

LIVING INDEPENDENTLY IN BLAENAU GWENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In November 2006, Blaenau Gwent Council agreed the implementation of a major new strategy for the care of older people.

“Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent in the 21st century” has been developed between the Council, health services, the voluntary sector, and private providers.

The main aim of the strategy is to develop community based support, which will allow older people to live as independently as possible for as long as possible.

The strategy underwent an extensive consultation process involving over 300 stakeholders, public meetings, meetings with residents and their families, and fact-finding visits to other, similar projects.

The first part of the strategy will include the closure of four of the Council's five residential care homes, which are now over 40 years old, and are struggling to meet the standards required. The homes have been carrying a high number of vacancies for some time as we have become more successful in supporting people in their own homes. The first home, Hafod Dawel, in Nantyglo, will close as soon as practicable, and work is underway with residents, families and staff to make transition to new care settings for the residents in the home as sensitive as possible. The Council is committed to ensuring all residents have their needs met before the home closes, and for this reason no final date has been agreed for closure.

The money saved from closure of the home will be reinvested in new services, including additional adaptations to people's own homes, 24-hour home care and support for preventative services from the voluntary sector.

The other three homes (Plas y Coed, Crawshay House and Cartref Aneurin Bevan) will close as the council develops alternative services which will include extra care sheltered housing and services in the community.

The Council's fifth home, Cwrt Mytton, was built later than the others, and is more able to meet required care standards. This will be developed to meet some of the specialist needs of frail older people.

The Council has already made a bid to Welsh Assembly Government for its first extra care Sheltered Housing scheme, in partnership with a Housing Association. If successful, this will provide 40 flats (one and two bedroomed) for older people, and will have home carers on site 24 hours a day. These schemes have proved to be very successful in neighboring authorities. This will be the first of a number of such schemes the Council would wish to develop.

The strategy will also allow the further development of assistive technology including telecare services. Telecare is currently being used locally and has

had notable success in supporting people and enabling people to return to their own homes following lengthy hospital admissions. The development of the SMART house in Tredegar is used as a demonstration for members of the public and practitioner alike to see the potential benefits of the technology. This includes such devices as the Piper Lifeline as part of routine support packages for vulnerable people. Emergency calls are handled by staff at C2BG, who contact family members or neighbours.

Councillor Jim McIlwee, Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing – Social Care, said: “This is an exciting and long-term strategy for the Council to take forward, and should result in greater choice and flexibility in service provision for the older people of Blaenau Gwent.”

Main Aims of the Strategy

- Increased support in the home, with more flexible home care services.
- More choice and availability of day services – including those organised by voluntary organizations.
- The use of assistive technology (including community alarms, fall monitors etc), which gives confidence to older people who know someone will respond if they are in difficulty.
- The use of Direct Payments (older people can receive a cash payment instead of direct services, so they can make their own arrangements for support).
- The development of extra care sheltered housing – where people will retain their own “front door”, but still have immediate access to 24-hour support.
- Less dependence on standard residential care, with increased and improved provision of specialist care for those who need it, such as in nursing homes, or homes developed for those who have developed dementia type illnesses.