



Torfaen Council Panel Performance Assessment

Asesiad Perfformiad Panel Cyngor Torfaen

May 2025 / Mai 2025



1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 In accordance with the performance duties under the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, Torfaen County Borough Council commissioned a Panel Performance Assessment (PPA) via the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).
- 1.2 The onsite assessment was completed over a four-day period concluding on 2nd May 2025 with a feedback presentation provided to the Council outlining the key findings detailed within this report.
- 1.3 The assessment was undertaken based on the Council's agreed scoping document and the WLGA's PPA methodology, which was developed with the sector. The PPA methodology provides an overarching framework: the lines of enquiry are not prescriptive but provide guidance to the panel on the areas that could be explored to meet the statutory duty. However, the extent to which the panel explores those areas should be proportionate to the Council's scope but sufficient to enable the panel to form a conclusion.
- 1.4 In accordance with the statutory guidance the PPA is not an audit or an inspection and does not seek to duplicate work undertaken by regulators and other bodies. Whilst the panel has undertaken a corporate assessment, this assessment was not in-depth and should be considered alongside other sources of assurance such as the Council's own self-assessment, internal audit reviews, external audit, and regulatory reviews.
- 1.5 In preparing for the PPA, the Council scoped their requirements to maximise the value and impact of the assessment to the Council. The specific areas of focus identified by the Council are reflected in paragraph 3.2.
- 1.6 This report provides a summary overview of the conclusions of the panel reported by exception.

2. Peer Team

- 2.1 The following peers were commissioned by the WLGA to undertake the assessment. Selection of the peers was agreed and at the discretion of the Council, based on suitability of skills and experience:
 - Independent Chair: Jack Straw – Independent Consultant, former Chief Executive of Swansea City Council &, former Chief Executive of Swansea Local Health Board.
 - Senior Member Peer: Cllr Peter Bradbury – City of Cardiff Council, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Tackling Poverty & Supporting Young People.
 - Senior Officer Peer: Diane Reynolds, Powys County Council, Director of Economic Development & Growth.
 - Wider Public, Private, or Voluntary Sector Peer: Sara Powys - Professional trainer and consultant with multi sector management and leadership experience.

- 2.2 The panel were supported by the WLGA in advance of the onsite phase by Anne-Marie McCafferty (Senior Policy Officer - Improvement), Emily Griffiths (Senior Support Officer), during the pre-onsite and onsite phases, and Cerith Thomas (Senior Policy Officer (Improvement – Democratic Services) supported the panel during and after the onsite phase.

3 Scope and Approach

- 3.1 As of 1st July 2024, Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC) and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (BGCBC) shared a Chief Executive for an initial period of up to nine months. As part of this arrangement, both Councils agreed to a 'discovery phase' mandate, which involved investigating the potential benefits and challenges of closer collaboration. Subsequently, in [January 2025](#) both Councils agreed to the permanent appointment of a Joint Chief Executive and to proceed to the next phase. The [Discovery Report: Future Alignment of The County Borough Councils of Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen](#) set out full details of the work undertaken so far through the discovery phase and the next steps in the development of greater alignment between both Councils following the joint appointment.
- 3.2 The Council has commissioned the Peer Assessment Panel to provide an honest and impartial assessment of the current corporate health of the organisation and help inform future service delivery of services.
- 3.3 The PPA will examine the Councils' position in relation to the three performance duties, which is the extent to which the Council is:
- Exercising its functions effectively.
 - Using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively; and
 - Has effective governance in place for securing the above.
- 3.4 The Council has requested the following themes be utilised to inform the assessment:
- The agreed federated approach with Blaenau Gwent Council.
 - The Council's work on the Marmot and the Communities approach, and
 - The Council's associated model for Early Intervention and Prevention (EIP)
- 3.5 Throughout the PPA leadership, culture, and readiness to deliver will feature. A key element was to assess the extent to which associated risks were identified and managed.
- 3.6 In undertaking the assessment, the panel conducted a desktop review of Council's documents, data, external reports, and other relevant intelligence. The onsite stage of the review involved a series of individual meetings and focus groups with the following stakeholders:
- Leader of the Council and the Cabinet.
 - Chief Executive Officer and Corporate Leadership Team including S151 Officer.

