

Civic Centre, Castle Street,
Merthyr Tydfil CF47 8AN

Main Tel: 01685 725000

www.merthyr.gov.uk



FULL COUNCIL - INFORMATION REPORT

Date Written	11 th September 2020
Report Author	Head of Corporate Services / Performance and Scrutiny Team
Service Area	Performance and Scrutiny
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	7 th October 2020

*To: Mayor, Ladies and
Gentlemen*

Annual Scrutiny Report 2019 / 2020

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Scrutiny is a function of Councils in England and Wales and was introduced by the Local Government Act 2000 creating separate Executive and Scrutiny functions in Councils. The role of scrutiny was strengthened with the passing of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.
- 1.2 The role of Scrutiny includes monitoring performance; challenging the Council's spending proposals; reviewing services; contributing to policy development; examining the work of other local public service providers and promoting public engagement in the democratic process.
- 1.3 The scrutiny function at Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) is performed by six scrutiny committees. These committees are made up of Elected Members (or Councillors) who are not part of the Council's Executive (Cabinet); along with co-opted representatives.
- 1.4 The purpose of this report is to apprise Council and other interested parties of the role of the scrutiny committees, and their work during the 2019/20 municipal year.

2.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to apprise Council and other interested parties in the role of scrutiny committees, and their work during the **2019/20** municipal year.
- 2.2 Overview and Scrutiny (often just referred to as “scrutiny”) is a function of Councils in England and Wales introduced by the Local Government Act 2000 which created separate Executive (Cabinet) and Scrutiny functions. In Wales the scrutiny function was extended in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.
- 2.3 Broadly speaking, local government scrutiny committees operate in a manner similar to the select committees supporting the UK Parliament. They are composed of non-executive councillors of all political groups (in proportion to the Council’s overall political balance), and meet both in public and in private to:
- Help the Administration develop and review policies;
 - Test the Council’s performance and offer advice for improvement;
 - Provide pre-decision scrutiny of decisions that the administration is about to make;
 - Periodically call in for examination decisions that the administration has recently made;
 - Offer a platform for citizens and citizen groups to represent their concerns or ideas for improvement.

Further information can be found the MTCBC website.

- 2.4 The Centre for Public Scrutiny outlines that scrutiny has four ‘cornerstones’, namely:
- Led by ‘independent minded governors who own the scrutiny role;
 - Acts as a ‘critical friend’ of the executive, holding decision makers to account;
 - Represents the views and concerns of the citizen;
 - Leads to the improvement of public services.
- 2.5 The Scrutiny function at MTCBC is supported by the Democratic Services and Performance and Scrutiny teams. Working closely, the support team ensures the scrutiny function is delivered in line with statutory requirements. Scrutiny is comprised of Elected Members, co-opted members and young people; all these play a valuable role in the meetings, each bringing a different perspective. Work is ongoing to promote the work of the scrutiny committees.
- 2.6 Elected Members will recall the report ‘Appointment to Committees 2019-2020’ presented to Council on the 15th May 2019, the Council’s annual general meeting (AGM). This report details the appointments to committees and the cycle of meetings.

3.0 UPDATE ON ACTIONS

3.1 Audit Wales (formerly the Wales Audit Office) report '[Overview and Scrutiny: Fit for the Future? – Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council](#)' outlined 6 recommendations (in addition to 2 recommendations from a related WAO report). Following this changes have been made to the Scrutiny function at MTCBC. These changes include (but are not contained to):

- greater ownership of the forward work programme and meeting agendas is taken by the committee members;
- Cabinet Members attend Scrutiny committee meetings to be held to account;
- continuing to review the type and level of scrutiny required (value for money);
- work is being done to consider effectiveness (e.g. section 13); and
- a Cabinet Forward Work Plan was developed for 2019/2020; with the 2020/2021 version currently under development.

3.2 Table 1 (below) offers a brief overview of some of the 'headlines' linked to the delivery of the scrutiny function (excluding joint overview and scrutiny committee meetings) over the 2019/2020 municipal year.

