



Annual Self-Assessment and Well-Being Report 2022/23

October 2023



OUR VISION FOR TORFAEN

**Improve the sustainability, connectivity and well-being of our county
by strengthening our communities, by creating a thriving local economy and
by protecting and enhancing our environment**

OUR VALUES AS AN ORGANISATION

Supportive, Fair, Effective, Innovative





Our Annual Self-Assessment & Well-Being Report 2022-2023

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Foreword

Welcome to our Annual Self-Assessment and Well-Being report for 2022–2023.

This report is our annual update on the progress we have made delivering and developing our key services, including details of the work we have carried out to take forward the 9-priority objectives in our County Plan.

Our County Plan for 2022/27 was adopted by Council in December 2022, setting out our key ambitions and priorities over the next 5 years, describing as a Council more precisely what ‘we will’ aim to achieve over the course of the County Plan.

The plan was developed in response to major challenges and changes we are facing as an organisation. Our plan considers and responds to the combined impact of national and local challenges - particularly health inequality across our communities made worse by the cost-of-living crisis faced by residents. It aims to focus the Council to meet these critical challenges such as growing economy and skills across the county, addressing the climate and nature emergency, involving and sharing power with our communities, and responding to the challenges highlighted as part of the follow up to our most recent Estyn inspection.

Our work is also set within the context of ever increasing financial challenges. We cannot hide from this fact as we continue to manage with depleting resources by finding more effective and efficient ways of working. We must ensure we do everything within our power to be ready to meet this challenge head on.

Changing and adapting our operational practices and rethinking our service delivery will be a constant as we face up to the difficult financial situation. In many ways our recent journey has strengthened our organisation’s resilience and our ability to adapt quickly to unforeseen circumstances. Our new framework for an outstanding Council will be central to us not watering down our ambitions, ensuring we are capable of improving the well-being of our residents in Torfaen despite the difficulties facing the public sector across Wales. We will build a culture that encourages our staff to continuously improve, empowers them to challenge and to ask questions about what we are doing and how we could do it better.

We will focus on continuing to deliver efficiencies, savings and investing in new technologies, in order to further protect frontline services. But we must also rethink the way we deliver our services. Central to these efforts is our new Communities approach, shifting the council’s work towards prevention and early intervention, helping us provide the right support at the right time, so that vital resources can be focussed on those with the greatest need. Our approach will harness the power of individuals, groups, organisations and business within our communities helping them to become a powerful first line of prevention, giving everybody living in Torfaen more resilience enabling people to be better equipped to meet life’s challenges.

We are extremely proud of the progress made to date against our vision, ambitions and priorities, which would not be achievable without our dedicated staff, Elected Members, our supportive partners and the wider public, who continue to work with us to make the borough a great place in which to live, work and visit.



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 our conclusion as to how we have performed within the previous year and reflects upon where we need to focus our attentions, in the year ahead.

Though much of this report looks back on what has been delivered throughout 2022-23, it also sets the scene for significant organisational change that is required, up to 2027.

Like all public bodies across Wales, we are required to comply with certain statutory 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.

In particular, both Acts requires 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.

Local Government & Elections Act 2021

This is our second report, under the requirements of the Local Government and Elections Act 2021 and at the heart of this new performance regime, is the requirement for all councils to keep their performance arrangements under review. Councils need to do this through robust, continuous self-assessment of their findings, of which are reported through this annual report.

Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (WBFG Act) puts 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 in collaboration with each other 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.

This report demonstrates how we have linked our key priority well-being objective areas to this Act and our commitment towards it.

2. Selecting our Objectives

Our County Plan 2022-2027



Our County Plan was adopted by Council in December 2022 and will be in place for the duration of the existing Council administration – up to 2027.

The Plan and our objectives have been developed around four central themes that will guide our policy making and service design, over the coming years. Grouping initiatives together into themes has helped to ensure decisions and planning is not undertaken in silo's and is focused more around the 'bigger picture' and vision for the County.

Our themes are not self-contained, they are more cross-cutting and will form the basis by which delivery of current plans and all future proposals will be tested. The themes of our work are:

Well-being...

Maximising independence, early intervention and prevention, partnership working and to tackle key drivers of inequality

Sustainability...

Improving economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being for Torfaen and the world

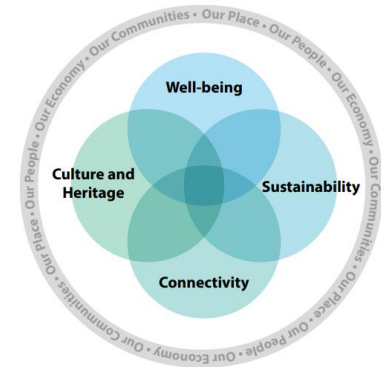
Connectivity...

Welcoming, resilient and empowered communities, joining up skills and businesses enabling a physically and digitally accessible Torfaen

Culture and Heritage...

Respecting our history, welcoming of diversity, proud of our place, celebrating who we are and what we stand for

Our 9 key priorities area's that we will work to deliver on and of which will collectively form our well-being objectives, throughout the life of the plan, are as follows:



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

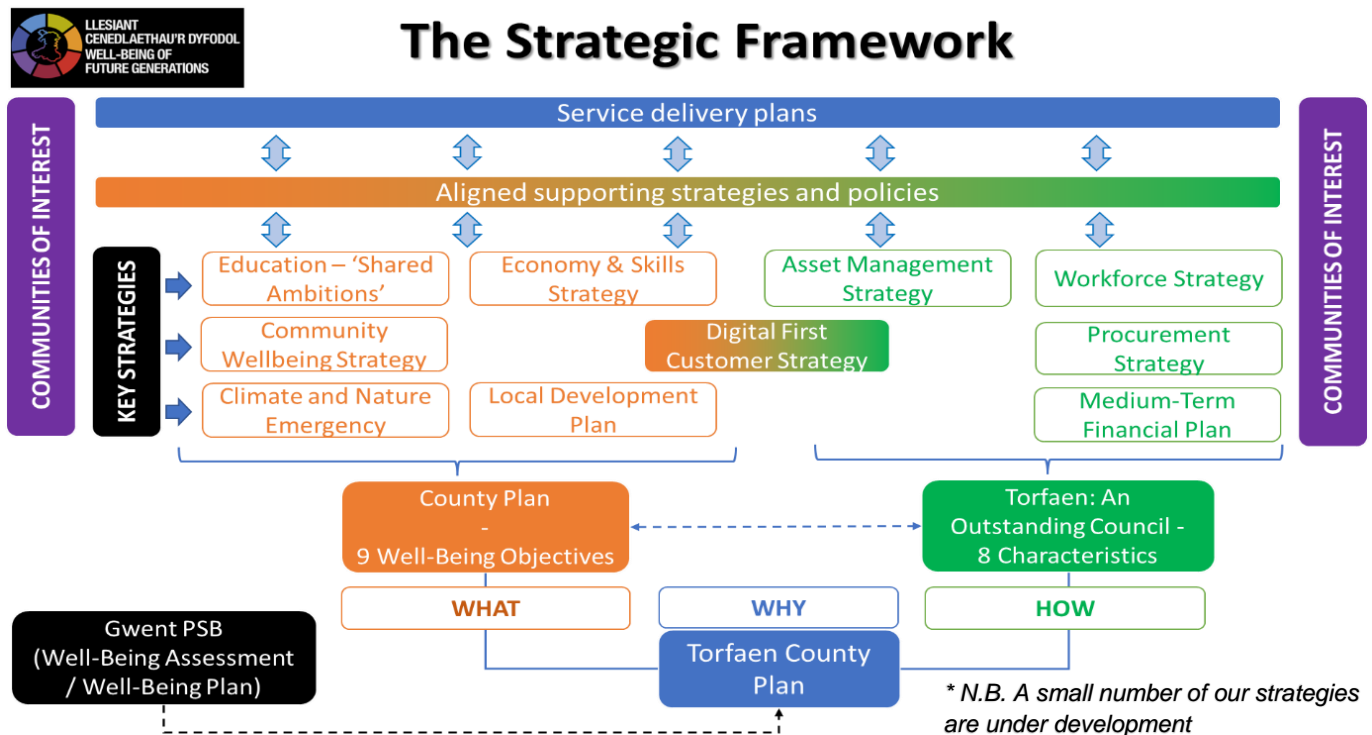
Well-being Objective 9 - We will provide efficient customer focused services that reflect the way people live their lives and wish to access services.

These 9 wellbeing objectives have been developed through the consideration of an extensive evidence base, from existing commitments and previous key drivers including the Well-being of Future Generations Act and describing what 'we will' set out to achieve over the coming years - not just for Torfaen, but in meeting the collective responsibility to improve well-being in Wales. They are also underpinned by:

- Commitments and previous key drivers including the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Collectively, we consider our well-being objectives 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'.

- Key strategies and plans which provide more detail about what we are going to do and how we will do it.
- Primary involvement of our communities and others. Particularly during the development of our strategies and plans, to ensure that our priorities and actions are the right ones for Torfaen.
- Secondary involvement which is central to the future delivery of our priorities by asking our communities how they can support and work with us to deliver our objectives going forward.
- Gwent Well-being Assessment carried out by the newly formed Gwent Public Service Board, including the well-being assessments for Cwmbran, Pontypool and Blaenavon and their surrounding communities. This told us about wider aspects of well-being across the county today but also how it is most likely to develop in the future based on challenges such as social and economic differences, an ageing population, health inequality, educational attainment gaps and climate change.

This has been simplified within the illustration below:



A full version of our [County Plan](#) is available to read or download.

Sitting alongside our County Plan, is our statutory [Well-being Statement for 2022/27](#), which explains in more detail how we have derived our objectives and how they will contribute to the 7 national well-being goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. Our Well-Being statement also acts as a key driver for improving 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’.

Gwent Regional Public Service Board (PSB)

As well as our individual duty as a public body to set our own well-being objectives, we also have a collective duty with our partners to come together and set priorities/joint well-being objectives, that we will work together on, to deliver.



Also established under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, Public Services Boards (PSBs) are statutory partnerships that bring together public services in an area to improve well-being, both now, and in the long term. PSB’s are required to assess the well-being of the area they cover and form well-being plans on a five-year cycle.

In September 2021, as the first cycle of well-being plans came to an end, the five PSBs across Gwent region agreed to merge, simplifying, and strengthening existing partnership arrangements by bringing all the public services together into one regional Public Services Board (PSB) for Gwent. Membership of the newly formed Gwent PSB can be viewed [here](#).

The Gwent PSB adopted its first Well-being Plan in July 2023, setting out how public services will collaborate to respond to some of the key issues identified in [Gwent Well-being Assessment](#).

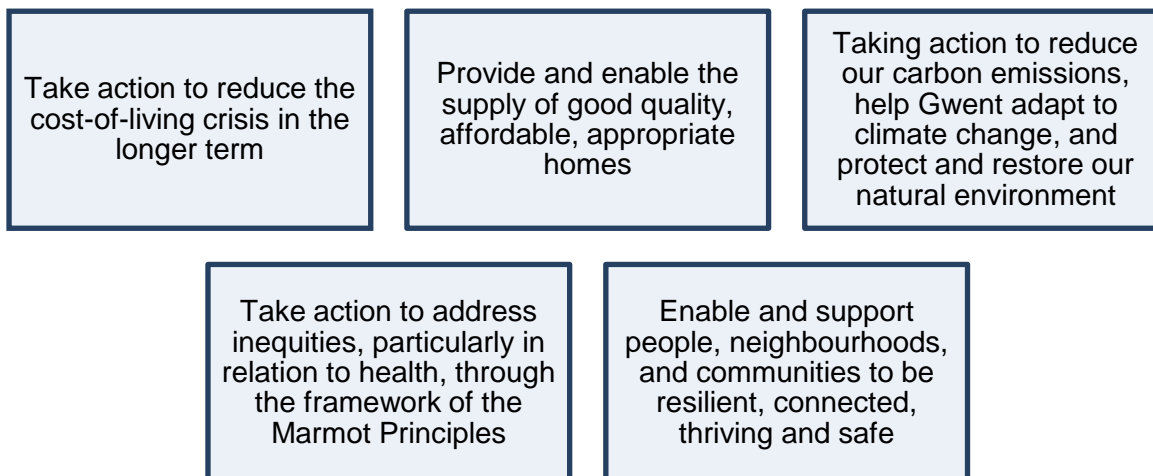
The plan sets out two interconnecting well-being objectives and five underpinning steps across the five-year delivery period of 2023-28. It also provides a framework for the next 25 – 30 years recognising that Gwent's well-being challenges are big and complex and will require much longer-term solutions that will begin with taking action in the short and medium term.

During the first year of the plan, delivery plans will be prepared for the well-being steps at a regional and local level. Our Torfaen Local Delivery Group will develop the local delivery arrangements, recognising that the five local authority areas that make up Gwent are very different, and within each community there are distinct strengths and challenges. This means that, as well as collaborating on issues that affect the whole region, delivery plans can provide bespoke local solutions and interventions.

PSB's Well-being Plan Objectives are as follows:

- 1. We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all.**
- 2. We want a climate-ready Gwent, where our environment is valued and protected, benefitting our well-being now and for future generations.**

The five steps that been identified to help us achieve these objectives, are as follows:



How our individual and collective duties work together:

In order to deliver against our own council's well-being objectives and those jointly adopted with the PSB we are required under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to set out what we can do ourselves to improve well-being, alongside what we can collectively achieve by working together with other public bodies. These are distinct, but complementary duties.

Our County Plan 2022-27 sets out how we will support well-being in Torfaen over a five-year period and what we will deliver for the year ahead. At the end of each year, we will review our progress and consider what we need to do the following year to ensure we keep on track.

Although the Gwent PSB's Well-being Plan was adopted in July 2023, officers from the Council have been involved in its development through Gwent Strategic Well-being Action Group and this also informed our approach to developing Torfaen's County Plan so that our objectives are aligned, and we have begun to think about how we can support delivery of the PSB's shared well-being objectives to make the greatest difference to local well-being.

As the PSB's Local Delivery Group for Torfaen, which includes officers from the Council, comes together during 2023-24 to develop local delivery plans for each of the PSB's five Well-being Steps, we will be able to make sure our County Plan reflects our contribution to shared delivery.

