

## WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 2:

*Encourage and champion children, young people, and families so they can thrive*

### **Promoting foster care....**

Promoting the provision of local foster care is important because it provides vulnerable children and young people with safe, stable, and nurturing environments when they cannot live with their birth families. Foster care supports emotional wellbeing, educational attainment, and healthy development, helping children build resilience and reach their potential. It also plays a vital role in safeguarding, reducing the risk of neglect or harm, and offering tailored support to meet individual needs. By promoting foster care, communities can ensure more children grow up in loving homes, and more carers are recruited and supported to make a lasting difference in young lives.

Throughout 2024, we have continued to promote foster care and recognise the successes that our local authority fostering community has made; and continues to make to our most vulnerable children's lives.

The Foster Wales, 'Staying Local' campaign, aims to highlight the benefits of local authority fostering over independent foster agencies, including local support and close links with children's social workers.

This follows the Welsh Government's introduction of the Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025, which positions Wales as the first UK nation to ban profit-making by commercial fostering agencies—except in exceptional circumstances—in a landmark move to reform children's care.



By fostering with a local authority, children are enabled to maintain relationships with their family and friends and remain in their local community, which makes it easier for them to settle into their new home.

Children in need of foster care, are initially matched with local authority foster carers, before being matched with a third-sector or commercial foster agency if a suitable placement cannot be found.

Last year, nearly 70 per cent of children placed with commercial fostering agencies were cared for outside of their local area, compared to just 15 per cent of children in local authority foster care.

In Torfaen, 75 per cent of our children in mainstream foster care are placed with our local authority carers, but an estimated 35 additional foster carers are needed to meet local demand going forward. Despite not achieving our target of young people placed within in house foster care placements, we have however reduced overall numbers of children requiring care by 18, since last year.

In recognition of our foster carers we hold an event every year. In May 2024, we invited our 160 local authority foster carers from across Torfaen to a special event to celebrate the exceptional contribution they have made to the lives of our vulnerable children.

The 'Bring Something to the Table' campaign also ran throughout October and November on our social media channels, which is a Foster Wales initiative aimed at demonstrating how rewarding fostering can be.

In April 2025, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) undertook an inspection into our Fostering Service. Their findings were extremely positive indicating that our children:

- experience consistent and stable care with foster carers who are committed to supporting them to achieve good well-being outcomes
- develop positive relationships with their foster carers and are supported to remain within their family or extended networks, wherever possible

- are engaged in education, activities and are supported to lead happy, healthy and active lifestyles and maintain relationships with people significant in their lives.

CIW also recognised that our review, aligned with a wider restructuring of our Children's Services, will provide an opportunity to develop and improve standards of service performance and delivery, going forward. A full copy of the report can be viewed here: [Care Inspectorate Wales](#)

## Supporting our young people....

Supporting our young people is essential for building a thriving, inclusive, and forward-looking society. It helps them develop the skills, confidence, and resilience they need to navigate life's challenges, succeed in education and employment, and contribute positively to their communities. By investing in their wellbeing, education, and opportunities, we reduce the risks of disengagement, inequality, and poor mental health, while fostering ambition, creativity, and social responsibility.

In September 2024, two Welsh Government Ministers visited and commended our 'My Support' Team (MyST) to reinforce the importance of specialist mental health support for young people in care.

Sarah Murphy, Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, and Dawn Bowden, Minister for Social Care and Children, spoke with families and staff to learn about the range of mental health services provided by the team.

The Gwent Regional My Support Team (MyST) programme is a dedicated mental health service for young people up to the age of 18. The programme, which has previously benefitted from more than £1.4m as part of the Regional Integration Fund, supports children and young people who are looked after and have complex mental health and social needs, using a wide range of psychotherapeutic models.



Throughout 2024/25, our service has supported 97 children and young people with complex mental health needs, and their friends and families, as well as providing psychological support to another 130 young people involved with children's services.

The transformative impact of MyST has led to one young person successfully transitioning out of residential care, into semi-independent living.

The My Support Team programme follows the Welsh Government's NEST framework – Nurturing, Empowering, Safe and Trust – for improving mental health and wellbeing services for babies, children and young people, and their families. It aims to ensure children and young people, as well as their support networks, are given the best possible chance to succeed through a range of direct psychological support and a whole system approach to care. We see this as being fundamental in ensuring care experienced young people, have access to the support they need, to succeed in life.

## Reviewing provision/accommodation for our looked after children....

Providing appropriate accommodation for children looked after is essential to ensure their safety, stability, and emotional wellbeing. A secure and nurturing home environment helps children recover from trauma, build trusting relationships, and thrive both personally and academically. It also supports consistent access to education, health services, and social development opportunities. Without suitable accommodation, children are at greater risk of instability, poor mental health, and disrupted life chances. Investing in quality placements—whether foster care, residential homes, or supported living—lays the foundation for better outcomes and a more hopeful future.

