An anti-poverty strategy for Caerphilly County Borough

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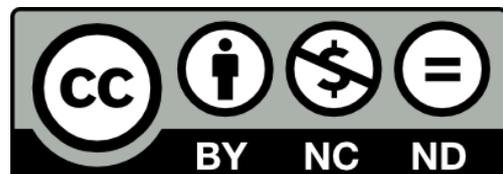https://www.bevanfoundation.org

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1. Introduction

Poverty affects people in almost every community across Wales. More than one in five people in Wales (22%) were living in poverty between 2021-22 and 2023-24.[1] This includes almost a third of children (31%) and 16 per cent of pensioners.[2] Broadly speaking, rates of poverty have stalled at these levels for more than two decades.

Despite the urgency of making progress in tackling poverty, there is little information available on it below the national level. Along with pressures that affect people nationwide, local factors are also likely to be at play in the poverty that is experienced in local areas and an understanding of them is crucial to inform action taken locally.

This report is aimed at catalysing and informing an ongoing anti-poverty strategy for Caerphilly County Borough. It is the product of a partnership between the Bevan Foundation and Rhymney Valley Food Bank. Both organisations recognise that despite the structural drivers of poverty that lie largely outside the control of local communities, action at the local level can make a big difference. In Caerphilly as elsewhere over the course of the cost-of-living crisis, food banks and other frontline support organisations have expanded their activities to provide ever more emergency support for people in crisis. This has provided essential lifelines, but there is a need for strategic approaches to ensure that limited energies and resources are also directed towards initiatives that produce lasting change and provide a sense of ownership and hope for communities that often feel forgotten.

The report brings together relevant data on poverty in Caerphilly with what we have learned from people and organisations living and working in the area during a series of workshops and conversations undertaken over the past six months. It addresses the key themes that have been raised in our engagements and provides some suggested starting points for action. We offer this to the people of Caerphilly County Borough to use to continue to build community power and reduce the impacts of poverty.

1.1 How and why did we produce this report?

"The same issues continue over many years with no action."
Workshop participant

This report brings together the findings from a desk-based review of the available data on poverty in Caerphilly undertaken by the Bevan Foundation, along with what we learned from three workshop days with residents and organisations working in the poverty space in the Borough. Workshop events took place in New Tredegar, Risca, and Rhymney in November 2025 and January 2026. Contributions were captured in the written notes of participants during the New Tredegar and Risca workshops as well as via facilitators. Verbatim spoken quotes were recorded and transcribed from conversations held at the Rhymney workshop. All contributions published in this report are anonymised. Several follow-up conversations were conducted.

In the summer of 2025, Rhymney Valley Food Bank (RVFB) approached the Bevan Foundation with a proposal to work together on an anti-poverty strategy for Caerphilly. Research carried out by RVFB's Campaigns Coordinator, alongside feedback and intelligence from local partners, highlighted that services across the area—particularly those delivered by the third sector—are quite fragmented. We also identified that the local authority does not currently have an up-to-date anti-poverty strategy in place. Alongside this, the data RVFB collects from agencies referring individuals and families to the food bank for emergency food support showed a significant and worrying increase in need. During the 2023–2024 reporting period, RVFB supported 5,239 people—3,369 adults and 1,870 children. In the 2024–2025 reporting period that figure rose to 6,450 people, an increase of 23 per cent. This included 4,292 adults and 2,158 children. The estimated population of the Borough as of mid-2024 is 176,865, including 33,721 children up to the age of 16.[3] This means that RVFB alone may be supporting up to almost four per cent of all residents in the Borough with emergency food, and up to six per cent of all resident children. There are four other Trussell food banks operating in Caerphilly Borough.[4]

RVFB also saw a significant spike in crisis referrals for emergency food, with a notable proportion of people struggling with debt. In response, RVFB took action and procured a specialist debt advice service with Citizens Advice. By providing rapid access to debt advice, the service aims to address urgent financial issues, help stabilise people's circumstances, and ultimately reduce their reliance on food bank support.

Because of these trends and the wider picture emerging locally, RVFB commissioned the Bevan Foundation to carry out this piece of work. The aim was to better understand the current anti-poverty landscape, identify gaps in support, and explore how services across the area could work more closely together to strengthen the overall response to poverty. While the Food Bank commissioned the report, it is intended to support the wider community, local partners, and care and support agencies to take the findings forward and turn the recommendations into action.

The Bevan Foundation provided staff time and resources at no charge to facilitate the work which was codesigned with RVFB. The Bevan Foundation is grateful to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which provides funding for its work on poverty, including this project.

We are grateful to all those who engaged with us during the process, and everyone who helped facilitate and support the work.

2. The drivers of poverty

Poverty is the condition people find themselves in when they do not have enough resources to meet their basic needs, including being able to take part in society. The drivers of poverty are multiple and interconnected. The four main reasons for poverty are:

- **income from work not being sufficient** for a decent standard of living,
- **the social security (benefits) system failing to provide an adequate 'safety net'** of financial support for people who need it,
- **arrangements within households** which increase costs or make it likely that income will be lower, such as the presence of children or disability,
- **high costs of living**, especially housing costs.

For any household or individual experiencing poverty, one or multiple of these reasons may be at play at any given time. Many of the drivers of poverty are structural, and largely outside of individual, community, local government or even Welsh government control, and would need significant intervention on a UK government level to change. For example, the UK government has control over social security in Wales, setting the value of benefit payments and their administration. However, this does not mean that communities can't play a role in supporting people who are underserved by the system; action taken at a local level is instrumental in ensuring that people claim everything they are entitled to and are supported when things go wrong, or when they face a crisis. It is important to understand the dynamics of the challenges people are facing locally so that action can be taken on a local level.

Drivers of poverty

Work or lack of it

GOV.UK
Social security system

Household arrangements

Cost of living

The following sections focus on themes that emerged in our conversations as participants were asked to think about what poverty looks like for them, for those in their neighbourhoods and for people they are involved in supporting, as well as the change they want to see.

2.1 Measuring poverty in Caerphilly

There is very little data on poverty per se at local authority level in Wales. The notable exception is the estimates of child poverty published by the End Child Poverty Coalition, which show that 31 per cent of children in Caerphilly lived in poverty in 2023-24.[5]

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) is an additional source of data providing some insight into relative levels of deprivation between small geographical areas.[i] It uses eight types of deprivation (income, employment, health, education, access to services, housing, community safety, and the physical environment) to give a score to each area in Wales.

The results from WIMD 2025 show that 11 per cent of areas in Caerphilly are highly deprived (i.e. in the top 10 per cent of deprived areas in Wales).[6] Two of the 15 most deprived areas in Wales are in Caerphilly (*St James 3* and *Twyn Carno 1*).[7] These two neighbourhoods along with *Bargoed 4* and *Bedwas Trethomas and Machen 6* are in the list of 22 small areas in Wales considered in the Index as areas of 'deep-rooted' deprivation, meaning that they have remained consistently in the top 50 most deprived areas of Wales over 20 years.[8]

While the results from WIMD provide an indication of particular areas where deprivation is high and a long-term issue in Caerphilly, the significance of the Index for understanding poverty in local areas should not be overstated due to its limitations. It is important to note that many people on low incomes live outside of the most deprived areas identified in the Index.[9] For the purposes of developing approaches to tackling poverty, it is most useful when used alongside other evidence, including local intelligence.[10]

Fig. 1. Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2025, overall ranks, lower super output areas, Caerphilly
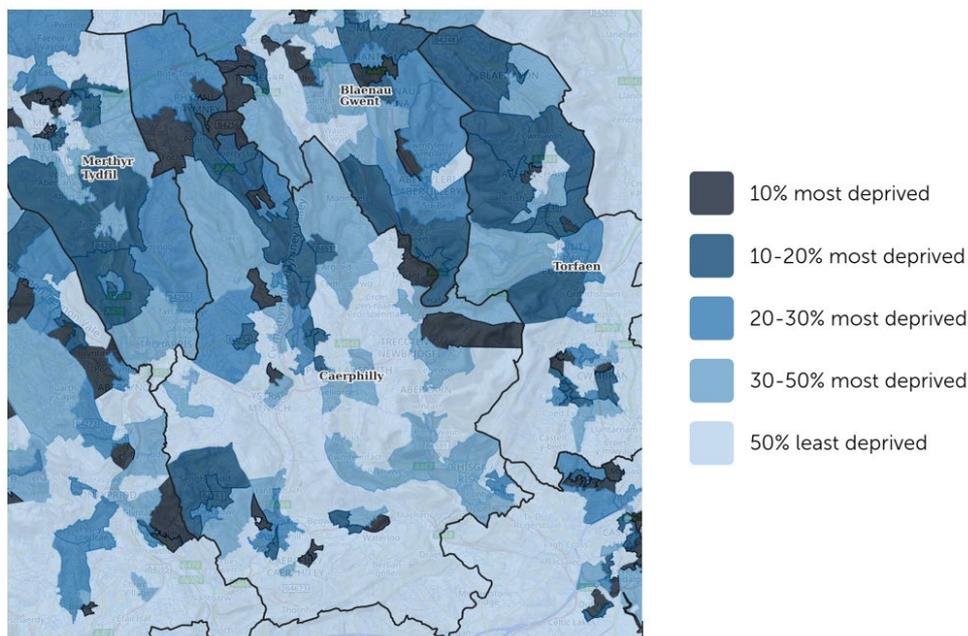
Source: DataMapWales[11]

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[i] Lower super output areas (LSOAs), each containing an average of 1,600 people

3. Low income, employment and benefits

Challenges around employment were a major theme of our discussions with Caerphilly residents. As income from work or the lack of work is one of the major drivers of poverty, it is important to try to understand the employment landscape in Caerphilly.

3.1 Employment rates & economic inactivity

Data gathered by the Office for National Statistics show that employment rates in Caerphilly are roughly comparable with Wales as a whole. Caerphilly's employment rate for those aged 16-64 was 75.6 per cent for the 12 months to September 2025, compared to the Wales average of 72.3 per cent.[12] The employment rate for this period was very similar between men and women in Caerphilly, at 75.8 per cent and 75.4 per cent respectively.[13] There is some uncertainty around this data, so it should be interpreted with caution alongside other evidence in this report.

Over the same period, rates of economic inactivity in Caerphilly are also similar to the Wales average, at 22.5 per cent of those aged 16-64 (25,100 individuals) compared to 24.1 per cent across Wales.[14] The largest proportion of economically inactive people in Caerphilly was made up of those who are economically inactive because they have a long-term sickness (36%). This is a slightly larger proportion than the estimates for Wales as a whole (34%). Caerphilly contains proportionately fewer people who are economically inactive because they are studying (15% vs 24% for Wales), and a higher rate of people who are retired before the age of 65 (21% vs 14% for Wales).[15]
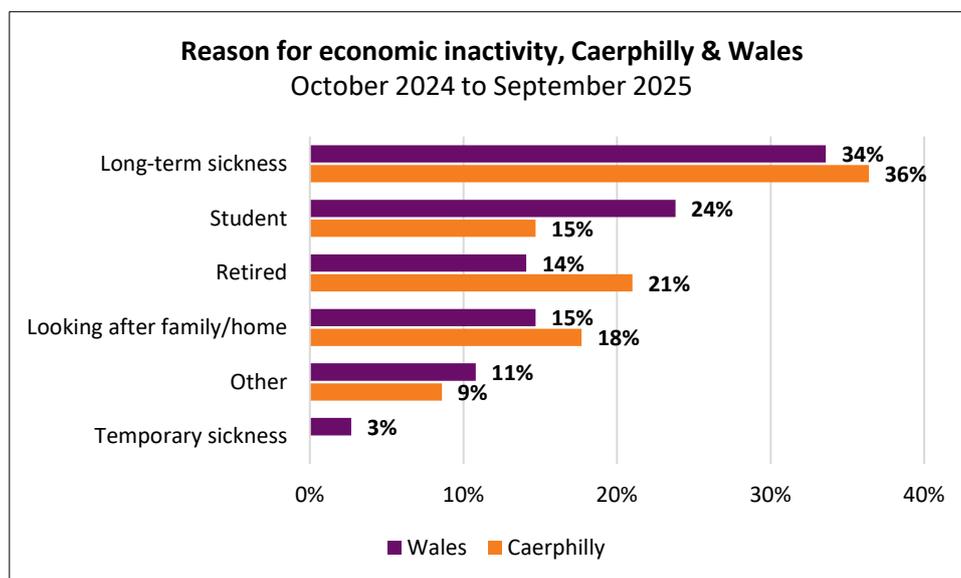
Source: Office for National Statistics Annual Population Survey, via Nomis

Many people in Caerphilly told us that they were concerned by difficulties gaining employment in their areas, and the headline data on employment almost certainly masks significant differences between areas in Caerphilly. The 2021 Census allows us to see employment rates by ward, which show large differences in the employment rate between areas. The wards with the highest employment rates[ii] were Ystrad Mynach (58.8%), St Martins (Caerphilly) (58.5%) and Abercarn (58.2%) while those in Van, Twyn


[ii] Amongst all adults aged 16 and over (including retirees)

Carno and Moriah & Pontlottyn were significantly lower (43.5%, 44.7% and 47.4% respectively).[16]

3.2 Earnings

The average (median) gross weekly pay for full-time workers in Caerphilly is £709.80, as of April 2025 (the latest data available).[17] This is £9.50 less than the average for Wales, and £57 less than the average for the UK.[18] Average hourly pay (full time, excl. overtime) is £18.42, less than the average for Wales (£18.54) and the UK (£19.67).[19] The differences appear to be largely driven by lower rates of pay amongst women in Caerphilly.

