

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

Annual Report 2022-23



RHONDDA CYNON TAF



Councillor J. Edwards

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

Annual Report 2022-23

Chair's Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the first Overview & Scrutiny Annual report since being appointed as Chair to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2022-27 and following the first year of the revised Scrutiny arrangements. The implementation of the newly created Scrutiny Committee framework supports the new requirements in the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act for 2021. These changes provide a more simplified reporting structure which better aligns with the Council Corporate Plan and the operation of services and has further enhanced the ability for better support returning and newly elected Member to undertake their scrutiny role and effectively challenge and scrutinise service delivery.

This report reflects on the diligent efforts and hard work of all our Scrutiny Committees who have been dedicated to ensuring that we operate an effective function and provide a constructive critical friend challenge to drive improvement in the delivery of our services. The report highlights the challenges the Authority has faced, the solutions implemented and the outcomes achieved for our residents. The report also demonstrates our commitment to continuous improvement and provides valuable insights into our work. This year we have placed a greater priority on undertaking pre-decision Scrutiny to support the Executive in making well informed and considered decisions and are effective in achieving the intended outcomes for the public.

Some of the highlights from this year's report where Scrutiny have played an integral role and influenced the decision process include a Review of Residential Care in RCT, Scrutiny of the Council's Budget setting process and continuous monitoring the impact of the 21st Century Schools Modernisation programme. These are significant topics that impact on our residents. More information on these topics can be read in greater detail within the report.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay thanks to all Scrutiny Chairs, Vice Chairs, Scrutiny Members and Co-opted Members for their dedication and support in ensuring our Committees have continued to make a positive impact, I would also like to thank our stakeholders & officers for their support, hard work and commitment throughout the year.

Councillor J. Edwards
Chair, Overview & Scrutiny 2022-27 Committee
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2022-2023 Municipal Year

Contents

- **Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee (2022-23)**
- **Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee (2022-23)**
- **Community Services Scrutiny Committee (2022-23)**
- **Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee (2022-23)**



Councillor J. Edwards

Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee (2022-23)

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee co-ordinates the work of the four Scrutiny Committees and is responsible for approving the Work Programmes developed by the three thematic scrutiny committees to ensure a deliverable, co-ordinated and outcome focussed schedule of work programmes. Where there are matters that fall within the remit of more than one Scrutiny Committee, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will determine which Committee has responsibility for its review. This Committee is also responsible for dealing with all 'Call-ins'. More information on the responsibilities of the Committee can be found [here](#).

Pre Scrutiny - Residential Care for Older People

On the **29 November 2022** and **27 February 2023** we had the opportunity to pre-scrutinise the proposals on the preferred options on the future provision of accommodation with care for older people in Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Modernisation and investment proposals as a result of a need to modernise and continually improve adult social care services in Rhondda Cynon Taf with the focus shifting to supporting independence so that people are supported to remain in their own homes for as long as possible. More information on the decision taken forward can be found [here](#).

Members welcomed the report and agreed that doing nothing was not a viable option and that there would be a need to make difficult decisions for the benefit of achieving good quality, fit for purpose, modern accommodation for residents. They acknowledged that the demand for residential care has reduced, with more residents wishing to remain independent and to be cared for within their own homes which was at the forefront of our questioning of the proposals;

Recommendations/outcomes

- Members **recommended** appropriate engagement with staff around redeployment and voluntary retirement options be undertaken, where necessary.
- Members emphasised the importance of consulting on the proposals with residents, and families at every stage of the process to ensure that residents are able to stay close to their families. This would also support the Authority in analysing the demand to ensure the facilities are future-proofed and fit the needs of our residents.
- Members raised concerns around the decommissioning of existing care homes before the development of new accommodation such as the relocation of Ferndale House and the Ystrad Fechan care home. As the latter is located on a flood zone, further concern was raised that this resource could be removed permanently if an alternative location is not found – as a result Members **recommended** to receive a further information on this care home, over and above that contained within the report was requested by Committee.
- Members felt that, whilst the Extra Care facilities are excellent, they **recommended** that they are designed to accommodate residents should they develop more complex needs and also meet modern day standards; this would prevent residents having to move facilities and they could remain in their home where their surroundings are familiar and comfortable.

