

## WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 7:

### ***Promote healthier lifestyles in Torfaen to improve mental and physical well-being***

**Helping people to have healthier lifestyles and improve mental and physical well-being....**

#### **Being Dementia Friendly**

Being dementia-friendly helps create inclusive, supportive communities where people living with dementia can feel safe, respected, and understood. It promotes awareness, reduces stigma, and encourages environments that enable individuals to maintain independence and dignity for as long as possible. By being dementia-friendly, we improve access to services, foster compassion, and strengthen social connections—benefiting not only those with dementia but also their families, carers, and the wider community.



More than three-quarters of a million people currently live with dementia in the UK and it's expected that one in three of us will develop the condition at some point in our life.

At the end of April 2024, we launched an innovative sports programme, aimed at supporting dementia sufferers to relive their favourite sports and help them live happier and more active lifestyles.

Over 50 people living with dementia and their carers have signed up to the Dementia Friendly Sports Programme, run by Age Connect Torfaen, in partnership with our Sports Development Team.

So far, participants have taken part in dementia friendly golf at Greenmeadow Golf Club, as well as weekly gym sessions with Strength & Performance Wales, with assisted tennis planned in the summer months.

Research shows regular exercise can support cognitive function as well as improving physical and mental wellbeing for people with dementia, as well as their carers.

The activities that we have set up, provide participants with either an opportunity to try something new, or to revisit a once loved pastime, whilst providing them with the physical, emotional and social benefits that physical activity can offer. By collaborating with local community providers, including Pontnewydd Golf Club and Strength & Performance Wales, our vision is to empower more people living with dementia to actively participate in sports and enjoy an improved quality of life.

#### **Supporting over 60's Fitness....**

Supporting fitness activities for our older residents helps maintain physical health, mobility, and independence, reducing the risk of chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and osteoporosis. Regular exercise also boosts mental well-being, combats loneliness, and improves cognitive function. By encouraging active lifestyles, we enhance quality of life, reduce pressure on health and social care services, and help older adults stay connected and engaged in their communities.

At the end of May 2024, we launched our 'Thrive - Live Long and Prosper' campaign which is a new wellness activity, fronted by our Sports Development Team, aimed to energise residents aged 60 years and above, to stay healthy and active in older age.

According to a report by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, healthy life expectancy for women in Torfaen is approximately 55 years, while men's stands at 60 - both below the Welsh average of 62 years.



To help narrow this health gap, our 'Thrive' sessions are being offered in Blaenavon, Cwmbran and Pontypool, which include chair-based activities, gentle exercise, circuits, and dance.

Financial support can also be offered to groups in the community that champion wellness and social inclusion, through the various sporting and social activities they offer.

So far, groups have received support for acquiring equipment, renting facilities, and covering instructor costs.

This programme promotes lifelong physical activity in a variety of forms, aiming to empower our over 60s population to lead active lives and prevent sedentary lifestyles.

### **Encouraging our residents to become healthy....**

Helping people lead healthier lifestyles and improve their mental and physical well-being enhances quality of life, reduces the risk of chronic illnesses, and lowers pressure on health and social care services. Good health supports productivity, learning, and social participation, while improved mental well-being fosters resilience, stronger relationships, and community cohesion. By promoting healthier choices and environments, we can build a more active, inclusive, and thriving society.

### **Promoting physical activity**

We are committed as an organisation to promoting healthy lifestyles and helping children get the best start in life.

In August 2024, we launched our 'Lending Library', which is run by our Library Service, in partnership with our Sports Development Team. This initiative aims to promote physical activity, by providing easy access to sports equipment, for residents of all ages.

The lending library works like borrowing books and the equipment that is available covers a wide range of sports, including badminton, basketball, boccia, boxing, curling, cricket, football, mini golf, netball, pickleball, rounders, rugby, table tennis and tennis.

Fitness equipment is also available for use at home or in an appropriate setting.



This initiative will help to introduce people and families to new sports, without the cost of buying new equipment straight away. It will also help to reuse items that may otherwise be thrown away.

In July, our Sports Development Team also launched a new joint-initiative with Blaenavon and Cwmbran Community Councils, to set up 'Community Kit Rooms' that offer free sports equipment and clothing, to low-income families. We asked local residents whether they would have any good quality sports clothes or footwear they no longer needed, so that they could donate to our 'Community Kit Rooms', in an attempt to make exercise more accessible and affordable. Since the introduction of the lending library and community kit rooms over 120 families have accessed the facilities, and more community venues will be hosting the kit rooms.

### **Providing new sports facilities**

At the beginning of October, we progressed plans to transform disused tennis courts in Blaenavon, into a new all-purpose sports facility.

The refurbished tennis courts were upgraded to a multi-use games area, suitable for tennis, basketball, and netball. It comes in response to a growing demand for basketball and netball within the area, highlighted by a school-wide sports survey and echoed by residents living within the Blaenavon Community.

The new multi-games area features a gated technology system, allowing users to book the courts online, through the Tennis Wales Club Spark system.



