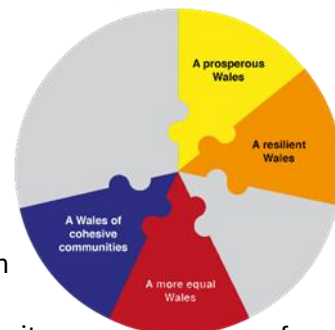


Well-being Objective 3

Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient

Why This Is Important as an Area of Focus - The Council wants to encourage and support people to make healthy lifestyle choices to enable children, young people and families to thrive. Research has proven people demonstrating positive health behaviours from birth throughout their life will lead to greater independence, and people being free from complicated health conditions later in life. This in turn could reduce demand on services and ensure the services that are provided are high quality, efficient and responsive to local people's needs. With reduced funding and increasing demand on services the Council can no longer do everything it has done in the past. The focus must be on those actions that will have the greatest impact.

Safeguarding the most vulnerable people in the community continues to be a top priority for the Council alongside transforming the aspirations of residents and valuing fairness and equality in everything we do.



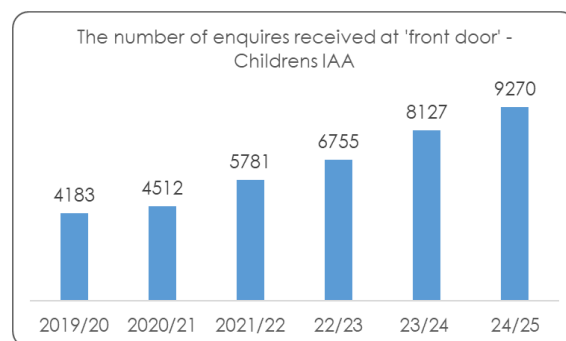
What We Aim to Achieve - An increase in the resilience of communities, where everyone is welcome and safe and which minimises dependency and maximises independence.

How well are we doing?

The following narrative provides an evaluative reflection of the activity, undertaken throughout 2024/25, across service areas that directly support this Well-being Objective. The narrative reflects what has gone well but also, and more importantly, where we are experiencing challenges. These challenges have then been collated together at the end of each section. These areas will be identified as areas of focus moving forward and will be reported as part of our next Self-Assessment, as well as performance monitoring throughout the year.

Information Advice and Assistance

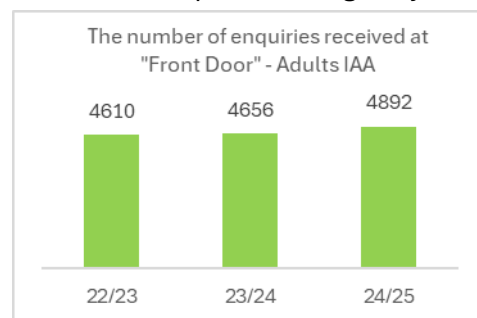
The Social Services Directorate continues to have dedicated Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) Teams for both Children and Adult Social Services working as the first point of contact for the public who wish to access advice and support. The teams take a preventative and strength based approach to ensure needs are met at the earliest opportunity, by providing the right services to prevent needs from escalating.



Referrals into Children's Services IAA continues to increase. The numbers during 2024/25 are significantly higher with an increase of 1,143 (14.1%) compared to 2023/24. Of the 9,270 referrals during 2024/25, 566 (6.1%) were referred to preventative services (Families First), compared to 8,127 referrals in 2023/24, with 711 (8.7%) of referrals to Families First.



Referrals into Adults Services IAA data collation was revised in August 2021; therefore, data is only comparable to two previous years and demonstrates a small increase in contacts. Of the 4,892 enquiries during the year, 2,478 (51%) were resolved at referral and did not require a comprehensive assessment by the long-term teams. In comparison, of the 4,656 received during 2023/24, 2,506 (54%) were resolved within the IAA team.



A review was conducted in 2023/24 to assess how we can enhance support for children and families in Blaenau Gwent through preventative measures. Based on the recommendations from this review, service managers are exploring opportunities for greater collaboration between the Family Information Service, Flying Start, and Families First. This initiative includes the development of a single point-of-access family support hub, which is scheduled to become operational by the end of 2025. The hub aims to ensure families are easily able to access the information they need.

Safeguarding

The council is committed to creating an environment which enables people to maximise their independence, develop solutions and take an active role in their communities whilst feeling safe and protected. We believe that all children, adults and young people have the right to be safe from harm, and it is a corporate objective to put effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm.

