

Leisure Service

Torfaen County Borough Council

November 2025



About us

We have prepared and published this report under section 15 of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015.

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Audit snapshot

What we looked at

- 1 In December 2024, Torfaen County Borough Council's (the Council) Cabinet approved a Sport and Leisure strategy (the strategy).
- 2 This audit looked at whether the Council considered the sustainable development principle (the principle) when it developed this strategy.
- 3 The Well-being of Future Generations (2015) Act (Wales)¹ defines the sustainable development principle. In summary, the Act is a law in Wales that requires public bodies to work together to improve the environment, economy, society and culture for the people of Wales today and for future generations.
- 4 There are five things that public bodies need to do to show that they have applied the sustainable development principle. These are:
 - understanding how priorities can support and affect the priorities of other public bodies;
 - working with others to deliver plans and activities;
 - avoid repeating past mistakes;
 - understanding both the current and future needs, risks and opportunities; and
 - involving people and groups with an interest while making sure those people reflect the full diversity of the population in the area the public body serves.

¹ [The Well-being of Future Generations | GOV.WALES](#)

Why this is important

- 5 The sustainable development principle in Wales is important because it legally requires public bodies to balance current needs with the long-term well-being of future generations.
- 6 It promotes integrated decision-making across economic, social, environmental, and cultural aspects of life. This approach can ensure policies, strategies and actions taken today do not compromise the quality of life for people in the future.
- 7 The principle requires public bodies to think about the long-term consequences when making decisions.
- 8 It encourages prevention and early intervention, helping public bodies to address potential issues before they worsen and become harder to resolve.
- 9 The principle also emphasises the importance of working with other organisations and involving diverse people in its decision-making.

What we have found

- 10 The Council applied the sustainable development principle when it developed its Sport and Leisure Strategy. It used a range of data to inform it and aligned the strategy to its corporate priorities. The Council also took a collaborative approach to both developing and delivering the strategy. But, although the Council consulted its residents, it did not fully draw on a diverse range of residents' views. Also, while the Council set its reporting arrangements, it does not have sufficient performance information to effectively assess progress.

What we recommend

- 11 We made two recommendations to the Council on:
 - strengthening engagement and consultation with residents; and
 - performance measures.

Our findings

The Council applied the sustainable development principle when developing its Sport and Leisure strategy

- 12 The Sport and Leisure Strategy (the strategy) clearly aligns with the Council's well-being objectives and its commitment to the Marmot Principles to improve health and reduce health inequalities of its residents.² Underpinning this long-term vision is a Five-year County Plan, Community Wellbeing Plan and the Sport and Leisure Strategy. By aligning the strategy with its corporate priorities, the Council reduces the risk of duplication and helps to identify opportunities to deliver multiple benefits.
- 13 The Council used a breadth of relevant data and information to help inform the strategy. It considered data from Public Health Wales, the Institute for Health Equity and the Health Board, such as healthy life expectancy, healthy weight, economic inactivity, and social behaviour. The Council also looked at data provided by its own services, including Adult Social Care and the Health, Sport and Fitness service. Its wide use of data has given the Council a good understanding of the current situation. It also helps the Council understand existing and future opportunities and risks.
- 14 The Council recognises that the strategy needs to adapt to respond to new data and information. Some of the data used to shape the strategy is updated every two to three years. This means the Council can flex and adapt its delivery of the strategy in response to the data and track change over the medium to longer term.

² [Marmot Council | Torfaen County Borough Council](#)

- 15 The Council is also committed to understanding the impact and outcomes of the strategy and using this to inform future delivery. For example, it commissioned a university to evaluate its initiative that encourages women to be more physically active. The Council intends to use the findings, expected in December 2025, to understand the initiative's impact and shape its future development.
- 16 The Council involved its Extended Leadership Team, which includes Heads of Service, in the development of the strategy. This collaborative approach had several benefits. It helped the Council gain assurance that a range of Council services contributed to its development. It helped promote a common understanding of the contribution sport and leisure can have on supporting the Council's priorities. It also gave individual services an opportunity to identify how they can help deliver the strategy.
- 17 The Council encouraged residents and stakeholders to take part in its consultation on sports and leisure. The consultation asked for views on levels of current participation; barriers to physical activity; volunteering; and accessing information. The Council captured the gender and age of survey respondents, but it did not capture any further information that would give the Council assurance it received views from a diverse range of its residents. For example, the Council sent the survey to the Torfaen Access Forum but as the Council only collected data on the age and gender of survey respondents, it does not know whether it captured views from individuals or groups that represent individuals with disabilities.³ This is a missed opportunity to understand the insights and experiences that vary by demographics.

