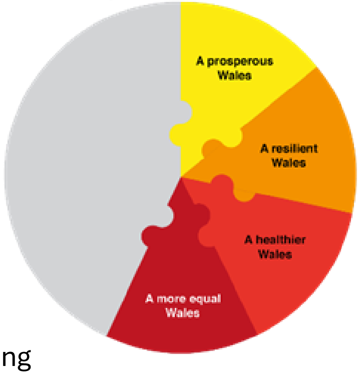
Well-being Objective 1

Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent



Why This Is Important as an Area of Focus - Improving the quality and provision of teaching and learning is vitally important to ensure the service is achieving ambitious outcomes for all. The Council will continue to invest in services in order to support economic development and regeneration in order to provide opportunities for local people and businesses.

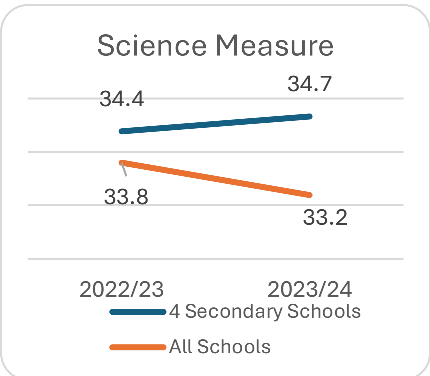
What We Aim to Achieve – An increase in the resilience of the community, providing high quality educational and skills opportunities to create a thriving economy from birth onwards, minimising dependence and maximising independence. The authority aims to ensure that all children and young people are given the best start in life, enabling them to grow into fruitful adults living a healthy and fulfilling life whilst contributing to society and forming a valuable part of their community.

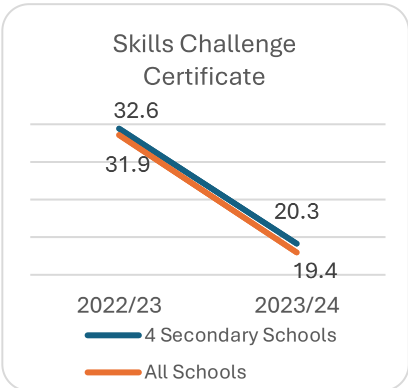
How well are we doing?

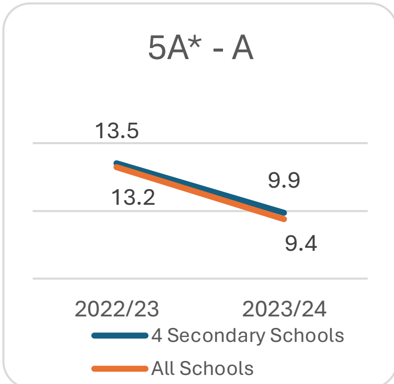
The following narrative provides an evaluative reflection of the activity, undertaken throughout 2024/25, across service areas that directly support this Well-being Objective. The narrative reflects what has gone well but also, and more importantly, where we are experiencing challenges. These challenges have then been collated together at the end of each section. These areas will be identified as areas of focus moving forward and will be reported as part of our next Self-Assessment, as well as performance monitoring throughout the year.

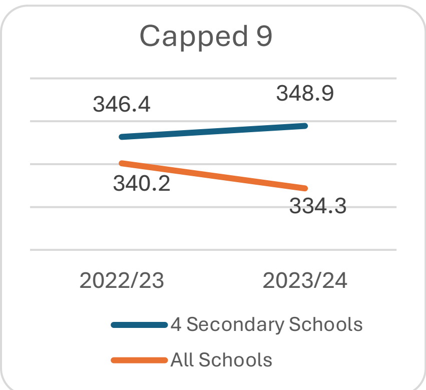
Raising attainment within our schools

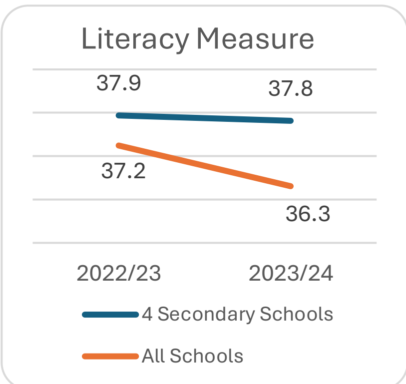
In 2024 all Key Stage 4 examination indicators declined when compared to 2023, as it did across Wales. Performance was, for the most part, in line with Welsh government modelled estimates. The majority of schools' performance in the Capped Points score, Literacy measure and Skills Challenge, exceeded that of the family average, with half the schools exceeding it in the Numeracy and Science measures. However, no school performed above the family average in relation to the 5A*-A measure. Some examples are shown below:

