

APPENDIX 1



OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

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

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Chairperson's Foreword



Welcome to Rhondda Cynon Taf's Annual Scrutiny Report 2024-25.

This Annual Report reflects the breadth of subjects explored by our scrutiny committees during the 2024-25 Municipal Year.

I would like to thank the members and co-opted members of all our scrutiny committees for their commitment and hard work. Together they provide an appropriate 'check and challenge' for decision makers with the ultimate aim of improving public services for our local residents. I also want to thank the Council officers, Executive Members and partners who have engaged with our scrutiny committees over the past year and shared their experience, advice and expertise.

The context for the work of the scrutiny committees has been challenging and demonstrates how financial challenges and the rising demand for services continues to present challenges for our own and partner organisations. Through our work we have explored some very difficult choices for service providers and service users. However, we have also seen examples of innovative co-production of services and effective partnership arrangements. Scrutiny has also had the opportunity again in the last twelve months to support service improvement and through our work recognise that the Council is well placed to meet future challenges in the short, medium and longer term.

Against this backdrop of challenging times, Scrutiny in RCT has engaged in a higher degree of 'pre scrutiny,' which is where scrutiny members can add most value and influence positive change. Continuing to recognise, and value, the input of Scrutiny will lead to better decision making by the Council as a whole.

I am confident that this report again represents and demonstrates the robust scrutiny and challenge provided by all elected members, and in doing so reflects the importance placed upon our scrutiny functions.

Councillor J. Edwards

Chair

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

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Scrutiny Principal Aims

Scrutiny in RCT is a key tool for promoting the best interests and wellbeing of its residents and seeks to ensure that local people receive high quality services that meet their needs.

What Is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny aims to ensure that public services and policies best meet the needs of RCT residents. Scrutiny acts as the 'check and balance' to the Council's Executive decision makers, the Cabinet, by:

- Contributing to policy review and development;
- Holding the Council's Cabinet to account for their decisions and performance;
- Investigating issues that matter to RCT residents;
- Working with Council officers and partners to improve services;

Who Is Involved?

Non-executive Members make up the membership of the scrutiny committees (along with co-opted members on the Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Committee) and each scrutiny committee has dedicated officer support. Cabinet Members, Council Officers and representatives of partner organisations are invited to attend meetings to discuss issues.

Work Programme Planning

Effective work programming ensures that issues of local importance are considered in a way that adds value and makes a difference. Scrutiny work programmes identify topics for consideration for the year ahead in the most efficient way possible and to ensure that the committees are focussing on priority issues, making best use of both time and resources.

This year scrutiny changed the way it developed its forward work programmes through a further strengthened, member led process, by identifying areas for improvement and changing the process to establish a work programme that made more effective use of performance information; better use of the Cabinet Work Programme and encompassed a more effective agenda management.

What resulted was scrutiny work programmes which include statutory/annual items, Members' suggestions, performance data, relevant matters identified from the Cabinet work programme and items that aligned with the Council's Corporate Plan. They are more succinct, focussed and reflect the community interests and Council priorities.

Task and Finish / Working Groups

Task and finish / Working groups may be established to carry out a 'time limited' examination of specific issues of interest or concern. The Task and Finish Group / Working Group will agree the scope of the review which will establish the question or questions to be answered, the way in which evidence will be gathered to reach that outcome (and from whom), the councillors nominated to form part of the group, the names of any co-optees and officer support arrangements.

Evidence-gathering will be undertaken through a number of methods such as desktop research; officer reports; stakeholder's attendance at meetings and site visits. The preparation of a report, for submission to the relevant scrutiny committee will contain an agreed set of recommendations which, following endorsement will be reported to the Cabinet for its consideration.

Currently there are two Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups underway, the **Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Working Group** and the **Overview & Scrutiny Task & Finish Group**.

The former has considered the impact, learning and outcomes of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, the outcomes of the first phase on the second phase projects that are underway/in progress and how they align with the Well-being Act's five ways of working. This working group is currently finalising its recommendations for endorsement by the Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Committee before being considered by Cabinet.

The latter is working alongside the Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) in defining the parameters within which the Council can positively affect change to deliver better outcomes for children living in poverty. This matter was referred to the relevant scrutiny committee from **Full Council** as a **Notice of Motion** and will be reported back to Council upon completion.

A further Notice of Motion from Council was referred to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee to inform a potential Cabinet decision on the feasibility of having a lifesaving defibrillator placed in every school in Rhondda Cynon Taf and how these can be made as publicly available as possible.

The work and progress of the Task and Finish Groups and the Notice of Motion is mentioned in further detail under the respective Scrutiny Committee sections.