The Council recognises its responsibilities in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk, and this includes the contribution we make to working together with other agencies so that all children and young people reach their full potential and we continue to look after the most vulnerable people in our communities.

Monitoring and reporting systems are well-developed to ensure the department is able to track information and evidence that the safeguarding agenda remains a priority for the local authority. Performance information is collated to identify activity, demands and trends in order for service delivery and improvement to take place. This includes a number of items that are statutory requirements as part of the Welsh Government Performance Framework.

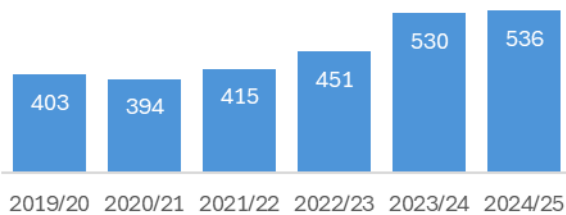
Safeguarding reports are submitted annually through the council's democratic process and are categorised separately for Adult Services, Children's Services, and Education. These reports are presented to ensure transparency, maintain accountability, and provide oversight of safeguarding practices across 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](#)

Overall, the data shows a slight increase in referrals of adults at risk in 2024/25 (**834**) compared to 2023/24 (**803**) – 3.8%. This may be reflective of there being more adults at risk due to increased poverty with regards to the cost-of-living crisis affecting all local communities. The increase could also be due to the national and regional media awareness raising. People are becoming more aware of their rights and the importance of reporting any concerns. The actual number of adults has risen slightly from 530 to 536.



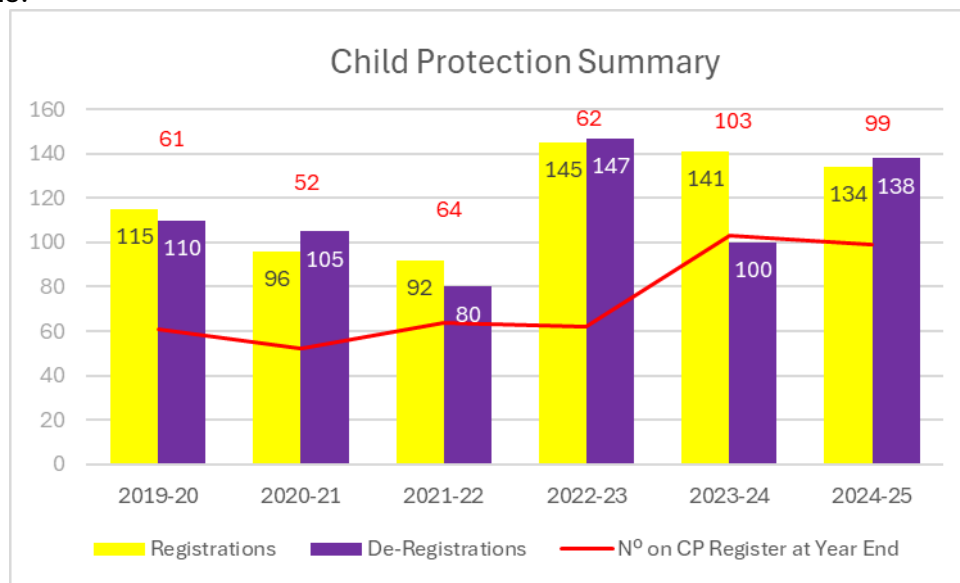
Number of adults suspected of being at risk of abuse or neglect reported



The Safeguarding Board earlier this year focused on the impact of poverty on the most vulnerable. The increase could also be due to awareness raising through the regular Safeguarding training that we deliver jointly with Caerphilly safeguarding team. Child Protection reports identified that 98.72% of Initial Child Protection Conferences were held in timescales. In 2025 there were 99 children on the Child Protection register in comparison to 103 children as at the end of 2023/24.

The Council has continued to see an increase in adult safeguarding referrals as shown in the graph above. This increase is potentially attributed to increased awareness raising and enhanced safeguarding training delivered jointly with Caerphilly safeguarding team

As at the end of 2024 there were 99 children on the Child Protection register in comparison to 103 children as at the end of 2023.



The total number of visits to children on the child protection register that were completed within statutory timescale:

- 2024/25 – 2,043 (87.0%)
- 2023/24 – 1,270 (66.2%)

138 children were removed from the child protection register during the year. Of those the average number of days they were registered is 231.9 days.

