



**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY  
ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24**

[Scrutiny | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council \(rctcbc.gov.uk\)](http://Scrutiny | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (rctcbc.gov.uk))

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## **Chairperson's Foreword**



Welcome to Rhondda Cynon Taf's Annual Scrutiny Report 2023-24. As Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny it is my privilege to introduce this report which captures the dedication and diligent work of our Overview and Scrutiny Committees over the past year.

During these challenging times for public services, transparency and accountability are essential components of effective governance and the important role scrutiny plays in local government cannot be overstated. Our Committees are tasked with examining the decisions of the local authority, and provides a mechanism for all elected members to contribute too, and influence key decisions of this Council.

In this annual report, you will find a summary of the robust work undertaken by our dedicated Scrutiny members over the past year, ranging from Cabinet Member Engagement to analysing policies to identifying areas of improvement and scrutinising the Council's performance and budget setting process. Our efforts have been tireless in upholding the principles of good scrutiny. It is important to note that whilst our goal is to identify areas for improvement we can also celebrate successes of those policies and service changes that enhance the lives of our residents.

I wish to take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to all those who have contributed to this report, and also to our valued stakeholders who have supported our meetings. It is through this collective dedication and collaboration that we can continue to advance the cause of scrutiny and accountability, ensuring a brighter and more transparent future for all.

Lastly, I would like to pay thanks to all Scrutiny Chairs, Vice Chairs, Scrutiny Members and Co-opted Members for their dedication and support throughout this last year in ensuring our committees have continued to positively influence the decision-making process of the council.

Once again, I am sure all readers of the following pages, will note the positive and constructive way in which elected members have amplified the priorities, experiences, and views of residents through the scrutiny process.

Councillor J. Edwards

Chair, Overview & Scrutiny 2022-27 Committee Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

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## **Scrutiny Principal Aims**

The underlying principle of the Council's Scrutiny arrangements is to ensure that the decision making process is open, accountable and transparent. The process aims to secure improved outcomes for residents by reviewing and evaluating services.

Scrutiny aims to identify areas for improvement and ensure that resources are used effectively and efficiently.

Scrutiny has the following roles:

- Holds the Cabinet to account for the decisions it makes;
- Ensures that the Cabinet and Officers perform effectively and that the Council is delivering on their commitments;
- Gives our residents a voice - Listens to the views of the public and make sure the public voice is heard;
- Develops and reviews policy to ensure that it is fit for purpose and provides the best outcomes for the people of RCT.

## **Work Programme Planning**

Scrutiny Work Programmes are formulated at the start of the municipal year by the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs with engagement from RCT Officers, and Cabinet Members. There is a well-established practice of work programme planning in place to underpin the work of the scrutiny committees which is co-ordinated by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to ensure work programmes are manageable, timely and there is no duplication or crossover of work. The final determination of work programme planning and priorities rests with members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which comprises the chairs and vice-chairs of all 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.

## **Public Participation and Engagement**

The continued use of hybrid meetings and the live broadcasting of meetings, provides the most flexible way for residents and stakeholders to attend our scrutiny committees, or view the work and discussions of elected members. The process has enabled those residents who wish to attend and/or contribute to do so despite potential constraints on their time and location. We have welcomed public speakers to a number of meetings this year, including to scrutiny's discussions of Cabinet decisions, where they have added value to the discussions on issues which have affected our communities, in advance of feedback to Cabinet. [Access](#) to live streaming and the recording of committees is widely available on the Council website

where residents can follow meetings as they happen from the comfort of their own home. An understanding and awareness of the scrutiny process is key to our public engagement, so we continue to provide timely notification of agendas, work programmes, updates to our dedicated scrutiny webpages and consistency with our feedback processes from scrutiny to Cabinet. This matters because it provides transparency and clear accountability to our scrutiny processes and Council decisions.

In line with the requirements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the Council has published its [Public Participation Strategy](#) which sets out the ways in which local people are encouraged to participate in the decision-making process of the council. Among the number of duties placed on each Council regarding participation is it's 'Arrangements made to bring the views of the public to the attention of Overview & Scrutiny Committees'. The existing arrangements and the actions to improve these measures are clearly set out in the living document which means it will continuously evolve to ensure it remains relevant. The Council will strive to provide the public with the most up to date information in respect of its democratic process and importantly their valued engagement.

