

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Annual Self- Assessment and Well-being Report 2024/25 Executive Summary



*Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and
welcoming to all by working with and for our
communities*



Blaenau Gwent Annual Self-Assessment 2024/25

Executive Summary

Blaenau Gwent Council looks to operate as a self-improving organisation, whereby there is a recognition of what has gone well, but, and most importantly, it recognises where improvements are to be made. The Council works to respond to the following questions in the work that it undertakes:

- **Is the Council exercising its functions effectively?**
- **Is the Council using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively?**
- **Are the governance arrangements of the Council effective for securing continuous improvement?**

Our Self-Assessment provides an overview of the work that has been undertaken throughout 2024/25 and has been written to consider:

- **How well are we doing? Narrative of the activity that has taken place;**
- **How do we know? Qualitative and quantitative evidence provided; and**
- **What and how can we do better? Actions to implement over the coming years.**

The focus of the Annual Self-Assessment is the Blaenau Gwent Council's Corporate Plan priorities, known as Well-being Objectives, and providing an assessment of how well the Council feels it has achieved against these during 2024/25 and the challenges to progressing these.

The Corporate Plan 2022/27 Well-being Objectives are:

- **Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent;**
- **Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities.**
- **An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place; and**
- **Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient.**

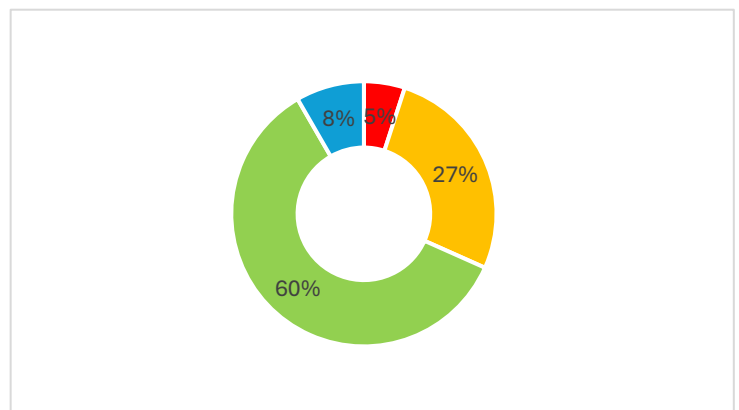
Under each Well-being Objective is an annual delivery plan supported by operational business plans. Overall, for 2024/25, the majority of actions, contributing to the Well-being Objectives, have been achieved, however, we fully recognise that we still have a number of challenges to address and further work is to be undertaken to fully achieve each of our long term aims.

The breakdown is:

- Completed (Blue) – 8%
- On Target (Green) – 60%
- Behind Target but with a plan to get back on track (Amber) – 27%
- Behind Target with significant concerns (Red) – 5%

A full report setting out in more detail the progress made against each of our Well-Being Objectives was received by Council in July 2025 and is

available [here](#). Alongside this, an infographic has been prepared, as well as making each chapter of the full Self-Assessment available online to promote ease of access to reading.



The following summary report highlights our progress and challenges over the last year under each of our 4 Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.



Well-being Objective 1

Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent

This Well-being Objective looks to increase resilience within the community by providing high quality education and skills to support a thriving economy from birth onwards, minimising dependence and maximising independence.

Throughout 2024/25 the Council has achieved in a number of key areas with some areas of weakness, however, the Council feels the achievements outweigh the weaknesses.

Key Achievements

- ✓ Primary school attendance increased from 90.7% to 91.8%, while secondary attendance rose from 86.5% to 89.4% for 2024/25.
- ✓ Engagement with Welsh language youth provision has increased by 60% compared to previous year.
- ✓ The Council launched the 'Goldworks' a flexible workspace to support local businesses.
- ✓ The Additional Learning Needs Resource Base review and consultation was completed, resulting in an additional 40 new autism spectrum disorder places reducing out-of-county placements and waiting lists.
- ✓ Reduction in the number of young people becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training), with the rate decreasing to 2.1%, an improvement from the previous year's rate of 2.5%.
- ✓ Attendance for Gypsy and Traveller pupils rose to 74.52% this academic year, compared to 73.15% previous year.
- ✓ 41 young people were supported by the internal Aspire apprenticeship scheme.
- ✓ The QuickStart Programme enabled 27 unemployed individuals to start a 6 month work placement.
- ✓ Key projects supported through the Shared Prosperity Fund include; the refurbishment of Brynmawr Tennis Courts; Garnlydan and Glyncoed playgrounds; and funding community safety wardens, helping our residents to feel safe.