There are 201 Children Looked After (CLA) compared to 203 at the end of previous year. The rate of admissions into care has continued to drop this year with 55 children in 2023/24 and 53 this year.

The Wales Safeguarding Procedures for children and adults at risk of abuse and neglect details the essential roles and responsibilities for practitioners to ensure that they safeguard children and adults who are at risk. The Procedures help practitioners apply the legislation in the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and statutory safeguarding guidance, [Working Together to Safeguard People](#).



The 2024 Independent Reviewing Officer annual report provides clear evidence of how the safeguarding teams within Blaenau Gwent Children's Services met their responsibilities throughout 2024. As part of this report an action plan was developed which set out seventeen service aims for the year, these actions included:

- Ensuring full-service delivery and staff levels were maintained;
- Reporting to the senior management team quarterly relating to child protection and disruptions of placements;
- Providing both internal and external safeguarding training;
- Being proactively involved in delivery the further development of the outcome focussed approach;
- Full participation in the Public Law Action Plan and the CIW rapid review;
- Attendance at multi agency meetings specifically in relation to safeguarding i.e. multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA); and
- Undertaking internal audits/updating and developing policies and procedures.

All aims were met except for one ongoing internal audit and the goal of strengthening team resilience around participation and attendance—an area that could not be addressed due to reliance on another coordinator and lack of training for partner agencies.

Looking ahead to 2025, the safeguarding team will contribute fully to the Practice Development Action Plan, building on the findings from completed audits. The team will also develop a new framework for ongoing audits and update service delivery processes across several safeguarding areas. The top priority remains maintaining complete and effective service delivery.

Residential Home

Through the Welsh Government Radical Reform Grant, the Council was provided with money to purchase two detached 5-bedroom houses, at a cost of approximately £900,000, along with a further £700,000 for refurbishment costs. These will be providing safe, high-quality care for our local children to remain within the Borough. Since opening, the home has successfully welcomed its first young person, and the team has worked hard to establish a nurturing, trauma-informed environment that promotes stability and emotional safety. Although still in its early stages, Mons Calpe is already demonstrating positive outcomes, with strong multi-agency collaboration and a committed staff team in place. We're proud of the progress so far and excited about the potential impact moving forward

Working in Partnership

Effective collaboration and partnership working assists us in identifying existing needs and shape and commission future sustainable services.

The Social Care and Housing Support Team continues the joint working with attendance and participation in Gwent wide Regional Commissioners meetings; Care Home and Domiciliary Care Forums/Meetings, Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group; and national webinars /meetings with Care Inspectorate Wales and Social Care Wales. The Team has also recently refreshed the joint (with Caerphilly County Borough Council) Domiciliary Care Framework.

The Safeguarding Team is working in partnership with the other Gwent Safeguarding Teams and the Gwent Regional Safeguarding Business Unit in promoting and delivering the new Safeguarding Training Framework introduced by Social Care Wales.

The Community Options Team is working in partnership with Torfaen Council, who are leading on a feasibility study focussed on supported employment models for people with learning disabilities and/or neurodivergence in Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen.



The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, effective from April 2016, places a statutory obligation on local authorities to adopt a preventative approach in meeting individuals' care and support needs, which includes minimising the impact of impairments. Rehabilitation services for those with sensory impairment offer short-term, specialist assessment and support to people with visual impairment and/or dual sensory loss who are eligible and would benefit from a period of focused rehabilitation.

The Rehabilitation Officer for Visually Impaired (ROVI) plays a critical role in enhancing service users' confidence, providing emotional support, facilitating the recovery and development of life skills, promoting independence and informed choice, and assessing requirements for specialized equipment and adaptations. In recent years, there has been a decline in the number of vision rehabilitation officers in Wales, and recruitment for such positions in Blaenau Gwent has been challenging. During this period, Caerphilly County Borough Council supported and advised IAA staff in assisting individuals with visual impairment and collaborated closely with service users to design and implement individualized rehabilitation training programmes.

A Gwent Regional Partnership Board (RPB) is in operation, fulfilling local authority statutory duties required under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. The Act places a statutory duty on local authorities and health boards to prepare a Regional Area Plan, following the publication of the region's Population Needs Assessment (PNA) and Market Stability Report (MSR).

The Gwent PNA was previously approved by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, during Autumn 2022. The Area Plan highlights the commitment to work in partnership to improve the health and wellbeing across the population of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen. Given current challenges and financial pressures, it is paramount to work together to deliver joint solutions, to shared priorities, and avoid duplication.