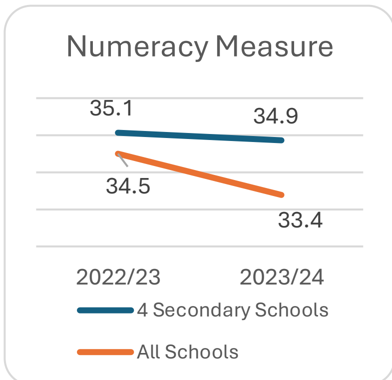






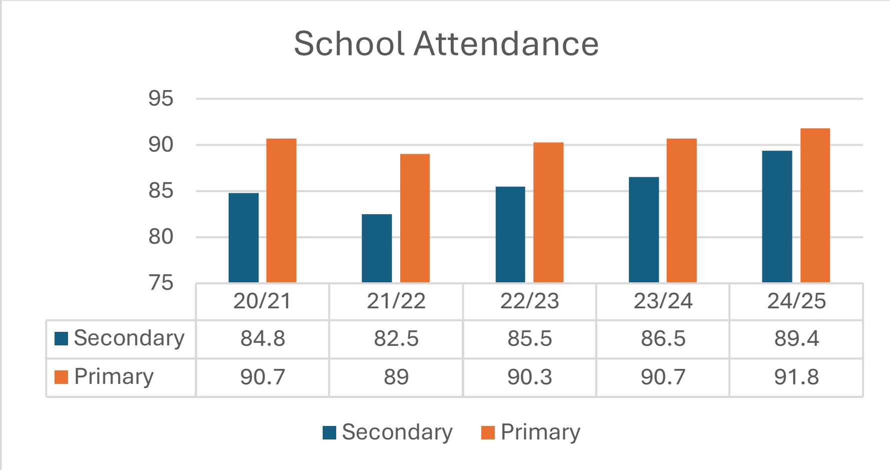






(Note: the significant decline in the Skills Challenge Certificate measure was due to 1 Secondary School not entering any pupils for the qualification and the cohort number still having to be used in the calculation)

Increasing Pupil Attendance



On an annual basis school attendance is showing an increase in both primary and secondary schools. Attendance figures in Blaenau Gwent are mirroring those of national trends. Incidents of fixed term exclusions and the number of days lost during the year decreased in secondary schools when compared with the previous year. This is the opposite for Children Looked After (CLA) whereby the number of incidents and days lost increased. The primary reason why exclusions are issued continues to be for persistent disruptive behaviour particularly in respect of secondary aged pupils. 15 primary schools issued exclusions this year compared to 17 schools for the same period last year, but despite this, both the number of exclusions and days lost have continued to increase. The Education Welfare Service are working closely with those schools to support early intervention to further reduce exclusions.

Data analysis	Number of Exclusions (Inc/Dec)	Days of Exclusion (Inc/Dec)	Permanent Exclusions (Inc/Dec)
Secondary	625 (-243)	769 (-280)	8 (+3)
Primary	220 (+45)	291 (+25.5)	2 (-1)
Special Schools	79 (+56)	113 (+57.5)	0
Increase/ Decrease (-)	**-142**	**-197**	**2**

There has been an increase in the number of exclusions and days lost in both Special Schools, although the majority of exclusions relate to one school. The Education Welfare Service are working with the school to look at support that can be provided to address reasons behind exclusions. The 3 main reasons for exclusions across all settings are:

- persistent disruptive behaviour (287);
- verbal abuse/threatening behaviour against an adult (179); and
- physical assault against a pupil (153).

Note - When analysing exclusion data, it can include learners who are excluded more than once.

Working with our schools and communities to improve attendance is a core priority for the Education Directorate. The Council are running a media campaign this year #everydaymatters to highlight the importance of good attendance and to direct families to support.

