

**TORFAEN
COUNTY
BOROUGH**



**BWRDEISTREF
SIROL
TORFAEN**

Annual Self-Assessment and Well-Being Report

OCTOBER 2022



OUR VISION FOR TORFAEN

Torfaen: A safe, prosperous, sustainable place where everyone has the opportunity to be the best they can be

OUR VALUES AS AN ORGANISATION

Supportive, Fair, Effective, Innovative





Our Annual Self-Assessment & Well-Being Report 2021-2022

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Foreword

Welcome to our Annual Self-Assessment and Well-Being report for 2021–2022.

Our annual report includes both an update on the progress we have made delivering our council's 3 key priorities - our commitments to, deliver a clean and green county borough, support children and young people's wellbeing and raise educational attainment and support Torfaen's most vulnerable residents.

Our report also combines our key findings from an organisational self-assessment exercise. We have been through a process of developing a framework of 8 characteristics that we will use to self-assess our progress towards becoming an outstanding Council. In future years, our new approach to performance and governance will continue to use our framework, supporting our council to develop and build a culture in which we are able to continuously challenge ourselves to improve and to ask questions about what we are doing and how we could do it better.

Although our report largely looks back on the progress we have been made in 2021-22, we are in the process of producing a new County Plan, setting out a new ambition and aspiration for Torfaen and how we will do things differently in responding to the needs, challenges and opportunities for our residents and communities.

Our new plan will not be a definitive blueprint for our work, but a framework within which change can be encouraged, directed and responded to. Our plan will be reviewed on a regular basis and as schemes and projects are developed, they will form part of an annual delivery plan which moves our ambition into action. Our approach will ensure our plan remains iterative and agile so that new initiatives, challenges and opportunities can be responded to throughout the life of the plan.

At the heart of our plan are four central themes that will guide our policy making and service design over the coming years – Connectivity, Wellbeing, Sustainability and Identity and Culture. It is these themes that will help to ensure decisions and planning are focused around the big picture and vision for Torfaen.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis has provided a powerful reminder of the importance of frontline services and the council's central role in supporting communities. It also confirmed the power of working together to address key issues and in making improvements to people's lives. Financial forecasts facing the public sector and local authorities are extremely challenging and provide context to our County Plan as we focus effort on what services matter most and what resources are required to deliver them.

When we report again in 2023, we will include our first comprehensive assessment of progress against our new County Plan. We are realistic about the scale of the challenge - the loss of government funding, rising costs and changing demands means facing tough choices about where to focus resources. While the financial landscape is very challenging this is not a time to lessen our ambition. We know just how important our day-to-day services are to residents and businesses and that we all share a collective ambition of improved services across Torfaen. It is therefore more important than ever that we adopt a new approach, challenging ourselves to be more innovative and questioning the way we deliver our services, in order to achieve our aspirations for Torfaen.



Councillor Anthony Hunt

Leader of the Council

Stephen Vickers

Chief Executive



1. Background

Our Annual Report

Our 'Annual Self-Assessment and Well-Being Report' sets out an annual self-assessment of how we are performing and where we focus our attentions in the year ahead. Though much of this report looks back on what has been delivered 2021-22, it also sets the scene for significant organisational change that will take us into 2022-23 and beyond.

We are required, like all public bodies across Wales to comply with certain duties. Our 'Annual Self-Assessment and Well-Being Report', combines our statutory reporting requirements and statutory publishing duties, under both the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and the Local Government and Elections Act 2021, requiring us to;

- Publish an annual report of our progress against our Well-being objectives (WBFG Act 2015); and
- Publishing an annual Self-Assessment Report setting out the extent to which we are meeting our performance requirements.

This is our first report under the requirements of the LGE Act 2021. The new legislations place a number of duties on public bodies but at the heart of the new performance regime is the requirement for all councils to keep their performance arrangements under review. Councils will do this through robust, continuous self-assessment the findings of which are reported through this annual report.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (WBFG Act) put into law seven priority well-being goals that all public bodies are required to work towards, detailing the way in which public bodies must work, and work together to improve the well-being of Wales.

In working towards these goals, public bodies are required to consider the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

Selecting our Objectives

We adopted our Corporate Recovery Plan from in March 2022, based around 3 existing Corporate Plan Priorities.

In adopting these priorities, it was agreed that our recovery plan integrate our Corporate Plan and the priorities should continue as our well-being objectives. COVID-19 disrupted much of the planned services during 2020/21, which was also the final year of Corporate Plan 3.

Our plan set out the three areas we believe will deliver;

- cleaner and greener communities and a sustainable local environment that residents are proud of,
- all young people being given the best possible chance in life by achieving a good education, and
- healthier communities where vulnerable people are assisted to lead socially inclusive, independent lives, free from inequality.

Our priorities recognise the challenges facing Torfaen residents as a consequence of the cuts in public services expenditure, demand for services, albeit within a framework of revised priority statements linked to the impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Our agreed three well-being objectives are:

- Ensure a clean and green county borough
- Support children and young people's wellbeing and raise educational attainment
- Support for Torfaen's most vulnerable residents

The plan sets out not just what we will do but also the areas we will support, through working alongside partners, local communities, volunteers and residents.

A copy of the full version of the [Corporate Recovery Plan](#) is available to read or download.

2. Reporting on our Well-Being Objectives


Our Annual Well-Being and Performance Report will therefore demonstrate our compliance with our legislative requirements, through demonstrating our commitment to delivering against our own three corporate plan priority areas, setting out how we have concentrated our efforts on the right things and improved the areas that matter most to Torfaen citizens.

For each of our improvement objectives/corporate plan priorities, a set of our outcomes were defined, to deliver improvement to citizens in each of these areas. The following section reviews the work we have undertaken towards our well-being objectives, during the 2021/22 year. These updates have been monitored and reported to us by our service areas throughout the year, via our performance management and service planning processes.


How our well-being objectives are contributing to the achievement of the well-being goals:





A Clean and Green Torfaen

Volunteering can improve self-esteem and mental well-being, bring people and communities together and to connect with and appreciate nature. It can also provide opportunities to learn new skills that can be a gateway into future employment. 

Managing our natural resources in a sustainable way will help support biodiversity and contribute towards ecological resilience. Well managed natural resources can also support current and future climate resilience and help to tackle declining nature globally.


Taking action to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions locally will help to mitigate the global impacts of climate change. 


Taking action to prevent fly-tipping, littering and to tackle anti-social behaviour such as dog-fouling will protect Torfaen's culturally important natural resources and make them safer for people to enjoy and experience the associated health benefits of being active outdoors. 


More active travel doesn't only mean less carbon emissions it is also good for our health by reducing air pollution and keeping us active. 

Healthy functional ecosystems are fundamental to our health - they produce oxygen, help regulate climate, manage water, improve air quality and can reduce noise.

Enabling all parts of our communities to benefit from access to greenspace and its health benefits contributes towards a more equal Torfaen.

Working with private landowners and communities to maintain open spaces contributes to more cohesive communities. 


Increasing the amount of household waste that is re-used, recycled and composted in Torfaen, will help to tackle the unsustainable and unequal consumption of resources. 


Ensuring appropriate development is provided at the right time and place and that responds to the challenges of housing and employment provision, protecting green infrastructure and biodiversity, promoting sustainable travel and responding to climate change, will support the long-term well-being of Torfaen's communities. 

Supporting Children & Young People's Well-Being & Raising Educational Attainment


Tackling educational attainment gaps and improving educational outcomes, especially for young people from low-income families or with additional learning needs, can remove barriers to employment in later life and help reduce the inequalities that exist in some of our communities.

Supporting school attendance and positive behaviours will prevent young people from disengaging with learning.

Supporting and encouraging young people to prevent them becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) will enable them to become part of a skilled local workforce. 

Improving learning facilities and minimising their carbon impact through the 21st century schools programme will support current and future generations of children and young people to thrive and contribute towards our net zero emissions journey. 

Improving provision of Welsh Language education will help preserve Welsh culture and identity for future generations.

Supporting young people to develop into well rounded citizens who feel connected to the wider world and empowered to 'think globally' and to 'act locally', will support cohesive communities. 

Supporting young people with their mental health and wider well-being will support vulnerable pupils to fulfil their potential in life.


Ensuring children have a fun and safe environment to play and providing opportunities to take in the daily mile, to experience arts, crafts and other cultural activities, will support good mental and physical health and can begin a life-long interest in sports and being active.


Out-door play can provide young people with opportunities to connect with and learn about the value of nature. 

Support for Torfaen's most vulnerable residents

Keeping people well, living in the community, and out of hospital for longer will help people to live healthier, more independent lives and to feel part of their communities.

Supporting Dementia Friendly Communities will help create a Torfaen that meets the needs of its most vulnerable residents.

Working with partners in the community and the voluntary sector to support vulnerable people will help improve community cohesion and support a more equal Torfaen. 

Ensuring that the Welsh language is built into service planning and delivery of services will help Welsh culture and identity to thrive. 


Ensuring that children and young people get the support they need at the right time will help them have a good start in life and grow up healthy and cared for.

Protecting Torfaen's children and families from exploitation, violence and abuse will support their long-term health and well-being and will contribute to safer communities.

Supporting residents in financial difficulty to maximise their income can contribute towards both mental and physical well-being and give people the opportunity to afford healthier choices.

Preventing homelessness and providing housing advice will help ensure that local housing needs are met and will support long-term health and well-being 

Supporting the most vulnerable within the labour market, through our employability programmes, to sustain secure employment, with fair levels of pay and progress at work will contribute to a more prosperous and equal Torfaen. 

Connecting rural agricultural industries with town centres through the Food 4 Growth project will support business innovation and diversification and promote local food 

Promoting and encouraging town centre regeneration and using Town Centre Place Plans as drivers for capital investment, will support safe, resilient, attractive and productive places.

Attracting more visitors, including those from overseas, to Torfaen's globally important World Heritage Site will support local culture to thrive and increase community pride.



Our Corporate Plan Priority & 2021/22 Well-Being Objective... ... Ensure a clean and green county borough

Keeping the county borough clean and tidy and free of litter...

Streetscene

Litter is a significant problem in Torfaen and a concern for much of our population. As an approximate estimate, we currently spend more than £1.36M per annum cleaning up litter and fly-tipping, in public areas.

At the end of March 2021, as part of the national campaign to eradicate litter, we launched our new five-year [litter and fly-tipping strategy](#). The strategy is our commitment to keeping Torfaen a clean and green place to live work and visit, and our aim is to encourage residents to show the same commitment and help reduce our yearly clean-up costs. In particular, the strategy will help deliver the following commitments:

- We will keep the borough clean and free of litter
- We will support residents working to improve the appearance of their local community
- We will expect residents not to litter, fly tip or allow their dogs to foul in public areas



At the beginning of 2021, WG funding was secured via Keep Wales Tidy (KWT) to employ a coordinator until March 2023, to deliver a programme of activities linked to priorities within our Litter Strategy.

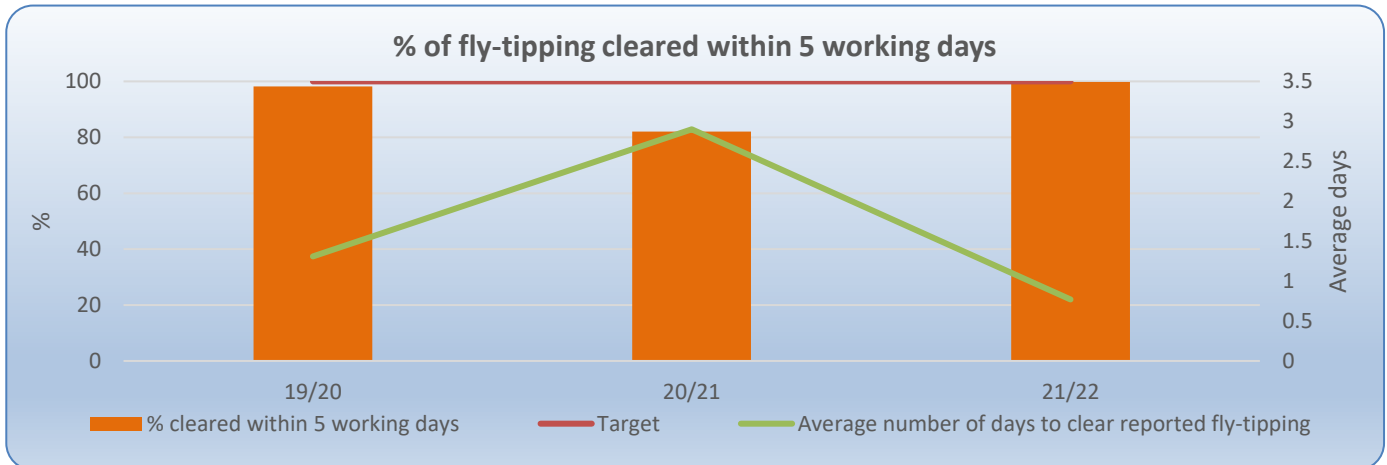
Further partnership working continued to take place with Keep Wales Tidy under the Caru Cymru banner, including the Spring Clean Cymru initiative and day to day support of community-based litter champions, picking up litter on a weekly basis.

Community volunteer groups and individual volunteers carried out a series of litter picks and river cleansing within the Torfaen area, over a two-week period within the spring and autumn period of 2021. Between April 2021 and March 2022, there have been 91 people registered as volunteers that have come forward to litter pick and 100% of fly tipping has been picked up in response time, helping to maintain safe places for people and wildlife. We highly value the involvement of local people as a major important component of our clean and green agenda helping to keep the borough free of litter and providing opportunities for engagement and social interaction.

Alongside working with local communities, we have also engaged with our local supermarkets Asda and Morrisons to help minimise the number of trolleys being abandoned and to encourage them to implement a retention scheme. As a result, the number of trolleys being reported, as abandoned, has been low.

Although there has been a steady increase in fly-tipping since 2019/20, with a substantial increase in 2020/21, we have since improved our performance in clearing fly-tipping within 5 working days. Our ability to clear fly-tipping was curtailed in 2020/21 as a result of reduced staff numbers, due to the pandemic, and increased quantities being fly-tipped.

Our Public Protection service continues to work with both Streetscene and residents/volunteers in respect to fly-tipping reports, in an effort to identify the person or persons responsible for the waste and its unlawful deposit to initiate enforcement action, where appropriate.



Public Protection

Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO's) help local authorities tackle anti-social behaviour. In September 2021, we reviewed our PSPO in place, relating to dog controls to ensure that they remained relevant and effective, in maintaining a clean and green Torfaen.

Our PSPO in Torfaen, contains three types of restrictions, which must be reviewed every three years. The restrictions are, as follows:

- **Dog fouling:** This is a borough wide PSPO, where it is an offence to fail to remove dog faeces from any land to which the public has access.
- **Dog Exclusion Areas:** There are 140 areas within the borough where dogs are excluded, including school grounds, children's play areas and marked sports pitches. Dogs are also excluded from the Lapwing breeding area near the Garn Lakes Nature Reserve.
- **Dogs on Leads Areas:** It is also an offence to let a dog off a lead in specified areas, including Garn Lakes, Cwmbran Boating Lake, and all of our cemeteries.



As part of our review, we carried out a consultation with our residents asking them to confirm whether they were still in support of the PSPO, would like to see any changes made, or think the PSPO should be removed.

A good level of public participation was received from residents with 98% of respondents confirming that they were in favour of retaining restrictions relating to dog fouling, 84% in favour of retaining those relating to dog exclusion zones and 90% in favour of retaining dogs on lead areas.

In November 2021, we presented the findings of the public consultation to our Cabinet Members who approved the extension of the existing PSPO to ensure service continuity and agreed for Officers to start reviewing the additional areas proposed by members of the public during the Consultation. This work is currently on-going and Members will be informed of the findings, once complete.

our measures of performance	direction of travel	target	reported performance 21/22	reported performance 20/21	2-year trajectory
% of highways & relevant land inspected of a high or acceptable standard of cleanliness	Higher is better	98	97.5 (238 high or acceptable grades out of 243 inspections)	97.2	=
Average number of working days taken to clear fly tipping incidents	Lower is better	1.5 days	0.78	2.91	↑
% of reported fly tipping incidents cleared within 5 working days	Higher is better	99	99.89 (899 incidences cleared out of 900 reported incidents)	82.03	↑
% of fly-tipped waste, containing evidence from where it originated, which led to formal enforcement action by Public Protection	Higher is better	50	55.5 (10 formal enforcements out of 18 pieces of fly tipping containing evidence)	44.1	↑
% of smashed glass complaints responded to within 1 day	Higher is better	86	98.1 (156 complaints responded to on target out of 159 complaints)	90.10	↑
% of dog fouling on hard surfaces complaints responded to within 3 days	Higher is better	95	98.4 (184 complaints responded to on target out of 187 complaints)	98.31	=
% of overgrowth/obstruction complaints responded to within 10 days	Higher is better	60	32.48 (102 complaints responded to on target out of 314 complaints)	51.9	↓
Cleanliness Index (Annual Measure)	Higher is better	78	77.6	N/A – no LEAMS report produced by Keep Wales Tidy	N/A

Waste & Recycling

We have continued to implement our [waste strategy](#) action plan, as adopted by our Cabinet Members, in April 2019. (This establishes the future strategic priority and Action Plan for waste up to 2025).

Our Strategy goes beyond simply meeting Welsh Government targets. Through the delivery of our single integrated strategy, we have identified how we will:

- achieve our vision;
- develop infrastructure required to do this,
- Collaborate with others,
- Initially engage and educate residents and where appropriate take enforcement action, and



- Place the Well Being and Future Generations goals, at the heart of all that we do.