Following the publication of the regional Population Needs Assessment (PNA) report, each local authority and health board are required to prepare and publish an Area Plan setting out the range and level of services they propose to provide in response to the PNA core themes, which are:

- Children, Young People and Families;
- Adults, including People living with a Dementia;
- Health & Physical Disabilities including Sensory Loss & Impairment;
- Mental Health and Learning Disabilities;
- Autism and Neurodevelopmental Conditions; and
- Unpaid Carers.

The Gwent Area Plan 2023-[2028](#) has been signed off by the Gwent Regional Partnership Board and an Area Plan summary has also been included. The plan has been developed in partnership with Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen local authorities, and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, Third Sector partners and the Regional Partnership Team and their commitment to the Marmot principles. The Area

Plan sets out the actions required to achieve the priorities identified in the PNA, by our partners and citizens, and closely aligns to the Public Service Board (PSB) and Well-being Plan. The Area Plan is reviewed annually and can be updated to ensure we are meeting the needs of our communities. The progress against delivery of key objectives in the Area Plan, is monitored through the RPB Annual Report which considers specifically the priority groups set out in the PNA and cross cutting themes.



The work of the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) supports the delivery of integrated responsive care and support across the region. However, there is still a great deal of work to do to ensure the Area Action Plan, developed by the RPB, translates into meeting the needs of local citizens. The vehicle for Blaenau Gwent to make this happen is the Integrated Services Partnership Board (ISPB). This board has set a small number of priorities based on the those outlined in the Area Plan. A number of task and finish groups have been set up to progress these priorities. An example is the campaign to increase breast feeding rates in Blaenau Gwent and improve the oral hygiene of children. Both areas have seen significant activity early in 2024, with the expectation that evidence will follow after 12 months of the difference that has been made

Breastfeeding campaign

In 2024 the Blaenau Gwent Flying Start Programme launched a new breastfeeding campaign to improve breastfeeding rates and provide support to new mothers across the borough. The programme is supported by a comprehensive action plan which includes several initiatives in collaboration with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, Public Health Wales, local schools, colleges, businesses and the Voluntary Sector. These initiatives include training for peer counsellors, arranging support groups and providing educational resources.



In 2024 38.6% of mothers breastfed at first feed, following the launch of the campaign, in 2025 64% of mothers breastfed at First Feed.

	Breast feeding rates 2024	Breast feeding rates 2025
First Feed	38.6%	64%
10 days	34.18%	64%
After 6 weeks	24.7%	32.1%
After 6 months	19.6%	21.4%

Additional shared prosperity funding has been secured to enhance the current team by recruiting a Breastfeeding Support Worker to ensure there is a remained focus on Breastfeeding and that support and information continues for mothers. The campaign and action plan will be continued to be implemented and kept on focus for the year ahead, to embed sustainable change. To compliment the campaign an Early Years Nutrition pathway in collaboration with ABUHB Dietetics team which will be launched in 25/26 to focus on giving children the best start in life and reducing childhood obesity rates.

Workforce

Our workforce continues to be our greatest asset to ensure we deliver the best care and support available. Having a skilled and motivated workforce is essential in order to provide high quality services. As part of this, the Council has a Joint Workforce Development Team with Caerphilly County Borough Council with responsibility for delivering a training and development strategy that supports development opportunities for staff at all levels in Social Services.

Workforce stability is a key consideration within Social Services as some teams are facing staffing shortages, however, it is acknowledged that this is a Wales wide position and there is no simple solution. The department continues to look at innovative ways of managing the workload within teams as well as developing recruitment and retention strategies to address workforce pressures. Despite these significant pressures the existing staff and providers of services have continued to ensure children and adults needs are met, risks are managed, and safeguarding issues dealt with.

During 2024/25 we did however see a stabilisation of our workforce within Childcare Social Work teams. Turnover of staff still occurs; however, we have been able to fill these vacancies. Staffing levels in our provider services have also seen



workforce stabilisation and a reduction in the use of agency staff. This has resulted in a reduction in staff sickness which no doubt has led to an improved consistency of care.

A number of posts within Social Services are supported via grant funding. There is a significant risk that this funding will come to an end within the next few years with referrals into Social Services increasing, there is a risk that lack of external funding will impact service delivery and sustainability moving forward. Workforce and capacity is a key risk area for Blaenau Gwent and is featured on the Corporate Risk Register which is monitored regularly by Joint Executive Team.