The Council introduced an attendance pathway in September 2023 and most schools that have implemented all aspects of the pathway have seen an increase to their attendance rates. The Education Welfare Team will continue to support all schools to use the Attendance Pathway this academic year. The Education Welfare Team will also continue to work closely with schools this year, undertaking planned activities such as visiting families to support them where there are attendance concerns.

Schools causing concern

At the start of the academic year 2024/25 and continuing, one school was in a category, The River Centre. The school is in receipt of enhanced support from the Local Authority and the Education Achievement Service (EAS).

During the year Brynbach Primary was removed from Estyn follow up in April 2025 and All Saints Primary are waiting for their follow up meeting with Estyn which should take place in Autumn Term 2025. It is expected that the school will be removed from follow up. Following an inspection in the summer term, Abertillery Learning Community was placed in significant improvement.

An additional 3 schools are receiving targeted support from the Local Authority /EAS as identified during the Professional Discussion process. These schools received support and challenge on a half termly basis, in order to monitor progress and improvements. Professional Discussions are an important way for the LA to engage with schools to ensure their priorities for improvement are being implemented and are having impact, and to identify and offer appropriate support where relevant.

Entitlement to Free School Meals (eFSM)

Blaenau Gwent has consistently had amongst the highest numbers of pupils entitled to Free School Meals, when compared to other Local Authorities in Wales. An anomaly in the process, by which statuses were being recorded artificially, inflated the numbers in 2020/21 and 2021/22, with numbers now returning to pre-Covid levels.

Indicator	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Entitlement to FSM (Pupils aged 5 – 15)	25.5%	31.4%	33.3%	24.6%	24.1%	25.3%
Entitlement to FSM (All pupils)	23.7%	28.4%	30.3%	22.3%	21.9%	23.2%

Current levels of pupils entitled to FSM rank Blaenau Gwent as having the 6th highest local authority in Wales. This would appear to conflict with other measures of deprivation across Blaenau Gwent, compared to other Local Authorities, where levels of deprivation are higher than other local authorities.

Elected Home Education (EHE) Pupils

There has been an increase in the number of electively home-educated (EHE) children within Blaenau Gwent over the past few years. EHE pupils continue to be supported by the Education Welfare Service; this support will be monitored closely going forward to ensure that the number of visits continue to increase in line with the figures. There are currently 229 pupils on the EHE database compared to 158 for the same period last

year. This is an increase of 44.9%. 36 of these pupils are from the Gypsy Roma Traveller Community (GRT).

Children Looked After (CLA)

At the end of March 2025, 201 children were being looked after by the Local Authority. Although there has been a small decrease over the year, the number still remains high.

A total of 10 CLA (7%) experienced at least one or more non-transitional school moves during 2023/24. This is a decrease when compared with the previous academic year when the figure was 17 children (13%). Consistency of schooling continues to be considered as part of the matching process when a CLA moves placement. Transport is provided where necessary to ensure the stability of schooling. When a child does have to move school, processes are in place to ensure that delays in admissions are avoided, wherever possible.

At the end of academic year 2023/24:

- 141 children of statutory school age were looked after by Blaenau Gwent local authority. This is an increase compared with the previous year when the figure was 136;
- The majority of children who are looked after by Blaenau Gwent continue to be educated within Blaenau Gwent and attend mainstream schools. A small proportion of our CLA attend more specialist education settings;
- There has been a further increase in the number of CLA accessing Local Authority maintained special school placements - a total of 14 in 2023-2024 compared with 11 in 2022-2023 and 9 in 2021-2022;
- There has been a further reduction in the number of CLA attending independent school settings outside Blaenau Gwent – a total of 2 in 2023/24, compared with 3 in 2022/23 and 7 in 2021-2022;
- Almost all learners achieved recognised qualifications at the end of their statutory school studies in 2023-2024 with the majority now engaged in post 16 educational and/ or training opportunities; and
- During academic year 2023/24, 67% of Personal Education Plans for newly accommodated children were initiated within statutory timescales. This is a decrease when compared with the previous year when the figure was 88%. A total of 8 plans were not initiated within 10 days. This was as a result of 4 learners being Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children who were not in school at the point of becoming looked after. The 4 learners have since been admitted to schools and have education plans in place.

Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

- The Local Authority has made good progress in aligning the ALN legislative duties to the reform programme. There are only 20 outstanding Statements of Special Educational Needs to be converted to Local Authority Individual Development Plans (Spring 25), compared to 140 in the same period last year.
- In most cases ALN duties are now completed within statutory timescales with only a few being inhibited by required extensions.
- All required processes to allow the Local Authority and schools to fulfil ALN legislative duties (0-25) have been fully developed and are in place – these are effectively monitored and evaluated on a biannual basis to ensure changes can be made to align with any changes needed as the new duties evolve.
- Training, development and review is ongoing in terms of ALN implementation and the support available from the Local Authority to the schools is comprehensive and increasingly responsive to monitoring and evaluation conducted by Officers.
- Most Additional Learning Needs Coordinators and the Early Years Additional Learning Needs Coordinators have appropriate knowledge regarding the importance of early identification, planning and carrying out high-quality transition activities in order to ensure a smooth pathway to the next step of their education.
- There is good progress in many Autistic Spectrum Disorder settings with including learners into the mainstream setting, giving a strong platform for re-inclusion.
- Most pupils in Learning/Learner Resource Base make at least expected progress in line with their abilities and stage of development.

- Phase 1 and 2 of the ALN Resource Base Review and consultation have been successfully completed with 40 additional ASD places created across primary, Welsh medium and secondary settings – this has effectively reduced the number of out of county placements and numbers on waiting lists.
- The purpose of the River Centre has been successfully re-evaluated, resulting in all pupils being single registered since January 2024.
- Collaborative working between education, social care, and health has improved which has led to better early identification of additional learning needs and complex health needs.
- In many cases Post 16 ALN transition planning is working well; however, in a few cases this has not been effective.
- The vision for inclusion, which aligns with the ALN Code of Practice, in our mainstream schools, is supported by the ALN Implementation Lead Officer. In addition, the Inclusion Team commissions the Inclusive Practice Service to continue supporting schools on a systemic basis and individual pupils where required.

Education Finance

The Council aims to deliver effective and efficient services within the financial constraints. The Local Authority has a track record of spending within its education budget in recent years, with relatively small underspends for the past three years against the overall education budget.

The Council allocated £53.705 million to schools in 2024/25 via the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) to provide high quality education and to improve pupil outcomes. In addition, Blaenau Gwent continues to make a financial contribution to the regional EAS arrangements which was £283,537 for the financial year. Processes such as monthly Local Authority /EAS Partnership meetings are in place to ensure the Local Authority can hold the EAS to account for the support and challenge they provide to schools and ensure value for money for the Local Authority.

The ISB in 2025/26 is £7.274m higher than it was in the previous year. This is a 13.54% increase and is made up of:

- £2.392m cost pressure funding (to fund the development of new resource bases and prior years school pressures with regards pay awards and utilities);
- £963k transferred into the ISB from other Education Budgets (due to the River Centre moving to Single Status registration); and
- £3.919m in relation to Grants transferring in from Welsh Government and to fund the current years pay award and increments.

School balances dropped from £1.204 million at the end of the 2023/24 to a deficit position of £1.321 million at the end of the 2024/25. The overall level has reduced by £2.525 million, with 10 schools in a deficit position.

- Primary school balances have dropped from £1.669 million to £0.489 million;
- Secondary school balances have fallen from £38,000 to a deficit position of £177,000;
- All through school balances have dropped from a deficit of £597,000 to a deficit of £1.183 million; and
- Special schools have dropped from £94,000 to a deficit of £450,000.

The Council has committed to funding teachers' pay awards for future, however there is a risk that school balances will be depleted further by March 2026. Many Schools are unable to produce a balanced budget for 2025/2026. Given the level of deficits, Schools are being supported to produce deficit reduction plans over the short to medium term which will identify financial efficiencies and the impact of those efficiencies. These plans will be considered by the Deputy Chief Executive Blaenau Gwent and Strategic Director Children, Young People and Families and the Corporate Director of

Corporate Services. School cost pressures will continue to be reported within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

Deprivation and Educational Outcomes

The Local Authority provides a range of support to tackle inequalities in education experiences and outcomes for children living in poverty and data is used well to target interventions appropriately. This work includes providing free school meals, period equity, vulnerable learners support, Youth Service and youth support services, family engagement officers, school holiday provision and post 16 transport. There are also many strengths in the services to support the well-being of children and young people and to promote positive relationships. Support has been provided to schools to provide an environment where health and well-being is at the heart of the curriculum, ensuring support and appropriate interventions are accessible, with a specific emphasis on vulnerable and disadvantaged learner categories. A whole school approach self-evaluation tool has been rolled out which encourages schools to assess the key barriers to learning and to provide specific support relating to the emotional and mental well-being of the child. It encourages schools to question how inequality can impact on the learning and life outcomes of a child and fosters an inclusive and caring environment.

