

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY 2013/14 ANNUAL REPORT



STRONG HERITAGE | STRONG FUTURE
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
TREFADAETH GADARN | DYFODOL SICR

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FOREWORD



I would like to begin by thanking my fellow scrutiny colleagues for their hard work and commitment shown throughout the year. We completed the review of Welfare Reform and our work relating to the planning process has contributed to a major change in how our Development Control Committee operates.

As I mentioned in my last report, scrutiny is high on the Welsh Government's agenda as part of the drive to deliver public services across Wales in a more efficient and collaborative way. The WLGA, Wales Audit Office and CfPS have been engaged over the year in providing a range of support programmes aimed at improving the level of scrutiny across Wales. Whilst these seminars/conferences are useful in sharing knowledge and raising the profile of scrutiny, they are also an additional demand on Members' time and also the officers supporting scrutiny. Of particular significance was the 'Scrutiny in the Spotlight' event held in Cardiff on the 28th November 2013 which showcased the learning from the National Scrutiny Improvement Study undertaken by the Wales Audit Office. This was particularly important as not only was it aimed at scrutiny members and officers but also cabinet members and chief executives from across Wales emphasising that it is everyone's responsibility to ensure that there is effective scrutiny.

The Regulators and Inspectors are now taking a keen interest in scrutiny to ensure that we are doing our job and we have already made some changes to our practices following feedback from the Wales Audit Office. We will continue to strive to improve our scrutiny and whilst this will be a key piece of work for 2014/15, I must mention the working group formed to consider in detail the findings and recommendations contained in the Wales Audit Office report Good Scrutiny? Good Question1 which was published on 29th May 2014.

The need to take tough decisions this year has resulted in a number of 'call-ins' and the forthcoming year will I'm sure be even more demanding on Councillors and officers as we try to ensure that our limited resources are put to best use. It will be more important than ever for scrutiny to be a 'critical friend' but I am sure that we will rise to the challenge and look forward to another productive year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. K. Turner', written over a horizontal line.

**County Borough Councillor R K Turner
Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Chairman and Vice Chairman

County Borough Councillors R K Turner and G Hopkins.

Members: County Borough Councillors (Mrs) H Boggis, S Bradwick, (Mrs) J Cass, (Mrs) A Crimmings, G R Davies, (Mrs) M E Davies, P Griffiths, P Jarman, (Mrs) C Leyshon, M A Norris, S Rees, G Stacey, G Thomas, P Wasley and C J Williams.

Terms of Reference: to co-ordinate the work of the four Service Scrutiny Committees and to fulfil the overview and scrutiny role in relation to 'all Council' cross cutting themes which cut across the terms of reference of the four standing service scrutiny committees. When required, to sit as the Council's designated Crime & Disorder Committee (under Sections 19 & 20 of the Police and Justice Act)

A key element of the Local Government (Wales) Measure is taking account of the views of the public and public participation in scrutiny has long been identified as a key challenge for us. It was therefore with great interest that the Committee received a presentation at its first meeting of the municipal year from the Corporate Policy and Consultation Manager on the work which has been undertaken jointly across the Cwm Taf region in developing a Consultation and Engagement Hub. Committee Members could see that the development of the Hub has the potential to create a number of exciting opportunities for scrutiny such as being a vehicle to gauge public opinion about services thus informing work programmes, facilitating consultation exercises and also acting as a knowledge bank. The Committee will continue to receive progress updates on the development of the Hub.

In undertaking its Crime and Disorder functions, the Committee considered the Police and Crime Commissioner's Crime Reduction Plan for 2013-17 and also scrutinised the provision of

the substance misuse services across the Cwm Taf region and in this respect we were pleased to welcome Ms Nicola John – Executive Director for Public Health, Cwm Taf UHB to the meeting.

At its October meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee responded to the Welsh Government's consultation in respect of the designation of individuals and organisations to be subject to scrutiny by local authority scrutiny committees under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011. However, to date, the Welsh Government has not proceeded with issuing final guidance.