Benefits continue to be realised for and by the workforce through the scale of opportunity possible due to the joint workforce development service model hosted by Blaenau Gwent in partnership with Caerphilly.

When comparing the performance of the collaborative approach to other workforce development services in Gwent some key headlines from 2024/25 include:

- Supported 51% of all the internally sponsored Social Work students in Gwent (32);
- Supported 85% of all those that achieved the Social Service Practitioner award in Gwent (23);
- Delivered 46% of all the Newly Qualified Social Workers in Gwent (28); and
- Delivered 56% of all the learning opportunities offered in Gwent.

Dementia coordinators have been recruited on a fixed term basis through the Health and Social Care Regional Integration Fund (RIF) to support individuals who are experiencing issues with their memory. The coordinators support the family until individuals are referred to the Memory Assessment Service and formally diagnosed and improving their journey throughout the system.

This improves the flow of hospital discharge and ensures the voice of the individual and family is heard. There is a challenge of sustainability of the service due to posts being grant funded.

Children's Services

There has been a consistent gradual increase in costs of placements for children looked after with Independent Fostering Agencies and residential providers over the past few years. High costs, combined with increasing numbers of looked after children and complexity of their needs, places a significant strain on the council budget and available funding for other aspects of children's services.

Furthermore, sufficiency of fostering placements even with private providers is increasingly an issue leading to escalation of needs for children when a family environment fostering placement is not available and the only option remains a residential placement, which in fact is not justified by the level of child's needs. In some situations, children are placed unnecessarily out of county, away from their birth families, friends and communities leading to long term higher costings and poor outcomes for children looked after.

Even when children looked after are placed within their local area, accessing the necessary care, facilities and therapies is often difficult, especially for those with complex needs or for older children. There has also been an increase in the use of unregulated placements as a last resort, where accommodation is provided, but not good quality care.



While the local authority invested in development of our own residential provision, this option doesn't come without its challenges in terms of registration requirements, matching of children and managing voids. Recruitment and retention of foster carers is, also, a priority for Blaenau Gwent but we need to acknowledge that availability of prospective good quality foster carers is limited in a small borough facing poverty, high level of unemployment and reliance on state benefits. Our fostering households are aging and there is an annual natural loss leading to limited availability locally. We have developed strategies to attract generic foster carers via approval for respite only so they have an opportunity to experience the role without the pressure of a long term commitment. We, also, prioritise family placements by assessing connected people who are able and willing to look after children locally and this has led to an increase of children living with kinship foster carers.

Generic My Support Team (MyST) foster carers are to be recruited to act as realistic options for step down placements for complex children or as avoidant placements for those children who may escalate to residential placements. Our rate of disruption is low for Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) placements with 1 placement (children) breakdowns during the last financial year 1.23% and even for these cases, due to the work undertaken by the SGO support team, all children were accommodated with other family members or returned to their birth parents with none of them coming back into the care of the Local Authority.

SEWAS celebrated 10 years of the National Adoption Service with a regional event held in Blaenau Gwent in November 2024 to celebrate SEWAS being a regional service for 10 years. This event was a wonderful celebration of adoption, sharing stories and information with professionals in a morning session followed by a session of fun activities with children and families in the afternoon.

With a new Marketing and Recruitment Officer in post, activity is focusing on the recruitment of more prospective adopters and expanding the SEWAS adoption community. There has been increasing interest from prospective adopters in Welsh Early Permanency across the SEWAS region since the framework was launched across Wales with one child being placed within the Welsh Early Permanency arrangements within this 2024/25 time period.

Over the year, SEWAS has provided twenty-one Understanding the Child Days (UTC) for twenty-seven children; ten of these children have also received direct work. Twenty-six children have had Trauma Nurture Timelines completed over the year.

SEWAS are also now providing post adoption training across our 5 LA areas in line with the NAS contact planning tool. We are also collaborating with Torfaen Contact Centre around best practice for final contact. SEWAS has also established a Stay and Play Group, set up for adoptive families with pre-school children. Stay and Play is a fun, safe space for children and their parents to play, learn and meet others.

A CIW inspection was undertaken for the Fostering services with positive feedback being offered to the local authority regarding the quality of support offered to foster carers. The recommendations made were incorporated in an Action Plan that will be delivered during the following financial year.

Significant work has been delivered under the Children Looked After Reduction [Strategy](#) as while we have had recorded a consistent increase in referrals (Duty to report) into Children Services and child protection inquiries and registration, the number of children looked after remained quite stable by the end of the financial year 2024/2025



The Council has signed the Welsh Government's Corporate Parenting Charter, strengthening our commitment to ensuring the best services and opportunities for children and young people who have experienced care.