The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2022-2023 Municipal Year

Budget 2023-2024

As well as monitoring the Council's Financial performance throughout the year, Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also undertake the crucial role of scrutinising the setting of the **Council's Annual Budget** to ensure that the proposals put forward reflect the priorities of the Council and demonstrate an effective and efficient use of our resources.

As we are all feeling the effects of the current UK Cost of Living Crisis, we were pleased to hear that proposed increases to Council Tax would be minimal and the proposal of 3.5% put forward, was far below the rate of inflation and one of the lowest proposed increases in Wales. Whilst we were reassured to hear that the Budget Strategy allocated funding in full to cover school costs, members **challenged** the use of schools reserves and **recommended** that the Authority supports schools in having a plan in place for utilisation of the reserves to support future efficiencies.

In considering efficiency saving proposals in the Budget, members of the Committee agreed with the Council's approach to maximise efficiency savings and on-going approaches to find new ways of working but recommended that Scrutiny closely monitors the impact of the efficiencies to ensure these do not result in a reduction in the service delivery, particularly frontline services that have a direct impact on our residents.

We were pleased to see that proposals in relation to the fees and charges were realistic and support the Council in achieving a balanced budget. We were satisfied that the charges continue to remain competitive and provide value for money for our residents when compared to neighbouring authorities. We did recommend that the Authority explore the option of charging non RCT residents a higher fee for use of the lido which would result in a higher income for the Authority but also contribute to the reduction of block booking and no shows which the Council has experienced. You can read in further detail our feedback to the Cabinet **here**.

The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2022-2023 Municipal Year

Consultations - Review of Parliamentary Constituencies in Wales – Boundary Commission for Wales' Initial Proposals

Members acted as consultees and provided formal feedback on the final revised proposals of the Boundary Commission for Wales at their meeting on the **7 November 2022**.

The Local Boundary Commission for Wales are responsible for reviewing parliamentary constituency boundaries in Wales and are currently required to submit a formal report by 1 July 2023 on the basis of rules set out in the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 (as amended by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020). The review will involve a significant reduction in the number of constituencies in Wales from the current 40 to 32. Further information on the final proposals and how these affect Rhondda Cynon Taf that were considered by the Committee can be found **here**. We look forward to receiving the final decision from the Boundary Commission when published in July.

Outcomes / Recommendations

- Members expressed concerns with the proposal for the **Taffs Well** ward to sit within the Cardiff North constituency as it was felt that **Taffs Well** had no direct connections with the other communities that would fall within the proposed constituency. Members also felt this would cause confusion within the community as they would sit within different Boundaries at a Local Authority and Parliamentary level. Members therefore **recommended** that if **Taffs Well** should move out of the **Pontypridd** constituency, it would be better placed within the **Cardiff West constituency** as the Community has more in common with neighbouring wards such as **Gwaelod-Y-Garth** and **Pentyrch**.
- Similar concerns were raised in relation to **Mountain Ash**, in that this area does not have any strong connections with **Pontypridd** and this aligns better and is more commonly known in the **Cynon Valley**, therefore members recommended that this would fall better if sat with **Merthyr and Upper Cynon Constituency**.
- Members raised concerns that the wards serving **Pencoed** are included in the proposed **Rhondda** constituency and stated that this proposal was contrary to the statement that the commission will seek to recommend constituencies that are made up of whole electoral wards that are next to each other and do not contain detached parts. Members therefore recommended that this proposal is not taken forward

Some other highlights of the Committee included:

Coal Tip Safety (Wales) White Paper

Service Review Community Meals Service

Revised Waste Management Strategy

Electoral Administration and Reform White Paper

**Council Progress Update - Audit Wales Equality Impact Assessments:
more than a tick box exercise?**

Annual Equalities Report

Welsh Language Promotion Strategy – 5 Year Action Plan

Corporate Decarbonisation Strategy

Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee (2022-23)

Consultations

Open Consultations run by the Welsh Government are distributed to Members via the Members' Researcher & Scrutiny Officer on a monthly basis and are updated every fortnight. The end date of each consultation is noted accordingly for Members' convenience.

