



OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

Annual Report 2025 - 2026



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

Executive Summary

This annual report details the work of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function during 2025-26 and demonstrates how Members have supported the Council's decision making, strengthened accountability and contributed to improvements in the Council's services for residents. Over the course of the municipal year, Scrutiny has continued to play an important role in the Council's governance arrangements. Through a structured programme of Committees, working groups and joint working, Members have considered a wide range of issues that matter to communities across RCT. These have included key service areas such as housing, education, transport, community safety and tackling poverty, alongside cross-cutting themes such as workforce and financial pressures.

A notable area of work this year has been the continued focus on partnership working and collaboration. Across the Scrutiny Committees, Members have considered how the Council works with external organisations, regional bodies and local partners to deliver services and improve outcomes for residents. This includes ongoing engagement with the Corporate Joint Committee and consideration of how regional decisions may impact on the County Borough.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Child Poverty Working Group has been a significant piece of work during the year. The Group brought together Members, officers and partners to examine the causes and impacts of Child Poverty, resulting in a set of 18 recommendations aimed at improving the Council's response to Child Poverty, making services more accessible to residents and removing the stigma associated with accessing those services.

Scrutiny has put a strong focus on service performance by reviewing quarterly performance reports. Members have considered areas of risk and sought reassurance that appropriate action is taken where needed. This has included detailed consideration of issues such as Houses in Multiple Occupation and Home to School Transport to ensure that lessons are identified and acted upon.

The thematic Scrutiny Committees have ensured scrutiny coverage across key service areas. This has included consideration of Elective Home Education where Members explored the Council's approach to safeguarding and supporting learners outside of mainstream education; oversight of partnership arrangements through scrutiny of the Cwm Taf Youth Justice Service; and a review of the implementation of the 20mph speed limit changes across the County Borough. Together these areas demonstrate the breadth of scrutiny activity across all

Committees and their role in providing appropriate challenge across a diverse range of Council services.

Notably, Scrutiny has continued to provide a transparent setting for constructive discussion and debate with all meetings open and accessible to the public and live streamed on the Council's website. The meetings have enabled Scrutiny Members to challenge Cabinet Members and senior officers in an open setting, helping to ensure that decisions are subject to appropriate challenge and the rationale for decisions is the Council's Scrutiny function was also considered as part of the recent external Panel Performance Assessment, which provided positive assurance on the effectiveness of the Council's overall governance arrangements. The Panel found that Scrutiny is well supported with Members able to access the support they need to carry out their roles effectively. It also noted that **"challenge is welcomed by both members of the Executive and officers of the Council"** with a positive response to Scrutiny recommendations and clear evidence of follow-up actions. Importantly, the Panel heard from cross-party Members that Scrutiny is taken seriously within the Council, highlighting there is **"an appropriate balance between pre and post scrutiny of decisions"**. The assessment concluded that the Council's **"scrutiny and assurance arrangements are strong and effective"** underpinned by positive working relationships between Members and officers and a shared commitment to improvement.

Looking ahead, scrutiny will continue to develop this work and will remain focused on the issues that matter most to residents and adjusting its approach where necessary to ensure it remains effective. This will include continued cross-committee collaboration where appropriate and engagement with partners to ensure that scrutiny continues to add value in a way that is constructive, and outcome focused.

Overall, the work undertaken during the 2025-26 municipal year demonstrates a scrutiny unit that is engaged and committed to supporting good governance and better outcomes for the communities across RCT.

Contents

	Page
Executive Summary	2 - 3
Chair’s Foreword	5
What is Scrutiny?	6
Introduction	7 - 8
Scrutiny at a glance	9
Pre and Post Scrutiny	10
Developing and Delivering the Scrutiny Work Programme	11
The Work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee	12 – 17
Thematic Scrutiny Committee Work :	
• Education and Inclusion	18 – 21
• Community Services	22 – 27
• Climate Change, Frontline Services and Prosperity	28 - 32
Cabinet Member Engagement	33
Scrutiny Working Groups	
• Child Poverty Working Group	34
• Sustainable Communities for Learning Scrutiny Working Group	35
• Defibrillator Working Group	36
Joint Scrutiny	
• Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Service Board Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee (JOSC)	37 – 38
• Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC)	38
Engaging with the Public, Partners and Stakeholders	39
Scrutiny Chairs & Vice Chairs	40 - 41
Scrutiny Research	42
Looking Ahead to 2026-27	43
Appendices List	
• Scrutiny Membership 25-26	44
• Glossary of terms	44
• Easy Read Scrutiny Annual Report	44

Chair's Foreword



I am pleased to introduce the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2025–2026. This report outlines a year of constructive and wide-ranging scrutiny, during which the Committees have continued to play a key role in supporting open, accountable, and evidence-based decision-making across RCT Council.

This year, we have delivered a comprehensive programme of work, providing oversight on core issues such as finance and performance. We scrutinised the quarterly performance reports and provided detailed feedback on Phase 1 and 2 of the consultation process of the draft 2026/2027 budget. Our pre-scrutiny work has helped shape Council plans and policies, including the operating model of respite care provision for people with a learning disability 'My Stay, My Way', the proposed new model of support for unpaid carers and the Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) and final draft of the action plan, prior to consideration by Cabinet, before being submitted to the Welsh Government. Our scrutiny arrangements are embedded into a strong scrutiny culture, supported by the Executive and Senior Leadership Team.

The Council's scrutiny function was highly commended in the final report of the [Council's Panel Performance Assessment](#), which was conducted in accordance with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and undertaken between 7th and 10th October 2025. The Panel commented on the **'well supported and resourced scrutiny and assurance functions' and that 'challenge' is welcomed by both members of the Executive and officers of the Council'**. As Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee I particularly welcomed the Panel's view that **'there is a positive response to recommendations from scrutiny with evidence of follow up actions in place'**. The panel concluded that the Council's Scrutiny arrangements are **'strong and effective'** which resonated with the hard work and positive approach Scrutiny Chairs, Vice Chairs and Members have all brought to the table in their respective areas. We continue to encourage the voice of residents and stakeholders in the Council's decision-making process through a number of ways, and we will continue to push hard on this next year so that we can broaden our perspectives and increase accountability.

As set out in the report, three Scrutiny Working Groups have undertaken strong, in-depth reviews that have all produced worthy recommendations and I was privileged to have been part of one of those reviews, the Overview & Scrutiny Task & Finish Working Group which considered how the Council could exercise its powers to better support children and families affected by poverty.

I would like to thank the committee Members, officers and partners who have contributed to and supported scrutiny during the year. I hope this report helps you to understand the work and value of scrutiny in RCT and it entices you to get involved.

J Edwards

Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee

What is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny is a fundamental part of the Council's governance arrangements and plays a critical role in ensuring that decision making is transparent, accountable, evidence based and in the best interests of the residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

At its core, scrutiny allows Councillors who are not part of the Cabinet to examine the work of the Council and its partners, to influence policy, to shape decisions before they are taken (pre-scrutiny), and to challenge performance where necessary. It provides a forum for robust discussion, constructive challenge and democratic oversight.

Scrutiny is a statutory function. Under the [Local Government \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#) and the [Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#), the Council must ensure that it has arrangements in place to scrutinise decisions made or proposed by the Cabinet and to review the effectiveness of policies, strategies and services.

This includes the requirement to:

- Promote improvement in the delivery of services
- Monitor the Council's performance
- Hold the executive to account
- Engage with the public and other stakeholders in policy development

The [Terms of Reference](#) for each of the Scrutiny Committee's outlines the remit and responsibilities of its four Scrutiny Committees, one overarching [Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#) and the three thematic Committees covering [Education and Inclusion](#), [Community Services](#) and [Climate Change, Frontline Services and Prosperity](#)

Scrutiny in Rhondda Cynon Taf is also a key mechanism through which the Council discharges its duties under the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#). The Act places a legal duty on public bodies to work in a more sustainable and long-term way, and to consider the impact of their decisions on future generations. Scrutiny contributes to this duty by:

- Challenging services to adopt the five ways of working (long term, prevention, integration, collaboration and involvement)
- Reviewing how well the Council is progressing against its Well-being Objectives
- Ensuring that decisions and policies reflect the priorities of the community.
- Holding public bodies, including partners in the Public Services Board (PSB) to account for how they are working collectively to improve local wellbeing

Introduction

The Overview and Scrutiny Annual report provides a summary of the work carried out by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's Scrutiny function during the 2025-26 municipal year. It highlights the contribution scrutiny has made to local decision-making, the outcomes delivered through its recommendations, and the ways in which it continues to meet the needs of Members, residents and partners.

Scrutiny is a core part of the Council's governance framework, providing independent and democratic oversight of decisions made by the Cabinet. It ensures that decision making is transparent, evidence informed and accountable to the communities we serve. Through robust questioning, performance monitoring and engagement with service users and partners, scrutiny helps ensure that policies are effective, services deliver value for money, and the voice of the public is heard.