It is a priority within our local authority to ensure that we find safe and appropriate ways to work with families to help them meet their children's needs, including their need to be protected from harm. We will, whenever it is safe to do so, always look for ways to support children and young people to remain with their birth family or extended family and avoid the need for children and young people becoming looked after.

There are, however, currently a number of children within our care who have complex/challenging needs who require care within a residential setting, as a short-medium and long-term option, depending on their level of need and complexity.

Like all Local Authorities, we are required to offer sufficient accommodation for children who are looked after, in line with Section 79 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (the Act). (SSWA), and we have a duty to ensure that placements are made within our own area, unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so, or if there are overriding reasons for placing a child out of authority, mainly relating to safeguarding.

There is currently a deficit of good quality and affordable residential care provision to meet the needs of children and young people with multiple and complex needs. This will likely be exacerbated by the 'Eliminate Agenda' which aims to rebalance profit for care, within this sector.

Without this type of accommodation, we will be required to continue placing our children/young people out of county, which is costly and not always in the best interests of the child/young person.



To respond to the demands and meet the needs of our children and young people, we have continued with our efforts to progress the development of our own residential provision within the borough.

In July 2024, our Cabinet approved the decision to award a contract for the provision of care and support at Greenhill Bungalow Residential Children's Home.

At the beginning of November, our new residential children's home welcomed its first young person as it opened its doors, following a full refurbishment. (This was made possible by working in partnership with Melin Homes, funded via the Welsh Government Housing with Care Fund, HCF).

Our new home, is designed to provide a safe, nurturing, and supportive environment for children and young people, in the care of the Local Authority.

Greenhill Bungalow has been carefully developed by Melin contractors OTL (One Transformation Ltd) to meet the needs of children, who require a stable and caring environment. Midway Transitional Solutions is providing the care and support, staffed by a team of highly trained and experienced professionals, who are dedicated to helping children thrive and reach their full potential, promoting emotional well-being, educational development, and life skills.

The collaboration between Welsh Government, Melin and ourselves provides care for up to three children, creating a home that closely replicates family life and meets the needs of the young people who live there.

This project reflects our commitment to provide more than just "bricks and mortar" but is also helping to create a foundation for people to build their futures, creating brighter opportunities for those who need it, most.

Building upon this, plans are currently underway to acquire further properties, to develop a portfolio of residential children's homes within the Borough, going forward.

### **Safely reducing our children looked after population....**

Reducing the number of children looked after is important because it reflects progress in addressing the underlying issues that lead to family breakdown, neglect, or abuse. While foster care and residential care provide essential protection, being in care can disrupt a child's emotional development, education, and sense of stability. By investing in early intervention, family support, and community services, we can help families stay together safely, improve outcomes for children, and reduce the long-term social and economic costs associated with care. Ultimately, fewer children in care means more children growing up in secure, loving environments where they can thrive.

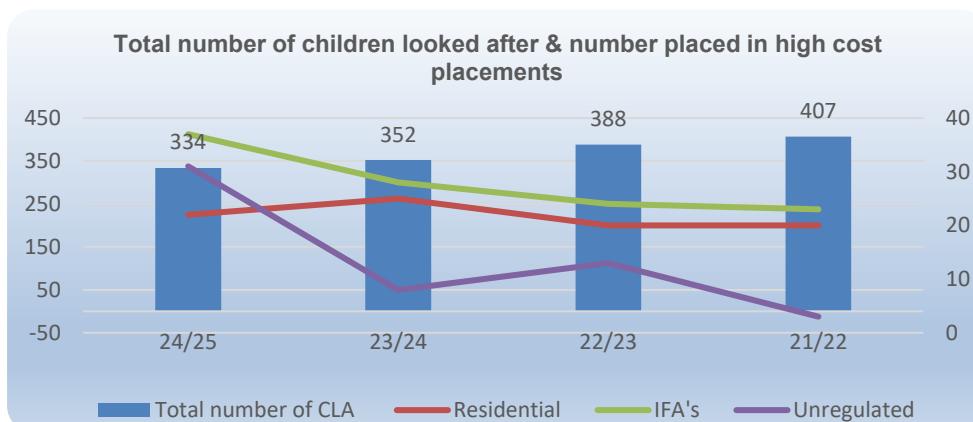
Torfaen continues to have the highest rate of children looked after - per 10,000 of the population, under 18 years of age, in Wales. This has however, reduced year on year, since 2021, when it was at its highest of 232 per 10,000 population, which equates to 479 children looked after.