Public Participation and Engagement

[Access](#) to live streaming and the recording of committees is widely available on the Council website where residents can follow meetings as they happen which creates an understanding and awareness of the scrutiny process, which is key to our public engagement. To further aid this understanding, we continue to provide timely

notification of agendas, work programmes and updates to our dedicated scrutiny webpages. Key and of notable consistency is our feedback processes from scrutiny to Cabinet with timely reporting back via reports and letters to Cabinet following pre scrutiny. This matters because it provides transparency and clear accountability to our scrutiny processes and Council decisions.

In line with the requirements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the Council's [Public Participation Strategy](#) sets out the ways in which local people are encouraged to participate in the decision-making process of the Council. We continue to review our existing arrangements to improve these measures. The Council will strive to provide the public with the most up to date information in respect of its democratic process and importantly their valued engagement.

Scrutiny has benefited from further public participation in the scrutiny process this Municipal Year, with a number of addresses to Committee by Members of the public. This has ranged from public addresses to scrutiny committees in relation to two [School closure proposals](#) and two Call In meetings in relation to the standardisation of [Waste Collection](#) and [Residential Care proposals](#). Scrutiny's consideration in relation to the Residential Care proposal also provided opportunities for engagement in the process by the Alzheimer's Society, who presented questions for consideration.

In addition, it was pleasing to see the new Petitions Process that was agreed by Council in 2024 being utilised, with a referral from Council to the [Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#) in relation to two petitions received in respect of the standardisation of waste collection. The process provided further opportunities for the public to be involved and engaged in the democratic process as the Council provided due diligence to the petitions received.

Through the Child Poverty scrutiny working group the group will benefit from the citizen researcher perspective and will look at further engagement opportunities with the public through potential social media platforms and the HDRC website.

How we involve our stakeholders and citizens:

- The provision of public engagement guides which provide information on how residents are able to participate in Scrutiny Committees can be found on our website by clicking [here](#).
- Dedicated Scrutiny webpages, which are reviewed where necessary, to ensure they promote engagement through the publication of clear and transparent scrutiny information, agendas, and committee terms of reference.
- Forward Work Programmes provide early sight of information, committee schedules and those matters for consideration.
- Scrutiny Annual Report - Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility to

produce an Annual Scrutiny Report to highlight their work and this combined report brings together a summary of the scrutiny activity for the municipal year.

- The broadcasting of meetings, which goes beyond the statutory requirements placed upon the Council.
- Inviting and involving stakeholders and external representatives to contribute to broaden the committees' understanding and inform discussions. The representatives that have attended this year include:
 - Welsh Government
 - Central South Consortium
 - Head teachers
 - Teaching staff
 - South Wales Police
 - Older Persons Advisory Group (OPAG)
 - Community Councillors
 - Higher Education
- The inclusion of co-optees on our Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee, representing parent governors, and the Church in Wales.
- Engaging the public whilst ensuring openness and transparency, by webcasting all our Scrutiny committee meetings – details can be found [here](#)
- Welcoming members of the public to our 'Call-in' meetings to provide their valuable comments and feedback on a number of important issues (many of which are contained in the Overview & Scrutiny section of this report).
- Involving stakeholders to support the Task & Finish Groups with their work with the provision of expert insight and information

Wellbeing of Future Generations

Scrutiny pre-meetings continue to be held in advance of the Committee meetings to support Chairs and Scrutiny Members prepare their questioning and focus their understanding of the reports. Through this process, Members are also able to consider the reports and ascertain whether they have paid due regard to the various aspects of the Well-being of Future Generations Act including the seven national Well-being goals and the five 'Ways of Working' which helps the Council to demonstrate it is meeting the Sustainable Development Principle – i.e. *'Acting in a manner which ensures that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'*.

Building Effective Scrutiny/Member Development

The right culture and behaviours are the bedrock of an effective scrutiny function and the group discussion which takes place in the pre meetings provides Members with the space to plan and co-ordinate questioning as a team. In addition to minimising duplication, it enables committee Members to test their understanding and builds in additional structure to the business of the committee.

This good practice had developed Members' understanding of the scrutiny principles by:

- Enabling the whole committee to be clear on the overall purpose and specific objectives of each topic on the agenda;
- Developing key lines of enquiry within a questioning strategy for relevant and constructive questions with follow ups;
- Defining questions around themes to focus and explore the subject matter.

Scrutiny Member development sessions are available to all the non-executive scrutiny members through one-to-one training. This can be requested through the Members Personal Development Reviews should Members feel that further training may be beneficial to them or to expand their existing knowledge.

This year Scrutiny welcomed three new co-optees to the Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Committee where previous terms of office have expired. Each co-opted Member has successfully undertaken a bespoke package of training to apprise them of their code of conduct and an overview of their scrutiny committee.