### **How do we involve our stakeholders and citizens?**

- The provision of useful public engagement guides which provide information on how residents are able to participate in Scrutiny Committees can be found on our website by clicking [here](#).
- Dedicated Scrutiny webpages, which are reviewed where necessary, to ensure they promote engagement through the publication of clear and transparent scrutiny information, agendas, and committee terms of reference.
- Forward Work Programmes provide early sight of information, committee schedules and those matters for consideration.
- Scrutiny Annual Report - the Council's Scrutiny Annual Report is published to provide an overview of the work undertaken by each scrutiny committee throughout the respective municipal year, achievements, and clear outcomes as well as any matters to be revisited.
- The broadcasting of meetings, which goes beyond the statutory requirements placed upon the Council.
- Inviting and involving stakeholders and external representatives to contribute to broaden the committees' understanding and inform discussions. Some of the representatives that have attended this year include:
  - Welsh Government
  - Central South Consortium
  - Head teachers
  - Teaching staff
  - South Wales Police

- The inclusion of 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](#)

## **Wellbeing of Future Generations**

With the aim of providing a greater emphasis on conducting constructive and effective scrutiny that adds value and secures tangible outcomes that have a positive impact on the lives of local people, pre-scrutiny meetings have been established. Pre-scrutiny meetings support Chairs and Scrutiny Members to prepare stronger and more focused questioning. The pre-meetings are also useful in establishing 'Key Lines of Enquiry' which minimises duplication, enables committee Members to test their understanding and adds additional structure to the business of the committee. Through this process , Members are also able to consider the reports and ascertain whether they have paid due regard to the various aspects of the Well-being of Future Generations Act including the seven national Well-being goals and the five 'Ways of Working' which helps the Council to demonstrate it is meeting the Sustainable Development Principle – i.e. '*Acting in a manner which ensures that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*'.

Whilst we are making progress in embedding Sustainable Development into scrutiny processes, we are continuing to review our approach in the light of new and existing Scrutiny Tools and [Frameworks](#) issued by the Future Generations Commissioner and good practice from other Councils. We also engaged with staff from the office of the Future Generations' Commissioner who delivered training to Elected Members and officers in January and February 2024, to continue to raise awareness, understanding and application of the requirements of the Act.

The Council's new Corporate Plan and its four Well-being Objectives more closely align to the four pillars of Well-being i.e. Economic, Social, Environmental and Cultural. This alignment will strengthen the alignment of the four pillars of Sustainable Development, further embedding the Act into the business and scrutiny of the Council.

## **Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a number of areas of responsibility within its portfolio and it is our duty to ensure we scrutinise and challenge on each of these areas throughout the year. This year we have provided feedback and recommendations on a number of policy review & policy development for all Council areas including the setting of the Council's Budget, the Corporate Plan, Equality strategies and Welsh in Education Strategic Plan which propose to improve and progress Council's services. More of which is detailed throughout this report.

As well as scrutinising our own portfolio areas, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also co-ordinates the work of the scrutiny committees and is responsible for approving the Work Programme's developed by the three thematic scrutiny Committees to ensure a deliverable, coordinated and outcome focused 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.

### **Pre-Scrutiny**

This year, our Scrutiny Committees considered 17 pre-Scrutiny reports providing an early opportunity to identify risks and drawbacks early on in the decision making process and ensure that the choices are well informed. Looking at decisions before they are made provides Scrutiny with the means to challenge assumptions that may have been made as the decision was developed; Scrutiny may bring a different perspective to the decision-making process, which can help decisions to be more robust, and present alternative approaches or improvements for the Executive to consider.

It is through the Cabinet forward work programme, which Scrutiny use as the source from which selections for pre-decision scrutiny are made. Following the pre scrutiny exercise, and in each case, Scrutiny has informed Cabinet in writing of their considerations, which has formed part pf the Cabinet report and importantly Cabinet's considerations.

The pre scrutiny work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee can be found [here](#)

### **Call-Ins**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee is also responsible for dealing with Council 'Call-ins' which is another valuable mechanism of scrutiny. A "call in" is a key element of the Council's scrutiny function and a fundamental part of the Council's Governance arrangements. This process provides an opportunity for non-executive members to "call in" for examination an executive decision that has been made but not yet implemented. Once a decision has been Called In, it is effectively put on hold and is not actioned until it has been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

During the last municipal year, 3 decisions of Cabinet have been called-in by

members for consideration by Scrutiny. On each occasion, the committee has welcomed the opportunity to add challenge and explore the matters involved further.

## Cabinet Engagement Sessions

This year, Scrutiny Committees have progressed revised arrangements to scrutinise the decisions undertaken by the Cabinet and ensure the appropriate mechanisms are in place to effectively scrutinise the Executive. Each of the Cabinet Members were invited to their respective scrutiny Committees to deliver a report on their portfolio area for challenge and questions; thereby strengthening the opportunity to make recommendations for policy improvement and providing an opportunity for Members to scrutinise the decisions undertaken by the Cabinet and hold them to account.

