

# ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT & WELL-BEING REPORT 2025/26

OCTOBER 2026

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



## **Our Annual Self-Assessment & Well-Being Report 2025-26**

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Look for this icon throughout the document, when you see it, you can read about the great work that has been undertaken to progress the Blaenau Gwent Deal, showing the stories behind the work: what is new or strengthened because of The Deal.



## Foreword

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Welcome to our Annual Self-Assessment and Well-Being Report for 2025/26. This report sets out our assessment of how well we have performed during the year, the progress we have made against our Corporate Plan Objectives, and, equally importantly, what we have learned about the challenges facing Blaenau Gwent and how we need to respond to them.

Over the past year, we have continued to deliver a wide range of services for residents whilst also taking significant steps to change the way we work as a council. Our ambition has always been greater than delivering services well. We want to improve life chances, reduce inequality and strengthen communities so that Blaenau Gwent continues to thrive, both now and for future generations.

Last year we spoke about our ambition to create a different relationship between the Council and the people we serve; one where residents have a stronger voice, communities play a greater role in shaping local priorities and solutions, and public services work alongside people rather than simply doing things to or for them. During 2025/26 that ambition became a reality through the introduction of the Blaenau Gwent Deal.

The Deal is not a programme or a single initiative. It is a new way of thinking about how we improve well-being across our borough. It recognises that the complex challenges facing our communities, whether they relate to health, education, the economy, housing or community well-being, cannot be solved by public services acting alone. They require stronger partnerships, shared responsibility and a recognition that communities themselves possess significant strengths, knowledge and capability. Throughout the year we have worked extensively with residents, community groups, volunteers, businesses and partners to better understand what matters most to people and how we can work together to improve outcomes. That work has reinforced our belief that lasting change is achieved when communities are actively involved in shaping their own future.

The Deal has also helped us organise our efforts around five shared missions that focus on some of the most important long-term challenges facing our communities. These missions give us a clear sense of direction whilst creating the flexibility needed to learn, innovate and adapt as circumstances change. They provide a framework through which residents, partners and public services can work together to create healthier, fairer and more resilient communities.

Alongside this, we have continued to strengthen our pioneering federated partnership with Torfaen County Borough Council. This innovative approach, unique in Wales, reflects a shared commitment to ensuring both councils remain sustainable, resilient and capable of meeting the growing challenges facing local government. Increasingly, our services, leadership and planning are becoming more closely aligned, allowing us to build capacity, share expertise and focus on delivering better outcomes for the people and places we collectively serve.

Whilst there is much to be proud of, this report also makes clear that significant challenges remain. Demand for many services continues to increase. Inequalities persist. Financial pressures remain considerable. We know that progress is rarely linear and that meaningful change takes time.

What gives us confidence is the commitment shown every day by our staff, elected members, partners, volunteers and communities. Together we are developing new ways of working that place prevention, collaboration, evidence and community leadership at the heart of what we do.

We do not claim to have all the answers. However, we are increasingly clear about the direction we need to travel and the importance of taking that journey together.

On behalf of the Council, we would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the progress described within this report and who continues to play a role in shaping a stronger, fairer and more sustainable future for Blaenau Gwent.



**Councillor Stephen Thomas**  
**Leader of the Council**

**Stephen Vickers,**  
**Joint Chief Executive**



## 1. Introduction

**What** public services are aiming for:  
**Seven national well-being goals**



Our Annual Self-Assessment and Well-being Report reviews our performance during 2025/26, identifies areas for improvement, and looks ahead to the organisational change required up to 2027 and beyond. It brings together our statutory reporting duties under the Well-being of Future Generations [Act 2015](#) and the Local Government and Elections Act [2021](#), including our assessment of how effectively we are meeting our performance requirements.

Under these duties, we must keep our performance arrangements under review, consider the long-term impact of our decisions, work collaboratively with people, communities and partners, and help prevent persistent challenges such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

**How** public services should work:  
**Five ways of working**



Integration



Prevention



Collaboration



Long term



Involvement

## 2. Mission, Vision and Values

The ethos of our Joint Executive Team continues to place a strong emphasis on collective responsibility and mutual support to achieve shared goals, in working towards our well-being objectives.

In late 2026, in order to further work as federated Councils both visions were reviewed and a new joint vision established: ***'A future without inequality, where everyone thrives in a fair, inclusive, and resilient community'***.

Also, the values of both Councils were reviewed and are now: ***Working with people; Working openly; Working together to deliver***. Our values play an essential part in the culture of our organisation and guide our behaviours, beliefs and principles. The vision and values are now aligned and will be used for decision-making, challenge and reflection. They will provide the framework for all that we do.

## **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](#)

## **Deal Engagement and Citizens’ Assemblies**

To support the development of the Blaenau Gwent Deal, a multi-layered engagement plan began in autumn 2025, enabling stakeholders, residents and partners to help shape its development through consultation, feedback and discussion. Consultation in November and December 2025 attracted almost 700 online visits and 250 completed surveys, followed by a Citizens’ Assembly held across three sessions in January and February 2026.



The Assembly used an established approach to support in-depth discussion; capture lived experiences and consider the question: “What principles should guide the new relationship and ways of working to deliver our shared ambition for our borough?” Participants agreed principles focused on meaningful public involvement, volunteering and community leadership, community hubs, shared power and cooperation, pride and future potential, thriving town centres, and learning and listening together. More information on the Blaenau Gwent Citizens’ Assemblies can be found here: [Blaenau Gwent CBC](#)

## **Blaenau Gwent: A Marmot Council – Putting Fairness and Well-being First**

Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent are proud to be the first Marmot Councils in Wales, reflecting a long-term commitment to reducing health inequalities and creating fairer, more inclusive and resilient communities.

The Marmot Masterplan provides a 15-year framework to embed Marmot principles into how we plan, deliver and measure impact, supported by robust data and short, medium and long-term measures. To make a meaningful difference, these principles must be reflected across organisational planning, priorities, services and review processes.

Together, the Corporate Plan, Gwent PSB Well-being Plan, Marmot Principles, Communities Approach and Health Determinants Research Collaboration support a cultural and operational shift

towards a more preventative, evidence-led and partnership-based approach to improving well-being now and for future generations.

To find out more information on Blaenau Gwent as a Marmot Council, click here: [Blaenau Gwent: A Marmot Council | Blaenau Gwent CBC](#)

You can find out more about the Marmot Principles here: [Professor Sir Michael Marmot - IHE](#)

### **Wales: The First Marmot Nation**

The Welsh Government has recently announced that Wales is the first Marmot Nation in the world – a significant milestone. Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent have been at the forefront of this journey, leading the way and showing what's possible when fairness becomes a priority.

### **Our Federated Approach**

Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Councils have established an innovative federation model, including the appointment of the first Joint Chief Executive in Wales and a discovery phase launched in June 2024 to explore closer integration.

During 2025/26, the partnership has moved from exploration to delivery. Both Councils have formally committed to strengthening collaboration, embedding joint leadership arrangements, strengthening governance, and aligning corporate planning, performance and financial frameworks. This is helping to coordinate priorities, reduce duplication, improve oversight and build resilience across both organisations.

Work has been undertaken to implement new joint corporate governance arrangements, including a joint leadership structure; alignment of processes, policies and strategies; improved data, technology and AI; Joint Appointments Committee and Joint Scrutiny arrangements; and a joint Blueprint for Growth and Joint Local Development Plan.



The federation is a key enabler of long-term transformation, supporting more sustainable services, better outcomes for residents and a stronger, more resilient operating model across both councils.

### **Gwent Public Services Board**

Under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Council has both an individual and collective duty. Our collective role is delivered through the Gwent Public Services Board (PSB), which brings public service partners together to assess local well-being, agree shared well-being objectives and take long-term action to improve outcomes for people and communities across Gwent.



To support the PSB in tackling high levels of inequality across Gwent, partners have worked with the Institute of Health Equity, drawing on the guiding principles identified in Professor Marmot's review, Fair Society, Healthy Lives. This work led to the [Building a Fairer Gwent Report](#) and the commitment for Gwent to become a Marmot region.

Further detail on the Gwent PSB can be found here: [Home - Gwent Public Services Board Gwent Public Services Board](#)

## **Communities Approach**

Alongside the Marmot Masterplan and Corporate Plan, the Communities Approach provides the practical model for delivering change by embedding prevention, early intervention, place-based working and community resilience into how services are designed and delivered.

During 2025/26, the approach has moved from design into early implementation, with work progressing to embed it into service planning, budget setting and partnership working. This is enabling a shift towards more preventative, place-based delivery, focused on local need, community capacity and targeted support.

A key element is the redesign of the prevention model and workforce structures, ensuring people receive the right support at the right time through a more holistic understanding of well-being, with communities acting as the first line of prevention and resilience.

## **Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC)**

During 2025/26, Blaenau Gwent worked with Torfaen through the HDRC to strengthen the use of evidence and research in local decision-making. The collaboration is helping both councils better understand the wider factors affecting health and well-being, plan services around community need, and build research capacity. Work has focused on areas such as early years, education and elective home education, supporting prevention, fairness and improved outcomes for children, residents and communities.

## **3. Our Corporate Plan 2022-2027**

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The Corporate Plan, adopted in October 2022 and in place until 2027, sets out the Council's commitment to supporting thriving communities through modern, high-quality services that promote economic growth and well-being. By creating the conditions for deeper partnership working, shared responsibility and system-wide transformation, approaches such as Marmot, the Communities Approach and the federated model have significantly strengthened the delivery of the Plan, enabling us to achieve greater impact for our communities.

The Plan is based around four Well-being Objectives, supported by service plans to ensure accountability for delivery:

- **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.**

These priorities focus the Council's efforts on improving the social, economic and environmental well-being of Blaenau Gwent and the quality of life of residents. They were developed using research, local need, engagement activity, the Well-being Needs Assessment and public consultation. A full version of our Corporate Plan is available to download here [corporate-plan-2022-2027.pdf](https://corporate-plan-2022-2027.pdf) ([blaenau-gwent.gov.uk](https://blaenau-gwent.gov.uk))

## **Reporting against our Well-being Objectives 25/26**

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

| Well-being Objective                                                                                     | Blue<br>(action completed) | Green<br>(action on target) | Amber<br>(action off target with a route back to green) | Red<br>(action off target significant concerns) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent           | 0                          | 9                           | 5                                                       | 0                                               |
| Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities                                | 0                          | 4                           | 5                                                       | 0                                               |
| Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient                              | 1                          | 8                           | 8                                                       | 0                                               |
| An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place | 0                          | 5                           | 5                                                       | 0                                               |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                                             | <b>1</b>                   | <b>26</b>                   | <b>23</b>                                               | <b>0</b>                                        |

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](#).

#### 4. Reporting against our Well-being Objectives 2025/26

As a self-improving organisation, the Council recognises both what has gone well and where improvement is needed, with honest and open self-assessment central to achieving our ambitions.

Our Self-Assessment considers how effectively we are exercising our functions, using our resources, and maintaining governance arrangements that support continuous improvement. It provides an evidence-based overview of work undertaken during 2025/26, structured around: **how well are we doing, how do we know, and what can we do better?**

The report brings together activity from across the year, informed by a wide range of evidence and a rigorous review process, with a focus on assessing progress against the Council's Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives, achievements, and the challenges to future delivery.

## Well-being Objective 1

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

### How well are we doing?

Good progress has been made against Well-being Objective 1, particularly in education outcomes, reduced exclusions, youth engagement, STEM development and local apprenticeship opportunities through Aspire. However, challenges remain around attendance, specialist provision, support for children looked after, school finances and the future of employability funding. A continued focus will be needed on vulnerable learners, financial sustainability and clear pathways into skills, training and employment.

| What we said we would do in our 2024/25 Self-Assessment                                                                                                                                                                                       | What we achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Schools to produce deficit reduction plans identifying financial efficiencies and their impact                                                                                                                                                | The Local Authority has worked closely with schools to develop robust deficit recovery plans. While school finances remain challenging, with balances deteriorating from a £1.279 million deficit in 2024/25 to a £2.965 million deficit in 2025/26 across 15 schools, this is still significantly better than the £4M deficit forecast by the end of March 2026.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Strengthen support for families considering or choosing Elective Home Education by providing timely advice, guidance and school-based options to help them make informed decisions and keep children in education settings where appropriate. | Electively Home Educated (EHE) pupil numbers have increased from 229 to 286. Supporting families remains a key priority, with a renewed emphasis on providing early intervention and timely support to help families make informed decisions and access appropriate educational opportunities.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Continue to support the 2 schools in an Estyn category, The River Centre and Abertillery Learning Community                                                                                                                                   | The River Centre has been removed from an Estyn category, Abertillery Learning Community has made significant progress against its Estyn recommendations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Prioritise Key Stage 4 performance where declines have been identified                                                                                                                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key Stage 4 performance was mixed across the measures reported.</li> <li>A–A* performance increased in 3 of the 4 mainstream schools. The Blaenau Gwent 5A*–A average increased by 2.1 percentage points to 11.5%, compared with the Welsh average of 18.1%.</li> <li>Capped 9 Point Score: performance increased in 3 of the 4 mainstream schools. The Blaenau Gwent average increased by 8.6 points to 342.9, compared with the Welsh average of 354.3.</li> <li>Literacy Measure: performance increased in 3 of the 4 mainstream schools but decreased in 1 school. Overall, the average decreased by 0.6 points to 35.7, compared with the Welsh average of 38.6.</li> <li>Numeracy Measure: performance increased in 2 of the 4 mainstream schools. The average increased by 0.2 points to 33.6, compared with the Welsh average of 36.0.</li> <li>Science Measure: performance increased in 3 of the 4 mainstream schools. The Blaenau Gwent average increased by 0.5 points to 33.7, compared with the Welsh average of 35.8.</li> </ul> |

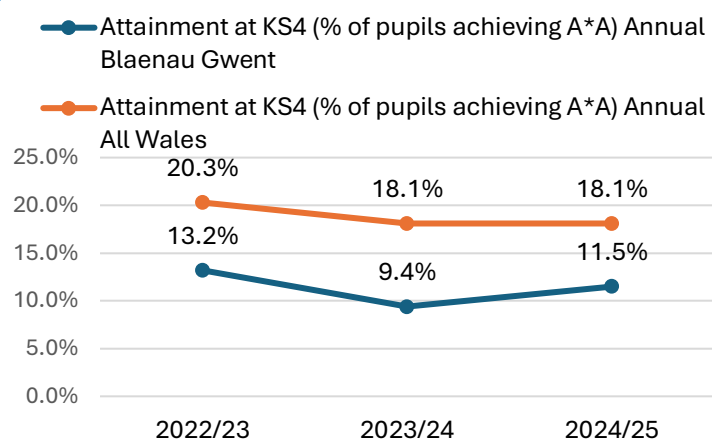
Develop a Council Property Strategy and set performance targets through the Asset Management Plan.