Despite women having similar rates of employment in Caerphilly to men, on average they earn less. Gross hourly pay (full time, excl. overtime) for women in Caerphilly is £16.65, whereas for men it is £19.88—an hourly difference of £3.20 on average.[20] This is a larger gender pay disparity than that seen across Wales and the UK.
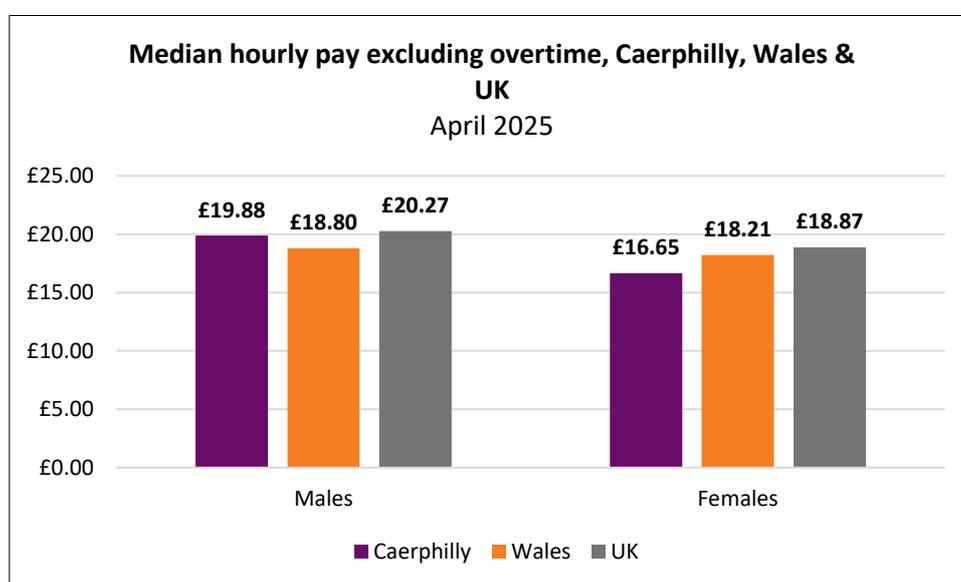
Source: Office for National Statistics Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, via Nomis

While median wages are lower in Caerphilly than average, it is also important to consider the situation faced by those on low pay, because many lower paid workers earn significantly less than the median salary. While we have seen welcome increases to the National Living Wage in recent years, which now stands at £12.21 per hour, it remains £1.24 per hour less than the Real Living Wage, the minimum wage rate based on estimates of what people really need to live.[21] Across Caerphilly, an estimated 17.8 per cent of people earn less than the Real Living Wage.[22] This is more than the rate for Wales which is estimated at 16.4 per cent. This highlights the progress still to be achieved in Caerphilly in ensuring work pays enough to meet essential needs.

3.3 Qualifications

The proportion of working-age people with higher-level qualifications is much lower in Caerphilly than on a Wales or GB level. 38 per cent of Caerphilly residents have qualifications at level 4 or above (higher education, e.g. university degree), compared to a Wales-average of 44 per cent and a GB average of 47 per cent.[23] For level 3 qualifications (e.g. A or T Levels), there is a smaller but still large difference between Caerphilly residents and Wales and GB residents. 60 per cent of working-age adults in Caerphilly have level 3

qualifications, compared to 66 per cent of people across Wales and 68 per cent of people in GB.[24] The proportion of Caerphilly residents with level 1 or level 2 qualifications (e.g. GCSEs) is broadly similar to the Wales average, at 88 per cent and 86 per cent respectively.[25]

3.4 Unemployment/out of work benefits

According to the ONS, in January 2026, there were 3,775 people claiming out-of-work benefits in Caerphilly (Jobseeker's Allowance and Universal Credit where there is a requirement to seek work).[26] At 3.5 per cent of all working-age residents, it is a similar rate to that seen across Wales (3.3%).[27]

The proportion of younger people claiming out of work benefits in Caerphilly is notably higher than across Wales. 29 per cent of all male out of work benefits claimants in Caerphilly are aged 16-24, compared to 24 per cent on average in Wales.[28] 25 per cent of Caerphilly's female claimants are in the 16-24 age bracket compared to 21 per cent across Wales.[29]

Universal Credit

In December 2025, there were 27,727 people in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) in Caerphilly.[30] The majority of claimants (20,264, or 73%) were not in employment, while 7,464 were recorded as being in employment (27%).[31] Caerphilly's proportion of in-work UC claimants is slightly lower than the Wales average (29%).[32]

Among people who were claiming UC and were recorded as being in employment, 3,512 had no further work conditions applied to their claim, meaning they were judged by the DWP to be working enough.[33] They made up 47 per cent of total UC claimants who were in employment, proportionately more than the average for Wales (44%).[34]

2,093 UC claimants were in work (or their partner was in work) but with an individual or household income below the thresholds set by the DWP, so had a condition attached to their UC claim that they should look to increase their earnings.[35] People with an in-work requirement condition make up 29 per cent of Caerphilly's in-work UC claimants.

For claimants who were recorded as 'not in employment', the vast majority (16,877, or 83%) were not required to look for work because of ill-health or disability, caring responsibilities or because they were in full-time education.[36] The proportion of claimants in this category in Caerphilly is similar to the rate for Wales (82%) but significantly above the average for GB (74%).[37] Just 17 per cent of out-of-work UC claimants (3,453) in Caerphilly Borough are required to take action to secure work or increase their earnings.[38]

As of November 2025, the 27,727 UC claimants in Caerphilly were in 23,656 households.[39] A large majority of households claiming UC in Caerphilly are single-adult households, at 83 per cent, or 19,579.[40] This the same proportion as the Wales and GB averages. Single-adult households with no children made up the largest group of households in Caerphilly claiming UC, at 12,318 or 52 per cent.[41] The next largest group is made up of single adult households with children, at 7,261 or 31 per cent.[42] Households containing a couple with children total 2,699 (11% of the total), while couple households where there are no children make up just 6 per cent of the total, at 1,377.[43] These proportions are almost identical to those seen on a Wales and GB level.[44]

3.5 What the data tells us

From this broad analysis of the available data on employment and benefits take-up in Caerphilly, several issues are raised. First, while employment rates are generally similar to Wales averages, significant numbers of people are not in employment in Caerphilly, and employment rates likely differ significantly in different areas. Earnings are lower on average in Caerphilly than at a Wales level, driven in large part by lower wages among women. Significant numbers of workers in Caerphilly are paid below the Real Living Wage which means that their wages are not sufficient to meet the real costs of living. While there is not always a direct link between qualifications and wages or employment, qualifications data suggests that many people in Caerphilly are under-qualified for higher-skilled roles.

While out of work benefits claims are proportionately similar between Caerphilly and Wales, a higher proportion of younger people are claiming them in Caerphilly, suggesting that younger people are finding it difficult to find suitable employment. Overall, a large proportion of benefits claimants in Caerphilly are in work, suggesting high rates of low pay. Out of work benefits claims are likely driven by high rates of long-term disability and illness as they are across the UK. Taken together, the data suggests that there is a need for increased availability of secure and well-paid employment in Caerphilly to help drive down poverty. However, the usefulness of the data is limited given how broad it is, and it should be read alongside what people in Caerphilly say are the challenges in their communities.

3.6 What the community said

Generally, there was agreement among many of the participants at our workshops that the employment landscape is challenging in Caerphilly, particularly given the prevalence of low-paid jobs and the competition for them. It was felt that this was a disincentive for many to work.

"How are these kids meant to get into jobs?"

"Low wage jobs – no incentives to work."

Transport

Transport emerged as a significant barrier to getting on:

- "You have to travel, haven't you, for jobs basically. And some people can't travel, some people don't drive."
- "So that's a massive barrier, then, isn't it?"

"It's a struggle then, because if you've got a job, you've got to travel there, and then your kid's ill, travel back, come and get your kid from school, it's always something all the time isn't it."

"Jobs need to be near station."

Digging deeper, many agreed that there was a lack of suitable public transport, with routes and services not meeting people's needs in terms of jobs:

"It's transport then, isn't it? If you start work at 6 and the buses don't start 'til 8, you've had it!"

"It's like my daughter who works in New Tredegar, half the time she goes to catch a train, that one's cancelled, so we've got to take her... We've got her down there for convenience, so it's only one bus away, one train ride away. No, we've got to take her most of the time."

For younger people, support with meeting the costs of getting to training or employment was seen as lacking, particularly where opportunities were just outside of the Borough:

> *"I've found with the Borough, my daughter started training last year and she went to Merthyr because that was the closest one to us. They were trying to say she should be in our Borough – well, yeah, but to stay in our Borough she would need two buses, whereas it's one bus to Merthyr, that wasn't our Borough, but that was closest to us. They were singing with the money for the buses, then, and they were trying to say, like, I'll have to pay it, because she should go to one in her borough. If they're going to do free bus passes, do one to Merthyr, because to go to Ebbw Vale, she would have to catch a bus from Rhymney to Tredegar, Tredegar to Ebbw Vale."*

Given the issues raised around public transport and employment, it is perhaps not surprising that relatively few people reported they use buses to commute to work in Caerphilly at the time of the 2021 Census (1,680 or 2% of the working population).[45] By contrast, 46,223 people said that they drive to work by car or van (60% of the working population), with a further six per cent saying they catch a lift to work in a car or van as a passenger.[46]

Transport issues in the Borough are explored further in sections 5 and 7.

Benefits

During our workshop conversations, the benefits system was universally regarded as unfair and pushing people on low incomes in the Borough in financial difficulty, while many felt that it was difficult to know whether they were claiming everything they are entitled to:

> *Punitive social security system"*
>
> *"Not knowing what help is out there!"*

The Bedroom Tax and Carer's Allowance were two benefits which people viewed as particularly unfair. What was raised around the Bedroom Tax is explored further in section 4.

Carer's Allowance is a benefit of £83.30 per week paid to people who care for someone for at least 35 hours a week.[47] However, the benefit is taxable, there is an earnings limit of £196/week after deductions,[48] and while the UK Government's messaging is that generally claimants will be better off after claiming,[49] there has been much anecdotal evidence that the complications in the system have led to people being out of pocket.[50]

There were frustrations expressed about Carer's Allowance in our discussions, with it being seen as failing to recognise the value of the care people give, and acting as a disincentive to work:

"Carers are being penalised when claiming Carer's Allowance"

"The Carer's Allowance, they give it to you and then take it back."

"I get Carer's Allowance, right, now I can work up to just over £204, something like that. But if I get £205 then my Universal Credit gets hit. So that's to say to you, "Well you can't work x amount of hours," because they'll nail you for it."

"We need carers to look after people, but yet they're taking money off you for you to look after people."

3.7 What could be done?

There is undoubtedly a need to increase incomes and the rates and quality of employment in Caerphilly to address poverty. While responsibility for setting minimum wages, economic policy and the value of benefits lie with the UK government, there are ways in which local authorities and communities can address some of the issues raised at our sessions around jobs and income. These include the following:

Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council could work with local employers and other stakeholders to develop an ongoing Living Wage campaign in Caerphilly, to boost the incomes of the lowest paid workers.

Recommendation: An anti-poverty alliance should explore further the gaps in transport services for people to access employment in Caerphilly, to identify solutions. Caerphilly Borough Council could work with partners in community transport and Transport for Wales to push for new and improved services strategically aimed at increasing employment, education and training.

Recommendation: The community could continue to find ways to raise its voice on various platforms to represent how residents are being failed by the benefits system and push for change at the UK and Welsh government levels.

Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council and other support services should continue to increase signposting and support for people to maximise their incomes through the benefits system.

Recommendation: Organisations that provide crisis support should remain mindful of the groups most likely to face difficulties in the benefits system, so that support is geared towards levels of need.

4. Housing and homelessness

High housing costs are a significant driver of poverty, and the type of housing people live in is a factor in how likely they are to be in poverty. People who own their own homes in Wales (outright or with a mortgage) are the least likely to live in poverty, at 13 per cent, while 37 per cent of people renting privately and 43 per cent of people in social rented housing live in poverty.[51] While rates of poverty amongst social renters are overwhelmingly due to low income, 35 per cent of private renters are pulled into poverty by their housing costs.[52] The kinds of tenure people live in is therefore relevant to how we can understand the drivers of poverty in the Borough.

