Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

ANNUAL REPORT

DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES 2025/2026

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2025/26 AT A GLANCE



4822

ADULT SOCIAL SERVICES REFERRALS



9373

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL SERVICES REFERRALS



97

CHILDREN ON CHILD PROTECTION REGISTER



134

YOUNG CARERS RECEIVING SUPPORT



226

ADULT CLIENTS IN RESIDENTIAL & NURSING HOME CARE



202

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER



803

ADULT CLIENTS IN RECEPT OF ELECTRONIC ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY



123

NUMBER OF CARE LEAVERS SUPPORTED



181

COMPLETED MENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

CELEBRATING SUCCESSES...

EARLIER HELP FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

A continued focus on prevention and early intervention 'helps' children and carers receive support at the earliest opportunity, reducing the risk of needs escalating and, improving overall well-being. Strong safeguarding performance, effective child protection interventions and timely access to assessments enable vulnerable individuals and families to receive the right help at the right time. Increasingly, children and families are accessing support at an earlier stage. This helps reduce the need for more intensive interventions later on. It also supports greater family stability, improved outcomes and long-term resilience. Services have continued to work well together, adapting support to meet local needs. This demonstrates good progress in providing timely, preventative and person-centred support.

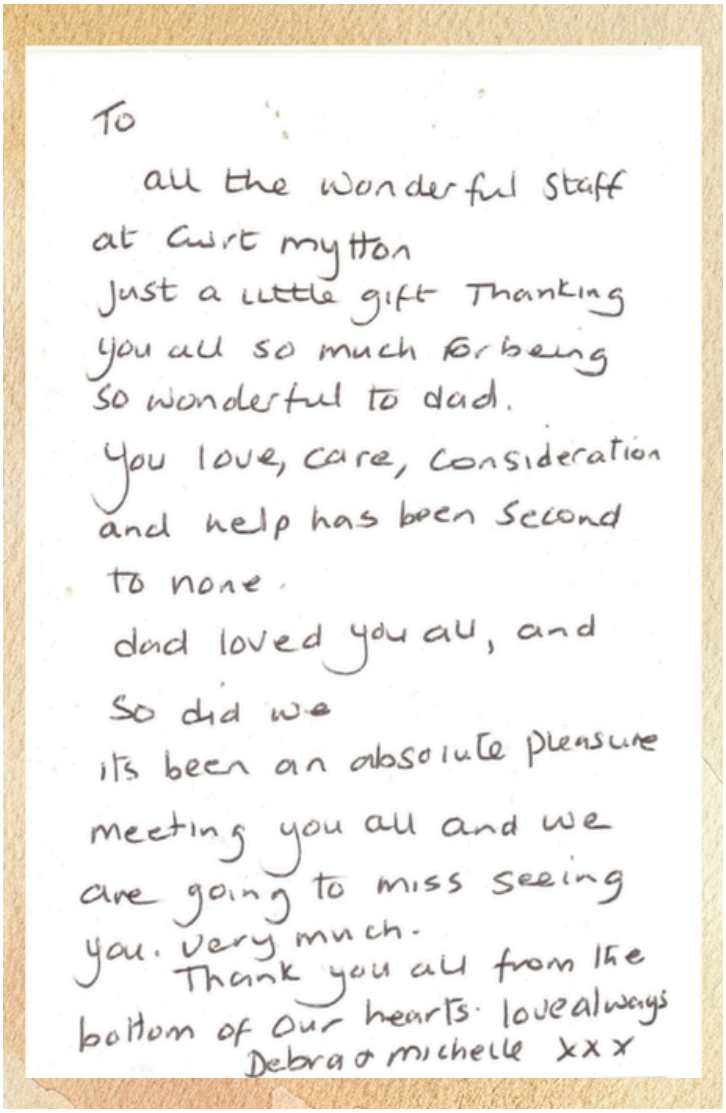
PROMOTING INDEPENDENCE AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Significant progress has been made in promoting independence, well-being and community inclusion through the increased use of Assistive Technology, community-based support programmes, respite services and independent living initiatives. These developments have helped people remain safe, active and connected within their communities while receiving support tailored to their individual needs. Services have continued to strengthen personalised care, improve planning with individuals and enhance quality assurance arrangements to ensure support remains focused on achieving positive outcomes. Collaborative community-led improvements, particularly at Augusta House, further demonstrated the value of partnership working in enhancing quality of life, strengthening local connections and creating services that are increasingly centred on the people who use them and the outcomes that matter most.

STRONG PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Improved partnership working has been a key success during the year, enabling services to deliver more integrated, sustainable and responsive support. Collaboration with health, regional organisations, providers, community groups and local residents strengthened service planning, safeguarding arrangements and specialist provision across Blaenau Gwent. The introduction of MDT Coordinators and the Functional Assessment Team at the end of this year further improved coordination between agencies, supporting more timely decision-making, better communication and improved outcomes for people with complex needs.Evidence of their impact will be reported in 2026/27.At the same time, the Council continued to work more closely with communities and partners to address issues earlier and closer to where people live, helping to build stronger communities, support local solutions and create more joined-up services that improve well-being and independence

Just wanted to highlight how brilliant D's support worker was with him today. I believe he was only meant to take D to the gym today, but ended up supporting him throughout the entire process of getting in touch with MH services, including a review with myself. Very supporting of D throughout. Provided excellent input during the assessment. Really went above and beyond to make sure D was safe and felt supported throughout the process.



To
all the Wonderful staff
at Court mytton
Just a little gift Thanking
you all so much for being
so wonderful to dad.
You love, care, consideration
and help has been second
to none.
dad loved you all, and
so did we
its been an absolute pleasure
meeting you all and we
are going to miss seeing
you. very much.
Thank you all from the
bottom of our hearts. love always
Debra & michelle xxx

ACKNOWLEDGING THE CHALLENGES

There is always room for improvement and there are significant challenges facing Social Services nationally and in Blaenau Gwent

INCREASING DEMAND AND COMPLEXITY OF NEED

Demand across Children's Services continues to rise, with more people requiring support and presenting with increasingly complex needs. This is reflected in higher safeguarding activity, sustained referral levels, and an increasing number of children entering care. Despite progress through earlier intervention and improved planning, Children's Services remain under significant pressure, making it difficult to reduce care admissions and achieve longer-term improvements.

WORKFORCE CAPACITY AND SERVICE SUSTAINABILITY

Recruitment and retention of specialist staff and foster carers remain a priority. In addition, adoption services have made progress in recruitment but still do not have sufficient approved adopters to meet demand, leading to delays in matching and permanency for some children.There is more work for us to do to strengthen and clarify the pathways into and out of reablement, rehabilitation and intermediate care. This will be a focus for us In 2026/27

PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY AND SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

A shortage of suitable local placements means a number of Children Looked After continue to be placed outside Blaenau Gwent, and in some cases outside Wales. Reliance on external providers, financial pressures, and the need for sustainable local care provision remain ongoing concerns. Alongside this, successful implementation of the replacement system for WCCIS, namely MOSAIC, is required by Spring 2026. This transition is requiring careful planning, effective data migration and comprehensive staff training.

CONTEXT: LEADERSHIP, WORKFORCE, FUNDING AND MORE THAN JUST WORDS LEADERSHIP

LEADERSHIP

During 25/26 the Social Services Directorate underwent a structural change when Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and Torfaen County Borough Council federated.

Children's services became part of a new directorate merged with education, namely Children, Young People and Families and Adults services became part of community services, namely Adults & Communities. To enhance this federation the existing Blaenau Gwent Head of Adults Services became joint head of Adult Services managing both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen. This new structure added to the existing strong leadership already in place.

Political leadership during 2025/26 was overseen by the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families, Cllr Sue Edmunds, and by Cllr Helen Cunningham, who was Cabinet Member for Adults and Communities until December 2025, after which Cllr Jules Gardner assumed the role. This support has provided effective leadership and support to drive forward the social services agenda.

The work of Children and Adult Services is overseen and challenged by the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Committee and Adult and Communities Scrutiny Committee, with relevant strategies and reports escalating to cabinet and full council when necessary. Also, formal performance challenge sessions occur every 6 months with the Executive Board. These sessions support in monitoring areas of concern and emerging issues and identifies progress made in supporting the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan.

WORKFORCE

SUPPORTING THE SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE IN THEIR PROFESSIONAL ROLES 2025/26

Blaenau Gwent has a skilled and committed social care workforce focused on delivering high-quality services. Regular engagement with staff helps shape services, while recruitment and retention remain key priorities to maintain a stable workforce.