## Strategies

As the overarching Scrutiny Committee, included within its terms of reference is the responsibility for the scrutiny and review for The Council's Corporate Plan and all strategies. The setting of the Council's **Budget Strategy**, our scrutiny members ensured their questioning focused on the impact that any decision would have on our residents. Through thorough scrutiny, the Committee provided feedback on a number of areas including proposed Council Tax increases, Education budgets, proposed efficiency measures and the Council's use of reserves. Members also recognised the legal duty upon all elected members of the Council for setting a balanced budget.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcomed the opportunity to feed into the **Draft Equality Plan** and **Draft Strategic Equality Plan**, which are essential to the council meeting its obligations in the Equality Act 2010. Members discussed many elements of the plans and provided feedback in a number of areas including discrimination of poverty and class. Members also noted the Equality monitoring data around national identity and ethnicity and recommended more commentary and summary in this area, particularly including information around how the Council is widening recruitment practices to ensure we are an attractive employer to the global majority. Scrutiny will revisit this item in the future to measure its effectiveness and implementation. Members were reassured that the plan was supported by a detailed action plan which has been developed which will be embedded within the Council's Performance Management arrangements.

The **Welsh in Education Strategic Plan** (WESP) is a key priority for the Council and is the strategy for increasing and improving the planning of the provision of Welsh medium education in RCT to enable all learners in our communities to develop their Welsh language skills and assist with Welsh Government vision of one million Welsh speakers by 2050.

A Key emerging theme which Members raised were staffing issues in Welsh Medium Education, particularly in the ALN area recommended that more investment was required to promote Education as a profession, particularly amongst welsh speakers and the ALN profession and encouraged the Council to work directly with schools and colleges to encourage pupils to study welsh at 6th form. Members also recommended using the upcoming Eisteddfod platform to promote the profession. Overall, the

Overview and Scrutiny Committee were supportive of the plan and were pleased to note the progress being made and the positive feedback from Welsh Government

## **Corporate Plan 2024 – 2030**

Pre-Scrutinising the Council's Corporate Plan is especially important as it allows Scrutiny to provide feedback to ensure the Corporate Plan aligns with the needs and priorities of the local community before the plan is adopted by the Council and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to do so at their meeting in January 2024. Overall, Members welcomed and supported the plan and felt it demonstrated ambition, whilst also highlighting the challenges the Council and its communities will face over the next six years.

## **Performance Monitoring**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees monitor the performance of Council, Council services and implementation individual decisions, policy objectives, performance targets and any areas of specific public interest. This ranges from monitoring strategies and their associated action plans to the evaluation of the authority's performance against its Corporate Plan, its improvement objectives and local and national performance indicators. Central to this are the outcomes for service users and ensuring that there is evidence to support this

Quarterly performance reports serve as a means of communicating progress, challenges and successes to Elected Members and to the public. The Scrutiny of these reports is a critical function of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which serves a purpose of evaluating and recommending improvement in the operational delivery of the Council's services.

The performance monitoring promotes accountability across all Council Directorates. By Scrutiny regularly assessing the progress against targets; Officers, the Executive and stakeholders are held responsible for their objectives. Through regular scrutiny and monitoring, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has supported by analysing key performance indicators across a number of areas including Social Care, Procurement, Recruitment and retention of council staff and school attendance. The regular performance monitoring allows for timely interventions and amendments to refine the Council's processes and ultimately to enhance the performance of the Council.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee use performance information to inform the work programming of other scrutiny committees. This has included a ensuring a focus upon the Council's Corporate Plan priorities, providing continuity across Social Care and delivering the Council's ongoing programme of work to tackle Climate Change

## **Consultations**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee formally responded to a number of consultations thus providing an independent review and analysis of proposals, policies and recommendations. As well as acting as a consultee for a number of RCTCBC consultations, Members were also able to consider a number of Welsh Government consultations. Members submitted a formal response to the **Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill**, they were supportive of the proposals in principle and recognised the potential positive impact of the proposals. Members particularly welcomed the proposed arrangements that sought to improve diversity in the Senedd and Local Government and were optimistic about the potential benefit this would bring in terms of attracting candidates who may not have previously considered standing in an election.

Members also formally responded to the Welsh Government Consultation on **Council Tax Reform**. Members acknowledged change is required to create a fairer system, however, were concerned that the proposal for implementation of reform from 2025 was too soon, with the consequences and impacts not being fully understood, therefore recommended further public awareness and engagement.

A number of Members referred to the missed opportunity to fundamentally reform this area. Members also expressed concern on the additional burden of cost these proposals could create for properties of higher value and questioned the principle of connecting property values with households' ability to pay. The Committee look forward to seeing the final proposals before they are implemented. You can find more Committee feedback on these proposals [here](#).

**Further work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can be found [here](#)**

## **Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee (2023-24)**

This Committee is responsible for focussing upon Education and Schools. It is responsible for scrutinising all Education provision from 3-19 and all other services, provided by the Council which young people engage with within our communities. The Committee also scrutinises the work of the Central South Consortium which has delivered aspects of school improvement services, commissioned by five local authorities (Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Vale of Glamorgan and Rhondda Cynon Taf) to provide a school improvement service that challenges, monitors and supports schools to raise standards. This Committee scrutinises the Council's compliance with Welsh Language Standards and the delivery of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. As required by law and guidance from Welsh Government the Education and Inclusion Committee Membership includes voting representatives of religious faiths and parent governors.

