

Annual Scrutiny Report 2021/22

Appendix 2- Feedback from Chairpersons & Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees

‘Making a difference together’



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

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Background and Introduction

Scrutiny is a key 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.

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.

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.

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 2021/2022 municipal year.

Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 received Royal Ascent in January 2021. The Act aims to reform and strengthen local government and to improve electoral arrangements. It contains wide ranging changes, but our scrutiny improvement programme will help how the Council adapts.

The Council uses the four principles of good scrutiny (Centre for Governance and Scrutiny) to underpin the function.



1. Provides constructive, critical friend challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-takers



2. Amplifies and enables the voice and concerns of the public and its communities



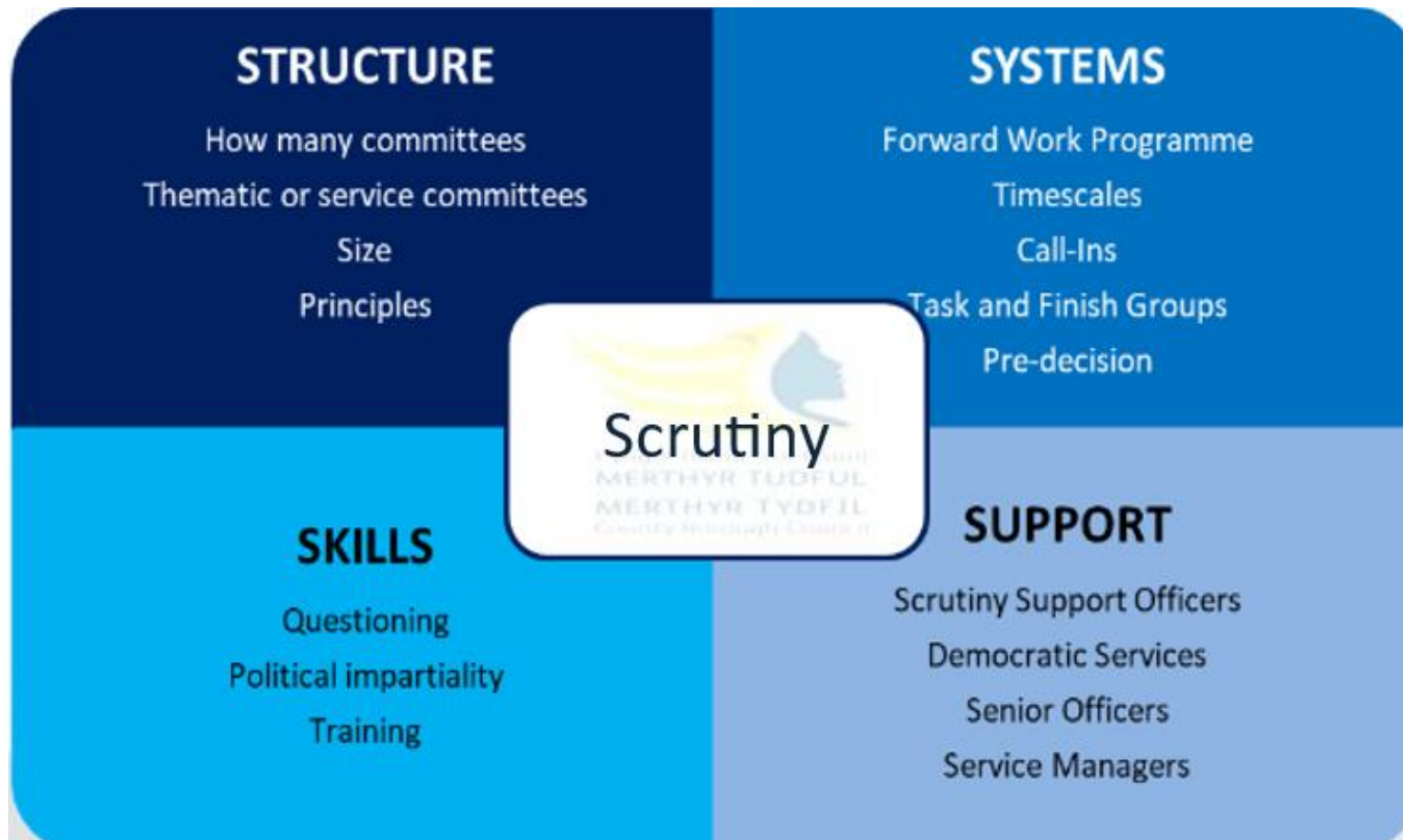
3. Led and owned by independent minded Councillors on behalf of the public



4. Drives improvement in public services

This has led to an agreed overarching aim of **‘making a difference together’** and two overarching models that form part of the Council’s scrutiny improvement programme. These models inform how scrutiny works at MTCBC. For example, the 4R’s forms the basis of the scrutiny work programme framework. This will be used going forward to develop and review the scrutiny work programme.