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

Scrutiny Research

The research provision is available within the Council Business Unit for all Members to access. The research support, provided by Democratic Services, can enhance our Elected Members' scrutiny role through acquiring statistical data, historical information, charts, policy and background material on a requested topic. This offer of engagement and support has been welcomed and is having a noticeable impact in the pre committee work and discussions undertaken by Elected Members.

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

Research Web Page:

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

Three significant research requests have been submitted and completed during the 2024/2025 Municipal Year as follows and have been published to the Council website:

- [Public Bus Services- Fares Increases](#) (Release Date: 20 May 2024)
- [RCT Primary Schools DATA 2024](#) (Release Date: 18 November 2024)
- [Mobile devices in schools](#) (Release Date: 19 March 2025)

Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee

In accordance with its terms of reference the Overview & Scrutiny Committee 'coordinates the work of the three thematic scrutiny committees and ensure that the work of each of these committees is effective. The Committee is responsible for approving the work programmes developed by the three themed scrutiny committees to ensure deliverable, coordinated and outcome focused programmes of work. To fulfil the overview and scrutiny role in relation to "all Council" cross cutting themes which cut across the terms of reference of the three thematic scrutiny committees.

The Committee is also responsible for dealing with all 'Call ins' (*under the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules*).

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a number of areas of responsibility within its portfolio. This year the Committee has provided feedback and recommendations on policy review and policy development for all Council areas including setting the Council's Budget and the Council's corporate arrangements for the safeguarding of children and adults at risk, including the progress against the delivery plan for 2023-24. It scrutinised and helped shape the draft guidance document for members of the public in relation to the creation and receipt process of petitions submitted to Council and received its first referral from Council through the Council's revised Petitions Protocol, allowing the Committee to once again hear the voice of service users. The Committee scrutinised the progress of the Council's Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022-2027 Action Plan Update 2024-2025. In other areas, it provided feedback on the Boundary Commission for Wales Initial proposals on the 2026 Review of the Senedd Constituencies and it continued to receive updates on coal tip safety.

In response to a Notice of Motion to Council on Child Poverty, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee agreed to convene a Task and Finish Group to work alongside the Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) to deliver better outcomes for children living in poverty. The Task and Finish Group, whilst scoping its work, determined that its membership would include not only that of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee but representatives from the Community Services and Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committees. The Working Group also sought support from two citizen researchers and four partner organisations from the voluntary sector in an advisory capacity and to represent the voices of residents as and when required.

The overall aims of the Task and Finish Group include:

- A report on the current evidence base in relation to child poverty in Rhondda Cynon Taf and the findings of the Working Group to support service areas to action recommendations.
- A set of clear, evidence-based, recommendations for improving outcomes for children living in poverty in RCT, for subsequent consideration by Council and/or Cabinet.
- Recommendations for potential policy changes or new initiatives aimed at responding to child poverty.

Pre-Scrutiny

A significant number of pre-scrutiny reports have been undertaken this year across all the scrutiny committees, as this process continues to provide our non-executive Members with the opportunity to make comments on a proposed decision before it is made, thereby giving scrutiny a valuable opportunity to influence decision-making through debate and challenge.

It is through the Cabinet forward work programme which Scrutiny use as the source from which selections for pre-decision scrutiny are made. Following the pre scrutiny exercise, and in each case, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will inform cabinet in writing of their considerations, this will be acknowledged by the Cabinet through its report to outline the views of the committee prior to decision (and are found in the links to each pre-scrutiny activity below).

A number of Overview & Scrutiny specific pre-scrutiny work included:

- Pre-Scrutiny - [The Council's Corporate Asset Management Plan 2024-2030;](#)
- Pre-Scrutiny - [Overview of the Impact and Legacy of the RCT National Eisteddfod;](#)
- Pre-Scrutiny- [Residential Care Homes for Older People;](#)
- Pre-Scrutiny - Service Changes Subject to Consultation - [Residential Care Homes for Older People](#)
- Pre-Scrutiny- [Draft Annual Equality Report 2023 – 24;](#)

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

Call-Ins

Overview and Scrutiny Committee is also responsible for dealing with Council 'Call-ins' which is a key element of the Council's scrutiny function and a fundamental part of

the Council's Governance arrangements. This process provides an opportunity for non-executive members to "call in" for examination a key decision that has been made but not yet implemented. Once a decision has been Called In, it is effectively put on hold and is not actioned until it has been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

During the last municipal year, two decisions of Cabinet have been called-in by Members for consideration by Scrutiny. On each occasion, the committee has welcomed the opportunity to add challenge and explore the matters involved further.