It is hoped that this approach will not only enhance the user experience but will also help to secure the courts from anti-social behaviour and vandalism.

We are dedicated to promoting sports and physical activity within the community by engaging more people in healthy activities and expanding opportunities for participation. The instrumental support from the local community has been crucial in pushing this development forward and we look forward to the positive impact this enhanced sports facility will have for the local community to enjoy.

(This new development follows the recent refurbishment of courts in Cwmbran Park and Pontypool Park, which received a combined £220,000 from the Lawn Tennis Association, Sport Wales, Torfaen Council, and Section 106 funds).

### Encouraging well-being through active lifestyles....

At the end of October 2024, a consultation opened inviting residents to provide their views on local sports, leisure, and fitness activities.

The survey is part of our commitment to improving well-being through active lifestyles, as well as the potential to transform areas into a premier leisure destination. By understanding the needs and preferences of our residents, we can provide the opportunity for them to engage in physical activities that promote a healthier lifestyle.

The benefits of physical activity for mental and physical health are well-documented but the extent of local participation is unclear.

This consultation therefore aims to identify the sports and activities that people enjoy and how they discover them. It also seeks to pinpoint areas where provision is lacking and understand the barriers that prevent participation.

Feedback collected played a crucial role in shaping our 'Communities Well-being Sports and Leisure Strategy'. This strategy aims to make leisure opportunities more accessible, support exceptional sporting talent, and highlight the positive impact of sports and leisure on overall well-being.

We want to ensure that Torfaen becomes a top leisure destination in the future, including, utilising its natural landscape to attract visitors for various activities and events. Supporting local sports clubs to become community hubs and ensuring the right facilities are in the right places are also key components to our vision.

In December 2024, Cabinet approved and adopted our Sports & Leisure Strategy, as a supplementary chapter of our Community Wellbeing Strategy, which provides us with the strategic framework for supporting community activity and promoting wellbeing.

The strategy is centred on how we can utilise existing facilities and provision to build our preventative offer, support them in developing and delivering local solutions and in turn strengthen community and individual resilience.

At the end of March 2025, we announced that the award-winning social enterprise - Halo Leisure will be providing leisure services, in Torfaen

It marks the start of a new 10-year partnership with Halo following a previous contract with Torfaen Leisure Trust.



The charity will take over the management of leisure facilities at Cwmbran Stadium, Active Living Centres at Pontypool and Bowden, Fairwater Leisure Centre and Snowsport Torfaen.

As a not-for-profit organisation, we expect Halo to put people before profit and make a positive and long-term difference to our residents' health by encouraging physical activity and healthier lifestyles.

This partnership will contribute towards our aspirations to tackle health inequalities and create healthier, happier communities.

(Over the past 20 years, Halo has managed leisure services in Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil, Gloucester, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Stratford and Wiltshire).

### **Investing in our schools to encourage active lifestyles and well-being....**

Investing in our schools helps children develop lifelong healthy habits, improves physical and mental health, and enhances learning and social development. Active schools also promote inclusion, reduce health inequalities, and strengthen community connections by involving families and local organisations. This investment supports a healthier, more resilient population and contributes to long-term social and economic benefits.

Nearly £4m has been invested in a range of new sports facilities at our Abersychan School.

Work on a new £2.2m 3G pitch was completed within 2024/25. The facility, which includes a 3G pitch built to the World Rugby and FIFA standards, floodlights and a spectator stand, is also available for community hire from April 2025.



Work is also being carried out to transform the old leisure centre, situated on the school site with a refurbished sports hall and changing rooms, a purpose-built dance studio, all of which will be available for community hire, through the school.

These facilities will not only benefit the pupils at Abersychan School but also children and adults who play for local football, and rugby clubs, or are part of other sports clubs.

It is one of three new 3G pitches in the borough, alongside a new 3G pitch at Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw, which opened in Autumn 2024 and a pitch in Llantarnam, which is due to be completed in spring 2025.

(The new 3G pitch has been funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and FAW Cymru Football Foundation. The new dance studio, sports hall, changing rooms and ALN base have been funded by a combination of UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund and the Welsh Government's ALN grant. The new netball courts were paid for by the Welsh Government's Community Focused Schools fund).

### **Our Key Challenges...**

#### **Education:**

- Complete the school and community 3G facilities in Trevethin, Llantarnam and Abersychan**
  - this will require coordinated planning, funding, and construction within tight timelines. These facilities are important for improving access to high-quality sports and leisure opportunities, supporting both educational outcomes and community wellbeing.

#### **Sport & Leisure:**

- Developing a clearer strategic framework for our investment in sport & leisure in Torfaen** – without a clear strategic framework, investment decisions in sport and leisure may lack direction, consistency, and alignment with broader community needs and priorities.

- **Consider our approach to commissioning sport and leisure services** - our commissioning approach directly influences service quality, value for money, and how well sport and leisure provision meets the needs of Torfaen's communities. This is important because how we commission sport and leisure services shapes the accessibility, inclusivity, and long-term sustainability of opportunities for physical activity and wellbeing across Torfaen.