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. 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	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

Strategy and monitor numbers.	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.

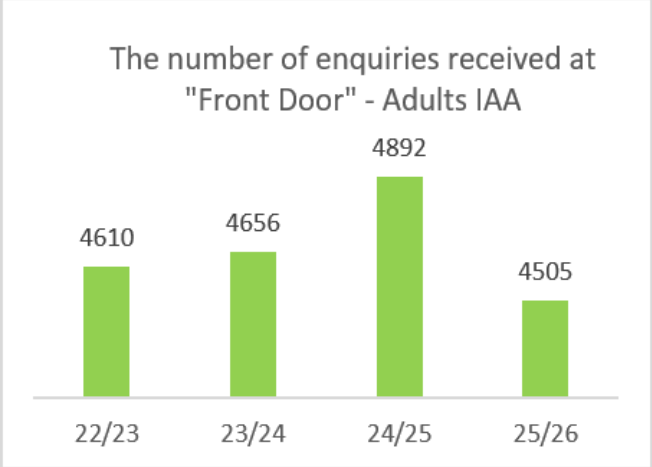
The emerging model takes a "community first" approach, supporting residents earlier through local provision, clearer referral pathways, a more consistent front door, coordinated case management and better use of data to reduce demand for statutory services.
The next stage will focus on developing an integrated prevention system, with stronger governance, clearer outcomes, consistent performance measures and improved oversight of prevention investment.

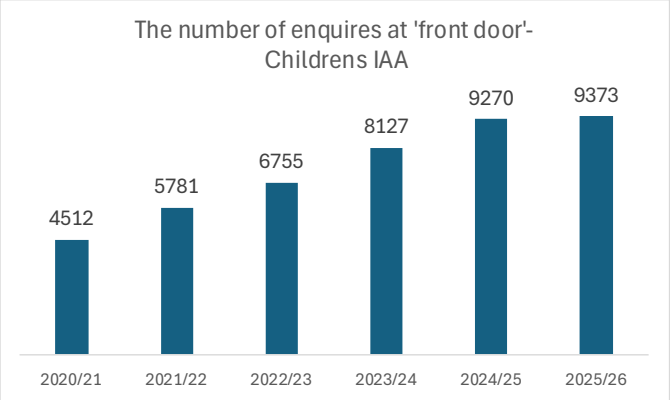
Leisure Review

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.

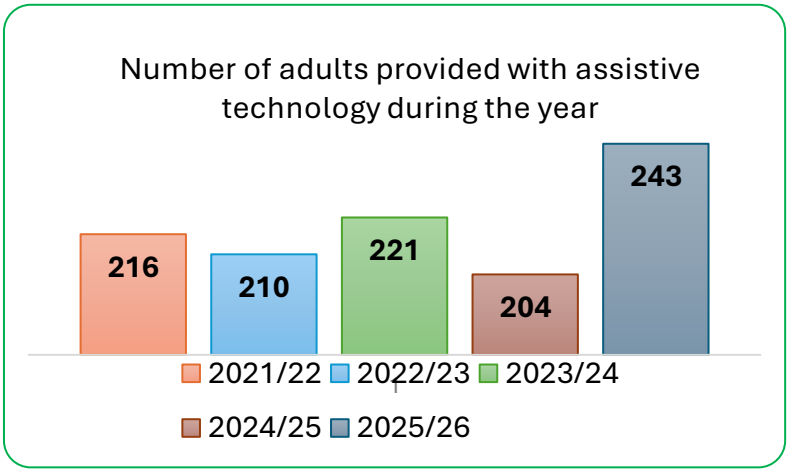




Children's Services also experienced sustained demand through the Information, Advice and Assistance Team, reflecting ongoing safeguarding pressures and increasing family complexity. Most referrals were managed without statutory intervention, suggesting that front door screening, threshold decisions 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

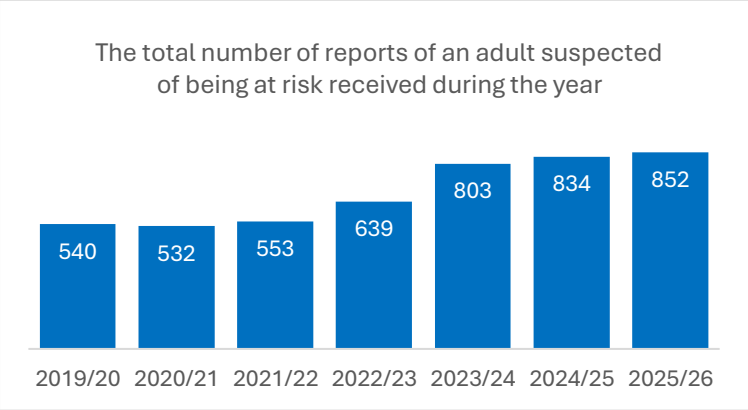
Assistive Technology, including lifeline alarms, sensors and SMART technology, supports people to live independently at home for longer, promotes well-being, reduces isolation and helps prevent the need for more intensive health and social care support.



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.

