Gwent Public Services Board

Mid Valleys East Local Well-being Assessment

A Caerphilly county borough local well-being assessment

FEBRUARY 2022

Contents

1   Executive summary

This section provides a summary of the key assets and challenges identified in this Local Well-being Assessment for Mid Valleys East.

Assets

Road links from Mid Valleys East to Caerphilly, Cardiff and Newport are very good. The Ebbw Valley railway line runs through the community area with an hourly service to Cardiff, and an hourly service from Crosskeys to Newport. Ongoing infrastructure works will extend this service to cover the whole community area. There are regular bus services between Blackwood and other towns such as Tredegar, Bargoed and Ystrad Mynach, as well as services to smaller villages within the community area.

There is good access to banks and building societies in Blackwood, together with a range of national and independent shops. There are also other services such as schools, libraries and leisure centres across the community area.

There have been significant developments from volume housebuilders in recent years and there is market demand for new developments. However, the population density in the community area is significantly higher than the county borough average.

The community area has very few areas which are considered the most deprived, with only Argoed 1, Cefn Forest 1 and Crumlin 3 featuring in the Education domain and Blackwood 4, Pengam 2 and Pontllanfraith 3 featuring in the Community Safety domain.

Pen-y-Fan Pond is one of the last remaining canal feeder reservoirs in Wales and offers accessible green space for local residents. Blackwood Miners Institute is a professional performing arts space and is also a landmark building in Blackwood town centre. The building hosts hundreds of events and participatory activities and has benefitted from significant investment in recent years.

Local residents have told us that they live in close knit communities that have pulled together to help one another during the Covid-19 pandemic. They value the wide range of facilities available to them, which have been even more apparent during the pandemic.

Challenges

Blackwood is the only principal town within the county borough which is not located on a railway line, which means that it suffers in comparison to other towns in terms of access to Cardiff and Newport. Due to the topography of the mid valleys area, it is very difficult to travel from the east to the west of the county borough by public transport, disadvantaging residents living in these areas in terms of accessing employment and services.

There is a significant issue with access to adequate broadband speeds in Newbridge 2 in particular.

Th e majority of the community area has higher levels of criminal damage and burglary crimes than the Wales average.

Some wards have significantly higher death rates and premature deaths rates than the county borough and Wales averages. Figures for healthy life expectancy are significantly lower than the Wales average in the majority of wards in the community area for males, and almost all wards for females.

There is wide variety in the house price to income ratio across the community area, making it difficult for single people and first-time buyers to get on the property ladder.

Local residents have told us that there are not enough activities for all age groups. They also said that there is a need to reduce anti-social behaviour, by increasing street lighting and police presence. They also requested that public services engage more regularly at a community level and allow there to be two-way communication.

2   Description of Mid Valleys East

The **Mid Valleys East** community area includes the wards of **Argoed, Blackwood, Cefn Fforest, Crumlin, Newbridge, Pengam, Penmaen and Pontllanfraith**. The area is characterised by small rural villages to the north and larger residential areas to the south. The principal town in the area is Blackwood, with a local centre at Newbridge.

Blackwood is the principal town in the community areas and is the location of the Blackwood Miners' Institute, which serves as a regional performing arts centre, and Blackwood Little Theatre, which is a local community theatre. The town houses a growing number of light industrial and high-tech firms and is the hometown of influential rock band the Manic Street Preachers.

Newbridge is a Local Centre which includes the Newbridge Memo and Institute Building and provides a range of cultural activities. The building is comprised of the former Institute building (which opened in 1908 as a monument to the miners who built it) and the adjoining Memorial Hall (which was built in 1924 as a memorial to the local servicemen who lost their lives during World War One). A bridge over the Ebbw River linking the school and leisure centre site with the rest of the local centre was completed at a cost of over £3 million and was opened by Joe Calzaghe and his father Enzo Calzaghe in November 2009.

The community area comprises the valleys and adjacent uplands of the Ebbw and Sirhowy rivers and provides a distinctive and attractive landscape. Over 70% of the area is open and is used primarily for agriculture and forestry. Pen-y-Fan Pond is a country park and is one of the last remaining canal feeder areas in Wales, providing a popular recreational facility.

Figure 1: Blackwood Miners' Institute

Figure 2: Joe Calzaghe bridge, Newbridge

3 About Mid Valleys East

Area	56.8 km^2 – approximately 20.4% of the total area of Caerphilly county borough at 278km^2.
Population	The estimated population is 45,849 – approximately 25.2% of the total population for Caerphilly county borough at 181,731[1].
Population density	The population density is 8.07 persons per hectare, with the LSOAs of Pontllanfraith 1, Penmaen 1 and Cefn Fforest 1 having the highest populations. There are 6.53 people per hectare in Caerphilly county borough[2].
Dwellings	The dwelling count is 19,911 – approximately 24.8% of the total number of dwellings in Caerphilly county borough at 80,149[3].
General	Mid Valleys East consists of 6 Middle Layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs), containing 28 Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs). By looking at smaller geographical areas, we can see any differences that can impact on well-being.

LSOAs	MSOAs
Argoed 1 & 2	Caerphilly 005
Blackwood 1 - 5	Caerphilly 006
Cefn Fforest 1 & 2	Caerphilly 007
Crumlin 1 - 4	Caerphilly 009
Newbridge 1 - 4	Caerphilly 010
Pengam 1, 2 & 3	Caerphilly 011
Penmaen 1, 2 & 3	
Pontllanfraith 1 - 5	

Key:

Blue line – LSOA boundary
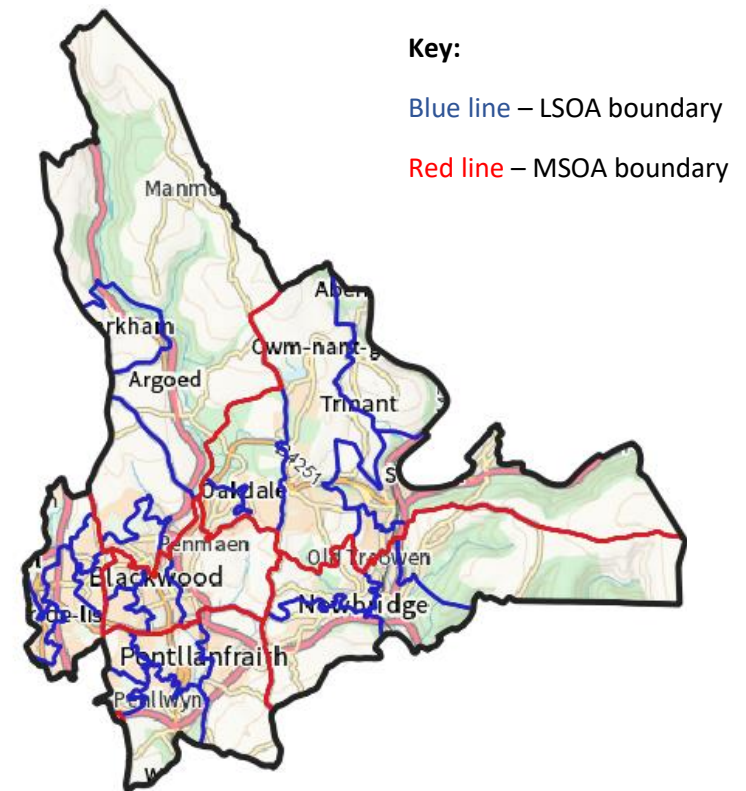
Red line – MSOA boundary