11.4%

STAFF TURNOVER

WHAT WE DO

The Joint Workforce Development Service provides learning and development across Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, helping staff and carers build skills, meet professional requirements, and progress in their careers. Training focuses on key priorities such as safeguarding, neurodiversity, dementia, leadership, and strengths-based practice to support a skilled, resilient, and sustainable workforce.



694

NUMBER OF WORKFORCE

HOW WE DO THIS

Learning is delivered through a mix of e-learning, virtual and face-to-face training, supported by the Thinqi e-Learning Management System. We also provide support to improve digital confidence and ensure learning is accessible for all staff.

WHAT WE ACHIEVED IN 2025/26:

- 232 learners achieved qualifications or professional development awards;
- 30 internally sponsored Social Work students were supported;
- 11 staff completed the Social Services Practitioner Award;
- 34 Newly Qualified Social Workers completed their development programme;
- Nearly 11,000 learning opportunities were delivered;
- 66 learners achieved Level 2 and 3 Health and Social Care; and
- 12 learners achieved Level 4 and 5 Health and Social Care.

The Council's "grow your own" approach continues to support the recruitment, development and retention of skilled social workers.

WORKFORCE (continued)

Workforce stability is a key consideration within Social Services with some teams facing some staffing shortages, however, it is acknowledged that this is a Wales wide position and there is no simple solution. The department continues to look at innovative ways of managing the workload within teams as well as continuing to develop recruitment and retention strategies to address any workforce pressures. Despite this staff and providers of services have continued to ensure needs are met, risks are managed, and safeguarding concerns are dealt with.

POSITION TYPE	NUMBER
VACANCIES	29
FIXED TERM	57
PERMANENT	482
PERMANENT - FIXED TERM REGULATIONS	18
TEMPORARY	**2**
RELIEF	135
SUM:	**723**

WORKFORCE FUTURE FOCUS

- Supporting Learners to progress into 2026/27;
- Supporting registration requirements and social care career pathways;
- Supporting social work career pathways;
- Supporting priority areas including legislation, frameworks, guidelines and compliance; and
- Developing Learning Managemet System.

MORE THAN JUST WORDS

As a department we continue to monitor compliance with our responsibilities within 'More Than Just Words' and the Active Offer. We continue to ensure that when citizens contact both our Adult and Children Services Departments, that they are offered the opportunity to communicate in the language of their choice.

Our assessment tools within our Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) system specifically asks the question "Do you require this conversation / assessment to be carried out in Welsh?" The form is then attached to the person's referral.

The 'More Than Just Words' action plan has progressed, there is liaison with the local Welsh language champions and promoting the wide resources and opportunities available is now standard.

Our commissioned providers work in partnership with us to promote the Welsh Language and this is reflected in our contracts and service level agreements.

OUR FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND HOW WE PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

The total budget allocation for Social Services (Adults' and Children's Services) in 2025/26 was £56 million, representing an increase of £2.13 million compared with the previous year.

At the end of 2025/26 Social Services reported an overall overspend of £2.375 million, comprising an underspend of £764,449 within Adults' Services and an overspend of £3.140 million within Children's Services.

Adults' Services achieved an underspend through effective budget management, staffing underspends and the maximisation of grant funding, which helped offset demand-led pressures across several service areas. However, significant cost pressures remained within Community Care, Supported Living and Legal Services, reflecting the increasing complexity of care needs and continued demand for statutory support.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES (continued)

Children's Services reported an overspend of £3,139,894. The adverse position was primarily driven by ongoing pressures within looked after children services, particularly residential placements, external provision, legal costs and permanency arrangements. Despite robust financial management and the use of grant funding to mitigate costs where possible, increasing demand and the complexity of children's placements continued to place significant pressure on the service budget.

The financial position reflects the ongoing challenge of meeting increasing levels of demand and complexity across Children's Services, whilst continuing to deliver statutory services and support the most vulnerable residents.

The provision of regular financial forecasting reports in line with the Council's budget monitoring and reporting framework, enabled the Social Services Senior Management to make informed decisions on service delivery and financial management throughout the year.

The allocated budget and outturn for 2025/26 is provided in the table below:

SERVICE AREA	BUDGET	OUTTURN	VARIANCE (ADVERSE) / FAVOURABLE
Children's Services	£15,053,330	£18,793,224	(3,139,894)
Adult Services	£40,028,370	£39,263,921	764,449
Total	**£55,681,700**	**£58,057,145**	**(£2,375,445)**

PEOPLE, VOICE AND CONTROL



133

NUMBER OF PEOPLE RECEIVING DIRECT PAYMENTS



140

THE NUMBER OF "ACTIVE OFFERS" OF ADVOCACY FOR CHILDREN



30

NUMBER OF ADULTS FOR WHICH AN IDEPENDENT PROFESSIONAL ADVOCATE WAS PROVIDED

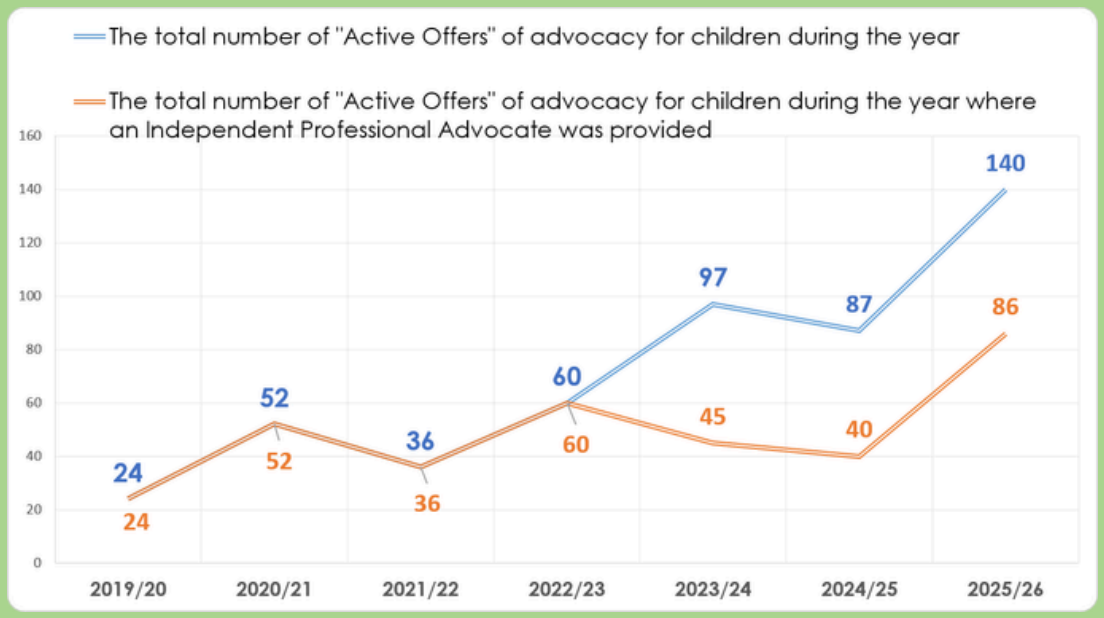
2025/26 SUMMARY

During 2025/26, People, Voice and Control remained a key focus in Blaenau Gwent, promoting greater choice, independence and participation in decision-making. Increased access to advocacy for children, improved access to Direct Payments, development of the Functional Assessment Team, and support for adults with learning disabilities helped individuals and families access the right support at the right time. The service actively sought the views of people with lived experience and worked to make communication more accessible.

WHAT WENT WELL

ADVOCACY AND ENSURING PEOPLE'S VOICES ARE HEARD

The Council continues to promote advocacy and support people to have a strong voice in decisions about their care and support. During 2025/26, there were 140 active offers of advocacy for children aged five and over, a significant increase from 87 in 2024/25. In addition, 86 children received support from an Independent Professional Advocate, compared with 40 in the previous year. This demonstrates a strengthened commitment to ensuring children and young people are supported to express their views and participate in decisions that affect them.



For adults, the need for an Independent Professional Advocate was identified in 53 cases, with 30 adults receiving advocacy support, compared to 74 being identified last year, with 41 being provided with an independent professional advocate. This helped ensure that people who may have experienced difficulties in understanding processes or expressing their wishes were able to participate meaningfully in assessments, reviews and care planning.

> *"I was listened to for my needs and given very good help when needed."*

SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO REMAIN INDEPENDENT

Adult Services supported 400 adults through home care services, providing 6067.75 home care hours each week and successfully completed 406 reablement packages during the year. These services have enabled many people to remain safely within their own homes and communities, supporting independence and reducing reliance on longer-term services. The implementation of the Functional Assessment Team (FAsT) has further strengthened pathways by supporting timely hospital discharges and ensuring care packages are reviewed to reflect changing needs.



