

# Conclusion

## 1. Introduction

This assessment provides a snapshot of well-being in Gwent, and our local communities, in 2022. To produce it we have considered over 120 issues, engaged with our residents and other stakeholders (although due to Covid-19 this has been mainly through digital means), and considered the Future Trends Report. Preparing an assessment for the whole of Gwent has been challenging at times, with resources channelled to responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. It covers five local authority areas and shows that there are many similarities around the issues affecting people, communities and businesses across Gwent, but there are also some differences which are described in the main part of the Assessment and the Local Area Assessments.

The Assessment shows that there are some aspects of well-being that are real strengths for our communities:

- Communities in Gwent are strong and connected with the most vulnerable being supported in their local neighbourhoods. The Covid-19 pandemic has only strengthened those ties and the sense of pride many have for their local areas.
- There's a diverse economy that has the potential to be at the forefront of future industries, including those that will help the transition to a zero carbon Wales.
- The environment of Gwent is made up of a range of habitats that support plants and wildlife, as well as providing open spaces for people to visit and enjoy, enhancing their health and well-being.
- Our communities are strengthened by Gwent's rich cultural heritage and arts sector, which brings people together, enables new skills to be developed and supports the economy.

The assessment shows that there are also some weaknesses in the well-being of our communities:

- Inequalities exist across and within our communities, impacting on many aspects of well-being. People living in more disadvantaged communities can have considerably shorter life expectancy, and are more likely to be living with life limiting health conditions.
- Although the employment rate across Gwent is around the Welsh average, many families are struggling to meet their basic needs, made worse by the rises in fuel and food prices. Even in areas which appear to be more affluent there are pockets of hidden poverty.
- Our environment is being threatened and in poor condition in some places due to overuse and the growing impacts of climate change.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has had a damaging impact on tourism and the sports and cultural sectors, and the jobs and income those provide.

## 2. Working together

Throughout the assessment the links between themes and organisations have shown that improving well-being is complex. The Well-being of Future Generations Act requires the Public Services Board to think in a strategic and long term way, in order to prevent issues getting worse or making it harder for others to do their work. Many organisations are involved in several partnership arrangements or regional initiatives at the same time, all working on different aspects of well-being. The establishment of the Gwent Public Services Board will enable better alignment across many of these relationships, supporting opportunities for collaboration and joint working with all these networks and communities, to avoid duplication of effort and ensure that benefits are maximised for the residents, communities, businesses and habitats of Gwent.

### 3. Key findings

#### 3.1 Social well-being

The assessment shows that there are inequalities in people's health, housing, education and ability to travel, across the region, with the most deprived living in the valleys and around our towns and city centres. These are also the places where people are more likely to be adversely affected by the impacts of climate change, such as flooding.

Life expectancy is very unequal across Gwent, with average healthy life expectancy in Blaenau Gwent being around 10 years less than that in Monmouthshire<sup>1</sup>. The Population Needs Assessment, produced under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 evidences many of the health and care needs of people in Gwent and complements the findings of this Assessment. The impacts on people's mental and physical health of the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to make these inequalities worse.

Housing too is an area where there are differences in experience across the region. While Monmouthshire has the lowest proportion of housing deprivation, with Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly having the highest<sup>2</sup>. Monmouthshire also has the highest average house prices and the highest house price to income ratio, with Blaenau Gwent having the lowest<sup>3</sup>.

Across Gwent, housing that is resilient to the results of climate change, such as flooding, is suitable for the needs of an ageing population and is affordable are issues that will need to be addressed going forward. There is the potential for renewable energy to power many of the homes in the region, and beyond, providing clean energy that causes less damage to the environment<sup>4</sup>.

Nearly a quarter of school age pupils in Gwent are eligible for free school meals, which is an indicator of the levels of poverty in the region<sup>5</sup>. This is reflected in educational attainment, especially in relation to those children achieving good (A\* - C) GCSEs, with those receiving free school meals performing less well<sup>6</sup>, although there is less variation across the local authorities than with some of the other indicators. The long term impacts on learning, and what they mean for young peoples' future prospects, have not been established yet.

Transport underpins many aspects of well-being and is vital for people's ability to get to work, do the weekly shop, visit friends or access the services they need. Active travel, walking and cycling, has the potential to keep people healthy, and together with public transport, reduces the negative impacts of private car use, such as air pollution. The rural nature of Monmouthshire means that residents here are more disadvantaged in terms of public transport than many other areas, resulting in a greater reliance on private vehicles<sup>7</sup>. The affordability of transport, whether private ownership or public, is an issue for many in our communities, limiting their employment and leisure opportunities. The requirement to work from home, where possible) during the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the move to hybrid working, and together with home schooling, caused a dramatic reduction in travel. It also highlighted the inequalities in access to digital infrastructure and technology.

### 3.2 Economic well-being

Gwent has a diverse economy, including large companies exporting to the world and smaller businesses providing products and services to the local area. Gwent is well placed to take advantage of the new and emerging economic opportunities coming from the need to decarbonise, build and improve local supply chains, and the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal. The right skills will need to be available within Gwent to maximise the potential benefits.

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy of Gwent are not yet fully known, and may change much of the understanding we currently have around economic activity within our communities. Furlough and the closure of many hospitality and leisure venues for an extended period caused employees to find alternative employment, resulting in a significant number of vacancies as restrictions eased in the summer of 2021<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, the long term impacts of leaving the European Union are still unclear, with changes to funding, workforce changes and opportunities for global trade still being clarified.