A Property Strategy and Strategic Asset Management Plan are being developed, supported by a new corporate asset group.

## How do we know?

### Raising attainment within our schools

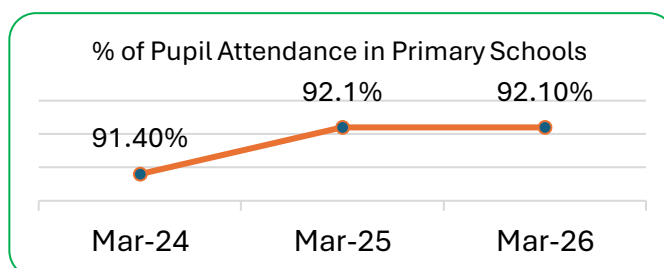
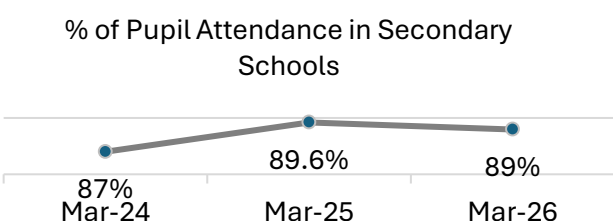
The percentage of pupils achieving A\* to A grades improved by 2.1 percentage points between 2023/24 and 2024/25. This improvement was mainly because one school performed significantly better, exceeding the average for similar schools by 6.6 percentage points. Girls' results also improved; however, this further widened the existing gap between girls' and boys' performance in Blaenau Gwent.



### Increasing Pupil Attendance

School attendance has improved in both primary and secondary schools, broadly reflecting national trends.

Primary attendance increased from 91.4% in March 2024 to 92.1% in March 2025 and remained at this level in March 2026. While performance has been maintained, attendance remains below the 2024 level, but declined by 0.6 percentage points in the latest year and remains two percentage points below target, requiring continued focus on attendance practice, early intervention and support for schools, learners and families.



Secondary attendance improved from 87% in March 2024 to 89.6% in March 2025, before reducing to 89% in March 2026. This is the highest improvement in secondary attendance rates in Wales at this point. However, performance remains below our ambitious 91% target, so continued support is needed to

address barriers to attendance and sustain improvement.

Fixed-term exclusions and exclusion days have decreased overall, including in secondary, primary and special schools. Special school exclusions relate to one school only. Persistent disruptive behaviour remains the most common reason for exclusion, while verbal abuse or threatening behaviour towards adult's accounts for the greatest loss of learning time. The Education Welfare Service continues to work with schools to strengthen early intervention and targeted support.

| Data analysis         | Number of Exclusions | Days of Exclusion | Permanent Exclusions |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Secondary             | 58                   | 77                | 1                    |
| Primary               | -89                  | -77.5             | 0                    |
| Special Schools       | -34                  | -8.5              | 0                    |
| Increase/Decrease (-) | -65                  | -9                | 1                    |

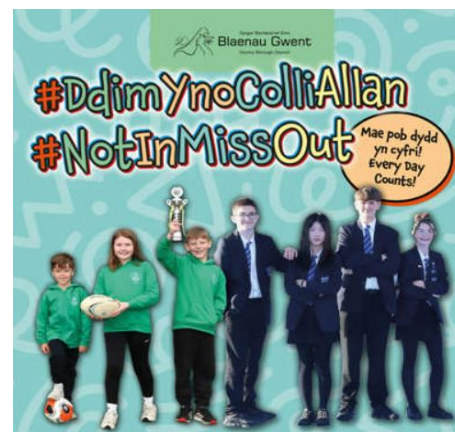
Note – Exclusion Data can include learners excluded more than once

Improving attendance remains a core priority for the Education Directorate. The Council's [#NotInMissOut](#) campaign promotes the importance of good attendance and signposts families to support.

The attendance pathway, introduced in September 2023, has supported improved attendance in many schools where fully implemented. The Education Welfare Team will continue to work with schools and families through the pathway and planned support activity where attendance concerns are identified.

### Schools causing concern

During 2025/26, the Council maintained oversight of school performance through evidence, professional discussion and targeted support, including the Local Authority School Improvement Service and Team Around the School approach. Strengthened arrangements improved monitoring and follow-up, with enhanced support for schools in Estyn categories, including an Accelerated Improvement Board at Abertillery Learning Community. Progress was evident, with All Saints Primary and Bryn Bach Primary removed from Estyn review and the River [Centre](#) removed from special measures. No schools now remain in Estyn review, although one school continues to require significant improvement, highlighting the need for continued targeted support to sustain progress.



### Entitlement to Free School Meals (eFSM)

Blaenau Gwent has consistently had among the highest proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals compared with other local authorities in Wales. An anomaly in the process meant that statuses were being recorded in a way that 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 | 2025/26 |
|-----------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Entitlement to FSM (Pupils aged 5 – 15) | 25.5%   | 31.4%   | 33.3%   | 24.6%   | 24.1%   | 25.3%   | 26.2%   |
| Entitlement to FSM (All pupils)         | 23.7%   | 28.4%   | 30.3%   | 22.3%   | 21.9%   | 23.2%   | 23.2%   |

*Note – 2025/26 figures were unverified at the time of reporting.*

Current levels of pupils entitled to FSM rank Blaenau Gwent as the sixth highest local authority in Wales. This appears to conflict with other measures of deprivation across Blaenau Gwent, compared with other local authorities, where levels of deprivation are higher.

### Sharing free school uniform and essentials within local communities

Through the Deal and Mission 2 activity, 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.



### **Electively Home-Educated (EHE) Pupils**

The number of children who are EHE in Blaenau Gwent has continued to increase during 2025/26. There are currently 286 pupils recorded on the EHE database, compared with 229 at the same point last year, showing an increase of 24.9%. This includes 33 pupils from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. The Education Welfare Service continues to support families and monitor arrangements, with a focus on maintaining appropriate contact and ensuring visits increase in line with the growing number of pupils. This remains an area requiring continued oversight to ensure children and families receive the right support and that the Council maintains a clear understanding of this changing pattern of education.

### **Education and Children Looked After (CLA)**

At the end of March 2026, 202 children were looked after by the Local Authority, including 151 of statutory school age at the end of the 2024/25 academic year, an increase from 141 the previous year. Most children looked after continue to be educated in Blaenau Gwent mainstream schools, although the number accessing Local Authority maintained special school placements has continued to rise, from 14 in 2023/24 to 24 in 2024/25. A small number attend independent settings outside Blaenau Gwent.

School stability remains a key consideration when matching children to placements, with transport provided where needed and processes in place to minimise delays where school moves are unavoidable. However, 22 children looked after experienced at least one non-transitional school move during 2024/25, compared with 10 in the previous year.

Almost all learners achieved recognised qualifications at the end of statutory education, with the majority progressing into post-16 education and/or training. Personal Education Plan timelines also improved significantly, with 97% initiated within statutory timescales, compared with 67% the previous year; only one plan was delayed due to the complexity and timing of an Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child entering care late in the academic year.

### **Additional Learning Needs (ALN) 0-25**

During 2025/26, good progress has been made in implementing ALN reform. All former statements of Special Educational Needs have been transferred to Individual Development Plans, statutory reviews were completed on time, and agreed provision was put in place by schools. Schools are following statutory processes, queries have been managed effectively, and there were no pending tribunal cases at the point of reporting, although some delays remain due to staff absence and capacity pressures.



Guidance, training and updated processes have strengthened support across schools, early years, post-16 education, children looked after, electively home-educated learners and those educated outside school. Transition, inclusion and reintegration planning have also improved, supported by reviews of specialist provision, statutory panel activity and the new post-16 provision at Pen-y-Cwm School's Vision [House](#). Further work will focus on maintaining ALN guidance and induction, strengthening health and early years collaboration, and improving the timeliness of post-16 transition planning and record transfers.

## Education Finance

The Council allocated £60.979 million through the Individual Schools Budget in 2025/26, with a further £283,537 supporting regional school improvement arrangements.

School finances remain under significant pressure. Overall balances deteriorated from a £1.279 million deficit in 2024/25 to a £2.965 million deficit in 2025/26, with 15 schools reporting deficit balances. Although this was lower than the forecast cumulative deficit of £4 million by the end of March 2026, the year-on-year deterioration remains substantial.

The Council has worked with schools to develop deficit recovery plans, identify sustainable efficiencies and strengthen financial monitoring. These arrangements may have contributed to the position being around £1 million lower than forecast; however, further recovery is required. Several schools are unable to set balanced budgets for 2026/27, and there remains a significant risk that overall balances will deteriorate further by March 2027. Recovery plans will continue to be subject to senior officer scrutiny and ongoing monitoring through the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

## Youth Service

Blaenau Gwent Youth Service continued to provide high-quality universal, targeted and specialist support for young people aged 11–25, helping them develop skills, improve well-being, participate in their communities and manage key transitions. During 2025/26, the service engaged 2,032 members, reaching 19% of the local youth population. While membership reduced due to the temporary closure of two youth centres for refurbishment, overall contacts increased by 22% to 29,917, and both centres have since reopened with improved facilities.

Young people remained central to service development, with feedback from over 300 young people shaping priorities around well-being, life skills, inclusion, residential opportunities and safe social spaces. Partnership working also strengthened provision, including Welsh language opportunities and international participation through the Street Child World Cup in Mexico.



Prevention and targeted support remained key strengths. More than 190 young people were reviewed through early identification arrangements, all 61 young people initially unknown to services were contacted, and 97% progressed into education, employment or training. The EOTAS pilot also delivered positive outcomes, supporting 21 young people, with 95% returning to mainstream education, average attendance of 90%, and improved well-being for 80% of participants. The NEET figure is 2.6% (16 young people), which is above the Welsh average of 2.1%, and the need to sustain engagement following the reopening of youth centres.

## The Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) Community Education Service

The GRT Community Education Service continues to provide targeted support for children, young people and families, working with schools, families and the Education Welfare Service to support attendance, learning and inclusion. Attendance improved from 76.22% in 2024/25 to 77.31% in 2025/26, and literacy support has helped many learners improve their reading and spelling. The



service also provides tailored one-to-one and small group support, including literacy and vocational learning for some secondary-age electively home-educated learners. A GRT Padlet has also been developed to help schools better understand GRT culture, promote inclusion and strengthen practice.

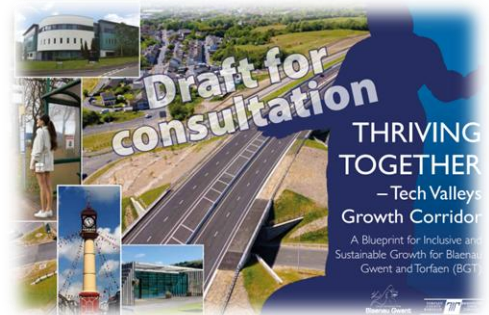
### Blueprint for Growth

The joint Blueprint for [Growth](#) sets out a long-term approach to support economic growth across Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen by investing in people, places and businesses. It aims to create better conditions for local businesses, attract new opportunities, support good-quality jobs, and respond to

challenges such as low job density, out-commuting, and health and skills inequalities.

The Blueprint focuses on four areas: **Investment, Placemaking, Planning and Property**, covering business growth, town centres, connectivity, skills, land and buildings.

Scrutiny Committee considered the Blueprint in March [2026](#) and welcomed its ambition and focus on involving local people. Public engagement, consultation and an annual delivery plan will follow to help turn the vision into action.



### Replacement LDP (RLDP)

In March 2026, the Council agreed to move from preparing its own RLDP to developing a joint plan with Torfaen County Borough Council. Following Ministerial approval, the previous plan was formally withdrawn, and work began on the Joint Local Development Plan, including governance, consultation, data and privacy arrangements. The focus is now on building the evidence base and delivery arrangements, including the Blaenau Gwent Growth Study and a shared consultation system. Joint working with Torfaen is now embedded, supporting a more consistent and long-term approach to land use, housing, infrastructure and economic planning up to 2041.

### High Value Engineering (HiVE) Site (Hi-Tech Post 16 Education Facility) Blaenau Gwent Council – STEM Facilitation Project

The official opening of the HiVE STEM [Centre](#) marked an important milestone for STEM education in Blaenau Gwent. During 2025/26, it developed as a local hub connecting schools, employers and education providers, helping pupils access high-quality STEM experiences, employer links and clearer pathways into apprenticeships, higher education, training and employment. Future work will focus on raising awareness of STEM careers, supporting teacher development and continuing STEM League activity.



### Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

Ebbw Fawr Learning Community has become the first secondary campus in Blaenau Gwent to be named STEM School of the Year. The award recognises its work to expand STEM opportunities through hands-on learning, career-focused activities and skills development. STEM is now embedded across

school life, supported by a dedicated STEM space, specialist equipment and a wide range of activities and clubs, with more girls taking part than ever before. The full story can be found [here](#).