400

ADULTS RECEIVING HOME CARE



406

REABLEMENT PACKAGES COMPLETED

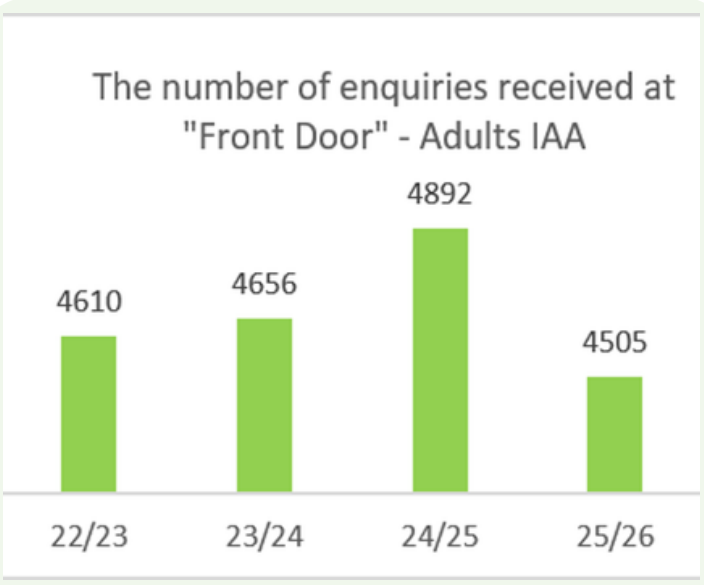
GREATER CHOICE AND CONTROL THROUGH DIRECT PAYMENTS

A total of 133 people received Direct Payments (34 children and 99 adults), enabling them to arrange care and support that best meets their individual needs and preferences. Direct Payments continue to be an important mechanism for promoting independence, flexibility and personal choice, allowing people to exercise greater control over how their support is delivered.

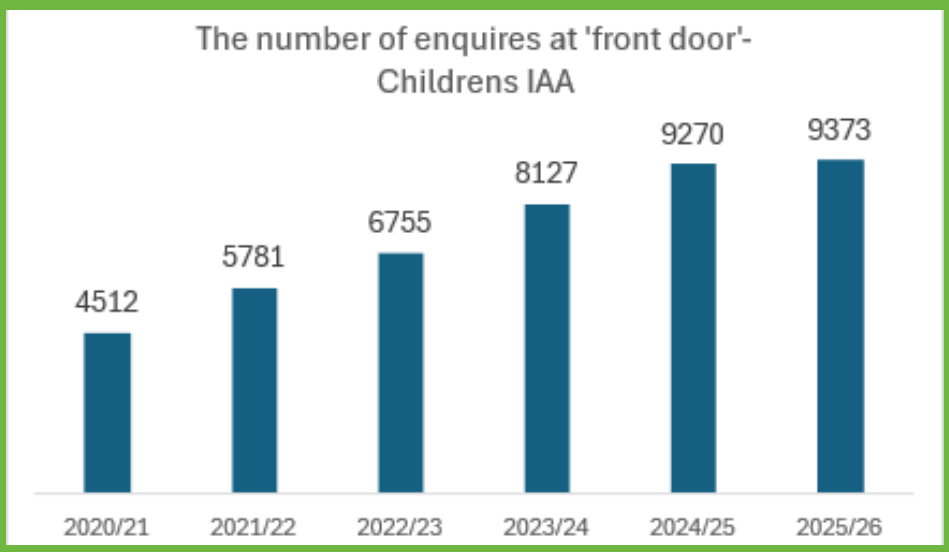
Moving forward we will continue to develop a more sustainable and resilient Direct Payments service through closer collaboration with Torfaen Council. Plans are progressing to appoint a shared Team Manager across both authorities. This will help ensure that more people can access Direct Payments and receive the support they need to manage them effectively, providing greater choice, flexibility and control over how their care and support is delivered.

PROVIDING INFORMATION, ADVICE AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Adult Services received 4,505 enquiries through the Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) service. Of these, 2,161 enquiries (48%) were resolved at the point of contact through advice, information, signposting or preventative support, allowing people to access help quickly without requiring a full social care assessment.



Children's Services also maintained a strong focus on early intervention. During 2025/26, 9,373 referrals were received, with 89.9% either closed with no further action or stepped down to preventative support services. This demonstrates effective screening, assessment and signposting arrangements, ensuring statutory services remain focused on those with the greatest levels of need whilst providing families with appropriate support at the earliest opportunity.



WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

ADVOCACY PROVISION

Advocacy remains an important safeguard, but there is still a gap between identified need and provision. During the year, 53 adults were identified as requiring an Independent Professional Advocate, but only 30 received support. Further work is needed to understand the barriers to access and strengthen referral pathways, so that eligible individuals can receive timely advocacy and be supported to take part fully in decisions about their care and support. We will also continue to build on the positive progress made in children's advocacy, ensuring children and young people are supported to have their voices heard.



MANAGING INCREASING DEMAND AND WORKFORCE PRESSURES

The introduction of the domiciliary care rightsizing Functional Assessment Team (FAsT) has improved outcomes for people leaving hospital who require support alongside supporting the sustainability of the domiciliary care market in Blaenau Gwent . However, demand has been higher than expected, particularly through hospital discharge pathways. Increased numbers of patients within hospital settings, admissions and more complex needs have placed pressure on service capacity, workforce availability and responsiveness.

Recruitment of additional Functional Assessors is ongoing to strengthen capacity and support this growing demand. This will help ensure people receive timely assessments, reviews and support plans that reflect their changing needs, while maintaining a focus on independence and prevention.

FRONT DOOR DEMAND AND SERVICE SUSTAINABILITY

While Adult Services successfully resolved many enquiries through information and advice, demand remains significant. Similarly, Children's Services continue to experience consistently high referral levels.

Sustaining effective early intervention services while managing demand and financial pressures will remain a key priority and we will continue to strengthen our Information, Advice and Assistance services to ensure people can access the right support at the right time.

By improving information, signposting and early intervention pathways, we aim to resolve more enquiries at the earliest opportunity, reducing the need for statutory intervention where appropriate and improving people's experience of accessing support.
.

EMBEDDING NEW WAYS OF WORKING

Progress has been made in strengthening quality assurance, digital systems and service delivery models. However, work continues to fully embed these new approaches, strengthen oversight and make further use of digital systems to support safe, effective and person-centred care.

This will help improve service quality, support staff and ensure people receive high-quality support that reflects their individual needs and aspirations. This has to be delivered alongside addressing ongoing recruitment challenges, workforce resilience and the sustainability of grant-funded support arrangements.

"I just wanted to say how lovely and supportive you have been during our conversation. You were very understanding, made me feel reassured, and was a great help."

A mother who recently self-referred to the department

WHAT DIFFERENCE WAS MADE?

MORE CHOICE AND CONTROL

Through the provision of 133 Direct Payments, individuals were able to tailor support arrangements around their personal circumstances, preferences and outcomes. This increased flexibility enabled people to exercise greater control over their daily lives, and promoted independence and well-being.

EARLIER SUPPORT, CLOSER TO HOME

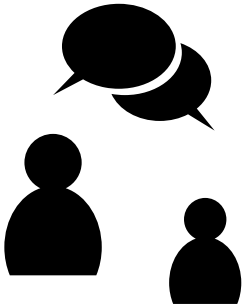
The continued development of community-based services, including home care, reablement and the Functional Assessment Team, enabled more people to remain safely at home and avoid unnecessary long-term dependence on services. Timely interventions supported recovery, maximised independence and facilitated hospital discharge where appropriate.

BETTER SUPPORT FOR DECISION MAKING

The increased use of advocacy for children and the continued provision of advocacy for adults ensured that more people could express their views, understand their options and influence decisions about their care and support. This strengthened a rights-based and person-centred approach across services.

TIMELY ACCESS TO SUPPORT

Strong screening through the Information, Advice and Assistance arrangements ensured many adults, children and families received early advice and preventative support, helping prevent needs from escalating and enabling statutory services to focus on those at greatest risk.



PREVENTION

153

ADULT CARER NEEDS ASSESSMENTS UNDERTAKEN

47

YOUNG CARERS' NEEDS ASSESSMENTS COMPLETED

2,156

ADULT ENQUIRIES THAT PROCEEDED TO ASSESSMENT DEALT WITH BY PREVENTION IAA

695

ADULTS SUSPECTED OF BEING AT RISK OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT REPORTED

2025/26 SUMMARY

Prevention services continued to support residents through early intervention, safeguarding, assistive technology and family support, helping people access the right support at the right time to maintain independence.

