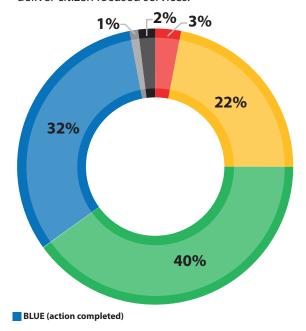
# Highlights of our Annual Self-Assessment and Wellbeing report 2023/24

Our County Plan outlines our medium-term wellbeing objectives, while our Characteristics of an Outstanding Council provide the framework for setting standards. Together, they set out the mechanisms for achieving the council's ambitions.

#### In Torfaen our county plan priorities are helping:

- raise educational attainment
- · children and families to thrive
- reduce inequalities
- · connect people and communities
- improve the local environment and increase recycling rates
- · new businesses start-up
- people choose healthier lifestyles
- · make communities safe and attractive
- · deliver citizen focused services.



- GREEN (action on target)
- AMBER (action off target but with a clear route back to 'GREEN')
- RED (action off target significant concerns)
- GREY (action not yet due to start)

# BLACK (action aborted)

#### Our progress against our key activities in 2023/24:

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 (73%). However, 22% of actions experienced some difficulties, though we are confident that there is a clear plan to get them back on track and 3% deemed as having more significant concerns.

Nearly three quarters of all projects were delivered, with a further quarter delayed, but with an absolute commitment to deliver. Therefore, given there were 176 activities, having only 3 aborted and 5 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. 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 2024 and is available to view here. Key highlights on our progress over the last year, against a selection of key activities, under each of our 9 County Plan Well-being Objectives, is as follows:

#### Some key highlights from the last year:

# **Wellbeing objective 1**

- raising educational attainment, helping young people and adults to gain qualifications and skills needed to live positive lives
- Strategically aligned our children's services and education services, into a single directorate, which better informs our decisions on how we provide support and intervention for our children and young people.
- Carried out termly evaluations of teaching and learning in all of our schools.
- Received positive feedback from Estyn on how we are now effectively holding schools and support services to account for their work and improving outcomes for pupils.

- 7 out of 8 of our schools inspected in 23/24 have received a positive Estyn Inspection, with 1 school still remaining in special measures.
- Started construction on the new £17m Maendy Primary School.
- Decreased our NEET figures for young people to
   1.9%, putting us 9th out of 22 LA's and below the Welsh average.
- Continued to provide a range of work experience opportunities for our school leavers.
- Improved attendance rates over the past academic year at both Primary and Secondary schools by 1.4% the biggest improvement across Wales.
- Finalised a new attendance strategy and a #notinmissout campaign that reinforces the importance of daily school attendance.
- **Helped 100% of Adult Community learners** achieve grades A to C in English and 68% A to C in Maths.
- Enrolled 750 people onto Essential Skills adult and community learning courses.
- Enrolled 170 people onto Digital adult and community learning courses.
- Opened a new one-stop-shop in Cwmbran Town Centre for anyone looking for employment or to improve their skills. ('Torfaen Works').
- **Started building work** on our new 3G pitch at Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw.

# Wellbeing objective 2

- encourage and champion children, young people and families so they can thrive
- Opened Carreg Lam, a specialist centre for children wanting to transfer from English-medium to Welsh medium primary school education.
- **Opened Gofal Plant Yr Enfys Gwynllyw**, a new Welsh medium childcare setting in Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw.
- Significantly expanded our childcare provision in Torfaen, through new Flying Start areas which sets to benefit more families.

- Received positive feedback from CiW for our commitment to support children and young people to remain with their families, where it is safe for them to do so.
- Continued to work towards a safe reduction in our children looked after population.
- Reviewed and developed our accommodation provision for young people.
- Progressed with the development of our first in house residential provision for children looked after with complex needs.
- Launched a new youth outreach scheme to tackle antisocial behaviour in Cwmbran.
- Continued to provide free play provision to thousands of children throughout the borough, through our Play Service.
- Rolled out free school meals to all primary aged children. We are one of only 14 local authorities in Wales who are offering free school meals to all year groups.

# Wellbeing objective 3

- tackle inequality by focusing on early identification and prevention activities that support people to live independent lives and fulfilling lives
  - Created a new Adults & Communities Directorate that will help develop a new "communities model" to service development and delivery.
  - Finalised our Community Well-being Strategy which is our initial three-year plan, designed with a focus on communities, well-being and prevention, placing communities at the core of services.
- **Created an Integrated Reablement service** to better support individuals to maintain their independence.
- Set up a Carers' Champions Network to help provide advice and support for staff who are unpaid carers.
- Became the first organisation in Wales to be granted Carer Friendly Employer Accreditation by the Care Collective.
- Supported over 500 residents with debt management, as well as providing advice on maximising benefits and employment.



- Finalised our Rapid Rehousing Plan, in line with Welsh Government's ambition to prevent and mitigate homelessness.
- **Utilised Housing Support Grant Funding**, to convert Pearl House into 15 one-bedroom flats, for homeless people in Torfaen.