One of the most pleasing outcomes for the Committee during 2013/14 related to the formation of a scrutiny working group to consider Payday Loans which came about following a Notice of Motion to Council. As a result of scrutiny's work, any user of the Council's Public Access PC's (and PC's used internally within the Council) trying to access a payday loan website is re-directed to the Council's webpage for "Money Matters" which has also been

improved to consolidate information therefore assisting service users to make the right choices around credit services /products and improves signposting to credible organisations such as CAB and Dragon Savers Credit Union.

Again, as a result of a Notice of Motion to Council, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was asked to consider whether all Members of the Council should undergo enhanced checks by the 'Disclosure and Barring Service'. The issue was very well debated at the February meeting with the recommendations of the Committee reported to and accepted by Cabinet.

The Welfare Reform Working Group also completed its work and presented its final report to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in February 2104. Having considered all the evidence, the Working Group was pleased with the positive work undertaken by the Council and its Partners in preparing for change and the proactive approach taken to raising awareness and identifying those most at risk. Nonetheless, the Working Group made 27 wide ranging recommendations and a response is now awaited from the Executive.

The Local Service Board (LSB) Scrutiny Working Group has met on a quarterly basis to monitor the LSB's delivery of the Single Integrated Plan (SIP). However, it has been acknowledged by the LSB that the work required to develop the SIP and establish the partnerships has to some extent led to a loss of focus on delivering innovative approaches. There is also a need for the scrutiny working group to carve out a role for

itself which does not rely solely on monitoring performance reports.

Along with the four service scrutiny committees, the Committee has continued to undertake robust scrutiny of budget and performance through the quarterly exception reports and as usual was part of the consultation process in respect of determining the revenue budget strategy for the forthcoming year.

During the year, the Wales Audit Office carried out a review of the Council's scrutiny function, meeting with Members and observing at Committees. In response to their feedback, scrutiny played a key role in reviewing and challenging the draft performance assessments before their inclusion in the Council's Annual Delivery report. Following on from this work it was agreed that each scrutiny committee should form a small dedicated working group to scrutinise each of the improvement action plans within the remit of their committee, the findings of these working groups to be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to the action plans being incorporated into the Council's Corporate Plan.

In closing I would like to thank my fellow Members for their efforts. I would also like to thank my vice Chairman, County Borough Councillor G Hopkins and wish him all the best in his new role as Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Equality.

*County Borough Councillor R K
Turner
Chairman of the Overview &
Scrutiny Committee*

COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY **COMMITTEE**

Chairman and Vice Chairman

County Borough Councillors (Mrs) M E Davies and (Mrs) S Rees.

Members: County Borough Councillors W J David, C Davies, A S Fox, (Mrs) S Jones, S Lloyd, I Pearce, K Privett, (Mrs) A Roberts, (Mrs) J Rosser, R W Smith, B Stephens, L Walker, (Mrs) J S Ward, D Weeks and D H Williams.

Terms of Reference: to undertake the overview and scrutiny role in connection with Community Care, Community Housing, Children's Services, Health and Wellbeing.

The Committee began the year by considering the Director of Social Services Annual Report. The report set out the challenges for 2013/14 which included integration of health and adult social care services and the requirements of the Social Services and Wellbeing Bill; and for Children's Services included the need to continue to develop approaches and systems to establish more effective use of resources given the high level of demands on the service at a time of financial constraint.

At the same meeting, the Committee considered its work programme, and we were pleased to welcome representatives from the CSSIW to join in the discussion.

Continuing on the theme of integrated health and social care, during September the Committee considered the pivotal role played by the Reablement service and the development of a new operating model and staff structure. It was interesting for Members to have some case studies included within the report which provided an insight into how the service can make a difference to people's lives. The Committee has also continued to receive its regular update reports on Delayed Transfers of Care and the ongoing work with the Health Board to

improve the community and hospital interface.