Key Challenges Identified for Action in 2025/26

- School balances dropped from £1.204 million at the end of the 2023/24 to a deficit position of £1.321 million at the end of the 2024/25. The overall level has reduced by £2.525 million, with 10 schools in a deficit position. Schools are producing deficit reduction plans over the short to medium term in order to identify financial efficiencies and the impact of those efficiencies.
- There has been an increase in the number of electively home-educated (EHE) children within Blaenau Gwent over the past few years. There are currently 229 pupils on the EHE database compared to 158 for the same period last year. This is an increase of 44.9%. 36 of these pupils are from the Gypsy Roma Traveller Community (GRT). This area will be monitored closely going forward to ensure that the number of visits to EHE pupils increase in line with the figures, this is monitored as part of our performance indicators.
- Continue to support the one school in a category, The River Centre.
- Provide enhanced support to Children Looked After owing to the increase in both the number of exclusions and days lost.
- In 2024 all Key Stage 4 examination indicators declined when compared to 2023, as it did across Wales, no school performed above the family average in relation to the 5A*- A measure. This will be a key priority for the Council during 2025/26.
- There has been an increase in the number of exclusions and days lost in both Special Schools, although the majority of exclusions relate to one school. The Education Welfare Service are working with the school to look at support that can be provided to address reasons behind exclusions.
- Finalise the Councils Property strategy and set performance targets to ensure effective monitoring.
- The percentage occupancy of Blaenau Gwent Industrial Units has seen a decline to 86% from 89% last year.



Well-being Objective 2

Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities

This Well-being Objective looks to reduce carbon emissions and provide an environment which supports growth and well-being and connects communities.

Throughout 2024/25 the Council worked to address a number of areas but also has a number of challenges to address moving forward.

Key Achievements

- ✓ Blaenau Gwent's recycling rate increased from 66.18% in 2023/24 to 68.89% for 2024/25.
- ✓ The Pollinator Policy was endorsed by the Council in 2024 to promote the creation of pollinator friendly habitats on land owned by the Council.
- ✓ There were four successful prosecutions for various waste offences across the borough resulting in £5,913 being issued in fines and costs.
- ✓ New PV installations have been installed at Willowtown Primary School, Rhos Y fedwen Primary School, Abertillery Leisure Centre and Ebbw Vale Sports Centre to convert sunlight to usable energy.
- ✓ Installation of low carbon technologies, including LED replacements, at Coed y Garn Primary School, St Mary's Church in Wales Primary School and Georgetown Primary School.

Key Challenges Identified for Action in 2025/26

- Improve take up of energy improvement measures across homes.
- Build resilience within our communities with regards to climate events through the implementation of the Council's flood management action plan.
- Continue to work to achieve the Welsh Government recycling target of 70%.
- Consult the public during 2025/26 on the Council's new Waste and Recycling Strategy.
- Implement the new Local Nature Recovery Action Plan and Pollinator Policy to respond to the nature emergency.



Well-being Objective 3

Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient

This Well-being Objective looks to increase the resilience of communities, where everyone is welcome and safe, and which minimises dependency and maximises independence.

Throughout 2024/25 this has been a key area for the Council, and a lot of work has been undertaken to address this objective but there remain significant challenges in the longer term to address the predicted increase in demand for services, resulting from the forecast demographic changes.