The Charter sets out 11 principles on equality, eradicating stigma, working together, inclusive support, fulfilling ambitions, nurturing, good health, a stable home, education, thriving in the future, and after care support. Blaenau Gwent has drafted its own Corporate Parenting plan linked to the Welsh Government charter, following an extensive engagement programme with care experienced children and young people. The plan is expected to be

signed off through the democratic process in 2025.



Flying Start Expansion

Flying Start is the Welsh Government's targeted Early Years programme for families with children under the age of 4 in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Wales. The programme's core elements, which include enhanced health visiting, parenting support, early language support, and part-time childcare for two-year-olds, have been shown to lead to positive outcomes for children and their families. The programme aims to tackle some of the inequalities faced by children who grow up in poverty.

The Welsh Government's Flying Start Programme is a geographically targeted initiative that relies on income benefit data, a proxy indicator for poverty, to identify areas with the highest proportions of children aged 0-3 living in income benefit households.

From September 2025, there will be an expansion of the Flying Start programme in Blaenau Gwent to an additional 150 children via phase 3; by rolling out the Flying Start childcare provision into a further 15 areas using existing methodology and geographical targeting.

To meet this target, existing Flying Start childcare providers will be supported to expand their reach, with work ongoing to encourage new providers in areas with lower numbers, including those who specialise in Welsh-medium provision, to offer Flying Start childcare places. A new Welsh-medium Day Nursery has been opened this year in 2025 and the seedling school, under construction in Tredegar, will include a dedicated Welsh-medium childcare facility so we are steadily increasing provision.

Preventing homelessness

During the reporting period, 160 households were identified as being at risk of homelessness, of these, 86 households (54%) were successfully supported to retain their accommodation. The service experiences significant challenges with a persistent shortage of move-on accommodation in both the private and social housing sectors, and many clients approaching the Council only at crisis point, limiting early intervention opportunities.



9 families were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, which is below the target of 12, and represents a reduction of 3 compared to 2023/24. Whilst this is a positive step, the continued use of such unsuitable accommodation highlights ongoing pressures on homelessness services and the lack of suitable housing options for families. To address this, several initiatives have been implemented:

- A “Temp to Perm” Scheme and a Private Sector Leasing Scheme (PSL) have been launched in collaboration with private landlords; and
- The homelessness hostel has been remodelled in partnership with Pobl, releasing 10 additional units for direct homeless placements.

These efforts are already showing results, with 18 clients moving into permanent accommodation and 5 units now part of the leasing scheme, offering more sustainable housing solutions.

The Council continues to work closely with Registered Social Landlords to identify properties for homelessness and resettlement schemes. In 2024/25 4 properties were identified: 3 properties identified in partnership with Tai Calon and 1 property with United Welsh. These properties are included in a bid under the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) to further expand housing options.

Progress has been made in increasing housing availability with:

- 36 affordable homes delivered in 2024/25, up from 25 in 2023/24; and
- The Common Housing Register saw a reduction from 2,735 to 2,617 households.

However, completion of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) works dropped from 94 to 53 due to budget constraints, negatively impacting performance indicators. We aim to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) in private homes within a target timescale of 330 days, supporting individuals to live independently in their own homes. The performance of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) has experienced a decline, primarily due to the removal of the means test and ongoing pressures on the capital budget. These factors have impacted our ability to meet the target timescales for delivery. As a result, the average delivery time for a DFG has increased to approximately 460 days.

Despite these challenges, DFG remains a key performance indicator for the service. The council is currently reviewing the capital funding arrangements with the aim of streamlining the process. This review is expected to help reduce the existing backlog more efficiently and improve turnaround times, thereby enhancing overall performance.

In March 2025 the Council launched its Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2025-[2030](#) setting out the Council’s plans to tackle the high number of empty homes in the Borough. As of April 2024, there were 1,023 empty homes in the Blaenau Gwent with 98 of them being empty for over 10 years. An action plan accompanies the strategy which sets out 3 objectives:

- **Objective 1:** Promote, educate and support empty property owners and prospective purchasers/ developers;
- **Objective 2:** Prioritisation and targeted approach in addressing empty properties; and
- **Objective 3:** Take appropriate enforcement action to effectively deal with empty properties.

The action plan sets out a range of key actions which will be monitored throughout the year, the progress of the implementation of the strategy will be reported in the next self-assessment report.