Figure 3: Map of Mid Valleys East

4   Social well-being

4.1   About the community

Overall, the estimated population of Mid Valleys East increased by approximately 583 residents, from 45,266 in the 2011 Census to 45,849 in 2020[4] (+1.3%), compared to an increase of 3.5% in Wales as a whole. 17 of the 28 LSOAs in Mid Valleys East saw an increase in their population over this period, with the largest increase in Penmaen 1 (up 13.3% or 246 people). The remaining 11 LSOAs saw a decrease in their population over the time period, with the largest decrease in Blackwood 3 (down 6.7% or 132 people). Understanding how the population might change in the future can help us think about key well-being challenges and opportunities.

Unfortunately, population projections are not available below the county borough level, so these figures are included below.

The overall population in Caerphilly county borough is projected to increase by 2.0% between 2019 and 2043[5], to 186,991. This is in contrast to recent trends, where the population grew by 5.4% between the 1991 and 2011 censuses.

The number of people aged 0-15 living in Caerphilly county borough is projected to decrease by 7.4% between 2019 and 2043, roughly similar to the Welsh average of 8.0%[6]. The largest decline is projected up to 2028 and following that the figure is projected to remain fairly consistent at around 31,000. This could mean 2,521 fewer people in this age range across the county borough by 2043.

The number of people aged 16-64 living in the county borough is projected to fall by 3.1% between 2019 and 2043 (compared with a decline of 2.1% in Wales as a whole), with a fairly steady projected decline over the time period. This could mean 3,487 fewer people in this age range across the county borough by 2043[7].

The number of people aged 65 or over living in Caerphilly county borough is projected to increase by 27.2% between 2019 and 2043, slightly lower than the Welsh average of 28.7%[8]. For Caerphilly county borough this could mean an additional 9,653 people in this age range by 2043[9]. This figure is 61% higher than the combined projected decrease in the population figures for the 0-15 and 16-64 age groups by 2043[10].

The number of people aged 85 or over living in Caerphilly county borough is projected to increase by 82.6% between 2019 and 2043, significantly higher than the Welsh average of 69.5%. For the county borough this could mean an additional 3,145 people in this age range by 2043[11].

Without question there are many potential benefits to individual, family and community well-being from people living longer.

However, this does mean that there could be higher demand for social care and health services in the future, particularly amongst the elderly population, as the demand for health and social care services tends to increase as we get older.

An ageing population will also require appropriate housing that meets their needs, both now and in the future.

The latest data from the 2021 Census is not available, but from the 2011 Census:

Welsh speakers	20.3% of residents in MVE could at least speak some Welsh, lower than the Caerphilly county borough average of 22.2% and significantly lower than the Welsh average of 37.8%[12].

Country of birth	90.2% of residents in MVE were born in Wales, marginally higher than the county borough average of 88.6% but significantly higher than the Wales average of 72.7%[13].
Ethnicity	98.5% of residents in MVE were of a White ethnicity, virtually identical to the county borough average of 98.3% and higher than the Wales average of 95.6%[14].
Religion	49.9% of residents in MVE had a Christian based religious, marginally lower than the county borough average of 50.7% and significantly lower than the Wales average of 57.5%[15].

Taking action to help support and grow the Welsh language will help preserve Welsh culture and identity for future generations.

4.2   Getting around

People travel for a range of reasons both within Mid Valleys East and beyond; for recreation or to meet with friends and family, to attend education or work, for the movement of goods or the delivery of services, or to access services themselves. There are also travellers to the area, such as those working in the industrial estates or shops and offices, and those visiting for tourism purposes or enjoying the wonderful countryside.

The **Ebbw Valley Railway** provides an hourly (two hourly Sundays) passenger service between Ebbw Vale Parkway and Cardiff Central. Within Mid Valleys East there is a station at Newbridge. From December 2021, an hourly service has operated between Newport and Crosskeys, which will be extended to Ebbw Vale in 2023 following infrastructure improvements.

Blackwood is the only principal town that is not located on a railway line and, as a result, suffers in comparison to other principal towns in respect of public transport links to Cardiff. Rail Linc 901 is the dedicated, fast and convenient service linking Ystrad Mynach station with Blackwood, Pontllanfraith and Maesycwmmer.

The community area has good road links south to Caerphilly/Cardiff and Newport, and also includes the vital A472 mid-valleys east-west link that runs from Crumlin, through Newbridge to Ystrad Mynach and beyond. Regular bus services operate between Blackwood and Tredegar, New Tredegar, Bargoed and Ystrad Mynach. In addition, there are a number of bus routes that regularly operate around the smaller villages within Mid Valleys East.

One the main public transport issues in the community area is that it is very difficult to travel from the East to the West of the county borough, and individuals would need to take multiple buses to make this journey.

The **South Wales Metro** is an integrated public transport network that will make it easier for people travel across the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR), transforming rail and bus services as well as cycling and walking. For more information on the plans for the Metro, visit the Transport for Wales website South Wales Metro | TfW.

Transport and its accessibility can have a significant impact on households with low or limited incomes, and high prices can make public transport an expensive option for those who depend on it. Reducing transport costs can help to increase disposable income and help to reduce in work poverty.

There are a small number of public electric vehicle charge points in Mid Valleys East, at West View car Park (Newbridge) and the Market Trader car park (Blackwood)[16]. The housing stock in Mid Valleys East is predominantly detached or semi-detached, with some terraced properties. This will mean that many properties are likely to have drives or off-street parking, which will help to enable electric vehicle infrastructure to be installed by homeowners. However, for terraced properties charging electric vehicles could still be problematic. Future developments in electric charging infrastructure will hopefully help to solve this issue.