Torfaen PPA Final Report

- Heads of Service and Team Managers.
- Leaders of the Opposition Group.
- Backbench Elected Members.
- Staff focus groups.
- Trade Unions.
- Partner Agencies.
- Business Fora.
- Children and young people.
- Residents Groups.
- Vice Chair: Standards Committee.
- Chair/Vice Chair of the 5 Scrutiny Committees.
- Chair/Vice Chair of Governance & Audit Committee.
- Chair/Vice Chair Democratic Services Committee.

Executive Summary

4. Overall Conclusions

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 The Council has established appropriate and effective governance systems and operates with a notable "golden thread of positivity."
- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 There is an opportunity to leverage the 'Apollo Model' to deliver the transformation programme and deal with wicked issues.
- 4.6 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.

5. Local Context

- 5.1 Torfaen County Borough Council is the third smallest borough in Wales and is situated just north of the M4 corridor bordered by Monmouthshire, Newport, Caerphilly, and Blaenau Gwent. Torfaen is also the third most densely populated local authority area in Wales and has a population of over 94,000 with 18 Electoral Wards represented by 40 Councillors. It is a varied, 12-mile-long valley from Blaenavon in the north to Cwmbran in the south and the central town and civic centre of Pontypool. In common with the other Welsh valleys, the area has a great iron, steel, and coal mining heritage.

Blaenavon

- 5.2 Blaenavon was established to exploit the coal and iron resources in the area. Characterised by a dramatic environment rich in cultural and historic assets, and ecological diversity, the cultural landscape around Blaenavon was described by

UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 2000. One of only four World Heritage Sites in Wales, UNESCO recognised that the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape is one of the best areas in the world where the full social, economic, and technological process of industrialisation through iron and coal production can be studied and understood.

- 5.3 Attracting thousands of visitors each year, the area has many important heritage features linked to its industrial past and the town is now famous for the Big Pit National Coal Museum, its 18th century ironworks, Blaenavon Heritage Railway, Workmen's Hall, and the World Heritage Centre. The dramatic natural environment and proximity to the Brecon Beacons National Park also brings many walkers, cyclists, and outdoor enthusiasts to the area.

Cwmbran

- 5.4 Based around a network of older villages, Cwmbran was designated the first new town in Wales in 1949. It was designed as a distinctive and modern town offering new opportunities for its residents. The landscape of Cwmbran is different to that Blaenavon or Pontypool, with the town nestled between the impressive backdrop of the south Wales coalfield and the Usk valley.
- 5.5 Cwmbran Shopping is the main retail centre attracting visitors from far afield and with its bus and train station, the town centre acts as Torfaen's main public transport hub. Although compact, it has an extensive range of services from the pedestrianised retail area to leisure, theatre, and arts. Today, Cwmbran remains a popular place to live, providing a successful town centre, excellent road and transport links, a high-quality natural environment and varied employment opportunities. You can also visit the popular Greenmeadow Community Farm and enjoy miles of open green spaces that follow the course of the Afon Lwyd and lead to the boating lake.

Pontypool

- 5.6 Pontypool is located at the centre of Torfaen and was built around industrial wealth with a strong claim to be the first 'industrial town' in Wales. Iron furnaces and forges were operating from as early as the 1400s. Between the 1700s and 1900s the area thrived as a major centre for iron and tin-plated 'Japanware' products, and a bustling market town emerged. The town has strong links to the Hanbury family, which remain today and who were responsible in the 19th century for creating most of the town's important civic and religious buildings, as well as Pontypool Park.
- 5.7 Today, Pontypool is known for its distinctive architectural heritage, its listed park and Italian gardens, its Victorian market, and a strong sense of community spirit. The town centre provides retail and employment and there are many opportunities for recreation and indoor and outdoor exercise, with the Pontypool Active Living Centre and Pontypool Ski Centre located within Pontypool Park.
- 5.8 Walkers can choose to follow the Afon Lwyd River, explore the upland landscapes, and visit the Folly or Shell Grotto or take in the tranquility of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal. The canal basin at Pontymoile makes an excellent starting point for exploring along the towpath. Llandegfedd reservoir straddles the Torfaen and

Monmouthshire border and provides a great location for water sports, bird watching, fishing, and walking.

