

TORFAEN  
COUNTY  
BOROUGH



BWRDEISTREF  
SIROL  
TORFAEN

# Annual Scrutiny Report 2023-24

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May 2023 – May 2024

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

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# Introduction

Welcome.....

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

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This report gives an overview of scrutiny activity undertaken by the Council's five scrutiny committees. It delivers an assessment of the effectiveness of scrutiny in 2023/2024 and identifies areas for further development in 2024/25.

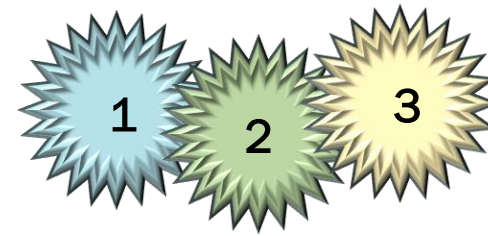
The council's Executive is composed of 8 Councillors (collectively referred to as 'the Cabinet'). The other 32 of the 40 councillors sit on one or more scrutiny committees in line with political balance considerations. Their purpose is to hold the Executive to account, to comment on proposals before decisions are taken, to have an input into policy development and to monitor performance against county plan priorities. This report covers the main topics scrutinised during 2023/24, detailing the outcomes of this work and describing future plans for improvement or development.

In 2023/24, the Council operated 5 scrutiny committees; Healthier Communities O&S Committee, Education O&S Committee, Prosperous Communities O&S Committee, Cleaner Communities O&S Committee and Cross Cutting Resources & Business O&S Committee.

**Scrutiny is most effective when members work as a team. We would like to thank all scrutiny members for their work and commitment during the year. We are also very grateful to Torfaen residents, service users, Cabinet Members, partner agencies and relevant officers who support us to try and ensure that we achieve our aim.**

***Scrutiny Chairs 2023-24***

# Scrutiny in Numbers



## How Much Scrutiny Did We Do?

July 2023 saw the start of a very busy scrutiny year with each overview and scrutiny committee holding their visioning sessions for the 2023/24 year. During these sessions, members met the Executive Members and Strategic Directors who report to the individual committees and discussed the relevant issues forthcoming in the year ahead relevant to that specific committee. Following discussion each committee prioritised their basket of items for scrutiny activity in the year ahead. Inclusive of these sessions, 30 scrutiny meetings were held up until May 2024, an increase of 4 meetings held in 2022/23. Each meeting was preceded by a pre-agenda session where committee and co-opted members determined a questioning strategy for the meeting. The continued preference for “single item” agendas for all overview and scrutiny committee meetings has ensured in-depth challenge is undertaken for each item under discussion and clear, well considered recommendations are made to Executive Members and Strategic Directors.

Where appropriate, scrutiny members have adopted less formal working methods to inform and widen the perspective of their work. This has included, undertaking visits. Across the 5 scrutiny committees, in 2023/24, 11 visits took place which was a significant increase from 2 visits in 2023/24. These visits have included the Springboard Innovation Centre, The Settlement Pontypool, all cemeteries within the borough, Able Social Enterprise and several schools. Feedback from members has indicated that where appropriate, visits have contributed significantly to delivering effective scrutiny.

Following each cycle of committee meetings, the Scrutiny Support Team meet with the 5 Chairs to reflect on the previous cycle and plan for the upcoming round of meetings. As part of these discussions and to strengthen the relationship between scrutiny and the Executive it was agreed that Executive Members would be invited to all scrutiny meetings rather than on an invitation by report basis as adopted previously. There were 23 Executive Member appearances at 20 meetings over 2023-24 (where invited). With priority also still focused on addressing Estyn recommendations, the Education committee continues to receive regular briefings from the Executive Member for Children, Families & Education with 4 meetings in 2023/24.

It is important that any scrutiny activity has an impact and so during the work programming process, and throughout the course of the year, several items were deemed as being of importance to members, but as they would form update information rather than impactful scrutiny activity, these items were referred to the more appropriate avenue of Member Seminars. In 2023/24, 9 Member Seminars were held as a result of scrutiny referral.



4 **Annual Review**



July 2024



## How Much Engagement Did Scrutiny Achieve?

	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22
Average Member Attendance at Scrutiny Meetings	68%	77.5%	74%
Number of Invitees Attending/Contributing	54	21	(Not counted)
Number of Webcast Views	2059	1086	256
Number of Public Comments	163	(Not counted)	(Not counted)

The rate of councillor attendance, measures an important aspect of effectiveness as it reflects the engagement of councillors in the scrutiny process. 2023/24's figure for attendance is 68% for all committees which is down considerably on the previous year's figure of 77.5%. (Individual scrutiny committee and member attendance is broken down later in this report.) As a result of continual attendance monitoring and the identification of decreasing attendance during the year, a Member's workshop was held on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024 to look at how we can support the strengthening of our democratic processes, a key aspect of which covered ways in which we could improve attendance at meetings. As a result, a new meeting time offer will come into effect in the 2024-25 scrutiny year.

The total number of webcast views across the scrutiny committees in 2023-24 was 2059, almost double the 1086 views in 2022-23 and a 10-fold increase on the 256 views recorded in 2021-22. The average views per meeting (that were webcast live) was 69. The 9<sup>th</sup> November 2023 meeting of the Healthier Communities O&S Committee looking at Adult Services moving to an Integrated Reablement approach received 139 views with the Cross Cutting Resources & Business O&S Committee meetings on 10<sup>th</sup> October considering the Climate Change & Nature Emergency and the meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023 scrutinising the Initial Revenue Estimates 2024/25 having 119 and 113 views respectively. These figures clearly demonstrates an increase in public engagement in the scrutiny process and reaffirms the aim of scrutiny committees to review items where an impact can be demonstrated, and which are of importance to residents.