In Rhondda Cynon Taf, the scrutiny function is delivered through four main Committees:

- The [Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#) which has a coordinating role, oversees corporate performance, and undertakes cross-cutting and strategic scrutiny
- The [Community Services Scrutiny Committee](#) which examines services such as adult social care, public health and housing
- The [Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee](#) which scrutinises school improvement, inclusion, youth engagement and learner outcomes
- The [Climate Change, Frontline Services and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee](#) which covers transport, environmental services, regeneration and the Council's response to the climate emergency

Each Committee set their own Work Programmes, developed through Member workshops, public engagement and consideration of the Cabinet's forward plan. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also has a key role in coordinating and approving the work of the three thematic committees to avoid duplication and ensure strategic alignment.

Scrutiny plays a vital role in supporting good governance across the Council. It provides a check and balance to executive power and ensures that decision-making is based on evidence, reflects public need and is subject to democratic challenge. It strengthens accountability by:

- Holding Cabinet Members and senior officers to account for service delivery and performance

- Reviewing the effectiveness of policies and strategies
- Examining how the Council is progressing against its priorities
- Making constructive recommendations for improvement

The scrutiny function also supports the Council's wider responsibilities under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, by challenging how decisions are made with a view to long term outcomes, sustainability, collaboration and prevention. Through its work, scrutiny helps ensure that the Council considers the wider impact of its decisions, not just for today's residents, but for future generations to come.

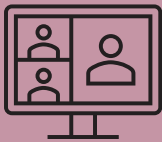
This report outlines how scrutiny in RCT has continued to evolve as a member-led, evidence informed function that supports better outcomes for the people and communities of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Scrutiny At A Glance



3 Task and Finish Groups

11 Pre-Scrutiny Meetings



31 Scrutiny Committee Meetings Held

131 Recommendations Made



27 External Partners Engaged

11 Letters Sent to Cabinet



Pre and Post Scrutiny

This year scrutiny has considered a good balance of pre, and post decision scrutiny matters where both have influence but from different perspectives. The consistent spread of pre and post decision scrutiny throughout the municipal year demonstrates that a wide range of structures are in use and that the outputs of scrutiny activity involve planning and effective work programming.

Table 1

	Type of Scrutiny	Nº	Percentage
1	Pre-Scrutiny	10	18.8%
2	Monitoring/Performance Management	11	20 %
3	Policy Development	13	23.6 %
4	Briefings and Updates	12	21.8%
5	Consultations	9	16.3 %
	Total	55	

The pre-scrutiny process has provided feedback on a number of matters during this Municipal Year, recorded and captured in a letter for Cabinet’s consideration as a means of ensuring accountability and transparency. It also creates a document trail for members of the public to be able to follow and monitor through publication on the Council website. Scrutiny Committees can review responses to understand if any recommendations have been accepted, rejected or require further action.

The Council has long held a shared understanding between Scrutiny and the Executive to enhance transparency and accountability. This was identified as good practice in the final report following a Panel Performance Assessment of the Council which was conducted in accordance with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and undertaken between 7th and 10th October 2025. In the final report, the Panel recognised that ***‘there is an appropriate balance between pre and post scrutiny of decisions with some work to support policy development also undertaken’***. Achieving a good balance of pre and post - decision scrutiny is critical to ensure that work programmes and outcomes reflect a robust and transparent decision making process.

The Council continues to enhance the opportunities for scrutiny to inform and comment upon the key strategy decisions of the Council and crucially this approach is facilitated and supported through the forward planning of Council business. The Cabinet work programme is now a standing item on the Overview and Scrutiny agenda.

Examples of both aspects of scrutiny have been evidenced within the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report under the individual heading of each thematic Scrutiny Committee, provided as a summary and a snapshot of the work undertaken throughout the Municipal Year 2025-2026.

Developing and Delivering the Scrutiny Work Programmes

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's approach to work programme setting during 2025-26 continued to evolve into a more robust, inclusive and strategically aligned process. This year's programme was shaped through a strengthened Member led model, supported by performance data, Cabinet priorities and public feedback. This ensured that the scrutiny agenda remained relevant, timely and impactful.

Officers held a number of work programme workshops across all Scrutiny Committees, enabling Members to consider evidence from a range of sources, including performance data, Cabinet reports and service reviews. These sessions also provided an opportunity for Members to propose topics using a structured Member Suggestion Criteria Form that ensured proposals aligned with good scrutiny principles, including public interest, added value and aligned with the Council's corporate priorities.

Importantly, the Committees took flexibility into account to enable them to respond to emerging issues throughout the year, with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee maintaining its coordinating role, ensuring that duplication was avoided across thematic Committees and that scrutiny capacity was reviewed and allocated effectively.

Pre-Scrutiny remained a key feature of the Work Programmes with Committees identifying decisions scheduled for Cabinet consideration where early Member engagement could strengthen policy development and decision making. The Work Programmes were further informed by public consultation, which included targeted engagement with trade unions and the Older People's Advisory Group, whose feedback led to the inclusion of topics in the Community Services Scrutiny Committee Work Programme. Consultation was also undertaken with Council staff, recognising that many employees are residents of RCT and can therefore provide us with valuable local insight. The Youth Forum were also engaged in the Scrutiny process where at recent meetings they debated topics for inclusion on the work programme, as a follow up to this they will be surveyed for further suggestions. It was also recognised that formal Committee settings can be a barrier to engaging young people in democracy, therefore engagement sessions will be held outside of the formal committee setting.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in its overarching role also approved additional meetings to accommodate the scale and complexity of work required for the year. The extra sessions ensured that high priority issues could be given due attention without compromising the depth of scrutiny. Overall, the Committee's approach to Work Programming this year reflects a developing scrutiny culture that is Member-led, evidence informed and responds to the voices of our communities.

The Work of the Overview and Scrutiny

Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee provides oversight of the Council's scrutiny function and plays a central role in ensuring that scrutiny activity is well planned, proportionate and outcome focused. The Committee oversees the work of the thematic scrutiny committees ensuring that their work programmes are aligned and address the Council's key priorities.

This Committee co-ordinates the work of the four Scrutiny Committees and is responsible for approving the Work Programmes developed by the three thematic scrutiny committees to ensure a deliverable, co-ordinated and outcome focussed schedule of work programmes. Where there are matters that fall within the remit of more than one Scrutiny Committee, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2022 - 2027 Committee will determine which Committee has responsibility for its review. This Committee is also responsible for dealing with all 'Call-ins'. For more information and the Terms of Reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can be found [here](#)

Quarterly Performance Monitoring

During the Municipal Year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook scrutiny of the Council's corporate performance reports, including quarterly financial and operational performance, organisational health and strategic risk management. This scrutiny provided assurance to Members on service delivery and ensured that emerging pressures and risks were identified and addressed as early as possible.

The effective scrutiny of performance reports was praised in the Panel Performance Assessment as they recognised that scrutiny was ***'also using the performance reports to design their own forward work programmes'***. Importantly and as a result of Scrutiny Committees being equipped to effectively contribute to performance evaluation and management. ***'The panel saw evidence of continuous improvement across the Council's services and functions facilitated by an embedded approach to change'***.

The Committee's consideration of quarterly performance reports formed the first phase of a wider, coordinated scrutiny approach. Following the consideration of each report, key issues of concern were fed into the Council's thematic Scrutiny Committees through the Chairs and Vice Chairs. This allowed Members across all Scrutiny Committees to consider performance issues in greater depth, strengthening the overall impact of scrutiny across the authority.

Members regularly challenged performance, particularly in relation to children's and adult social services, workforce capacity, sickness absence, and the financial risks arising from national policy changes. The Committee also sought assurance that high risk areas were being actively managed and monitored, and that performance reporting reflected both progress and ongoing challenges within the Council. During the year, officers committed to improving year on year comparative data, providing clearer information where performance is influenced by external partners, and improving the visibility of workforce and risk management actions within the future reports. Members also used the performance information to identify future scrutiny items to ensure that emerging risks were subject to further review by the appropriate scrutiny committees.

In addition, the Committee used performance reporting to hold the Council to account for long term planning and governance, including scrutiny of the Council’s response to the Future Generations Commissioner’s recommendations. Members challenged the absence of clear milestones where actions were “accepted in principle” and sought assurance that progress would be monitored through existing performance management arrangements reinforcing transparency arrangements

Impact of Scrutiny of Performance Reports

- Strengthened accountability across the scrutiny function
- Improved the quality and transparency of performance reporting
- Ensured early identification and escalation of risk
- Influenced how strategic risks are monitored and reported
- Strengthened the link between performance, financial sustainability and decision making
- Shaped future scrutiny priorities
- Promoted continuous improvement, rather than compliance

Budget Consultation Process

As part of their terms of reference, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee played a central role in scrutinising the Council’s budget strategy at both Phase 1 and 2 of the consultation process. Members welcomed the opportunity to engage prior to any decisions being made, recognising that timely scrutiny participation is essential in shaping a balanced budget.

