

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO COUNCIL

25 NOVEMBER 2015

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE LEGAL & REGULATORY SERVICES

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

1. Purpose of Report.

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present Council with a review of work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny function during the period September 2014 - September 2015.

2. Connection to Corporate Plan / Other Corporate Priorities.

- 2.1 This report relates to the Corporate Priorities of working together to make the best use of our resources by improving the way we communicate and engage with citizens.

3. Background.

3.1 The Scrutiny Function

- 3.1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committees oversee the decision making of the Cabinet Members and support the work of the Cabinet and the Council. They allow citizens to have a greater say in Council matters by holding public meetings into matters of local concern. These lead to reports and recommendations which advise the Cabinet and the Council as a whole on its policies, budget and service delivery.

- 3.1.2 Within their terms of reference, Overview and Scrutiny Committees will:

- (a) review and/or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions;
- (b) make reports and/or recommendations to the Council and/or the Cabinet and/or any joint committee in connection with the discharge of any functions;
- (c) consider any matter affecting the County Borough or its inhabitants; and
- (d) exercise the right to call-in, for reconsideration, decisions made by or on behalf of the Cabinet but not yet implemented.

- 3.1.3 Overview and Scrutiny Committees can 'call-in' a decision which has been made by the Cabinet or an Officer but not yet implemented. This enables them to consider whether the decision is appropriate. They may recommend that the Cabinet reconsider the decision. They may also be consulted by the Cabinet or the Council on forthcoming decisions and the development of policy.

3.2 Corporate Structure

- 3.2.1 Since 2008, there have been a number of incremental changes to the corporate

structure. Some changes to the remits of the committees have been undertaken but these changes have only been to realign the scrutiny committees to the directorate responsibilities. With the significant challenges faced by the Authority to meet the requirements of the MTFs, savings have to be made across all departments and Directorates, with scrutiny being no exception.

3.3 Reconfiguring Scrutiny

3.3.1 Following a work programming exercise in 2014 it was identified that there was a significant volume of replication between the scrutiny committees. Members expressed their concerns that this is a duplication of effort and distracts the committees from undertaking effective scrutiny of the service areas.

3.3.2 To address this and other concerns a review of the activities of Scrutiny was undertaken. Proposals were developed in consultation with the Scrutiny Chairpersons which were subsequently collated into a report for presentation to Council in April 2015.

3.3.3 The Future Delivery of Effective Scrutiny report proposed a significant number of changes to address the concerns of Members, these included scrutiny of the following topics being co-ordinated by the Corporate Resources & Improvement (CRI) Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OVSC).

- a. Performance Monitoring
- b. Corporate Plan
- c. Business Planning
- d. Budget Monitoring

All Scrutiny Chairs and Corporate Directors will be invited to attend CRI OVSC meetings for these items in future to provide a single corporate focus for the consideration of these topics.

3.3.4 The Scrutiny Chairs considered a number of options of how the committee remits could be reconfigured to reflect changes to the corporate structure and to better balance the workload of scrutiny. They proposed that the following changes to the committees be made.

<u>Previous</u>	<u>Current</u>
Community Safety & Governance	Partnerships and Governance
Corporate Resources and Improvement	Corporate Resources and Improvement
Community Renewal & Environment	Community, Environment and Leisure
Health & Wellbeing	Adult Social Care
Children & Young People	Children & Young People

3.3.5 To maintain the specialised service area knowledge when considering these reports it was agreed that one member from each of the other scrutiny Committees be co-opted to the Committee when considering that item.

3.3.6 Appropriate Cabinet Members and Chief Officers were to be invited to attend these meetings to consider these items. This was identified as being beneficial by having cross cutting representation to provide a truly corporate view of the issues being considered.

3.4 Report Approval Process

3.4.1 Covering reports from the Scrutiny Officers to the Scrutiny Committees have now ceased. Scrutiny Officers have now begun to work with the service officers to prepare their reports in accordance with the committee requirements. This process will continue to be developed and it is hoped that reports presented to the Scrutiny committees will fully meet their requirements. The involvement of scrutiny officers to support the authors of the reports will also reduce the likelihood of additional requests for information being made by the committee, thereby substantially reducing the considerable amount of time spent by Scrutiny and other Officers within the directorates in following up requests for further information.

3.5 Assessing the impact of Scrutiny

3.5.1 Members will recognise that capturing and assessing the impact of Scrutiny is not an easy task as the outcomes of Scrutiny activity are not always tangible and able to be measured in a systematic way.

3.5.2 For example, whilst 'outputs' like the number of recommendations approved by Cabinet may shed light regarding relations between the Executive and the Scrutiny function, this does not reveal the extent to which the substance of the recommendations were actually implemented and whether or not intended outcomes were achieved.

3.5.3 It is important to reflect some of the intangible effects of Scrutiny and its ability to influence decision makers through discussion and debate. Sometimes there are no measureable outputs from Committee discussion yet the opportunity for Cabinet Members and Officers to reflect on proposed courses of action has undoubtedly influenced the way in which the proposal was implemented.