Throughout 2021/22 we have:

- Reverted to a three in a cab operation following a change to convoy, working in the early part of the pandemic, after engagement with the crews. Meaning the most efficient collection methodology was reinstated.
- Following engagement and agreement with crews, we changed their working practices so we now collect recycling and waste on the majority of bank holidays improving the service for residents.
- Reintroduced the bag sorting requirement for our residents at the Household Waste Recycling Centre to reduce the amount of waste sent for disposal and increase the amount of material being recycled.
- Recruited a new Operations Manager which will assist in the provision of an efficient and effective collection service to our residents.
- Undertaken 7 million separate waste collections, during the year. including black box recycling, garden waste, food, cardboard and residual waste, providing an efficient recycling and waste disposal service for our communities.
- Continued with the procurement of replacements for part of the vehicle fleet which will enable us to likely introduce the WG Blueprint service leading to service improvement for our communities. The recycling vehicle procurement process has since been completed and an order for 2 electric vehicles have been submitted. The vehicles are expected to be in place by end of May 22.
- Continued discussions related to the acquisition of an alternative site for our materials reprocessing facility which will be an improvement on the current facility and if developed will accept all waste from the new vehicles enabling more recycling streams to be collected and processed and improvements to the collection service.
- Progressed an extension to our Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) operations and management contract, ensuring the ongoing provision of a suitable HWRC for our communities.
- Procured a new contract for our green waste processor, ensuring our green waste collections are appropriately processed.
- Progressed the procurement of new telehandlers for the Ty Coch materials reprocessing facility, improving the operation of the facility.
- Worked with other local authorities and WRAP, related to the potential technology improvements including rerouting and in cab technology that will lead to future service improvements, better customer experience and improved efficiency.
- Continued our work with Capital Valley Plastics to collect and recycle “stretchy” plastics. This work has been suspended due to a fire at Capital Valley, but it is hoped this will be reintroduced when their facility is rebuilt and allow us to reinstate the recycling of this stream.
- Following closure of the re-use shop by the withdrawal of one of the partners, we have negotiated and secured a new provider and the facility will be reopened shortly, allowing us to sell items that were destined for recycling or disposal. So far, the reuse shop at the New Inn Household Waste Recycling Centre is proving a big hit with residents since it reopened in December. In January 2021, more than 3,100 household items were reused rather than being recycled or turned in to energy.

The past year has seen the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly affected the operation of our Waste and Recycling Service, mainly due to the enforced closure of the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) and the suspension of bag sorting at the HWRC, which has now been reintroduced.

Despite the pandemic it was hoped that that the actions within our Waste Strategy would enable us to meet the 70% statutory recycling target in 2024/25. In investigating the reasons for the decrease in performance, there are no specific reasons that can be determined as a causation factor. The most significant factor however, has been an increase in kerbside collected residual waste against the kerbside collected recycling, which is thought to be as a result of behaviours that were forced to change during the pandemic, such as working from home, and greater use of the residual waste capacity continuing. In terms of other contributors, it was also the case that the Household Waste Recycling Centre is seeing less throughput of recycling and waste, and as a contributor to the target, this also had an effect.



We continue to monitor performance within this area and will continue to engage with the Welsh Local Government Association and the Waste Resources Action Programme to continue to seek to improve on our performance, which will not only achieve government targets, but which will deliver “cleaner and greener communities and a sustainable local environment that our residents can be proud of.

our measures of performance	Direction of travel	target	reported performance 21/22	reported performance 20/21	2-year trajectory
% of local authority collected municipal waste recycled	Higher is better	45.5	41.53 (17,836 tonnes of waste recycled out of 42,952 tonnes collected)	42.28	=
% of local authority collected municipal waste prepared for reuse	Higher is better	0.5	1.02 (438.2 tonnes of waste reused out of 42,952 tonnes collected)	0.6	↑
% of local authority collected municipal waste collected as source segregated biowastes and composted or treated biologically in another way	Higher is better	18	19.63 (8,433 tonnes of waste treated biologically out of 42,952 tonnes collected)	19.2	↑
% of municipal waste collected by local authorities and prepared for reuse and/or recycled, including source segregated biowastes that are composted or treated biologically in another way	Higher is better	64	62.18 (combination of 3 measures shown above)	62	=
Kilograms of residual waste generated per person	Lower is better	200	190.2	204.59	↑
Tonnage of waste sent for disposal	Lower is better	16,800	18,039	19223.3	↑

Working in a sustainable way to ensure the local environment is valued and maintained for future generations...

Decarbonisation

We have implemented a range of decarbonisation and sustainability projects over the last five years aimed at cutting our energy consumption including street lighting upgrades, LED lighting overhauls and the installation of numerous Building Energy Management Systems (BMS) within public sector buildings.



More recently, in 2021, two street lighting upgrades have been completed, using the Wales Funding Programme. 1,922 outdated street lanterns have been replaced with more modern light emitting diodes (LEDs), which are six times more efficient than the previous units. The upgrades will save an additional £50k annually and further reduce carbon emissions. It is anticipated that the Wales Funding Programme loans will be paid back over several years, from savings made on energy bills, making the improvements cost neutral.

Alongside upgrades with Salix, the local authority has also invested over £614,000 in corporately funded projects including voltage optimisation, LED lighting, pool pumps and boiler replacements across public facilities including the Civic Centre and Leisure facilities. These projects have helped reduce the annual energy bills by £120,000 and save 549 tonnes of carbon dioxide.

Looking ahead, we have further plans to improve our carbon footprint and green credentials and are hoping to invest in more renewable technologies and are currently assessing the viability of installing wind turbines within the borough.

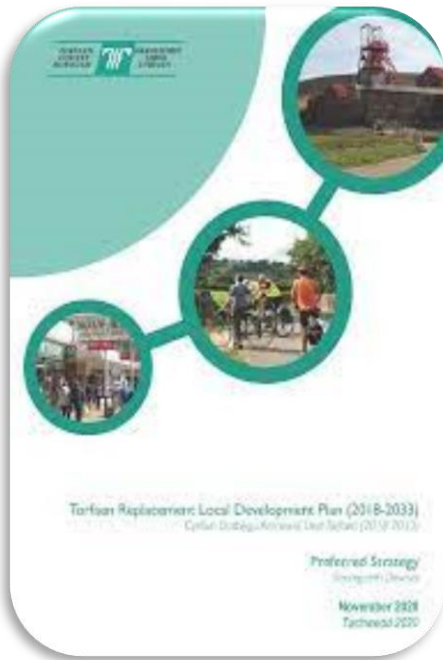
Other projects we have progressed work on throughout 21/22 include:

- assessing the potential for decarbonisation of our fleet, via electric vehicles, based at our New Inn depot. Funding of £300K has been secured within 2021/22 to support fleet decarbonisation, £25K to support resource capacity for decarbonisation and purchased a new fully electric van for our public health enforcement team, replacing two diesel vehicles, in an attempt to deliver service improvements and protect the environment from harmful emissions.
- Completing 10 new dual electric vehicle-charging points in Torfaen. In partnership with other local authorities in Gwent, we have been awarded a share of £459,000 funding from the UK Government's Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV), to start to develop the infrastructure for the vehicles of the future. A joint bid was put together by the authorities, supported by the Energy Saving Trust and submitted by Blaenau Gwent Council. As a result of this, 67 fast charge points are being installed across Gwent. The project has also been supported by the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales.

Planning

The principle of sustainable development, as set out within the Future Generations Well-being Act, has been embedded within existing Planning and Building Control legislation and policies, and is applied through Future Wales, the Local Development Plan (LDP), Development Management decisions, and Building Control Regulations. Compliance with the requirements of the Well-Being and Future Generations Act 2015 has therefore been implicit in all decision-making for both of our Planning and Building Control Team's and the importance of this Act has been emphasised by the COVID Pandemic, which the Planning service is continuing to respond to, accordingly.

Planning is a multi-faceted function which seeks to deliver improved economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being by making sure appropriate development is provided at the right time and in the right place.



Planning decisions in Torfaen are informed by the LDP, which is a statutory requirement providing the strategic directions for the development and use of land within the Borough.

The current LDP guides local planning decisions and the replacement LDP ([RLDP](#)) looks to ensure future development responds to the new emerging challenges for Torfaen, particularly housing and employment provision, protection/integrating green infrastructure, biodiversity, ecosystem resilience, promoting sustainable travel and addressing climate change.

The Preferred Strategy consultation closed in 2021, but delays associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and additional work required as a result of stakeholder discussions, further evidence gathering, and national planning requirements, have all raised a significant number of issues, which need considering for the progress of the RLDP. There is therefore a need to review: the plan and a new timetable, for the plan preparation. Full details of how we are going to progress the RLDP is hoped to be reported to the Council, in due course.

Maintaining open spaces on council owned land to an acceptable standard and working with private landowners and local partners to ensure this...

Environment and Streetscene - Green Infrastructure Strategy

In 2021, we adopted the [Green Infrastructure Strategy](#) with the Public Service Board (PSB), which sets out a framework to maintain, enhance and promote our natural environment to achieve wider wellbeing goals and actions. The strategy has been designed to help shape and coordinate the improvement and management of green infrastructure in Torfaen, to provide social, environmental and economic well-being benefits now and in the future, (in accordance with Welsh Government legislation). The strategy helps us to address the concerns and priorities identified by residents and stakeholder organisations in the Torfaen Well-being Assessment.



Within the context of the Green Infrastructure Strategy, we have also adopted a new tree and woodland management strategy which aims to develop a more co-ordinated approach to tree planting, management, protection and appreciation. The strategy has supported funding bids from a variety of grant sources.

In particular, the external grant funding has helped us to start delivering our resilient environment commitments through changes to grass cutting regimes, tree planting, nature-based activities, public awareness campaigns, peat bog restoration and access improvements. These activities have enabled us to commence our response to the climate and nature emergency, as follows:

- planted approximately 1206 trees, comprising mainly of native trees, such as sessile oak, beech, field maple and hawthorn.
- established two new orchards at Brooklands Park and Cwmbran Boating Lake using local Welsh varieties of apple and plum, such as Pride of the Valleys (Merthyr Tydfil).
- planted trees at Cwmbran Boating Lake, Blaenavon World Heritage Site and Pontypool Park, as a contribution to the Queens Green Canopy project.
- installed signage and an interpretation boards in Pontypool Park, for the winner of 2019 Woodland Trust's, Wales Tree of the Year (Sweet Chestnut)
- established a partnership with Cardiff, Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent County Council's to enter into a joint framework contract, for tree felling and maintenance works

- developed a programme of works to deal with ash dieback
- diversified our parks and green spaces for the benefit of people and wildlife, through various grass management regimes, to enhance biodiversity and ecological connectivity, as well as capturing and storing more carbon, building on previous commitments we have made, in line with legislative duties.

Open Spaces

Over the last year, park improvements have been implemented at Garn yr Erw, New Inn and Oakfield Gardens to improve opportunities for children's play, whilst encouraging supervising adults to spend time outdoors.

We have also met our targets for managing biodiversity and public access, including local nature reserves, the local biodiversity partnership, local access forum (with Blaenau Gwent) and provided timely advice to other teams relating to ecology, landscape, access and heritage to support sustainable development. This work has provided areas for local people and visitors to spend time in the outdoors, in nature rich areas, thus improving well-being and biodiversity.

We have also developed an Open Space Assessment and undertook landscape, ecology and access assessments for all additional Local Development Plan Candidate Sites. This work has been fundamental in helping us to deliver the statutory requirements of the future Local Development Plan, ensuring a balanced land use planning approach, that takes account of recreation, green infrastructure, trees, biodiversity and play going forward.

We are very proud of our parks and open spaces in Torfaen, and one of our greatest achievements in 2021/22 was that four of our sites were awarded Green Flag status. Cwmbran Boating Lake, Garn Lakes Local Nature Reserve, Panteg Park and Pontypool Park were awarded flags, in recognition of their excellent visitor facilities, high environmental standards, and commitment to delivering great quality green space.



Recruitment and employment of a Canal Officer took place throughout the summer of 2021. This post-holder is responsible for developing a strategy and seeking external sources of funding to restore and improve the maintenance of the canal, throughout the Borough.

Work to create a new area for wildlife enthusiasts also began in November 2021, along the canal in Cwmbran. The plans included a new pond dipping platform and seating alongside the canal by Pontnewydd Park, as well as improved footpaths and a new footbridge to the park. A new landscaped entranceway into the park will also be built to open the canal up to visitors soon.

The project forms part of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal Adventure Triangle Programme, aiming to develop outdoor recreation, tourism and leisure activity along the canal in Torfaen and Caerphilly and also connect upland areas of Mynydd Maen.

The pandemic showed us just how important high-quality parks and green spaces are to our communities and with more visitors than ever enjoying our green spaces, the hard work of the staff and volunteers must be commended on their the hard work, in helping us to maintain excellent standards at these sites.

Identifying opportunities for increasing the number of essential journeys undertaken through walking and cycling...

Active Travel

Work continues on the development and implementation of new active travel routes within the Borough and the total length in metreage of active travel will be reported on, year on year. (As part of the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, we, and other local authorities in Wales, must map, plan for, improve and promote

opportunities for active travel. Active Travel means walking and cycling for everyday journeys such as getting to school, work, shops, health and leisure services and not just for recreational purposes).

Recruitment for an Active Travel Officer took place early in 2021 and a new officer was employed.

As part of our review on our Integrated Network Map, at the end of June 2021, we carried out a consultation to find out from our residents how walking and cycling routes throughout Torfaen could be improved, in an attempt to encourage residents to refrain from using their cars, for everyday journeys.

The aim of the consultation was to find out how the network can be improved and extended. It was also an opportunity to find out the different challenges walkers and cyclist face and what can be done to help. For example, cyclists using their bells to alert walkers, and dog owners ensuring pets are on leads, when cyclists need to pass.



More than 1000 people took part in the consultation and those responses helped to shape a draft Active Travel Network Map (ATNM) for Torfaen.

As a result, an additional 111km routes were added to the network, and a further consultation carried out asking residents to give their views on the new sections, together with existing routes, identified as acceptable and those needing improvements.

The new iteration of the active travel network map for Torfaen has been finalised and submitted to Welsh Government for approval.

We also commenced with the construction of Pontypool and New Inn Railway Station, this is part of a £7.9m project, which will include station improvements, new electric vehicle charging points and a footbridge and lift, aiming to increase the number of people travelling sustainably from across the borough and surrounding areas.

The scheme is funded by Torfaen Council, Cardiff City Region and Welsh Government, and will be one of the first Cardiff Capital Region Metro Plus schemes to be delivered.

our measures of performance	direction of travel	target	reported performance 21/22	reported performance 20/21	2-year trajectory
Improvements made to active travel routes in metres (Annual Measure)	Higher is better	250	495	N/A – new measure for 21/22	N/A

Developing and implementing our Climate and Nature Emergency action plan...

Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan

In 2019, Torfaen Council declared a climate emergency and committed to becoming net carbon zero by 2030. Since this time, the Council has also declared a nature emergency on 21st September 2021, to recognise the serious threat of declining biodiversity. Plan development involved officers from across the Council including Leadership, the Policy Development Forum and the Heads of Service Forum. Recommendations from the Resources and Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee also shaped our approach.

To help us develop our vision, priorities and objectives, we asked our communities how they could help reduce carbon emissions across the borough.

Further community involvement coincided with the United Nation's Climate Change Conference (COP 26) in October/November 2021, where we carried out various social media activities, to raise awareness and to asked our communities what they thought of the actions set out in the draft action plan, and what other steps they think should be taken. Staff engagement also took place, at this time.

A Climate Ambassadors Network was also launched in November 2021 – in recognition that the community need advocates and champions who emulate best practice and who recognise that climate change and declining nature isn't just a Council issue but needs everyone working together.

In February 2022, our [Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan](#) was approved by Cabinet, who recognised the need and agreed to establish a Cabinet Sub-group to oversee progress and successful implementation.

The first meeting of the Cabinet sub-group took place in March 2022.



**Our Corporate Plan Priority & 2021/22 Well-Being Objective...
... Supporting Children & Young People's Well-Being & Raising
Educational Attainment**

Work with schools, governing bodies and the Education Achievement Service (EAS) to deliver high quality teaching and improved outcomes for learners...

Attainment

As a local authority we recognise the importance of improving life chances to enable people to fulfil their potential and contribute to the local economy. Working to ensure all learners have effective literacy and numeracy skills is one of our main priorities in ensuring they are equipped to become part of a productive workforce, which will support a prosperous Wales.

The changes associated with the new Curriculum for Wales development and the impact of the pandemic on public examinations has meant that Authorities have had to adapt quickly on how progress and standards are judged within our schools and to accurately identify the support individual schools require.

We no longer have the wealth of performance or National Categorisation data that informed our thinking previously, therefore we have had to rely upon wider sources of information as part of our ongoing dialogue with schools, LA services and our regional school improvement partner, the EAS.

Despite everything the pandemic put in the way, the incredible energy and perseverance of our learners and all teaching staff/school staff cannot be underestimated.

Overall, summer 2021 examination results in Torfaen, were very pleasing and followed national trends, with outcomes improving overall and significantly at the higher grades of A*/A. Torfaen post 16 learners also received their first set of very positive results from our new Torfaen Learning Zone.

The pandemic may have resulted in significant gaps in pupils' learning. The extent of this challenge is dependent on a range of issues that includes the effectiveness of remote learning strategies, pupils' access to digital technology and quality of support from home. It is currently too early to fully assess the impact of

the pandemic period on standards and progress of learners, although the big focus going forward, for all settings and the Local Authority will be the continuing challenge around recovery of learners’ knowledge, understanding and skills, to ensure all Torfaen learners can reach their expected outcomes.

our measures of performance	direction of travel	target	reported performance 21/22	reported performance 20/21	2-year trajectory
<p><i>N.B. Welsh Government has suspended the calculation and publication of key performance measures for attainment for the 2021 and 2022 academic year, therefore we are unable to present this data. We are however, looking to develop new systems and processes that will provide meaningful data that will help us to better determine the quality of teaching and learning within 2022/23.</i></p>					

Attendance

School attendance remains an ongoing focus for the Education Service, as a result of the pandemic.

The legacy of the COVID 19 period, in terms of both national and local attendance policy, and an increase in the number of parents electing to educate their children at home, have adversely impacted on overall rates of attendance across the borough.