Model 1 – The 4S’s of Scrutiny



Model 2 – The 4R's of Scrutiny



We will review our progress using the same principles as set out in our 'Performance Management and Quality Assurance Framework' that was approved by Council March 2022. That is our 'Plan → Do → Review → Improve' cycle.





TRANSFORMATION, COMMERCIALISATION & CORPORATE SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Committee Chair:

Cllr. Tanya Skinner

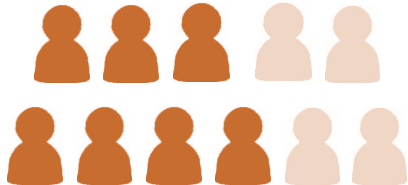


Portfolio Member:

Cllr. Chris Davies

Transformation, Commercialisation & Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee consists of:

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- 7 Elected Members (the Chairs of each of the other Scrutiny Committees; and the Chair of the Council's Governance and Audit Committee;
- 2 Co-opted Members (public appointed)
- 1 Co-opted Member (voluntary sector)
- 1 Co-opted Member (Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum)

Chairperson's comments

This year we have been keen to secure a wider overview of the impact the pandemic has had on the way we work. With this being the final year our priority as a committee has been to conduct a 5-year reviews on the four main wellbeing strands:

- Living Well
- Best Start
- Environmental wellbeing
- Working Life

Work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee for the 2021/2022 Municipal Year.

Work undertaken by the Transformation, Commercialisation and Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee during what has again been an unprecedented year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, included critically examining several key topics.

- Agile working: reviewing plans to re-open the One-Stop Shop;
- Tackling Poverty (review if the Council's debt collection function);
- Welsh Public Library Standards;
- Development of the next iteration of the Council's Corporate Wellbeing Plan;
- Healthy Organisations (a key theme of the Council's RTI Plan);
- Commercialisation;
- Living Well thematic report – Five Year Review to identify lessons learned;
- Corporate Consultation and Engagement Process;
- Working Life thematic report – Five Year Review to identify lessons learned; and
- Best Start thematic report – Five Year Review to identify lessons learned.

Reports outlined progress made against the lifetime of the current Corporate Wellbeing Plan. As a committee we were able to assess progress made against the corporate objectives; and identify challenges faced/managed; along with opportunities identified and actioned.

Another work strand that dominated this year included the Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan including the implementation of the Local Government Elections Act 2021 and the need to ensure effective/proactive policy review. We were able to explore any possible changes that may be required in Committees' role in future years. In this year, this meant a new refreshed remit and name for the committee.

This year in direct response to public feedback following recent Council consultation activities; the Committee sought to understand the Council's current standard consultation approach and to explore the process undertaken.

I wish the next Chair well and I would be hopeful that as a scrutiny function we can to increase awareness and promote the importance of scrutiny to the public. Exploring more accessible ways of interacting with young people and people who have been truly isolated during the pandemic i.e. people unable to access digital forms of communication.

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 2021/2022.



LEARNING & LGES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Committee Chair:
Cllr. Harvey Jones



Portfolio Member:
Cllr. Lisa Mytton

Learning and LGES (Local Government Education Service) Scrutiny Committee consists of:

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- 6 Elected Members
- 2 Co-opted Members (public appointed)
- 1 Co-opted Member (School Governor)
- 1 Co-opted Member (Parent Governor)
- 1 Co-opted Member (Diocesan)
- 1 Co-opted Member (Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum)

Chairperson's 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 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 and gathers the views of specific stakeholders to explore possible solutions to identified issues, as part of a scrutiny review / investigation.

An essential document, which members of the Learning and LGES Scrutiny Committee frequently 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.

Work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee for the 2021/2022 Municipal Year.