Using social media to understand the views of citizens, speaking with experts and relevant stakeholders in person and via online methods and conducting in-depth research and review work have all contributed to helping members broaden their knowledge of the issues being scrutinised. Committees have also regularly invited external witnesses / invitees to contribute to their meetings to help broaden their knowledge of the issue under scrutiny. This has involved the participation of Executive Members, Strategic Directors, Heads of Service and service-based officers, service providers and service users, external regulators, and other professional bodies. Invitees involved in scrutiny over the last year have included representatives from Bron Afon, South-East Wales Education Achievement Service, Gwent Police, Headteachers, local business owners, Torfaen Voluntary Alliance (TVA) and social enterprise managers.

## What Impact Did Scrutiny Have?

	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22
Total Number of Recommendations Made	159	152	111
Number of Recommendations Accepted	79% (n.126)	84% (n.128)	58% (n.64)
Number of Recommendation Noted for Further Consideration	17% (n.26)	12% (n.18)	36% (n.40)
Number of Recommendations Rejected	4% (n.7)	4% (n.6)	6% (n.7)

Committee members make recommendations for improvement, reflecting discussions at committee meetings that require a timely response from the Executive Member/ Strategic Director. The rate that Executive Members accept scrutiny recommendations is a good indicator of whether scrutiny is making strong recommendations, based on robust evidence.

A breakdown by committee is detailed below in the committee section. The percentage of accepted recommendations is down from 84% in 2022-23 to 79% in 2023-24, with the number of recommendations that were noted for consideration up from 12% to 17% and the number rejected remaining at a low 4%. These outcomes continue to indicate that members are making impactful, effective recommendations.

Annually, each committee receives an Update on Recommendations report, which reflects on the recommendations made over the course of the year, determining whether the intended impact of scrutiny activity was achieved and measures the extent of which accepted recommendations have been actioned.

During 2023/24 the Healthier Communities O&S Committee and the Cross Cutting Resources & Business O&S Committee trialed having officers remain for recommendation formulation. This worked well for the items under consideration, and we will look to roll out this procedure further in 2024/25 where scrutiny activity is appropriate and where members agree that it would be beneficial. In addition, with continued training, development and experience, we aim to ensure all scrutiny activity results in SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely), impactful recommendations.

# Developments delivered during the year...

Our approach to overview and scrutiny has continued to adapt and strive for improvement during 2023-24

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## Self-evaluation

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

Last year, we operated a system of utilising a post scrutiny survey which was emailed to all committee members, reporting officers and invitees. Unfortunately, response levels dropped off, and so we implemented post scrutiny meeting self-assessment sessions. These reviews take place immediately following the meeting with all members still present. Members are asked a series of questions to determine whether they were adequately equipped to prepare for a meeting, to conduct the specific scrutiny activity and review the committee's success of delivering effective, impactful outcomes.

Officers and invitees were still sent an email survey, however responses to these have been very low and our proposals to address this in the upcoming year are set out later in this report.

The results from these surveys are fed into and are regularly monitored as part of our service planning performance monitoring in order for timely changes to be made or issues addressed.

The Annual Scrutiny survey results are reported later in this report.

## Service Plan Reporting

The Council's Service Plans strengthen accountability, transparency and ownership, as each activity provides details of who will be delivering them by when and what outcome can be expected. Through regular updates and reporting it can be demonstrated how successful we have been achieving our aspirations and if necessary, identify whether action is required to alter the way in which things are done.

The Scrutiny Support Team update and contribute to the Business & Democratic Support Service's service plan on a monthly basis, including activities that are; Business as usual (day to day activities of a service) change activities (service developments) and measures, so we can monitor our progress against our targets to demonstrate how successful we have been in achieving an effective scrutiny process.

## Annual Survey 2023-24

Each year, the Scrutiny Support Team conducts a Member's Scrutiny Survey to seek members' views on the support they receive in order to fulfil their roles as scrutiny members, on the scrutiny process, and on the impact and outcomes of scrutiny activity. The key findings from the 2023-24 survey are set out below:

### Positives:

- 93.8% of members feel well or very well equipped to conduct scrutiny, an improvement on 90% in 2022-23
- 100% of members responded they were well, to fully supported by the scrutiny support team with no members responding they were inadequately supported.
- 92.9% of members believe the visioning process results in scrutiny committees considering the right issues up from 72.2% in 2022-23
- 86.7% of members believe the work programme is member led, a massive improvement from 68.4% in 2022-23 & 41% in 2021-22
- A larger percentage of members now believe scrutiny committees fulfil their role in holding the Executive to account with a reduction in the percentage feeling they don't at 21.4%, down from 29.4% in 2022-23
- 92.8% of members feel scrutiny committees make robust recommendations the majority of the time
- 85.7% of members responded they were satisfied with the responses from the Executive Member, up considerably from 57.9% in 2022-23
- 64.2% of members responded that the public are adequately engaged in the scrutiny process, up significantly from 35% in 2022-23

### Areas for greater focus in 2024-25

- 50% of members responded that they feel there are constraints to effective scrutiny. Points referenced included: resources, time constraints, member knowledge, and member attendance at pre-agenda meetings
- Comments supplementing survey responses indicates more needs to be done to increase member knowledge and awareness of the work of committees that they are not a member of

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





## Torfaen Council's County Plan

The County Plan highlights the Council's ambitions between 2022 and 2027. It also sets out key delivery activities for each year that will help teams and services achieve those ambitions.