	Governance, Performance, Business Change & Corporate Services	Learning & LGES	Regeneration & Public Protection ¹	Social Services	Neighbourhood ¹² Services	Total Performance
Percentage of scheduled meetings completed	100% (7/7)	100% (7/7)	86% (6/7)	100% (7/7)	75% (5/7)	92% (32/35)
Number of reports considered by Committee	16	20	18	20	11	85
Number of Cabinet decisions debated under 'call in'	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of external partner representatives attending a scrutiny meeting	1	2	2	3	0	8
Number of task and finish groups established in 2019/2020	1	1	0	0	1	3
Number of reports task and finish group reports completed and submitted to Cabinet for consideration	0	0	1	0	2	3

Table 1: Key outcomes recorded through delivery of the Council's scrutiny function

¹ Meeting cancelled due to Election activity

² One meeting cancelled due to requirement to respond to flooding caused by storms Ellen and Jorge

- 3.3 This will form the basis of further analysis to measure the effectiveness of the scrutiny function at MTCBC in meeting the WAO recommendation outlined above.

4.0 **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: GOVERNANCE, PERFORMANCE, BUSINESS CHANGE AND CORPORATE SERVICES**



Chair:
Cllr. Tanya Skinner

4.1 The Governance, Performance, Business Change and Corporate Services consists seven Councillors plus four co-opted members (1 voluntary sector member; 1 Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum members and 2 public, non-voting members).

4.2 Chairpersons comments

The unprecedented challenges of this year namely, Storm Dennis and the Corona Virus have meant that we haven't been able to cover all areas of our work programme and events of this magnitude will no doubt be felt for many more months or years to come.

This year we were able to continue work on the 'Working Life' and 'Best Start'. Following on from the work the committee carried out in scrutinising the draft copy of the 'Tackling Poverty Strategy' this year we were able to bring it back to scrutiny to review progress.

Recommendations made by Audit Wales round 'Council support for the Third Sector' also saw substantial progress this year with a small working group formed and the potential for a pilot project to take place being developed.

Work began in further engaging Committee Members to play an active role in shaping the Work Programme for this year. As Chair, I arranged and lead a workshop-style meeting for the committee at the start of the year. This enabled us to shape and determine a collaborative work programme.

Although we have continued to make progress on the overview function of the committee; further work is required in this area and will need to be considered as part of the comprehensive scrutiny function review within the Local Authority.

I remain hopeful that we can become part of any public consultation events in the future in order to increase awareness and promote the importance of scrutiny. I feel it is important that we offer an alternative method for members of the public to bring items to our attention. I think being out in the community could be a positive step change in the way we deliver this function in the future.

4.3 Work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee for the 2019/2020 municipal year

The role and remit of the Governance, Performance, Business Change and Corporate Services scrutiny committee is wide and varied. Over the municipal year; the

Committee has received reports on a variety of topics which were reviewed and scrutinised. A selection of these are listed below:

- The Council's DRAFT Annual Governance Statement;
- Welsh Public Library standards
- Thematic performance report reflecting the progress made against the Council's Living Well wellbeing objective as outlined in Focus on the Future: wellbeing in our community;
- The Council's Change Programme;
- The Council's DRAFT Annual Performance Report for 2018/19;
- The Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy;
- Thematic performance report reflecting the progress made against the Council's Best Start wellbeing objective as outlined in Focus on the Future: wellbeing in our community;
- Recommendations made by external regulators (WAO, CSIW, ESTYN, Welsh Government etc.); and
- Thematic performance report reflecting the progress made against the Council's Working Life wellbeing objective as outlined in Focus on the Future: wellbeing in our community.
- Human resources

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my scrutiny colleagues; officers and partners who have all contributed to the work of the Committee during 2019/20, particularly given the significant challenges and tragic losses we endured this year.

4.4 Additional work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee during to 2019/2020 municipal year

The task and finish group established continues to develop the work looking at the current status regarding 'Council Support to the Third Sector'. This work will create a repeatable process that MTCBC can use to consider value for money and a 'fit for the future' model of third sector spend against outcomes.

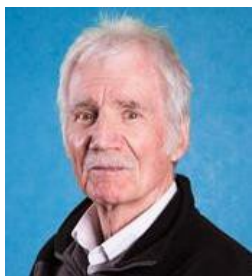
4.5 Looking forward to 2020 / 2021

This year, the Committee's Work Programme will offer the opportunity to scrutinise a cross section of topics to meet identified organisational needs and requirements (e.g. scrutiny of thematic updates linked to the objectives laid down in the Corporate Wellbeing Plan and considering the impact of recent events to identify lessons learned which will provide clarity on how the Council needs to change how it works. The Annual Performance Report will once again be scrutinised this year).