4.1 The housing landscape in Caerphilly

The majority of Caerphilly residents lived in owner-occupied housing as of the 2021 Census. In total, 51,502 households were in the owner-occupied sector, making up 68 per cent of all households. This is slightly higher than the rate for Wales (66%).[53]

The rental sector was made up of 24,477 households in Caerphilly in 2021, 32 per cent of all residences in the Borough.[54]

Socially rented housing makes up a greater proportion of all tenures in Caerphilly than it does across Wales. Socially rented homes also remain as a majority of all rented homes in Caerphilly, whereas in Wales the private rented sector overtook the social rented sector as of the 2021 Census. 14,323 households were renting socially in 2021 in Caerphilly, 19 per cent of all residences. This compares to the 17 per cent of homes that were socially rented across Wales as a whole.[55]

Caerphilly Borough Council is one of 11 local authorities in Wales which are still a social landlord, the remaining 11 local authorities having transferred their housing stock to housing associations. As of the 2021 Census, 10,065 households in Caerphilly were council tenants while 4,258 household were renting from a housing association.[56]

13 per cent of residences in the Borough are privately rented (10,154 households). In Wales as a whole, the private rented sector lets to 17 per cent of all households.[57]

Housing tenure distribution, Caerphilly & Wales
Census 2021

Legend: Caerphilly (purple), Wales (orange)

Category	Caerphilly	Wales
Owns outright	36.0%	38.0%
Owns with a mortgage or loan	31.5%	28.0%
Rents from council or Local Authority	13.2%	8.7%
Private landlord or letting agency	11.3%	14.5%
Other social rented	5.6%	7.8%
Other private rented	2.0%	2.5%
Shared ownership	0.3%	0.3%
Lives rent-free	0.1%	0.2%

Source: Census 2021, via Nomis

4.2 The crisis in social housing supply

Across Wales, there aren't enough social homes to meet demand. Shelter Cymru has shown that more than 94,000 households in Wales were on social housing waiting lists in the summer of 2024, equivalent to one in every 14 households.[58] Those waiting for social homes are left facing ongoing cost of living pressures including rising rents caused by a shortage of other affordable housing options.

In Caerphilly in August 2024, there were 7,162 households on social housing waiting lists.[59] The number of lettings to new tenants in the Borough in 2023-24 was 751, equivalent to around 5 per cent of Caerphilly's social housing stock.[60] This means that for every available social home in Caerphilly, there is a waiting list of 10 households.

The pressures facing people in need of a social home in Caerphilly appear to be particularly severe for those who need one-bedroom accommodation. In 2023-24 Caerphilly had 2,075 general needs one-bedroom social homes, making up 15 per cent of all general needs stock in the Borough.[61] In August 2024, there were 3,580 people waiting for one-bed homes in Caerphilly, making up 61 per cent of all general needs applicants.[62]

Supply of general needs social housing (2023-24) vs demand in Caerphilly (August 2024) by number of bedrooms

Bedrooms	Total	Households waiting
1 bedroom	2,075	3,580
2 bedrooms	4,761	1,552
3 bedrooms	6,390	583
4 or more bedrooms	296	183
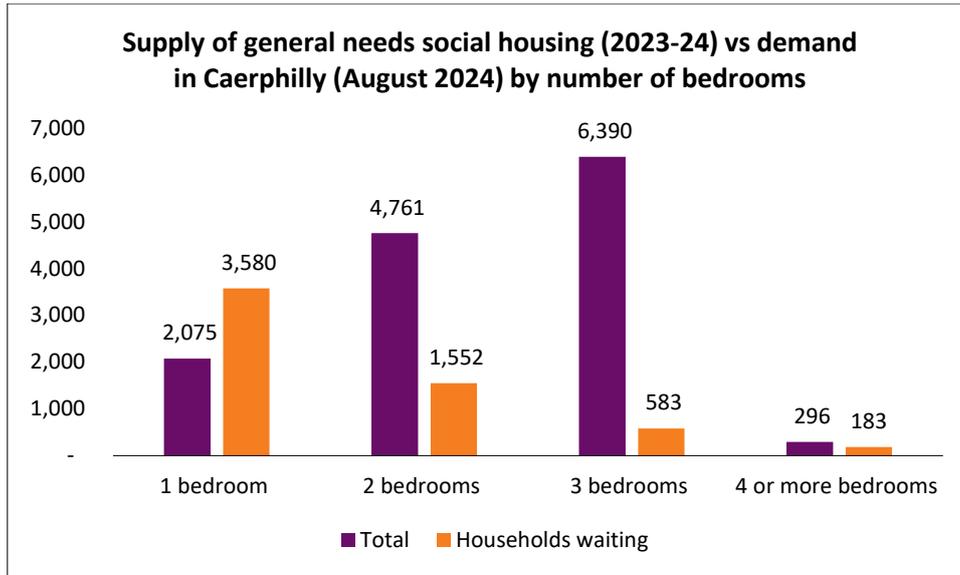
Sources: StatsWales[63] & Shelter Cymru[64]

4.3 Home ownership is increasingly out of the reach of many

While a significant proportion of households in Caerphilly own their own home, for those looking to get on the housing ladder, rising house prices are increasingly making it less likely that this will be an option for many. Earnings have not kept up with rising house prices, and as of April 2025, the average house price in Caerphilly was 5.1 times average full time annual earnings (see Table 1 below). This means that the average home in Caerphilly is unaffordable; it is generally accepted that the affordability threshold for owner-occupied housing is five times median earnings.[65] This is a similar picture to affordability in Wales overall, where the average home was 5.6 times average annual earnings. However, affordability has been dropping in Caerphilly at a faster rate than in Wales. Between April 2015 and April 2025, the average house price in the Borough increased by 71 per cent, well above rate of increase in Wales (+59%) in the same period. As a result of this, people in Caerphilly will be increasingly reliant on the rental sector.

Table 1. House Prices and affordability, Caerphilly/Wales/UK; April 2015, 2020 & 2025

Geography	April 2015		April 2020		April 2025	
	Avg. house price	Proportion of avg. annual earnings	Avg. house price	Proportion of avg. annual earnings	Avg. house price	Proportion of avg. annual earnings
Caerphilly	£106,573	4.3x	£133,519	4.7x	£181,925	5.1x
Wales	£129,756	5.1x	£151,534	5.3x	£206,000	5.6x
United Kingdom	£177,994	6.4x	£212,160	6.7x	£261,258	6.7x

Source: UK Land Registry and Office for National Statistics[66]

4.4 People are struggling to keep up with the cost of renting

The average private rent in Caerphilly was £730 per month in January 2026, 8.3 per cent higher than in January 2025. This is £215 more than in August 2019, when it was £515—an increase of 42 per cent.[67]

Although rents are higher on average in Wales and the UK overall, Caerphilly has seen several periods since the pandemic where the rate of increases (inflation rate) of private rents has spiked well above the rates in Wales or the UK. For 11 months to July 2025 the inflation of private rents in Caerphilly outpaced that of Wales and the UK, before dipping below the rate for Wales in August 2025, and since October 2025 it has risen above the rates for Wales and the UK again.[68] This means that private rents are rising more quickly in Caerphilly than elsewhere in the UK.

Average monthly private rent, Caerphilly, Wales & UK
January 2017 to January 2026

Source: Office for National Statistics[69]

Private rents annual inflation, Caerphilly, Wales & UK
January 2017 to January 2026
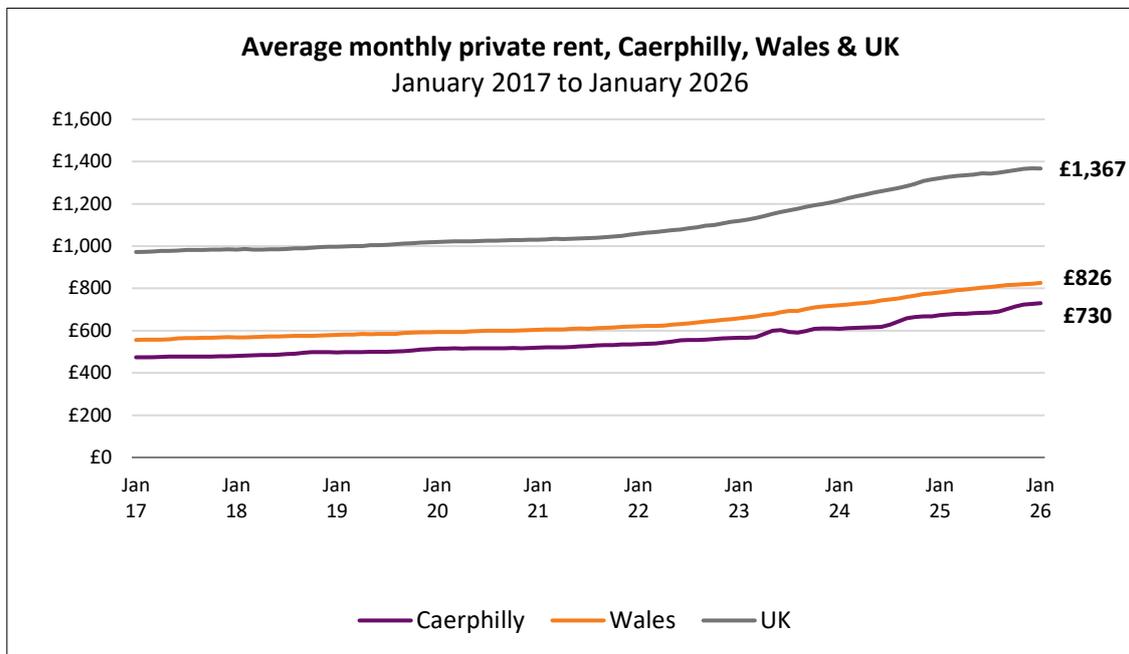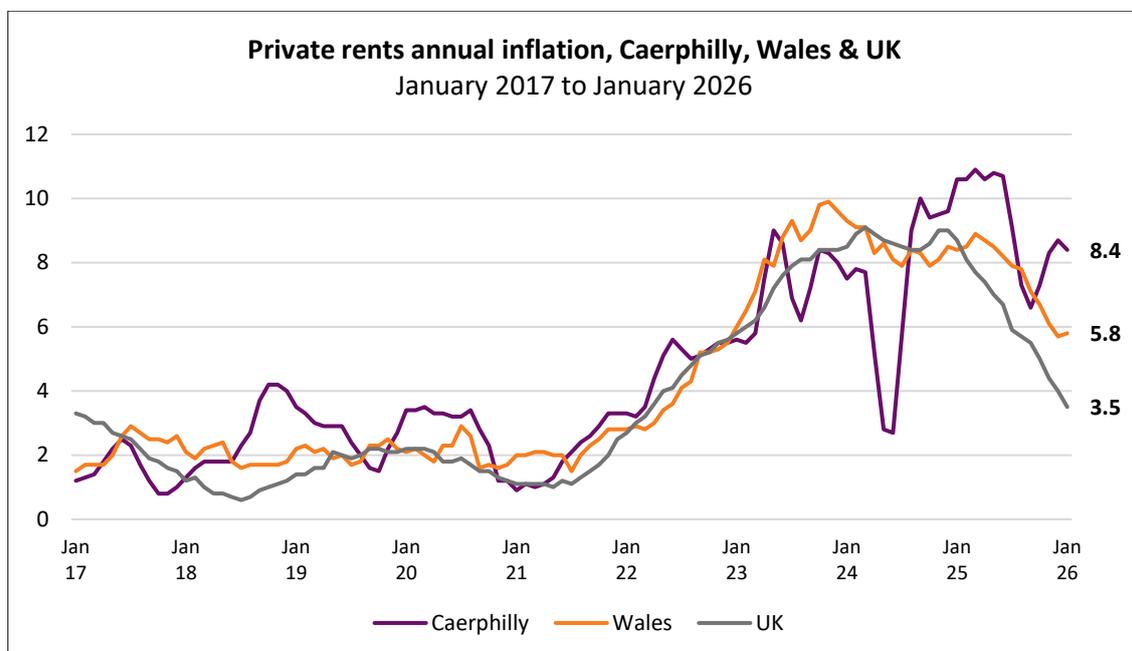
Source: Office for National Statistics[70]

There were 4,136 low-income households in Caerphilly who receive assistance to pay their private rent through Universal Credit at the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate in

November 2025.[71] While these rates used to cover the bottom 50 per cent of private rents in local areas, this was brought down to the bottom 30 per cent of rates in 2011 and LHA has been subject to several freezes since, including for 2025/26.[72] [73] These decisions have meant that this support is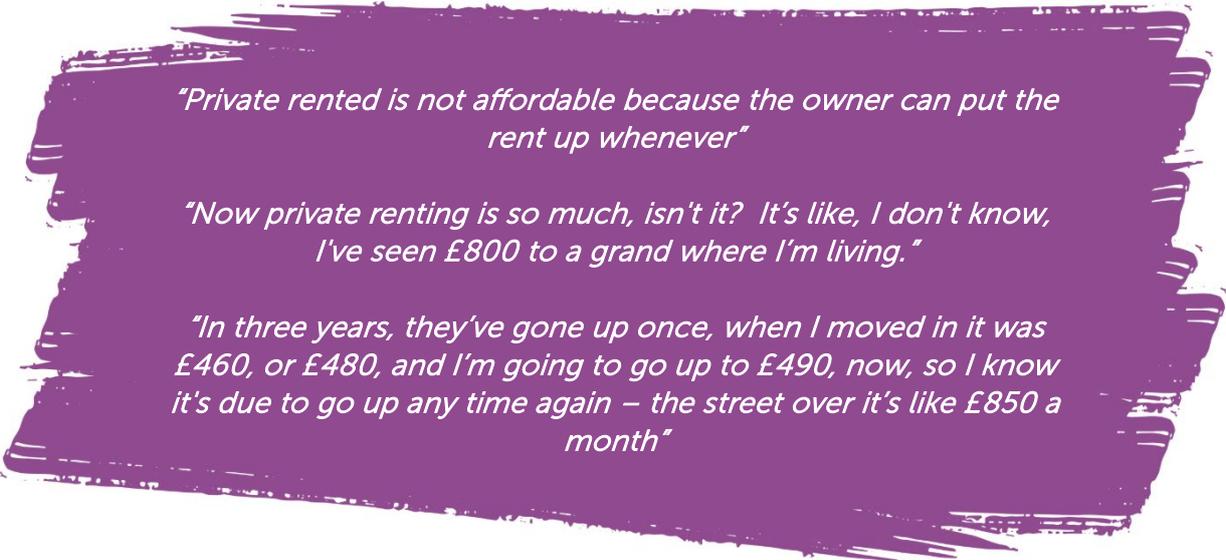 not keeping up with private rent increases, forcing low-income households to find money from other sources to afford their rent. Given the shortage of affordable homes, this is likely ultimately to mean the prospect of homelessness for many of those who cannot keep up with their rent payments. 77 per cent of Caerphilly residents who privately rent and receive housing support from Universal Credit do not have their rent covered in full by their benefits.[74] This is significantly higher than the rate for Wales at 66 per cent.

