



Implementing Audit Wales recommendations to improve the Council's digital approach

Torfaen County Borough Council

January 2026

About us

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Audit snapshot

What we looked at

- 1 In May 2024, we issued a report to Torfaen County Borough Council (the Council) following an audit on its digital strategy. We made three recommendations. In June 2024, the Council's Governance and Audit Committee received this report and the Council's management response to address the recommendations (see Appendix 2). This audit looked at whether the Council is addressing them.
- 2 We also looked at how the Council tracks and reports its progress on external audit recommendations, using the digital strategy recommendations to assess its arrangements.
- 3 We undertook this audit in November 2025.

Why this is important

- 4 External audit reports give an independent view on the Council's arrangements. Our reports include recommendations for the Council when we identify gaps or weaknesses in its arrangements. Acting on these recommendations can help ongoing improvement. That is why it is important for the Council to have effective arrangements to monitor and challenge progress against them.

What we have found

- 5 The Council has made good progress in addressing the digital strategy recommendations. It has comprehensive arrangements supporting senior officer and member oversight of external audit recommendations.

What we recommend

6 We made no recommendations.

Our findings

The Council has made good progress in addressing the digital strategy recommendations

- 7 To align its digital strategy with its resources, in 2025 the Council transferred its data, digital and information governance functions to the Shared Resource Service (SRS)¹. This change aims to combine resources to increase efficiency and resilience. There are early signs of the benefits such as increased availability of resources due to shared staffing.
- 8 The Council is developing a Benefits and Values Framework (the framework). This can help the Council measure the impact of new digital solutions, such as a voice-to-text solution for Adults and Children's services. By understanding possible savings, performance improvements, and efficiency gains at the start, the Council can better judge value for money when delivering its digital projects. For 2025-26, the Council expects to save £150,000 from digital initiatives and it can use the framework to identify future savings.
- 9 The Council is improving how it monitors its digital strategy. It set up a digital, data and technology steering group which uses the framework to assess digital project ideas and monitor progress. Annual service plans include digital strategy performance measures and the Council monitors these quarterly. The Adults and Communities scrutiny committee asked for a progress report on the digital strategy, showing members' commitment to reviewing and challenging progress. These arrangements let officers and members monitor progress of both individual digital projects and the Council's overall plans for digital.

¹ [About Us | Shared Resource Service](#)

- 10 The Council recognises its digital strategy did not show enough evidence of its engagement and how this shaped the strategy. The Council has learnt from this and is committed to showing how engagement and consultation inform future strategies.
- 11 The Council collects feedback on customer satisfaction and customer effort when using digital methods to contact the Council. The Council is using this feedback, as well as its Rebel Torfaen forum, to engage with a diverse range of people to develop digital solutions to improve services. Examples include changing its residents Torfaen App following customer feedback and restarting its Digital Champions network in response to feedback from its Rebel Torfaen forum. At the time of this audit, the Council had around fifty Digital Champions. This shows the Council listens to feedback and supports staff to promote and guide digital use across the organisation.
- 12 Overall, the Council has made good progress in responding to our digital strategy recommendations.

The Council has comprehensive arrangements supporting senior officer and member oversight of external audit recommendations

- 13 Senior officers receive external regulator reports. In the past, these reports went only to the relevant Director and Head of Service. Now, reports go to the Leadership team, which includes all Heads of Service. This change ensures that all senior officers are aware of audit findings and recommendations and allows them to respond collectively.
- 14 The Governance and Audit committee (GAC) receives all reports from external regulators along with the relevant management response form (MRF). Depending on the topic of each report, the appropriate scrutiny committee also receives both the report and MRF. This ensures that members are aware of external audit findings and that they agree on the actions to address recommendations before these are put in place.