Key Achievements

- ✓ The Council established a multi-agency Anti-Social Behaviour Task Force in 2024. The Task Force's achievements were recognised when it received the Welsh National Safer Communities Award.
- ✓ Progress has been made in increasing housing availability with 36 affordable homes delivered in 2024/25, up from 25 in 2023/24.
- ✓ Corporate Parenting Charter endorsed, strengthening the Council's commitment to ensuring the best services and opportunities for children and young people who have experienced care.
- ✓ Launch of a new breastfeeding campaign resulting in an increase of 64% of mothers breastfeeding at First Feed compared to 38.6% the previous year.
- ✓ Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2025/30 launched setting out the Council's plans to tackle the high number of empty homes across the Borough.
- ✓ Repair café established in Tredegar resulting in 95 items being repaired by volunteers in the community.
- ✓ Multi-agency Anti-Social Behaviour Task Force launched resulting in 2,000 young people engaged in positive activities and successfully diverting them from trouble spots through the Council's Youth Detached Team.
- ✓ 'Waste Warriors' Pilot launched with 5 primary schools to support reduction in food waste.

Key Challenges Identified for Action in 2025/26

- Completion of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) works dropped from 94 to 53 due to budget constraints. DFG target in private homes is to be delivered within 330 days however, during 2024/25, the average delivery time increased to 460 days. Review capital funding and streamlining processes to be undertaken to reduce the backlog and improve turnaround times for DFGs.
- Continue to monitor the implementation of the homelessness initiatives.
- Implement the Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2025/30.
- 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. Sufficiency of fostering placements is increasingly an issue leading to escalation of needs for children.
- Continue to closely monitor the spend of impact of placements within Children's Services.
- 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.
- At the end of 2024 there were 103 children on the Child Protection register compared to 62 children at the end of 2023.
- During 2024/25, 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.



Well-being Objective 4

An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services at the right time and in the right place

This Well-being Objective provides a focus for the Council to work in partnership to provide high quality services to meet local need and improve the quality of life and well-being within the community.

Throughout 2024/25 adequate progress has been made against this Well-being Objective with the achievements outweighing the challenges but noting that some of the actions are behind schedule or falling short.

Key Achievements

- ✓ Increase of staff who have Welsh language speaking skills ranging from 'fluently', 'quite well', 'moderately', 'foundation' to Courtesy/Entry Level from 605 to 629 in 2024/25.
- ✓ Improvement in response rates to Freedom of information requests from 88% to 91.6% in 2024/25.
- ✓ First annual Blaenau Gwent Pride took place with over 300 people in attendance.
- ✓ Refreshed Charter of Common Agreement developed with Town and Community Councils.
- ✓ Residents survey launched for the Council to better understand residents experience of the local area and the council which will help to shape the local area and local services.
- ✓ A Digital Exclusion Officer has been appointed to assist residents in the community with getting online, enhancing their digital skills and supporting the community to self-serve.

Key Challenges Identified for Action in 2025/26

- The Council experienced delays in finalising and completing the audit of the 2022/23 Statement of Accounts which have subsequently impacted upon both the 2023/24 and 2024/25 accounts. Significant progress has been made in addressing the issues that have contributed to the delays, and it is expected that the preparation of the 2025/26 and future years annual accounts will be achieved in line with statutory deadlines.
- The Council has some difficulties with recruiting into some professional and technical roles. There is some reliance on agency workers to cover staff absence and hard to fill specialist roles and projects.
- The Council continues to prioritise reducing sickness absence in the workforce to prevent capacity impacts on service delivery. The end of year outturn figure for 2024/25 is 13.85 days lost per full time equivalent, an increase of 2.03 days from 11.82 days in comparison to 2023/24.
- Accelerate response to implementing the outstanding recommendations from the Audit Wales review of Corporate Safeguarding.
- Respond to all outstanding Audit recommendations through monitoring of the Council's business plans and reporting of risk and assurance tracker.
- Improve monitoring of the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) for facilitating and informing our decision-making processes.
- Deliver budget reductions of £34m over the five-year Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- Increase the number of Welsh Language Essential roles in our recruitment process.
- Continue to work to reduce the number of days lost to sickness.



Characteristics of an outstanding Council

The development of our Corporate Plan was important in setting our priorities and commitments, but without defined specific organisational conditions, we will never be as effective as we can be in delivering upon all of the outcomes we are seeking to achieve.

Therefore, in order to review where we are organisationally and to provide a full picture of Council activity, the following section provides an overview of our progress against the Characteristics of an Outstanding Council.