5.9 Headline data - Health and Wellbeing in Torfaen¹

- **Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE):** Torfaen residents experience a lower healthy life expectancy compared to the UK average. Alarming, HLE for females has shown a downward trend, reaching only 54.9 years for males and 53.3 years for females in 2018-2020, significantly below the Welsh averages of 60.3 years for males and 59.6 years for females.
- **Health-Related Behaviours:** A higher proportion of adults in Torfaen report being smokers (15% vs. Wales average of 13%) and engaging in less than 30 minutes of exercise per week (40% vs. Wales average of 30%).
- **Socioeconomic Deprivation:** A significant proportion (32%) of Torfaen's Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) fall within the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. Furthermore, 19% of households in Torfaen experience material deprivation, exceeding the Welsh average of 16%.
- **Social Isolation:** Loneliness is more prevalent in Torfaen, with 17% of residents reporting feeling lonely compared to the Welsh average of 13%.
- **Vulnerable Children:** As of March 2024, 355 children in Torfaen were in care, representing approximately 1 in 50 children in the area.
- **Educational Attainment:** A higher percentage (12.4%) of working-aged adults in Torfaen lack qualifications compared to the Welsh average of 8.3%.
- **Social Cohesion:** Only 54% of Torfaen residents feel their area is one where people from different backgrounds get along well and treat each other with respect, significantly lower than the Welsh average of 64%.

The Future Implications of Current Health and Wellbeing Trends.

These statistics not only highlight current disparities but also foreshadow concerning future outcomes if left unaddressed:

- **Avoidable Mortality:** Individuals residing in the most deprived areas of Torfaen are approximately 3.5 times more likely to die from avoidable causes compared to those in the least deprived areas, underscoring the profound impact of socioeconomic factors on life chances.
- **Impact of Loneliness:** The elevated levels of loneliness in Torfaen are likely to contribute to poorer health outcomes, including both physical and mental health deterioration, placing further strain on individuals and healthcare services.

¹ Details extracted from PPA scoping document and relevant to the additional local areas of focus

- **Burden of Preventable Diseases:** The higher rates of physical inactivity and smoking, coupled with potential issues around diet and nutrition, are likely to fuel a continued rise in non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and obesity, impacting quality of life and healthcare costs.
- **Long-Term Disadvantage:** The significant proportion of working-aged adults without qualifications suggests a higher likelihood of facing lifelong limitations in employment opportunities, income, and overall well-being, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage.
- **Challenges for Looked-After Children:** The higher number of children in care in Torfaen indicates a greater need for support and intervention to mitigate the poorer outcomes often experienced by this vulnerable population across various aspects of their lives.
- **Economic and Social Consequences:** Lower levels of perceived social cohesion and educational attainment can hinder the development of a thriving local economy, limiting opportunities for education, skills development, employment, social connections, and overall quality of life for residents.
- **Link Between Income Deprivation and Health:** The prevalence of income deprivation in Torfaen is likely associated with a higher incidence of various health conditions, including serious mental illness, obesity, diabetes, and learning disabilities, further exacerbating health inequalities.