Through a partnership approach the Youth Engagement and Progression Team continue to support young people to prevent youth homelessness and to support emotional wellbeing. Support has also been provided for the local response relating to the resettlement scheme for Ukrainian people and further engagement with housing solutions is planned for 2025/26.



While there have been notable improvements in affordable housing delivery and reductions in temporary accommodation use, homelessness continues to rise. The Council remains committed to expanding sustainable housing options and strengthening partnerships to meet the growing demand and reduce reliance on unsuitable temporary solutions.

Housing Benefit

The Department of Work and Pensions provides Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) monies to the Council to support residents on housing benefit or universal credit to 'top up' any shortfall that they have with paying rent and housing related expenses. Rents across the Borough have been increasing, a similar position to across Wales and the UK, and the reduction in funding since Covid are impacting these payments. This pot of money is used to prevent residents from becoming homeless and the increased number requiring support is putting pressure on the service. As there is a shortage of housing across the borough, many of those becoming homeless may require B&B accommodation which is costly and not an appropriate long-term solution.

The Government contribution for 2024/25 was £140,170 however the Council's actual spend for the year was £267,861 this additional funding is funded through the Council's internal budgets which proves a challenge, if the Council can't find additional funding, then applications could be refused, and residents could face homelessness if they are unable to pay the rent shortfall. This in time will cost the Local Authority more as temporary accommodation can prove costly. To note out of the 583 applications received for DHP 244 were refused due to non-eligibility.

There have been other challenges to the service due to government policy, which is outside of the Councils control, this includes welfare reform changes such as the Winter fuel payments. The Council regularly communicates with DWP for updates on relevant changes and contributes to consultations like the recent Green Paper on Welfare Reform.

Supporting communities to become more resilient

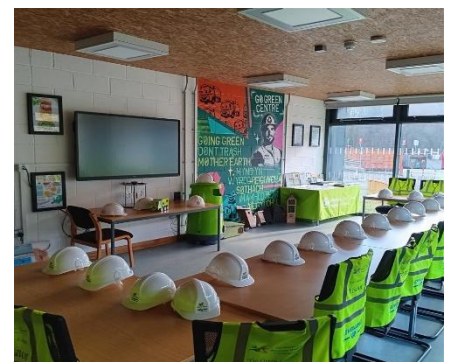
Repair café – Due to the success and appeal of the previous two repair cafes the council launched another repair café in Stocktonville Tredegar, repairing around 95 items in total since April 2024. A group of volunteers have diligently supported this initiative and fixed many items for residents of Tredegar. It is linked with the local community coffee morning which is well attended.



Community Kit room – [Blaenau Gwent CBC](#) have teamed up with Aneurin Leisure Trust to help establish sports reuse throughout the borough. The donated sports clothing will be used to support the community so that appropriate kit does not become a barrier to sports participation.

Education and artwork – Working with BG arts department the Council has put together sessions for schools at our education centre on reuse and the environment. The Council

has also linked with youth workers and a local artist to create a mural in their design at the education centre.





Bike repair event – BG linked with Dr Bike and Bryn bach Tredegar to host a bike pop up stall in July 24. The stall was successful with 10 repairs being carried out and further advice given to residents on fixes to bikes. We will be looking to make this a regular occurrence moving forward.

Community Safety

In response to growing concerns about youth-related crime and anti-social behaviour in the Borough, the Council established a multi-agency Anti-Social Behaviour Task Force in 2024. To reassure residents and improve visibility in hotspot areas, Community Safety

Wardens were commissioned to work alongside Police Community Support Officers. Together, they provided regular patrols and helped rebuild trust within the community. Joint face-to-face engagement events offered advice, promoted reporting, and encouraged collaboration between residents, businesses, and local authorities.

The Council's Youth Detached Team played a key role, engaging over 2,000 young people in positive activities and successfully diverting them from trouble spots. Civil injunctions were granted for specific young people involved in persistent offending, with targeted interventions to address the underlying causes of their behaviour and prevent future incidents. Those young people complied with the conditions of their injunctions, and feedback from residents, businesses, and elected members was consistently positive.



The Council maintained open communication by providing regular updates through press releases, social media, and direct discussions with the public. The Task Force's achievements were recognised when it received the Welsh National Safer Communities [Award](#).