The table below set out how the Council's 9 well-being objectives link to Gwent PSB's well-being objectives and well-being steps:

Council Well-being Objectives	Gwent PSB Well-being Objective	Gwent PSB Well-being Steps	Making the links
1. Raise educational attainment, helping young people and adults to gain the qualifications and skills needed to lead positive lives.	We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all.	Take action to address inequities, particularly in relation to health, through the framework of the Marmot Principles.	Supporting children, young people and adults to take up opportunities for learning or employment, can have long term positive impacts on their health and well-being. Ensuring that children can have access to a good meal can help learning, improve health and support families that are finding it hard to pay for the basics of life. Encouraging healthy lifestyles can support educational performance and people's ability to find or sustain decent work.
2. Encourage and champion children, young people and families so they can thrive.	We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all.	Take action to address inequities, particularly in relation to health, through the framework of the Marmot Principles.	Ensuring that children and young people get the support they need at the right time will help them have a good start in life. Developing parenting skills will help ensure that children 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. Childhood experiences can seed a lifelong interest in sports and the mental and physical benefits that exercise can provide.
3. Tackle inequality by focusing on early identification and prevention activities that support people to live independent and fulfilling lives.	We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all.	Provide and enable the supply of good quality, affordable, appropriate homes. Take action to reduce the cost-of-living crisis in the longer term. Take action to address inequities, particularly in relation to health, through the framework of the Marmot Principles.	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. 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 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. Access to high quality counselling services for children and young people will support good mental health. Summer holiday provision of a free nutritious breakfast and lunch through fun and food camps and ensuring all children have access to a good meal at school can improve health. Adult Services that start with the person, will help ensure services users health needs are met. Tackling anti-social behaviour can improving feelings of safety and support peoples mental and physical well-being. Supporting households already struggling with a debt burden can help contribute towards both mental and physical well-being and will give

Council Well-being Objectives	Gwent PSB Well-being Objective	Gwent PSB Well-being Steps	Making the links
			people the opportunity to afford healthier choices.
<p>4. Make Torfaen more sustainable by connecting people and communities, socially, digitally and physically.</p>	<p>We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all.</p> <p>We want a climate-ready Gwent, where our environment is valued and protected, benefitting our well-being now and for future generations.</p>	<p>Enable and support people, neighbourhoods, and communities to be resilient, connected, thriving and safe.</p> <p>Taking action to reduce our carbon emissions, help Gwent adapt to climate change, and protect and restore our natural environment.</p>	<p>The ability to travel is very important for reducing loneliness and isolation and can support mental well-being.</p> <p>Good transport links can help people access to access sports and leisure facilities, helping people to stay healthy and active.</p> <p>Supporting the shift towards greener transport solutions for the region will help reduce air pollution, exposure to which can adversely affect the health of the most vulnerable in the population.</p> <p>Providing opportunities for active travel can help Torfaen transition to net zero carbon emissions and support healthy lifestyles.</p>
<p>5. Respond to the climate and nature emergencies, recycle more and make improvements to the local environment.</p>	<p>We want a climate-ready Gwent, where our environment is valued and protected, benefitting our well-being now and for future generations.</p> <p>We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all.</p>	<p>Taking action to reduce our carbon emissions, help Gwent adapt to climate change, and protect and restore our natural environment.</p> <p>Take action to address inequities, particularly in relation to health, through the framework of the Marmot Principles.</p>	<p>Healthy well-functioning natural resources underpin good health. They provide a place for people to be active, produce oxygen and cycling nutrients, help regulate climate, store carbon and have a role in water management (reducing flood-risk). They can also absorb air-borne pollutants that are harmful to health and provide a pollination resource which is important for food production.</p> <p>Health risks associated with a changing climate have the potential to impact greatest on the most vulnerable in society, so we need to be prepared.</p> <p>The impacts of climate change have the potential to further increase inequalities within our communities and to have greater impact on vulnerable groups. Some communities will also be at greater risk to a changing climate due to where they are located. Taking preventative action to mitigate the risks of climate change will contribute to the well-being of future generations.</p> <p>Moving away from a reliance on fossil fuels can lead to improvements in air quality and reductions in health conditions associated with air pollution.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>As well as supporting active travel, our networks of cycle paths are also important wildlife corridors. Being able to move between fragmented habitat is key to the survival of many plants and animals.</p> <p>Having access to greenspace is important for good physical and mental health.</p>
<p>6. Make Torfaen a great place to do business by working with local employers, encouraging new business start-</p>	<p>We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all.</p>	<p>Take action to reduce the cost-of-living crisis in the longer term</p> <p>Take action to address inequities, particularly in relation</p>	<p>Creating inclusive employment opportunities and supporting the most disadvantaged into decent employment through our adult and community learning offer will help create a more equal Torfaen.</p>

Council Well-being Objectives	Gwent PSB Well-being Objective	Gwent PSB Well-being Steps	Making the links
ups and entrepreneurial activities.		to health, through the framework of the Marmot Principles.	Having work can has a positive impact on an individual's health and a thriving economy needs a healthy workforce. Supporting the foundational economy will help ensure people have access to the everyday services they rely on, such as health and care provision which will support a healthier Torfaen.
7. Promote healthier lifestyles in Torfaen to improve mental and physical well-being.	We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all.	Provide and enable the supply of good quality, affordable, appropriate homes. Take action to address inequities, particularly in relation to health, through the framework of the Marmot Principles.	Updating and embedding the Gwent Whole School Food and Fitness Policy will help ensure opportunities to support good health in a school setting are maximised. Working with Torfaen Leisure Trust to extend the sports and leisure offer within the borough will provide more opportunities for people to be active. Working with targeted groups through programmes aimed at developing physical, mental and health with help to tackle health inequalities. Intervene early to reduce the number of residents in poverty or requiring formal, professional support services will support good health.
8. Support our local culture and heritage and make Torfaen a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit.	We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all. We want a climate-ready Gwent, where our environment is valued and protected, benefitting our well-being now and for future generations.	Enable and support people, neighbourhoods, and communities to be resilient, connected, thriving and safe. Taking action to reduce our carbon emissions, help Gwent adapt to climate change, and protect and restore our natural environment.	Participation in the arts and cultural activities can have a positive impact on physical and mental health. Introducing measures to tackle crime, anti-social activity will improve feelings of safety will help support people's mental and physical well-being. Torfaen's natural environment is strongly influenced by its industrial past and this distinct landscape, important to our culture today, is also a significant ecological resource that needs to be protected and enhanced.
9. Provide efficient customer focused services that reflect the way people live their lives and wish to access services.	We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all.	Take action to address inequities, particularly in relation to health, through the framework of the Marmot Principles. Enable and support people, neighbourhoods, and communities to be resilient, connected, thriving and safe.	Promoting the <i>Connect Torfaen</i> website will link residents to volunteering opportunities in their local community that can help to enhance mental health and well-being. Using assistive technology where appropriate, can support people to lead independent lives and to stay healthier for longer. Creating community hubs to provide advice, assistance and support to residents close to where they live will help support sustainable communities.

During 2022/23, Audit Wales undertook a review to find out 'to what extent has the Council acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives'.

The findings of their review were that: 'The Council has considered the many ways that it can apply the sustainable development principle, throughout the process of setting its new well-being objectives. However,

there is more work for it to do, to evaluate the progress it is making towards delivering its well-being objectives’.

A full copy of the audit report can be viewed [here](#).

3. Mission, Vision & Values

The last 2 years 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, has required us to go through a process of review, reflecting on our mission, vision, and values, reconsidering our priorities and assessing the best way to deliver them.

The ethos of the newly reconfigured Senior Leadership Team places strong emphasis on collective responsibility and mutual support to achieve shared goals, in working towards our well-being objectives.

The Councils vision is to: ***“improve the sustainability, connectivity and well-being of our county by strengthening our communities, by creating a thriving local economy and by protecting and enhancing our environment”***

The values of our council are, to be ***Supportive, Fair, Effective and Innovative***.

Our values play an essential part in the culture of our 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.

Our values will only be made real by the behaviour we demonstrate. This includes how we do things; how we treat others; what we say and how we say it.

The changes we are making to the organisation will put our vision and values as well as 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.

Alongside the development of our County Plan, we have also produced a set of internally focused objectives, which we will assess ourselves against - our 8 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 our County Plan objectives.

4. Our Self-Assessment 2022-23

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

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

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

Our self-assessment report is an aggregation of all of the self-assessment work that we have undertaken in the previous year. Our report 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. The key conclusions set out within our self-assessment report were reviewed by the Governance and Audit Committee, as part of the statutory process in October 2023.

This part of the reports sets out the progress we have made against our 2 organisational frameworks, our ‘County Plan’ and ‘Torfaen, An Outstanding Council’, that we continue to use as a means to assess the progress we are making and how well we are performing.

a. Our County Plan - Reporting against our Well-Being Objectives 2022-23

Our County Plan 2022/27 commits the Council to nine high-level ambitions we want to deliver on or achieve during the lifespan of the County Plan. These ambitions will be reviewed on a regular basis and as schemes and projects are developed will form part of an annual delivery plan each year - moving our ambition into action. This approach is particularly important so that the plan can be iterative and agile and so that new initiatives, challenges, and opportunities can be responded to throughout the lifespan of the plan (such as the emerging PSB regional Marmot work). A copy of the [County Plan Delivery Plan for 2022/23](#) is available to read or download.

The “basket” of activities and performance measures, set out within each year’s delivery plan will begin the Council’s journey towards each of our ambitions up to 2027 – linked to our well-being objectives and have formed the basis of our quarterly monitoring and reporting during 2022/23 and beyond.

Our first Delivery Plan highlights the key activities we planned for 2022-23 financial year, in meeting the ambitions 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.”

An overview of progress against each objective is set out below:

County Plan Delivery Plan 2022-23					
	BLUE (action completed)	GREEN (action on target)	AMBER (action off target but with a clear route back to 'Green')	RED (action off target - significant concerns)	BLACK (action aborted)
1. We will raise educational attainment, helping young people and adults to gain the qualifications and skills needed to lead positive lives	4	16	2	2	0
2. We will encourage and champion children, young people and families so they can thrive	8	14	6	2	0
3. We will tackle inequality by focusing on early identification and prevention activities that support people to live independent and fulfilling lives	16	18	16	0	0
4. We will make Torfaen more sustainable by connecting people and communities, socially, digitally and physically	8	4	3	0	0
5. We will respond to the climate and nature emergencies, recycle more and make improvements to the local environment	4	6	6	0	0
6. We will make Torfaen a great place to do business by working with local employers, encouraging new business start-ups and entrepreneurial activities	2	1	6	1	0
7. We will promote healthier lifestyles in Torfaen to improve mental and physical wellbeing	0	8	1	0	0
8. We will support our local culture and heritage and make Torfaen a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit	5	8	4	2	1
9. We will provide efficient customer focused services that reflect the way people live their lives and wish to access services	3	11	3	0	0
OVERALL PROGRESS UPDATE	50	86	47	7	1
	26.2%	45.0%	24.6%	3.7%	0.5%

Overall, we have made good progress against each of our Well-Being Objectives, with the vast majority being reported as either on target or completed (71%). However, 25% of actions experienced some difficulties, though we are confident that there is a clear plan to get them back on track and 4% deemed as having more significant concerns.

The above analysis demonstrates that nearly three quarters of all projects were delivered with a further quarter delayed, but with an absolute commitment to deliver. Therefore, given there were 191 projects, having only 1 aborted and 7 causing concern, shows the scale and pace of delivery. Most of this can be attributed to the hard work of officers and the impact of the new performance and project management processes which we've embedded across the Council in the year. Many of the challenges associated with these projects are due to their complexity, with further difficulties associated with inflation, finances, the cost of living and workforce.

A full report setting out in more detail the progress made against each of our Well-Being Objectives was received by Council in July 2023 and is available to [view here](#).

The following section of this report highlights our progress over the last year, against a selection of key activities, under each of our 9 County Plan Well-being Objectives:

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 1:

Raise educational attainment, helping young people and adults to gain the qualifications and skills needed to lead positive lives

Improving outcomes for our learners...

We recognise that outcomes for learners in Torfaen need to improve, across all of our schools.

In March 2022, Estyn made four recommendations to the Local Authority:

- R1 Improve outcomes for learners, particularly in secondary schools.
- R2 Strengthen performance management.
- R3 Strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning processes and the link between them.
- R4 Improve strategic leadership of learning and ALN.

A copy of the full Estyn Report can be viewed on the following link: [Inspection report Torfaen County Borough Council 2022 \(gov.wales\)](#)

In response to addressing these specific recommendations, a Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP) was produced and agreed with Estyn, in September 2022.

Governance of the work of our Education Services was also strengthened through: the establishment of a monthly Accelerated Improvement Group (AIG), a termly Strategic Improvement Board (SIB), quarterly performance reporting into our Leadership Team, in addition to regular reporting into Overview and Scrutiny Committee's.

As we continue to respond to our Estyn inspection, we have developed robust self-evaluation systems to ensure better planning, focusing on key areas of work, supported by our improvement partner the Education Achievement Service (EAS). This will support all of our schools to improve the quality of their leadership and teaching, in order to achieve better outcomes for every learner.

Over the course of this academic year, all schools have participated in School Development Plan (SDP) professional discussions with the Local Authority and the EAS to gain a shared understanding of their development priorities and to coordinate bespoke support, to address these.

At least termly, Team Around the School (TAS) meetings have taken place with all of our secondary schools to review the impact of support being provided and to enable revisions to support to be made, where



required. Officers and teams within Education Services have an improved understanding of the performance of schools and are beginning to collaborate more effectively to support schools and learners.

Over the course of the year, several of our schools have received positive inspections by Estyn - with no further follow up. Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw was formally removed from Special Measures, in March 2023 and although the school has been removed from this category, higher levels of support and Team Around the School (TAS) meetings will continue, to ensure improvement is sustained.

One of our secondary schools still remains in special measures, and as part of a pathway to progress, the school continues to be in receipt of bespoke support, from both the local authority and EAS teams.

Other new strategies that we have introduced throughout 2022/23, are as follows:

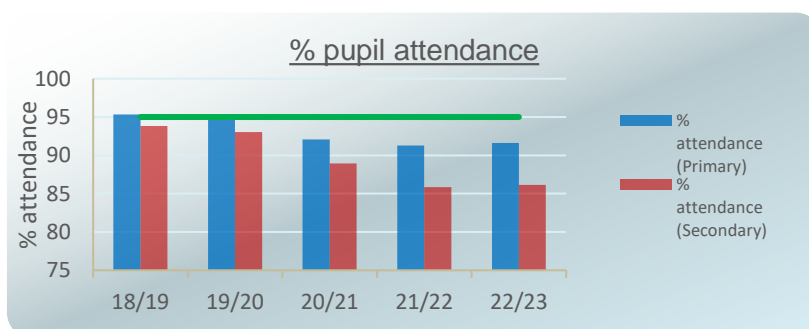
- A new Curriculum for Wales - introduced in all primary and some secondary schools from September 2022. Moving away from a prescribed National Curriculum, schools have moved to a broad framework within which they can design their own school curriculum. This is one of the biggest changes in education for a generation, aimed to better prepare children and young people for a changing world.
- Developed a new comprehensive ALN strategy - that will outline the Authorities vision for ALN and setting out specific support for learners and schools over the next five years. The team responsible for delivering against this strategy will review its provisions for learners with ALN during the Summer term of 2023 to determine future provision and needs of the service.
- Developed a new Education Digital Learning strategy - for the county, outlining our aspirations for learners and schools over the coming five years. We are currently undergoing wider consultation with schools and stakeholders on this.

Improving attendance rates within our schools...

Low rates of attendance continue to be a significant issue in nearly all of our schools. This aligns with the national picture and is undoubtedly a legacy impact of the pandemic, which is having lasting impact on a significant number of learners.



Whilst attendance in our schools has improved in recent months, it still remains a concern, in Torfaen. There is a continued need for joint working between key teams and agencies to ensure that learners who are persistently absent or excluded are identified earlier and effective strategies put into place to support and improve attendance.



Since 18/19 academic year % **pupil attendance** within our primary and secondary schools has decreased by 3.7 and 7.7%.

In comparison to 21/22, % of pupil attendance has however slightly improved for both sectors by 0.3% (primary) and 0.2% (secondary).