We are therefore, planning to work in collaboration with our schools to reinvigorate our “Strive for 95” initiative, to improve pupil attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism and unauthorised absence within our schools, going forward.



our measures of performance	direction of travel	target	reported performance 21/22	reported performance 20/21	2-year trajectory
% of pupil attendance in primary schools (termly)	Higher is better	96	91.2 (1488526 total sessions attended / 1632184 total number of sessions)	91.7	↓
% of pupil attendance in secondary schools (termly)	Higher is better	95	85.7 (1195480 total sessions attended / 1394806 total number of sessions)	88.8	↓

Teaching & Learning

Schools are pivotal to us delivering our aspirations for children and young people. The COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges to the education service, such as supporting the rapid introduction of blended learning, providing provisions for vulnerable children and those of keyworkers, and the safe reopening of schools.

Despite this, we have seen good progress at all our education sites, especially in Griffithstown School and Croesyceiliog Comprehensive, which have recently been removed from special measures. We continue to work closely with our other schools in special measures - Cwmbran High School and Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw, to increase the pace of improvement. We will also be taking a number of actions to improve outcomes for learners more generally, and in particular in our secondary schools, following the March 2022 inspection by Estyn.



The gradual return to more normal practice in our daily lives and the impact of the pandemic continued throughout 2021 and provided significant challenges to our educational settings and on the service itself.

All schools reported ongoing pressures around staffing levels and having to deal with, on a daily basis, the implications of the Test, Track and Trace protocols. We have therefore continued to support all our education establishments during this difficult time to ensure provision is maintained and provided.

In addition, we have also coordinated more effective cross-Council services, working with schools to ensure high quality services are being delivered and operational delivery issues are resolved, in a timely manner.

Provide additional support to pupils who may have fallen behind in their education...

Skills and Employability

Our employability and NEETs teams work with individual residents to remove their barriers to finding, maintaining or progressing in employment (whatever that barrier may be). Whilst they work with individuals, the impact of these teams is felt on families, communities, employers and the wider economy.

Employability can have far reaching benefits not only for individual job outcomes, but for communities at large. Projects in Torfaen have delivered the following outcomes:

Early Identification & Prevention:

- Through the I2A (Inspire to Achieve) project we have helped over 1400 young people in secondary school who had been identified as being at risk of becoming NEET in the past 6 years.
- Each year, between June and 1st November, our I2A and I2W (Inspire to Work) workers support young people that are most at risk of becoming NEET, who are leaving or have left school without a destination into employment or training. This includes significant outreach work with those young people who are unknown and/or did not engage whilst in school. On average each year the project staff work with 100 NEET young people over this period who have significant barriers to their progression to support them into education employment or training.
- In addition, the European Social Fund (ESF) funded project staff have been the key support for ensuring that again on average, the number of NEET young people leaving school in year 11 in Torfaen is around 24 out of total school leaver numbers of around 1100 each year, with those that are NEET being unable to access education; employment or training at the time because of significant barriers they were unable to progress into provision.
- Raising Young Peoples' Aspirations → Our I2A and I2W projects have supported 360 young people in achieving qualifications that are on the Qualification and Curriculum Framework in Wales, since 2018, helping young people to access employment in sectors ranging from construction to creative industries. For example, 50 young people have achieved the Health and Safety in Construction level 2 course; 20 have achieved the Emergency 1st Aid at work qualification; 5 have achieved the Teaching Assistant level 2 qualification, etc.
- Youth Unemployment. Our I2W project has worked with over 580 young people and has helped so far 225 NEET young people into employment and 72 into further learning since the project began in 2016.

- There are a number of examples of young people who are in poverty being supported by I2A and I2W workers with a range of support through projects, including accessing work related courses and training free to the young person; accessing free work clothing and equipment in order to enter employment education and training; parents being supported to access benefits to support the young person and the family; provision of transport to access employment; and in some cases the project staff have supported the young person and their family get access to services such as the provision of free furniture and IT equipment etc. in order to improve the life chances of the young person.
- Supporting Looked after Children – The I2A and I2W projects work closely with the Looked After Children Team within our Social Care and Housing Service Area, in supporting young people in care in Torfaen. A range of needs-led support is provided for the young people as part of an overall package to help those young people progress and engage and become more confident and resilient, including providing placement opportunities for young people in care. In addition, the Inspire projects work closely with the Youth Offending Team to help other young people with the most significant barriers to their engagement and progression.
- In addition, our Looked After Children’s Team are a part of the Keeping in Touch process in Torfaen where all young people aged 16-19 in care and NEET are discussed to look at what additional support needs to be provided as and when they require it.



In general, NEETs performance has remained relatively stable at the end of 2021/22, despite the pandemic. That said, the number of NEET young people did rise slightly in 2021 to over 20 young people. Key trends were that the number of students who faced multiple “risk of NEET” factors was considerably higher in the 2021 cohort of school-leavers with a greater prevalence of students reporting mental and physical health barriers (8 compared to 3 in 2021). The most significant trend was a shift towards students wishing to enter employment directly (the second highest LA in Wales) and/or work-based learning (the highest in Wales). The employment market in June-October (the time that young people are seeking a destination) was volatile as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic which, given learners preference for employment, presented an additional risk in Torfaen this year.

Once the 2022 predicted destinations data is received, the Positive Pathways group will consider what further support can be given to young people seeking employment if these trends continue.

Whilst the number of “unknowns” has risen due to constraints on tracking it continues to be below the Welsh and EAS average.

Year	Torfaen NEETs (%)	EAS Average NEETs (%)	Wales Average NEETs (%)	Torfaen Unknowns (%)	EAS Average Unknowns (%)	Wales Average Unknowns (%)
2014	2.2	3.1	3.1	0.0	0.5	0.6
2015	1.9	2.3	2.8	0.0	0.2	0.5
2016	2.0	2.0	2.0	0.0	1.4	0.8
2017	1.1	1.6	1.6	0.0	0.4	0.5
2018	1.8	1.7	1.6	0.7	1.4	3.5
2019	2.1	1.7	1.8	0.4	1.1	1.1
2021	2.6	1.9	1.6	0.9	1.3	1.2

Throughout 2021/22 we have continued to prepare a business plan on a future model for NEETS projects, once the EU funding ends in winter 2022. Following the departure of the UK from the European Union, the UK will no longer be able to access European funds. This includes the European Social Fund (ESF) which has been the principal funder of both Local Authority and Welsh Government employability projects in

Wales. This means that the external funding available for the delivery of employability projects for Torfaen CBC will drop from £3.5M to £700K, unless alternative sources of funding are made available.

In April 2022, UK Government released further detail on the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), including a requirement for local authorities to work regionally to produce a regional Investment Plan by the 1st August. Each Local Authority has been provided with an allocation of funding for 2022/23/24.

Over the past 18 months, Torfaen CBC officers have led efforts to bring all 10 local authorities in the Cardiff Capital Region together to review, reflect on and re-shape employability priorities, in readiness for the future launch of Shared Prosperity Funding. Under this approach, the 10 local authorities have now prepared a joint submission for inclusion in the draft SPF Investment Plan. This includes funding provision to support young people at risk of becoming NEET as well as wider employability support for those 16+ who are currently NEET.

Coordinate and provide support that promotes the wellbeing of staff and pupils across all schools...

Healthy Schools

Much has been undertaken to encourage schools to respond and report confirmed incidents of bullying accurately and to prioritise anti-bullying work.

Bullying data has been submitted to the local authority on a termly basis, throughout 2021/22. Primary schools use the SIMS tool which has built in reporting systems. Secondary schools have manually completed and returned a termly bullying form. Both systems are aligned to the Protected Characteristics, as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Schools are regularly reminded of their obligation to report confirmed incidents to the local authority on a termly basis, via email, and follow up emails are sent to schools who fail to respond or who report "nil" incidents of bullying. Outcomes are recorded in an Anti-Bullying Action Log. Advice to schools, encouraging the reporting of confirmed incidents of bullying is on-going and provided via email and telephone conversations.

In response to an increase in alleged incidents of sexual harassment/bullying (reported by Key Stage 2 pupils via the Torfaen Anti-Bullying Survey), the local authority commissioned Brook sexual health charity to deliver Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool training. This training helped school staff identify, understand, respond, and report sexual harassment/bullying in schools.

Further virtual training by Gwent VAWDASV has been recommended to those schools where allegations of sexual harassment/bullying were made.

Members of the Torfaen Youth Forum revealed inconsistencies in how school staff responded when incidents of bullying were reported (e.g. issues not taken seriously, no satisfactory outcome). To address this and to reinforce the importance of recording and reporting confirmed incidents of bullying, the local authority commissioned Positive Vibes International to deliver a series of four workshops, throughout 2021/22. This resulted in a working group developing an infographic to encourage consistency in reporting bullying across the local authority.

our measures of performance	direction of travel	target	reported performance 21/22	reported performance 20/21	2-year trajectory
Number of schools reporting a decline in bullying and increase in learning levels	Higher is better	10	16	0	↑

Mental Health

In November 2021, our Cabinet approved plans to invest £1.2 million to help the community recover from the impacts of covid-19 and as part of this investment, to provide additional counselling provision for young people within our communities.

This project increases the amount of free counselling support available in the borough for young people aged 7 to 19 in response to additional challenges caused by the pandemic.

Evidence received through the Positive Pathways Group indicates that while the number of young people asking for additional support is not increasing significantly at the moment, with demand returning to pre-COVID levels, a number of concerning changes in demand are emerging, due to the following factors:



- All of the agencies present, reported increased levels of anxiety in young people in general and that there is a well-being deficit across the age range of young people they work with.
- Young people are expressing concern about returning to school in many cases and about transitioning to new settings like college or work.
- Job centres report that YP are not engaging with them due to anxiety.
- Tensions in the community are heightened – Community Safety report an intensification rather than an increase in volume of anti-social behaviour.
- Case numbers may be static (in the main) but there is a general trend in increasing complexity of need being presented.
- There is widespread concern amongst agencies that many young people's resilience has been worn down throughout the pandemic to date, leading to issues that could have been dealt with quickly becoming exaggerated and requiring more significant interventions. Inputs:

Our staff at the Cwmbran Centre for Young People (CCYP) are responsible for delivering and managing this additional provision, providing a more significant level of support for our young people.



Well-being

As a result of the pandemic a wealth of projects have been delivered effectively by our Play, Sports Development and Youth Services Team's to increasing numbers of children and young people.

By working collaboratively, our dedicated teams have delivered fun activities whilst following social distancing rules, in the midst of the pandemic, to ensure children have a fun and safe environment to play.

At these sessions' children had the opportunity to take part in a range of activities, including the daily mile, team games, music, arts and crafts and more.

During school holiday times, a series of successful camps were delivered within various primary schools across the Borough, focusing on wellbeing and providing an opportunity for more than 120 vulnerable children to take part in a range of sports activities, get creative through play and generally let off some steam, during these troublesome times.

The activities delivered, linked to the "5 ways to wellbeing" which encourage children to Connect, Give, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Be Active.

Over 30 playworkers and 5 sports development workers came together to deliver the positive wellbeing sessions and in addition, two specialist wellbeing provisions were delivered for children with disabilities identified by Crownbridge School, the Inclusion Team and Social Services.

Great emphasis continued throughout 2021/22 in supporting our vulnerable pupils. This has included play and respite sessions being delivered to children with disabilities and complex behaviours and through

partnership working with our Inclusion Team and teams' within Social Care, Looked After Children, young carers and children on the child protection register have also been supported to access play provision, linked to schools during holiday times.

our measures of performance	direction of travel	target	reported performance 21/22	reported performance 20/21	2-year trajectory
Number of young people engaged in mental health and well-being programme	Lower is better	600	1405	0 – due to lockdown	↑

Further enhance and develop the digital inclusion approach for learners...

Play

To complement home learning already taking place within our schools, within January 2021 our Play Service provided additional resources and activities online for families to take part in, at home. As a result of the lockdown, it was felt integral that children should be able to play as it has so many benefits for both their physical and mental health.'

Focussing on the concept of learning through play, a program of daily activities was posted on the Torfaen Play Facebook page – Chwarae Torfaen Play and ran until schools reopened.



Families were provided with the opportunity to tap into the online resource, as and when they required, around their own home school learning timetable.

our measures of performance	direction of travel	target	reported performance 21/22	reported performance 20/21	2-year trajectory
Number of looked after children supported to attend play provision	Higher is better	100	163	160	↑
Number of young carers supported (cumulative)	Higher is better	25	80	New measure for 20/21	N/A
Total number of children with disabilities and Special Educational Needs supported by Play Staff (cumulative)	Higher is better	140	336	370	↓
Number of respite sessions provided by the Play Service	Higher is better	60	607	278	↑

Teaching and Learning

As a result of the pandemic, we have along with our school improvement partner - the EAS (Education Achievement Service) had to adapt quickly to refocus our resources, in support of new ways of working and the specific operational needs of all schools and non-maintained settings. Over the last two years both organisations have been responsive to the changing demands of schools and childcare settings, to provide

invaluable support and guidance including professional learning to enable staff to effectively deliver the curriculum through on-line/blended learning, as well as provide support to pupils and staff in an attempt to look after their wellbeing.

A key component of this has been the support for the digitally disadvantaged and future ICT developments around the new Curriculum. Many schools in our 2021 Headteacher Survey rated the quality of technical support provided to them for ICT, as being satisfactory or better, with 51% rating good or better. In addition, all schools rated the quality of curriculum support for ICT, as satisfactory or better with 96% good or better.

Encourage all young people to participate in post-16 education or training

21st Century Schools

A new £24m centre for all post-16 education in Torfaen was officially opened in October 2021.

Coleg Gwent's Torfaen Learning Zone, in wbran, opened to students in April 2021. Since this time, more than 1,300 students have enrolled onto A-Level courses, a range of vocational qualifications, foundation degrees and the Welsh Baccalaureate.

The new centre, offers state-of-the-art facilities including a music and media suite, performance hall and science laboratories and is located next to Morrisons supermarket and has excellent public transport links from across the borough.



The new centre replaced three English medium sixth form schools in Pontypool and Cwmbran.

Plan for new and improved school buildings which are fit for purpose in the 21st century...

21st Century Schools

The 21st Century Schools programme is a One Wales commitment and a unique collaboration between the Welsh Government, the Welsh Local Government Association and councils. It is a major, long-term and strategic capital investment programme with the aim of creating a generation of 21st Century Schools in Wales. The programme will create schools of the right type and size in the right place.

Band B of our investment programme has been underway within 2021. These projects have included:

- Completed the new centre for post 16 education - Torfaen Learning Zone in Cwmbran, replacing 6th forms in our English Medium secondary schools
- Completed demolition of old school and creation of 2G pitch (Croesyceiliog School)
- Extended age range from 11-18 to 3-18 from 2021 and invested in new premises to accommodate nursery/primary age provision (Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw)
- Secured funding and started design works on new replacement primary school (Maendy)
- Started redevelopment works at special school (Crownbridge)
- Continue redevelopment works on the refurbishment of 2 primary schools (Ysgol Bryn Onnen and Ysgol Cwmbran)



Building works also began in May 2021 on the Ysgol Panteg primary school site to locate a new Welsh Medium childcare provision. Welsh Government Childcare Offer Capital funding has been granted to

develop Welsh Medium childcare in the Panteg area, after the last full Childcare Sufficiency Assessment highlighted a need for demand within the community.

The proposal encompasses childcare for children aged 2-12, including wrap around, breakfast club, after school and holiday childcare for the purposes of long-term sustainability. The primary purpose of the capital programme is to facilitate and support the co-location of the Foundation Phase and childcare provision on the same site, wherever possible.

Welsh in Education

At the end of 21/22, we submitted our new [Welsh Education Strategic Plan \(WESP\)](#) to Welsh Government for approval. The activity within this plan will deliver on local Welsh Government's outcomes and targets and provides a 10- year overview of how we intend to offer Welsh medium education, as a real choice for families to increase the number of pupils in Welsh medium education to one in 10. This is a statutory requirement as set out within The Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) Regulations 2019 which makes provision for a local authority to prepare a ten-year Plan, to take effect from 1 September 2022.

As part of our preparation around the WESP a considerable amount of work has been undertaken, as part of our planning around Welsh medium education across the borough, e.g. the aforementioned development at Gwynllyw and provision of significant levels of additional learning and resources being made available across our three welsh medium primary settings.

Tailor our early year's education and family support services to meet the needs of all learners and their parents / carers...

Early Years

During 2021/22, the Flying Start programme continued to support the most disadvantaged families through childcare placements, family support, language interventions through phone calls, online virtual delivery and groups, as well as in-person sessions for the most vulnerable families.



In October 2021, we carried out a survey to find out from parents whether there is adequate provision of childcare services, within Torfaen. (The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment is a statutory five yearly assessment that examines the supply and demand of services available).

Our Early Years Team has been successful in receiving an additional £187,000 of funding from the Welsh Government to help the sustainability of registered childcare providers in Torfaen who have been directly impacted by COVID-19. This funding was made available to support childcare settings impacted by increased costs due to the challenges Covid-19 presents and to help sustain and develop good quality provision, where no other public funding is being provided to cover the same costs. In addition, the fund helped to support families by removing the need for providers to charge parent fees when a service is not being provided due to COVID-19.

our measures of performance	direction of travel	target	reported performance 21/22	reported performance 20/21	2-year trajectory
% of parents report that their child's language skills have improved as a result of accessing the groups	Higher is better	95	86.3 (88 / 102)	100	↓

Coordinate early identification and prevention activity to ensure readiness for school and better outcomes

Inclusion

Throughout 21/22 our ALN and Early Years teams have been working together to develop a service offer and provision map for professionals to outline the services and systems/processes for identification and intervention for Early years pupils who may have ALN.

Early years ALN officers have also been supporting pupils and their families who require support for transition and Person-Centred Planning meetings have taken place for pupils with their feeder schools to plan for pupils. Torfaen Early Intervention Panel have been established to provide a single point of access, regardless of funding streams, to provide early intervention and additional support to vulnerable children and families identified for those with emerging needs, under our Universal services offer.