On the **29th September 2022**, Members of the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee were invited to be consultees of the **Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance 2022 (WelTag)** Consultation and the **National Transport Delivery Plan 2022-2027** Consultation.

Both consultations were run by Welsh Government and representatives from the Welsh Government were invited by the Scrutiny Committee to attend and provide Members with an overview of the background information to each consultation. Members welcomed Ms Clark and Mr Holder, Welsh Government representatives, to the Committee. Members were presented with the questions set out in the consultation and were advised that their responses would be collated and fed back to Welsh Government within the consultation deadlines.

Outcome:

- Members felt that well-being of the community is key and that travel has to be convenient and quick for people to use it;
- Members agreed that the cost of public transport will prohibit the Council achieving Net Zero and advised that if we are to make it more sustainable then the cost of transport has to be addressed;
- Members felt that if the Welsh Government are still working on what 'fairer fares' mean then this negates the purpose of the consultation;
- In respect of the WelTag Consultation, Members felt that there needs to be accountability and scrutiny as the programmes continue. Members agreed that it should be performed by in house teams, however, it was noted that this is reliant on resources. As Democratically Elected Councillors, Members agreed that they are best placed for this, given that they all have links in their own communities and their own areas;
- In respect of the NTDP 2022-27, Members agreed on the importance of raising the accessibility of the Welsh language. The more that people travel by public transport the more they hear and see the language. The more that is used bilingually the better it will be to enhance the use of the Welsh language; and,
- Members felt that they could not answer all the questions in the NTDP Consultation as not enough information had been provided by Welsh Government. Scrutiny therefore requested a further breakdown of the Plan from the Director of Frontline Services.

Subsequently, Scrutiny's comments were collated and sent back to Welsh Government to include Scrutiny as consultees.

The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2022-2023 Municipal Year

Pre-Scrutiny of The RCT Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy

At their meeting on the **15th November 2022**, the Committee received a report which provided an opportunity for Members to pre-scrutinise the **Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy**. At the meeting Members welcomed the Council's Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy and praised the Council's hard work in this area.

The focus of this strategy was to actively protect Rhondda Cynon Taf's Trees and Woodland – the green infrastructure of parks, gardens, woods, trees in streets, footpaths, green spaces, trees and hedges that significantly benefit our environment. The strategy also sets the framework for the Council's commitment to the largest tree planting programme in a generation, adopting the “right tree, right place, right reason” approach.

Outcomes:

- Members considered that the following areas within the report required improvement:
- Consideration on the spacing and planting of fruit trees in clusters to enhance growth, fruit yields and appearance of the trees within the environment and location;
- Whether the report should consider referencing legislation regarding dangerous trees as opposed to the policy referred to in the document. Members felt that the statutory legislation would supersede any local policy and should therefore be included;
- References within the report noting British Standard BS5837 should be checked to confirm that they refer to the updated BS5837 (2012) standard and not previous versions with the name 'BS5837' identifier; and,
- Consideration should also be given to guidance set out by other advisory bodies and relevant associations, such as the NHBC or Royal Botanical Gardens publication and reference materials.

In conclusion, Members commended the report and commented that the Council's ongoing work in this area would lay a solid foundation for supporting further work on the Tree, Woodlands and Hedgerow Strategy.

The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2022-2023 Municipal Year

Electrical Vehicle Charging 'Implementation Plan' and associated 'Action Plan'

On the **29th September 2022**, Members were provided with **The Electric Vehicle Charging Implementation Plan and associated 'Action Plan'** and were asked to provide comments on the Plan to be fed back to the Climate Change Cabinet Sub Committee. The purpose of the Strategy is to inform and set out the Council's aspirations and the Implementation Plan is intended to provide further guidance and advice on the requirements for the development of electric vehicle charging infrastructure across the County Borough.