At the September, meeting the Committee considered the important role played by the Fostering Service Panel and was also made aware of progress in increasing the number of friends and family appointed foster carers as part of a broader strategy which endeavours to place children with family members where it is safe and possible to do so.

In undertaking its scrutiny of safeguarding, the Committee considered the annual reports of the Cwm Taf Adult Safeguarding Board and the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children Board. Members also considered the Social Services Representations and Complaints Procedures Annual Report and the annual CSSIW's Evaluation report

As a result of previous concerns raised by the Committee in relation to Childhood injuries in the 0-4 age group, the Committee was pleased to welcome Nicola John, Director of Public Health for Cwm Taf UHB and Dr Sarah Jones, Public Health Wales to its October meeting where they provided Members with some very interesting facts and figures and discussed what actions could be undertaken to reduce the number of injuries.

During the year the Committee undertook the usual scrutiny of the quarterly budget and performance reports and at the October meeting we also scrutinised the delivery of the 2012/13 Improvement Action plans for Children's Services and Managing People's Independence, with the feedback used to inform the production of the Council's Annual Delivery report.

In line with feedback from the Wales Audit Office to improve our scrutiny processes, this year it was agreed that each scrutiny committee would establish working groups to scrutinise the draft improvement action plans for 2014/15 and delivery of the 2013/14 plans. Therefore, during May, the Committee set up a working group to consider the draft Improvement Action Plan in relation to Managing People's Independence and given the cross cutting nature of some areas of work a joint working group was formed with the Education and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee to consider the Education and Children's Services action plans.

During December and January, the Committee was part of the usual consultation process for the setting the Council's Revenue budget which is becoming more difficult year on year. However, once again, the Council did show its commitment to Community and Children's Services through its allocation of resources.

Also during December, the Committee received Rhian Huws-Williams, the Chief Executive of the Care Council (Wales) who informed Members on the role of the Care Council and also provided a perspective on the Welsh Government's White Paper – The Future of the Regulation and Inspection of Care and Support in Wales.

As a result of concerns raised by Members, at the March meeting, the Committee received a presentation on the advocacy services available to children and young people in the care system in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Committee also learnt of the plans to re-commissioned the advocacy services jointly with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council in the new financial year and also agreed that there was a need for relevant Member training to be provided in respect of the Children and Young People's Advocacy Service and this will take place the autumn.

Since undertaking a review of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Teenage Sexual Health and Teenage Pregnancy Strategy during 2009/10, the Committee has continued to take a keen interest on progress and receives an annual update. Whilst pleasing to note that the teenage pregnancy rates continue to fall there is increasing concern that the incidence of sexually transmitted infection is on the rise.

This year has been tinged with sadness as we had to say farewell to our Group Director for Community and Children's Services, Mr Ellis Williams, due to ill health and I would like to thank the Service Directors for continuing to support the Committee's work during a difficult period. I would like to thank my vice chair, County Borough Councillor Sharon Rees and the rest of the Committee for their continued support and look forward to working with the new Group Director, Mr Giovanni Isingrini during 2014/15.

*County Borough Councillor (Mrs) M E
Davies
Chairman, Community & Children's
Services Scrutiny Committee*

CORPORATE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Chairman and Vice Chairman

County Borough Councillor G Stacey and M Norris

Members: County Borough Councillors: H Boggis, S Carter, (Mrs) J Cass, J David, J Davies, (Mrs) M E Davies, P Griffiths, S Lloyd, (Mrs) M Tegg, (Mrs) J S Ward, P Wasley, M Weaver, E Webster, D Weeks and R Yeo.

Terms of Reference: to undertake the overview and scrutiny role in connection with Financial Services, ICT, Estate Management, Procurement, E-government, Legal & Democratic Services, Development Control & Regeneration, Communication, Marketing, Tourism and Museums.

When setting the work programme for the Committee in July 2013, Members were keen to have an update in respect of the Discretionary Housing Payment in light of welfare reform. As a result the Director of Operational Finance came along to the Committee in September to update Members who were informed that applications had soared as a result of benefit changes. Members were informed that new guidance from the DWP was being used to update and review the Council's internal process to make the most efficient use of the fund, help those in greatest need whilst at the same time be mindful of the budget limitations.

