Bettws Early Learning Community

Our Bettws:
experiences, strengths and needs
June 2023

Bettws
Cymuned Addysg Gynnar
Early Learning Community

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Introduction

This report is the product of a collaboration between partners and family voices across the early years system, united in wanting to see children thrive in their earliest years.

Child poverty data reveals stubbornly high in Newport and Bettws remains one of most underserved communities in Wales. We know that to see things shift to better meet the needs of families and children we need to understand the ecosystem and take an informed approach based on learning and adapting.

This is the second yearly report that attempts to draw together all we know in order to influence change. Central to our approach is gathering the voices of the community, many who are proud of the strength of community & connection, feeling that Bettws is a good place for families to live.

Good progress has been made in improving how families have a voice , groups of parents come together on a regular basis to share their voices, take an active role in the ELC and want to make change happen. We've also been able to develop and embed systems change approaches: BELC's focus on activity that directly seeks to tackle key systemic challenges relating to early years in Bettws, such as the work of the Embrace project which has come directly from learning and innovating in response.

So please read and use this report to understand again our place and the change we want to see.

Rebecca Thomas,

Bettws Early Learning Community Lead

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BETTWS EARLY LEARNING COMMUNITY: background

The Bettws Early Learning Community (BELC) aims to **improve early learning outcomes for children living in poverty**. We launched in September 2019. Since then, we have been working in partnership to improve the life chances of children by changing the Early Years system that supports them to develop and thrive.

Children in Bettws face significant inequality and disadvantage as a result of experiences faced before entering primary school. We know this negatively impacts on life changes and are committed to working together to create an environment where every young person has the **opportunity to thrive**.

We take a **'whole system' approach** to improving the early learning outcomes of children growing up in poverty. This means that we have a **shared strategy for change** and work across the Early Years system to **join up and strengthen services** that already exist.

We identify families in need and deliver programmes to address the issues, testing new approaches and ways of working, and we share our learning as widely as we can to increase our impact beyond Bettws.

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BETTWS EARLY LEARNING COMMUNITY: our vision

To support **communication** and **language** development as well as the **social** and **emotional** development of children during their **first 1001** days and **crucial life transitions.**

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Our Bettws Report: purpose of this document

“Talk to us about what’s going on – and our ideas”

Bettws mum of 5, February 2022

“Systems need flow of data and information to run their learning engine and enable adaptation and innovation”

Evaluating Complexity: Propositions for Improving Practice, pp.11

We undertook considerable research before we launched our Early Learning Community to help us understand the strengths and needs in Bettws, and how the Early Years system currently works together to support children and families. We used this to develop our first Bettws Early Learning Community strategy, our workstreams and the interventions we have been testing.

Over three years have passed since then, most of this time facing huge challenges and under significant restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Partners across the ELC see first-hand the increased pressures on families as the cost of living rises and the continued impact on young children of the ‘COVID generation’. **It is timely to look at all the voices and evidence available to us to help us build up a picture** of experiences, strengths and needs for families with young children in Bettws.

This second edition of the report builds on the first and draws together voices from the community over the past year, with families at its heart. This evidence will help us moving forward with identifying the areas of focus for the ELC, and where there are gaps in our understanding and opportunities for future learning.

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Methodology:

This document is a synthesis of a range of different data and insights on Bettws from multiple sources. Family voices are at the heart of our ELC, so each section includes the experiences and views shared by families on Bettws, through the January 2023 Parent survey, interviews and group conversations at parent peer-support groups and other family engagement on Bettws. We have also included publicly available data from the Census and Welsh Index of Deprivation (WIMD), and locally collected data on housing, health, crime and education.

In our Early Years system we have many actors, activities, and settings across families, the community and different agencies and organisations. We know there are lots more insights to gather from across education, health, social care, housing, community safety, environmental services to help our ELC understand the opportunities to shift what we do and how we do it to improve outcomes for families.

This second edition of the report builds on the first edition produced in March 2022. In this edition we have included findings from our thematic 'spotlights' or 'deep dive' reports, where the ELC Board identified an area for further research.

A note on the geographical breakdown of data:

Much of the quantitative data in this report is from the 2021 Census, 2020 mid-year population estimates and the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD), a measure of relative deprivation for small areas. These data sets are broken down geographically into Lower-level Super Output Areas (LSOAs). LSOAs are a useful way that large data sets for England and Wales are broken down to give structure for collecting, processing, storing and aggregating data. Using LSOA data also allows comparison across places. However, they often do not align with the real communities we identify with. For example, Bettws is made up of six different LSOAs as we use the data from all six here in this report.

Please see the references at the end for detailed information on data sources.

About Bettws:

Our place
Who lives here?

About Bettws: our place

"Bettws has a great community vibe – it is located perfectly for the city and countryside - options for all"

(Parent of 3 children, January 2022 Family Survey)

Bettws is an area in the North of Newport, South Wales. It sits on a hill in the north of the City and covers 5.14km square or approximately 2.4% of the total area of Newport[1].

Bettws is a green and open area, surrounded by farmland to the North and South. Despite this open space and access to countryside, Bettws is still most commonly known for the Bettws estate which is in the middle of the ward and was built in the 1960s. There is a brook running through the middle, small woodland, a nature reserve and easy access to the canal.

The M4 Motorway runs between Bettws and much of the rest of the City.

Newport City Council: https://www.newport.gov.uk/en/Leisure-Tourism/Visit-Newport/Leaflets-and-maps.aspx

Active play at Bettws in Bloom, March 2022

A short history of Bettws[3]

Bettws is an ancient parish and has existed since at least the 16th century. Before the Bettws estate was built in the 1960s, Bettws was a small farming community made up of just over 150 people living in 46 houses. Back then, there were no schools, shops, social facilities or support services, and transport links were very limited.

The first new residents arrived on the new Bettws estate during October 1961. The new homes were spacious, modern and light, they had a front and back garden, and, most importantly, an inside toilet and running hot water. Many people found Bettws to be a very sociable estate and neighbours quickly made friends and Bettws has grown to be a bustling place with over 8,000 residents in 2022.[2]

[1]Newport City Council. 2017
[2] Newport North Profile 2021
[3]Based on Bettws in Bloom community research published on: https://moving2bettws.wordpress.com/a-history-of-bettws/

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About Bettws: our place

Population density:

Bettws has an average population density of 1,615 people per square km. The population density varies across Bettws, as you can on the map below.[2] This means that some parts of Bettws can feel very busy and bustling, like around the shopping centre and schools and where there is lots of housing, but other areas feel quieter and less urban.

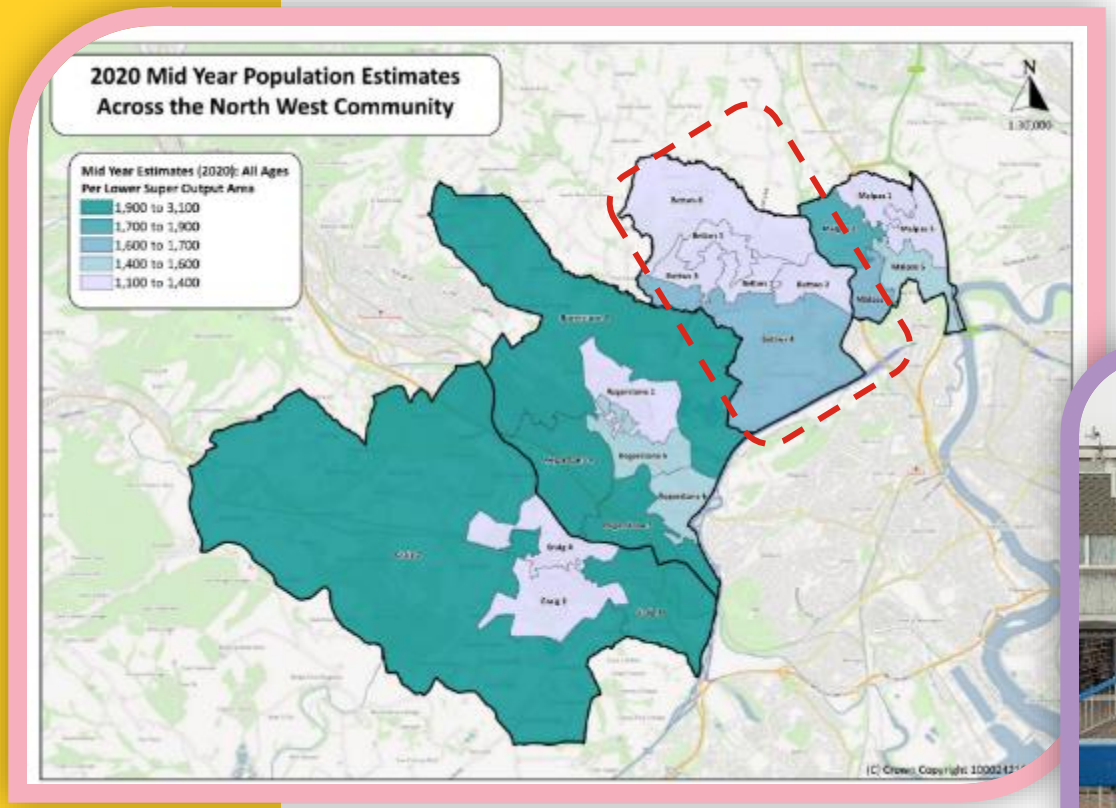

Figure adapted from Newport North Profile 2021

How does this compare to the surrounding areas?

- Over double the density for Newport as a whole
- similar to neighbouring Rogerstone (1,550 per square km)
- less than half of that in Malpas (3,671 people per square km)

View of homes and shops, taken from outside Bettws Community Centre (The North Hub), March 2022

Bettws covers 2.4% of the area of Newport…

…but we have double the population density of Newport

Some parts of Bettws feel busy and bustling, and other parts are much quieter

[2] Newport North Profile 2021

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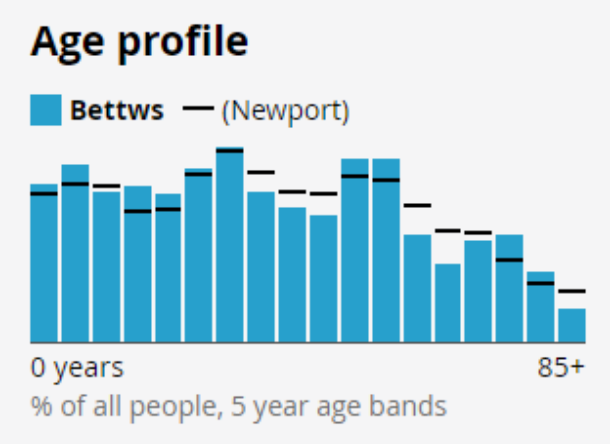
About Bettws: who lives here?

Population size and ages:

The Annual Population Change in Newport over the past decade has been 0.91%, and the population of Bettws has increased at a rate of 0.88%. According to the latest Census data, released in March 2021, 8,300 people live in Bettws.[4]

About **1,660 children live Bettws** – that's 20% of the population of Bettws who are aged 14 and under.