It has been inspired by the Well-being of Future Generations Act and aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Torfaen.

It identifies four key themes: wellbeing, connectivity, sustainability and culture and heritage which underpin nine key priority well-being objectives.

Whilst scrutiny doesn't directly feed into any of the nine key priorities, effective scrutiny is vital to ensuring the Executive, Strategic Directors and service areas are making robust decisions, contributing to developing delivery plans and strategies as well as monitoring service area performance in delivering on the objectives.

## Action Plan for Governance & Improvement

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

Each overview and scrutiny committee reports back to the Council's Governance & Audit Committee annually with a progress update against recommendations and proposals for improvement made by our external regulators. The progress update relevant to each committee was received prior to the visioning sessions in July 2023 and the recommendations from each committee were reported back to the Governance & Audit Committee in October 2023.

The 2023/24 progress update report will be prepared for each referral and will be reported back to the relevant scrutiny committees for assurance purposes in July 2024. Should the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and / or the Governance & Audit Committee highlight any concerns over the progress made in addressing the agreed recommendations, a report will be prepared for consideration by Cabinet.

## Recommendation Formulation

During 2023/24 the Healthier Communities O&S Committee and the Cross Cutting Resources & Business O&S Committee trialed a revised process of formulating recommendations with the Executive Member and reporting officers still present. Whilst members have indicated, through feedback, that they would have preference of maintaining the opportunity to summarise recommendations at the end of the meeting once the Executive Member and the officers have left, they still agree that the process has worked well, in offering more effective and impactful recommendations.

## Annual Update on Recommendations

Each scrutiny committee takes an annual report to assess progress against the implementation of recommendations accepted or those noted for further consideration as well as reflecting on the impact that their scrutiny activity has had.

To ensure the impact of scrutiny is properly evaluated and recommendations are not just accepted but acted upon, a summary of progress is produced by service areas, against each scrutiny item; including a progress update for each recommendation previously accepted or to be considered and examining what has been the impact of progressing the recommendation(s).

The update reports for each committee were considered in July 2024 and can be accessed on the agenda page for the relevant committee.

## Impact of Scrutiny

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

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

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

## Examples of particular areas where scrutiny has had an impact over the last year are:

### **Prosperous Communities O&S Committee – Springboard Innovation Centre**

Recommendations from the three Prosperous Communities Scrutiny Committee meetings up to October 2023, reviewing the draft business case and the findings of the Oxford Innovation report informed the development of the final Full Business Case, which was submitted for Cabinet approval in January 2024.

# IMPACT

### **Education O&S Committee Attendance & Exclusions**

The committee endorsed the approach and actions being taken to improve pupil attendance and reduce exclusions, whilst offering recommendations to strengthen the approach, around training and development and sharing of best practice.

### **Healthier Communities O&S Committee Integrated Re-ablement**

Scrutiny activity assisted with clarity on purpose for the transformation to an Integrated Reablement system and provided recommendations on how to ensure the performance data is seen alongside service users stories/ case studies to evaluate over time the impact of the changes both to individuals and to the Council in terms of promoting independence, positive risk taking and enabling people to live the life they choose.

### **Cross Cutting Resources & Business Torfaen Council's Climate And Nature Emergency Annual Report 2022-2023**

In scrutinising the Climate & Nature Emergency Annual Report, members assessed the Council's performance in delivering on the intended objectives, which resulted in offering recommendations to build capacity and accelerate progress of C&NE workstreams

### **Cleaner Communities O&S Committee Flood Risk Management**

Scrutiny of the draft Local Flood Risk Management Strategy drew public interest and comment, and the committee found it very useful to be able to draw on points raised by the public in taking forward the scrutiny process. The points highlighted by the committee were largely taken on board and informed the final document that was subsequently approved by Cabinet and Welsh Government.

## Training

Training offers members the opportunity to develop their skills and become more effective in their roles. Members were offered a range of training schemes in 2023-24 to help progress their skills in questioning and understanding of data, which led to more focussed and effective scrutiny.

### 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023 – Chairs Training

WLGA provided bespoke training to the 5 scrutiny Chairs. An interactive workshop covered the key skills required to chair meetings effectively. The workshop catered for the specialist needs of the chairs of overview and scrutiny committees.

### 21<sup>st</sup> June 2023 & 4<sup>th</sup> July 2023 – Questioning Skills Training

WLGA provided training in 2 workshop sessions highlighting to councillors that effective questioning in scrutiny is not just about questioning techniques – it's also about preparation, processes and teamwork. Simple questions can at times be the most effective, and councillors do not need to be an expert in a subject to ask good questions or get the information the public cares about.

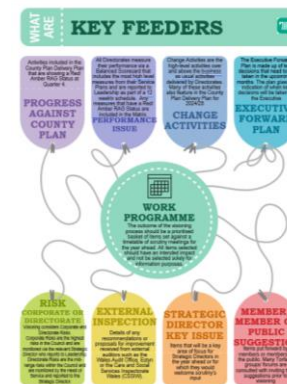
### 20<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023 – Data 101 Introduction to Understanding & Using Data

Data Cymru delivered 2 sessions of training offering practical guidance to help members build skills and confidence in understanding and using data. The course covered the different types of data and how to find it. Members were guided through a series of questions designed to help make sure they understood the data they are working with. This was followed by some techniques to help turn data into knowledge.

