

TORFAEN COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2022-23



JULY 2022 – MAY 2023

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

TORFAEN
COUNTY
BOROUGH



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OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

Welcome.....

...to Torfaen Council's annual review of its overview and scrutiny function.

This report highlights the work undertaken by the Council's five overview and scrutiny committees and the PSB O&S Committee during the 2022/23 municipal year. It sets out recent developments in the Council's overview and scrutiny function and details the progress made in the previous year to strengthen performance. Finally, it also underlines proposals to improve and develop the overview & scrutiny function going forward.

Local Government Elections in May 2022 saw the election of 17 new members onto the Council. Induction sessions were run in June 2022 providing new and returning members with a wide-ranging introduction to Council life giving members the information and knowledge required to fulfill their new duties. Part of the induction set out the scrutiny process adopted in Torfaen, highlighting its remit and importance within the overall democratic function of the Council.

Many of the newly elected members were appointed to one or more of the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committees. Whilst being part of the scrutiny process was new for a number of newly elected members, their appointments and engagement have brought a wealth of new experiences, knowledge and views that have helped shape and evolve this crucial democratic function.

Overview & Scrutiny in Torfaen...

Overview and scrutiny within the Council is member led through five committees, namely:

- ⇒ **Cleaner Communities**
- ⇒ **Healthier Communities**
- ⇒ **Prosperous Communities**
- ⇒ **Education**
- ⇒ **Cross Cutting Resources & Business**

Each committee (except for Cross-Cutting Resources & Business) is made up of nine elected members, reflecting the political balance of the Council as a whole. Membership of the committees in 2022/23 was approved by Council at their meeting on 24th May 2022.

The Cross-Cutting Resources & Business Committee continued to look at issues that have an impact across the Council. The membership of this committee is made up of all non-executive members.

There is also a **Public Service Board (PSB) O&S Committee** which scrutinised the work of the Torfaen PSB while it transitioned to a Regional PSB. This committee is made up of the five chairs of the scrutiny committees and meets twice a year.

In addition to the five individual overview and scrutiny committees, the Council has a **Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee**, made up of all members who are not part of the Council's Cabinet. This committee only convenes during a full Council meeting to consider challenges to Cabinet decisions. During the past municipal year, no challenges were made by scrutiny members and therefore no meetings of the Council's Overview & Scrutiny were convened in that period.

Full details of the work of these committees are highlighted later in this report.

TORFAEN SCRUTINY IN NUMBERS

HOW MUCH SCRUTINY DID WE DO?

	<i>2022/23</i>
Number of Committee Meetings:	26
Number of meetings attended by Executive Member (on invitation):	13/ 13
Number of invitees attending/ contributing to committee meetings:	21

How Much Scrutiny Did We Do?

Following Annual Council in May and the formal appointment of elected members to committees, each overview and scrutiny committee held their visioning sessions for the 2022/23 year in July 2022. During these sessions, members met the Executive Members and Chief Officers who report to the individual committees and discussed the relevant issues forthcoming in the year ahead relevant to that specific committee. Following discussion each committee prioritised their basket of items for scrutiny activity in the year ahead.

September 2022 saw the start of a very busy scrutiny year, with 26 meetings held up until May 2023, an increase of 10 meetings held in 2021/22.

The continued preference for “single item” agendas for all overview and scrutiny committee meetings has ensured in depth challenge is undertaken for each item under discussion and clear, well considered recommendations are made to Executive Members and Chief Officers.

Each meeting was preceded by a pre-agenda session where committee and co-opted members determined a questioning strategy for the meeting. Pre-agenda meetings have proved particularly beneficial this year with new members learning new methods of questioning and enquiry before taking part in formal meetings.

Where appropriate, scrutiny members have adopted less formal working methods to inform and widen the perspective of their work. This has included, undertaking visits, using social media to understand the views of citizens, speaking with experts and relevant stakeholders in person and via online methods and conducting in-depth research and review work. Committees have also regularly invited external witnesses / invitees to contribute to their meetings to help broaden their knowledge of the issue under scrutiny. This has involved the participation of Executive Members, Chief Officers, Team Leaders, officers from other local authorities, service providers and service users, external regulators, and other professional bodies. Invitees involved in scrutiny over the last year have included representatives from Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, South-East Wales Education Achievement Service, Housing Associations, The British Liaison Group, Regional Partnership Board, local business owners and APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence).



Healthier Communities O&S Committee Visit to Ty Glas Yr Dorlan - 21st September 2022

Members of the Healthier Communities O&S Committee visited Ty Glas Yr Dorlan in September 2022 as part of its scrutiny activity in reviewing the facility and service's performance in its first 6 months of operation. Members welcomed the opportunity to speak with service providers, tour the building and facilities and most importantly, engage with service users.



Prosperous Communities O&S Committee Visit to Springboard Business Innovation Centre – 5th October 2022

In October 2022, the Prosperous Communities O&S Committee scrutinised the findings of the commission by Oxford Innovation, to inform and determine the preferred way forward for the Springboard Innovation Centre. As part of their research, the committee visited the Springboard Business Innovation Centre, Llantarnam and took the opportunity to speak with officers, tour the facility and speak with business owners who operate from the centre.

Cabinet members have attended scrutiny meetings to answer questions and provide information when invited by the committee. Cabinet attendance at scrutiny meetings is a good indicator that the 'holding to account' role of scrutiny is functioning well. During 2022/23 Executive Members attended formal scrutiny meetings on 13 occasions, up from 7 occasions in 2021/22. This is in addition to the 4 dedicated Executive Member briefing meetings, held by the Education O&S Committee.

21 experts/ invitees have contributed to committee meetings either in person or via MS Teams during meetings, pre-agenda meetings or via e-mail contributions in 2022/23, a return to pre-pandemic levels.