At phase 1, the Committee considered the early budget position and the significant pressure facing the Council. These included rising costs, increasing demand for services such as social care and education, and wider economic uncertainty.

The Committee emphasised the importance of protecting essential frontline services wherever possible and ensuring that spending decisions continued to reflect the priorities set out in the Council’s Corporate Plan. Members also stressed that residents should be given clear and honest information about the Council’s financial position, so they understand why certain proposals are being brought forward.

When the Committee considered phase 2, Members reviewed the results of the public consultation along with the updated budget proposals. Whilst Members welcomed the opportunity for residents to share their views, concerns were raised about the relatively low number of responses received and Members questioned whether the consultation had been as far reaching as possible

Members highlighted that budget decisions can have a real impact on people’s lives and that it is particularly important to hear from those who may be the most affected. They discussed the need to strengthen community-based engagement and to work more closely with voluntary and community groups to encourage wider engagement and participation. The Committee also discussed the continued financial pressures within schools, particularly in relation to Additional Learning Needs, and sought reassurance that these pressures would continue to be monitored closely. Members advised that prevention and early intervention must remain part of the Council’s approach to managing its finances.

Following their discussions across both budget meetings the following **recommendations** emerged:

- **Improve Public Engagement:** Future Budget consultations should include more targeted outreach, using community networks, voluntary organisations and local partnerships to ensure a wider and more representative range of views. Engagement methods should be clear, accessible and easy to understand
- **Provide Clearer Information for Residents:** Budget information should be presented in a straightforward and transparent way, to help residents understand the financial pressures facing the Council and the reasons behind the proposed changes
- **Maintain Focus on Prevention and Long-Term Sustainability:** The Committee emphasised that investing in prevention and community resilience helps reduce pressure on services in the future and should remain a priority.
- **Monitor School Funding Pressures:** Ongoing reporting of school budgets, particularly around Additional Learning Needs, should continue, to ensure that emerging challenges are addressed quickly.

Impact of Scrutiny

The Committee's contribution ensured that the Executive's proposals were subject to open and constructive challenge *before* final decisions were made. Scrutiny strengthened the focus on public engagement, transparency and long-term planning, helping to ensure that budget decisions reflect both financial realities and the needs of local communities.

Section 19 Flood Reports

During the municipal year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee continued to monitor the Council's response to the significant flooding incidents through consideration of Section 19 Flood Investigation reports which were prepared under the Flood and Water Management Act. The reports examined the causes of flooding events, the roles and responsibilities of the authority and external bodies involved and identified opportunities to reduce the likelihood and impact of similar incidents in the future.

Members welcomed the detailed investigations undertaken by officers and used the reports as an opportunity to seek assurance that lessons were being learned from each event. The Committee explored the circumstances surrounding each of the flooding incidents, including the condition and capacity of drainage infrastructure, highway drainage performance, and the impact of extreme weather conditions. Members also highlighted the importance of understanding how different agencies work together during flooding events, including the Council, Natural Resources Wales, Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and other stakeholders so were grateful to have directly from Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water at the meeting

Outcomes

- **Improved transparency and accountability** – Members reviewed the findings of the investigations to ensure that the causes of flooding incidents were fully examined and that the roles and responsibilities of the relevant authorities were identified

- **Lessons learned to inform future work** – The Committee received assurance that the findings from the recommendations from the investigations would be used to inform future flood risk management activity, including maintenance programmes and longer-term infrastructure planning
- **Strengthened partnership working** – Scrutiny highlighted the importance of continued collaboration with partners such as Natural Resources Wales and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water where responsibilities for drainage and water infrastructure are shared.
- **Improved communication with the community** – The Committee stressed the importance of keeping affected communities informed about the progress and outcomes of investigations and any follow up actions being taken.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Standards

The Committee received a report on the Council’s approach to regulating Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and the effectiveness of the current inspection and licensing regime in ensuring appropriate health and safety standards for residents. The report defined the legislative framework for HMOs, the operation of the Council’s county-wide Additional Licensing Scheme and the practical work undertaken by officers to monitor the standards and respond to the issues arising within the private rental sector.

The Committee noted the significant level of inspection and monitoring activity undertaken by the Housing Standards Team, including annual inspections of licensed properties and check on suspected unlicensed HMOs, which was supported by evidence gathered through Council services and engagement with local communities.

The report demonstrated the important role that the licensing regime plays in maintaining property standards and protecting tenants. Evidence presented to Members highlighted that a high proportion of properties applying for licenses were initially found to be non-compliant with legal requirements, highlighting the need for ongoing regulation and inspection to improve standards over time.

Members considered a range of issues including property standards, fire safety management arrangements, the appropriateness of shared spaces within properties and the wider impact of HMOs on local communities such as waste management. Members also discussed the relationship between planning and HMO licensing, with Members acknowledging that HMOs are increasingly being used as long-term accommodation rather than the traditional student housing. Members were of the view that planning policy and supplementary planning guidance play an important role in managing the number of location of HMOs within communities and ensuring appropriate accommodation standards.

Outcomes

- The Committee recognised the significant cross-council work being undertaken between Housing Standards, Planning, Streetcare, community safety partners and local stakeholders to regulate HMOs and respond to community concerns and **recommended** collaborative working where possible

- Members highlighted the importance of continued proactive enforcement and **supported** the inspection activity to ensure properties remain compliant with the required standards
- The Committee **recommended** that a further report be brought back to Scrutiny during the next municipal year, specifically to examine HMO issues from a planning perspective, including the effectiveness of planning controls and the role of supplementary planning guidance in managing HMO development and concentrations across the County Borough.

Home to School Transport

During the year the Committee undertook a joint piece of work with the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee to review the early implementation of the revised Home to School Transport Policy. This provided Scrutiny Members with the opportunity for cross committee collaboration on a topic which cuts across several service areas and affects several of our residents. Members considered early data that covered the first term following the implementation of the new policy. The Joint Committee acknowledged that this was an early position and that future monitoring would be required by them to fully understand the longer-term impacts on learners. Despite this, Members undertook a detailed review of the available evidence and were pleased to hear from a headteacher and a local campaign group. Members raised several concerns, particularly in relation to the hardship fund and they also discussed the accessibility of alternative dedicated school transport, highlighting the concerns in its provision and practicality. The Joint Committee were grateful to receive lived experience of learners to enable them to learn of the practical challenges they face, noting that the impacts did vary between communities. In response to the issues raised, Members were reassured to hear of some of the mitigating actions put in place by the Council, including the introduction of a discretionary hardship fund, ongoing engagement with schools and families and adjustments to transport provision where required. However, members agreed that further work was needed to enable them to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the measures.

Outcomes

- Members **recommended** that a further report to be brought back within 6 months' time, to include further evidence of data collected over the winter term
- Members recommended engaging with young people and their families to capture the views and experiences of young people to be included within the report
- Further analysis of any potential impact on Welsh Medium Education
- More detail on how the hardship fund is accessed and utilised
- The exploration of the practical measures in schools such as drying rooms and lockers

This joint approach enabled a broader examination of the policy and its impacts, ensuring that both educational and wider community considerations were considered in the scrutiny process

Child Poverty Working Group Report

During the year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a dedicated Child Poverty Working Group to review of the impacts of child poverty within RCT to identify practical recommendations that could help improve outcomes for children and families. The Working Group brought together Members, Officers and a range of external partners from across the public and voluntary sectors. The Working Group was supported by the Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC), which provided support and expertise in evidence gathering and data analysis which enabled the Working Group to undertake a structured approach to the review. Its approach has been evidence-led, drawing on a wide range of sources including academic research, local data, professional expertise, and the lived experiences of residents.

The Working Group gained a comprehensive understanding of both the scale of the challenge and the barriers faced by families in accessing support services.

A Key focus of the Group's work was focused on improving access to practical and financial support, such as access to benefits, free school meals and wider cost of living support. The Group also explored issues including the awareness of available support, complexity of application processes, stigma and the role of partnership working to help identify families needing support at an early stage.

The Working Group developed 18 recommendations aimed at addressing the key issues identified through its work. Work is now underway across the Council Services and external partners to implement them to deliver meaningful improvements for children and families. Progress will continue to be monitored through a recommendations tracker and reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Further detail on the work of the Child Poverty Working Group report can be found later in this report.

