



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY 2022-2027 COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee held on Monday, 26 February 2024 at 5.00 pm

This meeting was recorded, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

County Borough Councillors – The following Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee Councillors were present online

Councillor B Stephens (Chair)
Councillor R Bevan Councillor M Ashford
Councillor R Davis Councillor J Bonetto
Councillor Sheryl Evans Councillor Sera Evans
Councillor G L Warren Councillor C Middle
Councillor S Emanuel

Other Members in attendance

Councillor D Wood
Councillor C Lises
Councillor K Webb

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr P Booth
Mr M Veale

Officers in attendance:-

Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Mr R Evans, Director Human Resources
Mr S Williams, Director Highways, Streetcare and Transformation
Ms Jacqueline Mynott, Head Of Infrastructure Asset Management
Mr T Britton, Head of Achievement RCT – Primary sector
Ms S Corcoran, Head of Achievement and Wellbeing for secondary and through schools in RCT
Ms C Edwards, Head of Service Transformation And Data Systems
Ms Melanie Warburton, Diversity and Inclusion Manager
Ms S Daniel, Principal Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for absence

Councillor J Edwards Councillor K Morgan
Councillor S Morgans

60 Declarations of Interest

In accordance with the code of conduct the following declarations were made pertaining to the agenda:

Councillor R Davis Personal Interest in item 5 “My partner works for Spectacle theatre which is mentioned in the report and my daughter works for the Urdd”

Councillor Sera Evans Personal interest in item 5 “My sons schools are both named in the WESP and item 6, my employer is named in the Draft Equality report”

Councillor S Emanuel Personal Interest in Item 5 “Both my Children attend a school mentioned in the report”

61 Minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 11th January and 29th January 2024

62 Consultation Links

The Principal Scrutiny Officer advised of the open consultations and reminded Members if they had any queries that they should contact the scrutiny team.

63 Cabinet Work Programme

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications advised Members that the Work Programme is presented to Members for information at each meeting, therefore providing Members the opportunity to review and raise any matters identified for Pre-Scrutiny.

Members were advised of the Home to School Transport item which Members had previously been consulted on had been allocated a date for Cabinet, therefore the opportunity will be provided to Members to be able to pre-scrutinise this item, prior to a decision being taken by Cabinet.

64 Welsh in Education Strategic Plan

The Chair welcomed Officers and Members of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee to the meeting who had been invited to attend the meeting to give their contributions on this item.

The Director Education and Inclusion presented the report to Members to provide an update on the implementation and the progress of the Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2022–2032

The Director continued that The Council's Annual Review Report for year one of the WESP was submitted to Welsh Government for consideration on 31st July 2023. Feedback from Welsh Government on the report was received on 14th November 2023. The feedback received was largely positive. There has been further notable progress made in a number of areas since the report was prepared and submitted to Welsh Government in July 2023 which were listed in the report

Members were invited to provide their observations and feedback on the report

A Member raised concerns of the staffing issues in Welsh Medium Education, particularly in the ALN area and stated that Welsh Government need to do more to promote Education as a profession, particularly amongst Welsh speakers.

The Member commented that the Authority could provide support in this area to ensure the language and the education profession is better promoted, such as working with schools and colleges to encourage pupils to study welsh at 6th form.

The Director Education and Inclusion acknowledged that the Workforce is a challenge, not only in the Welsh Medium sector but also the English. The Director agreed there needs to be a national approach to tackle this as this is a national problem and there needs to be a systemic approach to fast tracking people into the welsh sector and to think creatively how we encourage welsh speakers as a career option. She continued that in RCT we have options of volunteering in schools as part of work experience settings for those who are considering this path but acknowledged that it needs to be strengthened.

A Member noted from the report that there is investment in welsh medium education in the south of RCT and stated that they would like to see a development and progression schedule looking at Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhondda

The Director Education and Inclusion advised that investment if guided by where the priority is the greatest and where we need to address surplus capacity and pressure points and they are in the process of considering the next 9 years and will be sharing our plans with Welsh Government soon once the review and priority schedule has been agreed. The Service Director 21st Century Schools advised that Cwm Rhondda is part of the Band B Programme and is part of the Strategic Outline Programme with Welsh Government. She confirmed that a feasibility study has been undertaken and they are working with urban designers to manage the site. She continued that it is a challenge to find a site big enough to house a new secondary school. The Service Director continued that they are also working on the Special School with a feasibility study in the works and moving it forward with Welsh Government. She added that school places are demand led and the location of welsh schools is looked at together with some new substantial housing developments where welsh medium schools are encouraged in those areas.