Key achievements included strong performance in child protection processes and early support for over 1,400 children and adults. All lifeline alarms were successfully migrated to digital technology, and effective support was provided for carers, adoptive families and Special Guardianship Order families. The Council also strengthened its preventative approach through the new Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025-2030 and improved commissioning arrangements through the introduction of Care Cubed.

WHAT WENT WELL

COMMISSIONING AND PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY

The Social Care and Housing Support Commissioning Team successfully piloted the Care Cubed system to strengthen fee-setting processes and improve understanding of care costs. This has supported more evidence-based commissioning decisions and greater consistency across providers.

The Council's in-house residential homes continued to provide a valuable local placement option, supporting six children during the year and helping some children remain closer to their communities and support networks.

SOUTH EAST WALES ADOPTION SERVICE

The Council strengthened its preventative approach through the adoption of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2025-2030, developed with care-experienced young people and partners. The strategy focuses on prevention, early intervention and improving outcomes for children and young people in care.

Preventative support for Special Guardianship Order (SGO) families remained effective, with only three placement breakdowns during the year (1.58% of all SGO cases), none resulting in children returning to Local Authority care.

South East Wales Adoption Service also made positive progress in adoption support, with 13 Blaenau Gwent families receiving support at year end. Recruitment remained strong, with 32 adoptive families approved across Gwent and a revised marketing strategy introduced to increase approvals over the next three years.

EARLY INTERVENTION AND SUPPORT

Prevention services continued to support residents at the earliest opportunity, helping to reduce escalation and promote independence. In 2025/26, Adult Social Services received 4,822 referrals and Children's Social Services received 9,373, reflecting sustained demand. Prevention teams also managed 2,156 adult enquiries that progressed to assessment. During the year, 153 adult carers' needs assessments and 47 young carers' needs assessments were completed, helping to identify needs early and provide timely advice and support.

SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION

During 2025/26, Children's Services continued to provide early advice, support and safeguarding for children and families, while managing increasing demand across the system. The focus remained on helping families access the right support at the right time, preventing needs from escalating where possible, and protecting children and young people at greatest risk.

Adult safeguarding activity remained responsive, with 852 reports of adults suspected to be at risk received during the year and 352 cases progressing to safeguarding enquiries. Continued safeguarding awareness raising and professional training supported the identification and protection of vulnerable adults.

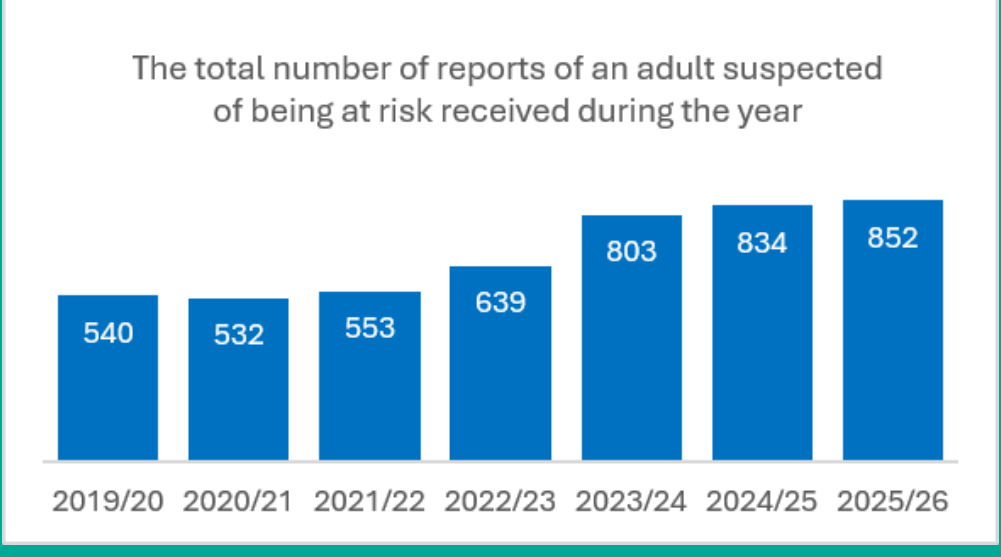
352

NUMBER OF REPORTS OF AN ADULT SUSPECTED OF BEING AT RISK WHERE ENQUIRIES ARE TO BE MADE

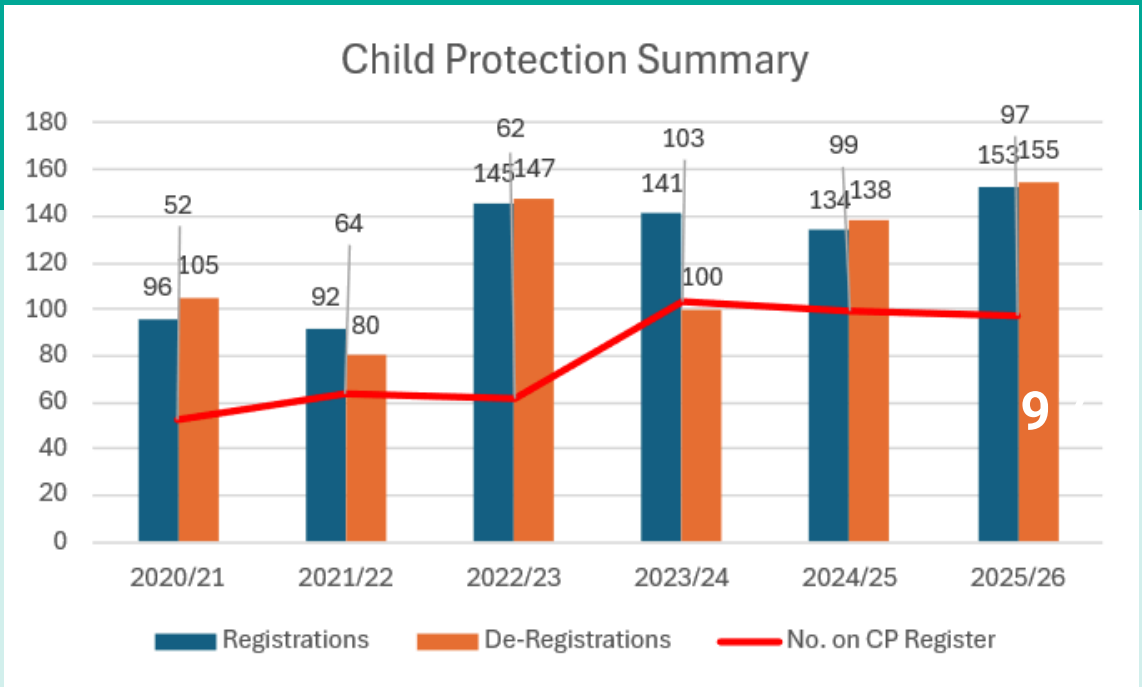
60.7%

OF ENQUIRIES COMPLETED WITHIN 7 WORKING DAYS FROM THE RECEIPT OF THE REPORTED ALLEGED ABUSE

> *The approach during the adult safeguarding enquiries process was really sensitive and supportive, making me feel listened to.*
>
> Comment received from an adult at risk



Performance against statutory requirements remained strong, with 98% of Initial Child Protection Conferences completed within timescales. At year end, there were 97 children on the Child Protection Register, slightly lower than the 99 recorded in 2024/25. During the year, 155 children were appropriately de-registered from Child Protection Plans when risks reduced, demonstrating effective intervention and support. Statutory visiting performance also improved significantly, with 94.9% of visits completed within statutory timescales compared with 87.0% in the previous year.