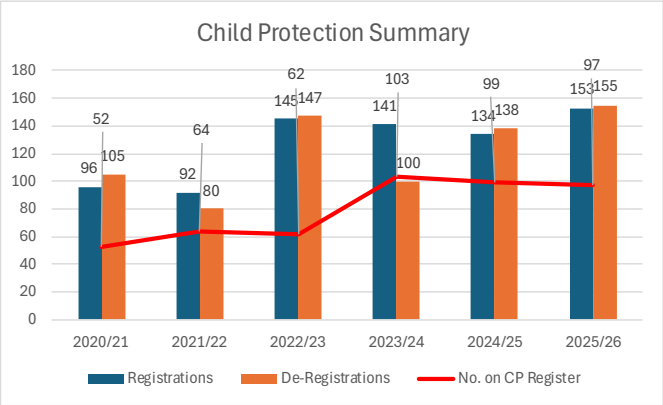
Safeguarding

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

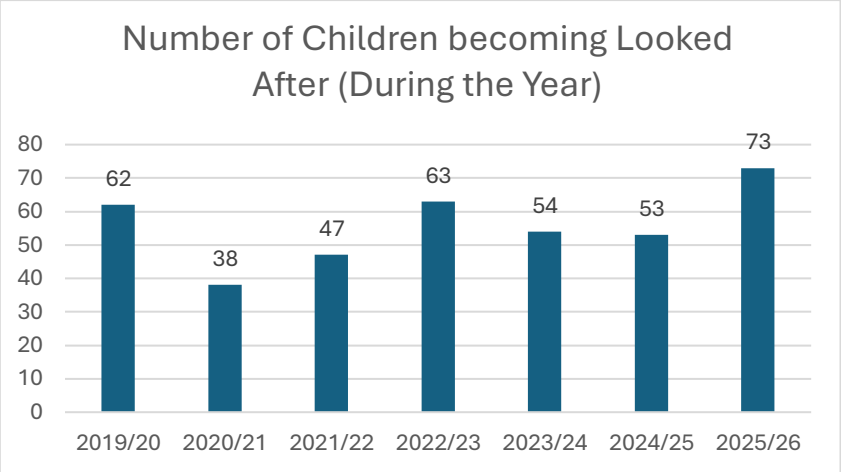
Mytton improved quality assurance, received positive inspection feedback and embedded digital systems to support safer care planning and medication management. However, demand for homecare and functional assessment remains higher than expected, creating pressure on capacity, workforce availability and 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.

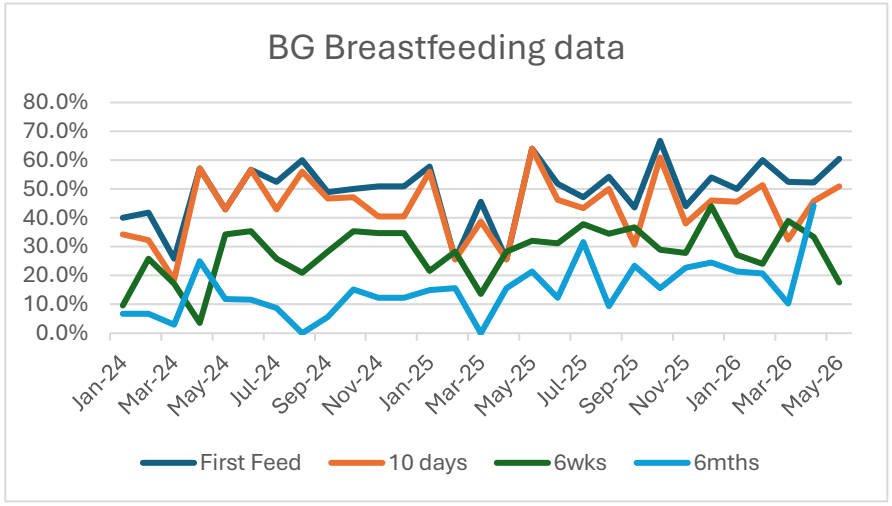
SEWAS, the South East Wales Adoption Service, and Adoption Services

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.

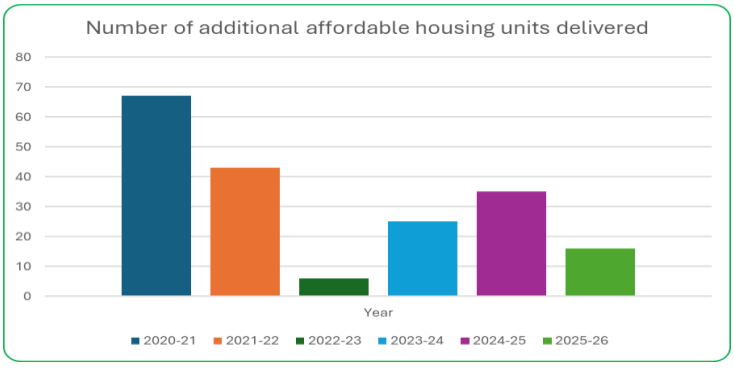
Family Support and Skills Development

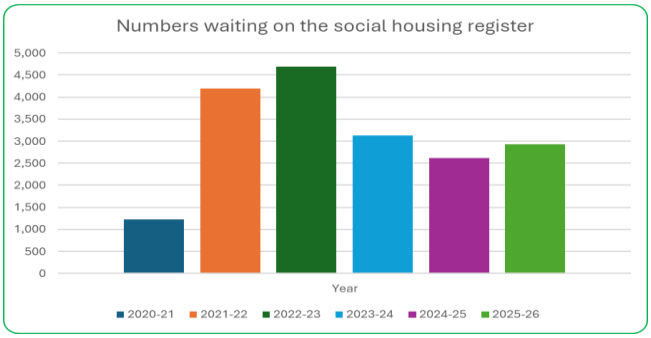
From April 2026, the Family Support Hub will provide a single front door for families and professionals to access information and support, bringing together the Family Information Service, Flying Start, Families First and wider preventative services.

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 31st 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.