The employment rate in Gwent is slightly higher than the Welsh average, although the higher employment rates in Monmouthshire and Newport off set the slightly lower figures in the other areas<sup>9</sup>. Despite employment rates being broadly similar, there is disparity between incomes in our communities and between men and women<sup>10</sup>, with many people experiencing in-work poverty, which impacts on their ability to purchase the basics they need. Increases in the cost of living, including energy prices, will only make this worse. The affordability and availability of childcare can impact on parents' ability to take on more or better work, further reducing their ability to provide for their family.

### 3.3 Environmental well-being

Gwent has a distinctive landscape that encompasses rivers, mountains, woodlands, towns, villages and heritage sites. It provides the food, water and air needed for the basics of life, as well as places to enjoy. However, many habitats and species are under threat, with over 70% being classed as in 'unfavourable' condition, and the demands for food production, resources and development puts further stress on the environment. The agricultural sector covers around 65% of Gwent's land, providing employment and local food. However,

agriculture is responsible for some of the major pollutants adversely affecting water and habitat quality<sup>11</sup>, as well as creating around 14% of Wales' greenhouse gas emissions<sup>12</sup>.

Each of the local authorities in Gwent has declared a climate emergency, acknowledging the challenges caused by overuse of natural resources and pollution. The average person in Wales needs the equivalent of 3.3 planets' resources to support current lifestyles<sup>13</sup>. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report<sup>14</sup> suggests that as a result of a changing climate there will be increases in storms, floods and drought which are likely to affect the most deprived in our communities the most, as well as threatening habitats and wildlife. Gwent has the potential to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions through improved food, energy and transport systems, as well as better resource use and increasing recycling rates. These changes will provide opportunities for new skills, jobs and businesses to support the local economy, as well as helping to protect and enhance the diverse environment of Gwent.

### 3.4 Cultural well-being

The economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the sports and cultural sectors have been considerable, with income from tourism decreasing by 70% and jobs reducing by 52% from 2019 levels<sup>15</sup>. The rich cultural heritage of Gwent, together with some uncertainties around future limitations on foreign travel, mean that the region is well placed to rebound after what have been a difficult two years, although this may take some time. Changes in the climate, such as warmer summers, offer potential for new businesses to be created and will require the right skills for a changing tourism offer.

The arts sector has found new ways of connecting with audiences, including digitally. This has opened up new opportunities for some, i.e. those with mobility issues or on limited incomes, but excluded others, i.e. those without the necessary digital connectivity. As with many other areas, the move away from virtual to in-person performances and experiences will need to ensure that they are accessible to all.

The Welsh language is a cornerstone of Welsh culture and heritage and the number of Welsh speakers is increasing in most areas<sup>16</sup>. Diversity across Gwent's communities varies, with Newport being the most diverse local authority area, with many languages and cultures living side by side, sharing experiences and ideas.

Throughout the pandemic communities came together informally, to support the most vulnerable in their communities, or just to connect with each other. Many of the respondents to the engagement survey cited a sense of community as one of the things that made their neighbourhood special. Many people volunteered in more formal ways, such as helping with the vaccine roll out or supporting people with their shopping or health needs. The population of Gwent is ageing and this may mean that more people volunteer in their community after they have retired.

## 4. Next Steps

The Gwent Public Services Board will be using this evidence, and the additional information provided by the Gwent Regional Partnership Board's Population Needs Assessment, particularly around the demography and diversity of Gwent's people, to produce a new Well-being Plan for Gwent.

Consideration needs to be given to what this means for different people, as well as how these different aspects interact with each other. There will be aspects of well-being in one area that are affected by issues in another, for example, poor housing can contribute to ill health, or having access to the countryside can support good mental health.

Now that all this information has been collected, the next step is to look at what it is telling us about well-being as a whole and what can be done to improve it. This is called a 'response analysis' and is a more detailed investigation into some of the key themes emerging from the Assessment, and importantly, how they interact with each other. This detailed analysis will provide the Public Services Board with the information they need to determine their priorities, which will be their new Well-being Objectives.

The Board's Well-being Objectives and how these will contribute to well-being at a regional, sub-regional and community level, will be the basis of the new Gwent Well-being Plan, which will be published in May 2023. These objectives will be supported by Local Delivery Groups in each local authority area, who will be considering how they can contribute to the emerging priorities at a more local level.

As the Plan is being developed there will be further opportunities, as detailed in the 'Our approach to involvement' chapter, for individuals, communities, businesses and other stakeholders to contribute to the emerging priorities and the activities that need to take place to address them. This Assessment will continue to be used to monitor trends and progress throughout the life of the new Well-being Plan.

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<sup>1</sup> Public Health Wales Observatory, 2019

<sup>2</sup> WIMD 2019, Welsh Government

<sup>3</sup> Average survey of hours and earnings (ASHE), ONS, 2020; average pay combining residence-based and workplace based earnings; house price to income ratio based on workplace-based earnings

<sup>4</sup> Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Assessment Regional Summary. Carbon Trust, December 2020

<sup>5</sup> PLASC 2020/21

<sup>6</sup> Stats Wales

<sup>7</sup> WIMD 2019

<sup>8</sup> ONS Vacancies and Jobs in the UK: July 2021

<sup>9</sup> Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics (Annual population survey)

<sup>10</sup> Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics (Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings - resident analysis)

<sup>11</sup> State of Nature Report 2016

<sup>12</sup> Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales, Welsh Government 2019

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- <sup>13</sup> Ecological and Carbon Footprints of Wales Update to 2011, Stockholm Environment Institute and GHD, 2015
- <sup>14</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report 2018
- <sup>15</sup> GTS (UK) Ltd STEAM data, 2021
- <sup>16</sup> Census 2011