Political Structure

- 5.10 Torfaen County Borough Council was established following local government reorganisation on 1st April 1996. Following the local government elections in 2022, the Council's membership has now been reduced from 44 to 40 Councillors. Torfaen's membership is currently represented by the following political parties:

- Labour	- 28
- The Independent Group	- 5
- Reform UK Wales Group	- 4
- Torfaen Independent Group	- 3

- 5.11 The Cabinet in Torfaen Council comprises 8 executive members (including the Leader and Deputy Leader). Each cabinet member has a specific area of responsibility. The Leader of the Council is Councillor Anthony Hunt. The Deputy Leader is Cllr Richard Clark.
- 5.12 The full Council is the highest decision-making body within the Council, with decisions delegated down by Council through Cabinet, to individual executive members (Category A decisions) and Strategic Directors/Heads of Service (Category B and C decisions).
- 5.13 The Council is composed of 4 Directorates that sit under the Chief Executive, Steven Vickers. The 4 directorates are: Economy and Environment, Children and Family Services, Adults and Communities, and Resources each led by a Strategic Director.

The Strategic Director for Adults and Communities is also the Deputy Chief Executive. The Director of Resources is also the s.151 Officer.

- 5.14 These 5 officers, along with the Council's Director of Corporate Services (who reports to the Director of Resources), and the Shared Resource Service (SRS) Chief Officer form the Council's Executive Team.
- 5.15 Each directorate has its own management structure composed of numerous services and teams who have responsibility for delivering the services and discharging the duties the Council is responsible for. This structure was developed following the appointment of the new Chief Executive in the summer of 2021. It is designed to promote cross Council working and ownership for the delivery the Council's County Plan.

6. Strengths and Areas of Innovation

- 6.1 As highlighted in the report's overall conclusion, the Council benefits from exceptional widespread support for its Leader and Chief Executive and there are positive member-officer relationships built on a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. These are undoubted strengths that are essential to the implementation of the federated model, the Marmot approach and the EIP programme, which are themselves innovative.
- 6.2 **Marmot** – A Marmot region is a network of local stakeholders committed to tackling inequity through action on the social determinants of health. They are influenced by 8 policy areas namely, early years development, education and lifelong learning and skills development, employment, living standards, communities, ill-health prevention, discrimination, and environmental sustainability. The Council is working with strategic partners in Gwent as part of the Public Services Board (PSB), to take a regional approach to well-being. The range of inequity in Gwent led it to becoming the first Marmot region in Wales. Working with the University College of London, Institute of Health Equity (IHE), the Council has sought to rapidly develop and embed a social determinants approach to reducing health inequality. A recent IHE report exposed the extent of health inequity throughout Gwent and recommended regional and local change strategies where more targeted interventions could be made, and a more proportionate universal approach would lead to effective improvements in health equity. The report included a set of Marmot indicators that could be used to help support the evaluation of the Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HRDC) over time as well as supporting decision making processes as potential benefits measures. Torfaen whilst operating within this regional context has decided to proceed at pace to operationalise the marmot principles rather than being tied to the pace of others.
- 6.3 The **EIP** programme prevention model is being fundamentally redesigned, including its staffing structure, to provide the "right support to the right people at the right time." Rather than the traditional approach of assuming a need for a service provision at the outset, this approach prioritises community-led prevention, recognising local networks are often the primary source of wellbeing support. In collaboration with the

HDRC, the new model encourages communities to address their specific wellbeing needs by providing capacity building, research, data, and financial resources. This shift transitions the Council from a service-driven to a systems-driven prevention strategy. Consequently, all requests for targeted prevention will be centrally triaged, commissioned, and delivered through a dedicated prevention hub, rather than individual council services.