HOW WELL DID WE DO?

	<i>2022/23</i>
Average Councillor Attendance at Scrutiny:	77.5%
Number of webcast views:	1086

How Well Did We Do?

The rate of councillor attendance measures an important aspect of effectiveness as it reflects the engagement of councillors in the scrutiny process. Attendance figures for councillors are collected by the Council's Democratic Services Team and published on the Council's website. 2022/23's figure for attendance is 77.5% for all committees which is up on the previous year's figure of 74%. (Individual scrutiny committee and member attendance is broken down later in this report.) This increase in attendance, backed up by responses in the Member's Scrutiny Survey, continues to reflect members preference for and the benefits of introducing a hybrid system for scrutiny meetings with an even balance of members attending scrutiny meetings online and in person in the Chamber.

The total number of webcast views across the scrutiny committees in 2022-23 was 1086, a massive increase on the 256 views recorded in 2021-22. The average views per meeting (that were webcast live) was 42 which is almost 3 times the average viewing figures in 2021-22. The 9th February 2023 meeting of the Cleaner Communities O&S Committee looking at Options to improve recycling through reviewing the frequency of residual waste collections in the Borough received 158 views. It is important that we reflect on these figures as it clearly demonstrates an increase in public engagement in the scrutiny process and helps us develop the most productive avenues for further improvements.

Awareness and understanding of scrutiny are an important aspect of effectiveness. This data is collected via an annual survey of councillors. Many of the questions asked are based on characteristics of effective scrutiny identified by Centre for Public Scrutiny / Wales Audit Office. The numbers of councillors who responded to the survey this year was 19 (59% of scrutiny members). Specific findings are set out in detail under the self-assessment section of this annual report.

WHAT WERE THE OUTCOMES OF SCRUTINY?

	<i>2022/23</i>
Number of recommendations made:	152
Number of recommendations accepted:	128
Number of recommendations rejected:	6
Number of recommendations noted for consideration:	18

What were the Outcomes of Scrutiny?

Recommendation pro-formas are an established part of the scrutiny process in Torfaen. They allow the committee to communicate quickly and efficiently, directly with the relevant Executive members. Committee members make recommendations for improvement, reflecting discussions at committee meetings that require a timely response from the Executive Member/ Chief Officer.

The rate that Executive Members accept scrutiny recommendations is a good indicator of whether scrutiny is making strong recommendations based on robust evidence.

Executive Members responded to 152 recommendations in 2022-23 of which;

- **128 (84%)** - **were accepted**
- **18 (12%)** - **were noted for consideration**
- **6 (4%)** - **were rejected.**

A breakdown by committee is detailed below in the committee section. The percentage of accepted decision is up from 76% in 2021-22 to 84% in 2022-23, with the number of recommendations that were noted for consideration down from 36% to 12% and the number rejected improving, down from 6% to 4%. These outcomes clearly indicate that members are making impactful, effective recommendations. With further training, development and experience, we aim to ensure all scrutiny activity results in SMART, impactful recommendations.

Developments delivered during the year ...

Our approach to overview and scrutiny has continued to adapt throughout 2022-23.

Self-evaluation & training ...

Informal meetings have been held with all the Scrutiny Chairs via teams, to reflect and self-evaluate the performance of each committee, to reflect on any initial issues that have arisen during the scrutiny process or meetings and to discuss proposals for improvement/ development.

Each year, the scrutiny support team conduct a Member's Scrutiny Survey to seek members' views; on the support they receive in order to fulfil their roles, on the scrutiny process, and on the impact and outcomes of scrutiny activity.

Survey Key Findings:-

Positives:

- 90% of members surveyed felt well, or very well equipped to conduct scrutiny, an improvement from 77% in 2021/22
- 100% of members responded they were well, to fully supported by the scrutiny support team with no members responding they were inadequately supported. This is an improvement from 88% in last year's survey
- 94.5% of members consider the pre-agenda meetings useful, a significant improvement from the 83% response rate in last year's survey
- 68.4% of members believe the work programme is member led, which is a significant improvement on last year's response rate of 41%
- 89.5% of members responded that scrutiny makes a level of impact, which is on par with last year's response of 88%

Areas for greater focus in 2022/23:

- 72.2% of members believe the visioning process results in scrutiny committees considering the right issues. Disappointingly this is down slightly from 76% in the 2021/22 survey
- 29.4% of members responding feel that scrutiny committees do not fulfil their role in holding the Executive to account
- 57.9% of members surveyed were very satisfied or satisfied with the responses received from the Executive Member to the committee's recommendations, down from 71% in 2021/22. A surprising and disappointing result considering the number of accepted recommendations has increased so significantly
- Only 35% of members feel the public are adequately engaged in the scrutiny process

An action plan will be developed setting out steps and proposals to address the findings of the survey which will be regularly reviewed and progressed in consultation with Chairs of scrutiny committees, at the Informal Chairs Meetings.

In addition to the Annual Survey, a Post Scrutiny Survey has also been implemented. Following each meeting the link is sent to all members of the committee, relevant officers and invitees to complete and reflect on the work up to and prior to the meeting, and the meeting itself. The results from these surveys are regularly monitored as part of our service planning performance monitoring in order for timely changes to be made or issues addressed.

Item for Next Meeting Report

To ensure work programmes are flexible, each committee now considers an 'Item for Next Meeting' report during the final stage of a meeting. This report gives members the opportunity to review the updated Executive Forward Plan, consider any emerging external inspection reports and reflect on their original work programme. Should the need arise, the committee may decide to re-prioritise the items they scrutinise, ensuring scrutiny activity is reactive and focusses on the key issues facing the Council.

