

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

HELD AT COUNCIL CHAMBER, GUILDHALL ON MONDAY, 16 MARCH
2015 AT 4.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor M H Jones (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)	Councillor(s)	Councillor(s)
R A Clay	J P Curtice	J W Jones
A C S Colburn	N J Davies	R V Smith
D W Cole	E W Fitzgerald	G J Tanner
S E Crouch		

Co-opted Members:

D Anderson-Thomas

Officers:

W Parkin - Senior Lawyer
B Madahar - Scrutiny Co-ordinator
S Woon - Democratic Services Officer

181 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A M Cook, P Downing, T J Hennegan, P M Meara and Mrs S Joiner.

It was noted that Councillor Andrew Jones had now stood down from the committee. The chair paid thanks to his contributions on behalf of the committee.

182 **DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL & PREJUDICIAL INTEREST.**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, no interests were declared.

183 **PROHIBITION OF WHIPPED VOTES AND DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPS.**

In accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, no declarations of Whipped Votes or Party Whips were declared.

184 **MINUTES:**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Scrutiny Programme Committee held on 16 February, 2015, be agreed as a correct record.

185 **CABINET MEMBER QUESTION SESSION:**

a. Cabinet Member for Anti Poverty

The Committee took the opportunity to question Councillor W Evans, Cabinet Member for Anti Poverty.

Members noted the short report on 'headlines' in relation to portfolio objectives which assisted the Committee in focusing on priorities, actions, achievements and impact.

The Cabinet Member referred to poverty as being far reaching and detailed the Joseph Rowntree Foundation definition of poverty. He advised that Poverty was one of the Council's 5 Corporate Priorities.

Members noted the increasing number of food banks within the Swansea area and the lower super output areas identifying areas of deprivation. He referred to the inequality in terms of life expectancy between Swansea East and West.

Members asked questions of the Cabinet Member who responded accordingly.

The Cabinet Member stated that he would provide written responses in relation to:

- The development of the LIFT Programme and difference between the Communities First Programme and LIFT Programme in relation to work carried out to get adults into work;
- Timescales for developing and implementing a Local Delivery Framework in respect of the first phase of roll out of Universal Credit;
- Changes to the Target Areas approach previously established by the Cabinet;
- Cuts to the Community Food and Growing Team and the proposed establishment of a Community Interest Company; and
- The source of the data and clarification about boundaries when talking about the difference in life expectancy figures between East and West Swansea...

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for attending.

RESOLVED that the Chair of Scrutiny Programme Committee write to the Cabinet Member reflecting the discussion and sharing the views of the Committee.

**COUNCILLOR R V SMITH (VICE CHAIR) PRESIDED FOR THE FOLLOWING
ITEM ONLY**

b. Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities

The Committee took the opportunity to question Councillor D Hopkins, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities.

Members noted the short report on 'headlines' in relation to portfolio objectives which assisted the Committee in focusing on priorities, actions, achievements and impact.

The Cabinet Member referred to the diverse range of services covered by his Portfolio which included Council housing; preventing homelessness; improvements in renewal areas; Disabled Facilities Grants and energy efficiency schemes; Welsh Housing Quality Standard and Bricks and Mortar. He referred to the additional resources from the Housing Revenue Account, the exact amount would be known by the end of the month. He stated that there was considerable investment in affordable housing and he welcomed any assistance scrutiny could provide in the future.

Members asked questions of the Cabinet Member who responded accordingly.

The Cabinet Member stated that he would provide a written response in relation to:

- The ability to control number of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in areas where there is already a high density;
- Issues associated with the amalgamation of Council housing waiting lists with registered social landlords; and
- Progress on the suspension of the right to buy scheme.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for attending.

RESOLVED that the Chair of Scrutiny Programme Committee write to the Cabinet Member reflecting the discussion and sharing the views of the Committee.