The graph on the left shows the age profile for Bettws (in blue) and Newport (black lines).

Looking at the total percentage of children and young people across first four age groups (0-4, 5-9, 10-14, 15-19), there are 26.4% living in Bettws compared with 24.4% across Newport.

The profile also indicates that the percentage of teenagers living in Bettws is higher than the percentage across Newport.

A multi-generational population: Anecdotal contributions at the BELC design workshops suggested that Bettws has a multi-generational population with fewer 'new' people moving in compared to other areas of Newport. Families are often close and supportive of one another, and approaches to parenting are shared between generations within families.[5]

8,300 people live in Bettws

1,700 children under 16 live in Bettws – that's 21% of the population!

Many generations of families live here and support one another

[4] 2021 Census, Office for National Statistics
[5] BELC Strategic Plan, updated July 2021

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About Bettws: who lives here?

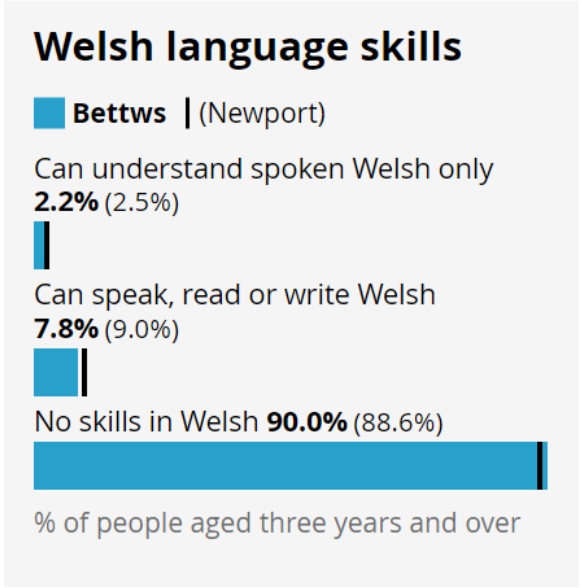
Welsh Language Skills

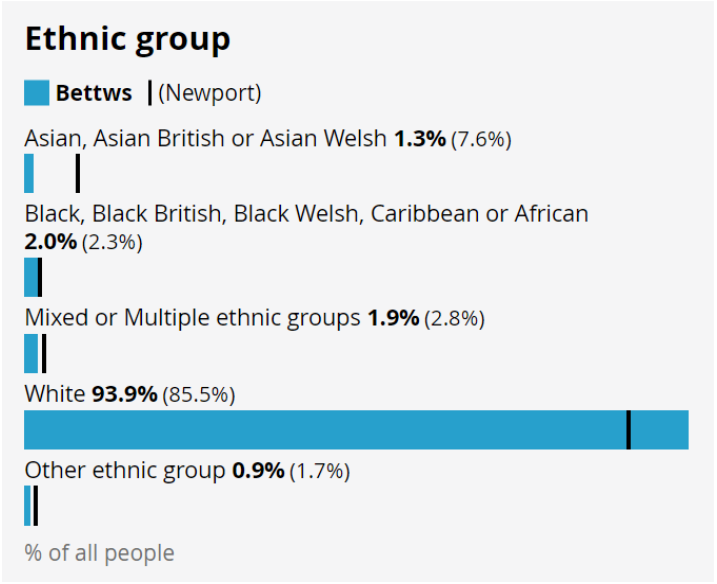
The 2021 Census data[4] showed a decrease in the percentage of children aged 3 to 15 years reported as being able to speak Welsh in Wales compared to the 2011 data. The decreases tended to be larger in areas with lower concentrations of Welsh speakers, including Newport (-1.2%).

The data indicates 10% of people in Bettws have some Welsh language skills, compared to 11.5% of people in Newport.

Religion

In the 2021 Census, 56% of people living in Bettws said they had no religion, compared with 47% of people in Wales. 36% of people in Bettws are Christian (compared with 44% in Wales).





Ethnic Group

The data shows that 93.9% of people living in Bettws are from a white background, this is higher than in Newport (85.5%).

Bettws has a low percentage of Asian, Asian Bristish or Asian Welsh people (1.3%) compared to Newport as a whole (7.6%).

10% of people in Bettws have some Welsh language skills

92.8% were born in UK

94% are from a white background

[4] 2021 Census, Office for National Statistics

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Our experiences, strengths and needs:

- Community and connections
- Play
- Resilience and wellbeing
- Physical health
- Education, schools and childcare
- Access to services
- Finance and employment
- Housing
- Community Safety
- The impact of the cost-of-living crisis

Community and connections

"The community, support from local councillors, activities on offer at the hub, flying start services"

Parent of two (February 2023 Family survey)

"Being close to family and friends having the support from each other"

Parent of two (February 2023 survey)

In the January 2023 Family Survey[7], parents were asked "**what do you like best about living in Bettws?"**

Below is a word cloud showing what the themes and words which were used most often:

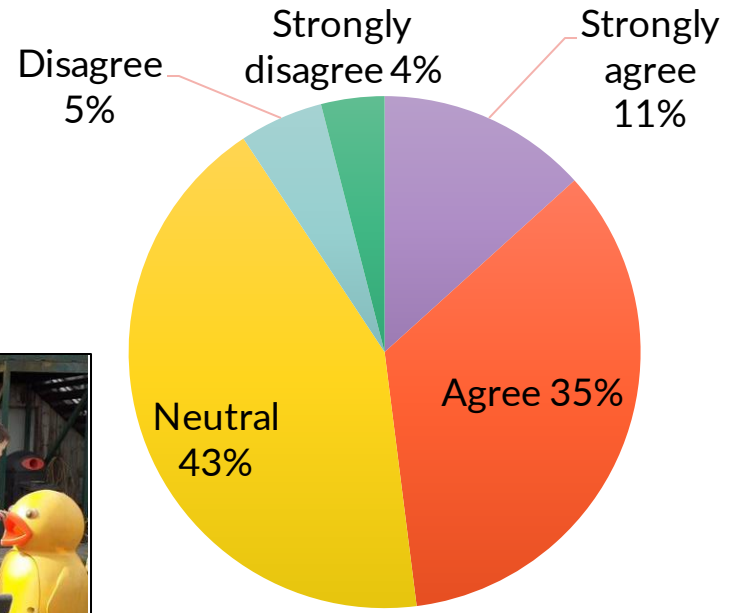
Parents said the most supportive aspects of their local community are:

- Family & friends
- Playgroup & schools
- ELC coffee morning groups

Getting together at Bettws in Bloom, April 2023

In the 2023 Family Survey, 48% of parents said they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that Bettws is a good place for families to live, compared to 70% in the 2022 Family Survey.

"I think Bettws is a good place for families to live"



[6] Bettws Early Learning Community Family Survey February 2023

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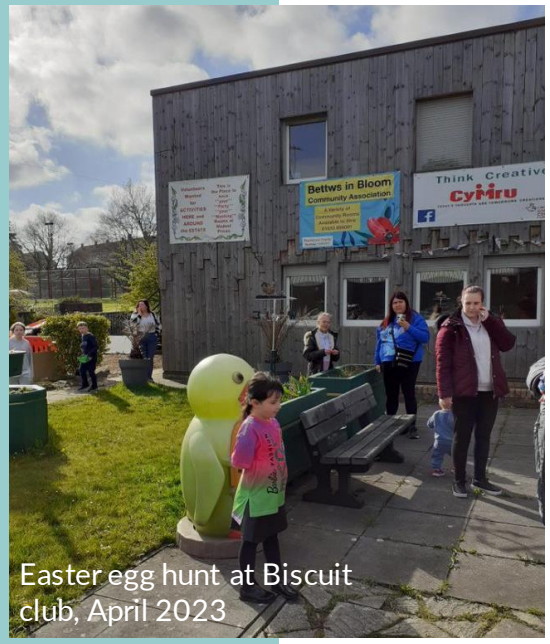
Community and connections

Arts & crafts at Biscuit club, January 2023

Bettws Early Learning Community Peer support groups for parents
Support for parents via weekly coffee mornings has continued to develop and strengthen over the past year. These groups are open to all parents across Bettws providing support and signposting and a variety of activities for parents and their children to enjoy, such as arts and crafts.

Halloween at Biscuit club, October 2022



Easter egg hunt at Biscuit club, April 2023

Parent feedback on Bettws ELC peer-support groups has been very positive.
Examples of comments made by parents include:

"Coffee group is my safe space"

"The groups I go to have been really, really good because if you're alone at home with your child all the time, or if they've gone to school and you're home alone, then it's very, very lonely."

"The staff that run the group are so friendly and helpful and will listen and give great advice on any life issues"

"I don't feel judged when attending as would if out in society"

Some parents have found their confidence has increased since joining a coffee morning group, including their social confidence and confidence in their parenting.

"I've met many likewise friends at coffee group and even found a job through one of the friends"

"Self-confidence has improved, and I feel more confident in asking for help if I need it"

"I feel more confident in my parenting skills"..... "Chatting to people and socialising"

"I feel more confident in general within myself. Knowing other people have the same or similar issues makes me feel more at ease as a parent."

