



Annual Self-Assessment and Well-Being Report 2024/25

October 2025



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 2024-25

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Foreword

Welcome to our Annual Self-Assessment and Well-Being report for 2024–2025.

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

Like all authorities, we continue to face many challenges. However, there is cause to feel excitement and a real sense of optimism with what is to follow next. The challenges we face as councils today such as the impact of global events, shrinking budgets, cost of living, escalating demand, and growing inequality across our communities, aren't problems we can solve with yesterday's tools. These are deep, interconnected challenges that demand new approaches, fresh perspectives, bold experimentation and collective creativity.

This time last year we began exploring innovative plans to work more closely with Blaenau Gwent Council, through a shared Chief Executive for an initial 9-month discovery phase. This exploratory phase was designed to assess opportunities for greater efficiency, identify resources that can work at scale across both authorities, and unlock potential for increased innovation and creativity in how we deliver services.

The success of the initial discovery phase led to the establishment of more formal, long-term arrangements with Blaenau Gwent Council under a federated model of service delivery. This pioneering approach, the first of its kind in Wales, represents a bold and innovative response to the sustainability challenges facing the public sector. It reflects our shared commitment to collaboration, resilience, and delivering better outcomes for our communities.

We have made a clear commitment to reducing inequality and improving well-being in Torfaen. This ambition drives everything we do, and it's embedded at the heart of our financial strategy. Our medium-term financial plan prioritises early intervention and prevention, building resilience in individuals and communities, and addressing the wider determinants of health. By adopting the Marmot principles, we are taking a proactive, evidence-based approach to tackling health inequalities and promoting sustainability. Working in partnership with Blaenau Gwent strengthens our ability to deliver meaningful change. This collaborative, preventative approach is not only innovative, it reflects our ethos of thinking differently about how we meet the complex challenges facing our communities.

Moving into 2025/26, we will endeavour to further empower our residents, giving meaningful decision-making power to our communities, giving them a real say on where resources are spent within their locality, encouraging local people to collaborate as equal partners in the design, delivery and evaluation of services.

We'll look to formalise our approach, through a new 'deal' with the residents of Torfaen, setting out what people in Torfaen can expect from the Council and how residents can do their part to help us to achieve our shared missions. We are aiming for a future without inequality, where everyone thrives in a fair, inclusive, and resilient community. To achieve this, we must aim to create a lasting change by building trust, fostering shared responsibility, and driving innovation through strong collaboration between the council, residents, and partners.

We value everyone within our organisation and as we move forward, it is reassuring to know we can rely on the dedication of all our staff working alongside partners, community groups, volunteers and elected members to continue to shape our success story.



**Councillor Anthony Hunt,
Leader of the Council**

**Stephen Vickers,
Joint 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 2024-25, it also sets the scene for significant organisational change that is required, up to 2027 and beyond.

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.

Both Acts require us to:

- Publish an annual report of our progress against our Well-being objectives (WBFG Act 2015); and
- Publish 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 third 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, 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. It details the way in which public bodies must work and collaborate 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

We are committed to making Torfaen a more equal and sustainable borough through the delivery of our County Plan. Through supporting our residents and the communities in which they live to become more independent, we know that we can reduce demand, not only on our own statutory services but on those delivered by our partners such as the NHS. Simply put we are the frontline defence to public services.

Working in this way will ensure we are getting the most out of our limited resources; by focussing on this mission, we will secure value for money, improving people's lives whilst simultaneously reducing costs. The Council's Service and Financial planning are not competing against each other to deliver different objectives but are complimentary strands of work supporting the Council to deliver its objectives.

This strong positive relationship is focussed on addressing the same problems in order to deliver healthier, happier, more independent communities that will make for a sustainable, prosperous Torfaen. Resilient communities sit at the heart of the council being more sustainable and will result in us being able to spend the limited resources available to us more efficiently, needing to spend less money on those Council services that cost the most money.

We continue to take our aspirations forward in all that we do, however, in the last 12 months a number of key fundamental pieces of work have been developed and delivered as we work towards delivering our County Plan and becoming a more sustainable and resilient Council. These are introduced below to help set the scene but will be referred to frequently throughout the remainder of this report.

Federated Approach

Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Councils entered into an innovative collaborative working agreement during 2024/25, with the first Joint Chief Executive post in Wales. An initial discovery phase was agreed in June 2024, to begin exploring the potential for efficiencies and increasing innovation and creativity across both authorities.

Both councils are taking a forward-thinking approach to address current challenges and future demands. They recognise that local government in its current form is facing an uncertain and unsustainable future, therefore the members and officers in both councils are taking a proactive stance in finding new solutions that go beyond the usual 'salami-slicing' approach. This has led to an open consideration to align the councils to create a strong, strategic foundation for the change that is needed.

In January 2025, both Councils agreed to move the temporary arrangements for closer working on to a more permanent footing.

Marmot Masterplan and the Communities Approach

We have begun systematically reshaping our operating model following the Public Service Board's commitment to become a Marmot region. This 'Communities Approach' has been designed to ensure we are not just saying the right things and doing more of the same, but that we are delivering a real tangible change. In Torfaen we have been adamant that this would not and could not happen.

Our work in 2024, has focussed on 'how'. We recognise that without a clear 'operating model' we would not be able to deliver the change we need, and this is where our Communities Approach comes in. The first pillar of our Communities Approach has asked how we as a council can make a real difference in a complex 'wellbeing' system?

This year, with £5M funding from the National Institute of Health and Care Research, we have established a Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC): the first in Wales. This collaboration between the Council, University of South Wales, ADR Wales, and Aneurin Bevan Health Board will conduct research, and gather and link local-level data to inform any decisions impacting on the wellbeing system. We will embed the HDRC into decision making processes across the Council, including service redesign and budget planning, to ensure decisions are based on sound evidence and need. The HDRC can strengthen the Councils ability to prioritise interventions using data and research, for example, mapping where investment in early years or housing can reduce downstream demand, where a new walking and cycling route would have the biggest impact, how a school could engage parents to reduce economic inactivity, how a community can support an older adult to stay in their own home, etc.

Early Intervention and Prevention

The second pillar of the Communities Approach is the wholesale redesign of our prevention model, and the associated staffing structures. Our model is designed to provide the right support to the right people at the right time, rather than assuming a 'need' for service provision first. Support can come from many places including (for most people most of the time) their own community. They are the first line of prevention and are essential in helping us manage our wellbeing, particularly at times of personal crisis. Working with our HDRC, our new model incentivises communities to focus on local wellbeing needs, and provides capacity

building, research, data and financial support to do so. Our HDRC will work with our communities to undertake action research and evaluate what works in prevention.

The model also moves the Council away from a service-led approach to prevention, to a systems-led approach. Through our new model, any requests for targeted prevention will be triaged, commissioned and delivered by a prevention hub rather than by individual housing, community safety, children's or adults services.

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. Although our approach to communities, Marmot, early intervention and prevention and the federated model have been implemented since, they do not change our County Plan, only strengthen our ability to deliver it.

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 are not undertaken in silos and are 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

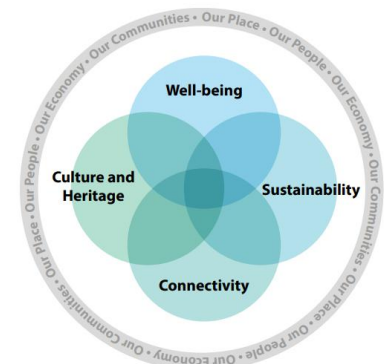
Connectivity...

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 areas that we will work to deliver on, and 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 address our 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 delivering fair work for all by working with local employers & trade unions, 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.

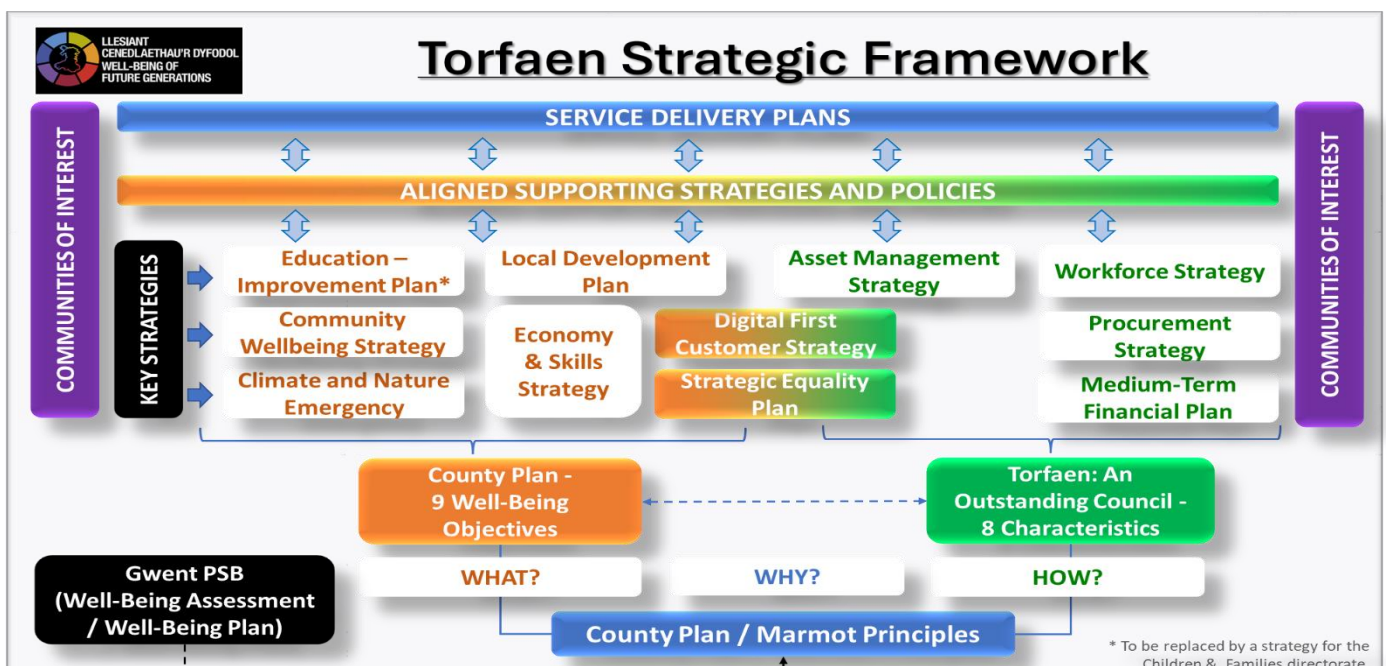
Well-being Objective 8 - We will support our local culture and heritage and make Torfaen a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit

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 nine wellbeing objectives were developed through the consideration of an extensive evidence base, from existing commitments and previous key drivers including the Well-being of Future Generations Act. They describe 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, reviewed annually by the Council's Leadership Team.
- 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 seven 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 Public Service Board (PSB)

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act has been introduced in Wales to ensure sustainable development is embedded at the heart of the public sector.



The Act means public bodies have a duty to think about people now and in the future when they make their decisions. To do this, the Future Generations Act sets out:

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



How public services should work: **Five ways of working**



Integration



Prevention



Collaboration



Long term



Involvement

Under the Act, the Council has both a collective and an individual duty.

Our collective role:

This involves working with public sector partners, through a Public Services Board (PSB), to set joint well-being objectives, that we will deliver together.

PSBs are statutory partnerships that bring together public services in an area to improve well-being, both now, and in the long term. PSBs are required to assess the well-being of the area they cover and form well-being plans on a five-year cycle. Membership of the Gwent PSB can be viewed [here](#).

Gwent PSB adopted its first [Well-being Plan](#) in July 2023, setting out how public services will collaborate to respond to some of Gwent's key well-being challenges.

The plan runs from 2023-25 and sets out two interconnected well-being objectives and five underpinning steps to be delivered over a five-year delivery period.

Gwent PSB well-being objectives:

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.*

Five underpinning steps:

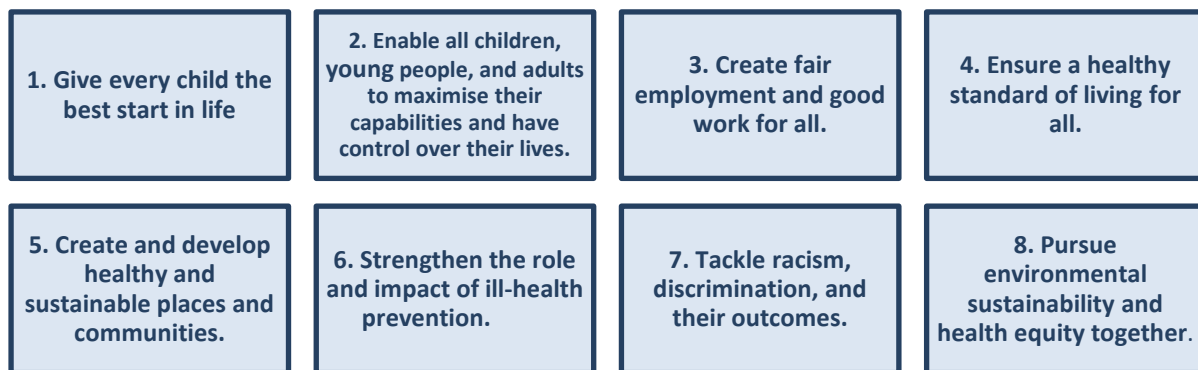
- *Take action to reduce the cost-of-living crisis in the longer term.*
- *Provide and enable the supply of good quality, affordable, appropriate homes.*
- *Taking action to reduce our carbon emissions, help Gwent adapt to climate change, and protect and restore our natural environment.*
- *Enable and support people, neighbourhoods, and communities to be resilient, connected, thriving and safe.*
- *Take action to address inequities, particularly in relation to health, through the framework of the **Marmot Principles**.*

During the past year, Gwent PSB has decided on four priority areas of focus, namely:

- That every child has the best start in life
- That everyone lives in a place they feel safe
- That everyone has the same economic chances
- That everyone lives in a climate-ready community where their environment is valued and protected

To support the PSB to tackle the high levels of inequality across Gwent, it worked with the Institute of Health Equity, using guiding principles identified in Professor Marmot's review, ***Fair Society, Healthy Lives***, for achieving greater health equity. This resulted in a range of recommendations documents in the ***Building a Fairer Gwent Report***.

The 8 Marmot Principles:



In 2022, Gwent officially became a Marmot region and Torfaen CBC strategically and forensically focussed our organisation on tackling socio-economic inequalities and the social determinants of health, a bold move that has attracted significant attention.

In December 2024, we hosted the Canada-UK Council Colloquium (CUCC) at Blaenavon Workmen's Hall. This year's Colloquium was entitled: 'Fairer Society, Healthier Lives: Overcoming Unequal Health Outcomes in the UK and Canada'.

A **blog post** by CUCC governing body member Greg Quinn OBE, reflecting on the event, explains:

"The Colloquium drew together senior scientists, religious figures, politicians, diplomats, youth advocates, and NGOs amongst many others. As with all Colloquiums the goal is to allow participants to talk openly and candidly about the issue at hand.

That so many such influential people took part (from both sides of the Atlantic) and that so much interest was shown on the part of authorities in Wales, demonstrates how valuable people see the CUCC as a platform to discuss issues of mutual interest and concern. All to help inform policy and to make recommendations for the betterment of citizens in both Canada and the UK".

Subsequently, the Welsh Government Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, Sarah Murphy, has highlighted **Wales' commitment to become the world's first Marmot Nation**, an announcement made at the Canada-UK Council's Fairer Society, Healthier Lives report launch in Cardiff on 16th June 2025.

We continue to focus on the wider determinates of health here in Torfaen, to plan and shape the work that we do across our organisation well into the future.

In 2024/25, we were awarded funding through the Health Determinates Research Collaboration Fund to enhance our research capacity and capability to support a culture of evidence based decision making. We have since appointed a team who are all now in post, exploring key topics that were highlighted by our Town/Community Councils and residents.

The Marmot Principles continue to underpin the developing work of the Gwent PSB and the board share Torfaen's commitment to improving the evidence base for our work. One key development this year, led by our colleagues at Public Health Wales, has been the development of the **Gwent Joint Strategic Assessment and accompanying Gwent Indicator Framework**, which provide a comprehensive overview of the health and well-being of the people of Gwent, in an accessible way for everyone to view.

The tools provide partners across Gwent with a shared intelligence source to inform planning for local service delivery. Together, they provide a framework for building a Healthier, Fairer, Safer and Stronger Gwent, supporting decision-making, by providing a strong evidence base on which to build positive change. We will continue to build on the data included until it can serve as a single point of truth for various statutory assessments including the PSB's Well-being Assessments, the Regional Partnership Board's Population Needs Assessment and Natural Resources Wales - Southeast Wales Area Statement.

a. Our Long-Term Master Plan....

The specific commitment within the Gwent PSB's regional plan to become a Marmot region, represents the next phase of our County Planning. It is important that we don't just consider this ambition as a regional endeavour, but as something that we must live and breathe as a Council, in the way in which we deliver services to our local communities.

In common with other regions of Gwent, it is an unfortunate fact that communities in Torfaen face some of the worst health disparities in Wales. Addressing generational inequality across the county, demands that we take a longer-term perspective. Being a Marmot council offers us a chance to focus, and to use our council's resources and wide-ranging influence to tackle sources of inequality.

We therefore began the development of our own Masterplan. However, this does not represent the development of a new or replacement County Plan but rather it builds upon and dovetails our existing County Plan. It recognises a need to plan over a longer period of time, in the knowledge that this work will take us well beyond the current County Plan for 2027. Our County Plan continues to remain active and relevant, representing the first 5 years of our journey towards our longer-term aspiration to reduce inequity in Torfaen. Furthermore, our own 15-year plan, also signals we are serious about our role and our commitment to adopting the principles of being a Marmot council, over future generations.

We must therefore not forget that our County Plan and each supporting single year delivery plan represents a contribution to a much longer-term endeavour. Therefore, when considering lines of activity in our delivery plan such as, the development of a new school, a childcare setting or a leisure facility, increasing participation and achievement in adult education courses, improving uptake of benefits and grants, increasing the use of assistive technology, installing new photovoltaic installations or raising the recycling rate - it is important not to lose sight of the fact that these milestones are not just part of a single year plan but are vital stepping stones taking us towards a longer term ambition. Furthermore, these aspirations go well beyond the end of our current County Plan in 2027 and are part of a longer-term journey, as we aim to meet the needs of future generations.

In collaboration with the HDRC, we are also supporting the development of outcome indicators, aligned to local priorities, such as healthy life expectancy, housing insecurity, and social capital. These indicators will be incorporated into a performance dashboard, which we are co-developing with Public Health during 2025/26. This dashboard will contribute to a Joint Strategic Assessment (JSA).

Future Developments....

The measures listed in our Masterplan will continue to be refined and improved over time, as new datasets become available or are developed internally. In doing so, we will ensure that the plan is always being supported with the best possible data to evidence the impacts of our actions, including those associated with the recommendations made in the 'Building a Fairer Gwent' report.

Importantly, the adoption of the Marmot principles and the development of the outcomes and measures represent only a small part of the work we must do to become a Marmot council. In order for Torfaen and our partners to have any meaningful impact on the wider determinants of health, the approach must penetrate all parts of the organisation and run far beyond reporting against a list of outcome measures. We will shortly be running a First into Research training programme for staff, elected members and the wider community, that will encourage the use of research and evidence, in their decision making.

Through our planning processes, we are therefore questioning how we do things, adjusting as necessary to ensure we are maximising the impact on sources of inequality and inequity in Torfaen. We are serious about our role and our commitment to adopting the principles of being a Marmot Council, but this must be matched by our actions. Therefore, reviewing what we do and how we measure its impact will be under constant review in the years to come, as we develop stronger delivery mechanisms to reach our outcomes.

Without doing so, we will never be able to address the social determinants of health, which for the residents of Torfaen will inevitably mean they are far less likely to reach their full potential and far more likely in the future to be the recipient of Council and wider public service support or interventions.

3. Mission, Vision & Values

The ethos of our reconfigured Executive Team continues to place a strong emphasis on collective responsibility and mutual support to achieve shared goals, in working towards our well-being objectives.

The Council's 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 continue to make to our 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 will also continue to assess ourselves against a set of internally focussed objectives - our 8 characteristics of an outstanding Council. We believe these characteristics define the conditions that will enable us to thrive as a council, helping us to become more efficient and effective and giving us the greatest opportunity to deliver on our County Plan objectives.

4. Our Self-Assessment 2024-25

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 efficiently 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 September 2025.

This part of the report 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 2024-25

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 are reviewed on a regular basis and as schemes and projects are developed, 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 2024/25](#) 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 2024/25 and beyond.

Our third Delivery Plan highlights the key activities we planned for 2024-25 financial year, in meeting our ambitions, as set out within our 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 2024-25						
	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)	GREY (action not yet due to start)	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	8	9	3	-	-	-
2. We will encourage and champion children, young people and families so they can thrive	-	8	2	2	-	-
3. We will tackle inequality by focusing on early identification and prevention activities that support people to live independent and fulfilling lives	10	18	4	1	-	1
4. We will make Torfaen more sustainable by connecting people and communities, socially, digitally and physically	5	1	-	1	-	1

5. We will respond to the climate and nature emergencies, recycle more and make improvements to the local environment	11	6	4	-	-	-
6. We will make Torfaen a great place to do business by working with local employers, encouraging new business start-ups and entrepreneurial activities	5	3	6	-	-	-
7. We will promote healthier lifestyles in Torfaen to improve mental and physical wellbeing	7	2	1	-	-	-
8. We will support our local culture and heritage and make Torfaen a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit	-	6	6	-	-	-
9. We will provide efficient customer focused services that reflect the way people live their lives and wish to access services	2	5	9	1	-	-
OVERALL PROGRESS UPDATE	48	58	35	5	-	2
	32.43%	39.20%	23.64%	3.38%	-	1.35%

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 (72%). However, 27% of actions experienced some difficulties, though we are confident that there is a clear plan to get them back on track, and 1% are deemed as having more significant concerns.

The above analysis demonstrates that nearly three quarters of all projects were delivered, with a quarter delayed, but with an absolute commitment to deliver. Therefore, given there were 148 projects, having only 2 aborted and 5 causing concern, shows the scale and pace of delivery. Our progress, can to a large degree, be attributed to the hard work of our officers and the impact of the new performance and project management processes, which we have embedded across the Council. Many of the challenges associated with these projects are due to their complexity, with further difficulties associated with demand, funding, and lack of affordable housing.

A full report setting out in more detail the progress made against each of our Well-Being Objectives was received by Council in July 2025 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

Investing in our schools....

Modern, safe, and inspiring school buildings contribute to better attendance, behaviour, and wellbeing, all of which are linked to higher academic achievement.

Throughout 2024/25, as part of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (formerly known as the 21st Century Schools Programme), we have committed approximately £15 million on new, extended and refurbished schools.

Our major projects for 2024/25, are as follows:

- * Construction of a new net zero carbon emission school Maendy Primary.
- * Construction of a new net zero carbon 50 place extension at Crownbridge School
- * Design & build 3G pitch at Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw

Maendy Primary



Construction of our new £17.1million, 420 place, Maendy Primary school, began in May 2024.

This will be our first net zero carbon free school and will see the capacity of the school rise from 231 to 420 with a 30-place nursery, providing capacity for the predicted growth in pupil numbers.

The development will include facilities for the wider community and an additional needs assessment centre, as well as new Childcare and Flying Start facilities.

The construction of the school is scheduled to be completed by July 2025, with community facilities scheduled to open in February 2026. Pupils will continue learning in existing school buildings until the new school is complete. The old school buildings will then be demolished, and the school grounds will be landscaped providing two new playgrounds, a forest school zone, play equipment and a grass sports pitch.

(The new facilities, built on the existing school site have been funded by both the Council and Welsh Government and is scheduled to be completed by July 2025).

Crownbridge School.

In March 2025, our £12.35 million, 50-place extension to Crownbridge School, was officially opened. The extension has been built on the current school site, in Croesyceiliog and will help meet increased demand for special education, within Torfaen.

The extension to the school, known as Mynydd, includes six new classrooms, a kitchen for pupils to use, course room, office spaces, a hall and a rebound room - which is a full-size floor level trampoline for pupils to undertake therapies. There is also a new multi-use games area with external play and learning areas.



As a result, the school has been able to admit new pupils and provide better facilities, in which to educate and nurture children with severe and profound learning difficulties.

The extension on Crownbridge represents the first completed scheme in our band B investment, which will further improve and expand our learning environments for our young people. The extension enables us to respond to the sharp growth in demand for special school places and the extension will enable another 50 children to be educated in the facilities at Crownbridge.

(The extension is 75% funded by Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning programme).

Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw - 3G Pitch



Within 2024/25, we submitted a bid to secure funding to build a 3G pitch for Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw, through the Welsh Government's 'Cymraeg 2050' scheme. This scheme aims to increase the number of Welsh speakers to one million by 2050. Both the local authority, school and Welsh government saw this initiative as an opportunity to enhance sports education, whilst promoting the Welsh language.

Completed in November 2024, the new FIFA Quality and World Rugby 3G artificial grass pitch was constructed at Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw.