### Placemaking Plans

Positive progress has been made in delivering placemaking plans across Blaenau Gwent's town centres, with work moving from planning into delivery. Activity has focused on bringing empty and underused buildings back into use, improving key sites and public spaces, supporting businesses and events, and developing longer-term regeneration opportunities.

- **Ebbw Vale:** progress continues on the Northern Gateway, including acquisition and due diligence for key sites, temporary arrangements for the outdoor market, feasibility work at Station Square and future opportunities for the former Civic Centre site.
- **Tredeggar:** options are being developed for the Gwent Shopping Centre following Council acquisition, alongside the recommenced restoration of the former NCB Building and wider town centre improvements.
- **Brynmawr:** the first Food Festival increased footfall, façade improvements and cleansing have enhanced the town centre, and future use of the former Stagecoach Depot is being explored.
- **Abertillery:** the former Trinity Chapel has been brought back into use as a library and adult education facility, with increased membership and footfall, while further projects are progressing at Castle Street Library, Abertillery Institute and through the community-led Abertillery Town Boost.

Wider town centre activity has also supported regeneration, including £400,000 through the Transforming Towns programme, over 40 events in the last two years, shop local campaigns, murals, trails and pop-up activity. The Placemaking Wales Charter continues to guide the Council's approach, with further food festivals planned for 2026/27. The emerging Blueprint for Growth will provide a broader framework linking town centre renewal with economic growth, skills, transport, housing and infrastructure across Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen.

### Town Boost

Through the Deal and Mission 4 activity, 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.



### Pride in Place Neighbourhood Fund

Blaenau Gwent has been identified to receive up to £20 million over 10 years through the UK Government's Pride in Place Neighbourhood Fund. Following Scrutiny and Cabinet approval in January 2026, the Sirhowy Valley was selected as the priority area, based on evidence of deprivation, health, employment and community safety need.

Work is now focused on establishing the foundations for long-term, community-led investment, including appointing an independent Board Chair, developing governance arrangements, recruiting a representative Neighbourhood Board and commissioning communications and marketing activity to raise awareness and encourage participation across Tredeggar and the Sirhowy Valley.

The Board and engagement activity will support community consultation and co-design in autumn 2026, ensuring local people help shape priorities and the future investment plan. Potential investment themes include town centres, housing, heritage, health and well-being, transport, community safety, skills, employment and wider community infrastructure.

### Pride in Place Impact Fund

In addition to the long-term Neighbourhood Fund, Blaenau Gwent has secured £1.5 million through the Pride in Place Impact Fund to deliver visible improvements, strengthen communities and build local pride ahead of the wider investment programme.

The funding will support three key objectives:

1. **Stronger Communities and Community Capacity** will be delivered through a GAVO community grants programme, supporting grassroots projects, local initiatives and community organisations to strengthen well-being, resilience, civic participation and local leadership.
2. **Health, Well-being and Community Spaces** includes a £750,000 investment in Brynmawr Welfare Park to improve play and leisure facilities, support physical activity and create more inclusive spaces for children, young people and families.
3. **Towns Together** will support local town centre initiatives in Brynmawr, Blaina and Nantyglo, encouraging community participation, collaboration and pride in place.

Across all objectives, projects will be shaped through engagement with residents, partners, elected members and community representatives to ensure investment is evidence-led, locally supported and aligned with wider regeneration and community development priorities.

### Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF)

Following the end of the UK SPF programme, the Council is reviewing project impact, capturing learning and considering how future employability and skills support can align with local need and new funding opportunities. While programmes such as Trailblazer and potential Local Growth Fund investment offer opportunities, they do not fully replace previous SPF activity. The focus is therefore on managing the transition carefully, identifying gaps, working with partners to maintain accessible support, and developing a longer-term approach to employability and skills growth across Blaenau Gwent.

### Deal and 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.



### Aspire Apprenticeship Programme

The Aspire Programme continued to support local people into employment and training while helping the Council and local employers develop skills in key service areas and sectors. New apprenticeships were progressed in areas including licensing, HGV mechanics, business administration, carpentry, care and countryside services. Since it began, Aspire has supported over 200 local apprentices, with a further 150 supported through related partnership programmes. In 2025/26 celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> [year](#) and supported 15 internal and 40 external apprentices across manufacturing and engineering. The programme gained national recognition when the Shared Apprenticeship Programme won the Collaboration and Partnership Award at the IESA Awards with Merthyr Tydfil.



### Trailblazer Programme

The Trailblazer [Programme](#) supports economically inactive residents to move closer to work through personalised help for people facing barriers such as disability, health conditions, caring responsibilities or low confidence. During 2025/26, it continued to support participants into employment, skills and training opportunities, with Blaenau Gwent's model recognised nationally and highlighted as good practice.



Since its launch, the programme has supported 240 participants with mental and physical well-being; 52 into community groups; 71 with life skills; 28 to gain qualifications; 45 into volunteering; 18 into work experience; and 11 into paid work trials. Future delivery will be strengthened through the Access Elemental System, improving monitoring and tracking of participant outcomes.

**(Picture: Professor Isabel Oliver, chief medical officer visiting trailblazer activity)**

### Council Property and Assets

The Council will continue to maximise the efficient use of its remaining corporate assets, including the General Office, Energy Centre, ViTCC and Blaina ICC, while continuing to develop its hybrid working model to support the Medium-Term Financial Plan and Workforce Strategy.

The Council will also continue to manage its industrial assets to support local businesses, employment and wider economic growth. The Business and Innovation, Estates and Technical Services teams will work together to improve these assets, increase occupation and make best use of available space.

A new Property Strategy is being developed to align property decisions with the Council's priorities and set annual performance targets through the Asset Management Plan. A Corporate Property and Asset Management Group has also been established to review accommodation needs, building status, cost-saving opportunities and community use of buildings, including longer-term leases and Community Asset Transfers.

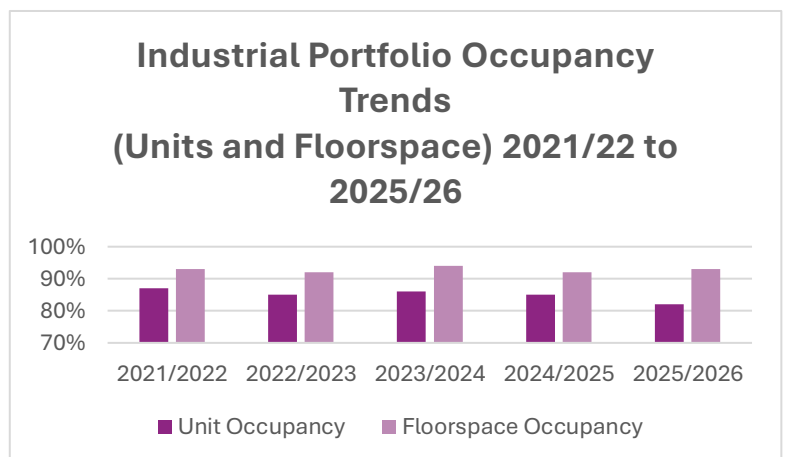
The focus moving forward will be on supporting community groups through the CAT process to support long-term sustainability. A draft Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) is being prepared for consideration, including plans to review and strengthen CAT policy and monitoring.

### Industrial Portfolio

The Council's industrial portfolio provides a range of workspace to support businesses to start, grow and invest in Blaenau Gwent. This includes co-working and office space, small starter units and larger industrial premises, with available accommodation promoted through the Blaenau Gwent Business Hub and wider commercial market.

In 2025/26, the portfolio included 15 industrial estates and 193 lettable units, accommodating 114 businesses and supporting more than 800 jobs. Occupancy remained high, with 83% of units occupied and 92% of floorspace let, showing continued demand for larger industrial accommodation.

External funding was also secured to refurbish vacant units and deliver wider improvement works, including roof and cladding upgrades from 2026/27. This will help bring more space back into use, improve the quality and sustainability of employment sites, and support business retention, investment and future growth.



## Key Challenges and Actions for 2026/27

- **Strengthen financial recovery and improve attendance across schools**, with targeted action to reduce the £2.965 million deficit across 15 schools and improve attendance towards the 93% primary and 91% secondary targets.
- **Strengthen support for children looked after to improve school stability**, with a focus on reducing non-transitional school moves and monitoring the rise in special school placements.
- **Maintain accessible employability and youth progression support**, following the end of Shared Prosperity Fund activity, to reduce the NEET rate from 2.6% and sustain youth engagement.
- **Move regeneration, property and business space plans into delivery**, including the Blueprint for Growth, Joint Local Development Plan and asset plans, while improving use of industrial units and increasing occupancy from the current 83%.
- **Community Asset Transfers**, work to be undertaken to work more collaboratively across Blaenau Gwent service areas and also with Torfaen Council.

## Well-being Objective 2

### *Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities*

#### How well are we doing?

Good progress has been made against Well-being Objective 2, particularly through biodiversity activity in schools and communities, reduced non-spend carbon emissions, solar installation, the Decarbonisation Dashboard and strengthened flood response following Storm Bert. However, challenges remain around recycling performance, increased residual waste and the complexity of delivering net zero, particularly due to cost pressures, data gaps and procurement emissions.

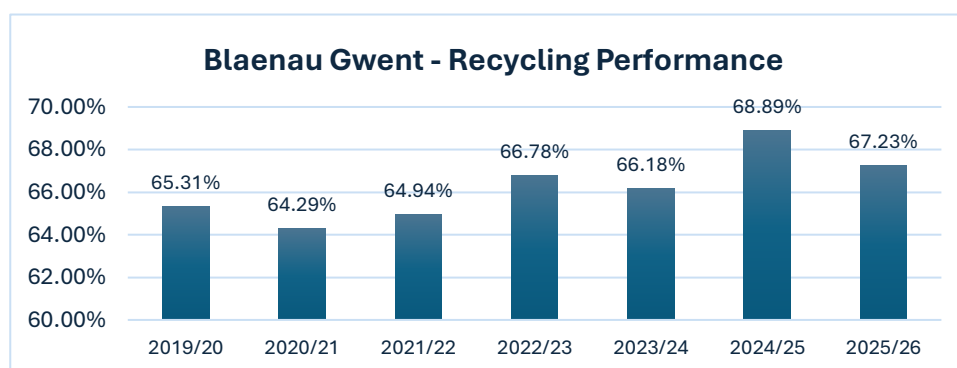
| What we said we would do in our 2024/25 Self-Assessment                                                                                             | What we achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Explore complementary delivery routes to improve take-up of energy improvement measures and increase ECO4Flex uptake across the borough             | ECO4Flex has stopped and no replacement programme has been confirmed.                                                                                                                                             |
| Build community resilience into climate events by working with partners and implementing the flood management action plan                           | Flood preparedness has improved through regional climate risk work, the Cwm Flood Task Force and progress on 19 flood actions. Further focus is needed on communication, infrastructure and community resilience. |
| Continue working towards the Welsh Government recycling target of 70% and consult the public during 2025/26 on the new Waste and Recycling Strategy | The new Waste Strategy has been consulted on, but recycling fell to 67.23%, below the 70% target, so improvement remains a priority.                                                                              |
| Implementation of the new Local Nature Recovery Action Plan and Pollinator Policy to respond to the nature emergency                                | Progress is being made, with biodiversity work moving into practical delivery, though capacity remains a challenge.                                                                                               |

#### How do we know?

##### Recycling

Blaenau Gwent exceeded the Welsh Government recycling target between 2019/20 and 2023/24, but performance has since fallen below the updated 70% target. In 2025/26, recycling performance reduced further, meaning the Council would need to divert

additional waste from residual disposal into reuse, recycling and composting to meet the target.

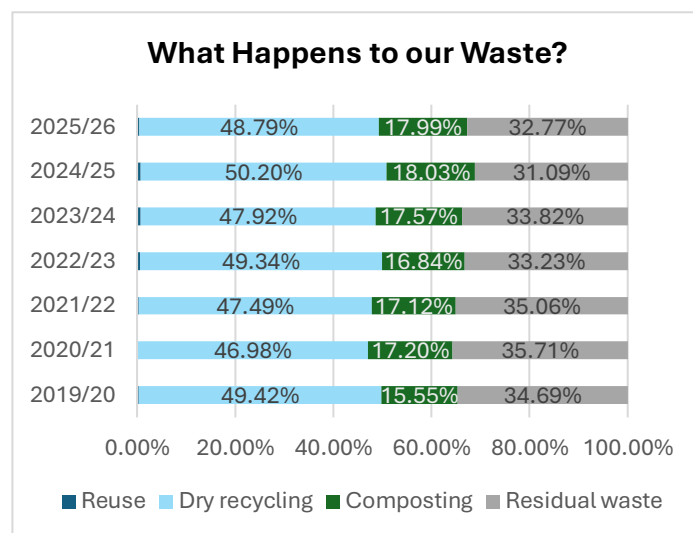


Breakdown of 2025/26 performance:

| Period                                  | 2024/25       | 2025/26       | Diff.         |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Quarter 1 (April – June)                | 69.83%        | 69.21%        | -0.62%        |
| Quarter 2 (July – Sept)                 | 69.27%        | 67.24%        | -2.03%        |
| Quarter 3 (Oct – Dec)                   | 68.40%        | 67.68%        | -0.72%        |
| Quarter 4 (Jan – March)                 | 68.03%        | 64.84%        | -3.19%        |
| <b>Annual (not yet verified by NRW)</b> | <b>68.89%</b> | <b>67.23%</b> | <b>-1.66%</b> |

The 2025/26 tonnage data shows increases in residual waste, food waste and garden waste compared with 2024/25, alongside reductions in kerbside dry recycling, HWRC recycling and commercial recycling.

The data shows a challenging position, with residual waste increasing while key recycling streams, including kerbside dry recycling, HWRC recycling and commercial recycling, have reduced. If performance remains below the statutory target, the Council could face a financial penalty, although 2025/26 data is still subject to NRW verification and may change.



