

# OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

## Annual Report 2020-21

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**RHONDDA CYNON TAF**





**Councillor L. M. Adams**

## **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY**

### **Annual Report 2020-21**

# **Chairman's Foreword**

**When the pandemic hit, the Council's overwhelming focus was to protect its residents and continue to operate its key functions. The Council's scrutiny function, as with all its formal Committees, has found out that both Members and Officers can be flexible and operate incredibly well in a rapidly changing environment. We have learnt to scrutinise remotely, maintain a flexible approach to our forward work programmes and adapt to changing priorities. Our colleagues and partners have embraced new ways of working and have worked alongside us. Every Scrutiny Committee has evidenced, through their work programme outcomes that we can produce good quality scrutiny at pace. Remote working has taught us to streamline processes, maintain quality yet increase our flexibility and agility.**

This has been a much shorter Municipal Year than normal as the Council's Annual General Meeting (AGM) was delayed until September 2020. Before that, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee became the single point of scrutiny for all reports and updates with an invitation extended to all non-executive members to participate. During that time, we considered a number of Covid related reports as well as the traditional scrutiny reports, ensuring we did not place any undue burden on our officers and partners who were involved in the Covid response and recovery process.

Beyond the AGM all four thematic Scrutiny Committees resumed their activity with a much-needed carefully managed forward work programme that would see them identify the emerging issues and adopting a more business as usual approach. The Scrutiny Committees have all successfully produced sharper pieces of work, mixed in with traditional scrutiny reports to respond to what is a fast-moving situation. We have undertaken a number of pre-scrutiny opportunities which means we have been able to comment on important decisions before they are made.

We are already best placed to deal with the requirements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act, in particular robust scrutiny of the executive. I believe we are already undertaking this good practice which will stand us in good stead for the future. We have also participated in a number of Welsh Government consultations, to make sure scrutiny's voice is heard at the early stage of the process.

As Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee I am confident that we have taken the opportunities to enhance our collective resilience and focus on key issues for the benefit of the communities that we serve.

**Councillor L M Adams**  
**Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
**Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council**

# The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year

## The Year in Numbers

**41** Scrutiny Committees in total held

**6** Pre-scrutiny of key decisions

**1** Notice of Motion referred to Scrutiny by Council

**1** Members' Steering Group established

**3** Consultations Contributed to

**1** Call-In

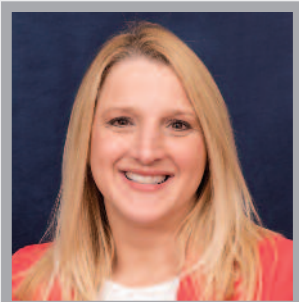
**1** Referral from Audit Committee

**20** Reports in response to COVID-19

# Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairs



Cllr. L. M. Adams



Cllr. S. Rees-Owen



Cllr. S. Bradwick



Cllr. R. Yeo



Cllr. M. Powell

**Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee:** Cllr. L M Adams

**Chair of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee:** Cllr. S. Rees-Owen

**Chair of Public Service Delivery, Communities & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee:** Cllr. S. Bradwick

**Chair of Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee:** Cllr. R. Yeo

**Chair of Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee:** Cllr. M. Powell

# The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year

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- **Scrutiny's principal aims**



**Councillor L. M. Adams**

## Overview & Scrutiny Committee

I am proud to have been Chair of the **Overview & Scrutiny Committee** at such a pivotal time in the council calendar, when scrutiny continued to be member led and robust. Although we acknowledged that it had to be more flexible than ever before, we demonstrated that it could be conducted in a supportive and constructive way, scrutinising issues that impacted on the lives of residents and the places in which they live and in line with the Committee's **terms of reference**.

The Committee has scrutinised a range of Council services over the year, with a number of key recommendations being brought forward, which it is anticipated will assist the service in its delivery and have a positive impact on the residents and users of those services within RCT. Details of this work is illustrated at the end of this section of the report, however, a number of key areas taken forward by the Committee have been highlighted below.

### **Pre Scrutiny of the Council's Residential Care Home Service for Older People.**

During this shortened municipal year, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee has undertaken pre scrutiny of many important issues, some of which have been a long standing and substantive focus for some time. **Pre-Scrutiny** in Rhondda Cynon Taf provides the opportunity for all members to inform the development of key policy areas providing the ability to act as a critical friend in advance of Cabinet consideration.