1. **CALL-IN:** [Standardisation of The Council's Waste Collection Arrangements \(Including Revisions to Trade and Green Collection Arrangements\)](#)
2. **CALL IN:** [Residential Care Homes for Older People](#)

Budget Strategy

As well as monitoring the Council's Financial performance throughout the year, Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also undertake the crucial role of scrutinising the setting of the **Council's Budget Strategy** to ensure that the proposals put forward reflect the priorities of the Council and demonstrate an effective and efficient use of its resources. The Committee provided feedback on a number of areas which were incorporated into a Budget Consultation report, alongside all other feedback received from stakeholders, for consideration by Cabinet as part of developing a draft Revenue Budget Strategy for 2025/26. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also had further opportunity to undertake pre-scrutiny of the draft Revenue Budget Strategy as part of phase 2 of the Budget Consultation process, highlighting the impact scrutiny has in considering Education budgets, proposed efficiency measures and the Council's use of reserves. Members also recognised the legal duty upon all Elected Members of the Council for setting a balanced budget.

Performance Monitoring

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees has continued to receive quarterly performance reports which provide information on revenue and capital budgets as well as performance and key exceptions. Quarterly performance reports serve as a means of communicating progress, challenges and successes to Elected Members and to the public. The scrutiny of these reports by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee evaluates the operational delivery of the Council's services and promotes accountability across all Council Directorates.

As the membership of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee includes the Chairs and Vice Chairs of all the Council's scrutiny committees, this mechanism ensures that

regular scrutiny and monitoring of the performance reports is undertaken across a number of service areas and can inform the work programming of other scrutiny committees. This also directs a focus upon the Councils Corporate Plan priorities and delivery of the Council's ongoing programme of work.

This Municipal Year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have continued to challenge the Council's Organisational Health data, reported within the quarterly reports. The Committee will undertake a deeper dive in relation to this area as part of their work programme for the 2025/2026 Municipal Year.

Cabinet Member Engagement

Throughout the year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held a series of meetings with Cabinet Members to ensure that the actions and decisions of the executive were transparent and accountable. The sessions were critical in challenging and reviewing the work of Cabinet Members, providing them with an opportunity to answer questions and address any concerns raised by Committee Members.

This process is an essential part of the Scrutiny process allowing for assessment of the Cabinet's decisions and ensures that public resources are being effectively used in line with the Council's strategic objectives. By holding Cabinet Members to account, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee helps to enhance the quality of decision making and promote greater public confidence in RCTCBC.

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

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 which has delivered aspects of school improvement services, commissioned by five local authorities (Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Vale of Glamorgan and Rhondda Cynon Taf) to provide a school improvement service that challenges, monitors and supports schools to raise standards. This Committee scrutinises the Council's compliance with Welsh Language Standards and the delivery of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. As required by law and guidance from Welsh Government the Education and Inclusion Committee Membership includes voting representatives of religious faiths and parent governors.

Consultation on a proposal to establish a new Welsh medium primary school for 3 to 11 year olds as part of the Llanilid housing development and the proposed change of language medium to Dolau Primary School from dual language to English medium.

At their first meeting on the 11th September, Members of the Committee formally responded to the Council's consultation which proposed to establish a new Welsh medium primary school for 3 to 11 year olds as part of the Llanilid housing development and the proposed change of language medium of Dolau Primary School from dual language to English medium. It is recognised that scrutiny is a vital component of good governance and improves Councils' decision making, service provision and cost effectiveness. The opportunity for the Committee to respond to the consultation in this area, strengthens accountability and assists Cabinet Members in taking any future decisions on these matters.

Outcomes

- Members felt that a principal piece of information in the report relating to the funding and investment opportunities if the school was to be built as a Welsh medium school, as outlined in option three was not made apparent in the report. To assist in better understanding of the proposal it was **recommended** that such information should be made more prominent in the report. Members sought a stronger statement to confirm if a Welsh Medium School would present a stronger funding case for Welsh Government support.
- A Member was concerned that the education provision for the residents of the new estate was being determined by grants and the targets, rather than need, and felt that residents were being forced into choosing Welsh Medium education. Members noted original indications for this new school intended it

to be an English Medium school. The Member sought clarification on the capacity of the English Medium school.

- Members was concerned around the financial implication of the potential increase in home to school transport, which had been highlighted, and the sustainability of this.
- Members **recommended** that the language and intent of the proposal to be strengthened in terms of providing a Meithrin e.g., 'We will work with Mudiad Meithrin to establish a Meithrin'.... rather than 'look to provide a Meithrin.'
- A Member felt that the HR elements were a little vague and not consistent throughout the document in terms of Welsh Medium staff in Dolau and **recommended** the Council offer reassurance to staff from the outset.
- A Member noted that several Members had mentioned surplus places, but felt the point was what could be done to address those surplus places and **recommended** that a concerted campaign needed to be underway, earlier on, before the building commences. The Member felt it was important for people to understand the benefits of a Welsh Medium education and have the choice. It was important not to be in a position 10 years down the line, where there were more surplus places than now, so important to try and achieve the WESP targets.