The Committee was keen to have an understanding of how the Council's Procurement Service assists local businesses and therefore at the September meeting, Members received a presentation focussing on the actions taken by the service to drive economic, social and environmental benefits.

In September the Committee also received its usual annual report in

relation to Complaints of Maladministration.

In January, the Committee received a report from the Director of Development Control which conveyed some concerning statistics for Rhondda Cynon Taf with regard to planning appeals. Members were so concerned that it was agreed to form a scrutiny working group to explore the issues in more detail. The working group considered a range of evidence along with the proposals of the Welsh Government contained within the draft Planning (Wales) Bill and as a result produced a report suggesting wide ranging changes to the operation of the Council's Development Control Committee and which was used to inform Council's decision at the AGM.

The Electoral Administration Working Group also met during to the year to consider the proposals put forward as part of the Community Review considering what changes, if any, were required with regard boundary and electoral arrangements.

In January, Members received a very informative and interesting

presentation from the Director of Customer Care and ICT in respect of the Council's information management arrangements and the rigorous Public Service Network accreditation process.

The Committee has particular responsibility for monitoring Treasury Management arrangements and as usual considered the strategy and mid-term reviews as well as receiving quarterly updates as part of the quarterly exception reports.

As well as the usual quarterly exception reporting, at its October meeting the Committee scrutinised the delivery of the Better Customer Contact Improvement Action plan for 2012/13 which was used to inform the production of the Council's Annual Delivery report.

In order to strengthen scrutiny arrangement, this year it was agreed that each scrutiny committee would establish a scrutiny working group to scrutinise the draft improvement action plans for 2014/15 within the remit of each committee. Therefore, during May, the Committee set up a working group to consider the draft Improvement Action Plan in relation to Regeneration of our Communities. This same working group will meet during the autumn of 2014 to scrutinise the delivery of the 2013/14 action plan.

During December and January the Committee was part of the usual annual revenue budget consultation process.

Finally, whilst technically falling into the 2014/15 Municipal Year, I will mention the Call-in which was held in early June to consider a decision taken by Cabinet prior to the AGM in May. The Call-in related to the Heritage Service, in particular the decision to close the Cynon Valley Museum. Those Members bringing the Call-in spoke very passionately in their attempt to convince the Committee to refer the matter back to Cabinet. However, despite the persuasive arguments put forward, the Committee felt that given the financial pressures facing the Council that the Cabinet decision should stand. Unfortunately, given the dire financial position which local authorities across Wales find themselves, it is likely that the Committee will find itself in this position more frequently during the next few years.

In concluding I would like to thank my vice-chair, County Borough Councillor Mark Norris for his support during the year and also thank all the Members of the Committee for their hard work in what has been a busy year.

*County Borough Councillor G Stacey
Chairman of the Corporate
Services Scrutiny Committee.*

EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY **COMMITTEE**

Chairman & Vice Chairman

County Borough Councillors (Mrs) C Leyshon & C Williams

Members: County Borough Councillors M Adams, (Mrs) J Bunnage, (Mrs) A L Calvert, A L Davies MBE, J Elliott, S Evans – Fear, M Griffiths, P Jarman, (Mrs) S Jones, R Lewis, B Morgan, G Smith, B Stephens, G Thomas and L Walker.

Co-opted Members: Reverend E Counsell, Mr J Fish, Mr J Horton, Mrs S Sevany, Mrs C Jones, Mr C Jones, Mr A Minton, Mr D Price and Ms A Jones.

Terms of Reference: to undertake the overview and scrutiny role in connection with Children & Young People, School Support and Improvement, Lifelong Learning and Libraries.

