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Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council

FULL COUNCIL - INFORMATION REPORT

Date Written	23 rd June 2021
Report Author	Performance and Scrutiny Team
Service Area	Scrutiny
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	14 th July 2021

To: *Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen*

Annual Scrutiny Report 2020 / 2021

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 2020/21 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 **2020/21** 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 Governance and Scrutiny outlines that scrutiny has four principles, 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 teams ensure the scrutiny function is delivered in line with statutory requirements. Scrutiny Committees comprise elected Members and co-opted members; all members play an invaluable role in the meetings. Work is ongoing to promote the work of the scrutiny committees.
- 2.6 Elected Members will recall an ‘Appointment to Committees¹’ report was presented to the Council’s Annual General Meeting (AGM) on the 19th May 2021. This report details the appointments to committees and the cycle of meetings.

¹ [Annual General Meeting and Mayor’s installation](#)

3.0 UPDATE ON ACTIONS

- 3.1 Audit Wales (formerly the Wales Audit Office(WAO)) 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. In addition, Audit Wales has made formal recommendations to the Council, as reported to Council April 2021. One of these recommendations is specific to Scrutiny:

Recommendation 9 - The Council should strengthen its scrutiny arrangements including how scrutiny could have a more focused and impactful role. For example, scrutiny committees could consider their role in the following areas:

- the RTI Plan; and
- holding the Cabinet to account in accordance with statutory guidance (Guidance for County and County Borough Councils in Wales on Executive and Alternative Arrangements 2006, paragraph 2.18).

(Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Assessment of Progress to Address Key Concerns; Audit Wales; March 2021)

- 3.2 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 (to improve the impact of scrutiny);
- work is being done to consider effectiveness (e.g. section 13 below); and
- a Cabinet Forward Work Plan was developed for 2021/22; with Quarter 1 of the Cabinet's quarterly work plan being rolled out in May 2021.

3.3 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 2020/2021 municipal year.

	Governance, Performance, Business Change & Corporate Services	Learning & LGES²	Regeneration & Public Protection²	Social Services²	Neighbourhood Services²	Total Performance
Percentage of scheduled meetings completed	100% (7/7)	86% (6/7)	86% (6/7)	86% (6/7)	83% (5/6)	88% (30/34)
Number of reports considered by Committee	8	13	8	14	14	57
Number of external partner representatives attending a scrutiny meeting	1	3	4	1	0	9
Number of task and finish groups established in 2020/2021	0	0	0	0	1	1
Number of task and finish group reports completed and submitted to Cabinet for consideration	0	0	0	0	0	0

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

3.4 This data will form part of the analysis in measuring the effectiveness of the scrutiny function at MTCBC in meeting the Audit Wales recommendations outlined above.

3.5 It should be noted that, as a result of the ongoing pandemic, the meetings scheduled for the beginning of the municipal year were cancelled to align with public safety requirements. During this period, processes were developed to ensure virtual meetings could be effectively delivered, enabling scrutiny sessions to re-initiative whilst maintaining the safety of all Committee Members and officers participating.

² Meeting cancelled as a result of Coronavirus Mass Testing exercise

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

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).



Chair:
Cllr. Tanya Skinner

4.2 Chairpersons comments

The ongoing challenges of Coronavirus have meant adapting our work programme and adjusting to a digital platform, there is also the very real awareness that the long-term consequences of the virus will no doubt be felt for many more months or years to come.

This year has been based around 3 main strands of work our continued on the four strands of our Corporate Plan (Focus on the Future: Well-being in our community), alongside the work identified as part of the Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan and ensuring that all areas of work are explored through the lens of a post Covid-19 world.

Ongoing development of the local authority's scrutiny function has progressed this year with a range of workshops being delivered and performance against a range of recommendations being implemented.

I remain hopeful that we can increase awareness and promote the importance of scrutiny to the public; and continue to explore more accessible ways of interacting with young people and people who have been truly isolated during the pandemic (e.g. people unable to access digital forms of communication).

4.3 Work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee for the 2020/2021 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:

- Coronavirus Update – Report on Response and Recovery;
- Thematic Update on the Environmental Well-being theme in the Corporate Plan;
- Thematic Update on the Living Well theme in the Corporate Plan;
- Thematic Update on the Working Life theme in the Corporate Plan;
- Thematic Update on the Best Start theme in the Corporate Plan;
- Report on the Council's Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan;
- Report on Welsh Public Library Standards (Performance and Rating); and

- Report on Service Charges linked to Waste Bins

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 2020/21, particularly given the significant challenges and tragic losses we endured this year.