Wellbeing Offer/ Children's Services Development Plan

We recognise that the wellbeing of children and young people is of critical importance, not just for physical and mental health wellbeing, but because of the link between wellbeing and fulfilling potential in life.

In 2018-19, we started a piece of work to establish what our Wellbeing Offer to Children & Young People (C&YP) looked like. We undertook it as a wider partnership piece of work, under our remit of joint leads with Public Health Wales, for Objective 3 (provide children and young people with the best possible start in life) of the Torfaen Public Service Board (PSB) Wellbeing Plan, but also closely aligned to our T22 Transformation plan.

Coinciding with our work, Audit Wales carried out an examination of how we are applying the Well-being of Future Generations Act within the development of our well-being offer. As a result of their examination findings, we were required to report back to Audit Wales with our progress, with an extension of time provided, as part of the pandemic.

Running in parallel with the Audit Wales' recommendations on the well-being offer, a further set of recommendations were received relating to Children's Services in Social Care and Housing - Delivery of the T22 Children's Services Transformation Programme. As a result, we agreed with Audit Wales, as the two areas are closely aligned, that our Well-being Offer and Children's service recommendations be merged into one plan, consisting of a joint set of activities.

Throughout 2021/22, we have been actively developing a Children and Young People's Services Development Plan. This plan forms the foundation for all aspects of our aspirations of ensuring that all children, young people and families have the best possible start in life and are supported in a manner that promotes independence and resilience. It will also lay out clear expectations on how agencies will work together and collaborate to identify need and provide support in a manner that promotes de-escalation and the reduced need for statutory services to intervene. It is recognised that providing early support and intervention is far more effective in promoting positive outcomes for children and families rather than reacting when need increases or becomes entrenched.

The Plan is due to be consulted on and approved by Council within 2022 and we envisage that this plan will supersede both the well-being offer and the T22 plans and address Audit Wales' findings.

Our Corporate Plan Priority & 2021/22 Well-Being Objective... ... Support for Torfaen's Most Vulnerable Residents

What we have done so far...

Throughout 2021/22 we have been focused on managing demand on social care services, across both Children and Family and Adult Services.

We have continued to build on our strengths-based ways of working, already embedded in the way we work. This has resulted in a slight decrease in demand for services, however we recognise that in order to significantly impact and reduce demand for all social care services we need a strengthened community offer, across all parts of the Council.

We have worked extensively with all our partners to support UK government and Welsh Government's COVID-19 Recovery Plans on a national, regional and local level to ensure the continued support and protection of the most vulnerable citizens in Torfaen.

Enabling our most vulnerable people to acquire and maintain independence, with voice and control in their lives

Care Support



In Torfaen we recognise that carers need to take time to care for themselves. The Torfaen carers' grant has again been successful throughout 2021, as it has given carers the chance to decide for themselves how and when they would like to take a break, or decide what would make their lives, that little bit easier.

Over the past year our social care teams have helped more than 350 people, caring for a loved one, with small grants, respite services and practical advice. Grants of up to £300 have also been provided to help carers with financial pressures, experienced during the pandemic, to support them within their caring roles.

We are particularly proud of one of our Carer Support workers who won a Care Star award for the support she has provided to local carers, during the last 15 months. Up against 120 care staff from across Wales, our member of staff was shortlisted down to the final 12 winners, picking up the Care Star award for 'social care support for adults. (This award is part of a Social Care Wales initiative which was created to shine a light on social care and early years workers who have made a positive difference to people's lives, during the pandemic).

Throughout 2021/22, we also continued to support our Dementia Friendly Communities across Gwent with online dementia awareness workshops and sessions. Most were completed online but we did provide a few face-to-face sessions with Sporting Memory groups and Parkinson's Support groups, to raise awareness and support available in the area.

We continue to support the national 'Get There Together' project in Gwent through a multi-agency steering group with partners consisting of people living with dementia, their carers, elected members and other leads from the local authority, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) and independent/third sectors.

Resources were also developed and uploaded onto the Dewis Cymru website so that people could access them, before leaving the house and attending a venue ([Get There Together: Videos to support people affected by dementia in Wales through coronavirus | Alzheimer's Society \(alzheimers.org.uk\)](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-there-together)). Gwent resources were also showcased at Regional and International Dementia conferences, as we had ABUHB Occupational Therapy students leading on developing the project, as part of their innovative placements. We continue to support this project and are currently working to trial an app which will hold all the resources and allow people to make more bespoke content to support loved ones.

We are also currently working with partners across Gwent, trialling a Dementia wrist band to support people in the community who are living with Dementia. The project is led by Gwent Police who are the first police force in Wales to offer this extra safeguarding technology to compliment the Herbert Protocol. After the 6-month pilot, an evaluation will be completed by the Gwent Regional Partnership Team, and if successful, we will be looking to expand further.

We have and will continue to support ABUHB and partners with the launch of the Dementia Friendly Hospital Charter, which will play a large part going forward, in improving the lives of people living with dementia, their families, and carers as part of the National Dementia Standards work.

our measures of performance	direction of travel	Target	21-22 Actual	20-21 Actual	2-year trajectory
The total number of carers needs assessments for adults undertaken during the year (CA/004)	Demand Led		128	111	N/A
- Needs could be met using a carer's support plan or a care and support plan (CA/005a)	Demand Led		20	13	N/A
- Needs were able to be met by any other means (CA/005b)	Demand Led		101	78	N/A
- There were no eligible needs to meet (CA/005c)	Demand Led		7	20	N/A

Community Meals

Our Council meal delivery service has seen demand for our service increase by almost a third over the past year, serving up to more than 1150 meals a week, compared to an average of 860 in 2018/19.

The service, which costs £5 for a two-course menu, is aimed at people who live in their own homes but cannot prepare their own meals, as well as offering valuable wellness checks. More than 200 residents are signed up for the service and have the option to receive a hot meal and additional tea tray items, as often as they like, with no on-going contract. Although many of those who use the service are older people, the Community Meals service is open to anyone who is unable to prepare a meal, because of frailty, illness or disability.

Whilst the service is doing extremely well, our Adult Services teams continue to promote the Community Meals service with residents they look after, as a viable way of supporting them at home with wellness checks and a hot, healthy meal.

Domiciliary Care

Work in Adult Services, Housing & Commissioning continues to focus on enabling independence, supporting positive risk taking and promoting social inclusion and community connectivity.

Whilst the pandemic has affected people and community's well-being, there has been amazing work that has been completed during this time of crisis. It has strengthened partnerships between our service areas, with staff from all service areas being willing to assist Social Care in our COVID response and to support the most vulnerable citizens of Torfaen.

Throughout 2021/22, we have continued to implement our Domiciliary Care Strategy. (Domiciliary Care includes a range of services which support people to continue to live in their own home, allowing them to have choice and control, with a focus on 'What Matters' and personal outcomes).



The recruitment and retention problems within the domiciliary care sector remain constant and are a significant challenge to the department. Despite national, regional and local initiatives the challenges remain and have increased, at the latter part of the year. As a result, there continues to be people waiting for the availability of packages of care (approximately 80) and our

external providers are struggling to meet their existing commitments, needing to invoke contingency measures.

In an attempt to alleviate this issue, we have trained staff from other teams within Social Care and redeployed them to deliver domiciliary care within the community. These short-term arrangements will be in place until 31st March 2022 and have been funded through the Social Care Recovery Fund.

We will continue to engage with domiciliary care providers to test out different ways of working, to try and attract people into the care sector and to retain staff who are already working there, to improve the situation going forward.

Homecare

In August 2021, we invited people and their families, who are in receipt of home care services to tell us about their experiences. The aim of this feedback was to help assess current levels of home care being delivered across the borough and help shape the future of local social care services.

We were successful in attracting GovTech Catalyst funding from UK Government to set a challenge in looking at developing innovative technological solutions to Adult Social Care pressures. The challenge resulted in us working with two tech companies to develop innovative ways of delivering community care services, using technological solutions.

our measures of performance	direction of travel	Target	21-22 Actual	20-21 Actual	2-year trajectory
The number of new assessments completed for adults during the year (AD/004)					
- Needs were only able to be met with a care and support plan (AD/005a)	Demand Led		1,520	1,607	N/A
- Needs were able to be met by any other means (AD/005b)	Demand Led		258	272	N/A
- There were no eligible needs to meet (AD/005c)	Demand Led		73	174	N/A
The percentage of care and support plan reviews were completed within the statutory timescales	Higher is better	80%	44% (405 out of 921)	31.78%	↑
The total number of packages of reablement completed during the year (AD/010a)	Demand Led		238	311	N/A
Average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant	Lower is better	220	339 18 DFGs delivered	394	↑

Reviewing our long and short-term based provision

At the end of 2021, we opened our new £3.7-million wellbeing hub in Cwmbran - Ty Glas y Dorlan.

The multi-purpose centre offers high quality housing with care, 6 permanent tenancy extra care flats and short-stay enablement and respite flats, so people have their own front door for the duration of their stay. Ty Glas Y Dorlan is a community asset and seeks to provide information, advice and assistance to citizens, as well as opportunities for social interaction to alleviate isolation and loneliness and support well-being. This project is the first of its kind



within Wales. Designed to enable people to achieve what matters to them, can support with discharge from hospital (when a person cannot return directly to their own home), support with hospital avoidance, (by providing an alternative, if the person doesn't need to be in hospital, but can't remain in their own home) and provide carers with a break.

Welsh Government, council Members, Regional Partnership Board, Health Board, Primary and Community Care and guests have all given positive feedback on this new provision and it is being hailed as a flagship project. This has maximised partnership working within the Council, with Bron Afon, third sectors and Aneurin Bevan Unitary Health Board (ABUHB).

Tackling poverty, especially child poverty

Our multi-agency working on poverty has continued throughout 2021/22. The Welfare Reform Group – a collective of local public and third sector organisations, who support those in, or at risk of poverty – has redefined its role. The Group will now focus on Community Resilience and is developing a clear action plan of joint endeavours that can help residents with the continued cost of living pressures. The group has established a new approach which looks to both service providers and communities to direct emergency, preventative and aspirational support to vulnerable residents. An action plan is under development, focussed on those areas of greatest pressure – food, energy, transport, housing, income maximisation, financial inclusion, digital and employability.

Supporting people to be equipped to deal with the economic and financial challenges they face

Financial Inclusion

In October 2021, as a result of Central Government's announcement to cease the temporary increase in Universal Credit, we increased our Discretionary Housing Payments by £4 a week, until March 2023, to help some of our most vulnerable residents.

Whilst the Discretionary Housing Payment budget has proved essential in being able to help those in most need, it was clear to the council that more demand could be met if the budget was supplemented.

In November 2021, our Cabinet Members approved plans to invest a further 1.2 million to help the community recover from the impacts of covid-19 and as part of this investment to help financial inclusion and discretionary housing payments, helping those most in need with living costs, which were especially pertinent given the current rise in inflation and particularly heating costs together with the recent reduction of £20 in Universal Credit payments.



We continue to provide preventative support for those most at risk from the cost of living crisis, including financial inclusion officers, as part of the Communities 4 Work programme. Officers will also continue to explore ways of increasing the number of financial inclusion officers, as part of the cost of living response.

Safely reducing the number of our children looked after

Children's Services

Throughout 21/22, we enhanced our partnership working through an expanded Multi Agency Support & Safeguarding Hub (MASSH), which ensures children and families receive the right support, at the right time.

The Children & Family Services team has had a continued focus on managing demand placed upon the service, both at the front door and throughout, to the point where children require being looked after. The division has undertaken significant pieces of work and training aimed at changing and developing practice, so that practitioners feel safe in making judgements and decisions, whilst balancing risk and recognising the strengths within families and communities. As part of this work, we have also developed our on-line

referral pathway which aligns to a threshold of need and enables professional referrers to make effective decisions when considering referring to children and family services. This aims to manage demand by ensuring the right service is provided, based on a determined level of need.

Through a range of practice changes and initiatives we have ensured a net reduction of Children Looked After and we have reduced usage and spend on residential placements.

We have also carried out a review of our children looked after documentation, towards the latter part of 2021 and carried out a number of consultation events with our Torfaen Young Persons Forum. This resulted in information being reviewed and updated that we provide to young people, such as our: complaints policy, “my review“, “living with foster carers” and “being looked after” booklets.

As part of the Corporate Parenting Board responsibilities, a “What Matters Survey” was also developed to capture, young people who are leaving care, views on things that mattered to them. The survey was developed by the young people who sit on the Corporate Parenting Board. The findings of this survey will influence service delivery and change and will be part of the Corporate Parenting Board Development Plan for 2022/2023.

our measures of performance	direction of travel	Target	21-22 Actual	20-21 Actual	2-year trajectory
The total number of new assessments completed for children during the year	Demand Led		3,195	3,236	N/A
The total number of children with a care and support plan at 31 st March	Demand Led		176	143	N/A
The total number of children on the child protection register at 31 st March	Demand Led		93	80	N/A
The number of children looked after at 31 st March	Demand Led		407	446	N/A
% of new assessments completed for children during the year that were completed within statutory timescales	Higher is better	100%	95% (3,050 out of 3,195)	98.21%	↓

Fostering

In July 2021, Local Authority fostering services in Wales joined forces to become ‘Foster Wales’ in an attempt to: increase the opportunities to offer children a home, that meets their needs within their local community, provide access to expert local support, increase learning and development opportunities and to equip foster carers, for the exciting journey ahead.

We are excited to be part of this initiative which enables us to: continue keeping our children looked after within Torfaen or helping them remain connected with their family and friends and; ensure they continue to attend their school, maintain community links and maintain their identity.

Throughout 2021, various foster campaigns took place by Foster Wales and the network of 22 local authorities, in an attempt to recruit more local authority foster carers for local children.

A whole service review of the Family Placement Team has also been carried out, with the end result, aiming to increase placement stability for our Children Looked After, improve the usage of in-house foster placements and ensure our Foster Carers continue to receive requisite and enhanced support.



our measures of performance	direction of travel	Target	21-22 Actual	20-21 Actual	2-year trajectory
Number of approved foster parents on the local authority register at 31 March	Demand Led		121	129	N/A
% of foster placement made In House v Agency Placements In house	Higher is better	80%	86% (137/159)	79%	↑
% of foster placement made In House v Agency Placements Agency	Lower is better	20%	14% (22/159)	21%	↑
% of Children Looked After who have experienced three or more placements moves during the year	Lower is better	8%	7% (30 Children)	9.87%	↑

Young Carers

As a council, we are very proud of the young carers within our borough, who provide an excellent example of the true meaning of caring and highlight the relationship between dependence and independence. In 2021, we launched a new ID card scheme in partnership with Welsh Government to support our young carers.

In June 2021, we were one of the first local authorities in Wales to launch the Young Carer ID card scheme. The card scheme enables young people to identify themselves as carers to schools, GPs surgeries and pharmacies and it gives them access to free swimming, gym sessions and fitness classes within the centres of our Leisure Trust. It enables services to acknowledge the challenges faced by young carers and acknowledges their efforts and hard work.



Providing support to people in danger of losing their home

Access to affordable and sustainable housing is fundamental to the lives of each resident within our community as we know that unstable and unsuitable accommodation can detrimentally impact the outcomes of both individuals and communities. The past year has been challenging for individuals and households within our communities and further challenges are ahead in managing the impact of the pandemic, changing legislation and the cost of living increases. The local authorities Housing Team are committed to supporting people to access, manage and sustain affordable and appropriate accommodation.

During 2021/22, the Torfaen Housing Solutions Team provided 283 households with information and advice to prevent them from becoming homeless. Where homelessness could not be prevented, 437 people / households were accommodated, within temporary accommodation.

The Housing Support Grant Programme provides much needed housing related support through the provision of a range of supported accommodation, floating support and drop-in services for people needing assistance, to access and sustain their accommodation.

The programme provides a broad range of preventative support, as well as services that support people experiencing homelessness, alongside a range of other challenging issues (such as domestic abuse, mental health, financial issues, substance issues).

In 2021 / 22:

- 2929 people accessed our community support services (floating support)
- 145 people accessed our supported accommodation provision
- Drop-in services were used on 1702 occasions

We also developed and finalised our [Housing Support Grant Strategy and Delivery Plan](#). This strategy provides our strategic direction by ensuring services are planned for and delivered successfully.

Our local authority Housing Team has a dedicated Financial Inclusion Service which is funded by the Housing Support Grant. The Financial Inclusion Service was established to further support the prevention of homelessness, with the primary objective being to sustain tenancies and allow people to remain in their homes, through effective budgeting, money management skills and income maximisation. The team assist those in financial difficulty that may have rent or mortgage arrears, utility arrears and other debts. The work undertaken by the Financial Inclusion Service varies greatly, from low level money advice to complex mortgage cases with significant secure and unsecured debts. The Officers negotiate with creditors, provide court advocacy and liaise with landlords on behalf of the service users.

In the financial year 2021/22, the Financial Inclusion Service commenced support with 70 new clients and raised/saved their clients circa £93,000 through income maximisation, grant applications and other support to reduce/clear debts.

During 2021/22 the local authorities Housing Team have also launched a new Housing Intervention Team. This team consists of 3 officers and a team leader who are responsible for providing a holistic package of support, to those people accessing temporary housing and supported housing, with the main aim of moving them on, in a timely manner, into more settled and permanent housing solutions. We know that prolonged stays in interim accommodation solutions, can be a real challenge for people and it is felt that this support is vital to achieving the aims of minimising stays, in short term accommodation and promoting sustainable tenancies. Despite the service only operating for a short period of time, in the second half of 21/22, the team commenced support with 18 clients, up to 31st March 2022.

Throughout 2021, we continued to strive to provide high quality, responsive and creative solutions to homelessness, particularly within the care leaver population.