I am thrilled to be writing my first annual report for the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee, and I would like to say what a pleasure it has been to chair such a dedicated committee, who are committed to undertaking rigorous scrutiny on all aspects of the Education & Lifelong Learning Service. I would like to thank my Vice Chair, County Borough Councillor Chris Williams for his assistance during my first year as Chair and to all Committee members, 'Thank you for your hard work and dedication'. It would also seem an opportune time to again welcome our 2 new co-opted members, Mr Fish and Ms Sevany who have already demonstrated an active role in the Committee membership. It is also unfortunate that we also said goodbye at the end of this Municipal Year to Mr Alan Minton, another of our proactive co-opted members, and again I repeat my thanks for the knowledge and experience that you were able to bring to the Scrutiny Committee.

As the Wales Audit Office state in their recent publication "Good Scrutiny? Good Question"

"Scrutiny is integral to demonstrating local authorities are open and transparent"

Ensuring transparency and accountability is an important issue for the Committee, which was highlighted when the Committee met to consider two Call In's in relation to service change proposals for school admission arrangements and also the review of school catchment areas. These items were called in by non-members of the Committee, which illustrates the importance every member within the council holds in respect of the Education provision provided to the Children and young people of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

It would be fair to say that the austerity measures that the Council face has impacted upon the Education and Lifelong Learning service, so it is fundamentally important that scrutiny members

continue their roles as 'critical friends' to ensure that the decisions taken, although they may be necessary are the right decisions for the people of the Authority.

At the start of the year the Committee devised a full and challenging work programme looking at new areas for scrutiny as well as continuing to receive the regular performance monitoring reports and monitoring the attendance of both primary and secondary schools across the County Borough. It has been extremely pleasing to note the improvements witnessed with attendance in primary schools improving at a higher rate than the Wales average between 2011-2013 and this is attributable to the hard work of the Local Authority, Head Teachers, Governing Bodies, and of course both the pupils and the parents. Improving attendance was a recommendation by Estyn following its inspection in March 2012 and it was pleasing to see the work undertaken by this Committee through the attendance scrutiny working group being recognised by Estyn during its monitoring visit during April this year and the general positive progress being made by the Local Authority against the Estyn recommendations.

Of course one of the recommendations made by Estyn during the 2012 inspection was to improve the 'rigour and the level of scrutiny and challenge across all services and partnerships'. This focus on rigorous scrutiny by Estyn was reiterated during the Greater Gwent Challenge event in June, where Mr Gerard Kerlake (Estyn HMI) advised that Inspectors were

"scrutinising scrutiny". These expectations illustrate the importance of scrutiny, the positive role it can play and the resulting positive outcomes that can be achieved through a rigorous level of scrutiny. As Chair of this Committee I will encourage all my Committee members to continue to apply a high level of challenge during the forthcoming municipal year.

Receiving the outcomes of the National Literacy and Numeracy test and the annual report in respect of school performance is always welcomed by the Committee as we gauge whether the provisions that the Authority put in place are having a positive impact on the young people of the Authority. It has been pleasing to note the good progress made at all key stages over the last 3 years and the reduction in the gap between our performance and that of the Welsh average, although as other local authorities and schools also improve across Wales we need to ensure that we can continue to better the rate of improvement across Wales if we are to ensure the young people of Rhondda Cynon Taf are able to compete on an equal basis for employment and further /higher learning opportunities.

In respect of learning opportunities, the Committee welcomed the Director, Customer Care & ICT in respect of the 'ICT enabled Schools Transformation Programme'. This programme will deliver a range of technological building blocks to aid connected ways of teaching and learning and also provide access to innovative digital media and e-learning for

teachers and pupils, as well as a wealth of other positive benefits in respect of access to safe learning tools and digital content. Due to the advances with technology we welcome the opportunities this programme can offer and also appreciate the safeguarding measures that need to be in place.

Safeguarding is an important issue for the Committee, which is reflected through the Committees consideration of an audit undertaken by the Local Authority on safeguarding arrangements in Education Services for Children and Young People in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Although there were many good practices identified there were still areas for improvement and due to its importance we will be receiving further information on this during the next Municipal Year. In respect of safeguarding can I also thank our fellow Audit Committee members for their referral to the Committee following concerns regarding DBS checks.

