

# HEALTHY CHANGE FOR BLAENAVON - MAKING IT HAPPEN



Kevin Warren, Clerk to Blaenavon TC, explains how the council came to engage a Healthy Blaenavon Officer

We are often told, by statistical data, that the people of Blaenavon are unhealthy, that they have poor lifestyle habits and are at higher risk of chronic conditions. It's not a good message to hear, or to accept, if you are one of those people. Subsequently, we started to think about how we might offer an alternative to the standard public health messages we are faced with every day. How could we create a Healthy Blaenavon?

Despite those statistics, we see a movement of change across the town, and we want to build on that. Sports clubs are thriving with the creation of more junior teams, teenagers are using the gym at the Active Living Centre and the community spirit that is so prevalent here is encouraging that change.

In 2018 Torfaen Public Service Board made a commitment to improving the health and well-being of Blaenavon as part of its well-being plan. Partners want to test an approach that is multi-faceted which involves a greater focus on tackling the social determinants of poor health and well-being. By definition, this brings services together working in a collaborative and integrated way and asks the community to shape this change. It was an opportunity that the town council just had to get involved with.

The Healthy Blaenavon Officer post is funded jointly between Blaenavon Town Council and Torfaen County Borough Council. The project is managed by the TC and is supported strategically by the Public Health Team of Aneurin Bevan University Health Board.

One of the biggest challenges of talking to the people of Blaenavon about health and physical activity was the decision several years ago to remove the swimming pool from the town. Inevitably this comes up in conversations with people, so we need to find ways to positively move away from this issue.

Part of our solution regarding this has been working with Torfaen Play Schemes to provide free transport to Pontypool so that children can swim during the summer and half terms. Another challenge is transport out of the town, particularly for elderly people.

We will be working hard to promote what is already on our doorstep, working with partners on transport solutions for older



From left to right as follows:

- Emma Davies McIntosh - Torfaen Service Development Lead, Integrated Wellbeing Networks.
- Kevin Warren - Clerk to Blaenavon Town Council.
- Rebecca Smith - Healthy Blaenavon Officer - Blaenavon Town Council.
- Councillor Gareth Davies - Project Lead - Blaenavon Town Council.

people to get to lunch clubs, art class or other available social activities.

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Tackling loneliness and isolation is a huge part of improving health and well-being, it's not just about physical activity. We've recognised this as part of our award-winning intergenerational work with the Hwb Youth Club, Big Pit Mining Museum and others key partners.

Our advice to other councils would be, find out what the strategic issues that are prioritised at the Public Service Board level, then offer your local knowledge, awareness, agility, accessibility and democratic accountability. They should see this for the huge potential and added value that town and community councils can bring to solving local social and economic issues.

We are at the beginning of this journey and this summer our Healthy Blaenavon Officer will start to get out and about talking to people about their health and well-being, connecting them to things that might help and feeding back community thoughts, feelings and ideas to our multi-agency steering group.

Rebecca Smith, Healthy Blaenavon Officer said "In order to deliver a bespoke service you need to truly understand your community, to resonate with their issues and capabilities. To do this, time must be spent engaging with the residents. This needs to be done predominantly in the short term for wider dissemination to support the life of the project"