# **Wellbeing objective 4**

- make Torfaen more sustainable by connecting people and communities, socially, digitally and physically
- Secured £420,000 investment in two active travel/ safe routes to schools' schemes.
- Continued to upgrade the Pontypool and New Inn Train Station.
- Launched our new Torfaen Veterans' Support Hub in Cwmbran which offers a wide range of services, including assistance with benefits and housing, access to mental health resources, and opportunities for acquiring new skills.
- Launched our new partnership programme,
   'Connecting Torfaen' which will help increase funding opportunities for our Third Sector organisations.

# **Wellbeing objective 5**

- address our climate and nature emergencies, recycle more and make improvements to the local environment
- **Created a new governance regime** to help us raise our recycling rates to meet Welsh Government's target of 70%, by 2025.
- Expanded our kerbside recycling service, to include used batteries being collected within black recycling boxes, and weekly cardboard collections.
- Invested in our recycling vehicles, including new in-cab technology and staff training, to improve the quality of the service.
- Introduced new recycling points for our residents, for plastic bags and wrapping, known as "stretchy" plastics.
- Offered our residents free compost, as part of a trial to reuse green waste, collected from local homes – free of charge.
- Continued to work in partnership with Bron Afon
   Community Housing to increase the number of flats

- with recycling facilities.
- Continued to hold Spring Clean events, with both volunteers and school children to tackle litter hotspots around the borough.
- Appointed two new Decarbonisation Officers to provide help and advice to our residents, communities, and businesses, in order to help us meet Welsh Government's 2050 net zero target for carbon emissions.
- **Installed solar panels** on 14 schools.
- **Submitted our Flood Risk Management Strategy** to Welsh Government which sets out our strategy to manage flood risk over the next six years.
- Developed plans for Blaenserchan Colliery to become our 8th Local Nature Reserve.

# Wellbeing objective 6

- make Torfaen a great place to do business by working with local employers, encouraging new business startups and entrepreneurial activities
- Launched a new Torfaen Business Direct Service to support new and aspiring businesses who are looking to set up their business, in Blaenavon or Pontypool town centres.
- Launched a new business start-up club. The fullyfunded Startup Club will provide entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge they need to set up and run their own businesses, including weekly expert-led workshops and support.
- Worked with Torfaen Business Forum and 'top 60' businesses within our area to help consider strategic investment and business plans.
- Delivered 17 Tech Grants totalling £44,833 aimed at supporting investment in new technologies which has created an investment of £185,000 within our local businesses.

# Wellbeing objective 7

- promote healthier lifestyles in torfaen to improve mental health & physical well-being
- Produced a Whole School Approach to Emotional Health and Well-being Strategy for all schools.



- **Allocated £2.3 million** in Shared Prosperity Funding to build a new floodlit all-weather community sports pitch for the north of the borough.
- As part of our wider investment in sports facilities within the borough, the construction of 3G pitches are also taking place at our Welsh medium secondary school - Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw and on former school fields in Llantarnam.
- Opened a multi-functional community facility at Croesyceiliog School as part of a £30 million investment which includes a new sports hall and changing facilities, dance studio, conference rooms and a theatre with capacity for 200 people, which local groups and clubs can now book to use.
- Continued to develop and expand opportunities for people to improve their fitness, health & well-being, including for Dads by Dads and mother and daughter fitness sessions).

# Wellbeing objective 8

- supporting our local culture and heritage and make
   Torfaen a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit
- Continued to pursue funding to regenerate our town centres:
  - £9.3 million from the UK Government Levelling Up Fund to create a Pontypool Cultural Hub project. This Government funding aims to create jobs and grow the local economy within a specific area.
  - More than £1m invested in transforming three derelict buildings within Blaenavon Town Centre. (Market Tavern, former bookmakers and former butchers in Broad Street)
- Invited our residents to comment on plans for a new drainage scheme at our **British site** to help improve site safety.
- **Provided additional investment of £1.64 million** to redevelop Greenmeadow Community Farm.
- Approved a new 10-year plan to protect and improve the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal in Torfaen.

# Wellbeing objective 9

- provide efficient customer focused services that reflect the way people live their lives and wish to access services
- Finalised our Digital First Customer Strategy and Annual Delivery Plan, setting out how we will use Digital, Data and Technology to improve the customer experience and our operational efficiency.
- Invited our citizens to participate with us in our Torfaen People's Panel meetings, so that they are able to have their say on the work the council does or is planning to do.
- **Relaunched our Torfaen Youth Forum**, which is a group that enables young people to talk to us, about issues that affect them.

# PRIORITIES & CHALLENGES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD:

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 2024/25.

Our 2024/25 delivery plan has been developed considering new and existing key challenges and the progress made against our 2023/24 Delivery Plan.

Our Annual Delivery Plan for 2024/25 was adopted by Council and published in February 2024. 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 continue 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.