Walking, cycling and public transport can make an important contribution to local transport needs, whilst also helping to address issues of congestion, pollution and climate change associated with car dependency.

Safe active travel routes, particularly those which provide commuting potential, can help to support healthy lifestyles. In the future more people might choose to travel actively, so that they can keep healthier into old age. Future generations might use electric bikes to navigate within the area.

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen many of us **walking and cycling more** and appreciating the value of our local greenspaces.

Route 467 of the National Cycle Network (NCN) branches off Route 46 into the Sirhowy valley, past Tredegar and onto Blackwood via Argoed. The section between Markham and Blackwood is a safe and attractive traffic-free route, making it perfect for families and novices. It travels along the side of Sirhowy Valley and through the peaceful wooded hillside, although there is a gap in the route south of Tredegar and north of Markham.

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen many more of us working from home and accessing services online, but there are certain types of work that cannot be done remotely or digitally, such as factory work or retail. Future generations may not need to travel as much for work.

Broadband access	The majority of households in MVE have access to broadband of at least 30Mb/s, although there are pockets where access is poorer, such as Newbridge 2 (32.1%), Pengam 1 (21%) and Argoed 2 (9.4%)[17]. For half of the households in MVE the proportion without access to broadband of at least 30Mb/s is less than 1%.

Whilst broadband accessibility in Mid Valleys East is generally good, affordability of broadband is much more of an issue for those with low or limited incomes. Poor digital literacy can also be a significant barrier for certain groups within the community.

Communities of the future may be less reliant on fixed telecommunication systems and more people might use newer technologies such as 5G etc.

We do not currently know if homeworking and online access to services will be a permanent arrangement for the foreseeable future, or if people will begin to return to their places of work or choose to access services face-to-face. In reality it is probable that there will be a blend of online, remote and in-person interactions.

In the future the whole of Caerphilly county borough (including Mid Valleys East) will need to be cyber secure and digitally inclusive.

4.3 Access to services

Blackwood is the principal town within Mid Valleys East, and residents will travel from surrounding areas to the town to access the services they need. It has a number of large national supermarkets (including Asda, Farm Foods, Iceland and Sainsburys), five bank branches and a building society branch, plus a range of national and independent shops along the High Street.

Oakdale Business Park is the principal employment site for the Mid Valleys East and is complemented by the Woodfieldside, Britannia, Hawtin Park, St David's, Penmaen, Newbridge Road, Tram Road and Pen-y-Fan industrial estates. There is also a small retail park in Blackwood, all of which will provide a wealth of local employment opportunities.

Newbridge is a local centre that has a number of smaller national and independent shops.

Across Mid Valleys East are the following services:

Asset type	Number
Primary school	19
Secondary school	3
FE college	1
Libraries	4
Leisure centres	4
Community centre	7
Banks/building societies	6
Post office	8
Country parks	1

Mid Valleys East also has a number of Post Office branches in the smaller villages, which offer alternative access to banking services where there are no bank branches.

Mid Valleys East has 15 English medium primary schools, four Welsh medium primary schools and three English medium Comprehensive schools (Blackwood, Newbridge and Islwyn High School) providing education for children aged 11-16 years. The main campus of the county borough's Welsh Medium Comprehensive school (Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni) is also located in the area and provides Welsh medium education for children aged 11-19 years. Apart from Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni, schools in Mid Valleys East have no sixth form provision, so pupils wanting to go onto further and/or higher education will usually attend either Coleg Gwent (Crosskeys campus) or Coleg y Cymoedd (Ystrad Mynach campus).

There is a large leisure centre at Newbridge and smaller leisure centres at Pontllanfraith and Cefn Fforest. Newbridge Leisure Centre is located adjacent to the comprehensive school and incorporates a large swimming pool with a tube slide, pirate ship and water play equipment, plus a multi-use sports hall, fitness suite, dance studio and group cycling studio.

4.4 Crime and community safety

Unless people feel safe in their homes and the places they live and work, they may not have the confidence or desire to access services or participate in community life.

20 of the 28 LSOAs in Mid Valleys East had **Criminal Damage** rates higher than the Wales average of 1.14 cases per 100 population. Five LSOAs (Blackwood 4, Blackwood 2, Pontllanfraith 3, Pengam 2 and Cefn Fforest 2) had rates over twice the Wales average for Criminal Damage, and in Blackwood 4 the figure was almost three times the Wales average[18].

12 of the 28 LSOA's in Mid Valleys East had a **Violent Crime** rate above the Wales average of 2.67 cases per 100 population. One LSOA (Blackwood 4) had a rate over twice the Wales average for Violent Crime[19].

Five of the 28 LSOA's in Mid Valleys East had an **Anti-Social Behaviour** crime rate above the Wales average of 2.55 cases per 100 population. Only one LSOA (Blackwood 4 – rate 7.52) had a rate almost three times the Wales average for Anti-Social Behaviour[20].

15 of 25 LSOA's in Mid Valleys East had a **Burglary** rate above the Wales average of 0.98 cases per 100 population (the information was not available for the other three LSOAs). Pontllanfraith 3 (rate 2.11) had a Burglary rate of more than twice the Wales average for Burglary[21].

Seven of 21 LSOA's in Mid Valleys East had a **Theft** rate above the Wales average of 0.53 cases per 100 population (the information was not available for the other seven LSOAs)[22].

17 of 21 LSOA's in Mid Valleys East had a **Fire Incidence** rate above the Wales average of 0.38 cases per 100 population (the information was not available for the other seven LSOAs). Five LSOAs (Pontllanfraith 2, Pontllanfraith 3, Blackwood 4, Pengam 2 and Pengam 1) had rates over twice the Wales average, and Pontllanfraith 2 had a rate of 1.25, over three times the Wales average for Fire Incidence[23].

Tackling the causes of crime and anti-social behaviour will support greater cohesion in the communities of Mid Valleys East.

4.5   Deprivation

The **Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)** is the Welsh Government's official measure of relative poverty. It identifies those communities (at an LSOA geography), with the highest concentrations of different types of deprivation, plus overall deprivation. WIMD ranks all LSOAs in Wales from the most (rank 1) to the least (rank 1909) deprived.

WIMD domain ranks are available for every LSOA in Wales, and the information below summarises the LSOAs which fall in the most deprived categories in Mid Valleys East, for Overall Deprivation and certain domains.

