

Torfaen County Borough Council

Annual Audit Summary 2024

Date Published: March 2025

This is our audit summary for Torfaen County Borough Council. It shows the work completed since the last Annual Audit Summary, which was issued in March 2024. Our audit summary forms part of the Auditor General for Wales' duties.



More information about these duties can be found on our [website](#).

About the Council

Some of the services the Council provides



Key facts

The Council is made up of 40 councillors who represent the following political parties:

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

The Council spent £235 million on providing services¹ during 2023-24².

¹ We define spending on services as the cost of services charged to the general fund from the Expenditure Funding Analysis, less any Housing Revenue Account cost of services, plus precepts, levies and debt interest.

² Source: 2023-24 Statement of Accounts

Key facts

As at 31 March 2024, the Council had £41 million of useable financial reserves³. This is equivalent to 17% of the Council's annual spending on services⁴.

Torfaen County Borough Council has 5% of the most-deprived 10% of areas in Wales, this is the ninth lowest of the 22 unitary councils in Wales⁵.

Torfaen County Borough Council's population is projected to increase by 4% between 2024 and 2043 from 94,500 to 98,200, including a predicted 3% decrease in the number of children, no change in the number of the working-age population and a 21% increase in the number of people aged 65 and over⁶.

The Auditor General's duties

We completed work during 2023-24 to meet the following duties

- **Audit of Accounts**

Each year, the Auditor General audits the Council's financial statements to make sure that public money is being properly accounted for.

- **Value for money**

The Auditor General examines whether the Council has put in place arrangements to get value for money for the resources it uses, and he has to be satisfied that it has done this.

- **Sustainable development principle**

Public bodies need to comply with the sustainable development principle when setting and taking steps to meet their well-being objectives. The Auditor General must assess the extent to which they are doing this.

³ We define useable financial reserves as reserves usable for revenue costs, where the purpose is not protected by law. This is the total of the general fund, earmarked reserves and schools' balances. It excludes Housing Revenue Account reserves, capital receipts and capital grants unapplied.

⁴ Source: 2023-24 Statement of Accounts

⁵ An area in this context is defined as a 'Lower Super Output Area'. Source: Stats Wales

⁶ Source: [Stats Wales, Population Projections](#)

What we found

Audit of Torfaen County Borough Council's 2023-24 Accounts

Each year, we audit the Council's financial statements.



To meet the Auditor General's duties we complete specific projects, but we also rely on other audit work, and the work of regulators such as Care Inspectorate Wales and Estyn (the education inspectorate). We take the findings of our audit work into account when assessing whether the Council has put in place arrangements to secure value for money. Our findings and conclusions are summarised below.

For 2023-24:

- the draft statements were presented for audit prior to deadline of 30 June 2024 set by the Welsh Government.
- the quality of the draft statements presented for audit was generally good, but we reported some issues with the production, timeliness and quality of certain working papers and audit evidence, and we identified weaknesses in the evaluation process and related accounting adjustments of Property Plant and Equipment.
- the Auditor General gave an unqualified true and fair opinion on the Authority's financial statements on 28 November 2024, meeting the deadline agreed with the Welsh Government of 30 November 2024.
- the Authority's Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Report were prepared in line with the CIPFA Code and relevant guidance. They were also consistent with the financial statements prepared by the Authority and with our knowledge of the Authority.
- a number of changes were made to the Authority's financial statements arising from our audit work, which were reported to the Audit Committee in our Audit of Financial Statements Report in November 2024.
- in addition to the Auditor General's responsibilities for auditing the Authority's financial statements, he also has responsibility for the certification of a number of grant claims and returns. Our work to date has not identified any significant issues.
- the Auditor General issued the certificate confirming that the audit of accounts for 2023-24 has been completed.

Assurance and risk assessment review

We reviewed the arrangements the Council has put in place to secure value for money in the use of its resources. We produced the following reports from our assurance and risk assessment work:

- Use of performance information – service user perspective and outcomes – we looked at the service user perspective and outcome data provided to members and senior officers, and how this information is used. We found that performance information provided to senior leaders to enable them to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of the Council's activities is limited, restricting their ability to understand the impact of its services and policies.

Unscheduled care

Overall, we found that despite a clear focus on improving patient flow within the region, a significant number of medically fit patients are occupying hospital beds. This continues to have serious knock-on effects on other NHS pathways of care and creates risks for patients' physical and mental well-being. More timely assessments of patients, a less risk averse approach to discharge planning and more consistent application of discharge policy is needed. Workforce and IT system challenges continue to be key barriers that partners will need to focus on to secure value from the investments they have made and to achieve the improvements they recognise are needed.

Digital Strategy

During 2022-23, we examined the Council's strategic approach to digital, and specifically the extent to which this has been developed in accordance with the sustainable development principle; and that it will help to secure value for money in the use of the Council's resources. We found that the Council has a developed a digital strategy but it is not fully costed and there are weaknesses in arrangements to monitor and review its delivery.

Financial Sustainability

During 2024, we reviewed the council's financial sustainability including a focus on the actions, plans and arrangements to bridge funding gaps and address financial pressures over the medium term. We 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.

Counter Fraud Arrangements

During 2024, we reviewed the council's counter-fraud arrangements. We found that the Council's focus on strong governance and controls provides a sound foundation for preventing and detecting fraud, but there is scope to strengthen some aspects of its arrangements.

National reports and products published in 2024

As well as local work at each council, each year, we also carry out studies across the local government sector to make recommendations for improving value for money. We published the following reports in 2024 which may be useful to the Council and can be found on our website.

Report title	Publication date and link to report
Local Government Financial Sustainability	December 2024
Local Government Financial Sustainability Data tool update now includes data from the draft 2023-24 accounts	December 2024
National Fraud Initiative in Wales 2022-23	October 2024
Active travel (report and data tool)	September 2024
Governance of Fire and Rescue Authorities	September 2024
Affordable housing	September 2024
Digital by design? – Lessons from our digital strategy review across councils in Wales	August 2024
Councils' use of performance information: service user perspective and outcomes – A summary of findings from our review at Welsh councils	July 2024
Governance of National Park Authorities	April 2024
Supporting Ukrainians in Wales	March 2024
From firefighting to future-proofing – the challenge for Welsh public services	February 2024
Planning for sustainable development – Brownfield regeneration	January 2024

Planned work for 2024-25

We also looked at the key challenges and opportunities facing the Council. These could have an effect on the Council's ability to meet its legal obligations in relation to the sustainable development principle and the use of its resources.

Our planned work for 2024-25 includes:

- Assurance and risk assessment
- Commissioning arrangements
- Leisure services

The Auditor General is independent of government and was appointed by Her Majesty the Queen. The Auditor General undertakes his work using staff and other resources provided by the Wales Audit Office, which is a statutory board established for that purpose and to monitor and advise the Auditor General. The Wales Audit Office is held to account by the Senedd.

The Auditor General audits local government bodies in Wales, including unitary authorities, police, fire and rescue authorities, national parks, and community councils. He also conducts local government value for money studies, assesses compliance with the remaining requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and may undertake special inspections under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

Beyond local government, the Auditor General is the external auditor of the Welsh Government and its sponsored and related public bodies, the Senedd Commission, and National Health Service bodies in Wales.

Audit Wales is the non-statutory collective name for the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office, which are separate legal entities with their own legal functions, as described above. Audit Wales is not a legal entity.

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

This document is also available in Welsh.