- 6.4 The Council demonstrates good practice, notably the developing and innovative approaches of:
- 6.5 **Rebel Torfaen** – This programme engages staff within the Council aimed at aligning all Council activities with its overall goals and aspirations. The initiative emphasises using research and evidence to inform decisions, involving local people in health research priorities, and sharing and evaluating interventions.
- 6.6 **Future Torfaen, the County Plan** - highlights the Council's ambitions between 2022- 2027. It sets out key delivery activities for each year that will help teams and services achieve those ambitions. It identifies four key themes that underpin nine key priorities namely, wellbeing, connectivity, sustainability, culture and heritage.
- 6.7 **Diverse Minds** – The Council actively promotes neurodiversity initiatives of which this group is an important part.
- 6.8 **Torfaen Youth Forum** – Open to young people aged between 11 and 18 who live in Torfaen. It offers young people the opportunity to tell the Council about issues that are important to them and to contribute to decisions the Council makes.
- 6.9 **Rebel Youth** – This initiative is part of the Council's wider efforts to involve young people in decision-making. The programme gives secondary school students the opportunity to shadow senior roles and contribute to the Council's strategic direction, particularly on issues affecting young people.
- 6.10 To maximise their impact, these initiatives should be strategically aligned with core priorities and objectives and integrated into existing management arrangements.
- 6.11 **The project 'Apollo'** approach to managing finance and transformation corporately represents a positive practice. It is intended to address the shortfall in the Council's medium term financial plan and has been developed under 8 separate workstreams with the aim of driving down costs and increased efficiency.
- 6.12 The Council has entered into a **Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HDRC)** data to inform future action. The Council established the first HDRC in Wales with £5million funding from the National Institute of Health Care Research. It is a collaboration between the Council, University of South Wales, Administrative Data Research (ADR) Wales and the Aneurin Bevan Health Board. It will conduct research and gather and link local-level data to inform any decisions impacting on the wellbeing system. The HDRC will go live during 2025/26 and is intended to inform 3 tiers of decision-making, namely:

- Community leader decisions at the hyper-local level – enabling community leaders to direct their assets where they can make the biggest difference to local wellbeing priorities e.g., schools, clubs, groups, and volunteers.
- Local Authority decisions – How it shapes the Council's services in communities.
- Integrated Services Partnership Board (ISPB) decisions – Established in Torfaen to make decisions on the wellbeing system involving health, police, charities, Council, and its county voluntary Council (CVC).

7. National and Local Challenges

- 7.1 Torfaen Council, like all councils in Wales, is facing significant financial sustainability challenges, despite that in 2023/24 the Council underspent by £227,000 against its £223 million budget, which was around 0.1% of the budget when the economy and environment were the key financial pressures.
- 7.2 The forecast for 2024/25 shows a potential overspend of £1.3m, without further mitigation. The key area of pressure is Children and Family Services with a £3.4m overspend. Schools' balances are projected to fall from £5.9m to £2.9m in 2024/25. The Council reports that of the 2024/25 budget savings agreed 83% of mitigations are expected to be achieved in full, and the main area of concern is within Children & Family Services.
- 7.3 The total budget gap over the four-year period from 2026/27 is approximately £9.2m. The areas where the most significant cost pressures are expected to be; pay-related costs across schools and non-schools, demand pressures, particularly in areas such as Adult Social Care, and non-pay pressures, a substantial proportion of which will relate to inflationary cost increases.
- 7.4 Work will be undertaken to identify the mitigations required in order to bridge the gap and allow for any required investment over and above the unavoidable pressures already identified.
- 7.5 The panel noted the October 2024 Audit Wales Financial Sustainability Assessment review of Torfaen County Borough Council found 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.

8. Overview of Findings

- 8.1 The panel, acting jointly, is required to assess the extent to which the Council is meeting the three performance duties, that is, the extent to which:
1. it is exercising its functions effectively.
 2. it is using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively; and
 3. it has effective governance in place for securing the above.

- 8.2 The panel was able to triangulate and gather evidence from diverse sources that provided assurance that the Council is generally meeting its performance duties. The evidence included internal reports and documentation, stakeholder feedback, performance data and metrics, and audit and regulatory reports.
- 8.3 The key findings are detailed below, along with the panel's recommended areas for improvement, focusing on the areas that would have the greatest impact on progress.

The extent to which the Council is exercising its functions effectively: Key findings:

- 8.4 The Council carries out its functions in the context of the challenges facing all local authorities in Wales. 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.

The extent to which the Council is using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively: Key findings.

