

ANNUAL
SELF-ASSESSMENT
& WELL-BEING REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
2025/26

*A future without inequality, where everyone thrives in a fair,
inclusive, and resilient community*



Executive Summary

A year of progress and reflection

This Executive Summary highlights our performance during 2025/26, identifies areas for improvement, and looks ahead to the organisational change required up to 2027 and beyond. The assessment considers how effectively the Council is exercising its functions, using its resources and maintaining governance arrangements that support continuous improvement.

The report has been written to show activity against the Council's four Well-being Objectives as identified within the Corporate Plan 2022/27:

- **Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent;**
- **Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities;**
- **An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place; and**
- **Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient.**

During 2025/26, the Council adopted the Blaenau Gwent Deal, strengthened its federated approach with Torfaen, progressed its role as a Marmot Council and moved the Communities Approach into early implementation. Together, these developments support a shift towards prevention, shared responsibility, stronger community involvement and more evidence-led services.

An overview of progress against each Well-being Objective during 2025/26 is set out below:



Overall, for 2025/26, the majority of actions have been achieved. However, we fully recognise that we still have a number of challenges to address and further work is needed to fully achieve each of our long-term aims. A full report setting out in more detail the progress made against each of our Well-being Objectives was received by Scrutiny in July 2026 and is available [here](#).



Well-being Objective 1

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

Key achievements for the year

- ✓ Key Stage 4 performance improved, including a 2.1 percentage point increase in pupils achieving A* to A grades.
- ✓ The River Centre was removed from special measures; All Saints Primary and Bryn Bach Primary were removed from Estyn review.
- ✓ School attendance has improved overall since 2024, with primary attendance increasing from 91.4% to 92.1% and remaining stable in 2025/26, while secondary attendance improved from 87% to 89%.
- ✓ Fixed-term exclusions and days lost through exclusion reduced overall.
- ✓ Youth Service contacts increased 22% to 29,917; 97% of those supported through early identification progressed into education, employment or training.
- ✓ The EOTAS pilot supported 21 young people, with 95% returning to mainstream education.
- ✓ Aspire supported 15 internal and 40 external apprentices and received national recognition.
- ✓ The HiVE STEM Centre opened and regeneration, placemaking and joint planning activity progressed

Key Challenges

- Although school attendance has improved, attendance remains below target, with primary attendance at 92.1% against the 93% target and secondary attendance at 89% against the 91% target. Continued support is needed to address barriers to attendance and sustain improvement across schools
- Fifteen schools reported deficit balances, with the overall deficit reaching £2.965 million, although more than £1 million better than forecast.
- School stability and special-school placements for children looked after require continued attention.
- The NEET rate was 2.6%, above the Welsh average of 2.1%.
- The end of Shared Prosperity Fund activity creates uncertainty around future employability and skills support.
- Industrial unit occupancy was 83%, with further work needed to improve use of business space.



Well-being Objective 2

Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities

Key achievements of the year

- ✓ Non-spend-based carbon emissions fell to 10,677 tonnes, 28% below the base year and 6% lower than the previous year.
- ✓ The Decarbonisation Plan midpoint review and new Power BI dashboard strengthened carbon and energy monitoring.
- ✓ Solar installations progressed across schools and leisure sites, with funding secured for the Works District Heating Network.
- ✓ Biodiversity work moved into practical delivery through habitat, species, monitoring, school and community projects.
- ✓ Reuse and repair initiatives included the Community Kit Room, Library of Things, bike repair events and The Den.
- ✓ The Cwm Flood Task Force was established and progress made against 19 flood improvement actions.
- ✓ Planning performance remained strong, with most applications determined on time

Challenges

- Recycling fell from 68.89% to 67.23%, below the 70% target, subject to NRW verification.
- Residual waste increased while key recycling streams reduced - reductions in kerbside dry recycling, HWRC recycling and commercial recycling.
- The Council could face a financial penalty if performance remains below the statutory target.
- Net zero delivery remains complex because of costs, data gaps, procurement emissions and solar monitoring.
- Further improvements are required in flood communication, infrastructure planning and operational readiness.
- Capacity pressures in biodiversity and planning need to be managed.