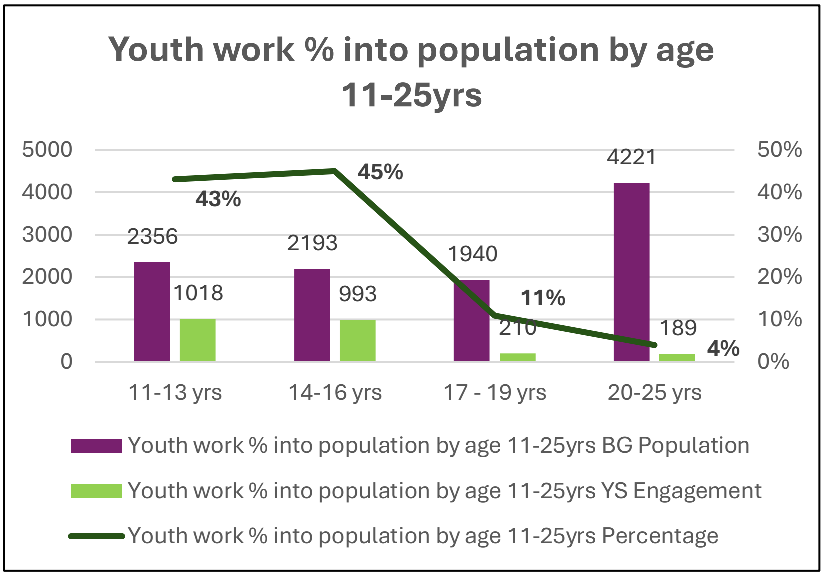
Improving outcomes for our children and young people

7 schools were inspected in the academic year 2024/25. 6 of the schools inspected received positive Estyn reports and were not placed in a category. The schools were Glanhowy, Saint Josephs, Glyncoed, Sofrydd, Bro Helyg and Willowtown. Although Estyn identified a number of strengths when it inspected Abertillery Learning Community , in particular the strong leadership from the headteacher, the school was placed in the category significant improvement.

Youth Service

Blaenau Gwent Youth Service offers a comprehensive range of services for young people aged 11-25 years, centred upon voluntary engagement and the provision of informal learning. This approach promotes personal, social and emotional development whilst raising aspirations through the achievement of positive outcomes.

In 2024, over 22% of the youth population regularly accessed youth service learning opportunities, ranking 2nd for reach across the region and 7th across Wales.



Young people directly influence the service and set the direction every year. As a result of their feedback, the service restructured to mandate all full-time staff to work a minimum of two evenings per week, which has led to an increase in the number of youth clubs from 4 to 9. As a result, young people are able to access support within a reasonable distance from wherever they live, and this has had a positive impact on levels of engagement

Vulnerable young people are well supported by the Youth Service to achieve above expected attendance, wellbeing and post 16 transition. Support for young people identified at risk of disengaging from their learning in school and college is effective, as demonstrated by all pupils supported remaining in their setting (661 pupils). Young people accessing the new EOTAS provision, delivered by the Youth Service, have shown significant improvements in their attendance, wellbeing, and attitude towards

learning. During the first term, there was an 80% improvement reported across six core areas, with an average attendance of 90% in the EOTAS (educated other than at school) provision compared to 82% in mainstream schools. Of the original cohort, 80% returned to their mainstream school on a full timetable. The 2 remaining learners were identified not suitable to return with 1 requiring an Individual Development Plan.

Support for Electively Home Educated learners is strong with 36 electively home educated young people accessing two social groups offering non-formal activities, designed to reduce social isolation and promote wellbeing. For many participants, these sessions serve as their only opportunity for social interaction with peers. All 16-year-olds transitioned successfully into Post 16 provision.