Percentage of Universal Credit LHA claimants whose LHA award does not cover household rent in full, Caerphilly and Wales
May 2025
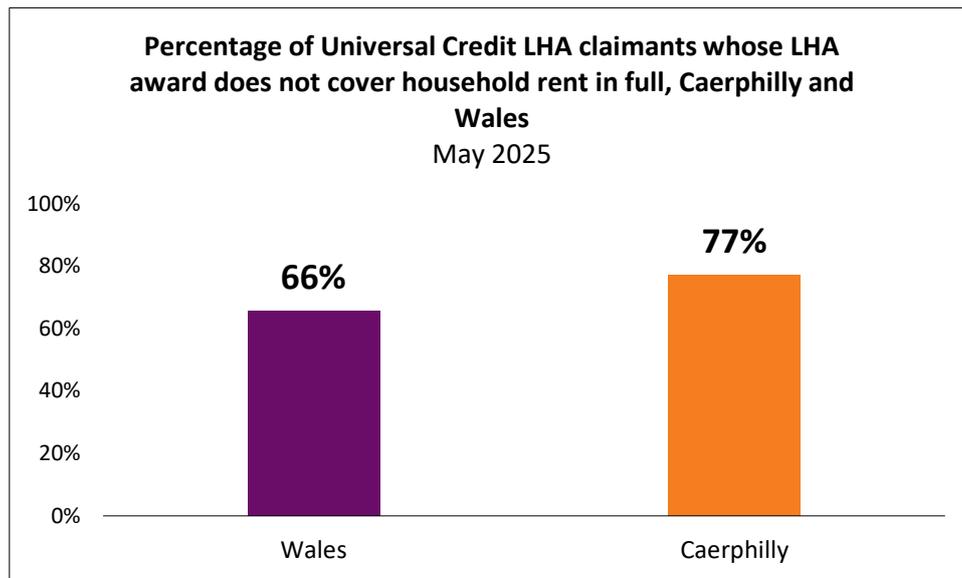
Source: DWP, 'Households on Universal Credit' via Stat-Xplore

The costs of renting were a major theme in our discussions with Caerphilly residents. Several participants noted the sense of insecurity that comes with living in privately rented accommodation as rents rise, and the fear of being evicted:

"Private rented is not affordable because the owner can put the rent up whenever"

"Now private renting is so much, isn't it? It's like, I don't know, I've seen £800 to a grand where I'm living."

"In three years, they've gone up once, when I moved in it was £460, or £480, and I'm going to go up to £490, now, so I know it's due to go up any time again — the street over it's like £850 a month"

One resident told us how they were evicted from their home and became homeless because their landlord decided to sell up, and of the relief that came from being offered a council house:
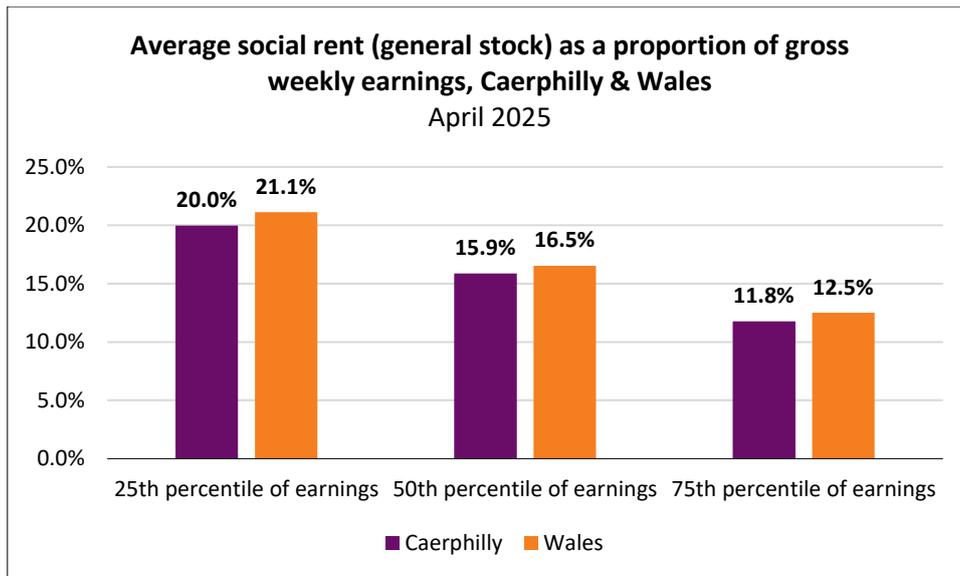
> *"...but the fear of them selling. That's what happened to me... I think before all these new rules came in, it was supposed to be six months. But she gave me a couple of weeks, and the legal minimum - and I said, "But I've got nowhere to go." She said, "I don't care." She said, "Book yourself into a hostel." I said, "I've always paid you rent." ... and she was like, "You need to paint it all white for me... I want every wall painted white, you book yourself into a hostel." So for me, I mean... the fear of private renting, because the Council said to me- I was ringing, crying to everyone, "Please help me," you know, and they were like, "You need to find a private rent." And I said, "Well I can't." And not only that, if I did, I would live with that fear then of that happening again." I was preparing to move into a hostel and I rang everyone... Within two weeks I was housed... And I'll never forget the housing officer going, "We'd like to offer you a house."...*

4.5 Social rents and the Bedroom Tax

Social rent levels are regulated by the Welsh government to keep them affordable, and social landlords are not permitted to increase them by more than the level of CPI inflation plus 0.5 per cent or one per cent in one year, in most cases.[75] The average weekly rent for a household renting in social housing[iii] in Caerphilly is £112.73 for 2025/26, slightly below the average for Wales of £118.98.[76] Rents that account for more than 30 per cent of gross household income are considered to be unaffordable.[iv] Set against gross weekly earnings for residents in the Borough in 2025, this means that social rents in the Borough would be considered affordable for those earning at the bottom 25th percentile of earnings.

[iii] General needs stock

[iv] Opinions differ in the UK on the affordability threshold. See for example:
https://www.gov.scot/publications/rent-affordability-affordable-housing-sector-literature-review/pages/4/

Average social rent (general stock) as a proportion of gross weekly earnings, Caerphilly & Wales
April 2025

Source: Office for National Statistics and StatsWales[77]

While social rents can be considered affordable in Caerphilly by this measure, TPAS Cymru has reported that across Wales only 42 per cent of social tenants regard their rent as affordable, with younger people and people who work particularly struggling, as well as underrepresented groups.[78] Perceptions of affordability have reduced from 62 per cent in 2024 and 78 per cent in 2025.[79]

A particular challenge is deductions from housing support through the benefits system. People on low incomes who receive a housing allowance from benefits can have this reduced if they are subject to the removal of the spare room subsidy (the 'Bedroom Tax'). This is a deduction from the housing element of Universal Credit for people living in a socially rented home that is judged to be larger than required for their needs. The deduction is 14 per cent if the claimant has one 'spare' bedroom and 25 per cent if they have more than one spare bedroom.[80] This means a shortfall in rent for those affected.

The proportion of people renting socially in Caerphilly who are affected by the bedroom tax is significantly higher than that across Wales or GB. 28 per cent of social tenants receiving Universal Credit in Caerphilly are affected by the bedroom tax, compared to 22 per cent in Wales and 18 per cent in GB.[81] While most of these tenants only face the lower rate of deduction (for one spare bedroom), 5 per cent face the higher deduction as they are judged to have more than one spare bedroom, again higher than the rates for Wales (4%) and GB (3%).[82]

Percentage of social tenants on Universal Credit affected by the Bedroom Tax, Caerphilly, Wales & GB
November 2025
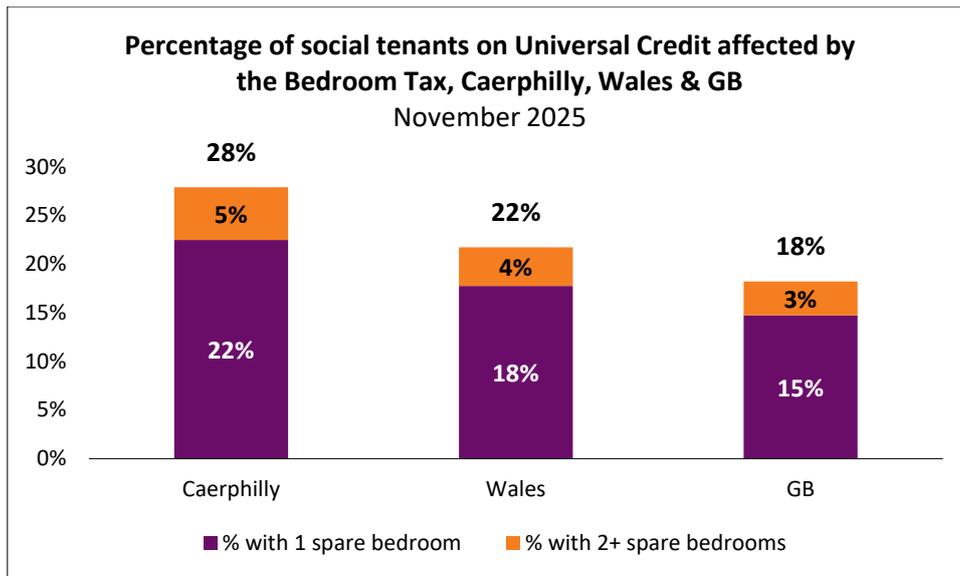
Source: DWP, 'Households on Universal Credit' via Stat-Xplore

Affording social rents and the Bedroom Tax was a source of concern for many of the residents that we spoke to. Many felt that after their rent was paid there was little left over, and that the Bedroom Tax was unfair, especially where social housing is in such short supply and people had caring responsibilities or other factors meant they needed to stay in the house that they live in:

"[With] the bedroom tax, they tell people with two bedrooms move … they're single or whatever, if all of them said they wanted to move. They haven't got enough one-bedrooms to put them all in."

"My rent is £500-odd a month. I've got two lots of Bedroom Tax to pay. Universal Credit will only give me £240 a month, but they pay that to my rent and I'm on zero a month. I don't have any money at all after Universal Credit, because my partner has just gone on to State Pension."

Despite this, many felt that they received more security in various ways from living in Council housing, as they were safe from eviction and maintenance was carried out in a timely fashion.

"Council housing repairs get done quicker than private"

4.6 Homelessness

Homelessness affects everyone who does not have a stable place to call home and takes several forms beyond rough sleeping, the most dangerous form of homelessness. Homelessness is growing in scale and severity across Wales.

Statutory homelessness is the legal definition of homelessness and includes anyone who does not have accommodation which they are able to access or remain in (including where it is unreasonable for them to stay due to the threat of abuse or violence), is not fit for habitation, and those whose accommodation is moveable (e.g. a van or boat) and there is nowhere they can legally locate it. The statutory definition also extends to people at threat of homelessness if they are likely to become homeless within 56 days.[83]

Local authorities have a duty to provide advice and assistance to all those assessed as being homeless or threatened with homelessness. They have a **full duty** to provide accommodation for people considered homeless if they are assessed as having **priority need** on the basis of certain characteristics, such as old age or disability, being pregnant or having a dependent child, or being a victim domestic violence. While permanent accommodation is found for them, local authorities may place people in temporary accommodation. Their duty to provide accommodation is ended when they have found suitable accommodation in either the social or private rented sector.

Hidden homelessness affects many more people than are assessed under statutory homelessness duties, and includes people who are squatting, sofa surfing or living in unfit or overcrowded accommodation, for example. In addition, across Wales, there are likely very large numbers of people who are at risk of homelessness because they have very low income or their housing is insecure.

