

The Year Ahead and Beyond

Throughout our report we have outlined many of the key challenges we face as an organisation, as well as the key developments we plan to deliver. However, there are a small number of central concepts, fundamental to our approach to ensuring future generations are able to meet their needs.

Our focus on the delivery of the Marmot Masterplan and our communities' approach, alongside the delivery of the Corporate Plan, provides a focus on us delivering greater resilience to our communities and residents, to meet their own needs, resulting in much greater independence and less chance of individuals needing costly Council interventions in their lives. We are committed to our aim of radically change the way we operate, making 'communities' and 'wellbeing & prevention' genuine cornerstones in the way we design our services so that we can empower our communities to be healthier, better connected and more equal.

The Blaenau Gwent 'Deal' will look to further empower communities, in a way that shifts meaningful decision-making power to our communities, giving the residents a real voice in how and where resources are spent within their locality, encouraging the people who use services, their families, carers, and professionals to collaborate as equal partners to design, deliver, and evaluate services.

This empowerment will only come with greater autonomy over the resourcing of our communities, transferring the control of budgets and assets previously held by the Council to our residents. The Council will go beyond communities deciding on how public funds are allocated, moving the focus onto involving communities in the design and delivery of public services. Our approach will look to develop a Culture of Collaboration between the Council and communities within Blaenau Gwent, replacing traditional mindsets with meaningful relationships that focus on allowing communities to maximise their strengths, fostering trust and autonomy among public servants and citizens.

As part of this approach, the Council is looking to remodel its services to provide a greater early intervention and prevention approach. The Council will look to move to a prevention-first approach by taking proactive steps to tackle the root causes of inequality. This means designing services that intervene early, invest in community strengths, and aligning resources to reduce future demand.

Every directorate and service area will identify opportunities to prevent demand growing, promote wellbeing, and close gaps in outcomes. We will measure success not just by what we fix, but by what we prevent, ensuring that our actions today build a fairer, healthier, and more resilient communities for tomorrow.

Blaenau Gwent 'Deal'

The Blaenau Gwent 'Deal' will be a contract between the Council and the residents of Blaenau Gwent explaining in simple terms what they can expect from the Council and in return what our residents can do to support the delivery of 5 shared missions:

- **Mission One:** Early Years - Building Bright Futures;
- **Mission Two:** Inspiring Lifelong Learning, Ambition and Resilience;
- **Mission Three:** Wellbeing Through Community Leadership;
- **Mission Four:** Thriving Economy, Vibrant Places; and
- **Mission Five:** Empowered Communities, Shared Power and Success.

The 'Deal' will support our commitment to becoming a Marmot Council and in doing so to sustainably reduce in inequality and inequity in Blaenau Gwent. Our approach recognises that well-being is not just about individual choices or biology. The conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age have a profound impact on their well-being. We must therefore go beyond healthcare to improve health in developing whole-system approaches that tackle the root causes of our problems, developing tailored, inclusive, and long-term solutions. The 'Deal' is our mechanism for bringing this aspiration to life.

Our vision is for a future without inequality, where everyone thrives in a fair, inclusive, and resilient community achieved through create lasting change by building trust, fostering shared responsibility, and driving innovation through strong collaboration



between the council, residents, and partners. These plans are ambitious and our approach alongside our partners in Torfaen Council continue to set us aside to other Councils in Wales. We are committed to be a learning authority, acting upon the feedback we receive through close working with the public, partners and our regulators as well as our recent Council wide peer review (panel performance assessment). It is therefore important to continually test whether our actions are delivering the intended benefits. Alongside the new 'Deal' we will implement a new evaluation framework for our work, further strengthening our ongoing and continuous self-assessment and review processes in order to have the greatest impact on improving the well-being of our residents.

Early Intervention and Prevention

A programme of early intervention and prevention (EIP) is being scoped in Blaenau Gwent for implementation in 2025/26, with the aim of enabling residents to remain resilient and to handle a crisis without premature or serious statutory intervention where it is not needed.