4.4 Additional work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee during to 2020/2021 municipal year

There were additional scrutiny meetings held this year and workshops delivered as part of the ongoing development of the Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan.

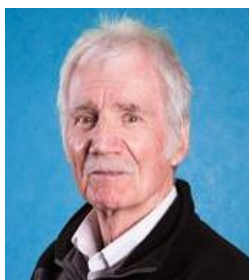
4.5 Looking forward to 2021 / 2022

In the coming 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 Well-being 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. We also welcome the Cabinet forward work plan to further develop a more strategic and effective scrutiny process overall.

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.

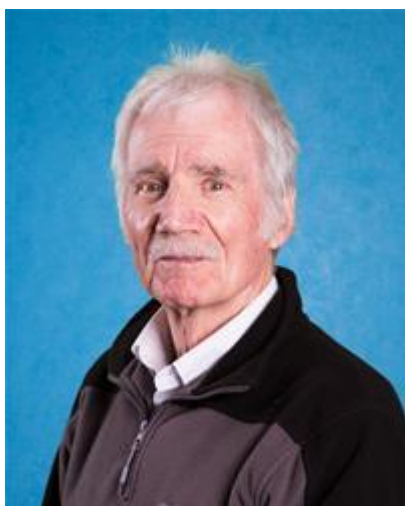
5.0 **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: LEARNING & LGES**

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



5.2 Chairpersons comments

Chair:
Cllr. Harvey Jones



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 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 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.

5.3 Work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee for the 2020/2021 Municipal Year.

Work undertaken by the Learning & LGES Scrutiny Committee during what has 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 these key topics scrutinised by the Committee during 2020/21 was just not possible.

However, I wish to make particular mention of two items included in the 2020/21 Work Programme considered by members of the Learning & LGES Scrutiny Committee:

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

Both these items were 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 Response to the Covid - 19 Pandemic

In March 2021, the Chief Officer of Learning 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 Chief Officer (Learning) considered what needed to be done next to ensure children and young people have the best educational experiences possible in order to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

Most of the damaging impacts of the pandemic will have been 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 cannot be underestimated and combined with the ongoing situation of families under stress from loss of jobs and/or reduced income, there is a risk it could cause mental health problems for many of our children.

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

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 a 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.

The aim was to publish and launch the Strategy for September 2020. However, this has now been moved to a later date due to the impact of Covid-19.

A Selection of Further Topics Considered by the Learning & LGES Scrutiny Committee during 2020/21 are provided below. It should be appreciated however, that Covid-19 is still with us and has resulted in the 2020/21 Work Programme being the subject of continual change.

- ESTYN Self Evaluation Reporting (SER) Framework (Inspection Area 2) and the Corporate Self Evaluation KQ2;
- Well-being: Report on Anti-bullying;
- ESTYN Self Evaluation Reporting (SER) Framework (Inspection Area 3);
- Further Update on Covid-19 Pandemic;
- Additional Learning Needs (ALN) & Outreach Support across the Authority; and
- Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) Update Report.

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).



Chair:
Cllr. Declan Sammon

6.2 Chairpersons comments

The Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside Scrutiny Committee have met via Teams during the last year, but this hasn't affected the committee's ability to challenge the Cabinet Member and Officers on the services they are responsible for.

Some of the topics looked at by this Committee have included Fly-tipping on unregistered land, Tree Policy and the Nature Recovery Plan.

The Committee have been successful in getting reports on future policy changes that fall under the Neighbourhood Services umbrella, to be brought to scrutiny before they are presented to Cabinet and Full Council.

It is also pleasing that following the report Fly-tipping on Unregistered Land being presented and then scrutinised by the committee, the Cabinet Member and Officers implemented a policy of removing rubbish that was causing nuisance and distress to residents from unregistered land.

As in previous years, it is my opinion that this Committee has worked very well together 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 Member 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 in ensuring that this Committee continues to run smoothly and that its members have all the information they need to perform their scrutiny role. It has been especially difficult for these Teams over the last twelve months but as always, they have gone above and beyond of what is expected of them.