Well-being Objective 3

Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient

Main achievements

- ✓ Community Hubs and Warm Hubs provided local access to advice, digital support, activities and signposting.
- ✓ A review established an evidence base for a more coordinated, community-first prevention model.
- ✓ Assistive Technology helped more residents live independently at home, supported by the replacement of analogue lifeline alarms with digitally compatible units ahead of the national switchover
- ✓ Flying Start expanded to a further 150 children across 15 areas.
- ✓ More than £350,000 was invested in playgrounds; 102 Disabled Facilities Grants were completed with around £880,000 investment.
- ✓ A new Corporate Parenting Strategy was co-produced with care-experienced children and young people.
- ✓ Homelessness prevention expanded through leasing, Housing First, STAR Flats and property acquisitions.
- ✓ The Community Food Strategy was developed through the Blaenau Gwent Food Partnership

Challenges

- Demand and complexity remain high across adult and children's services.
- There were 202 children looked after at year end, while admissions increased from 53 to 73.
- More local fostering, adoption and residential options are needed.
- Housing pressures continue around supply, affordability, private renting, adaptations and supported housing.
- Engagement with unpaid carers remains low.
- The impact of prevention and community hubs needs stronger evidence and performance measures.
- Community safety work requires stronger data, sustained public reporting and targeted action.



Well-being Objective 4

An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services at the right time and in the right place

Main achievements

- ✓ The Council set a balanced 2025/26 budget without using general reserves.
- ✓ Federated working with Torfaen strengthened alignment across leadership, governance, performance, workforce, finance and digital arrangements.
- ✓ Workforce sickness reduced by 1.5 days and around 73% of staff had no sickness absence.
- ✓ Of 105 external audit recommendations, 75 were completed or moved into business as usual and none were significantly behind target.
- ✓ The Audit and Risk Manager provided Reasonable Assurance over governance, risk management and control arrangements.
- ✓ Corporate safeguarding, risk management and counter-fraud arrangements were strengthened.
- ✓ Digital improvements included the AI Front Door, improved Council Tax forms, the Single View of Child dashboard and Teams Telephony across 24 schools.
- ✓ Complaints reporting and resident engagement were strengthened

Challenges

- The provisional outturn showed a £1.68 million adverse variance, particularly in Children's Services and school finances.
- Future budget gaps require savings, service redesign, prevention and demand management.
- The 2025/26 accounts will not meet the usual statutory deadlines, although a recovery plan is in place.
- Mental health remained the leading cause of sickness absence, with vacancies and capacity pressures in key services.
- Employee accidents and incidents increased from 251 to 293, although HSE-reportable incidents reduced.
- Contact Centre demand, call handling and waiting times remain under pressure.
- Freedom of Information timeliness dipped to 89.3%, with 34 requests outstanding.
- Clearer evidence is needed of resident benefits from federated transformation.



Blaenau Gwent 'Deal' and Missions

The Blaenau Gwent Deal is a social contract between the Council, residents, businesses and partners, reshaping how the Council works by moving from “doing to” towards “doing with”. Rooted in shared responsibility, prevention, fairness and community power, it provides a prevention-first, community-centred and collaborative approach to delivering services and putting the Corporate Plan into practice.



The Deal will be delivered through five shared missions:

- **Mission 1: Early Years – Building Bright Futures**
- **Mission 2: Inspiring Lifelong Learning, Ambition and Resilience**
- **Mission 3: Well-being Through Community Leadership**
- **Mission 4: Thriving Economy and Vibrant Places**
- **Mission 5: Empowered Communities – Shared Power and Success**

More information on the Blaenau Gwent Deal and Missions can be found here: [Blaenau Gwent CBC](#)

Stories behind the work: what is new or strengthened because of The Deal

Objective 1 Mission 2	Sharing free school uniform and essentials within local communities Families can donate and access pre-loved school uniform and essential items through one local platform. This helps reduce costs, keeps usable items in circulation, and supports children to arrive at school equipped and ready to learn. Sharing and reusing items locally also helps reduce waste, tackle inequality and strengthen community connections.
Objective 1 Mission 4	Town Boost Town Boost brings residents, businesses and council teams together to improve local places through shared action and ownership. The first pilot in Somerset Street, Abertillery, delivered visible town-centre improvements, and learning from this will be used to extend the model to other town-centre locations.
Objective 1 Mission 4	Public Artwork and Murals Community-shaped murals are helping bring local identity, history and pride into public spaces across Ebbw Vale, Brynmawr, Tredegar and Blaina. Designed with residents and local groups, they support pride, belonging, connection and wider placemaking ambitions, with further community-led design planned for future locations.
Objective 2 Mission 5	Community-led woodland stewardship The Council and community woodland groups are working together to improve access, habitats, investment and participation at Sirhowy Hill. This shared stewardship model combines volunteer knowledge with council support, keeping valued green spaces accessible and welcoming while supporting biodiversity, volunteering, learning and well-being. Sirhowy Hill has achieved its first Green Flag Community Award, with further work planned to strengthen access, habitat management and volunteer development across both sites. https://vimeo.com/1209543662



