cartridges are disposed of responsibly. Construction materials that can be re-used are retained for that purpose.

8 A Competent Council

The Council is taking steps to satisfy tests of competency.

All councillors are provided with briefing papers to inform them of Council's policies, procedures and administrative arrangements. Where relevant, training opportunities are made known to Members and requests are recorded in the Training Plan and met according to budget. Casual vacancies in 2023/24 were advertised and filled as soon as practicable.

Council is benefitting from the experience of its staff who are provided with training opportunities where relevant.

Relevant new policies have been prepared and adopted at Council and new processes have been put in place to ensure that Council is improving in terms of policy and procedures.

The Council's annual budget for 2024/25 was set in December 2023 and is in the order of £365k, along with a precept of £275k, whilst initiating a modest increase in hire charges. This followed a period of austerity in 2023/24 when Council had to reduce its capital budget. The situation has now been restored for the 2024/25 financial year. Notwithstanding this, the Council Tax level remained competitive in 2023/24 in comparison with many of its neighbouring town and community councils.

This approach to budgeting reflects the Council's philosophy, and its confidence in its sound management and financial systems. These are reflected in quarterly meetings of the Council's Resources Committee to review quarterly income and expenditure and financial reconciliation, and through regular engagement with its Internal Auditor. Accounts are scrutinised by the regulatory authorities each year, and the 2022/23 accounts were submitted to a robust internal and external audit process resulting in an unqualified audit opinion in 2024.

Agendas, minutes, accounts and contact details can be viewed at www.blaenhonddan-wcc.gov.uk

A Charter is in place to govern the Council's relationship with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and Members attend the Community Councils Liaison Forum. In accordance with the Charter, the Council is pleased with all of its regular engagement on, legal, electoral, planning and property matters.

Objectives

As featured above, the Council has adopted the following long-term objectives:

To contribute towards the delivery of:

- A Prosperous Blaenhonddan
- A Resilient Blaenhonddan
- A Healthier Blaenhonddan
- A More Equal Blaenhonddan
- A Blaenhonddan of Cohesive Communities
- A Blaenhonddan of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language
- A Globally Responsive Blaenhonddan
- A Competent Council

Specifically in 2023/24, the Council planned to focus on the following projects which have, with the exception of the Strategic Plan programmed for later in 2023, been delivered, with the exception of the Environment Committee aspiration which will need to be revisited in 2024/25 -

- Complete a review of the Council's Strategic Plan
- Manage the Council's difficult financial circumstances and challenging budget situation arising from significant increases in anticipated expenditure, and set a realistic budget for 2024/25
- Undertake preparatory work on capital projects with a view to being ready to implement once a capital budget can be identified
- Deliver further training in accordance with the Training Plan
- Embed the fledgling Environment Committee in the work of the Council, with a refined work programme for the future

In 2024/25, the Council will focus on the following aspirations –

- Undertake priority capital projects in accordance with the capital budget identified
- Complete a rebuild of the Council's website
- Deliver further training in accordance with the Training Plan
- Embed the fledgling Environment Committee in the work of the Council, with a refined work programme for the future, in preparation for the submission of its second Biodiversity Action Plan Report in March 2025.

Addendum – Well-being Objectives

In 2019, the Council's Clerk met with officers from Neath Port Talbot CBC regarding the Neath Port Talbot Well Being Plan and indicated in general the steps taken to contribute to its local objectives in the Addendum to its Annual Report. The following Addendum will be forwarded to Neath Port Talbot CBC to update the Council's position in 2024.

Blaenhonddan Community Council Annual Report 2024 Addendum

Contribution towards the objectives in the Well-being Plan

Section 40 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 places a duty on certain community and town councils to take all reasonable steps towards meeting the local objectives in the local well-being plan that has effect in their areas. A community or town council meets those criteria if, for each of the preceding three financial years prior to the local well-being plan for its area being published, either its gross income or its gross expenditure was at least £200,000.

In addition to the Council's achievements towards meeting its own objectives during 2023-2024 it also made a number of contributions to the local objectives in the Public Services Board's Well-being Plan:

Objective	Steps taken to contribute to the local objectives
Supporting children in their early years, especially children at risk of adverse childhood experiences	Provided and improved play provision within its parks and community centres, worked with partners to support groups that meet children's needs, including those at a disadvantage
Creating safe and resilient communities focusing on vulnerable people	Provided facilities for and services that assist groups that support vulnerable people, maintained facilities in all of its communities, supported new community groups including "warm hub" initiatives
Encouraging ageing well	Provided facilities and funding support for bespoke senior citizen groups, and other social groups where older people participate in activities
Promoting well-being through work and in the workplace	Engaged with staff on a regular basis to ensure that working arrangements properly reflect a work life balance, finalised and adopted its Health and Safety policies and procedures, implemented new procedures for monitoring work places
Valuing our green infrastructure and the contribution it makes to our well-being	Maintained green spaces through responsible management having introduced new biodiversity measures, engaged and supported environmental groups.