



## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Tuesday, 8 January 2019 at 5.00 pm at the Council Chamber, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park. Clydach Vale, Tonypandy, CF40 2XX.

### **County Borough Councillors - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-**

Councillor M Adams (Chair)

Councillor S Evans	Councillor P Jarman
Councillor J Harries	Councillor H Boggis
Councillor J Brencher	Councillor D Macey
Councillor E Stephens	Councillor L Walker
Councillor G Caple	Councillor M Griffiths
Councillor S Morgans	

### **Officers in attendance:-**

Mr C Hanagan, Director of Communications & Interim Head of Democratic Services

### **County Borough Councillors in attendance:-**

Councillor M Norris – Cabinet Member for Corporate Services  
Councillor R Bevan – Cabinet Member for Enterprise Development & Housing  
Councillor J Williams – Chair of Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee  
Councillor R Yeo – Chair of Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

#### **29. Apologies**

An apology of absence was received from County Borough Councillors E. George, J. Bonetto and A Cox.

#### **30. Declarations of Interest**

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

#### **31. Minutes**

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on the 13<sup>th</sup> December 2018 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

#### **32. Cabinet & Scrutiny Engagement Session**

The Director of Communications and Interim Head of Democratic Services stated that this was the first time for the Leader of the Council to address the Overview & Scrutiny Committee as part of the Council's Scrutiny Engagement sessions which have been conducted by other Cabinet Members to their

respective Scrutiny Committees.

Members were advised that the Leader's presentation to Scrutiny would be in context with the State of the County Borough debate, delivered to Council in November 2018, and that many of the areas referred to have been and will form part of the forward work programmes of the four themed scrutiny committees.

The Leader opened his address by reminding Scrutiny that the Council is still in austerity measures and therefore the budget remains a core priority and the Council need to ensure sustainability. He advised that the Capital Programme is one of the largest in Wales with £8m having been invested in schools over the last year. The Leader reported on the 3 year £23.5m highways Improvement Programme which has seen vast improvements to A, B and C roads throughout the County Borough, more so than in any other Local Authority in Wales and which has resulted in significantly less claims made against the Council. Members were reminded that the Council has no control over the local bus services, but alluded to the consideration of a combined transport authority was being progressed.

The Leader commented on the ongoing commitment to supporting town centres across the County Borough and made reference to the significant regeneration work being undertaken in Pontypridd and Aberdare town centres and the recent completion of work in Tonypandy with the creation of more short-term parking bays to improve access to local shops. There are opportunities being explored in Porth and Mountain Ash, the former progressing with plans for a new transport hub and station quarter. It was reported that the work to date has been well received amongst the town centre traders.

Members were reminded of the investment in both indoor and outdoor leisure facilities. By the end of March 2019, 102 play areas will have been renewed or upgraded and to date 11 outdoor 3G pitches have been delivered in Abercynon, Porth and Ferndale with plans for further pitches in other areas such as Penywaun and Beddau. The Leader added that the target is to ensure that there will be provision of a 3G pitch within three miles of every RCT resident, no matter where they live. There has also been significant investment in Leisure Centres which will encourage residents to get fit and healthy.

The Leader advised Members that more resources have been invested in early intervention services within Children's Social Services to alleviate the pressures and to prevent families from breaking down and children being taken into care. The Leader referred to the award winning Stay Well @ Home service which enables residents to get hospital discharges in place as quickly as possible so that they can remain in their own homes. He also emphasised the need to support elderly residents at home via the means of available packages of care which would alleviate the strain on health services, particularly over the winter.

Following his address to Members the Leader responded to a number of questions and comments from Members.

In response to a query in respect of how the Council Tax data within the report had been presented as "Average Council Tax per Dwelling -18/19" which the Member considered it did not reflect the reality of how the Council Tax is calculated, the Leader explained that it was difficult to compare like for like, for example, 43% of all properties in RCT are classified as Band A whereas in Cardiff this figure stands at only 3%. By comparison, in Cardiff, the combined

number of properties classed as Bands A-C stands at 55,640 (35.76%), whilst in Rhondda Cynon Taf there are considerably more at 88,900 (81.25%), showing the significant difference in the amount that the two Authorities can generate in total via Council Tax. It was further reported that the data within the table is Welsh Government data and is based on the value of the property. It was reported that the average Council Tax for Band D in Blaenau Gwent is £1,754 and in RCT it is £1,604, which equates to £47 more in Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.

In response to a query, Members were reminded that there had been additional funding from Welsh Government to local authorities in Wales to manage winter pressures across health and care as well as the investment through its Integrated Care Fund which is aimed at preventing unnecessary hospital admissions and to develop more care at home.

In respect of a particular request for information regarding a particular school within RCT, the Leader agreed to write to the Member following the meeting.

In response to a query regarding whether Wales (and subsequently RCT) will follow the trend in England where there is a shortage of social workers, the Leader confirmed that in RCT a social worker is allocated to every child where and when required. He alluded to the effective early intervention mechanisms in place to support families and to the use of multiagency approaches to provide support for children and their families which has meant the number of children taken into care has recently plateaued.

A Member praised the Council for delivering on its equality objectives as a corporate body and for being recognised by Stonewall as one of the 100 top Employers for the inclusivity displayed and support given to employees but queried its support for those from minority backgrounds and the gender pay gap. The Leader acknowledged that closing the gender pay gap is a key issue across the public and private sector. It was reported that RCT is one of only 3 Local Authorities in Wales to have a female Senior Bridge Engineer. He reminded Members that the Council's Senior Leadership Team has been extended to include eleven senior members of staff, two of which are female. It was recognised that more needs to be done to improve recruitment and marketing vacancies across the Council. The Leader praised the work of the Human Resources team who have, with the support of the Deputy Leader, driven the equality objectives forward.

In response to a query regarding business rates and occupancy levels within our town centres, the Leader confirmed that there needed to be a level of clarity and consistency around the business rates as the current system can prove confusing with so many rates available to businesses. He emphasised the importance of getting early notification of the rate relief so that it may be applied to local businesses when issuing the NNDR bills.

A Member highlighted the importance of presenting correct and up-to-date data in respect of occupancy levels within the Council's Residential Care Homes and in respect of the Council's care provision arrangements raised concern at the potential for the local authority to become an enabler rather than a provider. that Members were reminded that a commitment had been given to providing at least 30% of social care, home care and re-ablement services to ensure the local authority retains a market share and a valuable service. It was reported that in-house staff provided vital care to the residents of RCT last year during inclement

weather as Council staff were able to access those in need.

A query was raised in respect of the formula for distribution of the Individual Schools Budgets (ISB). The Leader clarified that, as approved by the School Budget Forum of Rhondda Cynon Taf held before Christmas, the balance of the Schools Budget after deduction of centrally retained funds is termed to the individual Schools Budget. He added that there has been no change to the School Core Budget.

In conclusion, the Leader explained that the apprentices referred to in the report are gaining their experience from a range of Council Service areas such as Highways, Social Care and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and it was agreed that details of the Graduate and Apprenticeship schemes would be supplied. The Chair agreed that the schemes offered the graduates and apprentices valuable ongoing training.

Following consideration of the report and the Leader's presentation it was **RESOLVED** to:-

1. Acknowledge the information contained within the report and within the verbal presentation; and
2. Where requested, information to be circulated to the respective Member(s)

**This meeting closed at 6.20 pm**

**CLLR M. ADAMS  
CHAIR.**