3.5.4 Scrutiny activities can be wide ranging and diverse and are not necessarily experienced by stakeholders within the process in a consistent and easily describable way. For example, Research and Evaluation Panels provide a less formal form of interaction between Committee Members and invitees than a traditional Committee meeting setting allows for. However, 'Call-Ins' are a very different experience for invitees and the impact of Scrutiny in these two instances will be specific to each case.

3.5.5 Striking an effective balance between the 'challenge' and 'support' elements of the Scrutiny function is reliant on Committees building strong working relationships and demonstrating other key skills such as negotiation and influencing, team-working, policy analysis and questioning techniques. Recommended good practice based upon the four principles of effective Scrutiny can be used to help identify developmental objectives for Members and Scrutiny function.

3.5.6 Care should be taken in focussing too carefully upon the number of recommendations approved and adopted by Cabinet as this gives no indication of the quality of the recommendation made in the first instance and the extent to which it may have been later implemented.

3.5.7 In 2012/13, Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) took an active role in the WAO Improvement Study, "**Good Scrutiny? Good Question**". A Learning

Exchange Team, comprising of the Scrutiny Chairpersons, a Scrutiny Officer and a Cabinet Member participated in a number of activities, including regional events hosted by Bridgend, discussions regarding best practice and peer evaluation of scrutiny committee meetings in Neath Port Talbot CBC. In turn, overview and scrutiny meetings Bridgend were observed by Cardiff Council.

3.5.8 The outcome of this study was the publication of the “Characteristics of Good Scrutiny”. These characteristics have been used to undertake an assessment of the scrutiny function in Bridgend.

Outcome What does good scrutiny seek to achieve?	Characteristics What would it look like? How could we recognise it?
1. “Better Outcomes” Democratic accountability drives improvement in public services.	a. Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Overview & scrutiny has a clearly defined and valued role in the council's improvement and governance arrangements. ii. Overview & scrutiny has the dedicated officer support it needs from officers who are able to undertake independent research effectively, and provides councillors with high-quality analysis, advice and training. b. Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Overview & scrutiny inquiries are non-political, methodologically sound and incorporate a wide range of evidence and perspectives. c. Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Overview & scrutiny regularly engages in evidence based challenge of decision makers and service providers. ii. Overview & scrutiny provides viable and well evidenced solutions to recognised problems.
2. “Better decisions” Democratic decision making is accountable, inclusive and robust.	a. Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Overview & scrutiny councillors have the training and development opportunities they need to undertake their role effectively. ii. The process receives effective support from the council’s corporate management team who ensures that information provided to overview & scrutiny is of high quality and is provided in a timely and consistent manner. b. Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Overview & scrutiny is councillor-led, takes into account the views of the public, partners and regulators, and balances the prioritisation of community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance. ii. Overview & scrutiny meetings and activities are well-planned, chaired effectively and make best use of the resources available to it. c. Impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Decision makers give public account for themselves at overview & scrutiny committees for their portfolio responsibilities.
3. “Better engagement” The public is engaged in democratic debate about the current and future delivery of public services.	a. Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Overview & scrutiny is recognised by the executive and corporate management team as an important council mechanism for community engagement, and facilitates greater citizen involvement in governance. b. Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Overview & scrutiny is characterised by effective communication to raise awareness of, and encourage participation in democratic accountability. ii. Overview & scrutiny operates non-politically and deals effectively with sensitive political issues, tension and conflict. iii. Overview & scrutiny builds trust and good relationships with a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders. c. Impact

Outcome What does good scrutiny seek to achieve?	Characteristics What would it look like? How could we recognise it?
	i. Overview and scrutiny enables the 'voice' of local people and communities across the area to be heard as part of decision and policy-making processes.

4. Current situation / proposal.

4.1 The following is the assessment of the Better Outcomes element of the Characteristics of Good Scrutiny.

Better Outcomes” - Democratic accountability drives improvement in public services.		
Environment	<p>Overview & scrutiny has a clearly defined and valued role in the council's improvement and governance arrangements.</p>	<p>The role of executive members and senior officers in contributing to Scrutiny is clearly defined in the Bridgend County Borough Council Constitution which states:</p> <p>Any Overview and Scrutiny Committee or sub-committee may scrutinise and review decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any Council functions. As well as reviewing documentation, in fulfilling the scrutiny role it may require (subject to the operation of the Member and Officer Codes of Conduct) the Leader and any (other) member of the Cabinet, the Head of Paid Service and/or any senior officer to attend before it to explain in relation to matters within their remit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) any particular decision or series of decisions; and/or (ii) the extent to which the actions taken implement Council policy; and/or (iii) the performance of their respective department / directorate portfolio and those persons shall attend if so required. <p>In addition to this Corporate Director, Head of Service and Cabinet Member involvement has been embedded throughout the Overview and Scrutiny process, including attendance at pre-agenda meetings where the subject, focus, content and timescale for individual items of the forward work programme are agreed.</p> <p>Corporate Directors and Heads of Service are involved in the report approval process at key stages, for example at request, Legal and Finance approval stages, and Directors and Cabinet Members are required to sign off the final version of the report.</p>