This £1.4 million project encompasses not just a 3G pitch, but also a SAB-approved drainage system, access road, pathways, pedestrian lighting, retaining structures, rain garden, and landscaping. (This is a hybrid pitch that will serve as both an artificial football pitch and artificial rugby pitch).

Beyond benefiting our school students, the artificial grass pitch is available to hire by local sports clubs, providing a high-quality training and match venue for the wider community, providing a suitable pitch for sports and activities to take place within the school day, whilst bringing initiatives to grow the use of the Welsh language in the local community, outside of school hours.

Improving outcomes for our children and young people....

Improving outcomes for young people is critically important because it shapes, not only their individual futures, but also the wellbeing and prosperity of society, as a whole.

Children & Families Directorate Estyn Inspection

During June 2024, Estyn inspectors revisited our Children and Families Directorate to conduct a monitoring visit, as a follow up to their core inspection, which took place in March 2022.

Out of the four recommendations made by Estyn in the June monitoring visit focused on recommendations two and three, which were:

- To strengthen performance management.
- To strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning processes and the link between them.

Since their last visit, Estyn recognised that improvements had been made to our leadership, performance management and evaluation processes, within our Education Service.

Early Autumn 2024, inspectors visited the service again, to assess our performance against the other two recommendations they previously made:

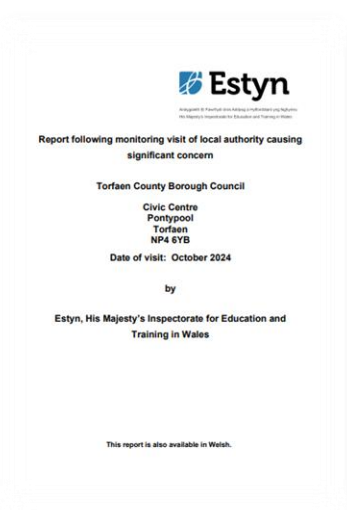
- Improve outcomes for learners, particularly in secondary schools.
- Improve strategic leadership of learning and ALN.

In November 2024 Estyn published their findings from the monitoring visits that they had conducted throughout the year. They confirmed that we made sufficient progress and could be removed from their list of Local Authorities causing 'significant concern'. Please click on link for [Estyn's full report](#).

In particular, Estyn inspectors recognised:

- Improved outcomes for learners, particularly in secondary schools
- Strengthened performance management
- Strengthen self-evaluation and improvements in planning processes
- Improved strategic leadership of learning and additional learning needs

Inspectors also highlighted a strong focus on improving pupils' attendance; effective work in identifying and supporting young people who are at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET); and improvements in how young people have helped informed the council's strategic direction.



The move out of the category is testament to the hard work and tenacious approach, not only from within the Children and Families Directorate, but across the council, and the outcome truly shows the impact of cross directorate working and corporate ownership to problem solving.

In February 2025, Estyn also published an 'effective practice' case study entitled 'Leaders securing improvement in a local authority'. This case study details how our Local Authority progressed recommendations from the last full Estyn inspection, including how "The local authority has worked proactively with all stakeholders and secured notable improvements in many aspects of their work". The case study can be viewed on the following link: [Estyn.gov.wales](https://estyn.gov.wales)

Estyn Judgements and School Categories

Cwmbran High School has made sufficient progress in relation to Estyn's recommendations and therefore has been removed from Estyn's "special measures" category, in March 2025. As of March 2025, we now have no mainstream schools in an Estyn statutory category. Although we recognise this as solid progress, progress and support levels will continue to be monitored closely, via Wider Group and Team Around the School (TAS) meetings.

In December 2024, Estyn judged our Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in need of significant improvement. The quality of teaching and learning was found to be too variable and as a result, pupils are not always making the progress of which they are capable. We will now continue to support PRU leaders to build upon the positives of the leadership's strengths, the nurturing learning environment and strong working relationships, between staff and pupils to deliver the aims of the PRU Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP).

Although not a statutory category, additional support continues to be provided to Ysgol Bryn Onnen, as it remains in Estyn review. Suitable progress is however being made, against Estyn's recommendations.

The well-being objectives within our County Plan, and our longer-term approach as a 'Marmot council' will continue to ensure that our efforts focus on continuous improvement and strive to provide the best services and best possible outcomes for our children and young people.

Raising attainment within our schools....

Examination results for the academic year 24/25 demonstrate that overall our schools performed above our modelled expectations. We recognise, however, that outcomes in a minority of schools, are still too low, particularly in mathematics and numeracy.

Increasing our pupil's attendance with schools....

Increasing attendance rates in schools is crucial because regular attendance is one of the strongest predictors of educational success. Students who attend school consistently have more time to engage with the curriculum, participate in lessons, and complete assignments. This leads to better understanding, skill development, and ultimately, higher attainment.

Overall rates of attendance in Torfaen continue to improve, although they have still not yet recovered to pre-pandemic rates. This is evident across all Local Authority areas in Wales.

At the end of February 2025, Torfaen's overall attendance rate was 91.4%. This ranked our local authority in 6th place out of 22 Welsh local authorities.

Monthly Attendance Analysis (percentage)

	Sept-March 2019	Sept-March 2025	Difference
Primary	93.8	93.1	-0.7
Secondary	92	89.1	-2.9

Primary school rates of attendance are higher than secondary school rates of attendance. If this particular rate of attendance is maintained going forward, we would expect to see further improvements in comparison, to previous years.

Our #NotInMissOut campaign has helped significantly in increasing attendance, particularly in reducing requests for authorised or unauthorised absences, for reasons other than illness or medical appointments.

In comparison to last year, our exclusion rates within schools have also improved but we are conscious that our figures still remain too high.

- Fixed-term exclusions (≤ 5 days): down by 261 cases
- Days lost to exclusion: down by 931 days
- Permanent exclusions: reduced from 10 to 8

Research has shown a direct link between good attendance and academic achievement, so in supporting our children to attend school regularly, is central to our core objective of improving educational attainment.



Reducing the numbers of our year 11 young people, classified as 'not in employment, education or training (NEET)....

Reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) is vital for improving their long-term life chances, mental health, and economic prospects. Being NEET increases the risk of poverty, social exclusion, and poor wellbeing, while also limiting access to skills and qualifications needed for future success. Addressing this issue helps promote equality, reduce risky behaviours, and strengthen the economy by ensuring more young people are engaged, supported, and contributing positively to society.

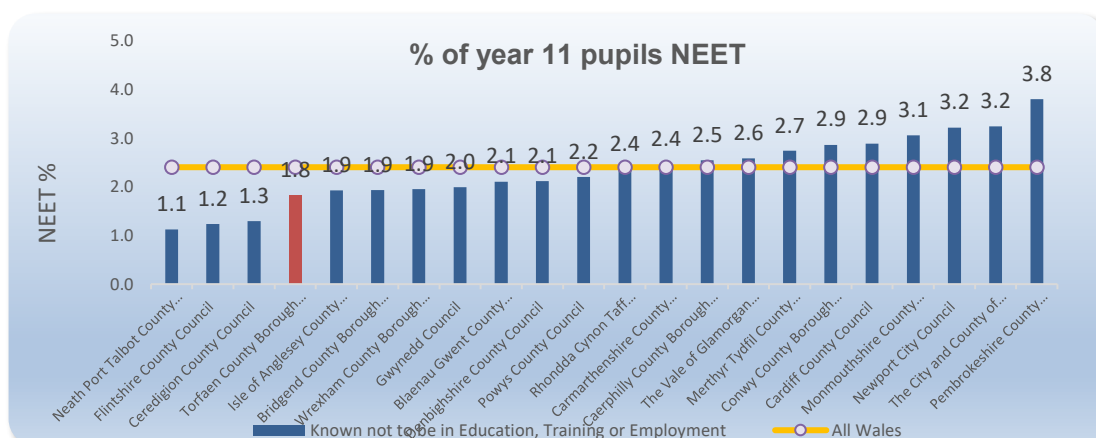
Throughout 2024/25, we have continued with our commitment to provide: effective early intervention for our young people at risk of inactivity, or not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Work experience opportunities have been supported in various ways by our Inspire Team, who have set up projects/opportunities such as: serving food in our new café within the Civic Centre and undertaking bike maintenance projects.

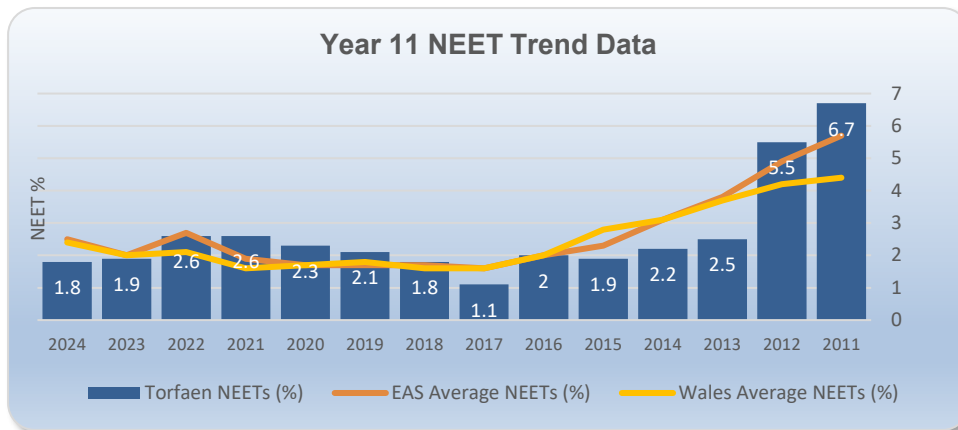
In addition, our Inspire project has also provided a range of qualifications and courses, as defined by the Qualifications and Credit Framework, targeting secondary-school aged young people, at risk.

In comparison to previous years, our NEET figures for young people leaving year 11 have slightly decreased

and is now lower than the Welsh average. Whilst we recognise that the number of young people leaving school, not in employment, education and training is still too high, we remain committed to improving outcomes



and monitoring/supporting all of our young people who are due to leave school each year.



The % of year 11 pupils not in education, employment or training has been confirmed as being 1.8% for Torfaen for 24/25, which ranks us 4th out of 22 LA's. This is an improvement on previous year's performance: 2.1 (19/20), 2.3 (20/21), 2.6 (21/22), 2.6 (22/23) and 1.9 (23/24)

* Data obtained from Careers Wales website [Pupil destinations | Careers Wales](#)

Increasing essential skills and employability among our adults....

Increasing essential skills and employability among adults is vital for building a resilient, inclusive, and productive society. It enables individuals to access better job opportunities, adapt to changing labour market demands, and contribute more effectively to the economy. For communities, it reduces unemployment, poverty, and reliance on public services, while promoting social mobility and wellbeing. Investing in adult skills also supports lifelong learning, boosts confidence, and helps people re-enter education or training, especially those who may have missed out earlier in life. Ultimately, it strengthens both individual prospects and collective prosperity.

Our essential skills courses within adult education focus on building fundamental skills that are necessary for work and everyday life. These courses typically cover English, numeracy, and digital literacy, helping individuals improve their reading, writing, math, and computer skills. They aim to enhance confidence, employability, and overall effectiveness in various settings.

Throughout 2024/25, we had 747 learners enrolled on to our Adult and Community Learning Essential Skills courses. These figures are roughly at the same level as last year, due to the Multiply programme delivering Numeracy Essential Skills, alongside our Adult and Community Learning courses.

(The Multiply programme in Wales is a UK-government funded initiative aimed at improving the numeracy skills of adults aged 19 and over. It provides free courses and support to help adults enhance their confidence with numbers in everyday life, manage finances, and potentially boost career opportunities. The program is part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and is delivered locally by various organizations across Wales).

The number of residents enrolled with our Employability Services was 1,587 which is a decrease in comparison to 23/24 - 1,934 and falling short of our target set for 24/25 of 1,800. This has mainly been due to the closure of the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) programme.

The number of qualifications achieved from our employability programmes did however exceed our target of 1,050 to 1,431, which is an increase on last year's figures of 235. The majority of these participants were supported to achieve an array of qualifications ranging from HGV, to IT qualifications.

At the end of 24/25, we have supported 402 Economically Inactive (EI) and Long Term Unemployed (LTU) people into employment, which is an increase on last year's figures of 231. Most have had to overcome multiple barriers to succeed and the support offered by Torfaen Works has helped with these barriers.

Our Key Challenges...

Education:

- **Improving learner outcomes in literacy and numeracy—and closing the attainment gap for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners**—is vital because these core skills are the foundation for success in education, work, and everyday life. This will be a challenge because disadvantaged learners often face barriers like poverty, lower early language exposure, and limited access to tailored support, which impact their ability to engage and progress in education. By focusing on those who face extra challenges, we will help ensure that every child has a fair chance to succeed, which strengthens communities and supports long-term wellbeing and equality.
- **Ensuring effective targeted and specialist provision for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)** will be a key challenge because these learners often require tailored support that goes beyond standard classroom teaching. Meeting their diverse needs, demands skilled staff, appropriate resources, and strong coordination across services. Without this support, learners with ALN may struggle to access education equally, which can affect their confidence, progress, and future opportunities. Providing the right help will ensure every learner can thrive, promotes inclusion, and helps close gaps in achievement and wellbeing.
- **Promoting learner wellbeing and encouraging community engagement** will require a joined-up approach across schools, families, and local services. When learners feel safe, supported, and mentally well, they are more likely to succeed academically and socially. Community engagement helps build strong support networks around learners, making education more inclusive and responsive to local needs. Addressing this challenge is essential to creating environments where all learners can thrive, especially those facing disadvantage or isolation.
- **Develop learner progression pathways to encourage lifelong learning** – will require clear, flexible routes that support individuals at every stage of their education and career. Many learners—especially those facing disadvantage—need tailored guidance and support to stay engaged and move forward confidently. It's important because lifelong learning helps people adapt to change, improve their skills, and access better opportunities throughout life. Strong progression pathways will ensure that learning doesn't stop at school, but continues in ways that promote personal growth, employability, and wellbeing.
- **Promote staff wellbeing** – will involve addressing a wide range of physical, emotional, and professional needs in a demanding and often high-pressure environment. When staff feel supported, healthy, and motivated, they are more productive, engaged, and better able to deliver high-quality services. Prioritising wellbeing will help us to attract and retain skilled professionals, reduces absence, and creates a positive workplace culture that benefits both employees and the communities they serve.
- **Develop the physical and digital environment for learning** – will require significant investment, long-term planning, and the ability to keep up with rapidly changing technology. Many schools and learning spaces may have outdated facilities or limited access to digital tools, which can create barriers to effective teaching and learning. It's important because modern, accessible, and well-equipped environments—both physical and online will help create engaging, inclusive, and flexible learning experiences. This supports better outcomes for all learners and prepares them for the demands of a digital world.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 2:

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

Promoting foster care....

Promoting the provision of local foster care is important because it provides vulnerable children and young people with safe, stable, and nurturing environments when they cannot live with their birth families. Foster care supports emotional wellbeing, educational attainment, and healthy development, helping children build

resilience and reach their potential. It also plays a vital role in safeguarding, reducing the risk of neglect or harm, and offering tailored support to meet individual needs. By promoting foster care, communities can ensure more children grow up in loving homes, and more carers are recruited and supported to make a lasting difference in young lives.

Throughout 2024, we have continued to promote foster care and recognise the successes that our local authority fostering community has made; and continues to make to our most vulnerable children's lives.

The Foster Wales, 'Staying Local' campaign, aims to highlight the benefits of local authority fostering over independent foster agencies, including local support and close links with children's social workers.

This follows the Welsh Government's introduction of the Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025, which positions Wales as the first UK nation to ban profit-making by commercial fostering agencies—except in exceptional circumstances—in a landmark move to reform children's care.



By fostering with a local authority, children are enabled to maintain relationships with their family and friends and remain in their local community, which makes it easier for them to settle into their new home.

Children in need of foster care, are initially matched with local authority foster carers, before being matched with a third-sector or commercial foster agency if a suitable placement cannot be found.

Last year, nearly 70 per cent of children placed with commercial fostering agencies were cared for outside of their local area, compared to just 15 per cent of children in local authority foster care.

In Torfaen, 75 per cent of our children in mainstream foster care are placed with our local authority carers, but an estimated 35 additional foster carers are needed to meet local demand going forward. Despite not achieving our target of young people placed within in house foster care placements, we have however reduced overall numbers of children requiring care by 18, since last year.

In recognition of our foster carers we hold an event every year. In May 2024, we invited our 160 local authority foster carers from across Torfaen to a special event to celebrate the exceptional contribution they have made to the lives of our vulnerable children.

The 'Bring Something to the Table' campaign also ran throughout October and November on our social media channels, which is a Foster Wales initiative aimed at demonstrating how rewarding fostering can be.

In April 2025, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) undertook an inspection into our Fostering Service. Their findings were extremely positive indicating that our children:

- experience consistent and stable care with foster carers who are committed to supporting them to achieve good well-being outcomes
- develop positive relationships with their foster carers and are supported to remain within their family or extended networks, wherever possible
- are engaged in education, activities and are supported to lead happy, healthy and active lifestyles and maintain relationships with people significant in their lives.

CIW also recognised that our review, aligned with a wider restructuring of our Children's Services, will provide an opportunity to develop and improve standards of service performance and delivery, going forward. A full copy of the report can be viewed here: [Care Inspectorate Wales](#)

Supporting our young people....

Supporting our young people is essential for building a thriving, inclusive, and forward-looking society. It helps them develop the skills, confidence, and resilience they need to navigate life's challenges, succeed in education and employment, and contribute positively to their communities. By investing in their wellbeing,

education, and opportunities, we reduce the risks of disengagement, inequality, and poor mental health, while fostering ambition, creativity, and social responsibility.

In September 2024, two Welsh Government Ministers visited and commended our 'My Support' Team (MyST) to reinforce the importance of specialist mental health support for young people in care.

Sarah Murphy, Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, and Dawn Bowden, Minister for Social Care and Children, spoke with families and staff to learn about the range of mental health services provided by the team.

The Gwent Regional My Support Team (MyST) programme is a dedicated mental health service for young people up to the age of 18. The programme, which has previously benefitted from more than £1.4m as part of the Regional Integration Fund, supports children and young people who are looked after and have complex mental health and social needs, using a wide range of psychotherapeutic models.



Throughout 2024/25, our service has supported 97 children and young people with complex mental health needs, and their friends and families, as well as providing psychological support to another 130 young people involved with children's services.

The transformative impact of MyST has led to one young person successfully transitioning out of residential care, into semi-independent living.

The My Support Team programme follows the Welsh Government's NEST framework – Nurturing, Empowering, Safe and Trust – for improving mental health and wellbeing services for babies, children and young people, and their families. It aims to ensure children and young people, as well as their support networks, are given the best possible chance to succeed through a range of direct psychological support and a whole system approach to care. We see this as being fundamental in ensuring care experienced young people, have access to the support they need, to succeed in life.

Reviewing provision/accommodation for our looked after children....

Providing appropriate accommodation for children looked after is essential to ensure their safety, stability, and emotional wellbeing. A secure and nurturing home environment helps children recover from trauma, build trusting relationships, and thrive both personally and academically. It also supports consistent access to education, health services, and social development opportunities. Without suitable accommodation, children are at greater risk of instability, poor mental health, and disrupted life chances. Investing in quality placements—whether foster care, residential homes, or supported living—lays the foundation for better outcomes and a more hopeful future.

It is a priority within our local authority to ensure that we find safe and appropriate ways to work with families to help them meet their children's needs, including their need to be protected from harm. We will, whenever it is safe to do so, always look for ways to support children and young people to remain with their birth family or extended family and avoid the need for children and young people becoming looked after.

There are, however, currently a number of children within our care who have complex/challenging needs who require care within a residential setting, as a short-medium and long-term option, depending on their level of need and complexity.

Like all Local Authorities, we are required to offer sufficient accommodation for children who are looked after, in line with Section 79 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (the Act). (SSWA), and we have a duty to ensure that placements are made within our own area, unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so, or if there are overriding reasons for placing a child out of authority, mainly relating to safeguarding.



There is currently a deficit of good quality and affordable residential care provision to meet the needs of children and young people with multiple and complex needs. This will likely be exacerbated by the 'Eliminate Agenda' which aims to rebalance profit for care, within this sector.

Without this type of accommodation, we will be required to continue placing our children/young people out of county, which is costly and not always in the best interests of the child/young person.

To respond to the demands and meet the needs of our children and young people, we have continued with our efforts to progress the development of our own residential provision within the borough.

In July 2024, our Cabinet approved the decision to award a contract for the provision of care and support at Greenhill Bungalow Residential Children's Home.

At the beginning of November, our new residential children's home welcomed its first young person as it opened its doors, following a full refurbishment. (This was made possible by working in partnership with Melin Homes, funded via the Welsh Government Housing with Care Fund, HCF).

Our new home, is designed to provide a safe, nurturing, and supportive environment for children and young people, in the care of the Local Authority.

Greenhill Bungalow has been carefully developed by Melin contractors OTL (One Transformation Ltd) to meet the needs of children, who require a stable and caring environment. Midway Transitional Solutions is providing the care and support, staffed by a team of highly trained and experienced professionals, who are dedicated to helping children thrive and reach their full potential, promoting emotional well-being, educational development, and life skills.

The collaboration between Welsh Government, Melin and ourselves provides care for up to three children, creating a home that closely replicates family life and meets the needs of the young people who live there.

This project reflects our commitment to provide more than just "bricks and mortar" but is also helping to create a foundation for people to build their futures, creating brighter opportunities for those who need it, most.

Building upon this, plans are currently underway to acquire further properties, to develop a portfolio of residential children's homes within the Borough, going forward.

Safely reducing our children looked after population....

Reducing the number of children looked after is important because it reflects progress in addressing the underlying issues that lead to family breakdown, neglect, or abuse. While foster care and residential care provide essential protection, being in care can disrupt a child's emotional development, education, and sense of stability. By investing in early intervention, family support, and community services, we can help families stay together safely, improve outcomes for children, and reduce the long-term social and economic costs associated with care. Ultimately, fewer children

		Year ▼					
Local authority ▼ ▲		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
All Welsh local authorities		110	116	117	114	116	116
All Welsh local authorities	Blaenau Gwent	168	158	152	151	155	152
	Bridgend	130	134	133	128	136	128
	Caerphilly	117	121	124	128	129	131
	Cardiff	122	129	134	141	141	137
	Carmarthenshire	49	44	40	46	51	71
	Ceredigion	53	64	74	87	114	120
	Conwy	98	96	99	94	104	108
	Denbighshire	86	90	94	95	104	109
	Flintshire	76	80	81	79	79	77
	Gwynedd	112	131	127	125	129	130
	Isle of Anglesey	110	122	122	107	111	111
	Merthyr Tydfil	158	164	153	142	140	157
	Monmouthshire	101	130	126	124	124	117
	Neath Port Talbot	110	107	103	95	92	89
	Newport	106	107	106	103	103	95
	Pembrokeshire	65	79	94	93	103	109
	Powys	103	103	104	97	98	105
	Rhondda Cynon Taf	136	144	139	133	127	130
	Swansea	119	122	120	107	104	104
	Torfaen	220	229	232	212	201	181
	Vale of Glamorgan	104	95	104	105	117	120
	Wrexham	98	118	133	132	124	112

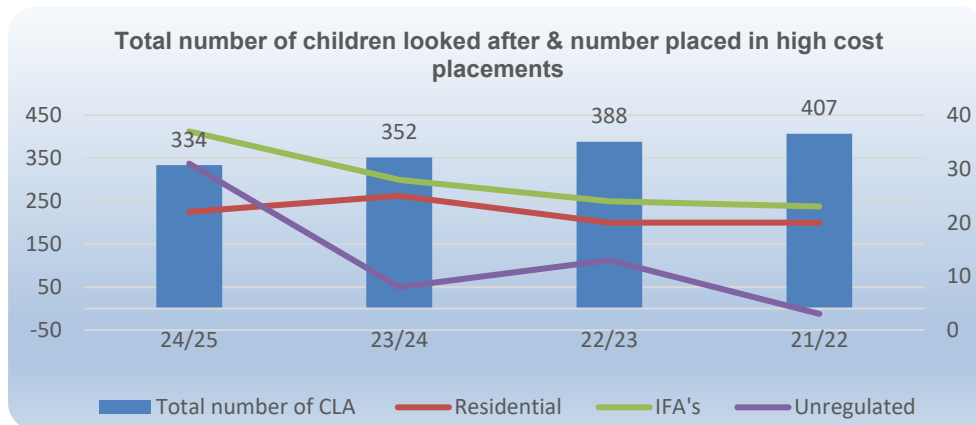
in care means more children growing up in secure, loving environments where they can thrive.

Torfaen continues to have the highest rate of children looked after - per 10,000 of the population, under 18 years of age, in Wales. This has however, reduced year on year, since 2021, when it was at its highest of 232 per 10,000 population, which equates to 479 children looked after.