In recent years, this approach has been further enhanced through the ability of scrutiny to consider the Cabinet Work Programme and as a result of the engagement undertaken with Senior Leadership Team and Cabinet Members, enables Scrutiny Chairs to be cited on the decisions and policy developments.

The modernisation process of the Council's Residential Care Home Service for Older People has been one of our key considerations since Cabinet outlined its vision for services for older people in 2018. This committee has been at the forefront of the council's considerations and we, once again, had the opportunity to undertake pre scrutiny of the consultation feedback on the **1st December 2020**.

Scrutiny agreed that the proposals to increase the number of the retained council residential care homes to 9 and redeveloping 2 further homes to meet identified needs for additional accommodation with care and support, would provide adaptable solutions for the growing needs of an aged population. We also acknowledged how the thorough consultation process had listened to the views and opinions of residents.

**Outcome** - The comments and feedback of the Committee were presented to the Cabinet on the **3rd December 2020**. Scrutiny will continue to be involved at further stages of the process and contribute to this hugely important development.

# The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year

## Review of Flooding in RCT

During February 2020 and just prior to the pandemic, Rhondda Cynon Taf suffered enormous storm damage and flooding in the wake of Storm Dennis. To understand the extent of the impact of the storm on the communities of RCT, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee undertook a review to consider information relating to the flooding via council officers and relevant partner organisations such as Welsh Water and Natural Resources Wales (NRW), to contribute to the statutory reporting mechanisms of the Council (as flood management authority) and to establish an inquiry session whereby local members would present their views and first hand evidence.

Over the course of two Scrutiny Committees (**14th October 2020, 9th December 2020**) and the Scrutiny Inquiry Session as well as the collation of verbal and written accounts, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee identified several common issues which emerged from both verbal and written accounts.

**Outcome** - The substantial evidence in its entirety was submitted to Cabinet on the **18th December 2020** together with a summary of Scrutiny's comments and observations. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee will continue to scrutinise the Council's flood risk management and emergency planning arrangements following the outcome of the Council's internal review, including any quarter performance information in respect of these areas. Scrutiny will complete its review in the next municipal year.

# The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year

## Response to Consultations of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act.

On 18th November 2019, Welsh Government published the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill. The Bill (now the Act, having received Royal Assent in January 2021) aims to reform and strengthen local government and to improve electoral arrangements. It contains wide ranging proposals that will have a significant impact on the Council. To ensure Members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee were formally briefed on the content of the proposed legislation and the likely impacts of those proposals on local government, scrutiny, as supported by Full Council, has undertaken several opportunities to formally indicate their position on the proposals and communicate this to Welsh Government.

At our meeting on the **13th January 2020** we responded to the general proposals and any potential barriers to the implementation of the Bill's provisions, the appropriateness of the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation and the financial implications of the Bill. Scrutiny has since also provided its responses to Welsh Government's consultation to consider draft regulations which would be made under that legislation in respect of the establishment and operation of Corporate Joint Committees (CJC's). More recently we received a **position statement** in respect of the requirements of the Act. The 'Coming into Force' provisions of the Act are complex and therefore the position statement sets out a much needed Action Plan detailing the various provisions of the Act, the work already undertaken and that which is required to prepare this Council for these various provisions.

**Outcome** - The Overview & Scrutiny Committee will continue to receive further information on the requirements of the Act and in particular the future role for scrutineers.

## Call-In - Call in of Key Officer Delegated Decision: Sale of Part of the Former Lady Windsor Colliery Site, Ynysybwl

Earlier in the year, a **call-in** requested that the decision of the Director of Corporate Estates relating to the Sale of Part of the Former Lady Windsor Colliery Site, Ynysybwl published on the 30th July be considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. On the 12th August 2020, Committee considered a range of written and oral evidence from the three signatories to the call-in, members of the public and the Director of Corporate Estates.

**Outcome** - Scrutiny determined to refer the matter back to the decision maker, the Director of Corporate Estates, for further consideration based on the grounds of the call-in.



## The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year

The broader work programme of the Committee has continued to challenge and scrutinise the delivery of Council services, including the Council's recovery planning following the initial lockdown in 2020. Many areas of the Council's work have received specific focus over the last municipal year, including how the Council seeks to promote equalities and the steps the Council is taking to address climate change locally.