### **Estyn's Report on Education Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council**

At their first meeting on the [20th June 2023](#), the Committee undertook pre-scrutiny of Estyn's Report on Education Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, which provided details of the inspection process and highlights the information gathering process undertaken in advance of the inspection, the citizen survey undertaken and advises upon the main forms of evidence captured as part of the inspection. 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. Members acknowledged this was a very robust report, and offered the Committee's congratulations, noting there were several areas of good practice identified and the Directorate needed to be commended, for that and also the fact that Estyn had requested the two case studies, which was something to be proud of. The recommendations Estyn had posed, were fair and very much actionable.

Members importantly acknowledged that the areas identified by Estyn, reflected the focus of the Scrutiny committee in respect of supporting improvement and monitoring performance.

### **Outcomes**

- Members questioned the variability of the 'quality of support and the information provided by the CSC,' around SIPL reports, with Members advised that CSC had been working on their quality assurance processes, as there should be no surprises when Estyn inspected a school.

- Members **recommended** that Estyn acknowledge 'the impact of poverty' in relation to the inspection report.
- Members **recommended** that in relation to 'the rate of permanent exclusions was broadly in line with the national average' there should be more data to ensure scrutiny, in the future of how the service had improved, in line with the R3 recommendation.
- Members acknowledged recommendation R1, and **recommended** it was important to firmly embed a more self-reflective, listening, and co-ordinated work ethos across the Directorate.
- Members recognised that in terms of stakeholder feedback, it could be evidenced that the service had consulted with wide ranging partners, but **recommended** learner voice as an area that required strengthening.
- Members **recommended** that steps needed to be taken to improve the process and the portal system, in relation to the ALN referrals process.
- Members questioned the work done with other local authorities, in respect of Welsh language immersion opportunities.
- Members noted the comment in respect of ALN complex needs class comment, acknowledging that it was not a precise science and all placements required informed and careful decision making.
- Members questioned why there was no mention of Step 4.
- Members **recommended** a further report in 6 months' time on how the Estyn recommendations had led to improvements and developments, across the county borough.

### **Proposals to realign additional learning needs mainstream learning support class provision within RCT**

At their meeting on the [14 September 2023](#), the Committee received a report which provided Members with an update on the outcomes of the recent consultation in respect of the proposal to realign the mainstream Learning Support Class (LSC) provision within Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT). This provided Scrutiny with the opportunity to undertake pre-scrutiny of the outcome of the consultation in respect of the proposal to realign the mainstream LSC provision within RCT, prior to its consideration by Cabinet. Members praised the report, noting the amount of work that had clearly been undertaken and welcomed suggestions to increase Learning Support provision across Rhondda Cynon Taf.

### **Outcomes**

- Members recognised that in relation to proposal two, the majority of the responses disagreed with the proposal. Some members sought clarity that the reason for the disagreement was largely due to the move in location and asked for reassurance that these concerns were mitigated, where possible, and that

should Cabinet be minded to progress with this option, Members **recommended** that the authority look to put sufficient support in place for pupils and parents during transition.

- Members also sought reassurance that the move in location would not mean a difference in the quality of facilities or experiences received noting from the responses received in the consultation the praise provided for Abercynon Primary School.
- Members noted the report section, which outlined the Council's aim to work toward a fully operative bilingual ALN provision, however felt that the Council was nowhere near fully bilingual as highlighted by response in the Welsh Language services comments and **recommended** fulfilment of the Council's own Welsh Education Strategic Plan.
- Members **recommended** that if Welsh language provision was the preference, regardless of location in county borough, that transport would be provided to ensure access.
- Members also noted the impact travelling long distances to receive Welsh language provision would have on their carbon footprint and **recommended** the ideal scenario of ensuring provision across the borough in the future should be a key priority for the Council.
- Members were mindful of the challenges that change would present for individuals affected by the proposal and **recommended** that this should be considered when detailed implementation plans are made should Cabinet adopt the proposals.
- Overall, the committee noted its support in favour of the proposals.

### **The work of the Central South Consortium in the Region and Rhondda Cynon Taf**

At their meeting on the 13 March 2024, the Committee received a report which provided Members with an update on the contribution of the Central South Consortium (CSC) in the region and Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Authority 2022-2023 to raising standards in schools across Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT). This provided Members with an opportunity to hear from stakeholders and representatives, from the CSC leadership team and the Head teacher of Ferndale Community School, which contributes to broaden the committees understanding and inform discussions. Members agreed that this had been a really useful discussion and were able to get 'under the skin' of the report and were grateful to the CSC Officers and Head teacher of Ferndale Community school for attending.

### **Outcomes**

- Members were grateful to hear from the Head teacher, Ferndale Community School, who had provided context to the work of the CSC and **recommended**

replicating this approach in future, as Member were keen to hear from the practitioners themselves.