- 15 Members monitor the Council's progress in addressing recommendations. When the GAC receives reports from external regulators, it decides whether to monitor progress itself or pass this task to a scrutiny committee. The GAC receives progress updates every six months for the recommendations it tracks. Each year, scrutiny committees get updates on the recommendations they monitor and then report back to the GAC. This gives members oversight and the opportunity to challenge the Council's progress in addressing recommendations.
- 16 The Council is learning from its federated approach with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (Blaenau Gwent CBC).² It is using Blaenau Gwent CBC's tracker to log all external regulator reports and recommendations, along with the actions taken to address them. From November 2025, the Joint Executive team will receive an updated tracker every six months. This will give senior officers regular opportunities to review and challenge progress.
- 17 When the Joint Executive Team receives these updates, it will decide if enough progress has been made to close recommendations and remove from future monitoring. The relevant scrutiny committee and GAC will then consider the decision as part of their monitoring arrangements. This should improve clarity and oversight of decision-making.

² Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent County Borough councils have agreed to work in federation to strengthen strategic capacity, improve resilience, and deliver better outcomes for residents and communities, while maintaining the sovereignty, democratic accountability, and statutory independence of each Council. Source: [Federation and Collaborative arrangements between Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Councils](#)

Appendices

1 About our work

Scope of the audit

This audit looked at whether the Council addressed the recommendations in the Digital Strategy report we issued in 2024. We also looked at the Council's arrangements to oversee and report progress in addressing external audit recommendations. We used the Digital Strategy recommendations to assess the arrangements.

Audit questions and criteria

Questions

This audit answered the following questions:

- Has the Council addressed the recommendations contained in the Digital Strategy report dated May 2024?
- Does the Council have arrangements to oversee how it addresses external audit recommendations?

Criteria

We assessed whether:

- the Council aligned its digital strategy with available resources;
- the Council improved how it monitors and reviews its digital strategy;
- the Council improved its engagement to involve those who have an interest in the delivery of its approach to digital;
- members and senior officers receive external regulator reports;

- there is a central log of external recommendations;
- members and senior officers receive updates and provide challenge;
- members and senior officers decide when the Council has addressed external audit recommendation.

Methods

We read documents, watched a Scrutiny Committee meeting, and interviewed officers and members.

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2 Digital Strategy – Organisational Response Form 2024

Ref	Recommendation	Organisational response Please set out here relevant commentary on the planned actions in response to the recommendations	Completion date Please set out by when the planned actions will be complete	Responsible officer (title)
R1	<p>Identifying resource needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To help ensure that its digital strategy is aligned with available resources the Council should identify the short and long-term resources implications of delivering it together with any intended efficiency savings.. 	<p>The council will review current digital capabilities and capacity and develop an action plan to address any gaps.</p> <p>The council has established a Digital, Data and Technology Steering Group who will support with the prioritisation of projects based on available resources and an understanding of potential impact.</p> <p>The council will review it's Digital First Customer Delivery Plan to identify anticipated impacts, including potential efficiency savings.</p>	<p>Quarter 2 2024/25</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Quarter 2 2024/25 for current plan and ongoing thereafter</p>	<p>Head of Customer, Digital and ICT Services</p>
R2	<p>Arrangements for monitoring and review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure it better understands the impact of its digital strategy and progress in delivering it over the short, medium, and long-term the Council should strengthen its arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the delivery of the strategy. 	<p>The council has established a Digital, Data and Technology Steering Group to monitor progress and support delivery.</p> <p>Deliverables associated with the Digital First Customer Strategy will be identified and embedded within annual Service Planning and quarterly monitoring.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing as part of the annual Service Planning and quarterly monitoring process</p>	<p>Head of Customer, Digital and ICT Services</p>

R3

Strengthening engagement opportunities

- To help ensure that its resources are effectively targeted the Council should strengthen engagement with the full diversity of those who have an interest in the delivery of its strategic approach to digital.

The council will continue to capture customer feedback such as Customer Satisfaction and Effort and use this insight to inform improvements as part of the annual service planning process.

The council is part of the WLGA/DATA Cymru national residents survey working group and will undertake an annual residents survey.

The council will provide an annual report to council on service user perspectives.

Ongoing as part of the annual Service Planning and quarterly monitoring process

Q3. 2024/25

Q4 2024/25

Head of Customer, Digital and ICT Services

Head of Communications, Engagement and Civil Contingencies

Head of Communications, Engagement and Civil Contingencies

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Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.