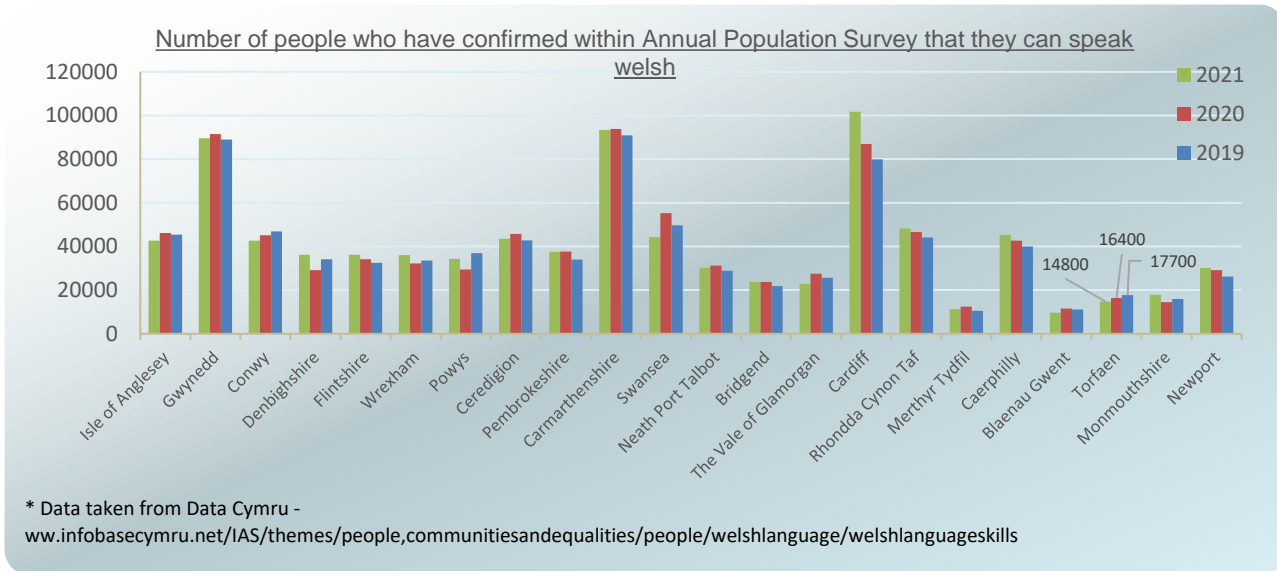
Key actions to increase the attendance rate within 2022/23 have involved:

- The Local Authority facilitating the use of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) within schools to address unauthorised absence
- A social media campaign being launched, which is ongoing #notinmissout
- An Attendance Forum being established to enable schools to share good practice
- Re-establishment of attendance data sharing, across Torfaen schools
- Deep dive attendance reviews, in individual schools to support an accelerated increase in attendance rates

- Cluster policy development has been facilitated to support consistency of approach, across Torfaen

Increasing Welsh medium Education provision...

As part of the national ambition to have one million Welsh speakers by 2050, the county faces some significant challenges in developing this, in an area, where currently the numbers of Welsh speakers are low. We are also facing some real challenges in recruiting Welsh speaking staff, into our education settings.



In an attempt to further increase opportunities to live and learn in the medium of Welsh language, we continue to promote Welsh language education and increase opportunities for learners to use Welsh within our schools. This is in line within our specific commitments that we have set out within our Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP), which is our 10-year plan, agreed by Welsh Government, in Spring 2023.

Throughout 2022/23, we have:

- established a new childcare setting at Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw and 2 new Flying Start provisions - Clych Meithrin Cwmbran and Clych Meithrin Dolwerdd.
- as part of our Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, we are in the final phases of planning, towards the delivery of a new 3G pitch at Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw, in order to improve facilities for learners and the wider community
- established a Welsh Medium immersion provision, in collaboration with our Welsh Medium schools to increase language fluency for children moving to a Welsh Medium school. This was hosted by Ysgol Panteg, and the setting opened in April 2023.
- increased provision and offer of Welsh Medium Education for pupils with Additional Learning Needs, by developing specific resources for our Welsh medium learners. This work continues and we are discussing provision with regional colleagues.

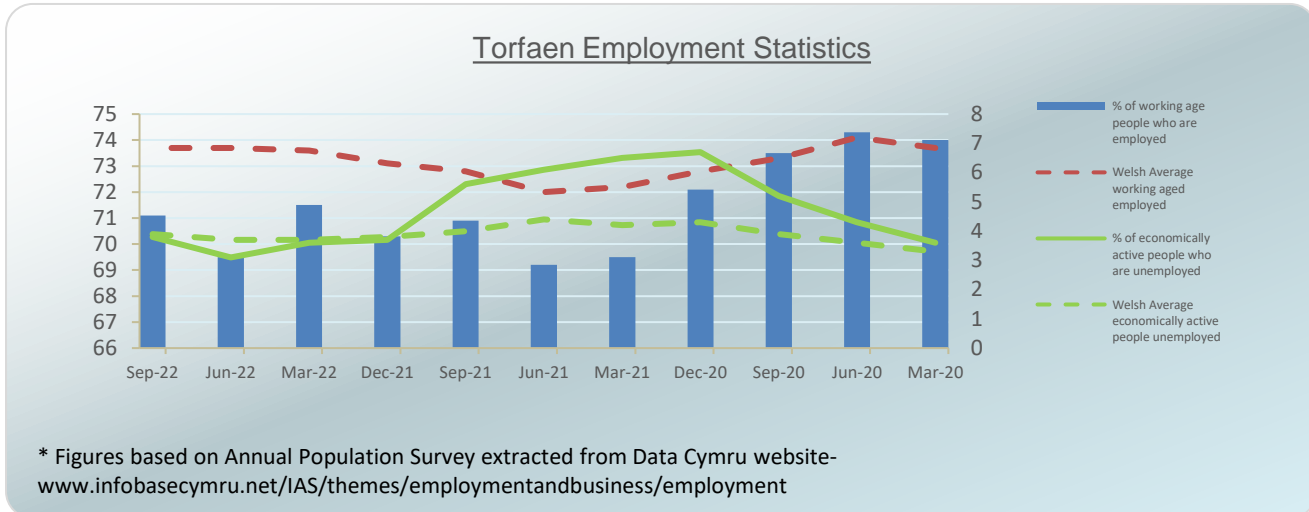
Increasing employability and skills...

Our employability and NEETs (not in education, employment, or training) 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.

The Council plays a vital role in shaping the type of economy that we have in Torfaen, and in helping our residents to access the economic opportunities which a flourishing economy can bring. To achieve this ambition, we appreciated that there was a need for a clear strategic framework.

In October 2022, our [Economy and Skills Strategy](#) was approved by Council, which sets out how we intend to support our communities, residents, places, and businesses of Torfaen over the next 8 years. It recognizes that a successful, sustainable Torfaen economy will be a well-balanced Torfaen economy. A

Borough whose businesses are delivering economic growth, whilst helping to create thriving, safe and attractive places for shopping, trade and leisure and supporting our citizens into skilled, prosperous & secure employment.

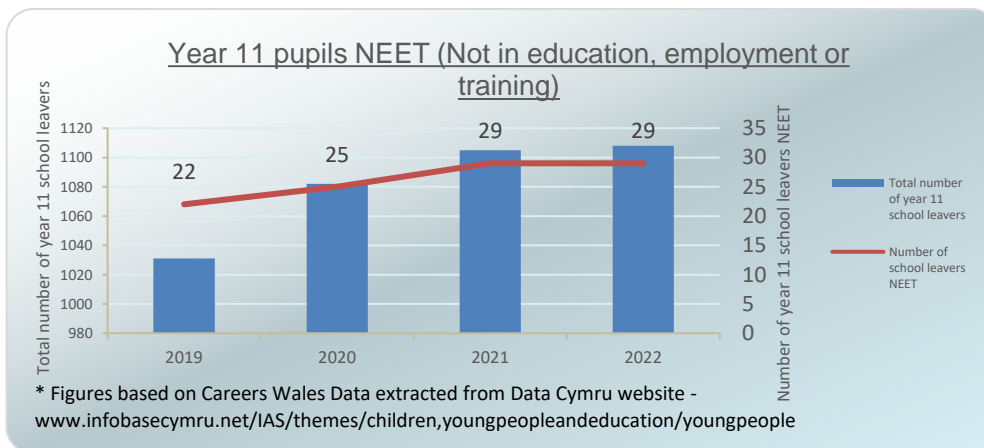


The latest figures available, up to September 2022, illustrates that the **% of working age people (18-64 years old) employed** within Torfaen is below the Welsh average by 1.8%.

Since December 2022, the **% of economically active people unemployed** has been more in line with the Welsh average.

(People defined as economically active are people who are either in employment or actively seeking employment).

Our NEET figures for young people leaving year 11 has slightly increased over the last 4 years. Within 2022, a number of young people encountered various barriers to progression into education, employment and training - mostly relating to mental health or other medical factors and some young people being in care.



In comparison to previous years our **NEET figures for young people leaving year 11** have very slightly increased, but we have continued to monitor and try and support all of our young people who leave school, each year.

In working towards our priorities within the Economy and Skills Strategy, over 2022/23, we have:

- began delivering work experience programme within the Council. The main programme will provide opportunities for up to 40 young people (initially under 16's) from September 2023, as well as developing opportunities for a small number of young people aged 16-19 from work-based learning to move into traineeship roles, within our Council departments.
- had 894 enrolments for Essential Skills, GCSEs and Vocational on to our Adults and Community Learning from people wanting to improve their qualifications – 30% higher than our target for the year.
- reached a total number of 3,555 participants on our 5-year employability programmes, (Bridges into Work, Nurture Equip Thrive and Working Skills for Adults) which help our Torfaen adult residents find employment or to move forwards within their careers.
- worked with over 350 young people who have been referred from secondary schools, who needed support with engagement and to address barriers to their positive progression.

- supported over 150 young people unemployed or economically inactive, towards or into, employment education or training, including providing access to appropriate and required vocational qualifications to support them into employment.
- provided direct destination support to 265 young people leaving year 11 and closely monitored destination of 100% of all year 11 leavers.
- secured additional Shared Prosperity Funding to replace ESF funding to continue and develop youth engagement and employability programmes for young people aged 11-20 in Torfaen. This will help us to continue to positively impact and help reduce the number of young people not in education, employment, or training to 1.9% of the school cohort in 2024.
- secured additional funding to continue our youth engagement programme so that we can reduce the number of young people not in education, employment, or training to 1.9% of the school cohort in 2024.
- placed 3 additional graduates for recruitment within our Council, Melin and STG Aerospace during 22/23, to help innovation and increase the average pay rates in the Borough.
- created a new drop-in hub for people who need advice about returning to work, finding a better job or help to increase their skills. The Employment and Skills Advice Pod has been set up by our Employability and Skills Team and is a pilot project funded by UK Government's Community Renewal Fund, as part of a regional project called CELT – Connect, Engage, Listen, Transform.

Our Key Challenges...

Improving outcomes

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 has been 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.

Additional Learning Needs

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.

Increasing Welsh provision

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 also 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.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 2:

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

Providing Sustainable Communities for Learning (21st Century Schools) ...

We recognise that the needs of the curriculum and learners has transformed over the last 40 years and continues to evolve. Most of the council's 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 school buildings. Addressing this, the council's 21st Century schools programme has allowed us to create a significant number of new schools and refurbishment of existing schools, although we appreciate there is still much more we need to deliver.

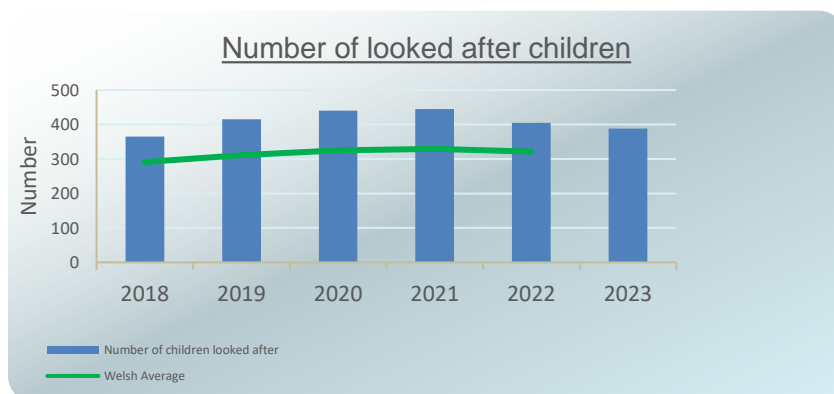
Whilst a few building projects have unfortunately been delayed throughout 2022/23, our main projects, are as follows:

- Begun the £6.85m net zero carbon, 50 place extension at Crownbridge School to enhance provision for children and young people, with severe learning difficulties.
- Undertook the first 3 out of 14 scheduled solar photo voltaic installations within schools, to generate electric power.

Ensure our children and families get the right help at the right time and minimise escalation through to statutory services...

Our ongoing focus throughout 2022/23 has been to safely reduce demand for Children and Families Social Care by recognising and developing community, family and individual strengths. In safely reducing the level of demand on the service, we aim to shift and target more resource to develop and expand a local offer to ensure preventative and early intervention services are continually developed and that statutory services are more effectively and efficiently targeted to those who require them.

Torfaen Children Looked After (CLA) Population remains among the highest in Wales, however, the number of 388 as at the end of March 2023 is considerably lower than its peak of 475, in September 2020.



Since 21/22, the **number of children the local authority looks after**, has gradually reduced, although this figure is still above the Welsh average.

Work to reduce this population has been undertaken safely and effectively through a dual strategy to discharge Care Orders on children placed with their families, Placed with Parents (PWP), Kinship Care Orders and by preventing children unnecessarily coming in to care. This has been achieved through a combination of service redesign, using existing resources and implementing an overarching strength-based approach to practice. This work has shown to be effective in the reduction of care numbers and the highest number of PWP Orders revoked in Wales over the last two years. Staff development has been key to achieving our ambitions and following the implementation of strength-based training across the workforce.

Further work has also been undertaken to support those children already in care with increased capacity in our Family Placement Team and a large percentage of our children being supported by in house foster carers. Those children whose needs cannot be met in foster care and escalate to residential care have had to be placed out of county. Whilst Torfaen's numbers have remained relatively low, in comparison with other Welsh Local Authorities, this cohort of children were often placed some distance from their families and in placements that were not meeting their needs in the most effective or optimum way. To ensure those children that do require residential care have the best support, Torfaen has progressed with plans for its first residential home in Greenhill Bungalow and work to develop this property is ongoing and monitored through our Project Management Office process.

Our online referral process was launched within 2022 to all schools to enable more effective referral processes to Children's Services. The challenge however continues to be that 67% of referrals result in 'No Further Action' (January 2023), which remains too high and more work with partners is needed to reduce this significantly as although we want concerns to be raised, we want partners to only be notifying us in appropriate circumstances. In addition, a Gwent Safeguarding Board Task and Finish Group has recently been put together, due to the quality of certain referrals being received into our Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub. These strategies combined should reduce the referrals with no further action required. This will enable us to ensure that resources and responses are effectively targeted for those in the greatest level of need.

In January 2023, Care Inspectorate Wales also reviewed our children's services, as part of our national review of care planning, for children and young people, subject to the Public Law Outline pre-proceedings.



The purpose of this review was to provide external scrutiny, assurance and to promote improvement in relation to the care planning for children and young people.

The findings from this review were positive: *"Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC) has procedures in place to support its decision-making in relation to Public Law outline (PLO) pre- proceedings. The local authority's strength-based culture is underpinned by a child and family-focused approach, which aims to promote positive outcomes whilst ensuring risks and concerns are appropriately identified and managed"*.

To view the findings and recommendations in full, please see attached link: [230324-National-Review-children-young-people-torfaen-en.pdf \(careinspectorate.wales\)](#)

Supporting of young people in need of prevention and intervention for anti-social behaviour...