Other work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee included:

[Consultation: Draft Regional Transport Plan](#)

[The Future Generations Report 2025](#)

[Understanding The Council's Budget](#)

[Corporate Safeguarding Annual Report](#)

[Pre-Scrutiny: Housing Allocation Scheme and Proposed Policy Changes](#)

[Welsh Language Action Plan / Strategy](#)

[Coal Tip and Infrastructure Risk Management](#)

[Child Poverty Working Group Report](#)

Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee

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](#)¹ 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 (WESP). As required by law and guidance from Welsh Government the Education and Inclusion Committee Membership includes voting representatives of religious faiths and parent governors.

Play Sufficiency Assessment 2025 – 2028

At their meeting on the [25th September 2025](#), Members of the Committee pre-scrutinised the Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) and final draft of the action plan, prior to consideration by Cabinet, before being submitted to the Welsh Government, as per statutory obligation placed on the Council in Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 and the Play Sufficiency Assessment (Wales) Regulations, 2012. 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, strengthens accountability and assists Cabinet Members in taking any future decisions on these matters.

Outcomes

- Members **recommended** that there needed to be equitable distribution of specialist play equipment across RCT to encourage use, noting that some specialist play equipment was only available in specific places, and could mean a long journey of up to an hour, for parents and carers, which had a knock-on effect in respect of costs e.g. parking, fuel, public transport.
- A Member noted the report stated that 20% of children hardly ever played or 'hung out', which was a significant figure and **recommended** a deeper analysis should be done on this cohort, in terms of where they concentrated in specific wards, or from particular socioeconomic backgrounds or have specific needs e.g. disabilities and what was the targeted action plan for these children.
- A Member noted that play was not referenced in the Council's Wellbeing plan, and **recommended** that it should be added, as it was pivotal to children and young peoples' wellbeing.
- A Member **recommended** that the report would benefit from SMART timelines, even though it was recognised some timelines would be a three-year process.

¹ From September 2025, the Central South Consortium (CSC) underwent a major restructure following the Welsh Government's "Middle Tier Review." School improvement services transferred to individual local authorities (Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf, and the Vale of Glamorgan), while the CSC has transitioned into a regional professional learning and support service.

Draft Healthy Eating in Schools Regulations

On the 24th November 2025, the County Youth Forum discussed 'Healthy Eating' at its forum meeting, following a presentation on the item by the Council's Education Officers. At its meeting on [9 December 2025](#), the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee received a report which updated Members on the proposed changes to the Welsh Government Healthy Eating in Schools (Nutritional Standards and Requirements) (Wales) Regulations 2013. The report considered the changes, which have been made to the primary menu, and the support being provided to pupils, parents/carers and schools and governing bodies to implement and work towards the proposed changes.

Outcomes:

- Members **recommended** writing to Welsh Government.
- Members **recommended** Welsh Government should review the current UPFSM unit rate, recognising that £3.40 remains insufficient to cover the actual cost of delivering nutritionally compliant meals, particularly given rising food, staffing and operational costs.
- Members were particularly concerned about the increasing cost and complexity of medically prescribed diets, which require specialist dietetic oversight and pose significant financial pressure on local authorities. Members **recommended** supporting the service's call for dedicated Welsh Government funding for dietetic capacity, as the current position risks compromising compliance where tailored dietary provision is required for medical conditions.

Education Strategic Plan 2026 – 2030

Again, at its meeting on [9 December 2025](#), the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee received a report inviting Members to formally respond to the Council's consultation on the draft Education Strategic Plan for 2026–2030. The meeting provided Members with the opportunity to consider the proposals and submit their views ahead of the consultation deadline of 23 January 2026. During the meeting, Members acted as consultees and offered feedback and comments following a constructive discussion on the report presented by the Director of Education and Inclusion Services.

Outcomes

- A Member referred to strategic priority two and **recommended** strengthening the wording, noting that “good” progression and outcomes felt too modest, and the plan should aspire beyond “good” toward excellence, which is reflected elsewhere in the report.
- A Member supported Strategic Priority four: delivering safe and sustainable communities for learning but **recommended** extending it to include “enabling innovative teaching practices and community engagement.” They noted the importance of using community spaces and

schools as sustainable learning hubs, which had been a recurring theme in the recent task and finish group's work.

- A Member emphasised the importance of effective leadership, echoing previous comments and, noted that the 90% target for governance and leadership on page 65 felt insufficiently ambitious and **recommended** aiming higher, despite recognising the challenges involved.
- A Member expressed concern about the record high increase in elective home education, questioning whether the plan gave sufficient focus and **recommended** it may require more detailed scrutiny in the future.
- A Member highlighted ongoing difficulties for parents and carers navigating the complex ALN system and accessing timely advice. They referenced a recent University of Leeds and Cerebra report, Systems Generated Trauma, which examined the significant stress caused by the system itself, **recommending** this may warrant further consideration.
- A Member highlighted concerns about social media's impact on post-COVID mental health and well-being, noting the future use of AI in schools and referencing Australia's ban on social media for under-16s. They **recommended** stronger measures in the plan to balance these issues.
- A Member noted that USW was undertaking significant STEM projects and emphasised its importance as a key partner for community engagement and aspiration. They **recommended** strengthening references to USW in the plan.

Elective Home Education

At their meeting on the [29th January 2026](#), Members received a report which provided an overview of learners who are Electively Home Educated in Rhondda Cynon Taf, in addition to providing Members with an overview of the offer of services provided. In Wales, education is compulsory but attending school is not. If a child is home educated, there is an obligation on parents to ensure their child receives an 'efficient' and 'suitable' full-time education, as stated in section 7 of the Education Act 1996 [Education Act 1996](#). The definition of Elective Home Education (EHE) is set out in the Welsh Government Guidance [Elective home education guidance | GOV.WALES](#).

Outcomes

- Members **recommended** writing to Welsh Government.
- Members **recommended** Welsh Government should strengthen national EHE guidance, including consideration of placing key elements on a statutory footing, to provide clearer expectations, improve consistency and support more robust monitoring.
- Members **recommended** clearer national criteria are needed for determining whether education is "efficient and suitable", including how progress, curriculum breadth and learning evidence should be assessed.
- Members **recommended** Welsh Government should review capacity and funding arrangements, recognising the significant rise in EHE numbers and increasing complexity linked to ALN, anxiety and post-COVID impacts.

- Members **recommended** Welsh Government should review PLASC arrangements, exploring mechanisms for funding to follow EHE learners, particularly those with ALN or where support could encourage a return to school.

Other work included:

[Sustainable Communities for Learning Working Group – 16th July 2025](#)

[Mobile Devices in Schools \(Part 1\) – 16th July 2025](#)

[School Governance – 16th July 2025](#)

[Welsh in Education Strategic Plan Update – 25th September 2025](#)

[School Modernisation – Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme – 10th November 2025](#)

[Attendance & Barriers to Engagement in Schools – 10th November 2025](#)

[Estyn’s Recommendations for Improvement – 10th November 2025](#)

[Bi-Annual Cabinet Member Engagement – 9th December 2025](#)

[Post 16 Curriculum Officer \(including Progression Pathways at Post-14 and Post-16\) 29th January 2026](#)

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).

Pre-Scrutiny of My Stay, My Way respite model

At their meeting on [29th September 2025](#), the Community Services Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to pre-scrutinise the targeted consultation with stakeholders on the proposed, co-produced, operating model of respite care provision for people with a learning disability (The proposed respite model) for the My Stay, My Way model.

Outcomes

- Members welcomed the increased personalisation and flexibility for service users, recognising it as a positive shift in practice.
- It was clarified that the proposal is expected to be **cost neutral**, providing reassurance around financial sustainability.
- Although unlikely to significantly reduce hospital admissions due to the complexity of the user group, Members were satisfied the model is expected to **maintain current cost levels while improving user experience**.
- Members acknowledged that changes could create anxiety for service users and carers and were reassured that individual reviews will incorporate the views of service users, primary carers, and others involved, ensuring a **holistic and inclusive planning process**.
- Members felt it was positive that this approach is intended to **reduce anxiety and increase confidence** in the new arrangements by ensuring they work for everyone involved.
- Members noted the data from the consultation results and **emphasised the importance of meaningful breaks**, particularly overnight, for family carers.
- The proposal was recognised as a **strong, forward-looking approach** that acknowledges the needs of both service users and key stakeholders, including primary carers.

Pre-Scrutiny of the Proposed Model Of Support For Unpaid Carers

At their meeting on [3rd November 2025](#), Members welcomed the opportunity to pre-scrutinise the outcome of the targeted consultation with stakeholders on the proposed new model of support for unpaid carers. Members undertook a constructive discussion in respect of the report before them and the recommendations contained within.