The EIP will have alignment to the Blaenau Gwent 'Deal', the Marmot Master Plan and the Council's Corporate Plan, and will be built around the following 10 core principles:

1. Prioritise prevention, independence and wellbeing;
2. Maximise role of the community;
3. Ensure that all roles can provide basic level of information, advice and signpost on full range of crises;
4. Reduction in demand at statutory gateways;
5. Understand the support needs of different cohorts;
6. Viewed as a single prevention system – maximise effectiveness and efficiency for our residents;
7. Minimise referrals between providers, reduce hand offs;
8. Based around single view of an individual;
9. Outcome/impact drives the performance framework and joins up the story behind the data; and
10. Journey mapping- Simplification of systems and structures for customers and minimise handoffs / duplication.

We want 'wellbeing and prevention' to be genuine cornerstones of how we design our Council services. Any Council service that interacts with residents should be there to support residents to stay well without the need for statutory services. This proportional shift towards prevention will help us provide the right support at the right time so that resources can be focussed on those with the greatest need at a time when it is needed most.

Communities Approach

Resilient communities are complex systems involving several different players: residents, community leaders and local councillors, volunteers, community groups, charities, clubs and hubs, pubs, open spaces, shops and cafes, churches, council services, Police, NHS services and more.

The Communities Approach is a wholesale redesign of our prevention model, and the associated staffing structures. The model needs to provide the right support to the right people at the right time, rather than assuming a 'need' for service provision first. Support can come from many places including (for most people most of the time) their own community. They are the first line of prevention and are essential in helping us manage our wellbeing, particularly at times of personal crisis. Working with the Council, our prevention model will look to incentivise communities to focus on local well-being needs, and provide capacity building, research, data and financial support to do so.

An effective community's approach requires all partners to agree to a single vision, principles and strategic outcomes framework for the system. This means that a clear and consistent governance framework needs to be in place at the strategic (Borough), tactical (Community Council) and operational (Ward) level.

Future Blaenau Masterplan

Gwent: A 15 Year Wellbeing,



resilience and health equity are the cornerstones of successful and vibrant communities. This is why they are central to the Fairer Gwent (Marmot) report and are at the heart of our Well-being Objectives. As a Council we are proud to be incorporating these principles into our annual Service Plans.

Our annual Service Plans show what we are doing to improve well-being, resilience and health equity across the Borough. We will use these plans to report progress and make judgements on whether or not we have done what we said we were going to do.

But we also need to understand whether what we did has actually made the difference that we intended it to make. We recognise that sustainable change in the ways as set out in the Fairer Gwent report will not always happen overnight. This is why we've produced this 15-year Masterplan. The Masterplan will allow us to monitor the impact that our activities are having over the course of a generation.

We cannot wait until the end of the 15 years to see if our activity is having an impact. So, we will monitor impacts over three distinct periods of time.

1. **By the end of each year.** We can monitor these indicators monthly/quarterly, report on them at the end of each year, and adjust the target for the year ahead.
2. **By the end of this Council term (5 years).** On top of the monthly or quarterly indicators, this also allows us to present data that is only collected annually.
3. **By the end of the Masterplan.** As well as monthly, quarterly & annual indicators, this allows us to monitor truly long-term statistics from a variety of sources such as national studies that will give a definitive view on whether the Council is improving well-being and reducing inequality.

Our Future Blaenau Gwent Masterplan will measure our success against the 8 Marmot Principles that underpin the Council's own Well-being Objectives.

Corporate governance and culture

Extensive work has begun to implement new corporate governance arrangements that also link, where appropriate, to Torfaen processes. During 2025/26 this will continue as a key piece of work in order to implement re focussed Corporate Plan priorities and indicators and making alignment to the Marmot Masterplan and the deal. Work will also continue to enhance our data systems and presentation of data to improve the transparency and accuracy of the information we provide to senior leaders, councillors and the community.

Corporate Safeguarding

As highlighted within the body of the report, Safeguarding is everybody's responsibility and is a crucial area for the Council. The Council needs to accelerate its response to implementing the outstanding recommendations from the Audit Wales review of Corporate Safeguarding.

The Council's Designated Safeguarding Persons (DSPs) Group will have the operational responsibility for addressing the actions within the plan but also to ensure that safeguarding remains high on the agenda across all Council services. This group is responsible to the Council's Executive Team who will act as the Corporate Safeguarding Board. Reports on progress will also be provided through the Scrutiny Committee process.