Through this focus, which we have been required to provide, and as a result of virtual arrangements and the pressure faced by Council Officers, there are a number of areas of work which the Council has needed to suspend during this shortened municipal year, which we will seek to resume as part of the 2021/22 municipal year.

I would like to extend my thanks to my Vice Chair, Councillor Wendy Lewis, and members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for their continued support and hard work.

[Click here for all Scrutiny \*\*Virtual meetings\*\*.](#)

Other work of the **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** included:

- Annual Equalities Report 2019/20
- Customer Feedback Scheme – Comments, Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2019/20
- Progress of the Cardiff Capital Region ('CCR') Joint Cabinet (the 'Regional Cabinet' - a joint committee)
- Welsh Government Consultation: Draft Regulations to Establish Corporate Joint Committees
- The Council's Fire Safety Risk Assessment Process
- Local Authority Arrangements to Safeguard Children and Adults at Risk
- Consideration of the Cabinet Forward Work Programme
- RLDP Members Steering Group

# The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year

## Scrutiny Chairs & Vice Chairs

The Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs continue to meet to ensure co-ordination between the respective Committees, oversee forward work programmes and share learning. The Chairs and Vice Chairs have also maintained regular engagement sessions with their respective Scrutiny Lead Officers and Cabinet Members to discuss forward work programmes and to form a sound knowledge of each other's work.

I would like to acknowledge the due diligence of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the four thematic Scrutiny Committees for undertaking such a large volume of scrutiny this year and for maintaining such an overwhelming pace of work under virtual conditions.



**Councillor S. Rees-Owen**

## Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee

Key to the **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee's** work for 2020/ 2021 has been the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to Education and Children's Services. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee became the first of the thematic Scrutiny Committees to undertake a programme of work so that it could scrutinise and challenge the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic from both an education and children's services perspective and in line with its **terms of reference**.

### Response to COVID-19 - Education & Children's Services

The first of many COVID-19 responses from an education perspective was presented on the **22nd July 2020** as we examined a number of critical actions taken by the service since March 2020 and preparations for the return to school in September 2020. We are grateful for the frequency and level of detailed evidence we have received directly from the Director of Education & Inclusion Services, to enable committee to engage effectively with these fast-moving matters over the last municipal year.

From the outset of this municipal year, we prioritised scrutinising the response of Children's Services approach to supporting vulnerable children and families of Rhondda Cynon Taf during the pandemic. We scrutinised how the service, in keeping with Welsh Government statutory guidance, has continued to maintain services such as family support, safeguarding duties, children looked after and youth offending.

We have received a number of **joint reports** from both Directorates outlining the support to promote the health and emotional wellbeing of pupils, staff and families across RCT as a result of COVID-19. We scrutinised the work of all service areas to ensure they are adapting to new and emerging challenges with a clear focus on preventative and sustainable models of service delivery that are both efficient and effective for the wellbeing of our young people.

More recently and as lockdown measures unfold, our attention has turned to the huge challenges ahead for both service areas in developing their recovery plans.

**Outcome** - Committee will scrutinise the delivery adjustments as they are made in response to the national alert levels and we have committed to **receive termly education** updates to remain well-informed.

## The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year

### Scrutiny of the impact of the Central South Consortium

In line with our terms of reference we continue to challenge the **Central South Consortium (CSC)** on their approach in developing a school led system and to provide evidence that CSC is value for money and to demonstrate its impact and effectiveness. Committee held the CSC to account for its support to schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf, particularly during lockdown, and of its assessment, evaluation and accountability arrangements supporting a self-improving system.

**Outcome** - We propose to maintain our robust challenge of the Central South Consortium on a regular basis.

### Notice of Motion (NOM) - Kinship Care

We welcomed the **Notice of Motion (NOM)** in respect of kinship care which was referred to our Committee by Council on the 29th July 2020.

Following our meeting held on the **13th January 2021** Committee proposed, in discussion with the proposer and seconder of the NOM, to scrutinise the results of a survey of carers and kinship carers to assess their needs and we will invite representatives from 'Grandparents Plus' who are working closely with the local authority to improve support to friends and families across Rhondda Cynon Taf.

**Outcome** - We will complete our review and make our recommendations to Cabinet in the next Municipal Year.

# The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year

## Referral from the Audit Committee – to the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee

The **referral from the Audit Committee** to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee came following concerns raised in respect of high levels of unauthorised absence at statutory school ages and Post-16 attendance levels. Attendance and exclusion data are routinely reported to scrutiny as are regular updates on the Attendance Strategy.