Outcomes

- The Committee recognised the importance of improving the Council’s support offer for unpaid carers and commended the inclusive approach that has been taken to develop the proposed model. Members agreed that the three-tier framework provides a logical and accessible pathway for carers, and that closer alignment between Adult Services, Community Development and Library Services represents a positive step toward a more joined up approach.
- However, Members also emphasised that the success of the model will depend on adequate resourcing, clear communication, and robust monitoring to ensure that outcomes for unpaid carers are genuinely improved and therefore **recommended that adequate resourcing is confirmed prior to implementation** to ensure that additional responsibilities for staff across Adult Services, Libraries and Community Development are manageable.
- Members expressed concern that expanding the provision across seven community hubs and multiple library sites could place additional pressure on Adult Services, library staff, and community coordinators. The Committee therefore **requested that Cabinet ensure that staffing structures, workloads, and responsibilities are reviewed** and, where necessary, adjusted to reflect the increased demand. A specific request was made that a caveat be attached to the Cabinet’s decision, highlighting that the implementation of the model is dependent upon sufficient staff resources being available.
- Members **sought assurance that carers will be able to discuss sensitive or personal matters in a private and dignified setting**. While reassured that private areas are available within libraries and that staff will not be expected to hold detailed discussions at public counters, Members highlighted the importance of maintaining confidentiality and appropriate safeguarding in all interactions.
- Members noted that many individuals providing care do not recognise themselves as unpaid carers and therefore may not access support. It was suggested that the Council work closely with the Health Board to identify and record unpaid carers as registration stage, for example through new patient forms, and that this information be used to improve local engagement and support.
- The Committee **emphasised the need for clear and wide-reaching communication** to ensure that information reaches carers in all communities, including those who are digitally excluded. Members encouraged officers to make use of community networks, third sector partners, and local groups to raise awareness of the model and associated support available.
- Concerns were raised about access in areas without a local library facility. Members suggested that alternative Council buildings such as leisure centres or community venues could be used to provide advice sessions or drop-in opportunities. **Members recommended flexibility in implementation.**

- Members considered it essential that the impact of the model be monitored from the outset. It was therefore **recommended that a set of measurable outcomes be developed** to assess whether the new approach reduces isolation, stress and burnout among unpaid carers and improves access to support. Members proposed that a follow up survey of unpaid carers be undertaken approximately twelve months post implementation and the findings be reported back to scrutiny.
- Members welcomed the emphasis on co-production with unpaid carers and encouraged officers to continue involving carers in the shaping and review of the service as it develops.

Pre-Scrutiny of the Cwm Taf Youth Justice Service

At their meeting on [8th December 2025](#), Committee undertook pre-scrutiny on progress against the nine HMIP Inspection recommendations, following Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) Inspection of the Cwm Taf Youth Justice Service in April/May 2024.

Outcomes

- The Committee recognised the clear progress made by the Cwm Taf Youth Justice Service (YJS) against the nine recommended improvement areas following the HMIP Inspection of the Cwm Taf YJS in 2024. They commented on the proactive approach taken by the Cwm Taf YJS and Management Board which has impacted the positive response.
- Members were particularly pleased to learn that since the Cwm Taf YJS was moved from Quadrant 2: (Satisfactory Performance) into Quadrant 3: (Requiring Improvement) by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) the decision has since been reversed following a review of progress which was undertaken in August 2025 by the Ministry of Justice Performance Oversight Board (POB);
- Members agreed that the reversal back to Quadrant 2 was testament to the 'positive strategic and operational improvements' made against the Inspection recommendations and evidenced via the formal letter from the YJB recognised that the change of Quadrant was: *'in recognition of sustained and continued improvements across key indicators which is driven by significantly strengthened governance, strategic leadership and effective partnership working'*;
- Members sought assurance that as part of the review to ensure that *'all practitioners are supported to identify and analyse factors impacting on the safety of the child and the safety of others'* the Prevention and Diversion Assessments (PADA) training is not only incorporated into induction training for new staff but also forms an integral part of the annual training plan and is a comprehensive training programme for all existing staff members;

Consultation Disabled Persons Parking Bay Scheme

At their meeting on [21st July 2025](#), Committee welcomed the opportunity to formally respond to the consultation on the proposed amendments to Rhondda Cynon Taf Council's Disabled Persons Parking Bay (DPPB) Scheme following a recent review. Representation from the Older Person's Advisory Group (OPAG) were present at this meeting and shared their views as part of Committee's consideration.

Outcomes

- Members questioned the annual limit of 12 bays and felt robust rationale is needed for the final number allocated each year.

Cabinet Outcome: It was recommended that the number of disabled parking bays allocated be increased to a maximum of 15 bays per year.

- Members raised concerns about the cost of medical assessments needed to be obtained as part of the application process and the potential workload to GP Practitioners with such applications, although noted that other forms of evidence from other medical practitioners could be sourced.
- Members acknowledged the undue stress that could arise from the process of providing medical evidence (at cost), combined with the uncertainty of whether their application would be successful. Members felt that the 'non-exclusive use' of a residential parking bay could also provide undue stress on the individual for the reasons previously highlighted.

Cabinet Outcome: Taking into account feedback recommended council introduce new eligibility criteria set out in 7.3 require medical evidence from selection of medical professionals that specifically addresses applicants' difficulties related to mobility and parking, not to pay for or reimburse costs related to gathering medical evidence, funded by applicants.

- Members suggested strengthened management of Residential bays, with proactive reallocation of bays that are no longer required by the Bay holder and consideration was given to the allocation of bays on an equitable geographical footing across the County Borough.

Cabinet Outcome: In order to ensure that the circumstances of a person who has been allocated a disabled parking bay has not changed, and they remain eligible for the scheme, it is recommended that:

- allocated disabled parking bays be reconfirmed annually and failure to ensure this could result in a bay being earmarked for removal
- an internal process be introduced within the Council to manage the removal of parking bays when no longer required.
- Members requested to review the progress of the revised scheme in 12 months to monitor the effectiveness

Community Services Scrutiny Committee (Crime & Disorder) - Community Cohesion

At their meeting on [15th October 2025](#), Committee welcomed the opportunity to scrutinise a report on the current position of community cohesion in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) which outlined the key challenges and opportunities. The report also outlined regional collaboration activity across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region in tackling community tensions, preventing extremism, and promoting shared values across communities. Committee were pleased to welcome a representative from South Wales Police to the meeting who was able to provide valuable insight into the joint working and future aims for Community Cohesion.

Outcomes

- Members discussed the Clear, Hold, Build Model as outlined in the report and were pleased to see the positive results this had seen as RCT was the first area in Wales to implement the Home Office's model in Cae Fardre. Members **recommended the expanding of this model** and were pleased to hear the support from South Wales Police in the benefits of the model where crime data indicates a need. Members recognised the resource intensive model and were supportive of the reflection work being undertaken to prevent situations escalating to a point where the model is required.
- Members acknowledged the work of the RCT Community Cohesion Group and were supportive of the continuation.
- Members noted the rise in hate crime figures contained with the report and queried school based interventions. Members were reassured by information provided regarding a pilot anti-bullying initiative that has already taken place in an RCT primary school and that YEPS is expanding to support the **primary-to-secondary transition**, identifying vulnerable pupils earlier.
- Members **stressed the value of visible PCSOs and wardens and recommended this continue throughout communities** within the County Borough. Members acknowledged that staffing challenges within South Wales Police but emphasised that local knowledge of PCSO's remains a vital tool. Members were pleased to hear a major recruitment campaign is underway.

Other work included:

[RCT Adult Community Learning Partnership Estyn Inspection Progress Update](#)

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

[Director Social Services Annual Report 2024/25](#)

[Public Toilets Strategy Interim Update](#)

[Home Care](#)

[Pathways of Care Delays](#)

[RCT Locality based floating support service to ensure people can access support to maintain their housing for all tenures](#)

[Children's Services Residential Transformation Strategy](#)

[Children Looked After Prevention Strategy](#)

[Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership – RCT Impact and Progress](#)

Climate Change, Frontline Services and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee

The Climate Change, Frontline Services and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee is responsible for Holding the Executive to account for its performance across all the Council's priority areas. This includes ensuring people are independent, healthy and successful, creating places: where people are proud to live, work and play, enabling Prosperity by creating the opportunity for people and businesses to be innovative and entrepreneurial. The Committee also considers keeping RCT clean through efficient street cleaning services, minimising the amount of waste we send to landfill, achieving our recycling targets through weekly recycling and regular refuse collections, and reducing our carbon footprint. The Committee also focuses on keeping the County Borough moving through improvements to roads and pavements and public transport, whilst also improving air quality and getting the best out of our parks by looking after and investing in our greenspaces.

Review Of Welsh Government 20mph Speed Limit

On the [17th July 2026](#), Members of the Committee were afforded the opportunity to scrutinise the progress made with regards to Welsh Government's 20mph speed limit review, including consideration of a list of 26 candidate roads identified following conclusion of the technical review process for possible reversion to a 30mph speed limit. This review was undertaken in line with Welsh Government's revised assessment criteria and the findings of the National Listening Programme.