(* Data obtained from Stats Wales website: [Children looked after at 31 March per 10,000 population aged under 18 by local authority and year](#))

There continues to be a need for our children looked after population, to safely reduce at pace, in order to bring our performance, in line with the national average and so that we are able to manage overall demand and continue to focus on improving outcomes for our children and families.

Placement costs can also vary enormously from approximately £400 per week to over £7,000 per week and significantly more if an unregulated placement is required. This places a significant financial demand on our service and on the Local Authority.



Towards the end of 2024, the overall financial position in relation to our Children's Social Care division projected an adverse variance, of circa £3.2m. This is a very significant financial position and much more than previous years. This is mainly as a result of placement numbers exceeding the budgeted level, alongside an increase in the number of high-cost placements required. (High-cost placements include: residential placements and Independent Fostering Agency placements (IFA).

All these factors have formed the key foundations of the transition work that we have undertaken within Children's Services throughout 2024/25, which has been overseen via an Accelerated Improvement Group (AIG). The focus of which, is developing services and systems aimed at:

- **Preventing** people from requiring a statutory service (universal services, EIP).
- **Enabling** people to develop independence and reduce the need for ongoing statutory service (rehabilitation).
- **Providing a high-quality service** to those that require statutory services (service quality to improve outcomes).

The work being carried out and directed through the AIG, has been effective in managing demand and overall spend within the service area. There has been a significant reduction in the children looked after population from 355 to 316 since January 2025, which corresponds to an overall reduction of 11%. This trajectory bodes well for a continued reduction and annual achievement against overall children looked after numbers, although we will continue to monitor this closely.

Going forward, it is essential that we continue to manage and safely reduce demand within this area. In recent years, through a previous process of transformation, we have reduced our children looked after population significantly, but from a high starting point. This needs to reduce further, in order that we can exercise greater control within the service area, by ensuring that the right services are provided at the right time and are based on assessed need, an enhanced community offer and increased community resilience. We have also established a 'Best Start in Life' research group, which is focused on exploring how research can further support efforts to address the high numbers of children looked after in Torfaen.

Helping our children, young people and families so they can thrive....

Helping children engage in play activities is essential for their ability to thrive, both emotionally and developmentally. Play supports cognitive growth, creativity, and problem-solving skills, while also fostering social interaction, communication, and emotional regulation. It allows children to explore the world, build confidence, and develop resilience in a safe and enjoyable way. Importantly, play contributes to physical health and mental wellbeing, and is especially valuable for children facing challenges or trauma. By promoting play, we create environments where children can grow, learn, and flourish holistically.

New play facility

A new play facility to support parents and children, under the age of eleven, was opened in our Civic Centre building, in April 2024.

Run by our Play Service, 'Civic Play' hosts several provisions including Lego clubs, family play, dad's groups, disability groups and young carers play clubs. A creche is also available for parents who are attending training within our council offices.



This is the first time we as a council have offered this kind of service at the Civic Centre and it forms part of an expansion of play provisions already being offered across the County Borough.



Our Play Service

Throughout the summer of 2024, over 400 of our staff and volunteers from our Play Service held more than 30 different clubs and activity sessions for children up to the age of 11, as part of our 'Summer of Fun' programme.

Around 2,500 children and young people took part in different sessions every day, including playschemes, food and fun camps and specialist respite sessions for children with complex needs.

This year, the service offered scooter and cycle training at all food and fun camps, funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund. These sessions taught safe cycle and scooter use to help children travel more actively.

Our dedicated teams work tirelessly throughout the summer holidays to create a diverse and engaging summer of fun programme that caters to the interests and needs of all children and young people within our communities.

In September 2024, we launched a new consultation to help shape the future of our play opportunities, across our communities within Torfaen.

Our Play Sufficiency Assessment is conducted every three years and evaluates the availability and quality of play and recreational opportunities for children and young people up to the age of 25.

This assessment looks to gather feedback on staffed play provisions, infrastructure such as parks, play areas and open spaces, as well as early years, sports, youth and cultural activities.

It also considers factors such as time, space, and permission to play, aiming to identify and improve areas where play opportunities might be lacking.

By taking part in the consultation, residents have been able to voice their concerns and share their insights on current play provisions, highlighting any areas they feel need improvement.

Feedback from the consultations are used to develop an action plan, which will be submitted to the Welsh Government in June 2025.



At the end of January 2025, our Play Service launched a series of new Saturday play sessions.

These new sessions were in response to a previous Play Sufficiency Assessment, which received contributions from over a thousand children under the age of 12.

The survey, which captured children's play habits, views, and opinions, highlighted a common theme: a desire for more activities and things to do on weekends.

These new sessions are an excellent addition to the wide portfolio of play and recreational opportunities already available to children and young people in Torfaen.

A new set of venues will also be introduced from April 2025, to cover more areas of the borough, ensuring that every child has access to enriching and enjoyable play opportunities.

Inclusive play park

Work to transform a derelict piece of land in Pontnewynydd into an inclusive play park was completed at the end of 2024/25.

The park aims to address the findings of a previous play sufficiency assessment, which identified a lack of play provision for children with special needs, in the north of the borough.

We recognise that play areas and parks provide a range of benefits for children, including promoting physical activity, boosting social skills, building self-esteem, developing motor skills and encouraging creativity.



(This project was made possible by nearly £1.2 million from the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund and also supports other various projects across Torfaen, such as enhancing disability access to Blaenavon Flower Park, creating a new multi-games area in Pontnewydd Park, and planning a new outdoor gym in Cwmbran).

Our Key Challenges...

Education:

- **Develop a new Youth Offer and Strategy and increase open access and targeted Youth provision** - is a key challenge because young people's needs are diverse and constantly evolving. It will require meaningful engagement, flexible services, and strong partnerships to ensure support is accessible, inclusive, and relevant. This is important because well-designed youth services help

young people feel valued, build confidence, and develop skills for life. By offering both open access and targeted support, we can reach those most at risk, reduce inequalities, and create opportunities for all young people to thrive in their communities.

- **Continue to increase the uptake of free school meals and reduce food waste within school kitchens** - Many eligible families may not claim free meals due to stigma, lack of awareness, or administrative barriers—meaning children miss out on nutritious food that supports learning and wellbeing. At the same time, reducing food waste requires changes in kitchen practices, menu planning, and portion control, which can be complex to implement. It's important because improving access to meals helps ensure all children are well-fed and ready to learn, while cutting waste supports climate goals and makes better use of public resources.

Children Services:

- **Safely reduce our children looked after population, at pace** – will involve balancing the need to protect vulnerable children with the goal of supporting families to stay together. It will require intensive, coordinated support, effective early intervention, and suitable alternatives to care. It's important because achieving this safely improves outcomes for children, reduces long-term demand on services, and helps build stronger, more resilient families and communities.
- **Develop a broad range of accommodation to meet the needs of children looked after** - requires diverse, high-quality housing options that meet individual needs, often in the face of limited resources and complex care requirements. Without suitable placements, children may experience instability, which can negatively impact their wellbeing and long-term outcomes.
- **Enhance our overall commissioning model, as it relates to accommodation and other commissioned services, so as to have greater control over the market** – will require greater strategic control over a complex and competitive market. Without this, the council may struggle to secure high-quality, cost-effective placements that meet the diverse needs of children looked after. Strengthening commissioning arrangements will help ensure better outcomes, value for money, and long-term sustainability of services.
- **Have a greater ability to manage overall demand by enhancing the community offer and developing more effective early intervention and prevention services with clear pathways** - managing overall demand requires a shift from reactive services to proactive, community-based support. Enhancing the community offer and developing clear early intervention pathways takes time, coordination, and investment—but it's essential to prevent issues from escalating, reduce pressure on statutory services, and improve long-term outcomes for individuals and families.

Community Safety:

- **Develop a stronger suite of impact measures that help us to track the effectiveness of our targeted prevention interventions** – this will require clear, consistent ways to track how well targeted prevention services are working, often across complex and varied needs. Without robust measures, it will be difficult to understand what's making a difference, improve services, and ensure resources are used effectively to support long-term outcomes.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 3:

Tackle inequality by focusing on early identification and prevention activities that support people to live independent and fulfilling lives

Supporting our residents with cost of living....

Supporting residents to build resilience and to mitigate the impact of increases in the cost of living is essential to ensure that individuals and families can meet basic needs—such as food, housing, heating, and transportation—without falling into financial hardship. Rising living costs can impact on our ability to protect ourselves during a wellbeing crisis because they can lead to increased stress, poor health, and reduced opportunities for education and employment. By offering support, communities can promote financial stability, reduce inequality, and improve overall wellbeing. It also helps prevent crises such as homelessness

or debt and strengthens social cohesion by ensuring everyone has the chance to live with dignity and security.

The scale and demand for our revenue and benefits service continues to grow, as a result of the increased rises in the cost of living. Key headline activities for 2024/25, are as follows:



- Received 890 customer referrals for people needing support and advice
- Paid out £23,948,594 in Housing Benefits
- Awarded £358,567.05 Discretionary Housing Payments
- Administered 9,227 claims, as part of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, totalling £10,642,765
- Awarded 4,256 Free School Meal claims
- 3,185 school uniform grants awarded
- 200 guardian/adoption payments awarded

Making our communities more resilient....

Making communities more resilient is important because it helps individuals and groups better withstand and recover from challenges such as economic hardship, climate events, public health crises, and social change. Resilient communities are equipped with strong support networks, inclusive support in their community, and the ability to adapt and innovate in the face of adversity. This leads to improved wellbeing, reduced inequality, and greater social cohesion. By investing in resilience—through education, infrastructure, local leadership, and prevention—we create safer, healthier, and more empowered places where people can thrive, even during difficult times.

In March 2024, we invited our residents to take part in a survey to help ensure that our new approach in working with communities, is delivered in the most effective and impactful way.

The feedback from this survey helped shape the final version of our 'Community and Well-being Strategy for 2023-27'.

At the end of April 2024, Council approved our '[Community Well-being Strategy 2023-27](#)'.

This strategy sets out our new vision and mission to put 'communities' and 'wellbeing & prevention' as genuine cornerstones in the way we design our services.

It aims to empower our communities to be more resilient, healthier, better connected and more equal. - The strategy is based on the concept of 'resilience', which is our ability to cope when we face a significant challenge, a crisis or during a transition in our life. It recognises that our communities are central to supporting our resilience and wellbeing and takes into account that different communities have different strengths and needs to provide this support.

The strategy identifies six strategic objectives to create the conditions for effective resilience. These are:

1. Community Leadership & Planning at Place
2. The 'Connect' Network: Building Community Infrastructure
3. Prevention through Volunteering & Community Connecting
4. The Council's Front Door & Universal Services: Personalised Wellbeing Information, Advice & Assistance
5. Targeted Prevention & Reablement from the Council & Voluntary Sector
6. Whole System Delivery: Delivering a Communities Approach with Partners

The strategy also outlines key actions, performance indicators and outcomes for each objective, as well as the governance structure and monitoring arrangements for the delivery of the strategy, that we will work against, throughout the period of strategy.

Improving flow through our Adults Services....

Research shows that our residents within Torfaen are living longer, but are in poorer health. By focusing on prevention, early intervention, and promoting independence—such as through community support,

reablement, and skills development—local authorities can help adults live healthier, more autonomous lives. This not only improves individual outcomes but also allows services to focus on those with the most complex needs, ensuring better overall impact and value for money.

Many of our residents say they would prefer to live independently and not rely on statutory services. To make sure we as a Council can play our part in supporting residents, providing those that need preventative services, with the right support at the right time, we have redesigned our services accordingly.

Our work throughout 2024/25, therefore impressed on the importance of information, advice and assistance and suitable signposting, 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 these challenges, we recognise that 'Early Intervention and Prevention' provision needs to expand, and a 'Community Offer' be developed that enables a greater level of community resolution. This will enable the council to channel its resources and statutory services to meet the needs of those with an assessed eligible need.

Our vision is to bring about a whole system change within our organisation. Namely the front door into social care, and the redesign of Early Intervention and Prevention services before the front door and within communities.

Since April 2024, our Information, Advice & Assistance (IAA) - Front Door and the Integrated Reablement (IR) Service has been in operation.

This 'Community Offer' provides information, advice and assistance, and primary prevention, within our residents own neighbourhood. If the resident is either able to self-solve their needs at this point or with non-statutory support, then it is unlikely that they will need to move on to the front door adult services offer. However, when the needs cannot be solved by community-based prevention services then the front door of Adult Services provides more targeted assistance as appropriate, offering packages of preventative support.

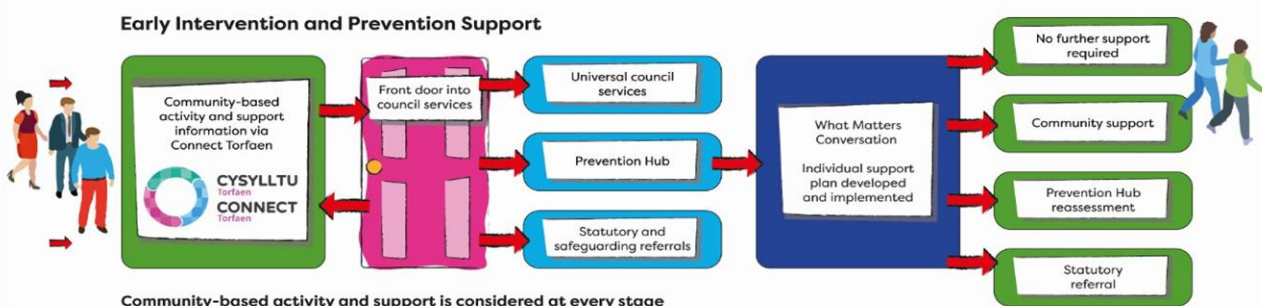
These services are beginning to slowly impact upon our social care systems and improve outcomes for individuals.

Early Intervention and Prevention....

Early intervention and prevention is crucial because it helps identify and address issues before they escalate, improving outcomes for individuals and reducing long-term demand on public services. By acting early—whether in health, education, social care, or community support—we can prevent crises, promote wellbeing, and support people to live more independently.

Alongside our 'Community Offer', throughout 2024/25, we developed an early intervention and prevention approach to help individuals and communities be more resilient, improving health and well-being in the long-term. Our newly created prevention hub now triages referrals, by assessing:

- what provision is available within our local communities,
- what additional support might be needed and;



- whether that support needs to be commissioned or council delivered.

As of March 2025, our new Early Intervention and Prevention (EIP) Hub Team relocated into a new office space that encourages knowledge, experience and skills to be shared, as well as providing an opportunity to discuss the best pathway for referrals. All referrals for preventative support are now dealt with by the hub, where the team will triage each case and assess what support might be needed, including any community-delivered activity and support.

It is part of our wider 'Communities Approach' aimed at increasing individual and community independence and resilience. Our teams are office based in the Civic Centre and will complement and be in addition to the statutory Adults Information, Advice and Assistance service and children's MASSH services.

Looking ahead, our HDRC will be leading a project in September 2025, focused on exploring how artificial intelligence can enhance the referral process within adult social care, with the aim of identifying and triaging urgent cases more effectively.

Looking after our elderly population....

Looking after our elderly population ensures that older adults can live with dignity, safety, and wellbeing. As people age, they may face health challenges, social isolation, or financial hardship, and providing appropriate support helps them stay active, connected, and independent for longer. Valuing and caring for older people also strengthens families and communities, preserves intergenerational relationships, and honours the contributions they've made throughout their lives. Investing in their care is not only a moral responsibility—it also promotes healthier, more inclusive societies for everyone.

In April 2024, we developed plans within our organisation to be recognised as an 'Age-Friendly Community', by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The aim is to ensure our local communities, services and organisations work with older people to ensure everyone is supported to age well.

To help us understand what is already being done well within our borough and what more needs to be done, a consultation was launched, aimed at anyone aged 50 and over.

The consultation was divided into four separate surveys, focusing on areas identified by the WHO as being vital to ensuring the well-being of older people:

- Outdoor spaces, buildings and transport
- Housing and health care
- Community, respect and inclusion
- Communication, information and employment



Almost 42 per cent of the population within Torfaen is aged over 50, and almost 10 per cent aged over 75. Whilst we appreciate most people in their 50s aren't considered old, these individuals may already have an insight into how we can help people age well in Torfaen, through their own parents' experiences.

The results of the survey will be used to help us understand what people want us to focus on and ensure Torfaen's Age-Friendly Plan is led by our communities and leads to positive change that benefits both current and future older generations.

Preventing homelessness....

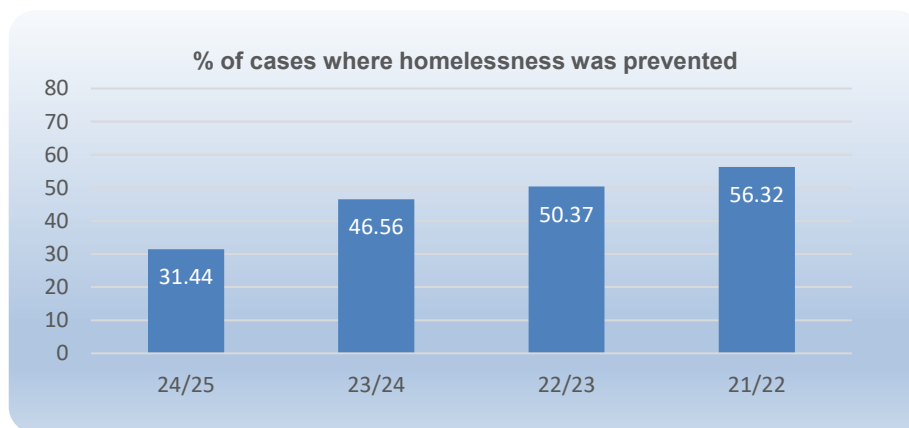
Reducing homelessness protects people's dignity, health, and safety, while also strengthening communities and reducing pressure on public services. Homelessness can lead to poor physical and mental health, social isolation, and barriers to employment or education. By addressing its root causes—such as poverty, lack of affordable housing, and unmet support needs—we can help individuals rebuild their lives and prevent long-term hardship.

Homeless prevention continues to be a challenge for us, within the current housing climate. This is mainly due to there being very few affordable housing options available. This leaves many individuals with little choice, other than to access social rented housing options or requiring support through homelessness.

Additional steps are being taken however, to increase the supply of affordable housing options, through the introduction of Leasing Scheme Wales. This initiative aims to improve access and affordability to homes within the private rented sector, improve standards, support tenancies and reduce homelessness. Essentially it enables property owners to lease their residential properties to the local authority. Within Torfaen there has been a positive response and within 25/26 we aim to deliver 15 units for rent. In addition, a significant £3m capital project of Pearl House, Pontypool is nearing completion transforming the building to include 15 self-contained, modern flats, supporting individuals who have been homeless or are at risk of homelessness, that will become operational early in 25/26 (April).

Our partner – the Wallich will support residents, who are expected to stay at Pearl House for up to six months, while they are assisted with help to move onto alternative accommodation and sustain that accommodation. A new Housing Support Hub, run by The Wallich, will also be available on the ground floor and is due to open later in 2025. The hub will offer a variety of services and host multiple agencies, including the council's housing team, to help those facing homelessness access the necessary support and advice.

In addition, some additional capacity has been sourced to increase mediation provision and services to seek to prevent homelessness. Further support is being provided to assist in sustaining accommodation, where individuals are struggling with finances.



In comparison to previous years, our performance on **preventing people becoming homelessness** has decreased. This is mainly due to an increase in the amount of people presenting themselves homeless and there being less affordable housing to rent/buy.

The Housing Support Grant (HSG) is a Welsh Government Grant that funds housing related support and homelessness prevention activity for vulnerable people, who may be at risk of homelessness. The programme provides essential support services to enable vulnerable people to access and sustain appropriate accommodation and provides a range of services, such as, peripatetic support, refuge for women experiencing domestic abuse, hostel accommodation for young people and supported accommodation for people with mental health issues.



This programme benefited from an uplift to funding within 2024/25, to support Welsh Government commitments to fair work practices and promote service sustainability. Under the guidance and terms and conditions for the funding, each Local Authority is required to develop a 4-year Housing Support Programme Strategy, which is supported by a 3-year Delivery Plan.

In December 2024, Cabinet approved our Housing Support Programme Strategy and 3-year Delivery Plan, which provides a strategic direction for Torfaen and ensures our services are planned and delivered successfully. It sets out the priorities that we intend to deliver through the Housing Support Grant and highlights any updates and progress made against the delivery plan.

A summary of our progress so far, is as follows:

- We have increased the supply of supported accommodation in Torfaen through working with Registered Social Landlords's and local providers to develop accommodation and support services for young people and increase capacity within generic supported housing.
- We have reconfigured and recommissioned the following service provisions to respond to evolving needs and demands of communities: VAWDASV community and accommodation services, low level and preventative support services, Housing First Service
- We have worked with local and regional partners to develop and sustain the following service provisions: Gypsy and Traveller Support Service, Substance Misuse Assertive Outreach Service, Criminal Offender Service, Homes Engagement Service – Hoarding Issues, Access to Financial Inclusion Advice and Support, Housing Intervention Team, Young Person's Housing Officer

Our reviewed and revised strategy builds upon the activities we have already undertaken, whilst acknowledging the fast paced and evolving environment to respond to strategic priorities. It is however prudent to highlight that the policy and legal landscapes are set to further develop, as Welsh Governments 'white paper' for ending homelessness progresses.

Whilst the Housing Support Programme has benefited from an uplift in this financial year, the position for subsequent years remains undetermined, as the financial position remains uncertain.

Improving accessibility to affordable and healthy food....

Providing access to affordable healthy food supports physical health, mental wellbeing, and overall quality of life. When people can afford nutritious food, they are less likely to experience diet-related illnesses such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. It also helps children concentrate and perform better in school, and adults stay productive at work. Ensuring access to healthy food reduces health inequalities, supports vulnerable families, and strengthens communities by promoting fairness and dignity. Ultimately, it's a key part of building a healthier, more resilient society.

Promoting healthy & sustainable food

In August 2024, a partnership helping local businesses and community groups to promote healthy and sustainable food, was given a national award.

Our 'Torfaen Food4Growth' scheme aims to increase locally produced food, by creating a network of food producers and suppliers, providing grants to help food businesses diversify, and supporting organisations to find sustainable solutions to food poverty.

The partnership was awarded a silver award by the UK Sustainable Food Places programme, which recognises areas that are driving innovation and best practice on all aspects of healthy and sustainable food. This demonstrates just what can be achieved when creative and committed people work together.

Whilst we feel there is still much to do and many challenges to overcome, Torfaen Food Partnership has helped to set a benchmark for other members of the UK Sustainable Food Places Network to follow.

Throughout 2024, our Food Resilience Team has given out grants to over 34 community groups and 13 businesses through our 'Food4Growth' partnership.

(The Torfaen Food4Growth partnership includes Torfaen Council, Torfaen Voluntary Association, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, as well as 80 businesses and community organisations.

The Food Resilience Programme is funded by the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund and Welsh Government).

Food Strategy

In October 2024, plans were underway to develop our first Torfaen Food Strategy, which aims to increase the availability of sustainable food within the borough.

The strategy will include a focus on healthy eating, long-term solutions to food poverty and support for local businesses to diversify and reduce the environmental impact of food production.

Throughout 2024/25, we had planned to carry out a consultation to find out what local businesses, community groups and residents would like to see included within our strategy. This was however postponed, due to uncertainty around future Shared Prosperity Funding. This activity will however, commence within 2025/26.

We are committed to developing a sustainable food strategy that truly reflects the needs and aspirations of our community, therefore our residents feedback is invaluable in helping us create a plan that promotes healthy eating, supports local food businesses, and minimises the environmental impact of food production and consumption.



Together, we can ensure that everyone in Torfaen has access to affordable, nutritious food, while fostering a sustainable food economy.

(Our Food Strategy is being developed by the Torfaen Food Partnership, which includes Torfaen Council, Torfaen Voluntary Association, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, Bron Afon Housing, Tasty Not Wasty, Trussell Trust, FairShare Cymru and Zero Wales Torfaen).

Planning & sustainable development within our communities....

Planning for sustainable development within our communities ensures long-term wellbeing for both people and the environment. It helps balance economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection—creating places that are livable, resilient, and future-proof. Sustainable development supports better housing, transport, energy use, and public services, while reducing carbon emissions and resource waste. It also promotes fairness by meeting current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. Ultimately, it builds stronger, healthier communities that can thrive over time.

In November 2024, Council approved a new timetable for the delivery of our Replacement Local Development Plan RLDP.

This plan sets out where new housing and employment sites are to be allocated throughout the borough, as well as identifying areas and measures to improve well-being and biodiversity.

Our current adopted plan covers the period from 2013 to 2021, but within 2024/25 work begun on a Replacement Local Development Plan for 2022-2037.

The Council has now agreed a new Delivery Agreement, which sets out the timescale for the development of the plan and how and when interested parties and the public can be involved.



The key dates are:

- Preferred Strategy- October 2025
- Deposit Plan - October 2026
- Submission to Welsh Government - January 2028
- Adoption by Torfaen Council - December 2028

The Preferred Strategy outlines the strategic direction of the Local Development Plan and the Deposit Plan provides the details of the plan itself.