(\* Data obtained from Stats Wales website: [Children looked after at 31 March per 10,000 population aged under 18 by local authority and year](#))

There continues to be a need for our children looked after population, to safely reduce at pace, in order to bring our performance, in line with the national average and so that we are able to manage overall demand and continue to focus on improving outcomes for our children and families.

Placement costs can also vary enormously from approximately £400 per week to over £7,000 per week and significantly more if an unregulated placement is required. This places a significant financial demand on our service and on the Local Authority.

Local authority	Year						
		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>All Welsh local authorities</b>		110	116	117	114	116	116
Blaenau Gwent		168	158	152	151	155	152
Bridgend		130	134	133	128	136	128
Caerphilly		117	121	124	128	129	131
Cardiff		122	129	134	141	141	137
Carmarthenshire		49	44	40	46	51	71
Ceredigion		53	64	74	87	114	120
Conwy		98	96	99	94	104	108
Denbighshire		86	90	94	95	104	109
Flintshire		76	80	81	79	79	77
Gwynedd		112	131	127	125	129	130
Isle of Anglesey		110	122	122	107	111	111
Merthyr Tydfil		158	164	153	142	140	157
Monmouthshire		101	130	126	124	124	117
Neath Port Talbot		110	107	103	95	92	89
Newport		106	107	106	103	103	95
Pembrokeshire		65	79	94	93	103	109
Powys		103	103	104	97	98	105
Rhondda Cynon Taf		136	144	139	133	127	130
Swansea		119	122	120	107	104	104
Torfaen		220	229	232	212	201	181
Vale of Glamorgan		104	95	104	105	117	120
Wrexham		98	118	133	132	124	112



Towards the end of 2024, the overall financial position in relation to our Children's Social Care division projected an adverse variance, of circa £3.2m. This is a very significant financial position and much more than previous years. This is mainly as a result of placement numbers exceeding the budgeted level, alongside an increase in the number of high-cost placements required. (High-cost placements include: residential placements and Independent Fostering Agency placements (IFA)).

All these factors have formed the key foundations of the transition work that we have undertaken within Children's Services throughout 2024/25, which has been overseen via an Accelerated Improvement Group (AIG). The focus of which, is developing services and systems aimed at:

- **Preventing** people from requiring a statutory service (universal services, EIP).
- **Enabling** people to develop independence and reduce the need for ongoing statutory service (rehabilitation).
- **Providing a high-quality service** to those that require statutory services (service quality to improve outcomes).

The work being carried out and directed through the AIG, has been effective in managing demand and overall spend within the service area. There has been a significant reduction in the children looked after

population from 355 to 316 since January 2025, which corresponds to an overall reduction of 11%. This trajectory bodes well for a continued reduction and annual achievement against overall children looked after numbers, although we will continue to monitor this closely.

Going forward, it is essential that we continue to manage and safely reduce demand within this area. In recent years, through a previous process of transformation, we have reduced our children looked after population significantly, but from a high starting point. This needs to reduce further, in order that we can exercise greater control within the service area, by ensuring that the right services are provided at the right time and are based on assessed need, an enhanced community offer and increased community resilience. We have also established a 'Best Start in Life' research group, which is focused on exploring how research can further support efforts to address the high numbers of children looked after in Torfaen.

### **Helping our children, young people and families so they can thrive....**

Helping children engage in play activities is essential for their ability to thrive, both emotionally and developmentally. Play supports cognitive growth, creativity, and problem-solving skills, while also fostering social interaction, communication, and emotional regulation. It allows children to explore the world, build confidence, and develop resilience in a safe and enjoyable way. Importantly, play contributes to physical health and mental wellbeing, and is especially valuable for children facing challenges or trauma. By promoting play, we create environments where children can grow, learn, and flourish holistically.

#### **New play facility**

A new play facility to support parents and children, under the age of eleven, was opened in our Civic Centre building, in April 2024.

Run by our Play Service, 'Civic Play' hosts several provisions including Lego clubs, family play, dad's groups, disability groups and young carers play clubs. A creche is also available for parents who are attending training within our council offices.

This is the first time we as a council have offered this kind of service at the Civic Centre and it forms part of an expansion of play provisions already being offered across the County Borough.



#### **Our Play Service**

Throughout the summer of 2024, over 400 of our staff and volunteers from our Play Service held more than 30 different clubs and activity sessions for children up to the age of 11, as part of our 'Summer of Fun' programme.

Around 2,500 children and young people took part in different sessions every day, including playschemes, food and fun camps and specialist respite sessions for children with complex needs.

This year, the service offered scooter and cycle training at all food and fun camps, funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund. These sessions taught safe cycle and scooter use to help children travel more actively.