## Monthly bulletins

All scrutiny members now receive monthly one-page bulletins that cover a range of dedicated scrutiny matters. Several of the bulletins provide training materials such as developing good questioning techniques, financial questioning, performance questioning, making effective recommendations etc...

One-page bulletins were developed setting out the visioning process and highlighting each key feeder and its relevance to the scrutiny process. These were emailed to all scrutiny members prior to commencement of visioning sessions, aiding understanding and promoting effective item selection / work programming.



Members are reminded that should they have any training needs or suggestions, to please contact the Scrutiny Support Team who will identify and arrange suitable opportunities

# HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES



**Cllr Janet Jones**  
Chair  
6/7 Meetings



**Cllr Lucy Williams**  
7/7 Meetings



**Cllr Rose Seabourne**  
5/7 Meetings



**Cllr David Williams**  
6/7 Meetings



**Cllr Jayne Watkins**  
6/7 Meetings



**Cllr Steve Evans**  
6/7 Meetings



**Cllr Catherine Bonera**  
5/7 Meetings



**Cllr Alfie Best**  
2/7 Meetings



**Cllr Lynda Clarkson**  
7/7 Meetings

**Average Member Attendance = 79%**

# Scrutiny Meetings 2023-24

Total Number of Recommendations Made

39

Number of Recommendations Accepted

77% (n.30)

Number of Recommendations Noted for Further Consideration

15% (n.6)

Number of Recommendations Rejected

8% (n.3)

**25 May 2023**

Community Wellbeing Strategy - Draft

**9 November 2023**

Integrated Reablement

**18 January 2024**

Front Door to Adult Social Care

**18<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

Placement Availability & Sufficiency

**5<sup>th</sup> July 2023**

Annual Update on Recommendations & WAO Referrals

**14 September 2023**

Social Enterprises

**29 February 2024**

Child Protection/ CIW Rapid Review

# CHAIR'S ANNUAL STATEMENT



This year the committee had some challenging items for scrutiny including Social Enterprises, Integrated Reablement, Front Door to Adult Social Services, Child Protection/CIW Rapid Review and Placement Sufficiency & Availability.

All were very emotive subjects and as a committee we posed challenging questions to all the officers whose reports we scrutinised. Many of the recommendations made have been taken on board and some referrals have been made for future members seminars.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to extend our thanks to all the invitees, stakeholders, service users and partner representatives who contributed to our scrutiny activity. Conducting visits and speaking with people who are in receipt of our services, really enriches our knowledge and scrutiny activity.

May I also thank all the officers, who attended our meeting, our scrutiny team, and all members for their support during the year.

**Councillor Janet Jones**  
**Chair of the Healthier Communities**  
**Overview & Scrutiny Committee**



# EDUCATION



**Cllr Rose Seabourne**  
**Chair**  
**6/7 Meetings**



**Cllr Lucy Williams**  
**5/7 Meetings**



**Cllr Janet Jones**  
**6/7 Meetings**



**Cllr Liam Cowles**  
**4/7 Meetings**



**Cllr Jayne Watkins**  
**7/7 Meetings**



**Cllr Caroline Price**  
**4/7 Meetings**



**Cllr Chris Tew**  
**1/7 Meetings**



**Cllr Alfie Best**  
**3/7 Meetings**



**Cllr Colette Thomas**  
**7/7 Meetings**

**Average Member Attendance = 68%**

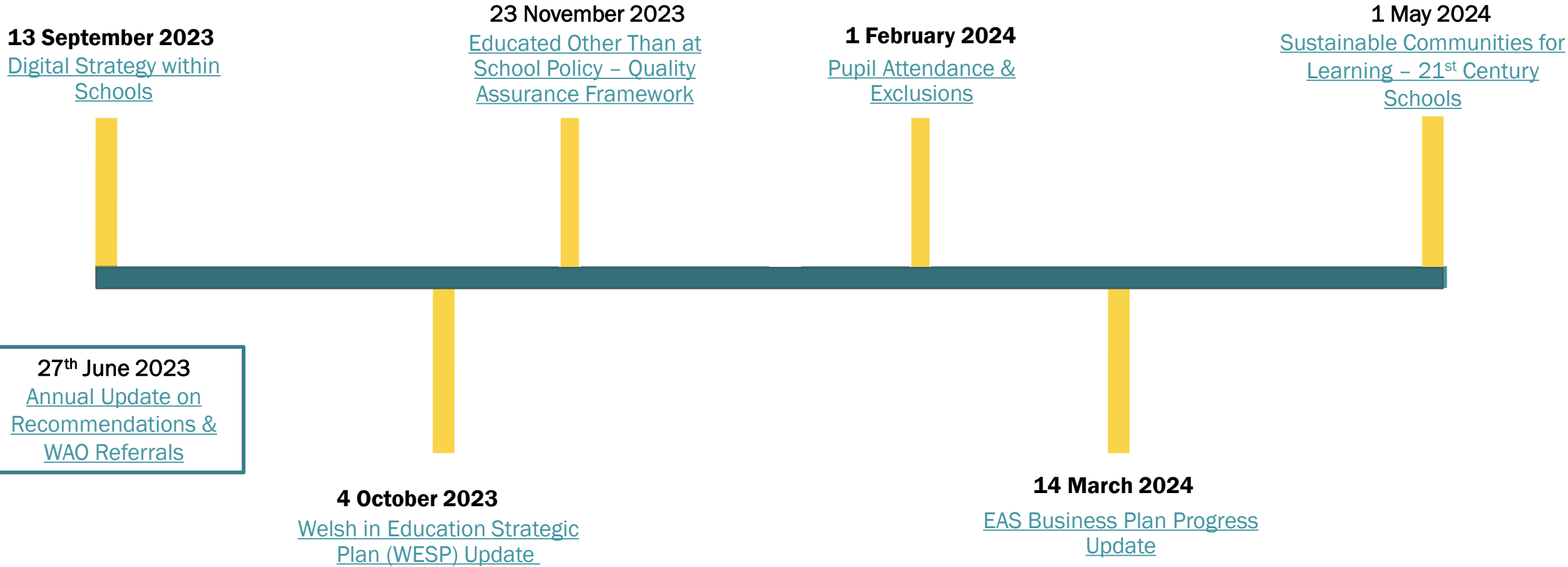
**Co-opted Member – Welsh Medium Parent Governor**