Homelessness data is an important part of building a picture of poverty in Caerphilly. As well as giving us a sense of how many people do not have access to a stable foundation on which to build their lives, it can provide us with an indication of the living conditions which are being experienced by people waiting to be permanently housed. It can also inform our knowledge of the scale of need for new housing and the ability of the local authority to fulfil their duties to prevent homelessness.

Rough sleeping

There were three people recorded by the local authority as sleeping rough in Caerphilly on the last day of December 2025.[84] Since April 2023 when this phase of recording began the number has fluctuated from month-to-month, between two and seven.[85] It should be noted that these records are compiled by the Welsh government, which sets the criteria for inclusion in the statistics, and are subject to errors as they can only include rough sleepers who are visible and known to local authority staff on the date the survey is carried out.

There was concern from participants at our workshops who are involved in supporting people experiencing or at risk of homelessness that the official statistics showing levels of rough sleeping in the Borough almost certainly underestimate the scale of the problem in reality. We had further conversations with the Supporting People team at Caerphilly Council to explore this. It was felt that the very strict criteria which need to be met for individuals to be recorded as rough sleeping risk misrepresenting the scale of the problem, particularly if these are the figures used to inform policy.

We think there could be a benefit in Council teams working collaboratively alongside third sector organisations to better understand the scale of the problem of housing instability in the Borough and to produce reporting which better represents the reality of the scale of need for support.

Temporary accommodation

There were 524 people living in temporary accommodation in Caerphilly at the end of December 2025, including 82 children under the age of 16.[86] The data is more delayed for households; there were 369 households that were being provided with temporary accommodation in Caerphilly between January and March 2025, including 66 families with children.[87] The high proportion of single-person households in temporary accommodation in Caerphilly — 276, or 75 per cent of the total[88] — again underlines the need that exists for more one-bedroom social housing.

The types of accommodation being used to temporarily house people in Caerphilly include bed & breakfasts (B&Bs) and hotels, hostels, private sector accommodation, women's refuges, registered social landlord-owned housing stock, and Council-owned housing stock[89]

Where are people being placed?

B&Bs and hotels are by far the most common type of placements used to temporarily house people in Caerphilly (60%), followed by private sector accommodation (18%) and hostels (16%). The majority (43%) of temporarily housed children are placed in B&Bs and hotels, 30 per cent in private sector accommodation, and 17 per cent in hostels as of December 2025[90]

Given that Caerphilly Council owns its social housing stock, it is notable and worrying that there is such a reliance on B&Bs, hotels and hostels for temporary accommodation. Across Wales, while the most common type of housing for temporary accommodation generally is B&Bs (24%), children are most commonly placed in Council-owned stock (41%).[91] There are concerns around the usage of B&Bs, hotels and hostels as settings for temporary housing, especially for families with children, including the lack of cooking facilities, privacy and insufficient safety. These issues are explored in the Bevan Foundation's 2025 report, *'The impact of temporary accommodation on children and their families'.*[92]

Caerphilly residents were concerned about the issue of homelessness affecting people in the Borough, and how when people experience financial crisis, the availability of support services risks people becoming homeless:

"Limited support for homelessness"

"Rough sleeping stats not accurate portrayal of current situation"

"Wait time for support creates homelessness"

The lack of supply of housing in the social rented sector clearly contributes to the risks of homelessness, and where people are eventually placed by the Council as a result, this can often be far away from where their lives and support network are. One resident described how they had to fight to be housed in an area that made sense for them after becoming homeless:
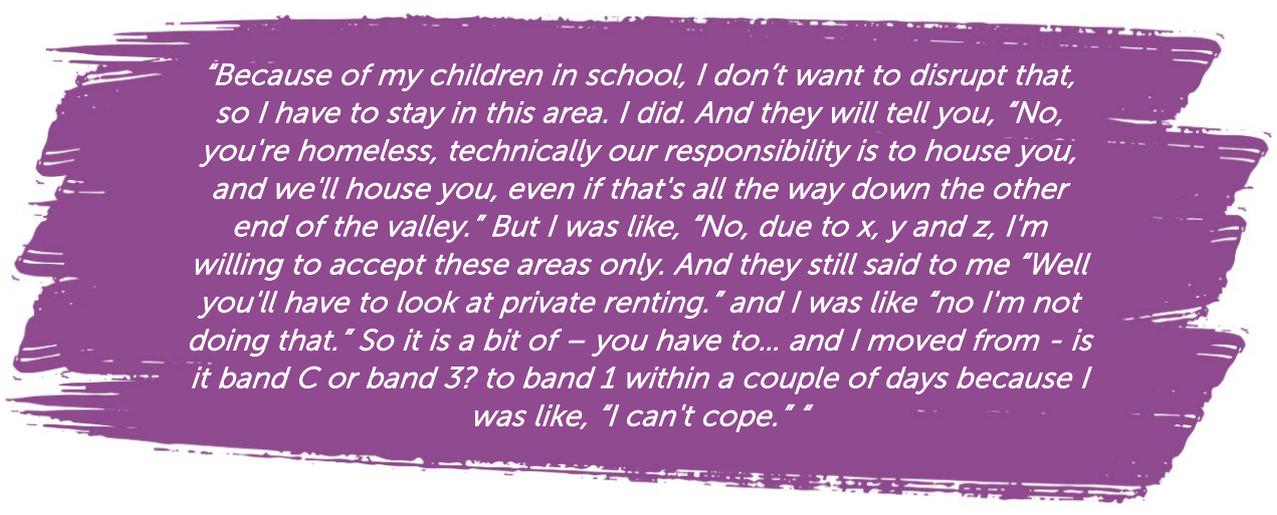
"Because of my children in school, I don't want to disrupt that, so I have to stay in this area. I did. And they will tell you, "No, you're homeless, technically our responsibility is to house you, and we'll house you, even if that's all the way down the other end of the valley." But I was like, "No, due to x, y and z, I'm willing to accept these areas only. And they still said to me "Well you'll have to look at private renting." and I was like "no I'm not doing that." So it is a bit of – you have to… and I moved from - is it band C or band 3? to band 1 within a couple of days because I was like, "I can't cope." "

4.7 What could be done?

Housing is a foundation—having a safe and secure home provides people with dignity, financial, physical and mental security, and is the bedrock of communities.

Sadly, placing the data on the housing landscape in Caerphilly with what residents told us, it is clear that too many people do not have this foundation. This is ultimately driven by the severe shortage in housing supply that exists across Wales and which the Bevan Foundation continues to highlight.[93] The Welsh and UK governments both have critical roles to play in funding and regulating the building of new homes, and responsibility for reducing the financial burden for social and private renters—through changes to the Bedroom Tax and ensuring LHA rates are sufficient—lies with the UK government. But local authorities and communities can also act strategically to reduce the housing shortage and maximise support for those experiencing housing insecurity.

For the Council and communities, it is crucial that funding and opportunities to increase housing stock are maximised.

This includes making sure community-led housing schemes are encouraged and supported as far as possible, though these are likely to remain small in scale compared to the rest of the housing market.

While waiting lists for social homes are high for all sizes of homes, the scale of need for one-bedroom homes in Caerphilly appears particularly urgent. While much of capital funding enabling local authorities to build new social homes comes from the Welsh government, decisions on the types of housing built lie with the local authority. It is crucial that a strategic approach is taken to address the shortage of the homes that are most needed.

The issues that we explored with residents and housing support organisations around hidden homelessness has exposed the need for improved collaboration between agencies around the statistics used to inform policies, particularly in terms of rough sleeping.

Temporary accommodation in the Borough must be safe and suitable, and permanent accommodation found as quickly as possible. We recognise that the Council is working

within a very challenging set of circumstances, but it should renew its focus on ensuring that people are placed appropriately, especially children.

It is also critical that the Caerphilly community finds ways to raise its voice to call for changes to the benefits system which currently piles housing pressures on those on low incomes via the Bedroom Tax and the inadequacy of LHA.

Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council should find ways to move away from the use of B&Bs for temporary accommodation, especially for families with children, given the risks that have been identified of this type of accommodation.

Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council should focus efforts on ensuring that any temporary accommodation is safe and suitable for those placed in it, especially where potential harms can exist for children.

Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council could work to produce and publicise more nuanced estimates of the scale and nature of rough sleeping in the Borough and use this to feed into action, as well as to inform policymaking at the Welsh government level.

Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council should find opportunities to increase the supply of social housing targeted at levels of need, particularly for single people.

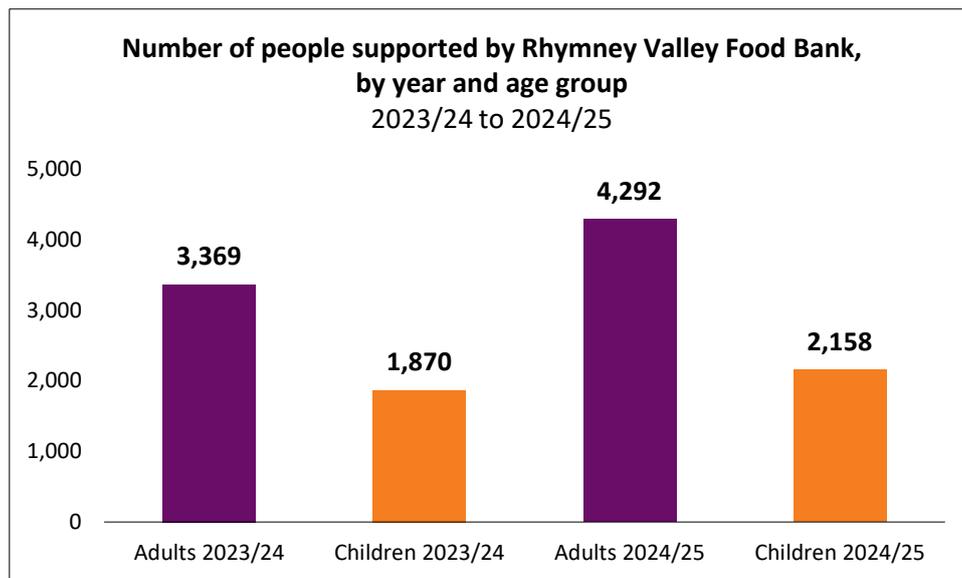# 5. Food

5.1 The price of food has soared

Access to quality and affordable food was a major and recurring theme raised by Caerphilly residents in our engagements. Across the UK, the evidence shows that food costs remain a major issue for people on lower incomes.

High levels of inflation—the speed at which prices rise across the economy—is the story of the cost-of-living crisis of the past five years. But there is also a story of inequality within that crisis. While price rises affect everyone, those on the lowest incomes have been affected in far more significant ways for several reasons: they spend a greater proportion of all their household expenses on essentials like food and energy,[94] the prices of these essentials have risen at an even faster rate than other goods and services in the economy, and because of the cumulative effect of high price rises over time—low-income households are far less able to absorb sustained cost increases.

Overall, prices in the UK were 28 per cent higher in November 2025 than they were in November 2020.[95] Food prices rose by 38.6 per cent in the same period.[96] While commentators were in broad agreement at the end of 2025 that inflation in the UK was likely to continue on a slow but consistent downward trend,[97] decreasing inflation means that prices are still increasing, just less quickly. And across the UK, people are reporting that the cost of essentials is still rising for them: of the 61 per cent of adults in GB who reported that their living costs had increased over the previous month in November 2025, 95 per cent said that the price of their food shopping had increased.[98] And there is now renewed concern because of recent global instability, which is likely to see prices rise rapidly once more.[99]

The impacts of rising food prices are plain to see in Wales-wide polling commissioned by the Bevan Foundation: in autumn 2025, a quarter of adults in Wales reported they had cut down on portion sizes or skipped meals, a picture that has remained largely stagnant over the course of the cost-of-living crisis.[100]

Given this context, it would be surprising if those on lower incomes in Caerphilly were not feeling as though affording food was a struggle. It is in evidence in the Rhymney Valley Food Bank data referred to in section 1, which shows that the number of people referred for emergency food support in the communities that it serves is high and rising. These figures are a strong indication that many continue to struggle to afford all the essentials—particularly food—in Caerphilly, and that families with children are disproportionately affected.

Number of people supported by Rhymney Valley Food Bank, by year and age group
2023/24 to 2024/25

Adults 2023/24	Children 2023/24	Adults 2024/25	Children 2024/25
3,369	1,870	4,292	2,158

Source: Rhymney Valley Food Bank

The challenge of being able to afford food and other grocery essentials was universally acknowledged at our workshop events across Caerphilly. The following contributions are just a selection from many others:

"Food poverty is normalised & not challenged"

"I go to Tesco's and in the evenings all the labels come down on different products, and like some things go up by five pence, not many people would notice the five pence. But some labels then, you can see the jump - it'll go up from £2.50 to £3, it's like, "Wow."… Five pence is a jump, but £2.50 to £3, I'm like-"

- "For me… I'm a working person, parent… we've had to cut necessities out of our shopping. So at home we used to buy kitchen roll before - kitchen roll is a luxury."
- "Yeah, I agree. I had kitchen roll for Christmas this year, not actually a Christmas present! But I bought it as my Christmas food shop… I had it because it was a treat for Christmas."