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		<p>Any conclusions, recommendations or requests for further information are fed back to Corporate Directors, Cabinet Members and Heads of Service for responses as necessary.</p> <p>Recommendations to Cabinet are either presented directly to Cabinet or are incorporated into Directorate Reports where they inform Cabinet in their decision making. For example Learner Transport, where the Committees recommendations to treat all Post 16 Learners equally and to ensure that provision for Voluntary Aided Schools remain in line with the proposals for Welsh Medium Schools, was agreed by Cabinet and were incorporated as part of the final consultation proposals and informed the final outcome.</p>
	<p>Overview & scrutiny has the dedicated officer support it needs from officers who are able to undertake independent research effectively, and provides councillors with high-quality analysis, advice and training.</p>	<p>Bridgend County Borough Council has for many years had dedicated Scrutiny Officer support. Although the number of Scrutiny Officers has reduced in recent years, the quality of their work and the personal dedication to achieve positive outcomes for Scrutiny, the Authority and the residents of the County Borough remains unwavering.</p> <p>Scrutiny Officers proactively keep up to date with the most current information on a national and local level to enable them to support and advise Members effectively. This is done through independent research and external training. For example, Scrutiny Officers attended External Training, for example: Many Hands - A Conference on Scrutiny, Partnership, Collaboration and Regulation to share best practice and learn about working with regulatory bodies to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Scrutiny; WLGA - Equality in 2015: Making an Impact seminar; established links with Equalities colleagues in BCBC and counterparts in other authorities; Scrutiny in times of Austerity and Scrutiny of Partnerships and Corporate Effectiveness through an external training provider, ContinYou Cymru.</p> <p>Scrutiny Officers from Bridgend are keen to work with Scrutiny Officers from across Wales to develop best practice. With the recent removal of funding for the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) the Scrutiny Officer Network was no longer supported. Officers from Bridgend and other Local Authorities requested that the Welsh Government facilitate future meetings of the</p>

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network in order to continue the development of scrutiny across Wales. A tentative agreement was made by the Welsh Government to support this network.

This proactive approach ensures that the Authority has the benefit of regional and national input and that the Scrutiny team is able to feedback lessons learned and best practice into the Scrutiny process and use the experience to help to support colleagues in improving and developing the type of information used as a basis for decision making.

Research – Scrutiny Officers continuously raise awareness of the need and importance of considering comparisons with other local authorities to identify best practice and to monitor our performance from a national perspective. Scrutiny Officers often carry out research to support this and ensured that where this information is available it is included in Officers’ report to Committee. This approach was used to inform a recent report on **Waste Services** within the LA where information on other LAs performance regarding Waste Recycling was included in the report on the request of the Scrutiny Officer and used by the Committee to identify and recommend potential for sharing best practice.

A number of Research and Evaluation Panel (REP) meetings have taken place, for example the **Budget REP, the Member and School Engagement Panel and the Local Service Board Scrutiny Panel**. This requires intensive organisation, preparation and support by Scrutiny Officers as well as detailed research prior to meetings and development of suggested areas of enquiry to assist and advice Members in their questioning.

Support and Training for Members – As well as organising training for Members, other support needs of Members have been identified by Scrutiny Officers and addressed. For example, **School Performance Data Training** – Arrangements for further training and support was set up by the Scrutiny Officers to address the ongoing issues surrounding the Committee’s school performance monitoring role. A workshop was established to provide the opportunity for Officers to carry out data training with Members. This also provided an arena whereby Officers and Members could discuss and agree the

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		<p>structure and content of school performance reports which would meet the requirements of Estyn whilst also meeting the needs of the Committee; enabling them to understand, interpret and question the data accurately and to improve the effectiveness of their monitoring role.</p> <p>Committee Support – Scrutiny Officers organise and attend pre-meetings with Chairs to provide an opportunity to discuss detailed analysis of reports to identify areas of focus for the Committee and ensuring best use of time during Committee meetings. Between these meetings and the Committee meeting the Scrutiny team work closely with all parties to ensure that requests for information for Scrutiny reports are clear and are understood. Report authors are identified at the start of the process to enable Scrutiny Officers to liaise with them in ensuring that the focus of the report remains as requested and that the format of the report is accessible and clear.</p> <p>Support and advice is extended upon with the all Committee Members during the meeting where detailed advice is provided as part of a pre-discussion and summing up process at the beginning and end of every meeting.</p>
Practice	<p>Overview & scrutiny inquiries are non-political, methodologically sound and incorporate a wide range of evidence and perspectives.</p>	<p>The BCBC Constitution requires that the Scrutiny Committees and the appointment of Chairpersons be politically balanced and therefore this mirrors the make-up of Council. However, members put aside their political differences to ensure that all outcomes are in the best interest of the Authority and its constituents.</p> <p>Every Committee and Research and Evaluation Panel investigation has flexible but clear terms of reference.</p> <p>BREP has cross party membership and considers contentious issues at the early stages of development which Members approach with confidentiality and objectivity, irrespective of political allegiances.</p> <p><u>Forward Work Programme (FWP)</u></p> <p>Officers also use the following sources in order to identify items for inclusion on the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Committee Requests for Scrutiny from previous Forward Work Programmes;</i> • <i>Wales Audit Office Assessment Letters;</i>

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- *Corporate Risk Assessment;*
- *Directorate Business Plans;*
- *Performance Reports to Scrutiny Committees;*
- *Annual business planning and budget setting process;*
- *Commission of Public Service Governance and Delivery (the Williams Report)*

The Scrutiny Committees have a finite capacity to consider the volume of topics that are generated. During development of the FWP these topics are initially prioritised in consultation with Cabinet Members and Officers. The draft FWP are then considered by the committee to ensure that they meet its requirements. The top 12 topics are scheduled into its 6 committee meetings with the non-priority topics being listed for information.