The new Delivery Agreement replaces the initial agreement approved by our Councillors, in 2023.

Torfaen Replacement Local Development Plan (2022-2037)
Cynllun Datblygu Lleol Newydd Torfaen (2022-2037)

Delivery Agreement
Cytundeb Cyflawni

July 2023
Gorffennaf 2023

Our Key Challenges....

Education:

Continue to increase the uptake of free school meals.

Housing:

- **Develop a revised suite of key performance indicators that more appropriately measure impact of our approach to meeting housing demand, including our Rapid Rehousing programme** - measuring the impact of housing initiatives—especially complex programmes like Rapid Rehousing—requires performance indicators that go beyond basic outputs and reflect real outcomes for individuals and communities. Developing these indicators will take time, data, and collaboration, but it's essential to understand what's working, improve service delivery, and ensure housing support meets local needs effectively
- **Ensure early intervention and prevention is a key consideration to our approach in delivering housing support and reducing housing demand** - embedding early intervention and prevention into housing support will require a shift in approach—from reacting to crises to proactively identifying and addressing needs before they escalate. It demands strong coordination, timely data, and flexible services, but is essential to reducing long-term housing demand, improving outcomes for vulnerable individuals, and making better use of resources.
- **Increase the supply of affordable housing through new developments and programmes to bring void properties back into use quickly** - increasing the supply of affordable housing requires overcoming barriers such as limited land availability, funding constraints, and lengthy planning processes. Bringing empty properties back into use quickly also demands coordination and investment. Addressing these issues will be vital to meet growing housing needs, reduce homelessness, and ensure everyone has access to safe and secure accommodation.
- **Review our preventative commissioning arrangements to ensure services are co-ordinated and responsive to a person's need, inclusive of housing support** - reviewing preventative commissioning arrangements requires aligning multiple services to work together effectively and respond to individual needs in a timely way. It's complex to coordinate, but essential to ensure housing support is proactive, person-centred, and reduces long-term demand by preventing issues before they escalate.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 4:

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

Investing in our rail network....

Investing in our rail networks supports sustainable transport, boosts economic growth, and improves connectivity between communities. Rail systems reduce road congestion and carbon emissions, making travel more environmentally friendly. They also provide reliable, affordable access to jobs, education, and services—especially for people without cars. Upgraded rail infrastructure can stimulate local economies, attract investment, and support regional development.



Remedial work to address historical issues with the platform at Pontypool and New Inn Railway Station was completed in December 2024.

Work to regrade and resurface the platform was carried out as part of

a £7.1m project to transform the station and create a new park and ride facility.

The project was due to be completed in the summer, but the additional work, plus unforeseen issues, during construction, delayed the opening.

At the end of February, the new park and ride facility was officially opened. It comes after the Office of Rail and Road authorised the new facility to enter service.

The car park - accessible via a new road from the A4042 - includes 129 general spaces, 11 accessible parking bays, motorcycle bays, secure bike spaces and drop off bays. The site also includes a number of electric vehicle charging bays which will be available for use in the next few months.

A new footbridge and lifts suitable for wheelchairs and bikes have also been installed, as part of this development.

The £7.1m project is one of the first to be completed as part of the Cardiff Capital Region Metro Plus scheme to create a £50m South Wales Metro system.

The work has included:

- Improvements to the platform and seating area
- Improved CCTV and lighting
- New customer information systems and help point

It's hoped the new facility will encourage more people to use the station, leading to an increase in train services.

This has been an exceptionally challenging project that has involved several organisations working together, to create a new regional transport hub, as part of the South Wales Metro scheme.

The new facility will not only benefit people who already use the station but will hopefully encourage others to use it as well. Increasing the number of people who use the station will mean we can lobby for more trains, which will be beneficial to commuters and those who want to travel more sustainably.

(The project has been funded by Cardiff Capital Region, Welsh Government and Torfaen Council. Other Metro Plus schemes include Caerphilly Interchange, Merthyr Tydfil Interchange and Porth Transport Interchange).

Delivering active travel and safe routes to schools....

Providing active travel routes for our schools—such as safe walking and cycling paths encourages healthier lifestyles, reduces traffic congestion and pollution, and promotes independence among children and young people. It supports physical and mental wellbeing, improves concentration and readiness to learn, and helps build lifelong habits of active travel. These routes also enhance safety, reduce transport costs for families, and contribute to more sustainable, connected communities. Investing in active travel around schools' benefits pupils, families, and the wider environment.

At the end of May 2024, ten of our primary schools signed up to a new scheme encouraging children to walk, scoot or cycle to school, on a regular basis.

As part of this scheme, pupils record how they travel to school each day, as part of the Walk Once a Week - or WOW - initiative, launched by the Living Streets charity and funded by Welsh Government.

As an incentive, pupils can earn up to 11 different badges for walking, cycling or scooting to school at least once a week, and the information can be used by schools to inform and develop their active travel plans.

Since 2021, we have helped 16 schools to develop individual active travel plans, which aims to reduce the number of pupils and staff, who travel to school by car.

Griffithstown Primary School, in Pontypool, is one of the schools taking part in the WOW scheme and has recently developed an active travel plan.

The WOW initiative so far has demonstrated that by walking or cycling to school just once or twice a week can make a big difference to the amount of traffic near schools, which is safer and healthier for our pupils.

More pupils are now walking, scooting and cycling to a school in Cwmbran, since they introduced an active travel schools plan.



Llantarnam Primary School was the first in Torfaen to adopt the new generation of active travel school plan in July 2022, aimed at increasing the number of pupils who regularly travel actively to school. Since this time, our Active Travel Team has worked with the school to provide scooter storage, bike training, carry out surveys, create new active travel routes, and install a zebra crossing and additional entrances into the school. The school has since requested additional bike storage, due to the number of pupils now coming to school by bike.

The active travel plan has concentrated everyone's minds on the benefits of walking, cycling and scooting - we now talk to the children about the benefits, and we encourage them to have similar conversations at home.

According to the school's Living Streets WOW tracker, 68 per cent of pupils have walked, scooted or cycled to school so far this month.

Within 24/25, our Active Travel Team has supported another 13 schools in Torfaen to develop active travel school plans and is working with another three.

In October 2024, our Active Travel and Road Safety Team have also offered balanced bike sessions to all nursery, Reception and Year 1 primary school, providing younger pupils with the chance to learn the basics of how to ride a bike.

The aim of these sessions is to teach the children skills, in a fun and practical way, with lots of games and activities. By teaching our children these vital skills, we are not only promoting a healthier lifestyle but also ensuring they are well-prepared to navigate our roads safely.

So far, 24 schools have signed up for the training which aims to give children the building blocks to become a confident safe cyclist in the future.

(Balance Bike training is one of the initiatives rolled out in 2024/25 through active travel. Active travel received £250,000 2024/25 from the UK government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund).

In November 2024, according to the latest Wales-wide 'Hands Up' survey, Torfaen was reported as having the 4th highest percentage of pupils who travel actively to school – an increase of eight places compared to last year.

Implementing Welsh Governments Active Travel Act....

Reducing speed limits to 20 mph on roads—especially in residential areas and near schools improves safety, saving lives, and enhancing community wellbeing.

In January 2025, we reviewed the number of exceptions to the 20mph limit, in built up areas within Torfaen.

In September 2023, the Welsh Government changed the default speed limit from 30mph to 20mph within built up areas. The new legislation meant 30mph roads defaulted to 20mph, unless they met Welsh Government guidance to be classed as an exception.

At this time in Torfaen, 36 exceptions were identified as meeting the Welsh Government's criteria for a higher speed limit and [Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders](#) were put in place.

Last year, the Welsh Government invited residents to contact their local authorities to suggest additional exceptions and issued revised guidance to councils on the assessment criteria.

In total we received a total of 702 comments about roads in the borough, with a mix of views for and against exemptions.

We reviewed all the suggestions according to the revised guidance, and proposed the following roads to be added to the exceptions to the 20mph limit:

- Newport Road, Cwmbran (part)
- Estate Road, Blaenavon (including Gilchrist Thomas Industrial Estate)
- The A4043 north from Pontypool towards Abersychan (part)
- New Road, between Griffithstown and New Inn (part)
- Usk Road, New Inn (part)
- Riverside, Pontypool
- Turnpike Road, Llanyravon (part)
- B4236 Caerleon Road (part) - 40mph section

As at the end of February 2024, the formal process of introducing Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) to make the exceptions permanent was underway.

We appreciate that the new 20mph default speed limit has had a positive impact in many of our communities, reducing the speed of traffic and helping residents living on those streets and other road users to feel safer, although we do understand it isn't appropriate in every area.

Connecting Torfaen....

Providing communities with access to a community platform fosters connection, collaboration, and empowerment. These platforms enable residents to share information, access local services, participate in decision-making, and support one another. They strengthen social cohesion, improve communication between citizens and local authorities, and help identify and respond to community needs more effectively. By giving people, a voice and a space to engage, community platforms contribute to more resilient, inclusive, and proactive communities.

Throughout 2024, we have continued to collectively promote our 'Connect Torfaen Network' as the primary platform for our residents to access community led activity and support.

More than 1,000 people are now registered on our 'Connect Torfaen' website which includes over 300 community groups and organisations who promote their events and services.



There are around 400 community listings on the site on average every month, making it Torfaen's one-stop-shop for local activities and events.

Primarily, the platform aims to connect residents with community groups and services in their local area – allowing them to search for activities, attend events or sign up for volunteering opportunities.

Since its launch in 2021, the Council has featured lots of community-based opportunities, harnessing the support of the local community. This has included our:

- Greener Cleaner litter pick days: mobilising volunteers to keep our community clean.
- Canal project: working with residents to preserve and enhance our local waterways.
- Digital Inclusion gurus: connecting tech-savvy volunteers with those needing digital assistance.

(Our Connect Torfaen website is a collaboration between Torfaen Council, Torfaen Voluntary Alliance, Bron Afon Community Housing and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board).

It's a growing space where residents and service providers can find out more about what is already happening in, and being delivered, by their communities.

In addition, to support the implementation of our [Community Wellbeing Strategy](#) - 2023-2027, our frontline teams are starting to think differently about how, when and why support is provided to communities.

As well as using 'Connect Torfaen' to advertise our council services and projects, in the first instance, our teams also look to support our residents and explore what community-led activity already exists. Where our teams identify there isn't any community provision available, but there is a demand or need for it, we encourage our residents to feed this back to our Building Resilient Communities Team in order to work with local groups to see how a response could be developed.

Investing in our libraries....

Investing in our libraries is important because they serve as inclusive, accessible hubs for learning, community engagement, and personal development. Libraries provide free access to books, digital resources, and educational programmes, helping people of all ages improve literacy, skills, and wellbeing. They support children's learning, offer safe spaces for study and creativity, and help adults with job searches, digital inclusion, and lifelong learning.

Our Cwmbran Library is a well utilised community facility, of which we have invested nearly half a million pounds into.

Throughout the Summer of 2024/25, more than 900 children took part in an annual reading challenge with many coming into the library, every week to borrow books.



It is hoped that this new investment will help to modernise the facilities and attract even more visitors.

Libraries remain vital hubs for lifelong learning, public engagement, and personal growth. These renovations will help modernise the space whilst preserving its role as a welcoming and accessible resource for all.

The renovation is expected to include a reconfiguration of the existing space to provide more opportunities for agile working and study, a new teenage library and designated health and well-being and information and advice areas. New furniture and digital facilities will modernise the space and enhance the customer experience.

The library renovation opened in March 2025.

(The investment follows previous Welsh Government funding in Pontypool and Blaenavon Libraries, with £300,000 allocated to Pontypool Library in 2011 and £100,000 provided when Blaenavon Library was moved into the World Heritage Centre in 2015. The Cwmbran Library renovation is part of wider plans to improve Gwent House over the next couple of years, ensuring that the community continues to benefit from modern, accessible, and welcoming spaces).

Our Key Challenges...

Digital:

We need to increase opportunities for our residents to digitally engage with us and provide support for those who are not digitally engaged - increasing digital engagement requires accessible, user-friendly platforms while also supporting those who lack digital skills or access. Bridging this gap is essential to ensure all residents can interact with services confidently and fairly, without being excluded from important information or opportunities.

Community Capacity:

We need to work more closely with our community councils to prioritise activity at a Community Council level around what will make the biggest difference to community wellbeing - working more closely with community councils requires strong collaboration, shared priorities, and clear communication. Aligning activities at a local level can be complex, but it's essential to ensure that efforts are focused on what will most improve community wellbeing and reflect the needs of residents.

We need to research and understand what impact our different activities / decisions will have on wellbeing, at a local level - understanding the local impact of different activities and decisions requires reliable data, meaningful engagement, and the ability to measure wellbeing in ways that reflect community experiences. Without this insight, it's difficult to make informed choices, improve services, and ensure that actions genuinely benefit residents at a local level.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 5:

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

Increasing our Carbon reduction....

Our programme of work to reduce energy use, and carbon emissions associated with our buildings has continued during 2024/25.

To support the transition to low carbon heating, we have piloted heat pump technology at five of our sites, with most of the installation work having taken place, during 2024/25.

Grant funding from Welsh Government Energy Services' Local Authority Low Carbon Heat Grant has helped to enable gas boilers to be replaced with low carbon heat alternatives at our Greenmeadow Community Farm, Ty Blaen site and The Powerstation.

A further heat pump has been installed at our new Maendy Primary School, in Northville. This is the first fully net zero school in the borough and alongside the air source heat pump, the building, which has been positioned to optimise energy efficiency, is super-insulated and has 700m² of solar PV panels. The new extension at Crownbridge School also utilises heat-pump technology.

To support wider carbon reduction in the borough, during 2024/25 our Energy Team delivered an ambitious decarbonisation project to support our community centres, sport centres, charities and businesses, across the borough to reduce the carbon footprint of their buildings.

Funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, grants totalling £360,000 have been issued to help organisations invest in energy efficiency measures, and renewable energy generation. 38 schemes have been supported through the project, with total projected annual cost savings of over £200,000. In total, these projects have an estimated annual carbon saving of 346 tonnes of CO₂.

Protecting and enhancing our local parks....

Protecting and enhancing our local parks is crucial because they provide vital green spaces that support physical and mental wellbeing, encourage social interaction, and promote environmental sustainability. Parks offer safe places for play, exercise, and relaxation, helping to improve community health and cohesion. They also support biodiversity, improve air quality, and help mitigate the effects of climate change. Investing in parks makes communities more attractive, inclusive, and resilient,



SOLAR PANELS AT LLANTARNAM GRANGE- ARTS CENTRE, CWMBRAN



LED LIGHTING UPGRADE AT THE CO-STAR PARTNERSHIP, COMMUNITY CENTRE, CWMBRAN

ensuring that everyone—regardless of age or background—can enjoy the benefits of nature close to home.

In September 2024, residents were invited to respond to a consultation to help shape our new management plans to protect and enhance our local parks.

The plans focus on encouraging more people to use parks, protecting and enhancing biodiversity and identifying opportunities for future investment and development.

As a result, each of our parks will have its own management plan, focusing on the maintenance of existing facilities and identifying opportunities for further facilities, whilst addressing any issues raised through public consultation.

The parks are as follows:

- Blaenavon Park
- Cwmbran recreation areas (Boating Lake, Northfields and Southfields)
- Cwmbran Park
- Fishpond Park, Griffithstown
- Glansychan Park, Abersychan
- Pontnewydd Park
- Pontypool Park

We appreciate that we need to make sure that we manage all aspects of our parks in the most sustainable way, but without knowing how our residents use our parks and what they find most important, we are unable to plan for their future.

The responses from this survey will therefore help us create a series of management plans to support external grant applications to fund their delivery, ensuring our parks continue to be fit for purpose.

(Preparation of our management plans has been made possible through £49,120 of grant funding from the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund).

Keeping our local environment clean and tidy....

Keeping our local environment clean and tidy promotes public health, enhances community pride, and creates safer, more attractive spaces for everyone to enjoy. Clean environments reduce pollution, discourage antisocial behaviour, and support biodiversity. They also contribute to mental wellbeing and encourage outdoor activity, which benefits physical health.

Throughout 2024/25, we have continued to hold our annual spring clean events around the borough.

Torfaen Spring Clean takes place every year and is an opportunity for residents, businesses, schools and other agencies to carry out litter picks to help clean up our borough and create litter free zones.

Our litter picks took place at: Pontypool Park, Garn Lakes, Blaenavon town centre, Garndiffaith Millennium Hall Car Park, Pontypool town centre, Springvale Woods, Northfields, Llantarnam Ponds, Cwmbran Boating Lake and Woodland Road fields. Five of the locations were chosen because they were suitable for volunteers with mobility problems.

Nearly 100 volunteers tackled 10 litter hotspots, and collected a total of 57 bags of rubbish, and 25 bags of recyclable items.

We are grateful to all of our volunteers who get involved in our Spring Clean events and we recognise that by working together, we really can make a difference to the cleanliness of Torfaen.

In December 2024, eight of our primary school eco committees also signed up to a Keep Wales Tidy campaign, to help keep communities free from litter.

Cwmffrwdor, George Street, Penygarn and Griffithstown primary schools, in Pontypool, have become Litter

Free Zones, together with Woodlands, Llantarnam and the Federation of Blenheim Road and Coed Eva primary schools in Cwmbran.



They will now carry out regular litter picks around their school grounds. We have donated litter picking packs to each school, as part of a joint initiative between our Active Travel and litter and Fly-tipping Teams.

This is an exciting project that not only focuses on improving the appearance of local communities but encourages more people to consider walking or cycling for short journeys.

(The active travel Litter Free Zones project is funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund).

Encouraging biodiversity....

Encouraging biodiversity is vital because it helps maintain healthy, resilient ecosystems that provide essential services like clean air, water, and fertile soil. It supports food security, contributes to medical discoveries, and strengthens economies through agriculture and tourism. Biodiverse environments also enhance mental well-being and preserve cultural heritage. Protecting biodiversity ensures nature can continue to support life and adapt to challenges like climate change and disease.

In May 2024, we encouraged our residents to support our 'No Mow May' campaign to leave their lawns uncut throughout May, to help biodiversity and tackle climate change.

It's 10 years since the council first introduced its sustainable grassland management programme, which identifies areas of land where grass cutting is reduced, between April and October, to allow grass and wildflowers to pollinate during the summer.

The Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Local Nature Partnership group is now planning to carry out a study to see what impact the programme has had on local butterfly numbers.

We now have 200 areas across Torfaen that are being managed sustainably, and we know they are having a positive impact on local insect populations. Last year, we discovered wasp spiders in a verge in Pontnewynydd and at Henllys Local Nature Reserve, which is the furthest north they've ever been recorded. We've also seen a wider variety of butterflies including Orange-tips, Small Skippers, Marbled Whites and Peacock butterflies.

There are hopes a local nature reserve in Cwmbran could be expanded following a successful bid for National Lottery Heritage funding. The funding has been used to purchase a three-acre meadow and woodland area near Henllys Local Nature Reserve.

On 25 February 2025, Blaenserchan valley was officially declared as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR). This site is a former colliery site in Abersychan, which previously consisted of remnants of coal spoil heaps.

The site has since been reclaimed by nature and is home to many species of wildlife, including scarce flora, which will be protected for future generations. Biological surveying activities (Bioblitz) are planned to take place on 5 July, during Wales Nature Week.

Work also begun in March 2025, to improve biodiversity at Coed Meyric Moel, including planting new hedging and developing natural wildlife corridors, with further plans to create paths leading to Henllys Local Nature Reserve and a nature trail with help from Able, in Cwmbran, an organisation which supports people living with disabilities.



The project is being supported by Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen's Local Nature Partnership, which this year celebrates its 25th anniversary.

(There are currently now eight Local Nature Reserves in Torfaen: at Garn Lakes, which is currently the largest at nearly 53 hectares; Cwmavon Corridor (the cycleway linking Garndiffaith and Blaenavon), Tirpentwys, Cwmyrnyscoy Quarry, Springvale Ponds, Henllys, Llwynycelyn and Blaensychan.

Reducing our waste....

Reducing our waste helps protect the environment, conserve natural resources, and reduce pollution. When we produce less waste, we use fewer raw materials and less energy, which lowers greenhouse gas emissions and slows climate change. It also reduces the strain on landfills and incinerators, which can harm ecosystems and human health. By managing waste responsibly—through recycling, reusing, and reducing—we create cleaner, more sustainable communities and support a circular economy that benefits both people and the planet.

Increasing our recycling

At the start of July 2024, plans to introduce a new recycling bag were approved, as part of the council's 'Raise the Recycling Rate' campaign. Unfortunately, due to supply chain issues the roll out of this scheme was delayed.



From the end of October and throughout November, every household received a new red recycling bag, a leaflet explaining what to put in the new bag, and a guide to the council's full kerbside recycling service.

Our new red bags are now used for plastic, cans, tins, and cartons and are collected weekly, alongside black boxes, cardboard bags and food waste bins. Glass, paper, batteries, and textiles continue to go into the black boxes.

(Collecting recycling separately, is in line with the Welsh Government's Blueprint for Recycling Collections).

The 90-litre bags hold more than the black boxes, so will reduce the need for residents to have multiple boxes and the time it takes for crews to sort recycling, at the kerbside. It is also felt that the new bags will be easier to store, and the resealable lids will reduce the amount of litter caused by items blown from boxes. They also offer much better value for money - costing less to buy and being more hardwearing.

In 2023, 87 per cent of people who took part in our 'Raise the Rate' survey said they would be prepared to separate their recycling. We already know a lot of residents already sort out their recycling into different black boxes, which makes a big difference to crews, but it is hoped further improvements to the service will also encourage people to recycle more.

Cardboard continues to be collected in the blue bags and food waste in the brown caddies weekly.

(The Welsh Government has set local authorities a target of 70% waste recycled by 2025).

Waste Education & Enforcement Policy

At the beginning of December 2024, our Cabinet Members approved a Waste Education and Enforcement Policy, which will come into place in 2025.

This policy will help increase our recycling rates in the borough by reducing the amount of recycling put into purple-lidded bins. Around 62% of what residents place in their purple lidded bins is recyclable. It will focus therefore on householders who over-fill their purple-lidded bin or leave rubbish bags alongside their bin, as well as those who do not recycle.

In our 'Raise the Rate' survey in 2023, 56 per cent of our residents said they would support enforcement action being taken against those who do not recycle.

Going forward, our Education and Enforcement Officers will be contacting residents in person and in writing to offer further information and support, with enforcement action taken as the last resort.

Over the past few years, after a lot of hard work, we managed to hit the statutory 64 per cent recycling rate by March 2024. From 2024/25, the target we have to reach now however, is 70 per cent, or the local authority could be fined by Welsh Government.

We are confident that if we work together with our residents, we can increase our recycling rates, which will be better for our environment and future generations.

Reducing our food waste....

In October 2024, several of our primary schools reduced their food waste by a third on average, as part of a competition run by our Catering Service.

Our 'Waste Warriors' competition was launched last year, as a way of making the school meal service more sustainable.

Fourteen of our schools took part in the Waste Warriors competition – cutting their food waste by an average of 33% - 13% per cent more than last year.

Pupils monitored and recorded the amount of food thrown away at lunchtimes and planned a campaign to get their fellow pupils to reduce what they threw away.

The winners were pupils from Ysgol Gymraeg Cwmbran, who reduced their food waste by a total of 36%. Cwmffrwdor Primary School were runners up.



To help with our ambition to raise our recycling rate, we feel that by learning about reducing food waste, at such an early age is important. It can help our children understand where their food comes from, develop a greater appreciation for nature, and make healthier eating choices. It can also help reduce food waste in homes, which can help the planet and save money.

Both schools won an all-day healthy cooking session, thanks to funding from our [Food4Growth partnership](#). The group also paid for weighing scales for each school taking part in the competition.

Our Key Challenges...

Education:

- **Continue to reduce food waste within our school kitchens** - reducing food waste will require a change in our school kitchen practices, menu planning, and portion control, which can be complex to implement. It's important because improving access to meals helps ensure all children are well-fed and ready to learn, while cutting waste supports climate goals and makes better use of public resources

Waste & Recycling:

- Our objective remains to achieve 70 percent recycling rate. If we fail to reach 70 percent by 2025, we face fines of £100,000 for every 1 percent we fall short and that could have a financial impact on all of our council services. If we cannot raise the rate by changing behaviours, we will be left with little choice but to reconsider systemic changes.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 6:

We will make Torfaen a great place to do business delivering fair work for all by working with local employers & trade unions, encouraging new business start-ups and entrepreneurial activities.

Developing our Springboard Business Innovation Centre to become a hub network of innovation spaces....

Supporting high-growth science and technology businesses is important because they drive innovation, create high-value jobs, and boost economic productivity within our communities.

Our Springboard Business Innovation Centre, aimed at supporting high growth science and technology businesses, welcomed 11 new tenants, at the end of March 2025.

Occupancy rates at the Springboard Business Innovation Centre have nearly doubled over the past two years from 14 tenants in 2023 to 25 in 2025, following investment from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Around £600,000 has been used to update and expand facilities at the centre, in Cwmbran, and offer six-month set up grants and ongoing in-house business support.