- Members questioned the CSC self-evaluation process and the challenge around value for money of the CSC and **recommended** that the Committee have sight of the Business plan for future reviews, in order to be able to understand the associated KPI's, RAG rating and timescales, and around the how and when.
- Members questioned point 2.1 of the report, with regard to 'further developing professional relationships with elected members / officers in RCT' and asked what was felt to be deficient and how it was planned to develop those relationships further.
- Members questioned the Merits of face to face, over online sessions, in respect of Governor Training, and whilst noting that currently for most governors the desire was to keep them online, acknowledging that the programmes would be fully evaluated, **recommended** that a hybrid approach was needed.
- Members noting the [appendix on page 55](#), which provided the 3 recommendations from the Local Government Education Services (LGES) inspection and **recommended** that future reports integrate the recommendations and the support provided from a CSC perspective, into the report itself. As this was an ideal opportunity to integrate how CSC had demonstrated for RCT to work towards these recommendations.

### **Education & Inclusion Task & Finish Group**

Following an update report on School Modernisation – Band B Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, an Education & Inclusion Task & Finish Group was formed to review the outcomes/ transformation/learning following the review of completed projects; and consider the impact of the afore-mentioned key outcomes of the first phase on the second phase projects that are underway/in progress and that they align well with the Well-being Act's five ways of working. The Education & Inclusion Task & Finish Group would then report the draft recommendations to the Education and Inclusion Services Scrutiny Committee, who would in turn report the final recommendations to the Council's Cabinet for its consideration.

At its first meeting, the group received a presentation from Education & Inclusion Services on the Sustainable Communities for Learning/contextual background/SOP/Criteria, whilst considering the experiences & feedback of other Welsh Local Authorities with regards to their own long term strategic investments. The Education & Inclusion Task & Finish Group agreed to draft a set of questions for stakeholders ahead of school visits. This will allow the Group to receive first-hand information from stakeholders in relation to the implementation of the Council's school modernisation investment programme and obtain a deeper understanding of the challenges presented and opportunities for improvement.

As the work of the group, is still ongoing, this will be reported in the next Annual Report.

**Other work included:**

[Education Workforce Data – 19th July 2023](#)

[School Admissions – 19th July 2023](#)

[Proposals to develop a new Special School in RCT – 14th September 2023](#)

[Child Poverty and Community Schools Update – 16th October 2023](#)

[Update on Year 2 of the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act 2028 in RCT – 16th October 2023](#)

[Annual School Exclusion Performance report for the Academic Year 2022/23 - 14th December 2023](#)

[School Attendance Data – 14th December 2023](#)

[Welsh Government Consultation – Structure of the School Year - 22nd January 2024](#)

[Estyn Recommendations – 22nd January 2024](#)

[Universal Primary Free School Meals – 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024](#)

[Overview of Post-16 Offer – March 2024](#)

## **Community Services Scrutiny Committee**

The Community Services Scrutiny Committee is responsible for focussing on the services provided by the Council which support the Health and Well-being of our communities. This includes working with partners in the Health Service and also consideration of factors which support the services delivered to support older people. The Committee considers adult social services as well as all other factors which contribute to the Health and Well-being of the County Borough, such as Leisure services and Public Health and Protection related Services. As part of its remit, and alongside the Corporate Parenting Board, it considers the Council's responsibilities as Corporate Parents including Looked after Children responsibilities. In addition, this Committee is the Council's designated Crime and Disorder Committee (under Sections 19 and 20 of the Police and Justice Act, 2006).

### **Day Services for Older People**

At the meeting held on [21st November 2023](#) the Committee undertook pre-scrutiny on proposals in relation to Day Services for older people where Members were presented with the report outlining the needs for the service area to redesign its offer of day services for older people, ensuring it continues to meet assessed and changing need, in more cost effective and efficient ways, in line the overall requirements of the Council's Day service model for older people. Members were informed that redesigning the Councils Day services offer will ensure that provision is delivered in a way that promotes individual wellbeing and independence while supporting a more efficient service delivery and making effective use of Council resources. Members were generally supportive of the reasons for the proposals and discussed the benefits that would be achieved as outlined in the report. There were also in-depth discussions about the importance of ensuring that any changes did not have a detrimental effect on staff and service users.

#### **Outcomes:**

- Members **recommended** that any change in service provision should not detrimentally affect current service users from attending and challenged the data provided in the report to ensure capacity levels were not full.
- Members **recommended** the need to ensure that any changes would not mean a change in the standards of the provisions available.
- Members also **recommended** ensuring appropriate management of the process of change for service users and staff to ensure the same level of care is provided and support for staff undergoing any service restructuring.
- Members also acknowledged the importance of service users being able to continue to access open spaces as part of a day centre offer.