Education Committee – Executive Member Briefing

Following the Council's Estyn inspection in March 2022, the Education O&S Committee established dedicated meetings with the Executive Member for Education, outside of the formal scrutiny meeting setting. These sessions act as an informal, open and honest dialogue between the Executive Member for Education and the Education O & S Committee, providing committee members with an overview of the key issues within Education and our schools, further strengthening their knowledge and understanding prior to conducting formal scrutiny activity.

PSB Scrutiny

In September 2021, the five individual PSBs for Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Newport, Monmouthshire and Torfaen, merged to become the Gwent Public Services Board. In line with this merger, the Gwent PSB has established a regional PSB scrutiny committee consisting of representatives from the 5 reporting authorities. Torfaen representatives on the Gwent Regional PSB Committee are Cllr Rosemarie Seabourne and Cllr David Williams. Whilst there has been a move to a regional scrutiny approach, the authority will maintain our own PSB scrutiny committee to continue reviewing and considering local delivery and action plans.

Engaging citizens ...

Overview and scrutiny has actively used the Council's social media channels during the past year – Facebook, Twitter and the Get Involved page – to seek the views of interested citizens. All overview and scrutiny reports are posted in advance of the meetings, and any views or comments made are considered by members in their pre agenda meetings to inform their questions for invitees and officers.

The scrutiny support team work with the communications team to pro-actively seek views from the public on all upcoming scrutiny reports and these comments have been used by members in meetings to inform their challenging and questioning of officers. Public engagement has increased significantly this year with hundreds of comments to our posts setting out forthcoming scrutiny reports. The Cleaner Communities O&S Committee received in excess of 1000 public comments and contributions when undertaking its scrutiny activity looking at future options for the waste service. Other scrutiny items including the Healthier Communities O&S Committee's scrutiny of the Housing Crisis and the Prosperous Committee's review of the British regeneration project all generated numerous comments from the public which were all considered by members prior to them undertaking formal scrutiny activity.

Feedback on scrutiny recommendations that have been made is also posted on social media, so citizens can see the result of their involvement and the conclusion of the scrutiny activity.

A '[Suggest an Item for Scrutiny](#)' page is available on the Council webpage, inviting suggestions from members of the public on types of items that could be scrutinised by an overview & scrutiny committee. This page has seen an uptake in use this year, with a number of suggestions being put forward via this channel.

Public contribution is key particularly during the visioning process. Residents' views, and those of the People's Panel, the Youth Forum, Older Persons Forum and the Climate Ambassadors Network are sought prior to visioning sessions, to determine what issues are important to them and what they think committees should be scrutinising. In 2022/23, 47 public suggestions were put forward (a number of which were grouped into themes such as litter). A member of the public wrote in suggesting we look at improving delivery of affordable housing, which resulted in a report on 'Addressing the Housing Crisis' going to Healthier Communities O&S Committee in March 2023 as well as a suggestion on Domiciliary Care which was considered by the committee in November 2022. Further suggestions requesting scrutiny look at litter & flytipping, green infrastructure and active travel were also put forward by residents, with reports on these issues being received by the Cleaner Communities O&S Committee in 2022/23.

Further details of these reports and the recommendations made following the scrutiny activity are set out later in this report.

Scrutiny has developed a close relationship with the Torfaen Climate Ambassadors Network, engaging with their members at their monthly meeting in March 2023, to set out how they can be involved in the Council's democratic processes including contributing suggestions for scrutiny prior to visioning sessions and as part of evidence gathering exercises during the scrutiny process. We thank them for their continued engagement and contributions.

Local press has also regularly reported on our scrutiny meetings and the items being investigated over the last year. This is another welcome avenue through which public awareness and engagement with our democratic process has been increased.

Action Plan for Governance & Improvement

Any service specific recommendations made by the Council's external regulators are received by the Council's Governance & Audit Committee, who will then refer the issue for monitoring by the Council's relevant overview and scrutiny committee. A new referral process was implemented in 2021 to ensure effective communication between the Governance & Audit Committee and the scrutiny committees.

Each overview and scrutiny committee reports back to the Council's Governance & Audit Committee annually with a progress update against recommendations and proposals for improvement made by our external regulators. The progress update relevant to each committee was received prior to the visioning sessions in July 2022 and the recommendations from each committee were reported back to the Governance & Audit Committee in October 2022. The 2022/23 progress update report will be prepared for each referral and will be reported back to the relevant scrutiny committees for assurance purposes in July 2023. Should the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and / or the Governance & Audit Committee highlight any concerns over the progress made in addressing the agreed recommendations a report will be prepared for consideration by Cabinet.

Audit Wales Review of Scrutiny

During 2017/18 Audit Wales reviewed scrutiny arrangements across all councils in Wales exploring how 'fit for the future' their scrutiny functions were. The review considered how the council's scrutiny function includes the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) in relation to their scrutiny function. They also looked at how well-placed councils are to respond to future challenges. The findings from the review, 'Overview & Scrutiny: Fit for the Future?' were published [in July 2018](#).

The report contained some proposals for improvement and an action plan was prepared and regularly updated in response to these findings. The action plan was presented to Governance & Audit Committee on 19th October 2022 where it was recommended and agreed that whilst we continue to strive to develop and improve our scrutiny function, the recommendations put forward by Audit Wales had been addressed and so would be removed from further monitoring by the Governance & Audit Committee.

Well-being of Future Generations Act

Members received an induction seminar in July 2022 setting out the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act. The application of the act when undertaking scrutiny activity was more specifically referenced and expanded on within the Scrutiny induction session in June 2022.

The council has developed a well-being assessment which is now a well bedded-in feature for inclusion with all reports that are put forward on new policies or strategy development. Under the Act it is equally important to properly reflect the requirements of the Act in all of our scrutiny arrangements and a key area for member development in the year ahead will be in giving greater consideration to the Act when developing their lines of questioning.