**Outcome** - Following thorough scrutiny of the information we proposed that an audit of post 16+ is undertaken in the new municipal year. We will make our recommendations to the Audit Committee based on further evidence and as such, this will be included as part of our forward work programme for 2021/22.

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In addition to the above, Members have continued to challenge a range of other areas including access to online learning by disadvantaged pupils during the pandemic and the how attendance has been impacted, including consideration of how the Council is working to improve attendance<sup>1</sup> across Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The Committee has also sought to understand how the pandemic may have impacted on the participation in Welsh Medium Education and the unique challenges faced by parents and pupils by remote learning.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to thank Members for their hard work and contributions over what has been an extremely challenging year. My thanks also to the Vice Chair, Councillor Julie Edwards, for her support throughout the year.

Other work of the **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** included:

- Regional Adoption Annual Report
- Report from the Corporate Parenting Annual Report
- Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Inspection in relation to the Disable Children's Service review
- WESP Annual Report
- Eye to Eye Counselling Service report
- Implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act (ALNET) 2018
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)



**Councillor R. Yeo**

## Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

**The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee** plays a vital role in assessing service performance and policy development across a range of Council Services, including all aspects of Adult Social Care, Housing, Leisure Services and Public Health and Protection, as set out in its **terms of reference**.

### Response to COVID-19 - Adult Services

The first of many reports and updates to Committee outlining the Council's response to the COVID -19 pandemic from an Adult Services perspective was presented on the **14th September 2020**. This became our key focus for the 2020/21 Municipal Year, and we requested relevant statistical indicators to accurately monitor the performance and recovery actions of this vital service in line with the Council's 2020/21 Corporate Plan.

Not only did we scrutinise the plans in place across health and social care that addressed the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, we proposed that this also included information on the winter pressures across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region. Committee was keen to understand how the health and social care providers and partners delivered quality care and services throughout a demanding period and to ensure that the frequently updated guidance from Welsh Government had been disseminated appropriately.

**Outcome** - To undertake further scrutiny of the recovery oversight and coordination for Adult Services.

### Response to COVID-19 - Adult Carers Support

As a result of Committee's concerns regarding the support available for adult carers and the increased resilience by them and their families culminating in a higher demand on adult social care, we received a report at our meeting on the **8th February 2021** on the provision for adult carers throughout the pandemic. We scrutinised the work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Carers Support Project (CSP) along with data from day service provision, sitting services and formal respite provision.

Respite services has continued to support unpaid carers, residential and nursing placements, sitting services and day centre provision for adults with learning disabilities or dementia, have all continued to operate despite the restrictions.

**Outcome** - Committee has committed to scrutinise this issue through regular reporting to ensure that the strength and resilience of all carers has been and continues to be adequately supported throughout the pandemic.

# The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year

## Response to COVID-19 - Public Health and Protection Services

The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee has a commitment to review the work of the Public Health and Protection Services. An overview of the regulatory service response to the pandemic was provided to the Committee on the **12th January 2021**. It included Regulatory Services (including Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Licensing, Community Safety), Homelessness Provision and the Registrar Service. It also included the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Contact Tracing Service operated by RCTCBC on behalf of the Region. To ensure that monitoring the demand on the vulnerable within our communities had been undertaken, we requested an **update** on the Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022 to revisit and review the Action Plan accordingly.

We reviewed the renewal of the **Service Level Agreement between the Local Authority and Hope Rescue**, which provides the stray dog kennelling facility for the Council. Evidence of more robust processes and sustained improvements in service delivery, since its initial implementation, warranted the endorsement to renew the Service Level Agreement.

**Outcome** - Committee endorsed the Service Level Agreement between Hope Rescue and the Local Authority.

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I would like to extend my gratitude to all members of the Committee for their support throughout this challenging period, particularly my Vice Chair, County Borough Councillor Sheryl Evans for her contribution.

Other work of the **HEALTH & WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** included:

- Integrated Substance Misuse Service in Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil



**Councillor S. Bradwick**

## Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee

I am delighted to introduce to you just some of the work of the **Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee**. The role of the Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Committee as defined in their **terms of reference** is the scrutiny of matters that affect RCTCBCs key Community Services.