5.2 Food insecurity and food deserts

An issue that exacerbates the issue of rising food prices for many people living in Caerphilly is the prevalence of food insecurity driven in part by food deserts. A food desert is an area of deprivation which is poorly served by grocers or supermarkets, meaning that access to fresh food is limited and high cost.

While larger towns—Caerphilly, Risca, Ystrad Mynach, Bargoed, Nelson, Blackwood— contain supermarkets, many of the towns and villages in Caerphilly Borough are served only by smaller convenience stores, selling a very limited range of food and often at far higher prices than larger supermarkets. The gaps are arguably the most glaring in the north of the Borough. Along the A469 or A4049 main roads from the top of the valley around Bute Town, for around 7.5 miles south until Bargoed, there are no supermarkets beyond small convenience stores. This is despite these stretches of road running through areas where many people live, including the communities of Rhymney (pop 8,522), New Tredegar (pop 4,639) and Darran Valley (pop 2,485).[101] The nearest larger supermarkets for these communities are northwest to Lidl and Asda at Dowlais Top outside Merthyr Tydfil, northeast to Lidl and Farm Foods in Tredegar, or south to Morrisons and Iceland in Bargoed.

Rhymney is an example of a town that was previously served by a supermarket, with Kwik Save and latterly Aldi operating there in the past. The closure of Aldi in 2013 however meant the loss of an important service for the town and surrounding area.

While at least some online grocery shopping is available in these areas, the participants at our engagements were clear that this does not completely alleviate the food challenges they face; residents reported that they were often sent food that was close to its use-by date, making it impossible to plan for a week or more's meals, replacements were often felt to be inadequate, and high delivery charges mean that the total cost of online shopping adds significant pressure to household budgets. Disabled participants felt at a particular disadvantage, because online shopping was often the only option for them.

- "...she's got a disability, so her mobility is less, and she has to do internet shopping, but then the cheapest supermarkets don't offer delivery."
- "You pay delivery...and it could be like up to £6.50... and with some you've got to have a certain amount in your basket to even get delivery, so if you wanted, say, less shopping..."

"...the dates are rubbish when you get internet shopping...if I was in the supermarket, I'd be right at the back for the best date. No, you don't get that option... fruit and veg will maybe only have three days, which doesn't help."
- "So you can't really budget for food, can you?"
- "...sometimes when you have stuff from Asda's, when it comes it's that date."
- "Yeah, I had delivery Sunday, it was chicken things for the baby, but then it was a two days later date... if you don't eat them in two days they've got to go in the bin."

- "It's all the time. All the time. I actually now tick 'no substitutes' because it was so bizarre what they'd swap it with. You think, "It's not even the same product.""
- I ordered sugar once and I had mayo!
- One of the girls in Tredegar ordered a chicken... for dinner, and they gave her chicken nuggets instead because they didn't have chicken.
- Yeah but that's chicken, you can't put mayo in a cup of tea or coffee, can you? Or on cereal? At least give us syrup, but not mayo!

Attempts to map the problem of food deserts have shown in recent years that Caerphilly has a high proportion of underserved areas. The map below shows 2021 data from the Consumer Data Research Centre (CDRC), which ranks areas in Caerphilly on the extent to which they show the characteristics of food deserts. These include how many grocery retail locations are in the area and how close they are, transport links, deprivation, and the availability of online grocery services. The map shows that many areas in Caerphilly are in the most food-disadvantaged ten per cent of areas across England and Wales, with the north of the Borough being particularly affected. A similar exercise undertaken by Which? and the CDRC in 2023 highlighted that the South Wales Valleys are particularly affected by food insecurity; South Wales East Senedd region had the greatest number of neighbourhoods identified as 'priority places' for food, where challenges accessing affordable food were the most pronounced and intervention was most urgently needed.[102] At a UK constituency level, 75 per cent of neighbourhoods in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney[v] were identified as a priority place, placing it third out of all Welsh constituencies.[103]

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[v] The constituency was abolished following the 2023 review of Westminster constituencies

Fig. 2. Caerphilly 'E-deserts' map: The prevalence of areas exhibiting characteristics indicative of poor access to food (including online) alongside deprivation (food deserts) in Caerphilly, ranked by severity (deciles). 2021 data.
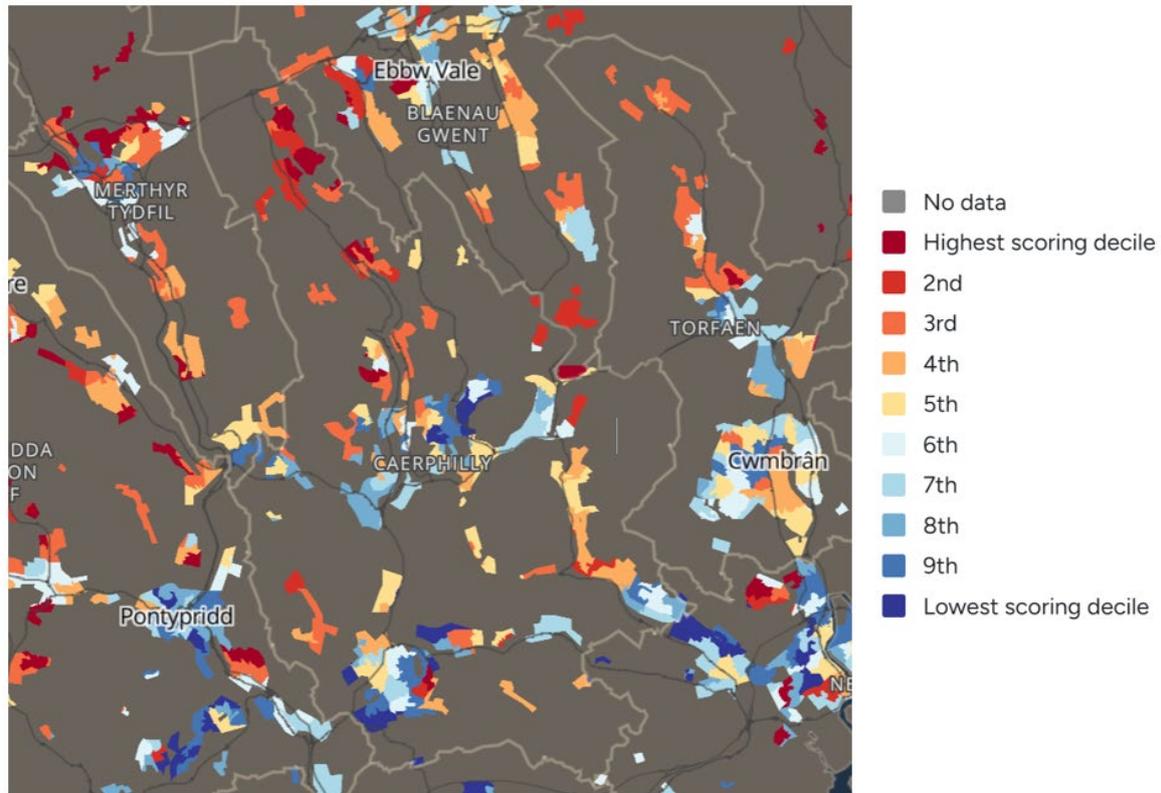
Source: Consumer Data Research Centre[104]

Given the sparsity of choice of where to shop for groceries and long distances between shops and where people live in many areas, the availability of affordable and useful transport is pivotal in determining whether people can access affordable food. For people on lower incomes, options are often limited to public transport—the Bevan Foundation found in 2025 that a third of people on low-incomes in Wales do not have access to a car or van, far less than the proportion of those on higher incomes who do not (10%).[105] However, we heard from people in Caerphilly that the safety, accessibility and affordability of public transport, as well as the usefulness of routes, placed significant barriers in their way when it came to food shopping. We explore transport issues facing the Borough further in section 7.

"If you've got to go to the supermarket, you've got to get on the bus or whatever, because we've got nothing, we've got no supermarkets."

There was frustration for communities living in the Upper Rhymney Valley that where supermarkets put on promotional offers to help people with the cost of food, it was only helpful for those who could actually get to them cheaply, or had the ability to store food in a big freezer:

> - *"Christmas, when they have the veg thing on, a lot of people buy the cheap veg, freeze it, and then use it through the year"*
> - *"Yeah, but if you've got a little freezer and a little fridge like me…"*
> - *"…now, in Morrisons, they've got some potatoes, stuff like that for nine, ten pence, but it's miles away, Morrisons is, from here, miles away.*
> - *"There's no bus, you've got to catch two buses to get to Morrisons from here"*
> - *"So you've already spent £10 on the bus for a 19 pence potato!"*

As supermarkets can be few and far between in large parts of the Borough, this means that people face a challenge in working out where is the most affordable place to shop for food, adding to the mental burden on low-income families. While it is well known that different supermarkets cater to different price points, research by Which? has shown that even between larger supermarket chains, the speed of price rises can vary significantly as well. The annual inflation rate between supermarket chains—i.e. how far they are passing on price rises to customers—is as much as double the rate for those with the fastest rising prices compared to those with the slowest as of November 2025.[106]

> - *"Obviously I shop for the food pantry, and I go to multiple different shops just to make sure you get the most you can for the money."*
> - *"But that takes time, doesn't it?"*
> - *"And it's heavy!"*
> - *"And the fuel costs and everything."*

While residents in the Upper Rhymney Valley face a lack of affordable grocery options, they noted the abundance of fast-food takeaways in their areas by contrast, which makes it difficult to make healthy choices, while they are also expensive:

> *"How can you cook healthy with all the takeaways around here? Go down the high street and count how many's on that one street… like fish shops, kebab shops, Chineses, it's all we've got."*
>
> *"I had a chip shop the other day, right, and I know this is off topic – I couldn't believe how expensive it was."*

5.3 What could be done?

Given the overwhelming evidence of high levels of food insecurity that exists in the Borough, there is a strong case for the community to find ways to tackle it. While high food prices are driven in large part by factors outside of the control of local communities, and there is more that could and should be done at the Welsh and UK government levels,

local initiatives and coordination have the potential to alleviate some of the pressures on Caerphilly residents.

The rise of services like food banks and community pantries are a clear sign of rising need. Trussell reports that in Wales, emergency food provision almost doubled in the ten years to 2025.[107] This rise in provision is also a demonstration of the will and capacity of communities to step in to help when crisis hits. However, while food banks and other community initiatives have developed their expertise and capability to address the underlying drivers of hardship for the people they work with beyond emergency food provision—through e.g. holistic services like debt and income maximisation advice—Trussell reports that food banks are groaning under the weight of need, and in many cases holistic support still fails to bring people out of crisis.[108]

Further structural approaches to bringing down levels of food insecurity are urgently needed, which will require innovative solutions and coordination between people, frontline organisations and the local authority.

Addressing market failure and bringing services back to the community

While we heard evidence that supermarkets can and do innovate to offer solutions for people struggling to afford food, they are ultimately driven by market prerogatives which means that they fall short of meeting the needs of communities in Caerphilly. There was a strong sense from participants at our workshops that they are forgotten, underserved by food retailers, and importantly, that this was not always the case:

> *"Like years ago, you'd have a butcher, you'd have a fruit and veg shop, you'd have all these different ones round here, all right, you'd pay that bit extra, but you'd know that it would last longer."*
>
> *"'Dai the fruit', he used to come to Aber. He'd stop outside – you'd get all your potatoes off him... it was reasonable."*

Residents living in communities which are underserved by grocery retail felt that there could and should be ways to bring these services back into the community.

> *"It would be good if there was somewhere, where you could like bulk buy, you know like food you buy from different shops, but you know if there was like a little, not a warehouse, like a unit, and they bulk buy everything, and then you can get it for cheaper."*

For people who need to order their groceries online, there was a feeling that more could be done by supermarkets to ensure that what they receive is fresh enough to allow them to plan meals:

Much of the food insecurity within Caerphilly communities is arguably a result of market failure. Given the pressures that this clearly piles on those who experience it, the community could look at ways to increase access to food in underserved areas. There are local initiatives which have been successful in other parts of the UK which could provide a model for Caerphilly to follow. One such initiative is the 'Queen of Greens' mobile greengrocer in Liverpool:

Greengrocer on wheels: Queen of Greens, Liverpool

Queen of Greens is a mobile greengrocer launched in 2022 to bring affordable fresh food to communities facing food insecurity in Merseyside.

It is a social enterprise, run as partnership between Alchemic Kitchen CIC, the Feeding Liverpool food alliance, and food charity Foodrise.

The service has two specially adapted greengrocer buses, which run from Monday to Friday, making around 40 stops at neighbourhoods identified as food deserts, such as those identified in Caerphilly. The timetable is published on its website so that people know when they can expect the bus to stop in their area and plan their food shopping.

The service sells affordable food at the quantities that people need—single items of fruit and veg for example— and helps people to plan meals based on what they can afford. People can pay by cash or card, and NHS Healthy Start cards and Alexandra Road food vouchers are also accepted.

https://www.queenofgreens.co.uk/about/

This scheme grew out of a collaborative and multi-agency approach to food insecurity that has been established in Liverpool. A Food Insecurity Taskforce for the city was established as part of Liverpool City Council's Covid Recovery Plan, and brings together the city council with a range of other organisations including the University of Liverpool, Public Health and charities.[109]

Given the ongoing food insecurity in evidence in the Borough, and the potential for it to worsen further, Caerphilly could develop its own coordinated cross-agency response to specifically focused on tackling food insecurity. This could include working with supermarkets to address the issues that have been raised by residents, alongside community-driven solutions.

Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council could establish a food insecurity taskforce in collaboration with public health, third sector and other relevant partners to develop initiatives to tackle food insecurity in the Borough. This could include new community services such as a mobile greengrocer.

Beyond initiatives to bring more food services into underserved communities, ensuring that there are transport services available for people to travel to supermarkets would also make a big difference to low-income households. Issues around transport are addressed further in section 7.

6. School-related costs

There is mounting evidence that the cost to parents of the school day has increased significantly in recent years, in Wales and across the UK more widely. In 2025, Child Poverty Action Group produced research showing that the average cost to parents of sending a child to school in 2024 was £2,274.77 per year for secondary-aged pupils and £1,003.63 for those in primary school.[110] Since 2022 these costs are estimated to have risen by 16 per cent for primary pupils and 30 per cent for secondary pupils, outpacing rises in incomes.[111] The total cost to parents is driven by a combination of food and snack-related costs, uniform and kit, ancillary learning costs (e.g. art/design materials), transport, and school trips, as well as incidental asks from schools to participate in fancy dress or other special events such as prom or leavers days.

While Welsh parents have been helped by various Welsh Government initiatives, such as universal Free School Meals in primary schools and the School Essentials Grant, the Bevan Foundation and other organisations have highlighted that there is a need for more support. Of particular concern is the drag effect caused by a failure to consistently uprate the value of schemes and their eligibility criteria in line with inflation—what the Bevan Foundation has termed a 'silent squeeze'.[112] This means that the value of cash support is effectively reduced over time while it is necessary to be poorer in real terms every year to claim it.

One of the schemes which has suffered from this effect is the School Essentials Grant—a payment of between £125 and £200[vi] available to low-income parents at the start of every school year from Reception to Year 11. While this scheme has been expanded since its introduction to include more school years,[vii] the value of the £125 payments have not increased, nor has the earned income threshold for claiming of £7,400/year. If both of these had been increased in line with inflation, the value of the payments would now be £164.53, while the earned income threshold would be £9,740.27.[113] Similarly, the earned income threshold is £7,400/year to be able to receive Free School Meals in secondary schools, meaning that only the very poorest families have this pressure taken off them. With every year that the threshold isn't moved with inflation, more families lose access to this lifeline.

Given this context, it is not surprising that the issue of school costs was an acute concern for many of the participants at our workshops.

For several parents, it was felt that school food costs piled pressure onto the household budget, and resulted in significant stress:

[vi] £125 is available every year for each eligible child, apart from those entering Year 7 who receive £200 to reflect the higher cost of starting secondary school.
[vii] Originally introduced in 2018 as the Pupil Development Grant (Access), the scheme originally only provided £125 payments to families of children starting Reception or Year 7.

"So I've got four children... my oldest son is in comp, I'm paying £25 a week for school dinners, and my other son's going up now, that's going to be £200 a month... I give them £5 a day because that's what all the other kids have, so I think the meals are like £2.70-something... And I don't want them to be singled out for not being able to buy a bagel when all their friends have got, like, you know? ... I've got to pay for full school uniform, I've got to pay for their dinners when they go to comp... I feel ill thinking about it."

Concerns about the cost of school uniforms and kit were raised at all our workshops. For children in comprehensive schools especially, parents felt that uniform could be expensive, depending on the school. It was said blazers can cost in the region of £35 even where schools have capped prices, and some schools enforce rules so that parents can't source clothing from alternative suppliers. Where parents are allowed to buy unbranded uniform, some still struggle with the cost of adding school badges to items:

"Just if you buy your own jackets, but the badge, it's £8 per item. If you buy it yourself, just to put it on it's £8."

Some parents said that their children are expected to have two sets of PE kits for different purposes:

"When they go to comp, they've got to have obviously the jumper and the shirt and trousers, the tie, and then they've got two PE kits. The boys have got two, so they've got a normal one to be inside, and then the rugby one... he's a size 10 shoe, so it costs me a bomb."

"Kids grow – it adds up."

While uniform exchanges operate in Caerphilly where parents can obtain school clothing on a pay as you feel basis or by swapping, there were concerns raised that not all parents are aware of this.

Parents expressed frustration with schools failing to give sufficient notice of the payments they would be asked to make for various school activities, with some of these payments being due in December, a time of year when many are struggling already with the costs of Christmas:

"Just before Christmas, we had to pay for a Christmas concert, we had like residential trips, so we had to pay £50 deposit, then the full balance has got to be paid by like March or April. Then there was like hampers and raffles you had to pay for, and it was just way too much, just before Christmas."

Parents didn't understand why schools weren't able to provide details of the payments they would be asked for at the start of the year, which would make it easier for them to budget for them:

"If they said to us in September, "Right, just to let you know…" then parents would have time to prepare… but they're just like, "No we want this, this, this, and this.""

"Why can't they total it for the whole year, what they need for fundraising and for trips, and spread it out, instead of all at once?"

The importance of schools being poverty aware was highlighted by parents who have been asked to source single use items for themed events, such as a Christmas concert:

"They had to dress up as Hawaiian, like Hawaii shirts. I'm thinking, "how am I going to make a Hawaiian shirt?" And that'll never be used ever again. And I was even on Vinted, and I just thought, "Oh, why can't it just be simple?" you know?"

There was also evidence of the financial cliff-edge caused by the Welsh government's failure to uprate the eligibility criteria for its various support schemes, such as the School Essentials Grant, and the confusion which this causes:

"…Well I used to get it [the school uniform grant], but my circumstances haven't changed, and I don't know if they've moved the goalposts…"

While the pressures of school-related costs were universally recognised in our conversations, several parents spoke of the positive difference that can be made by teachers whose awareness of poverty is high and who find creative ways of doing more with less. As one parent told us, of their daughter's primary school:

"…My daughter's teacher now, she said, "it's £1.50 for snacks—they have an apple a day," She said, "can you give me the £1.50?" and she's doing cooking lessons with them… her teacher goes out with all the kids' £1.50, and they've been doing omelettes, cakes, they've done salads, they've been teaching them to chop everything and do everything in the café, because she said she can buy a lot out of—say it's 24 x £1.50, she said she can buy a lot more than apples. So she's been buying—they've been doing fruit kebabs, and gingerbread biscuits. What did they do the other week? They've done omelettes… her teacher's really, really good."

While the warm appreciation of parents for these small acts by teachers was palpable, the obvious implication is that parents face something of a lottery when it comes to how aware or capable their schools are of poverty-proofing, and it was a common theme that from secondary-age onwards, costs begin to rise.

6.1 What could be done?

The Welsh government has responsibility for Welsh education settings and could introduce legislation to compel schools to limit the costs to parents of the school day. However, while the importance of reducing education costs is recognised in its Child Poverty Strategy,[114] it has up to now stopped short of issuing comprehensive instructions to school governing bodies on uniform cost, or school trips and other incidental costs of the school day. Schools must instead have regard for the statutory guidance on school uniform and appearance,[115] which states that high-cost items such as blazers should be avoided and that schools should not make branded items compulsory—including badges (sew-on or not) and other unique clothing.

However, it is clear from our engagements with parents in Caerphilly that many schools are not following through on this guidance on costs, and the Welsh government also allows schools to decide if and how to discipline pupils for breaches of uniform policy, although it advises them to make allowances where this is caused by financial difficulty.[116] While there are longstanding calls on the Welsh government to strengthen its regulation of school-related costs, it has made no changes to its guidance since 2022, saying only at the end of 2025 for example that it was "reviewing the impact of the changes to the guidance."[117]

Significant responsibility for poverty-aware policies within schools in Wales therefore remains with school governors., while the local authority arguably has a responsibility to help support and drive awareness of schemes such as uniform exchanges. Given the high level of concern about school costs expressed by participants experiencing poverty in Caerphilly during our engagements, there is a strong argument for schools in the Borough to find ways to share good practice and implement new policies to rise to their responsibilities to poverty proof their settings.

Specific activities which can be undertaken by schools include engaging with parents and children about their concerns and creating comprehensive calendars of school costs. A range of organisations have produced advice and resources to help schools take action on poverty. These include the Children's Commissioner for Wales 'Check with Ceri' series.[118] Schools should make active use of these resources.

Recommendation: The Caerphilly Anti-Poverty Alliance could bring school governors together to share best practice around the cost of the school day and develop renewed guidelines for themselves, responsive to the advice of parents with lived experience of poverty and groups with relevant expertise such as CPAG, Children in Wales, and the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Recommendation: Caerphilly schools could link in with the platform of a Caerphilly anti-poverty strategy and commit to become national leaders in poverty-proofing.

Recommendation: The Caerphilly Anti-Poverty Alliance could work with local Members of the Senedd to call on the Welsh government to legislate to lower the costs associated with school.

7. Transport

"Can't afford a bus. Bus never turns up. Trains & bus unreliable & costly. Hinders job safety / stability."

Access to affordable and useful transport was one of the major themes raised by Caerphilly residents in our engagements. Transport is an essential service that needs to be there to allow people to get to work and medical appointments, shop for essentials, and see friends and family. We have already seen that transport emerges as a barrier to accessing affordable food and jobs in sections 3 and 5. This section explores transport in further detail.

For people on low incomes across Wales, shortcomings in public transport services combine with the lack of amenities locally to produce major inequality and financial pressure. People on low incomes are far more likely to be reliant on these services; as we referenced in section 5, the Bevan Foundation found in 2025 that that a third of people living in a low-income household in Wales do not have access to a car. Transport issues prevent people from participating in society and hold them back from taking or retaining employment opportunities as well as meeting essential needs: almost 1 in 10 adults in Wales said they had not managed to get to their place of work or study at least once in the three months to May 2025 because of transport issues, while 1 in 20 said they had been unable to get to a medical appointment.[119] Findings from the National Survey for Wales 2021-22 showed that among people who are out of work but would like to be working, one in five give 'transport issues' as a reason it is difficult for them to find work, while a quarter say that the type of work they need is not available locally.[120]

The need to improve public transport in Wales has been recognised by successive Welsh governments, and in recent years the urgency both of carbon reduction and social justice have acted as major drivers for renewed funding and attention on it.[121] Major funding has been released to develop the South Wales Metro and supply new trains, which serve large parts of Caerphilly[122] and reforms to the bus system[123] will see control over buses returned to Welsh ministers, with the aim of implementing an integrated transport system for Wales which enables people to move away from car use and serves the transport needs of everyone.

While these developments are positive, it is clear from the Bevan Foundation's recent research[124] that there is a long way to go in reversing years of underfunding and under-delivery on public transport in Wales. In Caerphilly, research from Friends of the Earth and The University of Leeds showed that the frequency of buses fell by 45 per cent between 2010 and 2023.[125]

As section 5 showed, many communities in Caerphilly are cut off from basic services, and without a car, rely on public transport or online services. The community raised a range of issues around transport during our consultations.

7.1 Communities are underserved by bus routes and taxis

There was a wide recognition from residents that the geography of Caerphilly and the sparsity of shops and other amenities in many local areas mean that getting around is a challenge.

> "Physical environment of Caerphilly. Poor infrastructure, difficult for anyone without a car"
>
> "There's a lack of supermarkets round here as well, isn't there? So obviously with the supermarkets being so far away, you've got to rely on – you have to travel."

Despite the clear demand for transport services, many in the north of Caerphilly noted that they were underserved by local taxis, and where they are able to book them, they are prohibitively expensive:

> - It's no good you ringing a taxi, we used to have about 5 or 6 companies, I don't think there's one in...
> - That's what I keep asking, is there a taxi service in Rhymney, because I can't find one.
>
> "My son got a taxi from Merthyr on Saturday night to here [Rhymney], it cost him 25 quid."

While train services have been improved in Caerphilly over the past few years as part of the South Wales Metro project, including increasing the frequency of services between Rhymney and Cardiff from one to two per hour[126] and the introduction of new trains[127], engineering works as part of the upgrades have meant that there has been disruption for residents. This included planned closures over eight months in 2025.[128] From what we heard from residents in the north of the Borough, there is still work to do to improve reliability, and closures may have increased perceptions that trains are unreliable:

> - "I don't know about anyone else, but you can stand at the train station and then two minutes before it's about to come it's cancelled."
> - "The six weeks holidays, the trains were cancelled all the way through, so you couldn't go to Barry, because you'd have to go either to Merthyr first, catch a bus, which takes nearly two hours to get to Cardiff on a bus, because it goes to every train station, doesn't it? but the trains were cancelled for the whole six weeks holidays."