This has not been without its challenges however, but there has been a clear focus on the key agencies working together to identify and respond to needs on both an individual and a general basis. Equally positive, is the number of young people currently supported in “When I am Ready” placements. The purpose of the WIR guidance was to delay young people leaving home, until they were ready. This has in turn, helped to reduce pressure on Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and offered young people, the time, space and awareness to seek out accommodation options, that are more in line with their peers. We hope to see this trend continue.

Particularly pleasing, is the very low number of young people in prison within this group. Historically, Care Leavers have been over-represented in custody. The co-existing issues of offending, drug use and homelessness continue to be an issue for a small number of young people, however, this number is steadily reducing and this is a very positive trend.



The allocation of St David's Day funds has also assisted greatly in terms of preventing eviction and as a helping hand for some young people who have got into difficulty. This funding has prevented homelessness, as a result.

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, risk assessed direct work has continued with the Care Leaver population and it is hoped that as restrictions ease and we return to some normality that the preventative services – for example education sessions in schools, will be able to recommence. The focus will remain on working together



and strengthening existing partnerships, between Social Care, Housing, Health and Police, alongside our other colleagues within the third sector.

our measures of performance	direction of travel	Target	21-22 Actual	20-21 Actual	2-year trajectory
% of cases where Homelessness was successfully prevented	Higher is better	50	50% (99 out of 198)	54%	↓

Supporting people losing, or in danger of losing employment, as a result of COVID-19 by increasing their skills, qualifications and employability, secure an apprenticeship, a job or to start a business

Skills and Employability

We continue to provide significant support to those who are seeking employment or are looking to progress into employment, through our EU-funded suite of programmes and our Communities 4 Work programme. Throughout 2021/22:

- We have engaged and supported **380** residents, through Bridges into Work and Nurture Equip Thrive
- By coordinating & delivering a range of labour market interventions, helped residents into sustainable employment & provided advice, guidance and support to improve residents’ employability and strengthen general wellbeing. In total, we supported **252** residents to remove barriers to employment by upskilling and helped 200 residents find meaningful employment and improve their labour market position
- We have ensured our employability programmes strive to support the most vulnerable within the labour market, to sustain secure employment, with fair levels of pay and progress at work
- We have supported **51** residents to access work experience placements, with local employers, to get the skills and experience needed for employment
- We delivered **400** essential skills and job specific qualifications to residents, that will impact/reduce the number of low skilled/no skilled residents, in Torfaen
- We provided **125** unique learning opportunities, within our Adult Community Learning venues and **4** in our Library facilities, as part of the Learning Library ethos
- We continue to grow our extensive range of full-cost courses, in areas such as arts, crafts, languages and family history. We will continue to develop a curriculum which is exciting, engaging and rewarding and supports social inclusion for our residents
- Supported over more than **300** unemployed people, through a project that focuses on improving mental and physical health
- Offered workshops on sleep, healthy eating, mindfulness sessions, gentle exercise and walking groups through our wellness project, run by our Skills and Employability Service. As well as supporting health and wellbeing, the sessions teach communication, team building and leadership skills



Supporting the establishment and success of small businesses

Skills and Employability

Whilst funding has been made available to support businesses through the Covid pandemic by both the Welsh Government and UK Government, the need to focus on stabilising businesses has been critical.

In November 2021, our Cabinet approved plans to invest £1.2 million to help the community recover from the impacts of covid-19 and as part of this investment, help increase turnover of local business. £50,000 for small businesses and new start-up grants has been made available, particularly to enhance IT, that enables businesses to improve their future turnover. This could be by improving or creating an online presence, investing in software or hardware to boost productivity, or investing in technology, to reduce their carbon footprint.

Throughout 2021, we also helped support our businesses within the Borough to receive nearly £1.3m from a new UK Government fund. By inviting all local organisations to bid for a share of the UK Community Renewal Fund, the focus of the fund is very much in line with our priorities for prosperous, resilient economy that offers high-skilled employment opportunities and supports those who are unemployed into work.

In particular, the successful initiatives were, as follows:

- Connect, Engage, Listen and Transform: The CELT research project will trial new techniques and interventions to support the long-term unemployed into work across 10 local authorities in South Wales. The findings will inform future bids for the UK Government's new Shared Prosperity Fund and other grant funding for employability programmes.
- Food 4 Growth: This project will focus on connecting rural agricultural industries with town centres in Torfaen, Caerphilly and Monmouthshire. It will include a feasibility study to explore community renewables, fuel bulk buying, diversification; local food promotion and a rural innovation support programme.
- Stepping Stones: This is an entrepreneurship programme aimed at supporting the over 50s, who are unemployed, to start their own businesses.
- Pontypool and Blaenavon Small Business Support Project: Promoting start-ups ups and business-to-business purchasing within Pontypool and Blaenavon. It will also develop a skills swap platform to support new businesses, trial opportunities for short-term premises and work with landlords to bring empty buildings back into use.
- The Life You Want: An employability and confidence programme, specifically targeting domestic abuse victims. Qualifications will be supported through digital or classroom-based learning
- Young Enterprise Torfaen: This project will support young people into self-employment by helping them to develop skills, such as digital and entrepreneurial expertise's, and confidence.
- A Complete Digital Package for Torfaen Businesses: Businesses in Torfaen who do not have an online presence will be offered support through the development of an app and bespoke websites

Promoting and encouraging town centre regeneration by supporting new and diverse activity...

Community Safety

Throughout 2021, we have run various community engagement days to raise awareness within the community, of the various agencies that are working together to tackle anti-social behaviour. The main aim was to increase confidence in public services and help residents feel safe within their communities.



Pre-COVID, we held sessions in areas particularly identified as Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) hotspots, or where there were community tensions. This information was gathered, using data from Gwent Police and information from the public, local councillors and other TCBC agencies. We also targeted areas, where there was little communication from the public with high rates of ASB (known to police and partners), and low rates of reporting.

This helped to build relationships with specific communities and to help residents feel empowered to make changes in their area by reporting ASB, so that those causing ASB can be identified and appropriate action taken, to alleviate any further tensions and disorder. We usually hold around 2 or 3 of these sessions per year, where on average, 80 people attend each time. On occasions, attendance was doubled if we did an evening event, to ensure children and young people could attend and were involved.

Our Community Safety Team continues to work closely with the Police and Youth Offending Services, to address anti-social behaviour, crime and disorder and neighbourhood disputes throughout the borough, aiming to intervene at the earliest possible stage. ASB questionnaires are also sent out regularly, in an attempt to find out resident's experience of anti-social behaviour within their areas.

Regeneration

We recognise that COVID-19 has hit our town centres hard, with the loss of some major high street chains and a decline in footfall, at various points throughout the year.

This has highlighted how much communities still rely on their local town as a hub for essential supplies and services, and as a focal point for social and leisure activity. Our Place Plans (and subsequent Levelling up Fund bid) will address the longer-term investments needed to transform our towns and to diversify the mix of activities that people can do in them. In the short term however, it was recognised that there are things that needed to be done now to improve the presentation and overall appearance of towns and help to attract longer term investment.

In November 2021, our Cabinet members approved plans to invest £1.2 million to help the community recover from the impacts of covid-19 and to help respond to a range of negative impacts on the community.

The one-off fund for a series of projects aimed at supporting communities affected by the pandemic and particularly to address the impact on young people, mental health, education, people's employment and some resulting inequality and anti-social behaviour issues.

A project manager was appointed and allocated to each project with some projects able to start immediately and others requiring planning and delivery within agreed timescales. The projects consisted of:

- £466,000 for town centre enhancements in Pontypool and Blaenavon
- £259,365 for inclusive sensory play equipment at Cwmbran Boating Lake and Pontypool Park
- £200,000 to help financial inclusion and discretionary housing payments, to help those most in need with living costs
- £30,000 for improved assets on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal and to engage community groups
- £70,000 to work with the Friends of Pontypool Park to repair and reopen the Shell Grotto and Folly visitor attractions
- £50,000 for small businesses and new start-up grants, focused on digital improvements
- £40,000 for additional free counselling services to young people aged 7-19 at the Cwmbran Centre for Young People
- £25,000 for youth and adult mental health first aid training courses
- £59,635 to start the process of developing a new floodlit all-weather community sports pitch, in the north of the Borough.



In addition, we have approved £490,000 to develop a proposal for the UK Levelling Up Fund to support our town centres. Proposals (developing a food and cultural economy in Pontypool and boosting visitor numbers to the world heritage site through the creation of a landmark hotel) are in development, with advanced discussions with partners. We anticipate submitting the proposals to the UK Government Levelling Up Fund in July 2022.

Moreover, regeneration officers are working closely with the owners of Cwmbran town centre following its takeover in 2021. Discussions have been positive and, whilst they are at an early stage, we are supporting the owners to access external funding to bring two major vacant sites back into use.

3. Mission, Vision & Values

The last 18 months has begun a process of organisational change. The appointment of a new Chief Executive followed by the election of a new Council and the need to set out a new longer-term plan for Torfaen. We have therefore, been going through a process of review, reconsidering our priorities and assessing the best way to deliver them.

The introduction of the Local Government and Elections Act 2021, (in particular the new regime around performance and governance and the drive, across Wales to place greater prominence on the Well-Being of Future Generations Act), has provided a useful focus in which to frame the development of our plans for the future.

The changes we are making to the organisation will put sustainability at the heart of everything that we do, both in terms of what we are looking to achieve, but also in the way we will work towards our objectives. The WCFG Act 2015 provides a blueprint for improving well-being across Torfaen.

Our new County Plan has been developed, setting out our nine objectives where we will focus our efforts. Our objectives have been developed and will be delivered in accordance with the Act. During the next five years, our well-being objectives will form the framework around which we will plan, deliver, report and give account of what we do.

Alongside the development of our County Plan, we have produced a set of internally focused objectives, which will assess ourselves against - our eight characteristics of an outstanding Council. We believe these characteristics define the conditions that will enable us to thrive as a council, enabling us to be more efficient and effective and giving us the greatest opportunity to deliver the objectives set out within the County Plan.

Our well-being objectives within the new County Plan will also be underpinned by a set of key strategies which will provide more detail about what we are going to do. Newly developed strategies will have an associated delivery plan setting out the actions that will need to be taken, in order to deliver the aspirations of the strategy. Each strategy will also define governance arrangements that will be adhered to, in order to ensure we are effectively monitoring each plan's delivery.

Our strategic framework for sets out how, in developing plans and strategies, considerations should be given to; Council's County Plan, the goals and sustainable development principle of the WCFG Act 2015 to enable us to deliver our mission for Torfaen.

The county plan and feeder strategies are underpinned by our service planning process which is the vehicle through which we will deliver, monitor and report on the progress we have made in delivering our objectives.

How public services should work:
Five ways of working



Integration



Prevention



Collaboration



Long term



Involvement

How – creating the right conditions to apply the five ways of working in a consistent and meaningful way:

8 characteristics of an outstanding council:

1. Innovative
2. Aspirational and visionary
3. High performing
4. Collaborative and inclusive
5. Well-managed
6. Engaging and accessible
7. Financially astute
8. Digital and data led

Our core values:

- ✓ Fair
- ✓ Supportive
- ✓ Effective
- ✓ Innovative

How - underpinning governance:

Workforce Plan	Public Participation strategy	Asset Management Strategy
Procurement Strategy	Medium Term Financial Plan	Strategic Equality Plan
Performance Management Framework	Corporate Planning	Risk Management
Collaboration Framework	Performance Management	Project Management

What public services are aiming for:
Seven national well-being goals



What –maximising our contribution to the national well-being goals:

Our 9 missions statements / well-being objectives:

1. Raising educational attainment
2. Encouraging and championing young people and families
3. Tackling inequality
4. Connecting people and communities
5. Responding to the climate and nature emergencies
6. Making Torfaen a great place to do business
7. Promoting healthy lifestyles
8. Supporting culture and heritage and making thriving, safe and attractive places
9. Providing efficient customer focused services

What - underpinning strategies and plans (examples):

Economy & Skills	Children & Young People
Climate & Nature Emergency	Community Strategy (under development)
Digital First Customer Strategy (under development)	Local Development Plan

4. Summary of Improvements Required

- Our Key Challenges

Outcomes for learners in Torfaen need to improve across all of our schools. As we respond to our Estyn inspection, we are developing robust self-evaluation systems to ensure we can better plan and focus our

work, supported by our partners in the Education Achievement Service (EAS), to support every school improve the quality of their leadership and their teaching to get better outcomes for every learner.

A new Curriculum for Wales will also be introduced in all our primary and some of our secondary schools from September 2022. Moving away from a prescribed National Curriculum, schools will move to a broad framework within which they can design their own school curriculum. This is one of the biggest changes in education for a generation.

We must respond to the rising number of learners with complex Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Over the last five years we have continued to see a steady increase in the numbers of learners with multiple and complex needs. We are expanding Crownbridge school and will continue to work with schools to understand and plan for how we can best meet the needs of learners with ALN in mainstream, specialist resource bases and our special school over the next five years.

As part of the national ambition to see one million Welsh speakers by 2050 we face some significant challenges to develop Welsh speakers in an area where currently the numbers of Welsh speakers are low and we face some real challenges in recruiting staff to our education settings.

We need to create additional Early Years Childcare provision, extending the opportunities for Welsh language education and address the need for “immersion” opportunities for learners to join a Welsh medium school later in their educational journey and improve the quality of our Welsh medium schools.

The needs of the curriculum and learners has transformed over the last 40 years and continues to evolve. Most of our school buildings were designed for a pre-internet age when teaching methods were largely focused on whole class teaching. The demands of the modern curriculum and teaching methods means that many teachers have to find ways to overcome the shortcomings in the design of our buildings. Our 21st Century schools programme has seen us create a significant number of new schools and refurbishment of schools to address this and there is still much more to deliver.

There are a range of challenges that span across social care services that relate to overall demand placed on services and the consequent expectation of statutory services delivery to meet the level of demand. From this challenge there is a continued need to focus on the development and delivery of services that are aimed at preventing escalation into and through services.

There is an ongoing focus on safely reducing demand for Children and Families Social Care by recognising and developing community, family and individual strengths. In reducing the level of demand on the service we can shift and target more resource to develop and expand our local offer and ensure that services are more effective and efficient and targeted to those who require statutory services.

Adult Social Care is in high demand, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the knock-on impact within health and social care. Our work impresses on the importance of information, advice and assistance and suitable signposting in order to ensure that citizens do not get drawn into a system and service when, with the assistance of alternative non-statutory support, they can maintain independence and able to live the life they want.

Affordable, good quality housing is in high demand not just in Torfaen but also across Wales and the UK. House purchase prices and rents are at an all-time high, which is impacting on availability and affordability to the general public to access, particularly as we are currently in a cost-of-living crisis.

This is also impacting on homelessness as households are unable to access affordable housing. We are working with partners in response, not just in terms of homelessness prevention activity, but also with our RSL partners to bring existing and new housing on stream as quickly as possible.

Our residents pride and confidence in their County is often informed through how they perceive and rate their local environment. Where they live, where they work and where they go for recreation and shopping.

We want our towns, streets and our natural environment to be beautiful, attractive, clean and sustainable. Far too often the tremendous pride in local communities promoted by the majority is harmed by the minority.

While not significantly different to surrounding areas, we see too much litter, we have too much fly-tipping and we want to work in partnership with our communities to stamp out this behaviour for the benefit of all.

Increasing recycling and composting rates is one way all residents can live more sustainably. All local authorities in Wales are required to reach a 70% recycling and composting target by 2024/25, which forms a key part of the Welsh Government's 'Towards Zero Waste' strategy. This represents a significant challenge for Torfaen and we will need to work closely with our communities to reach this milestone.

Maintaining and investing in our assets such as our parks, our green and natural spaces and also our roads and pavements to promote active travel, community use and facilitate connectivity between communities, neighbours and help people access leisure and job opportunities are fundamental to achieving the aims of this plan.

Working with communities and also with national programmes we must ensure that Torfaen as a community leader can facilitate a whole system transition to net zero carbon to ensure that we protect our environment, our way of life and our wellbeing for the future generations.

The success and prosperity of the local economy is a fundamental to deliver much of what is in the County Plan. There is a proven link between better economic outcomes to individuals health, community well-being, and confidence in young people to aspire and succeed, whatever their ambition maybe. The Torfaen economy cannot act in isolation. It is part of a much bigger, regional, national and international jigsaw but the programmes we deliver, and the relationships we form can facilitate and encourage growth.

We want to capitalise on the strength of our highly skilled workforce primarily based around advanced manufacturing to diversify the sectors into which advanced manufacturing can grow with a particular focus on the life science sector.

Building on national and regional programmes focusing on promoting innovation we want to build local entrepreneurship and confidence to access new markets, take opportunities and build a dynamic, active and research led economy.

With the creation of Place Plans for our town centres the Council wants to rewrite their purpose. To halt the decline and build ambition and hope the Council wants to inspire confidence in our town centres, with innovative investment, bold ambitions for regeneration to create spaces our residents, businesses and visitors all want to come and help keep the pound circulating in the local economy.

We need to harness the role that Communities already play in delivering information, advice, guidance and how we focus early intervention and prevention resources more effectively. To achieve this means redesigning our services around the customer and how they live their lives and use our services.

One of our main responsibilities is to equip our communities with the skills and resources so that they can become more resilient to the challenges that they face in a rapidly changing world. We want to support and empower our communities so that we can design responses to these threats together in a way that puts the customer first and reflects the uniqueness of each area. In short, we want to develop a communities approach to public service.

Communities are at the heart of all 9 of our wellbeing objectives. Co-designing and co-delivering services with communities is vital if we are to raise aspirations amongst our young people, reduce inequalities, support healthy lifestyles, and respond to the climate and nature emergencies. To do this we need to be clear on how, when and from whom our residents can access information, advice, guidance and support. We want to create a 'shared front door' with our communities and our partners which directs people to the right level of help at the right time from the right source so that when people do need the support of the Council it will be consistently delivered to the highest quality.

There are, of course, challenges in developing a communities approach to public service. Each area is different with its own set of service needs and its own community offer. Currently not enough residents feel that they can shape or influence the service offer in their local area and we need to improve the coordination of volunteers across the borough.