Work undertaken by the Learning & LGES Scrutiny Committee during what has again been an unprecedented year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, included critically examining several key topics. Unfortunately, restrictions on the length of this report, means that inclusion of all those key topics scrutinised by the Committee during 2021/22 was just not possible.

However, I wish to make particular mention of two topics that were of vital importance, not only to members of the Learning & LGES Scrutiny Committee, but to ALL members of the Council. These topics were:

- The Learning Department's Continued Response to the Covid - 19 Pandemic
- The Raising Aspirations, Raising Standards (RARS) Strategy 2021 – 2026

Both these items are critical in shaping the Learning Department's response to the pandemic, as well as the strategic direction of the department moving forward.

The Learning Department's Continued Response to the Covid - 19 Pandemic

In 2021, the Director of Education presented Scrutiny Members with an excellent report that provided us with an update on the Covid 19 Pandemic. This report showed the ongoing impact of the pandemic on the Learning Department and how it had maintained and delivered key services to children, young people and their families.

The report itself showed the ongoing challenges faced by the Learning Department as a result of the pandemic. In addition to providing members with an overview of the work undertaken by the department during this time, the Director of Education considered what needed to be done next to ensure children and young people received the best educational experiences possible in order to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

Most of the damaging impacts of the pandemic were successfully overcome through the positive actions to support those learners and families hardest hit. However, the pandemic and subsequent closure of schools took away from our children and young people routine, structure, friendship, opportunity and freedom. Those in specific year groups will never regain those rites of passage – the last day of school, the school prom. The impact of these problems cannot be underestimated and when combined with the ongoing situation of families remaining under stress from loss of jobs and/or reduced income, there was still a risk that Covid could continue causing mental health problems for many of our children. Fortunately, the situation has slowly improved whereby all our schools appear to be getting back to normal. However, it is going to take time.

The Raising Aspirations, Raising Standards (RARS) Strategy 2021 – 2026

Along with the Learning Department's continued response to the pandemic, the Raising Aspirations, Raising Standards (RARS) Strategy 2021 – 2026 was introduced.

Academic achievement across the County Borough has, for too long, been variable with too many young people not achieving their academic potential. The ambition for the Raising Aspirations Raising Standards Strategy began in the academic year 2018/19, following robust self-evaluation activities within the Learning Department. Through discussions with stakeholder groups, a number of goals were identified as being key to accelerating educational achievement in Merthyr Tydfil and ensuring that all children and young people have the opportunity to succeed. This strategy sets out our commitment to achieve the very best for the children and young people of Merthyr Tydfil. It also recognises that families and communities inextricably shape outcomes of our young people outside of school.

Merthyr Tydfil's education community believes that all our children and young people are entitled to the best possible life chances. This can only be achieved by enhancing their access to the highest quality educational opportunities and by supporting and encouraging them to aim as high as they can. Currently, whilst there have been successes in many areas, we accept the need to do more to deliver sustainable change for our children and young people. Outcomes across schools are too variable and this, combined with the consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic, makes it even more important to improve the life skills and academic achievements of our children and young people. We recognise the many challenges ahead, but we believe that by working together we can realise the ambitions for all our children and young people set out in this strategy.

Two further topics of vital importance were also considered by the Learning & LGES Scrutiny Committee during 2021/22. These were:-

- Attendance in Schools
- ESTYN Self Evaluation Reporting (SER) Framework (Inspection Area 3) and the Corporate Self Evaluation KQ3.

In terms of Attendance in Schools, this is highlighted within the RARS strategy as a vital area of work for the Council. The link between good attendance and learning is clear. Good attendance supports pupils having the best possible chance in life and maximising their potential, both in terms of academic achievement and future employability. Whilst improving attendance has been a consistent focus for the Council and there has been an improvement over time, there is much work to be done to close the gap further and to consolidate improvements in a positive attendance trend, including particularly a reduction in persistent absenteeism.

The ESTYN Self Evaluation Reporting Framework and the Corporate Self Evaluation, focussed on the completion of the self-evaluation undertaken by the Learning Department in relation to Leadership and Management. The report highlighted the key findings of the self-evaluation activity and outlined areas of good practice along with areas for development. The report also identified the priorities for improvement which are incorporated in our Business Improvement Plan.