The FWP is presented at each committee meeting to enable them to undertake a review to ensure that topics for consideration are prioritised and this allows scrutiny to remain current and provide an element of flexibility in considering priority topics. During the consideration of its FWP each committee is able to identify suitable invitees who can provide first-hand account or evidence in respect of the subject matter.

Timing of reports coming to Scrutiny is informed by other activities, such as reports to Cabinet, Corporate Plans, the budget setting processes and regular and ad-hoc performance evaluation reporting.

The process for maintaining and reviewing individual forward work plans to help to establish focus and agree content, timing and invitees for items coming to Scrutiny Committees has been reviewed and improved this year.

For example, forward work plans for each individual Committee are collated into a single document with an overview which summarises the schedule for the work of all of the Committees. This ensures that the programmes can be assessed and managed as a whole to minimise the potential for duplication of effort and to enable the team to manage the workload, timescales, deadlines and areas for Scrutiny as a whole.

Areas or subjects where representation from all Committees and Directorates is appropriate are identified and planned for collaborative

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		<p>committees to ensure the best approach is used. For example, this approach is used for the Corporate Resources and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee when considering items such as the Performance and Financial Monitoring for the whole Authority and the Corporate Plan.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Chairpersons have a monthly meeting where they review the FWP and ensure that topics are not duplicated and possible additional items for inclusion on the FWP are identified. They also consider the best courses of action for scrutiny to deliver the outcomes it requires.</p>
<p>Impact</p>	<p>Overview & scrutiny regularly engages in evidence based challenge of decision makers and service providers.</p>	<p>As a matter of course, Scrutiny Committees require Cabinet Members and Corporate Directors to attend Committee meetings, as well as pre-agenda meetings where discussions over the detail in the forward work programme take place between Cabinet members, Officers and the Scrutiny Chair.</p> <p>Overview and Scrutiny regularly engages with and holds to account partners and associates of the Authority responsible for providing and supporting service delivery.</p> <p>Examples of this include meetings of the Member and School Engagement Panel where Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of individual schools are invited to meet with the Panel based on set criterion and are then held to account on their performance and improvement. This provides an opportunity to identify good practice which can then be communicated and replicated in other schools in the County Borough.</p> <p>Further examples include scrutiny of HALO, our service provider contracted for the management and provision of Leisure Services. There is also ongoing communication and engagement with the Central South Consortium, to monitor the quality and provision of service and ensure the needs of service users are met as agreed.</p> <p>In addition to this, the Scrutiny process is taking the opportunity to utilise the option provided by the Local Government (Wales) Measure which enables Scrutiny Committees to request designated persons to attend and provide information on particular items.</p>

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		<p>Examples of this include Registered Social Landlords attending for items relating to Homelessness and Housing and also Representatives from the Business Community to provide information relating to Regeneration.</p> <p>Scrutiny Officers have recently begun working with colleagues in the Partnership Support team to identify information sharing opportunities and to compile a ‘bank’ of information on key organisations and individuals which Scrutiny Members and Officers can access and use to identify potential external contacts to invite to Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings to ensure independent perspectives can be included in the Scrutiny process.</p>
	<p>Overview & scrutiny provides viable and well evidenced solutions to recognised problems.</p>	<p>Overview and Scrutiny Committees carry out pre-decision scrutiny where they have provided views on options for service delivery, often linked to a direct decision of Cabinet. Examples of this include:</p> <p>Learner Transport – Scrutiny made as series of comments and recommendations to cabinet on the new changes proposed for Learner Transport. This resulted in further, more robust consultation and directly influenced the final decision and outcome which ensured that provision for Post-16 Learner transport continued.</p> <p>Waste Services – Scrutiny received a report setting out options for future Waste Service Provision in the County Borough. Members were asked to provide comments on the options to be considered for service provision, resulting in recommendations to Cabinet which will inform the way forward and be monitored by the Committee.</p> <p>Recommendations made and accepted by Cabinet provide a good indication that Executive Members and Officers recognise the value of Scrutiny as a constructive check and balance to decision making.</p>