³ [Torfaen Access Forum | Torfaen County Borough Council](#)

- 18 In addition, the consultation did not specifically target young people. By not involving the full diversity of its residents, the Council cannot have assurance it designed the strategy to meet its residents' needs. The need to strengthen engagement opportunities was also a recommendation we issued in our May 2024 report on the Council's Digital Strategy.⁴ The Council's upcoming engagement with local communities on its 'Deal' may offer an opportunity to collect and understand the views of a wider range of residents.⁵
- 19 The views of others did result in the Council making alterations to the strategy. For example, at the Extended Leadership Team, Adult Social Care provided data on bone density health in older women and the impact on frailty and falls, both for the individuals and the health service. The Council amended the strategy to include the importance of bone health for women linked to prevention and early intervention activities. This demonstrates how the Council considered data and the responses from its consultation and engagement exercises to inform the strategy.
- 20 The Council is committed to collaborative working to deliver the strategy. At the time of this audit, the Council was working with Community Connectors, the Torfaen Voluntary Alliance, Sports Clubs, Community Councils and Halo Leisure to improve the health and wellbeing of its residents.^{6 7} In addition, we were told different Council services such as Parks, Social Services and Active Travel have roles in delivering the strategy. Working collaboratively can result in the sharing of knowledge, expertise and resources that can lead to better outcomes.

⁴ Audit Wales, [Torfaen County Borough Council – Digital Strategy Review](#), August 2024

⁵ The Deal is a new relationship between the Council and local communities with the aim of building something better together.

⁶ [Connect Torfaen – Connecting you to your community](#).

⁷ [Home | Torfaen Voluntary Alliance](#)

- 21 The Council does not set aside specific resources for the strategy. Instead, several Council services share responsibility for delivering it, using money from their individual service budgets. Although this approach could make delivery of the strategy more vulnerable to budget pressures elsewhere in the services, it also brings benefits. For example, it can help to embed the strategy into everyday service delivery and encourage officers to work collaboratively to maximise resources. As the financial benefits of the federated model with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council are realised, the Council also has the opportunity to redirect released resources towards its priorities, potentially including the strategy.
- 22 The Council has secured £5 million in funding over five years to work in partnership with the Health Board and a local university for research into the health and wellbeing of Torfaen residents. The Council intends to use this research to provide evidence to develop future targeted programmes and activities to improve residents' health and wellbeing.
- 23 The Council's leadership places strong emphasis on performance management, and its Executive Team makes good use of Power BI to monitor and challenge performance. The Council is creating a Power BI dashboard to help it monitor its early intervention and prevention work, including the contribution of sport and leisure.
- 24 The Extended Leadership Team recently began monitoring annual progress against key Council strategies. The Sport and Leisure Strategy will be considered as part of the Community Wellbeing Plan, rather than as a standalone strategy in September 2026. The relevant Cabinet Member will receive an annual progress report, and the appropriate scrutiny committee can decide if it wants to receive an update.
- 25 Monitoring the progress of the strategy is important for the Council to understand if it is delivering the intended benefits at the necessary pace. But at the time of our review, the Council was still developing the information it will need to effectively assess progress against the strategy. For example, while the strategy does contain performance indicators, at the time the Council approved it there was no baseline data or targets. Some of the performance indicators are new and the Council is gathering baseline data in 2025-26. However, this lack of baseline data and targets will make it difficult for the Council to determine if it's delivering the strategy as expected.

- 26 The Council does not have a delivery plan supporting the strategy. Instead, we were told the Council incorporates relevant actions and measures into individual service plans, which it monitors in line with corporate arrangements. However, we have not received any service plans for 2025-26 that show how different service areas are delivering actions in the strategy.

Recommendations

R1 Strengthening engagement and consultation

- 1.1** When designing its consultation and engagement exercises, the Council should ensure it has arrangements to capture and understand the demographics of those participating. This can help the Council assess whether views represent the full diversity of its citizens (paragraph 17).
- 1.2** The Council should strengthen its engagement with the full diversity of those who have an interest in the delivery of the Sport and Leisure strategy. This will help ensure the strategy meets the needs of as many residents as possible (paragraph 18).

R2 Performance measures

- 2.1** Once the Council establishes baseline data, it needs to set targets and milestones to support ongoing assessment of progress against the strategy (paragraph 25).

Appendices

1 About our work

Scope of the audit

This audit looked at whether the Council considered the sustainable development principle when it developed its Sport and Leisure strategy.

We undertook this audit in September 2025.

Audit questions and criteria

Questions

This audit sought to answer the following questions:

- Did the Council apply the sustainable development principle when developing the strategy?
- Does the Council have the resources to deliver its Sport and Leisure strategy?
- Are there arrangements to monitor progress in delivering the Sport and Leisure strategy?

Criteria

We assessed whether the Council:

- has a good understanding of current and future need, risks and opportunities to help develop its Sport and Leisure strategy;
- understands the root causes of problems;
- conducted effective involvement with the diversity of the population when developing its Sport and Leisure strategy;
- drew on the results of involvement activity to help develop its Sport and Leisure strategy;
- considered how the Sport and Leisure strategy can improve wellbeing and have a broad impact over the short, medium, and long term;

- can resource delivery of the strategy;
- has measures, milestones, targets, and outcomes to enable the Council to monitor progress; and
- has reporting arrangements.

Methods

We looked at documents and interviewed Council officers and a Council partner.

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