

## 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.

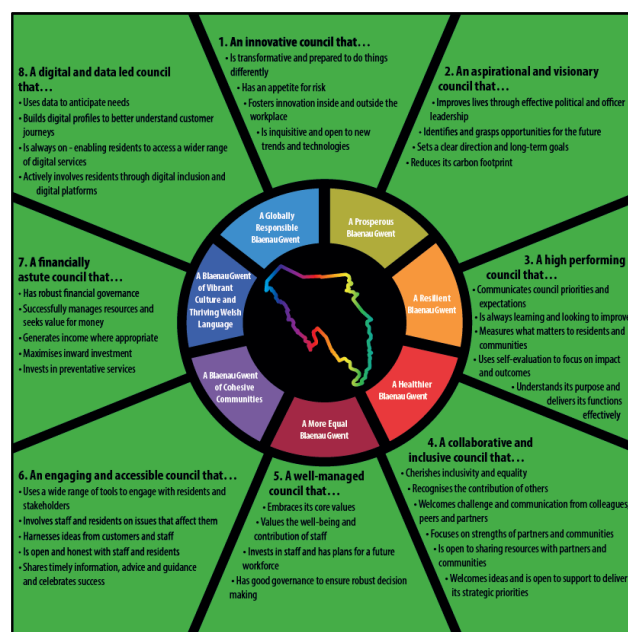
| What we said we would do in our 2024/25 Self-Assessment                                                   | What we achieved                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 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:

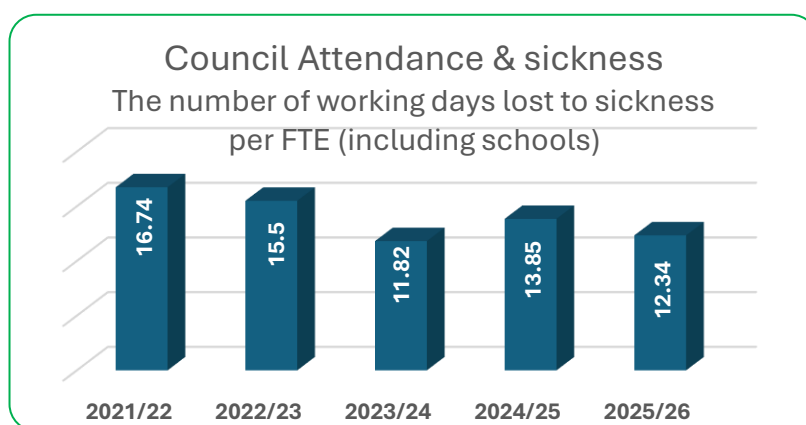
|                                           | Council<br>(Including<br>schools) | Adults &<br>Communities | Children,<br>Young<br>people &<br>families<br>(excluding<br>schools) | Corporate<br>Services | Economy<br>and Place | Neighbourhoods<br>and environment | Schools |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|
| 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<br>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**

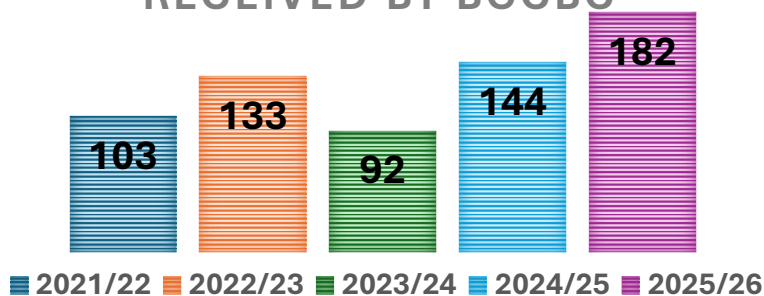
The Council continues to promote the Welsh language and support the national ambition of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. Progress against the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022–2027 is monitored through regular service updates and the Welsh Language Core Compliance Officer Group, strengthening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

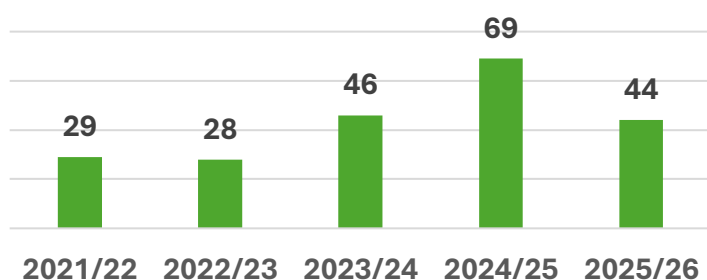


The Council has strengthened complaints and compliments reporting through a Performance Information interactive dashboard, improving visibility of feedback trends, service-level information and organisational learning over time.

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 Thingi 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.