- 8.5 The Council has in place a range of activities that seeks to ensure that its functions are carried out efficiently and effectively both now and, in the future, including;
- A commitment to Phase 2 Federation.
 - A commitment to deliver against the Marmot principles, and its developing, delivery plan.
 - A commitment to implement its EIP programme and its emerging performance framework.
 - Its 'Apollo' programme that deals with the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), transformation and financial sustainability.
- 8.6 These arrangements should be further enhanced by,
- The 'Apollo' project more clearly addressing the costs of transformation arising from any and all programmes.
 - The 'Apollo' programme agree 'wicked issues' with Cabinet that need to be resolved within its remit.
 - The Corporate Risk Register to identify and manage the risks associated with federation, Marmot, EIP given they are now established strategies and should be regularly monitored by senior leadership and Cabinet. The entire system of risk management at Portfolio Management Office (PMO), departmental and corporate level be reviewed and ensure consistency, completeness, and simplicity. Points of escalation be determined and the risk register to be overseen by senior leadership and regularly reviewed by Cabinet.
 - The strategic elements of federation, EIP and Marmot need to be fully embedded into appropriate programme and project management arrangements.

The extent to which the Council has effective governance in place: Key findings.

- 8.7 The panel concluded that the Council's governance framework and operations are generally sound. Their key findings are as follows:
- 8.8 **Corporate Plan:** The Council has in place a County Plan that meets the requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015. This is supplemented by the adoption of the Marmot principles and the characteristics of an outstanding Council.
- 8.9 **Governance Framework:** Which incorporates the standards and processes required for good governance. A policy framework that facilitates the integrity of Council operations is in place. A scheme of delegation sets out clearly the responsibility for decision making at an appropriate level.
- 8.10 **Regulatory Compliance:** There are no current concerns highlighted by regulators. There was strong evidence provided, including from stakeholders, that good governance is the norm. The effectiveness of scrutiny and the Governance & Audit Committee were particularly noteworthy.

Recommended actions for improvement.

- 8.11 In addition to the three performance duties, the Council requested peer insight on the following areas as part of the panel assessment.
- The agreed federated approach with Blaenau Gwent Council,
 - The Council's work on the Marmot and the Communities approach, and
 - The Council's associated model for Early Intervention and Prevention (EIP).
- 8.12 The panel's key findings and areas for improvement are as follows.

Federation

- 8.13 The adoption of the federated approach is an appropriate and innovative response to the sustainability challenges faced by the whole public sector in Wales. While the risk of doing nothing outweighs the risks associated with progressing Phase 2 – Discovery. There are clearly risks and issues associated with an extended period of implementation of Phase 2.
- 8.14 Therefore, it is recommended that:

1	• 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.
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Marmot and Communities

- 8.15 Broadly speaking the awareness of the Marmot principles is high, however at this stage of the design the implications and specific activity are not as clear. Faced with inevitable resource constraints the Council should develop rapidly a delivery plan that supplements the “guide all that we do” principle. Namely,

2	• 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 operational changes.
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Early Intervention and Prevention (EIP)

- 8.16 The EIP programme is again well understood by most stakeholders at the principal level. Given where Torfaen is on the development path there is a lack of clarity as to the implications at the specific service provision level. It is recommended that:

3	• The developing draft of the performance framework is given visibility across the organisation as it evolves. • A 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.
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- 8.17 Clarification is required within the strategy for both EIP and Marmot as to whether the target follows a social model, an economic model, or a mix. Stakeholders want to be clear as to the driving force for the change at a programme level and individual activity level.

Communications and Engagement

- 8.18 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.

4	• 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 5 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.
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Organisational Development (OD) and Workforce Wellbeing

8.19 The extent of change faced by all in Torfaen is extensive and the pace is inevitability rapid. It is recommended that:

5	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.
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8.20 The Panel's recommendations were informed by the following rationale:

8.21 Whilst the core principles of EIP are generally understood, there is a need for greater specificity in their application. Children Looked After (CLA) plans provide an example of how to achieve this clarity. Stakeholders have raised concerns regarding long-term funding and the potential impact of service restructuring on capacity and the inappropriateness of hot desking. To demonstrate the value of the EIP programme, it is crucial to develop a robust evidence base, including compelling narratives.