The Multi Agency Pupil Intervention (MAPI) process was initiated in 2014, to ensure a coordinated, multi-agency approach within Torfaen, in tackling anti-social behaviour, by focussing on early intervention and prevention rather than enforcement or crisis management. MAPI meetings were introduced to identify vulnerabilities in young people that could indicate a heightened risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour and/or crime that would eventually lead to those individuals entering the criminal justice system.

MAPI facilitates the sharing of information and intelligence about young people in a school setting who are committing low level anti-social behaviour in school and in the community.

Over the past two years there has been an increase in the number of referrals for youth related anti-social behaviour. The types of behaviour included in the referrals shows an escalation in severity and frequency of behaviours. Young people now have more access to preventative services to ensure that interventions are available to tackle the behaviours at the earliest possible opportunity.

MAPI takes a child centred approach to problem solving for ASB reduction, ensuring the needs of the child are at the centre of the interventions. Working in partnership and having built networks through the Community Safety Hub, the team are able to ensure a coordinated approach is taken to support the young person and their family. The absolute core is to prevent these individuals from a life of crime and escalating concerns.

Since September 2022, 74 young people have entered the MAPI process throughout Torfaen. Whilst there hasn't been a reduction in the amount of people entering the Strike process (higher level ASB), our ambition is that cohorts will be prevented from escalating to the Anti-social Behaviour process.

Out of the total of 74 young people on MAPI, 12 have escalated to the ASB process, mainly due to lack of engagement with voluntary interventions. The 12 are being managed using more formal methods of intervention, such as face to face clinics in a police station and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts that can prohibit a young person from entering certain places. This process also ensures that the young person and their family are supported by the Youth Offending Service.

Expanding accessibility of childcare to all 2-year-olds

Flying Start is the Welsh Government's targeted Early Years programme for families with children under four years of age, who live in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Wales.

It aims to give children the best possible start in life, by working with families right from the antenatal period, through to when children start school.

Currently around 1,100 children and their families already access Flying Start support in Torfaen, which includes an enhanced health visiting service, antenatal classes, access to parenting groups and help to support children with speech, language and communication development.

The Flying Start scheme was expanded in September 2022 in the Abersychan area, providing early years support to more than 140 children aged from birth to four years.



A separate plan to develop Flying Start provision in Blaenavon has also been produced and is due to be delivered within 2023, to ensure that an additional 90 children will also be able to access the service.

This is really exciting news for Torfaen and the rest of Wales, especially during the cost-of-living crisis and the great hardship this is creating within our communities. Going forward, we are looking forward to working with Welsh Government to roll out further Flying Start schemes and childcare for two-year-olds to more communities in Torfaen.

Our Key Challenges...

21st Century Schools

We have been able to invest significantly in our schools estate over recent years under the auspices of the 21st Century Schools Programme (now called Sustainable Communities for Learning). More remains to be done but the global financial environment over the last 2 to 3 years has led to unprecedented price increases. The greatest challenge we are facing is to work with Welsh Government on how future work will be funded. In addition, planning of our future school places will need to take account of the ongoing refresh of our Local Development Plan albeit it is expected that funding for additional places will need to come via associated Section 106 agreements.

Children 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.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 3:

Tackle inequality by focusing on early identification and prevention.

Providing a range of financial support for those most in need...

The scale of the cost-of-living crisis and demand for many of our revenue and benefits services continues to grow as communities continue to recover, from the pandemic.

Key headline activities that we have undertaken in 2022/23, are as follows:

- 4,318 claims totalling £23,437,609 has been paid out to help residents with their rent.

- 9,716 claims totalling £10,185,107 have been paid out, to help residents with their council tax.
- Paid out £449,224.63 in discretionary housing payments, to help people remain in their homes
- A total of 11,863 payments have been paid to residents, as part of the Winter Fuel Scheme
 - 2,302 claims totalling £806,000 have been paid to eligible unpaid carers
 - 34,059 payments have been made totalling £5,108,850.00 as cost-of-living payments to occupiers of properties in council tax bands A, B, C and D and people eligible under the council tax reduction scheme
 - Provided almost £400k in additional £150 payments to support families who are accessing free school meals
 - Supported 414 residents through the Building Resilient Communities Scheme, to maximise their income



Continue to work with our internal and external partners to identify and work with young people and families to ensure that they are supported and engaged to prevent anti-social behaviour and exclusion...

The Positive Futures programme has continued to grow, and we have seen an increase in demand through our work with partners including Community Safety, Police, Fire, as well as schools. The purpose of this programme is to provide an alternative curriculum intervention, offering accredited courses for looked after young people, those disengaging from mainstream education, those who cannot engage with mainstream education and the hardest to reach young NEETs (not in education, employment, or training) who have been referred from Pupil Referral Units.

Throughout 2022/23 we have worked with young people in 4 schools and have received enquiries from another 4 schools, providing skills and helping young people to increase their self-confidence and esteem, whilst allowing them to stay within their school setting.

The Community work that has also taken place within 4 identified antisocial hotspot areas has enabled us to work with 75 young people, providing them with support and helping residents to feel less vulnerable in their homes.

The relationship between partners continues to strengthen, as this work is highly valued.

Ensure that our young carers continue to be identified and assessed and that communication with key agencies is effective to enable services to be provided...

We continue to provide our in-house young carers service, which is effective in identifying and assessing young carers. The National ID card scheme was launched by Carers Trust Wales in 2021 and allows young carers to easily identify themselves to professionals, without having to share personal details about their caring role. This scheme also allows carers to be more visible within their communities and entitles them to gain free access into leisure facilities and specific tourist attractions within the borough.

Nearly 190 young carers in Torfaen have signed up for a national ID card, allowing them to be more visible within their communities. One of our proudest achievements during 2022 was becoming the first organisation within Wales to be granted Carer Friendly Employer Accreditation by the Care Collective.

The Care Collective is the largest charity supporting unpaid carers in Wales. It offers training and accreditation to organisations and teams across Wales to help support carers in the workplace.



This award recognises the work the authority has done with carers to date and our future plans to support staff who are unpaid carers.

Helping people to remain independent within their own homes...

Adult Social Care is in high demand, particularly as a result of the covid pandemic and the knock-on impact that this has had, on health and social care.

Our working throughout 2022 has focused on how we can support our residents to maintain their independence and resilience, which we know leads to improved outcomes for those individuals. We have also emphasised the importance of information, advice and assistance so that residents do not get drawn into a system and service, when, with the assistance of alternative non-statutory support, they can maintain independence and live the life they want.

In order to address the challenges, the council recognises that Early Intervention and Prevention and Reablement provision needs to be a focus for our activity. We also recognise that we need to build on the great work that takes place within our communities to enable even greater levels of community resilience and community support to help people maintain their independence. There are a range of services that are commissioned with both private and voluntary sector providers across the county borough in order to ensure people are able to live independently and safely within their own homes. This includes the provision of domiciliary care services alongside the provision of alarm services and assistive technology to maintain an individual's independence. Our Housing Support Grant funded services provide additional housing related support provision to all residents where support is needed and supplements and compliments statutory and third sector services to assist in individuals maintaining independence.



Work, across the council, in order to develop community resilience and reduce the need for and burden on statutory services has therefore continued at pace throughout 2022. The creation of the new Adults and Communities Division became operational on 1st April 2023 which will help to focus on front door access to adult social care and will develop an integrated community rehabilitation offer. This should enable those residents who require the most help to be dealt with efficiently.

At the end of 2022, the capacity within the domiciliary provider market improved, allowing us to reduce the number of hours of uncommissioned domiciliary care, ensuring people get the care they need in the community.

We have also been able to increase the number of reablement packages provided, by mitigating need or reducing support, through our reablement.

Looking at our teams in Ty Glas yr Dorlan, Intake and Emergency Care at Home, we have begun reshaping our reablement models to provide an integrated community reablement service, in line with Welsh Governments further faster initiative. This will inform a business case for phase 2 and has been agreed, as an Integrated Services Partnership Board (ISPB) priority.

Providing affordable housing and preventing homelessness...

Affordable, good quality housing is in high demand not just in Torfaen but also across Wales and the United Kingdom. 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 during a cost-of-living crisis.



In comparison to 21/22 our performance on **preventing people becoming homelessness** has decreased by 5.95%. This is mainly due to an increase in the amount of people presenting themselves homeless, due to the cost-of-living crisis and there being less affordable housing to rent/buy.

This is also impacting on homelessness as households are unable to access affordable housing. The council continues to work proactively with partners to respond, not just in terms of preventing homelessness, but also with registered social landlords to bring existing and new affordable housing into use, as quickly as possible.

Throughout 22/23 we have:

- Continued to work with registered social landlords to ensure residents are able to access key services in order to sustain their accommodation.
- Acquired additional units of temporary accommodation which have been leased to us for homeless households.
- Carried out pro-active joint engagement to prevent homelessness and reduce tenants' debt, in socially rented housing.
- Jointly commissioned a system upgrade to our Civica Housing system, through the Homeseeker partnership.
- Carried out collaborative work at a strategic level through the Strategic Housing Partnership
- Been pro-active in our "move on" arrangements established to improve the flow into permanent accommodation and reduce hardship.

Our Key Challenges...

Adult Services

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.

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 are able to live the life they want.

Communities

We also 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 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 community's 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 community's 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.

Housing

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 will continue to work with partners in response, not just in terms of homelessness prevention activity, but also with our Registered Social Landlord partners to bring existing and new housing on stream, as quickly as possible.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 4:

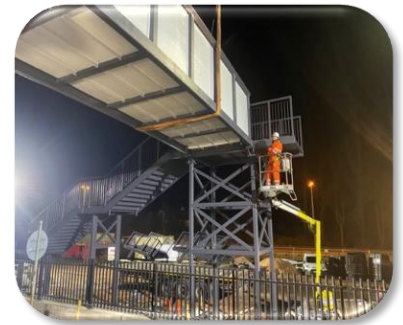
Make Torfaen more sustainable by connecting people and communities, socially, digitally, and physically

Encouraging active travel...

Work continues on the development and implementation of new active travel routes within the Borough to improve and promote opportunities for active travel, by walking and cycling for everyday journeys.

A project to transform Pontypool and New Inn Railway Station also reached a significant milestone at the end of 2022 and is nearing completion. This consists of a £7.1m development to increase the number of people to use the station and making it easier for passengers to leave their cars at the train station, as well as cyclists, to travel further afield.

This project is one of the first Cardiff Capital Region Metro Plus schemes to be delivered, as part of plans to create a South Wales Metro system.



Other significant new schemes and projects that we have undertaken to help with changing behaviours to encourage transition from the car to active travel include:

- Widening the walking and cycle paths on both Cwmbran Drive and Edlogan Way
- Commencement of project to investigate and address active travel severance (i.e. so there are less interruptions to the active travel route) on Cwmbran Drive
- Working with Cwmbran Shopping to increase the use of Active Travel in the town centre.
- Working with Llantarnam Community Primary School/Woodland School to promote Safe Routes in the Community (SRiC) scheme.
- Carried out dropped kerb schemes around various parts of the borough
- Carried out surveys for progressing new active travel routes at road crossings along the canal towpath in conjunction with the Canal Regeneration Strategy

Connecting our communities...

One of our main priorities, is to equip communities with the skills and resources so that they can become more resilient to the challenges they face in a rapidly changing world. We want to be able to support and empower communities, so they are able to shape or influence the way in which we deliver our services, appropriate to their needs. In short, we want to develop a 'Communities Approach' to public service, which directs people to the right level of help, at the right time and from the right source, so that support will be delivered consistently and to the highest quality.

Throughout 2022 we have created our Communities & Digital Directorate to develop a new "Communities Approach" to the delivery of public services – an approach where the Council works more closely with our local communities (residents, community groups, community councils and other public bodies) to design and deliver services. Our Communities Approach will be set out within a Community Wellbeing Strategy which is currently at the visioning / objective-setting stage. This strategy will set out how we will use the

Communities Approach to work together with our local communities to alleviate poverty, promote health & wellbeing, and stimulate community activity with the aim of enhancing the quality of life and resilience of the residents of Torfaen.

So far throughout 2022, we have:

- Increased the number of services accessible on the council's website.
- Worked with telecoms providers to reduce digital exclusion by improving broadband.
- Expanded Public Wifi across the Borough

Our Key Challenges...

Active Travel

Active Travel is key to sustainably connecting people and communities to local services and facilities. There are also proven health and well-being benefits along with promoting the climate change agenda and improving our local environment.

Following an extensive consultation process we have identified 175 future routes as part of our Active Travel Network Map but whilst these infrastructure improvements have been identified, we must ensure we continue to engage with our residents to consider wider aspects of any active travel scheme being delivered through our prioritised list, such as cycle storage provision and seating areas for resting points to capitalise on any future funding awards to benefit our communities.

Changing the behaviours of our communities to ensure Active Travel is considered as the preferred mode of travel for local journeys will be a challenge, but in the absence of a national change behaviour campaign, we will continue to engage with our communities and work with our internal and external partners to maximise active travel growth.

Digital Connectivity

We have invested in a Head of Customer, Digital & IT Services, to help bring together our Digital, Data and Technology functions and have introduced a new Digital First Customer Strategy. This strategy, however, relies on a significant cultural shift in the way that our teams conceive of and design services. Accelerating this cultural change will be a significant focus for us. for the year ahead.

Connecting our communities

Our Communities Approach is still new. We need to keep a continued focus on strengthening our relationship with our communities, community leaders and the third sector, so that the community system has the capacity to address challenges at a local level. We will need to ensure we strike the right balance between encouraging community activity and focussing that activity on those priorities that matter most to local people.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 5:

Address our climate and nature emergencies, recycle more and make improvements to the local environment

Addressing our climate and nature emergencies, by reducing our emissions, encouraging biodiversity and protecting green space...

Our aim is for our towns, streets and our natural environment to be beautiful, attractive, clean and sustainable places. Maintaining and investing in green spaces, roads, and pavements to encourage active travel and community use, which is fundamental to achieving the aims of our County Plan.

We appreciate that we won't be able to fulfil these obligations unless we work together to respond to the climate and nature emergencies. This means decarbonising our vehicles and how we travel, changing how we heat and power our buildings and reducing the carbon impact of the goods and services we buy. Not only do we need to work with our communities, but we must also act as a community leader to encourage the transition in becoming net zero carbon, to ensure the environment and the well-being of future generations are protected.

Taking action to mitigate the risks of climate change will contribute to future well-being and ensuring our natural assets are well managed and in good condition will mean that future generations can experience their well-being benefits. We have an important role to play supporting our communities on the net zero journey and providing opportunities to contribute towards our climate and nature emergency objectives and although we already doing a number of things to reduce carbon emissions, prepare for a changing climate and to protect nature, we are aware that much more action needs to be taken.

In order to focus our efforts, we have developed an action plan setting out what we will do to address our climate and nature emergencies, how we will recycle more and make improvements to the local environment. In February 2022 our Cabinet approved our Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan, creating clear ownership, accountability and the assurances needed to support delivery.

In November 2022, an early draft of our underpinning delivery plan was presented to our Leadership Team, along with a 6 monthly performance report. It has been agreed that our 8 themes and 45 actions would be reduced to 4 workstreams, making it much easier to measure progress against each of our objectives. These are as follows:

Workstream 1: The Council itself becomes net zero carbon by 2030.

Workstream 2: The Council leads, supports, facilitates, and encourages Torfaen's communities, residents and businesses towards net zero carbon by 2050.

Workstream 3: Our changing climate is factored into the way we plan, so that our communities and the services we deliver are resilient.

Workstream 4: Torfaen's precious natural resources, and the biodiversity they support are protected and enhanced.