### Waste Strategy 2026–2031

To address the shortfall, the Council has consulted on a new Resource and Waste Strategy 2026–2031, focused on reducing residual waste, increasing recycling participation and supporting reuse. This will be supported by operational improvements, including new recycling vehicles, plans for flexible plastics collections and stronger enforcement. Reuse initiatives, including Roseheyworth Reuse and Recycling Centre and The Den, are also helping to divert waste from disposal and support a more circular economy.



## Reuse and repair

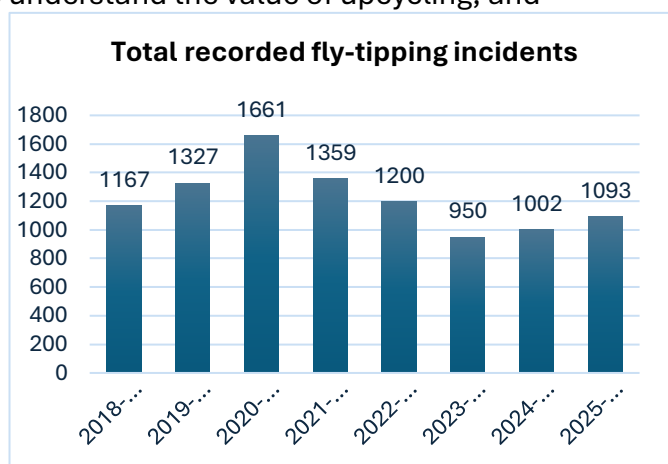
Reuse and repair activity continued to support waste prevention, recycling and the circular economy across Blaenau Gwent, helping residents access items and services more affordably and sustainably while reducing materials going to disposal. It also supported wider well-being by encouraging physical activity, creativity, community participation and more sustainable choices. Key initiatives included the:

- **Community Kit Room in Ebbw Vale**, providing preloved sports and leisure equipment;
- **Library of Things at Llanhilleth Institute**, enabling residents and groups to borrow rather than buy;
- **bike repair pop-up events**, supporting repairs, maintenance and active travel;
- **reuse through art**, helping schools and young people understand the value of upcycling; and
- **The Den at Roseheyworth Reuse and Recycling Centre**, enabling residents to donate and buy good-quality reused items.



## Fly-tipping and Street Cleansing

- Number of £400 fixed penalty notices issued for fly-tipping: 93;
- Number of £300 fixed penalty notices issued for commercial duty of care: 84; and
- Number of £300 fixed penalty notices issued for household duty of care: 4.



## Lakeview Litter Heroes

To enhance the Deal and deliver aspects of Mission 2, the 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>

## Biodiversity



The Council continued to support biodiversity through the Local Nature Recovery Action Plan and Linking Landscapes project, moving from planning into practical delivery during 2025/26. Work has focused on habitat improvement, species recovery, monitoring, community involvement and partnership working, including the Go Wild! event, the Barn Owl Project, biodiversity improvements across schools, housing estates, leisure sites and community spaces, and surveys of Council-owned land and local nature sites.

This activity is strengthening local evidence, improving habitats, supporting wildlife recovery and involving more residents and volunteers in nature recovery. The main challenge remains capacity within the Biodiversity Team,



particularly following the Nature Recovery Officer vacancy. Further work is needed to embed biodiversity consistently across the Council and strengthen reporting arrangements.

### Community-led woodland stewardship

Through the Deal and Mission 5 activity, 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>



### Net Zero 2030

The Council has continued to work towards its Net Zero 2030 ambition through the Decarbonisation Plan 2020–2030, supported during 2025/26 by a midpoint review and new Power BI Decarbonisation Dashboard. These are improving understanding of carbon performance, energy costs and the actions needed to support a more realistic pathway to organisational net zero. Further work is needed to strengthen carbon tracking, address data gaps and improve monitoring of solar generation. The latest available direct carbon emissions figures are shown below. These exclude spend-based procurement emissions, which are less suitable for tracking progress and rely more heavily on action by suppliers and wider markets.

| Tonnes CO2e/year                 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2024/25 | 2025/26 | Change from Base Year | Change from Last Year |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Non-spend-based carbon emissions | 14,783  | 11,818  | 13,100  | 12,353  | 11,951  | 11,368  | 10,677  | -28%                  | -6%                   |

Buildings remain the largest source of direct emissions. Solar installations have continued across the school estate, with further schemes planned, and Aneurin Leisure Trust has progressed installations at Ebbw Vale Sports Centre and Parc Bryn Bach. Funding has also been secured to improve the Works District Heating Network, supporting greater efficiency, reduced energy use and lower running costs. Procurement-related emissions are also being considered through supplier specifications, delivery methods and carbon reduction plans, with work underway to improve supplier emissions data and target future action more effectively.

### Net Zero 2050

Work towards Net Zero 2050 has focused on fairer, greener and more accessible travel. Progress has included the Council's response to the Citizens' Forum travel recommendations ([published](#)), the establishment of a corporate travel group, work on electric vehicle charging for residents without off-street parking, and participation in Solar Together. Low local uptake of Solar Together shows the need to make low-carbon choices more accessible and practical for residents.



### Climate Adaptation

The Council has worked with Public Services Board partners to develop the Gwent Climate Change Risk Assessment, with input from officers across the organisation to identify climate risks affecting

Council assets and services. This work, alongside the developing federated approach with Torfaen, will help strengthen climate adaptation planning and delivery, building on recent flood response activity through the Cwm Flood Task Force and wider adaptation work in Cwm and Llanhilleth. During 2025, the Council also took part in Solar Together South-East Wales through the Cardiff Capital Region, helping residents access solar panels and battery storage through a collective buying scheme. In Blaenau Gwent, 12 households took part: 10 had solar panels installed and 2 added battery storage to existing systems. Take-up was slightly above the level predicted by the market profile for Blaenau Gwent, and the Council will participate in the rebranded Switch Together scheme again in 2026.

### Storm Bert

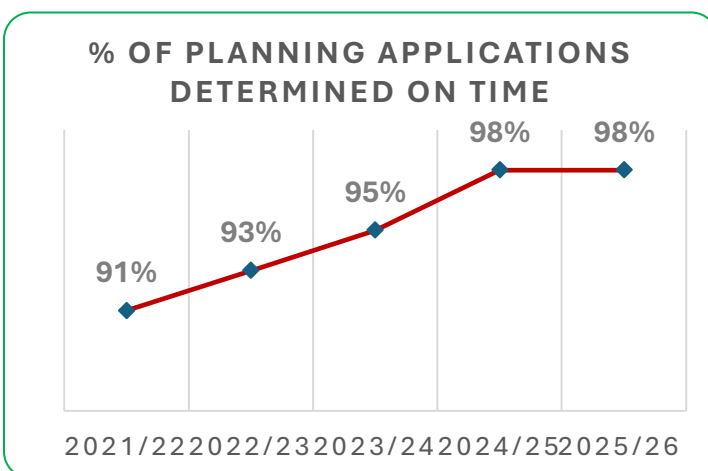
Following Storm Bert in November 2024, which caused significant disruption in areas including Cwm, Cwmtillery and Llanhilleth, the Council reviewed its flood preparedness and emergency response arrangements. The review identified the need for improvements in operational readiness, communication, infrastructure 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. Progress against the 19 improvement actions identified to address flooding was reported to Scrutiny in February, full report and progress can be found [here](#)



### Planning

In 2025/26 most planning applications were determined on time, improved enforcement performance, and no Planning Committee decisions made contrary to officer recommendation. However, older and more complex applications continue to affect average determination times, partly due to staffing, system and capacity pressures. Recruitment, training and process improvements are underway to strengthen resilience and support further improvement in 2026/27.

Planning performance is reported frequently to the Council's Planning Committee. Previous quarterly reports can be found [here](#).



### Key Challenges and Actions for 2026/27

- **Improve recycling performance** by increasing recycling rates back towards the 70% target, reducing residual waste, and strengthening performance across key recycling streams.
- **Increase waste prevention and public participation** by encouraging residents to reduce waste, recycle more consistently, and supporting delivery of the new Waste Strategy through measurable actions.
- **Strengthen net zero delivery** by addressing data gaps, improving monitoring of procurement and building emissions, and tracking the impact of solar generation more effectively.
- **Improve climate resilience and emergency preparedness** by strengthening communication, infrastructure planning, operational readiness and community flood resilience, learning from the impact of Storm Bert.

- **Maintain capacity and service resilience** by managing staffing, system and workload pressures to sustain progress in biodiversity, planning and wider service delivery.

**Well-being Objective 3**  
*Empowering and supporting communities to be safe,  
independent and resilient*

**How well are we doing?**

Overall, progress against this Well-being Objective is positive, with preventative and community-based support helping residents stay safe, independent and connected. Key activity across early intervention, Warm Hubs, assistive technology, unpaid carers, homelessness prevention, childcare, play, food resilience, learning disabilities and mental health is contributing to well-being. However, demand and complexity remain high across adult and children's services, particularly in safeguarding, homecare, respite, specialist mental health support, housing and placements for children looked after. Continued focus is needed to embed prevention, strengthen unpaid carer engagement, evidence outcomes and manage ongoing pressures.

| What we said we would do in our 2024/25 Self-Assessment                                            | What we achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Improve Disabled Facilities Grant delivery, review capital funding and streamline processes        | 102 grants were completed, with additional investment this year taking the overall budget to £880,000 invested and delivery times improving. Demand, suitable housing and affordability remain pressures.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Continue to monitor homelessness initiatives                                                       | Homelessness prevention work continues through leasing, Housing First, STAR Flats and acquisitions. Demand for affordable housing remains high and we work closely with our housing associations through our Strategic Housing Partnership to accelerate new development.<br>Our homelessness prevention offer continues to grow in response to the growing demand, with additional leasing, Housing First projects, STAR flats and move-on / supported property acquisitions |
| Implement the Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2025–2030                                        | Work continues to bring empty homes back into use, supported by the Housing Strategy, leasing, acquisitions and affordable housing development.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Monitor Social Services sustainability risks, including grant-funded posts, workforce and capacity | Demand and complexity remain high across social services. Risks are being managed through prevention, service redesign, recruitment and partnership working.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Monitor the cost and impact of Children's Services placements                                      | Placement sufficiency and cost pressures remain significant, with further work needed to reduce reliance on independent and residential placements.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

|                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Increase foster carers in Blaenau Gwent                                                   | Foster carer recruitment and retention remain priorities, alongside reducing reliance on independent placements.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Improve access to care, facilities and therapies for children looked after placed locally | Support has strengthened through the Corporate Parenting Strategy, further development of our MyST (My Support Team) and local residential provision. Ongoing work continued with Health colleagues to establish appropriate packages of care including therapy via the Complex Needs Panel and Continuing Care process.                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Continue to implement the Children Looked After Strategy and monitor numbers.             | The year-end number of children looked after remained almost unchanged at 202, compared with 201 the previous year, while admissions into care increased from 53 to 73. During the year, 72 children ended their looked after status through the conclusion of care proceedings, discharge of Care Orders or planned moves into family placements, supported living or independent living. A dedicated Children Looked After team became operational on 1 April 2026 to strengthen oversight of discharge work and move-on plans. |

### **How do we know?**

#### **Communities Approach and Community Hubs**

The Communities Approach continued to mature during 2025/26, supporting the Council's ambition to empower residents and build more resilient, self-sustaining communities. The Community Hub Model remains central, providing a local front door for advice, digital support and signposting, improving access to help closer to home and enabling earlier identification of need.

Strong partnership working with the voluntary sector, housing, health, DWP, Citizens Advice and community groups has supported more coordinated local help around well-being, employment, advice and digital inclusion. The approach is also helping residents build confidence, independence and digital skills, while aligning with wider transformation priorities including early intervention, prevention, community hubs and community capacity-building [activities](#).

Data, insight and working in partnership with our communities is increasingly shaping services and targeting support, but further work is needed to embed the model consistently, strengthen evidence of impact, and support communities and local organisations to respond actively to local challenges and opportunities.

#### **Age-Friendly Communities & Warm Hubs**

The Age-Friendly Communities programme supports residents to age well, stay connected and access support within their communities. During 2025/26, Warm Hubs continued to develop with partners, using Welsh Government funding to provide safe, welcoming spaces for social connection, activities, advice and signposting. Some hubs now operate beyond winter and may also provide cool spaces during extreme heat, strengthening community resilience year-round.

The programme has also supported targeted outreach in trusted community venues, helping residents access energy advice, dementia awareness, cost-of-living support and wider health and well-being opportunities. This has improved access to information, supported prevention and early intervention, and helped reduce loneliness and social isolation.

#### **Early Intervention and Prevention**

During 2025/26, good progress was made in developing a clearer, more coordinated approach to Early Intervention and Prevention. A comprehensive review has mapped current activity, identified

duplication, inconsistent delivery, multiple entry points and gaps in performance information, and established a stronger evidence base for redesign.

The emerging model takes a “community first” approach, supporting residents earlier through local provision, clearer referral pathways, a more consistent front door, coordinated case management and better use of data to reduce demand for statutory services.

