

**COUNCIL  
4 DECEMBER 2018**

**TORFAEN STATE OF THE NATION REPORT**

*Report Submitted by: Alison Ward*  
*Report Written by: Alison Ward*

**1. Area Affected**

1.1 County Borough wide.

**2. Purpose of Report**

2.1 To provide Members with an overview of the work of the Council throughout 2018.

**3. Recommendation**

3.1 It is recommended that Members note the activities and achievements of the officers of the Council during the past twelve months

**4. Activities and Achievements**

**4.1 Public Services Support Unit**

4.1.1 The Torfaen Public Service Board (PSB) Well Being Plan Assessment and Well Being Plan was coordinated and delivered within the statutory timescales. The Plan was approved by Council and its partners, and now provides the footprint for partnership working in Torfaen.

4.1.2 The statutory requirements of the new General Data Protection Regulations were met. New guidance, advice and assistance has been provided across the Council and new processes embedded.

4.1.3 The Multi Agency Pupil Intervention process has been expanded. Both primary and secondary schools have established a process to identify children at risk of anti-social behaviour much earlier. In the last quarter, 341 cases were successfully managed which prevented children entering the criminal justice system.

4.1.4 Six families have been successfully supported under the Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Schemes. Two more families will be resettled shortly.

4.1.5 Prevent Counter Terrorism awareness training was delivered to 222 members of staff working directly with residents, giving them the confidence and knowledge to identify and support those at risk of radicalisation.

- 4.1.6 A new Community Safety Hub was developed and launched to better coordinate and tackle anti-social behaviour. Based at the Pontypool Police Station it enables partners to collectively tackle issues as they arise and target interventions on a multi-agency basis.
- 4.1.7 Advice and assistance has been provided to both members and staff to ensure compliance with the Council's Welsh Language Compliance Notice. The demand for Welsh language translations has steadily increased in the last year with over a million words translated.
- 4.1.8 Data research and analysis was delivered to the PSB well-being assessment process, staff and residents' surveys, and the T22 Behavioural Economics project. Geo-mapping was also used to support various funding bids, the forward planning of pupil places, and the vulnerable person's data base.
- 4.1.9 The Torfaen Youth Forum was supported, and accredited training delivered to a new cohort of 'Young Inspectors'. Four organisations also completed self-assessments to encourage young people to participate in the running of public services.

## **4.2 Social Care and Housing**

### Adult Services

- 4.2.1 Adult Services embraced change and adhered to the principles of a new patch based way of working. By moving accommodation and becoming more accessible to the public, relationships with communities have been built and stronger relationships with professionals established. We are now better able to respond to clients and have improved knowledge of the diverse health and cultural needs, and resources, people and communities on a smaller patch basis.
- 4.2.2 Safe and timely discharges from hospital were enabled through a discharge to assess model.
- 4.2.3 We tested different ways of working with providers, such as the Carer's Trust and we collaborated with the Local Health Board, Groundwork Wales, Bron Afon, and various multi-disciplinary teams on a number of projects to support older people in their communities.
- 4.2.4 Teams went above and beyond in the snow, providing meals and personal care against all odds.
- 4.2.5 We developed robust partnership commissioning arrangements through the Regional Care Homes Collaboration resulting in more conducive relationships with providers and better support and services for residents. Positive outcomes were also achieved through the use of external grants such as the Integrated Care Fund.

## Children's Services

- 4.2.6 The Rapid Response Team prevented placement breakdowns in family situations including those already in the looked after system, thus averting an escalation of provision and avoiding cost. A new out of hour's service was established providing phone and direct support at times of crisis outside of normal working hours. Family feedback about this new service has been positive.
- 4.2.7 Children who could not live safely with parents came into care in a timely way and were able to benefit from swift adoption, or other long term care arrangements. We progressed care proceedings ensuring that wherever possible children could live with their extended family. The Family Focus Service is now utilised prior to, and within the Court Care Planning process, which has received positive feedback. A high number of in-house fostering placements were provided, and despite increased volumes we delivered court-led kinship assessments within court timescales.
- 4.2.8 Young carers' services were provided in-house, receiving positive evaluations by parents, children and young people.
- 4.2.9 Increased referrals in the Family First Team were effectively managed, with early intervention and support being delivered to children and families. We have established stronger relationships between teams which has avoided delays in providing appropriate support and a smoother flow of information between key partners.
- 4.2.10 We developed an adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) framework in response to presenting needs from engagement with the most vulnerable adults and families.
- 4.2.11 The Building Resilient Communities programme delivered successful outcomes including positive engagements with families enabling them to cope and manage crisis situations, with a concentrated focus on families where the compounded impact of generational ACE's are present. Subsequent timely interventions have resulted in families feeling more confident in supporting their children and better equipped to move closer to the labour market.