Due to current circumstances and the transformative events that have taken place this year it is prudent to adjust our requirements for scrutiny this year. Events such as the pandemic and community lockdown will inevitably affect the future landscape; and scrutiny needs to demonstrate support and flexibility to accurately reflect this. We are living in very uncertain times and hopefully we can use the scrutiny process to reflect on how we have had to change as an organisation; to aid our recovery. Now more than ever be the 'critical friend' that is needed

5.0 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: LEARNING AND LGES

- 5.1 The Learning & LGES Committee consists of six Councillors plus seven co-opted members (1 Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum Member ; 2 public, non-voting Members; 1 Association of School Governors member; 1 Parent Governor (primary) member; 1 Parent Governor (secondary/ special) member; and 1 Diocesan member).



Chair:
Cllr. Harvey Jones

5.2 Chairpersons comments

“The Learning and LGES Scrutiny Committee continues to give high priority to Education. Members have worked effectively to ensure a strong focus on improving education outcomes for all our learners. Through reports to the Scrutiny Committee, members continue to have a good overview of the Education Services, in order to challenge these services effectively and make well informed decisions. Scrutiny members have also held managers to account for the services and outcomes that they are responsible for”.

“The key role of the Learning and LGES Scrutiny Committee is to determine if performance levels are acceptable in relation to the Learning department. The Committee also determines if a specific policy is fit for purpose. It must also satisfy itself that the Council is working well with its partners in tackling major issues. The Committee also gathers the views of specific stakeholders and explores possible solutions to identified issues, as part of a scrutiny review / investigation. An important issue for the Scrutiny Committee members each year, is to assess and comment upon the proposed budget and make suggestions to cabinet regarding the proposed budget’s ability to deliver the priorities of the Council.

An essential document, which members of the Learning and LGES Scrutiny Committee frequent refer to, is the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme. This document identifies the topics and issues that the Scrutiny Committee will consider throughout the year. By reviewing and prioritising these topics and issues, members are able to ensure that the work programme delivers a member-led agenda. The Work Programme is a dynamic document and is reviewed at every meeting of the Learning & LGES Scrutiny Committee; to ensure its contents are still relevant and will add value to what the Council and its partners are doing. At each meeting, the Committee will agree the agenda items for their next meeting.

A necessary inclusion within the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2019/20 was the Annual Performance Report. This provided Scrutiny Members with the opportunity to give detailed consideration to the Performance of Merthyr Tydfil schools during 2019/20.

I am pleased to report that at Foundation Phase, progress from Reception entry baseline shows that most pupils made at least expected progress in all core areas of learning, with between 54% and 87% of pupils making more than expected progress.

At Key Stage 2, performance at the expected level was good, with the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level being above the national average for the majority of key indicators.

At Key Stage 3, performance at the expected level was good and above the national average for the majority of key indicators.

In February of this year the Learning and LGES Scrutiny Committee considered the important topic of Attendance in order to determine what progress if any, had been made during the academic year 2018/19. Whereas attendance within our Primary Schools suffered a very slight decrease of 0.11% compared with that of 2017/18, attendance across our secondary schools increased by 0.41% over the same period. This increase is encouraging, as the attendance gap between that of Merthyr Tydfil's secondary schools and the national average, has continued to close since 2016/17 and our rate of improvement was the third best in Wales in 2018/19.

Unfortunately, restriction on the length of this report, meant that inclusion of most of the other items scrutinised by the Committee during 2019/20 was just not possible. However, to end my commentary, I wish to make a brief mention of two items included in the 2019/20 Work Programme that were considered by members of the Learning and LGES Scrutiny Committee. I refer briefly to these two items because of their importance to education within Merthyr Tydfil. These two items are:-

- Impact of Flying Start and Registered Education Providers on outcomes in maintained schools.

This involved Committee members scrutinising a report on the work within early years to support the improvement of outcomes for pupils once they change to primary school.