Overall deprivation	There are no LSOAs in the 10% most deprived category for Overall Deprivation in MVE. There are four LSOAs in the 11-20% most deprived category – Argoed 1 (rank 213 from 1909 in Wales), Newbridge 2 (rank 214), Crumlin 3 (rank 251) and Cefn Fforest 1 (rank 367).
Health Domain	Only the Newbridge 2 LSOA (rank 171) is in the 10% most deprived category for the Health Domain in MVE. A further three LSOAs are in the 11-20% most deprived category in MVE – Argoed 1 (rank 267), Pontllanfraith 2 (rank 287) and Crumlin 3 (rank 339).
Community Safety Domain	Three LSOAs are in the most deprived category for the Community Safety Domain in MVE – Blackwood 4 (rank 55), Pengam 2 (rank 168) and Pontllanfraith 3 (rank 174).
Income Domain	Only the Argoed 1 LSOA (rank 156) is in the 10% most deprived category for the Income Domain in MVE. There are five LSOAs in the 11-20% most deprived category in MVE – Newbridge 2 (rank 240), Blackwood 2 (rank 295), Pengam 2 (rank 300), Crumlin 3 (rank 303) and Cefn Fforest 1 (rank 367).

Employment Domain	There are no LSOAs in the 10% most deprived category for the Employment Domain in MVE. There are seven LSOAs in the 11-20% most deprived category in MVE – Argoed 1 (rank 192), Cefn Fforest 2 (rank 233), Crumlin 3 (rank 237), Newbridge 2 (rank 249), Pengam 2 (rank 332), Blackwood 2 (rank 344) and Pontllanfraith 2 (rank 374).

A table showing the domain ranks for every LSOA in Mid Valley East is shown on Pages 11 and 12. This highlights that there are very limited pockets of deprivation in Mid Valleys East, with no LSOAs in the top 10% most deprived category for Overall Deprivation, and only the Education Domain and Community Safety Domain having more than one LSOA featuring in this category.

Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 - Mid Valleys East									
LSOA Name	Overall Deprivation	Income Domain	Employment Domain	Health Domain	Education Domain	Access to Services Domain	Housing Domain	Community Safety Domain	Physical Environment Domain
Argoed 1	213	156	192	267	155	1375	411	604	1584
Argoed 2	710	913	958	1198	826	260	44	678	1294
Blackwood 1	1009	914	871	927	1019	1405	865	354	700
Blackwood 2	394	295	344	653	250	834	1334	197	1182
Blackwood 3	1731	1542	1447	1552	1533	1838	1866	1042	1092
Blackwood 4	945	932	929	912	985	1605	752	55	957
Blackwood 5	1682	1586	1343	1604	1722	1212	1701	945	1247
Cefn Fforest 1	367	367	417	421	105	1676	420	673	1117
Cefn Fforest 2	420	413	233	524	408	1205	1223	232	1065
Crumlin 1	1448	1525	1612	1230	1313	1494	587	1518	128
Crumlin 2	1558	1346	1390	1182	1289	1505	1666	1304	776
Crumlin 3	251	303	237	339	91	461	1528	568	1004
Crumlin 4	929	993	766	930	827	1272	512	656	546
Newbridge 1	1242	1186	1132	874	995	1547	1007	781	612
Newbridge 2	214	240	249	171	195	298	1129	502	1166
Newbridge 3	1110	995	867	827	1161	1543	1160	672	599
Newbridge 4	798	748	873	663	1108	1479	441	317	289

Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 - Mid Valleys East									
LSOA Name	Overall Deprivation	Income Domain	Employment Domain	Health Domain	Education Domain	Access to Services Domain	Housing Domain	Community Safety Domain	Physical Environment Domain
Pengam 1	472	538	491	411	483	880	323	411	959
Pengam 2	405	300	332	500	378	1279	819	168	1154
Pengam 3	918	882	781	611	878	1682	755	726	641
Penmaen 1	1733	1716	1416	1513	1560	1882	1847	992	877
Penmaen 2	947	841	821	721	683	1859	594	1156	977
Penmaen 3	1519	1486	1135	1109	1302	1511	1380	1117	1209
Pontllanfraith 1	664	676	525	767	545	676	1355	648	681
Pontllanfraith 2	423	408	374	287	780	478	901	426	912
Pontllanfraith 3	1007	887	833	1250	776	1422	1189	174	1003
Pontllanfraith 4	1713	1718	1445	1374	1475	1809	1480	1568	800
Pontllanfraith 5	715	432	616	954	715	1003	1206	832	765

WIMD Rank 1-1909
1-191: 10% most deprived
192-382: 11-20% most deprived
383-573: 21-30% most deprived
574-955: 31-50% most deprived
956-1909: 50% least deprived

4.6   Health

Good health is a major aspect of well-being for all individuals in every community, and there are limited challenges in Mid Valleys East in relation to income, educational achievement and community safety levels of deprivation that may have an impact on health, and possibly contribute to or be caused by poor health.

Although self-reported health is generally good, the rate of premature death is higher than the average rate for Wales and 25.2% of the people living in Mid Valleys East have a limiting long-term illness.

Limiting long-term illness	25.2% of residents in MVE reported that their day-to-day activities were limited a little or a lot due to their health. This figure is virtually the same as the Caerphilly county borough average (25.4%), but higher than the average (22.7%) in Wales as a whole[24].
All cause death rate	The all-cause death rate in the MSOAs in MVE over the period 2017-19 was between 990.9 per 100,000 population in Caerphilly 011 (Pontllanfraith) and 1255.8 in Caerphilly 007 (Pengam and Cefn Fforest), compared with the Caerphilly county borough (1103.7) and Wales (1031.2) average rates[25].
Premature death	The rate of premature deaths (under 75) in MVE ranges between 335.0 per 100,000 population in Caerphilly 011 (Pontllanfraith) and 455.0 in Caerphilly 007 (Pengam and Cefn Fforest), which is significantly higher than the average rate for Wales (382.4)[26].

GP recorded chronic conditions	The percentage of residents with a GP recorded chronic condition in MVE ranges from 13.3% in Caerphilly 009 (Blackwood) to 16% in Caerphilly 007 (Pengam and Cefn Fforest). The percentage in three of the six MSOAs in MVE is higher than the Wales average of 14.3%[27].
GP recorded mental health condition	The percentage of residents with a GP recorded mental health condition in MVE ranges from 18.9% in Caerphilly 009 (Blackwood) to 28.2% in Caerphilly 010 (Newbridge). Only one MSOA (Caerphilly 009) in MVE is higher than the Wales average of 23.2%[28].

Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy can vary considerably even within relatively small areas, especially where there are a mix of more deprived and less deprived areas. Within Mid Valleys East, for males at birth healthy life expectancy ranged from 55.8 years in the Argoed and Cefn Fforest wards to 60.8 years in the Blackwood ward, a gap of 5.0 years. The figures for five of the eight wards in Mid Valleys were significantly below the Wales average. For females, healthy life expectancy ranged from 55.3 years in the Cefn Fforest ward to 63.1 years in the Penmaen ward, a gap of 7.8 years. For every ward apart from Penmaen the figures for every ward were significantly below the Wales average[29].

Tackling the leading causes of premature death and illness, delaying frailty and helping working age adults live healthier lives for longer, by preventing health-harming behaviours and promoting mental well-being, will help create a heathier Mid Valleys East.

Residents of Mid Valleys East are most likely to visit either the Royal Gwent Hospital in Newport (within the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board area) or Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr in Ystrad Mynach in order to treat minor injuries or access planned surgery, diagnostic services and specialist outpatient clinics. The Grange University Hospital located in Cwmbran (again within the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board area) provides Specialist, Trauma and Critical Care services for the whole of Gwent.

24.9% of residents in Mid Valleys East said that their health was fair, bad or very bad. This figure is almost identical to the county borough average of 25.2%, but higher than the Wales average of 22.2%[30].

4.7   Housing and households

A key consideration for the future of Mid Valleys East is ensuring there is the right sort of housing to support the needs of the community.

If the housing of the future is improved in terms of energy efficiency, homes would be warmer, cheaper to run and would produce less carbon emissions. Homes of the future will need to be resilient to a changing climate. The housing being built now will be a legacy left for future generations.

Housing stock	45.2% of properties in MVE are semi-detached houses compared with the county borough average of 39.2% and the Wales average of 31%. 29.9% of properties were in the terraced category, compared with the county borough average of 36.1% and the Wales average of 27.8%. 19.1% of properties were in the detached category, compared with the county borough average of 16.1% and the Wales average of 27.7%.

Council tax band	52.5% of housing in MVE is rated as Council Tax band A or B (the lowest valued housing categories), almost identical to proportion in the county borough as a whole of 52.9%.
Tenure	70.9% of housing in MVE is owned outright or with a mortgage, slightly higher than the figure of 69.3% in the county borough as a whole and 67.4% in Wales. 18.2% is rented from the local authority or a housing association, compared with 18.7% in the county borough as a whole and 16.4% in Wales.

In WIMD 2019, 12 of the 28 LSOAs in Mid Valleys East had percentages higher than the Wales average (5.5%) of people living in overcrowded households, with Argoed 1 (9.9%), Newbridge 2 (9.1%) and Cefn Fforest 1 (8.6%) having the highest percentages[31].

Nine of the 28 LSOAs in Mid Valleys East had percentages higher than the Wales average (19.7%) for the likelihood of poor quality housing – with Argoed 2 (41%), Blackwood 4 (29.1%) and Newbridge 1 (28.4%) having the highest percentages[32].

Nine of the 28 LSOAs in Mid Valleys East had percentages higher that the Wales average (18%) for the likelihood housing containing serious hazards – the figure for Argoed 2 (36.9%) was over twice the Wales average, with high figures in Blackwood 4 (26.1%), Newbridge 1 (25.5%) and Newbridge 4 (24.5%)[33].

11 of the 28 LSOAs in Mid Valleys East had percentages higher that the Wales average (3.2%) for the likelihood of housing being in disrepair – the figure for Argoed 2 (6.7%) was over twice the Wales average, again with high figures in Blackwood 4 (6.2%), Newbridge 3 (5.3%) and Crumlin 4 (5.3%)[34].

The **Welsh Housing Quality Standard** is a set of standards that all Council and Housing Association homes in Wales must meet. The standard states that all homes should be in a good state of repair, safe and secure, adequately heated, up to date in kitchens and bathrooms, well managed, in attractive and safe environments and suitable for specific households. As the Council has retained its housing stock, it is responsible for bringing the stock up to this standard.

Around £260 million has been spent across the county borough in recent years to achieve this standard. Internal works have included new kitchens, bathrooms, heating and electrical rewiring. External works have included new doors, windows, guttering/downpipes and reroofing properties. An environmental improvement programme has also been delivered as part of WHQS, which looks at areas outside the curtilage of council homes.

> There is wide variation in the median increase in prices paid for houses in different wards in Mid Valleys East between March 2019 and March 2021. In Penmaen ward the median price has increased by 56.2% to £202,995, and in Argoed ward the median price increased by 30.1% to £117,000. The smallest percentage increase was in the Crumlin ward, where the median price increased by 10.6% to £134,975[35].

The average annual income in Caerphilly county borough is £29,289[36], which means that the house price to income ratio is almost 7:1 in Penmaen ward (which had the highest median price in March 2021), and 4:1 in Argoed ward (the lowest median price). This means that a single person would have to spend almost 7 times their salary to be able to purchase a property in the Penmaen ward, which is likely to mean that many single people are prevented from buying a property without assistance, such as help from family or shared ownership.

Defining housing need is complex and several factors will have an influence on the overall levels of demand.

This area is characterised by lower house prices and rental values when compared to the other areas. There has been significant development from volume housebuilders within this area in recent years, with 950 units being built on large sites (over 10 dwellings) over the past 15 years. There is market demand for new development in this area.

The 2018 LHMA assessment shows an additional requirement for the development of 1 bed, 2 bed and 4 bed, general needs social housing and a small requirement for low cost home ownership. The highest requirement for social housing is 1 bed general needs.

5   Economic well-being

5.1   Education

Childhood experiences can determine long-term development and overall life achievements.

For Mid Valleys East, the WIMD 2019 Education domain shows the following:

Education Domain	Three LSOAs in MVE are in the 10% most deprived category for the Education domain – Crumlin 3 (rank 91), Cefn Fforest 1 (rank 105) and Argoed 1 (rank 155).

Ensuring all children receive a good quality education and raising the aspirations of future generations of young people will support their long-term economic well-being.

The data shows that the proportion of Key Stage 4 leavers entering Higher Education in Mid Valleys East ranges between 10.8% in Newbridge 2 to 46.1% in Blackwood 5. It also shows that the proportion of adults aged 25 to 64 years with no qualifications ranges from 12.6% in Blackwood 3 to 39.5% in Newbridge 2[37].

For some young people, their financial circumstances and the cost and availability of transport can be major barriers to entering higher education.

Current and future generations of young people need to be supported and encouraged to prevent them becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training).

Repeat school absenteeism	Repeat absenteeism of school pupils in MVW ranges from 1.9% in Blackwood 3 and Blackwood 5 to 11.8% in Cefn Fforest 1[38]. (This indicator measures the percentage of primary and secondary pupils missing more than 15% of school sessions, and is based on a three-year average)

5.2   Work and skills

Improving local skills through workforce planning, training, apprenticeships and volunteering opportunities will help future generations find decent, rewarding work and avoid in-work poverty.