49

NUMBER OF SIBLING GROUPS ON THE CHILD PROTECTION REGISTER



165.2

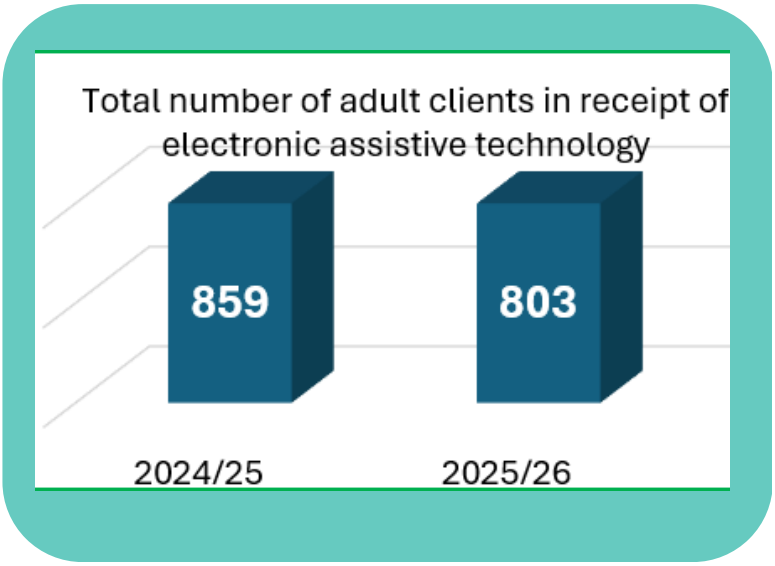
AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS CHILDREN HAVE BEEN ON THE CHILD PROTECTION REGISTER

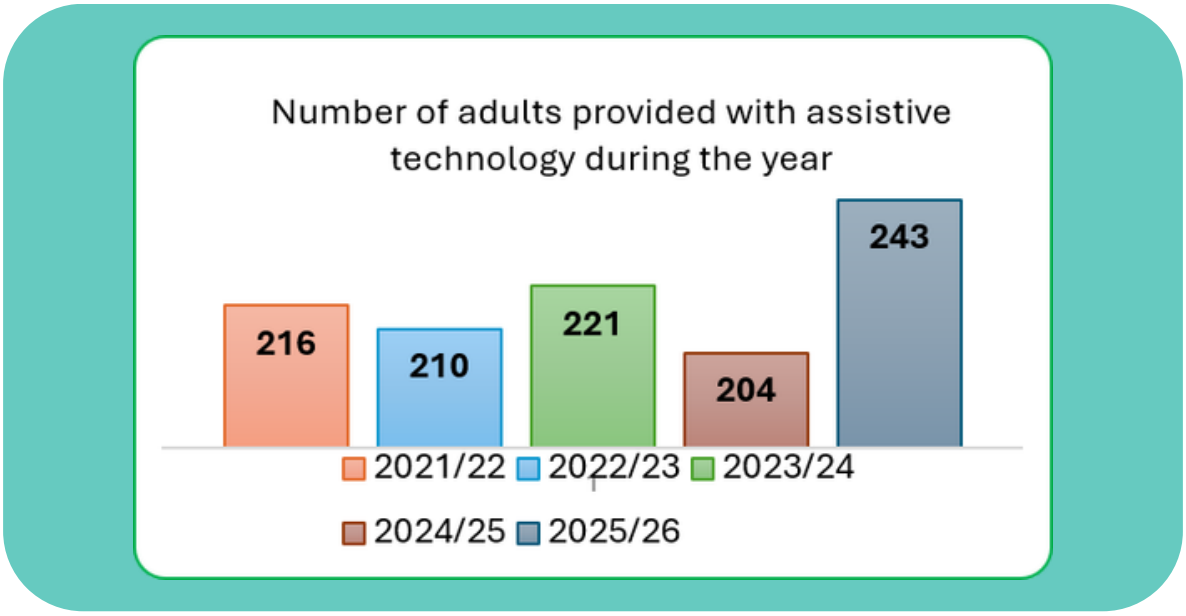
ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Significant progress has been made in modernising Assistive Technology services. All analogue lifeline alarms were successfully migrated to digital-compatible equipment, ensuring continued service provision ahead of the national analogue switch-off.

This major programme of work safeguarded support arrangements for vulnerable residents and ensured compliance with future digital telecommunications requirements.

Promotion of Assistive Technology also resulted in increased uptake, with 243 new individuals accessing the service during 2025/26 compared with 204 in the previous year. This reflects growing awareness of the benefits of technology in supporting independence and reducing the need for more intensive health and social care interventions.





"I got better and i'm happy"

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

INCREASED DEMAND AND COMPLEXITY

Demand across both adult and children's services remains high and increasingly complex. Although safeguarding referrals for adults rose by a relatively modest 2.2%, safeguarding enquiries increased by 18%, indicating greater levels of complexity and intervention required. Ongoing monitoring will be required to ensure services have the capacity and resources needed to respond effectively to growing demand.
Alongside an increase of Safeguarding enquiries, Adult Services has seen an increase in the complexity of care and support needs including increased demand for commissioned provision such as specialist domiciliary care and care home placements.The Council will continue to strengthen preventative approaches and early intervention services to reduce escalation. wherever possible and support sustainable service delivery.

SAFEGUARDING TIMELINESS

While safeguarding activity remained robust, only 60.7% of adult safeguarding enquiries were completed within seven working days. Further work is required to improve timeliness and ensure safeguarding concerns are investigated as quickly as possible while maintaining quality and proportionality.

RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY

Although local residential provision remains important, occupancy continues to be affected by challenges in safely matching children within shared placements. During 2026/27, consideration will be given to the future use of Madison House and how best to maximise local placement opportunities in response to sufficiency pressures and changing demand.

ADOPTION AND PLACEMENT AVAILABILITY

While adoption recruitment activity has been positive, adopter availability and wider placement sufficiency remain key challenges. Future work will focus on increasing adopter numbers, strengthening post-adoption support arrangements, expanding trauma-informed practice and improving family feedback mechanisms.

WORKFORCE AND SERVICE CAPACITY

Recruitment and retention of qualified social workers to maintain a skilled and resilient workforce will remain a priority to ensure preventative services can continue to respond effectively.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY GROWTH

Although uptake has increased, there remains further opportunity to expand awareness and use of Assistive Technology and emerging digital solutions. Continued promotion with professionals, carers and residents will help maximise the preventative benefits of technology-enabled care.

WHAT DIFFERENCE WAS MADE?

EARLIER SUPPORT

A total of 1,405 people were supported through preventative services during the year, including 1,072 children and 333 adults. Early intervention enabled many individuals and families to access support before needs escalated, helping them remain resilient and reducing reliance on more intensive services.

Carers benefited from dedicated assessments that identified support needs and promoted well-being, helping sustain vital caring relationships and preventing breakdowns in care arrangements.

BETTER PROTECTION FROM HARM

Safeguarding services ensured that concerns about vulnerable adults and children were identified and responded to appropriately. Improved child protection performance, high compliance with conference timescales and increased statutory visiting activity contributed to better oversight of risk and improved outcomes for children.

For adults, safeguarding enquiries provided protection and support where abuse or neglect was suspected, helping to reduce risks and improve safety for vulnerable individuals.

INDEPENDENT LIVING

The successful migration to digital Assistive Technology ensured vulnerable residents continued to receive reliable support while benefiting from modern technology solutions. Increased uptake of Assistive Technology enabled more people to remain safely in their own homes, reducing social isolation and supporting independence.

GREATER STABILITY FOR CHILDREN

Preventative support provided through Corporate Parenting, Special Guardianship Order services, adoption support and family interventions helped maintain stable family arrangements and prevented children from entering or returning to care unnecessarily. Low levels of SGO disruption and strong placement stability demonstrate the impact of this preventative approach.

MORE EFFECTIVE USE OF RESOURCES

The introduction of the Care Cubed system strengthened commissioning arrangements, supporting better value for money and greater transparency in care fee negotiations. This provides a stronger basis for sustainable commissioning decisions while helping to ensure that service users continue to receive safe, high-quality care and support.



PARTNERSHIPS



2025/26 SUMMARY

Partnership working remained a key strength across Social Services, supporting more integrated, sustainable and person-centred services. Collaboration between the Council, health, third sector organisations, care providers and local communities improved service coordination, strengthened safeguarding, supported timely hospital discharges and enhanced community well-being initiatives. The introduction of Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) Coordinators and the Functional Assessment Team improved joint working and outcomes for people with complex needs, while community-led improvements at Augusta House showed the positive impact of collective action. Future work will focus on embedding integrated approaches, expanding MDT arrangements, and strengthening regional and community partnerships to meet demand and improve outcomes for residents.

WHAT WENT WELL

PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND REGIONAL COLLABORATION

Strong partnership working across Adult Services continued to support service improvement and regional development throughout the year. Collaborative working with health partners, Welsh Government, third sector organisations, care providers and neighbouring authorities strengthened the development of integrated health and social care services across Blaenau Gwent and the wider region. This joint approach supported a better understanding of care costs, service sustainability and performance, helping to inform future service planning and delivery.

Partnership arrangements also contributed to a range of community well-being initiatives, including Happy Healthy Blaenau Gwent and other place-based care programmes. Regional collaboration further strengthened safeguarding arrangements for vulnerable adults, promoted proportionate and person-centred practice, and supported the establishment of a new forensic mental health post to improve specialist support across Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen.