Our dedicated teams work tirelessly throughout the summer holidays to create a diverse and engaging summer of fun programme that caters to the interests and needs of all children and young people within our communities.

In September 2024, we launched a new consultation to help shape the future of our play opportunities, across our communities within Torfaen.

Our Play Sufficiency Assessment is conducted every three years and evaluates the availability and quality of play and recreational opportunities for children and young people up to the age of 25.

This assessment looks to gather feedback on staffed play provisions, infrastructure such as parks, play areas and open spaces, as well as early years, sports, youth and cultural activities.

It also considers factors such as time, space, and permission to play, aiming to identify and improve areas where play opportunities might be lacking.

By taking part in the consultation, residents have been able to voice their concerns and share their insights on current play provisions, highlighting any areas they feel need improvement.

Feedback from the consultations are used to develop an action plan, which will be submitted to the Welsh Government in June 2025.



At the end of January 2025, our Play Service launched a series of new Saturday play sessions.

These new sessions were in response to a previous Play Sufficiency Assessment, which received contributions from over a thousand children under the age of 12.

The survey, which captured children's play habits, views, and opinions, highlighted a common theme: a desire for more activities and things to do on weekends.

These new sessions are an excellent addition to the wide portfolio of play and recreational opportunities already available to children and young people in Torfaen.

A new set of venues will also be introduced from April 2025, to cover more areas of the borough, ensuring that every child has access to enriching and enjoyable play opportunities.

## Inclusive play park

Work to transform a derelict piece of land in Pontnewynydd into an inclusive play park was completed at the end of 2024/25.

The park aims to address the findings of a previous play sufficiency assessment, which identified a lack of play provision for children with special needs, in the north of the borough.

We recognise that play areas and parks provide a range of benefits for children, including promoting physical activity, boosting social skills, building self-esteem, developing motor skills and encouraging creativity.



(This project was made possible by nearly £1.2 million from the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund and also supports other various projects across Torfaen, such as enhancing disability access to Blaenavon Flower Park, creating a new multi-games area in Pontnewydd Park, and planning a new outdoor gym in Cwmbran).

## Our Key Challenges...

### Education:

- **Develop a new Youth Offer and Strategy and increase open access and targeted Youth provision** - is a key challenge because young people's needs are diverse and constantly evolving. It will require meaningful engagement, flexible services, and strong partnerships to ensure support is accessible, inclusive, and relevant. This is important because well-designed youth services help young people feel valued, build confidence, and develop skills for life. By offering both open access and targeted support, we can reach those most at risk, reduce inequalities, and create opportunities for all young people to thrive in their communities.
- **Continue to increase the uptake of free school meals and reduce food waste within school kitchens** - Many eligible families may not claim free meals due to stigma, lack of awareness, or administrative barriers—meaning children miss out on nutritious food that supports learning and wellbeing. At the same time, reducing food waste requires changes in kitchen practices, menu planning, and portion control, which can be complex to implement. It's important because improving access to meals helps ensure all children are well-fed and ready to learn, while cutting waste supports climate goals and makes better use of public resources.

### **Children Services:**

- **Safely reduce our children looked after population, at pace** – will involve balancing the need to protect vulnerable children with the goal of supporting families to stay together. It will require intensive, coordinated support, effective early intervention, and suitable alternatives to care. It's important because achieving this safely improves outcomes for children, reduces long-term demand on services, and helps build stronger, more resilient families and communities.
- **Develop a broad range of accommodation to meet the needs of children looked after** - requires diverse, high-quality housing options that meet individual needs, often in the face of limited resources and complex care requirements. Without suitable placements, children may experience instability, which can negatively impact their wellbeing and long-term outcomes.
- **Enhance our overall commissioning model, as it relates to accommodation and other commissioned services, so as to have greater control over the market** – will require greater strategic control over a complex and competitive market. Without this, the council may struggle to secure high-quality, cost-effective placements that meet the diverse needs of children looked after. Strengthening commissioning arrangements will help ensure better outcomes, value for money, and long-term sustainability of services.
- **Have a greater ability to manage overall demand by enhancing the community offer and developing more effective early intervention and prevention services with clear pathways** - managing overall demand requires a shift from reactive services to proactive, community-based support. Enhancing the community offer and developing clear early intervention pathways takes time, coordination, and investment—but it's essential to prevent issues from escalating, reduce pressure on statutory services, and improve long-term outcomes for individuals and families.

### **Community Safety:**

- **Develop a stronger suite of impact measures that help us to track the effectiveness of our targeted prevention interventions** – this will require clear, consistent ways to track how well targeted prevention services are working, often across complex and varied needs. Without robust measures, it will be difficult to understand what's making a difference, improve services, and ensure resources are used effectively to support long-term outcomes.