A number of representations were received from members of the public on this item which were forwarded to officers appropriately

Outcomes

- **Members were pleased to hear** that, other than the cost of Labour, there would not be a financial cost to the Council in changing the signs back to 30mph.
- Members sought clarity on the consultation process as only those Members whose wards were directly affected had been contacted. It was recommended that all Members of the Council should be consulted and not only those in the affected wards.
- Members raised concerns over Berw road and requested for this to be reviewed as it did not fit the criteria set out in the report.
- Members raised concerns in respect of the impact on the environment and recommended that this is taken into account when deciding whether to increase or decrease the speed limit.
- Members also recommended tighter enforcement action and more police presence before implantation of the changes take place.

Members subsequently had the opportunity to scrutinise the results of the Statutory Public Notice Period and Officer responses in the Committee meeting held on the [5th March 2026](#). Members were pleased that the correct procedures had been followed by officers and were pleased to note how officers had responded to responses in the Statutory Public Notice Period. Members were happy to recommend that officers progress a key decision to enable the notice of making to be published (and a Traffic Regulation Order be sealed) at the locations described within the report and that the physical works commence as soon as practicable.

Pre-Scrutiny of the Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Monitoring Report 2024/2025

On the [5th November 2025](#), Members of the Committee had the opportunity to pre scrutinise the Council's Community Infrastructure Levy Annual Monitoring Report 2024/25 prior to its consideration by the Cabinet. The report set out the contents of the CIL Annual Monitoring Report and the proposed changes to the Regulation 123 List.

Outcomes

- Members sought clarification on whether the communities of RCT could benefit from CIL expenditure as a result of larger developments in neighbouring Local Authorities, such as Cardiff West. Members cited developments in Cardiff West as potentially having an effect on RCT given the scale of the developments and the associated impacts on local traffic and parking within the RCT area. Members felt that the Council should communicate closely with neighbouring authorities to explore the cross-border impacts of development projects and that the Council should make representation to neighbouring Local Authorities and to Welsh Government for the impacts on RCT to be mitigated;
- Members were encouraged to hear that a close working relationship exists between the Community & Town Councils and the Local Authority in terms of potential projects to benefit from CIL expenditure at a local level, however, Members felt that there is still an imbalance in how the CIL expenditure is allocated between the north and south areas of the County Borough;
- Members recommended that a geographical map should be made more easily accessible to the public to show where in the County Borough the CIL is spent and the locations of the CIL zones, helping to ensure transparency. Members recommended that following the 2027 Local elections, an overview presentation should also be given to newly elected Members outlining the locations and how much CIL funding has been allocated to each project in the RCT area;
- Members noted the amount of CIL funds that have gone to some Town and Community Councils in the County Borough and sought information on the amount of funding they have received over the last five years. Members pointed to areas in the County Borough that do not or will not ever have large development projects undertaken in them. Members therefore questioned the equity and balance of the system being used when there are areas in the County Borough that will never benefit from CIL expenditure.

Members raised concerns regarding where CIL is charged compared to where it is spent and recommended that this is reviewed as part of the new LDP;

- Members were informed that Community/Town Council clerks are given advance notice of CIL income, which supports them in their ability to forward plan and develop a payment structure and survey potential projects; Members recommended the Council continues to work closely with the Community and Town Councils to give advance notice of the Regulation 123 list and CIL expenditure;
- Members queried the frequency with which the Regulation 123 List is updated as Members pointed out that some of the content was out of date and may benefit from further review to ensure that all highway and education projects are current; and,
- Members sought clarification on the decision-making process used to add items to the list. A Member highlighted access to passenger rail services in areas of high-density residential growth has been raised for some time but has been omitted from the list while other items have been included.

Pre Scrutiny of the Environment (Wales) Act Section 6 Biodiversity Duty

At its meeting on the [10th December 2025](#), Members had the opportunity to pre scrutinise the Environmental (Wales) Section 6 Biodiversity Duty prior to it going to the Energy Efficiency and Decarbonisation Cabinet Sub Committee for Cabinet Members consideration. The report sought to outline the progress in developing and implementing the Council's S.6 Biodiversity Duty Action Plan and to seek the Cabinet's Sub Committee's approval to submit the Action Plan to Welsh Government and to publicise it on the Council's website.

Outcomes

- Members praised the Planning Policy Wales for strengthening the priority given to biodiversity in planning decisions. Members suggested that the Council should be encouraging developers to put Swift boxes in new residential properties. Members also recommended that Swift boxes should also be promoted with third sector organisations and community halls within RCT;
- Members emphasised how important coal tips are to biodiversity and the success of the Coal Spoil Connections programme in highlighting the variety of insect friendly habitats uniquely found in spoil tips. Members recommended that this should be extended to other spoil tips across RCT to identify additional unique habitats that support wildlife and biodiversity across the region. Members also felt that making coal tips a nature reserve and part of the Living Landscape programme should be a priority for the Council and recommended that the plan for coal tips across RCT should be strengthened within the LDP;
- Members were encouraged to hear that the Authority works closely with neighbouring Local Authorities in this area, particularly in respect of the close working relationship with

Neath Port Talbot Council on Pen Y Cymoedd wind farm, the largest inland windfarm in England and Wales;

- Members were pleased to hear that the amalgamation of the Planning department and the Biodiversity department within the Council has enhanced biodiversity works throughout the County Borough and has had a positive effect in respect of prioritising biodiversity in planning decisions;
- Members recommended that the Council strengthen its public engagement work with the local business communities in RCT and third sector organisations to support them in becoming more biodiverse aware;
- Members praised the Council's work with wider partner organisations in helping to spread biodiversity planning work to community ecological groups and encouraged the Council to strengthen the work of the Local Nature Partnership to encourage biodiversity awareness going forward;
- Members recommended that when considering planning applications for approval, biodiversity is considered as part of the process and that any conditions or stipulations related to biodiversity are actively followed up to check they are compliant to avoid fostering a culture where they are viewed as optional rather than compulsory;
- Members pointed out that the 'Let's Talk RCT - Trees' website appears to be out of use and not regularly updated. Members recommended that this page is reviewed and that Council websites such as the Living Landscapes website, Local Nature Partnership website and social media sites are promoted to residents in its place;
- Members felt that the Authority could be doing more in terms of its social media campaigns to encourage residents to report wildlife sightings to SEWBReC as this will ensure that any decisions the Authority is making based on SEWBReC records is based on the most up to date records available;
- Members felt that more could be done to ensure that subs schemes take on board the requirement for biodiversity and ecology; and,
- Members were encouraged to learn that the new LDP will include more detail in respect of biodiversity requirements.

Pre-Scrutiny of the RCT Peatland Programme

At its meeting on the [10th December](#), Members of the Committee pre scrutinised the RCT Peatland Programme prior to consideration by the Energy Efficiency and Decarbonisation Cabinet Sub Committee. The report sought to take forward the next steps in the RCT peatland programme with specific consideration of peatbog extent, condition and the restoration and management options for CO2 emission reductions, carbon storage, flood risk reductions and biodiversity enhancement.

Outcomes

- Members praised the Council's involvement in the Lost Peatlands project, working collaboratively with Neath/Port Talbot Council on the Pen Y Cymoedd wind farm site and felt that it had been a huge success, particularly in terms of public engagement. Members felt that as the next phase of the Lost Peatland Programme goes ahead within RCT, a focus should be placed on widening community engagement and involvement across RCT to raise public awareness of the importance of the project, promoting the good work the Council is doing in respect of lost peatbogs and emphasising the benefits for residents in the wider area;
- Members raised concerns that grant funding for the lost peatlands project was only available until March 2028 and noted that continuing with this vital piece of work relies on external funding. Members emphasised the significance of this work and expressed their hopes that this will continue to be in place post March 2028;
- Members raised concerns in respect of forestry fell in the Rhondda and the fact that the tree stumps are left in situ, how this could impact the water flow off the mountains and the impact this could have on flooding and ecology issues. Members recommended that this is prioritised in the second phase of the Lost Peatland Programme;
- Members recommended that an educational site visit should be arranged for all Elected Members to visit an area within RCT where there is restoration of a lost peatbog;
- Members were encouraged to hear that a close working relationship exists with neighbouring Local Authorities, however, Members felt that more could be done to improve upon the resilience of the relationship between the Authority and NRW;
- Members felt that the Council could do more to educate the public on the important role that peatbogs play throughout RCT, particularly in terms of its social media campaigns.