With all of our key strategies, going forward, we are looking to improve how our planning for the year ahead will support the development and delivery of the County Plan, ensuring all of our Directorates consider how they can best contribute to this agenda / well-being objective.

Key progress made so far throughout 2022/23, is as follows:

- Installed 355kW peak output of renewable technology across our council assets.
- Managed 14% of greenspace positively for biodiversity, with more sites to be added
- Managed 7 Local Nature Reserves for the benefit of nature and people.
- Opened 1 Re-use shop next to our Household Waste Recycling Centre in New Inn
- Installed 21 double chargers with charging for 42 electric vehicles, for public use.
- Worked with a network of Community Climate Ambassadors who are focused on helping the borough become net carbon zero by 2050.
- Created 57.4 kilometres of existing active routes in Torfaen.
- Purchased 15 electric vehicles for the council's fleet.

Also, within 2022/23, 7 of our sites within Torfaen were awarded the prestigious Green Flag title, in recognition of their excellent visitor facilities, high environmental standards, and commitment to delivering great quality green space.

The Green Flag Award programme is delivered in Wales by environmental charity Keep Wales Tidy, with support from Welsh Government.

Independent green space experts volunteered their time in early autumn to judge applicant sites against eight strict criteria, including biodiversity, cleanliness, environmental management, and community involvement.



The sites awarded are Cwmbran Boating Lake, Garn Lakes, Panteg Park, Pontypool Park, Blaen Bran Community Woodland, Henllys Local Nature Reserve and Llanfrechfa Grange Walled Garden.

In building upon achievement, we have also:

- Commenced the process to designate a new Local Nature Reserve at Blaenserchan, to protect land that is particularly valuable for nature and to provide opportunities for community involvement
- Revised our approach to grassland management for 42 sites to capture and store carbon, enhance biodiversity, whilst also providing space for sport & recreation
- Launched a Green Infrastructure, and Biodiversity Guidance for developers to ensure that any future projects within Torfaen will continue to enhance our biodiversity and not damage it.

Reducing our waste...

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 Welsh Government's - Towards Zero Waste' strategy. This represents a significant challenge for our Council and one that will need working more closely with communities, to achieve this milestone.

Waste Management in Torfaen has performed well historically and mostly achieved recycling rate targets, as set by Welsh Government. In more recent years however, Torfaen has underperformed against targets, in part due to the pandemic, and has struggled to recover.

We currently reuse or recycle around 59.84% of municipal waste collected, which remains short of the Welsh Government statutory target of 64%.



The Council remains committed to reducing waste and we will continue to review the Waste & Recycling Service with the aim of improving performance and achieving Welsh Government's 2024/25 70% recycling rate target.

In 2023, the Council invited Audit Wales in to review its recycling service to help advise the Council on how it could improve and take the necessary steps to recover its previous good performance and ensure the Council was on track to deliver 70%. Audit Wales found that the Council understood the reasons for the service not achieving the targets and needed to put in place a plan so the Council had a trajectory which was clear on policy decisions, investment decisions and the role communities must play to enable success.

The final report was received after we made a brave decision to change our strategy on the way forward with waste as a result of the feedback received as part of our consultation exercise. Since this time we have been working with a cross section of Members, via the Strategic Partnership Board and stakeholders (WRAP / Local Partnership) to put in place a robust programme and governance framework, to enable the Council and the service to succeed.

Our Key Challenges...

Reducing Waste and Carbon Footprint

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.

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.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 6:

Make Torfaen a great place to do business by working with local employers, encouraging new business start-ups and entrepreneurial activities

Attracting new businesses...

The success and prosperity of the local economy is essential to deliver much of what is in our 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 may be.

The Torfaen economy cannot act in isolation. It is part of a much bigger, regional, national, and international jigsaw but the programmes delivered by the council and the relationships it forms can facilitate and encourage growth.

Our economy is diverse with both strengths from which we can draw and challenges we want to overcome. The council wants to capitalise on the strength of the 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 sciences sector.

The council wants to build on national and regional programmes that focus on promoting innovation, building local entrepreneurship and confidence to access new markets and take opportunities to build a dynamic, active and research led economy. As part of this strategy the Council secured nearly £1m as part of the Shared Prosperity Fund for a range of projects aimed at supporting innovation, business growth and business digitisation.

Over 2023-2024/2025 these projects then become key deliverables within the County Plan with the aim of creating over 50 new jobs, safeguarding 150 jobs and creating over 50 new businesses in the Borough.

With the creation of Place Plans for our town centres, the Council wants to reflect the different ways that people are using town centres so that we have more sustainable towns for the future. We are committed to bold ambitions for regeneration of the buildings and public spaces so that they attract residents, businesses, and visitors to help keep the pound circulating in the local economy. Led by the communities in each of our towns, we are looking to inspire confidence and attract innovative investment.

At the beginning of 2022, Pontypool was one of only 11 projects within Wales to receive a grant from the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund, which aims to create jobs and grow the local economy.

The £7.6 million grant will help fund our £9.3 million Pontypool Cultural Hub project, part of which will transform derelict buildings into a thriving cultural centre with a new restaurant, to boost the night-time economy and attractiveness of the town.

The investment will:

- transform St James' Church, a derelict Grade II listed building into a thriving cultural-hub with a pop-up cinema, pop-up food and exhibition space, a bar-serverly with indoor and outdoor seating and space for community events.
- convert public toilets into a landmark café/restaurant providing a high-quality lunchtime café offer, transforming into a “small plates” style restaurant in the evening.
- renovate an existing car park into safe and secure parking for users of these facilities and the town.



The projects will create jobs, drive economic growth, help restore people's pride in the places where they live and spread opportunity more equally.

The Cultural Hub project is expected to be completed by March 2025.

Our Key Challenges...

Economy

The success and prosperity of the local economy is fundamental in delivering much of what is in our 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.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 7:

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

Promoting mental health and wellbeing...

Encouraging healthy lifestyles for our residents, will not only benefit them now, but will also instil good behaviours and continued benefits later in life. Keeping people healthier and independent for longer - reducing the chances of ill health, also decrease the need to rely on statutory services.

In an attempt to increase opportunities and access to sport and physical activity for the residents of Torfaen we have supported a number of clubs throughout 2022, helping them to obtain further funding and providing coach education through National Governing Bodies, Safeguarding and UKCC. The number of clubs who received funding in 2022/23 were 24, totalling £302,732 through Sport Wales and National Governing Body Grants. Work has also been undertaken with the FAW and on a 3G strategy which will engage all partners, especially Torfaen Leisure Trust.

We continued to work proactively with our Health Colleagues and increased the number of partners accordingly, such as Public Health, Dementia Groups, Mental Health Charities etc. This is to influence and help shape future working both on a local and regional level and includes the Marmot Regional work and

the Gwent Obesity Strategy to promote the benefits of a physically active lifestyle.

A new and exciting support programme for dads was also launched in January 2022, which consist of an 11-week programme, aimed at helping and supporting new and expectant dads with children, up to the age of 18 months.



It includes weekly workshops and talks, covering a wide range of subjects, including:

- Health and well-being
- Diet and nutrition
- Midwife and health visitor information
- Psychology
- Gambling and gaming

The programme, run by our Torfaen Sports Development Team, has been devised following research by a number of organisations, including Fathers Outreach, Tidy Butt, Gwent Psychology, Recoveries 4 All and Newport County in the Community, who found that men benefited from having a safe space, where they can ask questions and learn about themselves and their children, as they start their journey of being a dad.

Continuing to encourage and support mental health and well-being within our borough, we have also developed static play areas at both Pontypool Park and Cwmbran Boating Lake, improving the availability and choice of play equipment for children with disabilities. These projects were fully funded by the Council through their Covid Recovery Fund.

Working with a project group, specialising in children with disabilities and autism, we have taken ideas and turned them into designs. The new inclusive play equipment was installed in Pontypool Park in October 2022, providing a wheelchair-accessible roundabout and trampoline.

Having inclusive play parks in the borough is so important for the health and well-being of children, and we hope that in the future more of our parks will have inclusive equipment.

Alongside other Gwent local authorities we are working together to become a 'Marmot' region with the intent of taking evidence-based action to reduce inequalities and address key challenges to current and long-term well-being across the region, to reduce the inequities that affect the wider determinants of health.



The Council's well-being objectives link to the Marmot principles, and directly contribute towards tackling health inequalities. The eight Marmot principles are, as follows:

1. Give every child the best start in life
2. Enable all children, young people, and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
3. Create fair employment and good work for all
4. Ensure a healthy standard of living for all
5. Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities
6. Strengthen the role and impact of ill-health prevention
7. Tackle racism, discrimination, and their outcomes
8. Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together

Our objective to 'encourage and champion children, young people and families so they can thrive' will support the Marmot principle to 'Give every child the best start in life'.

The Institute of Health Equity report, 'Building a Fairer Gwent – Improving Health Equity and the Social Determinants' highlighted a number of recommendations to improve access to safe and inclusive places to play; parks and green spaces are powerful tools to improve health and wellbeing. We are committed to improving the use of green spaces for those living in areas of higher deprivation and creating inclusive play parks throughout the borough to improve the health and well-being of children.

Our Key Challenges...

No key challenges identified.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 8:

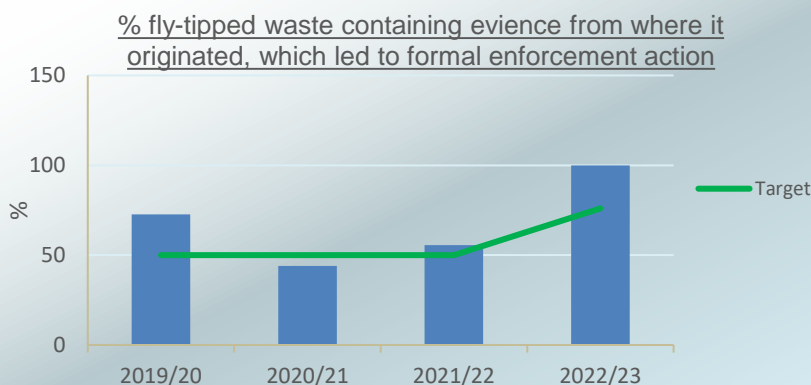
Support our local culture and heritage and make Torfaen a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit

Creating safe and attractive places to live...

We want our towns, streets, and our natural environment to be attractive, clean and sustainable. Often, the tremendous pride in local communities is harmed by the minority. While not significantly different to surrounding areas, there is too much litter, too much fly-tipping and the council wants to work in partnership with communities to stamp out this behaviour, for the benefit of all.

Our Litter and Fly Tipping Strategy was adopted by Council in March 2021, which sets out the national and local context with respect to litter and fly-tipping, explaining the causes and consequences of littering both local and globally and the importance of taking action in Torfaen. Whilst the current approach has been successful in engaging stakeholders in fly tipping and litter prevention actions, there are still litter and fly-tipping hot spots that are difficult to keep clean, for a variety of reasons - related to accessibility, health and safety reasons, site ownership and other constraints. The strategy rightly places greater emphasis on preventative activities including partnership working with communities, schools, and businesses, whilst also focusing on education and awareness raising, and as a last resort enforcement.

Throughout 2022, our Public Protection Team has continued to investigate reports of fly-tipped waste, to identify perpetrators and take formal enforcement action, as appropriate. We have also reviewed a new approach to prevention and enforcement, in an attempt to further reduce the amount of fly-tipping within the County.



In comparison to 20/21 and 21/22 our performance in **% of fly-tipped waste containing evidence where it originated from, which led to informal action** has increased. The number of incidences reported and action being able to be taken on evidence found, are however on a smaller scale for 22/23 in comparison to previous years.

Linked to this objective, our other aim is to create Place Plans for all of our town centres, halting decline, building ambition and hope, and inspiring confidence with innovative investment, through bold ambitious and regeneration of public spaces.

Plans to revitalise Blaenavon and Pontypool town centres were published within May 2022, aiming to redevelop the areas for people who already live and work there, as well as attracting new businesses and visitors.

The plans for Blaenavon include improved links between the town and local tourist attractions, enhanced public spaces including Market Square, and a plan to bring new traders into the town.

The vision for Pontypool includes: a new cafe and cultural hub on Hanbury Road that links the park and town centre, redevelopment of Civic Centre car park to make it more accessible and further improvements to the market.

Plans for Cwmbran are due to be launched in 2023 following more detailed discussions with the owners of Cwmbran Town Centre.

Local residents and businesses were consulted on their views on the Placemaking Plans, which will help set our aspirations, over the next 10 years.

These are very much long-term plans, which demonstrates our commitment to investing in Blaenavon and Pontypool, for the future.



Our Key Challenges...

Communities

Our resident's 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.

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 our County Plan.

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.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 9:

Provide efficient customer focussed services that reflect the way people live their lives and wish to access services

Providing efficient customer focussed services...

Our County Plan seeks to more effectively harness the role that communities already play in delivering information, advice, guidance and help through a greater focus on early intervention and prevention resources. To achieve this, it means that we need to redesign services, around how customers live their lives and use our services.



Throughout 2022 we have:

- Involved our customers in the design of our services to improve content on our website so it becomes much easier to find information and complete services online. This has already been linked to key communications activity including Waste and Recycling, Cost of Living support, Roads, Travel and Parking and new 20mph legislation. A rolling programme of improvements to the website will be delivered over the coming years.
- Begun developing a Communities Strategy to provide a framework of advice, assistance and support that is available, near to where residents live
- Developed an Age-Friendly Plan and created a role for an advisor who can help advise us and explore the extent to which our services meet the needs of all older people.
- Sourced British Sign Language Interpreters to attend Torfaen Access Forum meetings, enabling members of the Deaf community to attend and share their experiences of public services, and engage in our consultations.
- Published our Public Participation Strategy and relaunched our Torfaen's People Panel to ensure that our residents have the opportunity to influence how decisions are made, that affect their lives and the wider community.

Our Key Challenges...

Digital Connectivity

We have invested in a Head of Customer, Digital & IT Services, have brought together our Digital, Data and Technology functions and have introduced a new Digital First Customer Strategy. However, this strategy relies on a significant cultural shift in the way that our teams conceive of and design services. Accelerating this cultural change will be a significant focus for us for the year ahead.

Our priorities and challenges for the year ahead

Throughout this section of our report we have identified a number of challenges we are facing associated with each of our well-being objectives. These will need to be overcome in order for us to realise our ambitions. To take our ambitions forward in the year ahead we have published a delivery plan for 2023/24

Our 2023/24 delivery plan has been developed considering new and existing key challenges and the progress made against our 2022/23 Delivery Plan.

Our [Annual Delivery Plan for 2023/24](#) was adopted by Council and published in February 2023. It moves our ambitions into action as we move into the next phase of delivering our County Plan. This annual approach to County Planning means that our plans going forward will be iterative and agile, taking into consideration any new initiatives, challenges and opportunities that have arisen which can be responded to, throughout the lifespan of the County Plan.

Throughout the year, we will use our service planning monitoring approach to monitor and demonstrate our progress on a regular basis, in order to evidence the success of our ambitions. This will be central to delivering upon our aspirations.