Impact of Scrutiny

It is important to know that the work and the efforts of scrutiny members are having a positive impact, making a difference and adding value. As such, all committees continue to monitor the impacts of their recommendations. This ensures scrutiny recommendations are properly evaluated to improve the function's effectiveness, including reviewing any follow up work against proposed actions and examining outcomes.

Each potential item for scrutiny activity must be set out in a visioning template, which includes a section on the intended impact of scrutiny of a particular item. These include impacts such as performance monitoring, building confidence, and/ or policy development/ policy review. It is stressed to members during visioning sessions that only items that will have an impact should be selected for scrutiny activity throughout the year. When the committee receives the update on recommendation reports at the end of the scrutiny year, members are then clearly able to make an assessment as to whether scrutiny activity of an item achieved the intended impact as set out at visioning.

Each scrutiny committee and their individual scrutiny activity is undertaken with the aim of having an impact, however that impact can be a range of deliverables depending on the subject matter. Examples of particular areas where scrutiny has had an impact over the last year are:

- **Prosperous Communities O&S Committee** – In scrutinising the future options for operation of the Springboard Business Centre, the committee had the opportunity to feed into the development of the future operating policy for Springboard and the range of potential delivery options. It also provided a forum for reviewing progress made against the aims and objectives of Springboard's operating policies with members providing helpful guidance on key areas to consider by reviewing financial parameters, administration of the Centre and operational management.
- **Healthier Communities O&S Committee** fed into the initial stages of the development of the new Community Wellbeing Strategy. Through early scrutiny, the committee played an active role in shaping the vision and objectives.
- **Education O&S Committee** – This year, each of the Education scrutiny meetings has focused on an area or recommendation arising from the 2022 Estyn Inspection. Through this focused scrutiny, the committee has ensured robust and sufficiently paced progress has been made in addressing each of the recommendations.
- **Cleaner Communities O&S Committee** – Through scrutiny of Recycling – Achieving 70% Recycling Target for 2024-25, members provided an important window into the concerns of citizens within Torfaen over the proposed changes to residual collections. Conversations also helped officers shape the way in which communication were delivered to residents in order to gain maximum value from feedback.
- **Cross Cutting Resources & Business** – In October 2022, the committee received the draft County Plan 2022- 2027. In reviewing and challenging the draft plan, members contributed to the shaping and detail of the themes and well-being objectives by which delivery of current plans and all future proposals will be tested.

Future Planned Developments ...

Overview and scrutiny will continue to evolve over the next 12 months to ensure it is an effective, impactful and integral part of the Council's democratic function.

Planned developments include:

- ⇒ Providing a suite of training modules to fully equip members, to fulfil their role of scrutiny member effectively. This will include dedicated Chair's training and Questioning Skills Training
- ⇒ Provide further training opportunities throughout the year to strengthen members' confidence and questioning skills. This will include publishing monthly 'scrutiny on a page' bulletins that will cover a range of issues such as training points, infographics, case studies and highlighting good scrutiny practice
- ⇒ Conducting an annual members' survey specifically on the scrutiny function in Torfaen, in order to ensure year on year improvements to the scrutiny process are being identified and actioned
- ⇒ Strengthening public engagement in the scrutiny process by exploring new and innovative ways to increase community awareness of and engagement with the scrutiny process
- ⇒ Considering what further steps can be taken to support the integration of the WBFG Act into the work of scrutiny committees, specifically imbedding consideration of the Act into members questioning development
- ⇒ Build robust performance monitoring processes into the scrutiny function, including training members in how to effectively monitor and challenge performance across the Council
- ⇒ Review the assessment process for determining meeting effectiveness – this will include the introduction of post scrutiny assessment discussions on the conclusion of the meeting
- ⇒ Trial a new method for making provisional recommendations during the course of a meeting (depending on the appropriateness of the item) with Executive Members and Officers present
- ⇒ Explore avenues for building more productive working relations between scrutiny chairs and executive members
- ⇒ With the introduction of a Regional PSB scrutiny committee, it is important to develop an appropriate reporting mechanism to facilitate our appointed representatives feeding back the outcomes from the regional committee to local members

CLEANER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair of this Committee was Councillor Steven Evans (4/4 meetings attended).

The membership of the committee 2022/23 was:

- Councillor Stuart Ashley (4/4 meetings)
- Councillor Lynda Clarkson (4/4 meetings)
- Councillor Elizabeth Haynes (2/2 meetings)
- Councillor Nick Horler (4/4 meetings)
- Councillor Gaynor James (0/4 meetings)
- Councillor Mark Jones (2/2 meetings)
- Councillor Jason O'Connell (2/2 meetings)
- Councillor Norma Parrish (4/4 meetings)
- Councillor Chris Tew (0/2 meetings)
- Councillor Colette Thomas (4/4 meetings)

The Committee held 4 meetings throughout the 2022/23 municipal year. Average attendance by the members for the year was 83% up from 73% the year before.

The issues scrutinised by the committee during 2022/23 are set out here: *(Full reports can be accessed by clicking on the links below.)*

17th November 2022
[Green Infrastructure](#)

9th February 2023
[Options to improve recycling through reviewing the frequency of residual waste collections in the Borough](#)

9th March 2023
[Delivering the Council's Litter and Fly Tipping Strategy](#)

27th April 2023
[Active Travel](#)

On completion of this scrutiny activity, recommendations were made to the relevant Executive Member(s) and Chief Officer(s). (Use the links above to access the recommendations with responses pack.)

Executive Members responded to 40 recommendations in 2022-23 of which;

- 28 (70 %) - **were accepted** *(an improvement from 50% in 2021-22)*
- 8 (20%) - **were noted for consideration**
- 4 (10 %) - **were rejected.**

Chair's summary ...