4.2 The following is the assessment of the “Better Decisions” element of the Characteristics of Good Scrutiny.

“Better decisions” - Democratic decision making is accountable, inclusive and robust.		
Environment	<p>Overview & scrutiny councillors have the training and development opportunities they need to undertake their role effectively</p>	<p>Following the approval by Council of the Future Provision of Effective Scrutiny report in April 2015, appropriate Member Development was arranged to support the changes to the delivery of Scrutiny in Bridgend. Training Sessions facilitated by Ian Bottrill were offered to all scrutiny Members, Chairpersons and officers on 9 June and 6th July 2015 as follows:</p> <p><u>Session 1 Scrutiny in times of Austerity</u> The topics to be covered in this session included:</p> <p>Developing positive relationships between:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny Officers and Scrutiny Members • Scrutiny and Senior Officers/Cabinet Members <p>Focussing on key (Corporate) priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How Scrutiny can be most effective • How to prioritise what must/should/could be scrutinised. • How to determine what will deliver significant benefits to the Authority and its citizens <p>Prepare for effective Scrutiny Committees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • own research prior to Committee, • Not being reliant on committee reports • Innovative ways of collecting evidence, e.g. public engagement, partner agency engagement, utilise Scrutiny Officer effectively to carry out/or task with research and scoping exercises. <p>Questioning techniques for all Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to plan and develop questions and get what you want from those who come to answer questions. • Highlight pitfalls and how to get around them, to include the role of chairs in assisting the Committee in ensuring they get the right answers. • Supplementary and probing questions. • Avoiding statements, multiple questions and questions not relevant to Committee role or topic being considered. <p>How to make effective recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making recommendations rather than conclusions • Avoiding general and/or aspirational recommendations • Strong recommendations are achievable, measurable, and relate to specific policies

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etc.

- Appropriate follow up on the recommendations

Session 2 - Scrutiny of Partnerships and Corporate Effectiveness

Partnerships

- Focussing on
 - the partnership as opposed to the individual organisations
 - complementing rather than duplicating existing accountability mechanisms
 - Strategic rather than operational scrutiny
 - outcome focused
- Building relationships with partners

Corporate Effectiveness

- Evaluating activities and monitoring performance against its objectives
- Particular skills involved in Scrutiny of financial issues and proposed service reconfigurations.
- What is the process for committing expenditure
- Outcomes rather than outputs

Session 3 - Scrutiny Chairing Skills

- The nature of scrutiny leadership the skills of chairing scrutiny e.g. those skills needed to manage the Scrutiny process and the committee to get most constructive results.
- How style and approach is influenced by the chairperson linked with different approaches appropriate to topic.
- The relationships between:
 - Scrutiny chairs and scrutiny officers
 - Scrutiny Chairs and the Committee members. Linked to structured order of questions and ensuring Committee stays on topic.
 - Scrutiny Chairs and the Cabinet members/Senior Officers.
- Successfully achieving the Critical Friend Challenge
- Scrutiny Chairperson Only open forum: To address any specific concerns or queries which the chairpersons have in respect of Chairing Scrutiny meetings

NB: The repeat session was opened up to all scrutiny members as a development opportunity

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		<p>Feedback included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found this excellent and very useful • Very engaging open informal training. Provided opportunities for officers to engage with members – very focussed training • Excellent plenty to think about • Instructor was knowledgeable and easy to talk to. Very informative <p>Members are also able to identify development opportunities in the Personal Development Reviews which when circulated to the Head of Democratic can be included in individual or corporate member development plans</p>
	<p>The process receives effective support from the council’s corporate management team who ensures that information provided to overview & scrutiny is of high quality and is provided in a timely and consistent manner.</p>	<p>The Corporate Management Board are fully supportive of the Scrutiny process and regularly participate in scrutiny pre-agenda meetings to assist providing information to support the scrutiny FWP items being considered.</p> <p>Historically, there have been occasional issues with the provision of timely information and reports. This has led to the deferment of a report but it is accepted that all directorates have significant resourcing issues for the future which exemplifies the need for consistent agenda planning to ensure that directorates are able to adequately support the scrutiny process</p> <p>Estyn representatives in attendance at a Committee meeting witnessed that Scrutiny is monitoring the quality of reports and responding to a recommendation from their Local Authority inspection that reports going to Scrutiny are fit for purpose.</p> <p>Resourcing issues further led to reports being presented without sufficient detail and led to additional workloads for the Service areas due the number of further information requests and the increased number of times the topic was considered by the committee. Again this exemplifies the need for agenda planning and resourcing to support the scrutiny process</p> <p>Following the implementation of the Future Delivery of Effective Scrutiny report Scrutiny Officers take a more active and supportive role in the production of service area reports being presented to scrutiny committees. The intention was to improve the quality and timeliness of</p>

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		reports being presented to the committee which would allow the committees to have a comprehensive report on the topic in order for them to make appropriate recommendations without the need for additional information or meetings.
Practice	Overview & scrutiny is councillor-led, takes into account the views of the public, partners and regulators, and balances the prioritisation of community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance.	<p>As well as determining their Annual Forward Work Programme and identifying items for future meetings, part of the ongoing Scrutiny forward work programme process now includes the provision to revisit the items at each meeting and consider the list of future potential items to reprioritise as the Committees feels appropriate. A recent example of this has been where the Community, Environment and Leisure Scrutiny Committee determined to reprioritise the item on ‘Regeneration in the County Borough’ due to forthcoming changes in Corporate Priorities and future potential budget reductions in this area.</p> <p>Embedded in the ongoing forward work programme process is the option for Committees to refer specific items to other Scrutiny Committees for consideration. For example, this occurs frequently in the Corporate Resources and Improvement Committee as a result of the Committee’s monitoring of the LA’s performance including financial. It is then for the relevant Scrutiny Committee to determine where this item would then sit in terms of priorities on their own forward work programme.</p> <p>Members, with support from Officers, determined to reconfigure the Scrutiny process and remits to prevent duplication of work.</p> <p>BREP is proactively involved in developing future budget savings. They are able to bring their experience as Councillors in representing the views of their communities whilst realising the need for budget reductions within the Authority. and assisting to managing any potential tensions between the two.</p> <p>The BREP process identified that financial information was often presented out of context, making monitoring, evaluation and assessment of performance difficult.</p> <p>Scrutiny Officers worked with Officers in identifying and providing further data to address this issue, for example, information on budget savings to be used alongside budget pressures, advising on alternative formats to improve the clarity accessibility of the information and</p>