## Housing

- 4.2.12 We launched the Local Housing Strategy at the Torfaen Housing Summit and an annual operational action plan was developed. The Homeless Strategy was launched, and the Housing Solutions Service reviewed. These strategies will provide a focus for renewed partnership working to deliver improved customer focussed initiatives such as the establishment of drop in surgeries as part of the early intervention & preventative approach.
- 4.2.13 The Gypsy and Traveller site was improved and we received a site visit from a delegation from Welsh Government and elected members from Ards & North Down Borough Council in Northern Ireland.

- 4.2.14 We developed the Supporting People Strategy and the Supporting People Gateway Model was launched. Specific Supporting People services were remodelled and piloted to ensure immediacy and responsiveness of services. The Supporting People retendering framework was also developed.
- 4.2.15 The Homeseeker Allocation Policy was reviewed in line with Welfare Benefit Reform challenges and requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act, and the process for assessing Homeseeker applicants' health circumstances was improved for the assessment of current and future housing needs.

#### Communities

- 4.2.16 Social Prescribers are now an integral part of the service area and have received an increase in referrals. This has enabled rapid responses to the needs of individuals and mitigated the perceived need to visit the GP for non-clinical interventions such as financial inclusion, housing and benefit advice and support.
- 4.2.17 Support has continued for the most vulnerable individuals with complex needs to engage in employment, undertake voluntary work, or gain qualifications. Specific interventions have been provided to increase physical activity and manage mental wellbeing, thus enabling participants to reduce their barriers to employment. Continued success with employability programmes has also seen those furthest away from the labour market, gain skills, confidence and experience to move into sustainable employment.
- 4.2.18 The Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) data base was successfully implemented. Improved processes have led to efficiencies, improved quality monitoring, better data quality, and enhanced compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations. The development of the database will continue extending its use to Families First, Community Connectors and finance projects.

### **4.3 Education**

- 4.3.1 Young people, not in education, employment or training and lacking in confidence were supported to gain nationally recognised qualifications, undertake meaningful employment opportunities and go on to university to study youth work. A leadership pathway for young people provided opportunities for them to deliver sessions across community and school settings, ensuring an increase in our volunteer base. As a result of this work former students are now gaining employment in the sporting industry. We also supported young people who face barriers in their life, have volatile and destructive behaviours, or are isolated and suffering with low mood to develop their confidence, self-worth, and engage with peers who face similar challenges. The 'Moving-On Up project' helped 15 beneficiaries in their transition from primary to secondary school and received amazing feedback, lowering anxiety levels and increasing confidence.