Wreath making at Biscuit club, December 2022

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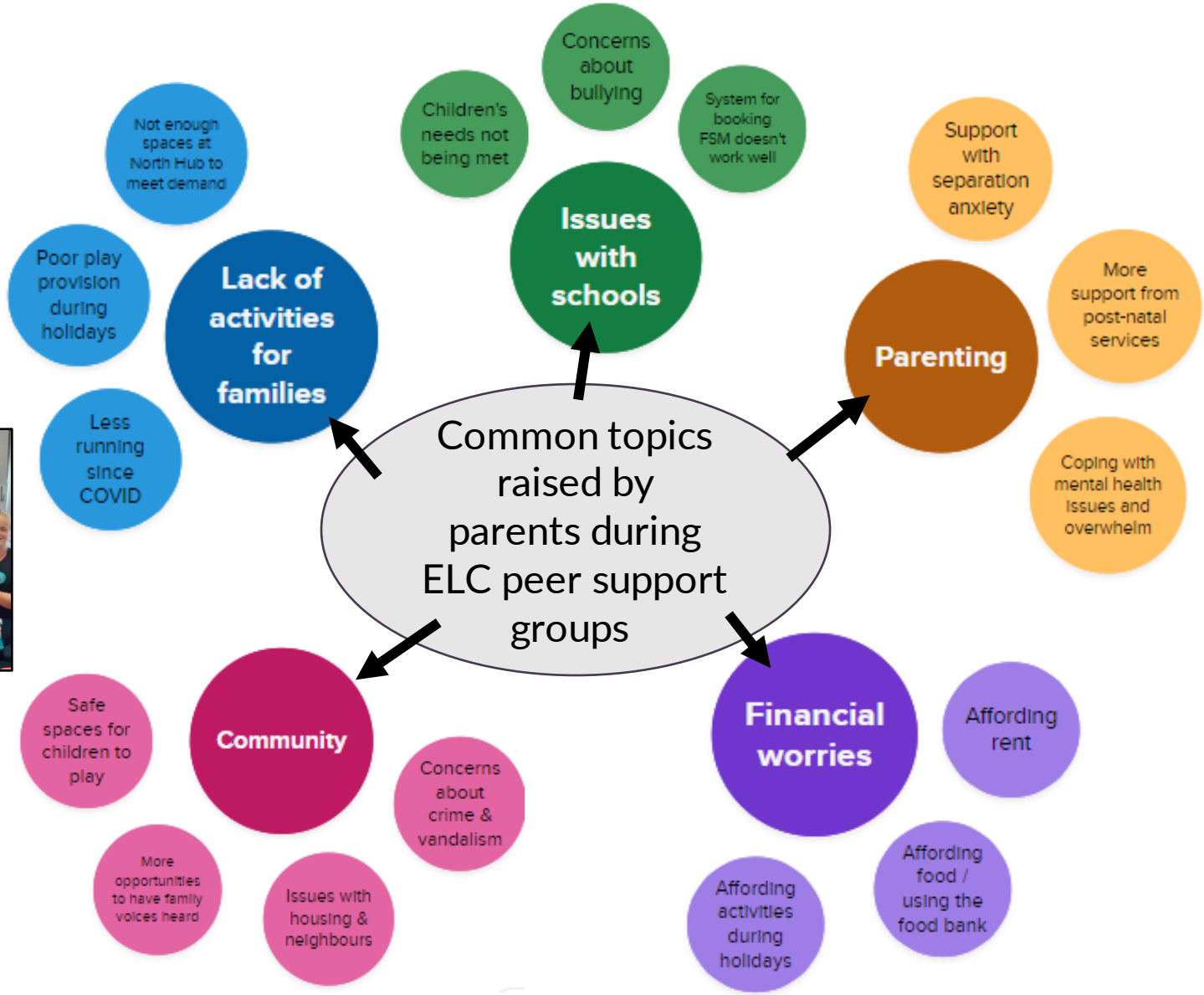
Parent Voices – What matters to us

Parent peer support group, Bettws in Bloom, January 2023



Voices 4 Bettws (V4B)

In addition to the ELC peer support groups, the V4B group meet every 3 weeks to discuss how to address important issues and be involved in decision-making in the ELC.

One of the parents has recently joined the ELC Board and will feed back to the group to ensure parents voices remain central to our work.

Parents have raised there is a need in Bettws to set up an **Additional Learning Need Support and Action Group** for parents with children who have additional needs. This is currently in the process of being established.

The group have also contributed to several reports and presentations for the ELC including the ACE's Hub and the Trauma Framework. The group are discussing opportunities for reaching more parents and raising parent voices more widely.

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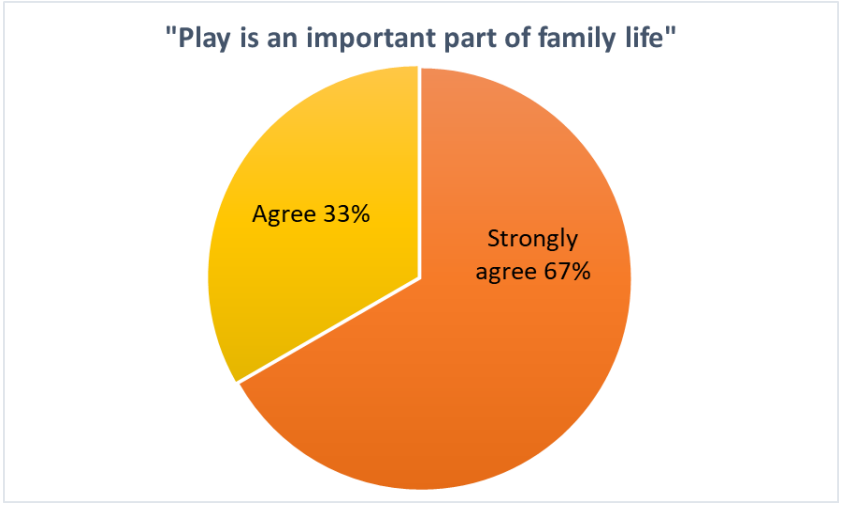
Play (1/3)

Play is very important to us in Bettws!

In the February 2023 Family Survey[6], parents were asked questions about play, such as how important is play to your family and are you happy with the activities available to your child/children in Bettws?



All 75 parents who responded said they strongly agreed or agreed that play is an important part of their family life.

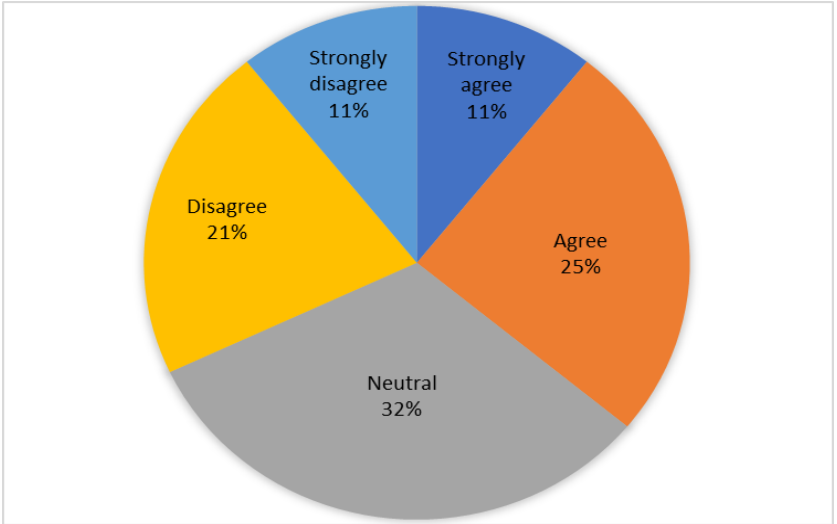
Play at an ELC coffee group, April 2023

Only 36% of parents said they agreed or strongly agreed that they are happy with the activities available, **compared with 51% in last year's survey.**

32% said they **neither agreed nor disagreed**

32% either **disagreed or strongly disagreed**

"I am happy with the activities available to my child in Bettws"



"A short walk in One direction, You find yourself in the City Centre. A short walk in the other direction is beautiful Countryside and Woodland ".

Parent of three (January 2023 Family survey)

Easter egg hunt at an ELC coffee group, April 2023

[6] Bettws Early Learning Community Family Survey, February 2023

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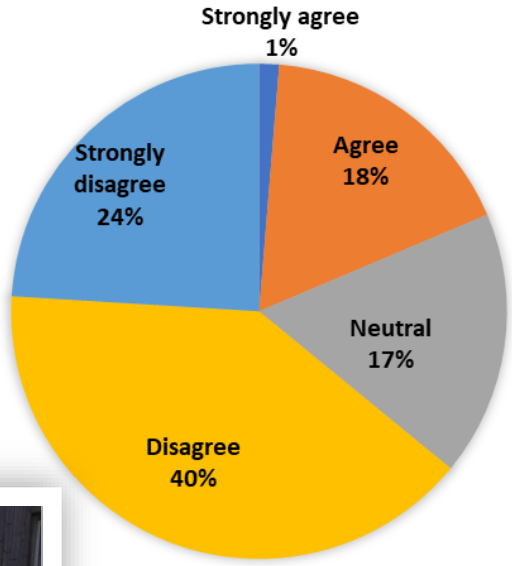
Play (2/3)

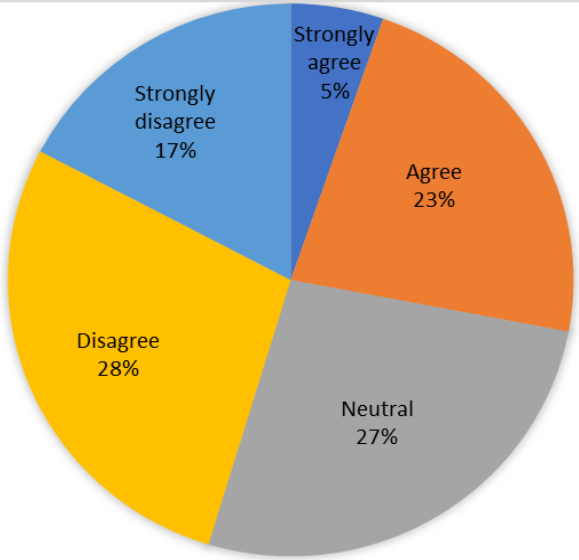
In the 2023 Family Survey[6], parents shared their feelings on outdoor play in Bettws. Here is what they said...

"There are lots of good places for children to play near to where I live"



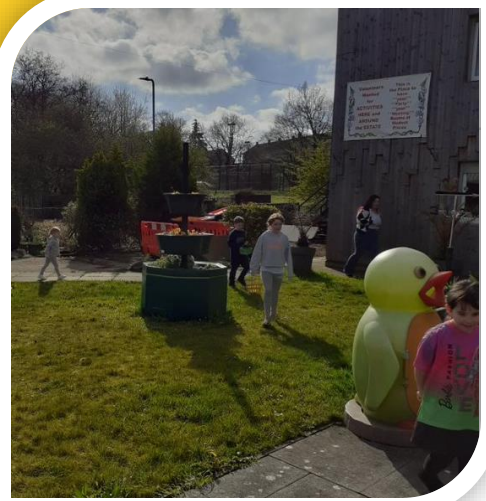
Only 19% of parents agreed that there are lots of good places for children to play near where they live, compared with 36% in the 2022 survey

"I'm happy for my children to play outside in Bettws"



28% of parents said they were happy for their children to play outside in Bettws.

45% disagreed (12% more than last year)



Outdoor play at Bettws in Bloom, April 2023

"More soft play areas to reduce risk of the Hub being too full and being the only one in Bettws is hard to walk to."
(parent of 2)

"Making the outdoor spaces more accessible for younger children and monitored safely"
(parent of 3)

"More safe parks, free organised groups for children to get involved in, football, camping, etc, as prices are rising.
(parent of 2)

Parents were also asked: **"Is there anything you think would improve outdoor play for Children in Bettws?"**

Here are some of their suggestions...

I feel there is a very underused space on the fields surrounding Bettws rugby club, these areas are ideal for muddy walks and the forest areas are full of adventure they are so underused I also feel there is no play area close to this side of Bettws for children to play on."
(parent of 2)

"Updated parks. More equipment. A skate park? Benches for families to have picnics etc"
(parent of 2)

[6] Bettws Early Learning Community Family Survey February 2023

Play (3/3)

Case study: A mum of two shares her thoughts and feelings on play and opportunities for her children to play in Bettws...

What does play mean to you in your family?