### **Public Toilet Strategy**

At the meeting on [10th July 2023](#), Committee received an update on the review of the Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Local Toilets Strategy from 2019-2023 to 2023-2028 and an opportunity for Members to pre-scrutinise the strategy. The strategy aims to review the quality and quantity of local toilets throughout the county borough, and to provide or facilitate the provision of clean, safe, accessible, and sustainable toilets for residents and visitors to the area at locations where the need for such facilities has been identified. Members discussed the provision available and acknowledged the position in comparison to other Local Authorities where budget constraints have resulted in the withdrawal of facilities. Members also discussed the benefits that engaging with and encouraging private sector business to make their facilities accessible would bring. Members felt this aspect would be beneficial in ensuring that residents and visitors were able to easily access facilities when needed but noted the increased costs to businesses as being a barrier. Members felt that through incentives, businesses would be more willing to work with the Council on this matter but again acknowledged the financial constraints being faced. Members with experience of supporting community projects also discussed the options to utilise community grants for volunteer organisations to provide public toilets.

### **Outcomes:**

- Members recognised the importance of residents and visitors being able to easily identify where public toilets are located and the opening hours. Members discussed the benefits of mapping facilities, clear signage and having a dedicated app which would display up to date information.
- Members **recommended** further discussion and engagement with the Council's Town Centre's department to identify ways to encourage businesses to make facilities available as a way of ensuring Town Centres are welcoming spaces encouraging residents to visit, noting that it is important to have facilities available to help town centres thrive.
- Committee acknowledged the challenge to provide facilities at a time when budgets are challenged and were pleased that in comparison to other Local Authorities there is still a provision in RCT. However, Members felt that there would be room for improvement and **recommended** working to identify any grants or external funding options available to support the programme.

### **HMO Additional Licensing Review**

At the meeting on [21st November 2023](#), scrutinized the effectiveness of the 2019 Additional Licensing Scheme (ALS) for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and, undertook pre-scrutiny on the proposal to declare a new ALS for HMOs from April 2024, in accordance with the provisions of the Housing Act 2004. The report outlined that HMOs are a necessary housing option and form an important part of the housing market in RCT. The evaluation of the 2019 Additional Licensing Scheme showed the positive 7 impacts that the licensing regime has had on HMO standards and

demonstrated clear evidence of the need for ongoing regulation of the sector to protect tenants from poor housing standards and to protect communities from the adverse impact of poorly managed HMOs. The feedback from the public consultation provided additional evidence of the impact of HMOs on our communities, particularly in Treforest.

### **Outcomes:**

- Members were supportive of the recommendations to continue with a new ALS for HMOs in Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- Members were pleased to see the level of engagement with the Consultation and acknowledged the valid comments that were provided as responses. There was concern around the level of feedback received from tenants as one group noting that it is important the voice of tenants is heard. There were queries around the engagement plans for the future in relation to this group.
- Members noted the process of inspections and raised a concern about the involvement of residents in inspections to ensure accurate experiences are recorded. Members **recommended** future consultation ensured robust methods to engage with tenants of HMO's would be beneficial.
- Members **recommended** the inclusion in licensing conditions to ensure personal safety is considered within HMO's and the need to ensure safe spaces. Members felt this was an important licensing condition to be included under any future scheme.
- Members discussed the process of responding to non-compliant landlords when issues are identified. Members felt the licensing scheme is a positive addition and ensuring robust and clear plans support this process.

### **Other work included:**

[Director of Social Services Annual Report](#)

[Representations, Compliments and Complaints Procedures Annual Report](#)

[Pathways to Care Delays \(Hospital Discharge pressures\)](#)

[Contaminated Land Strategy](#)

[Children's Services Strategy](#)

## **Community Services Scrutiny Committee (Crime and Disorder)**

### **Review of RCT funded PCSO's and Community Wardens (incl. attendance from Chief Superintendent SWP / Chief Inspector SWP**

As the Council's designated Crime and Disorder Committee (under Sections 19 and 20 of the Police and Justice Act, 2006 we welcomed the opportunity to review the progress of the RCT funded PCSO's and Community Wardens at our meeting on [28th February 2024](#) and we were delighted to welcome Chief Superintendent Stephen Jones and Chief Inspector Anthony Moyle to the meeting. Members were given a thorough review report of the work being undertaken in both the roles of PCSOs (RCT funded) and Community Wardens and the impact this work is having on Community Safety.

#### **Outcomes:**

- Members were pleased to note the success of the Community Wardens and shared local impacts the partnership work between the Council and Police was having on anti-social behavior issues in Aberdare and Pontypridd in particular.
- Members raised the need for the Community Wardens to present a professional image at all times and noted how the portrayal of this image is an important part of the role. Members **recommended** the need for consistency in uniforms across all Wardens.
- Members also raised concerns regarding the process of contacting 101 to report issues. Members noted that the most effective way of gathering intelligence and information on community issues for the Police is through the 101 service but highlighted the issues that have been experienced regarding long waits to contact 101. Members were pleased to receive an update from the Chief Superintendent regarding the work being done to improve this service and welcomed the opportunity to attend the Public Service Centre to observe the call handling process.
- Members also questioned the effectiveness of the fixed penalty notices and the number of these that have been paid. The Committee were pleased to gain further understanding of the process of issuing fixed penalty notices by Community Wardens and of the next steps that are taken when the fixed penalties are not paid. The Committee will continue to scrutinise the effectiveness of the roles of Community Wardens and RCT funded PCSO's through further updates.