Outcomes:

Members supported the Strategy and praised the Council's continue investment in its Climate Change Strategy. Members also considered that the following areas within the report required.

Additional focus and attention:

- The infrastructure and technology must be improved before rolling out the Strategy Council wide;
- Members recommended a hybrid approach;
- Members recommended that the Council improves its communication with residents of RCT before the strategy is actioned;
- The type of charging point is essential if residents of RCT are to take this up i.e. super-fast charging points are needed to get residents on board with the Strategy; and,
- Members agreed to review the practicalities of the implementation plan at a later date and asked Officers to return with a more detailed analysis.

Other Work Included:

- Pre scrutiny of the Community Infrastructure Levy annual monitoring plan
- Consultation: Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance (Weltag) 2022
- Green Waste Collections
- Current Biodiversity Works in RCT
- Report on The Council's Recycling Performance 2021/22
- Review of Mainstream School Transport
- Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy Update
- Porth Town Centre Strategy
- Welsh Government 20mph Speed Limit 2023
- Highways Investment Scheme
- Update on The UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund and The Investment Plans for South East Wales and Rhondda Cynon Taf
- The Development of A Draft Regeneration Strategy For Aberdare Town Centre.
- Public Rights of Way

The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2022-2023 Municipal Year

Bryn Pica Site Visit

Members were provided with the opportunity to visit Bryn Pica on the 25th October 2022 and the 13th January 2023. The tour was comprised of two parts: a visit to the Education Centre to allow Members to learn about the recycling process; this was followed by an on-site visit to the Material Recycling Facility (MRF) to see these processes in action. Members valued this opportunity to learn more about the recycling process and Members felt that these visits should be extended to more schools across the County Borough.

Community Services Scrutiny Committee (2022-23)

Children's Services Residential Transformation Strategy

On the **28th November 2022**, the Committee undertook pre-scrutiny of the Children's Services Residential Transformation Strategy report, which provided information about children's services plans for developing residential care services in line with the Council's duties, and in the context of the Welsh Government Policy ambition, to remove profit from the provision of care for looked after young people. It is recognised that scrutiny is a vital component of good governance and improves Councils' decision making, service provision and cost effectiveness, and the undertaking of pre-scrutiny by the Committee in this area, would strengthen accountability and assist Cabinet Members in taking any future decisions on these matters.

Outcome:

- Members acknowledged the considerable uncertainty around providers continuing with a not-for-profit model of delivery by 2027 and wanted reassurance that, if some for-profit organisations, exited the sector, specific provisions were still in place for children and young people to be taken care of.
- Members recognised the legislative intention in the drive to take profit out of the equation but raised concerns that this would have unintended consequences and cut across the drive, to reduce the number of residencies out of county.
- Members felt that it was important for Young People not to be living in bed and breakfast accommodation, whilst acknowledging there were no RCT under 18-year-olds in such accommodation.
- Whilst recognising the shortfalls in the market provision and there were certain exceptions, Members felt it was important for Young People to be reasonably placed, rather than out of county.
- Members felt it was important to consider the appropriate provision, in the right place, acknowledging the need to increase capacity, closer to home, with a sense of urgency.

The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2022-2023 Municipal Year

Support to refugees, Ukraine nationals and asylum seekers in RCT

At their meeting on the **30th January 2023**, the Committee received a report which provided an opportunity for members to scrutinise the support being provided by the Council to refugees, Ukraine nationals and asylum seekers in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT). The report outlined the considerable work undertaken by the Council and partner organisations, to respond positively and as effectively as possible across all the resettlement schemes. Members also heard from an afghan refugee who shared his experience as a refugee, coming to Wales.