MDT COORDINATORS

The introduction of MDT Coordinators within the Community Resource Team has strengthened partnership working between health and social care professionals. The role has improved the coordination of referrals, reviews and follow-up actions for individuals with complex needs, supporting more timely decision-making and improved communication between agencies.

The MDT approach has enhanced information sharing, reduced duplication and helped ensure individuals receive coordinated, person-centred support. Early implementation has demonstrated the value of dedicated coordination in supporting effective multidisciplinary working and community-based care.

On behalf of the entire team, thank you very much for your support and cooperation. We look forward to continuing our close working relationship throughout 2026 and the years ahead, as we work together to further enhance care provision within our communities.

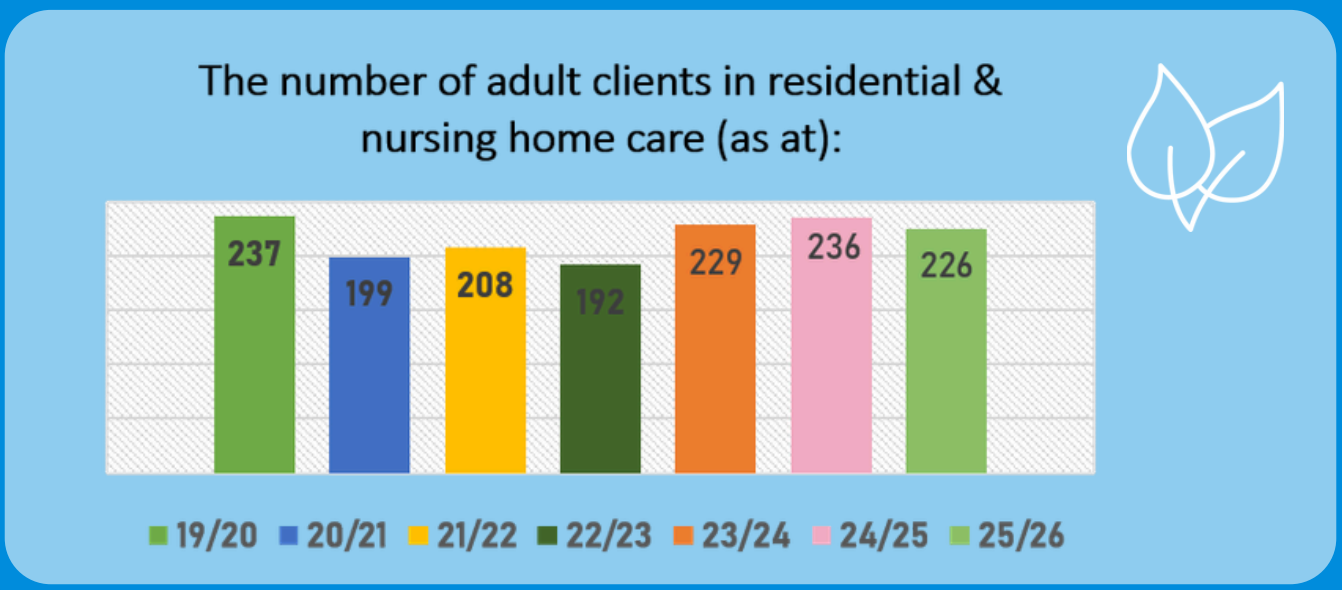
Comment received from a Provider in relation to both the local authorities Social Care and Housing Support Commissioning Team and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

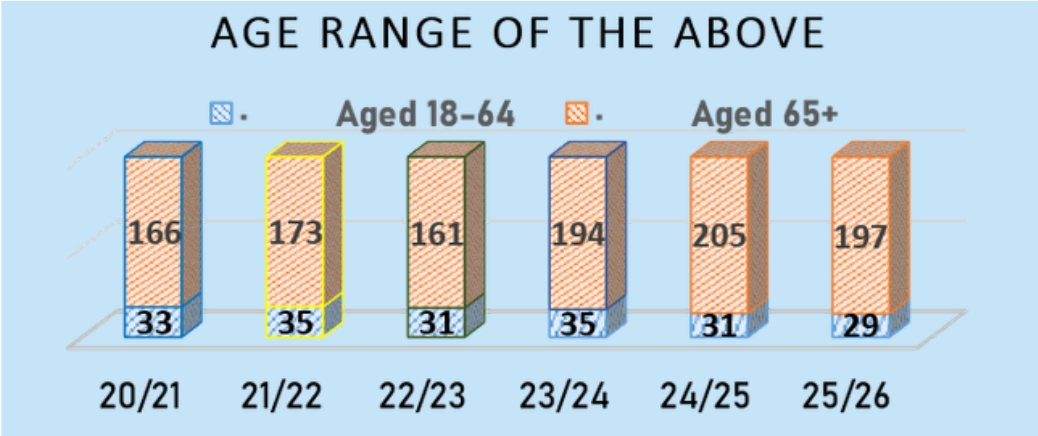
SERVICE DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

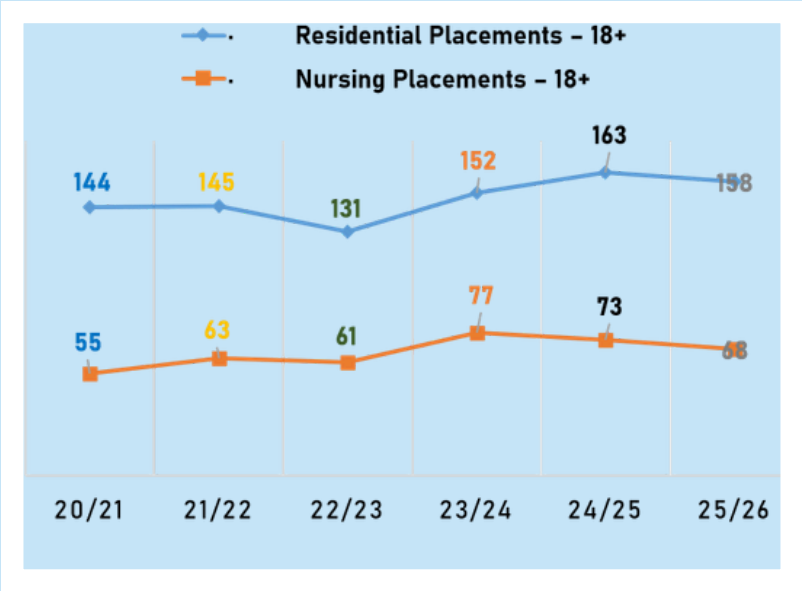
Partnership working played a key role in driving service development and community engagement. The new Functional Assessment Team improved integration between health and social care services, supporting timely hospital discharges and earlier reviews of care needs.

Significant improvements at Augusta House also demonstrated the strength of collaborative working, with local organisations, schools, families, residents, volunteers and Council teams coming together to enhance the environment and experiences of residents. This collective effort highlighted the positive impact that community-led partnerships can have on service quality and well-being outcomes.

Effective partnership working delivers high quality care & outcomes for our adult clients in residential & nursing home care







WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

PARTNERSHIPS AND INTEGRATION

While strong partnership arrangements are in place, continued work is required to support the development of the future regional social care model and ensure services remain sustainable in response to increasing demand and financial pressures. There are opportunities to further strengthen the use of regional data, shared performance information and joint planning arrangements to support consistent service delivery across partner organisations.

Future collaboration will focus on deepening integration between health and social care services, building on existing place-based initiatives and ensuring regional safeguarding and mental health arrangements continue to meet emerging needs.

MULTI DISIPLINIARY TEAM COORDINATION

As the MDT Coordinator role is still a relatively new development, further refinement of processes and responsibilities is required as the model becomes fully embedded. Increased participation from a wider range of health and social care professionals at MDT meetings has been identified as a key area for development to maximise the effectiveness of multidisciplinary discussions and decision-making.
The wider rollout of MDT Coordinators has been intentionally delayed to allow learning from the initial implementation phase and ensure the most effective delivery model is established. To date, the service has been implemented within one GP practice, with expansion to a further practice planned for September 2026.

DEVELOPING SERVICES TOGETHER

Although positive progress has been achieved, there is an opportunity to build on current partnership arrangements by increasing community involvement in service design and strengthening engagement with local groups and stakeholders. Continued development of integrated services will be important to ensure timely support for individuals and to maintain effective pathways between health, social care and community services. Future work will focus on sustaining successful initiatives, extending partnership opportunities and ensuring that community-led approaches continue to contribute to service improvement and positive outcomes for residents.

WHAT DIFFERENCE WAS MADE?