- 4.3.2 We provided over 100 different play related projects. These impacted positively on the community, reducing crime, and increasing levels of physical activity, well-being, volunteering, and citizen engagement. The number of participants increased to 4,000 per day over the summer. Early bird play sessions requested by schools were implemented and over 100 families have engaged through family play sessions on a weekly basis, increasing play awareness, physical activity and social interaction. We also helped to tackle the poverty agenda and the concept of holiday hunger by providing free healthy snacks.
- 4.3.3 We supported 165 children with disabilities / challenging behaviour, and complex families have been helped to breakdown stigma and increase their integration levels. The Enhancement Project helped family placements from breaking down and prevented costs from escalating.
- 4.3.4 We have worked in collaboration with other services and partners to implement the Childcare Offer. Other initiatives progressed include the First 1000 days, Additional Learning Needs regional work, and the development of outreach in Flying Start. Family support for children with pre-diagnosis of autism has been offered through the new 'Wriggly Woos' group.
- 4.3.5 Our on-line anti-bullying survey for Key Stage 2, 3, 4 and 5 pupils generated over 2,000 responses. Anti-bullying training was delivered in partnership with Actus Education Cymru and has enabled staff to adopt a shared understanding of bullying and greater knowledge of resources to support anti-bullying work.
- 4.3.6 Our work around the Healthy Schools initiative has continued. A Healthy Schools / Personal and Social Education / Health and Wellbeing Group for secondary schools was established giving an opportunity for staff to share thoughts, ideas, resources and good practice, and in June 2018 Nant Celyn Primary School was supported to gain the National Quality Award (NQA) for excellence in health and wellbeing showing they are implementing wellbeing initiatives at the very highest level. A personal trainer delivered boot camp sessions to parents of pre-school children in one setting, encouraging active families and positive relationships with physical activity for parents and children.
- 4.3.7 Our new Strive for 95%+ campaign was launched. Schools now work with families before referring onto the Education Welfare Service, which has helped to improve attendance in secondary schools and reduced the decline in primary schools. Working collaboratively with primary schools, support has also been put in place to develop provision for pupils and reduce the number of exclusions.
- 4.3.8 Intervention Panel and Education Improvement Board meetings were held to monitor improvements at red and amber categorised schools.
- 4.3.9 Our safeguarding procedures have improved. Most schools have signed up to the My Concern system, an electronic recording system to help manage safeguarding concerns in a consistent way so monitoring can be undertaken by themes and volumes. A single record of safe recruitment information has also been introduced across both schools and the service which has enhanced

management and monitoring arrangements, including the refresh of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

- 4.3.10 We continue to have a low rate of statutory assessments for children with additional learning needs and rarely are required to attend a Special educational needs and disability tribunal.
- 4.3.11 We completed capital schemes at Garnteg, Cwmffrwdroer and Penygarn Primary Schools leading to improved facilities. Victoria and Brynteg schools were closed and the pupils successfully transitioned to other schools. The new Croesyceiliog School and the sixth form centre projects have significantly advanced, work has been undertaken with the Archdiocese of Cardiff to plan a new 3-16 school, and funding has been secured to add primary provision at Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw. Schools have also been supported to introduce energy efficiency schemes such as lighting replacement, automatic lighting controls and boiler replacement, achieving carbon and financial savings, and making them more aware of energy conservation.
- 4.3.12 A Financial Benchmarking Tool was introduced, enabling schools to benchmark financial information across a wide range of areas and comparative schools. We led the development of this tool and have implemented the one for secondary schools across Wales, and the one for primary schools across the South East Wales region. Schools are now able to view their financial data in comparison with similar schools to identify potential areas of review to achieve financial savings. Over the last 12 months 9 primary schools have also been supported to improve their business management and administration functions, financial governance, efficiency and value for money through the Welsh Government's School Business Manager Grant. A bid for phase 2 of this project was successful which will enable us to extend this support to secondary schools.

#### **4.4 Neighbourhoods, Planning and Public Protection**

- 4.4.1 Funding was secured from Welsh Government to help us investigate the feasibility of creating a life sciences park adjacent to the Grange University Hospital. SQW with Innovation Oxford have been procured and a Strategic Steering Group established with key partners including Aneurin Bevan, Welsh Government, Cardiff University and Cardiff Met University to take this exciting and innovative project forward.
- 4.4.2 Occupancy at Pontypool Indoor Market reached its highest level since the refurbishment in 2015. We believe this has had a positive impact upon the footfall figures both in the market and Pontypool town centre. Four historic buildings in Pontypool have also been brought back into use through the Pontypool Investment Fund. These projects have levered £1.4 million into the town and created new living accommodation and retail space.
- 4.4.3 The Springboard Business Innovation Centre has worked with the University of South Wales to support 43 graduates and under graduates to explore the opportunities of entrepreneurship. This has created jobs in the county borough and helped create new businesses.