Due to the remit of the Committee there are areas that are cross cutting across the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee and it's positive to see that both Committee's have recognised the importance of continued scrutiny of the Fframwaith Partnership Board, with our Committee recently welcoming the Service Director, Direct Services, Business and Housing to the Committee to provide valuable updates on the work of the partnership and its governance arrangements, reflecting the WAO's statement that "*Scrutiny is at the heart and soul of effective*

governance" (Good Scrutiny? Good Question!)

It has been beneficial to also work jointly with the Community & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee through a joint working group to consider pre-scrutiny of the Corporate Plan, 2014/15.

It was unfortunate that the proposed joint scrutiny arrangements with Bridgend, Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan and Merthyr Tydfil Council in respect of scrutiny of the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service was halted following the production of the Welsh Government's proposed scrutiny arrangements following its response to the Hill Review. Although as a Committee we welcome the fact that the full Committee will now have the opportunity to fully scrutinise the Joint Education service, it does seem a missed opportunity for collaborative working with our fellow Local Authority neighbours and the potential to demonstrate value added.

So finally, as Chair, I look forward to the next Municipal Year and the work that the Committee will undertake. I'm sure that a detailed work programme will again be devised as we continue to demonstrate rigorous scrutiny across the Education & Lifelong Learning Service.

*County Borough Councillor (Mrs) C Leyshon,
Chairman, Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee.*

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Chairman & Vice Chairman

County Borough Councillors G Davies and S Bradwick.

Members: County Borough Councillors J Bonetto, (Mrs) L De Vet, J Elliott, G Holmes, P Howe, L Langford, (Mrs) S Pickering, S Powderhill, (Mrs) A Roberts, G Smith, (Mrs) M Tegg, R K Turner, M J Watts, T Williams and M Weaver

Terms of Reference: to undertake the overview and scrutiny role in connection with Transportation, Environment and Highways and Waste Services, Leisure, Culture, Public Health and Protection, Environmental Health, Licensing and Trading Standards.

My second year as Chairman of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee has not disappointed, and I would like to thank all members of the Committee for their hard work and dedication, ensuring that the Committee scrutinise service delivery and challenge performance within Environmental Services. My thanks are also conveyed to my Vice Chair, Councillor Bradwick and to all the officers for their hard work over the Municipal Year.

During the 13/14 Municipal Year the committee were extremely active in challenging the performance of streetcare services and recycling within RCT, receiving regular updates from the Service Director, Street Care at nearly every meeting due to the clear importance of the service and the need to improve recycling.

Following implementation of the changes to the residual waste collections the Committee have regularly monitored the impact that the changes have had on our recycling and landfill targets. This has been conducted through effective scrutiny of the quarterly

exception reports, where the Service Director was challenged by the Committee. Whilst we accepted there was a noticeable improvement in recycling we were still not hitting the Welsh average and the Committee questioned further what we could do as an Authority to improve this.

I feel it is important to highlight that in respect of dry recycling the Authority are in the top 5 quartile in Wales, however the food and green waste recycling is poor in comparison, therefore reducing the Authority's overall performance. We still have no mandatory powers to make people recycle although we as a scrutiny Committee are very much aware of the initiatives going forward to again try to improve performance. As a Committee we have welcomed the nappy collection scheme and the recycling projects taken forward with both primary and secondary schools to help educate the young about the importance of recycling. It would also be remiss of me not to mention the proactive efforts of the residents of Glyncoch 'a Zero Waste Village' and the recognised positive actions of the residents

alongside service officers and the positive increase in recycling rates witnessed. We wish the project continued success. We, as a Committee, will continue to scrutinise this vitally important area.

I welcome the future proposed arrangements to create a scrutiny working group to monitor the delivery of the Council Key Priority 'Street Care Services & the natural environment' with outcome 2 of this Priority Action plan focusing on improving recycling. Again, this illustrates the focus the Committee has on ensuring the Authority improve its recycling rate.