6.3 Work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee during the 2020/2021 Municipal Year

The Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside Committee has scrutinised a number of topics over the 2020-21 period; a sample of the topics reviewed is listed below:

- Coronavirus Update report – Response and Recovery;
- Environment (Wales) Act 2016 – focus on weed spraying;
- Fly-tipping;
- Energy Saving/Carbon Management;
- Overview of Property Services department;
- Community Asset Transfer policy;
- Update Report on Fly-tipping;
- Fly-tipping on Unregistered Land;

- Dog Fouling – Public Spaces Protection Order;
- Nature Recovery Plan;
- Tree Policy;
- Update Report – Black Bin Charges;
- Improving Recycling Rates; and
- Corporate Self-Evaluation – Environmental Well-being.

6.4 Looking forward to 2021 / 2022

A number of topics have been identified for review and scrutiny and these will be called before the Committee in 2021-2022. Some of the topics due to be explored and scrutinised by Committee Members include:

- Absorbent Hygiene Product (Nappy) Recycling
- Asset Management
- Planning
- Recycling & Fly tipping
- Local Development Annual Monitoring Plan
- Children’s Play Areas / Playgrounds
- HWRC’s permits and booking systems.
- Trade Waste Recycling
- Carbon Management / De-Carbonisation
- Grass Cutting & Bio-Diversity
- Furniture Re-Use Shop
- Fleet Management

The Committee will be receiving an information report regarding pollution and air quality around Twynyrodyn Road as we have previously received two reports on this issue. While this issue does not sit within the remit of this committee anymore, it was felt that a report should be received in order that members could see the end results of actions taken to minimise pollution and that scrutiny of this item has been satisfactorily completed.

The Committee will also receive a report, with a follow up workshop, on the Planning process due to the frustration felt by Members at their apparent inability to be able to make a decision, using their local knowledge, for fear of costing the Council money if their decision is overturned by the Planning Inspectorate.

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).



Chair:
Cllr. Gareth Lewis
May 2020 – January 2021

7.2 Chairpersons comments

During the year the Regeneration & Public Protection Scrutiny Committee received reports and updates on a variety of matters relating to the Regeneration and Public Protection Departments. These detailed reports provided assurance to the Committee that progress was being made against performance targets and the wider corporate priorities.

Since March 2020; the impact of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic Committee Members has had a huge impact on communities across the County Borough. At the point when scrutiny recommenced following the first lockdown; the Committee received a report which demonstrated how Community Regeneration, Environmental Health and Protection and Safety Services responded to provide critical support to people and local businesses; this report was followed by regular briefings which offered an overview not only of the immediate response to the crisis but also to outline the plans as we transition to recovery. These reports were comprehensive and showed the scope and scale of support offered, from distribution of PPE; to the £40 million of grant funding secured to support local businesses; mass testing exercises and most recently, updates on the progress of the vaccination programme.

Committee Members have also received reports from key partners at Safer Merthyr Tydfil and New Pathways; this supported the Committee to understand the wider impact of the pandemic on those who have been affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence.

In terms of community regeneration, two specific projects that have the potential to transform the long term socio-economic picture of the County Borough and the wider South Wales Valleys area were reviewed. The South Wales Metro aims to radically overhaul public transport and finally provide a fully integrated transport system, which should in turn catalyse investment to the Merthyr Tydfil CBC area. Committee Members sought to ensure that any changes would give full consideration to the longer-term environmental impacts and significantly supported the Council's de-carbonisation agenda.

Another key project reviewed was the further developments included in the proposed Cyfarthfa heritage Area Plan. The 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.

I'd like to thank the members of the Regeneration and Public Protection Committee for their input throughout the last year, and also the officers and the Cabinet for their contributions.

7.3 Work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee during the 2020/2021 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 2020-21 municipal year; the Committee has received reports on the following topics:

- Coronavirus Update Report – Response and Recovery;
- Housing & Homelessness;
- Anti-Social Behaviour and Substance Misuse in the Town Centre;
- Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence and its impact across the County Borough;
- Subsidised Bus Services and the City Deal Metro Programme;
- Sexual Violence and its impact across the County Borough;
- The Crucible Project and developing Special Purpose Vehicle; and
- Corporate Self-Evaluation – Working Life.

7.4 Additional work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee during the 2020/2021 Municipal Year

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on our communities; with lockdowns and increased regulation around safety requiring a timely and targeted response from the Council, Elected Members and staff. The Committee introduced a regular agenda item during 2020/2021 whereby a review of status in relation to public health and economic recovery was presented at every meeting for review. The outcome of these sessions showed officers were collaborating effectively to offer co-ordinated support services to the public; local businesses etc.