- 4.4.4 A tourism spend of £74.8m was achieved attracting 1.12m visitors. This has supported 922 jobs for local people and created demand for local goods and services.
- 4.4.5 The British Regeneration project produced a draft 'Masterplan' in partnership with the local liaison group and other community stakeholders which has promoted closer working relationships and will hopefully secure planning and begin the much wanted greening and cleaning of the site.
- 4.4.6 The streetscene area based model has been further embedded offering a seven day a week reactive service across the county borough and identifying opportunities for sharing experience and working methodologies across teams.
- 4.4.7 Targets for managing biodiversity and public access have been met, A positive contribution to Torfaen's Well-being Plan was made resulting in Green Infrastructure becoming an important component for multiple well-being benefits.
- 4.4.8 An approval body for Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems has been set up to change behaviour on how to drain land, develop engineering solutions, and promote methods which have regard to the natural and built environment.
- 4.4.9 External grant aid was secured for a Green Infrastructure strategy and capital works, volunteer coordination, the Mon & Brecon Canal Adventure Triangle Project and the South East Wales Resilient Uplands Project which we lead for Torfaen, Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent. £1.1 m was also secured for Torfaen as part of a £4.6 m regional project, with Caerphilly County Borough Council and the Canal River Trust to deliver a programme of canal improvements.
- 4.4.10 We have delivered infrastructure projects such as the new bridge at Pontypool Leisure Centre. Safer walking and cycling routes have also been provided as part of the Safe Routes in Communities funding and the Local Transport Fund.
- 4.4.11 Cemetery service procedures have been updated to create efficiencies, including the increased use of ICT.
- 4.4.12 The Torfaen Rural Development Programme supported the approval and delivery of eight projects totalling £1,106,000. Four European Social Fund projects have been extended until 2022, meaning 50 jobs have been protected, and a further £5 m of support is available to help communities and people into work.
- 4.4.13 Transport services were delivered on time and within budget, particularly with regards to home-to-school transport where the impact has been significant in terms of changing behaviours around how home-to-school transport is commissioned.
- 4.4.14 We maintained an open highway network during the most severe winter for 30 years, and £1m of prudential borrowing was secured to fund highway safety resurfacing schemes. All temporary and permanent traffic regulation orders were managed so planned and unplanned works undertaken on the highway

network were safe and coordinated.

- 4.4.15 Several road safety education and training initiatives were delivered including Kerbcraft, aimed at teaching children how to cross the road safely; cycle training; and Mega Drive, delivered to college age students who are planning on sitting their practical driving test.
- 4.4.16 The 'Slipper Talk project', a one-off multi-agency and intergenerational library project involved 246 older people, children and families, gifting 172 safe slippers to older people in Torfaen. Three intergenerational library tea parties took place, and craft activities for young and old were delivered. The Health & Wellbeing Information and Support Service continued by offering a listening ear, providing pertinent information, and sign-posting to community support. In the past 12 months, therapeutic activities were delivered to 615 Torfaen residents and 659 people have engaged with outreach and community events. As part of the 'Every Child a Library Member' project, 696 pupils were provided with library membership.
- 4.4.17 Major planning applications were supported including Croesyceiliog School, the Post 16 development and new Police HQ. At appeal, the Council's refusal of planning permission for a residential development on an open space at Brangwyn Avenue, Oakfield was successfully defended. The appeal was dismissed resulting in the retention of a valuable community open space for local residents and an important benchmark for future applications on open spaces. In the last financial year, the number of major planning applications have generated extra income of £250,000 in fees and Building Control has achieved self-financing status.
- 4.4.18 Regional planning policy collaboration is in place with Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent to secure a more strategic view of the LDP and benefit from the economies of scale in terms of best practice, and sharing resources and skills
- 4.4.19 An exemplar and resilient conservation service has been provided in collaboration with Monmouthshire.
- 4.4.20 Over 4,000 service inspection reports were undertaken around council properties on gas and electrical safety, legionella control, and fire risk control. Support for utility billing has been delivered together with energy efficiency schemes, LED lighting, boiler replacement schemes, and the development of a solar farm project. We have completed access projects at school sites and day-to-day responsive repairs have been managed ensuring property stock is kept functioning.
- 4.4.21 Information and accessibility to allergen guidance for school meals was improved ensuring better transparency for parents and clients. A new state of the art kitchen and a successful re-launch of the catering service at Penygarn Primary School was completed, and a revised food safety system devised to comply with current food safety legislation.