It has been another busy period for the Cleaner Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The role of scrutiny is vital to the smooth running of the Council. I would like to pass on my personal thanks to all of the Committee members for their welcome and enthusiastic support throughout the year. I would also like to thank members of the public for regularly engaging with the Committee especially via social media. Input from members of the public is always carefully taken into account. Behind the scenes the Committee has received excellent support from Officers in the Democratic Services and Scrutiny teams. Without these teams the Committee would not function, and it would be remiss of me not to recognise this. My special thanks go to Catherine Joseph who provided excellent support to me and the Committee on a day-to-day basis.

In November 2022 the Committee requested a progress report on Managing Torfaen's Green Infrastructure in response to the declared Nature Emergency, and to set out what is being done to inform management regimes in 2023 and beyond. We invited a representative from the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) to the meeting who had been involved in the process of helping to change regimes to assess how we were progressing. Many of the Committees recommendations built upon the positive work already taking place within the team.

On 9th February 2023 the Committee looked at Recycling and reaching the 70% Recycling Target. The Committee understood the difficult issues involved with the need to achieve the 70% Target set by Welsh Government. The Committee understood the difficulties financially, if targets are missed and the need to engage with residents and take feedback from consultation with Torfaen residents. The Committee proposed further consultation and engagement with residents as part of their clear and robust Recommendations to address this difficult issue.

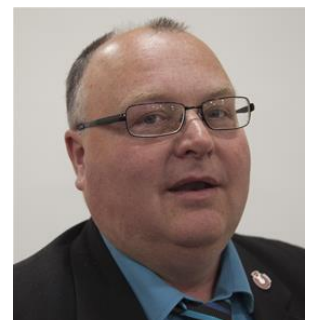
In March 2023 we looked at a report on Delivering the Litter and Fly Tipping Strategy. The Committee supported the new Strategy and made a number of recommendations including the need to keep momentum going in the work with Schools. The Committee also saluted the work that volunteers do across Torfaen in tackling Fly Tipping and Littering.

Active Travel was looked at on 27th April 2023. The Committee looked at the Mapping System of all Active Travel Routes in Torfaen and the new improved mapping system with new routes added on. The system shows links with areas such as the Canal and walking and cycle routes. The report shows how closely our officers collaborate with other Groups and Partners to achieve as many accessible routes as possible. We invited Groups to participate who provided responses regarding mobility issues and disabilities in using Travel Routes in Torfaen. We are grateful to those who took part and helped shape our questions and recommendations.

It was busy year for the Committee and members were very mindful of the impact on the Council policy initiatives and changes on the residents of Torfaen. I have no doubt that the work of the Committee has supported our community and helped the Council to continue to strive to improve services in difficult times.

Councillor Steve Evans

Chair of the Cleaner Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee



HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair of this committee was Councillor Janet Jones (5/5 meetings attended).

The membership of the committee 2022/23 was:

- Councillor Alfie Best (5/5 meetings)
- Councillor Catherine Bonera (0/2 meetings)
- Councillor Lynda Clarkson (5/5 meetings)
- Councillor Steven Evans (5/5 meetings)
- Councillor Mark Jones (3/3 meetings)
- Councillor Nick Jones (1/2 meetings)
- Councillor Rose Seabourne (4/5 meetings)
- Councillor Jayne Watkins (5/5 meetings)
- Councillor David Williams (1/2 meetings)
- Councillor Lucy Williams (5/5 meetings)

The Committee held 5 meetings throughout the 2022/23 municipal year. Average attendance by the members for the year was 89%, a significant improvement from 50% in 2021/22.

The issues scrutinised by the committee during the year are set out here (*full reports can be accessed by clicking on the relevant link*):

20th October 2022

[Ty Glas y Dorlan: First Six Month Review and Market Stability Report](#)

9th November 2022

[Domiciliary Care](#)

15th December 2022

[Community Resilience](#)

2nd March 2023

[Addressing the Housing Crisis](#)

20th April 2023

[Reducing Torfaen's Looked After Children Population \(to include Children's Residential Provision, Risk Management and Placed with Parent Population\)](#)

On completion of scrutiny activity, recommendations were made to the relevant Executive Member(s) and Chief Officer(s). (Use the links above to access recommendations with responses)

Executive Members responded to 32 recommendations in 2022-23 of which;

- 29 (91%) - **were accepted** (*up significantly from 70% in 2021-22*)
- 3 (9%) - **were noted for consideration**
- 0 (5%) - **were rejected**

Chair's summary

It has been an honour to Chair the Healthier Communities O&S Committee this year whilst being fortunate to have been supported by a committee of members who are vastly experienced in the social care sector and very much passionate and committed to improving the lives of the people in Torfaen. Our committee was extremely busy this year covering 6 key topics chosen during a visioning session and issues on which we could have an impact through our scrutiny activity and enable real change for Torfaen residents.

At our first meeting in September 2022, the committee reviewed the first 6 months performance of the **Ty Glas Yr Dorlan** operating model. We visited Ty Glas Yr Dorlan and welcomed the opportunity to engage with staff, tour the building and facilities and most importantly for members, speak with service users and tenants. Members were satisfied with the progress of Ty Glas Yr Dorlan against the outcomes in the first six months of operation and look forward to seeing it progress further in the year ahead, making recommendations to enhance this development. At this meeting members also scrutinised the **Market Stability** report before it was submitted to full Council for approval. Our committee determined that it was an accurate and comprehensive reflection of the stability of the commissioned services across Torfaen and Gwent Regional Partnership Board, however made recommendations on monitoring the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, and for the Executive Member to continue making representation to Welsh Government on the crisis in the Domiciliary Care sector.

