

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2014-2015

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4TH FEBRUARY 2015

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL &
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

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Agenda Item No.4
UPDATE REPORT – SCRUTINY ACTIVITY

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update in relation to the work across the Council's scrutiny committees.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that Members:

- (i) note the on-going scrutiny activity and reflect on whether there are other areas which also need targeting;
- (ii) consider issues for inclusion on the Crime and Disorder Committee agenda.

3. SCRUTINY WORKING GROUPS

3.1 Below is a short summary of the work currently being undertaken by the Council's Scrutiny Committees in the form of scrutiny review working groups.

3.1.1 Overview & Scrutiny Committee "Good Scrutiny! Good Question?"

This Working Group has been formed to consider the findings and recommendations of the Wales Audit Office's Scrutiny Improvement Study. The Working Group has met on 2 occasions to date. Following the first meeting which was held on 16th July 2014, a report was presented to each of the four service scrutiny committees in September, advising them of the recommendation of the Working Group, namely, that Members pre-meetings be introduced before scrutiny committee meetings. With the exception of the Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee, all scrutiny committees have agreed to introduce pre-meetings subject to discretion being given to the Chair to determine necessity and the length of time. The Working Group has also agreed a protocol for pre-meetings based on good practice from other authorities. Topics also discussed by the Working Group is 'cabinet member attendance at scrutiny committees' and

'public engagement' and as a result of this on-going work it is recommended that the appropriate Cabinet Members be invited to the service scrutiny committees when considering the 3rd quarter performance exception reports. Priorities for future meetings of the Working Group include 'effective questioning and influencing' and 'scrutiny work programmes'.

3.1.2 Community & Children's Services – Looked After Children Scrutiny Review

As a result of the Committee's concerns regarding the numbers of children being 'looked after' by the Council and the potential financial risks in the current climate, a scrutiny working group has been formed to ensure that the Council is obtaining best value for its expenditure in relation to placement costs. The Group will be holding its 3rd meeting on 11th February 2015.

3.1.3 Education & Lifelong Learning - Looked After Children's Educational Attainment

The Education & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee is also turning its attention to Looked After Children and a working group has been formed to review the effectiveness of the services in place to improve the educational outcomes for Looked After Children within Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Group recently made a visit to Tonyrefail School and Members were able to view the facilities and learn about the range of interventions and support in place to assist children who may be disadvantaged.

3.1.4 Corporate Services - 'Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)'

Following a request from Cabinet for scrutiny to consider certain aspects associated with the introduction of CIL, namely, the Regulation 123 List and engagement with Community/Town Councils, a scrutiny working group has been formed and met for the first time on 12th January 2015. The Terms of Reference have been agreed as

- (i) to consider how the Regulation 123 List is developed and maintained;
- (ii) to develop a strategy for engaging with Town and Community Councils on how the local element of the CIL will be administered;
- (iii) to consider how the local element of the CIL will be administered, including management of and accountability for funds; development of projects; agreement of projects (including any revenue costs arising from capital projects); project delivery; project evaluation; etc.
- (iv) to consider a mechanism whereby scrutiny can monitor the spend of the CIL money

3.1.5 Corporate Services - Planning Scrutiny Working Group

Following on from its work last year, this working group will be re-convening in the next month or so to consider the first year's operation of the new style dedicated Development Control Committee. The Working Group will also need to be updated with regard to the Planning (Wales) Bill.

3.1.6 Environmental Services – Empty Properties Working Group

Following a report to the Committee in September 2014, Members agreed to form a Working Group to consider:

- The Strategic Approach taken to understand the issue of long term vacant properties in the private sector, to include residential and non residential properties.
- The economic factors that contribute to the existence of areas of low housing demand
- Current policy and practice within Rhondda Cynon Taf in respect of empty properties and the options available to mitigate the impact of long term vacant properties and to facilitate their return to use.
- The extent to which the options and approaches available are deployed currently and their relative effectiveness.
- The emerging issues concerning empty properties, with particular reference to the role of private property owners, challenging housing market and areas of low demand across the County Borough and the impact of welfare Reform.

The Working Group has met on two occasions to date.

3.2 On completion of work, each of the above scrutiny working groups will report its findings and recommendations to Cabinet.

3.3 Scrutiny of Priority Action Plans

Building on the work undertaken during 2013/14, this year has seen a further strengthening of the scrutiny involvement in the statutory reporting of performance. Following on from the scrutiny of the draft 2014/15 improvement priority action plans last spring, the relevant scrutiny working groups were re-convened during September to consider the delivery of the 2013/14 action plans. Work is currently on going to improve and streamline these processes for 2015 with the aim of utilising existing representative groups and the Citizens Panel to add a user perspective. With this in mind Participation Cymru will be delivering a development session to officers and the chairs and vice chairs of the scrutiny committees on 23rd February 2015.

4. SCRUTINY OF CRIME AND DISORDER

4.1 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is the Council's designated Crime & Disorder Committee and as such is required to meet at least once each year in this capacity. The last Crime and Disorder Committee meeting took place on 19th March 2014 when Members received an

overview of the substance misuse provision for the County Borough. It is therefore necessary to hold a meeting in the near future and it is proposed that the Committee meets in its Crime and Disorder capacity on Wednesday, 18th March 2015. Members are asked to consider what issues they would like to see on the agenda.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

as amended by

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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Wales Audit Office 'Good Scrutiny? Good Question!': Auditor General for Wales improvement study: Scrutiny in Local Government', May 2014

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