- 4.4.22 We progressed a number of capital projects including extensions and refurbishments of Garnteg, Coed Eva, Penygarn and Cwmffrwdor Primary Schools; a replacement school at Croesyceiliog Comprehensive; and the new build on a brownfield site of Torfaen 6th Form Centre.
- 4.4.23 A new Public Protection Enforcement Policy was adopted, the Authority's Gambling Policy was reviewed, and a new Public Spaces Protection Order for dog controls was agreed. We commenced work to re-tender dog kennelling, with revised fees and a microchipping policy approved ready for new contract. The Gypsy & Travellers Illegal Encampment Policy was reviewed, and new collaborative operational procedures for infectious diseases were rolled out alongside the commencement of an associated training programme to help improve consistency and resilience. We actioned all priority referrals from the National Scams Hub relating to vulnerable victims of scams and a new Cold Calling Control Zone was set up in New Inn.
- 4.4.24 We completed the procurement for the treatment of food and green waste. A one year contract for a range of kerbside collected recycled materials was also secured. Statutory waste targets were met, consultation was undertaken on a new Waste Strategy and work commenced to change the reliance from agency staff to directly employed staff for waste collections. £620k of capital funding was secured for a new baler at Ty Coch which has since been procured, installed and commissioned. A survey on food waste recycling was undertaken in partnership with the Wales Audit Office, which we are now developing into a behaviour change initiative to investigate ways to encourage residents to participate more.
- 4.4.25 Adult Community Learning achieved excellent attainment outcomes for the 2017/18 academic year on the Coleg Gwent franchise and through direct delivery, and the new structured observation strategy in Torfaen Training resulted in improved feedback from learners and a 46% reduction in overstay learners. Estyn monitoring and link visits also confirmed satisfactory progress.

## **4.5. Resources**

- 4.5.1 We were the first authority in Wales to close its 2018/19 accounts. This early closure, and the receipt of an unqualified audit opinion has allowed more in-depth financial management of current and future years to be undertaken as well as enabling us to develop and refine our approach to medium term financial planning.
- 4.5.2 We supported services in the use of electronic creditor payment processes to increase efficiency and reduce cost.
- 4.5.3 The Council's commercial estate portfolio was effectively managed with minimal voids delivering a net income of £1.725 m to support the Council's base budget. Capital receipts totalling £4.6 million were generated which contributed to the

full funding on time of Band A of the Council's 21st Century School Programme.

- 4.5.4 Terms were negotiated for the acquisition of land for the new sixth form centre with work starting on site in line with agreed delivery timescales. Our office accommodation was further rationalised by moving out of Pearl House with all staff accommodated in the Civic Centre and Police Station, bringing teams much closer together.
- 4.5.5 We introduced a new appeals process resulting in smoother resolutions to employee relations matters and a reduced risk of employment litigation. A number of complex employment tribunal claims were managed, minimising the Council's exposure to financial and reputational risk.
- 4.5.6 A comprehensive staff benefits scheme was launched including a car leasing facility and a programme to support the development of awareness of mental health related problems in the workplace.
- 4.5.7 The target percentage for delivering the annual internal audit plan was exceeded, ensuring coverage of a wide range of systems across the Council; providing assurance to the Audit Committee on the internal control environment; improving individual controls; and reducing the risk of fraud and errors occurring.
- 4.5.8 High levels of Council Tax collection were maintained. Full reviews of single person discounts and current exemptions were undertaken, achieving a reduction in the awards provided and an assurance that exemptions are only awarded where appropriate.
- 4.5.9 A new team comprising of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services was created leading to more effective relationships and improved processes for customers. Customer Service provision has improved resulting in lower rates of call abandonment and the availability of more online services via My Council Services.
- 4.5.10 The shared Benefits Service developed further as the focal point for means assessments providing more cost effective services. Our performance in the delivery of discretionary housing payments has resulted in us being identified as the two leading authorities in Wales, and within the top ten in the UK. The service has also expanded to include the administration of free school meals ensuring the maximisation of entitlement and cross over with other benefits
- 4.5.11 We continued to deliver a pension's administration service to the Greater Gwent area and we played a key role in developing the all-Wales pension partnership, which pools pension funds to increase efficiency, reduce cost and increase return.
- 4.5.12 Procurement requirements across the Council were delivered and we provided support to the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal to tender for the region's digital strategy.