However, interpreting community safety data remains a challenge. As highlighted in the Community Safety Annual Report [2024](#), the recorded number of anti-social behaviour reports increased by 87% compared to 2023-24. Although this may seem negative at first glance, it reflects the Task Force's focus on encouraging residents and businesses to report incidents, making it difficult to set clear targets for reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

Food Resilience programme

The Council was awarded UK Shared Prosperity Fund Communities & Place funding for 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 to build Food Resilience and develop community food initiatives relating to food

access, healthy eating and food growing across the Borough. The Blaenau Gwent food resilience programme was formed in consultation with Torfaen Council to build a co-ordinated approach to food resilience with the aim in the short term to support the impact of the current cost of living crisis, providing opportunities to tackle food poverty and engage with food producers to increase local and regional supply chains.

Working in partnership together with the BG Food Partnership, the food resilience priorities can be identified as taking action against the following issues:

1. Addressing the root causes of Food Poverty and barriers to accessing good food;
2. Encouraging Healthy, local & sustainable food consumption;
3. Improving the local food environment, community and culture, increasing skills, knowledge, and resources;
4. Encourage green spaces for local food growing initiatives; and
5. Supporting food businesses & the sustainable food economy.



During the year food resilience officers have been recruited to work in partnership with the BG Food Partnership coordinator to build relationships with various partners and stakeholders across the borough, to demonstrate a visible and accessible platform for change within our local food system. Engagement with businesses and community food providers has been a vital tool for both understanding the challenges residents face within a local context and identifying the key levers for change already present in the borough. A wide range of activity has taken place during 24/25 through the food resilience programme. Some of these activities include:

- **Administration of Food Funding;**
- **School holiday food insecurity provision;**
- **Community Food Network workshops; and**
- **BG Food Partnership Governance.**

The programme officers have played a key role in supporting the development a robust and responsive Community Food Strategy through meaningful community engagement and strategic collaboration with the Food Partnership Coordinator. By organising consultations, workshops, and focus groups, we gathered invaluable insights from residents, local organizations, and stakeholders on issues such as access to nutritious food, local food production, and waste reduction. These efforts ensured the strategy was informed by the community's needs and challenges.

The strategy's key priorities include:

- **Access** Ensure everyone in Blaenau Gwent can obtain healthy, affordable food with dignity;
- **Health** Improve diets and wellbeing by embedding nutritious food into everyday life;
- **Community & Business** Strengthen local food networks, supporting enterprises and social initiatives; and
- **Climate & Nature** Promote sustainable food practices that protect the environment and enhance biodiversity.

The Focus of the programme during 2025/26 will be on continued development and implementation of the BG Community Food Strategy through the four priority objectives as outlined above.

Reducing our food waste

The council has been working across 5 primary schools as a pilot to support them in reducing food waste. 'Waste warriors' is a scheme designed to make the school meals service more sustainable. The aim of the scheme is for pupils to consider what goes in the bin from their lunch plates and weighing the waste on a regular basis to see if it declines. Further work is planned to roll out the scheme across more schools.

Key Challenges Identified for Action in 2025/26

- The performance of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) has experienced a decline, primarily due to the removal of the means test and ongoing pressures on the capital budget. These factors have impacted our ability to meet the target timescales for delivery Despite these challenges, DFG remains a key performance indicator. The council is reviewing capital funding and streamlining processes to reduce the backlog and improve turnaround times.
- Continue to monitor the implementation of the homelessness initiatives, which saw positive progress during 2024/25.
- Continue to implement the Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2025/2030 to expand sustainable housing options and reduce homelessness across the Borough.
- There is a challenge of sustainability in Social Services owing to a number of posts being grant funded. Workforce and capacity as a whole is included on the Council's Corporate Risk Register and is monitored regularly by the Joint Executive Team.
- The increasing cost of placements within Children's Services is placing a significant strain on budget which in turn is impacting available funding for other aspects of service. Work is being undertaken to



closely monitor the spend of impact of placements and will be reported to Joint Executive Team on a quarterly basis.

- Recruitment and retention of foster carers is a priority for Blaenau Gwent. Work will be undertaken to increase the number of foster carers operating across Blaenau Gwent to reduce the need for private providers and to improve outcome for children looked after.
- Children looked after placed within the local area find it difficult to access the necessary care, facilities and therapies required, especially for those with complex needs or for older children. Work with the Complex Needs Panel to instigate the Continuing Care process with the purpose of removing barriers and collaborating with partners to ensure access to services and better outcomes for our children looked after.
- Continue to implement the children looked after strategy and monitor numbers to ensure a downward trend.

