



**Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council  
Annual Scrutiny Report 2020-21**

# Scrutiny Committee Chairpersons



**Cllr Mandy Moore**  
Community Services  
Scrutiny Committee



**Cllr Stewart Healy \***  
Corporate Overview Scrutiny  
Committee



**Cllr Haydn Trollope\* \***  
Education and Learning  
Scrutiny Committee



**Cllr John Hill**  
Regeneration Scrutiny  
Committee



**Cllr Steve Thomas \*\***  
Social Services Scrutiny  
Committee

**\*Councillor Stewart Healy** is also Chair of the Joint (Budget) Scrutiny Committee and the Public Service Board Scrutiny Committee.

**\*\*Councillors Haydn Trollope** and **Stephen Thomas** jointly chair (on a rotational basis) the Joint Education and Learning and Social Services (Safeguarding) Scrutiny Committee.

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## Introduction

Welcome to Blaenau Gwent's Annual Scrutiny Report 2020/21 which gives an overview of the work undertaken by each Scrutiny Committee in what has been a year of unprecedented change.

On 23rd March 2020, the UK Government announced an unprecedented UK-wide 'lockdown' in order to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Along with other local authorities, the decision was taken to suspend the full schedule of formal Council Committees at the end of March 2020.

Owing to the first 'lock down' from March 2020 to July 2020, and officers being redeployed to support the emergency, there was a delayed start to the full Committee cycle which commenced in September 2020. However, the Annual General Meeting of Council was held via telephone conference during April 2020 and the Executive Committee and Regulatory Committees also continued to meet.

The Coronavirus Pandemic led the Council to adapt to new ways of working, for its committee meetings, such as conducting their meetings virtually via Microsoft Teams.

Despite the formal committee meetings starting later in the year, Scrutiny Members have continued to effectively challenge and influence the Council's decision-making process and add value to a wide range of activity, in order to deliver effective outcomes for the people of Blaenau Gwent.

Scrutiny in Blaenau Gwent is made up of five scrutiny committees that collectively support the work of the Executive Committee and Council, this allows non-Executive members to influence how local and strategic policy can work more effectively for the people they serve. There is also two Joint Scrutiny Committees for Budget Monitoring and Safeguarding for children, young people and adults; and a Public Services Board Scrutiny Committee, that scrutinises the work of the Public Services Board.

## Forward Work Programmes

Work to develop the **Forward Work Programmes (FWPs) for 2020/21** began during February / March 2020, however, owing to the COVID 19 pandemic and officers being redeployed to support emergency work, the FWP development stopped and recommenced in June / July 2020 to support the restarting of the Committee meeting cycle in September 2020. Work included:

- Meetings with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs and Officers using Microsoft Teams to further develop the FWPs. The Executive Members were also invited to observe these meetings.
- Informal Scrutiny Member Briefing Sessions were held via MS Teams with each Scrutiny Committee during July 2020, to discuss and finalise the Draft FWPs with individual scrutiny committees.
- The FWPs were formally signed off by each of the Scrutiny Committees during September 2020, then translated and made available for public view on the BG website.

## Reporting on the COVID-19 Pandemic to Scrutiny Committees

Scrutiny Committee Members have received reports during the year on how the Directorates have responded to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The Social Services Scrutiny Committee received a report at its meeting on 17th September 2020 and at the request of the Committee a further report focusing on the Children's Services response to vulnerable children was presented to the Committee on 17th March 2021.

The Education and Learning Scrutiny received a report on the Directorate's response to COVID-19 at its meeting on 3rd November 2020, and continued to receive verbal updates from the Corporate Director of Education at future meetings, in order to keep the committee informed of the changes being made regarding the schools and its pupils. The Committee requested a further formal report, which was presented to committee at its meeting on 20th April 2021.

The Regeneration Scrutiny Committee received a report on 23rd September 2020, to inform Members how the Directorate had supported businesses in the County Borough during the Pandemic.

All these reports can be found via this link: <http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1> and then by selecting the appropriate Committee and relevant date (detailed above).

## Scrutiny in Figures for 2020/21

**41 FORMAL  
COMMITTEE  
MEETINGS HELD**

**3 TASK AND FINISH  
GROUP MEETINGS**

**20 PRE DECISION  
SCRUTINY AGENDA  
ITEMS**

**543 MEMBERS  
OUT OF A TOTAL  
OF 696 ATTENDED  
SCRUTINY  
MEETINGS**

**96 UNIQUE VIEWS  
OF COMMITTEE  
MEETINGS ONLINE**

**17 MEMBER  
BRIEFING  
SESSIONS HELD**

**MOST VIEWED  
REGENERATION  
SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE ON  
2/12/20**

## Community Services Scrutiny Committee

**Chair:** Councillor Mandy Moore

**Vice-Chair:** Councillor Clive Meredith

**Members:**

Councillors: Peter Baldwin, Martin Cook, Malcolm Cross, Malcolm Day, Phill Edwards, Stewart Healy, Wayne Hodgins, Julie Holt, John C Morgan, Greg Paulsen, Tim Sharrem, Bob Summers, Lisa Winnett