### Response to COVID-19 - Waste and Recycling

In setting the 2020/21 Work Programme the Committee prioritised and had regard for the unprecedented time we have all found ourselves in. We recognised the inevitable impact on frontline services from COVID-19 and therefore prioritised the Councils response to the pandemic and how this impacted the strict Welsh Government target for Wales to recycle 70% of its waste by 2025. The Authority achieved the current target set out by Welsh Government of 64% and exceeded the target achieving 68% whilst only being down just over ½% on the previous year. This is testament to the resilience and commitment of our staff and collection and disposal processes.

As the Community Recycling Centres reopened with strict measures in place to comply with COVID-19 legislation, staff responded to the changes in legislation and quickly adapted operations to ensure residents were able to attend the Community Recycling Centres safely to dispose of their waste. Evident to see was the commitment from residents to recycling. During the Christmas 2020 period, more than double the amount that was usually collected was collected in the week before, during and after Christmas on dry recycling and food waste. Over 400 tonnes of food waste and 450 tonnes of dry recycling had been collected in one day, whereas the previous year this figure would have been collected over a week. This had contributed to the residual waste figure significantly reducing during this period. Well done to our residents who are clearly committed in supporting the Authority achieve the ambitious Welsh Government targets to ultimately achieve zero waste by 2050.

**Outcome** - Achieving the strict Welsh Government targets is a priority for the Authority and in setting our Forward Work Programme for 2021/22 we will have regard for these targets. As a Committee we will work with local schools and businesses to challenge their recycling and waste procedures, to improve them in support of the Authority. We want to convey a clear message that tackling this issue is everyone's responsibility.



## The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year

### Pre-Scrutiny of the Dog Control Public Spaces Protection Orders

On the **23rd September 2020** the Committee undertook pre-scrutiny of a proposed extension and variation to Rhondda Cynon Taf CBCs Dog Control Public Spaces Protection Orders. We considered the outcomes of the public consultation exercise to extend the two Public Spaces Protection Orders, relating to dog controls, in Rhondda Cynon Taf (the Dog Control PSPO's). It was proposed that they be renewed for a further 3 year period in order to maintain the significant benefits the orders have had in relation to dog fouling and ensure appropriate powers remain in place to deal with the minority who continue to flout the laws.

**Outcome -** Members determined that further enforcement would not be as effective as education and recommended that the Authority work closely with schools to educate our children and young people on the importance of being a responsible dog owner and understand the potential health risks of not clearing dog waste.

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The impact of COVID-19 on the Services covered by the Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee, has been substantial and we wish to extend our gratitude for the hard work, commitment and continued efforts of the staff involved in ensuring that vital services are still delivered to the residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough. I would like to thank my Vice Chair, County Borough Councillor Tina Williams, and all members of the Scrutiny Committee for their hard work and commitment over the past twelve months as we have continued to ensure that matters of public interest have been scrutinised throughout what we can all agree has been an extraordinary year.

Other work of the **PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY, COMMUNITIES & PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** included:

- Impact of COVID-19 on Community Recycling Centres
- Bryn Pica Waste Management Facility
- Impact of COVID-19 on Operations of Parks and Countryside
- Streetcare Enforcement
- Parking Enforcement Partnership
- Changes to Green Waste Collections



**Councillor M. Powell**

## Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee

As Chair of the **Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee** I am pleased to report on what has been another productive, albeit unprecedented, year. Throughout the pandemic, we have continued to maintain our rigorous challenge of the Council's budget proposals and expenditure and scrutiny of the Council's performance as set out in our **terms of reference**.

### Review of the Tourism Strategy

In December 2020, we received an update on the **Draft Tourism Strategy** in light of the current COVID-19 Pandemic. In view of the sector being impacted heavily by COVID-19, Committee was keen to understand how the Council was working with the sector to maintain and support its future recovery, recognising the opportunity this sector provides to deliver the aspirations of the Council's Corporate Plan. Members were complimentary of the progress which continues to be made and the ambitions set out with the draft plan.

### Pre-Scrutiny of the Council Performance Quarterly Reports

Committee scrutinised the **2021/22 Budget Consultation**, as part of its role as a consultee and in line with the Committee's terms of reference.

**Outcome** - Scrutiny feedback, queries and challenges were incorporated into a Phase 1 Budget Consultation report, alongside the feedback received from all other stakeholders, and were considered by Cabinet as part of a proposed Revenue Budget Strategy for the 2021/22 financial year.