Due to the flexibility of our work programme the Committee were able to react to the flooding incident that occurred within the County Borough, with two representatives from Dwr Cymru attending the Committee. Members were provided with an overview of the incident, the initial response taken and the assistance provided to the residents affected in the aftermath. It was pleasing to hear of the positive work undertaken to minimise the impact to the residents following such a traumatic experience and the collaborative work undertaken between Dwr Cymru and the Authority.

In respect of collaborative working the Committee received a positive update on the progress made with collaborative delivery arrangements for Trading Standards in the Cwm Taf region. Although the benefits witnessed had been predominantly of a more practical nature rather than financial, the benefits noted together with the consistency of

practices across our boundaries will allow us further opportunities for joint working within the service.

The Committee have displayed rigorous scrutiny this Municipal Year when considering the quarterly budget and performance exception reports, with the Committee ensuring that all aspects of the service are scrutinised and not just those in the focus of the public eye. The Committee positively challenged officers on the work going forward in respect of energy efficiency measures, domestic abuse, substance misuse and cultural services, reflecting the mix of services which are considered under the remit of the Committee. It is important that as a Committee we ensure that we scrutinise all aspects of the service as well as the 'priority' areas.

It was extremely interesting to receive an update on the implementation of the Welsh Governments food hygiene rating scheme 'scores on the doors' across the County Borough. It is hoped that the improvements witnessed in food hygiene following the voluntary implementation of the scheme back in 2010 will continue to be witnessed and further strengthened due the schemes now statutory footing.

Following the detailed review conducted by the Committees Working Group in respect of Houses in Multiple Occupation during 2012/13 the positive response received by the Executive to the working group's recommendations in respect of effective regulation was well received and as a Committee we

will keenly monitor the progress of the recommendations. Housing in general is an important issue especially in respect of the Housing Allocation Policy and Empty properties. Following numerous queries on these issues during Committee meetings, these could be potential areas that we take forward into the next Municipal Year.

The Council as a whole is facing many changes and challenges to the way it delivers services. As a Committee we welcome any assistance that we could provide, through the effective tool of 'pre-scrutiny' in reaching such difficult decisions. It is important that at such difficult times both Members and Officers work together for the benefit of the residents of RCT.

As a Committee we have acknowledged the hard work and dedication of officers within the service, as without them the services would not be delivered. Yet, it was with great sadness that during the Municipal Year the Committee respectfully acknowledged the sad passing of Mr Howard Thomas, Highways Technical Services Manager who was a regular officer to Committee meetings and was always willing to assist members whenever and wherever he could.

The sudden ill health of Mr George Jones the Group Director, Environmental Services was also a great shock to the Committee. George always fully supported the scrutiny process and his presence is greatly missed. Again on behalf of the Committee we wish George a speedy return to good health!

*County Borough Councillor G R
Davies
Chairman of the Environmental
Services Scrutiny Committee*

FUTURE CHALLENGES

A key feature of our work for 2014/15, will be how we respond to the findings and recommendations arising from the Wales Audit Office's Scrutiny Improvement Study. The Overview and Scrutiny Working Group set up to consider the issues in detail has already begun its work and acknowledges that we have to rethink and refresh our outlook and practices with regard to scrutiny if we are to improve. There has to be more focus on outcomes and key to this must be a move toward well organised pre-meetings which will give each committee the opportunity to consider the purpose of each item of business on the agenda and take a more considered approach to lines of questioning.

An exciting aspect of our work for 2014/15 relates to public participation. We have previously acknowledged that, along with most other councils, we are poor at engaging with the public. We were therefore pleased to be approached by the Welsh Government early in the year with a view to undertaking a project which would develop how citizen engagement can be used in scrutiny alongside performance indicators.