Responding to another key requirement, Committee Members have attended additional meetings to develop a fuller understanding of the ongoing development of the Council's Recovery, Transformation and Improvement Plan. This will be a key consideration for topics brought before the Committee in the coming year.



Chair:
Cllr. Lee Davies
February 2021 – May 2021

7.5 Chairpersons Comments: Councillor Lee Davies

Having previously been a member of the Regeneration and Public Protection Scrutiny for some months; I took over the Committee Chair role in February 2021 and have acted as Chair for all scrutiny meetings since that time.

Since becoming Chair, the Committee has received update information on both community-focused and corporate topics. The community received a presentation from colleagues working with

New Pathways; the rape crisis and sexual abuse service that started in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough and has since developed bases across Wales. The presentation highlighted to Committee the impact of these issues across the communities of Merthyr Tydfil; enabling Committee Members to review the impact, and importantly highlighting areas where the Council could collaborate with this agency to strengthen the support available to those who have been affected.

Reports were received on the developing Cyfarthfa Plan and the Crucible project. These collaborative developments led by the Council have secured significant funding to offer a raft of opportunities focusing on restoration of Cyfarthfa Castle to maintain this critical cultural asset; to look at options around the Cyfarthfa Furnaces (a scheduled ancient monument); and the development of the Cyfarthfa Foundation. Longer term goals for these projects will offer opportunities to local residents and visitors to the County Borough and the Committee will maintain oversight of this activity as progress is made.

The Committee also received the corporate self-evaluation report for the areas it oversees linking to the Working Life theme in the Corporate Well-being Plan. Committee Members reviewed the report and provided critical friend challenge to understand how judgements arrived at had been reached. The significant contribution of these service areas to the ongoing response to Covid-19 was seen to have successfully supported citizens and local businesses throughout the past year. The Committee were pleased to confirm the self-evaluative judgements for this area having received sufficient evidence to support them. The Committee agrees everyone in these department are giving their all in very challenging times and Committee Members thanks and commend all involved in delivering these services.

Moving forward, my intention for the Committee is to scrutinise services where Covid-19 has impacted those most. This includes services that provide assistance and practical support to those needing to access to housing and homelessness support. Covid has resulted in Welsh Government policy changes in these areas and this has increased the need for its effective scrutiny so in the coming year, 'deep dive' scrutiny will be undertaken on this.

Finally, I would like to thank all those involved in the Regeneration and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee; and to the officers and support staff who have supported the Committee and ensured regular meetings continued despite the challenges brought about as a result of the ongoing pandemic.

7.6 Looking forward to 2021/2022

Over the coming 12 months the Committee will scrutinise a number of areas which will have a significant impact on communities, businesses and visitors across Merthyr Tydfil County Borough. This will include housing and homelessness (as mentioned above) the implications of the end of European funding in 2022 and the developing preparation and plans with regards to any legacy/replacement funding;

an update from South Wales Police to review existing issues affecting our communities and further discussions with New Pathways to develop the initial discussions around future collaboration.

Throughout all of these areas Committee Members will review and scrutinise strategic decisions made to ensure that services remain outcome focused and continue to operate efficiently and effectively. Links to key corporate plans and strategies will be explored further to ensure opportunities to involve and work collaboratively with communities and other key stakeholders are capitalised upon.

8.0 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: SOCIAL SERVICES

- 8.1 The Social Services Committee consists six Councillors and four co-opted members (1 voluntary sector member; 1 Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum member; and 2 public, non-voting members). *All four co-opted member positions are currently vacant for this committee.*



Chair:
Cllr. Bill Smith

8.2 Chairpersons comments

The Coronavirus Pandemic (Covid 19) has had a devastating impact on many people throughout our communities. The lockdown period and the requirements for self-isolation and shielding have had serious implications on the well-being and quality of life in our local communities. 2020-21 has provided some significant challenges in relation to all elements of the services' workload. These unprecedented events have also

affected the scrutiny committee schedule with a number of committees and workshops cancelled to enable key officers to prioritise resources in order to provide critical support to the communities we serve.

The Social Services Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2020/21 was developed to focus and scrutinise the services provided to the community by Social Services during these times of austerity. The committee recognised that the services and officers are under growing pressure to accomplish their aims and objectives with every year that passes and this is becoming more and more challenging. As a committee, we aim to provide robust and focused scrutiny in order to drive improved outcomes from services.