#### **Other work:**

- [Community Safety Partnership update](#)

## **Climate Change Frontline Services and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee**

The Climate Change Frontline Services and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee scrutinises decision making in a number of key areas, namely; the Council's Frontline Services delivery, such as meeting recycling targets and maintenance of highways and access to public rights of way; Climate Change issues in line with the Council's Climate Change Strategy and Prosperity, which encompasses tourism, town centre regeneration and supporting growth of the local economy. Further detail on the Committee's remit can be found [here](#).

## **Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and Action Plan (LFRMS)**

After contributing to the consultation phase, the Climate Change Frontline Services and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee subsequently undertook pre-scrutiny of the LFRMS and Action Plan on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and Committee's comments were provided to Cabinet. As the Committee responsible for scrutinising the Council's Climate Change strategy, Members ensured that their questions were focused on emerging and current climate change issues and the devastating impact that recent weather trends have had on the residents of RCT.

### ***Outcomes***

- Members commented that the Strategy contains a significant number of specialist terminology and abbreviations. Members therefore recommended that a glossary of terms is included at the front of the Strategy for ease of reference;
- Members **recommended** that the Authority continue its collaboration with other Local Authorities and outside agencies;
- Members were pleased to hear that the Strategy also identifies opportunities to align with emerging local policies such as the Council's revised Local Development Plan and RCT's Local Nature Partnership – 'Action for Nature Plan' and **recommended** that the Council utilises these opportunities where possible;
- Members **recommended** that the Strategy should be promoted alongside a Communication Strategy to encourage residents to adopt the use of Flood Prevention Schemes and to educate residents on the availability of Flood Prevention self-help tools;
- Members **recommended** that the Strategy and Action Plan should include clear hyperlinks to highlight Ward specific risks together with a map of culverts throughout the County Borough;
- Member **recommended** that the Strategy and Action Plan should include regular reviews of RCTCBC's contingency planning in conjunction with working collaboratively with emergency services;
- Should the final Strategy and Action Plan be adopted by Cabinet, Members **recommended** regular and timely reviews of the Strategy in light of changing climate concerns and the constraints of budget pressures and austerity measures; and,

- Members emphasised the importance of targeting resources in respect of Flood risk to protect communities across the County Borough.

## **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Annual Monitoring Report**

On the 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023, Committee Members were provided with the opportunity to pre- scrutinise the Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Annual Monitoring Report 2023/24. Scrutinising the Council's CIL proposals and expenditure is a critical piece of work, and the recommendations of the Committee will help to shape and inform the Council's actions in this area for the forthcoming year.

### ***Outcomes***

- Members **recommended** increased communication between Community Council Clerks and the Council's CIL Officers;
- Members recognised that certain areas in the County Borough do not have Community Town Councils and therefore recommended that the Council continues to adopt a policy of engaging with the Local Members in respect of CIL spending in these areas; and
- Members praised the Regulation 123 List and were pleased to note that it supported growth in the economy in line with the Local Development Plan (LDP) and recommended that the Council continue with its current approach.

## **RCT Town Centre Strategy**

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023, Committee Members scrutinised the Council's Town Centre Strategy and were tasked with assisting the Council in positioning Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) as a key visitor destination by scrutinising how the Council could capitalise on the opportunity to increase footfall in Town Centres. Town Centres in RCT have been identified as an increasing key driver for the economy, bringing employment, skills and regeneration to the area. The Climate Change Frontline Services and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback on this important piece of work and to shape the Council's wider economic strategy in its approach to Town Centre regeneration.

### ***Outcomes***

- Members were pleased to see that RCT Council is at the forefront of continuous improvement to our town centers and therefore **recommended** that the Council continue in its approach to deliver its Town Centre Strategy;
- Members **recommended** that the Climate Change, Frontline Services and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee be tasked with monitoring the implementation and progress of the Strategy on an on-going basis;
- Members raised concern about the success of the strategy in areas where there are no Community Town Councils and **recommended** that the Council continues to build and strengthen its relationship with key stakeholders;

- Members **recommended** that the Strategy should reflect a balance between the regeneration of current derelict buildings and the introduction of new Social Housing projects;
- Members recognised the increased presence of out of town retail parks and **recommended** that the Council increase transport links with the town centres in order to increase footfall;
- Members acknowledged the significant problem of anti-social behaviour in town centres and **recommended** that the Council continues to strengthen its partnership work with the Police and other emergency services;
- Members highlighted the unique architecture in towns across the County Borough and recommended that the Council maintains the unique character and heritage of our town centres; and,
- Acknowledging the aims of the Council's Climate Change Strategy, Members **recommended** that provision is made for town centre regeneration to include provisions for green spaces and wildlife.