As a result, during the year we will be trialling public engagement as part of our scrutiny of two of the improvement action plans, namely Streetcare and Managing People's Independence. The Older Person Advisory Group will be used to provide citizen feedback in respect of 'Managing People's Independence' and it is hoped that

representatives of the Citizen's Panel will be able to contribute with regard to 'Streetcare'. If successful, this model can be rolled out for the scrutiny of the other action plans in the future and the lessons learnt from this project will assist in developing further public participation in scrutiny.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has also made a commitment to consider how the new Cwm Taf Consultation Hub can be used to inform scrutiny and engage the public.

As mentioned under the Overview and Scrutiny Section, there will be need over the coming year to consider the role of the LSB Scrutiny Working Group. In its early days the Group made a very positive contribution to the LSB's delivery of Domestic Abuse services and it is important that we do not lose the enthusiasm of our co-opted members. Therefore a priority for this year will be how this important scrutiny group can develop a more proactive role whilst not neglecting its obligations to scrutinise delivery of Rhondda Cynon Taf's Single Integrated Plan. Local Service Boards themselves will be put on a statutory footing once the proposals set out in the Future Generations (Wales) Bill are enacted.

Member Development will continue to be a priority and those scrutiny members involved in the working groups considering the action plans have already received training provided by Participation Cymru in

readiness for the public participation element of their work.

Finally, the recently published White Paper "Reforming Local Government" focuses on much more than just local government merger in Wales. There is also a strong emphasis on governance and scrutiny arrangements and this document provides another

indicator of how important the role of scrutiny is to the Welsh Government. It is clear that the challenges facing local authorities are so great that scrutiny will have to 'up its game' if it to make a positive impact in shaping the delivery of those services which our communities value and depend upon.

ATTENDANCE

Figures 1 and 2 below show elected Member attendance at scrutiny committees over the past 4 years. It should be noted that the figures do not include attendance at Working Groups or at any visits made unless part of a full committee meeting. In considering these figures it should also be remembered that many Members are on more than one scrutiny committee. Each of the five

scrutiny committees comprises of 17 elected Members with the Education and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee also having a number of co-opted Members made up of Church representatives, parent governor representatives and union representatives. The attendance of the co-optees is not included in the figures below.

Fig.1

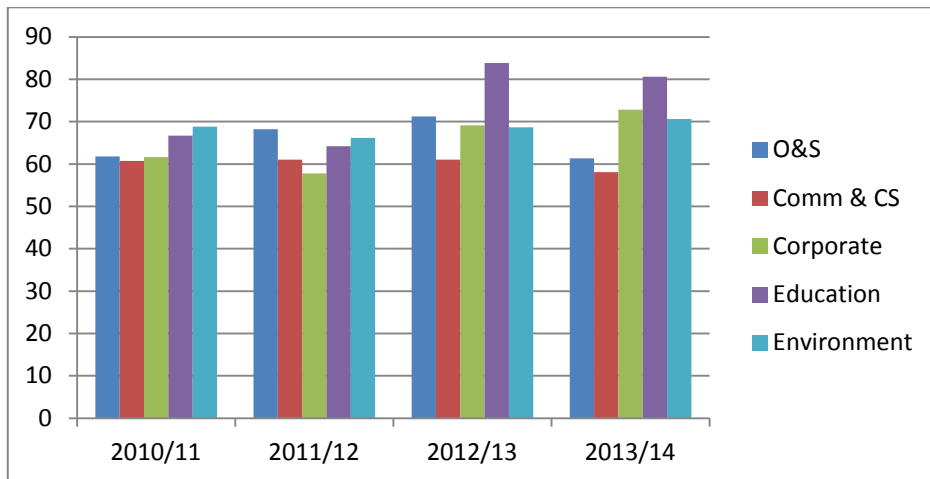


Fig 2

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
O&S	61.8	68.2	71.24	61.34
Community & Children's Services	60.7	61	61.03	58.08
Corporate Services	61.6	57.8	69.12	72.79
Education & Lifelong Learning	66.7	64.2	83.82	80.59
Environmental Services	68.8	66.2	68.63	70.59