Amotio Health moved into one of the centre's new laboratories, in October 2024, after looking at a range of other locations.

The company, which is developing a new orthopaedic device to improve hip replacement revision surgery, employs four people and expects to double its number of employees over the next year.

As well as the businesses based at Springboard, another 10 businesses use the centre, as their registered address. The centre also has a Spring Hub co-working area with 18 desks.

A new Spring Online mentorship programme, also funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, is also available to all businesses based in Torfaen. This website has so far connected 85 businesses looking for support with 32 mentors. Phase 2 of the development of the Spring Online concept is currently being developed using SPF funding.

The Business Innovation Team also assisted businesses within the wider Torfaen business community to adopt new technologies to make the business more competitive within the market place, via a Technology Grant. The Shared Prosperity Fund enabled 25 businesses to adopt new technologies and facilitated further investment of £184817.

We are committed to making Torfaen a great place to do business and the Springboard Centre is an example of how bringing businesses together can provide mutual support and opportunities for development. However, all the current programmes are funded via the Shared Prosperity Fund and future programmes will be subject to external funding being available.

Supporting our local businesses....

Supporting local businesses strengthens the local economy by keeping money circulating within the community, creating jobs, and fostering entrepreneurship. They often offer unique products and services tailored to local needs, contribute to the character and identity of an area, and are more likely to support other local suppliers and initiatives. By investing in local businesses, communities build resilience, reduce environmental impact through shorter supply chains, and promote inclusive, sustainable growth.

At the end of May 2024, businesses were being offered free digital support, in collaboration between our council and a local digital solutions company.

The project offers 200 businesses the chance of a bespoke website with digital support for 12 months, social media support and a year-long subscription to the Uddr app, which promotes local businesses, trades and services.

Around 110 businesses have already signed up to the initiative, led by Uddr digital services and so far, some companies have already seen an immediate increase in customer enquiries, as a result of this project.



Our HDRC is currently conducting research to better understand the factors contributing to the failure of many local businesses, within their first three years of operation.

(The project is funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and follows a similar initiative between our Council and Uddr in 2022, funded by the Community Renewal Fund. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK government's Levelling Up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills).



PONTYPOOL MARKET

TORFAEN
COUNCIL
BOROUGH

BWDEISTREF
SIRIOL
TORFAEN

At the end of 2024, our Pontypool Indoor Market celebrated 130 years of being at the heart of the town centre.

This milestone marks over a century of rich history and community spirit and is a central hub for weekly shopping. In recent years, however and particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, shopping habits have evolved, leading to a decline in traditional markets and town centres.

In response to these changes, we have therefore reviewed the business plan for Pontypool Indoor Market and asked our local residents to participate in a survey to provide their views, ideas and feedback to inform our new business plan and enhance the market.

Our goal is to develop new offerings that will ensure the market remains a vibrant and integral part of the town and its community.

As part of this survey, we asked residents whether they use the indoor market, what they use it for, and what they think would be a good addition to increase footfall.

As we look to the future, we are committed to revitalising the market and making it a thriving destination once again.

Supporting our social enterprises....

Supporting social enterprises is important because they use business to address social and environmental challenges, reinvesting profits into communities and creating inclusive opportunities. They help tackle issues like inequality, unemployment, and sustainability, while strengthening local economies and public services. By backing social enterprises, we promote innovation, resilience, and a fairer society.

At the end of July 2024, we offered grants to eight of our social enterprises, to help secure their long-term financial stability.

There are estimated to be more than 30 social enterprises in Torfaen, including social care providers, recycling projects and food co-operatives. Traditionally, these businesses rely on short-term grants, alongside alternative forms of funding.

Now, eight grants of up to £50,000 have been offered, alongside a package of training and support aimed at identifying new, sustainable income opportunities.

Our Social Enterprise Challenge was run by our Building Resilient Communities Team and also featured help to develop a 12-month sustainability model.

This is a great opportunity for our social enterprises to make a lasting difference to their organisations and local communities that they serve and also aims to help them to become more independent and less reliant on short-term pots of funding, so they can create real and sustainable change.

Supporting new businesses & entrepreneurs....

Supporting new businesses and entrepreneurs' fuels innovation, creates jobs, and stimulates economic growth within a community. They bring fresh ideas, drive competition, and often respond quickly to changing market needs. By backing startups and entrepreneurs, communities can diversify their economies, attract investment, and build resilience. Encouraging entrepreneurship also empowers individuals, fosters creativity, and helps develop solutions to social and environmental challenges.

We launched a new course in September 2024, aimed at anyone setting up their own business within Torfaen.

Our 8-week programme covered areas such as: developing business concepts, branding, marketing, sales and finance.

The courses were held at our Croesyceiliog Community Education Centre, in Cwmbran and includes insights from industry experts and local entrepreneurs.

The free Start-Up Programme was a collaboration between our Business Engagement Team and the business training academy 'Welsh Ice'.

We know there is a wealth of untapped talent in our area, and it is hoped that these such programmes will provide individuals with the relevant guidance and support they need, to turn their ideas into reality.



(The programme is part of the Business Support Project which has received £218,000 from the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund)

We want to help our high streets to grow by investing and supporting local businesses, which is why we feel courses like these are so important.

Our Foundational Economy Team has already had successes in Pontypool Indoor Market which has seen occupancy increase and has supported new businesses to start in Blaenavon.

Our Sustainable Food Team is also developing a network of local food producers, suppliers and sellers to help new and diverse retailers to thrive in our town centres."

(The Retail, Food and High Street Businesses start up course 5-9 Club is a part of the Foundational Economy initiative which has received £95,000 in 2024/25 from the UK government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund).

Driving economic growth....

Driving economic growth leads to more jobs, higher incomes, and improved living standards. It increases public revenue, which supports essential services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Economic growth also attracts investment, encourages innovation, and helps communities become more resilient to financial challenges. By fostering a strong and inclusive economy, we can create opportunities for people and businesses to thrive.

At the end of October of 2024, we held an event for business leaders, training providers and council representatives to meet to discuss ways of upskilling our local workforce to meet the needs of a competitive innovative economy and to identify the challenges and potential solutions.

The event was organised by our Torfaen Strategic Economic Forum, which represents large businesses in the borough, and follows on from a survey we carried out last year of companies, which identified a lack of skills and training as a barrier to growth.



This was deemed to be a very positive event with many new local companies in attendance.

Our Economy and Skills Strategy sets out a vision for a competitive innovative economy in Torfaen, which means working with industry experts to identify barriers and solutions to encourage inward investment and growth.

As a result of this event, it was agreed that by working more closely with schools to nurture young people's career aspirations, supporting unemployed people to feel positive about returning to the workplace and developing specialist skill sectors, these issues should be key focuses and for inclusion into an action plan for monitoring, going forward.

(Our Torfaen Strategic Economic Forum was set up in 2018 to drive economic development in Torfaen. The Torfaen Strategic Economic Forum skills and training workshop was funded thanks to £3,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund).

Our Key Challenges...

Economy:

Currently the UK inflation rate is 2.2%, the Bank Base Rate is 5% and, due to various unforeseen events, there has been global economic volatility throughout 2023-2024. Future economic performance within Torfaen and the wider Region will continue to some extent to be influenced by how the UK economy performs across the next 12 months. A further sustained period of volatility will inevitably present ongoing challenges to business growth/expansion although progress is being made through the measures set out above to provide a degree of support and resilience to our local economy.

Recent analysis of the UK Competitiveness Index (UKCI) indicates that all Local Authorities within the Northern Valleys area had improved their ranking positions with the exception of Torfaen, which fell from 336th to 346th between 2019 and 2023. Key improvement areas noted for Torfaen, and therefore priority challenges for the Council's future economic development and skills programmes are to improve our relatively lower levels of technology based new business start-ups and to deliver enhanced levels of skills development opportunities at NVQ Levels 4 and above.

The UK Government Levelling Up Programme, which includes the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), is currently due to come to an end in March 2025 and many economic growth/business support projects and programmes across the Region are currently funded from these sources. This was replaced by interim funding for the year 2025-2026 but after that dated there continues to be uncertainty over a direct replacement and how that funding (if any) will be distributed.

Overall Economy and Place Directorate:

Our recently approved federated council model brings a unique opportunity to reframe our economy and place vision and priorities for both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Council's. Work has already commenced to develop an overarching "Blueprint for Growth" strategy that aims to maximise investment opportunities, built upon the local distinctiveness of both areas and its strategic location within the region, whilst simultaneously building and sustaining vibrant communities, through our placemaking programme.

This strategy will provide the framework to establish future areas of work and priorities to ensure we make the biggest impact, whilst operating firmly within our financial and staff resources.

Our key priorities and challenges for 25/26 are, as follows:

- Develop and agree Blueprint for Growth – this will require aligning diverse stakeholder priorities, navigating complex and uncertain external factors, and balancing ambition with limited resources. The process demands robust data, effective engagement, and strong leadership to manage differing views, secure buy-in, and ensure the plan is both strategic and deliverable under public and political scrutiny.
- Establish work programmes and outcomes under the four pillars of – Investment, Placemaking, Planning and Property – will be a key challenge due to the need for clear alignment across diverse and interdependent areas. Each pillar involves complex, long-term objectives that require coordinated planning, cross-departmental collaboration, and consistent resourcing. Balancing competing priorities, ensuring stakeholder engagement, and defining measurable outcomes that reflect both strategic ambition and local needs adds further complexity to the task.
- Develop an appropriate staff structure to deliver the Blueprint for Growth across both councils – will be a challenge due to the need to align organisational capacity, skills, and resources with a shared strategic vision. It will also involve navigating differing governance arrangements, workforce cultures, and operational models, while ensuring the structure is flexible enough to support cross-council collaboration, accountability, and long-term delivery.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 7:

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

Helping people to have healthier lifestyles and improve mental and physical well-being....

Being Dementia Friendly

Being dementia-friendly helps create inclusive, supportive communities where people living with dementia can feel safe, respected, and understood. It promotes awareness, reduces stigma, and encourages environments that enable individuals to maintain independence and dignity for as long as possible. By being dementia-friendly, we improve access to services, foster compassion, and strengthen social connections—benefiting not only those with dementia but also their families, carers, and the wider community.



More than three-quarters of a million people currently live with dementia in the UK and it's expected that one in three of us will develop the condition at some point in our life.

At the end of April 2024, we launched an innovative sports programme, aimed at supporting dementia sufferers to relive their favourite sports and help them live happier and more active lifestyles.

Over 50 people living with dementia and their carers have signed up to the Dementia Friendly Sports Programme, run by Age Connect Torfaen, in partnership with our Sports Development Team.

So far, participants have taken part in dementia friendly golf at Greenmeadow Golf Club, as well as weekly gym sessions with Strength & Performance Wales, with assisted tennis planned in the summer months.

Research shows regular exercise can support cognitive function as well as improving physical and mental wellbeing for people with dementia, as well as their carers.

The activities that we have set up, provide participants with either an opportunity to try something new, or to revisit a once loved pastime, whilst providing them with the physical, emotional and social benefits that physical activity can offer. By collaborating with local community providers, including Pontnewydd Golf Club and Strength & Performance Wales, our vision is to empower more people living with dementia to actively participate in sports and enjoy an improved quality of life.

Supporting over 60's Fitness....

Supporting fitness activities for our older residents helps maintain physical health, mobility, and independence, reducing the risk of chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and osteoporosis. Regular exercise also boosts mental well-being, combats loneliness, and improves cognitive function. By encouraging active lifestyles, we enhance quality of life, reduce pressure on health and social care services, and help older adults stay connected and engaged in their communities.

At the end of May 2024, we launched our 'Thrive - Live Long and Prosper' campaign which is a new wellness activity, fronted by our Sports Development Team, aimed to energise residents aged 60 years and above, to stay healthy and active in older age.



According to a report by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, healthy life expectancy for women in Torfaen is approximately 55 years, while men's stands at 60 - both below the Welsh average of 62 years.

To help narrow this health gap, our 'Thrive' sessions are being offered in Blaenavon, Cwmbran and Pontypool, which include chair-based activities, gentle exercise, circuits, and dance.

Financial support can also be offered to groups in the community that champion wellness and social inclusion, through the various sporting and social activities they offer.

So far, groups have received support for acquiring equipment, renting facilities, and covering instructor costs.

This programme promotes lifelong physical activity in a variety of forms, aiming to empower our over 60s population to lead active lives and prevent sedentary lifestyles.

Encouraging our residents to become healthy....

Helping people lead healthier lifestyles and improve their mental and physical well-being enhances quality of life, reduces the risk of chronic illnesses, and lowers pressure on health and social care services. Good health supports productivity, learning, and social participation, while improved mental well-being fosters resilience, stronger relationships, and community cohesion. By promoting healthier choices and environments, we can build a more active, inclusive, and thriving society.

Promoting physical activity

We are committed as an organisation to promoting healthy lifestyles and helping children get the best start in life.

In August 2024, we launched our 'Lending Library', which is run by our Library Service, in partnership with our Sports Development Team. This initiative aims to promote physical activity, by providing easy access to sports equipment, for residents of all ages.

The lending library works like borrowing books and the equipment that is available covers a wide range of sports, including badminton, basketball, boccia, boxing, curling, cricket, football, mini golf, netball, pickleball, rounders, rugby, table tennis and tennis.

Fitness equipment is also available for use at home or in an appropriate setting.



This initiative will help to introduce people and families to new sports, without the cost of buying new equipment straight away. It will also help to reuse items that may otherwise be thrown away.

In July, our Sports Development Team also launched a new joint-initiative with Blaenavon and Cwmbran Community Councils, to set up 'Community Kit Rooms' that offer free sports equipment and clothing, to low-income families. We asked local residents whether they would have any good quality sports clothes or footwear they no longer needed, so that they could donate to our 'Community Kit Rooms', in an attempt to make exercise more accessible and affordable. Since the introduction of the lending library and community kit rooms over 120 families have accessed the facilities, and more community venues will be hosting the kit rooms.

Providing new sports facilities

At the beginning of October, we progressed plans to transform disused tennis courts in Blaenavon, into a new all-purpose sports facility.

The refurbished tennis courts were upgraded to a multi-use games area, suitable for tennis, basketball, and netball. It comes in response to a growing demand for basketball and netball within the area, highlighted by a school-wide sports survey and echoed by residents living within the Blaenavon Community.

The new multi-games area features a gated technology system, allowing users to book the courts online, through the Tennis Wales Club Spark system.



It is hoped that this approach will not only enhance the user experience but will also help to secure the courts from anti-social behaviour and vandalism.

We are dedicated to promoting sports and physical activity within the community by engaging more people in healthy activities and expanding opportunities for participation. The instrumental support from the local community has been crucial in pushing this development forward and we look forward to the positive impact this enhanced sports facility will have for the local community to enjoy.

(This new development follows the recent refurbishment of courts in Cwmbran Park and Pontypool Park, which received a combined £220,000 from the Lawn Tennis Association, Sport Wales, Torfaen Council, and Section 106 funds).

Encouraging well-being through active lifestyles....

At the end of October 2024, a consultation opened inviting residents to provide their views on local sports, leisure, and fitness activities.

The survey is part of our commitment to improving well-being through active lifestyles, as well as the potential to transform areas into a premier leisure destination. By understanding the needs and preferences of our residents, we can provide the opportunity for them to engage in physical activities that promote a healthier lifestyle.

The benefits of physical activity for mental and physical health are well-documented but the extent of local participation is unclear.

This consultation therefore aims to identify the sports and activities that people enjoy and how they discover them. It also seeks to pinpoint areas where provision is lacking and understand the barriers that prevent participation.

Feedback collected played a crucial role in shaping our 'Communities Well-being Sports and Leisure Strategy'. This strategy aims to make leisure opportunities more accessible, support exceptional sporting talent, and highlight the positive impact of sports and leisure on overall well-being.

We want to ensure that Torfaen becomes a top leisure destination in the future, including, utilising its natural landscape to attract visitors for various activities and events. Supporting local sports clubs to become community hubs and ensuring the right facilities are in the right places are also key components to our vision.

In December 2024, Cabinet approved and adopted our Sports & Leisure Strategy, as a supplementary chapter of our Community Wellbeing Strategy, which provides us with the strategic framework for supporting community activity and promoting wellbeing.

The strategy is centred on how we can utilise existing facilities and provision to build our preventative offer, support them in developing and delivering local solutions and in turn strengthen community and individual resilience.

At the end of March 2025, we announced that the award-winning social enterprise - Halo Leisure will be providing leisure services, in Torfaen

It marks the start of a new 10-year partnership with Halo following a previous contract with Torfaen Leisure Trust.



The charity will take over the management of leisure facilities at Cwmbran Stadium, Active Living Centres at Pontypool and Bowden, Fairwater Leisure Centre and Snowsport Torfaen.

As a not-for-profit organisation, we expect Halo to put people before profit and make a positive and long-term difference to our residents' health by encouraging physical activity and healthier lifestyles.

This partnership will contribute towards our aspirations to tackle health inequalities and create healthier, happier communities.

(Over the past 20 years, Halo has managed leisure services in Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil, Gloucester, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Stratford and Wiltshire).

Investing in our schools to encourage active lifestyles and well-being....

Investing in our schools helps children develop lifelong healthy habits, improves physical and mental health, and enhances learning and social development. Active schools also promote inclusion, reduce health inequalities, and strengthen community connections by involving families and local organisations. This investment supports a healthier, more resilient population and contributes to long-term social and economic benefits.

Nearly £4m has been invested in a range of new sports facilities at our Abersychan School.

Work on a new £2.2m 3G pitch was completed within 2024/25. The facility, which includes a 3G pitch built to the World Rugby and FIFA standards, floodlights and a spectator stand, is also available for community hire from April 2025.



Work is also being carried out to transform the old leisure centre, situated on the school site with a refurbished sports hall and changing rooms, a purpose-built dance studio, all of which will be available for community hire, through the school.

These facilities will not only benefit the pupils at Abersychan School but also children and adults who play for local football, and rugby clubs, or are part of other sports clubs.

It is one of three new 3G pitches in the borough, alongside a new 3G pitch at Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw, which opened in Autumn 2024 and a pitch in Llantarnam, which is due to be completed in spring 2025.

(The new 3G pitch has been funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and FAW Cymru Football Foundation. The new dance studio, sports hall, changing rooms and ALN base have been funded by a combination of UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund and the Welsh Government's ALN grant. The new netball courts were paid for by the Welsh Government's Community Focused Schools fund).

Our Key Challenges...

Education:

- **Complete the school and community 3G facilities in Trevethin, Llantarnam and Abersychan** – this will require coordinated planning, funding, and construction within tight timelines. These facilities are important for improving access to high-quality sports and leisure opportunities, supporting both educational outcomes and community wellbeing.

Sport & Leisure:

- **Developing a clearer strategic framework for our investment in sport & leisure in Torfaen** - without a clear strategic framework, investment decisions in sport and leisure may lack direction, consistency, and alignment with broader community needs and priorities.
- **Consider our approach to commissioning sport and leisure services** - our commissioning approach directly influences service quality, value for money, and how well sport and leisure provision meets the needs of Torfaen's communities. This is important because how we commission sport and leisure services shapes the accessibility, inclusivity, and long-term sustainability of opportunities for physical activity and wellbeing across Torfaen.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 8:

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

Supporting our local culture and heritage....

Supporting culture and heritage is important because it preserves the identity, history, and values of communities, fostering a sense of belonging and pride. It enriches lives through creativity, storytelling, and shared traditions, while also contributing to education, tourism, and the local economy. By investing in cultural and heritage initiatives, we strengthen social cohesion, promote diversity, and ensure that future generations can connect with and learn from the past.

At the end of July 2024, our Cabinet Members approved a decision to appoint a building company to begin work on the £3.7m redevelopment of our Greenmeadow Community Farm.

The contract was awarded to G Oakley and Sons following a competitive tender process and marks the next step in the renovation, regeneration and re-opening of Greenmeadow Community Farm.

Last year, councillors also approved additional investment for the redevelopment of the farm, which will include:

- a revamped Haybarn suitable for community events including weddings and parties
- a new all-weather indoor play barn with play equipment and a replacement outdoor adventure play area
- a new animal barn
- new and extended café
- an improved farm shop to promote local produce and suppliers
- attractive landscaping with woodland, trails and sensory paths
- improvements to the farm's entrance and site accessibility.

An additional £1.647m grant was secured earlier in 2024, to cover the cost of a new energy efficient heating system, alongside £183k match-funding from the council's climate reserve.



At the end of September 2024, construction work started on the redevelopment of Greenmeadow Community Farm, with an opening date of September 2025.

The start of this construction marks a major milestone on the journey to the reopening of the facility.

Investing in our town centres....

Investing in our town centres revitalises local economies, supports small businesses, and creates vibrant, attractive spaces for people to live, work, and socialise. It also helps to preserve local character and heritage, encourages tourism, and strengthens community pride.

Pontypool Town Centre

In December 2024, Cabinet Members approved a plan to utilise UK Government funding, allocated to Pontypool Town Centre to upgrade part of the town's sewer network.

Nearly £1 million has been earmarked for town centre improvements, thanks to the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF).

Up to £528,000 was used to upgrade the sewer network beneath Hanbury Road, which will be essential for any future development in the area.



The detailed design work for the Levelling Up Fund has highlighted an emerging capacity issue relating to the sewerage network in the Hanbury Road area of Pontypool. Without upgrading the sewer network, future regeneration projects in the area would likely be constrained.

The reality was that either we invest in this project, or block future regeneration in that part of town.

In January 2025, we invited our residents to attend a workshop to provide us with their ideas on how Pontypool Town Centre could be transformed.

The aim is to establish a town centre group that can help achieve the ambitions set out in the [Pontypool Placemaking Plan](#), as well as other ideas. We felt that this would be a unique opportunity for everyone to have their voices heard and make a real impact on the future of our town. By coming together and sharing

our visions, we can create a vibrant, thriving centre that reflects the needs and aspirations of all who live and work here.

(These events are paid for by the Welsh Government Transforming Towns fund and delivered in partnership with Torfaen Council and Cwmpass).

Over the past two years, Pontypool Town Centre has benefitted from over £400,000 in grant funding which has helped enable the renovation and reuse of two vacant properties.

(Pontypool is one of only 11 projects in Wales to be awarded £7.6M from UK Government's Levelling Up Fund to deliver the £9.3M Pontypool Cultural Hub & Café Quarter project).

Pontypool Indoor Market Streetfood Saturdays, the summer events programme and grants for new high street businesses are also some of the other initiatives supported by the SPF town centre project.

Cwmbran Town Centre

During 2023, the UK Government announced a £20 million allocation for Cwmbran Town Centre, as part of their long-term Plans (LTP) for town centres.

The £20 million long term plan will ensure investment over a 10-year period to drive town centre improvements and unblock barriers to regeneration. The boundary for the investment includes Cwmbran Town Centre and adjacent neighbourhoods.

Our 10-year vision will identify the longer-term priorities for the town and develop a 3-year investment plan which will be submitted to the UK Government, before August 2024. A mix of capital and revenue funding will be used to support projects centred around 3 key investment themes:

- Safety and Security
- High Streets, Heritage and Regeneration
- Transport and Connectivity.

In April 2024, the latest step in developing that plan was the establishment of a Cwmbran Town Investment Board, with the first meeting taking place in May.

The largest proportion of the board is made up of local business and community representatives with representatives from the public sector including local politicians. The Board's primary objective will be to develop the long-term plan and working closely with local people.

At the beginning of November 2024, residents were invited to have their say on an ambitious set of potential projects for Cwmbran town centre.

The Cwmbran Placemaking Plan sets out several proposals for the next 10 years, including better public spaces, walking and cycling routes and more to do in the evenings.

The plan also highlights how a range of public, private and third sector funding could help realise the vision.

The Placemaking Plan for Cwmbran town centre, represents a bold vision for the future. This plan is not just about development; it's about creating a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable community space that meets the needs of residents and visitors alike. (Placemaking Plans for Blaenavon and Pontypool were approved by councillors in 2022).

Keeping our public spaces clean....

Keeping our public spaces clean protects the environment, promotes public health, and enhances the appearance and safety of our communities. Clean spaces encourage people to spend time outdoors, support local businesses, and take pride in their surroundings. They also help reduce pollution, discourage littering and vandalism, and create a more welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for everyone.

Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO's) help local councils tackle anti-social behaviour in public areas like children's play areas and sports fields.

There are currently three PSPOs in place within our borough relating to dogs, which must be reviewed every three years. These are:

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



As part of our review, we were also keen to find out whether our residents still supported the current PSPOs in place, or whether they would like to see any changes, or think they should be removed.

Our consultation opened at the end of July 2024 and a high-level summary of the consultation findings, is as follows:

- 80.3% were in favour of retaining the dog exclusion areas
- 83.9% were in favour of retaining the dogs on leads areas
- 68.6% did not feel that the PSPO was appropriately enforced
- 58% did not feel that the PSPO was enough of a deterrent

The overall findings were similar with that, of the previous consultation three years prior, namely that there is a perception that the existing PSPO is not robustly enforced.