Economic activity/ inactivity	There were 33,020 residents aged 16-74 years in MVE at the time of the 2011 Census[39]. Of these, 21,459 were economically active:
	• 52.1% were employees (49.5% in Wales) • 6% were self-employed (8.6% in Wales) • 4.6% were unemployed (4.3% in Wales). There were 11,561 economically inactive residents in MVE: • 16.9% were retired (16.1% in Wales) • 4.2% were looking after their home or family (3.8% in Wales) • 7.5% were long term sick or disabled (6.3% in Wales)

Skills	The highest level of qualifications for residents of MVE in the 2011 Census is shown below[40].		
		MVE	Wales
	No qualifications	32.0%	25.9%
	Level 1	15.1%	13.3%
	Level 2	16.4%	15.7%
	Level 3+	29.0%	36.8%
	Apprenticeship	3.8%	3.9%
Industry of employment	In the 2011 Census the largest industry of employment in MVE was Manufacturing on 19.8% (10.5% in Wales). This was followed by Wholesale and Retail Trade: Repair of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles on 14.9% (15.6% in Wales) and Human Health and Social Work Activities on 11.7% (14.5% in Wales)[41].		
Main employment sites	There are industrial estates at Woodfieldside, Britannia, Hawtin Park, St David's, Penmaen, Newbridge Road, Tram Road and Pen-y-Fan, which together with Oakdale Business Park, provide a range of local employment activities for the area.		

The Mid Valleys East is not alone in having an over-reliance on the Manufacturing sector, with a similar picture right across Caerphilly county borough and much of South Wales.

The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have had a significant impact on the pattern of employment locally, with the biggest impacts in the Retail, Hospitality, Tourism and (to an extent) Construction sectors.

The most successful localities will be able to offer a range of quality jobs in different sectors, and the foundational economy is also of growing importance (the foundational economy provides the everyday services that our residents and businesses rely on, such as energy, food and healthcare, and has an important part to play in contributing to the long-term resilience of the local economy). Having good quality, well paid employment will have a positive impact on a person's health and well-being.

Caerphilly county borough, along with nine other local authority areas in South East Wales is part of the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) City Deal, which over a 10-year period seeks to deliver a set of targets in the region including 25,000 new jobs by 2036, the leveraging of £4bn of private sector investment and securing economic growth. Eight priority sectors have been identified as important for the region going forward[42]:

Life Sciences	Fintech (financial technology)	Artifical intelligence	Creative Economy
Transport Engineering	Compound Semi-conductors	Cyber Security & Analytics	Energy & Environment
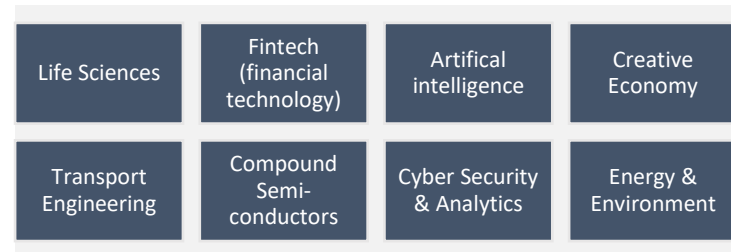
Figure 4: Cardiff City Region priority sectors

One of the key challenges for the whole of the county borough will be to ensure that the public, private and community sectors link in with the CCR City Deal where appropriate, so the area benefits as much as possible from the investment and economic growth that will take place in the years to come.

6   Environmental well-being
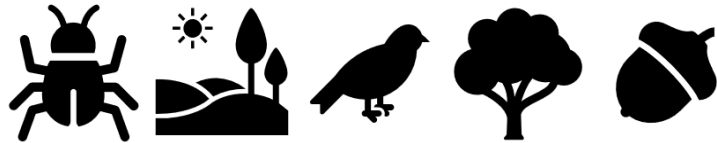
Our air, land, water, wildlife, plants and soils provide our most basic needs, including food, timber, fuel and recreation. They also provide less visible services including water management, supporting pollinating insects and carbon storage.

The former mining and iron industries and the associated heavy industrial sites have had a big impact on the landscape of Caerphilly county borough. Coal mines were located throughout the county borough, with the Upper Rhymney Valley alone having forty coal mines by the beginning of the 20th Century. These industries have contributed to the legacy of poor health within the county borough. By the end of the 20th Century, following the closure of all the pits, many of the remnants of those industries were reclaimed or removed and landscaped to remove the visible evidence of the county borough's industrial past. This past industrial legacy illustrates the importance of both maintaining and enhancing the natural heritage of the county borough, in order to improve quality of life and create a healthier environment for local people. However, it should also be noted that many of the remaining derelict and contaminated sites contain the most ecologically important landscapes within the county borough.

The greening of the South Wales valleys has been transformative – where pit heads and mine workings once stood, country parks and forestry now offer a green and healthy environment that attracts thousands of residents and tourists every year. The landscape is maintained, conserved and improved by farmers, enterprises and groups, supporting linked ecological systems, rich biodiversity, mitigation against climate change and providing the food on our plates.

The natural living environment in particular helps in lifting peoples' mental well-being, as well as providing a free green gym for improving peoples' physical health. This results in positive consequences in terms of increasing healthy lifespans, reducing the incidence of chronic disease, including cardiovascular disease, some cancers, type 2 Diabetes and osteoporosis.

The Valleys Regional Park champions the iconic landscape and people of the South Wales Valleys, working with partners to maximise the environment and social benefits for local communities and future generations. The whole of the Caerphilly county borough is part of the Valleys Regional Park[43].

Figure 5: Pen-y-Fan Pond, Oakdale

Pen-y-Fan Pond is one of the last remaining canal feeder reservoirs in Wales. Built around 1794, its purpose was to supply water to the nearby Crumlin arm of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal. Now, this popular destination offers safe, flat, open spaces for picnics, kite flying, fishing, kicking a ball around or walking. An historic and protected industrial monument, the pond is surrounded by fields and trees on three sides and is a popular magnet for local communities.