Outcomes

- Members wholeheartedly supported the work that was being carried out by the resettlement teams, noting the 800 asylum seekers expected to come into the area and were keen to ensure this was done in a comfortable and respectable way.
- Members recognised in respect of the Welcome Centre, there were some very sensitive issues being managed and it was very difficult to get the balance right, in terms of information, but it was important to consider how difficult this made it for local Members.
- Members noted that asylum seekers were probably going to be the most vulnerable of all and had very little access to resources and were keen to ensure the community cohesion strategy was as strong as it could be.
- Members were keen to ensure that if the Welcome centre, closed at the end of March, families would still continue to be supported.
- Members were concerned about the trauma affecting those that were arriving in the UK, and felt it was also important for Officers to have the appropriate support, to respond to trauma in their work, as a lot of what they would hear, would be harrowing.

The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2022-2023 Municipal Year

Learning disability services transformation programme (day services)

At the meeting on **20th March 2023** Members received an in-depth report and presentation regarding the engagement and co-production activity undertaken in the development of a new draft Day Services operating model and Strategy for people with a learning disability in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Members were taken through details of the comprehensive engagement process undertaken to date as part of the Learning Disability Service 'My Day My Way' project and shown a video providing the results of the engagement and key themes that have emerged that will shape the strategy when it is developed.

Outcomes

- Members noted the excellent work undertaken as part of the engagement process and were pleased to see the recognition it has received from the Social Care Institute for Excellence as an excellent example of co-production. Members recommended that the engagement process continues throughout the development of the Strategy.
- Members were welcoming of the need for change and noted the impactful responses received from individuals with a learning disability, parents & carers and staff regarding the way forward for the service and the offers provided to support individuals.
- Members noted the theme of employment and volunteering as a result of the engagement process and raised the potential opportunities that could be afforded to individuals through the growing number of Community Hubs across the borough.
- Members recommended that they undertake pre-scrutiny of the draft strategy and associated actions plans before its consideration at Cabinet.

Other work included:

- **Director of Social Services Annual Report 2021/22 - 5 October 2022**
- **Representations, Compliments and Complaints Procedures Annual Report - 5 October 2022**
- **Local Authority arrangements to safeguard children and adults at risk – 24 October 2022**
- **Aspects of Trading Standards which protect the vulnerable – 24 October 2022**
- **Audit Wales – Direct payments for adult social care – 24 October 2022**
- **Rhondda Cynon Taf Children's Services Workforce Strategy 2021-24 – 28 November 2022**
- **Hospital Discharge Pressures - 28 November 2022**
- **Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Housing Allocation Scheme 2018 – 30 January 2023**

Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee (2022-23)

Update on the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs & Education Tribunal Act 2018 in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

At their first meeting of the municipal year, on the **27th October 2022**, the Committee received a report on the implementation of the new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) legislation, in place, which was the Additional Learning Needs Education Tribunal Act (ALNET) and the new statutory ALN Code 2021. The report also looked at the potential risks and additional resources needed to ensure the local authority could meet the new statutory duties fully at the end of the three-year national ALN implementation timetable. Members were advised that the report had been presented to Cabinet on the 26th September 2022, and Cabinet had provided approval for the Access and Inclusion Service to progress with phase three proposals during years, two and three of the ALN implementation timetable.

Outcomes

- Members raised concern, whilst acknowledging the new constraints on budgets with individual schools, that staff taking on ALN responsibilities, would need time outside of the classroom to provide these functions effectively e.g., meet with parents, external bodies, etc, and it would be useful to revisit this when budget constraints became clearer within schools.
- Members highlighted the increase in the numbers of children aged 0 to 3 identified as having ALN, whilst acknowledging the implications of Covid-19.
- Members felt it would be useful to have anonymised case studies to come back to the committee, in the future.
- Members agreed that a further update to the Committee should be forthcoming include the priorities outlined, tying in with the status quo, case studies and best practice examples, monitoring and evaluation of early years growth, and the parental engagement plan.