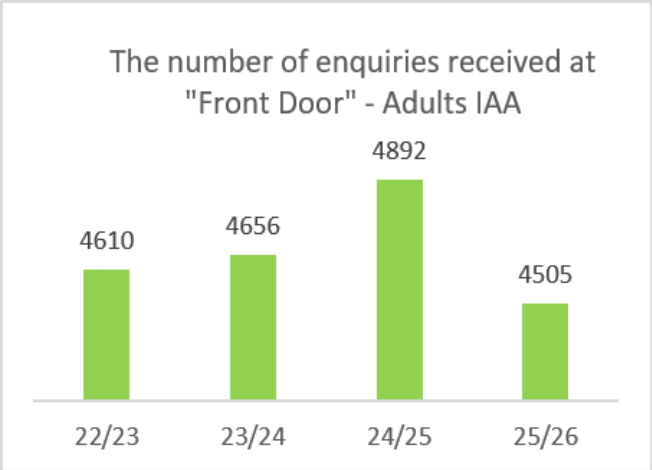
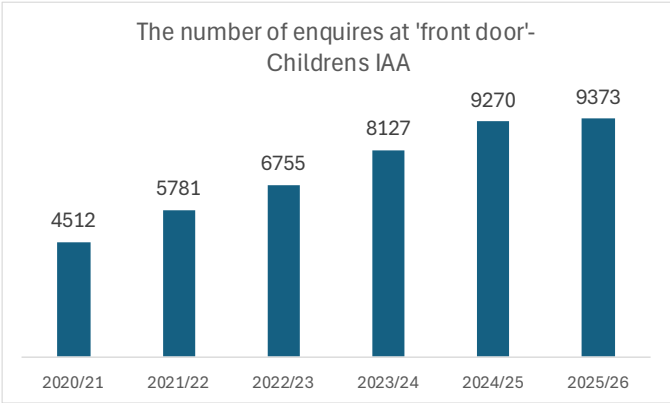
The next stage will focus on developing an integrated prevention system, with stronger governance, clearer outcomes, consistent performance measures and improved oversight of prevention investment.

**Leisure Review**

An independent review completed by Local Partnerships found that Aneurin Leisure Trust is well run, valued by communities and supports the Council’s aims around well-being, learning and prevention. The review recommended retaining the Trust model, while strengthening alignment with the Council, improving financial sustainability, increasing income, aligning services and rebuilding reserves. The Council and Trust will develop a recovery and development plan, supported by a focused business plan, with progress monitored through agreed performance measures, KPIs and financial oversight. Full report findings: [here](#).

**IAA and prevention support**

During 2025/26, Adult and Children’s Services continued to manage high levels of demand while focusing on early help, prevention, safeguarding, independence and service sustainability. Adult Services improved pathways for assessment and commissioned care, with many enquiries resolved at the point of referral rather than requiring long-term social care assessment.



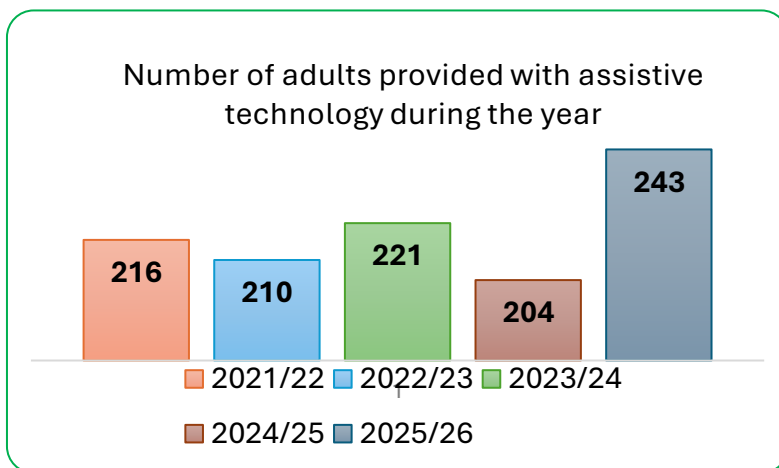
Children’s Services also experienced sustained demand through the Information, Advice and Assistance Team, reflecting ongoing safeguarding pressures and increasing family complexity. Most referrals were managed without statutory intervention, suggesting that front door screening, threshold decisions and early intervention pathways are operating proportionately, enabling statutory services to focus on children and families with the highest levels

of need and risk.

## Assistive Technology

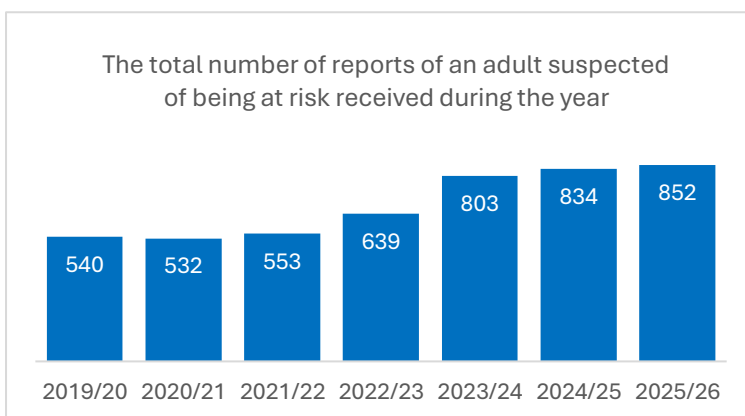
Assistive Technology, including lifeline alarms, sensors and SMART technology, supports people to live independently at home for longer, promotes well-being, reduces isolation and helps prevent the need for more intensive health and social care support.

During 2025/26, the Council completed a major programme to replace analogue lifeline alarms with digitally compatible units ahead of the UK-wide digital telephone switchover in January 2027. A data cleanse has also improved the accuracy of service records. The service continues to be promoted through health and social care professionals and Council channels, supporting increased take-up by new customers. Further promotion of Assistive Technology and emerging technologies will continue to help more people remain independent at home.



## Safeguarding

Safeguarding demand remained high across adult and children's services during 2025/26. Adult safeguarding referrals increased slightly, continuing the longer-term upward trend, while the larger rise in safeguarding enquiries suggests increasing case complexity. The Adult Safeguarding Team will continue to monitor both referral volumes and complexity.



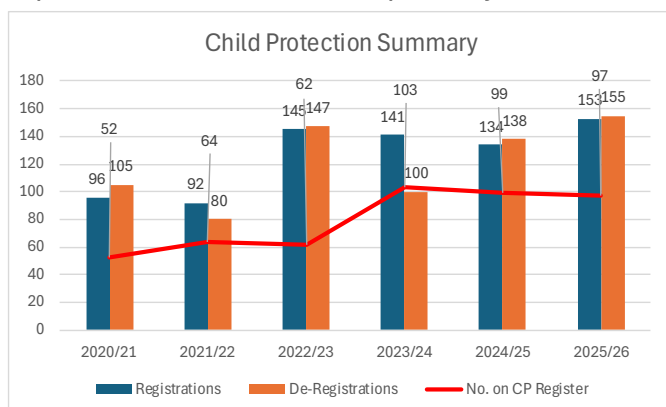
Children's safeguarding arrangements are being maintained, with Child Protection Register activity showing that children are being appropriately registered where risk thresholds are met and stepped down where risk has reduced. Statutory child protection processes and visiting performance remained high, demonstrating compliance with statutory requirements and effective safeguarding governance.

Safeguarding reports are submitted annually through the council's democratic process and are categorised separately for Adult Services, Children's Services, and Education. These reports are presented to ensure transparency, maintain accountability, and provide oversight of safeguarding

practices across all service areas, allowing the council to monitor progress, address concerns, and uphold the highest standards of care and protection for individuals at risk.

The most recent safeguarding reports can be found here:

- Education Safeguarding Annual Performance [Report](#)
- Children's Social Services Safeguarding Annual Performance [Report](#)
- Adult Social Services Safeguarding Annual



Performance [Report](#)

## Direct Payments

Work is underway to develop a federated Direct Payments approach across Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen, supporting a more sustainable, resilient and consistent service. A single Team Manager will oversee both teams for 12 months while future structures and delivery models are reviewed. This will strengthen the Direct Payments offer, giving residents greater choice, control and flexibility to shape care around their needs, support independence and improve well-being outcomes.

## Commissioning

The Care Cubed system was piloted to support a more consistent, transparent and evidence-based approach to care fee setting. By providing benchmarked costing information, it helps commissioners understand care costs, inform fee negotiations, allocate resources effectively and promote fair, sustainable arrangements that support quality and outcomes for people using care services. The pilot will continue in 2026/27, with Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen commissioning teams working together to maximise use of the system and share learning.

## Primary Care Multi-Disciplinary Team Co-ordinators

MDT Co-ordinators within the Community Resource Team have strengthened joint working between health and social care by improving referrals, reviews, follow-up actions and information sharing for people with complex or changing needs. This has supported more timely decisions, reduced duplication and improved community-based, person-centred support. Further roll-out is planned, with the next GP practice due to be included in September 2026.

## Long-term Care and Support

Support for adults with learning disabilities, people with mental health needs and young people moving into adulthood continued to focus on independence, prevention, choice and community involvement. Independent Living Skills PODS, Trailblazers, Community Options and supported employment activity helped people build confidence, everyday skills and opportunities through volunteering, employment-related support and community participation.

Engagement with people with lived experience is helping shape future support and improve accessible information, including around aspirations for work and volunteering and barriers such as training, employer awareness, benefits advice and transport. Respite support at Augusta House also continued to develop, with community involvement improving the outdoor garden space and helping create a more welcoming environment for people using the [respite service](#).

The Community Mental Health Team has strengthened early intervention, person-centred support and timely access to services, supported by regional partnership work including a new forensic mental health post



across Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen. However, respite capacity, information on demand and use, wider options such as Shared Lives, and waiting lists and assessment delays remain key areas for further improvement.

**Unpaid Carers**

During 2025/26, support for unpaid carers was strengthened through earlier identification, improved access to advice, assessments, peer support, well-being activities and practical help. The Carers Support Fund helped carers facing hardship, while community engagement increased through local activities and partnership working with Adferiad. Young carers and young adult carers also received targeted support, including assessments, ID cards, groups, wider opportunities and one-to-one advice. However, engagement remains low, and further work is needed to identify carers earlier, raise awareness, embed new arrangements and evidence impact.

**Provider Services**

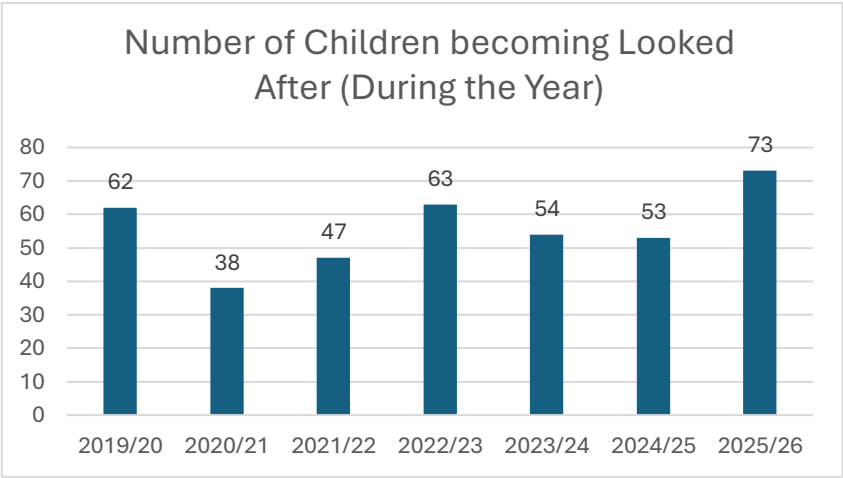
During 2025/26, Provider Services made positive progress across homecare, Cwrt Mytton and learning disability accommodation services, supporting people to remain safe, independent and well within their homes and communities. Homecare and the new Functional Assessment Team strengthened support for hospital discharge, care reviews and timely access to the right level of support, while Cwrt Mytton improved quality assurance, received positive inspection feedback and embedded digital systems to support safer care planning and medication management. However, demand for homecare and functional assessment remains higher than expected, creating pressure on capacity, workforce availability and response times. Recruitment is underway to strengthen resilience and maintain safe, effective and person-centred support.

**Blaenau Gwent Children’s Residential Homes**

During 2025/26, the Council’s in-house residential provision continued to provide an important local placement option, supporting six children in total, although occupancy remained limited with one young person accommodated at year end. A key challenge was safely matching children within a group living environment, taking account of individual needs, risks, vulnerabilities and the impact on others in the home. Future development of Madison House will therefore remain a priority in 2026/27, informed by local demand, placement sufficiency pressures and the need to align residential provision with the needs of Blaenau Gwent children and young people.

**Children Looked After**

There were 202 Children Looked After at year end, compared with 201 the previous year. Admissions into care increased to 73 children, compared with 53 in 2024/25. Monthly discharge meetings and care order revocation work are helping to maintain focus on children placed at home with parents or kinship carers. The restructure into two Child Protection and Court teams and one long-term Children Looked After and care planning team is expected to strengthen oversight and support the safe reduction strategy.



## Corporate Parenting Strategy

During 2025/26, the Council strengthened corporate parenting through a new 2025–2030 strategy, co-produced with care-experienced children and young people, staff, elected members and partners. The strategy sets out clear principles, promises and actions to improve outcomes across education, health, housing and employment, with progress monitored through annual Scrutiny updates.

Children's Services also continued to embed outcomes-focused practice through training, reflective learning, stronger family engagement and a new audit framework. Placement stability remained positive, with low disruption of Special Guardianship Order placements and none resulting in children returning to local authority care. Key challenges remain around reducing reliance on independent fostering and external residential placements and improving mandatory safeguarding and first aid training for foster carers.



## Using Young People's Voices to Shape Services through the Deal and Mission 2

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.