"Play to me is…playing in the park with my children, my daughter likes me to push her on the roundabout, on the swing, and I've just started putting the baby in the swing now and he enjoys the swing as well. My daughter loves board games at the moment, so we play with the board games, we do arts and crafts…she sometimes likes to play with her babies. With the baby then, he's got a ball pit, so I play with him in his ball pit, play with his toys, we read. My little girl sings to him, she does that every day with him. She plays with him as well with his toys."

How do you feel about the parks in Bettws?

"I don't really like them. Well, my daughter says she wants to go to the park, and quite often than not I do say no... because it's full of teenagers and I don't want her in there with the teenagers… it's all the time… living in a flat it's – you need the park. If you're not doing anything for the day. We've got a balcony, but it's nice to go to the park."

Is there anything else going on in Bettws, any clubs that kind of thing?

"Yeah, they do youth club on a Tuesday which I think is fab. She loves to go to that. But I feel like, nowadays, it's not much and again the teenagers have spoilt it… They're smashing windows, they're throwing stuff, they're terrorising the people in the library."

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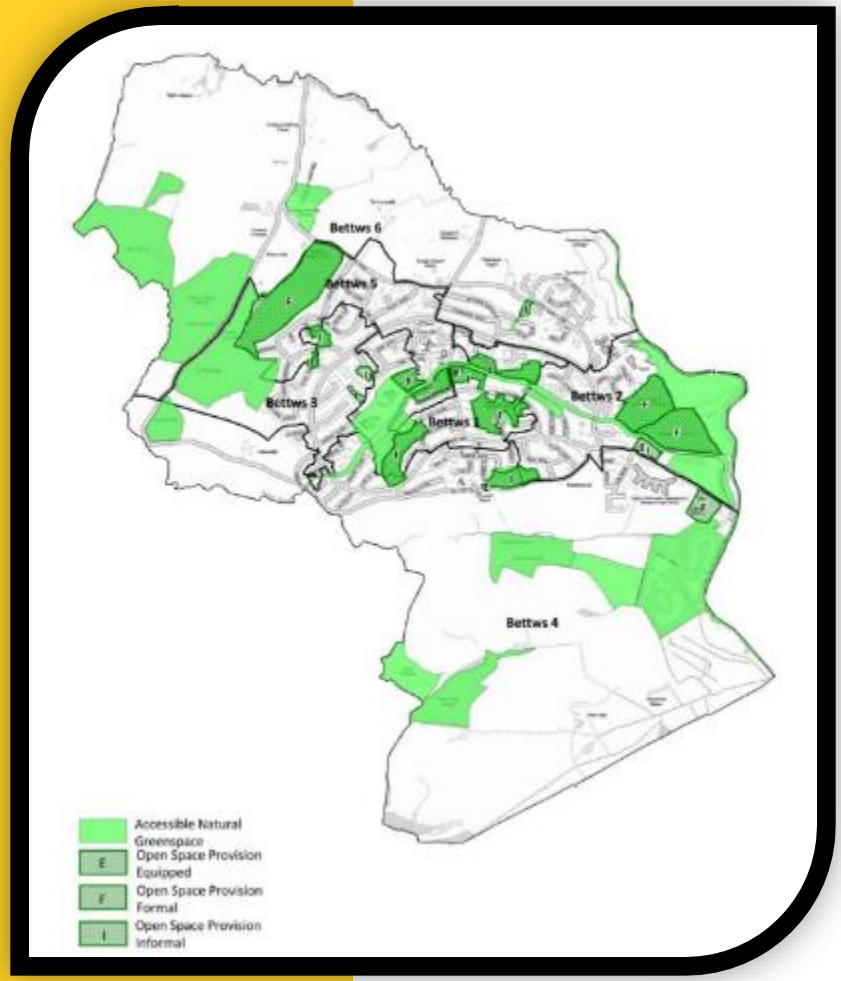
Space to play

Accessible natural green space and open space provision



We know that the social and physical environment around us has an influence on many aspects of our lives, including early learning outcomes for children. For example, a safe place for a child to play may reduce parental stress, improve attachment and increase opportunities for play and verbal exchanges which all influence the early learning outcomes.

Bettws is in an open and green part of Newport, surrounded by farmland to the North and South. There is a brook running through the middle, small woodland, a nature reserve and easy access to a canal walk. Bettws feels much more open than other urban areas nearby.

Most of Bettws ranks in the top 40% **least deprived** areas in Wales when it comes to the physical environment domain of the WIMD. This domain is made up of air quality, green space and flood risk.[2]

Accessible green space:
The Field in Trust 'Benchmark Standards' for outdoor sport and play suggest a minimum of 2.4 hectares of space for sport and recreation per 1,000 people.

Bettws has considerable green space - there is 50% more than the suggested minimum. However, whilst the level of open space in Bettws is above recommended levels, unfortunately a number of the community facilities that used to be available are now closed or are inaccessible. This means that we fall short of the recommended space dedicated to equipped play/sports areas.

Bettws is in the top 40% *least* deprived areas in Wales for physical environment (WIMD)

Bettws has great access to open, green space…

… but the availability of equipped open space is below recognised benchmarks

[1] Newport City Council 2017
[2] Newport North Profile 2021

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'Stay and Play' Pilot (1/2)

Over the past year, BELC has made play a top priority...

In our 2021 Play Audit, children told us they wanted more opportunities to play outside, but parents expressed concerns about the lack of safe spaces in Bettws for children to play, be active and socialise.[7] To address this, one of the recommendations in our Play Audit was to use the school grounds for play when the school day ends as an opportunity to support children's mental and physical health, create safer communities and increase access to nature and their local outdoor spaces. Play Wales are using our Play Pilot as a best practice example, sharing with Welsh Government and across Wales.

What did we do?

Play Wales and the BELC Project Officer hosted weekly 'stay and play' sessions after school at Monnow Primary School. Fun and easy-to-source equipment, such as balls, pavement chalk, fabric and bubbles were provided. Children were encouraged to explore and direct their own play. Participation varied between 5-11 children each week and children were aged between 2-11 years old. Parents stayed with their children to play and chat to other parents. It was a supportive environment, where families encouraged one another and there was lots of laughter.

[7] Bettws Early Learning Community (2021) *BELC Play Audit*

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'Stay and Play' Pilot (2/2)

What worked well?

•**Simple, fun equipment**: providing easily accessible play and household items (i.e. for den building) prompted discussions amongst parents about how they could use similar items at home to encourage their children to play.

•**Connecting:** The informal nature of the sessions meant there were opportunities for parents to socialise and support one another in ways that felt comfortable to them.

•**Opportunities for support:** There were opportunities to share and reinforce messages about language and speech and other issues affecting families, and where to seek support.

•**Schools feel safe:** All parents mentioned other places for play, but felt the school was a safe and cleaner space where they could relax. Parents were worried about traffic and hygiene issues in other open spaces in the community.

Key learning points:

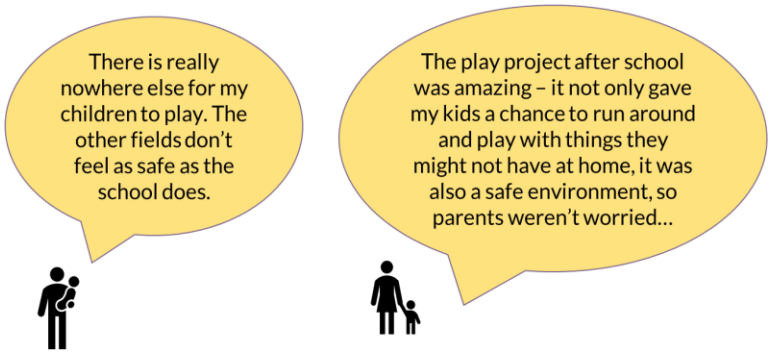
•**Extending the reach:** This pilot ran one day a week in one primary school. Having more regular sessions may increase engagement and it would be great to offer stay and play sessions at all three primary schools.

•**Sustainability:** To make stay and play sessions a regular activity in Bettws, resources would be needed for staffing, equipment and storage.

•**Publicity:** These sessions were publicised through school letters and by word-of-mouth. In future, we will test out other ways to promote activities through different ELC partners and different channels of communication (online, posters, school emails etc).

•**Wider support is needed:** Most parents who took part had money and/or other worries which were causing them anxiety and distress. Whilst attending a free at the point of access session may help ease tension, it must be noted that parental anxiety may stop parents from attending and may impact on their ability to support play both in and outside the home.

Feedback from families...



Next steps

Stay and Play sessions on school grounds were put on hold during the winter term, however they are restarting at Monnow Primary on 7th June.

Unfortunately, these sessions have not been possible at Millbrook Primary School since the school was condemned in the Autumn term and subsequently staff have been managing the temporary re-location.

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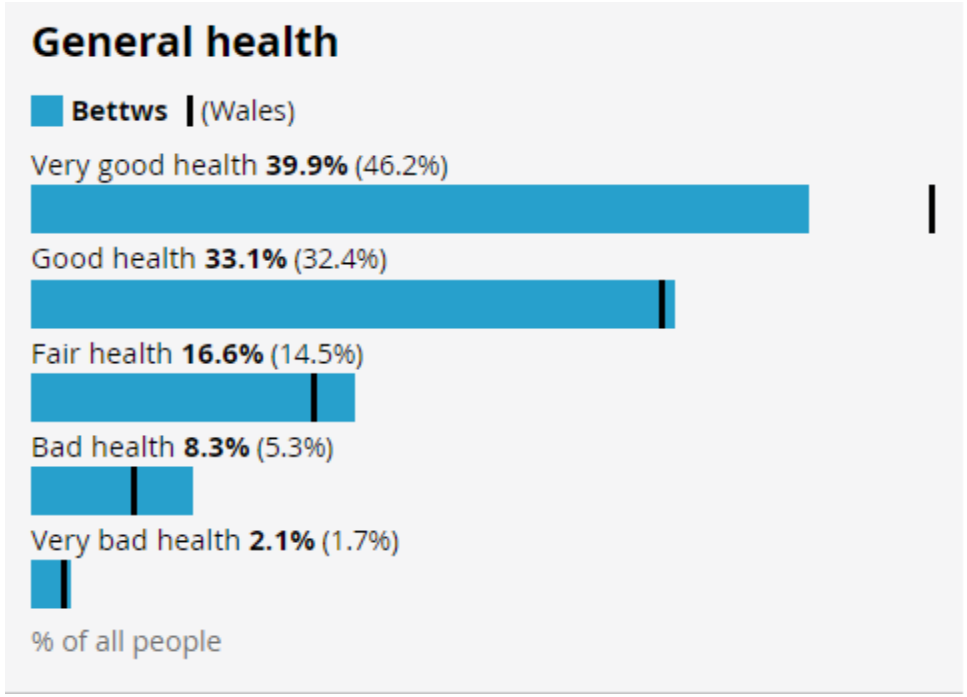
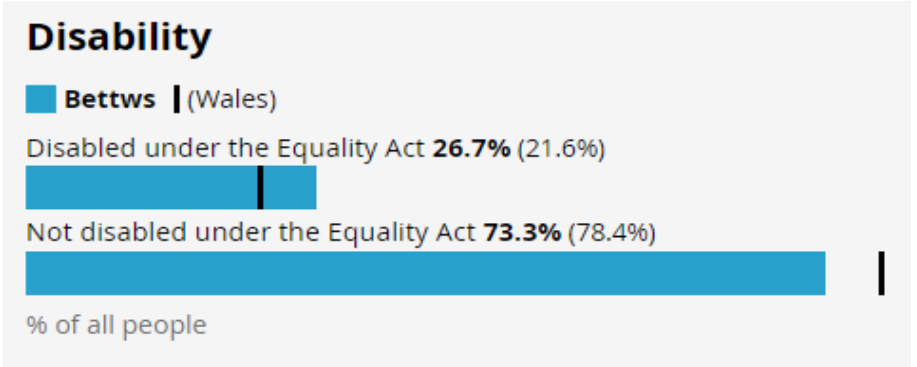
Health in Bettws: published data

For the **Health Domain of WIMD**, Bettws is one of most deprived wards in Newport, with all of its LSOAs ranked in the top 20% most deprived LSOA's in Wales (and 2 LOSAs were in the top 10%).[2] This means that people are more likely to have challenges with chronic conditions, long term illness, mental health conditions, cancer and children with low birth weight and/or obesity.