A Member commented that they would like to see more about the Eistedfodd and what work the Council are doing to support staff to improve their welsh language skills so pupils are able to hear the welsh language all throughout their schooling. The Member asked when will we see proposed schedule to address the actions

A Member asked are we where we thought we would be and what do the targets look like for this annual report. Another Member added the subject of targets was previously raised by Members and would like to see more smart targets added for the ease of reading for Members.

The Director Education and Inclusion advised that the overarching target is a 10% growth in the number of welsh speakers. The feedback we have been from Welsh Government has been that we haven't achieved this yet and this will be very challenging to meet. Outcome 7 has been well received by Welsh Government and has been helpful to understand the nature of the challenges. She continued that the investment programme has been really successful and ambitious compared to other Local Authorities.

A Member asked for more detail on why people aged 25-34 are leaving the profession and if there was more the Authority can do to encourage them to

continue in the profession. The Director Education and Inclusion advised that a workforce report has been requested by the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee which we will include this point in and provide more detail on.

A Member wished to place on record that as non-welsh speaker, their children attend a welsh medium school and have nothing but a positive experience in RCT and encouraged anyone considering this as an option to do it.

A Member noted that on Outcome 3 the statement refers to transition rates across the County Borough being positive, however, some were transitioning to nearest English Medium school, rather than welsh medium. They asked if there is a plan to investigate why a cohort is choosing this option

The Director Education and Inclusion advised that this area is one cluster that will be reviewed further to understand why and stated this the choice may be down to the perception and proximity of the nearest English medium school. She advised that partnerships will need to be formed with neighbouring schools so parents/ carers and pupils are fully informed of their choices. The Director confirmed that this will be prioritised as a strategic development opportunity to ensure growth in the number of welsh speakers is not lost.

A Member asked that future reports include performance indicators so Members are able to scrutinise meaningful and relevant data. The Director acknowledged this point.

Following conclusion of discussions it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note the progress made since the previous update.
2. Consider the actions contained within the appended Annual Work Plan and note the subsequent feedback received from Welsh Government.

65 MANAGEMENT OF TIP SAFETY IN RCTCBC

The Head of Infrastructure and Asset Management presented the report to Members to update them on the work that the Tip Safety Team have undertaken in the last year with respect to the management, monitoring and oversight of disused coal tips within the County Borough. The report was supported by a presentation to Members.

Following conclusion of the presentation the Chair invited Members to ask questions of the officers

A Member referred to the vacancies within the teams and noted that they were being filled by agency staff currently and asked what the long terms plans were for permanently filling the vacancies. The Head of Infrastructure and Asset Management responded that they have received authorisation to re-advertise the posts but advised they were navigating a limited market for the skills and experience required for the post along with salary competition.

A Member referred to a public meeting held in which there was a limited attendance and asked if the Council were doing enough to raise awareness of the issues. The Officer acknowledged that there was low attendance at the meeting and this is something the team are looking at. She added that residents are encouraged to raise their queries if they do have specific concerns.

A Member asked what powers the Council has on private tip owners. The Officer responded that there were a number of private tip owners in RCT but the powers the Council have are limited. She advised that if there were immediate safety concerns, they could call a “black defect” which in effect would mean that action should be taken immediately. She concluded that irrespective of ownership the Council undertakes the safety inspections.

A Member asked what the longer term commitment from Welsh Government is to address the issues regarding tip safety going forward. The Officer responded that she was not aware that Welsh Government have given ongoing longer term commitment to funding for coal tip safety but Committee can be advised if the situation changes. Members raised questions in relation to tips in Tylorstown and Ton Pentre and asked for regular reporting on the issue back to Committee. The Officer acknowledged and added that if Members do have any specific queries in relation to tips in their ward / area to contact the Coal Tip Safety Team at any time.

A Member sought clarification on the impacts on costs to the Authority as well as any crossover with flood alleviation schemes and how this is managed.