**Victoria Horlor**



# Scrutiny Meetings 2023-24

Total Number of Recommendations Made	37
Number of Recommendations Accepted	89% (n.33)
Number of Recommendations Noted for Further Consideration	8% (n.3)
Number of Recommendations Rejected	3% (n.1)



# CHAIR'S ANNUAL STATEMENT



I'm pleased to present the annual report of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2023-2024. Over the past year, our committee has diligently worked towards enhancing the educational landscape in our community, addressing key agenda items, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders.

The issue of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) remains a top priority for our committee. We have made significant progress in ensuring that children with ALN receive the support and resources they need to thrive in educational settings. Through thorough discussions and consultations with various stakeholders, including staff, students, parents, and governors, we have developed strategies aimed at improving inclusivity and diverse access to education for all learners.

Our committee has actively engaged with the Education Achievement Service (EAS), seeking to align our objectives with the overarching goals of educational excellence and student achievement. By scrutinising the EAS Business Plan and providing valuable feedback, we have contributed to the enhancement of educational services and outcomes across Torfaen.

In an increasingly digital world, our committee recognises the importance of integrating technology into education effectively. We have reviewed and refined the Digital Strategy Within Schools to ensure that it aligns with the evolving needs of students and educators. By promoting digital literacy and access to technology, we aim to equip our learners with the skills required for success in the 21st century.



The preservation and promotion of the Welsh language are integral to our cultural heritage and identity. Our committee has been actively involved in shaping the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, emphasising the importance of bilingualism and ensuring that Welsh-language provision remains robust within our educational institutions.

Investing in our school infrastructure is essential for creating conducive learning environments and fostering sustainable communities. Whilst considering Sustainable Communities for Learning (21st Century Schools) our committee has advocated for the maintenance and rebuild of 21st-century schools, prioritising projects that enhance safety, accessibility, and functionality. By collaborating with relevant stakeholders, we have advanced initiatives aimed at modernising our educational facilities.

With regards to Pupil Attendance and Exclusions, the committee endorsed the approach and actions being taken to improve attendance and reduce exclusions, whilst offering recommendations around training and development and sharing of best practice.

Throughout the year, our committee has conducted school visits to gain first-hand insight into the challenges and opportunities facing our educational institutions. These visits have allowed us to engage directly with students, teachers, and school leaders, fostering meaningful dialogue and informing our decision-making process.

Looking ahead to 2024-2025, our committee will identify its work programme during the July visioning session, and we look forward to continuing to support and challenge as a critical friend. We also aim to strengthen partnerships particularly with the voice of young people but also with parents, governors, staff and members of the public, fostering a collaborative approach to education governance.

In conclusion, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all members of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their dedication, expertise, and contributions throughout the year. I also wish to thank the staff, students, parents, governors, and members of the public for their valuable input and engagement on our agenda items. Together, we will continue to strive towards excellence in education and the holistic development of our community.

**Councillor Rosemarie Seabourne**  
**Chair of the Education Overview & Scrutiny Committee**



# PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES



**Cllr Mark Jones**  
**Chair**  
**6/6 Meetings**



**Cllr Liam Cowles**  
**5/6 Meetings**



**Cllr Caroline Price**  
**3/6 Meetings**



**Cllr Nathan Yeowell**  
**3/6 Meetings**



**Cllr Karl Gauden**  
**5/6 Meetings**



**Cllr Nick Byrne**  
**2/6 Meetings**



**Cllr Nick Horler**  
**6/6 Meetings**



**Cllr Nick Simons**  
**2/6 Meetings**



**Cllr Sue Malson**  
**0/6 Meetings**

**Average Member  
Attendance = 59%**

# Scrutiny Meetings 2023-24

11 July 2023

[Annual Update on  
Recommendations &  
WAO Referrals](#)

30 November 2023

[Townscape Heritage  
Programme](#)

21 March 2024

[Adult Community Learning  
Commercial Offer](#)

12 October 2023

[Springboard  
Innovation Ecosystem](#)

8 February 2024

[Torfaen Business Direct](#)

9 May 2024

[Preparing the Council to  
Comply with the Serious  
Violence Duty](#)

Total Number of Recommendations Made

15

Number of Recommendations Accepted

87% (13)

Number of Recommendations Noted for  
Further Consideration

13% (2)

Number of Recommendations Rejected

0

# CHAIR'S ANNUAL STATEMENT



It has been very much a privilege to chair the Prosperous Communities O&S Committee over the last 12 months. I was lucky to have a really good cross section of enthusiastic members on board as a committee and thank them very much for their attendance and their valuable input. Also, huge thanks go out to the scrutiny team for organising and putting everything together so expertly.