Social Services work regionally on a number of strategies including the Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service (YOS); Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Plan; and Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC). As such, Committee Members welcomed a number of regional reports from our key stakeholders. Members recognise that partnership working is critical in delivering successful outcomes for our communities, particularly during such challenging times. As a committee, we 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 Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Services Board (PSB) and the Committee Members with regards to Social Services issues.

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

8.3 Items reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee for the period 15th September 2020 to 27th April 2021

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

- Coronavirus Pandemic - Update on Recovery and Activity
- Complaints and Compliments
- Day Services
- Budget Position Updates
- Transition of Young People and Leaving Care
- Adult Services Strategies (2020/21)
- Children Services Strategies (2020/21)
- Review of Whistleblowing and Corporate Safeguarding
- Adults and Young Carers
- Safeguarding Board Annual Report
- Social Services Recovery, Transformation & Improvement Plan Update
- Community Occupational Therapy (COT) and Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)
- Edge of Care (Strategy Update)
- Recovery, Transformation & Improvement Plan - Adult Advocacy

8.4 Additional work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee for the period 15th September 2020 to 27th April 2021

With the unprecedented challenges faced by services, there was a need to amend the approach to the self-evaluation process for 2020/21. In 2019-2020, the process was delivered on a question-by-question basis; whereas for 2020-2021, service areas/ teams were required to consider all three questions at the same time. The completed corporate self-evaluation for Social Services was presented to committee members at a workshop for critical friend challenge. Members welcomed this approach and had the opportunity to make suggestions, observations and challenge services judgements.

8.5 Looking forward to 2020 / 2021

The Social Services department has embraced more collaborative working practices by working with other public bodies to effectively deliver its services. This includes the work with the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board Annual Report and Plan, Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service, Social Service and Well-being Regional Plan and several others.

However, through the Improvement and Assurance Board it has been identified that Social Services needs to increase its resilience. This has been especially challenging for Social Services, having to deliver key services to our residents, whilst responding to the 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.

Moving 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 flexible 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.

9.0 CWM TAF JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 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.

- 9.3 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.
- 9.4 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.

10.0 CARDIFF CAPITAL REGIONAL CITY DEAL JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

11.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT SCRUTINY

- 11.1 Whilst Scrutiny members, Cabinet members and Council officers contribute regularly to scrutiny activities, we also welcome public attendance and input at our meetings.
- 11.2 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.
- 11.3 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.
- 11.4 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

12.0 SCRUTINY DEVELOPMENT DURING 2020/2021

- 12.1 Self-evaluation is a key strand of the Council's governance arrangements. The intelligence generated through completion of this process enables a deeper understanding of activities to be taken forward and enables a more

focused/strengthened approach to the planning and further development for both current and future activities. Appendix 1 outlines the things we changed working with Scrutiny Committees.

- 12.2 In order to gain a baseline understanding to support how we strengthen scrutiny arrangements within the Council, Committee Members, Cabinet Members and Officers took part in a self-evaluation exercise which focused specifically on scrutiny.
- 12.3 When considering how self-evaluation could be undertaken in relation to scrutiny committees, it was noted that Committee Members would need a process which had questions that provided information in relation to three key areas:
 - Scrutiny Environment;
 - Scrutiny Practice; and
 - The Impact of Scrutiny.
- 12.4 A scrutiny specific self-evaluation template was developed to ensure relevant feedback and information could be captured on the scrutiny function. This feedback was analysed and intelligence generated to be able to establish what good scrutiny looks like. It also helps us to identify areas where development would be beneficial so decisions could be made to identify priorities for improvement.
- 12.5 The data gathering exercise of the scrutiny self-evaluation ran from 3rd November – 16th December 2020. On receipt of all responses, analysis was undertaken, and key findings identified. These were used as the basis of a feedback session to those who had been invited to participate in this exercise. The first feedback/workshop session took place on 26th March 2021. This well-attended session involved discussions around the key findings with a specific focus on the areas of development identified by respondents.
- 12.6 Through discussions at this workshop session, it was recognised that improvement was needed. Five key areas for development were confirmed:
 - Committee Work Programme development;
 - Committee member training;
 - Effective decision-making;
 - Improving public engagement; and
 - Developing and promoting the work of scrutiny.
- 12.7 In subsequent workshop sessions, these topics were revisited and it was agreed that cross-committee working groups would be established to begin to collaboratively plan the development activities to support the strengthening and improvement of these areas.
- 12.8 It was also proposed that a Joint Working Group would be established to focus on the strategic development of scrutiny. This group would consist representatives of Committees, Cabinet and Officers. The Council will continue to engage with the

Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) in developing and delivering this programme.

