

## Panel Performance Assessment

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A statutory requirement of the Local Government and Elections Act 2021, requires Councils to undertake an peer review known as a Panel Performance Assessment once every electoral cycle (every 5 years). At the end of April 2025, we supported our first ever Panel Performance Assessment (PPA), led by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).

The panel were comprised of a team of impartial expert peers selected to give their alternative perspectives through independent, objective challenge in order to; help inform our improvement journey; build on our annual self-assessment; and support us to look to the future, through a different lens. The team spent 4 days on site speaking with a variety of staff, members, partners, residents, unions and people receiving services in the community.

Overall conclusions within the report are noted below:

- Torfaen is a well-led Council that benefits from exceptional widespread support for its Leader and Chief Executive. There are positive member-officer relationships built on a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. Given the ambitious agenda this is vital to ensure members set a clear policy framework that allows and authorises the Chief Executive to rapidly implement.
- The Council has established appropriate and effective governance systems and operates with a notable "golden thread of positivity."
- It has articulated a brave, clear, ambitious, and innovative vision to address health inequality and the Wales-wide sustainability challenge, presenting an opportune moment to advance the federated model.
- To realise this vision, the Council needs to rapidly translate the principles of Marmot and its Early Intervention and Prevention (EIP) programme into the detail. Risk management should now focus on the execution of the set strategy rather than the risks of inaction. The inherent risks associated with the ambitious vision are mitigated to a degree by strong performance management that can adapt to allow for necessary programme adjustments.
- There is an opportunity to leverage the 'Apollo Model' to deliver the transformation programme and deal with wicked issues.
- While the strong leadership enjoys significant support, it will be important to remain mindful of the potential for overreliance on key individuals. There is a need to pursue a non-hierarchical leadership development programme seeking to create a leadership cadre throughout the authority reducing reliance on a number of individuals.

The PPA report makes 5 recommendations to the Council focussed on fine-tuning and further improving the Council's approach in progressing these initiatives. The recommendations are set out below:

### 1. Federation...

- The federated model should be accelerated and delivered faster and deeper.
- The Corporate Risk Register should be extended to include known risks, the major mitigation for which is prompt implementation.
- A further formal approach to Welsh Government be made to seek agreement not only on forward funding but, also importantly, to grant flexibility to allow for new service models.

### 2. Marmot & Communities...

- Develop rapidly a delivery plan that supplements the "guide all that we do" principle. Namely,
- Identifying actions already embedded in plans that contribute.
- Decide which principles input most at a local level and prioritise.
- Set clear activity plans and targets for specific outcomes.

In line with the later recommendation on communications and engagement:

- Clarify for users and residents the changes that flow from the principles.
- To create a narrative tailored to stakeholders, especially staff that details the specific operation changes.

### 3. Early intervention and prevention...

It is recommended that:

- The developing draft programme framework is given visibility across the organisation as it evolves.
- Need to rapidly ensure that the systems and data required to support this programme are fully in place as soon as possible.
- That the Performance Framework incorporate specific activities and outcomes.
- That to inform all stakeholders a tailored narrative is developed and supported by 'stories' relating to real life impacts.

#### **4. Communications and Engagement...**

The Council has invested significant time and effort in engaging stakeholders and staff. However, the scale of ambition and change in Torfaen is extremely significant and the effort to inform and engage needs to step up further.

- It is vital that the narrative around the change is tailored to the various stakeholder groups and targeted to meet the needs and interests using appropriate language and style.
- It is evident that principles are widely understood across stakeholders. In key areas (see below) the specifics are not yet clarified.
- The commitment to define the 'Torfaen Deal' is an essential element that should be completed at the earliest opportunity.

#### **5. Organisational Development (OD) and Workforce Wellbeing**

The extent of change faced by all in Torfaen is extensive and the pace inevitably rapid. The workforce development plan needs revisiting to ensure it adequately supports staff in the following areas, and no doubt more.

- Dealing with uncertainty/personal resilience.
- Change management.
- Skills analysis and acquisition.
- Digital/data and information.
- Develop a succession plan, including for senior leaders.
- There is a need to pursue a non-hierarchical leadership development programme seeking to create a leadership cadre throughout the authority reducing reliance on a number of individuals.

The full Panel Performance Assessment Report is available to [download here](#).