2021 Census Data showed that the percentage of adults reporting 'very good health' in Bettws was 6% lower than the Wales average; whereas the percentage reporting 'bad health' was 3% higher. Rates of disability reported in Bettws were also higher (26.7%) than across Wales (21.6%).[4]





Adults living in Bettws report poorer health than the Newport and Wales averages

Bettws is in the top 20% most deprived areas for health in Wales

[2] Newport North Profile 2021
[4] 2021 Census, Office for National Statistics

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Resilience and Wellbeing

In our ELC, we know that social, emotional and mental health are *contextual*. This means that they are determined by the conditions in which we are born, grow, work, live, and age.[8]

We believe that you cannot understand mental health without first considering somebody's circumstances, relationships and environments.

We know first-hand that growing up in households facing acute and/or chronic poverty, and where parents experience mental health problem, can lead to negative mental health and other outcomes children.[9]

We also know that reducing parental stress enhances opportunities for attachment, bonding, play and verbal exchanges between parent and child.

Too often when we talk about mental health we focus on the individual and we ask, "What's wrong with you?". The most useful question is, "What's happened to you, and in your family and community?"[10,11]

This is why our ELC is looking at mental health and wellbeing from a community perspective –to support our community to be psychosocially healthy.

8 WHO, 2014
9 Harold et al, 2016
10 Perry & Winfrey, 2021
11 Johnstone & Boyle, 2018

Easter egg hunt at Bettws in Bloom, April 2023

The Embrace Pilot (1/3)

PLATFFORM

Overview of Embrace

Platfform, the mental health and social change charity, has been **working in partnership with the Bettws ELC** to deliver the **Embrace Pilot Project** which started in June 2022. The project has been led by Nicole Moran as the Project Officer, alongside Dr Jen Daffin, Community Clinical Psychologist. The project has managerial support from Siobhan Parry, Head of Children and Young People's Services at Platfform, who also sits on the Bettws ELC Board.

Embrace is exploring how we can work with communities to move towards being *psychosocially healthy* and *heal through connection and community ownership* using a three-part model (see diagram on the right).

To do this, the project is drawing on the existing work started by the **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Hub, Public Health Wales** and other local trauma-informed practice/movements. The focus with Embrace is to implement this thinking and practice at a hyper-local level with residents and key stakeholders of Bettws.

The **aims** of the pilot project were to;

1. improve child and parents mental heal and wellbeing outcomes;
2. to explore how to provide support and services that are human-rights focused, non-violent, trauma-informed, community-led, healing and culturally sensitive;
3. to develop a self-healers movement (adult peer to peer support network);
4. to use storytelling for systems change by co-developing a place-based approach to understanding need and improving community wellbeing and resilience in Bettws.

The diagram below is a three-part model showing the core stages involved in moving towards psychosocially healthy, trauma-informed communities.

1. Enhancing community mental health understanding

↓

2. Developing meaning making, storytelling and collective action skills

↓

3. Reflecting, learning, taking action and sustaining change

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The Embrace Pilot (2/3)

Since June 2022, two parent groups have been meeting every 3 weeks at Ysgol Gymraeg Ifor Hael and Monnow primary schools in Bettws. The attendance at groups has continued to be good with 18 parents attending regularly across the two groups. The sessions have been framed around story telling using the Tree of Life approach, a psychosocial support tool underpinned by narrative therapy which involves 4 core processes (see diagram on right).

The **Tree of Life** approach is a collective narrative support tool for supporting groups and communities to overcome difficult life experiences. The approach was co-developed by Ncazelo Ncube and David Denborough in 2006.

Parent feedback

Parent feedback on Embrace has been very positive. Embrace sessions have given parents the opportunity to understand their mental health and behaviour, learn new techniques for processing and managing their feelings, and either form or strengthen connections with other parents. For some, attending the sessions has had an impact in their daily lives - some parents shared they are more able to cope in stressful situations and parent with greater patience and understanding.

Embrace for me helps me see things in a different way it allows me to open up and share my trauma in a safe and completely understan ding environment it shows me how mental health works and how I can then use it to accommodate to my life'

It was eye-opening, I've learnt things about myself that I didn't know.

I feel calmer in certain situations now where I used to just go off on one. It's changed how I interact with other people and I'm more patient with my kids.

Bettws ELC Project Officer with some of the parents who took part in Embrace, June 2023

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The Embrace Pilot (3/3)

The social determinants of mental health are societal problems that disrupt optimal mental health, increase risk for and prevalence of mental illnesses, and worsen outcomes among individuals with mental illnesses. These social determinants are underpinned by an unequal and unjust distribution of opportunity, which is driven by both public policies and social norms.[12]

What are we learning about the social determinants of mental health through Embrace?

We are learning that parents find the **systems** that they live and grow in **complicated** to say the least. Parents have voiced how certain systems that should be there to support families are **impossible to navigate**. For example, a parent has voiced that she doesn't choose to be unemployed, she has no option as there aren't any jobs available in the area that would support her caring for her son. This leads to feelings of **helplessness and stress.**

Understandably, parents have raised concerns around the **cost-of-living crisis** and the **detrimental impact** it is having on people's mental health, with a rising number of people experiencing challenges.

During Embrace sessions, there has been an underlying theme that parents really are **trying their best** for their children. Parents have spoken openly about **trauma they have experienced in childhood** and always stress that they are protective over their children to not have them experience the same trauma.

[12] Compton & Shim, 2020. The Social Determinants of Mental Health

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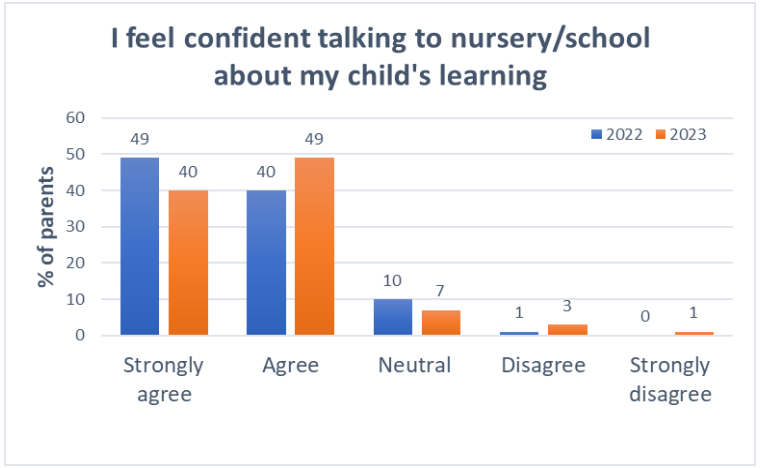
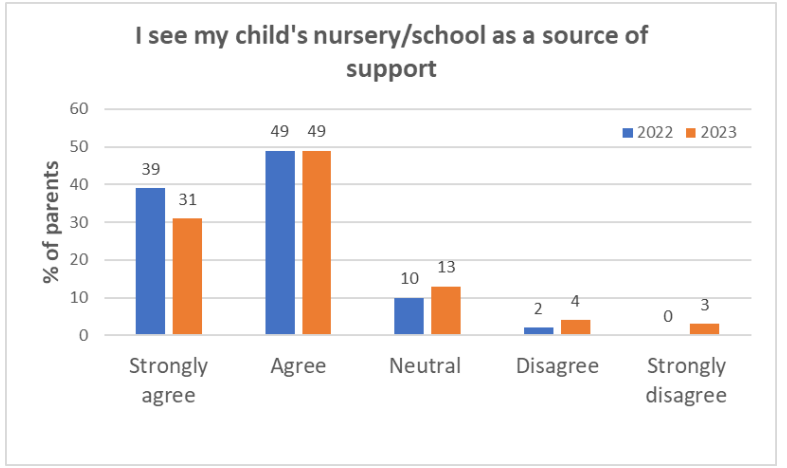
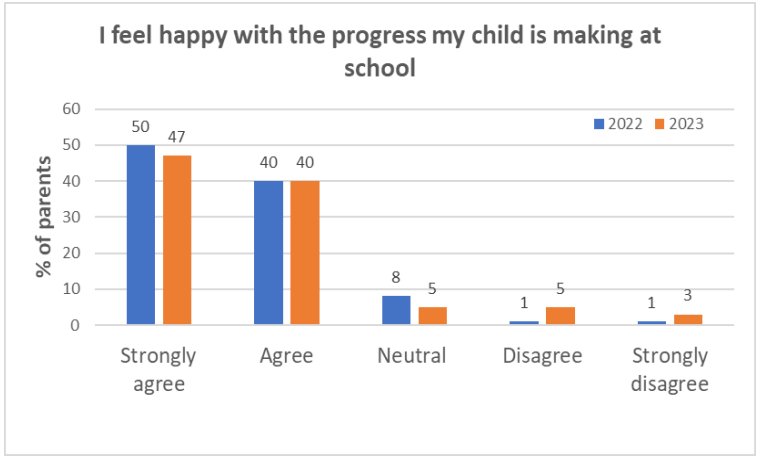
Schools and childcare: parents' views

In the 2022 and the 2023 Bettws ELC Family Surveys we asked parents to share their thoughts on their child/children's learning and their relationship with their nursery or school. The graphs below show examples of parents' responses from the surveys. [6,13]







36% of parents strongly agreed and 45% agreed that their child's nursery/school understand their child's needs

35% of parents strongly agreed and 43% agreed that they were happy with the way their child's nursery/school communicated with them

40% of parents strongly agreed and 48% agreed that they felt confident helping their child with their school-work

Most parents feel supported by their children's school/nursery

Most parents feel confident talking about their children's learning

Most parents are happy with the progress their children are making

[6] Bettws Early Learning Community Family Survey, January 2022
[13] Bettws Early Learning Community Family Survey, January 2023

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Schools and childcare: transitions

JOURNEY TO EDUCATION

The settings within the Bettws community (Chuckles Nursery, Millbrook Primary School, Monnow Primary School, Ysgol Gymraeg Ifor Hael, Flying Start, the North Hub, Speech and Language and other organisations) **have come together as a workstream, to ensure that all children and families have the same information and guidance when starting nursery or school.** The workstream meets half termly, where alongside the individual transitions' activities such as teddy bear picnics, forest schools and home visits, information is collated and added to the ELC website. This information is based on the voices of children, families and practitioners.