***Other items of work considered:***

- [Climate Change Strategy Performance Reports;](#)
- [Tree and Hedgerow Strategy;](#)
- [Decarbonisation Action Plan;](#)
- [Welsh Government's 20mph Speed Restriction roll out in RCT;](#)
- [EV Charging Strategy;](#)
- [Highways Investment Scheme;](#)
- [Shared Prosperity Fund and Levelling Up Fund Annual Report;](#)
- [Public Rights of Way Annual Report;](#)
- [RCT's Recycling Performance 2023/24;](#) and,
- [Heritage Services](#)

## **Development, Training and Support for Members**

### **Development, Training and Support for Members**

Immediately following the Local Government Elections in May 2022, all Scrutiny members received training on the scrutiny ‘essentials’ which enabled our new and returning Members to gain essential knowledge and understanding of the role in Rhondda Cynon Taf. This training was refreshed in the summer of 2023 with an in-house training module, specific to each of the four scrutiny committees, which helped to build on Members’ existing knowledge and to keep scrutiny working effectively. It emphasised the importance of effective work programming, listening and questioning skills, which can help Members improve and increase their impact, as well as a reminder of our key scrutiny tools. Those tools include pre scrutiny, which allows scrutiny to review decisions before they are taken, the call-in process and establishing working groups (to identify recommendations following a detailed piece of work).

Crucial to our scrutiny committees is the role of our Chairs and Vice Chairs who also received a separate session to help strengthen their pivotal roles and facilitate effective discussions between Members and Officers.

As part of the remit of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to consider the Council’s quarterly budget reports, its Members received training on understanding that financial scrutiny is about the aims and priorities of the Council and how it delivers on its corporate plan with figures and finance.

With a greater emphasis on conducting scrutiny committees that add value and secure tangible outcomes that have a positive impact on the lives of local people, pre-scrutiny meetings have been established, which support Chairs and Members with better questioning. The pre-meetings are useful in focusing the Committees’ questions and establish key lines of enquiry which prevent duplication and add structure to the scrutiny committee. Through this facility, Members are also able to consider the reports and ascertain whether due regard has been made to all seven wellbeing goals and the five ways of working, as contained within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which requires scrutiny to think about the long-term impact of decisions on communities to prevent consistent issues such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. Dedicated Scrutiny Officers also provide the necessary support to cut through the often complex reports to ensure that scrutiny focuses and produces outcomes that are relevant and make a difference.

Scrutiny members continue to receive regular updates on both Welsh Government open consultations and those from Rhondda Cynon Taf Council relevant to their particular scrutiny committees. They also have access to the Council’s Scrutiny research provision, dedicated officer resource and high-quality information.

### **Scrutiny Research**

The primary objective of research is the deepening and broadening of knowledge and understanding by responsible and professional means. It is important that all

Members of the Council are afforded the opportunity to receive information to help them undertake their role and to make informed decisions. Research is an important tool for assisting all Elected Members with their work as community representatives and their engagement in the democratic process. As a Council we support Members with research requests to assist them with their work with constituents, scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and undertake any roles they may be asked to do on behalf of the council and undertake effective overview and scrutiny. Research can provide statistical data, historical information, charts, policy and background material on a requested topic.

The provision of a Research Officer is available within the Council Business Unit for Members to access. All research requests are welcome and we encourage all Members to make use of this facility.

### **Research:**

The research supported provided by Democratic Services, has helped to support elected members to perform their scrutiny role, and has seen an uptake in use, and the complexity of information and support members are seeking to effectively perform their scrutiny role. This greater engagement has been welcomed and supported, and is having a noticeable impact in the pre committee work and discussions undertaken by elected members.

When submitting research requests, we ask all Members to complete a research request form to provide further detail about the nature and purpose of the research. Any request should be emailed to [scrutiny@rctcbc.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@rctcbc.gov.uk). Members are reminded that the Head of Democratic Services will review all submissions before agreeing to the research being carried out.

### **Research Web Page:**

Members are reminded that subject to the nature of the request, the research response will be made available to all Members of the Council and if appropriate to the public through the Council website. Our Elected Members Research page can be accessed [here](#).

Going forward, the completion of research requests will be made available on the Members Portal.

## **Focus for 2024/25**

- Continue to develop our scrutiny members' understanding of key areas of scrutiny such as performance data; financial scrutiny and the key tools such as pre scrutiny of key decisions through a dedicated package of training and ongoing evaluation of scrutiny outcomes.
- Ensure that Scrutiny complies with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and continues its focus on the need to reduce the inequalities of outcomes that result from socio-economic disadvantage.
- Continue to develop the public and stakeholder engagement of scrutiny through existing channels such as the publication of work programmes, committee agendas, webcasting of all Scrutiny committees and the publication of an Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report.
- Provide timely and supporting information to all members of the Council's Scrutiny Committees in their (pre) meetings (to help formulate key strategic questions) and scrutiny working groups which includes the provision of the Council's dedicated Member's Researcher.

## **Scrutiny Team**

For further details on the contents of this report please email:  
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