The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2022-2023 Municipal Year

Universal Primary Free School Meals

At their meeting on the **2nd February 2023**, the Committee received a report which provided Members with an update on the roll-out of Universal Primary Free School Meals in Rhondda Cynon Taf whilst considering how Welsh Government funding has been utilised to support this initiative. Members were informed that the Universal Free School Meal policy was part of the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, which would see free school meals extended to all primary school pupils over a three-year period. This ambition was informed by Welsh Government's understanding that younger children are more likely to be living in relative income poverty. The commitment represented a transformational intervention and an important further step to tackling child poverty and ensuring that children had at least one meal every school day, which was crucial in the current context of the increasing cost of living.

Outcomes

- Members were keen to ensure that special dietary requirements were catered for, including those such as asylum seekers or who had specific religious beliefs, and were included as part of the implementation.
- Recognising the increased costs, Members sought assurance that in relation to the additional catering staff costs, central catering, and data staff costs, would be fully funded by the Welsh Government grant.
- Members were keen to ensure the procurement of local produce, in the future, in the interest of sustainability, noting that the Service worked with procurement colleagues, and this was really high on the agenda with the Council carbon management programme.
- Members felt it would a great idea, to work with Coleg Y Cymoedd, to get that sustainability and chain of young people coming into the industry.
- Members agreed that having scrutinised the contents of the report, they wished to add this to the FWP, as an annual report.

Other work included:

- **Framework for Evaluation, Improvement and Accountability – 27th October 2022**
- **The Implementation of the Curriculum for Wales in RCT Schools – Readiness and Support for Schools – 27th October 2022**
- **An overview on the expectations of Curriculum for Wales (CfW) implementation on school transition, particularly when learners transition to secondary schools that have deferred CfW implementation until 2023 – 13th December 2022**
- **Community Focussed Schools – 13th December 2022**
- **Elective Home Education Update – 13th December 2022**
- **The work of the Central South Consortium in the region and Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Authority 2021- 2022 – 2nd February 2023**
- **School Modernisation – Update on Band B Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme – 2nd February 2023**

The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2022-2023 Municipal Year

Scrutiny Principal Aims

Scrutiny in RCT aims to secure better outcomes for citizens and communities and add to the effectiveness of the Council by supporting to improve Local Authority Policies, Legislation and public services. Scrutiny Committees add value by providing a constructive critical friend role and making clear recommendations to Cabinet and Officers on the development and improvement of Councils priorities.

Work Programme Planning

Scrutiny Work Programmes are formulated at the start of the municipal year, there is a well-established practice of work programme planning in place to underpin the work of the scrutiny committees. There are a number of ways that people who live and work in RCT can get involved in the scrutiny process. Our **work programmes** are available on the Scrutiny web pages of the Council's website and are regularly updated to reflect the changing priorities of the Council. Residents are able to bring views on any topic under consideration by Scrutiny to a Committee's attention.

Development, Training and Support for Members

Following the Local Government Elections in May 2022, all Scrutiny members were invited to attend three dedicated Scrutiny Training sessions, delivered by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). The training aimed to introduce new and returning Members to key topics such as questioning skills, chairing skills and provide Members with a comprehensive understanding of the Scrutiny process within RCT and the best practices required for undertaking effective scrutiny.

Participating in these sessions provided Members with the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills in the scrutiny committee (and pre meetings), to ask relevant questions and contribute to the development of effective scrutiny recommendations. The introduction of pre meetings has focussed Members' attention on the required outcomes and reduced duplication of questions within the committee meeting resulting in a more effective meeting.

To support Members within the committee setting, they receive:

- Regular updates on Welsh Government open consultations and those from Rhondda Cynon Taf Council relevant to their particular scrutiny committees;
- The Council's Scrutiny research provision which has a number of benefits such as improving scrutiny committee work programmes or supporting scrutiny working groups;
- Dedicated officer resource;
- Timely access to high quality information

In the next Municipal year all scrutiny members will have the opportunity to undertake bespoke, tailored refresher scrutiny training relevant to their specific scrutiny committee. This will act as a mid-year update on the forthcoming individual work programmes and engage Members on the principles of effective scrutiny.