Many participants noted that while buses are heavily relied upon, fares are unaffordable, and there is frustration that return tickets have been phased out by bus companies, meaning that people have to buy two single tickets or a day ticket for everyday journeys:

> *"Oh wow - do you know how much it is? Can't even buy a return anymore. Single – you've got to pay £5 each way – to Merthyr. You can't buy a return from Rhymney to Merthyr."*

The usefulness and frequency of buses was also seen as a major challenge for people. There was wide agreement that bus services provide far less value than they did in the past, due to cuts:

> *"I used to see buses all the time, I hardly see them now. The way they're always saying about public transport… the trains get cancelled, the buses stop after a certain time then…"*
>
> *"My mother lives in Pontlottyn, so she wanted to go down to Bargoed for something the other week. [It takes] about forty-five minutes, because they've cut the buses. I don't see why that bus has got to go through Brithdir when the other one is going to Phillipstown anyway… it doesn't make sense to me. And trains they're trying to get better, but buses, especially when you live in Abertysswg, after a certain time, oh."*
>
> *"It's a nightmare."*

The concerns raised by the community appear well founded when we look at the reality of bus services. Taking the example raised above, the journey by car of around seven miles from Rhymney to Bargoed takes around 17 minutes. By bus, this journey takes much longer due to roundabout routes, and the buses become infrequent into the evening. At the time of writing, on weekdays the number 53 and 51 buses run around every half an hour from Rhymney High Street to Bargoed, taking around 40 minutes and 47 minutes respectively. After the 18:21 53 service, there is just one further 51 service at 20:37 in the evenings.[129] These services are far more direct from Rhymney to Dowlais and Merthyr town centre, another important destination for residents in the north of the Borough for access to shops and other amenities, but they again become infrequent in the evening, with the last service at 22:13.[130]

Beyond conventional bus services, residents also noted that there was a shortage of community transport services to help people to get to essential services, such as shopper buses to supermarkets:

> - *"Years ago they used to run a free bus didn't they. They used to but they don't anymore"*
> - *"It used to be every Tuesday, my nan used to go on the free bus to Asda's"*
> - *"You'd be out all day though wouldn't you when you did that"*

While the Council operates a bus service called Connect2 to fill in transport gaps like these as well as shopper buses in the areas of Caerphilly and Bargoed, and minibuses for hire, the information provided on its website is sparse,[131] and lacking any detail on prices or a visual representation of routes. There appears to be a need for these services to be promoted more widely and for them to be integrated into centralised sources of transport information when possible in the future, such as Transport for Wales' in-development integrated journey planner and ticket platform.[132]

Transport for Wales operates a demand-responsive bus service called Fflecsi to complement or replace bus services in areas of need in partnership with local authorities, often working with existing community transport providers to augment existing services.[133] The service enables users to book journeys in advance within Fflecsi areas via its app or by telephone, and bus routes dynamically altered based on demand. While there is a Fflecsi area covering Blaenau Gwent, there is not currently a service for Caerphilly, and it is unclear whether there are any plans for one. Given the clear need for innovative transport services in Caerphilly, it would be beneficial for the local authority to work with the community and TfW to explore how this service could be brought into the Borough.

7.2 Safety

Beyond the availability and usefulness of transport services, some residents raised concerns around the safety of public transport. It was suggested that trains became less safe as they moved up the valley and people got off, and there was a desire for more visibility and supervision from staff. The perception around safety appeared to add to a sense the community had that they are forgotten about in terms of services provision:

"For me, it's safer trains, because I had an incident on a train... I was going to an event in Cardiff. I got on the train in Pontlottyn, which is the next village over, caught the train to Cardiff, came back about...half past 8... everybody got off the train... As I got to Bargoed, a man got on covered in blood... the whole train was empty, and he sat on the chair by the side of me, and was breathing all over and trying to touch me. And I got off the train and I said to the man, "You've seen him get on, you've seen I was on my own, yet you did not walk down that train." He didn't value my safety. Now they have like call whatever number. But at that time, that number didn't come up to say transport police. And by the time they would've got there, he would have got off anyway."

- "My granddaughter lives in Bargoed, and she's 13 now in May. And her father won't leave her get on the train in Bargoed, and somebody meet her in Rhymney. He will come all the way up to drop her off and then he catches the train all the way back down."
- He will not let her get on the train."

- "Knowing that Bargoed to Rhymney is such a dangerous train line, you would expect it to be more monitored wouldn't you, but it's not."
- "But that's what I mean, we're the black hole, nobody cares about us up here. We are referred to as the black hole."

7.3 What could be done?

The evidence shows that transport is a key issue in the Borough. While significant developments are underway to improve transport services across Wales, they are yet to make significant inroads, and low-income residents face barriers to accessing affordable food, employment and other essentials. The community and the local authority could work together to find ways to fill the gaps that exist, and push for public transport to be accessible for all, including improving perceptions of safety. We suggest that the following actions could be taken:

Recommendation: The community could work with Caerphilly Borough Council to increase the availability of community transport services in the Borough, focusing on access to food and employment, education and training.

Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council could work with the community and Transport for Wales to explore the options available for implementing a Fflecsi service in the Borough.

Recommendation: The local community could find ways to work with Transport for Wales and representatives in the Senedd to feed in experiences and concerns around safety on bus and train services so that action can be taken.

Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council and Transport for Wales should work collaboratively to improve their promotion of and signposting to transport services in the Borough.

8. Support organisations and services

A range of organisations that provide frontline support for people on low income in Caerphilly Borough were well-represented at our workshops. They raised a number of issues facing the third sector which challenge their ability to provide support. These focused on a wide agreement that support services are facing unprecedented and sustained demand for support, that funding is a challenge, a lack of coordination between organisations, and a lack of centralised sources of information to help direct people to the right support, as well as a sense that support does not sufficiently address the structural issues which cause people to be in financial crisis. The following is a selection of comments made by representatives of these organisations:

"Organisations are doing more with less resources"

"Some food resources but not enough to meet need & demand increasing"

"Food banks / tenancy support working as 'first responders'"

"For some communities there are no services"

"Silo working & poor communication"

"Lack of communication between services. Not knowing full story/journey"

"Too many individual agendas & stats-driven organisations"

"Lack of local stats & engagement. Lack of breakdown barriers of suspicion towards local authority help & help organisations"

"Timed contracts with organisations – no continuation with providers"

"When funding is lost – impact on the community that was benefitting from the service"

"Lack of central information point that can signpost effectively"

"Lack of a more local approach"

"Sticking plasters – revolving door – same people, same problems. Nothing sustainable"

"Lack of employment support"

"Consultations take place with no outcomes"

"Someone needs to step up and coordinate"

8.1 What could be done?

The support organisations working in the Borough provide vital services to support people facing crisis, but the message that emerged clearly from those present at our engagements was that they are overwhelmed by demand and that there is a lack of coordination of efforts. While there was a recognition that competition for funding is a challenge, and working together is difficult, there was a desire for this to improve. To address these issues, organisations had a range of ideas about what could be done. The following is a selection of what was suggested:

"To change: Our approach to supporting people – how can we move beyond catching people at crisis point?"

"More partnership working on a regular basis"

"Across-agency working"

"LA signposting facility"

"Something similar to the Cwtsh guide, with a description of what different services offer, and how best to get in contact"

"Map out services across Caerphilly & work cohesively"

"Tell the Council to come along and get involved & listen"

"Greater interactions between authorities and those on the ground to divert resources to those falling between the gaps"

"Review services across the Borough. Identify funding for more outreach work in vulnerable areas."

Local Authorities not always the right body to administer. E.g. give money direct to GAVO"

"Form third sector forum to share best practice & ideas across the sector"

"Find spaces where more bolshy voices can take issues on"

"Co-ordinate service advice or referral partners between an anti-poverty alliance"

Council to act as link between third sector, community groups, lived experience, NHS"

"Have long-term goals not short-term targets"

It is clear that there is both a real need and appetite to improve services for people facing poverty and financial crisis in the Borough. From the discussions that we had in our workshops and drawing on best practice from elsewhere in the UK, there are a number of steps we suggest could be taken to begin working to achieve this:

Recommendation: The community could establish an anti-poverty alliance for Caerphilly which brings together the local authority, public health partners, third sector organisations and people with lived experience of poverty. The group should be focused on understanding the nature of poverty in Caerphilly, maximising resources and taking strategic action on priority issues. Caerphilly Borough Council should take a clear role in funding and convening the group on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation: The Caerphilly Poverty Alliance could use the findings of this report together with further exercises to understand the nature of poverty in different communities in Caerphilly, and best practice learned from elsewhere (e.g. from Resolve Poverty[134]) to feed into an ongoing strategy for reducing levels of poverty in the Borough. The strategy should inform actions taken collaboratively. The strategy could focus on long-term goals (e.g. a 5-year plan) with regular updates on progress (e.g. yearly publications).

Recommendation: The Caerphilly Poverty Alliance could use its platform to escalate local issues where appropriate to local councillors, Members of the Senedd and Members of Parliament.

Recommendation: A mapping exercise should be undertaken to identify sources of support for a range of issues facing low-income residents in Caerphilly, for use by support organisations and people experiencing poverty. This should be promoted widely and updated regularly.

Recommendation: Local organisations could use the mapping exercise to help coordinate local services more effectively.

9. Conclusion

The findings of this report demonstrate clearly the significant problem of poverty that exists in Caerphilly Borough. Low income and a lack of employment opportunities combine with increasing cost-of-living pressures and insufficient services to produce a set of incredibly difficult circumstances for a large number of people living locally. The clear message from many residents was that they feel forgotten—a sentiment that should focus the minds of all those who have the power to make a difference. Recent global shocks have demonstrated the speed at which living standards could worsen again, and it is crucial that there are resilient, responsive and strategic community frameworks in place now to scaffold the capacity for supporting those who are the most vulnerable. While this work does not provide an exhaustive diagnosis of all the pressures facing low-income residents, it has demonstrated a range of challenges that exist, informed by the available data and input from the community.

Poverty is a deep-rooted problem across Wales, and action taken at the local level will not solve it overnight. But change is possible, and the community has a role to play. The enthusiastic engagement with our sessions and the expertise that has been gained in community power by a range of local organisations over the cost-of-living crisis mean that there are strong foundations to build upon. We hope that this report will be of use in informing a renewed set of efforts by the wide range of partners committed to change in the Borough, focused strategically on the drivers of poverty and long-term solutions.

10. Summary of recommendations

- Recommendation: The community could establish an anti-poverty alliance for Caerphilly which brings together the local authority, public health partners, third sector organisations and people with lived experience of poverty. The group should be focused on understanding the nature of poverty in Caerphilly, maximising resources and taking strategic action on priority issues. Caerphilly Borough Council should take a clear role in funding and convening the group on an ongoing basis.
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taken collaboratively. The strategy could focus on long-term goals (e.g. a 5-year plan) with regular updates on progress (e.g. yearly publications).

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- Recommendation: Local organisations could use the mapping exercise to help coordinate local services more effectively.

Low income, employment and benefits

- Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council could work with local employers and other stakeholders to develop an ongoing Living Wage campaign in Caerphilly, to boost the incomes of the lowest paid workers.
- Recommendation: An anti-poverty alliance should explore further the gaps in transport services for people to access employment in Caerphilly, to identify solutions. Caerphilly Borough Council could work with partners in community transport and Transport for Wales to push for new and improved services strategically aimed at increasing employment, education and training.
- Recommendation: The community could continue to find ways to raise its voice on various platforms to represent how residents are being failed by the benefits system and push for change at the UK and Welsh government levels.
- Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council and other support services should continue to increase signposting and support for people to maximise their incomes through the benefits system.
- Recommendation: Organisations that provide crisis support should remain mindful of the groups most likely to face difficulties in the benefits system, so that support is geared towards levels of need.

Housing

- Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council should find ways to move away from the use of B&Bs for temporary accommodation, especially for families with children, given the risks that have been identified of this type of accommodation.
- Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council should focus efforts on ensuring that any temporary accommodation is safe and suitable for those placed in it, especially where potential harms can exist for children.
- Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council could work to produce and publicise more nuanced estimates of the scale and nature of rough sleeping in the Borough and use this to feed into action, as well as to inform policymaking at the Welsh government level.
- Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council should find opportunities to increase the supply of social housing targeted at levels of need, particularly for single people.

Food

- Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council could establish a food insecurity taskforce in collaboration with public health, third sector and other relevant partners to develop initiatives to tackle food insecurity in the Borough. This could include new community services such as a mobile greengrocer.

School-related costs

- Recommendation: The Caerphilly Anti-Poverty Alliance could bring school governors together to share best practice around the cost of the school day and develop renewed guidelines for themselves, responsive to the advice of parents with lived experience of poverty and groups with relevant expertise such as CPAG, Children in Wales, and the Children's Commissioner for Wales.
- Recommendation: Caerphilly schools could link in with the platform of a Caerphilly anti-poverty strategy and commit to become national leaders in poverty-proofing.
- Recommendation: The Caerphilly Anti-Poverty Alliance could work with local Members of the Senedd to call on the Welsh government to legislate to lower the costs associated with school.

Transport

- Recommendation: The community could work with Caerphilly Borough Council to increase the availability of community transport services in the Borough, focusing on access to food and employment, education and training.
- Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council could work with the community and Transport for Wales to explore the options available for implementing a Fflecsi service in the Borough.
- Recommendation: The local community could find ways to work with Transport for Wales and representatives in the Senedd to feed in experiences and concerns around safety on bus and train services so that action can be taken.
- Recommendation: Caerphilly Borough Council and Transport for Wales should work collaboratively to improve their promotion of and signposting to transport services in the Borough.

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