WORKING TOGETHER

Partnership working enabled services to deliver more integrated, sustainable and responsive services. Joint working improved coordination across organisations, strengthened safeguarding arrangements and supported initiatives that promote independence, well-being and prevention. The creation of a forensic mental health post enhanced specialist support available across the region, while collaborative planning helped strengthen the foundations for future service sustainability.

MDT PARTNERSHIP WORKING

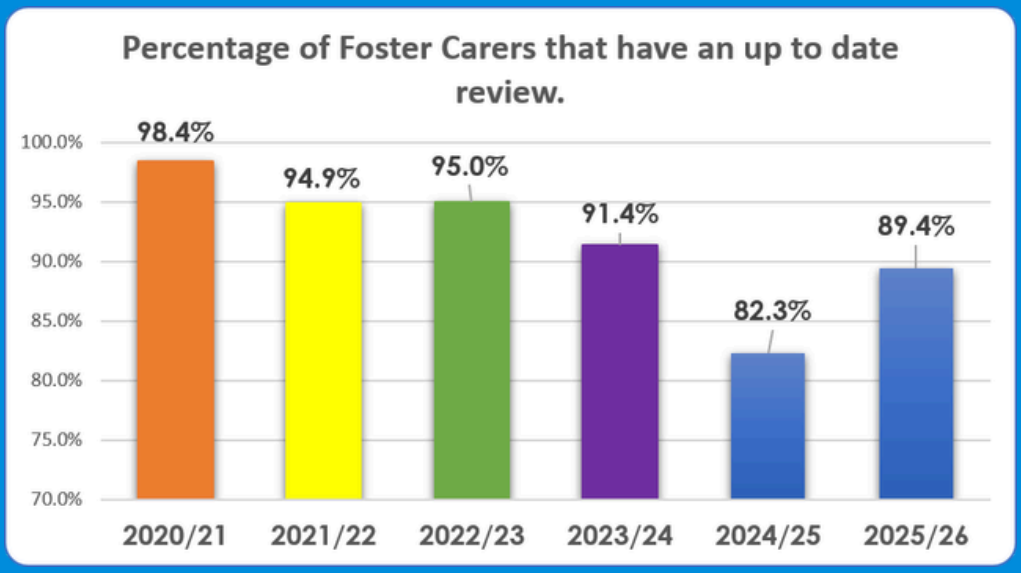
The MDT Coordinator role has improved the experience of individuals with complex needs by ensuring referrals, reviews and actions are coordinated more effectively. Improved communication and information sharing across agencies has reduced delays, supported quicker decision-making and enabled professionals to work together more efficiently. As a result, individuals have benefited from more coordinated, person-centred support within their communities.

SERVICE AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The Functional Assessment Team contributed to improved outcomes by supporting earlier discharge from hospital and ensuring care needs were reviewed more promptly, helping individuals return home safely and access the right support at the right time.

Community partnership working at Augusta House delivered tangible improvements to the environment and quality of life for residents. The involvement of local organisations, schools, volunteers and families strengthened community connections, increased opportunities for engagement and demonstrated how collaborative approaches can directly enhance resident well-being and service quality.

Partnership working in fostering means different professionals and carers working together to support a child's safety, well-being, and development.



WELL-BEING



202

NUMBER OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER



114

NUMBER OF ADULTS RECEIVING RESPITE CARE



911

NUMBER OF ADULTS WITH A CARE AND SUPPORT PLAN



615

NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH A CARE AND SUPPORT PLAN

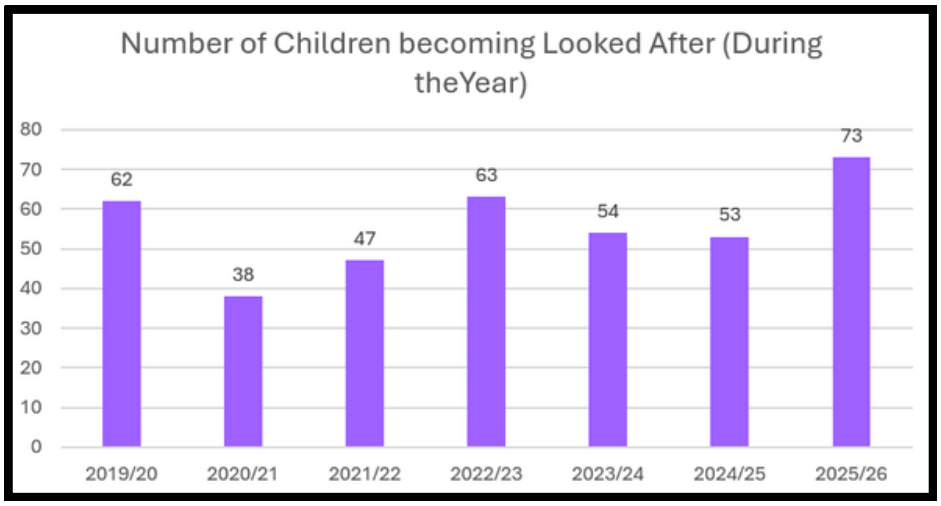
2025/26 SUMMARY

During 2025/26, Children's and Adult Services continued to focus on improving well-being by helping people to remain safe, independent and connected to their communities. Strong statutory performance supported positive outcomes for Children Looked After, while investment in independent living skills, respite provision, employment initiatives and community-based support helped adults and young people increase confidence, choice and independence. Support for unpaid carers was strengthened through well-being activities, assessments, financial assistance and targeted engagement, helping carers feel more recognised, informed and supported. Despite this progress, ongoing challenges relating to demand, workforce capacity and carer engagement mean continued focus on prevention, early intervention and well-being support remains essential.

WHAT WENT WELL

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

Supporting the well-being of Children Looked After remained a key priority throughout the year. Performance against statutory visiting requirements was strong, with 95% of visits completed within required timescales, helping to ensure children's safety, emotional well-being and developmental needs were regularly reviewed and supported. While the number of Children Looked After remained broadly stable at 202 at year-end, the service continued to focus on achieving positive well-being outcomes through effective care planning and permanence arrangements. Monthly discharge meetings and care order revocation work helped maintain a focus on children who could safely return to the care of parents or kinship carers, supporting family relationships, stability and belonging. The service restructure, creating dedicated Child Protection, Court and Children Looked After teams, has strengthened oversight and decision-making, ensuring children receive timely support that promotes their well-being and long-term outcomes.



60

THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER PLACED IN WALES BUT OUTSIDE OF BLAENAU GWENT

10

THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER PLACED OUTSIDE OF WALES

LONG TERM CARE AND SUPPORT

The Council continued to support the well-being of 966 adults and 617 children with Care and Support Plans, helping individuals achieve greater independence, choice and inclusion within their communities.

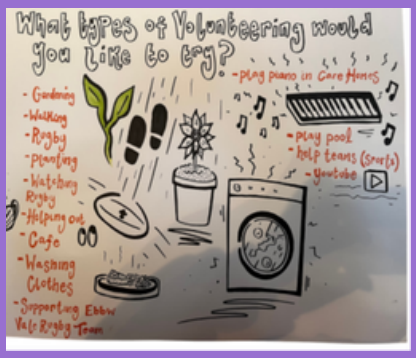
Services focused on enabling people to live fulfilled lives by building skills, confidence and resilience.

The Independent Living Skills PODs supported individuals to develop practical life skills that enhance independence and personal well-being, while improved information and personal stories increased awareness of support options and encouraged more personalised approaches.

Programmes such as Trailblazers, Community Options and supported employment initiatives created opportunities for skill development, volunteering and employment, promoting social inclusion, confidence and a sense of purpose, all of which contribute positively to well-being.

Augusta House expanded respite support for children and families, with community-led enhancements to outdoor spaces further improving opportunities for recreation, social interaction and well-being.

Support for young people transitioning into adulthood also continued to promote independence and positive life outcomes through greater participation in community life.







UNPAID CARERS

Significant progress was made in promoting the well-being of unpaid carers through improved identification, engagement and support. Work focused on ensuring carers could access information, advice and assistance earlier, helping them manage the challenges associated with their caring responsibilities. The Carers Support Fund provided direct financial support, benefits advice, budgeting assistance, employment support and access to technology, helping to reduce financial pressures and improve well-being. Engagement opportunities such as coffee mornings, workshops and community-based activities enabled carers to build social connections, reduce isolation and improve emotional well-being.