Stories behind the work: what is new or strengthened because of The Deal

Objective 2

Mission 5

Storm Bert

Following Storm Bert in November 2024, which caused significant disruption in areas including Cwm, Cwmtillery and Llanhilleth, the Council reviewed its flood preparedness and emergency response arrangements. The review identified the need for improvements in operational readiness, communication, infrastructure planning and community resilience. In response, the Cwm Flood Task [Force](#) was established, demonstrating a practical community-led approach to emergency planning, flood protection and preparedness, linked to the Blaenau Gwent Deal.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBoAQDEGoic>

Objective 2

Mission 2

Lakeview Litter heroes

Lakeview Day Centre in Brynmawr has a group of dedicated volunteers who have registered with Keep Wales Tidy to establish a litter picking group. Supported by the Council's Community Outreach provision, every week volunteers carry out litter picking sessions that contribute to cleaner streets, safer public spaces and a more welcoming environment for all. <http://intranet/media/224870/CaseStudy-A4-2up-LakeView.jpg>

Objective 3

Mission 2

Using Young People's Voices to Shape Services

Care leavers were actively involved in shaping support through co-design with Personal Advisors in the 14+ Team. Their lived experience informed activities focused on well-being, resilience and practical life skills, strengthening confidence and independence. This approach will continue to ensure young people's voices influence future service development.

Objective 3

Mission 1

Breastfeeding Support

The 'Get Blaenau Gwent Breastfeeding' campaign continues to develop positively, working with health, education, business and voluntary sector partners to promote breastfeeding and strengthen local support. The data shows an encouraging upward trend since the campaign launched, with rates improving year-on-year and record monthly highs achieved. This suggests the partnership approach is helping to raise awareness, normalise breastfeeding and improve access to support across the borough.

www.youtube.com/watch?si=wwryZTVxbseWp2rm&v=xnD5mLiZFSM&feature=youtu.be

Objective 3

Mission 1

Pop In and Play

Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen have aligned Pop In & Play around a volunteer-supported model. This is strengthening community ownership, helping sustain local play and learning sessions, and enabling staff to focus support on families who need guidance around early development and school readiness. Both councils will continue embedding the model and tracking its impact.

Objective 3

Mission 3

Health and Well-being with Partners

Tai Calon now provides focused volunteer days to community groups delivering health and well-being outcomes. This helps turn local ideas and volunteer energy into sustainable activity linked to community priorities. Support for One Life Autism helped open a community café, creating opportunities for residents with autism and a



welcoming place to connect. The café now supports more than 50 residents, with numbers growing each week. Further Deal partnerships are planned with two Blaenau Gwent organisations, including Aneurin Leisure, with potential to extend the approach through Torfaen.

Delivering Our Priorities for 2026/27

The Corporate Plan sets out our key priorities for the year ahead and, for the first time, more directly embeds the principles of the Blaenau Gwent Deal.

- **Learning and Opportunity** – Improving outcomes for children and young people, with a particular emphasis on educational attainment, school attendance and financial recovery; supporting vulnerable learners; maintain youth, skills and employability pathways; and move regeneration, property and business-space plans into delivery
- **Reducing Inequality** - Strengthening prevention and early help, ensuring people receive support at the earliest opportunity and can remain independent for longer.
- **Building stronger, more resilient communities** - Increasing participation, volunteering and community leadership.
- **Supporting a thriving local economy and vibrant places** - Regeneration, investment, skills development and business growth.
- **Delivering our climate and nature commitments** - Improving recycling performance and supporting the transition to a greener, more sustainable future.
- **Improving access to Council services** - Combining high-quality digital services with accessible face-to-face and community-based support.
- **Maintaining strong governance, financial resilience and effective stewardship of public resources.**

In summary

Our Annual Self-Assessment shows that, as a Council, we are making progress while being open about the scale of challenges we face.

Over the next year, Blaenau Gwent Council will focus on turning its plans into practical action that improves outcomes for residents and communities. We will continue to deliver valued day-to-day services while placing greater emphasis on prevention, early support, community involvement, regeneration, climate commitments, digital access and strong governance. Guided by the Corporate Plan, Blaenau Gwent Deal, Marmot ambitions, the five Missions and our developing federation with Torfaen, we will work with residents, partners and communities to reduce inequality, strengthen resilience and ensure services remain sustainable for the future. Our progress will be measured by the difference we make to people's lives, not just by the activity we

**Produced by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
October 2026**

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