At our November meeting the committee scrutinised the extremely important issue of **Domiciliary Care**, to ensure as a Council we are mitigating the risk of system failure and the impact this would have on vulnerable people and carers considering the current instability and pressures in the domiciliary care market. Concerned with regards to the instability and viability of the local domiciliary care sector the committee strongly recommended that the potential for expanding the in-house service be explored as a priority

Building **Community Resilience** was the next item considered by the Healthier Communities O&S Committee. Through thorough questioning and challenge the committee were satisfied that the actions being taken will embed a more community focused approach across Council services and that the steps being taken and proposed will lead to more resilient communities within Torfaen. Members made several recommendations in support of the work that is proposed and already being undertaken.

During the visioning session, **Addressing the Housing Crisis** was identified as a priority area for scrutiny activity in 2022/23. The committee welcomed representatives from Bron Afon, Melin and the Wallich who provided valuable contributions to our discussions. Whilst the committee were mindful that the housing crisis is being felt on a national level, we were assured that steps were being taken to mitigate the impact on a local level.

At our last meeting of the year in May 2024, the committee considered a report on **Reducing the Children Looked After Population**. As always this is a very emotive issue to scrutinise. Members welcomed the new strength-based approach and also the development of a children's

residential home in Torfaen but recommended that priority be given to addressing and reducing the number of no further action referrals.

Finally, I would again like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the committee for their excellent attendance, commitment, contributions and challenge they have consistently delivered during the year. Special thanks also to the care staff, service users, housing association representatives and public who have taken the time to engage with the committee and offer their views and experience. I look forward to continuing as Chair next year and trust that the committee will keep up its fine work.



Councillor Janet Jones

Chair of the Healthier Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee

EDUCATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair of this committee is Councillor Rose Seabourne (5/5 meetings attended).

The membership of the committee for 2022/23 was:

- Councillor Alfie Best (5/5 meetings)
- Councillor Liam Cowles (3/5 meetings)
- Councillor Janet Jones (4/5 meetings)
- Councillor Nick Jones (0/1 meetings)
- Councillor Caroline Price (2/5 meetings)
- Councillor Chris Tew (0/2 meetings)
- Councillor Colette Thomas (4/5 meetings)
- Councillor Jayne Watkins (5/5 meetings)
- Councillor Lucy Williams (4/5 meetings)

During 2022/23, this committee had 1 co-opted member – Statutory (voting members):

Secondary Parent Governor – Vacant

Primary Parent Governor – Vacant

Welsh School Parent Governor – Vicky Horlor

Roman Catholic Church Representative – Vacant

Church in Wales Representative – Vacant

Average attendance of this committee for the year was 74% in line with attendance of 78% from the year before.

The Committee held 5 meetings throughout the 2022/23 municipal year. Issues scrutinised by the committee during the year are set out below. *(Full reports can be accessed by clicking the relevant link.)*

5th October 2022

[Improvement to Self-Evaluation & Improvement Processes within Education - Post Inspection Action Plan \(PIAP\), Estyn Recommendations 2 & 3](#)

23rd November 2022

[Pupil Attendance and Persistent Absence](#)

2nd February 2023

[Additional Learning Needs \(ALN\) - ALN Strategy, Post Inspection Action Plan \(PIAP\), Estyn Recommendation 4](#)

16th March 2023

[Post Inspection Action Plan \(PIAP\), Estyn Recommendation 1](#)

30th March 2023

[EAS Business Plan 2023-2025 Consultation](#)

On completion of this scrutiny activity, clear recommendations were made to the relevant Executive Member(s) and Chief Officer(s). (Use the links above to access the recommendations with responses pack.)

Executive Members responded to 19 recommendations in 2022-23 of which;

- 19 (100%) - **were accepted** (56% in 2021/22)
- 0 (0%) - **were noted for consideration**
- 0 (0%) - **were rejected.**

Chair's summary...

Firstly, as my role as Chair, I would like to thank both members and co-opted members of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their hard work, knowledge, dedication, and support, over the last few years.

Throughout the last year, the committee's work programme has focused on key pertinent issues within Education and the most recent Estyn Inspection. I feel our role as a "critical friend", in constructively challenging decision makers progress and contributing to key policies, has therefore really made a difference.

A key priority for the authority going forward will be to continue to work hard to ensure progress is being made in meeting Estyn's recommendations and the Committee will continue to contribute in a constructive way to support the council in meeting this challenge.

It has been a time of reflection and the whole education team structure changed, and I think improved. The appointment of a new Strategic Director, Director of Education and others have added a strength and depth to the Department.

I believe we have a stronger and more trusting relationship with our schools, and we understand the immediate challenges and future requirements.

I would like to commend the hard work and support of our officers within the Education Directorate and our School Improvement Partner – the EAS, who have all taken time to address the Committee and share their expertise and knowledge with us.

The Committee has a lot of work still to do but the work over the last twelve months has been substantial.

I would personally like to thank Lianne Skellett, our Scrutiny Officer, for her exceptional personal support not only to the Education Committee but to me personally, chasing up emails and reports, sometimes with some very tight deadlines

Also, a special mention for the Executive Member Councillor Clark who has and continues to share information and brief the committee on a regular basis, helping us to feel more informed. The forthcoming year will undoubtedly be equally as busy, but I am confident that the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee will continue to focus on key issues, working thematically to provide efficient and effective scrutiny.



Councillor Rose Seabourne

Chair of the Education Overview & Scrutiny Committee

PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairs of this committee for 2022/23 were Councillors David Thomas (3/3 meetings attended), Nick Horler (5/5 meetings attended) & Mark Jones (1/2 meetings attended)

The membership of the committee in 2022/23 was:

- Councillor Nick Byrne (4/5 meetings)
- Councillor Liam Cowles (3/5 meetings)
- Councillor Karl Gauden (5/5 meetings)
- Councillor Sue Malson (0/5 meetings)
- Councillor Caroline Price (2/5 meetings)
- Councillor Nicholas Simons (1/5 meetings)
- Councillor Nathan Yeowell (3/5 meetings)

The Committee held 5 meetings throughout the 2022/23 municipal year. Average attendance of this committee for the year was 60%, down significantly from the previous year's attendance of 83%.