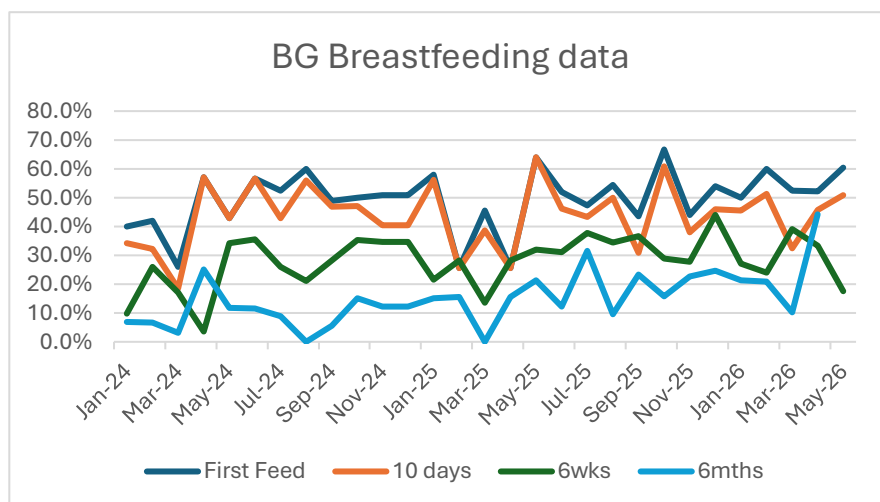
## SEWAS, the South East Wales Adoption Service, and Adoption Services

SEWAS made positive progress across adopter recruitment, permanence, trauma-informed practice, preventative adoption support and quality assurance. 32 adoptive families across the region were approved within the year and six children were placed for adoption, including two from Blaenau Gwent. Three Blaenau Gwent children were also matched during the year. A revised three-year marketing strategy has been agreed to increase adopter approvals by 10% each year.

Challenges across the service remain placement sufficiency for children looked after, including fostering and adoption, managing the budget and responding to an increase in demand and complexity of children and families' needs.

## 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. The partnership activity has taken place alongside year-on-year increases in breastfeeding rates, although the contribution of the campaign to this change cannot be determined from the available data.





## Childcare and Early Years Support

Flying Start continues to support families across Blaenau Gwent by improving early access to joined-up local services and expanding childcare provision. From September 2025, phase 3 extended support to a further 150 children across 15 additional areas, with future funding being sought to enable all two-year-olds in the borough to access 12.5 hours of funded term-time childcare.

Work is also progressing to expand childcare capacity, including Welsh-medium provision, through support for existing providers, Ty Chwarae Glyncoed, a planned facility at the new Welsh-medium seedling school in Tredegar, and further development in Brynmawr. Take-up of the Childcare Offer has increased significantly since 2017, with high attendance showing increased use of booked childcare hours.

## Play Opportunities for Children and Families

The 2025 Play Sufficiency Assessment and Action Plan was submitted, supported by positive partner engagement. Grant and capital funding enabled a range of play activities and family opportunities, alongside over £350,000 of investment in new and improved playgrounds across Blaenau Gwent.



Community involvement in local play spaces is developing through Friends of Playgrounds groups and the Play Friendly Communities campaign, supporting the wider aims of the Blaenau Gwent Deal by encouraging residents to help shape and improve local facilities. A full playground review in 2026/27 will guide future improvements, with greater focus on play value, natural features and local landscapes as well as equipment.

## Pop In and Play

Through the Deal and Mission 1, 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.



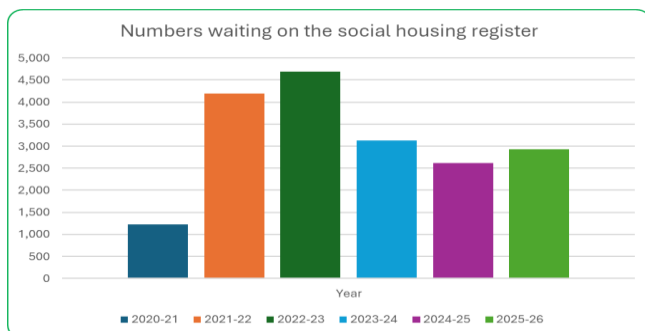
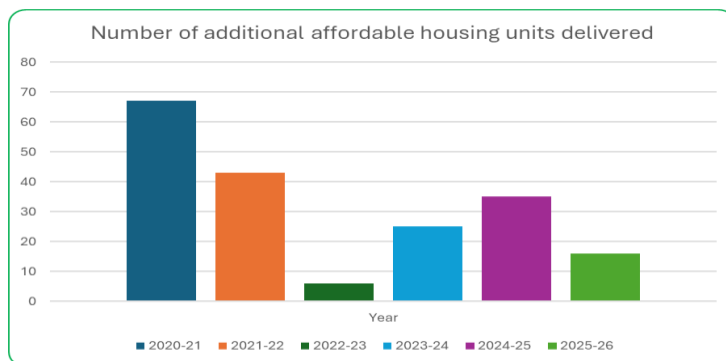
## Family Support and Skills Development

From April 2026, the Family Support Hub will provide a single front door for families and professionals to access information and support, bringing together the Family Information Service, Flying Start, Families First and wider preventative services.

The Pathways programme is helping adults aged 16 and over build practical skills for life, volunteering and employment through learning routes such as food and nutrition, social care, volunteering and training. The programme has already supported over 135 people, with participants gaining accredited qualifications and some progressing into volunteering, including roles supporting Y Big Bocs Bwyd and community cooking sessions at Willowtown School.

## Homelessness

During 2025/26, the Council continued to respond to increasing housing demand and homelessness pressures by focusing on prevention, increasing housing supply, reducing reliance on emergency accommodation and helping residents live independently.



Progress included expanding leasing and Housing First provision, supporting people to move from temporary to longer-term accommodation, progressing STAR Flats, securing funding for additional property acquisitions, and improving movement through supported accommodation. Adaptations and independent living support also continued, with 102

Disabled Facilities Grants completed, around £880,000 invested, and average delivery times improving during the year. Wider work also continued to improve homes and bring empty properties back into use. However, demand remains high, with ongoing challenges around limited suitable housing, access to private rented accommodation, landlord engagement, adaptation pressures and affordability. The Council will continue to strengthen partnerships, implement the new Housing Strategy, expand leasing and acquisition schemes, bring empty homes back into use, and develop more supported and affordable housing options.

## Community Safety

During 2025/26, the Council worked with partners to improve community safety and respond to crime, anti-social behaviour and community tensions.

Community Safety Wardens provided visible reassurance in hotspot areas, supported engagement with residents and businesses, and encouraged reporting to the Council, Police and registered social landlords. The contract ended on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026, having delivered 4,700 patrol hours.



The multi-agency Anti-Social Behaviour Task Force co-ordinated responses to place-based crime and anti-social behaviour, using early intervention, education, diversionary activity and enforcement where needed. It also worked with Social Services and Youth Services to promote the Crimestoppers [Fearless](#) programme and engage young people in schools, youth settings and the community. Partners also monitored wider community tensions, including hate-related graffiti and concerns linked to race, religion and immigration, and improved graffiti reporting. Police recorded 2,000 anti-social behaviour crimes

mainly linked to environmental issues such as fly-tipping, litter, dog fouling and graffiti.



The year highlighted the value of partnership working, visible engagement and early intervention, while reinforcing the need to strengthen data, sustain public reporting and continue targeted action. A

clear “you said, we did” approach remains important so communities can see their concerns are heard and acted upon.

### **Blaenau Gwent Food Resilience programme**

The Council used UK Shared Prosperity Fund Communities & Place funding to strengthen food resilience across Blaenau Gwent, working with Torfaen Council and local partners to improve food access, healthy eating, food growing and local supply chains. The programme also responded to food poverty and cost-of-living pressures.

Through the BG Food Partnership, this supported the development of the new [Community Food Strategy for Blaenau Gwent](#), a community-led plan focused on healthy, affordable food, improved well-being, stronger local food networks and more sustainable food practices.

Engagement with food businesses, growers and community food aid organisations also helped identify local challenges and opportunities for future action.

A wide range of activity took place during 2025/26 through the food resilience programme, including:

- **Community Food Development programme;**
- **School holiday food insecurity [mapping & promotion](#);**
- **Community Food Network workshops to provide guidance & capacity building;**
- **Administration of emergency food aid funding;**
- **BG Food Summit; and**
- **[Waste Warriors](#) programme.**

### **Key Challenges and Actions for 2026/27**

- **Strengthen governance and performance monitoring for prevention and community hubs**, so the impact of community hubs, Warm Hubs and early intervention can be clearly evidenced.
- **Sustain early help and targeted support to manage rising social care demand**, particularly where safeguarding pressures and case complexity remain high across adult and children’s services.
- **Increase local placement options for children looked after**, including fostering, adoption and residential provision, to respond to rising admissions and improve placement sufficiency.
- **Improve access to suitable, affordable and supported housing**, including adaptations and independent living support, to help manage ongoing demand for housing and homelessness services.
- **Use local data and community engagement to target action on community safety, carers and food resilience**, including anti-social behaviour, Council service reports and low unpaid carer engagement.
- **Community Hubs**, work to be undertaken to review facilities at the General Offices to consider the inclusion of a community hub in future. Work to be undertaken with staff to upskill them in supporting the public with their enquiries.

## Well-being Objective 4

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

### How well are we doing?

Progress is being made against Well-being Objective 4, supported by stronger alignment through the federated approach with Torfaen Council. Governance has been strengthened in areas including engagement, risk management, audit and customer access, although financial resilience and timely completion of statutory accounts remain key challenges. Continued focus is needed on financial sustainability, accountability, service improvement and clearer evidence of impact.

| What we said we would do in our 2024/25 Self-Assessment                                                   | What we achieved                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Accelerate delivery of outstanding Corporate Safeguarding recommendations                                 | All of the original actions identified to respond to the safeguarding recommendations are complete or business as usual; with additional actions identified which are in the process of being implemented. |
| Respond to outstanding audit recommendations through business planning and the risk and assurance tracker | 75 of 105 audit recommendations are complete or business as usual, with most remaining actions on target. The risk and assurance tracker has been reported to committees.                                  |
| Improve monitoring of the Integrated Impact Assessment process                                            | Governance and decision-making have strengthened, but a specific update on impact assessment monitoring is to be undertaken with Torfaen.                                                                  |
| Address delays in final accounts and return future accounts to statutory deadlines                        | The 2024/25 audit opinion was unqualified, but 2025/26 accounts remain delayed; recovery is planned for 2026/27.                                                                                           |
| Review recruitment processes and Welsh language requirements                                              | Welsh language promotion continues, but recruitment practice and workforce language skills need further focus.                                                                                             |
| Deliver £34 million of budget reductions over the five-year Medium-Term Financial Strategy                | A balanced 2025/26 budget was set, but future budget gaps, school deficits and Children's Services pressures remain significant.                                                                           |
| Continue monitoring of workforce sickness and set service and Council-wide targets                        | Sickness reduced by 1.5 days and 73% of staff had no absence. Mental health remains the main cause. Directorate targets have been set.                                                                     |

### How do we know?

#### Characteristics of an Outstanding Council

Blaenau Gwent's characteristics of an outstanding council describe the type of organisation the Council is working to be. They reflect a self-improving council that is honest about its performance, clear about where improvement is needed and focused on delivering better outcomes for residents.

Well-being Objective 4 sets out the Council's ambition to be an innovative and ambitious organisation that delivers quality services at the right time and in the right place. The activity described under Well-being Objective 4 will show how this ambition contributes to the characteristics of an outstanding council.



## Finance and Resources

The Council maintained sound financial management in a challenging environment, setting a balanced budget for 2025/26 through regular budget monitoring, governance and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The 2025/26 settlement was more favourable than expected, and the Bridging the Gap programme identified savings that enabled the budget to be set without using general reserves. However, the MTFS continues to show a significant future budget gap, requiring ongoing savings, service redesign and careful management of demand.

The provisional outturn position shows an overall adverse variance, with reserves used to support short-term resilience. The main pressures remain Children's Services and school deficits, highlighting the need to avoid reliance on reserves for recurring costs and to strengthen financial recovery plans.

| Portfolio/<br>Committee           | 2025/2026<br>Revised<br>Revenue<br>Budget<br><br>£m | 2025/2026<br>Provisional<br>Outturn<br><br>£m | Favourabl<br>e/<br>(Adverse)<br>Variance<br><br>£m |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Corporate Resources               | 24.91                                               | 24.16                                         | 0.75                                               |
| Children, Young People & Families | 94.15                                               | 97.29                                         | (3.14)                                             |
| Adults & Communities              | 48.88                                               | 48.10                                         | 0.78                                               |
| Economy & Place                   | 5.89                                                | 5.71                                          | 0.18                                               |
| Neighbourhood Services            | 27.71                                               | 27.96                                         | (0.25)                                             |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>201.54</b>                                       | <b>203.22</b>                                 | <b>(1.68)</b>                                      |

A further governance challenge is the timeliness and quality of the Statement of Accounts. Although progress has been made, including an unqualified audit opinion for 2024/25, the 2025/26 accounts will not meet the usual statutory deadlines. A recovery plan is in place to strengthen capacity, training, closedown arrangements, quality assurance and monitoring, with the aim of returning to the statutory timetable for 2026/27.

Overall, the Council has demonstrated good in-year financial control, but financial resilience remains under pressure. Continued focus is needed on demand management, prevention, service redesign, technology, budget accountability, school deficit recovery, Children's Services pressures and statutory accounts improvement.