- Developing our New Plan

Our new County Plan has been developed alongside our Annual Self-Assessment & Well-Being Report and our Statutory Well-Being Statement (our key document setting out the evidence base for our new County Plan).

Our County Plan identifies 9 key priorities that will collectively form our well-being objectives for the duration of the County Plan:

OUR WELL-BEING OBJECTIVES 2022-27

Well-being Objective 1 - We will raise educational attainment, helping young people and adults to gain the qualifications and skills needed to lead positive lives

Well-being Objective 2 - We will encourage and champion children, young people and families so they can thrive

Well-being Objective 3 - We will tackle inequality by focusing on early identification and prevention activities that support people to live independent and fulfilling lives

Well-being Objective 4 - We will make Torfaen more sustainable by connecting people and communities, socially, digitally and physically.

Well-being Objective 5 - We will respond to the climate and nature emergencies, recycle more and make improvements to the local environment

Well-being Objective 6 - We will make Torfaen a great place to do business by working with local employers, encouraging new business start-ups and entrepreneurial activities.

Well-being Objective 7 - We will promote healthier lifestyles in Torfaen to improve mental and physical wellbeing.

Well-being Objective 8 - We will support our local culture and heritage and make Torfaen a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit

Well-being Objective 9 - We will provide efficient customer focused services that reflect the way people live their lives and wish to access services.

These objectives have been developed out of commitments and previous key drivers including the Well-being of Future Generations Act. They therefore describe 9 priorities, that collectively we consider to be the right areas to focus on, to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Torfaen, by seeking to ensure 'that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

The COVID pandemic has provided a powerful reminder of the importance of frontline services and our central role in supporting communities. It also confirmed the power of working together, to address key issues and in making improvements to people's lives.

We are realistic about the scale of the challenge - the loss of government funding, rising costs and changing demands, leading to tough choices needing to be made about where we focus our resources. Our day-to-day services are important in making it possible for residents to get on with their everyday lives, for businesses to thrive, and provide support to people at different stages of their lives.

- Our Delivery Programme 2022 – 2023

Our Delivery Plan for the first year of the County Plan, highlights the key activity planned for 2022-23 financial year, in meeting the ambitions as set out within the County Plan. Our delivery plan focuses on commitments beyond the day-to-day services, to show how we will progress our priorities in meeting our vision. "Respecting our past, shaping our future, we will improve the sustainability, connectivity and wellbeing of our county, by strengthening our communities, by creating a thriving local economy and by protecting and enhancing our environment."

Our Delivery Plan 2022-23 is available in full [here](#).

- Our Intentions for 2022-27

The County plan is not a definitive blueprint for our work, but a framework within which change can be encouraged, directed and responded to. The plan will be reviewed on a regular basis and as schemes and projects are developed, they will form part of an annual delivery plan which moves our ambition into action. This approach is particularly important so that the plan can be iterative and agile, so that new initiatives, challenges and opportunities can be responded to throughout the lifespan of the plan (such as the PSB regional Marmot work). Although how we deliver our County Plan will develop over time, we are committed to deliver a number of intentions for each of our new Well-Being Objectives by 2027, which we will use to assess our success in achieving our ambitions.

A full list of our intentions for 2027 are available here.

5. Torfaen: Becoming an Outstanding Council

We are seeking to develop a culture where all parts of the organisation aim for better in everything we do. No matter how well they are already performing. Honest and open self-assessment is fundamental to realising this ambition.

This means we must have processes in place to continually assess whether we are;

- Exercising our functions effectively
- Using our resources economically and effectively, and
- Have governance arrangements in place, to secure the above.

It is therefore, as important to the organisation, to not just review the services we are delivering to our residents and businesses, and the impact they are having, but we must also ensure we are using our finite resources available to us, as efficiently and effectively as possible and that we have robust systems and processes in place to support the us to use of our resources and deliver our functions.

The development of our county plan is important in setting our priorities and commitments, but without specific organisational conditions, we will never be as effective as we can be and deliver all the outcomes we are seeking to deliver.

During 2021-22, we have been through a process of developing a framework a set of 8 characteristics that we will use to define what an outstanding Council looks like and will enable us to assess our performance and provide a structure for our annual self-assessment, as required under the Local Government Elections Act 2021.

Our 8 characteristics are set out below. Each characteristic is further defined by a set of supporting statements, further explaining what the characteristics mean, enabling us to assess the extent to which we are operating as an outstanding council.

In developing our framework for an Outstanding Council we have not just considered what is important from our own perspective, but we have also embraced the Well-Being of Future Generations Act 2015, giving consideration to the sustainability principle and the 7 defined areas of corporate governance. These characteristics, along with our organisational values will help us create the right conditions to apply the five ways of working in a consistent and meaningful way.

Creating the right conditions to apply the five ways of working in a consistent and meaningful way:

Characteristics of an outstanding Council

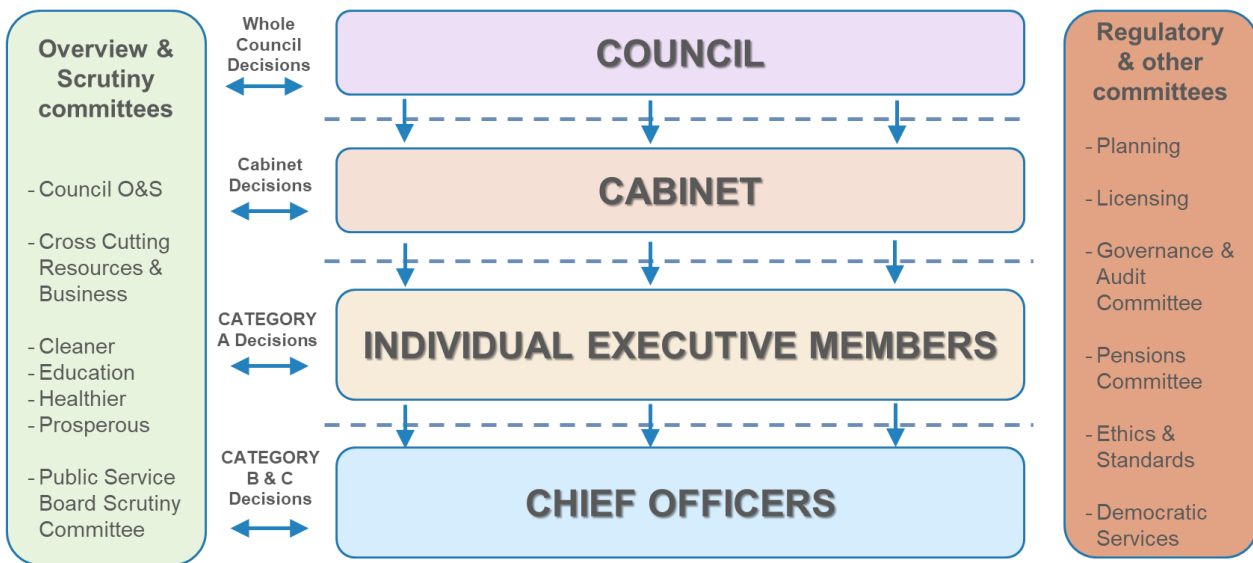
1. Innovative - Using innovative approaches to tackle causes rather than the symptoms, so that we can prevent challenges occurring	2. Aspirational and visionary - Planning for the long-term to develop responses that prevent and mitigate risk and enable opportunities to be captured for future generations.
3. High performing - Working in an integrated way to achieve our well-being objectives and so we can maximise our contribution to the national well-being goals.	4. Collaborative and inclusive - Working collaboratively with all parts of our communities, across the council and with external partners to achieve our well-being objectives.
5. Well-managed - Improving quality, maximising efficiency and delivering dynamic and responsive services that support well-being.	6. Engaging and accessible - Involving all parts of our communities in identifying our well-being challenges and the steps to be taken to address them.
7. Financially astute - Delivering services that are cost-effective, integrated and sustainable, including in the long term so that we target support to those that need it most.	8. Digital and data led - Accounting for the trends and externalities which are likely to impact Torfaen over the next 20-30 years which have the potential to drive further inequalities, lower resilience and impact on demand for services.
Core values	
<p>✓ Innovative</p> <p>Using innovative approaches to tackle causes rather than the symptoms, so that we can prevent challenges occurring.</p>	<p>✓ Fair</p> <p>Valuing people's opinions and perspectives and providing inclusive opportunities for collaboration and involvement</p>
<p>✓ Supportive</p> <p>Training our staff to work accordance with the sustainable development principle.</p>	<p>✓ Effective</p> <p>Showing the progress we are making towards achieving our well-being objectives.</p>

Following the development of our framework we have used it to undertake an organisational self-assessment, drawing conclusions and setting out the actions that need to be taken. Progress against our commitments will be monitored throughout the year and used to develop our self-assessment. In order to give account of our progress, key findings of our self-assessment will be reported through future Annual Self-Assessment and Well-Being Reports, alongside the progress made delivering our newly defined County Plan well-being objectives.

The development of our Self-Assessment has been through a rigorous process to ensure it is informed by a wide array of evidence and that the conclusions being drawn are the right ones.

A key part of this process is the input from our elected members. Our Council's Cross-Cutting Business and Resources overview and scrutiny committee scrutinised the process for developing the self-assessment and its contents in July 2022. The key conclusions set out within our self-assessment report were subsequently reviewed by the Governance and Audit Committee as part of the statutory process in September 2022. Strong democratic governance is a key element to us being a well-managed organisation and is therefore critical to meeting our performance requirements (an overview is set out below, further information is available in our [constitution](#)).

OUR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE



6. Key Learning from our Self-Assessment

Our self-assessment has been developed using the extensive information we have available to us, in order to produce a rounded picture of our Council. An overview of the key learning and findings are set out below.

1. An innovative Council that...

- Is transformative and prepared to do things differently
- Has an appetite for risk
- Fosters innovation inside and outside the workplace
- Is inquisitive and open to new trends and technologies

Key Conclusions

We have developed innovative solutions to some service and organisational challenges that we've faced, particularly during and in response to the COVID pandemic. It is clear to us that innovation takes place when the conditions that an organisation creates allow for the exploration of alternative approaches to service delivery and organisational challenges. Such conditions typically involve a greater acceptance of reasonable risk and a willingness to experiment, an involvement of a wide variety of stakeholders with a diversity of perspectives when developing a solution and a willingness to embrace alternative and less orthodox approaches when they can evidence an improvement in the quality and efficiency of service delivery.

a. Key Areas for Improvement

- We have created a new Communities, Customer & Digital Directorate which will be a driver for a more innovative and engaging approach to community focused service delivery in the coming years as we recognise the need to continuously adapt and transform our approach to service delivery and be prepared to do things differently.
- We have created communities of interest to help us to develop our approach to the post-pandemic workplace design that better supports hybrid working. It is clear to us that these communities of interest have brought a diverse perspective on the challenges presented which has resulted in more innovative solutions being created than would've been the case had we followed a more orthodox professional / specialist and therefore single perspective approach. It is our intention to establish more communities of interest involving staff, citizens and young people to engage in the challenges that we face so that a more inclusive and diverse perspective may be obtained when designing solutions to service delivery and organisational challenges.

b. Key Areas for Further Development

We are able to evidence a creative and innovative approach, when designing solutions to service delivery and organisational challenges and understand the conditions that we need to create, to allow innovation and transformation to take place, more readily. The following information sets out the key activities that need to take place over the forthcoming year, that we believe will support our ambition to become a more innovative Council:

- Embed the communities of interest approach, where appropriate within transformation programmes and projects.
- Implement the changes we have made to our Risk Management processes to further strengthen the way we manage our risks.

c. Key Strengths of the Organisation

An innovative Council will never be satisfied with our current level of performance and will always look to new ways to improve. We have been on a transformational journey for a number of years starting with our T22 transformation project, which sets a baseline for us and lays down solid foundations, in our preparations for the future. Good examples of our current approach, to being an innovative Council, are as follows:

- A new Children's Services Development Plan has been produced. This plan builds on strong foundations to support Torfaen's most vulnerable residents, set as priorities within the current Corporate Plan 2016-2021 and applied through the transformation work of T22. As we move into a new era, to ensure the plan is "future proof" and remains effective, it has and will continue to evolve. We recognise that development is a continual process, and the development plan will be continually reviewed. Whilst the focus is the improvement on outcomes for children and young people, the plan ensures a corporate and cross departmental ownership and responsibility.
- We have successfully and safely reduced our Children Looked After population to 426 from a high of 479 – a reduction of over 3%. This is the first occasion that a net reduction has been achieved in 7 years and these numbers continue to be reduced during 2022-23.
- We have developed and implemented innovative digital projects, such as our new Torfaen Bot and our new Employee Self Service Application that have streamlined and simplified ways in which the public can access services and enabled staff to quickly access support. We have been able to improve customer satisfaction levels and reduce/better manage, demand on HR Services.
- We have embraced Service Redesign where we have recognised things need to be done differently to adapt to ever changing events. A key example being, the impact of COVID-19 and how we needed to adapt to new ways of working.
- We embrace customer focused innovation, wherever possible, with the aim always in mind, to improve services for our residents.
- We have introduced a workplace transformation programme that has involved a wide variety of stakeholders, in its design and implementation.

2. An aspirational and visionary council that...

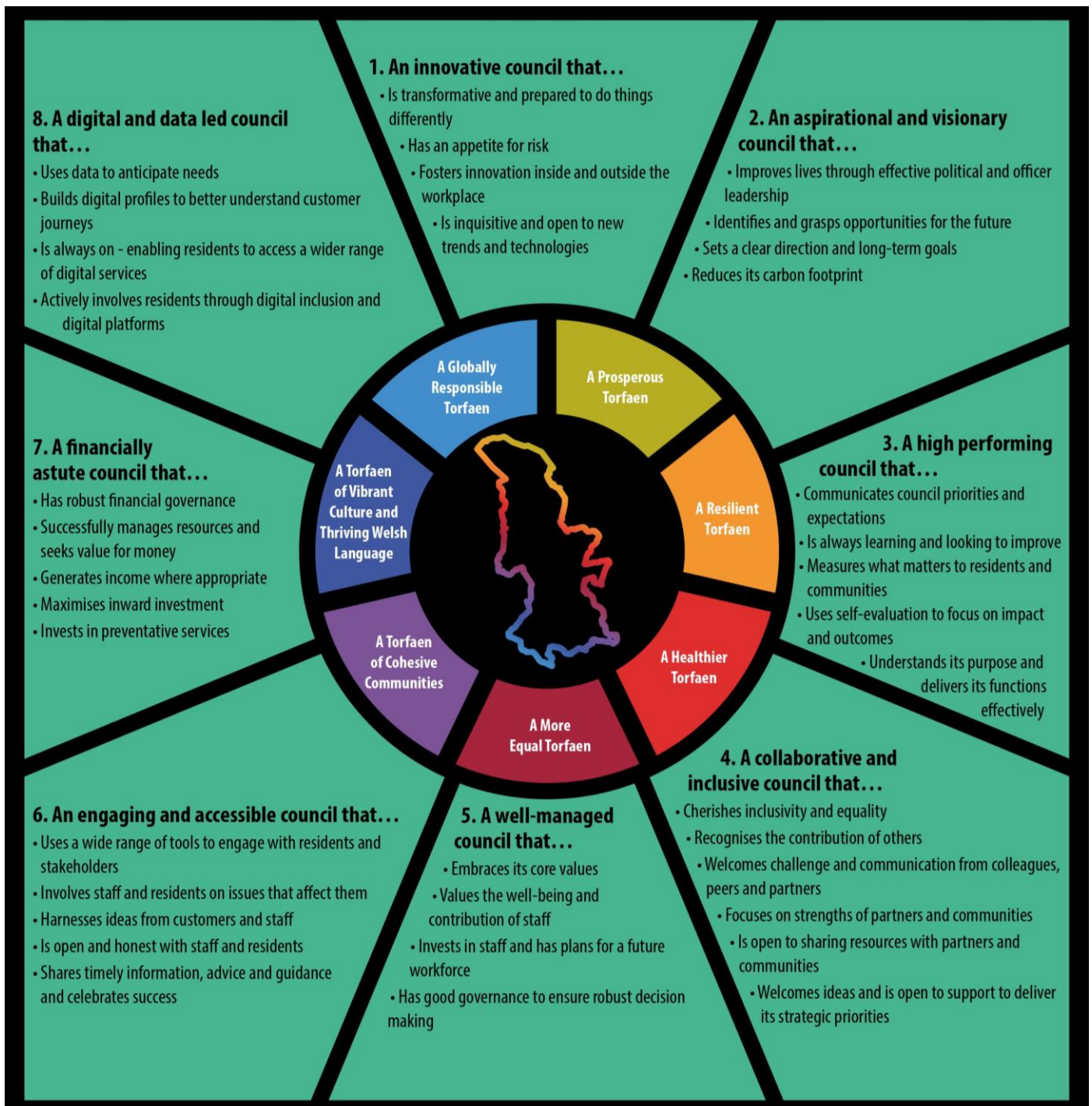
- Improves lives through effective political and officer leadership
- Identifies and grasps opportunities for the future
- Sets a clear direction and long-term goals
- Reduces its carbon footprint

Key Conclusions

As an aspirational and visionary Council, we will be defined by strong and effective leadership. Leadership from officers and members will set a clear route map for the Council to be the best we possibly can be, delivering the improvements to the people and place of Torfaen. Some of the areas we need to concentrate on to deliver those improvements are:

a. Key Areas for Improvement

- We are developing our Post Inspection Action Plan, in response to our recent Estyn Inspection. While our plan’s focus is specifically on the issues identified, we are also working with all of our all stakeholders to develop our strategic plan for education, in the borough over the next five years – our ‘Shared Ambitions’ statement. This will outline how all parties across the education partnership in Torfaen - the education service, across the wider Council, our partner bodies, and in schools – all have a part to play, in supporting every education setting, to deliver outstanding teaching, supported by great leadership, so that we can be confident that learners and families in Torfaen can access the excellent education they need and deserve.
- We have created a new Communities, Customer & Digital Directorate, as we will need to work with communities in order to raise aspirations. This means us being aspirational in the scope and ambition of the services we provide to our communities, but also raising the individual and collective aspirations of those who live and work within our communities.