- Impact against identified priorities for improvement (Business Improvement Plan)

This involved Committee members scrutinising the Learning Department's identified priorities for improvement, through the Department's self – evaluation process. The Committee members took the opportunity to scrutinise the evidence used, to provide judgements on the progress of impact.

It has indeed been a privilege to chair the Learning and LGES Scrutiny Committee. I would like to thank all members of the committee, the Cabinet member for Learning and all Officers, who have contributed to the work of the Committee over the past twelve months”.

6.0 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES, PLANNING AND COUNTRYSIDE

- 6.1 The Neighbourhood Services, Planning & Countryside Committee consists seven Councillors plus four co-opted members (1 voluntary sector member; 1 Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum members; 2 public, non-voting members).

6.2 Chairpersons comments



“Due to unforeseen circumstances, three of the last four Committee meetings have been cancelled but up until this time, Members have had a good overview of the Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside portfolio and were able to challenge the managers on the services they are responsible for whilst also being able to make recommendations through Task and Finish Groups.

Chair:

Cllr. Declan Sammon

Some of the topics looked at by this Committee have included missed collections for household waste and recycling, highways resurfacing and potholes, street cleaning and the Nature Recovery Report.

We finished our first Task & Finish Group which looked at major capital overspends on two important projects within the borough and we were able to make recommendations that more robust and stringent procedures be implemented which may help save the Council money in the future when it undertakes other important projects.

We have recently finished another Task & Finish Group looking at Pitch Fees and the Decreasing Rates of Participation in Team Sports in Merthyr Tydfil. The Committee will monitor the impacts of decisions made by the Cabinet, which will hopefully make a positive impact on participation rates in future years. We intend to continue creating Task & Finish Groups in order that important issues can not only be looked at in detail but also so that we can follow up by giving recommendations if we believe they may of help to residents and the Council.

I believe that this Committee has worked very well together again this year and also with both the Cabinet and officers, by being a critical friend in order that we try to positively shape the future of Merthyr Tydfil for future generations.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside Committee for their support and questioning skills throughout the last year, and also the officers and the Cabinet for their contributions.

I would like to pay special thanks to all members of the Performance & Scrutiny Team and the Democratic Services Team for their invaluable support and guidance, not just last year but over the past three years, in ensuring that this Committee continues to run smoothly and that its members have all the information they need to perform their scrutiny role.

6.3 Work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee during the 2019/2020 Municipal Year

The Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside Committee has scrutinised a number of topics over the 2019-20 period; a sample of the topics reviewed is listed below:

- Fly-tipping Enforcement Camera Facilities.
- Maintenance Schedule of Vehicles.

- Missed Collections for Household waste and Recycling.
- Carbon Management.
- Highways Resurfacing and Potholes.
- Street Cleaning.
- Traffic Phase of the Air Quality Management Scheme.
- Nature Recovery Report.
- Corporate Self-Evaluation Re: Environmental Wellbeing

6.4 Additional work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee during the 2019/2020 Municipal Year

A task and finish group was set up to look at Pitch Fees And the Decreasing Participation in Team Sports in Merthyr Tydfil which would look to analyse the factors contributing to the drop in participation and explore possible options to stop this decline. The Task and Finish Group reported back to the Committee on the work they had undertaken and following discussion with the Full Committee; the report was then submitted to Cabinet for consideration in May 2019.

Another Task and Finish Group was set up later that year looking at Recycling Rates and the Increased Reporting of Rats via Non Official Channels. The Task and Finish Group has reported back to Committee on the work undertaken and following discussion with the Full Committee, it was agreed that the report be submitted to Cabinet which will happen in the near future.

6.5 Looking forward to 2020 / 2021

A number of topics have been identified for review and scrutiny and these will be called before the Committee in 2020-2021. Some of the topics due to be explored and scrutinised by Committee Members include Weed Spraying, Fly Tipping, Responsible Dog Ownership, Recycling Rates and the Nature Recovery Action Plan. On topic with the recent floods and coronavirus pandemic, we have also asked for a report on how some of the departments within Neighbourhood Services coped with working during emergencies, which will delve into the difficulties faced by front-line service teams during recent events.

7.0 **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: REGENERATION AND PUBLIC PROTECTION**

7.1 The Regeneration and Public Protection Committee consists of six elected Members and four co-opted Committee Members: (1 voluntary sector member; 1 Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum members; 2 public, non-voting members).