# **TORFAEN: AN OUSTANDING COUNCIL:**

Our own internal 'Characteristics of an Outstanding Council' framework drives improvement within Torfaen Council.

Where our County Plan focuses on the improvements, we will deliver for the people who live and work within Torfaen, our Characteristics of an Outstanding Council framework sets out how we will become a more efficient and effective organisation, better equipped to deliver our County Plan aspirations.

In the same way as we do for the County Plan, we continue to monitor the key actions that are we believe will take us forward to become and outstanding Council. Below is an overview of the progress we have made against our 8 characteristics during 2023/24:

#### 1. An innovative council that... • Is transformative and prepared to do things 2. An aspirational and visionary 8. A digital and data led council differently council that... that... • Has an appetite for risk • Improves lives through effective political and officer • Uses data to anticipate needs Fosters innovation inside and outside the • Builds digital profiles to better understand customer leadership • Identifies and grasps opportunities for the future • Is inquisitive and open to new trends and technologies • Is always on - enabling residents to access a wider range Sets a clear direction and long-term goals of digital services · Reduces its carbon footprint · Actively involves residents through digital inclusion and digital platforms A Globally A Prosperous Responsible Torfaen Torfaen 3. A high performing 7. A financially council that... astute council that... A Torfaen of Vibrant Communicates council priorities and • Has robust financial governance **Culture and** expectations Successfully manages resources and Torfaen Thriving Welsh Is always learning and looking to improve seeks value for money Language Measures what matters to residents and • Generates income where appropriate communities Maximises inward investment • Uses self-evaluation to focus on impact Invests in preventative services and outcomes A Torfaen A Healthier of Cohesive • Understands its purpose and Torfaen Communities delivers its functions effectively A More **Equal Torfaen** 4. A collaborative and inclusive council that... Cherishes inclusivity and equality 6. An engaging and accessible council that... 5. A well-managed • Recognises the contribution of others • Uses a wide range of tools to engage with residents and council that... Welcomes challenge and communication from colleagues, stakeholders • Embraces its core values peers and partners • Involves staff and residents on issues that affect them Values the well-being and Focuses on strengths of partners and communities • Harnesses ideas from customers and staff contribution of staff • Is open to sharing resources with partners and • Is open and honest with staff and residents Invests in staff and has plans for a future communities • Shares timely information, advice and guidance workforce Welcomes ideas and is open to support to deliver and celebrates success · Has good governance to ensure robust decision its strategic priorities making



#### An innovative council that:

1

- created a platform on our intranet for staff to put forward innovative 'Rebel Ideas' for change that are shared with the council's Leadership Team and with each other
- developed our service planning processes to be more joined up internally.

## An aspirational and visionary council that:

2

- worked closely alongside our public service partners to become a 'Marmot' region in order to reduce inequalities and address key challenges to current and long-term wellbeing across the region
- is developing a master plan, based on the Marmot Principles, which will provide a longer term vision for the county.

# A high performing council that:

3

- continues to develop our use of PowerBi to further automate performance reporting across the council
- reviewed how we capture the views of our residents, and gathers service users perspectives to inform and improve service delivery.

#### A collaborative and inclusive council that:

4

- adopted a 'Community Wellbeing Strategy'
  which sets out a new vision and mission
  for the council putting 'communities' and
  'wellbeing and prevention' as genuine
  cornerstones of ho we design our services
- embedded our Participation Strategy, providing residents with appropriate opportunities to have their say on: the way we work and the decisions we take.

## A well-managed council that:

5

- strengthened our Workforce Strategy, by reviewing our current performance appraisal programme in a way that benefits all staff
- launched a new career development programme to help encourage people to pursue a career within the council
- provided our employees with the opportunity to access fully funded qualifications from the Welsh Government Apprenticeship Framework to help develop their skills and to support their professional development.

## An engaging and accessible council that:

6

- has set out a new way of working, 'Rebel Torfaen', which enables our staff to feel empowered to put their ideas forward for improving services, through a variety of staff led groups, considering some of the strategic challenges facing the council and mirroring the challenges being considered by the Leadership Team
- is developing a 'Rebel Youth' group that will enable us to better involve young people in the decision making processes of the council.

## A financially astute Council that:

7

- received positive feedback from our regulators that we are a well governed organisation whose resources are generally well managed with good financial processes
- continues to operate an effective framework of financial accountability, which can be demonstrated by our robust arrangements for financial control, through our accounting procedures and financial regulations
- developed 'Project Apollo' which is a council-wide approach with eight separate workstreams to address the shortfall in our medium-term financial plan
- continues to develop a Portfolio
   Management Office that is improving the
   way we are prioritising Capital investment
   and securing value for money.

#### A digital and data led Council that:



- secured funding for a Health Determinant Research Collaboration (HDRC) team that will lead on bringing together the knowledge and research to help us better understand our communities.
- developed a Digital First Customer Strategy, that provides a clear strategic vision on our journey to becoming digital and data-led council
- developed digital profiling to better understand our customers and from this have started to use Robotic Process Automation.