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		<p>requesting commentary to explain anomalies or extraordinary activities which may be 'masked' within top line figures.</p> <p>This has greatly improved the quality of information used to inform recommendations and decision making on budgets and financial planning. Furthermore, this approach will be used in future to ensure that all Committees have access to comprehensive information on both budget savings and budget pressures for each directorate to enable a better understanding of the overall budget position.</p>
	<p>Overview & scrutiny meetings and activities are well-planned, chaired effectively and make best use of the resources available to it.</p>	<p>As outlined in other headings there is a comprehensive forward work programme planning process which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Agenda meetings • Detailed report requests • A structured report approval system with set milestones for every stage e.g. Legal and Finance approval • Dedicated time allocated for Scrutiny Officers to meet with Chairs prior to Committee meetings to both understand and agree the focus that the Chair and the Members may wish for the meeting. • Pre-discussions in Committee meetings. <p>The scrutiny Chairs are “seasoned” elected members with wealth of experience of chairing general meetings. Their skills have been developed with the delivery of specific Scrutiny Chairs Training. This was a combined session with the first part including officers which enabled them to consider best practice and consistency across the range of scrutiny committees. Subsequently the chairs were able to discuss topics of their choice as a peer group with a facilitator without the officers in attendance. These sessions were well received by the Chairs and the facilitator commented that the Chairs were very intelligent and capable.</p> <p>Corporate Parenting - The role of the Corporate Parent is to seek for children in public care the outcomes every good parent would want for their own children. The Council as a whole is the ‘corporate parent’ therefore all Members have a level of responsibility for the children and young people looked after by Bridgend.</p>

“Better decisions” - Democratic decision making is accountable, inclusive and robust.

		<p>Scrutiny Corporate Parenting Champions support OVS Committees in this by advising them of the ongoing work of the Cabinet-Committee and particularly any decisions or changes which they should be aware of as Corporate Parents.</p> <p>Areas for improvement in reporting to and from Corporate Parenting Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committees were highlighted by Scrutiny Officers. Opportunities for the Corporate Champion to raise issues during the day to day business of OVSC were often limited as the arrangement was that all potential issues would be covered in biannual reports rather than whenever relevant subjects or issues were being discussed at OVSC meetings.</p> <p>Scrutiny Chairs were asked by Scrutiny Officers to review the arrangements for Corporate Parenting Champions providing feedback to and from Committees.</p> <p>The review resulted in an improved approach wherein Corporate Parenting Champions are asked to consider the items going to every OVSC meeting and to advise or update Members on any Corporate Committee work or decisions relevant to items during meetings, ensuring that links to the Corporate Parenting Committee are clearer and that feedback provided to and from Committees by Champions is timely and relevant and embedded in to the day to day work of the Committees.</p>
<p>Impact</p>	<p>Decision makers give public account for themselves at overview & scrutiny committees for their portfolio responsibilities.</p>	<p>In accordance with the constitution, Scrutiny Committees require Cabinet Members and Corporate Directors to attend Committee meetings give public account for themselves.</p> <p>They also attend pre-agenda meetings where discussions over the detail in the forward work programme take place between Cabinet members, Officers and the Scrutiny Chair. This ensures that the content and focus for reports going to OVSC meetings are agreed and that requests for information to be included in the reports are understood by everyone.</p> <p>Establishing these clear, agreed guidelines enables Scrutiny Officers to advise report authors on the inclusion and presentation of relevant information, resulting in accessible reports which provide an accurate reflection of requests from Members</p> <p>Reports to Cabinet containing recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee or</p>

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recommendations incorporated into Directorate Reports to Cabinet directly inform decision making process.

Scrutiny committee draw conclusions and also make recommendations to Officers as part of summing up at every committee meeting.
For example:

Parking Enforcement – recommendations to officers:

- The Committee recommended that Enforcement Officers work more closely in partnership with PCSOs to enable better communication and to ensure that issues are dealt with pro-actively and effectively.
- The Committee recommended that the impact of parking around schools on the safety of children be considered a priority when decisions are made on parking restriction and enforcement.
- The Committee recommended that clear information on cost and options for Town and Community Councils should be made available and a simplified process set in place to enable them to work with the Authority to improve communication and an understanding of the need of individual Councils and communities and the services and support available from the Authority.

Bridgend Change Programme - Building Capacity in the Third Sector and Town and Community Councils:

- The Committee recommended that a named BCBC Officer is identified as a single point of contact for interested parties requiring support when applying to undertake self-management of services, and for this arrangement to continue throughout the process to address concerns regarding lack of progress for some local parties who have expressed an interest in self-managing.