b. Key Areas for Further Development

We already have in place areas of work that need further development. These are:

- We will work to finalise and implement our new County/Corporate Plan, which will set our direction for the next 5 years. The new county plan will set a clear vision for Torfaen in 2027, with 9 ambitious well-being objectives, that clearly demonstrate how we will achieve that vision.
- We will continue to deliver against the priorities, as set out, within our Waste Strategy, providing a service which not only achieves government targets, but which will deliver cleaner and greener communities and a sustainable local environment that residents can be proud of.
- We need to ensure there is appropriate scale and pace, across the whole Council, in responding to the climate emergency – more specifically that we make progress to meet the strong commitment that has been made, to become net carbon zero by 2030. We will consider carefully and respond to the Auditor General's Report - Public Sector Readiness for Net Zero Carbon by 2030.
- We will look at other ways to improve the thermal efficiency of our existing school building stock (roofs and walls). We will aim to reach levels in some schools, where technologies like air and ground source systems may be workable.
- In terms of the initial aim for increasing our electric fleet, in line with Welsh Government aims, we would look to change as much of the smaller fleet vehicles, as possible, in the next 2-3 years.

c. Key Strengths of the Organisation

We have worked hard as a Council to be an aspirational and visionary council. Some examples of this good work, can be found below:

- Financial decisions were taken to increase discretionary housing payments until March 2023, investing a further £1.2 million, to help the community recover from the impacts of COVID-19.
- The launch the Young Carer ID card scheme, in March this year, enables young people to identify themselves as carers to schools, GPs surgeries and pharmacies, giving them access to free swimming, gym sessions and fitness classes, within the Leisure Trust.
- We have recently introduced, "The Torfaen Wellbeing Strategic Framework", which explains how we intend to achieve our mission. We will use this framework to engage with staff and residents to explain the direction we want to take going forward.
- The development of our Action plan to address the climate and nature emergency and also other projects, such as our 15-year plan for developing and constructing active travel routes, throughout the borough. In particular, our 2 main transportation schemes will provide improved opportunities for private car users to shift to more sustainable modes of travel:
 - Constructing Pontypool and New Inn Station, as part of the Metro Plus Programme.
 - Developing proposals for Cwmbran Town Centre, to improve the linkages between Cwmbran Bus and Railway Stations
- We have started to reduce our emissions and as such we have increased our generation and use of renewable energy. This is in line, with Welsh Government's target for Wales, to generate 70 per cent of our electricity consumption from renewable energy by 2030.
- We are working towards increasing our fleet with electric vehicles, of which we currently have 12, but are working towards significantly increasing supply capacity at our New Inn depot and enable the potential for a significant increase in charging capacity for electric vehicles.
- We are working in partnership with Torfaen Leisure Trust and our schools to deliver a range of energy efficiency schemes, to reduce our carbon emissions and reduce costs to services.

3. A high performing council that...

- Communicates council priorities and expectations
- Is always learning and looking to improve
- Measures what matters to residents and communities
- Uses self-evaluation to focus on impact and outcomes
- Understands its purpose and delivers its functions effectively

Key Conclusions

After gathering the evidence to support this characteristic, our findings have been clearer here, than in any of the other areas. As expected, there have been many examples of what we are doing well, but this is not always supported by evidence to demonstrate “how do we know” and “what impact it has had”.

We need to be more aware of why we are doing things and to have more of an evaluative approach, once we have done them. This will enable us to measure, whether what we have done, is having the desired impact on our residents. Currently, we are not doing that consistently across the Council.

The evidence provided to show how we believe we meet each characteristic, is often service specific and operational. It is therefore clear, in many cases, that there needs to be better defined strategic approaches, to the delivery of our defined characteristics, that will drive improvement across the Council. We therefore intend to concentrate on the following key areas to improve upon this:

a. Key Areas for Improvement

- We accept Estyn’s inspection Education Service recommendations. The Education service is preparing a Post-Inspection Action Plan (PIAP) that will deliver systemic change across the Education Service and the wider Council, that will improve upon our performance culture and our accountability framework – both of which are critical to ensuring significant and sustained improvement in outcomes for learners, over time.
- We will revise our approaches to service planning and self-evaluation, risk management and performance reporting (for activity, risks and performance data), as part of developing and documenting our overall approach to performance, in a revised performance management framework (PMF).
- We have begun working on the introduction of Power BI, to support our aspiration to become a more data and intelligence driven organisation, through improving the accessibility and visibility of data.
- We will reintroduce benchmarking, in future assessments of our performance, following the disruption caused by COVID on the availability and accuracy of national datasets.
- We have recently introduced the Programme Management Office (PMO) into the Council. The PMO will ensure that change programmes and projects are designed so that they contribute to the delivery of our corporate priorities, are properly resourced and managed, are delivered within budget and to agreed timescales and deliver the intended benefits.
- We are developing our new County Plan for the next 5 years, clearly articulating our improvement priorities and will be supported by an annual delivery plan, that will illustrate every year what we plan to do, to deliver against our priorities.

b. Key Areas for Further Development

To be a high performing Council, we believe we need to always be learning and looking to improve and we have already identified areas, where this is already taking place:

- The Children and Young People’s Services Development Plan needs to be finalised, in order to be able to progress the actions detailed within it and the performance management framework that has been created, needs to be embedded across all tiers within children and family services.
- The Recycling and Waste service is identified as a corporate risk and there is a programme of work in place, to improve performance. These include:
 - reviewing the strategy action plan and measures we can introduce on residual waste management, to increase householder participation in food and dry kerbside recycling services by March 2023; and
 - implementing a new long term more efficient service, including the introduction of 19 new recycling vehicles and a strategy to create a long term, resilient and sustainable central recycling facility, to process and bulk-up household recycling, prior to sale to market.

c. Key Strengths of the Organisation

We are always looking to learn and improve and feel there are aspects that have already been successful as shown below:

- The introduction of Torfaen's Wellbeing Strategic Framework, which includes our mission and how we intend to achieve it, is the start to reaffirming our priorities and expectations to our staff and residents. It includes our priorities and values and leads on to the 8 Characteristics of an Outstanding Council, which has been the basis for forming this first self-assessment.
- We have received a Youth Service Bronze, Silver and Gold Quality Marks for the range of opportunities being provided to our young people aged 11-25, in their local community youth clubs, out on the streets with our detached team, within local schools and through our exciting youth activities and projects. The work carried out in this area, was recognised by Estyn, in their recent inspection.
- During the 2020/21 financial year (our most recent report), the authority received a total of 75 complaints; 63 at stage 1, 0 stage 2 and 12 via the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (this is lowest number in Wales in 2020/21).
- Our Annual Complaints report also records the number of compliments we receive and for the year 2020/21 we received, 106 compliments from service users compared to 57 in the previous year. This is the first year we have recorded more compliments than complaints.

4. A collaborative and inclusive council that...

- Cherishes inclusivity and equality
- Recognises the contribution of others
- Welcomes challenge and communication from colleagues, peers and partners
- Focuses on strengths of partners and communities
- Is open to sharing resources with partners and communities
- Welcomes ideas and is open to support to deliver its strategic priorities

Key Conclusions

We have made strong progress in becoming a collaborative and inclusive Council, as evidenced throughout this document. We are committed however, to ensuring that everybody can have a positive impact, in ensuring Torfaen is a great place to live and work and our key areas for improvement, as set out below, will ensure that this happens:

a. Key Areas for Improvement

- We will move towards and invest in a Communities Approach to Wellbeing & Resilience, which will enable us to:
 - Reduce the levels of demand for formal services (advisory & statutory)
 - Increase communities' resilience, to adapt to future challenges
 - Improve wellbeing within the community
 - Improve community ownership of and perceptions of joint public service delivery

b. Key Areas for Further Development

- We will continue to respond to the Audit Wales' 'Fit for the Future Review, by undertaking further work with our Overview and Scrutiny Committees, to ensure that the Well-being of Future Generations Act is actively considered, as part of their approach, to undertaking scrutiny activity.
- We have involved a wide variety of staff, in the development of our behaviours framework (The Way we Work) and more recently in the design and implementation of the Workplace Transformation Project. The collaborative approach to both these activities have resulted in end products that better reflect the needs of the workforce and demonstrates the value of a collaborative approach to problem solving. We will embed our new 'communities of interest' approach in all future organisational development work.

c. Key Strengths of the Organisation

- We can evidence how we cherish inclusivity and equality by referencing a number of strategic plans or activities, that have been undertaken within the last year. Such as:
 - Our Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024
 - Our new Welsh Education Strategic Plan

- Working collaboratively with partners such as Displaced People in Action and Communities for Work Plus, particularly when planning commenced for supporting the Afghan Resettlement Scheme.
- We work well with others and can evidence the success of this, by referencing some of our collaborations, which are as follows:
 - Torfaen hosts the only Shared Revenues and Benefits Service, in Wales.
 - In response to Welsh Government's Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) strategy, we demonstrated our commitment to collaboration, through our role in establishing the Gwent Contact Tracing Service (GCTS). This was a partnership between the five local authorities in Gwent and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board.
 - The Shared Resource Service (SRS) brought forward a multi-million-pound business case to our four Local Authority partners, for the move of all of their primary technology services, from Blaenavon to a private data centre provider, in Newport.
 - We have strengthened partnership working through expansion of the MASSH (Multi Agency Support & Safeguarding Hub).
- Estyn made reference in their recent inspection report, that we have a strong history of working collaboratively with other authorities in the region. This, together with local approach to develop ALN reform leads, and cluster working, has supported schools well in their preparations and implementation of ALN reform.

5. A well-managed council that...

- Embraces its core values
- Values the well-being and contribution of staff
- Invests in staff and has plans for a future workforce
- Has good governance to ensure robust decision making

Key Conclusions

The evidence we have collated for this characteristic helps us to conclude we are a well-managed Council, although we recognise that the pandemic has delayed us in delivering improvements, within the areas where we knew improvements or developments were required. We are now back on track at re-invigorating the work we know, is required to help us improve, which are as follows:

a. Key Areas for Improvement

- We will plan for our future workforce, to ensure it remains robust.
- We will develop a recruitment portal, that will "sell" the reason that Torfaen is a great place to work. Our portal will outline the benefits and opportunities and explain our vision, values and aspirations and also result in more effective and quicker recruitment.
- We will increase the opportunities that we provide for the young people of Torfaen to start and develop their careers with the Council, through increasing our apprenticeship offer and commencing our School Leavers Scheme. We will also increase the number of opportunities we provide for supported employment, for people with learning difficulties.
- We will revise our approach to the WBFG Act 2015 through, project initiation, strategy development and decision making, to ensure we have the greatest possible impact on well-being in Torfaen.

b. Key Areas for Further Development

- We will update and revise our Workforce Strategy, as we come out of the pandemic and the strategic direction from both the aspirations of Leadership Team and the Corporate Plan become clearer.

c. Key Strengths of the Organisation

There are many examples we can use to evidence our strengths in this area, as follows:

- Values play an essential part in the culture of any organisation. By values, we mean the core beliefs and guiding principles, by which we carry out our business and the relationships we have with others. Torfaen's core values are:
 - Supportive
 - Fair
 - Effective
 - Innovative
- The Way We Work has been developed through a series of conversations and staff engagement sessions with staff, with the aim of bringing to life, our values.
- We have our own Staff Focus Group, made up of volunteers, from a cross section of Council services and roles at all levels. It was established in 2018 and provides a forum for staff to contribute to improving our working environment and to support a consistent approach, across the Council.
- We have recently introduced our Carer's Policy, which was created with the help of a Carers Working Group, which was set up to ensure the policy was created alongside staff, who are also unpaid carers.
- We understand the need to invest in our current staff, but there is also a need to look forward, by succession planning and have an apprentice programme in place, that not only looks to appoint new people to the council, but also enable those that are working with us, to undertake training, as part of the apprentice programme.
- Our Corporate Governance and Risk Management Group is chaired by the Assistant Chief Executive and oversees and keeps under review governance arrangements, to ensure they are effective and takes the lead, through the Monitoring Officer, in producing the Annual Governance Statement.
- Examples of how we are currently working to reduce our carbon footprint can be found below:
 - Our Action Plan sets out our approach to becoming carbon neutral by 2030 and how we will protect and enhance Torfaen's precious natural resources and the biodiversity they support.
 - By the use of innovative construction techniques, sustainable/energy saving/carbon reducing designs, especially within the mechanical and electrical installations.
 - We've increased the electrification of our fleet (we currently have 12 vehicles).
 - We've introduced charging points in 7 public car parks.

6. An engaging and accessible council that...

- Uses a wide range of tools to engage with residents and stakeholders
- Involves staff and residents on issues that affect them
- Harnesses ideas come from customers and staff
- Is open and honest with staff and residents
- Shares timely information, advice and guidance and celebrates success

Key Conclusions

We recognise the importance of communicating and engaging with our staff, residents, partners and stakeholders on the issues that affect them and we aim to do this, at all times. There is a lot more work we need to carry out, in order to improve on this, as follows:

a. Key Areas for Improvement

- During 2022/23, our new Communities directorate will establish a clear action plan, setting out how we will work with individuals, groups, and organisations (like community councils), within each of our communities, to identify and deliver against their wellbeing priorities.
- We will respond to the recommendations of the Audit Wales Springing Forward – Assets and Workforce report by providing a strategic approach to strengthening our ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of our services, in the short and longer term.

b. Key Areas for Further Development

- In 2022/23, we need to concentrate on the areas for greater focus, as highlighted within the results of the Overview & Scrutiny Members Survey and we will do this by continuing to address the findings of the survey and will be regularly reviewing and developing, our processes, in consultation with Chairs of Scrutiny Committees, at our regular Informal Chairs Meetings.
- We need to encourage the members of our Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) to play an active part in the business of the CPB, which includes adding agenda items and scrutinising performance, data and presentation topics. This should, and will be encouraged, going forward.
- We will develop means to better involve the public, in working with us. We will implement the protocols for participation and involving the public, which have been adopted within our Public Participation Strategy. This will involve staff training and raising awareness, across all service areas, to ensure we provide people with opportunities to have a say on the way we work and the decisions we make that affect them.

c. Key Strengths of the Organisation

We recognise the importance of communicating and engaging with our staff, members, residents, partners and stakeholders and this can be demonstrated, as follows:

- Our Workplace Transformation Project – we have been continually communicating with our staff, since the Summer of 2020, via survey's, newsletters and emails, to ensure staff are engaged in the process of transforming the way we work, going forward.
- Our Staff Focus Group - made up of volunteers from a cross section of Council services and roles at all levels, to provide a forum for staff, so they are able to contribute to improving our working environment and to support a consistent approach, across the Council.
- Our E bulletin Service – we produce an average of between 3-5 press releases a week, with just over 3,300 people subscribed to them. We also produce a Weekly News bulletin, which has around 15,500 people subscribed and is a roundup of that week's news from Torfaen Council.
- Annual Residents Surveys are conducted to test the levels of satisfaction with council services and to gather "on the ground" intelligence about areas of delivery that need improvement.
- We have implemented the "Bang the Table" product on our new "Get Involved" Torfaen website, which is our public participation platform and our "one-stop-shop" for community engagement.
- Our Youth Service was recently externally assessed for the Silver and then Gold Youth Work Quality Mark. We had already achieved Bronze, in 2021. At the Silver level we were assessed on whether the organisation has a strategy or plan in place, to ensure young people's continued active participation and engagement.
- We regularly consult widely with members of the public and our partners and act where possible, to the views and ideas, we receive, as a result of those consultations.
- Member's Survey – an annual survey carried out to seek member's views; on the support they receive, in order to fulfil their roles, including the scrutiny process and the impact and outcomes of scrutiny activity.

7. A financially astute Council that...

- Has robust financial governance
- Successfully manages resources and seeks value for money
- Generates income where appropriate
- Maximises inward investment
- Invests in preventative services

Key Conclusions

As a financially astute Council, we understand the requirement for robust financial governance, to ensure financial resilience/assurance and; that we are managing our resources efficiently and effectively. We do however, appreciate that there is always more we can do, to improve, as demonstrated in the sections below:

a. Key Areas for Improvement

- The CIPFA Financial Management Code acts like a self-evaluation of our financial management and governance as a Council. The significant areas for improvement include: a clear and consistent understanding of what value for money means; a focus on addressing the financial challenges over the medium and longer term; development of a wider strategic investment plan to support the capital strategy and greater public engagement.
- We will respond to the Audit Wales report on Commercialisation and in particular, determining how we wish to pursue it e.g. operating services more efficiently by, for example, reducing cost, raising charges, attracting new customers or users; reducing the cost of subsidising some services; delivering services differently

b. Key Areas for Further Development

- We will respond to the Audit Wales Financial Sustainability Assessment Report
- We will develop our approach, in conjunction with Cardiff and Monmouthshire Councils, as part of the collaboration of our Procurement Services. The arrangement will increase our capacity and expertise to provide greater resilience and stability to the procurement function
- We will look to secure additional benefits from our third party spend, to influence the decarbonisation agenda and secure additional social value and community benefits.

c. Key Strengths of the Organisation

As a financially astute Council, we understand the requirement for robust financial governance, to ensure financial resilience/assurance and we are managing our resources efficiently and effectively. This can be demonstrated by the following:

- Adhering to the Financial Management (FM) Code - designed to support good practice, in financial management (and wider governance aspects) and to assist local authorities in demonstrating their own financial sustainability. The FM Code sets out the standards of financial management for all local authorities, and focuses on value for money, governance and financial management styles, financial resilience and financial sustainability.
- The organisation has an effective framework of financial accountability which can be demonstrated by our robust arrangements, for effective financial control through the Authority's accounting procedures and Financial Regulations. These include established capital and revenue budget planning, setting and monitoring procedures.
- Effective Governance Arrangements – we are governed by a comprehensive Constitution that is regularly updated and considered by Council. The key elements of the Constitution outlines how we operate, the terms of references of all relevant committees and groups, how these meetings are conducted, how the scheme of delegation operates and what processes support the delegation process.
- The Governance and Risk Management Working Group - oversees and keeps under review the governance arrangements, to ensure they are effective and takes the lead, through the Monitoring Officer, in producing the Annual Governance Statement.
- Our Asset Management Strategy - sets out how Torfaen County Borough Council will exercise stewardship of our property assets, to help us deliver our corporate priorities, for the benefit of current residents and also for the benefit of future generations.
- Procurement - we have taken the decision to collaborate with Cardiff and Monmouthshire Councils to provide procurement services, due to lack of capacity and expertise within the Council.

