

Foreword

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**