Finally, it has indeed been a privilege to Chair the Learning and LGES Scrutiny Committee. I would personally like to thank all Members of the Committee, the Director of Education and her Officers, the Cabinet Member for Learning, Saeif Jablaoui of the Performance & Scrutiny Section; all of whom have contributed to the work of the Committee over the past twelve months.



NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES, PLANNING & COUNTRYSIDE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Committee Chair:
Cllr. Declan Sammon



Portfolio Members:
Cllr. Michelle Jones

Neighbourhood Services, Planning & Countryside and Planning Scrutiny Committee consists of:

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- 6** Elected Members
- 2** Co-opted Members (public appointed)
- 1** Co-opted Member (Voluntary Sector)
- 1** Co-opted Member (Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum)

Chairperson's comments

As in previous years, I believe the Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside Scrutiny Committee have worked well together by being a critical friend to both the Cabinet and Officers in order that we try to positively shape the future of Merthyr Tydfil for future generations. The Committee have again met via Teams during the last year, but this hasn't affected its ability to challenge.

The topics looked at by this Committee included Children's Play Areas / Playgrounds, Nappy Recycling and Grass Cutting & Bio-Diversity showing that we have continued to be aware of the issues that are of particular interest and also those that affect our residents the most.

Following agreement of our forward work programme which meant that this committee was going to look at Children's Play Areas / Playgrounds, the Cabinet also looked at this issue and money has now been set aside to refurbish these community assets over the next 5 years. Going forward, the two reports we asked for regarding Nappy Recycling may prove more beneficial to a future council administration when we need to increase our recycling rate in line with Welsh Government targets and as residents expect more to be done with our waste.

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 Member for their contributions.

Finally, I'd like to reserve special praise for all the members of the Performance & Scrutiny Team and the Democratic Services Team for their invaluable support over the last 5 years ensuring that this Committee has continued to run smoothly and that its members have all the information they need to perform their scrutiny role. Without the help of these Teams and the fantastic people in them, I would have been unable to perform my role.



REGENERATION & PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



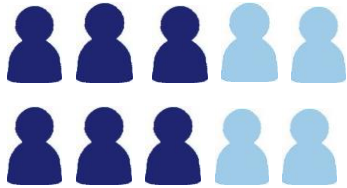
Committee Chair:
Cllr. Lee Davies



Portfolio Members:
Cllr. Geraint Thomas

Regeneration and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee consists of:

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- 6 Elected Members
- 2 Co-opted Members (public appointed)
- 1 Co-opted Member (Voluntary Sector)
- 1 Co-opted Member (Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum)

Chairperson's comments

The Regeneration and Public Protection (RPP) Committee has continued to hold its meetings via Microsoft Teams; this has enabled the committee to review and challenge the Portfolio Lead and the accountable officers on the work undertaken within their respective services.

Over the course of the municipal year, the Committee has received a number of reports in relation to the key challenges faced within our communities. The Committee's Work Programme for 2021/22 was collaboratively developed to focus and scrutinise the services provided to our communities during these challenging times. The committee recognises that the needs of the community changed during this period, and

services and officers are under growing pressure to accomplish their aims and objectives while trying to manage the significant challenges we face. As a committee, we aim to provide robust and focused scrutiny in order to drive improved outcomes from services.

As part of the Crime & Disorder work which this Committee delivers, Committee Members have also participated in a recent consultation exercise in relation to the refresh of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence National Strategy for 2022 to 2026; sending a collated response through to Welsh Government to ensure that feedback was received from the Merthyr Tydfil CBC.

Work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee for the 2021/2022 municipal year

- Discussion around Housing and Homelessness
- Update from South Wales Police
- The Regeneration of Hoover Strategic Regeneration Area and Glebeland Street (Exempt item)
- Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan
- The Identified Issues Arising as a result of the end of EU Funding
- Housing and Homelessness
- Crucible/Cyfarthfa Plan
- The Implications of the End of EU Funding
- Prevent and Protect
- Corporate Self-Evaluation Summary Report: Working Life
- Asset Management Plan

At the start of the municipal year, the Committee held discussions on the current position and to explore pressures placed on housing services in relation to both housing and homelessness. Current Welsh Government legislation in relation to homelessness directs that there is a statutory obligation to re-house those in temporary accommodation as a result of the pandemic. Additional funding was issued by Welsh Government in relation to this at the beginning of the pandemic. These requirements add substantial pressures to the Council, and there's a requirement to identify innovative ways to house this client group.