186 **SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE PANEL PROGRESS REPORT - SCHOOLS
(COUNCILLOR FIONA GORDON ATTENDING).**

Councillor Gordon, the Convenor of the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel presented her third update to the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

She advised that the Panel currently meets on a monthly basis and the work completed since the last update in December included:

- In December a session dedicated to looking at the Annual Education Performance Data was held and included the Cabinet Member for Education and the Chief Education Officer.
- In January the panel met with the Challenge Advisor, Head teacher and Chair of Governors for Clwyd Primary School.
- In February the Panel looked at how Pupil Deprivation Grant has been spent in schools across Swansea and the most recent school categorisation.
- Over this period the Panel had kept up to date with individual school Estyn Inspections publications and any advisory/practice documents including for example: relevant Estyn Inspection outcomes for Swansea, Estyn and other guidance information.

Councillor Gordon referred her letters to letters and responses received from Cabinet Members. Some of the issues raised and responded to included:

- The Wales Government Grant and regional allocations in particular how it will affect our Ethnic Minority and Achievement Services (EMLAS) in Swansea. The Panel recognised the good outcomes that the service produces and had concerns about the funding gap that will be apparent arising from the changing grant allocations. Councillor Gordon expressed some concern about progress in relation to the departmental review of EMLAS and asked the committee to write to the Cabinet Member for further information.
- Concern about the possible 'super' education budget allocation, with part of the education budget potentially being allocated to the region and decisions being made and monies shared with authorities who have different needs and priorities.
- The panel had been (and would be) following up on a number of issues that had been highlighted by schools when they have met with them including:
 - The issue of children being put on a school roll but never actually attending that school because they are on an educated other than at school pathway. Some schools are concerned that these children are on their roll but they have no control over their outcomes or attendance and that in turn skews their performance figures.
 - Recruitment of and dealing with competency issues in relation to teaching staff.
 - The Special Educational Needs budget formula and its allocation to schools.

Councillor Gordon referred to the future work programme which included the Panel examining the Education Funding Formula and particularly SEN Funding. It will also assess their years work and start to plan for the next municipal year. Contact had been made by email with Councillors, Head teachers and School Governors around future topics for education scrutiny which the Panel will consider at this meeting.

Members discussed:

- the role of the Head teacher and expressed concern regarding the amount of time Head teachers may be spending away from attainment matters dealing with Social Services (e.g. as designated named officer for child protection) and buildings issues and questioned whether there would be a more efficient manner in working; and
- the education funding formula. A specific issue was raised in respect of schools where there is a transient population (e.g. close to the University) and impact this has on the school budget not adequately dealt with by the funding formula.

It was noted that the March meeting of the Panel (which planned to look at the Education funding formula) had to be cancelled because of short term resources issues within the Education department. There was also concern raised in respect of the Transformation of Adult Social Services Panel about difficulties in obtaining information and attendance that has also led to cancelled meetings. The chair advised that if there are issues with the scrutiny process that cannot be resolved by conveners then these should be referred to the committee for action.

The Chair thanked the Councillor F M Gordon for the update and the Panel for its work.

RESOLVED that the updated be **NOTED**.

187 **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2014 - 15.**

The Chair presented an update on the Scrutiny Work Programme which explained the background and purpose of the Work Programme and the current position of all scrutiny activities. She referred to the work currently active and progress with the established Scrutiny Panels and Working Groups. The Work Plan Timetable for future Committee Meetings was also provided.

She advised that:

- Cabinet had now made a decision on the Public Engagement Scrutiny Inquiry report. On 17 February it agreed 15 out of the 16 recommendations (1 in part) and agreed an action plan. The Scrutiny Panel would reconvene for the purpose of following up on the action plan and impact of this inquiry. The committee noted that a response to the Street Scene Inquiry was also scheduled for 14 April Cabinet.
- The Corporate Culture Scrutiny Inquiry was almost at the point of concluding evidence gathering. The inquiry is projected to complete in May.
- The pre-inquiry Working Group which met to consider School Governance has agreed to proceed with an inquiry – terms of reference being drawn up and will be reported to the committee as soon as possible.
- The Sustainability Working Group had met on 9 March and following initial discussion agreed to hold a second meeting to look at further information requested and to discuss conclusions and recommendations for the Conveners letter.