## Workforce (A well-managed Council)

As of Quarter 4 2025/26, our workforce information is as follows:

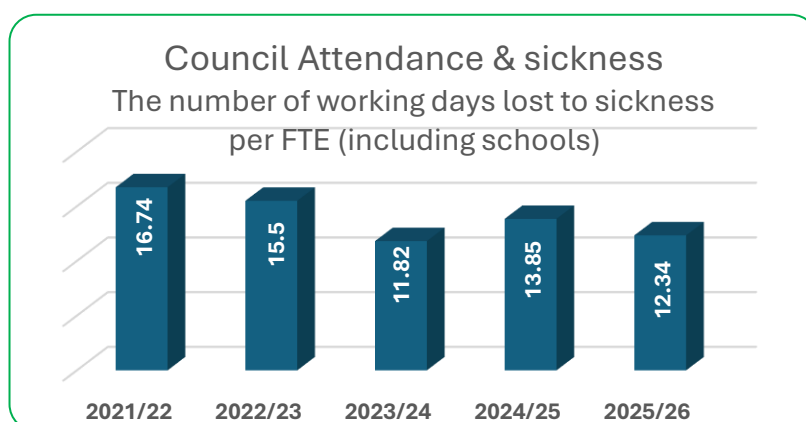
|                                           | Council<br>(Including<br>schools) | Adults &<br>Communities | Children,<br>Young<br>people &<br>families<br>(excluding<br>schools) | Corporate<br>Services | Economy<br>and Place | Neighbourhoods<br>and environment | Schools |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|
| Employee<br>Headcount                     | 3722                              | 515                     | 994                                                                  | 263                   | 118                  | 358                               | 1474    |
| Agency<br>Worker<br>Headcount<br>(Matrix) | 24                                | 1                       | 3                                                                    | 2                     | 0                    | 18                                | N/A     |

|                                                              |         |        |        |        |        |        |        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Employee FTE                                                 | 2437.52 | 327.27 | 530.74 | 243.96 | 128.73 | 277.53 | 929.29 |
| Employee FTE as a % of the Council FTE                       | 100.00% | 13.43% | 21.77% | 10.01% | 5.28%  | 11.39% | 38.12% |
| % of permanent positions vacant (no directly employed cover) | 6.46%   | 12.90% | 7.69%  | 10.91% | 12.00% | 9.52%  | N/A    |
| % Labour Turnover                                            | 2.02%   | 2.72%  | 2.41%  | 3.80%  | 3.39%  | 2.23%  | 1.02%  |
| Days lost to sickness per FTE (cumulative outturn)           | 12.34   | 16.10  | 9.72   | 6.70   | 4.33   | 16.92  | 13.33  |
| % of days lost to short term sickness                        | 31%     | 28%    | 30%    | 35%    | 36%    | 27%    | 34%    |
| % of days lost to long term sickness                         | 69%     | 72%    | 70%    | 65%    | 64%    | 73%    | 66%    |
| % of staff with no sickness absence                          | 72.91%  | 67.58% | 77.34% | 87.35% | 79.66% | 76.57% | 66.98% |

During 2025/26, progress was made in strengthening workforce governance, statutory compliance and organisational resilience. This included updates to HR policies, resolution of equal pay claims, continued development of recruitment and job evaluation arrangements, delivery of workforce planning activity, and recognition as a Disability Confident Leader. Partnership working with Torfaen Council has also supported shared

learning and a more federated approach to workforce matters. Corporate Governance and Resources Scrutiny Committee has reviewed workforce well-being and sickness, and in 2025/26 there was a reduction of 1.5 days lost in comparison to the previous year, with 73% of the workforce with no sickness. The leading cause of sickness absence was Psychiatric /

mental health accounting for 22.74% of work-related days lost. The full reports can be found [here](#) Workforce well-being and sickness absence remained under scrutiny, with improvements supported by clear attendance policies, real-time absence data, HR advice, occupational health, the Employee Assistance Programme and wider well-being initiatives. Mental health continues to be a key area of



focus, and a joint review of sickness absence practice is underway across Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen to strengthen consistency, compliance and future workforce support.

### **Health and Safety**

On an annual basis the Council is expected to report on its annual performance with regards to health, safety and welfare at work. The number of employee accidents/incidents increased from 251 in 2024/25 to 293 in 2025/26. The number of non-employee accidents decreased from 221 in 2024/25 to 217 in 2025/26. The number of employee accidents/incidents reportable to the HSE decreased from 18 in 2024/25 to 15 in 2025/26.

### **Corporate Safeguarding**

Following a series of Audit Wales findings, emphasis was placed on prioritising safeguarding corporately across the Council, noting that it is everybody's responsibility. As part of this, a Corporate Safeguarding Board and supporting Designated Safeguarding Persons Group were established, with representation from across all directorates. Following this, an action plan was developed to fully respond to the safeguarding recommendations. As at the end of 2025/26, a total of 39 actions had been identified and, of these:

- 23 are completed or moved to business as usual;
- 6 are in progress and on target;
- 4 are in progress but slightly behind target;
- 0 are significantly behind target; and
- 6 are not yet due to start.

### **Health and Safety and Corporate Health and Safety Group**

The Council reports annually on health, safety and welfare at work, with employee, non-employee and HSE-reportable incidents all reducing in 2024/25 compared with the previous year.

The Corporate Health and Safety Group provides oversight of health, safety and well-being risks, monitors performance, supports compliance with policy and legal duties, and promotes a positive safety culture to protect employees, service users, contractors and the public.

Future plans include bringing together corporate safeguarding and health, safety and well-being arrangements across Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen to support consistency, shared learning and greater collective capacity.

### **Welsh Language**

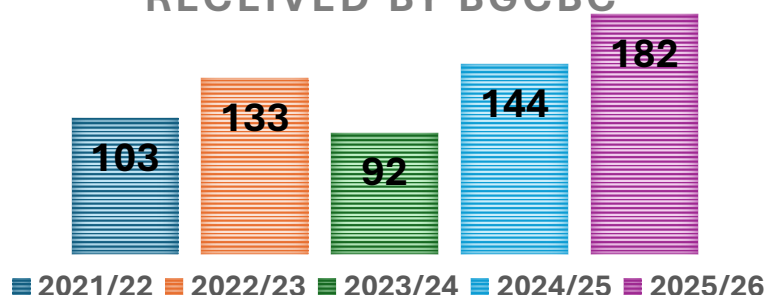
The Council continues to promote the Welsh language and support the national ambition of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. Progress against the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022–2027 is monitored through regular service updates and the Welsh Language Core Compliance Officer Group, strengthening oversight, accountability and compliance.

During 2025/26, activity focused on developing staff Welsh language skills, improving practical support for Contact Centre staff, increasing the visibility and use of Welsh across services and community events, and supporting the continued growth of Welsh-medium education, including Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar.

Key areas for further focus include strengthening workforce language skills, improving recruitment practices, embedding compliance across services, and maintaining standards following the closure of Welsh Language Commissioner investigations. Welsh Language Annual Report 2025 – [2026](#).

## Complaints and Compliments

### NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY BGCBC

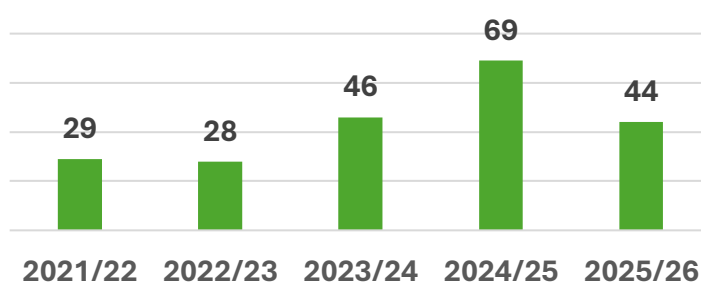


The Council has strengthened complaints and compliments reporting through a Performance Information interactive dashboard, improving visibility of feedback trends, service-level information and organisational learning over time.

During 2025/26, feedback was received across corporate complaints, social services complaints and compliments, with performance and outcomes

monitored through the dashboard and reported to Governance and Audit Committee twice a year. Most Stage 1 and Stage 2 corporate complaints were completed within expected timescales, although some delays remain. Social Services complaints also show a mixed picture on timeliness, reflecting the need to continue monitoring performance and learning from feedback to support service improvement. Complaints and compliments are reported to the Council's Governance and Audit Committee twice a year. The latest report can be found [here](#).

### Number of compliments received by BGCBC



## Information Governance

Information governance performance showed a mixed picture during 2025/26, although Freedom of Information performance declined in the final quarter and fell just below the desired response level. This does not currently require intervention, but performance will continue to be monitored.

| Detail                              | Volume 2023/24 | Volume 2024/25 | Volume 2025/26 |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Total FOIs received                 | 1044           | 959            | 1070           |
| Success rate within 20 working days | 918 (87.93%)   | 878 (91.6%)    | 956 (89.3%)    |
| Late but provided                   | 90 (8.62%)*    | 78 (8.1%)*     | 80 (7.47%)     |
| Still Outstanding                   | 36 (3.45%)*    | 3 (0.3%)*      | 34(3.17%)      |

*\*these figures were taken at approximately the same date last year but have subsequently improved*

Subject Access Requests increased, reflecting greater public awareness of information rights and improved staff recognition of requests. Most valid requests were completed within statutory timescales, although more complex and resource-intensive cases affected response times where delays occurred.

Data breach reporting increased during the year. While improved awareness may have contributed to the increase, further monitoring is needed to understand the underlying causes and identify any recurring risks.

## Internal Audit

An annual report, outlining areas that have undergone an assessment via Internal Audit, is provided to the Council's Governance and Audit [Committee](#) and also included in the Audit and Risk Manager's objective review of the Authority's system of internal control. Internal Audit issued 31 final audit reports during the year:

| Audit Grading        | Number of Audits |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Full Assurance       | 6                |
| Reasonable Assurance | 12               |
| Limited Assurance    | 6                |
| No Assurance         | 3                |
| Not graded           | 4                |

## Audit and Risk Manager's Annual Opinion

The Audit and Risk Manager's opinion was that Blaenau Gwent's system of internal control during 2025/26 operated at a level that provided Reasonable Assurance over the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's governance, risk management and control arrangements, while also noting comments in relation to the Children and Families Directorate. The full committee reports and full opinion of the Audit and Risk Manager can be viewed [here](#).

## Counter Fraud

During 2025/26, progress was made to strengthen the Council's counter fraud arrangements. A fraud risk assessment was created and presented to the Governance and Audit Committee in November [2025](#), where it was agreed that further refinement was needed before it is brought back alongside the Counter Fraud Plan. The Counter Fraud Strategy was produced and presented to the Committee in September [2025](#). Fraud awareness training was provided for Members in October 2025, and a Counter Fraud Awareness session was developed through Thinqi and rolled out to all officers and Members at the end of March 2026.

## Risk Management

Work continues to strengthen risk management arrangements across Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen. A Corporate Risk Management Group is being established to provide oversight of the framework and Corporate Risk Register. Alongside this, implementation of the Ico Risk software is progressing, with testing expected to begin mid-2026 and the system anticipated to be available during Autumn 2026. The Corporate Risk Register is reported each quarter through the democratic process and internally to Joint Executive Team, supporting the early identification, monitoring and management of risks that could affect service delivery, financial resilience and achievement of the Council's priorities. The latest risk register was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee and can be found [here](#)

## External Audit

External audit provides independent assurance on the Council's performance, use of public resources and governance arrangements. During 2025/26, the Council was subject to 25 audit reports containing 105 recommendations. Progress is monitored through service plans, reported internally to the Joint Executive Team, and presented through the scrutiny process, including an annual report to Governance and Audit Committee.

Recommendations are monitored using a BRAGG rating system, which shows whether actions are complete, on target, behind target, significantly behind target or not yet due to start.

Of the 105 recommendations:

- 75 are blue (71%)- have been completed or moved to business as usual;
- 0 are red -significantly behind target;

- 1 is amber (1%) behind target but manageable;
- 26 (25%) are green- on target; and
- 3 (3%) are grey - not yet due to start.

The full report on progress made against recommendations from external auditors can be found [here](#).

### **Joint Executive Team and Leadership Arrangements**

The Council has arrangements in place to support service delivery, decision-making and senior leadership through the Joint Executive Team and emerging Joint Leadership Team. Following the agreement in January 2025 for Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Councils to operate under one Joint Chief Executive, interim arrangements have stabilised senior management, with permanent posts established and further work underway to develop a permanent joint structure.

The Joint Leadership Team will bring senior leaders from both councils together to provide strategic leadership, oversee collaborative and federated programmes, support transformation and coordinate joint approaches where these improve effectiveness, efficiency and long-term sustainability. It will also provide assurance through the GRIPP process, helping both councils respond to financial, operational and service pressures while maintaining their independence and local democratic governance.

### **Joint Appointment Committee**

The Joint Appointments Committee is a formal joint committee across both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Councils established as part of the governance arrangements that support the federated working model between the two authorities. The committee provides a joint mechanism for the appointment of senior officers to roles that operate across both councils and are accountable to both organisations.

### **Future BGT**

Future BGT is a joint leadership and organisational development initiative across Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen, established to support the federated model by bringing together leaders and managers from both organisations to consider strategic challenges, share ideas and help shape future direction. It provides a forum for collaborative thinking and engagement, helping to ensure decision-making is inclusive, informed and focused on long-term outcomes for the councils and the communities they serve. A significant area of focus for Future BGT has been supporting the development and implementation of the Deal. The programme has also supported the development of a shared leadership culture across both councils.

### **Joint Scrutiny**

In July 2026, a report is scheduled for Council to approve joint scrutiny arrangements as part of the governance framework supporting the federated working model with Torfaen. The arrangements enable elected members from both authorities to scrutinise shared services, joint programmes and areas of collaborative activity whilst maintaining the sovereignty and democratic accountability of each council. The arrangements are intended to strengthen democratic oversight, provide effective scrutiny of shared priorities and performance, support transparency and accountability, and ensure that the benefits and outcomes of joint working are subject to appropriate member challenge and review.

### **Political Structure Elected Members and the Democratic Process**

Information on Blaenau Gwent's Councillors and Committee processes are included here:

<https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/council/councillors-and-committees/>

**The Constitution** can be found here - [2024\\_constitution\\_final-v16-finalised-2.pdf](#)

**Annual Governance Statement 2024/25** can be found [here](#)

**Code of Governance 2025/26** can be found [here](#)

**Annual Report of the Head of Democratic Services** can be found [here](#).

**Annual Scrutiny Report** can be found [here](#).

**Report of the Governance and Audit Committee** can be found [here](#)

**Standards Committee Report** can be found [here](#).

**Report of the Presiding Member** latest report can be found [here](#)

**Members Annual Reports** can be found [here](#)

### **Gwent Public Service Board (GPSB) Joint Scrutiny Committee**

Blaenau Gwent Council has been appointed as the host authority to undertake the administrative arrangements and provide dedicated support and advisers for the GPSB Joint Scrutiny Committee. The Committee has met four times between April 2025 and March 2026. Information on the committee can be found here [Meetings - Gwent Public Services Board Gwent Public Services Board](#)

### **Performance Management**

As part of the federated approach, the Council has aligned performance management arrangements with Torfaen Council, including shared reporting schedules, strengthened audit processes and a single approach to service planning from 2026/27. This will bring together key priorities such as the Corporate Plan, Marmot Principles, Mission, federation activity and the Communities Approach, supported by routine monitoring through the Joint Executive Team.