7.2



Chairpersons comments

During the year the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee received reports and updates on a variety of matters relating to the Regeneration and Public Protection Departments.

Chair:
Cllr. Julian Amos
May 2019 – Feb 2020

The Committee were impressed with the regular reports it received on its Corporate Self-Evaluation and how it was meeting objectives set. On a number of occasions the committee congratulated the Chief Officer and his staff for setting themselves challenging objectives and continuing to monitor their ongoing performance.

Reports were presented to the Committee on the use of CCTV in the County Borough. CCTV is one of the tools used in efforts to deal with instances of anti-social behaviour (ASB). The committee also received a detailed report on ASB which contained the somewhat heartening news that out of the whole Northern Division (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda, Cynon and Taff) Merthyr Tydfil had lowest percentage of reported ASB at (21%) and that there had been an overall reduction in ASB across Northern Division of 6% when compared to the previous year.

Reports were received on exciting ongoing projects designed to regenerate the County Borough. The press and media are quick to portray Merthyr Tydfil in a bad light. Frequently the Committee praised the work of the Department in attracting new enterprise to the County Borough; most notably:

- The Cyfarthfa Heritage Area;
- Rock UK Summit Centre;
- Bike Park Wales;
- The Merthyr–Abernant Tunnel Development; and
- The Merthyr Tydfil Bus Station Development.

The Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside Scrutiny Committee formed a Task and Finish Group to investigate one of the biggest complaints councillors receive – rat infestation. The same Task and Finish Group considered recycling rates. The draft report was presented to the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee for comment by Councillor D Sammon, Chair of the Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside Scrutiny Committee. Councillor D Sammon advised that a lot of the subject matter was in the remit of the Regeneration & Public Protection Committee and welcomed input from this group prior to presentation of the report to Cabinet. The Committee endorsed the recommendations in the report of the Task and Finish Group.

All councillors, like many residents of the County Borough are all too aware of the level of homelessness. The committee heard that the increases in homelessness were due to a variety of factors such as rental levels in the private rented sector, a significant lack of one bed accommodation in the social housing sector, the Westminster Government's Austerity policy and Welfare Reform. In 2014 the Welsh Government attributed the high level of impact of Welfare Reform in Merthyr Tydfil to the fact that nearly 25% of the population aged 16-64 claim working age benefits. The loss of income is not distributed evenly across the Borough, Merthyr Tydfil has the fifth highest in Wales of its citizens in prison.

The duties of a local authority owed to the homeless in Wales is contained in Part 2 Housing (Wales) Act 2014 (the "Act"). Between October 2018 and October 2019 the council were only able to meet 7% of one bed need. This is equivalent to only 49 households. To provide context over the same period Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council had a statutory Section 75 of the "Act" duty to 31 single people. This left just

18 properties to satisfy our Section 73 duties where 261 single people were owed this duty. It is worrying that through no fault of the local authority and its staff it is falling short of meeting its statutory duties under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. This is clearly unsustainable.

The Committee were present with a Homelessness Strategy Action Plan. The Action Plan setting out how the Department planned to improve the situation. The objectives were, to increase awareness of homelessness and support available, improve prevention and early intervention activity to prevent homelessness, ensure there is appropriate accommodation for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, ensure there's appropriate support available for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, maintain and develop partnership working and strategic direction. The Committee's young person's representative took a key role in this group's work; bringing a fresh perspective to discussion.

The Regeneration Department has a very broad remit and throughout the year presented other reports to the Committee. Those above are the "headline" reports! Its remit extends from Economic and Environmental Regeneration and the fruits of its success are there for all to see, to addressing the great social problems that the County Borough faces. The Department deals effectively with all its challenges and has excellent staff which I would like to express my gratitude for all they do and how they have worked with the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee. I will deliberately not mention any names because to do so would imply some are better than others. In my opinion everyone in the Department is giving their all in very challenging times with only limited resources. I thank every single one of them. I would also like to thanks the staff supporting the scrutiny function.

I am no longer the Chair of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and would like to extend my best wishes to my successor: Councillor Gareth Lewis.