Sir Harold Finch Memorial Park is an unusual green space sandwiched between Pontllanfraith and Blackwood, and is named in honour of Sir Harold Finch who served the Bedwellty constituency as its MP from 1950 to 1970. Once part of Penllwyn Farm, the park still retains some of the important wildlife habitats from its former agricultural past. With a mix of grasslands, hedges, a pond and a wetland area close to the River Sirhowy, the park is a wildlife jewel. 75% of this 4.5 hectare park has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), including the **Memorial Meadows Local Nature Reserve**, in recognition of its wildlife value. As a remnant of a traditionally managed hay meadow, it still retains locally rare and notable plant species, such as greater burnet, lady's mantle and bistort. It is currently managed to replicate the former summer grazing by cattle and hay cutting that made the site's flowers and plant life so rich.

For 26 miles, the **Sirhowy Valley Walk** follows the valley's ridgeway and floor through three counties from Newport to Tredegar. From the hilltop commons on a good day, panoramic views over the Bristol Channel and north to the Brecon Beacons can be enjoyed. In the valleys below are beech woodland, hedged lanes and riverside paths. Hidden amongst this is a wealth of agricultural, archaeological and industrial remains which recall the rich heritage of the South Wales valleys. A 5.2 miles section goes through the heart of Manmoel village, and down almost to the valley floor. The walk travels along disused railway lines, through a wooded plantation and along country lanes, before passing under the imposing Chartist Bridge and ending at Blackwood Garden Centre.

Figure 6: Sir Harold Finch Park, Pontllanfraith

In 2021, in a partnership supported by the Integrated Well-being Networks and Aneurin Bevan UHB Neighbourhood Care Networks (NCNs) and the Valleys Regional Park, a novel 'Nature Prescribing' pilot was undertaken, which will provide an additional way forward for supporting community health and well-being by connecting residents to activities in the surrounding natural environment.

7   Cultural well-being

Culture is broad and all-encompassing, covering shared beliefs, customs, characteristics and identity and defined by everything including language, tradition, heritage, social norms, and involvement in dance, music and arts and other recreational activities. Culture is also influenced by people moving into an area and increasing cultural diversity, leading to a growth in the culture of the area.

The ability to speak the Welsh language is seen as a big part of the culture of Wales by many people. The proportion of people able to at least speak Welsh in Mid Valleys East ranges from 14.7% in Newbridge 2 to 27.8% in Blackwood 3. 21 of the 28 LSOAs in Mid Valleys East had a figure below the county borough average (22.2%) and the figure in all LSOAs was significantly below the Wales average (37.8%)[44].

Younger age groups are more likely to more likely to be able to speak Welsh, demonstrating the influence of Welsh language education in the area.

Key attractions	**Blackwood Miners' Institute** is a multipurpose, professional performing arts centre and an iconic, historical Grade II* listed landmark situated in the heart of Blackwood. Built in 1925 as a single-storey snooker hall, the Institute was originally owned by the Coal Industry and Social Welfare Organisation (CISWO) and was paid for out of the Oakdale miners' wages at 3d a week. In 1936, two further floors were added to the building to include the stage, auditorium, dance floor, reading room, library, ladies' room and rehearsal rooms for local societies.

The building fell into disrepair in the 1970s-80s and following many of the local pit closures, the building was conveyed Islwyn Borough Council as a charitable trust in 1990. It was refurbished and reopened in February 1992 as a community arts and entertainment venue thanks to funding from Islwyn Borough Council and the Welsh Office. In 2010, Caerphilly County Borough Council invested £1.6m in a complete refurbishment. Each year the building hosts hundreds of events and participatory activities spanning drama, dance, family performances, live music, opera, literature and comedy. The Institute is the only professional venue in the county borough, which recognises the contribution the arts make to the social, cultural and economic regeneration of the region and to the health and well-being of residents.

Based in the Newbridge, **the Celynen Collieries Institute and Memorial Hall** are Grade II and Grade II* listed. The Institute building (which opened in 1908) is a lasting monument to the miners who worked so hard to build it, and the Memorial Hall (built in 1924) serves as a memorial to the local servicemen who lost their lives during WWI. In November 2014, the Art Deco auditorium (which was used to show films and provide entertainment to the miners and their families) reopened its doors, filling the space with music and culture once more. The building is treasured by the local community, with a vast programme of events for all ages. With a ballroom, meeting rooms and function room, they host a wide range of events including weddings, live music events, concerts, classes, parties, wakes, conferences and meetings.

The county borough is blessed with a large number of community arts organisations that are vital in raising the profile of the arts, for drawing in visitors and additional income into the county borough and providing an essential social element for local communities through opportunities for people to develop their skills or perform. There are nearly 100 arts groups that meet to rehearse, develop, make and showcase their work within the county borough. There are also a considerable number of community arts activities which go under the radar, such as one-off projects in schools, youth clubs, older persons groups, summer schemes, adult education and community centres.

Visual Arts - the visual arts have nearly 20 groups within the county borough covering photography, sculpture, painting, film, printmaking and crafts.

Public art - many towns and villages in the county borough have imaginative pieces of public artwork, including sculptures, mosaics, and murals. Caerphilly County Borough Council works with local schools, communities, artists and arts-based organisations to develop and produce artwork that enriches and reflects the history and culture of local communities.

Examples of public art in Mid Valleys East include the 'Chartist Man' (Chartist Bridge), the 'Ring of Eternity' (opposite Blackwood Miners' Institute), the 'Singing Tree' (Hall Street) and the 'Tower of Hands' (opposite the former Argos shop) in Blackwood; the Viaduct Mural in Cwmcarn and the 'Hallelujah Lamp' in Newbridge.

Over recent years a significant amount of investment has focused on public artwork within the county borough, with around £1.7 million invested in such projects. Funding for these schemes has come from the Council, and a range of external organisations, including European funding.

Figure 7: The Singing Tree, Blackwood

Engaging the local community in the significance of their local heritage is important in ensuring a sense of place and increasing community pride and well-being.

Mid Valleys East is home to a wide range of clubs and societies, including the Boys Brigade, Brownies, Cubs, Air Training Corps, choirs, a radio society, heritage associations, theatre groups, tenants and residents' associations, boys & girls club, older persons groups, gardening clubs, allotments associations and a photographic society.

Taking part in cultural activities can be a good way of bringing all parts of the community together and building community cohesion. This has been particularly important since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, and whilst meeting with others has been problematic for a significant period of time, the bonds forged within our communities has meant that vulnerable individuals have been supported through this difficult period.

Volunteering provides the opportunity to meet new people, to gain confidence and learn new skills for future employment and to have fun in an informal setting. Without volunteers giving up their time for the benefit of their local communities, none of the clubs and societies listed above would be able to exist. The many churches and chapels in Mid Valleys East are also home to volunteering efforts, particularly providing lunch clubs and food distribution to those in need. There are also a number of foodbanks in the Mid Valleys East who provide free or very cheap food to those in need or on low incomes – these include Markham Community Centre, Friends of Libanus Primary, Libanus Lifestyles and Caffi'r Ffynnon in Argoed.