Next steps for DSPs will be to:

- undertake Group C Safeguarding Training and will be required to provide Group B training to relevant staff;
- awareness raising of roles and responsibilities will also be provided to Elected Members;
- seek approval of the Corporate Safeguarding Strategy;
- review the internet and intranet to ensure that safeguarding resources and information is easily assessable and understandable;
- strengthen the volunteer list information and monitoring mechanisms;



- develop a clear process in respect of contractors working on-site at Council buildings; and
- enhance the corporate performance data available regarding safeguarding.

Counter Fraud Arrangements

As part of their 2024/25 work programme, Audit Wales undertook a review of Blaenau Gwent's Counter Fraud Arrangements. This report, provided to the Council in September 2025, and to be reported formally before the end of the year, highlighted weaknesses in the Council's counter fraud arrangements.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales recognises fraud as one of the most prevalent crimes in society today. Every pound stolen from the public sector means less monies to spend on key Council services.

The Internal Audit Section has established a number of arrangements that will address the finding from Audit Wales. These are to be approved later in 2025 and includes:

- Development of a comprehensive risk assessment of fraud to be adopted across the Council once approved
- The establishment of a joint Counter Fraud Officer post between Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Council's
- Development of an overarching Counter Fraud Strategy
- Training for all Elected Members in Fraud Awareness to be undertaken in October 2025
- Arrangements for the training of staff are to be developed over 2025/26.

Response to Storm Bert and Flood Management

As highlighted within the self-assessment, some Blaenau Gwent residents were severely impacted by Storm Bert. In response, the Council has in place a Flood Risk Management Group and operational action plan which is being implemented alongside the community.

Community resilience work is underway with two communities affected by flooding during Storm Bert. Community Emergency Hubs are being established, with relevant training being provided in September to the community groups involved in the hubs. These hubs will then be the designated 'place of safety', and a place for communities to meet during a local emergency to coordinate a local community based response. This supportive and proactive approach from the community to assist with flood management arrangements moving forward is a truly positive response and further supports us in our Communities Approach mission.

Social Partnership Duty

The Social Partnership Duty in Wales, introduced under the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023, places a statutory obligation on certain public bodies, including local authorities, to engage meaningfully with recognised trade unions or other staff representatives when setting Well-being Objectives and making strategic decisions. This duty came into force on 1st April 2024 and complements existing obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Its core aim is to embed collaborative working practices into public sector decision-making, ensuring that those delivering public services have a voice in shaping the policies and actions that affect them.

Local authorities must now, 'in so far as is reasonable', seek consensus or compromise with staff representatives at formative stages of policy development. This includes providing sufficient information and time for proper consideration and response. The duty also requires annual reporting: each authority must publish a report detailing how it has complied with the duty, agreed with trade unions where possible, or explaining why agreement was not reached. The Council intends to report annually as to how it has fulfilled its responsibilities under the Social Partnership Duty through this annual Self-Assessment and Well-being report.

The Council has a well-established relationship and works in social partnerships with the recognised trade unions, supported by a formal Facilities Agreement and Joint Consultative Committees that meet regularly throughout the approach gives year. The the opportunity



for engagement between Members, Officers and Trade Union representatives on important strategic and policy matters - balancing statutory duties, organisational change, financial pressures and workforce wellbeing. Working in partnership with trade unions in Blaenau Gwent has promoted a culture of mutual respect and trust, recognising that both employer and trade unions share an interest in the future of the Council, delivery of services and fair employment. Consultation and engagement has focused upon the development of the federated model between Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Councils, committing to transformation, the development of joint roles across both councils and a collaborative approach to sustaining and improving service delivery. It has also provided the opportunity for early engagement in visioning and the strategic direction for the Council in terms of service transformation by managing demand and focussing on early intervention and prevention and community empowerment. Trade Union Representatives have also, through the forum, been consulted and engaged in the priorities in the Corporate Plan that have been brought about by changes to the definitions of work-related

wellbeing goals within the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

In addition to the formal consultative committees that take place the Chief Executive meets with Trade Union Representatives on a bi-monthly basis to discuss strategic and policy developments affecting the council and its employees as well as any operational matters that may be pertinent at the time. The Head of HR also meets with Trade Union Representatives monthly to discuss any operational matters affecting employees and the workplace.