Cabinet Member Engagement

Cabinet Member Engagement sessions form a key part of the Council's scrutiny arrangements. They provide Members with structured sessions to hold the Executive to account and challenge their decision making. These sessions support transparency, strengthen democratic accountability and help ensure that executive decisions are informed by effective challenge and Member insight.

Through direct engagement with Cabinet Members, Scrutiny Committees are able to focus on outcomes, priorities and delivery, whilst also providing the opportunity to reflect on the leadership and governance of the Council.

During the municipal year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have held Cabinet Member Engagement sessions across all Members of the Cabinet. The sessions focussed on each of the portfolio holders remit and the challenges facing the authority in an increasingly pressured financial and operational environment.

Members questioned the Cabinet on progress against the Council's wellbeing objectives, the impact of external pressures on service delivery and decision making, and how the Executive balances long term ambitions with the financial and workforce challenges.

The sessions provided Members with assurance on the Executive's strategic direction and highlighted areas where further scrutiny work would add value and helped inform the Committees ongoing work programme and helped shape future scrutiny priorities, including areas for further exploration by the thematic scrutiny Committees.

Scrutiny Working Groups

Scrutiny Working Groups are a vital tool within the scrutiny function. They allow Members to examine specific issues in greater depth than is possible within the formal committee setting and allow them to draw on evidence, officer expertise and external perspectives where appropriate. By working across Committee remits, Working Groups support more detailed scrutiny and informed recommendations to ensure scrutiny adds real value and delivers tangible outcomes.

During this municipal year, three working groups were established across the Scrutiny Committees, reflecting key priorities for the Council and issues of significant interest to Members and our communities. The focus and work undertaken by each group is set out below.

Child Poverty Working Group

The Child Poverty Working Group was formed following a Notice of Motion received from Members of the Plaid Cymru group to respond to the scale and complexity of child poverty within the county borough and the need for a more focussed, evidence led approach to scrutiny in this area. Operating as a time-limited working group under the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, its purpose was to examine how the Council, within its power, could better support children and families affected by poverty and contribute to breaking the cycle of disadvantage. The group brought together elected Members, Council officers and a range of external partners, including the voluntary sector, to explore both the lived experience of families and the effectiveness of existing systems and interventions.

The work of the group was supported by the Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC), which provided support and helped the group draw on a broad range of evidence, including academic research, local data and lived experience. This approach allowed the group to develop a set of practical, evidence informed recommendations which aimed to improve access to support, reduce barriers and strengthen partnership working. The recommendations focus on areas where the Council can make a tangible difference, either directly or through its convening role with partners. For the full findings and detailed recommendations of the Child Poverty Working Group, please see the full report [here](#)

Sustainable Communities for Learning Scrutiny Working Group

In response to Members' concerns in early 2023 about whether completed Band B school investment projects were achieving their intended outcomes, a Sustainable Communities for Learning (SCfL) Working Group was established to review a selection of schemes and identify lessons learned. Between September 2023 and November 2024, the Group met five times and undertook a structured programme of school visits, supported by Education & Inclusion Services and the Council's Scrutiny team.

Members initially received briefings from Education Officers and agreed a baseline questionnaire for schools. This then informed a set of follow-up questions used during the visits. Engagement with Headteachers, staff, Governors and pupils provided valuable insight into the impact of the SCfL programme.

Evidence gathered demonstrated clear positive outcomes, including improvements to school environments, enhanced delivery of Curriculum for Wales, benefits in attendance, engagement, teaching & learning and overall school ethos. Members concluded that continued investment in the school estate remained essential.

The Working Group also identified several challenges and areas for improvement. These included the need to tailor projects to individual school contexts, ensure stronger recognition of pupil voice, particularly around toilet provision, review traffic management & active travel plans, undertake community impact assessments for all future projects and provide better support to schools in promoting wider community use of facilities.

In total, the Group formulated 12 recommendations to further strengthen and enhance the SCfL Band B programme in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Phase 2 of the work will form part of the Committee's ongoing annual programme to ensure continued monitoring and application of the five ways of working.

Following approval by the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee in July 2025, the report was presented to Cabinet in September 2025, who supported the recommendations.

For the full findings and detailed recommendations of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Working Group, please see the full report [here](#).

Defibrillator Working Group

A working group was established during the year to examine the feasibility of providing a lifesaving defibrillator in every school across Rhondda Cynon Taf. The initiative originated from a Notice of Motion considered at the Council meeting held on 27 November 2024, tabled by the Council Leader, Councillor A. Morgan OBE, and the Deputy Leader, Councillor M. Webber BEM.

At its meeting on 28 April 2025, the Community Services Scrutiny Committee received an initial report on the provision of defibrillators in schools. Recognising the importance and potential impact of the proposal, the Committee agreed to establish a dedicated working group to broaden the scope of the review and fully explore the implications of the Notice of Motion.

The working group was led by officers from the Education Department and benefited from the expertise and contributions of several key stakeholders. The Committee extends its thanks to the following organisations for their valuable input and attendance throughout the review process:

- Save a Life Cymru, Welsh Ambulance Service Trust (WAST)
- RCT Heart Heroes
- Cynon Valley Defibrillators

Their insight and experience were instrumental in shaping the group's understanding of current provision, operational considerations, and opportunities to strengthen community resilience.

The working group concluded its review with a set of ten recommendations designed to support the effective and sustainable rollout of defibrillators across all schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf. These recommendations were formally presented to Cabinet on 15 December 2025 for consideration. For the full findings and detailed recommendations of the Child Poverty Working Group, please see the full report [here](#).

Joint Scrutiny

Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Service Board Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee (JOSC)

Since the transition to a single Public Services Board (PSB) for Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM), the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee, consisting of Elected Members and Co-opted non-political members from RCT, Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend local authorities, has continued to scrutinise the overall effectiveness of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Services Board.

With the establishment of the core principles in the first year of the regional arrangements, the JOSC agreed to undertake scrutiny of the regional Community Safety Partnership (CSP), following the review and subsequent establishment of a single CSP for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region. Likewise, the JOSC also agreed to undertake scrutiny of the Regional Partnership (RP). In the interests of good governance and to provide a further mechanism for these specific issues to be challenged by Elected Members in a scrutiny environment, both additional responsibilities are now reflected in the terms of reference of the JOSC.

The JOSC has formulated its forward work programme for the year ahead with an emphasis on scrutinising and challenging the core priorities of the PSB and the RP. The forward work programme has provided a clear and robust framework for the JOSC ensuring both the PSB and RP have good governance and accountability arrangements in place.

The JOSC scrutinised and challenged the PSB Chair's report on the leadership, governance and accountability requirements for the Public Services Board (PSB) which identified key areas of focus to establish good governance and accountability arrangements. Members determined that the proposed new arrangements would provide a more strengthened and accountable approach to delivering the well-being objectives and as part of its role to hold the PSB to account it will undertake a review of the arrangements in twelve months' time to establish its impact.

The PSB JOSC scrutinised the regional agreement for the Provision of Integrated Health and Social Care Support for Older People and People Living with Frailty and their carers in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Region which proposes to bring together health and social care to deliver new community pathways and create a new model of integrated care across the Cwm Taf communities. Members undertook a constructive discussion in respect of the report before them and the recommendations, to include further scrutiny on the progress of the regional agreement.

The next steps for the JOSC include:

- hold an 'in person' training session to strengthen committee members' engagement and collaboration;
- Scrutinise the PSB and RP priorities to deliver evidence based recommendations;
- Monitor the implementation of outcomes/recommendations;
- Pre-scrutinise the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Well-being Assessment; and

- Produce the PSB JOSC Annual Report 2025/2026 summarising its clear and comprehensive work during the Municipal Year.

Corporate Joint Overview (CJC) Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC)

The South-East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) is a regional body that brings together the ten local authorities in the Cardiff Capital Region. It is responsible for strategic issues that affect the whole region in relation to economic development, regional transport planning and long terms strategic planning. These are areas where decisions made at a regional level can have a significant impact on our local communities here in RCT.

The CJC Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CJC JOSC) is responsible for the scrutiny of this work, made up with elected members from each of the ten local authorities in the region and its role is to challenge decisions, review performance and make recommendations to ensure that regional policies and investments deliver benefits for communities across the South-East Wales region.

Over the past year the Committee has continued to develop its role as a regional scrutiny body. Through a series of formal meetings members have examined key policies and major regional projects to ensure they are transparent and deliver value for money for our residents. Members have paid particular attention to regional transport and undertook scrutiny of the Regional Transport Plan and have also established a task and finish group to examine the issue in more detail. This work explored how transport investment is prioritised across the region on how improvements to connectivity can benefit communities beyond Cardiff, including valley areas such as here in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The Committee also provided scrutiny on how the CJC manages and invests public funds. The Committee reviewed the Responsible Investment Policy and Environmental, Social and Governance framework to ensure that regional investment decisions support wider social, economic and environmental goals. Alongside these topics, the Committee has also strengthened their role in holding the Executive to account through regular engagement sessions portfolio holders and senior officers. This has ensured that members from across the region can question progress and raise issues on behalf of their communities.