Issues scrutinised by the committee during 2022/23 are set out, as follows: *(Full reports can be accessed by clicking on the links)*

13th October 2022

[Springboard and the Innovation Ecosystem](#)

1st December 2022

[Administration of Section 106 Agreements and Associated Projects](#)

8th February 2023

[British Regeneration Project](#)

23rd March 2023

[Multi-agency Pupil Intervention \(MAPI\) Process](#)

11th May 2023

[Food Resilience](#)

On completion of this scrutiny activity, clear recommendations were made to the relevant Executive Member(s) and Chief Officer(s). (Use the links above to access the recommendations with responses pack.)

Executive Members responded to 18 recommendations in 2022-23 of which;

- 15 (83%) - **were accepted (up from 75% in 2021/22)**
- 3 (17%) - **were noted for consideration**
- 0 (0%) - **were rejected**

Chair(s) summary...

As Chair of the Prosperous O&S Committee for the visioning session and the first two meetings of the scrutiny year, prior to changes in political balance, I welcomed the opportunity to lead the committee in its development of a strong work programme for the year, in its scrutiny of the future options for the operating model of the Springboard Centre, and also in reviewing the management and oversight of Torfaen's Section 106 (S106) Contributions. It was a valuable opportunity to enhance our scrutiny work by visiting the Springboard Centre, and on behalf of the committee I would like to thank all the officers and business owners who took the time to speak with us and provide us with a tour of the facility.

As Chair, I was also pleased to create and promote a communications video, rolled out on our social media channels, detailing the work of scrutiny and highlighting how the public can play an active role, including providing their suggestions of matters they would like to see investigated by one of the five committees. This video led to a huge uptake in suggestions put forward for consideration and encouraged greater public engagement in our democratic processes.

Councillor David Thomas

Chair of the Prosperous Overview & Scrutiny Committee (2 meetings)



Following my surprise appointment as Chair after the political balance changed, this was my first appointment as chair on TCBC. My first meeting as the chair of Prosperous O&S was to scrutinise the British Regeneration Project. I spent a lot of time in discussion with Rebecca Fahey-Jones, Team Leader of Scrutiny and visited the site to get a clearer view of the contents of discussions that took place on the 8th February 2023. Following scrutiny of the very detailed report and challenging of the Executive Member and officers, the committee recognised the delays in progress due to the Covid pandemic and the need to source additional required funding but were satisfied that work was now progressing within the proposed timeline, to support the ongoing project. The committee made the recommendation on Financial Community Engagement. Overall, I felt that my first chaired meeting flowed well and had the engagement of all that attended, with a positive outcome.

My second meeting as Chair was to cover the new Chair Cllr Mark Jones after the political balance changed, who was on pre-planned leave that day. The Multi-agency Pupil Intervention program was discussed on the 23rd March 2023 where we scrutinized the impact the MAPI meetings are having on children in primary and secondary education in Torfaen, in breaking the cycle of / preventing anti-social behaviour and escalation to crime and disorder. The committee

reviewed the MAPI process and were satisfied that it is having a positive impact on children in primary and secondary schools in Torfaen in breaking the cycle of/ preventing anti-social behaviour and escalation to crime and disorder.

I would sincerely like to thank all officers who have written and presented reports to the committee for the two meetings I was chair and I would also like to thank my co-members of this committee who have been effective in conducting rigorous scrutiny.



Councillor Nick Horler

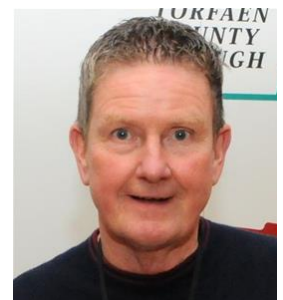
Chair of the Prosperous Overview & Scrutiny Committee (2 meetings)

Following further changes to political balance, I was pleased to take the Chair of the Prosperous O&S Committee for its final meeting in May 2023. The committee concluded its cycle of scrutiny meetings for the year by reviewing Food Resilience and how the interventions delivered to date are improving our food supply locally to create access to good, sustainable, healthy and affordable food for our residents. Considerate of the increasing difficulties arising from the cost-of-living crisis, the committee were assured that the work done to date had been effective in developing interventions to improve our sustainable and affordable food supply locally and made recommendations to strengthen this work going forward.

On behalf of the wider committee, I would like to thank Executive Members for their attendance and contributions and officers for their detailed reports and thorough responses to questioning and challenge. In addition, I would like to give my personal thanks to the members of the committee for their time, contributions, and commitment to delivering effective scrutiny. I look forward to Chairing the committee in the year ahead and the committee continuing to fulfil its democratic role.