We undertook pre-scrutiny of the draft 2021/22 Revenue Budget Strategy in **early 2021**. Specifically, we commented on the **proposed Cabinet Budget Strategy for Council Tax**, the **proposed Cabinet Budget Strategy for Schools Budget**, the **proposed Cabinet Budget Strategy for Efficiencies**, and the **proposed Cabinet Budget Strategy for Additional Investment**.

**Outcome** - This enabled non-executive Members to examine and provide feedback on the proposals, and for these to be considered by Cabinet prior to it recommending a Revenue Budget Strategy to full Council in March 2021.

## The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year

### Response to COVID-19 - Digital Transformation

In last year's scrutiny annual report, I included our review of the **Digital Strategy 2017-20**, and it was timely that we received an update on the **Council's Digital and ICT Services** which demonstrated how it had delivered and supported Council services over the last 12 months. Scrutiny recognised the value of the successful delivery of the Council's Digital Strategy 2017-20 which had formed the building blocks to enable the rapid response to COVID-19 for effective homeworking for staff, virtual meetings for Elected Members and Officers, HWB Schools transformation, the development of digital processes for RCT citizens and its support of the Trace, Track and Protect and mass testing/vaccination programmes.

**Outcome** - There is a continued commitment that the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee will be consulted on the Council's Digital Strategy for 2021 and the Committee were keen to ensure that the positive progress made during the pandemic to promote virtual working is embedded into future working arrangements.

### Scrutiny of the Employment & Skills Strategy 2019-21

As part of our remit, we reviewed the Employment and Skills Strategy for 2019-21 to assess how the Council and its partners have delivered their priorities throughout COVID-19 to offer support to learners, jobseekers and employers through a number of employment support programmes, employment routes programmes and online provision. Scrutiny recognised the longer-term impact of COVID-19 on businesses and communities and the importance of services adapting their delivery of provision to attract new learners and opportunities to maximise existing resources for the development of skills and employment support.

**Outcome** - In setting our Forward Work Programme for 2021/22 we will have regard to the Employment & Skills Strategy, particularly its recovery from COVID-19 and the proposals for the development of a new plan at the end of 2021.

## The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year

I must, of course, thank all members of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee for their continued hard work and dedication in challenging the Council's performance to deliver better outcomes for residents. Extended thanks to my Vice-Chair Councillor Graham Thomas for his support throughout the year.

I would also like to thank the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for his continued support for the Committee's work.

Other work of the **FINANCE & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** included:

- The 2021/22 Capital Strategy Report
- The 2021/22 Treasury Management Strategy Report
- Progress against the Corporate Asset Management Plan 2018/23
- The Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan 2020/21 to 2023/24
- CIL Annual Monitoring Report and the proposed changes to the Regulation 123 List
- The Council's 'digital by default' approach

# The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2020-2021 Municipal Year

## Scrutiny's principal aims:

- Better outcomes for the people of RCT
- Adding value to the way decisions are reached
- Working constructively with Cabinet
- Challenging positively as a critical friend
- Basing its findings on good evidence
- Learning from others

## Focus for 2021/22:

- Continuing the Council's good practice of undertaking pre scrutiny of key decisions and for scrutiny to continue to engage with the relevant Cabinet Member and portfolio holder to identify opportunities for future scrutiny in line with the proposals of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act.
- Development of the Scrutiny toolkit to provide easy to use practical guidance and clarity to Members.
- Further develop the best support for our Scrutiny Members with a focus on self-evaluation; chairing skills; scrutiny of performance data; financial scrutiny and the development of E-learning through the Members' Portal.
- Ensuring that the Scrutiny Committees complete self-evaluation exercises at least once a year (as part of the process of preparing for the Scrutiny Annual Report).
- Ensure our scrutiny arrangements continue to comply with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and focus on the need to reduce the inequalities of outcome that result from socio-economic disadvantage.
- As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, consider more innovative and effective ways of scrutiny, taking full advantage of technology to this end.
- Further encouraging of public participation within the democratic process through work programme setting and webcasting of meetings.

<sup>1</sup> The Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) Scrutiny Working Group, tasked with scrutinising the impact the implementation of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's) has on Attendance & Wellbeing across the County Borough, will submit its findings and recommendations to Cabinet in the 2021/22 Municipal Year.