For Rhondda Cynon Taf residents, the work of the CJC is particularly relevant because regional decisions on transport investment and strategic planning can directly influence connectivity opportunities across the borough. By participating in the regional scrutiny process, members are able to ensure that the interests of our local communities are represented and that regional initiatives deliver benefits across the valleys as well as the wider Cardiff Capital Region.

Engaging with the Public and Partners

The best scrutiny often occurs when a diverse range of people are included in the process and engaging with those who have similar life experiences to the topic project under scrutiny brings a wealth of personal perspective to the final goal of the scrutiny project/matter being considered or reviewed.

The Panel Performance Assessment clearly identified that *'external partners and other stakeholders spoke positively of the Council's willingness to work inclusively, with examples given of the Council sharing its resources and expertise in the partnership space to further the wider public good. This is much valued by partners'*.

Scrutiny has undertaken three Scrutiny Task and Finish groups this year, the Child Poverty Working Group, the Sustainable Communities for Learning Scrutiny Working Group and the Defibrillator Scrutiny Working Group. All have interacted with those that have direct input into the subject under review, whether it be the lived experience or organisations who can bring valuable knowledge and insight such as the Headteachers, Governors, School staff and pupils who contributed to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Scrutiny Working Group and Save a Life Cymru, RCT Heart heroes and Cynon Valley Defibs who participated in the Defibrillator Scrutiny Working Group. Scrutiny also collaborated with the Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) who assisted with the Child Poverty working group to specifically draw on academic research and local data to bring together the evidence based recommendations.

Scrutiny in RCT has engaged with the public this year through many avenues such as encouraging attendance and public speaking at a Committee and through the publication of key documents such as calendars of meetings and forward work programmes which are accessible to improve an understanding of the scrutiny process. Often, scrutiny agendas are shared directly with a number of groups such as the Older Persons Advisory Group (OPAG) and the Youth Engagement Service when subjects of interest are being considered. The Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Committee includes co-opted members which provides regular and immediate input. Other stakeholders have attended our scrutiny meetings to deliver reports and impart their knowledge on a specific area such as South Wales Police attending the Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee to focus on community cohesion activities in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water who attended the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to respond to the completed and published Section 19 reports, published under Section 19 of the FWMA 2010, following Storm Bert.

Scrutiny has been able to evidence many instances where input from the public and stakeholders has led to real change in relation to local issues. We thank everyone who has contributed to Scrutiny this year as we look ahead to pursue and enhance our public participation and stakeholder engagement.

Scrutiny Chairs & Vice Chairs

The O&S Scrutiny Annual Report once again acknowledges the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs for their engagement, resourcefulness and hard work. For the Chairs in keeping their respective scrutiny committees on track and leading by example has been a pivotal requirement in managing forward work programmes, facilitating discussion in meetings, summarising discussions throughout and in closing the meetings and being able to demonstrate an objective and evidence-based approach to scrutiny. For the Vice Chairs in their role as a close and trusted support to their Chairs and being available to step in at any point and fulfil the functions of the Chair.

The engagement of the Chairs and Vice Chairs is facilitated through their membership on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, bringing together their experience and knowledge to scrutinise the overarching and strategic matters that impact the Council. They also come together through meetings of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs to discuss any arising and forthcoming matters.

Importantly, the Chairs and Vice Chairs undertook a self-evaluation exercise at their meeting held in September 2025 whilst considering the [report](#) which was based on the draft Self Evaluation Framework for Scrutiny in Wales and came following a desktop review developed to assess whether the scrutiny function in Rhondda Cynon Taf is effective:

Following a constructive discussion on the merits of the report, particularly of the suggested areas for improvement, the following comments were made:

- All Chairs and Vice Chairs valued the pre meetings as a way of supporting them with their preparatory work ahead of the scrutiny meeting;
- Great support from the Scrutiny Support Officers;
- Working to improve stakeholder engagement was considered positive through existing channels such as the Council's YEPS service;
- Creative ways to further encourage public participation was supported;
- Chairs and Vice Chairs acknowledged that having a public facing webpage to track the progress of scrutiny would be useful.

The Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs agreed that the areas for consideration and proposed improvements respond to the practical experience of the current scrutiny arrangements operating in practice and ensure that the Council's scrutiny structures deliver upon the requirements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, including pre-decision scrutiny.

During this Municipal Year, the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs received training from colleagues in the WLGA, on the 8th July 2025, (More on this session under the following section, Member Training, Development & Support).

In July 2025, a dedicated chairing skills workshop was delivered to all Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs as part of our commitment to strengthening local accountability and leadership. The session, delivered by the WLGA was designed to enhance the effectiveness of scrutiny across Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The training was structured to be interactive, allowing Chairs to develop their role in promoting good governance and ensuring scrutiny processes remain member-led, evidence informed, and outcomes focussed. Key themes included the role of the Chair in shaping work programmes,

questioning strategies, meeting management (including remote and hybrid meetings), and developing constructive relationships with officers, Cabinet Members and external partners.

Emphasis was placed on the importance of scrutiny in:

- Ensuring decisions are made in an open, transparent and timely manner.
- Driving better outcomes for communities through effective performance monitoring and policy development.
- Strengthening public engagement and ensuring the voice of residents is heard.

Chairs and Vice Chairs were also supported to consider techniques for handling conflict, encouraging debate, and managing a range of committee members with varying degrees of knowledge and experience. The SMART recommendation-setting post meeting evaluation, and maintaining momentum between meetings was also explored, with a view to improving scrutiny impact and visibility.

This training formed part of the Council Business Unit's wider member development as well as there being specific support provided by the Scrutiny Officers. Such support in areas such as Scrutiny pre-meetings is highly effective in a structured space to enable a clear approach for Scrutiny Chairs, Vice Chair and members that respects time commitments, ensures transparency and develops clear lines of enquiry. The support provided to scrutiny members across all Committees was acknowledged in the Panel Performance Assessment **'The panel heard that the Council has well supported and resourced scrutiny and assurance functions' and demonstrating 'that the scrutiny arrangements are strong and supported by all political groups.'**

This is testament to the delivery of a well structured response to Scrutiny members' needs that is designed to ensure scrutiny in RCT continues to evolve as a confident, strategic and valued function of the Council.

Scrutiny Research

The Council Business Unit affords Members the opportunity to access a bespoke research facility. Members can access past research reports by clicking [here](#). During the 2025-26 Municipal Year, research requests have been received in respect of Sustainable Communities and EV Charging and these research reports will be published on the Council website in due course. We welcome research requests from Members on a variety of different subject matters, and each request will be reviewed by the Head of Democratic Services.

[Data Cymru](#) encourages Members to use data and statistics as part of their role as an Elected Member. Data and intelligence are essential tools for understanding the needs of the public and for making informed decisions. By using data effectively, Members can help to enhance local services, inform policy making and respond to community needs more effectively. High quality research will assist Scrutiny Members to use the data and statistics to make evidence based recommendations, which is critical for holding the Executive to account.

Looking Ahead to 2026-2027



The next few years will continue to be challenging for the Council, operating as it does in an environment of diminishing resources and increasing demand for services. As such, it is important that scrutiny focuses on activity where it can support the Council to make the best use of the resources available and in ensuring that frontline services are still delivered to the highest possible standards. As part of the further

development of scrutiny at the Council, committee work programmes will continue to be focussed and directed towards the key issues that face both the Council and its residents.

➤ In 2026/27 Overview & Scrutiny will aim to:

- Continue to review how activity across the Council is delivering on the ambitions of the Council's Corporate Plan;
- Carry out detailed scrutiny of the Council's budget proposals ahead of the formal budget and council tax setting by Council in March 2027;
- Continue to engage with our public and identify the most relevant topics to scrutinise. The high number of survey responses from our staff newsletters, School Governors, Trade Unions and the Voluntary sector demonstrated that this year scrutiny appropriately represented the concerns and needs of the RCT residents;
- Start its work programming for the year ahead in June 2026 so we can focus on the delivery of key priorities and areas that impact the communities of RCT;
- Strengthen engagement with the public and develop relationships with our stakeholders/partners so that we are able to hold services accountable and ensure our scrutiny adds real value;
- Utilise our Petitions process to support work programming;
- Re-visit the scrutiny self-evaluation process to understand and acknowledge what we do well and recognise where we need to improve;
- Promote the good practice of holding pre meetings to develop themes and lines of enquiry that support Members with good exchanges at their meetings.

Appendices List

- Scrutiny Membership 25-26
- Glossary of terms
- Easy Read Scrutiny Annual Report

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

Annual Report 2025 - 2026



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

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