The table below details an example of activity the Scrutiny Committee has undertaken during the year:

Topic	Activity	Outcome
Position Report Fly Grazing Horses	The Committee was provided with a report outlining the scale of the fly grazing issue, including the identification of geographical locations where the problem was most often reported. The report also set out the legislative and policy framework which was used to resolve incidents.	<p>The report was discussed in detail by Members and a recommendation was made to the Executive Committee that consideration be given to the Council to look to work with partners, and be granted permission to pursue enforcement with regard to the Control of Horses Act in prolific areas and in line with Objective 2 - 'Blaenau Gwent wants safe and friendly communities' of the Well-being Plan.</p> <p>The Executive Committee considered the report at its meeting in April 2020 and agreed to support the recommendation made by the Community Services Scrutiny Committee.</p>





### Policies, Plans and Strategies

The committee has considered and made recommendations where appropriate on the following topics:

- Flood Risk Management Strategy
- Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plan
- Litter Strategy



### Monitoring and Progress Updates

As part of its monitoring role, the committee received monitoring and progress updates in relation to the following topics:

- Highways Capital Works Programme
- Waste and Recycling Performance
- Civil Parking Enforcement
- Littering and Dog Control Enforcement
- Cemetery Burial Capacity



### Member Learning and Development

The following member briefing sessions, identified as part of the Committee's Forward Work Programme, were arranged, to which all members were invited to attend:

- Wood Facility / Central Depot
- Civil Parking Enforcement
- The Coal Authority (Disused Tips)

## Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee

**Chair:** Councillor Stewart Healy

**Vice-Chair:** Councillor Martin Cook

**Members:**

Councillors: Peter Baldwin, Garth Collier, Malcolm Cross, Gareth A Davies, Lyn Elias, John Hill, Julie Holt, Hedley McCarthy, Clive Meredith, John P Morgan, Greg Paulsen, Tommy Smith, Steve Thomas.

The table below details an example of activity the Scrutiny Committee has undertaken during the year:

Topic	Activity	Outcome
Public Space CCTV System Annual Monitoring Report 2020	The Committee received the report which provided an overview of the work undertaken during 2020.	<p>The Committee recommended that the Annual Monitoring report be endorsed by the Executive and also made a further recommendation that the Executive Committee investigate the possibilities of extra funding for the system in liaison with the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and a paper be brought back to the Scrutiny Committee to review the equality of provision across the County Borough.</p> <p>The Executive Committee considered the report and the Scrutiny Committee's recommendation.</p> <p>It was noted by the Managing Director that following discussions with the OPCC it had been confirmed that additional funding would not be available, as the system did not include live monitoring.</p>

## Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee



### Policies, Plans and Strategies

The committee has considered and made recommendations where appropriate on the following topics:

- Information Security Policy
- Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Policy
- Trans Equality Policy
- ICT Acceptable Usage Policy



### Monitoring and Progress Updates

As part of its monitoring role, the committee received monitoring and progress updates in relation to the following topics:

- Treasury Management
- Position Statement on CCTV
- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Communications Strategy
- Commercial Strategy



### Member Learning and Development

The following member briefing sessions, identified as part of the Committee's Forward Work Programme, were arranged, to which all members were invited to attend:

- One Council COVID-19
- Organisational Development Strategy
- EU Transition

Local Government and Elections Bill

## Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee

**Chair:** Councillor Haydn Trollope

**Vice-Chair:** Councillor Julie Holt

**Members:**

Councillors: Derrick Bevan, Garth Collier, Martin Cook, Malcolm Day, Lyn Elias, John Hill, Clive Meredith, John C Morgan, John P Morgan, Lee Parsons, Tommy Smith, Bob Summers, David Wilkshire.

The table below details an example of activity the Scrutiny Committee has undertaken during the year:

Topic	Activity	Outcome
Welsh Medium Education Consultation Proposal	A report was presented to the Committee in relation to the proposal to consult upon the creation of a new 210 places Welsh Medium primary school in the Tredegar / Sirhowy valley.	Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee were statutory consultees, and a consultation session with Members was held on 18th January 2021. The Committee posed a number of questions at the consultation event, e.g. impact on local schools, home to school transport budget savings and capacity at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg, and overall Members were supportive of the proposal to create a new Welsh Medium.

# Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee



## Policies, Plans and Strategies

The committee has considered and made recommendations where appropriate on the following topics:

- Local Authority Governor Policy
- Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
- School Admissions Policy for Nursery and Statutory Education
- School Organisation Policy



## Monitoring and Progress Updates

As part of its monitoring role, the committee received monitoring and progress updates in relation to the following topics:

- Self Evaluation
- School Inspection Outcomes
- Management of Pupil Places and the School Estate
- Youth Service Performance
- 21st Century Schools Programme



## Member Learning and Development

The following member briefing sessions, identified as part of the Committee's Forward Work Programme, were arranged, to which all members were invited to attend:

- The Role of the EAS
- Annual Performance Coleg Gwent

# Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

**Chair:** Councillor John Hill

**Vice-Chair:** Councillor Gareth A. Davies

**Members:**

Councillors: Martin Cook, Malcolm Cross, Gareth L Davies, Phill Edwards, Keith Hayden, Stewart Healy, Wayne Hodgins, Hedley McCarthy, John C Morgan, John P Morgan, Lee Parsons, Keri Rowson, Bernard Willis.