Statutory School Organisation – Proposal to close the Sixth Form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School with pupils transferring to Aberdare Community School

At their meeting on the [10th December 2024](#), the Committee received a report which provided Members with another opportunity to act as consultees on the Statutory School Organisation – Proposal to close the Sixth Form at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School with pupils transferring to Aberdare Community School. The involvement of the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee as consultees would contribute to the quality and robustness of Cabinet decision-making and Members were grateful to have been afforded the opportunity to respond to the consultation.

Outcomes

- A Member noted that the report highlighted significant funding shortfalls at both Mountain Ash CS and Aberdare CS for Post 16 education and sought clarification on how the proposal would result in a more financially sustainable Post 16 provision.

- A Member sought clarification how the Council would ensure accessibility for students with disabilities or other special educational needs.
- A Member acknowledged the figures for Mountain Ash CS and Aberdare CS had been provided in the report but felt a useful comparator would be to see how many young people were undertaking A-Levels at St John's School and **recommended** this be included in the final report to Cabinet.
- A Member also **recommended** that destination figures be provided in the final report to Cabinet, for context, to give reassurance that by making the changes, sixth form education within the area was going to be sustainable across two schools working in conjunction, rather than the three.
- Members sought reassurance that appropriate consultees were included in the consultation including, RhAG (Rhieni ar gyfer Addysg Gymraeg / Parents for Welsh Education), recognising the opportunity for Welsh Language Immersion, should the proposal go ahead.
- A Member raised concern about what steps were being taken to address the existing maintenance backlog of £1.4 million and what impact this would have on the future of Mountain Ash CS, acknowledging that whilst the report stated that Mountain Ash CS would continue to provide secondary education for pupils, were there any plans to develop the school to enhance its appeal, and overall education offer, recognising that some parents may consider starting their children earlier in Aberdare CS or St John's instead, if there was no sixth form, with home to school transport guaranteed for faith schools.
- Members highlighted their concern and sought clarification and reassurance around home to transport, including the potential increased costs which are unknown at consultation stage.

Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Working Group - Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme

The Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Working Group has continued to hold meetings in the current municipal year and following receipt of the initial survey results sent to those schools selected, Members received a high-level report, in relation to the cumulative survey results. Members were advised that the survey had been circulated to schools twice to ensure everyone had the opportunity to respond. Members were presented with responses, aggregated on a spreadsheet, which would give Members a feel for the strengths and areas to explore further on a school visit.

Following consideration by Members of the responses received, it was agreed to formulate a broad set of questions, aligned to some of the positives areas as well as

those of concern, that could be addressed to different stakeholders along the list of themes discussed.

During September 2024 the working group undertook visits to six schools across the County Borough including Treorchy Primary School, Y Pant School, Tonyrefail Community School, Cwmaman Primary School, Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Rhydywaun and Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Aberdar. Following these visits the, the survey responses were collated and circulated to Members in December 2024, for consideration prior to the final meeting of the Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Working Group in February 2025.

At the final meeting of the Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Working Group in February 2025, Members were able to formulate a final set of recommendations, aligned to the survey feedback and narrative received.

The final report of the Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Working Group is nearing completion and will be presented to the Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee for endorsement at its first meeting of the 2025/2026 municipal year. The report will be presented to Cabinet at a date to be confirmed.

Other work included:

[Attendance and Barriers to Engagement in Schools – 11th September 2024](#)

[School Based Counselling – 11th September 2024](#)

[Bi-Annual Cabinet Member Engagement – 14th October 2024](#)

[The work of the Central South Consortium in the region and Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Authority 2023 – 2024 – 14th October 2024](#)

[Consultation on the proposals to enhance Additional Learning Needs mainstream Learning Support Class provision within Rhondda Cynon Taf – 14th October 2024](#)

[Statutory School Organisation – Proposal to close Tref-Y-Rhyg Primary School with pupils transferring to Tonyrefail Community School – 24th October 2024](#)

[Statutory School Organisation – Proposal to close Trallwng Infants' School with pupils transferring to Coedpenmaen Primary School – 24th October 2024](#)

[Welsh in Education Strategic Plan \(WESP\) – Annual Plan Update – 10th December 2024](#)

[Careers and Work Related Experiences \(CWRE\) in RCT – 10th December 2024](#)

[Schools Governance – 29th January 2025](#)

School Modernisation – Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme – 29th January 2025

Bi-Annual Cabinet Engagement – 13th March 2025

Transition to Secondary School and Curriculum Offer – 13th March 2025

Proposed School Improvement Services in Rhondda Cynon Taf – 13th March 2025

Community Focused Schools – Family Engagement in Learning – 9th April 2025

Additional Learning Needs (ALN) – the continuum of support – 9th April 2025

Welsh Government Consultations – School Term Dates 2026 to 2027 – 9th April 2025

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-Meeting Discussions

During the course of the municipal year, the Community Services Scrutiny Committee has committed to strengthening its use of pre-meeting discussions, a recognised good practice by the Wales Audit Office, which has resulted in more effective and focused questioning and recognition of key themes and key lines of enquiry to ensure these are appropriately highlighted during the meeting. Members' engagement at the pre-meetings has been enthusiastic and this has led to more focussed discussions during the scrutiny of the reports received.