The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2022-2023 Municipal Year

Public Participation and Engagement

In line with the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act to strengthen local democracy and encourage public participation, Scrutiny Members are keen to engage our residents and stakeholders to help to inform scrutiny and improve outcomes. By involving residents and stakeholders in the scrutiny process, there is greater accountability for the decisions made by the Council. Residents and stakeholders are able to provide input and feedback on the decisions made, ensuring that the Council are acting in the best interests of the community.

Increased participation in the scrutiny process can encourage greater participation in the decisions undertaken by the Council. This can help to build stronger, more resilient communities that are better able to address the challenges they face.

The use of a hybrid approach to Scrutiny Committee meetings ensures greater flexibility for public participation in the process of decision making. The ability for residents and stakeholders to participate virtually in meetings removes previous barriers some residents may have experienced based on geographical location and time restrictions. Additionally, the Council regularly live streams or records its meetings allowing residents and stakeholders the opportunity to witness full discussion of items and providing an insight into the Scrutiny process. The combination of hybrid meetings and webcasting is a positive demonstration of accountability and transparency encouraging engagement and debate. Following the meeting the webcast is uploaded to the relevant Scrutiny Committee meeting page.

How do we involve our stakeholders and citizens?

- Members of the Public are able to participate in Scrutiny Committees by registering their interest online and by emailing the Scrutiny Team. Guidance on participating can be found on our website by clicking [here](#).
- Inviting stakeholders and external representatives to contribute to broaden our understanding and inform our discussions. Some of the representatives that have attended this year include:
 - Welsh Government
 - Central South Consortium
 - Headteachers of RCT Schools
 - Refugee living in Wales
- Having co-optees on our Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee, representing parent governors, and the Church in Wales.
- Engaging the public whilst ensuring openness and transparency, by webcasting all our Scrutiny committee meetings – details can be found [here](#)

The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2022-2023 Municipal Year

Scrutiny Research

A scrutiny research facility is available within the Council Business Unit to support Members' scrutiny responsibilities and their roles as Elected Members. Such research strengthens Scrutiny Committee work programmes to ensure outcome-based topics are identified.

The Scrutiny research facility is available to all Members of the Council. The aim of this facility is to assist Members with:

- Research on any case work/queries from constituents;
- Research on any reports being presented to Scrutiny;
- Research on any questions that you intend to raise during a Scrutiny Committee;
- Research on an item you feel should be added to the Scrutiny Work Programme; and,
- Any general research item that is important to you and your constituents

Examples of research requests that have been undertaken this Municipal Year include:

- A research request on the Council's hybrid policy;
- Research requests on questions asked by constituents; and,
- Research requests on the attendance figures of co-opted members at Scrutiny Committee meetings

All research requests are welcome and we encourage all Members to make use of this facility. Please email your request to **scrutiny@rctcbc.gov.uk**

The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2022-2023 Municipal Year

Focus For 2023/24

- Strengthen the links between Cabinet and Scrutiny by providing a greater focus on Pre-Scrutiny arrangements, allowing Scrutiny members to influence key decisions before they are taken by the Executive
- Develop the use of Scrutiny Pre-meetings to focus on the Key lines of enquiry at Committee meetings
- Increase engagement with communities through publication of Scrutiny Chair's blogs
- Provide bespoke in-house Scrutiny refresher training for all members of the Council covering core scrutiny skills, work programming and financial and budget scrutiny

The work of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the 2022-2023 Municipal Year

Scrutiny Team

For further details on the contents of this report please email: scrutiny@rctcbc.gov.uk

Julia Nicholls – Principal Scrutiny Officer - 07385 086814

Sarah Daniel - Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Officer - 07385 086169

Tracy Watson – Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer - 07747 485567

Jess Daniel - Democratic and Scrutiny Officer – 07385 401877

Sarah Handy - Members' Researcher & Scrutiny Officer - 07385 401942