12 October 2023 - Springboard Innovation Ecosystem.  
Prosperous were asked to review the options for Springboard following a commission by Oxford Innovation. The Prosperous committee were satisfied that the recommendations set out within the business case will support the intended outcome and will deliver the proposed transformation of the Springboard & Innovation Centre.

30<sup>th</sup> November 2023 - Townscape Heritage Programme.

Prosperous were asked to review the performance of the THP delivery within Blaenavon. The committee commended the team for the level of work that had been invested into delivering the Blaenavon THP and the visible improvements to buildings on Broad Street. Members were especially impressed with the community activities and the passion and energy of the THP manager and members stressed the importance of maintaining the legacy of the community work.



8<sup>th</sup> February 2024 - Torfaen Business Direct.

Prosperous were asked whether the activity and direction that TBD has taken over it's development phase is appropriate to continue into year 2 of its operation. The Prosperous Communities O&S Committee determined that the activity and direction that TBD had taken over its development phase was appropriate to continue in year 2 of the operation but with a few recommendations.

21<sup>st</sup> March 2024 - Adult Community Learning.

Prosperous were asked to determine whether they are satisfied with the performance of the adult community training commercial offer, including those courses that are in the first year of delivery. The Prosperous Communities O&S Committee determined they were very satisfied with the performance of the Adult Community Training offer, including those courses that are in their first year of delivery.



9<sup>th</sup> May 2024 - Serious Violence Prevention Duty.

Prosperous were asked to determine whether the Council is adequately meeting the statutory requirements of the Serious Violence Prevention Duty (Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Act 2022).

The Prosperous Communities O&S Committee determined they were satisfied that it is adequately meeting the statutory requirements of the Serious Violence Prevention Duty (Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Act 2022). The Committee did make a few recommendations to strengthen this activity.

Once again, many thanks for giving me the opportunity to Chair this committee and may the good work continue. Thanks.

**Councillor Mark Jones**  
**Chair of the Prosperous Communities O&S Committee**

# CLEANER COMMUNITIES



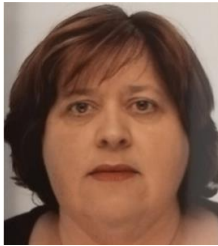
**Cllr David Williams**  
**Chair**  
**5/5 Meetings**



**Cllr Nick Horler**  
**5/5 Meetings**



**Cllr Steve Evans**  
**4/5 Meetings**



**Cllr Elizabeth Haynes**  
**4/5 Meetings**



**Cllr Gaynor James**  
**0/5 Meetings**



**Cllr Lynda Clarkson**  
**5/5 Meetings**



**Cllr Jason O'Connell**  
**2/5 Meetings**



**Cllr Stuart Ashley**  
**4/5 Meetings**



**Cllr Norma Parrish**  
**5/5 Meetings**

**Average Member  
Attendance = 76%**



# Scrutiny Meetings 2023-24

Total Number of Recommendations Made

45

Number of Recommendations Accepted

67% (n.30)

Number of Recommendations Noted for Further Consideration

27% (n.12)

Number of Recommendations Rejected

6% (n.3)

6 July 2023

[Annual Update on Recommendations & WAO Referrals](#)

15 November 2023

[Cemeteries Services](#)

7 March 2024

[Enforcement Service Review](#)

28 September 2023

[Weed Management](#)

13 December 2023

[Flood Risk Management](#)

# CHAIR'S ANNUAL STATEMENT



This 2023/24 report of the Cleaner Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee is set to be the last, as the structure of scrutiny committees changes for 2024/25 – with a new Economy & Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and a new membership.

It will be interesting to see if the new structures work as effectively as the old, especially as this last year has been a busy and varied one for Committee members.

It was a first year as a Chair of a Scrutiny Committee for me as a newish member, elected in May 2022, and so I would like to record my thanks and appreciation to the other members of the Committee for their effective and robust support over the year. I am also extremely grateful for the support from officers supporting both myself and the Committee as a whole. Committee members in turn have been very willing to ask questions and to probe into a wide range of topics.

This has included the management and control of weeds during September 2023, drawing on research work done and presented to our colleagues in Cardiff City Council. This was also a topic area that attracted considerable public interest, with a wide range of comments and observations being received. Committee members undertook their own research into this topic as well, and there were a good number of recommendations raised for the Cabinet Member and the relevant Department. It was recognised that there is a real challenge in balancing up public demands for tidy and well-maintained open spaces, parks and rights of way alongside supporting natural biodiversity and the Council's commitment towards moving to Net Zero.



At the meeting in November 2023, the Committee looked at the management of cemeteries in Torfaen, which was an understandably very emotional topic for many, with strong public interest. I was fortunate to visit the four cemeteries run by the Council at Blaenavon, Panteg, Cwmbran and Llwynceilyn along with Geraint as the Committee Support Officer – meeting both fellow councillors in those areas, members of the public, and cemetery staff. The Committee again made a range of positive and constructive recommendations, and we were pleased to see that many of these were acted upon.

Continuing in the vein of some ‘hot topics’, in December 2023 the Committee scrutinised the draft Torfaen Flood Risk Management approach prior to a final version going on to Cabinet and to Welsh Government. This was another subject that drew public interest and comment, and the Committee found it very useful to be able to draw on points raised by the public in taking forward the scrutiny process. It was again pleasing that points highlighted by the Committee were largely taken on board and informed the final document that was subsequently approved by the Council as a whole.