8. A digital and data led Council that...

- Uses data to anticipate needs
- Builds digital profiles to better understand customer journeys
- Is always on – enabling residents to access a wide range of digital services
- Actively involves residents through digital inclusion and digital platforms

Key Conclusions

As a digital and data led Council, we recognise the need to gather data and understand how to use it, in order to understand the needs of our customers. We will endeavour to do this by:

a. Key Areas for Improvement

- We will introduce our Digital First Customer Strategy, which is likely to include Digital, Data and Technology elements that enable excellent customer service which is data driven and preventative decision making will be key, to how we improve within this area.
- Service redesign can often still be consultative with customer voice introduced too late in the design process. We will introduce customer personas to ensure that customers are considered early, in any service design work. These are based on a broad and deep range of demographic and habitual data. The personas will introduce customer voice into early discussions, but will not replace resident engagement or user research, which will be strengthened, as service design progress.
- We will improve our digital recruitment process, to make the process more effective and quicker for applicants.

b. Key Areas for Further Development

- We will prioritise the recommendations provided by Audit Wales in their report - Information Governance – The maturity of local government, in the use of data. Our new Service Area - Communities, Customer and Digital is now in place and those recommendations will be monitored regularly and updated accordingly, as part of their work.
- We will implement an effective and efficient cloud-based electronic document management system that enables our workforce to access, store, retrieve and share information, wherever they may be and enable easier access to data insight and analysis to inform business and community needs.

c. Key Strengths of the Organisation

- We value the importance of our residents and we are increasingly starting to understand the implications of how the contact we have with them, should improve their lives, for the better. We can demonstrate how we are working towards this, by the following:
 - By monitoring our contact with customers, whether it be in person, over the telephone or online,
 - By monitoring the availability of online services, to ensure they are “always on” with as little downtime as possible, and
 - By ensuring our online functions are accessible to all - In Quarter 2 of 2022 our website was ranked 26th out of 411 Councils (with 1 being the best), for its accessibility.
- In order to be a digital and data led Council, we have recognised the need to gather data and understand how to use it, in order to understand the needs of our customers. By gathering data from our customers, during COVID, we were able to implement new digital processes to increase digital inclusion, throughout the borough. This can be demonstrated, by the following:
 - Working with our partners within the SRS, reconditioned laptops were provided to pupils for home use to enable blended learning.
 - Remote access to a range of e-books and e-magazines were made available, via the Library Service popular BorrowBox scheme.
 - A range of sessions, such as reading groups, baby rhyme times, story times, craft and Lego sessions were delivered digitally, which helped with digital inclusivity and with issues of loneliness.

7. Joining up our legislative requirements

Provisions outlined within both the Well-Being of Future Generation Act (2015) and Local Government Elections Act (2021) also align with other duties placed on councils, such as the Equality Act (2010), Welsh Language (Wales) Measure (2011) and Environment (Wales) Act (2016).

This section of the report will therefore provide details of how we have been working towards our other legislative requirements.

Equality and diversity

The Equality Act 2010 places a specific duty on councils, to develop and publish a Strategic Equalities Plan (SEP) every four years, combined with an Annual Equality Report which sets out progress on our [Strategic Equality Plan](#), in relation to statutory responsibilities.

Within our annual report we have demonstrated our positive contribution to a fairer society through the services we deliver, having due regard to eliminating discrimination, focussing on specific strategic equality objectives and exploring the work that we have carried out against each objective, over the past year.

Despite the highly challenging financial circumstances that the public sector continues to operate in, and the pressures resulting from the pandemic, we have still been able to make real progress in many areas of our Equality Objectives, often through partnership working, harnessing local adaptability and integrating our work to develop a coherent approach, in delivering our priorities to the community of Torfaen.

Our progress in 2021/22 in relation to our statutory responsibilities under the Equality Act is both compliant and satisfactory and there has been significant progress made against a number of key equality objectives:

- Reinforcing our status as an equal opportunity employer, we have created and implemented mandatory equality training to all members of staff aware, ensuring staff understand the importance of equality and diversity,
- Implemented a mental health strategy and training for staff and managers (mandatory for managers),
- Promoted awareness campaigns linked to Protected Characteristics and worked closely with third sector organisations i.e., Dragons Rugby. School resources and activities were also implemented throughout the year,
- Supported 430 vulnerable young people to reduce their risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) through our various support programmes
- Continued to promote understanding and celebrate diversity through various communications campaigns and training opportunities,
- Drafted and consulted on Place Plans for Pontypool and Blaenavon which will shape an application for over £20M in funding from the UK Government Levelling Up Fund to create new leisure, hospitality, and cultural spaces in our town centres,
- Supported the Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, which allows individuals, charities, community groups and businesses in the UK to bring people to safety – including those with no family ties to the UK,
- Created a drop in hub, within our library service, which is also a distribution centre for the Eastern valley foodbank. This has become one of the most visited distribution centres, across Torfaen,
- Opened our new £3.7million wellbeing hub in Cwmbran, Ty Glas y Dorlan, which offers high quality housing accommodation with care,
- Developed a "What Matters Survey" to capture young people's views, leaving care, on things that matter to them. The survey was developed by the young people who sit on the Corporate Parenting Board. The findings of the survey will influence service delivery and will be part of the Corporate Parenting Board Development Plan 2022/2023,
- Helped a further 200 residents to find meaningful employment and help to move forwards, in their careers,
- Continued to support our Dementia Friendly Communities across Gwent with online dementia awareness workshops and sessions, and
- Continued to ensure young people have an opportunity to have a say on issues that affect them.

Welsh Language

As part of our obligations under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, we must publish a five-year strategy which shows how we will promote and facilitate the use of Welsh.

The Welsh Language Strategy, was approved by Council on 20 June 2016, outlining the strategic direction during 2017 – 2022 that will assist the growth of the Welsh language within the Borough and support the Welsh Government's vision of a million Welsh speakers by 2050. Our progress against this strategy is reported each year, within our Welsh Language Standards Annual Report.

During 2021/22 we have:

- **Removed Barriers** - Through the Welsh Language Standard, to increase capacity and remove barriers that may restrict departments from delivering Welsh Language services. The outcome of this review will be reported on, within our next annual report.
- **Adhered to Signage Policy** – We have and will continue to encourage property developers to use Welsh names on new streets within the borough. During 2021/22, no new street names were submitted through the planning process. We are committed to naming 50% of all new streets (within any financial year) in Welsh. We no longer translate existing street names, following guidance from the Welsh Language Commissioner.
- **Considered the use of Welsh translation at Meetings** - Most meetings were held through Microsoft Teams, and the challenges of providing simultaneous translation through the Microsoft system has become more apparent. Due, to security concerns, with advice from our information technology provider, we have opted to use the secure Microsoft Teams platform. The platform currently does not offer multiple audio streams which is required for simultaneous translation to work seamlessly. Microsoft are working on a solution, but it is likely to be later in 2022, before this is available. Our information technology provider continues to work with Microsoft to ensure that systems are updated immediately when new functionality becomes available.
- **Promoted Cultural Events** - To celebrate St Davids Day, in partnership with Menter Iaith Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen a Mynwy, we were able to offer a live online festival called 'Torf-hwyl'. A number of artists performed live (on-line) throughout the day, interspersed with activities for different age groups, and information on learning Welsh. The Event was a huge success with residents within Torfaen and beyond, viewing the concert on-line.
- **Influenced Policy Development** – Our Welsh Language Service continues to be part of the Integrated Well Being Assessment, on policy decisions. All change activity that will impact upon council policy or the way services are provided to residents / local groups / businesses, requires an Integrated Impact Assessment which includes a Welsh language assessment. Prior to any report being presented to our council Members, the report is read to ensure that positive and negative impacts have been considered, in line with the Welsh language Standard.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is a cross cutting theme for local government with strong links to all other sustainable development issues. There is a range of legislation including the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 which places a duty on all local authority departments to have regard for biodiversity. We are committed to ensuring we meet our obligations to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity within Torfaen.

Torfaen is characterised by high quality natural habitats and contains areas of national and local conservation importance. There are four Sites of Special Scientific Interest, approximately 200 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation and seven Local Nature Reserves. The Afon Llwyd is an important ecological corridor in Torfaen alongside the Monmouthshire and Brecon canal.

Key habitats include ancient deciduous woodland, wetlands, species rich grassland and heather dominated upland heath. Woodlands in general comprise approximately 5% of the total area in Torfaen with many examples of ancient woodlands in Cwmbran that are over 400 years old.

The Torfaen Local Biodiversity Action Plan sets out how we will retain and enhance the borough's rich and varied biodiversity. The plan, facilitated by the Torfaen Biodiversity Partnership, includes separate action plans to ensure we meet our specific statutory obligations.

During 2021/22 we have:

- Received approval for our Green Infrastructure Strategy and Action Plan, setting out opportunities to improve the management of our green spaces,
- Managed 7 Local Nature Reserves for the benefit of nature and people. These are strategically located throughout Torfaen and are biodiversity hubs within our green infrastructure,
- Worked with the Police and South Wales Fire & Rescue Services to tackle illegal off-roading and wildfires in the uplands,
- Supported volunteers in managing the rights of way network and local nature reserves in Torfaen,

- Provided apprenticeship/training opportunities for 8 individuals,
- Undertaken an independent review of our Environment and Streetscene Service to create both efficiencies and identify opportunities to align the service with the aims of the Green Infrastructure Strategy,
- Mapped all Council greenspaces on our Geographic Information System (GIS) to enable appropriate ecologically and climate resilient management prescriptions, to be taken forward through Streetscene Operations
- Worked with Bron Afon Community Housing to identify alternative more sustainable grassland management regimes,
- Prepared a Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Plan setting out how we are contributing to the National Nature Recovery Action Plan,
- Mapped our Urban Green Infrastructure Assets and identified corridors which need protecting and enhancing to ensure ecological connectivity through the urban area,
- Trialled a new approach to grass cutting on verges and in new meadows to improve biodiversity. So far, over 60 sites are part of the new scheme and we hope to expand this to more sites,
- As part of the collaborative South East Wales Resilient Uplands project, carried out restoration on some peatland habitats that are vitally important for both carbon and water storage,
- Through the WG funded Resilient Greater Gwent and Local Places for Nature projects, worked in partnership to deliver community-based biodiversity enhancement and well-being projects,
- Started to develop a decision-making process to help give consideration to green infrastructure, biodiversity and ecosystem resilience in the Torfaen Replacement Local Development Plan
- Published a tree strategy which will help ensure that Torfaen's street trees, woodlands and hedgerows are valued, managed and enhanced for the benefit of current and future generations.

8. The Cost of our Services (our 2021/22 budget)

Our Revenue Budget

Our financial performance for 2021-22 is contained within our draft [Statement of Accounts | Torfaen County Borough Council](#)

Our 2021/22 budget was approved in March 2021 with a £283 million gross revenue budget which was financed from £88 million of service specific government grants, fees and charges for services and other funding & contributions. Our net budget of £194.7 million was funded by £145 million of unhypothecated funding from Welsh Government and £48 million by Council Tax.

Our 2021/22 revenue out-turn produced a net underspend, after contributions to reserves, of £3.3 million against our £194.7 million budget. We were able to action the transfers to reserves for several reasons, the generic variances are summarised as follows:

- Receipt of £3.7 million additional Welsh Government grants that have been used appropriately to offset core budget funding, with £3.1 million being in relation to the Social Care service.
- Receipt of new Welsh Government funding (£856,000) announced in March 2022, to allow the development of a discretionary cost of living support scheme.
- Receipt of further unbudgeted Welsh Government grants (£1.1 million).
- Grant funding exceeding base budgeted levels (£0.5 million).
- £1.9 million underspends across services in relation to costs of general administration and service provision.
- £3.6 million of staffing underspend, with £1.4 million being in relation to Social Care.

In addition to the additional specific grant funding, outlined above, Welsh Government announced, in March 2022, the distribution of £60 million of additional Revenue Support Grant to the 22 Welsh unitary Councils - with Torfaen receiving an additional £1.82 million of unhypothecated funding. In distributing this resource, Welsh Government indicated that the resource could be used to assist with the management of inflationary and service pressures and the ending of the Local Government Hardship Fund, as well as helping to continue to decarbonise services and respond to the climate and nature emergency (including providing access to electric vehicles). In this latter regard, this report proposes transferring £300,000 to a specific reserve to support the transition of our transport fleet to EV technology.

Our Capital Budget

In addition to the revenue spending we also spent £18 million on our assets through our 2021/22 capital programme, including spending on schools, roads, footpaths, and maintaining and developing our buildings. The programme:

- continued to implement the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, (previously 21st Century Schools Programme), which concluded: the construction of the new Croesyceiliog Comprehensive School, progressed the expansion of Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw, to create a through education provision on the existing site, commenced the extension of the Crownbridge school, and building of the Maendy school, and the work surrounding the redevelopment of Ysgol Bryn Onnen and Ysgol Gymraeg Cwmbran.
- commenced the development of the park and ride facility at Pontypool & New Inn train station.
- commenced the development of the British site.
- commenced the development of a new waste bulking and bailing facility; and
- continued to invest in disabled facility grants, to support our vulnerable citizens.

Our 2021/22 capital programme experienced £4.3 million slippage into 2022/23.

9. Consulting on our Performance

In response to the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales), which places a greater duty on local authorities to promote public participation in democracy, we have developed Torfaen Council's first draft Public Participation Strategy.

Our draft strategy went out to public consultation between May 2022 and August 2022 and we carried out face-to-face workshops with some of our citizen panels, including the Torfaen Youth Forum and Torfaen Access Forum. Their feedback will be used to revise the strategy and a report is due to go before Cabinet in October 2022.

When our strategy has been approved, we will embark on a programme of staff engagement and training to embed the strategy's principles into the work teams do, including project planning and service reviews. For example, co-production is a key part of the new strategy and the team is working with the Canals Co-ordinator to engage local residents in helping to develop a new strategy for the Mon and Brecon Canal, rather than just consulting them on a strategy that has already been written. The draft strategy will then go back out to the public for feedback.

Another key principle of our new strategy is a commitment to telling people who have taken part in consultations how their comments and feedback have been used.

In order to develop our framework for an outstanding council we have engaged a variety of staff. During the year ahead we will further develop our approach to consulting on performance to develop a greater understanding of how we are viewed by others.

Our new online community engagement hub Get Involved Torfaen offers teams one way of communicating back to respondents. Our platform allows people to register as participants and receive regular newsletters updating them on current and forthcoming consultations, and what action is being taken following expired consultations.

We have also used the new platform to create a dedicated area for residents to submit ideas for scrutiny on an ongoing basis. While there is information on the corporate website about how residents can contact the committees, we felt having an area that is easily accessible to people interested in engaging with the council's work would increase the amount of people contributing to the scrutiny process. The area has photographs of the committee chairs, a brief explanation of what each committee looks at as well as a video promoting the importance of the scrutiny process.

In July 2022 a new engagement and electoral participation officer was appointed to the communications and engagement team to support the strategic approach to engagement and advise and support teams on best engagement practice, including developing stronger links with the Torfaen People's Panel, citizen panels and community-based consultations.

The corporate website continues to be a valuable source of important information for residents and we have developed an area dedicated to cost of living advice.

The number of subscribers to our press releases and ebulletins has increased over the past year and we continue to encourage people to access our digital resources, including the MyTorfaen online council services app which allows residents to request, report or pay for services 24/7.

Our social media channels are the primary way in which we communicate directly with residents and our Facebook page has more than 20,000 followers. We recently created a TikTok account to communicate directly with younger residents and it is a channel we plan to develop in the next year.

We have taken on Orlo, a Digital Customer Service platform, to improve our scheduling and social listening abilities.

Up and coming public engagement activity includes our annual residents survey, budget consultation and ongoing staff engagement in the Civic Centre workplace transformation.

10. Delivering and Monitoring Progress

Activity will be managed through a robust approach to project management to ensure visibility of progress, risks and accountability for delivery.

The involvement of residents and stakeholders in the development of services and projects is critical to ensure that we do the right things, at the right time and in the right way. As part of the Local Government and Elections Act we have undergone a major review of our governance and participation arrangements, resulting in clarity on how members of the public can be involved in decision making, scrutiny and holding the council to account.

We recognise and value the central role our employees play in delivering this plan and the running of our many statutory services. We will continue to invest in activities that ensures we attract and retain a skilled and committed workforce, whilst making the most of working with external partners, to share particular expertise, to ensure this plan is delivered.

Our County Plan Delivery Plan links the activities in our plan to the identified well-being objectives. Our County Plan 2022-27 shows the outputs we will monitor to demonstrate progress and the high-level outcomes, which will evidence the success of our ambitions. These will form the basis of quarterly monitoring and reporting for 2022/23.

Our service planning process will be central to delivering upon our aspirations. We are developing the process to ensure each service area's plans are comprehensive, living documents that are the vehicle for delivering, reporting and giving account of all high-level plans and strategies. We will continue to build a culture of high performance throughout the Council, regularly monitoring the delivery of our activities, risks and performance data, that collectively will enable us to develop as an organisation and achieve our aspirations for Torfaen.



Produced by Torfaen County Borough Council

October 2022

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