Following the initial discussions around housing and homelessness, the Committee received an update on the progress made in relation to the issues and/or challenges presented by a change in Welsh Government legislation. This report was presented to the committee 6 months after the initial discussions were held to give officers the opportunity to gather the necessary information and to focus and plan their work accordingly. This intelligence supported greater alignment with the 15-year economic vision approved by Full Council on 3rd November 2021.

A co-designed community workshop has been established to explore the key challenges faced within our communities, with a considerable focus placed on housing and homelessness. This work is ongoing with plans to hold community events where we can engage directly with members of the public. This will give our residents the opportunity to share any issues, as well as their vision for their local communities. One of the desired outcomes of this is to help encourage the voices and perspectives of our residents on key themes and topics.

A key report received by the committee was 'The Identified Issues Arising as a result of the end of EU Funding'. Committee Members identified that, with the current EU funding arrangements due to end in 2022, it is anticipated there could be a significant impact on a number of services and programmes currently being delivered by the Council across the County Borough. Despite the many uncertainties surrounding this, the committee thought it be prudent to explore some of the key implications as a result of the loss of EU funding; to support/enable planned work and to maximise any grant funding available such as the Community Renewal grant and Levelling Up funding (both administered directly by the UK government).

The Committee also received the corporate self-evaluation report for the areas it oversees linking to the Working Life theme in the Corporate Wellbeing Plan. Committee Members reviewed the report and provided critical friend challenge to understand how the judgements had been reached. Committee members were pleased to confirm the self-evaluative judgements for this area having received sufficient evidence to support them. The Committee agrees that officers are doing their utmost to support our communities during these challenging times, and Committee Members thank and commend all involved in delivering these services.

A very broad range of services are delivered which are led by the Deputy Chief Executive encompassing Community Regeneration, Protection and Safety Services and Housing and Homelessness. Evidence received and reviewed has provided assurance that good progress is being made against targets, and a number of successes are there for all to see. The Department deals effectively with its challenges and has knowledgeable, experienced staff and I would like to express my gratitude for all they do, and how they have worked with the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.



SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

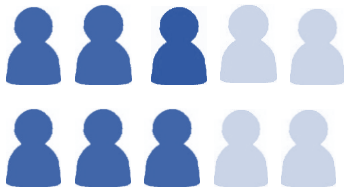


Committee Chair:
Cllr. Bill Smith



Social Services Scrutiny Committee consists of:

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- 6 Elected Members
- 2 Co-opted Members (public appointed)
- 1 Co-opted Member (Voluntary Sector)
- 1 Co-opted Member (Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum)

The coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) has continued to have a significant impact on Health and Social Care in the municipal year of 2021/22. Lockdown, self-isolation and shielding have had a serious impact on well-being and quality of life in local communities. In the last municipal year, Microsoft Teams meetings has proven to be a vital and welcomed tool for the continuation of the Social Services Scrutiny Committees. It has allowed the Members of the Scrutiny Committee to maintain a critical friend support and challenge with the Portfolio Member and officers alike to improve outcomes from services.

The Social Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for 2021/22 was developed in alignment with regional and corporate priorities and strategies, to focus and scrutinise the services provided by Social Services to the community during these unprecedented times.

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

- Supporting Change
- The Impact of the Pandemic on Care Homes for Adults
- Safeguarding 2020/21 - Internal Audit Report
- Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan Update
- Coronavirus Pandemic - Update on Recovery and Activity
- Current Budget Position
- Annual Report on Social Services 2020-21
- Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service (YOS) 2020/21 – Update
- Adult Day Services
- Building Blocks to Success - Early Help
- Staffing Update for Scrutiny Committee
- Children's Services Strategy - Success, Stability and Transition
- Regional Partnership Business
- Annual Report Social Services Complaints, Representations and Compliments 2020/2021
- Impact of Covid-19 on the Service
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board Annual Report 2020/2021
- Adult Services Advocacy Strategy
- Adult and Children's Services Carers Strategy
- Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) Adoption Collaborative Annual Report for 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021
- Living Well - Corporate Self-Evaluation

The Covid-19 pressures within the health services alleviated for a short period during 2021; however, this escalated again in August 2021 resulting in the need to re-instate regional governance systems. Understandably, these pressures translated into increased pressures within Adult social care across care management and service provision. Committee Members paid particular attention to these issues and received regular reports and verbal positional updates to ensure services were adequately resourced in order to provide the best services possible for the communities at this time.