Further information requested included:

1. looking at an issue in more practical terms, a case study on sustainability in relation to Food Security
2. looking at the document/tool used to for sustainability impact assessments
3. looking at examples of some future trends and how we are addressing these.

It was noted that further correspondence had also been received in relation to Parkland Primary School. The chair reminded the Committee that it had already written to the Cabinet Member on this matter and was awaiting a response.

RESOLVED that the further correspondence received in relation to Parkland Primary School be forwarded to the Cabinet Member for Education with a reminder to respond to the committee's letter.

188 **MEMBERSHIP OF SCRUTINY PANELS AND WORKING GROUPS.**

The Chair presented a report which advised of changes required to the membership of Scrutiny Panels and Working Groups.

RESOLVED that:

- a. Councillor A C S Colburn be appointed as Convenor of the Sustainability Scrutiny Working Group; and
- b. Councillor J W Jones be added to the Membership of the School Governance Inquiry Panel and Sustainability Working Group.

189 **SCRUTINY LETTERS:**

The Chair reported the updated Scrutiny Letters Log and referred to the recent correspondence between Scrutiny and Cabinet Members.

There was some concern regarding the Cabinet Member for Education's response to the Committee's letter following the session in December.

The issues were detailed as follows:

- EMLAS Review – there was concern that the review which began 18 months ago still does not have a completion date. This was particularly important given the cuts to schools budgets and to the EMLAS service and the impact on schools with large numbers of children from ethnic minorities and those with English as a second language.
- EOTAS Review - the Cabinet member's letter states that there has been a meeting of the Education Inclusion Inquiry Panel on this. Although that is positive it would be helpful to know the status of the internal review.

RESOLVED that:

- a. The Chair write to the Cabinet Member for Education seeking further information in relation to the EMLAS and EOTAS reviews; and
- b. the Scrutiny Letters Log be **NOTED**.

190 **FEEDBACK FROM RECENT SCRUTINY EVENTS:**

The Chair referred to the recent visit to the National Assembly for Wales – Public Engagement on 12 February and the Western Bay Regional Scrutiny Seminar on 23 February.

Members expressed frustration about progress in relation to scrutiny of the regional Western Bay Programme. It was noted that governance has only recently been confirmed by leaders / portfolio holders and that a report back from organisers of the seminar is awaited that will inform further discussion on scrutiny of the Western Bay and practical issue for the committee to consider.

191 **UPCOMING SCRUTINY EVENTS:**

The following upcoming events were noted:

- Scrutiny Improvement Workshop on 18 March
- National Conference on Scrutiny, Partnership, Collaboration and Regulation.

The chair also informed committee members about regional engagement events being organised by the Welsh Government to raise awareness of proposals set out in the White Paper (Reforming Local Government). The event for the Western Bay areas was taking place on 31 March and members were invited to attend one of 2 sessions (either 10.00am-12.30pm or 2.00-4.30pm).

192 **FOR INFORMATION: AUDIT COMMITTEE WORK PLAN.**

RESOLVED that the Audit Committee Work Plan be **NOTED**.

193 **DATE AND TIME OF FUTURE COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2014/15 MUNICIPAL YEAR (ALL AT 4.30 P.M. EXCEPT WHERE NOTED):**

The date and time of the last meeting of the 2014/2015 Municipal Year was submitted for information.

194 **DATE AND TIME OF UPCOMING PANEL / WORKING GROUP MEETINGS:**

The date and time of upcoming Panel/Working Group meetings were submitted for information to help increase the visibility of this work and encourage participation.

The meeting ended at 6.08 pm

CHAIR