Our Civil Enforcement Team are responsible for enforcing the PSPO for dog controls in Torfaen, and the Environment Operations Team respond to requests to remove dog faeces from public land. It is understood that Torfaen is one of only two Councils in Wales whose Civil Enforcement Officers carry out a dual role of parking and environmental enforcement.

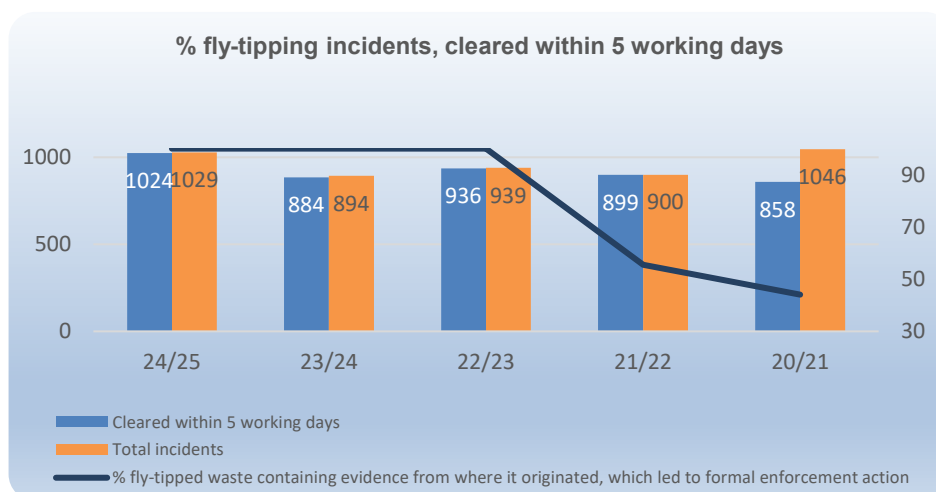
In November 2024, our Cabinet Members approved a variation to the existing Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for dog controls in Torfaen, to exclude dogs from any marked sports pitches and children's play areas on public land that have been developed since November 2021. They also agreed that the introduction of additional dog controls, as per feedback received as part of the consultation, be explored and assessed.

The PSPOs are an important tool in our fight against keeping our public spaces clean and safe for everyone to use. (PSPOs were introduced as part of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. All areas covered by a PSPO have signs explaining the requirements to encourage people to abide by them, and details of how to report breaches when they happen. Breaching a PSPO is a criminal offence, and possible sanctions include a Fixed Penalty Notice of £100 or a fine up to £1,000 on conviction).

Preventing litter and fly-tipping....

Fly-tipping is a serious environmental crime and costs taxpayers a significant amount to clean up. It not only looks unsightly, but can be potentially dangerous, especially to children and animals, and has a detrimental effect on our environment.

Throughout 2024, we have continued working on joint initiatives with our partner organisations and communities to identify those people involved in fly tipping and to take enforcement action, where appropriate.



In comparison to last year (23/24), despite the increase in the number of **fly-tipping incidents** reported, we have still maintained our performance in clearing fly-tipping within 5 working days. **% of fly-tipped waste containing evidence, where it originated from, which led to informal action** - performance also looks positive in this area, although we must highlight that these figures are on a much smaller scale in comparison to the overall total number of incidents reported, as shown in the table below.

% of fly-tipped waste containing evidence, where it originated from, which led to informal action

	24/23	23/24	22/23	21/22	20/21
% reports of fly-tipped waste, where evidence of the perpetrator is obtained, resulting in enforcement action	100%	100%	100%	55.56%	44.07%
Number of reports of fly-tipped waste, where evidence of the perpetrator is obtained, resulting in enforcement action	21	3	9	10	26
Total number of reports of fly-tipped waste, where evidence of the perpetrator is obtained	21	3	9	18	59

A number of cases publicised throughout 2024, has demonstrated that we and our neighbouring Councils will not tolerate fly-tipping and we will take robust action against those found to be responsible. We hope that by continuing to publicise the various prosecutions that we have pursued that this will continue to send a clear message to those who engage in such irresponsible behaviour, will expect to face serious consequences.

Our Key Challenges...

Town Centre Regeneration:

- **Progressing the Levelling Up Fund projects to delivery stage and ensuring that they deliver the intended benefits for Pontypool** - delivering the Levelling Up Fund projects effectively will be crucial to revitalising Pontypool and ensuring the investment achieves its intended social, economic, and environmental benefits for the community.

The British:

- **Developing a viable scheme to planning stage** - requires balancing heritage preservation, financial feasibility, and community benefit—while navigating planning regulations and stakeholder expectations. This is important because a well-developed scheme can unlock regeneration opportunities, attract investment, and ensure The British becomes a sustainable and valued asset for Pontypool's future.

The Canal:

- **Producing a Masterplan for 5 locks basin alongside implementing the wider volunteer programmes** - producing a Masterplan for the 5 Locks Canal Basin while implementing volunteer

programmes will require coordinating long-term strategic planning with community-led activity, ensuring both are aligned and will deliver meaningful impact.

- **Finding suitable grant funding to enable designs to be developed for the 5 locks road crossing** - securing suitable grant funding will be essential to move this scheme from concept to design stage, yet funding sources are often competitive, limited, and require well-developed proposals aligned with strategic priorities. Without this funding, progress on improving connectivity and safety in the area could be delayed or stalled.

WELL-BEING OBJECTIVE 9:

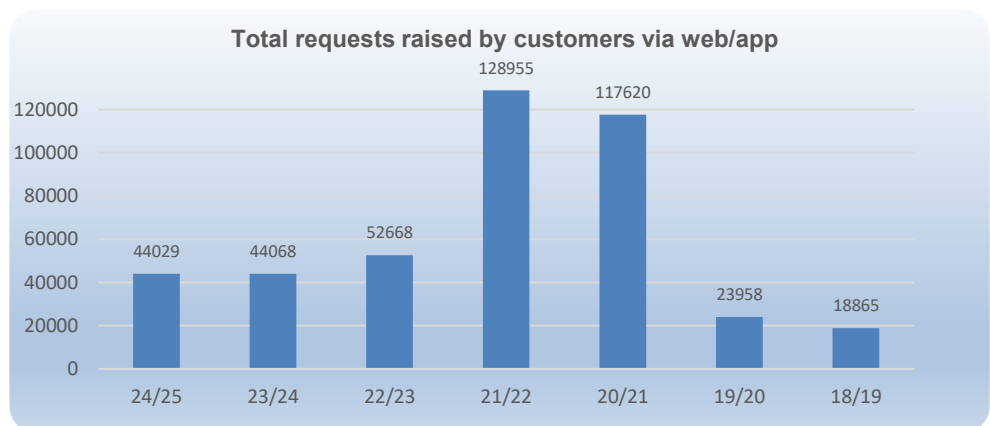
Provide efficient customer focussed services that reflect the way people live their lives and wish to access services

Providing efficient, customer-focused services that reflect how people live and wish to access support ensures services are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to real needs. It helps build trust with our customers, improves satisfaction, and encourages engagement by offering flexible options—whether online, in-person, or through community-based channels. By aligning our services with people's lifestyles, we can reduce barriers, improve outcomes, and make public services more effective and equitable for everyone.

Our 'Digital First' Customer Strategy was adopted in May 2023 and aims to use digital solutions and data insights to improve the customer experience and our operational efficiency.

Throughout 2024/25, there has been a range of activity that has taken place, to further improve the digital services that we offer and access support to use them.

This work includes making ongoing improvements to our digital forms and processes, the introduction of a new Contact Centre platform, and providing ICT and Digital support to residents at our libraries.



The digital first principle, is that those that can transact with the council digitally, can do so via easy-to-use services. It does not mean “digital only” therefore telephony and face-face provision will continue to remain available. It also seeks to ensure that our customers are supported to develop the skills and access to devices and connectivity to engage digitally, if that is their preference.

In August 2024, we received a report from Audit Wales on our Digital Strategy. The review examined our strategic approach to digital, with a particular focus on how well it aligns with the sustainable development principle. Audit Wales provided a series of specific recommendations on the identification of resources to deliver our strategy, improving arrangements for monitoring and reviewing our strategy and strengthening engagement opportunities. These recommendations are being addressed and progress will be reported through our Scrutiny Committees in 2025/26. A full copy of the report is available [here](#).

Digital Services

We currently have over 200 digital forms available via our website and app for the submission of service requests (English and Welsh).

Forms are available 24/7 and are passed on to the relevant service area, straight away. Work is ongoing to join systems up so that customers have better insight on the status of their request and what is being done, potentially avoiding the need for customers to get back in contact with the council to find out.

Over the past six years, there have been high levels of service requests, being raised by customers using the website and/or MCS app.

Data for 2020/21 and 2021/22 is considered an outlier, as is it covers the period affected by Covid-19, during which a number of temporary/new services were made available which include requests for: Key Worker Forms, Food Parcels, Application for FSM Pupils, Community Farm Booking, Recycling Centre Booking etc.

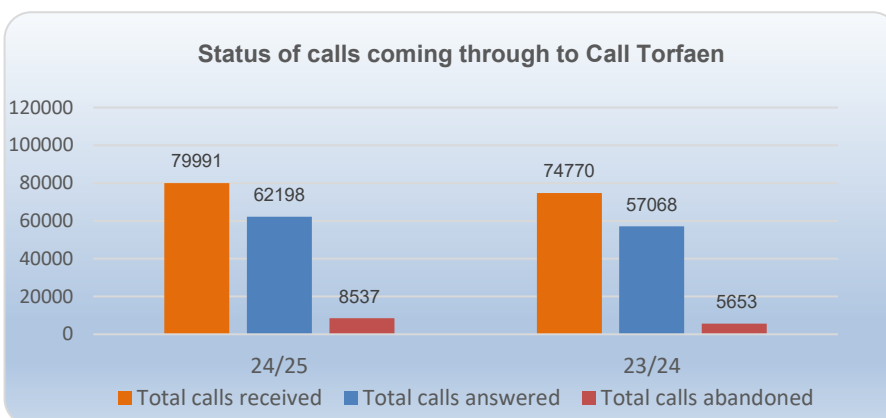
However, data does indicate the increased take up of digital services during Covid-19 has been sustained from 2022/23 onwards, particularly when compared to self-service volumes, pre-Covid-19. The percentage of service requests submitted online by customers versus those raised on a customer's behalf over the phone or in person by Customer Care was 71% in 2024/25. This compares with 74% in 2022/2023. This is important as there is a clear link between the availability, effectiveness and take-up of our digital services on demand management and Customer Care Performance. For example, by supporting and encouraging customers to self-serve digitally through the council's website and/or app, Customer Care resources can be more focussed on supporting digitally excluded customers, or those with more complex needs, over the phone or in-person (via our appointment provision).

Customer Care – Call Torfaen

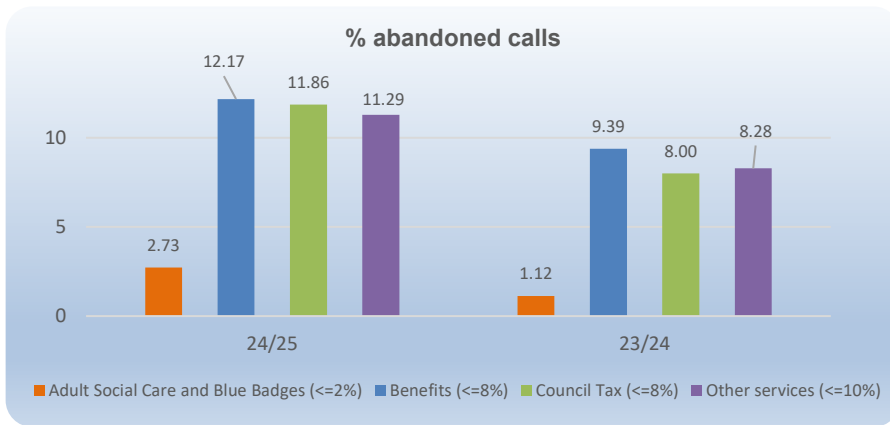
The majority of calls received into our Customer Care contact centre, relate to the following services:

- Adult Services and Blue Badges
- Revenues
- Benefits
- Economy and Environment
- Elections
- Welsh Language Calls
- Member Enquiries

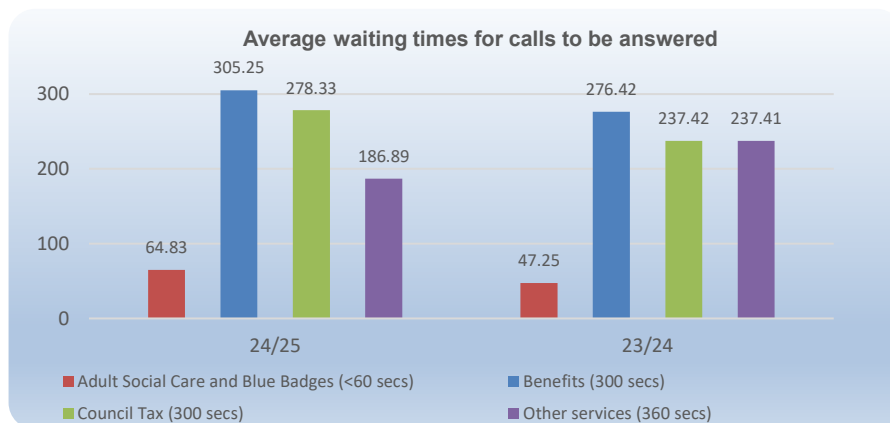
Performance of our Customer Care Centre is monitored and managed through the use of standard contact centre metrics, such as: Average Wait Times and Abandon Rates:



In comparison to last year, **the total number of calls received** has increased. Most positively, in spite of an increase in the number of calls received, the number of calls being answered is also higher, which demonstrates an improved customer journey.

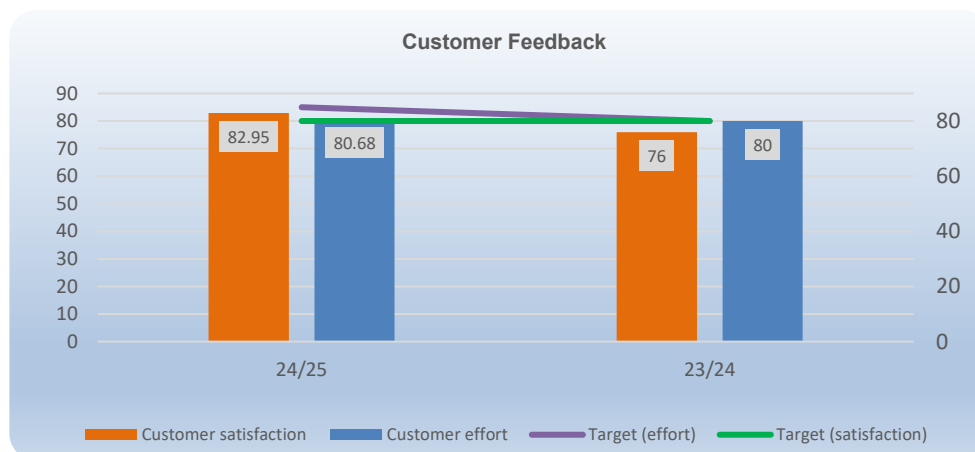


The number of **calls abandoned**, cannot be compared over the last two years, as the way in which we calculated this measured changed, due to the implementation of a new telephony system, in October 2024. Previously, we discounted calls that had abandoned within 60 seconds, but we have now since reduced this to <15 seconds.



Although the **average waiting time** has increased, so has the number of calls answered. With the introduction of the new telephony platform, the voicemail facility that was on adult services/Blue Badge calls was replaced by a call back facility. Figures suggest that customers are happy to wait to be answered, therefore we plan to review this measure in 25/26.

Feedback from our customers, who contact Call Torfaen direct, is very positive and generally scores a 5 (Excellent). Where improvements can be made however, is to better join-up back-office processes, as this is where negative comments have been reflected.



Going forward, we are planning to introduce an option for all customers contacting Call Torfaen, to opt in to providing feedback, after officers have handled their call. This will provide real time results, based on customer experience and will also be implemented alongside, other local authorities such as Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire and Newport, which will enable us to benchmark each other against, in future.

Customer effort seeks to capture how easy a customer found it to complete their interaction/transaction with our council and can be influenced by a number of factors, which are not necessarily under the control of our Customer Care – Call Torfaen Team.

Insight from feedback received throughout 24/25, highlights issues with customers finding information online and customers not receiving service updates. Work is therefore ongoing to develop our ability to

automatically inform customers of updates in some high-volume areas, such as highways, streetlights, drainage and trees, through the integration of service area systems with our CRM.

Further work is also being undertaken to analyse and share findings with service areas, to develop actionable activities and insights, which will improve customer experience from 2025/2026.

In conclusion, our continued focus on taking a digital first and customer focused approach to manage customer demand continues to support improvements in the customer experience and our operational delivery. Through the implementation of our Digital First Customer Strategy, we have continued to improve our self-service options while maintaining inclusive support for those with more complex needs. The use of evolving digital tools and solutions such as Artificial Intelligence, more joined-up systems and processes, enhanced feedback mechanisms, and ongoing service improvements reflect our commitment to putting residents at the heart of service design.

As we move into 2025/26, we remain dedicated to using data and insight to further enhance customer experience and ensure our services are accessible, equitable, and aligned with the needs of our communities.

Our Key Challenges...

Digital Transformation:

- Digital transformation is a key challenge because it requires organizations to fundamentally rethink how they operate, deliver services, and engage with stakeholders. It involves not just adopting new technologies, but also reshaping processes, upskilling staff, and overcoming cultural resistance to change. The complexity of integrating modern systems with older infrastructure, ensuring data security, and aligning transformation efforts with strategic goals makes it a demanding and often a disruptive journey.
- Delivering our strategy will require targeted investment, either on an invest-to-save basis or through the reinvestment of efficiencies identified, via our annual delivery plan. Business cases will be developed in line with our project management governance.
- We will also explore opportunities to secure additional grant funding to support our ambitions. Moving forward, we aim to accelerate digital-led service transformation by leveraging available tools, enabling staff to adopt more digital ways of working. To demonstrate impact, we will consistently apply our Benefit and Value framework to capture and communicate the benefits of digital transformation.

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 2025/26.

Our 2025/26 delivery plan has been developed considering new and existing key challenges and the progress made against our 2024/25 Delivery Plan.

Our **Annual Delivery Plan for 2025/26** 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.

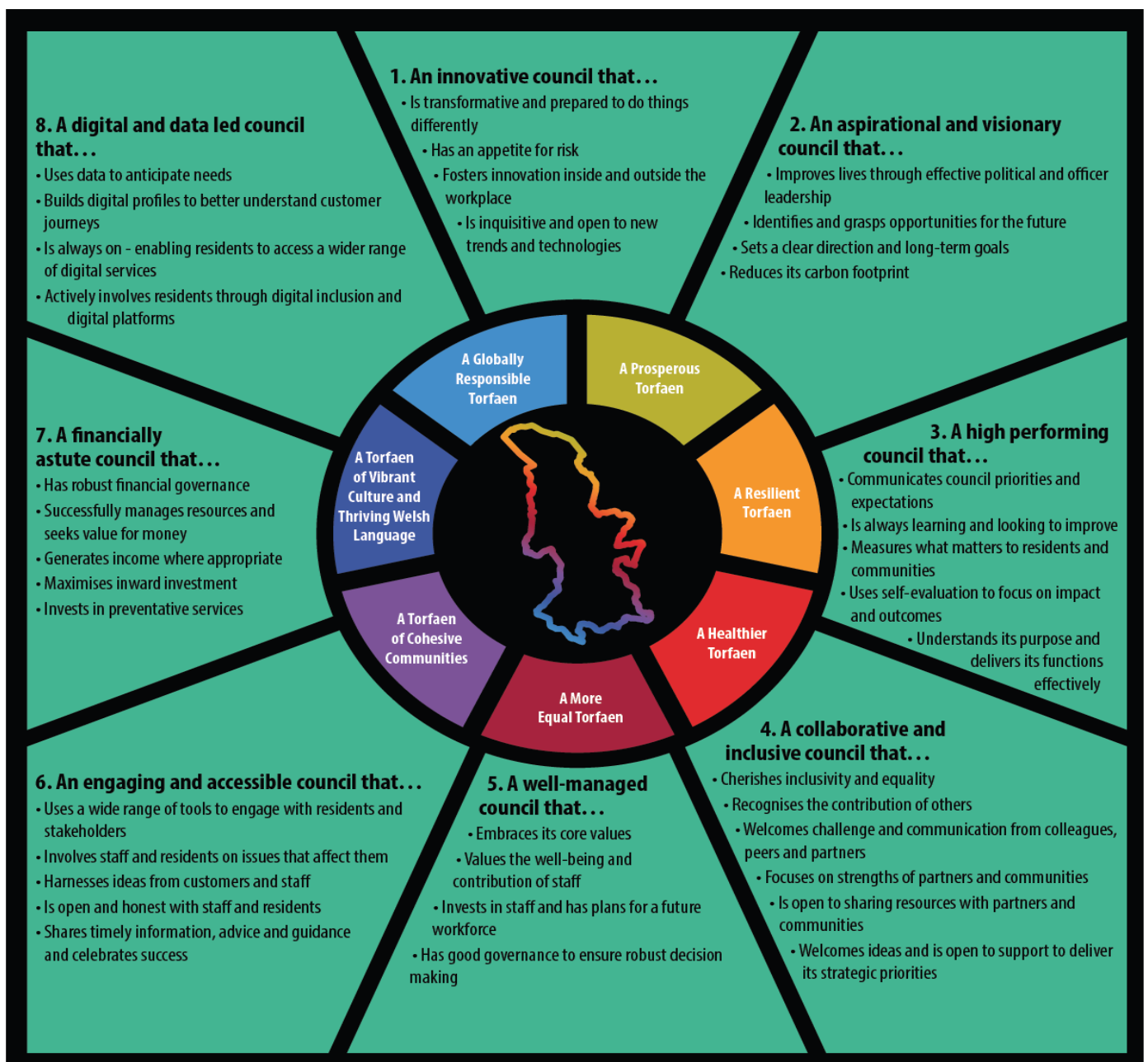
Throughout the year, we will use our service planning monitoring approach to monitor and demonstrate our progress on a regular basis, in order to evidence the success of our ambitions. This will be central to delivering upon our aspirations.

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

To support this endeavour, we developed framework comprising of a set of 8 characteristics, which we used 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 provide a focus for organisational development and to develop our annual self-assessment. This is the third year of reporting, against our Characteristics of an Outstanding Council.



The framework for an Outstanding Council was developed considering what is important from our own perspective, but we have also embraced the Well-Being of Future Generations Act 2015, considering 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 and further work was undertaken to better define our characteristics which has resulted in a set of descriptors for each supporting statement. This further helps us to explain what we believe outstanding looks like and to help us evaluate what areas we need to be concentrating on to help us get there. This enables the Council to be clear on the areas the Council is looking to improve in pursuit of being an outstanding council. These descriptors can be viewed [here](#).

Throughout the year, we have carried out various monitoring exercises against the activities we deemed areas for improvement or development within 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 Executive Team twice a year. 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 to become an outstanding Council.

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 within the following section of this report.

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

Key Developments

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. Indeed our recent Panel Performance Assessment concluded that, *'Faced with rising demand, particularly in social care and financial challenges the Council has adopted an ambitious plan to federate with Blaenau Gwent, adopt the Marmot principles and pursue Early Intervention and Prevention. This vision and strategy aims to tackle health inequality in the county and the sustainability challenge. This approach is innovative and of national interest'*. 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.

At the end of 2023, we set out a new way of working, which we branded as 'Rebel Torfaen'. This new way of working 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. The aim being to offer a broader and more diverse view and response to the challenges that we are facing.

Introducing an 'ideas culture', is enabling our staff to feel empowered to put their ideas forward for improving services, through a variety of staff led groups. During 2024/25 Rebel Torfaen Groups have been established and training provided to facilitators to support groups to undertake their work. The group has already explored some areas of service improvement. Internal review has determined that there is more work still to be done to embed the Rebel Torfaen Groups into the work of the Council. This will provide focus for the year ahead and will be taken forward as part of our work with Blaenau Gwent.

During 2024/25 we have focussed on developing the skills, knowledge and experience of all our staff so they are able to meet changing demands in service delivery and priorities. We have developed and implemented an online recruitment and induction process during the year, whilst also rolling out a new Learning and Development platform called Thinkqi that provides accessible training and development information to meet the needs of individuals and services

Improvement Activities for 2025/26

- Understand and Reduce Silo Working by: 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.
- Consider digital solutions to reduce time spent on administrative tasks
- Provide learners with a physical environment that promotes positive engagement and supports learning

2. An aspirational and visionary council that...

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

Key Developments

We have set a clear direction within our organisation and share our long-term goals for improving Well-Being across Torfaen. Our 5-year County Plan and longer term Master Plan does this by setting out clearly the outcomes/objectives/activities that we are aiming to achieve and is well understood and supported politically and organisationally.

The annual Delivery Plan for each financial year continues to be used to monitor and report our progress against our aspirations for the lifespan of the County Plan. We also continue to work alongside our partners in the Gwent Public Service Board (PSB) by 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.