The Positive Futures Programme is successful at preventing permanent exclusions, with no young people who accessed this provision being excluded in the year to date.

Engagement with Welsh language youth provision has increased by 60% (160 young people compared to 30 young people the previous year).

The Youth Service leads on implementing the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) and this is supported by the strategic multi-agency Raising Aspirations Group and implementation of the Early Identification Tool, providing prevention and support for young people at risk of becoming or currently NEET and or homeless.

The early identification and support for young people at risk of becoming NEET or homeless from as early as year 2 has proven highly effective. This approach has led to a consistent reduction in the number of young people becoming NEET, with the rate decreasing to 2.1% in 2024, which is below the Wales average of 2.4% and an improvement from the previous year's rate of 2.5%. The approach to this is well embedded and the levels have been consistently low for over 10 years, surpassing expected outcomes for the area. As part of this approach, young people are supported well in their transition from school to Post 16 and these transitions are sustained in most cases.

Participation is a strength within the Local Authority, and many young people are able to express their views and influence issues that affect them.

The organisation has embedded 'The Right Way' approach into its integrated Impact assessments (IIA), ensuring that Children's Rights are a core consideration in all service changes, budget decisions, and new initiatives.

In September 2024 the participation function transferred from the corporate policy team to the Youth Service. It had been identified that the reach needed to broaden to include more young people with diverse needs. The move has enabled a more integrated approach to increasing youth participation across Education and the Council.

The Gypsy Roma Traveller Community Education Service

The Gypsy, Roma Traveller (GRT) Service comprises of a family liaison officer and a commissioned education support teacher. The service continues to provide one to one, and small group support. The service supports children and young people academically both within lessons and through withdrawal, and this support is suitably targeted for each individual pupil. These specific lessons are reviewed within meetings between the schools designated staff and the GRT Team. During meetings, assessment data and other areas of the child/young person's education, such as attendance and exclusions is reviewed.

The focus of the literacy intervention is to identify through baseline assessment and support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners who are underachieving in reading and spelling. The service aims to improve literacy outcomes through tailored one-to-one or small group support, with regular assessment to monitor progress. The impact of the literacy intervention has been very positive, with clear evidence of progress in both reading and spelling. 94% of supported learners showed improvement in reading, and more than half improved in spelling. Four pupils have exceeded expected outcomes. These results demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention, and the importance of continued targeted support to ensure sustained progress.

Attendance for Gypsy and Traveller pupils has risen to 74.52% this academic year, compared to 73.15% last year — a sign of steady progress. This increase reflects the impact of continued monitoring and targeted interventions through a collaborative approach with families and the education welfare service.

A GRT Padlet has been developed to provide schools and practitioners with easy access to resources focused on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture. This online tool contains policies, training, referral criteria and signposts to professional learning. The aim is to raise awareness, promote understanding, and support more inclusive learning environments. Feedback on the Padlet has been very positive, with practitioners reporting increased confidence and engagement when working with GRT learners.

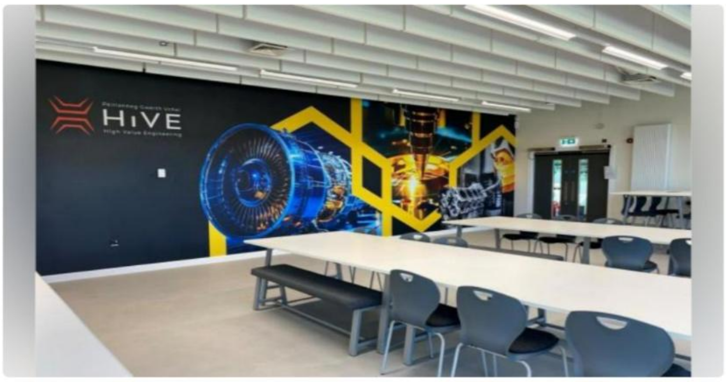
Economic Growth

Strategic employment sites and growth

Significant progress has been made, working collaboratively with Welsh and UK governments to attract and secure major employers to the area. The recent completion of the Heads of the Valley Road improvement, has provided a catalyst to secure the northern part of the county borough as a growth area. Further development work has taken place to firmly establish the area as a cluster growth area for job creation. Working in partnership with WG, planning permission was obtained on a strategic site and an investment proposal is being developed with a potential glass recycling employer

High Value Engineering (HiVE) Site (Hi-Tech Post 16 Education Facility)

Construction on the HiVE site in Ebbw Vale was on target to be completed by October 2024, however in September 2024 the developer, ISG, went into administration which impacted the delivery timeline and had financial implications. Owing to this, the site came back under the management of the council. In January 2025, following financial support from Tech Valleys, the council BESL (CMB) was awarded the contract to complete the works.
The project is now complete and ready to welcome students in September 2025.