The final topic considered by the Scrutiny Committee in March 2024 was the area of Enforcement – both traffic enforcement, and environmental enforcement. It is fair to say that this was another topic of strong public interest – and to all Council members, given the numbers of parking related queries that constituents raise. A good number of constructive recommendations were made, supporting the development of a service that had many new staff – and a mechanism for members to pass on pictures of parking issues for the Enforcement Team to follow up was one positive outcome now put in place.

The Committee does have one ‘deferred’ topic to pick up in July 2024, albeit that this will be the new Economy & Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee. There was an original scheduled review of the ‘Raise the Rate’ recycling programme in April 2024. It was then felt that more time was needed to realistically assess impacts, and this was discussed within the TCBC Strategic Recycling Board – which helpfully had a number of Members who were also part of the Committee. A ‘reserve’ topic of Green Space Management was set to replace this for scrutiny, before Departmental leads requested scrutiny of a specific component of forward Recycling Policy, namely an Enforcement Policy. This was also supported by the Strategic Recycling Board and so is set for discussion on 18<sup>th</sup> July. In many respects this exemplifies how the Scrutiny process and the Committee members have shown a willingness to be flexible and support the wider business of the Council, making sure that scrutiny is targeted to when, and to where, needed.

In conclusion it has been a busy final year for the Cleaner Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee, with very many constructive recommendations made – and as the wider Scrutiny overview report shows – a majority of these have been taken on board. My thanks go to all those members of the public who took the time to submit comments and concerns on scrutiny topics – these were very much appreciated and really benefited the scrutiny process. Finally, I would like to thank all those officers who have contributed to and presented reports to the Committee. This can be a daunting task, and for many Officers it was their first experience of the scrutiny process and engagement with Members. Hopefully they found it a useful (and not intimidating!) experience, and they produced some excellent reports and responses to questions raised.

**Councillor David Williams**  
**Chair of the Cleaner Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

# CROSS CUTTING RESOURCES & BUSINESS

Councillor Stuart Ashley (Chair)	(4/5 meetings)
Councillor Alfie Best	(2/5 meetings)
Councillor Catherine Bonera	(5/5 meetings)
Councillor Ron Burnett	(0/5 meetings)
Councillor Nick Byrne	(2/5 meetings)
Councillor Lynda Clarkson	(5/5 meetings)
Councillor Liam Cowles	(1/5 meetings)
Councillor Giles Davies	(0/5 meetings)
Councillor Steven Evans	(5/5 meetings)
Councillor Karl Gauden	(2/5 meetings)
Councillor Elizabeth Haynes	(3/5 meetings)
Councillor Nick Horler	(5/5 meetings)
Councillor Jon Horlor	(5/5 meetings)
Councillor Gaynor James	(0/5 meetings)
Councillor Jon James	(0/5 meetings)
Councillor Janet Jones	(4/5 meetings)
Councillor Mark Jones	(5/5 meetings)
Councillor Sue Malson	(1/5 meetings)
Councillor Rosemary Matthews	(0/5 meetings)

Councillor Jason O'Connell	(5/5 meetings)
Councillor Norma Parrish	(5/5 meetings)
Councillor Caroline Price	(0/5 meetings)
Councillor Rose Seabourne	(4/5 meetings)
Councillor Nicholas Simons	(1/5 meetings)
Councillor Alan Slade	(4/5 meetings)
Councillor Chris Tew	(0/5 meetings)
Councillor Colette Thomas	(4/5 meetings)
Councillor David Thomas	(5/5 meetings)
Councillor Jayne Watkins	(4/5 meetings)
Councillor David Williams	(5/5 meetings)
Councillor Lucy Williams	(3/5 meetings)
Councillor Nathan Yeowell	(3/5 meetings)

**Average Member  
Attendance = 58%**

# Scrutiny Meetings 2023-24

Total Number of Recommendations Made

23

Number of Recommendations Accepted

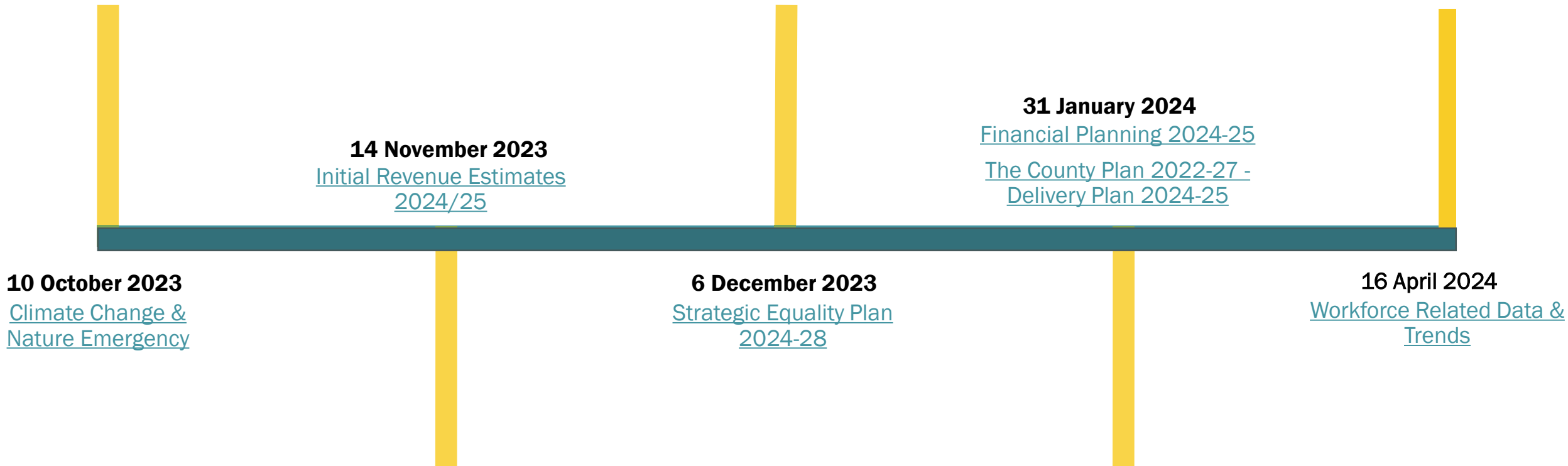
87% (n.20)