The Committee received a number of reports from partners from other public bodies and third and independent sectors throughout the municipal year and by working closely with them, the services have continued to provide targeted front-line responses to the constantly changing situation

that the Coronavirus pandemic has presented. Where required, Social Services have worked in different ways to meet emerging and existing needs. The services have worked hard to ensure people have remained safe and safeguarding has remained our number one priority throughout.

As part of the Recovery, Transformation and Improvement (RTI) Plan, the services have developed an advocacy strategy, enhanced the capacity within adult safeguarding, quality assurance and adult services management, and commenced the work around the development of an Extra Care facility and the cultural change around care management services. The Social Service Scrutiny Committee has closely monitored and reviewed the RTI plan throughout this time, and services have made good progress with numerous projects being successfully completed across both adults and children services. Moving forward, the projects and improvements implemented have and will become business as usual within the services.

Committee Members have heartily thanked the staff for all of their hard work throughout this year as they have demonstrated resilience and an incredible commitment to support the local community during the pandemic period.

Following completion of the first stage of the scrutiny self-evaluation exercise, a number of key areas for development and improvement have been identified by Committee Members and Officers. Over the coming 12 months, a series of targeted working groups will be developed to plan improvement activities and work towards securing the improvements identified. In order to achieve this, we plan to work with our key partners including the WLGA and an external expert.

When the priorities have been set and collaboratively agreed, outputs will be used to develop several key components to strengthen the Council's scrutiny function. For example, a scrutiny function SOAP. This model is used across the Council. Scrutiny will develop their own SOAP which will enable the function to more effectively monitor impact, whilst also securing a source of evidence to support future review, with a view to continuously improving the Council's governance arrangements.

Other key changes include:

- Additional support material
- Training and development programme
- Scrutiny surgeries
- Quarterly technical meetings
- Forward Work Plan Framework
- Earlier pre-meetings
- Greater focus on pre-decision scrutiny
- More on-line material and e-learning
- More data
- Greater promotion and public engagement
- Doing scrutiny differently – 'How are we adding value?'
- Applying key principles such as the 4R's and 4S's to make a difference together

Cwm Taf Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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, an 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. There are 5 core statutory functions of the Cwm Taf joint overview and scrutiny committee.

Members of the JOSC are reminded that, as set out within its terms of reference, their core statutory functions include:

- To review or scrutinise the decisions made or actions taken by Board;
- To review or scrutinise the Board's governance arrangements;
- To make reports or recommendations to the Board regarding its functions or governance arrangements;
- To consider matters relating to the Board as the Welsh Ministers may refer to it and report to the Welsh Ministers accordingly; and
- To carry out other functions in relation to the Board that are imposed on it by the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

In addition to carrying out its statutory functions, Members of the JOSC will work together with shared responsibility for improved outcomes across partner organisations, which will avoid duplication of time and resources of the Councils respective Scrutiny Committees.

In doing this, the JOSC will give consideration to the effectiveness of the Wellbeing Plan and of the performance measurement arrangements. It will also monitor the effectiveness of the Public Services Board in communicating its work, objectives and outcomes to its stakeholders.

Cardiff Capital Regional City Deal Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) City Deal is a programme agreed in 2016 between the UK Government, the Welsh Government and the ten local authorities in South East Wales to bring about significant economic growth in the region through investment, upskilling, and improved physical and digital connectivity.

Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRCD) is a Joint Committee of all ten local Authorities of South East Wales and has been established for the purpose of overseeing and co-ordinating the discharge of the Councils' obligations in relation to the City Deal. The Joint Scrutiny Committee consists of one non-executive Member from each Appointing Authority.

What is the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) City Deal?

The CCR City Deal is a programme for accelerating growth by maximising significant government investment in a long-term goal to improve economic conditions in South East Wales. The specific aims of the CCR can be summarised to:

- improve productivity and connectivity;
- create 25,000 jobs in its 20-year lifetime;
- build on foundations of innovation;
- invest in physical and digital infrastructure;
- provide support for business;
- ensure that any economic benefits are felt across the region;
- leverage at least £4billion of private sector investment.