- 12.9 When the priorities have been set, the Committees will develop their own Strategy on a Page (commonly known as a SOAP) which will enable them to more effectively monitor their impact. The SOAP would also provide a source of evidence to support future reviews to support the continuous improvement of scrutiny.

Response to recommendations from Audit Wales (some have been built into 2020/21 municipal year-end):

- 12.10 Scrutiny improvement forms a key part of the Council's RTI Plan. The RTI Plan, or aspects of the plan, have been presented at several committees during the 2020/21 municipal year. In summary, the RTI Plan is a key part of recovery from the pandemic for the Council and Member involvement and challenge of the work being undertaken is key in informing effective decision-making and plans moving forward (recommendations 4,8 and 9). Audit Wales (recommendation 7) highlight the need to remain focussed on improving performance and standards of education. This remains a key focus for the Council and this will form a focus for scrutiny.

- 12.11 The Council has committed to strengthening its scrutiny function and will continue to work with the WLGA to do so. More information on these points can be found in the Council report "Responding to Audit Wales Report – Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Assessment of Progress to Address Key Concerns" presented on the 19th May 2021 to Council.

13.0 LOOKING FORWARD TO THE 2021/2022 MUNICIPAL YEAR

- 13.1 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. The Council plans to work with the WLGA to do this.

- 13.2 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 'Strategy on a Page' (SOAP). This model is used across the Council. The Committees will develop their own SOAP which will enable them to more effectively monitor their Committees' 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)

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

15.0 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts	Neutral/Not Applicable	
1. Merthyr Tydfil Well-being Objectives	4 of 4	0 of 4	0 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 	5 of 5	0 of 5	0 of 5	
3. Protected Characteristics (including Welsh Language)	0 of 10	0 of 10	10 of 10	
4. Socio-economic Disadvantage	6 of 6	0 of 6	0 of 6	
5. Consultation and Engagement	Undertaken	Due to be Undertaken	Not Required	
	1 of 1	0 of 1	0 of 1	
6. Data and Evidence to inform the proposal	Yes		No	
	1 of 1		0 of 1	
7. Biodiversity and the resilience of Ecosystems	Maintained	Enhanced	Reduced	Neutral/Not Applicable
	0 of 1	0 of 1	0 of 1	1 of 1
Summary				
The main positive impacts are:	By holding effective scrutiny and improving the function we will positively impact on delivering our well-being objectives, how we work (5 ways of working). This will be supported by data gathering and analysis.			
The main negative impacts are:	No negative impacts have been identified.			

ALYN OWEN
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.

Appendix 1 – You said, we did document

You Said, We Did ...

Feedback from Committee Members showed us ...

There was a need to ensure Committee Chairs and Members received the Cabinet Forward Plan in advance to support the effective scrutiny of topics before final decision(s) are made

That following the temporary suspension of scrutiny meetings as a result of the initial lockdown in response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic; support and training was required to enable 'virtual' scrutiny meetings to take place, ensuring critical and effective democratic oversight was re-initiated

That following the temporary suspension of scrutiny meetings as a result of the initial lockdown in response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic; Committee Members requested an update on the Council's response to support communities and to maintain services for those who needed them

That there was an opportunity to make the development of Committee Work Programmes more collaborative by involving Cabinet members and Chief Officers in discussions around proposed topics

How have we responded?

Following ongoing dialogue with the Council's Cabinet Members, a Quarterly Cabinet Forward Plan has been developed and issued to all Committee Members.

All Committee Members were offered training on how to use Microsoft Teams; and a protocol was developed to support Committee Members to access, navigate and fully participate in scrutiny meetings; ensuring that scrutiny activities were resumed in a safe and timely manner.

At each scrutiny committees' first meeting; a report was produced to offer an update on the Council's response to the pandemic; and the transition to recovery.

In planning the Committees' Forward Work Programmes for 2021/2022, Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs met with Cabinet Members and Chief Officers to discuss Work Programme topics; enabling a joint understanding of how topics linked to corporate priorities, whilst also ensuring reports were received at the appropriate time to ensure the most up-to-date data and information was available.