The table below details an example of activity the Scrutiny Committee has undertaken during the year:

Topic	Activity	Outcome
Town Centre Task and Finish and Economic Response following COVID-19	The committee received a report detailing the work undertaken by the Task and Finish Group since its establishment in 2019, and also to agree to re-establish the group to continue the work on the Town Centre Strategy.	<p>The Committee agreed to re-establish the Task and Finish Group.</p> <p>It also agreed that the group would revisit previous areas considered to ensure that they aligned with any COVID-19 adaptations that may be required; and that prior to the first meeting of the Task and Finish Group members would be provided with a briefing note of previous discussions and to confirm next steps.</p> <p>The first meeting would also agree timelines and outcomes for the Task and Finish Group.</p>



## Policies, Plans and Strategies

The committee has considered and made recommendations where appropriate on the following topics:

- Replacement Local Delivery Plan
- Employment and Skills Plan
- Brynmawr and Nantyglo Masterplan



## Monitoring and Progress Updates

As part of its monitoring role, the committee received monitoring and progress updates in relation to the following topics:

- Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme
- Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Quarterly Performance
- Energy Prospectus Annual Review
- Targeted Regeneration Funding Update



## Member Learning and Development

The following member briefing sessions, identified as part of the Committee's Forward Work Programme, were arranged, to which all members were invited to attend:

- Local Development Plan

# Social Services Scrutiny Committee

**Chair:** Councillor Steve Thomas

**Vice-Chair:** Councillor Keri Rowson

**Members:**

Councillors: Derrick Bevan, Garth Collier, Gareth A Davies, Gareth L Davies, Phill Edwards, Keith Hayden, Wayne Hodgins, Julie Holt, Mandy Moore, Greg Paulsen, Tim Sharrem, Tommy Smith, Bob Summers.

The table below details an example of activity the Scrutiny Committee has undertaken during the year:

Topic	Activity	Outcome
Update on Legal Costs associated with Children's Services	<p>The Committee received a report in relation to the Children's Social Services legal budget.</p> <p>This report was not a public report, as it was likely that there would be disclosure of exempt information.</p> <p>Following a detailed discussion the Committee agreed to recommend to the Executive Committee that understanding the difficulties in finding a solution to the issue of legal support, that discussions are prioritised with neighbouring local authorities in an effort to seek a wider solution regarding the collaboration in relation to providing legal services for Children's Services; and also that senior politicians continue to highlight the position in Blaenau Gwent with the WLGA and other</p>	<p>The Executive considered the recommendations by the Scrutiny Committee, but did not support their recommendation as the Executive felt that senior politicians regularly raise the issue of funding within Children's Social Services; and with regards to the discussions with neighbouring authorities, this was already high on the agenda, but had been paused owing to the COVID 19 pandemic.</p>





## Policies, Plans and Strategies

The committee has considered and made recommendations where appropriate on the following topics:

- Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy
- Living Independently in the 21st Century Strategy



## Monitoring and Progress Updates

As part of its monitoring role, the committee received monitoring and progress updates in relation to the following topics:

- Children Looked After
- Regional Partnership Board
- National Adoption Service
- Corporate Parenting
- Community Meals



## Member Learning and Development

The following member briefing sessions, identified as part of the Committee's Forward Work Programme, were arranged, to which all members were invited to attend:

- Changes to Healthcare Services in Gwent
- Transforming Adult Mental Health Services

## Monitoring Member Attendance at Scrutiny Committee Meetings

The table below shows a comparison of the number of meetings held and member attendance from 1st September 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> April 2021 compared to the same period in the year 2019/20.

Member Attendance at Scrutiny Committees							
	Agreed Committee Membership	Total Members Due to Attend Sep 20 to Apr 21	Actual Members in Attendance Sep 20 – Apr 21	% of Members in attendance Sept 20-Apr 21	% of Members in attendance Sept 19 -Apr 20	Number of Meetings Held Sep 20 to Apr 21	Number of Meetings Held Sep 19 to Apr 20
Community Services	15	105	83	79	66	7	6
Corporate Overview	15	75	56	75	61	5	6
Education and Learning	15	105	87	83	82	7	6
Regeneration	15	120	96	80	68	8	6
Social Services	15	90	71	79	79	6	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>29</b>
Joint Safeguarding	23	46	31	67	61	2	1
Joint Budget	32	128	96	75	59	4	3
PSB	15	30	23	77	33	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>696</b>	<b>543</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>35</b>

\* 6 meetings were scheduled to be held during April 2020, however, these meetings were cancelled owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.