Pre-Scrutiny Draft Adult Social Care Strategy

At its meeting on [9th September 2024](#), Committee welcomed the opportunity to pre-scrutinise the outcome of the public consultation on the draft Rhondda Cynon Taf Adult Social Care Strategy 2024 - 2030 and to make recommendations on the draft strategy. Members recognised the importance of having a clear strategy for adult social care, with a focused set of priorities for future years. Such a strategy allows the Council to plan and allocate its resources to achieve positive outcomes that will make a difference to the people that need, and are eligible, for our support.

Outcomes:

- Members **recommended** there be clear monitoring and evaluation of the priorities set out in the strategy. Members welcomed the Director's intention to plot the 5-year strategy to ensure the annual service plan set some challenging priorities for the year to achieve strategy outcomes. Utilising the annual service evaluation provided opportunity to establish whether the service was meeting the priorities set.
- Members **recommended** that future consultation ensures clear and supported opportunities for service users to engage. Members noted that the consultation

results had a low percentage of service users' engagement in comparison to the levels of staff that responded. Discussion was held around the potential imbalance in the results. Members acknowledged the Director's response outlining the robust method of consultation and the Director shared that there is a low return rate from service users in relation to public consultation. Members also noted the shorter period of time for this consultation and the potential for consultation fatigue in relation to a general strategy.

- Members **requested a further update** on the actions being undertaken to engage with and reassure residents that this strategy is in their best interests. They noted that the consultation results demonstrated that 29% of respondents 'did not agree' or 'did not know' whether the priorities were the right ones for Adult Services and that 37% of respondents 'did not agree' or 'did not know' whether the service model will help focus resources to those with greatest need in the future.

Community Meals on Wheels

At their meeting on [17th March 2024](#) the Committee received a report on the service review of the Community Meals Service in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Following discussion by the Joint Consultative Committee, through the Councils Trade Union Colleagues, it was recommended that the Community Services Scrutiny Committee undertake scrutiny of the report.

Outcomes:

- Members queried the service area's ability to respond to the required change for medically prescribed diets and **requested confirmation** that the Council is confident that it is able to respond to changes in dietary requirements to ensure the safety of both the service user and Council staff delivering and preparing meals.
- It was noted from the report that since the service change, on average, there had been a reduction in the number of daily meals. Whilst Members acknowledged the fluctuating nature of the service throughout the year, they requested evidence to demonstrate the potential reasons for the drop in numbers.
- The Committee welcomed the contribution of the Older Persons Advisory Group (OPAG) representative who requested further information in relation to non-peelable products and assurance that this did not impact on service users' ability to consume the products. Although Members agreed in principle with the need to change to a non-peelable version, they **recommended** the continuation of support from staff to ensure meals were still accessible.
- The OPAG representative sought clarification on the process of providing meals

over the weekend, noting a 5-day operating model outlined in the report. Members were pleased to hear that the service accounts for the weekend by providing frozen meals where requested.

- Committee Members and invited guests were pleased to note the continuation of the Community Meals service, in comparison to other Local Authorities where provision has stopped, RCT residents are still able to receive a valuable and vital service.
- A Member **requested further information** regarding the long-term plans and goals of the service to address the need for kitchen or administration staff covering driver shortages.
- Whilst Members agreed the importance of ensuring value for money for the Community Meals service, they sought further information on the tender process for procurement of outside services and how this is reviewed to ensure the Council is getting the most value for money.
- Members were pleased that the issue of debt was being managed in a sympathetic manner.
- Members noted the introduction of technology to undertake service user satisfaction questionnaires and surveys and **recommended** that data relating to service delivery and service user experiences is presented and scrutinised at a future meeting.

Defibrillators in Schools

Further to the Notice of Motion at Council on the [27th November 2024](#), Council requested that a report be provided to Scrutiny Committee to inform a potential cabinet decision on the availability of defibrillators in schools and the required improvement actions to increase availability of units, access to the wider community where necessary, and to ensure units are maintained and registered where applicable on the 'Circuit' (the national defibrillator network).

At it's meeting on [28th April 2025](#), Community Services Scrutiny Committee received a report to examine the availability and coverage of defibrillators within Rhondda Cynon Taf schools.