Front Line Street Scene Service Delivery:

- The Committee recommended that clear information on cost and options for Town and Community Councils should be made available and a simplified process set in place to enable them to work with the Authority to improve communication and an understanding of the need of individual Councils and communities and the services and support available from the

“Better decisions” - Democratic decision making is accountable, inclusive and robust.		
		Authority.
		These will be followed up and monitored in any subsequent reports on the subjects.

4.3 The following is the assessment of the “Better Engagement”, element of the Characteristics of Good Scrutiny.

“Better engagement” - The public is engaged in democratic debate about the current and future delivery of public services.		
Environment	Overview & scrutiny is recognised by the executive and corporate management team as an important council mechanism for community engagement, and facilitates greater citizen involvement in governance.	<p>The Bridgend County Borough Council Consultation and Engagement Toolkit was issued in August 2014 incorporates the Participation Cymru’s National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales, which have been adopted by the Council.</p> <p>The document helps to ensure that all consultation and engagement projects are consistent, robust and effective.</p> <p>The Overview and Scrutiny Team will incorporate the principles into the development of consultation and engagement guidance specific to Scrutiny later this year to improve to way that the Authority engages and informs members of the public in all aspects of Scrutiny activity.</p> <p>Further work with relating to public engagement with scrutiny is on the forward work programme for the Partnerships and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be considered later this year.</p>
Practice	Overview & scrutiny is characterised by effective communication to raise awareness of, and encourage participation in democratic accountability	<p>It is recognised that scrutiny needs to develop its ability to communicate effectively with the public and to raise awareness of, and encourage participation in democratic accountability</p> <p>Engagement opportunities are being developed with Town & Councils and third sector organisations to invite individuals with specific experience to scrutiny meetings. This will provide scrutiny the opportunity to hear the views of others and gather evidence to make appropriate recommendations</p> <p>The BCBC webpages are also being reviewed to raise awareness of the scrutiny process and encourage active participation</p> <p>The planned development of the Webcasting facilities of the Authority have been put on</p>

“Better engagement” - The public is engaged in democratic debate about the current and future delivery of public services.

		<p>temporary hold until clarification is received regarding the revised welsh language standards. It is anticipated to the implementation of the webcasting facility will encourage greater engagement from and participation from the public.</p>
	<p>Overview & scrutiny operates non-politically and deals effectively with sensitive political issues, tension and conflict.</p>	<p>Every Committee and Research and Evaluation Panel investigation has flexible but clear terms of reference. BREP has cross party membership. BREP considers contentious issues at the early stages of development which Members approach with confidentiality and objectivity, irrespective of political allegiances.</p>
	<p>Overview & scrutiny builds trust and good relationships with a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders.</p>	<p>Local Service Board – This year Scrutiny Officers carried out a review of the Membership of the LSB Scrutiny Panel. The membership has been updated to better reflect the membership of the LSB, with non-executive members or members of trustee boards from partner organisations to ensure that Scrutiny is carried out objectively and comprehensively.</p> <p>Scrutiny also recommended 'delaying' the structure of the Local Service Board, consequently the current structure is clearer and more efficient and processes for information sharing, decision making and the development and progression of projects and activities are more effective.</p> <p>The substantial contribution that Scrutiny has made in supporting the streamlining of the structure and improving the efficiency of processes has been recognised by LSB Partners. Furthermore, the new structure will help to support the preparative work to ensure a smooth transition to Public Service Board in future.</p> <p>Committees have also engaged with Trade Unions, Registered Social Landlords, Representatives from local Businesses, Headteachers and Chairs of Governors</p>
<p>Impact</p>	<p>Overview and scrutiny enables the 'voice' of local people and communities across the area to be heard as part of decision and policy-making processes.</p>	<p>Members are proactive in their constituent roles and bring their experience from this into Scrutiny Committees whilst ensuring that they avoid a colloquial approach.</p> <p>Scrutiny challenges the Authority’s consultation and engagement process and ensures findings from consultation and engagement activities are included in reports and are listened to, presented objectively used to directly inform decisions.</p> <p>For example during the Call-In of Cabinet</p>

“Better engagement” - The public is engaged in democratic debate about the current and future delivery of public services.		
		Decision regarding the Provision for Pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Outcome of Consultations on Proposal for Changes to Pencoed Primary School – Members questioned the consultation process and the interpretation of the findings and provided a report to Cabinet with a series of comments and recommendations. The impact of this was that Cabinet abandoned the proposal to close the moderate learning difficulties (MLD) Learning Resource Centre for 1 September 2015 at Pencoed Primary School to enable a monitoring period to take place and robust information to be compiled to inform any further decisions on service provision.

4.4 Committee activity also uses the Centre for Public Scrutiny’s four principles of effective Scrutiny to capture some of the complexities associated with the Overview & Scrutiny process. These are as follows:

1. Provides ‘critical friend’ challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers.
2. Enables the voice and concerns of the public.
3. Is carried out by ‘independent minded governors’ who lead and own the scrutiny role.
4. Drives improvement in public services.