Councillor Mark Jones

Chair of the Prosperous Overview & Scrutiny Committee (1 meeting)



CROSS CUTTING RESOURCES & BUSINESS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| • Councillor Stuart Ashley | (4/5 meetings) | • Councillor Alan Slade | (3/5 meetings) |
| • Councillor Alfie Best | (5/5 meetings) | • Councillor Chris Tew | (0/5 meetings) |
| • Councillor Catherine Bonera | (5/5 meetings) | • Councillor Colette Thomas | (4/5 meetings) |
| • Councillor Ron Burnett | (0/5 meetings) | • Councillor David Thomas | (5/5 meetings) |
| • Councillor Nick Byrne | (1/5 meetings) | • Councillor Jayne Watkins | (5/5 meetings) |
| • Councillor Lynda Clarkson | (5/5 meetings) | • Councillor David Williams | (4/5 meetings) |
| • Councillor Liam Cowles | (3/5 meetings) | • Councillor Lucy Williams | (4/5 meetings) |
| • Councillor Giles Davies | (1/5 meetings) | • Councillor Nathan Yeowell | (2/5 meetings) |
| • Councillor Steven Evans | (4/5 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Karl Gauden | (3/5 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Elizabeth Haynes | (5/5 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Nick Horler | (5/5 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Jon Horlor | (4/5 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Gaynor James | (0/5 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Jon James | (0/5 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Janet Jones | (5/5 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Mark Jones | (4/5 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Nick Jones | (0/4 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Sue Malson | (1/5 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Rosemary Matthews | (1/5 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Norma Parrish | (4/5 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Caroline Price | (2/5 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Rose Seabourne | (5/5 meetings) | | |
| • Councillor Nicholas Simons | (0/5 meetings) | | |

Average attendance in 2022/23 was 59% on par with 58% in 2021/22.

The committee held 5 meetings throughout the 2022/23 municipal year (up to the time of writing this report).

Issues scrutinised by the committee are set out below. *(Full reports can be accessed by clicking on the relevant link.)*

21st July 2022

[1st Draft of the Evidence Gathering Exercise in relation to the Council's Self Assessment Report](#)

4th October 2022

[County Plan 2022-27](#)

12th October 2022

[Torfaen Council's Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2021 – 2022](#)

8th November 2022

[Initial Revenue Estimates 2023/24](#)

25th January 2023

[Financial Planning 2023/24](#)

On completion of this scrutiny activity, clear recommendations were made to the relevant Executive Member(s) and Chief Officer(s). (Use the links above to access the recommendations with responses pack.)

Executive Members responded to 28 recommendations in 2022-23;

- 24 (86%) - **were accepted** *(up significantly from 38% in 2021/22)*
- 3 (11%) - **were noted for consideration**
- 1 (3%) - **was rejected.**

Chair's summary...

It has been an honour to Chair the Cross Cutting Resources & Business scrutiny since being re-elected in May 2022 and I would like to thank the membership for their attendance and contributions at all the meetings held this year. The committee is focused on keeping an active oversight on all matters that impact across the whole Council. During the 2022/23 scrutiny year, the Cross Cutting Resources & Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee has covered 5 subjects in our work programme for this council year.

As set out earlier in this report, the committee has scrutinised the 1st Draft of the Evidence Gathering Exercise in relation to the Council's Self-Assessment Report, the draft County Plan 2022-27, Torfaen Council's Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2021 – 2022, Initial Revenue Estimates 2023/24 and Financial Planning 2023/24.

The Council's annual Budget proposals is always an item members take a key role in actively scrutinising. The committee welcomed the provisional settlement from Welsh Government on the 14th December 2022 which represented a good settlement, significantly above the initial forward indicated level and endorsed the identified actions that, alongside the additional Welsh Government funding announced in the provisional settlement, will fully address the adverse position initially identified. I appreciate the commitment of all scrutiny members, who have taken part in these difficult conversations to support the council to spend its limited resources as wisely as possible.

Scrutinising the draft County Plan was another significant piece of work undertaken by the committee, with members contributing to the shaping of the key themes and well-being objectives within the new County Plan 2022-27.

The work carried out in producing this programme represents a considerable amount of effort in terms of time and resource before it reaches committee. This is reflected in the detailed reports received by this committee, and I would like to thank all those who are involved in the process.

Once again, I believe we have again proved to be a valued critical friend, providing a sounding board, challenge and new ideas to those we have worked with. I look forward to Chairing this committee and working with members in continuing this work in the year ahead.



Councillor Stuart Ashley

Chair of the Cross Cutting Resources & Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee

PUBLIC SERVICES BOARD OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The membership of this committee is comprised of the chairs of the five overview and scrutiny committees. Average attendance of this committee was 100%.

- Councillor Stuart Ashley (2/2 meetings)
- Councillor Steven Evans (2/2 meetings)
- Councillor Nick Horler (1/1 meeting)
- Councillor Janet Jones (2/2 meetings)
- Councillor Rose Seabourne (2/2 meetings)
- Councillor David Thomas (1/1 meeting)

Issues scrutinised by the committee in 2022/23 are set out below. The full report can be accessed by clicking on the relevant link:

6th September 2022

[Torfaen Local Delivery Group Annual Report 2021/22](#)

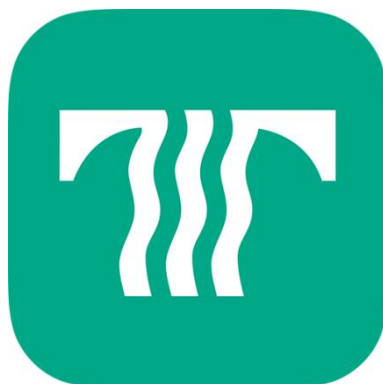
7th December 2022

[Gwent Public Services Board Draft Well-being Plan - 2023-2028](#)

On completion of this scrutiny activity, clear recommendations were made to the relevant Executive Member(s) and Chief Officer(s). (Use the links above to access the recommendations with responses pack.)

Executive Members responded to 15 recommendations in 2022/23 (at time of writing this report) of which;

- 13 (86%) - were accepted (an improvement from 70% in 2021/22)
- 1 (7%) - were noted for consideration
- 1 (7%) - were rejected.



Produced by Torfaen County Borough Council

July 2023

Further information on the Council's overview and scrutiny function is available to view at:

<http://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/CouncilDemocracy/DemocracyElections/Overview-and-Scrutiny/Overview-and-Scrutiny.aspx>

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