The Head of Infrastructure and Asset Management advised that the Council involvement in private tips, also covers Natural Resources Wales and Coal Authority owned tips and they have a duty for the prevention on danger from tips but it should be recognised there are limits to those powers. She confirmed that this is currently all covered by grant funding which the local authority applies for on behalf of private owners. She advised that in relation to Tree removal and water management, the Council can undertake maintenance to drainage channels, but they have to apply for water course consent in addition to other regulatory requirements under the framework they have to adhere to.

A Member asked if the Local Authority consider the removal of the tips where they endanger communities and would this be more cost effective in the longer term. The Officer responded that the removal has to be done on a priority basis as the cost is very very high and stated that the programme of work that should go forward is to look at the stability of the tip to see what rec of work can be undertaken where tip safety is an issue.

Following conclusion of the report it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Be aware of the work undertaken by the Tip Safety team
2. Consider the different approaches for Tip Safety with RCTCBC under the Mines and Quarries (Tips) Act 1969, as landowner and with ongoing risk management and prioritisation of resources.
3. Receive further reports in respect of further scrutiny.

66 Draft Annual Equality Report 2022-23

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications advised Members that the report was before Members to provide them with the opportunity to pre-scrutinise the Council’s Draft Annual Equality Report attached at Appendix B, for the year 2022-23 in advance of Cabinet’s consideration and whether it agrees the publication of the Annual Equality Report 2022-23. Members will recall the identification of equality and diversity for greater scrutiny as part of scrutiny improvements was identified in 2020.

Members were presented with the Annual Equality Report 2022/23 by the Diversity and Inclusion Manager for the purpose of undertaking pre-scrutiny and providing feedback and comments in advance of Cabinet's consideration of the report.

Members were advised that the Annual Equality Report has been developed to fulfil the Council's legal duties and obligations to report on its progress in delivering the General and Specific Equality Duties. Members were asked to consider whether the report has captured the relevant information required to fulfil the Council's legal duties and obligations to report on how it has met the General Equality Duty set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Members welcomed the Annual Equality Report and the following comments and observations were made

The Committee welcomed and supported the report and during discussions considered the possibility of poverty and class being discriminated against which is a concern. Therefore members recommended that this is considered as part of the reporting process in future reports.

In analysing data throughout the report, Members were pleased to note the improved outcomes in a number of areas including the Healthy Relationship Programme. Members highlighted that the data did not suggest improved outcomes following the project. Members were reassured to hear however that this was not the case and outcomes were positive.

Members also noted the Equality monitoring data around national identity and ethnicity and recommended more commentary and summary around ethnicity, particularly including information around how the Council is widening recruitment practices to ensure we are an attractive employer to the global majority.

Following conclusion of the report it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Undertake pre scrutiny on the report (attached at Appendix B), thus providing Scrutiny with an opportunity to contribute to this matter; and
2. Authorise the Service Director Democratic Services and Communications to provide feedback to Cabinet on behalf of Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

67 Draft Strategic Equality Plan

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications advised that the report was before Members to pre-scrutinise the Council's draft Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) 2024-28 Equality Report. He continued that Members of the Overview & Scrutiny are being provided with the opportunity to undertake pre scrutiny on the SEP in advance of Cabinet's consideration and whether it agrees the publication of the SEP Members will recall the identification of equality and diversity for greater scrutiny as part of scrutiny improvements identified in 2020

Members welcomed the Strategic Equality Plan which was supported by all Members of the Committee. Members thanked the officers for their commitment on the implementation of the plan and were reassured to see a detailed action plan outlining its implementation.

Members recommended that Scrutiny revisit this item in the future to measure its effectiveness and implementation, particularly in relation to the rollout and delivery of the mandatory training to all staff which they recognised is a vast undertaking.

Following conclusion of the item it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Undertake pre scrutiny on the report (attached at Appendix B), thus providing Scrutiny with an opportunity to contribute to this matter; and
2. Authorise the Service Director Democratic Services and Communications to provide feedback to Cabinet on behalf of Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
3. To include as an item on the future O&S Work Programme

68 Urgent Business

None

69 Chairs Review and Close

Thanked officers for attending the meeting.

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg / This document is also available in Welsh

This meeting closed at 7.10 pm

Chair.