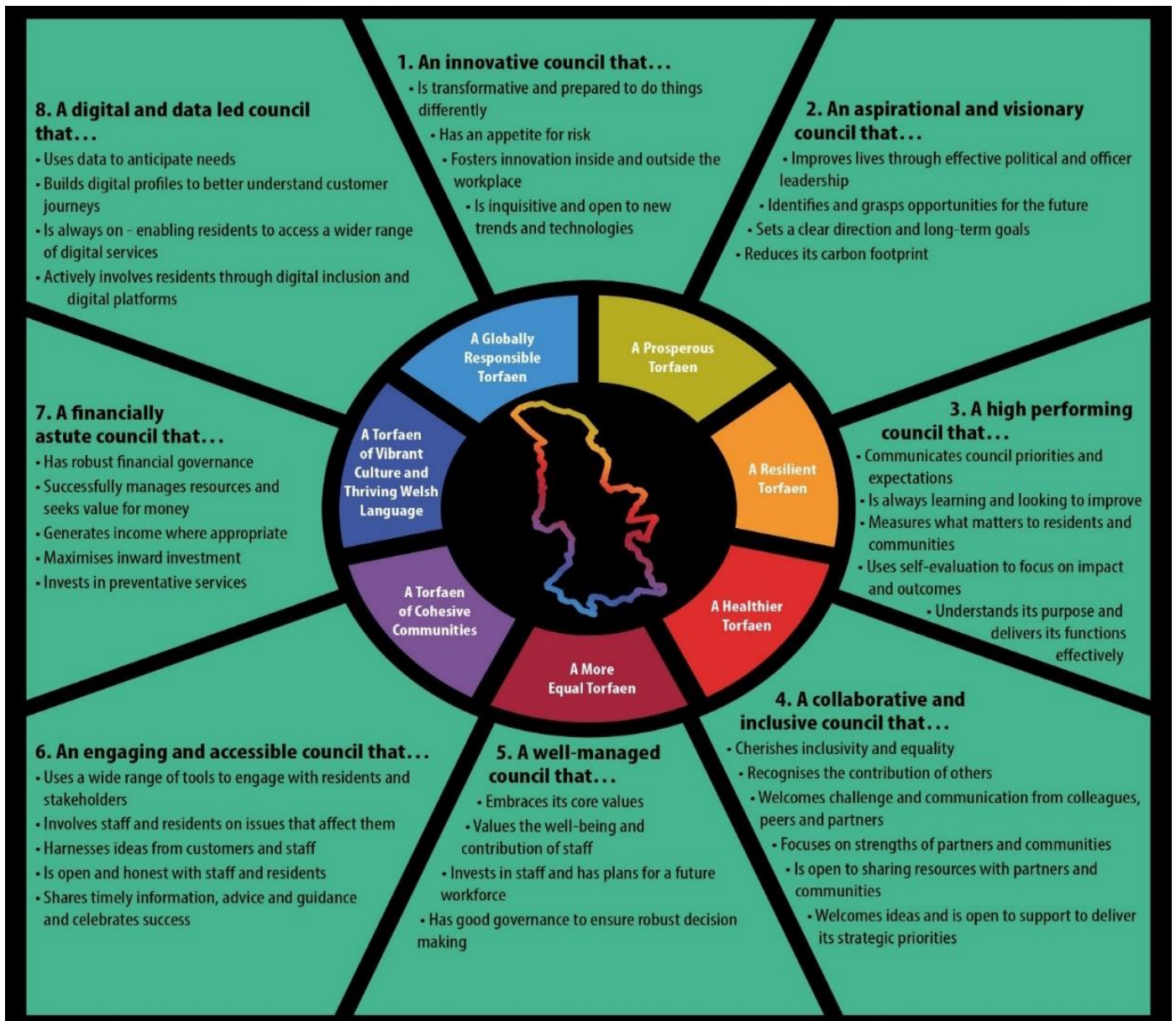
b. Torfaen: Becoming an Outstanding Council

It is 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 that our own internal processes and

systems are working well, ensuring we are using the resources available to us as efficiently and effectively as possible, with robust controls, systems and processes supporting every aspect of the Council’s activity.

The development of our County Plan is important in setting our priorities and commitments, but without specific organisational conditions defined, we will never be as effective as we can be in delivering upon all of the outcomes we are seeking to achieve.

During 2021-22, we went through a process of developing a framework - a set of 8 characteristics, which we use to define what an outstanding Council looks like to assess our performance against (*see diagram below*). This framework provides a structure which we have used, alongside our County Plan, to develop our annual self-assessment. This is the second year of reporting, against our Characteristics of 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.

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.

Throughout the year we have carried out monitoring exercises against the activities we deemed areas for improvement or development in last year's self-assessment report. These activities are reflected in the appropriate Service Plans and are monitored on a quarterly basis by the Directorates and reported to our Leadership Team on a six-monthly basis. Where there are areas we feel haven't improved as intended we will continue to monitor closely in the year ahead to help achieve our ambition in becoming an outstanding Council.

Whilst reviewing the process taken to produce our first annual self-assessment report, it was felt on reflection, too much emphasis was given to operational service-based activities rather than our corporate strategic activities. Our development as a Council over the past 2 years which has been evident of late with changes to the leadership structure to correspond to a more corporate/strategic approach which has led us to ensuring this year's report will take a more strategic approach.

In May 2023 we held a senior managers event. One of the topics on the agenda was to seek views on how staff felt about our Characteristics, if they felt they were being embedded or if more work was needed. Overall, the feedback on this was positive with general agreement that we were working towards the right set of Characteristics.

Leadership Team have taken part in workshops in order to assess the progress made in 2022-23 and to agree on where we need to concentrate efforts in the year ahead. Going forward with greater clarity around our own internal framework for improvement we intend to engage more widely across the organisation to develop greater understanding of the framework and to harvest ideas for further improvements.

It was felt however that further definition was needed in order to better describe what we meant by an Outstanding Council and what we needed to do in order to become one. Work was undertaken to better define our characteristics which has resulted in a set of descriptors for each characteristic. These descriptors can be viewed [here](#). This exercise was carried further help us define what we believe outstanding looks like and to help us evaluate what areas we need to be concentrating on to help us get there.

Following review, we have used our framework to undertake an organisational self-assessment, drawing conclusions and setting out the actions that need to be taken, going forward. Progress against our commitments is monitored each year and our key findings have been reported in the following section of this report.

Our Governance Arrangements

The Council's Governance arrangements are integral to the Council's ability to deliver its key services whilst effectively and economically deploying its resources.

Each year we produce an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) to outline the governance processes and arrangements that operate within the Council. The AGS is prepared by the officers across the Council whose remit is to ensure the Council is achieving and maintaining good corporate governance.

The Governance and Audit Committee also has oversight of the process for producing the **Annual Governance Statement (AGS)**, providing a mechanism for review prior to adoption by full Council. The AGS is integral to the Council's Self-Assessment process and is a key source of evidence when considering the progress made against our 'Characteristics of an Outstanding Council'.

Our Governance and Audit Committee is firmly embedded within our governance arrangements. The committee is made up of 5 local authority elected members and 3 lay members one of which holds the role of the Chair. A mix of both local authority members and lay members further strengthens the level of independent challenge within the committee. In addition to its role reviewing our AGS, the committee has a key oversight and assurance role in areas such as business risk management (including monitoring of individual directorate risk registers), financial management, our Council's Management Framework and our Complaints process. Another critical role of the committee is to provide assurance that the Council is responding appropriately and effectively to reports from our external regulators.

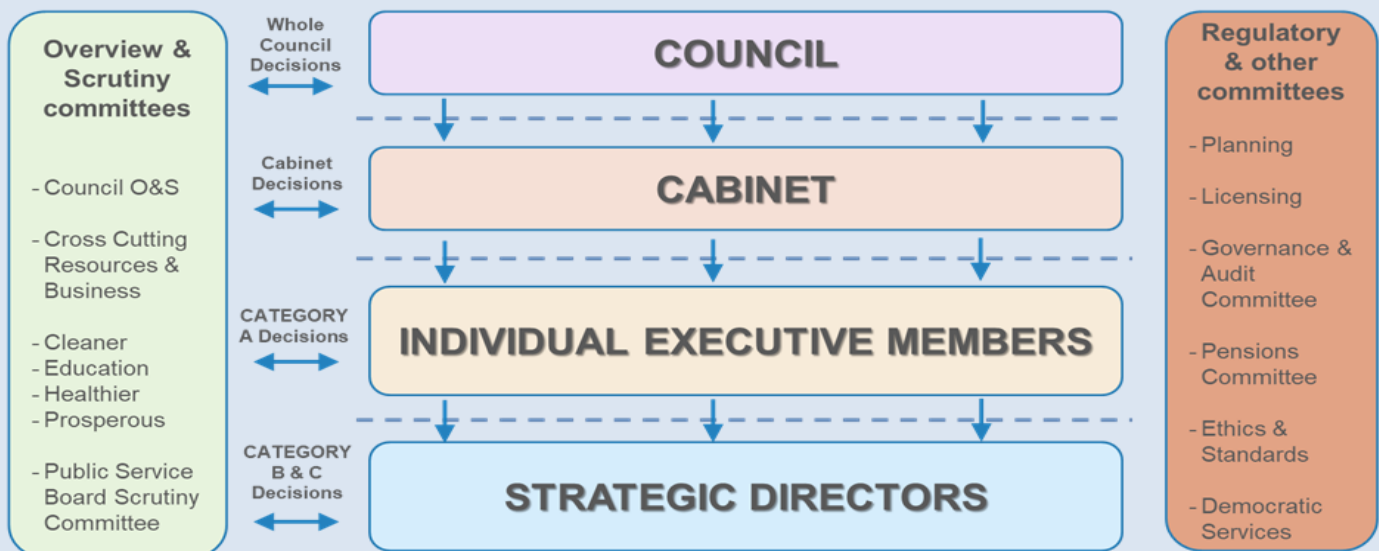
Any recommendations made by Audit Wales and our other external regulators, are received by our **Governance and Audit Committee** and added to the Council’s “Action Plan for Governance and Improvement”. This is the Council’s key document to demonstrate how accepted proposals for improvement / agreed recommendations received, are being addressed.

Our Action Plan is updated and reported on a regular basis to provide assurance to the Governance and Audit Committee. Monitoring of service specific recommendations is the responsibility of the Council’s overview and scrutiny committees, with annual progress updates being prepared for the Governance and Audit Committee for assurance purposes. Any concerns relating to progress identified by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and / or the Governance and Audit Committee are highlighted in a report for consideration by the Council’s Cabinet.

Over the past year we have strengthened overall political leadership with the introduction of effective cross-party scrutiny and cross-party focus groups. This has led to smoother planning, functioning and delivery of projects and services that are of priority and matter greatly to our communities. Cross-party work has involved elected Members from various geographical and political backgrounds collaborating to make decisions that benefit constituents and the county as a whole. It’s recognised that Members may have different ideologies and priorities, but this approach demonstrates progressive working in Torfaen where the interests of constituents and the well-being of the local communities are prioritised above partisan considerations.

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 of our governance arrangements has been set out, as below and further information is available within our **Councils Constitution**, which is our formal framework setting out how we as a council must operate and make decisions with efficiency, transparency and accountability.

OUR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE



Key Learning from Self-Assessing our Characteristics of an Outstanding Council

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

Conclusions

Our focus has developed over the last year, in line with our characteristics and many changes have taken place to help us become more innovative, as a Council. Importantly, we have continued to adjust quickly and respond positively to new challenges and initiatives, demonstrating that there is a willingness to adapt and deliver in ever changing circumstances. However, as we move forward we must match our willingness to take risks and deliver new innovative projects, with the pragmatism required to bring projects to an end when it is clear we are unable to take them forward or they will not deliver intended benefits.

We've recognised the need to develop digitally, with our recently adopted Digital First Customer Strategy, setting out our strategic vision for driving forward our aspirations. Implementing our strategy through innovative and effective use of secure, robust and joined up systems, technology and solutions will be central to the Council improving customer experience and data insight in the years ahead.

Service redesign has also featured heavily throughout the year, as well as implementing changes to our Risk Management processes to further strengthen the way we manage our risks. A more robust approach to Risk Management is in place and continues to develop, allowing for innovation and risk to be managed. This further strengthens the way we identify and manage our risk, to ensure action is taken and risks are mitigated, in a timely manner, where possible. However, we have identified scope to improve our appetite for risk and how we define them.

We have completed an ambitious Workplace Redesign by embracing and taking advantage of the changes in the way we work, brought about by Covid. This has allowed us to redesign and transform how the Civic Centre works, so that we are equipped with modern IT equipment, whilst maximising staff wellbeing, helping us to deliver great services for our residents, now and into the future.

A year ago we stated our intention to put in place a 'communities of interest approach' to enable staff to contribute in a variety of ways to areas of knowledge or interest beyond their usual professional scope. Although this has taken a little longer to scope out, it is now moving forward at pace. This has included profiling work with our leadership team, the continued work of our senior leaders group (Future Torfaen) and new series of staff groups that will begin working shortly. All of these workstreams will ensure we are best utilising the array of talents and interests of our staff when developing new programmes of work across Torfaen.

Each workstream has taken us further on our journey to becoming more innovative, but we recognise there is still a lot more that we need to do.

Improvement Activities for 2023/24

- **C1.1 - Explore and understand our appetite for risk by:**
 - Exploring how we define risk
 - Understanding what our appetite for risk is
 - Being able to look at risk through multiple lens or perspectives

- **C1.2 - Understand and Reduce Silo Working by:**
 - Providing access to Service Plans across our Directorates, at an early stage, which allows for proactive planning and reduces the risk of planning, in isolation.
 - Introducing an 'ideas culture', enabling our staff to feel empowered to put their ideas forward for improving services, through a variety of staff led groups.
- **C1.3 - Encourage more agility throughout the Council by:**
 - Being prepared to do things differently and to stop sooner if projects aren't working
 - Being open to more challenge linked to development of an 'ideas culture' (see C1.2).

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

Conclusions

We recognise the need to set a clear direction and share our long-term goals for improving Well-Being across Torfaen. The adoption of our new County Plan in December 2022 has helped us do that. Our new County Plan describes clearly the outcomes/objectives/activities that we are aiming to achieve and is well understood and supported politically and organisationally. The introduction of an annual Delivery Plan for each financial year will be used to monitor and report our progress against our aspirations for the lifespan of the County Plan. We also produced our second annual delivery plan for the County Plan, setting out activities and milestones that we will use to assess the progress we are making delivering against our priorities in 2023-24. Alongside our partners in the Gwent PSB we are working together to become a 'Marmot' region with the intent of taking evidence-based action to reduce inequalities and address key challenges to current and long-term well-being across the region, to reduce the inequities that affect the wider determinants of health. We will need to fully embed this aspiration into our service planning approach in order to achieve this goal.

Professional and political relationships have become better defined. In particular over the past year the Council has strengthened overall political leadership with the introduction of effective cross-party scrutiny and cross-party focus groups (as described on *pg.36, 'Our Governance Arrangements'*). Indeed, the Council's Presiding Member, Cllr Seabourne has stated, *'the Councils self-assessment reflects commendable cross-party collaboration and strong political leadership. The collaborative spirit is crucial for addressing the diverse needs of our community in driving positive change. It is heartening to see a commitment to working together for the betterment of Torfaen'*.

We are confident we are continuing to create a culture and environment of innovation & creativity which is gaining traction throughout the organisation and providing greater encouragement for staff to think differently to solve problems. This is a prerequisite for becoming an Aspirational and Visionary Council. Our new Leadership Team structure, has encouraged a more corporate and collegiate approach to service delivery. We also recognise the need to work differently with our communities in order to raise aspirations. To help us achieve this ambition we have created a new Communities, Customer & Digital Directorate which will provide more community focussed delivery of our services.