Learning and adapting

- This website will be shared with all parents whose children are starting school in 2023.
- Members of the workstream will share the website with parents of new starter children as well as sharing it as a resource for other professionals working with families, such as health visitors.
- STC will monitor feedback on how it is used to measure effectiveness over the next two years. And the workstream will work with families to review the website at key points in the year to ensure it continues to cater to parent's needs.

Innovating

- Feedback from families found that **information about children starting school was sometimes difficult to find** or was difficult to understand.
- To tackle this, and to ensure that all families and children had the same information before starting school, full of information about the settings, children's rights, what's going on in the **the workstream created a page on the Bettws ELC website** community, free school meals uniform swops and more!

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Education Data

According to the 2019 WIMD education domain Bettws is one of the most deprived wards in Newport, with five of its six LSOAs ranked in the top 10% most deprived LSOAs in Wales.[2]

We have three primary schools in Bettws, Millbrook Primary (re-located to Brynglas in Autumn 2022), Monnow Primary and Ysgol Gymraeg Ifor Hael.

In their latest Estyn inspections, the schools were rated as 'Good' or Excellent'.

Child Development baseline assessments

Child development levels Bettws are below national levels, demonstrated in the entry baseline assessments for the data available from two of the primary schools serving Bettws for the academic year 2022/23, in comparison with national data.[14]

For example, in one of our primary schools in Bettws, class profiles from Spring 2023 show the average rates at which children are meeting expected levels for numeracy, oracy, reading and writing (see tables below). Of the 309 children on roll, 35% of children are below the expected level for reading, 30% for numeracy, 25% for writing and 17% for oracy.[14]

Class profile data, Spring 2023 [15]

Numeracy			Oracy		
above	meets	below	above	meets	below
16%	54%	30%	11%	72%	17%

Reading			Writing		
above	meets	below	above	meets	below
18%	47%	35%	6%	69%	25%

Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need at primary school age is 16%.

In Bettws, the number of children identified as having ALN are:

- 24% in Millbrook
- 58% in Monnow
- 5% in Ifor Hael

Free school meals (FSM)

The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Primary is 23.0%. In Bettws, percentage eligible are:

- 49% in Millbrook
- 48% in Monnow
- 36% in Ifor Hael

[2] Newport North Profile 2021
[14] Welsh Government, September 2022
[15] Millbrook Primary School Class Profiles, Spring 2023

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Millbrook re-location

Due to concerns about the Millbrook school building in Autumn term of 2022, the school has been re-located to the old site in Brynglas House, which means it is no longer located in the Bettws community. This has caused considerable upheaval and disruption to children's learning and is having an adverse impact on the mental health and well-being of children and staff. It has also been a challenge to maintain community relationships.

The school has carried out a well-being questionnaire with children which indicates that many children are finding it difficult to adjust to the lack of space and poor play facilities at the Brynglas site.

Newport Live, have assessed the school grounds and advised that the space is too limited to have any play equipment. Children have a small yard area for playtime and access to a woodland area for forest school activities. The school recently held sports day on the old Millbrook grounds, some younger children were upset being back there, and saying that they miss their old school.

This situation has been a challenge for the whole partnership and meant that the innovation project planned for Millbrook school has had to have a delayed start.

Despite the disruption, the family coffee morning has restarted in the Summer term and it is hoped that in the midst of challenge we can use our existing learning and resources across the partnership to support and strengthen the response of both the school and community.

Millbrook Primary – old school site

Brynglas House – Millbrook current school site

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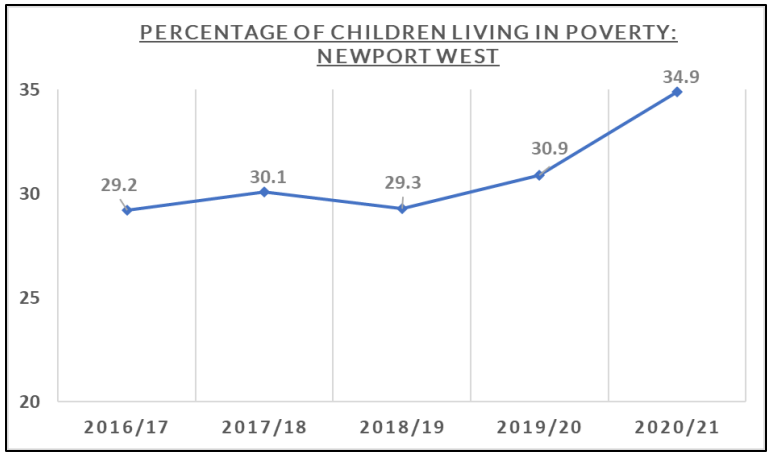
Child Poverty Data

The End Child Poverty Coalition and the Centre for Research in Social Policy published the latest child poverty rates in June 2023.[15] Across the Uk, 29% of all children, or 1 in 4, are living in poverty (2021/2022). The child poverty rate for Newport is just as high, this is equal to **10,980 children** living in poverty in the Newport area.

77% of the children in poverty in **Newport West** were in **working families** in 2021/22 (3,688 children).

Looking at the data released over the past few years, the child poverty figures for **Newport West** (see graph) between 2016/17 and 2020/21 increased from **29.2% to 34.9%,** equal to an estimated **6,126 children**.[16]

Data available on household income indicates that Bettws is one of the most deprived areas of Newport. 3 LSOAs in Bettws rank in the top 10% most deprived areas in Wales on the income domain. The other three LSOAs are in the top 30% most deprived.[2]



Free School Meals

The latest data available on percentage of children eligible for Free School Meals was 33% of children in 2021, with up to 45% eligible in Bettws LSOAs 1 and 2. This was significantly higher than Newport average of 21%.[2]

Approximately 80% of the Bettws area is designated a Families First area, reflective of the low income of many families who live here. Being a Families First area means there is investment in support for families, including additional childcare and parenting support.

Note: End Child Poverty Coalition figures are based on the Department for Work and Pensions Children in low-income families: local areas statistics which **estimates** the poverty rate before housing costs.

45% of children are eligible for free school meals in some parts of Bettws

Child poverty in Newport West is 34.9% (2020/21)

[16] End Child Poverty Coalition, June 2023
[17] End Child Poverty Coalition, July 2022
[2] Newport North Profile 2021

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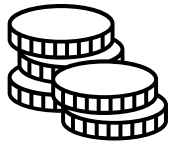
Family Finance



Data available on household income indicates that Bettws is **one of the most deprived areas** of Newport. Three LSOAs in Bettws rank in the top 10% most deprived areas in Wales on the income domain. The other three LSOAs are in the top 30% most deprived.[2]

Families living in Bettws have told us that they are struggling financially. In our Spring 2023 Bettws Parent Survey we asked families about the **main challenges** they had faced over the past year and the findings show:

- **64%** of families are struggling to afford essential items such as food, clothes, and household items
- **58%** are struggling to afford gas and electricity
- **30%** are struggling to afford transport
- **23%** are finding it challenging to pay off personal debt/credit cards.

Parents shared their experiences of the impact the **cost-of-living** crisis is having on their families. From their responses, it is evident that the crisis is having a negative impact on the physical and mental health of parents and their children in Bettws.

"There is no support for those of us who earn over the minimum threshold. Mentally it's hard and it's affected my physical health as well."

Parent of 3

"I'm having to rely on foodbanks to get through the month…. don't put the heating on."

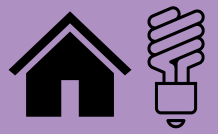
Parent

"I have struggled so badly to heat the house. My son suffers with Raynaud syndrome and needs to be kept warm. As a result of not being able to have my heating on as much, he sadly suffers… our shopping bill is also now minimal, and day trips are usually places free of charge."

Parent of 2

Household spending

The latest data on household spending published by the Office for National Statistics[17] highlights that **housing and energy costs** account for the **main proportion of low-income households' spending:**



- 24% of spending by 2nd lowest decile
- 27% of spending by the lowest decile

These proportions have risen significantly in the last 2 years:

- 20% of spending by 2nd lowest decile in 2019
- 22% of spending by the lowest decile in 2019

Nearly a fifth of low-income households' spending goes on food:

- 17% of 2nd lowest income decile / 18% lowest decile
- Equivalent to £36.60 to £42.70 a week (compared with £92.00-£111.20 of highest two groups)

Help with housing costs:
Universal Credit or Housing Benefit may not cover rent in full:

- In social housing: Bedroom tax/ spare bedroom subsidy withdrawn
- In private housing: Bedroom tax/ spare bedroom subsidy withdrawn and rent higher than Local Housing Allowance

[2] Newport North Profile 2021
[18] ONS, July 2022, Family Spending

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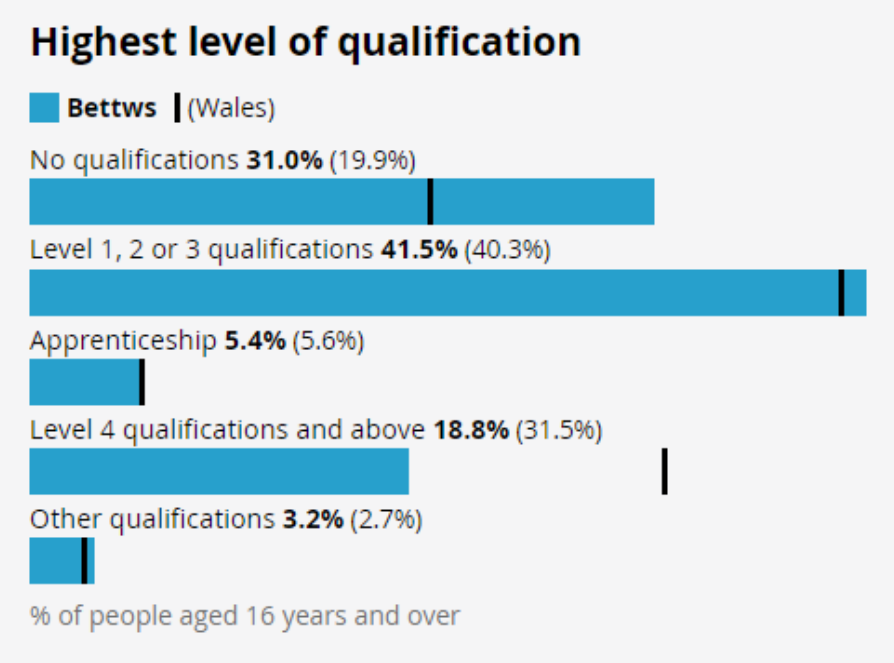
Employment and skills

Adult qualifications:

Adult qualification levels in Bettws are lower than Newport and Wales averages. In the 2021 Census, 31% of adults aged over 16 in Bettws had no qualifications – this is higher than Newport and the Wales average (23% and 20% respectively).[4] However, this is lower than in the 2011 census (40%).[18]

In the Education domain, Bettws is one of the most deprived wards in Newport, with 5 of its 6 LSOA's ranked in the top 10% most deprived LSOA's within the local authority.[2]



Employment rates and types

Over 50% of people in Bettws are in employment, but the unemployment rate (4.1%) remains higher than both the Newport (3.8%) and Wales (3.1%) rates. The data available for Newport shows that 11.8% of people are earning below Living Wage Foundation rates.