4.5.13 Working with colleagues in social care, we increased the capacity in our child care legal team to improve efficiency, reduce cost and provide a better service. Legal advice to all areas of the Council was also provided on a range of initiatives and projects.

#### **4.6. Chief Executive's**

4.6.1 The centralised Admin and Support Service continued to operate within its reduced budget envelope. The service has developed consistently over the past year, with staff working in different ways, across teams, and trying new approaches to manage and balance demand.

4.6.2 Despite increased volumes, we have delivered improved performance in responding to requests under Freedom of Information. Collaborative meetings have also been introduced with service areas to ensure customer experience and feedback from complaints is recognised, and used as a valid learning tool for service improvement.

4.6.3 Positive feedback received from the Wales Audit Office on the council's overview and scrutiny arrangements was welcomed and provided external validation of the work non-executive members undertake through their scrutiny committees.

4.6.4 Several by-elections were delivered and the 2018 full canvass was successfully undertaken, resulting in the updated electoral register being published on time.

4.6.5 We met all statutory standards for registering deaths without coronial involvement and performed above the regional and national average for the registration of births, still births and deaths with coronial involvement. During the past year the number of venues licensed for marriage within the county borough has also increased.

4.6.6 We delivered successful communications campaigns which helped service areas increase volunteer hours for community clean ups, improve school attendance and increase the number of fostering enquiries. Support was also provided to the British Liaison Group to develop The British Masterplan, and the Public Service Board, Gwent Safeguarding Board, South Wales Business, Visit Blaenavon and Llanyrafon Manor to develop their websites.

4.6.7 We successfully coordinated the council's emergency response to several episodes of severe winter weather, working collectively to warn and inform residents, resolve service issues, prioritise help to those most vulnerable, and return business as usual services as quickly as possible.

4.6.8 A new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) / Digital Transformation platform between Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire and Newport was secured so all partners now use the same system. As a result, the volume of customer self-service transactions and the number of people using online channels to engage with the council has increased.

- 4.6.9 Using behavioural economics eight customer journeys were mapped and used to identify where demand can be reduced or altered, leading to cost savings. The early intervention and prevention funding programme has also been used to avoid high cost interventions such as homelessness and looked after children. Evaluation of the first six months demonstrates impact, so a much wider system change is now being developed to generate cashable savings.

## **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 This report has been compiled in consultation with senior officers from across the Council's services.

## **6. Implications**

- 6.1 There are no implications arising from the recommendation in the report.

## **7. Risks**

- 7.1 There are no risks arising from the recommendation in the report.

## **8. Action to be taken following decision**

- 8.1 There are no actions arising from the recommendation in the report.

## **9. Monitoring and Evaluation**

- 9.1 There are no issues with respect to monitoring and evaluation arising from the recommendation in the report.

## **10. Conclusion**

- 10.1 Despite the considerable challenges presented by the financial climate, members will see from this comprehensive report that there has been a huge amount of activity taking place within the Council in 2018 and that many innovative projects are being taken forward whilst the majority of basic standards of service are being maintained. As in previous years, there has been a strong emphasis on moving forward in partnership with other key stakeholders within Torfaen and beyond to improve service and maximise value for money.

- 10.2 As we move into 2019 the financial situation is not getting any easier and we face continuing financial challenges coupled with the need to offer a high quality service to the public. Efforts continue to find efficiencies and to adhere with discipline to the priorities in our Corporate Plan whilst we persevere in delivering improved quality of life outcomes for our citizens despite the financial barriers that we face.

## **11. Recommendation**

- 11.1 It is recommended that Members note the activities and achievements of the officers of the Council during the past twelve months.

<b>Appendices</b>	None
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<b>Background Papers</b>	None
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<b>For a copy of the background papers or for further information about this report, please telephone:</b> None
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