Below shows activity that has taken place throughout the year in line with our characteristics, we know there is more to do, planned activity for the following year and beyond is also outlined below:

1. An innovative council

- ✓ Skills, knowledge and experience of staff developed to meet changing demands in service delivery and priorities.
- ✓ Continued monitoring of the Council's Corporate Risk Register.
- ✓ Increased use of Artificial Intelligence to drive innovation and increase efficiency

2. An aspirational and visionary council

- ✓ Sessions held to embed Marmot principles throughout the organisation and into service delivery for all areas of the Council.
- ✓ Introduced an Annual Delivery Plan for each financial year to monitor and report our progress the lifespan of the Corporate Plan.
- ✓ Stabilisation of the senior management structure of the Council.

3. A high performing council

- ✓ Business plans been developed to ensure that there is 'golden thread' from the Marmot Masterplan to the Corporate Plan.
- ✓ Enhancements made to audit process and performing reporting schedule to streamline performance management processes.
- ✓ The introduction of Power BI as part of our performance management arrangements.

4. A collaborative and inclusive council

- ✓ The 2024-28 Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) was published in April 2024.
- ✓ As an organisation we have continued to recognise and mark international campaigns, including, Black History Month, Holocaust Memorial Day, LGBTQ+ History Month and International Women's Day.

5. A well-managed council

- ✓ The final Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 was presented to Governance and Audit Committee alongside the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts as per CIPFA Guidance.
- ✓ Peer Panel Assessment completed with 15 recommendations provided to the Council.
- ✓ The Council conducted an anonymous staff survey to assess employees' perspectives on working for the organisation. The survey addressed topics including job responsibilities, work environment, communication, and management practices.

6. An engaging and accessible council

- ✓ Engagement and Participation strategy approved setting out how the Council plans to engage with residents.
- ✓ Marathoner Steve Jones MBE, OLY has received the Freedom of the County Borough of Blaenau Gwent for his outstanding contribution to the world of running.
- ✓ Residents survey conducted to understand the views from community of the Council and Council services.

7. A financially astute council



- ✓ Bridging the Gap programme continue to be the Council's strategic approach to achieving financial efficiencies and improving financial stability while setting a balanced budget.
- ✓ Budget engagement took place to gain an understating from residents on prioritising Council Services and Council tax to help set council budget.

8. **A digital and data led council**

- ✓ A new Digital Transformation Strategy has been developed for schools, outlining key elements related to the digital learner journey. This strategy is aligned with the Council's Digital Transformation Strategy 2023/27.
- ✓ In order to support collaboration and alignment of services, plans are being put in place to create a unified Digital, Data and Technology (Ddat) service aimed at enhancing public service delivery across multiple local authorities.

Focus on 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 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.

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.

Other areas of focus for upcoming year:



- Implementation of Rebel BGT to change mindset and culture across the organisation.
- Greater use of Artificial intelligence in everyday council work.
- Continue to work to create a permanent structure below the Corporate Directors.
- Fully embed Marmot Principles and Monitoring processes into the organisations practice.
- Closer collaboration between Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Council in communication, including utilising same communication software.
- Further embed Power Bi into performance reporting.
- Further conversations to take place with Town and Community Councils to ensure all TCC's have signed the Charter of common agreement.
- Implement recommendations made from Peer Panel Assessment.
- Drive improvements and make changes following results of staff survey.
- Analyse responses to resident's survey to make changes to services.
- Implement and monitor Engagement and Participation strategy.
- Explore closer collaborative working with Torfaen County Borough Council, it is anticipated that this will result in more resilient services and potential cost efficiencies.
- Create a unified Digital, Data and Technology (Ddat) service aimed at enhancing public service delivery across multiple local authorities.

Feedback

The Council welcome any feedback you might have about the Self-assessment 2024/25. Your views are important to us, and we want to know what information you would like to see and how you would like to see it reported. Please contact the team on the details below if you would like to give feedback on the Assessment or if you require this document in a different format e.g. large print, Braille, audio version, etc.

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Mae'r ddogfen hon ar goel yn Gymraeg
This document is available in Welsh.