4.4.1 Principle 1 - Provides ‘critical friend’ challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers.

Scrutiny Committees receive pre-decision Scrutiny reports throughout the year and they respond with recommendations to Cabinet to help to inform and improve decision making. There is evidence of direct impact from some of these, for example following the presentation of a report to Scrutiny on Learner Transport, where the recommendations of the Children and Young People Committee resulted in a change to proposals presented in relation to faith and Welsh Schools. The recommendations from the Committee also contributed substantially to the improvement of the overall quality of the consultation process by ensuring that further consultation was carried and that young people were engaged and their views were taken into account and used to inform the final decision.

Another example is the change to the way that Scrutiny of the Council’s Corporate Plan is carried out, where Members identified that there had been no timely opportunity to enable all Chairs to contribute to the process of consultation, evaluation and development of the Corporate Plan and, therefore, no corporate or overview response from Scrutiny was included in the consultation. To address this issue the Community, Safety and Governance (now Partnership and Governance) Committee invited all Scrutiny and Overview Committee Chairs to scrutinise the Plan, including the improvement priorities, actions to priorities and the commitments for 2015-16. The result of this was that all Chairs had the opportunity to contribute to the process, providing a ‘critical friend’ perspective and ensuring that a

representative, corporate wide response informed the consultation. All recommendations resulting from the joint exercise were accepted and implemented in the production of the final Corporate Plan before it was presented to Cabinet.

There are currently a series of recommendations awaiting formal responses from Cabinet which are being monitored by Scrutiny. Work will be undertaken with senior officers and Cabinet to develop a process to ensure that responses by Cabinet to recommendations from Scrutiny are received in a consistent and timely manner.

4.4.2 Principle 2 - Enables the voice and concerns of the public.

Through the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel both last year and already in the current year, members are extremely focused on ensuring that the views of the public are represented when considering any future savings proposals. In addition to this the Panel scrutinise and monitor the budget public consultation as a whole, ensuring that it is inclusive and accessible.

Committees are continuously seeking opportunities to identify and engage a range of independent representatives to help to scrutinise services provided or managed by the Authority. Some examples of external invitees to Scrutiny Committees are representatives from local businesses, trade unions, registered local landlords and school governors. Further work will be carried out to enable Scrutiny to encourage individuals, communities and organisations to raise awareness and understanding of the role of Scrutiny and of the opportunities for them to engage and participate in the scrutiny process.

4.4.3 Principle 3 - Is carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny role.

Members identified the risk of duplication or oversight when scrutiny of performance and budget was carried out separately by each of the five individual Committees. A review of the way in which information on performance and budget is reported and presented to Committees led to an agreement that the reports should be coordinated via the CRI Forward Work Programme and presented at CRI Committee meetings where all Scrutiny Chairs and Corporate Directors will attend to ensure a 'joined up', corporate wide approach to scrutinising performance.

This approach was piloted and was a positive experience and led to further developments to improve in the structure of the reports. Members have now requested that both reports are combined, resulting in a more effective and concise report which reflects the structure and flow of the meeting and ensures that Officer and Member time is used effectively during meetings.

Where Committees have received reports which have not been fit for purpose, for example due to incomplete, unclear or inaccurate information, they use a clear and consistent approach by using the option available to them to defer reports, thereby reinforcing the requirement for Officers to work with Scrutiny to Improve the quality of information going to Committees. This has resulted in a considerable improvement in the quality and completeness of information used by Members to monitor and challenge performance.

4.4.4 Principle 4 - Drives improvement in public services

Committees regularly carry out detailed performance and budget monitoring whereby Members evaluate the Council's Improvement Priorities, National and Local Performance Indicators as well as monitor the Authority's Revenue and Capital budgets. This enables continuous accountability and challenge of how public money is being allocated and spent by the Authority, ensuring value for money.

In addition to this, Scrutiny Members continuously monitor and challenge future financial plans for the Authority and contribute to the establishment of a coherent budget strategy that is based on a longer term view through the BREP. In this role, Members contribute substantially to the development of innovative ways of maintaining and improving public services working with diminished resources.

4.5 Further Development

4.5.1 Further work will be carried out

- to develop and improve current processes to enable Scrutiny Officers to better track and monitor recommendations once they have been made to Cabinet or Officers.
- with senior officers and Cabinet to develop a process to ensure that responses by Cabinet to recommendations from Scrutiny are received in a consistent and timely manner.
- to develop the ability of Scrutiny to communicate effectively with the public and to better facilitate engagement and participation in democratic accountability.

4.5.2 The scrutiny function is subject to the same reductions in resources as much of the Authority. The developments and improvements achieved during this year have been carried out within this context. Every effort is being made to ensure that the scrutiny function in Bridgend is carried out to the high standards that have become expected of the service. For the future however it is more important than ever for the committees to concentrate their efforts on issues that impact the most on the operation of the Authority. The intention to provide collaborative scrutiny committees has not progressed and requires the commitment and resources across the partner authorities.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

5.1 This report accords with the relevant Procedure Rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment.

6.1 There are no equality implications attached to this report.

7. Financial Implications.

7.1 There are no financial implications regarding this report.

8. Recommendation.

8.1 Council is recommended to note the contents of this report.

P A Jolley

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Background documents: None were used in the production of this report