We have secured regional aid beginning with the Community Renewal Fund (CRF) which was the pilot scheme to Shared Prosperity and the Levelling Up Fund. Our programme of 7 projects secured the largest amount of CRF money across all Local Authorities in the UK. We have also submitted funding bids, via the UK Shared Prosperity Programme, with a further two bids for the Levelling Up Fund.

We continue to aim to reduce our carbon footprint by further developing our Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan, which sets out how we intend to respond to the climate and nature emergency. Although this will continue to be a challenging area for us, we recognise the need for further development, in the coming years. We will ensure the necessary resources are available to deliver this action plan, regularly reviewing progress and reporting on an annual basis.

We have continued to work towards our 2-3 year plan of increasing our electric fleet in line with Welsh Governments aims. We have employed Zero Emissions Transport Officer who will help accelerate the roll out of Electrical Vehicles and now have a total of 15 EVs as part of our fleet. A working group is also now operational to develop a detailed Fleet Decarbonisation Strategy and Action Plan in 2023/24.

One of our key actions this time last year was to deliver cleaner and greener communities and a sustainable local environment that residents can be proud of by reviewing our Waste Services. This was because we have underperformed against targets in recent years, in part due to the pandemic from which we have struggled to recover. We currently reuse or recycle around 59.84% of municipal waste collected, which remains short of the Welsh Government statutory target of 64%. This has been recognised as not good enough and a more strategic approach has been introduced to work towards reaching our 70% target. In the past year the service has been working with a cross section of Members, via the Strategic Partnership Board and stakeholders (WRAP / Local Partnership) to put in place a robust programme and governance framework, to enable the Council and the service to succeed. Our work in these areas will be monitored through the County Plan Delivery Plan.

Improvement Activities for 2023/24

- **C2.1 - Support the organisation to embed the Marmot principles into everything we do, by:**
 - Developing and communicating a consistent narrative throughout the organisation to enable each part of the organisation to understand how they can connect and contribute to both: our organisation's well-being objectives and Marmot Principles.
 - Continuing to embed the Marmot Principles into Service Planning and Governance arrangements, via the new County Plan/Marmot Performance Indicators Performance Management Framework.

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

Conclusions

Positive new building blocks have been put in place to help us achieve our ambition of becoming a high performing council. These include the new County Plan and delivery plan; a new Performance Management Framework and approach, a new leadership structure and positive improvements being realised with regards to improving our Education service.

The development of a new Performance Management Framework (PMF) helps to outline and capture our developing approach to monitoring, reporting and improving performance in Torfaen. Our new Service Planning process for 2023-24 provides a more consistent approach across the organisation, for updating and monitoring performance. Activities comprising the County Plan Delivery Plan are embedded in our team plans enabling us to better monitor the delivery of our ambitions.

Our County Plan will enable us to better communicate our priorities and expectations which are now specific and clear and helps us to demonstrate how we aim to continually improve our services. We recognise the importance of measuring what matters to our residents and more work is required to review how we gather intelligence from our residents to enable us to monitor data that is relevant to them.

We have reacted in a timely manner, where performance issues have been identified with new more robust governance arrangements – such as within Waste Service where we have failed to achieve our statutory target and as such a new strategic approach has been introduced to work towards reaching our 70% target (*as documented above in Characteristic 2*). To support our aspiration to be high performing we need to become more data and intelligence driven going forward. We will undertake a review of our data, so we understand what we hold and identify where there are gaps. A key area for development in 2022/23 in this area was to roll out the Power BI system throughout the organisation. Our focus continues to be on

developing internal expertise for utilising Power BI and at present a number of directorates are in the process of implementing Power BI into their performance monitoring.

We have begun taking advantage of the reintroduced local authority benchmarking, in our self-assessment work. A new tool has been developed by Data Cymru to support local authorities with benchmarking within the Self-Assessment process. Going forward, we will seek to get greater use from this tool, to help compare our performance with other Local Authorities.

Overall, we recognise we have areas of under-performance within the Council and are putting arrangements and processes in place, to improve upon this. A number of new positive building blocks have been put in place but there is more we need to do to improve services in order to become a high performing council.

Improvement Activities for 2023/24

- **C3.1 - Explore ways of receiving better intelligence from residents by:**
 - Reviewing the way in which we carry out our Residents Survey and capture any other feedback from our customers - to ensure we receive the right feedback from the right customers at the right time
- **C3.2 - Identify gaps in our data by:**
 - Reviewing all the data we collect across our organisation and determining where there are gaps in our knowledge.
- *Also linked to work with our Staff Focus Group (C1.2) covered under Characteristic 1*

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

Conclusions

We cherish and embrace inclusivity and equalities within the organisation. Many of the plans that have been introduced within the last year such as the Gwent Well-being Plan and Strategic Equalities Plan (both developed through strong partnership and collaboration), demonstrate our commitment to this. We have committed, through our Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024, to improving upon our workforce's understanding of equality and diversity issues, so there is better knowledge of the needs of all our residents, ensuring service provision is responsive and flexible to the different needs within our communities.

There is a greater willingness to be challenged throughout the organisation, and this is largely seen as constructive challenge, rather than a negative force. We promote an open-door culture within the organisation which is becoming more apparent, strengthening challenge and communication not only within the Leadership Team but more widely throughout the organisation. This has helped us to recognise the contribution that staff from all tiers can make within the organisation. We continue to develop our communities of interest approach to enable staff to contribute in a variety of ways to areas of knowledge or interest beyond their usual professional scope (as set out under 'An Innovative Council'). There is also a continued commitment to being involved in Employee Relations Consultative Committee (ERCC) meetings, to ensure our effective industrial relations with the trade unions continue.

During 2022/23 one of our key areas of development was to introduce our Community Well-Being Strategy by moving towards and investing in a Communities Approach to Wellbeing and Resilience. The headline vision and supporting objectives for the Communities Approach have been developed and work to prepare the strategy continues. Implementing our new approach therefore forms one of our most important improvement activities for the year ahead.

There is still more that we will need to do to improve our 2-way communication with our residents. Embedding our Participation Strategy and the approval of our Communities Wellbeing Strategy will help us work more closely with our communities and help us work together to become a more collaborative and inclusive council.

Improvement Activities for 2023/24

- **C4.1 - Take forward the Communities Strategy Approach by:**
 - Improving the planning of priorities at a local level, ensuring that community delivery is a key principle in service design, increasing the number of volunteers in the community, and matching volunteers and community groups to service delivery.
- **C4.2 - Embed the new Participation Strategy across the Council by:**
 - Ensuring all Directorates within our organisation embed the requirements of our Participation Strategy, which will provide our residents with appropriate opportunities to have their say on: the way in which we work and the decisions that we need to take that may affect them.

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 well-being and contribution of our staff is valued and it is understood that this is fundamental to the delivery of high quality services. During the last year, we have undertaken significant work to further strengthening our approach around our Workforce Strategy. Our strategy sets out how through our workforce we will achieve the strategic aims of our County Plan, key legal duties and provides information of how the Council will take forward our characteristics of an outstanding council. Our strategy focuses on staff wellbeing and development, this is starting to be implemented through workstreams such as working with staff in the year ahead to review our current performance appraisal programme, in a way that benefits all staff.

We have developed and introduced a new induction programme and an Apprenticeship/Trainee and Upskilling Programme to ensure that staff feel supported and are able to learn and advance their careers within Torfaen council. Our new induction programme focuses on our values as an organisation and where we want to aspire to be in the future. Our programme also sets out what we are about as an organisation and what our expectations are from employees. We have more recently also implemented an approach offering apprenticeship and or trainee posts, for certain graded posts within our organisation. We will look to further empower staff through reviewing elements of the Council's scheme of delegation, potentially giving more staff the autonomy to take lower level decisions.

We are working towards the development of a new recruitment portal, which will promote Torfaen to potential job candidates as a great place to work. We have undertaken specific research to consider the best options to promote our organisation as an employer of choice. Through the support of our internal Communications Team we are developing accessible material to promote and encourage potential job applicants.

Governance remains strong within our organisation - the annual governance statement confirmed that our approach remains robust, and audit feedback in relation to governance is largely positive. Evidence we have obtained, including largely positive feedback from audit demonstrates there is good governance structures and processes in place, that supports robust decision making. We have committed to adopting a new approach to impact assessments to ensure we are taking account of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act 2015. Although our new approach is not yet imbedded it is planned to go live in the Autumn 2023.

Improvement Activities for 2023/24

- **C5.1 - Review the current arrangements for Performance Appraisals by:**

- Working with our Staff Focus group to ensure ideas are provided by a range of staff on issues that affect them and imbedded into our appraisal system.
- **C5.2 - Review our current scheme of delegation by**
 - Ensuring staff are empowered to take lower level decisions.
- **C5.3 - Identify gaps in our data by:**
 - Reviewing all data collected across our organisation to determine gaps in our intelligence and monitoring . (*As per Characteristic 3*)

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 and benefits of engaging with our staff, residents and stakeholders and we continue to work with as many groups and forums as possible, to ensure they are involved in the issues that affect them. We have good and well-established forums and networks (Citizens Panel, Youth Forum etc) who are largely engaged on the decisions and developments we are making. We also have a number of Member Champions split between cabinet members and back bench members who are also engaged on decisions relevant to the areas they represent. Some of our Member Champions include our Equalities & Diversity Champion, Carers Champion, Sustainability Champion and Mental Health Champion.

We communicate openly and honestly with residents and Members. This communication is frequent and through variety of mediums, which has proven to be highly productive, with large amounts of interactions and feedback. We celebrate our successes well and are open and honest in areas where our plans have not been delivered, as intended.

We have adopted and developed our Public Participation Strategy, to better involve our residents and encourage more to work with us. We are now at the implementation stage which involves staff training and raising awareness across all of our service areas, so that we are providing people with opportunities to have a say in the way in which we work and are able to impact on the decisions that may affect them.

Earlier in the year we took the decision to end our public consultation exercise on the plans to change the frequency of residual waste collections. This decision was taken after considering the many comments received from residents on the proposals. Although this was a difficult decision to make we strive to involve residents on the issues that affect them and are prepared to listen and act on feedback provided.

We have developed a new Adults and Communities Directorate and are in the process of setting out how we will work with individuals, groups, and organisations, within each of our communities, to strengthen resilience and identify and deliver against their wellbeing priorities. Through our new Adults and Communities Directorate we have defined how we will work with our residents, groups, and partner organisations (like community councils), within each of our communities, to identify and deliver against their wellbeing priorities and to increase resilience. Our 'Communities approach' is encouraging more engagement with our residents on decisions that affect them. Examples of our engagement includes relaunching the Torfaen Talks Community Newspaper, which has information about how residents can get involved with council decisions, from taking part in surveys to joining a citizen panel. We have also developed a relationship with the Torfaen Access Forum which is an independent body, who have been supporting the elections team with the forthcoming polling station review. We have also relaunched the Torfaen People's Panel, with members agreeing to be approached by teams looking to involve residents earlier in the consultation process.

As already mentioned under an 'Innovative Council', we are working to foster an organisational culture that empowers staff to have the confidence and ability to come forward with their ideas, something that it will be important for us to build upon in the years ahead.

Improvement Activities for 2023/24

- **C6.1 - Embed the new Participation Strategy across the Council by:**
 - Ensuring all Directorates within our organisation embed the requirements of our Participation Strategy, providing people with opportunities to have a say on the way we work and the decisions we make that affect them.
- *Also linked to the Staff Focus Group (C1.2) covered under Characteristic 1*

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

Our Conclusions

We are a financially well governed organisation and resources are generally well managed with good financial processes; sound budgets; good systems, alive to financial challenges which is positively viewed by our regulators. We have an effective framework of financial accountability which can be demonstrated by our robust arrangements for financial control, through the Authority's accounting procedures and Financial Regulations. We ensure, through our Annual Governance Statement (AGS), that our Council's business is conducted, in accordance with the law and to proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently, and effectively.

Our arrangements include established capital and revenue budget planning procedures. Our Councillors are provided with regular financial reports comparing actual revenue and capital expenditure / income to annual budgets, whilst the Authority's Medium-Term Financial Plan outlines the financial forecasts and any levels of estimated shortfall.

We supported our financial processes by devolving responsibility to individuals within our organisation, making them totally responsible and accountable for their budgets and the financial processes (including adherence to corporate financial processes), which are used within the provision of the service. However, staff are supported by effective, well respected Lead Finance Officers who are relied upon for expert advice and guidance.

During the last year, our Leadership Team have developed 'Project Apollo' which is our council-wide approach to addressing the shortfall in our medium-term financial plan, developed under 8 separate workstreams. Part of this programme is to develop the council's wider approach to commercialisation, which has led to the resulting delay in our timescales for this project. Our wider approach to commercialisation will then be reviewed to determine necessity or benefit of a specific strategy - in light of other Project Apollo themes of service redesign and digital transformation, which aims to drive down cost and increase efficiency.

We have added greater resilience and stability to our procurement function, as a result of our collaboration agreement with Cardiff City Council. We are working on developing a contract forward plan and once completed we will be able to identify future procurements and create a pilot on incorporating social value/community benefits. Guidance and risk assessment processes are being developed by Welsh Government/Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) which will assist in using procurement spend to influence the decarbonisation agenda.

We remain strong at attracting inward investment, including successful bids for Levelling Up Funding and Shared Prosperity Funding, resulting in new grant funding that will bring investment into our communities. There is a need to do more to seek value for money and as such this will be one of our areas for improvement in the year ahead.

Improvement Activities for 2023/24

- **C7.1 - Improve how we prioritise Capital investment by:**

- Linking to service planning and project mandates
- **C7.2 - Improve the way we secure Value for Money by:**
 - Exploring the use of a 'Five Case' Business Model with our Project Management Office for large scale projects

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

Our Conclusions

Although we have developed significantly in the past year, we are aware, that we have still have a great deal of work to do to achieve our ambition of being a digital and data led council. We have put in place a Digital and Data Team to strengthen our approach and hope to further build on the capacity of our team through a funding bid to the Health Determinant Research Collaboration (HDRC). Should we be successful in our bid, we will be the first in Wales to receive this funding.

Our Digital and Data Team has led the development of our Digital First Customer Strategy. Our strategy is helping us on our journey to becoming digital and data-led and we now have a clear strategic vision. Our draft Digital First Customer Strategy and Annual Delivery Plan was adopted by Cabinet in May 2023, following a period of public consultation. Implementation of our delivery plan through a variety of workstreams has begun and will take place in the year ahead.

We have appointed an external supplier for our Electronic Document and Record Management System (EDRMS). Progress is well on track with a target completion date of December 2024.

We have continued to introduce Power BI supporting our aspiration to become a more data and intelligence driven organisation, through improving the accessibility and visibility of data. Work has already proved the concept that data can be more visible, accessible and usable, with far less manual input.

We have developed digital profiles to understand our customers and as a result of this have started to roll out Robotic Process Automation. Further work is required to embed our customer personas and journey mapping within our service delivery approach. Numerous other projects aimed at delivering digital efficiency, such as the Torfaen BOT and our Employee Self Service Project are also being taken forward.

We need to do more to understand what digital solutions are available to us and how they can be best utilised by our diverse services across our organisation. We also need to understand and make better use of our data, analysing what data we hold and what data we need so that we have a better understanding of our services and the needs of our communities. These will be our priority areas of improvement, in the year ahead.