Outcomes:

- Members discussed the coverage of defibrillators in schools and noted the pleasing information that all secondary schools had defibrillators on site.
- Members **recommended** there be sufficient support and training for Governing bodies and Headteachers to ensure they undertake the necessary training and maintenance for defibrillators on school sites.

- Members **recommended** there be clear signposting to available funding to groups who wish to look into having a defibrillator located in their community.
- Members identified there are more opportunities to explore the feasibility of having public access to defibrillators in schools, noting the need to consider staffing requirements and safeguarding issues.
- Members also identified the need to undertake further work to highlight wider community availability of defibrillators outside of school locations.
- Members **agreed to hold a working group meeting** as part of their work programme for the next municipal year to scrutinise further the feasibility of having public access to defibrillators in schools and also undertake a mapping exercise of all public access defibrillators in Rhondda Cynon Taf communities.

Other work included:

[Pre-Scrutiny RCT Adult Community Learning Partnership Estyn Inspection](#)

[Pre-Scrutiny Director of Social Services Annual Report 2023/24](#)

[Pre-Scrutiny Social Services Representations, Complaints and Compliments procedures Annual Report](#)

[Pre-Scrutiny Draft Sustainable Food Strategy: Public Consultation](#)

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

[Pathways to Care Delays](#)

[Sport and Physical Activity Strategy 22-27: Progress](#)

[Early Years Transformation Programme final evaluation](#)

[Children's Services Workforce Strategy Update](#)

[Welsh Public Library Standards](#)

[Children's Services Right Help, Right Place, Right Time Strategy](#)

[Bi-Annual Cabinet Member Engagement \(Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care\)](#)

Community Services Scrutiny Committee (Crime & Disorder)

Pre-Scrutiny -Public Space Protection Order for Alcohol and Substance

At its meeting on [2nd September 2024](#) the Committee undertook pre scrutiny on the outcomes of the public consultation exercise undertaken to review the 2021 PSPO and recommendations for a new Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for Rhondda Cynon Taf. Members provided comment and feedback to Cabinet in advance of its meeting on the [23rd September 2024](#). The Scrutiny meeting was also attended by the Chief Inspector South Wales Police who provided valuable insight for Members from the perspective of South Wales Police.

Outcomes:

- Members noted the data contained in the report relating to anti-social behaviour in areas such as Tonyrefail and Porth and sought clarification on whether they would also benefit from a PSPO.
- Members questioned whether the level of fees in relation to the fixed penalty notices should remain at their current levels or whether this should be reviewed to ensure they are an effective deterrent.
- A member sought assurance that all instances of anti-social behaviour were being successfully recorded through the 101-contact number and whether the visibility of Community Wardens and PCSO's remained an effective deterrent.
- Members discussed the effectiveness of the PSPO in being able to tackle repeat perpetrators and were satisfied with Officer's response regarding utilising legislation effectively. Members noted that RCT are the first and only Local Authority to apply other legislation alongside PSPO legislation.
- Members recognised the importance of having a PSPO and noted the public support as outlined from the consultation responses. Overall committee noted its support of the proposals.

Other work:

[Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour- scrutiny of activities to reduce occurrence in RCT](#)

[Review of new project undertaking community outreach work to tackle domestic abuse](#)

Climate Change Frontline Services and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee

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

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Annual Monitoring Report

The Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee undertook pre scrutiny on the **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Annual Monitoring Report** during this Municipal Year with a view to providing feedback to Cabinet ahead of its consideration of the matters.

[On the 12th November 2024](#), Committee undertook pre scrutiny of the Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Annual Monitoring Report 2024/25 with the intention of providing its comments and feedback to Cabinet, at its meeting to be held on the 20th November 2024. Members were fully briefed on the Council's role as a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Authority and understood the concepts of both the CIL and Section 106 practices and how their approaches and implications differ. They explored the importance of equity of access for all communities to the provision of local infrastructure improvements that support development in the local area as a result of CIL income.

Some of the comments and recommendations are below:

- Members understood the historic reasons for implementing the original charging policy, particularly for Zone One, but were concerned that there are areas that could have benefitted from CIL income as a result of the large developments that have been implemented in the Rhondda and areas of the Cynon Valley;
- Members raised a number of concerns regarding the relevance of the Council's charging schedule (adopted on 31st December 2014) which sets out that Zone One equates to £0 sqm and that their concerns regarding the equity of income received are mitigated. Therefore, they recommended that should Cabinet be minded to progress with the proposal to approve the report, the authority undertakes a review of its charging schedule (to include the inspection process and consultation with Planning & Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW)) to ensure the figures for all zones are still appropriate (particularly for those wards set out in Residential Zone one);