[4] Office for National Statistics, 2021 Census
[19] Office for National Statistics, 2011 Census
[2] Newport North Profile 2021

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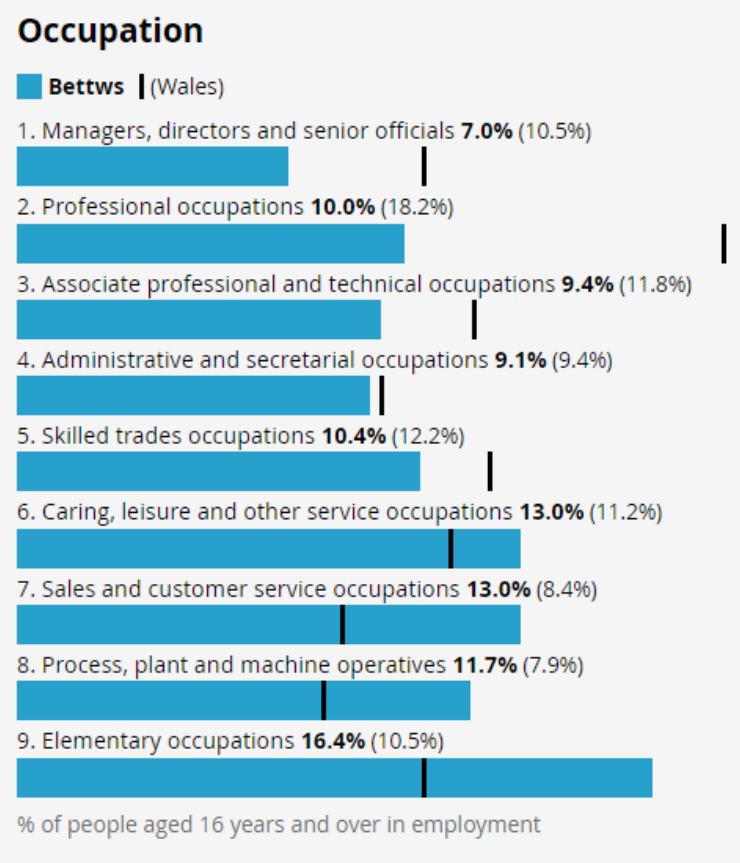
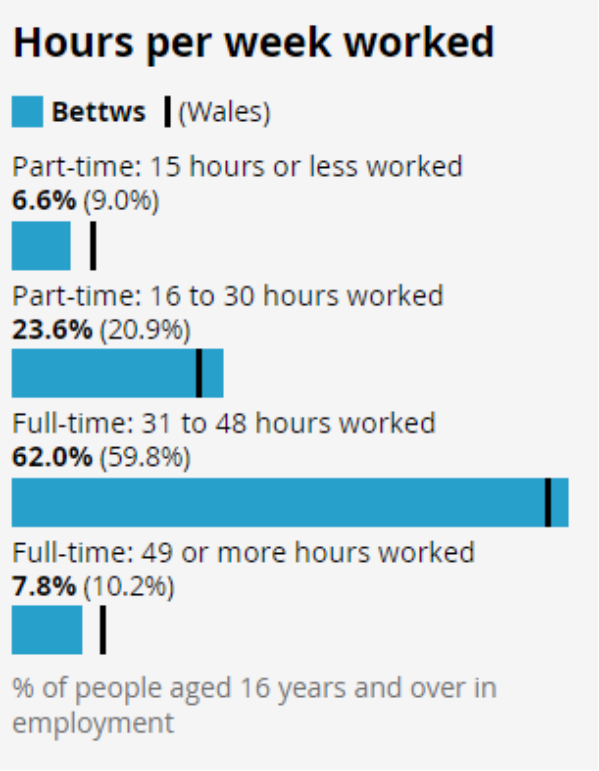
Employment and skills

The 2021 Census data shows the top three occupations in Bettws are: elementary occupations (jobs such as cleaners, shelf fillers and bar staff), sales and customer service occupations, and caring, leisure and other service occupations.
Data for hours per week worked shows that 62% of people aged 16 and over in employment in Bettws work full-time hours (31 to 48 hours), 2% more than the percentage for Wales. The percentage of people in Bettws who are not in employment and never worked is nearly 10% higher than the percentage across Wales.[4]

Census 2021 data quality considerations for the below statistics:
This census took place during a period of rapid change. The labour market data reflect a situation when many more people than at the time of the 2021 Census were working from home or on furlough.





4 Office for National Statistics, 2021 Census

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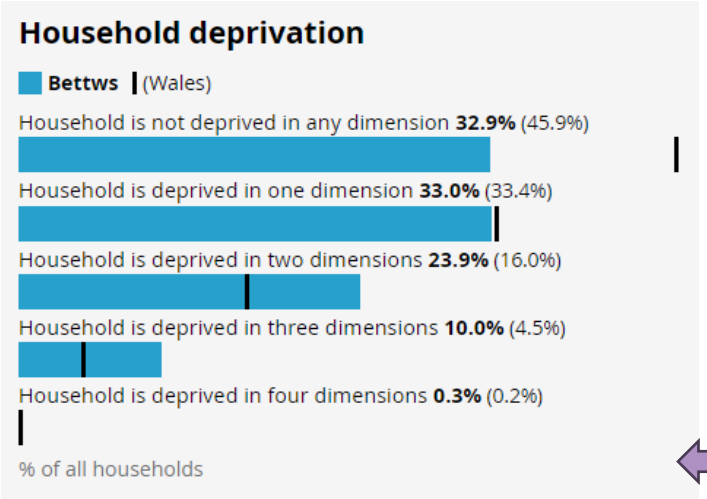
Housing

In the 2021 Census there were 3,500 households in Bettws, making up 5.3% of the 66,100 households in Newport.[4]

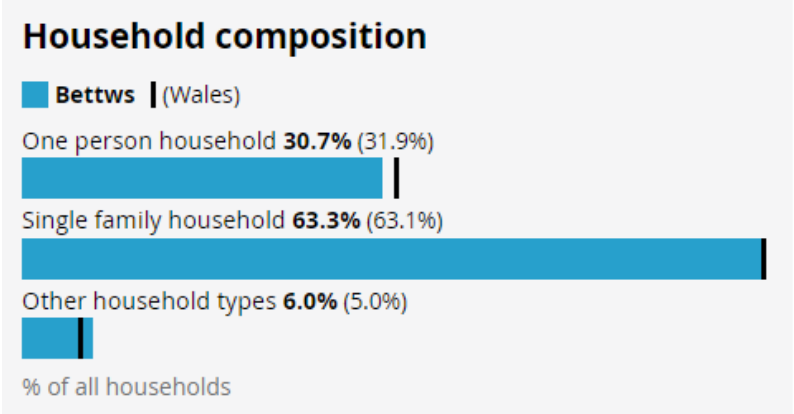
The percentage of existing stock which is affordable housing in Bettws was 41% in 2021.[2]

Some areas of Bettws are in the top 30% *least* deprived wards for housing in WIMD. However, this is likely because of the high proportion of social housing in the area. There is a requirement for social housing to maintain the Welsh Housing Quality Standard; this means that in areas where there is a high proportion of social housing, the modelled data tends to show a lower likelihood of poor-quality housing.

Our houses in Bettws, March 2022



A higher percentage of households in Bettws are deprived in two and three dimensions (23.9% and 10% compared with households in Wales (16% and 4.5%, respectively).[4]



Household composition data shows that 63.3% of households in Bettws are single family households.[4]

4 Office for National Statistics, 2021 Census
[2] Newport North Profile 2021

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The housing crisis

The housing crisis in Newport is escalating – over 9,000 people are now on the waiting list for housing (confirmed by NCH in May 2023). Newport City Council have said they are dealing with an unprecedented demand for both temporary and long-term housing. The availability of accommodation is simply not keeping up with demand.

During the pandemic, there was an increase in the number of households presenting as homeless and this has continued because of the current cost-of-living crisis.

The council have a policy of requiring developers to provide affordable housing as part of larger new developments, however some have been reducing that contribution due to the overall financial viability of development. Private rented housing is diminishing due to several factors; rents are increasing, and when landlords sell their properties, their tenants are faced with homelessness.

In social housing many people are subject to bedroom tax, and rent may be higher than the amount people can claim on housing allowance. Benefit levels are not keeping up with the rise in rent.

During coffee mornings parents have shared their feelings on housing costs in Bettws...