Improvement Activities for 2023/24

- **C8.1 Explore ways of taking staff and residents with us on our digital journey by:**
 - Understanding and assessing what technology is already available to us and what is required
 - Work with our Staff Focus Group to ensure the right culture is in place to improve digitally and ensure the right training and engagement is provided to our staff.
- **C8.2 Identify gaps in our data by:**
 - Reviewing all data collected across our organisation and determining where there are gaps in our intelligence. (As per C3.2)

5. Joining up our legislative requirements

Provisions outlined within both the Well-Being of Future Generation Act (2015) and Local Government

Elections Act (2021) also aligns with other duties placed on councils, such as the Equality Act (2010), Welsh Language (Wales) Measure (2011) and Environment (Wales) Act (2016).

This next section of this report will therefore provide details of how we have been working towards these 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.



The Council's Strategic Equality Plan for 2020 to 2024 was developed to guide the Council's efforts to advance equality and diversity and to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to meeting the Public Sector Equality Duties and the Equality Act of 2010.

Torfaen County Borough Council remains committed to the principles of inclusion, fairness, equity of outcomes and social justice and we strive to ensure that this is demonstrated in our employment practices, our staff's attitudes and behaviours and in our service delivery.

Ensuring our services help and support vulnerable people and those within our communities who have faced disadvantage remains an important priority for this Council. Despite financial and other challenges, we continue to work towards not only maintaining but improving our services so they work for, and protect the rights of, the people and groups covered by the Equality Act.

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.

It can be noted from our annual report that the Councils' progress in relation to its statutory responsibilities under the Equality Act is both compliant and satisfactory, and in relation to a number of the equality objectives that were set in the Strategic Equality Plan, there has been significant progress in a number of key areas.

Activity during 2022/23 included the following: -

- A Recruitment Training module has been designed that all managers will be required to undertake before they conduct interviews. This covers best practice and processes.
- A Workforce Strategy has been agreed which includes a Well-being Framework that has an emphasis on Mental Health. We will produce a monthly bulletin that looks at all aspects of well-being and a dedicated webpage has been set up to provide resources for staff.
- A wellness action plan is being developed that will support mental well-being in the workplace.
- We have reduced the number of young people NEET (not in education, employment or training) for the year and the numbers of unknown young people leaving year 11.
- During 2022/23, we delivered over £800,000 of cost-of-living support to 'at risk' residents. Support was targeted at priority groups including those in receipt of free school meals and older residents in receipt of community meals.
- Our Regional Partnership Board Team hosted the Gwent Dementia Friendly Communities Annual Conference in September 2022, which was the first event, held since the pandemic. This provided an opportunity for professionals, experts by experience and communities to get together and share learning, ideas, and collaborate to improve awareness, inclusion, and support. The event had 135 attendees and a further 34 attended our evening webinar conference.
- Phase 1 of the Torfaen Youth Alliance (TYA) project was successfully completed, with Phase 2 being introduced from March 2023.
- We continued to work productively with the Disabled People's Organisation - Torfaen Access Forum - to explore issues in the built environment and remove barriers to access.

- In 2022/23, our Financial Inclusion Team raised/saved their clients £86,633.76 via benefit claims, grant applications, reducing outgoings etc. The Team prevented 19 cases from becoming homeless as a result of their interventions.

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 2022/23 we have:

- **5 Year Promotion Strategy** - The Council's 5-year strategy came to an end in March 2022. The percentage of Welsh speakers has dropped by 1.6% to 8.24% (7,366 residents). Due to the delay in releasing detailed ward data on the 2021 Census, by the Office for National Statistics, we have been delayed in consulting on the Strategy for 2023-2027. Public consultation on the follow-on strategy, will therefore be held during 2023.
- **Creating More Welsh Speakers** - A specialist centre was opened towards the end of 2022/23 for children who want to transfer from English-medium to Welsh medium primary school education. The Carreg Lam unit (meaning "Stepping Stone") is based at Ysgol Panteg in Griffithstown and offers 12 places for pupils in Years 2 to 6 to receive an intensive 12-week language programme, to improve their Welsh and aide the transition.
- **Removing Barriers During 2022/23** - work on increasing capacity and remove barriers that may restrict departments from delivering Welsh Language services continued throughout 2022/23. The progress has been partly hampered by the national shortage of Welsh language translators. The Council aims to work with Colleges and Universities in the wider region and our Welsh medium Comprehensive in Torfaen, to identify training opportunities for budding translators.
- **The Use of Welsh at Meetings** - Most meetings were held through Microsoft Teams, and the challenges of providing simultaneous translation, through the Microsoft system continued to be explored. With the release of an update to enable dual audio streaming, the opportunities for officers to offer simultaneous translation has significantly increased. A recent recruitment of a qualified simultaneous translator to the team, has meant that we are able to offer an improved service to our customers, elected members and colleagues.
- **Cultural Events** - To celebrate St Davids Day, in partnership with Menter Iaith Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen a Mynwy, the council contributed to the 'Torf-hwyl' festival. With live performances, stalls, games throughout the day, interspersed with activities for different age groups, and information on learning Welsh. The event even had skateboard lessons through the medium of Welsh! The 'Torf-hwyl' Facebook page can be found [here](#).
- **Policy Development** - The Welsh Language Unit 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 Members, the report is scrutinised to ensure that positive and negative impacts have been considered in line with the Welsh language Standards.

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 2022/23 we have:

- Produced a draft Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)
- Managed 7 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) 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
- Secured agreement to increase the amount of Council land managed for biodiversity and climate adaptation
- Worked with Bron Afon Community Housing to identify alternative more sustainable grassland management regimes
- Through the Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Local Nature Partnership (LNP) commenced work on a Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP)
- Mapped our Urban Green Infrastructure Assets and identified corridors which need protecting and enhancing to ensure ecological connectivity through the urban area
- Completed staff training and Member seminars on subjects such as Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS), the Torfaen Tree Strategy and the s6 public bodies biodiversity duty
- 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
- Renewed the management plans for all 7 Local Nature Reserves plus an additional one for a proposed LNR at Blaenserchan
- Finalised a management plan for the Blorenge Site of Special Scientific Interest.(SSSI)
- Working with the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust creating 3 new ponds and Garn Lakes Local Nature Reserve
- Submitted a three-yearly s6 public bodies biodiversity duty compliance report to Welsh Government (WG)
- Supported the delivery of the Torfaen Climate and Nature Emergency Strategy and Action Plan
- Planted over 2000 trees, throughout the borough

6. The Cost of our Services (our 2022/23 budget)

Our Revenue Budget

Our financial performance for 2022-23 is contained within our draft [Statement of Accounts | Torfaen County Borough Council](#)

The 2022/23 budget was approved in March 2022 with a £299.9 million gross revenue budget which was financed from £90.3 million of service specific government grants, fees and charges for services and other funding & contributions. The net budget of £209.6 million was funded by £160.1 million of un-hypothecated funding from Welsh Government and £49.5 million by Council Tax. The 2022/23 revenue outturn produced a net favourable position, after contributions to specific reserves, of £975,000 against its £209 million budget.

In providing its day-to-day services the Council (including its schools) incurred a gross actual spend of £322 million comprising employee costs of £151 million, running costs of £160 million and capital costs of some £11 million. The primary reasons for the outturn position are summarised as follows:



- Additional receipt of new and existing grants from various organisations, including Welsh Government
- The displacement of core budgeted spending to grant funding
- Significant level of staff vacancies and staff turnover across all services
- Additional investment income arising from increased interest rates
- Limited costs associated with Change Management in schools
- General lower spend on non-employee operational budgets

Our Capital Budget

In addition to the revenue spending the Council also spent £20 million on its assets through its 2022/23 capital programme which included spending on our land and buildings including:

- continued to implement the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (previously 21st Century Schools), through the expansion of Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw, planning / developing the extension of the Crownbridge school, and planning / developing the building of the new Maendy primary school.
- continued developing the park and ride facility at Pontypool & New Inn train station.
- continued with the development of the British site.
- continued investment in the highways infrastructure.
- refurbishment of the Civic Centre, and
- continued to invest in disabled facility grants to support our vulnerable citizens.

The 2022/23 capital programme experienced £9.7 million slippage into 2023/24, within this the Economy & Environment slippage of £3.2 million relates to £656,000 from the asset maintenance budgets; £370,000 regarding the highways programme; £290,000 on the bulking and baling; £246,000 on electric vehicle infrastructure grants; £169,000 on flood recovery grants and £1.4 million on the Pontypool and New Inn Station. The slippage on Education was on Maendy Primary; whilst the Social Care and Housing slippage was on disabled facility grants. The main area of slippage for Adults and Communities relates to £1.1 million on the Universal Primary Free School Meals programme and £413,000 on Levelling Up.

7. Consulting on our Performance

In response to the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales), we adopted its first Public Participation Strategy, during October 2022.

The strategy went out to public consultation between May 2022 and August 2022 and face-to-face workshops were conducted with various citizen panels, including the Torfaen Youth Forum and Torfaen Access Forum. Their feedback was used to revise the strategy. A Participation Framework for staff was developed and promoted to staff and an area for participation has been developed on our Intranet, Swoop. A 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.

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. During 22/23 through the Get Involved platform we had 17,132 visits to the site; 5926 contributions to the platform; 443 registrations; 11 Get Involved newsletters were sent with an average open rate of 54.7%.

During 2022/23, we have involved the public around: Future Torfaen - A County Plan for all people 2022-2027; The Budget; Public Participation Strategy; Digital First Customer Strategy; Canal Strategy; Town

Centre Regeneration plans; The Well-being Plan for Gwent; Residents County Survey 2022; and changes to Waste Collection schedules.

During these consultations, we've used a variety of tools and held a mix of face-to-face engagement sessions as well as running an online surveys. Citizen Panels, Community Councils, and Community Groups were visited and drop-in sessions were held in Blaenavon, Pontypool and Cwmbran. Posters, leaflets and visual assets were used during each engagement activity. The Torfaen People's panel was also reintroduced, and the County Plan was the first consultation brought to them.

During 2022/23, more than 1,000 people took part in our annual residents' survey with more people saying they were satisfied with the quality of council services and how well the council keeps people informed than the previous year.

- 59% satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of council services
- 65% said the council keeps residents well or fairly well informed

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

Our engagement activities to improve participation in elections and to support young people's voter registration during 2022/23, resulted in:

- 50,000 reach on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter
- Approximately 2,000 young people engaged with face-to-face across school assemblies, mock elections and six roadshows.
- 9% increase in registration among 14-18-year-olds in Torfaen (from 34% to 43%)
- 2% increase in overall voter registration in Torfaen (from 90% to 92%)

Our Get Involved platform offers other useful engagement tools, not just surveys. We have also supported our other teams within the council, to capture ideas and thoughts from the members of the public. We have private group spaces for members to feel secure in expressing their opinions which is being used by the Climate Ambassadors network and Torfaen Peoples Panel and we currently have an ideas board for members to share their tips on recycling and suggestions for scrutiny – this is an engaging and fun way to share ideas, as it's a less formal way of sharing information.

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 engage directly with residents. We have:

- Over 40,000 followers on our 3 of our main social media sites – Facebook, 21.6k, Twitter 16.2k, Instagram 2.6k (70% female / 30% male)
- Received 25,000 inbound comments and messages (sentiment - 46% positive or semi-positive, 34% neutral, 20% negative or semi-negative) and around 5million people reached – 60,000 clicks on links in posts.
- Seen our "Get Involved" public engagement platform grow to 443 registered participants on the site, which means we capture their demographic details within their responses. They also receive direct emails, to notify them on new consultations and provide feedback on closed consultations.
- 25,000 subscribers to our Gov Delivery E-bulletin news service and 74,000 subscriptions to bulletins. Bulletins have a 40% open rate, 70% engagement rate and a 7.8% growth, in subscribers over last 12 months.
- Recently added customer feedback facility on to our Council's website which captures satisfaction with visits.
- Developed and added a dedicated area on our website to provide information on cost of living.

- Seen an increase in the number of subscribers to our press releases and ebulletins throughout 2022/23 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.
- Recently created a TikTok account to communicate directly with younger residents. We plan to develop this channel further going forward.
- Taken on Orlo, a Digital Customer Service platform, to improve our scheduling and social listening abilities.

8. Delivering and Monitoring Progress

As previously stated, the Council has been through a process of change and review in 2022/23, significantly revising the approach to key aspects of the Performance Management Framework, Service Planning and Risk Management, aimed at supporting the delivery of the Council's new County Plan. More information can be viewed within our [Performance Management Framework](#)

The review has also been in response to the Local Government and Elections Act and new Leadership within the Council, which has placed greater prominence on the Council's performance structures, processes and culture. The Act regards effective self-assessment as fundamental to enabling Councils to understand how they're performing and where they could do better. Our performance reporting arrangements are therefore critical to the Council's response to the Act.

Whilst reviewing and developing our performance management arrangements, Audit Wales undertook a further review during April 2022 and February 2023, seeking to find out whether the Council's performance management framework is robust and likely to support continuous and sustainable improvement?

Whilst Audit Wales made no specific recommendations, their overall findings were: *"the Council has developed new and appropriate arrangements to monitor and report on its performance, although robust quality control and good use of relevant measurement data will be critical to their effectiveness. We reached this conclusion because:*

- *the Leadership Team has provided direction and challenge in the development of an appropriate framework which should enhance the Council's ability to monitor and report performance, both internally and to the public;*
- *robust quality control arrangements for service planning will be critical to the overall effectiveness of the new Performance Management Framework;*
- *the new Performance Management Framework is reliant on good use of relevant measurement data if it is to support the Council to effectively evaluate the performance of its services and the impact of its improvement activity; and*
- *the Council is introducing arrangements to enhance accountability and challenge through more frequent and wider internal reporting of performance information".*

A full copy of Audit Wales' report can be viewed [here](#).

Aligned with the ethos of the LGE Act 2021, our Performance Management Framework is as much about implementing changes to processes, as it is about fostering a new culture of continuous self-assessment and improvement in the Council, by placing a much greater prominence on service-planning and the importance of routine performance monitoring.

Our new service plans are developed to ensure a clear linkage between directorate's plans, the County Plan and key corporate strategies. Routine monitoring of service plans will therefore enable the Council to monitor key actions associated with the Council's County Plan and strategic delivery plans.

Our new approach will, therefore, need to be carefully nurtured, supported and challenged, as it develops throughout the years ahead, to ensure it is working as expected, across the Council.

Since the introduction of the Local Government & Elections Act 2021 and on-going covid restrictions in 2021/22 the Welsh Local Government Association and Data Cymru have not undertaken any formal

benchmark reporting of performance across local authorities. In addition, Public Accountability Measures that were used to benchmark local authority performance have also been removed.

During 2023/24, we will therefore be further exploring and making use of available data that is on the Data Cymru hub, to benchmark our performance alongside finalising our own set of performance measures that we will use through the remaining 4 years of our County Plan to monitor the impact of our annual delivery plans.

Going forward, the Council's Leadership Team will continue to focus on performance through an agreed twelve weekly performance schedule, providing a focus on directorate performance, risks, the County Plan and other areas of performance. The Council's Policy Development Forum (Cabinet and Leadership) will also continue to receive quarterly progress updates against the County Plan Delivery Plan with wider Council reports every 6 months.

Work on enhancing, reporting and monitoring of performance will continue throughout 2023/24, which will bring an opportunity to further strengthen and align our plans and processes, taking a more integrated approach to the consideration of the challenges, aspirations and resources available to the Council in the year ahead, thus leading to more effective planning of our services.

Finally, we have already begun looking forward to 2024/25, giving early considerations to both the challenges and the areas we will prioritise in the following financial year. This forms part of our ongoing drive to further strengthen the ties between our Corporate, Service and Financial planning processes in order to deliver the best possible outcomes for the residents of Torfaen.



Produced by Torfaen County Borough Council

October 2023

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