- Cabinet were asked to consider the recommendation of the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee that the financial balance for areas where there is no Community/Town Council should be considered by a number of geographical wards rather than one, in the interests of transparency and in view of the implications on traffic/highway issues on the wider area and other local communities impacted;
- A Member queried the frequency with which the Regulation List 123 is updated as Members pointed out that some of the content may benefit from further review to ensure that all highway and education projects are current; Members suggested that the CIL is reviewed in line with the LDP and joining up the process would make sense;

The Committee's feedback was provided to the Cabinet at its meeting held on the [20th November 2024](#)

The Council's Draft Heritage Strategy

The Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee contributed to the Council's draft Heritage Strategy consultation process at its meeting on the [16th September 2024](#). They acknowledged the project's key objectives for the development and formalisation of a heritage strategy and gained an understanding of RCT's heritage and those involved in its management. Key to the discussion was the engagement and involvement of the public in the development of the strategy.

The following comments/feedback were made for inclusion in the consultation process which would inform the final strategy:

- Members acknowledged the importance of the involvement of smaller organisations and community projects in RCT Heritage and requested a mapping exercise to be undertaken to create one formal database;
- Members sought clarification on how the service area would maintain future interest in the museums and heritage sites across RCT and importantly how the school curriculum links in with the Council's heritage through toolkits and school visits;
- Engagement with RCT's children and young people formed an integral part of the feedback and discussion as Members were keen that every opportunity is taken to connect heritage with the children and young people via schools or the Library service to increase their engagement in practical projects across the communities of RCT;

- Members were keen that heritage integrates into other service area plans and policies and asked for this to be evidenced in future reports that come to the Scrutiny Committee, so that the correlation is clear such as with town centre regeneration;
- The importance of promoting RCT's key heritage sites and events widely was considered by Members as key to their success with future exhibitions and external presentations being held in collaboration with other organisations.

Cabinet Member Engagement

Members of the Climate Change, Frontline Services and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee had further opportunity to scrutinise the Cabinet Member for Environment & Leisure (whose portfolio includes the Council's Heritage Service & Visitor Attractions) on the implementation and progress of the Council's Heritage Strategy at its Cabinet Member Engagement session held on the [26th March 2025](#).

Members were keen to establish whether any significant patterns have emerged in terms of volunteer engagement and community participation. Also, whether any further future funding applications have been sought similar to the 'Altered Images' project which was awarded a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant of £250,000 for a three-year project in August 2021. It was agreed that the Climate Change, Frontline Services and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee will continue to monitor the progress of RCT's heritage activity into the next municipal year and scrutinise the associated action plans to identify any gaps in delivery of service.

Members also challenged the Cabinet Member on the Council's recycling performance for the year 2024/25 following the change to a 3-weekly collection frequency for residual household waste as well as bottle bank collections, glass collection and processing, waste awareness and the Council's education service.

Bryn Pica Site Visit – Members were invited to attend the educational centre and material recovery facility at Bryn Pica on the 26th November 2024, to provide them with an insight into the facilities. This supported their preparation for scrutiny of the Council's recycling performance.

Other work included:

- [Local Area Energy Plan \(LAEP\) for Rhondda Cynon Taf](#)
- [Review of Welsh Government 20mph Speed Limit](#)
- [The Council's Fleet Transition](#)
- [Highways Investment Scheme](#)

- [*Town Centre Regeneration Strategies and Placemaking Plans in Rhondda Cynon Taf*](#)
- [*Decarbonisation Strategy & Action Plan Update*](#)
- [*RCT Recycling Performance 2024/25*](#)
- [*Cabinet Member Engagement Session*](#)

Focus for 2025/2026

Scrutiny aims to develop the following areas during the next Municipal Year which remain integral to good scrutiny in RCT:

- Continue to support our scrutiny members' understanding of key areas of scrutiny such as performance data and financial scrutiny through a dedicated package of training and ongoing evaluation of scrutiny outcomes.
- Improve opportunities for elected members to use Financial and Performance information to inform work programming and scrutiny challenge.
- Ensure that Scrutiny continues to comply with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and is resolute in its focus to reduce the inequalities of outcomes that result from socio-economic disadvantage.
- Maintain our high-level work planning sessions to ensure the matters we include on our scrutiny forward work programmes are relevant and contribute towards the excellent service delivery expected by our residents.
- To guide the role and conduct of the scrutiny members in a modern council environment, including how to effect constructive challenge.
- Ensure that Council Officers and partners continue to bring good quality information to scrutiny meetings to enable effective challenge.
- Continue to develop the public and stakeholder engagement of scrutiny through existing channels such as the publication of work programmes, committee agendas, webcasting of all scrutiny committees and the publication of an Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report.
- Ensure the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs are fully supported through the WLGA Peer Review process which will look to provide collective challenge and mutual support to drive improvement.

Scrutiny Team

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