7.3 Work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee during the 2019/2020 Municipal Year

The role and remit of the Regeneration & Public Protection Committee scrutiny committee focuses on areas such as economic development; tourism heritage and culture; housing and homelessness; and community safety and public protection services.

Over the 2019-20 municipal year; the Committee has received reports on the following topics:

- Cyfarthfa Heritage Area;
- Refocus of CCTV service area;
- Anti-social Behaviour;
- Corporate self-evaluation – specific to Community Regeneration; Public Protection & Housing;
- Destination Development;
- Findings of a Welsh Audit Office (now Audit Wales) examination visit;
- Substance Misuse;
- The Council's Homelessness Strategy;

- Continued Development of the Town Centre and the Night-time Economy; and
- The Town Centre Master Plan.

7.4 Additional work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee during the 2019/2020 Municipal Year

On 30th October 2018, the Committee had agreed to create a task and finish group to undertake an independent review focusing on the issue of homelessness. During 2019-2020, a number of meetings have taken place between task and finish group members; with focused sessions also taking place with young people from Merthyr Tydfil Borough-Wide Youth Forum to discuss this issue with a view to securing their views on this topic and to identify possible solutions which would deal with this in the longer-term.

7.5 Chairpersons Comments: Councillor Gareth Lewis



Chair:
Cllr. Gareth Lewis
Mar 2020 – May 2021

I became Chair of the Regeneration and Public Protection Scrutiny just prior to the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in March 2020 and therefore, to date, have not had an opportunity to Chair a meeting of this Scrutiny Committee.

Moving forward, my intention for the committee is to scrutinise services where Covid-19 has impacted those most. This includes services that provide assistance to those affected by homelessness, domestic violence and mental health. Covid has resulted in Welsh Government policy changes in these areas and this has increased the need for its effective scrutiny.

I look forward to Chairing the committee for the remainder of the Municipal year and to working alongside committee members in ensuring we provide a beneficial and productive challenge to the decisions of the local authority.

7.6 Looking forward to 2020 / 2021

In terms of regeneration, two specific projects have the potential to transform the long term socio-economic picture of the County Borough and the wider South Wales Valleys area. The South Wales Metro can radically overhaul public transport and finally provide a fully integrated transport system, which should in turn catalyse investment to the Merthyr Tydfil CBC area. Whilst, the proposed Cyfarthfa Foundation is capable of ensuring that Merthyr Tydfil becomes a world renowned cultural destination that capitalises on our historic industrial heritage. Both projects are exciting and ambitious and it is my intention that the Regeneration and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee will provide constructive scrutiny in the progression of both initiatives.

8.0 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: SOCIAL SERVICES

8.1 The Social Services Committee consists six Councillors plus four co-opted members (1 voluntary sector member; 1 Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum members; 2 public, non-voting members).

8.2 Chairpersons comments



Chair:
Cllr. Bill Smith

“The Social Services Scrutiny Committee 2019/20 Forward Work Programme was developed to focus and scrutinise the services provided to the community by the Social Services in these times of austerity. The committee recognised that the services and officers are under more and more pressure to accomplish their aims and objectives with every year that passes and it is becoming more and more challenging due to the continued austerity. Therefore, we have strived to be a more robust and focused scrutiny committee to get the best outcomes from the services.

In 2019/20 the Social Services Scrutiny Committee formed part of the self-evaluation cycle and acted as a critical friend for the Social Services area. The members welcomed this new integrated approach to the self-evaluation process and the opportunity to make suggestions, observations and challenge services judgements when necessary.

As the Social Services teams work regionally on a number of strategies such as: the Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service (YOS); Safeguarding Board; and Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC), the scrutiny committee has also welcomed a number of regional reports from collaborative organisations. The members recognise that partnership working is critical for successful outcomes for our communities during these times of austerity and will continue to encourage, monitor and support this way of working. However, there is still a distance to be travelled to improve the reporting processes between the Public Service Board (PSB) and the scrutiny members with regards to Social Services issues.

During 2019/20 the scrutiny members have highlighted a number of reports presented to the committee do not have specific information required by the members to effectively scrutinise their areas and performance. This has led to the members and officers working together to improve the quality of the reports and the information presented.