As part of HiVE a series of expansion programmes were undertaken during 2024- 2025. As part of this the Welsh Education Minister Jack Sheppard visited Ebbw Fawr Learning Community Secondary Phase to view the Hi- Tech equipment on offer and engage with local students.

In response to an increase in demand for hybrid working space the Council launched Goldworks in October 2024 providing workspace options, business support services, hot-desking, private offices, and meeting rooms equipped for freelancers, startups, and local businesses. The facility also serves as a venue for business support events and local networking meetings.

Blaenau Gwent Council – STEM Facilitation Project

The Blaenau Gwent STEM Facilitation Project connects local schools with businesses to inspire students and prepare them for future STEM careers. Launched in 2021 and initially piloted in the Ebbw Fawr school cluster, its success led to full rollout across Blaenau Gwent. The project supports 'industry in schools' programmes, helping students gain real-world insights and skills aligned with workplace needs. Following additional funding, the project has been extended and will now run until 2028.

QuickStart

The QuickStart Programme, supported by the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), offers six-month paid work placements within Blaenau Gwent for unemployed individuals aged 16 and over. The initiative is designed to provide participants with meaningful work experience and the opportunity to develop key employability skills, thereby enhancing their prospects of securing sustained employment.

For 2024/25:

- 55 new participants enrolled to develop employability skills;
- 27 started a 6-month work placement;
- 25 received ongoing support on placement from 2023/24;
- Placements offered through 45 employers;
- 9 progressed onto an Apprenticeship; and
- 10 have remained employed 12 months after starting their placement (data is still being collected due to timescale of programme).

Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF)

The SPF Funding programme is being used to support the delivery of a number of key projects across the Council. These include support for communities, towns, community groups (through GAVO), business and SME support and the Employment and Skills Programme, working with both internal departments and partner organisations to deliver projects which were previously supported through ESF and other EU funding programmes. The total funding for Blaenau Gwent over the past 3 years including £603, 816 administration is £27,847,691 some of the key projects supported through SPF include; the refurbishment of Brynmawr Tennis Courts, Garnlydan and Glyncoed playgrounds. The funding has also been used to fund our community safety wardens, helping our residents to feel safe.

Priority	Allocation over 3-year period 2022- 2025
People and Skills	£9,172,303
Supporting Local Businesses	£7,529,504
Community and Place	£7,284,373
Multiply	£3,257,695

A transition year of funding has been approved for 2025-26 with a reduced budget and work is ongoing to understand what future funding will be available from the UK Government post March 2026.

Planning & sustainable development within our communities

Local Development Plan (LDP)

Work has continued to progress the Council's new local development plan and is scheduled to progress further during 25/26. The LDP provides the spatial framework for the Council over the next 10 years and is a key ingredient that unlocks the Council's economic and place-based objectives.

Placemaking

The following activity has taken place:

- Ebbw Vale - work continues with the development of the delivery plan. This has included exploring options for key sites and engagement with stakeholders. Future engagement will be undertaken with Design Commission for Wales;
- Brynmawr - the placemaking plan has been approved by Scrutiny and Cabinet and now work is underway on the development of the delivery plan. Several projects have been completed in recent years including development of the former NMC factory site.;
- Tredegar - The delivery plan contains the proposed list of projects to achieve the overall vision for the town. Some projects are already underway and expected to be completed in 2025. These include the Grade 2 listed Former Tredegar Town Hall and the walkway;
- Abertillery – Following the approval of the Placemaking plan, work has commenced on the delivery of short-term projects within the plan, including the pedestrianisation of Somerset Street (for outdoor dining), creation of public space at Jubilee Square, improvement works to Abertillery Arcade and completion of new Abertillery Library (in former Trinity Chapel); and
- Funding has been identified for the development of a Blaina Placemaking Plan and a tender process to secure the support for the plan's development will be undertaken in 2025/26.