Number of Recommendations Noted for Further Consideration

13% (n.3)

Number of Recommendations Rejected

0



# CHAIR'S ANNUAL STATEMENT

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It has been an honour to Chair the Cross Cutting Resources & Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee during the past scrutiny year and I would like to thank the membership for their attendance and contributions at all the meetings held during that time. The committee is focused on keeping an active oversight on all matters that impact across the whole Council. During the 2023/24 scrutiny year, the Cross Cutting Resources & Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee has covered 6 subjects in our work programme. I would also like to thank all the officers involved, for the effort and work carried out in preparation for and during the meetings.

As set out earlier in this report, the committee has scrutinised Torfaen Council's Climate and Nature Emergency Annual Report 2022-2023, Initial Revenue Estimates 2024/25, the Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028, Financial Planning 2024/25, the County Plan 2022-27: Delivery Plan 2024-25 and Workforce Related Data and Trends.

At the first meeting in October 2023, members were provided with an update on the work undertaken to deliver the actions set out in the Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan, which had been approved by Cabinet in March 2022. This is an issue very close to my heart! Members were satisfied with the extent to which the Council had delivered on the objectives during 2022-23; however this was a particularly active scrutiny session, which resulted in 11 recommendations for the Executive Members and Strategic Directors to consider.

The Council's annual Budget proposal is always an item members take a key role in actively scrutinising, with Initial Revenue Estimates 2024/25 being considered by the committee in November 2023 and Financial Planning 2024/25 in January 2024, once TCBC had received its 2024/25 provisional settlement from Welsh Government on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023. Overall, the committee were satisfied with the budget position including mitigations and made recommendations for consideration before budget and council tax setting went before full Council on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024. I appreciate the commitment of all scrutiny members, who have taken part in these difficult conversations to support the council to spend its limited resources as wisely as possible.

During December 2023 the committee considered the Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028, and members were satisfied that the proposed revised Equality Objectives for 2024-2028 addressed TCBC's commitment to achieving greater equality as an employer and in the performance of all aspects of its business.

Scrutinising the County Plan 2022-27: Delivery Plan 2024-25 was another significant piece of work undertaken by the committee in January 2024, with members invited to make recommendations to provide further support to the delivery plan. Members were satisfied the key activity planned for the 2024-25 financial year would meet the ambitions within the County Plan.

During the committee's final meeting in April 2024, members were provided with an overview of some of the key workforce trends and the actions incorporated within the Workforce Strategy 2023-28 that were planned or had been delivered and were intended to have a positive impact upon these trends. Members commended officers for the work that had been done, was being done, and was planned.

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

Once again, I believe we have proved to be a valued critical friend, providing a sounding board, challenge and new ideas to those we have worked with. As I look forward to starting my new role as the Chair of the Economy & Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee, I remain focused on contributing as a member of this committee and working with members in continuing this work in the year ahead.

**Councillor Stuart Ashley**  
**Chair of the Cross Cutting Resources and Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

# FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

In addition to embedding the new scrutiny committee portfolios, the following activities will be taken forward as priorities in the year ahead...

## Scrutiny Self-Assessment

Conduct an annual members' survey specifically on the scrutiny function in Torfaen, in order to ensure year on year improvements to the scrutiny process are being identified and actioned.

Implement an annual survey for officers to reflect on the effectiveness of scrutiny processes. It is hoped that engagement in an annual survey would be greater than the returns currently received on a per meeting basis.

## Public Engagement in Scrutiny

Strengthening public engagement in the scrutiny process by exploring new and innovative ways to increase community awareness of and engagement with the scrutiny process.

Implement a Public Speaking at Scrutiny Policy, allowing members of the public the opportunity to provide evidence to committee, or ask a question.

Involve Torfaen Youth Forum in scrutiny activity where appropriate.

## Formulation of Recommendations

Greater roll out of the new approach for making provisional recommendations during the course of a meeting (depending on the appropriateness of the item) with Executive Members and Officers present.

## Performance Monitoring

To build robust performance monitoring processes into the scrutiny function, by embedding relevant performance information into the 'Item for Next Meeting' report and conducting a half yearly review of performance.

## Annual Scrutiny Survey Action Plan

All scrutiny activity strives to have an intended impact and outcome. To address comments raised in the Annual Member's Survey and to achieve a position where all members feel like activity is delivering impactful outputs, training and guidance will be offered to members to equip them to take a more strategic approach to scrutiny, refining skills in questioning and formulating recommendations

## Regional Scrutiny Monitoring

With the Gwent PSB and the Cardiff Capital Region operating regional scrutiny arrangements, it is important to develop an appropriate reporting mechanism to facilitate our appointed representatives feeding back the outcomes from the regional committees to local members.



Produced by Scrutiny Support Team  
Torfaen County Borough Council  
July 2024

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

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

For further information about overview & scrutiny, or if you would like this document in an alternative format please contact:

The Scrutiny Team

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