"I pay £500 a month for a two-bedroom flat! Why am I paying so much? " *(parent of 2)*

"I pay the same for a three-bedroom house" *(parent of 3)*

Flats in Bettws

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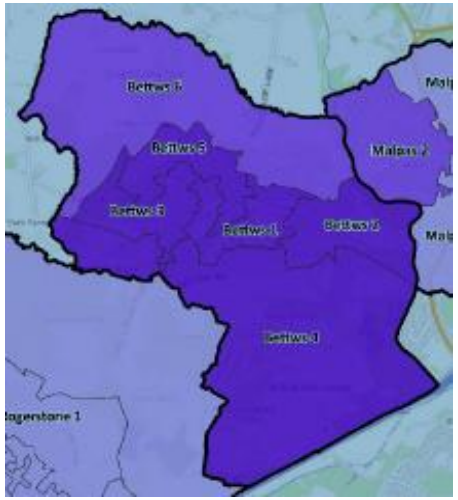
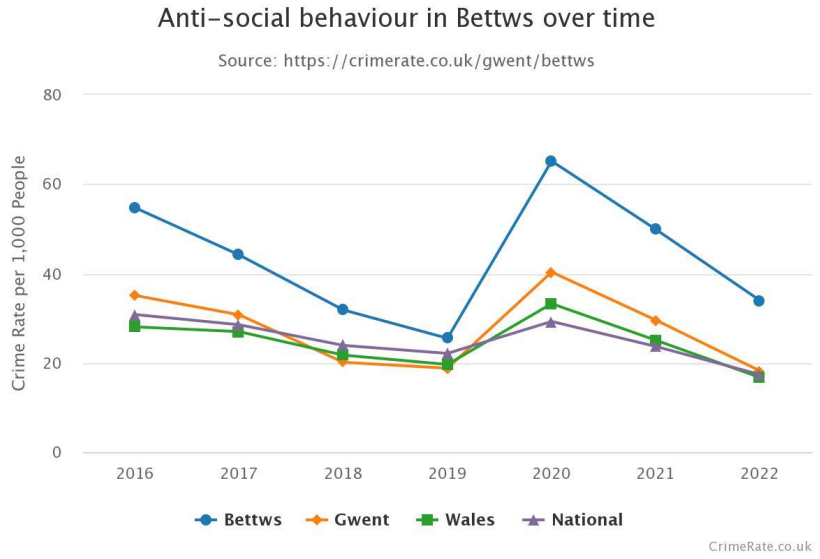
Community Safety: crime stats

Five of the six LSOAs in Bettws are in the top 10% most deprived areas in Wales for the Community Safety domain on WIMD. This domain is calculated based on recorded rates of criminal damage, ASB, violent crime, burglary, theft and fire.[2]

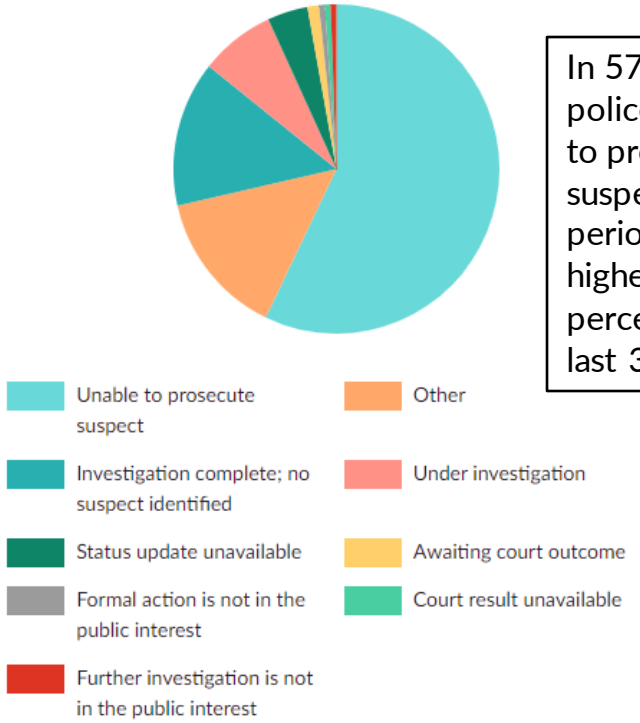


Crime and safety statistics available for Bettws include: Anti-social behaviour (2016-22)[18], crimes by outcome and crime type[19] (see graphs a, b and c, respectively)

a)



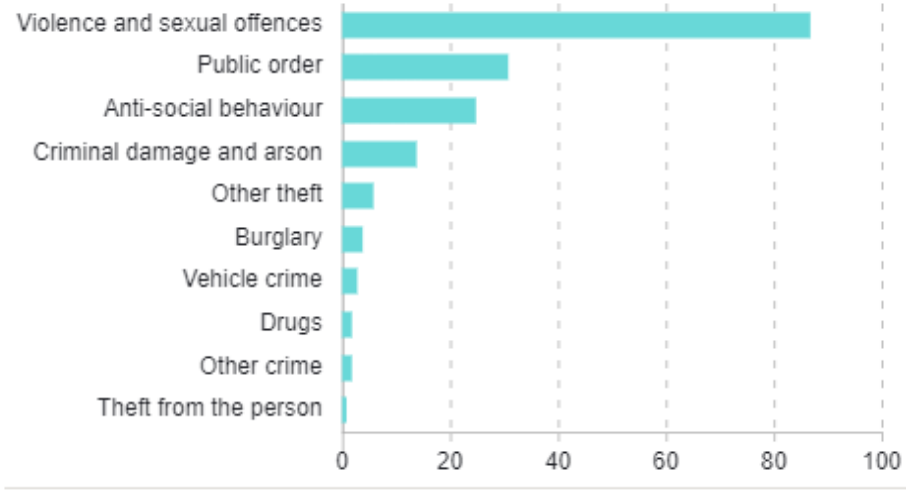
b) Crimes by outcome (Apr 2022 – Mar 2023)



In 57% of cases the police were unable to prosecute a suspect during this period– this is 12% higher than the percentage over the last 3 years.

c)

Crime type (Apr 2022 – Mar 2023)



[2] Newport North Profile 2021
[19] Crime and Safety in Bettws 2022
[20] Gwent Police, Bettws

Community Safety: what families say

43% of parents surveyed have concerns about their children growing up in Bettws.[7]

Parents feel very much the same as they did last year about community safety: many parents are still worried about crime and antisocial behaviour and the impact this has on children and families in Bettws. Many parents with young children report a lack of confidence using community facilities due to the behaviour of groups of young people. [6]

Parents' comments:

*"**Children are losing out playing outside** in the fresh air due to lack of safe play areas, and a lack of police support with issues like speeding cars…"*

*"It's **not safe** with drug abusers and teen gangs hanging around" .*

*"The **crime rate has gotten worse**"…"some **children are being hurt** and they're only young victims".*

A news article in South Wales Argus in March 2023 highlighted the ongoing anti-social behaviour in Bettws.[19] Local Councillors quoted in the article said they had been inundated with complaints from residents who witnessed a large group of young people smashing the greenhouses of a local community project, Bettws in Bloom (next to Bettws Police Station).

A Councillor commented *"We've had a few beatings of kids. One was an autistic child…and now in Monnow Primary School, during the daytime when people and teachers are in the school, [the youths are] there smashing windows."*

Bettws Police Station

Parents are concerned that Bettws Police Station is closed and the lack of police presence on the streets in Bettws to address the level of crime in the area.

How can community safety be improved?

Suggestions made my parents include setting up a youth club for young people, something meaningful rather than get involved in vandalism and drug abuse. Parents also think more police patrolling may help discourage criminal behaviour.

Crime and antisocial behaviour are significant worries for parents...

...particular concerns are about vandalism and drug dealing

Would more opportunities for young people help reduce crime and ASB levels?

[7] Bettws Early Learning Community Family Survey, January 2023
[21] South Wales Argus

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Spotlight research

Every quarter, we choose a 'spotlight' theme related to our ELC Theory of Change. Our first 'spotlight' theme in is 'Home Learning and Play'. These regular spotlights will be a chance to find out more about the local context and the experiences and views of families and professionals in Bettws. This will help us plan new ways of working and interventions to test to improve outcomes for families. We will also share our findings to influence policy and practice and contribute to wider learning projects.

Step One

Setting the theme:
The ELC Board agrees the spotlight theme; this is a key theme related to our ELC Theory of Change.

Step Two

Child and family voices:
a combination of:
- 1:1/group discussion with families
- creative workshops with children
- short family survey
- discussion group for secondary school young people

Step Three

Professionals' voices:
- community of practice sessions
- 1:1s with key professionals
- 'what works?' desk research

Gather other relevant data

Step Four

Analysis:
- What do we know about the theme in Bettws?
- What does this tell us?
- Opportunities for change?

Step five:

The ELC Board agree on how to take forward the findings

Methodology:

i. Survey for practitioners

ii. Group reflection session to delve deeper into survey responses

iii. Parents thoughts and feelings gathered during BELC Coffee groups

Here's what we discovered…

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Summary of Bettws ELC Spotlight research findings: Accessibility of services & support - Winter 2022

Data collection: From workshops with 9 parents, a family survey and feedback from 3 organisations on the topic of accessing support and services in Bettws we have found…

Key Insights:

1. Families want **clear, easy to access information** about Early Years support that's up-to-date

2. Trusted relationships – families want to feel heard and understood, consistency matters for building relationships and trust

3. Lots of barriers to accessing services e.g., location, waiting times, hard to reach

4. Wider systems challenges – support services often have long waiting lists, not able to meet people's needs

Opportunities:

1. Sharing information about local services and using the BELC website as an info hub

2. Consider a **family/key worker model** for families

3. Change the narrative on accessibility – removing barriers and increasing opportunities for support and services to be based locally to meet people's needs

4. Share the power of local peer support groups, and understand why they are valued

5. Raise family voices – to empower families to share their experiences and support self-advocacy

Summary of Bettws ELC Spotlight research findings: Practitioners' well-being and resilience – Spring 2023

Data collection: During February and March, 13 practitioners working in Bettws responded to a survey, 8 took part in a group discussion, and 10 parents shared their views during coffee morning groups.

Key Insights:

1. Work influences practitioners' well-being in a range of positive and negative ways. **Positives:** helping families, sense of purpose, supportive colleagues and agile working. **Negatives:** high workload, stressful work environment, barriers to change.

2. Some practitioners felt their well-being does have an impact on the way they work with families to some extent, whereas others didn't think so. All parents felt that it does have a "massive impact".

3. A **major barrier** to change in terms of supporting practitioners' well-being at work is that services are operating in a **'reactive'** state owing to the pressures of meeting increased demand for services, staffing issues and lack of funding.

4. Issues raised by parents were around a lack of understanding between professionals and parents leading to blame, and issues with communication and language used between parents and practitioners giving rise to tension and further stress.

Opportunities:

1. Prioritising time to connect and talk in person that will allow professionals to have the time and space to talk about matters affecting their well-being and reflect together on a regular basis.

Embedding reflective practice as a core part of the culture of services to create the conditions for practitioners to engage in continuous learning. This will enable the workforce to identify gaps in the system where change is required and develop solutions to improve conditions and services for families, with a long-term view.

3. Improving communication and relationships between parents and practitioners. Addressing the blame culture and identifying ways to increase understanding and develop compassion. Training on communication approaches for parents and professionals.

4. Improving relationships between practitioners from different settings through creating opportunities for them to connect

Closing reflections

As we have outlined, this report enables our partnership develop a deeper, richer understanding of our place, putting knowledge at the heart of everything we do. This learning is embedded in our overall strategy and approach and over the next year we will be producing a series of thematic spotlight research findings – opportunities to use this learning to inform the development of the ELC and build on our understanding of the early years system to influence change that will lead to system-wide improvements .

We continue to see the systemic challenges of poverty exasperated by local issues such as the disruption caused by the relocation of Millbrook school and by national issues such as rising inflation and the squeeze on personal finance.

We are confronted with an urgent need to find, fund, and support transformative solutions at a far greater pace. Systems change is a long-term process that requires patience, learning and collaboration. As our partnership moves towards greater support for these systems level efforts we can better drive deep and lasting social change.

Save The Children are committed to supporting the journeys of those interested in learning about systems, amplifying the best practices in supporting systems change and shaping innovation that will collectively make impact here in our place in Bettws but also through cascading that learning across the UK.

Rebecca Thomas, Bettws Early Learning Community Lead

Bettws
Cymuned Addysg Gynnar
Early Learning Community

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