The mental and physical benefits that exercise can provide are well documented. Through the hard work of members of the community, there are many sporting clubs and teams in Mid Valleys East including football, rugby, bowls, golf, cricket, karate and athletics. If future generations are to realise the health benefits of being active then barriers to participation need to be addressed, particularly amongst young women, who typically drop out of sporting activities as teenagers. A varied range of childhood experiences can help to seed a lifelong interest in sports and cultural activities.

Predominantly, the natural landscape of the Mid Valleys East is superimposed by features that relate to the major industrial change that occurred in the South Wales area in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. There are a number of examples of planned industrial heritage, and these provide the rich industrial heritage of the area, which is increasingly becoming recognised as a unique attribute of both the county borough and the wider South Wales Valleys. A key issue in respect of the area's industrial heritage is its protection and, more importantly, the beneficial re-use of its buildings. Bringing these buildings back into use will help to ensure their continued retention.

Within Mid Valleys East there are a total of 90 **Listed Buildings** – this term refers to a building or other structure officially designated as being of special architectural, historical, or cultural significance:

- Argoed – 1 x Grade II
- Blackwood – 14 x Grade II and 1 x Grade II* (Blackwood Miners' Institute)
- Crumlin – 27 x Grade II and 5 x Grade II* (Former Navigation Colliery North Winding Engine House; Former Navigation Colliery Chimney; Former Navigation Colliery Fan House and Fan Drift; Former Navigation Colliery Power House and Pump House; Former Navigation Colliery South Winding Engine House)
- Newbridge – 8 x Grade II and 3 x Grade II* (Celynen Collieries Workmen's Memorial Hall; Church of Our Lady of Peace and attached Presbytery; Cwmdows Farmhouse)
- Pengam – 1 x Grade II
- Penmaen – 8 x Grade II
- Pontllanfraith – 21 x Grade II and 1 x Grade II* (Gelligroes Mill)
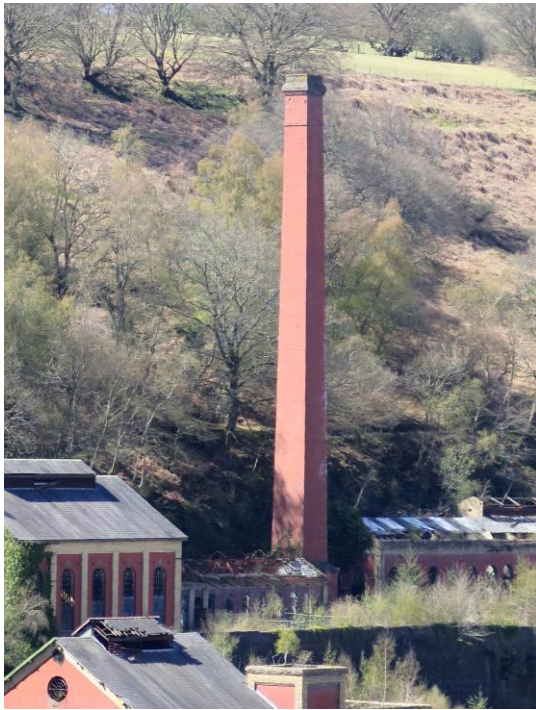
Figure 8: Former Navigation Colliery Chimney, Crumlin

Figure 9: Cross and lych gate, St Sannan's churchyard, Bedwellty (Scheduled Ancient Monument)

There are four **Scheduled Ancient Monuments** in Mid Valleys East – these are sites of archaeological importance with specific legal protection against damage or development. There are two in Argoed, and one each in Pontllanfraith and Crumlin.

There are four **Conservation Areas** within Mid Valleys East – Gellihaf (Pontllanfraith), Gelligroes (Pontllanfraith), Newbridge Gateway and Oakdale Village. The term Conservation Area almost always applies to an area (usually urban or the core of a village) of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which is considered worthy of preservation or enhancement.

8   What our residents have told us

The views of communities on how resources are used to meet their needs are vital, to help inform the way in which programmes and projects are delivered within and alongside public, private and voluntary sector organisations. People are involved throughout the process of assessing the well-being of our community areas, Caerphilly county borough and Gwent, right through to setting the objectives which will be included in the Well-being Plan. A group of engagement and communications professionals from across the Public Services Board member organisations developed a consistent involvement process to gather community views to support the Assessment process.

Due to the obvious difficulties in being able to engage with people face-to-face due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the primary engagement tool was an online survey. Paper copies were also made available in public places such as libraries and doctors' surgeries. In addition, two workshop sessions were arranged for each of the five community areas in Caerphilly county borough, enabling people to contribute their views through group discussions. Social media was used to advertise the survey and workshops and stakeholder groups were enlisted to encourage communities and groups to participate.

We have been able to analyse the views of residents within the community areas through postcode and other analysis, so that differing perceptions within an area can be understood and compared with the data in this Local Well-being Assessment.

Within the Mid Valleys East, many respondents felt that they lived in close-knit communities that generally pulled together to help one another during difficult times. Following Covid-19 related lockdowns, a number of groups and organisations had set up support networks in their communities to ensure that help was available for those who need it. Some respondents thought that the area was an attractive place to live, with people coming into the area being made to feel very welcome by local communities.

A number of respondents felt that there were not enough organised activities or facilities for people of all ages. They expressed a desire to start local clubs, groups or hubs, but recognised that they needed help in setting them up. Disused buildings could potentially be regenerated and managed by the community, to house groups and offer activities.

Respondents also told us that having access to a wide range of facilities within their community is very special to them and having frequent access to community clubs and classes for young people was very important. Additionally people told us that the restrictions placed upon them during the pandemic enabled them to spend more time within their local area, helping highlight the local facilities that are available locally.

For many respondents, safety in their community was a priority and they felt more should be done to reduce anti-social behaviour by improving education and facilities, particularly for young people. Increased street lighting at night and a greater policing presence in the area were also common suggestions to help make people feel safer.

Some respondents said that traffic speed is a problem within their local area. They told us that they often feel unsafe as traffic is regularly breaking the minimum speed limit, making it difficult for people to walk around their local community. When asked how they would like their community to look in the future, they told us that reducing minimum speed limits and increased police presence could be used as a deterrent to speeding and could go a long way to helping people feel safer within their community.

Some respondents suggested that public services could engage more regularly at a community level and improve the processes for two-way communication. A number were keen to volunteer and work with service providers to help make their communities a better place, but they needed support and encouragement.

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