8.22 While Discovery Phase 1 of the federation is complete, Discovery Phase 2 includes risks e.g., pay/grading and service standards that require proactive management. The current gradual implementation model prolongs these risks and fuels stakeholder uncertainty. To minimize the risk of project retreat and scope creep (which could deplete benefits), full and rapid implementation is crucial. Successful implementation will also enhance joint working.

8.23 While the Marmot principles are understood, there is a need to translate them into specific stakeholder actions. The current performance framework lacks stakeholder visibility and detailed activity metrics. Prioritising short/medium-term actions within the long-term social determinants strategy is essential. Key stakeholder concerns

include community capacity, proposal specificity, prioritisation, and impacts on current services. Clarification is required on whether a social model, economic case, or both, is being pursued. HDRC research provides strong support, and the decision to proceed at pace is acknowledged. This work enhances the visibility of how strategic intent influences service delivery plans.

- 8.24 The organisation faces significant challenges and risks. The current multi-level approach (corporate, project, and service) is complex and lacks clarity in risk ownership. Specifically, the role of the Portfolio Management Office (PMO) requires definition, and critical risks associated with strategic initiatives such as federation and EIP are neither monitored nor identified. To address these deficiencies, a fundamental reset of the risk management system is necessary, driven by these strategic projects and overseen by effective project and programme management arrangements.
- 8.25 Significant change necessitates increased and consistent communication to address a lack of understanding regarding strategic impacts among staff and stakeholders (residents, unions, members). While foundational principles are understood, there is a demand for detailed impact information, requiring targeted and simplified messaging delivered at appropriate levels. Effective change management also demands increased skills development and support for staff. Consistent messaging across both local authorities, driven by a unified Comms team (and HR), is crucial. Furthermore, proactive, and continuous engagement with scrutiny, governance, audit committees, and the Council is essential.

9.0. Improvement Support

- 9.1 If you would like to discuss any further improvement support, please contact Jo Hendy, WLGA Head of Improvement.

10.0. Acknowledgements

- 10.1 The panel and the WLGA would like to extend their thanks for their support in coordinating documentation requests, responses to queries, arranging meetings and workshops and providing onsite support to:

- Tom Roberts – Business and Democratic Support Services Manager
- Catherine Joseph - Senior Corporate Improvement & Scrutiny Officer
- Liann Skellett - Senior Corporate Improvement & Scrutiny Officer
- Dominique Redman - Team Leader Democratic and Member Services
- Rachel Beale - Personal Assistant to the Leader and Deputy Leader
- Karen Hale - Specialist Business Support Officer
- Lisa Hamer – Business Support Officer
- Robyn Paul - Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive
- Jacquelyn Tranter - Complaints/FOI Assistant Team Leader

Torfaen PPA Final Report

- Phillip Wilson - Children & Young People's Engagement & Participation Officer
- Jan Whitman – Engagement Officer
- Katie Blewett – Business Engagement Team Leader
- Gareth Jones – Team Leader Community Capacity Team

Appendix: Recommended actions for improvement

1. Federation

The adoption of the federated approach is an appropriate and innovative response to the sustainability challenges faced by the whole public sector in Wales.

Whilst the risk of doing nothing outweighs the risks associated with progressing Phase 2 – Discovery. There are clearly risks and issues associated with an extended period of implementation of Phase 2.

Therefore, it is recommended that:

- 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 and Communities

Broadly speaking, the awareness of the Marmot principles is high, at this stage of the design the implications and specific activity are not as clear.

Faced with inevitable resource constraints the Council should 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 (EIP)

The EIP programme is again well understood by most stakeholders at the principal level. Given where Torfaen is on the development path there is a lack of clarity as to the implications at the specific service provision level.

It is recommended that:

- The developing draft of 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.

Clarification is required within the strategy for both EIP and Marmot as to whether the target follows a social model, an economic model, or a mix. Stakeholders want to be clear as to the driving force for the change at a programme level and individual activity level.

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.



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