Council Property and assets

The Council will continue with its plans to maximise efficiencies in the use of its remaining corporate assets - the General Office, the Energy Centre, ViTCC and Blaina ICC - and to develop its hybrid working model, supporting the Medium-Term Financial Plan and Workforce Strategy, focussing on:

- The Council's Workforce Strategy;
- Current and future demands for service-based and agile-working staff across the Council;
- The need for hybrid meeting technology for day-to-day activities; and
- The needs of customers & Members.

The Industrial portfolio of 16 industrial estates comprising 191 lettable units, is jointly managed by the Business and Innovation Team within Regeneration and the Estates and the teams continue to work closely with Technical Services to improve the assets and increase occupation, estimated at 95% occupation and accommodating many SME's and about 800 jobs in total.

The Council is developing a Property Strategy which will seek to align property decision making with the Council's key strategies and objectives and to set performance targets that will be monitored annually through the Asset Management Plan

A Corporate Property and Asset Management Group has been established to discuss accommodation needs, building status and potentials for cost savings. Our focus is upon enabling the community to use and manage wherever possible, community-based buildings. Officers have made great progress in moving from our many short-term leases or tenancies to longer term leases as well as optimising the use of Community Asset Transfers (CATs Progress on the CATs include:

Completed CATs (in the last two years)	Close to Completion	New CATs Being Processed
• Rassau Resource Centre – lease to Rassau Resource Community Centre CIC. • Beaufort Welfare - upper Changing Room & Rugby Pitch. Lease to Beaufort RFC Fields and Facilities Ltd.. • Roseheyworth Field – changing rooms and pitches. Lease to Tyleryan Belles Sports Association Limited. • Cwm Community Allotments – lease to Barefoot Farm CIC Blaina Institute - Blaina Community Institute.	• Beaufort Colts AFC Fields & Facilities Ltd - Hilltop Fields Pavilion • Beaufort Welfare – lower Changing Room & Football Pitch. Lease to be assigned to Glyn Ebbw Fields & Training Facilities Ltd.	• Wetland area at Jim Owen Pavilion, Cwmtillery • Windsor Road Field • Six Bells Tennis • Brynithel Recreation Ground • Coedcae Scout Hall – • Brynmawr Welfare – football pitch, pavilion and bowling green -

Actions and priorities for 2025/26

The recently approved federated council model brings a unique opportunity to reframe our economy and place vision and priorities for both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen. Work has already commenced to develop an overarching "Blueprint for Growth" strategy that aims to maximise investment opportunities, built upon the local distinctiveness of both areas and its strategic location within the region, whilst simultaneously building and sustaining vibrant communities through our placemaking programme.
This strategy will also provide the framework to establish future areas of work and priorities to ensure we make the biggest impact, whilst operating firmly within our financial and staff resources.

Key priorities

1. Develop and agree Blueprint for Growth
2. Establish work programmes and outcomes under the four pillars of – Investment, Placemaking, Planning and Property.
3. Develop an appropriate staff structure to deliver the Blueprint for Growth across both councils.

Key Challenges Identified for Action in 2025/26

- Schools are producing deficit reduction plans over the short to medium term which will identify financial efficiencies and the impact of those efficiencies. This will be reported as part of next self-assessment
- There has been an increase in the number of electively home-educated (EHE) children within Blaenau Gwent over the past few years. This needs to be monitored closely going forward to ensure that the number of visits increase in line with the figures, this is monitored as part of our performance indicators.
- Continue to support the one school in a category, The River Centre.
- Provide enhanced support to Children Looked After owing to the increase in both the number of exclusions and days lost.
- In 2024 all Key Stage 4 examination indicators declined when compared to 2023, as it did across Wales, no school performed above the family average in relation to the 5A*- A measure. This will be a key priority for the Council during 2025/26.
- The Council is developing a Property Strategy which will seek to align property decision making with the Council's key strategies and objectives and to set performance targets that will be monitored annually through the Asset Management Plan. It is anticipated that the Strategy and Plan will be presented to Scrutiny Committee in the Autumn 2025.


MARKET HALL CINEMA