Our Marmot Masterplan was adopted by full Council in October 2024 (as part of the 2023-24 Annual Self-Assessment and Well-Being Report). Since that point further work has been undertaken to ensure the agreed performance framework supporting our Masterplan has been incorporated into the Council's Service Plans. Organisational wide understanding of the Marmot Principles underpinning our Masterplan are regularly supported through e-mail bulletins.

We have secured £5 million research investment, aiming to tackle health inequalities and improve health outcomes for our residents. The Department of Health and Social Care, through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), is making this investment through the Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HDRCs) over the next 5 years.

HDRC Torfaen will see research and data experts work alongside the council and communities to examine how health and well-being outcomes can be improved in a sustainable way.

This is the latest stage in the council's mission to transform health and well-being inequalities in Torfaen, working with the health service, community councils, housing associations and charities in areas that have the biggest impact on people's long-term health outcomes.

We face a significant challenge to reverse the stark health inequalities that exist within our communities, therefore we are embracing this challenge to ensure resources are targeted to where it can have the greatest impact on lives. By improving research and collaboration, we can get to the root causes of inequality and devise interventions that can have the greatest impact on public health.

Our HDRC is progressing well, with the focus over 2024/25 being the development of the HDRC's research strategy and putting a team in place to deliver on our ambitions. Due to the progress made in the HDRC development year, the NIHR (National Institute of Health and Care Research) have awarded Torfaen full HDRC status, confirming a further 5 years of funding. A final recruitment drive at the end of 2024/25 has meant all but one posts have been successfully appointed.

Improvement Activities for 2025/26

- As part of our process of developing and implementing the Torfaen Deal, we will,
 - Initiate early help and prevention-first redesigns
 - 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.
- As part of the development of our federated model of working with Blaenau Gwent, we will,
 - Launch our deal with three-year transformation plan

3. A high performing council that...

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

Key Developments

Positive building blocks continue to be put into place to help us achieve our ambition of becoming a high performing council. We have reviewed the way in which we carry out our Residents Survey and capture other feedback from our customers - to ensure we receive the right feedback from the right customers at the right time. Having taken part in the development of a national resident's survey alongside other local authorities, the WLGA and Data Cymru, we made the survey available to residents towards the end of 2024 resulting in an excellent response rate. We now report every 6 months to our Leadership Team on any work undertaken that provides us with service user perspectives giving us greater insights on the views of our residents ensuring feedback we are receiving is being properly disseminated, understood and actioned.

We know that to take our aspiration of becoming a high performing Council to the next level we need to become more data and intelligence driven going forward. During the year we targeted a number of projects with further intensive support where greater knowledge and understanding of performance was needed. These have included:

- Work to safely reduce the number of children looked after,
- Remodelling of our Early Intervention and Prevention services,
- Development of systems to better understand energy usage and carbon emissions across the Council's estate, and
- Performance of our waste and recycling services.

The introduction of the of Power BI will support our aspiration to become a more data and intelligence driven organisation, through improving the accessibility and visibility of data. Having undertaken projects in service areas across the Council we are now looking at how this project can be delivered centrally by the Shared

Resource Service (SRS), our IT support provider. Moving into 2025/26 we will look to prioritise work to automate dashboards for reporting on the Council's Marmot Masterplan through Power BI.

During 2024/25 we have also been in the process of developing our Asset Management Strategy for the Council's estate to ensure we are utilising our buildings efficiently and appropriately. The process has been slightly delayed but the new Asset Management Strategy is now timetabled for approval in July.

Improvement Activities for 2025/26

- As part of the development of our federated model of working with Blaenau Gwent, we will...
 - Develop performance and risk management frameworks
- Explore ways of receiving better intelligence from residents by: Undertaking the annual Residents Survey and capturing service user perspectives from surveys and any other feedback from our customers via our communication channels to ensure we receive the right feedback from the right customers at the right time
- Identify gaps in our data by: Identify the data Directorates need to make evidence-based decisions to through addressing the most significant challenges in each Directorate.
- Improving our data capability – Continue to work on the introduction of Power BI - to support our aspiration to become a more data and intelligence driven organisation, through improving the accessibility and visibility of data
- Explore a range of mechanisms to improve public engagement in the scrutiny process, including, working with groups, such as the Youth Forum and Torfaen People's Panel to explore involvement in the scrutiny process
- Reviewing our estate to ensure we are utilising our buildings efficiently and appropriately by: Preparing a new comprehensive and integrated Five-Year Asset Management Strategy and Implementation/Investment Plan
- Work with HR to ensure the most effective operational use is made of the Civic Centre
- Review whether the new suite of systems and performance data for the Front Door and Reablement on the Balanced Scorecard is effectively tracking the performance of health & social care outcomes.
- We will be a digitally enabled and efficient council providing excellent customer service, allowing more residents to complete their transactions online. We will digitise Missed Bins and Assisted Collection Requests to be fully managed online (Linked to Work Stream 1 - Quality of Service)
- Improve outcomes for learners, in literacy and numeracy

4. A collaborative and inclusive council that...

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

Key Developments

We cherish and embrace inclusivity and equalities within the organisation. We embrace and celebrate our neurological differences within our council, because they enable us to perform a wide variety of job roles and deliver diverse services, to our communities.

In January 2025, we set up 'Diverse Minds', which is a Torfaen staffing group that has been created with the intention of providing a dedicated space where colleagues can share their experiences of neurodivergent conditions (dyslexia, ADHD, Autism etc) and discuss the impacts and challenges they may face in life and at work. The focus is around how people experience these conditions in the workplace, sharing strategies to alleviate some of the challenges, and recognising the positive aspects of these conditions.



Group members have the opportunity to share ideas and strategies on a regular basis, in an informal setting. We are proud of our ongoing commitment to neurodiversity through initiatives like Rebel Torfaen and Diverse Minds Torfaen. These programmes highlight our dedication to creating an inclusive environment where everyone can thrive.

Our adopted 'Community Wellbeing Strategy' in April 2024, sets out a new vision and mission for the Council to put 'communities' and 'well-being & prevention' as genuine cornerstones in the way we design our services. We have continued to encourage community involvement in practical changes in the borough, for example facilitating a discussion between Torfaen Voluntary Alliance (TVA), Bridges and Blaenavon 50+ Forum around the challenges of transportation in the north. Our Canal Co-Ordinator embraced being introduced to Torfaen Access Forum and members supported on-site decision making regarding both locations of new additional benches near Two Locks and Five Locks and practical installation considerations. We have an ongoing piece of work across the council to understand our volunteering approaches and practices, to inform a more co-ordinated approach going forward. In addition, the principles of the communities approach are informing service re-design across a number of teams linked to early intervention and prevention.

During the year we have been embedding our approach to participation 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 may impact on them. We have formed a new staff Participatory Group that will help ensure future engagement and consultations are well planned, inclusive and accessible. We've also continued to see a clear link between the promotion of social media campaigns for each consultation and a steady increase in the number of site registrations on our online engagement portal (Get Involved).



Closer Working in Blaenau Gwent, enables us to explore more collaborative opportunities across Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent to improve efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability, setting out options for both councils to decide on ways forward over short, medium and longer terms. In January 2025 councillors in Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen agreed to work together as equal partners, providing the opportunity for sharing resources and expertise to address common challenges, and improve outcomes for residents. This included the formal appointment of a Joint Chief Executive. This has led to the establishment of a joint Executive Leadership Team, with 3 of the new directors being shared positions across both Councils. All directors are looking at how the new structures will look and further discussions and engagement has taken place with staff and trade unions.

A policy framework will establish the contractual arrangements for joint roles, and for a transformation team that will support and facilitate the delivery of the transformation plan. Local Partnerships who facilitated the initial Discovery review are developing a strategic outline case, including a financial model and criteria for service alignment and prioritisation.

Improvement Activities for 2025/26

- As part of the development of our federated model of working with Blaenau Gwent we will,

- Work with Welsh Government & WLGA networks to gain support, share learning and influence national policy direction
- As part of our process of developing and implementing the Torfaen Deal, we will,
 - Establish strategic partnerships with Welsh Government, WLGA, and public sector partners to align on Marmot prevention, equity, and resilience
- 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.
- 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.
- Closer Working in Blaenau Gwent: Continue to maximise collaborative opportunities across Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent, strengthening integration to improve efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.
- Ensure that specified training is provided to staff online and face to face and reporting mechanisms are in place, in the required mandatory subjects including Safeguarding, VAWDASV, Equalities and Diversity
- Establish a baseline of recruitment data and assess the diversity of job applicants and recipients to understand what further interventions are required
- Creation of and participation in research networks to share research ideas, best practice, processes, learning and co-production of future research

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 Developments

The well-being and contribution of our staff is valued and 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.

A Workforce Strategy delivery plan has been developed and embedded into our Service Plans. Frequent performance reporting takes place into our Leadership Team. Some of the key activities that have been taken forward in the last year have been the,

- implementation of an apprenticeship programme,
- the development of well-being programme for staff that provides targeted support to managers where issues are highlighted. This will include the roll out of Mental Health First Aiders and specific targeted events for men's mental health and financial wellbeing, and
- The introduction of a new performance appraisal system following the input from 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. The new approach went live during 2025.

In February 2025, as part of the National Apprentice week, we launched our latest group of Torfaen apprentices who joined our organisation. Our apprentices are part of a wider career development

programme, which already has over 100 employees working towards new qualifications. We recognise the important role our apprentices will play in helping us to deliver excellent services and help us to deliver upon our priorities, now and in the future. We will be recruiting the next group of apprentices, after the school exams in the summer of 2025.

Our staff survey undertaken in November 2024 provided a further opportunity to assess progress made as an employer. We were pleased to note a significant positive improvements were recorded for large number of the survey questions including the following:

- I get job satisfaction from my job
- There is a positive working atmosphere within the council
- I believe there is opportunity to develop my career at Torfaen
- My Manager/Supervisor sets a good example for others to follow
- My manager treats me with dignity, courtesy and respect
- I feel confident that issues raised in this survey will be acted upon and make a difference
- I believe the employee survey is still an important way to have my say

Furthermore, at the end of March 2025, our Council was named as one of the best employers by the Financial Times. Around 20,000 employees in the UK were surveyed by the FT and Statista for the inaugural edition of this annual list. Workers were asked to give their opinions on statements about their current employer in areas including working conditions, potential for development and company image. Our Council was one of only four local authorities within Great Britain to be included, in the top 500 list.

Following our decision to formalise our approach to working more closely with Blaenau Gwent there is a need to ensure that managerial and decision-making arrangements are both consistent and effective. Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent staff have been trained in the use of a diagnostic tool that will be used to assess the effectiveness of current and future organisational structures within and across both organisations. Organisational structural changes are underway to support the development of the federated model of working between Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen. However, there is still further work needed through the transformation programme to deliver structural changes within services as they are reviewed.

Governance arrangements continue to remain strong within our organisation - the annual governance statement (AGS) confirms 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 and our Panel Performance Assessment demonstrates there is good governance structures and processes in place, that supports robust decision making.

Improvement Activities for 2025/26

- As part of the development of our federated model of working with Blaenau Gwent...
 - Implement a new group at the Executive Team aimed at developing and aligning governance and assurance structures and processes across Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent councils.
 - Co-designed cultural values and workforce development plans
- As part of our process of developing and implementing the Torfaen Deal:
 - Launch Our Deal and the Marmot-aligned vision, embed and integrate the five missions of the Deal in the Council's work and ensure staff and partner organisations are trained to understand what the Deal means for them.
- Identify gaps in our data by: Identifying the data Directorates need to make evidence based decisions to through addressing the most significant challenges in each Directorate
- Strengthening our workforce effectively by: Undertaking a recruitment campaign and developing an apprentice support network"
- Strengthening our workforce effectively by: Developing a Wellbeing Programme for all staff
- Support the delivery of the Council's statutory Panel Performance Assessment (required once every electoral cycle under the Local Government and Elections Act 2021).
- Ensure that managerial and decision-making arrangements are effective by: Reviewing and adjusting the Council's organisational structures and its spans and layers with the support of the Local Government Association and utilising the Decision-Making Accountability Tool.
- Develop recruitment and retention for all workers in Torfaen. To enable a stable workforce to be able to be maintained

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 Developments

There are important 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.

The challenges we face are complex. They involve multiple factors, inter-dependencies, and a variety of uncertainties, and our success in tackling them, will require more than just our individual hard work, motivation, or even talent.

Engaging with our residents to inform council services....



At the beginning of December 2024, we launched a resident's survey, as part of a Wales-wide listening exercise.

'Let's Talk: Living in Torfaen' survey gave an opportunity for our residents to share their opinions on life, in the borough and their experiences of using our council services

We were one of a number of councils across Wales running the survey produced by the Data Cymru, on behalf of the Welsh Local Government Association.

Our residents' views are important to us, as they will help us to shape local services and ways in which we deliver them. The questions asked in the survey are also being asked across Wales, by many other local councils, who are also running this national survey.

Our People's Panel....

In September 2024, our residents were invited to take part in discussions, ahead of next year's council budget.

Residents were able to comment on our draft 2025/26 budget and were invited to return again in the New Year, after Welsh Government's budget settlement has been announced.

At this public meeting, our Head of Financial Services outlined how we set our annual budget, taking into account anticipated funding, predicted cost increases and expected demand for services.



Our People's Panel also had the opportunity to discuss and put forward ideas on how improvements could be made to our Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees, to make it easier for residents to be involved.

Our Youth Forum....

Over the past year, we have introduced new mechanisms by which the council can engage with more young people. These include a new larger Youth Forum made up of pupils from the borough's six secondary schools, the formation of a new Torfaen Youth Alliance, made up of representatives from a wide range of young people's organisations, and closer working relationships with schools' participation officers.

The aim of our Youth Alliance is to provide young people with a forum to come together to discuss issues, such as health and well-being, and any other issues that are important to them. They are able to share opinions and work together to provide a clear and strong voice back to our Council, and other partner organisations, to help ensure their views and needs are heard.

Our Youth Forum is open to young people, aged between 11 and 18.

At the end of October 2024, our Torfaen Youth Forum elected a new chair and two deputy chairs for the year ahead.

A year 11 pupil from Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw was elected chair, after pledging prioritise young people's mental well-being and support forum members to lobby their schools for positive change and pupils from Torfaen Learning Zone and West Monmouth School, were voted in as deputy chairs.

After the election, our 15 members of the Youth Forum discussed health and well-being challenges facing young people in Torfaen and reviewed the council's draft Children and Young People's Participation Strategy.

This strategy is due to go to Cabinet later in the year and, if approved, will set the standard for how all council services will consult and consider young people's opinions in the future.



The forum also agreed their work programme for the next year. They agreed to focus on litter, bullying and the health risks from vaping.

A separate junior forum for primary school pupils is also being developed.

The outcome of our first youth alliance meeting will be reported back into Council, who will then follow-up with the youth alliance, at its next meeting in early 2025.

Our Senior Leadership Team and Education Leaders have made listening to young people a corporate priority. Earlier this year, the senior leadership team invited young people to "take over" several senior council roles for the day and make decisions on issues including behaviour in schools and the environment. In the New Year, the Rebel Torfaen initiative to increase cognitive diversity in the decision-making process will also be expanded to include a new Rebel Youth group.

Representatives from youth forums across Gwent, also agreed to work more closely together in a new initiative.

Our Torfaen Youth Forum Deputy Chairs hosted the first regional meeting at Civic Centre, in Pontypool, in December 2024, welcoming representatives from Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly youth forums and discussed the topics their forums were interested in, such as bullying, mental health, vaping and littering.

They shared examples of their forums' work and discussed how to reach more young people, such as through school councils, junior forums and social media.

The regional youth forum is a great way for local youth forums to discuss issues that are common to young people in their areas and to share ideas. It is also a good platform for understanding how young people are

able to get their voices heard on a national level, such as through the Welsh Youth Parliament or the UK Youth Parliament.

The group has agreed to meet four times a year. The next regional meeting, which will include Newport and Monmouthshire representatives, will meet in the spring.

Later on in December, a draft Children and Young People's Participation Strategy was also discussed by Members of our Cross-Cutting, Resources and Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This meeting was attended by youth forum members.

Young people's take over day....

At the end of May 2024, a group of our secondary school pupils swapped their classrooms for our Council's boardroom, as part of the council's first-ever Young People's Take Over Day.

14 pupils from Croesyceiliog School, Cwmbran High School and West Monmouth School applied to take over five leadership roles with the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Children and Families Director, Adult and Communities Director and Head of Communications, Engagement and Civil Contingencies.

The day began with a Leadership Team meeting where they agreed a series of actions on school attendance/behaviour and our "Raise the Rate" waste recycling campaign.

Pupils also met with our Human Resources Team to help shape our council's work experience and apprenticeship programme and got the chance to quiz our Chief Executive about what is being done to support schools and pupils, especially those with mental or emotional issues.

The day concluded with a Policy Development Forum where they met and made recommendations to our Cabinet Members.

It is vital we take young people's views into account when we are making decisions and we are hoping that this will become an annual event and form part of a range of measures to engage with our young people, including through our Youth Forum and our new Youth Alliance.

Improvement Activities for 2025/26

- As part of our process of developing and implementing the Torfaen Deal:
 - o Develop the Torfaen Deal following in depth stakeholder engagement and public consultation and engagement.
 - o Begin the process of organisational transformation through Rebel Culture.
 - o Establish relationships with the communities to deliver communications & engagement
- Provide training sessions in each directorate on Public Participation strategy and Children's Participation strategy by: Providing online training and reference materials which teams can use ahead of engaging the public and young people. This will be supported by workshops with directorates.
- Rebel BGT will align activity to BGT's strategic work programme. 'Rebel BGT' staff groups will be formed to address corporate challenges including suggested topics such as Investing in People, the use of AI and Sharing Power with communities.
- A communication campaign will inform stakeholders about the benefits of the work of Rebel BGT. This includes establishing a feedback mechanism to gather input from stakeholders about effectiveness and areas for improvement and by celebrating successes and learning from challenges.
- Rebel Youth – Ensure Rebel BGT incorporates the decision making of younger groups through Rebel Youth
 - 'Rebel Youth BGT' will aim to bring young people together to tackle the issues that young people face in both authorities.
- Work with service areas across the Council and local communities across the Council to identify and carry out research

7. A financially astute Council that...

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

Key Developments

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.

Our most recent 'Financial Sustainability' study from Audit Wales concluded positively with no recommendations and overall conclusion that the *'Council has appropriate arrangements in place to support its financial sustainability and is focused on developing and implementing actions that will generate sufficient savings to address its identified budget funding gap in a timely and sustainable way'*.

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.

The work of the Internal Audit team in delivering the annual audit plan ensures that an annual opinion on the governance systems operating within the council can be produced and reported to Governance & Audit Committee. The opinion is included in the Head of Internal Audit annual report which feeds into the Annual Governance Statement.

The Councils Counter Fraud arrangements were reviewed during the year by Audit Wales who concluded the Councils focus on strong governance and controls provides a sound foundation for preventing and detecting fraud but there is scope to strengthen some aspects of its arrangements.

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 Finance Officers who are relied upon for expert advice and guidance.

'Project Apollo' continues to be our council-wide approach to addressing the shortfall in our medium-term financial plan, developed under 8 separate workstreams. The approach represents a far more strategic approach to delivering savings linked to our direction of travel i.e. the communities approach, early intervention and prevention and our new federated model, rather than the traditional model of cutting services to save money.

Our Portfolio Management Office (PMO) is working with teams across the Council to support the planning, initiation and delivery of strategic and larger scale programmes, projects, service improvements and transformation, ensuring we invest in the right things and deliver high quality services to maximise outcomes for the people and communities of Torfaen. We have a pipeline / project mandate process that has established a process for projects to be assessed and tested to provide assurances that each project will have the desired impact. The process therefore improves the way we are prioritising Capital investment and securing value for money from that spend. During the year we have sought to improve how we prioritise Capital investment by, linking the PMO's work programme to service planning and project mandates. This

has resulted in us establishing governance structures, ensuring projects and programmes align with corporate objectives and decisions are made in accordance with established policies and procedures.

We have added greater resilience and stability to our procurement function, as a result of our collaboration agreement with Cardiff City Council. During the year we have been working with Ardal (Cardiff Council procurement service), to deliver a Socially Responsible Procurement Policy that promotes the procurement of goods and services in accordance with the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2024, improving well-being through supporting the delivery of the aspirations in our County Plan. Although the Common policy across Ardal partners has been slightly delayed, implementation is expected by August 2025

Audit Wales have reviewed the Council's [arrangements for commissioning services](#) assessing whether we have in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources? Overall Audit Wales concluded that the lack of corporate commissioning arrangements has limited our ability to gain assurance we are securing value for money. Not having corporate commissioning arrangements has limited our assurance that all service areas consider key factors to help us consistently deliver value for money. A commissioning framework for Torfaen is under development and the recommendations from our Audit Wales review will be used to further improve our approach. We will take this forward as a priority into 2025/26, to ensure arrangements for commissioning services become more robust.

We remain strong at attracting inward investment, including successful bids for external funding, resulting in new grant funding that will bring investment into our communities.

Improvement Activities for 2025/26

- As part of the development of our federated model of working with Blaenau Gwent, we will,
 - Initiate financial modelling and resource strategies
- Review and implement revised capital programme management and governance arrangements, and embed processes for prioritisation of capital resources.
- Develop a strategy for balancing the medium-term financial position which sets out the actions required in individual years, via Project Apollo and specific service areas, to address the financial challenge.
- Regular forward monitor of school budgets to reduce risk of deficits and provide deficit recovery support, where required.
- Introduce a corporate approach to commissioning services, to enable the Council to assess the value for money of those services
- Implement the new national commissioning framework guidance to ensure that our commissioned services are demonstrating high quality outcomes and value for money.
- Socially Responsible Procurement: Work with Ardal (Cardiff Council procurement service), to deliver a Socially Responsible Procurement Policy that promotes the procurement of goods and services in accordance with the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2024, improving well-being through supporting the delivery of the aspirations in our County Plan.

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

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

Key Developments

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. 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. A critical part of delivering our Digital Strategy is ensuring our staff are able and equipped to get the most out of the digital tools available to them. This project has been a good test bed for our new Rebel Torfaen group with staff being asked to give their

input into the digital flooding programme. Staff feedback has led to the development of an innovation space for staff to pitch and consider ideas, and a review of our Customer App.

We have also taken forward the work to design and agree a digital skills programme to increase capabilities of our workforce targeting. The focus of this work is on, the skills all staff should have, the Minimum Viable Capabilities we need at an organisational and service area level in order to deliver digital transformation, and the skills our managers and leaders need to better understand digital possibilities and apply to business problems/opportunities. A working group of staff from HR, Organisational Development and Digital, Data and Technology representatives has been established to take this activity forward. Training material is being developed and will available through our online training platform (Thinqi).

Our Digital first Customer Strategy means we are focussed on increasing the proportion of transactions completed online, using customer feedback to drive further improvements. Over 300 online forms (76% of forms) are now available online with work ongoing to develop and improve the user experience (such as Bulky Waste bookings). The insight taken from customer satisfaction and effort surveys are used to inform priority areas for improvement going forward. This has include the revision and improvement of 23 of our Streetscene forms towards the end of 2024/25.

We are also taking forward the development of solutions to automate and streamline business processes contributing to increased productivity and improved outcomes for our customers. Positive progress is being made in relation to this activity with a number of projects underway or completed. For example use of Copilot to automate the taking of meeting minutes; automation of Welsh Language Translation requests; use of Gov.Notify to automate and streamline communication and engagement with course participants in Adult Community Learning; use of Microsoft Forms and Power Platform to automate the induction process for new starters in Waste and reduce administrative requirements. Copilot is now also being used to save significant amounts of time for social workers carrying out routine administration tasks, and the automated delivery of tasks to Streetscene officers which has removed manual tasks, printing and unnecessary travel to pick up job sheets.

Improvement Activities for 2025/26

- As part of the development of our federated model of working with Blaenau Gwent, we will,
 - Develop solutions for operating systems to enable Federation
- As part of our process of developing and implementing the Torfaen Deal, we will,
 - Begin digital and data infrastructure upgrades.
- 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.
- Explore ways of taking staff and residents with us on our digital journey by: Working 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.
- Identify gaps in our data by: Identify the data Directorates need to make evidence based decisions to through addressing the most significant challenges in each Directorate
- Designing and agreeing a digital skills programme to increase capabilities of our workforce targeting:
 - Skills all staff should have,
 - The Minimum Viable Capabilities we need at an organisational and service area level in order to deliver digital transformation, and
- Skills our managers and leaders need to better understand digital possibilities and apply to business problems/opportunities.
- Designing and agreeing a digital skills programme to increase capabilities of our workforce targeting:
 - Skills all staff should have,
 - The Minimum Viable Capabilities we need at an organisational and service area level in order to deliver digital transformation, and
- Skills our managers and leaders need to better understand digital possibilities and apply to business problems/opportunities.
- Use solutions available to us to automate and streamline business processes contributing to increased productivity and improved outcomes for our customers.
- Provide Customer Care insight re: areas of high demand to inform areas requiring service/process redesign and to prioritise delivery.