Unfortunately, Merthyr Tydfil has witnessed a number of unprecedented events in 2020, such as Storm Dennis and Storm Jorge in February, that caused untold damage to many areas within the borough, and the global pandemic (Covid-19), which resulted in the country being locked down from March. All of these events has had an immediate impact on the Social Services area and its resources. These unprecedented events have also impacted on the Social Services Scrutiny Committee as I had to take the decision to cancel several scheduled committees and workshops during this period to enable key officers to prioritise their commitments

and resources in order to provide critical support to the communities and its residents. However, the committee intends to prioritise any key reports that were scheduled to be presented during this period for the next municipal year.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my scrutiny colleagues and Cabinet Members, Officers of the Local Authority and partners for their continued support”.

8.3 Work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee during the 2019/2020 Municipal Year

Some of the topics that have been scrutinised and challenged as part of the Forward Work Programme are:

- Reconfiguration of Homes
- Corporate Self-Evaluation Re: Living Well
- Young Carers Annual Report (2018/19)
- Safeguarding Board (Annual Report and Plan (2018/19) and progress in 2019/20)
- Mental Health Inspection – Feedback and Action Plan
- Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service (YOS) Annual Report 2018/19
- Children’s Services Strategies
- Adult Social Care Strategies
- Annual Report on Social Services (ACRF) 2018 / 2019
- Budget Position Statements
- Mid-year Update on Social Services Complaints, Representations and Compliments Report.
- Progress on SS&WB Regional Plan (2019/20)
- Mid-year Update on Young Carers
- Vale, Valleys And Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) Annual Report 2018/19 and 2019/20 progress to date
- Progress on Corporate Parenting Board
- Adult Services Accommodation Strategy For Older People And Adults With A Learning Disability 2020-2030

8.4 Additional work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee for the 2019/2020 Municipal Year

During 2019/20, the Social Services Scrutiny Committee worked together with the Learning and LGES Scrutiny Committee to adopt a different approach to training and awareness session and introduced joint workshop style training sessions. During these workshop sessions, officers from both Social Services and the Learning department were able to demonstrate and explain what their particular service provided to areas that impacted both Social Services and Learning and LGES Scrutiny Committees, such as ‘Children Looked After’. This integrated approach to training allowed the members to develop and strengthen and broaden their knowledge in both the Social Services and Learning areas, whereby this opportunity may not have presented itself previously. These workshops were also extended and opened up to all elected members.

8.5 Looking forward to 2020 / 2021

The Social Services department has successfully embraced more collaborative working practices with other public bodies to effectively deliver services (e.g. Safeguarding Board Annual Report and Plan, Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service, SS&WB Regional Plan etc.) since the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act came into force in April 2016. However, it has been identified by the Assurance and Improvement Board (who was appointed by Welsh Government) that the Social Services department needs to increase its resilience. This has been especially challenging for the Social Services department in 2020 having to deliver services to our residents, whilst responding firstly to major flooding and then a global pandemic. The service is having to find new ways to deliver more for less, due to severe constraints on funding and there are likely to be additional pressures from new caseloads being reported following a release from the Covid-19 lockdown. Therefore going forward, the committee has requested specific details on all regional priorities to ensure there is effective alignment and synergy between MTCBC strategies and regional strategies. In addition to this, the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Members will continue to offer challenge as a critical friend and support the service as best as we can in order to provide the residents of Merthyr Tydfil with sustainable services for the future.

The Social Services Scrutiny Committee is also very aware that as a result of the Covid-19 global pandemic, the 'new normal' and the landscape of the scrutiny function will have to change and adapt to become more agile with its working processes. Therefore, the Committee Members will work together to ensure that this new way of working will be a success for the Council and the Community.

10.0 CWM TAF JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 10.1 In accordance with the requirement of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, 2015 and having taken into consideration the requirements of Section 58 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure, 2011 and associated statutory guidance a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been established comprising elected Members of both Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Councils to scrutinise Cwm Taf Public Services Board.
- 10.2 The Cwm Taf Public Service Board Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) membership comprises 10 elected Members (5 from Rhondda Cynon Taf and 5 from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Councils) plus a number of co-opted members. In 2019/2020, the co-opted members represented the local Health Board; Community Health Council; the Ambulance Service as well as a citizen representative from the County Boroughs of both RCT and Merthyr Tydfil.
- 10.3 The Terms of Reference for this Committee outlines that support requirements linked to Cwm Taf PSB JOSC would be jointly shared by RCT and Merthyr Tydfil county borough councils. The role of Chair and Vice Chair for the Committee would also be shared on a cyclical basis (e.g.) during 2019-2020, Councillor Jill Bonetto (RCT Council) assumed the Chair, with Councillor Skinner taking the role of Vice Chair; with RCT providing all relevant scrutiny support.