The partnership with Adferiad has strengthened support across Blaenau Gwent, with dedicated engagement officers helping to raise awareness of unpaid carers and develop structured programmes of activities. This year 134 young carers have received support. Young carers and young adult carers have benefited from assessments, support plans, weekly groups, educational visits, Duke of Edinburgh opportunities and one-to-one support, helping them maintain a balance between their caring responsibilities and their own health, well-being and future aspirations.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

Although the overall number of Children Looked After remained stable, admissions into care increased from 53 to 73, reflecting continued pressures on families and increasing demand for intervention. Placement sufficiency continues to impact well-being outcomes, with 60 children placed outside Blaenau Gwent and 10 placed outside of Wales. Being placed away from home can affect a child's ability to maintain family connections, friendships, education and community ties, all of which are important contributors to emotional well-being and resilience. Continued investment in preventative services, family support and local placement provision will be essential in helping more children remain safely connected to their communities and support networks.

LONG TERM CARE AND SUPPORT

While progress has been made in supporting well-being through a range of community-based services, there remains a need to further expand respite provision and alternative options such as Shared Lives arrangements. These services play a vital role in maintaining well-being by providing families and carers with breaks from caring responsibilities and enabling individuals to experience greater choice and independence. Continued development of community-based opportunities and flexible support options will help ensure people can access services that best meet their well-being needs and aspirations.

UNPAID CARERS

Despite positive developments, engagement with unpaid carers remains relatively low. This limits opportunities to fully understand carers' well-being needs, promote available support and demonstrate outcomes. Earlier identification of carers remains essential to ensure support is provided before caring responsibilities begin to negatively impact physical health, emotional well-being, education or employment. Further work is required to raise awareness across services and communities so that carers of all ages are recognised and supported at the earliest opportunity. Sustaining engagement and evidencing the long-term well-being benefits of support will also be important moving forward.



155

THE NUMBER OF ADULTS CARERS ASSESSED BY SOCIAL SERVICES

UP BY 36 COMPARED TO LAST YEAR



WHAT DIFFERENCE WAS MADE?

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

The support provided throughout the year contributed to improved well-being by ensuring children were safe, supported and regularly seen by professionals. A continued focus on permanence planning helped some children safely remain with, or return to, family members, strengthening their sense of stability, identity and belonging. Effective care planning and strengthened service oversight have helped ensure children receive support that not only meets their immediate needs, but also promotes positive longer-term well-being outcomes, including emotional security, healthy relationships and improved life chances.

LONG TERM CARE AND SUPPORT

The support provided has enabled individuals to improve their independence, confidence and overall quality of life. By developing practical skills and accessing volunteering, employment and community-based opportunities, people have become more active and connected within their communities. These opportunities have supported emotional, social and physical well-being by reducing isolation, increasing self-esteem and promoting greater independence. Enhanced respite services have also helped strengthen family resilience and well-being by providing valuable support and opportunities for families to sustain caring arrangements.

UNPAID CARERS

The support provided has helped unpaid carers feel recognised, valued and more connected. Financial assistance, activities and peer support have reduced hardship and isolation, while access to advice has increased confidence in their caring role. For young carers and young adult carers, dedicated support has strengthened confidence, educational participation and future opportunities, while reducing the impact of caring responsibilities on their day-to-day lives. Overall, these interventions have improved resilience, mental health and quality of life for unpaid carers across Blaenau Gwent.

WHAT PROGRESS HAVE WE MADE ON LAST YEAR'S 'AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT'

LAST YEAR'S AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT	PROGRESS MADE
Work together to deliver shared solutions, priorities and outcomes while reducing duplication and responding to financial pressures.	Partnership working and regional collaboration improved coordination, reduced duplication and supported sustainability. Further work is needed to strengthen integration and manage ongoing pressures.
Progress federation with Torfaen through the development and implementation of shared structures and services	Collaboration with Torfaen increased through shared services and regional roles, improving resilience and reducing duplication. Further work is needed to embed federated arrangements and maximise joint working benefits.
Sustainability remains a challenge due to reliance on grant-funded posts.	Partnership working, regional collaboration and improved commissioning strengthened sustainability. However, reliance on grant-funded posts and ongoing funding pressures remain challenges.
Develop new preventative, community-based approaches to help manage demand	Preventative and community-based approaches improved early support, promoted independence and helped manage demand. Further work is needed to expand their impact.
Register both residential homes with CIW and support local placements for children with complex needs.	Local residential provision supported six children and enabled some to remain closer to home. However, placement matching challenges continue to limit local placement opportunities.

WHAT PROGRESS HAVE WE MADE ON LAST YEAR'S 'AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT'

LAST YEAR'S AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT	PROGRESS MADE
Continue to implement the Children Looked After Strategy (CLA) and monitor numbers to ensure a downward trend	Continued to implement the Children Looked After Strategy (CLA) which has enabled strengthened oversight and care planning arrangements. However, admissions to care increased and CLA numbers remained stable, highlighting the need for continued focus on prevention and family support.
Continue to progress partnership working with neighbouring authorities to ensure services are sustainable into the future	Partnership working with neighbouring authorities and Torfaen improved resilience and reduced duplication. Further work is needed to embed these arrangements and support long-term sustainability.
Robustly monitor budget and grant information and address areas of overspend as they arise	Improved budget monitoring and commissioning strengthened financial management and value in Adult Services. However, Children's Services remains an area for development, with a need for stronger financial management. Budget pressures from increasing demand, workforce challenges, and reliance on grant funding remain ongoing challenges.
Deliver recommended improvements following Care Inspectorate Wales and Audit Wales Inspections	Inspection and audit recommendations drove improvements in performance, safeguarding and service quality.Inspection and audit recommendations have supported improvements in performance, safeguarding and service quality. These recommendations continue to be monitored and reported to the leadership team and through the democratic process.
Continue to maintain high performance in child protection and Children Looked After services.	Strong performance was maintained across child protection, safeguarding and statutory visits. Dedicated teams strengthened oversight and decision-making, ensuring effective support despite rising demand.

2026/27 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT



IMPROVEMENT AREA ONE

- Continue to maintain a focus on independence and prevention.
- Continue to improve service quality and digital innovation.
- Support a sustainable and resilient workforce.
- Ensure services remain person-centred.



IMPROVEMENT AREA TWO

- Increase access to early help, carers' assessments and assistive technology.
- Improve safeguarding outcomes while delivering the commitments set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- Strengthen commissioning arrangements and local care provision.



IMPROVEMENT AREA THREE

- Expand MDT Coordinators across additional GP practices to improve coordinated care.
- Strengthen regional data sharing to support planning and service sustainability.
- Increase community involvement in preventative service design and delivery, supporting communities to deliver the right universal support for their residents.



IMPROVEMENT AREA FOUR

- Continue to Improve the systems and processes in place to support Children and Families.
- Enhance early help and family support pathways to prevent needs escalating.
- Develop respite and shared lives opportunities further through service commissioning and community partnerships.

FURTHER INFORMATION

INSPECTIONS AND REVIEWS

Close links with the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and Audit Wales have continued during 25/26.

During the year, Blaenau Gwent Adult and Childrens Services received the following reports from Audit Wales:

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council – Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements Follow-up Report **link**

During the year, Blaenau Gwent Adult and Childrens Services received the following reports from Care Inspectorate Wales:

Local Authority Improvement Check Letter - BGCBC Adult Services **link**

Inspection Report South East Wales Adoption Service **link**

Inspection Report Augusta House **link**

Inspection Report Cwrt Mytton **link**

Progress following recommendations from inspections continues to be monitored in the Council's service plans and reported through the democratic process.

Progress against ongoing recommendations from external Audit Reports:
Adults, Communities and Well-being Scrutiny Committee link
Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Committee link

FURTHER INFORMATION

COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS

While we aim to provide high-quality services, we recognise that things can sometimes go wrong and that our service may not always meet the standards people expect. The Council has a robust system for capturing and dealing with complaints and ensuring that these are appropriately managed so that clear learning and improvements can be achieved.

The table below summaries the number of complaints that were received by Children and Adult Services during 2025/26. The table shows the number of complaints that were closed at stage 1 and 2 of the complaints procedure and identifies how many were closed within timescale. 19 complaints were received during 2025/26 and six were upheld. The remaining complaints were either carried forward from 2024/25 or remained open at year end and were therefore carried over to 2026/27.

DEPARTMENT	NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED	CLOSED AT STAGE 1	CLOSED AT STAGE 2	NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS CLOSED WITHIN TIMESCALE
Children's Services	15	4	15	4
Adult Services	4	3	0	3

REFERENCING OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Corporate plan
- Adults, Communities and Well-being Democratic meetings
- Children, Young People and Families Democratic Meetings
- Gwent Regional Partnership Board
- Care Inspectorate Wales
- Audit Wales

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

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