- Increase the number of Service Requests (SR's) raised in MCS directly by the customer (i.e. online self service)

c. Panel Performance Assessment

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 inevitability 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](#).

6. 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.

The Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023

The Social Partnership Duty in Wales, introduced under the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023, places a statutory obligation on certain public bodies—including local authorities—to engage meaningfully with recognised trade unions or other staff representatives when setting well-being

developing policy in a way that avoids future problems, or harnessing the lived experience of protected groups such as our Torfaen Access Forum – essentially providing free consultancy – our EDI work is not about ideology but rather effectively meeting our various legal responsibilities and often about getting things right, first time.

Our Annual Equality Report is not due to be published until 31st March 2026. However, content has been collated and will be presented to Council by the end of 2025. Actions within our Strategic Equality Plan for 2024-2028 were inserted into Service Plans and progress therefore subjected to regular performance monitoring.

Key points regarding our organisation wide performance and a few of the impacts of this work:

- We met the statutory deadline of 31st March 2025 for publishing our Annual Equality Report 2023-2024
- We made good progress against numerous actions which were published in the action plan that sits under our new Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) for 2024-2028.
- Feedback from the Equality and Human Rights Commission on the Council's compliance and wider local government compliance with the PSED was received in July 2025. Our feedback was generally positive but highlighted some minor oversights to be addressed and the need for the Council to identify an Equality Objective specifically around the Socio-economic Duty.
- We developed the internal Participatory Group to ensure expectations of engagement with protected groups, as listed in the Council's Public Participation Strategy. 45 officers from a range of directorates have attended the meetings, receiving guidance on inclusive consultation and support to ensure diverse community voices are heard.
- The Diverse Minds staff and Member network was born, which is developing our understanding of neurodiversity. A toolkit is being developed to support staff and managers, which will increase both efficiency and wellbeing of both neurodivergent and neurotypical staff. Meetings have also sparked discussion on how technology can be distributed to maximise its potential benefits, potentially funded by Access To Work funding.
- A review of recruitment data in relation to ethnicity highlighted positive findings, indicating a lack of discrimination.
- After reviewing and changing our processes so that the Equalities Officer is more promptly informed of equalities related corporate complaints, staff are being better supported to understand the implications of any complaints and respond accordingly, including adjusting practices where necessary.
- We responded punctually to an increased number of complaints and Freedom of Information requests (the former will be detailed in the Annual Equality Report).
- Torfaen Veterans Hub has been developed, becoming constituted and securing funding. It currently supports up to 50 veterans each week
- Informed by local domestic homicide reviews involving people aged 60+, our Age Friendly Communities officer worked in collaboration with Newport City Council and Gwent Regional VAWDASV Team to contribute to the production of an Older Persons Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Awareness video.

Collaboration across Gwent and beyond - Our work on equality, diversity and inclusion is informed by the Ways of Working outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the principles of collaboration and co-production. Staff continued to attend equality officer meeting coordinated by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to support good practice across Wales, worked closely with the West Gwent Cohesion Team and equality officers across Gwent and participated in Proud Councils network activities to outwardly show that Torfaen is a place for all, where discrimination is not tolerated.

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 the Welsh language and facilitate the use of the Welsh language more widely in the Borough.

The Welsh Language Strategy, was approved by Council on 27 February 2024, outlining our strategic direction during 2024 – 2029, that will assist the growth of the Welsh language within the Borough, support the Welsh Government’s vision of a million Welsh speakers by 2050 and the Councils Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP). Our progress against this strategy is reported to Council each year, within our [Welsh Language Standards Annual Report](#).



During 2024/25 we have:

- **5 Year Promotion Strategy** – We continues to work with Menter Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen a Mynwy, and other partner organisations to deliver the outcomes of our 5-year strategy (2024 – 2029). There are 5 key areas covered by the Strategy : 1) Legislation and Policy 2) Education 3) The Community 4) Services Delivery 5) The Workplace. The Strategy is closely aligned to our Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP) and the Welsh Government Strategy – Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers. The Welsh Language Commissioner will be conducting a review of Promotion Strategies across Wales during 2025/2026.
- **Staff Skill Audit** - We have many staff who have gone through Welsh medium education in the borough, but we know that often skills are forgotten, and confidence lost. We would like to support our staff to continue to use those extremely valuable life skills. This will also allow us to understand where we have skills gaps so we can look to fill these by recruiting and/or training in the future. At the beginning of 2024, a new campaign was launched to encourage our staff to record their language skills on iFOR (our HR system) using the CEFR levels. The 7 skill levels ranging from pure beginner (A1) to ‘fluent’ (C2) are linked to a recognised qualification and other assessment frameworks, in order to align us with other public sector organisations.
- **Removing Barriers** - In April 2024, our internal charging of directorates for translations was removed, easing the barriers faced by managers in balancing budget pressures and compliance with the Welsh language standards. Additionally, we transitioned to an electronic system for requesting and tracking translations, streamlining the process for both staff and translators. These changes have enabled us to place greater emphasis on promoting the Welsh language and enhancing our Welsh language services for residents. During the past 2 years the Council has been involved in a Welsh Government pilot scheme. A campaign which aims to encourage people from all walks of life to choose Welsh-medium education for their children. The ‘Cymraeg i Bawb’ (Welsh for All) partnership has been so successful that it is now being pushed across Wales with the help of Mentrau Iaith Cymru.
- **Cultural Events** - To celebrate Welsh culture in partnership with Menter Iaith Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen a Mynwy, the Council continues to support the ‘Torf-hwyl’ festival. A music, storytelling and activities event aimed at promoting Welsh culture among children and young people, regardless of their background. The event was held at Ysgol Panteg in 2024/2025. The Council also promoted awareness of St David’s Day, Santes Dwynwen, and the Eisteddfod throughout the year. This was achieved primarily through internal staff communications, themed menus at the Inspire Café, and the display of various flags outside the Civic Centre.
- **Policy Development** – The Council has strengthened its Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) following advice from the Welsh Language Commissioner. The assessment now references the “conscientious effort” needed for all policy decisions. A new on-line training module has been developed to sit alongside the IIA and assist managers and senior officers on making a “conscientious effort” when assessing the positive and adverse effects of the policy, both directly and in-directly on the Welsh language. The need to assess impacts earlier in the policy development process remains key to the process. We have worked with colleagues from Corporate Development to ensure this is made clear to all officers involved in completing the IIA.

[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 Environment (Wales) Act 2016, 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 through actions set out in our Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Plan, and our Climate and Nature Emergency Action Plan.

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 eight 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, ancient 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 Torfaen's Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Plan sets out how we will retain and enhance the borough's rich and varied biodiversity in accordance with our statutory duty set out in Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The plan, facilitated by the Torfaen Biodiversity Partnership, includes an action plan to ensure we meet our specific statutory obligations.

We have a key statutory role in development management to provide ecological expertise and advice through the planning process to ensure our obligations as a Local Authority as set out in Planning policy Wales 12, are fully met.

During 2024/25 we have:

- Designated a new Nature Reserve – Blaenserchan Local Nature Reserve – official opening to take place on 5th July with a bioblitz event.
- Managed 8 local nature reserves for the benefit of biodiversity and ecological resilience, as well people and communities.
- Through the Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Local Nature Partnership, began preparations for cross-boundary projects in accordance with the objectives in our NRAP.
- Delivered bespoke training to the Property Team – 'Bats and the Built Environment' to reduce any potential breaches in protected species legislation in project work.
- Began the process of undertaking a review of our Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Plan – currently going through consultation.
- Supported the delivery of the Torfaen Climate and Nature Emergency Strategy and Action Plan.
- 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 – including new ponds, tree planting, grassland restoration and community orchards and gardens.
- Planted 9700 trees
- Continued a conservation grazing programme across several sites including Llwyn Celyn LNR, Garn Lakes LNR, Llantarnam Abbey Meadow site, The Boating Lake Orchard, Pentwyn Field, Llantarnam Grasslands SINC, Ty Coch Grasslands and Llanyrafon Manor.
- Continued grassland restoration and management work for biodiversity.
- Organised public events to celebrate Wales Nature Week, including Go Wild Event held in Pontypool Park
- Worked closely with our Communication Team to release information to our residents about biodiversity related stories/news
- Provided on-going advice to the land use planning process in terms of its statutory requirement to protect and enhance biodiversity through planning decisions.
- A review of the criteria used to designate SINC sites.
- The Purchase of Coed Meyric Moel, an area of woodland and grassland near Henllys Local Nature Reserve
- Mapping of INNS
- Nature Festival held in a Primary school with support from our Litter and Fly-tipping prevention officer

- Partnership work with community councils, e.g. installing swift boxes in Pontypool Town Centre
- Film produced for Valleys Regional Park project promoting the work we do for biodiversity across our borough. Other short films/videos
- Film produced on the value of wetlands
- The Council's Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee has reviewed our approach to greenspace management, taking into account the Council's biodiversity duty.

7. The Cost of our Services (our 2024/25 budget)

Our Revenue Budget

Our financial performance for 2024/25 is contained within our draft [Statement of Accounts | Torfaen County Borough Council](#)

The 2024/25 revenue budget was approved by Council in February 2024, with a £342.2 million gross revenue budget that was financed from £110.3 million of service specific government grants, fees and charges for services and other funding & contributions. The net budget of £232 million was funded by £178.4 million of unhypothecated funding from Welsh Government and £53.4 million by Council Tax.



The 2024/25 revenue outturn produced a net favourable position, after contributions to specific reserves, of £834,000 against its £232 million budget. This was achieved whilst also not drawing down contributions from the General Fund Balance to support various pressures, in Adult Services and Education. In providing its day-to-day services the Council (including its schools) incurred a gross actual spend of £359.9 million, comprising employee costs of £173.0 million, running costs of £177.1 million and capital costs of £9.8 million.

The primary favourable reasons for the outturn position are summarised as follows:

- Favourable saving from staff vacancies / turnover across all service areas.
- The receipt of two large grants from Welsh Government to cover general pressures.
- Receipt of additional specific grant funding over that budgeted for.
- The receipt of interest income in connection with the Shared Prosperity Fund.
- An overall Council Tax surplus compared to that budgeted for.
- Lower demand than budgeted for in relation to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- An in-year saving against the budget for the school leavers scheme.
- Completion of a review of the balance sheet and write back of appropriate entries.

Despite the overall positive position, there were pressures relating to:

- The number and cost of children's social care placements.
- The number and cost of adult social care third party placements.
- Additional costs associated with the Waste and Recycling service.
- A shortfall of Housing Benefit Subsidy arising from the use of temporary B&B accommodation to support homelessness cases.

Our Capital Budget

In addition to the revenue spending the Council also spent £41 million on its assets through its 2024/25 capital programme, which included spending on the following schemes:

Implementation of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme through:

- extending the Crownbridge school and building the new Maendy primary school.
- delivery of Shared Prosperity Fund schemes, including new 3G pitches.
- completion of the park and ride facility at Pontypool & New Inn train station.
- refurbishment of Greenmeadow Community Farm.
- continued investment in the highway and building estate infrastructure.

- investment in energy efficiency measures.
- continued investment in disabled facility grants to support the most vulnerable citizens.

8. Consulting on our Performance

Public Participation

A participation strategy for Children and Young People was approved by our Cabinet Members, following the adoption of a Public Participation Strategy in 2022.

Over the past year, there was 28,726 page visits to our Get Involved Torfaen online engagement hub. There were 205 new registrations, bringing the total to 902 subscribers. These subscribers receive regular newsletters informing them of new consultations and updates about ones that have closed.

We have published 27 consultations, which had a total of 6,858 contributions. Highlights included:

- Play Sufficiency – 1,902 visits – 1,165 surveys
- Budget 2025/26 – 754 visits – 233 surveys
- Parks Management – 797 visits 438 surveys
- Rights of Way – 500 visits – 311 surveys
- Pontypool Market – 371 visits – 164 surveys
- Food Strategy – 207 visits – 86 surveys
- Cemeteries – 519 visits – 258 surveys
- Sport & Leisure – 348 visits – 227 surveys
- Cwmbran Outdoor Gym – 383 visits – 178 surveys
- 20mph Review – 680 visits – 256 surveys
- Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO) – 438 visits – 255 surveys

Between November and January 2024, we relaunched our new residents survey after a gap of two years. The survey was based on a new WLGA Data Cymru survey which enables local authorities to benchmark their results against other councils in Wales. The survey had 3,300 visits and was completed 2,049 times.

All consultations were to 3,700 contacts on the media releases mailing list, including regional and local press. In addition, they were promoted in Weekly News bulletins to just under 15,000 residents each time. These have also been sent to all of our Ward Members.

For each consultation, service teams engaged other primary stakeholders and 39 face-to-face engagement events.

Our Corporate Engagement Team regularly engages with our citizen forums, including a youth forum, youth alliance and three 50+ forums, and special interest groups, include the Torfaen Access Forum, which supports people with disabilities and the canal volunteers' group, Bridge 46.

In September 2024, the council's new look 'Get Involved' Torfaen People's Panel was set up. Following a low take-up, the panel was extended to include all citizen forums and community groups. It now has 73 members willing to take part in more in-depth consultations.

A staff Participatory Group has also been established to improve public consultation and engagement, putting an emphasis on informing the public how their contributions have influenced or changed policies or strategies.

Meetings are held every six weeks and have included discussions about data protection, accessibility and best practice for consultations.

Every quarter, we also reach out to key service areas for feedback on their service user perspectives, including business-as-usual feedback and annual service user surveys.

During 2024/25, subscribers to our digital press release and newsletters increased by 578, but the number of subscriptions fell. In total we have 25,239 subscribers and 75,675 subscriptions. We sent 506 bulletins, which had an average open rate was 38% and a 3.9% click rate per bulletin.

Our press releases regularly make it into the local newspapers (South Wales Argus and Pontypool Free Press) and occasionally BBC Wales and ITV Wales which helps to communicate examples of our performance to a wider audience.

Social media remains the primary way in which our Communications Team engages directly with our residents.

We have:

- Nearly 43,000 followers on our 3 of our main social media sites – Facebook, 23k, X 15.6k, Instagram 3.1k (70% female / 30% male).
- Our posts got 8.5m impressions and 7.5m reach.
- A growing council WhatsApp channel.

We produced two editions of Torfaen Talks during 2024/25 which is very popular with older residents and those who do not follow us online.

In September, we introduced a new Eco Echo magazine for schools. This termly magazine aims to promote and encourage school recycling and environmentally friendly practices.

Responding to Complaints

We will always aim to provide a first-class service to the residents and businesses operating in Torfaen but sometimes we may not always get it right. When this is not the case, we encourage people to tell us through a complaint and to let us know if they feel we have let them down in any way. If we have been unable to informally resolve a complaint at the point that it is expressed, a formal complaint for investigation can be lodged. Our complaints process is designed to help us:

- Put things right for the complainant.
- Make sure we don't make the mistake again, and
- Improve our services for everyone.

We regularly review, monitor and report on our complaints process throughout the year. This review includes looking at the number of complaints received across our services and reviewing how efficiently and effectively they are resolved. We constantly assess this information and use the outcomes of complaints to look where improvements could be made to our policies and procedures.

During the year, an internal audit of Corporate and Social Care Complaints was undertaken and full assurance was provided.

Each year, an annual complaints report is received and reviewed by the Council's [Governance and Audit Committee](#) prior to being endorsed by Cabinet. The Governance and Audit Committee play a vital statutory role in challenging the effectiveness of the Council's complaints process ensuring it is delivering the intended outcomes.

An overview of our performance is set out below:

Complaints received and responded to								
Financial Year	Stage 1	Late Reply	% on time	Stage 2	Late reply	% on time	PSOW*	PSOW Investigation

2022/23	135	4	97.04%	3	0	100%	18	0
2023/24	224	6	97.3%	10	3	70%	14	0
2024/25	166	2	98.8%	20	3	85%	18	0

There was a decrease in stage one complaints in 2024/25, with a significant reduction for Waste services following updates to collection arrangements. There was also marked improvements in communication across other service areas, helping to prevent enquiries becoming complaints.

It is important that complainants fully exhaust the complaints process prior to contacting the PSOW, the team has therefore proactively recorded a higher number of stage 2 complaints across both processes. The slight increase in complaints made to the PSOW is reflective of this. It is also worth noting that there were multiple submissions from two/three complainants which are counted separately in the Ombudsman's figures. There were no investigations undertaken by the Public Services Ombudsman. The number of complaints received by the PSOW remains very low in comparison to other local authorities and this gives us confidence that our own internal processes are fair and robust.

More information on the performance of our complaints process is set out within our latest [Annual Complaints report](#).

9. Delivering and Monitoring Progress

Since introducing our new County Plan we have been in the process of significantly developing its approach to Performance Management, Service Planning and Risk Management, aimed at supporting the delivery of the Council's new County Plan.

Our revised approach to performance has also been in response to the Local Government and Elections Act 2021 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.

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 service plans have been developed to ensure that there is 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 approach therefore continues to be carefully nurtured, supported and challenged, as it develops, ensuring it is working as expected, across the Council.

We have begun making use of available data that is on the Data Cymru hub; to benchmark our performance and more recently we have been working with other local authorities and Data Cymru, in order to further develop this system and the availability of comparative information. Further comparative information will be available going forward, through a common resident's survey that will be rolled out across Wales in the year ahead.

Our Executive and Leadership Teams will also continue to focus on performance, through an agreed twelve weekly performance schedule. This provides a specific focus on each directorate's performance, relating to

risks, progress against our County Plan well-being objectives and many other “deep dive” investigations into areas of performance causing concern.

The Council's Policy Development Forum (Cabinet and Leadership Team) will also continue to receive quarterly progress updates against the County Plan Delivery Plan. These are now supplemented with a quarterly update on the Council's budget position. Work on enhancing, reporting and monitoring of performance will continue, 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.

Our County Plan Delivery Plan update reports are received by full Council every 6 months, one half yearly and another at the end of the financial year, ensuring the Council is as transparent and accountable as possible.

In the coming months we will start to give early consideration to both the challenges and the areas we will prioritise in the forthcoming year, alongside how we can strengthen our process for service planning. 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.

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 it is to ensure the Council is achieving and maintaining good corporate governance.

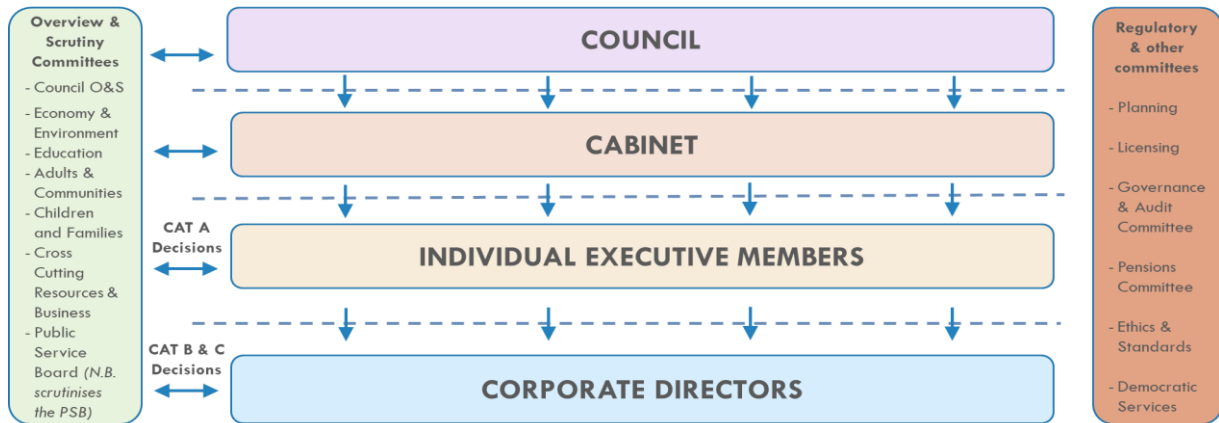
The Governance and Audit Committee also has oversight of the process for producing the Annual Governance Statement (AGS), providing a mechanism for review prior to adoption by full Council. The AGS is integral to the Council's Self-Assessment process and is a key source of evidence when considering the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

TORFAEN COUNCIL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE



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.

10. The Year Ahead and Beyond

Our report highlights not only the key developments we are planning to deliver, but also the significant challenges we are actively addressing as an organisation.

At the heart of our approach are a small number of core principles that guide everything we do - principles that are fundamental to ensuring future generations can thrive. These concepts reflect our long-term vision and our commitment to sustainable, inclusive progress across our communities.

Our Community Well-Being Strategy provides a focus on delivering greater resilience to our communities and residents, resulting in much greater independence and less chance of individuals relying on costly council interventions in their lives.

We are committed to our aim of radically change the way we operate, making 'communities' and 'wellbeing & prevention' genuine cornerstones in the way we design our services so that we can empower our communities to be healthier, better connected and more equal.

We recognise that our success depends on shifting power and placing trust in our communities. By empowering residents with meaningful decision-making authority over how and where resources are allocated locally, we are giving people a real voice in shaping the services that matter most to them. This approach encourages collaboration between our residents, partners and the council, working together as equal partners to design, deliver, and evaluate services. It's a powerful step toward building stronger, more resilient communities and ensuring that public services truly reflect the needs and aspirations of the people they serve.

Our approach is rooted in giving communities greater autonomy over the resources that shape their lives. By transferring control of budgets and assets previously held by the council, we are enabling local people

to take the lead in shaping their futures. But we're going further than simply allowing communities to decide how public funds are allocated, we're involving them directly in the design and delivery of public services. This marks a shift toward a culture of collaboration between the council and the communities of Torfaen, replacing traditional top-down models with meaningful partnerships. It's about unlocking the strengths within our communities, fostering trust, and empowering both public servants and residents to work together with shared purpose and mutual respect.

We've already taken important steps toward achieving our goals. Over the past year, the council has remodelled services to place greater emphasis on early intervention and prevention. However, we recognise that prevention is not the responsibility of the council alone. It requires a collective effort across our organisation and with our partners and communities. That's why we're embedding a prevention-first mindset into all our services and every aspect of our work, taking proactive measures to address the root causes of inequality. This means designing services that intervene early, invest in community strengths, and align resources to reduce future demand.

By working together, we can build a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable future for everyone in Torfaen.

Over the coming period, every directorate and service area will identify opportunities to prevent demand growing, promote wellbeing, and close gaps in outcomes. We will measure success not just by what we fix, but by what we prevent, ensuring that our actions today build a fairer, healthier, and more resilient communities for tomorrow.

The next phase of our approach is the development of a new relationship between the council and our communities. We will be introducing our 'Deal', a social contract built on trust, shared responsibility, and collective action. Our 'Deal' is not a project. It's a movement. A mindset. A commitment to doing things differently, by working together.

At its heart, our Deal is about sharing power, through devolved budgets, local decision-making, and a belief that communities know best what works for them. It's about working in partnership to reduce health inequalities, improve wellbeing, and build resilient, empowered, strong communities. It's about building something better together. Loving our borough, taking pride in our communities, and unlocking the potential that already exists in every street, every neighbourhood, and every person.

Our 'Deal' will be delivered through 5 shared missions:

- **Mission One: Early Years - Building Bright Futures**
Support every child to thrive by laying strong foundations for lifelong learning and development - addressing cognitive, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing
- **Mission Two: Inspiring Lifelong Learning, Ambition and Resilience**
Empower people of all ages to lead informed, independent, and healthy lives, fostering ambition and resilience throughout life
- **Mission Three: Wellbeing Through Community Leadership**
Partner with communities to harness local strengths and improve wellbeing, reducing reliance on statutory services through proactive, community-led solutions
- **Mission Four: Thriving Economy, Vibrant Places**
Drive sustainable economic growth and create well-connected, vibrant communities where people and businesses can flourish
- **Mission Five: Empowered Communities, Shared Power and Success**
Work alongside communities to capture their energy and ambition, co-designing services and creating conditions for resilience, self-reliance, and shared success

A year ago, the Council gave a commitment to becoming a Marmot Council and in doing so to sustainably reduce in inequality and inequity in Torfaen. Our approach recognises that well-being is not just about individual choices or biology. The conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age have a profound impact on their well-being. We must therefore go beyond healthcare to improve health in

developing whole-system approaches that tackle the root causes of our problems, developing tailored, inclusive, and long-term solutions.

The Deal is our mechanism for bringing this aspiration to life. We are committed to be a learning authority, acting upon the feedback we receive through close working with the public, partners and our regulators as well as our recent Council wide peer review (panel performance assessment). It is therefore important to continually test whether our actions are delivering the intended benefits

Alongside the new 'Deal' we will implement a new evaluation framework for our work, further strengthening our ongoing and continuous self-assessment and review processes in order to have the greatest impact on improving the well-being of our residents.

Our vision is for a future without inequality, where everyone thrives in a fair, inclusive, and resilient community achieved through create lasting change by building trust, fostering shared responsibility, and driving innovation through strong collaboration between the council, residents, and partners. These plans are ambitious and our approach alongside our partners in Blaenau Gwent Council continue to set us aside to other Councils in Wales



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