These arrangements strengthen collaboration, transparency and accountability, while supporting the Council's self-assessment duties under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Further work will focus on developing a more data and intelligence-led approach and improving the evidence used to demonstrate delivery and continuous improvement.

### **Equalities**

The Strategic Equality Plan 2024–2028 progressed during 2025/26, with stronger oversight, improved monitoring, better alignment with service planning, and wider equality learning and awareness activity. The Integrated Impact Assessment process was also strengthened through the SNAP platform, training and clearer governance, helping embed equality more consistently in policy, planning and decision-making. Key priorities for 2026/27 include increasing training uptake, responding to changes to the Public Sector Equality Duty in Wales, expanding member development and progressing towards Disability Confident Leader status.

### **Town and Community Councils (TCCs)**

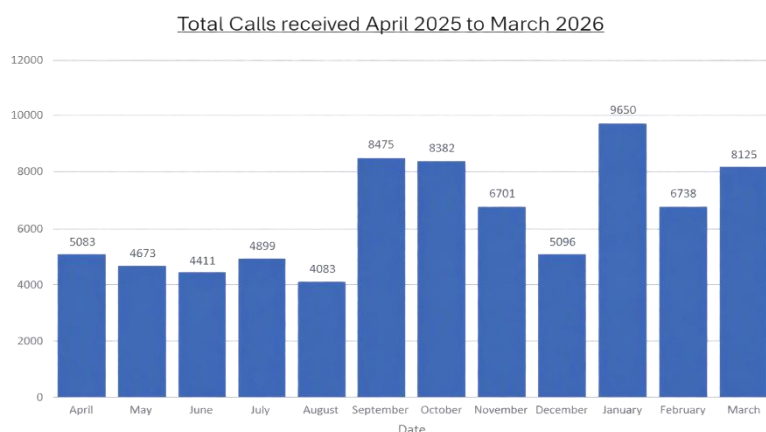
TCCs can help the Council understand the issues that impact the local community. There are four TCCs in Blaenau Gwent:

- Tredegar Town Council [Home | Tredegar Town Council](#)
- Nantyglo & Blaina Town Council [Home - Nantyglo & Blaina Town Council](#)
- Abertillery & Llanhilleth Community Council [Abertillery and Llanhilleth Community Council – Improving the Abertillery and Llanhilleth Community Council area to benefit the local residents' lives, health and wellbeing.](#)
- Brynmawr Town Council [Home - Brynmawr Town Council](#)

### **Customer Services**

The Contact Centre continues to face significant pressure from rising and increasingly complex demand, particularly linked to Council Tax, Waste and Recycling, missed collections and recovery queries. This has affected call handling and waiting times, highlighting the need to reduce avoidable contact and improve how enquiries are routed and resolved.

Improvement work is focused on IVR routing, clearer scripting, agreed handover points with service areas, reduced call handling times and supporting staff to resolve appropriate enquiries at first point of contact, while maintaining customer experience. This is being taken forward through the Contact Centre Improvement Plan.



## Communicating with and Informing our Staff

The Communications Team plays a key role in keeping residents, partners, stakeholders and staff informed about Council priorities, services and achievements. During 2025/26, proactive media relations, social media, priority campaigns and new engagement channels helped promote the Council's work, reach wider audiences and support key messages such as the Blaenau Gwent Deal, school attendance and environmental behaviour change.

Social media remains the main channel for direct resident engagement, supported by service-specific channels and plans to expand onto TikTok to reach younger audiences. New and relaunched channels, including GovDelivery, the weekly resident e-bulletin and BG Connect, have strengthened digital and non-digital engagement, helping reach residents who may not regularly access online information.

Internal communications also remained important through staff newsletters, Chief Executive updates and well-being messages, supporting staff awareness, recognition and well-being.

## Engagement and Participation

Engagement, participation, and customer experience are vital themes that influence the Council's service design and decision-making processes. The Council is dedicated to long-term community support and aims to achieve this through active community engagement. Effective engagement is essential for the Council's efficient operation, ensuring that the services provided are suitable and meet the needs of users. The current Engagement and Participation Strategy can be found [here](#). Work is to be undertaken in 2026/27 to review the Strategy to align it to the principles of the Deal and the new ways of working with the community.

The Council has implemented a new [Engagement Platform](#) which provides a mechanism for residents and stakeholders to take part in consultations and share views on issues affecting Blaenau Gwent.

## Resident survey

The last Let's Talk: Living in Blaenau Gwent survey was undertaken in October/November 2024. At that time 1,809 responses were received from Blaenau Gwent residents. The survey is to be undertaken every two years and will be distributed to the public in late 2026. This year, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Councils have added additional questions into the survey to consider the well-being and outcomes of residents.

## Budget Engagement

To support the Council in setting the 2026/27 budget, an engagement process was carried out to inform residents of the Council's financial position and to seek their views. The budget engagement process provided residents with the opportunity to comment on key issues to help inform decision-making, such as prioritising services and setting council tax levels. The budget survey went live on 4<sup>th</sup>

February 2026 and was available for two weeks. It was shared on social media, with the intention of encouraging as many people as possible to participate and share their views. [Cabinet Budget Report 2026-27](#)

### **Digital, Data Transformation and Technology**

During 2025/26, Blaenau Gwent strengthened digital, data and technology arrangements through a shared Digital and Data function within the Shared Resource Service and the establishment of a Digital, Data and Technology Programme aligned with Torfaen. These arrangements provide a more strategic, resilient and consistent approach to digital transformation, service design, data-led improvement and technology investment.

Improvement activity has focused on easier access to services, reduced avoidable demand and better use of data. This includes the AI Front Door programme, improved Council Tax online forms, development of the Single View of Child dashboard, stronger GIS capability, and data support for the federated Marmot programme to better understand outcomes, monitor progress and target interventions.

Key technology projects have also been delivered, including decommissioning Civica EDM and moving to a more sustainable document management model, migrating 24 schools to Microsoft Teams Telephony, and upgrading Paysuite360 to improve payment security, customer experience and compliance.

### **Social Partnership Duty**

The Social Partnership Duty, introduced by the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023, requires local authorities to engage meaningfully with recognised trade unions or staff representatives when setting Well-being Objectives and making strategic decisions. It supports the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 by ensuring staff have a voice in shaping relevant policies and actions.

The Council must seek early consensus or compromise with staff representatives where reasonable and publish an annual report on how it has met the duty. The Council will meet this requirement through its annual Self-Assessment and Well-being Report.

The Council has established social partnership arrangements through its Facilities Agreement, Joint Consultative Committees and regular engagement between Members, officers and trade unions. During the year, discussions have focused on the federated model with Torfaen, transformation, joint roles, financial pressures, workforce well-being, fair employment and Corporate Plan priorities. Regular engagement also takes place through meetings between the Chief Executive, Joint Head of HR and trade union representatives on strategic, policy, operational and workforce matters.

### **Key Challenges and Actions for 2026/27**

- **Strengthen financial resilience** by managing the £1.68m adverse variance, addressing pressures in Children's Services and school deficits, and planning for future budget gaps.
- **Complete and monitor Statutory accounts audit actions** by progressing the remaining external audit recommendations and improving arrangements to support timely completion of the 2025/26 accounts.
- **Reduce workforce sickness and address vacancies** by maintaining focus on attendance, mental health support and recruitment pressures across key service areas.
- **Improve customer access and information request performance** by managing demand in the Contact Centre and strengthening Freedom of Information response times.

- **Evidence the impact of federated transformation** by demonstrating clearer outcomes, stronger performance information and benefits for residents from joint working with Torfaen.

## Priorities for the year ahead and beyond

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### From Plans to Outcomes

The year ahead represents an important transition point for Blaenau Gwent. We must continue to deliver high-quality day-to-day services and the commitments set out within our Corporate Plan, whilst also accelerating the changes needed to respond to rising demand, increasing inequality and continuing financial pressures.

Our direction of travel is clear. The Corporate Plan, our Marmot ambitions, the Blaenau Gwent Deal, our five Missions and the developing federation with Torfaen are not separate programmes. Together, they form a single approach to improving outcomes, reducing inequalities and strengthening communities. At their heart is a simple belief: lasting change happens when public services, communities, businesses and partners work together around the outcomes that matter most.

The challenge for 2026/27 is therefore not to create more strategies. The challenge is to ensure that our ambitions increasingly influence the decisions we take, the resources we invest and the way we work, so that residents see a tangible difference in their daily lives.

### 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.**

These priorities reflect both the opportunities and the challenges identified through our annual self-assessment. They will remain the focus of our performance arrangements throughout the year ahead.

### Making Prevention Everyone's Business

Prevention remains central to our long-term approach.

Too often, public services are required to respond when problems have already become complex and costly. Our ambition is to increasingly shift effort, resources and decision-making towards earlier intervention and prevention, helping people live healthier, more independent and fulfilling lives.

This means understanding and influencing the factors that shape people's life chances, including education, employment, housing, health, community connections and environmental conditions. It requires us to look beyond symptoms and address underlying causes.

During 2026/27 we will continue to strengthen the connection between prevention, service planning, commissioning, budgeting and performance management. We will increasingly ask whether our decisions are reducing future demand, tackling inequality and improving long-term outcomes.

This will not always be easy. Financial pressures and rising demand create understandable pressure to focus on immediate needs. However, if we are to create sustainable public services and improve outcomes over time, prevention must remain at the heart of how we think, plan and act.

### **Working With Communities, Not Simply Delivering to Them**

The Blaenau Gwent Deal represents a long-term shift in the relationship between the Council, residents, community organisations, businesses and partners.

It recognises that communities are not simply recipients of services. They possess experience, knowledge, relationships, leadership and assets that are essential to improving outcomes and creating stronger places.

Over the next year we will continue to move beyond consultation and towards genuine collaboration and shared responsibility. This means supporting community leadership, expanding volunteering opportunities, strengthening local partnerships and involving residents earlier in shaping decisions, services and investment. Success will not simply be measured by how many people we engage with. Success will be measured by whether communities have a greater influence over decisions, whether local capacity is strengthened and whether collective action is helping to improve local outcomes.

### **Strengthening the Federation**

Our partnership with Torfaen continues to develop and mature.

The federated model represents an innovative response to many of the challenges facing local government, including financial pressures, workforce shortages, increasing service demand and the need for greater organisational resilience.

During 2026/27 we will continue to strengthen shared leadership arrangements, align systems and processes where appropriate, and explore opportunities for closer collaboration where this delivers clear benefits for residents.

The purpose of the federation is not structural change for its own sake. Rather, it is to create the capacity, capability and resilience needed to address complex challenges, accelerate learning, reduce duplication and invest more energy in prevention and long-term improvement.

As the federation evolves, we will remain focused on ensuring that local democratic accountability and local identity continue to be protected and strengthened.

### **Building the Organisation We Need**

Achieving our ambitions depends on our people.

Throughout 2026/27 we will continue investing in leadership development, workforce capability, digital skills, organisational learning and innovation. We will also complete work with Torfaen to establish a shared set of Values and Behaviours that reflect the culture we want to build across the federation.

These values will focus on:

- Working with people.
- Working openly.
- Working together to deliver.

Our ambition is not simply to describe the culture we want. It is to ensure that our behaviours are visible in the way we lead, collaborate, make decisions and serve our communities every day.

Alongside this, we will continue to invest in digital technologies, data and artificial intelligence where they can improve services, strengthen decision-making, increase productivity and release capacity for frontline delivery.

At all times, our use of technology will remain focused on improving outcomes for people, whilst ensuring services remain accessible and inclusive for all residents.

### **Measuring What Matters**

As our approach develops, we must increasingly focus on the outcomes we achieve rather than the activity we undertake. Success will not be measured by the number of strategies, programmes or initiatives we introduce. It will be measured by whether people's lives improve.

Over the coming years we want to see evidence that we are:

- Reducing inequalities.
- Improving healthy life expectancy.
- Strengthening communities.
- Increasing participation and community leadership.
- Improving educational outcomes.
- Supporting more people into good employment.
- Reducing avoidable demand on public services.
- Increasing investment in prevention.

Through our Marmot approach, working with the Torfaen Health Determinants Research Collaboration and wider evidence framework, we will continue to strengthen our understanding of what works, where outcomes are improving and where further action is needed.

We will also place greater emphasis on learning, ensuring that evidence, insight and experience are used to continually refine and improve our approach.

### **Beyond 2026/27**

The current Corporate Plan runs until 2027. Following the local government elections in May 2027, a new Council will establish its priorities for the next planning period.

Whilst future administrations will rightly determine their own priorities, the long-term challenges facing our communities are unlikely to change significantly. Inequality, demographic change, financial pressures, health outcomes, economic resilience, environmental sustainability and community wellbeing will continue to shape the decisions of public services for many years to come.

Our responsibility is therefore not simply to deliver the current plan. It is to leave behind stronger foundations for the future.

We want the next Council to inherit an organisation that is financially resilient, evidence-led, community-focused and capable of responding effectively to the challenges ahead. We want to leave behind stronger communities, stronger partnerships and a stronger operating model for public service delivery.

Ultimately, our ambition remains simple: to create healthier, fairer and more resilient communities where people can thrive.

The year ahead is another important step on that journey. The task now is not simply to describe the future we want to see, but to continue building it together through the decisions we make, the relationships we develop and the outcomes we deliver.



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