- 10.4 For the period 2019/2020; the responsibility for providing support to the Cwm Taf PSB JOSC was assumed by RCT County Borough Council, as per the agreed cycle.
- 10.5 During 2019-20; four JOSC meetings were scheduled and three held. The Committee reviewed, scrutinised and discussed a number of topics during 2019/2020; these are listed below:
- Progress updates from Cwm Taf Public Services Board (at every meeting);
 - Progress updates from Cwm Taf Strategic Partnership Board (at every meeting);
 - Live Lab Update;
 - Social Prescribing Update; and
 - Ferndale Community Hub Update
- 10.6 As the 2019/2020 municipal year ended; the country entered into a state of lockdown as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. A decision was taken that to ensure the requirements of this lockdown were adhered to; responsibility for provision of the support function for the Cwm Taf PSB JOSC would remain with RCT Council for the municipal year 2020/2021.

11.0 CARDIFF CAPITAL REGIONAL CITY DEAL JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 11.1 MTCBC has Elected Member representation on the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Performance and Scrutiny Team supports our contribution to this committee.

12.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT SCRUTINY

- 12.1 Whilst Scrutiny members, Cabinet members and Council officers contribute regularly to scrutiny activities, we also welcome public attendance and input at our meetings.
- 12.2 The involvement of local residents, community organisations and partners is an important part of the scrutiny process and scrutiny committees are committed to responding to the views and concerns of residents. We would like to encourage residents and organisations to attend and contribute to scrutiny work in securing the best possible public services. The intention is to make sure that we are dealing with the matters that are most important to the community and are delivering quality services.
- 12.3 The Constitution allows for members of the public to attend and speak at scrutiny meetings. With this in mind a guide as to how this can work in practice has been produced. The guide provides details on how to for example submit a written representation on an agenda item and the time limit for the member of public to put their case. This hopefully will allow members of the public the opportunity to tell Councillors directly about the things that concern them.

- 12.4 If members of the public feel that there is a topic that scrutiny should look at, they can let us know by completing a Scrutiny Request Form or email scrutiny@merthyr.gov.uk

13.0 LOOKING FORWARD TO THE 2020/20201 MUNICIPAL YEAR

- 13.1 In order to further strengthen the arrangements in relation to the scrutiny function; Committee Members; Cabinet Members and officers that have attended scrutiny meetings over the past 12-months will take part in an evaluation/self-assessment exercise. The findings of this will help to identify good practice; and enable Committees to consider areas for further development; enabling them to set their own priorities for improvement.
- 13.2 When the priorities have been set; and using the 'Strategy on a Page' (SOAP) model used across the Council; the Committees will develop their own SOAP which will enable them to more effectively monitor their impact; whilst also securing a source of evidence to support future review with a view to continuously improving the Council's governance arrangements.

14.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 13.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

14.0 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts	Not Applicable
1. Merthyr Tydfil Well-being Objectives	0 of 4	0 of 4	4 of 4
2. Sustainable Development Principles - How have you considered the five ways of working: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term • Prevention • Integration • Collaboration • Involvement 	0 of 5	0 of 5	5 of 5
3. Protected Characteristics <i>(including Welsh Language)</i>	0 of 10	0 of 10	10 of 10
4. Biodiversity	0 of 1	0 of 1	1 of 1
Summary:			

The Report (Annual Scrutiny Report 2019 / 2020) is for information only and does not contain any proposals for approval by Council.

Any developments or proposals made reference to in the Chairpersons comments would have already been subject to an EQIA (prior to September) or IIA on an individual basis as appropriate.

ELLIS COOPER
DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

COUNCILLOR ANDREW BARRY
CABINET MEMBER FOR GOVERNANCE
AND CORPORATE SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS			
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location	
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?			No

Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.