



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Programme Committee**

Multi-Location Meeting - Gloucester Room, Guildhall / MS

Teams

Tuesday, 19 March 2024 at 4.00 pm

Present: Councillor P M Black (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s)

A Davis
M Jones
F D O'Brien

Councillor(s)

E W Fitzgerald
W G Lewis
S Pritchard

Councillor(s)

V A Holland
P N May
T M White

Statutory Co-opted Member(s)

Elizabeth Lee

Councillor Co-opted Member(s)

C A Holley

S M Jones

P Hood-Williams

Officer(s)

Samantha Jenkins
Sarah Lackenby
Brij Madahar
Debbie Smith

Democratic Services Officer
Head of Digital and Customer Services
Scrutiny Team Leader
Deputy Chief Legal Officer

Also present

Councillor E King – Cabinet Member for Culture, Human Rights & Equalities

Councillor R V Smith – Cabinet Member for Education & Learning

Councillor A S Lewis – Cabinet Member for Service Transformation

Apologies for Absence

Statutory Co-opted Member(s): Beth Allender

Councillor Co-opted Members: L R Jones

85 Disclosures of Personal & Prejudicial Interest.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, the following interests were declared:

Councillor M Jones – Personal – Minute 89 - Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2022-23.

86 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.

87 Minutes.

Resolved that the Minutes of the Special Scrutiny Programme Committee held on 1 February 2024 and Scrutiny Programme Committee held on 13 February 2024 be approved and signed as correct records.

88 Public Question Time.

None.

89 Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2022-23.

The Cabinet Member for Culture, Human Rights & Equalities and the Cabinet Member for Education & Learning presented the Welsh Language Scheme Annual Report 2022-2023. The report provided a summary of the activities relating to Welsh Standards within the financial year ending 31st March 2023; including new projects and activities during the year.

The Cabinet Member for Culture, Human Rights & Equalities stated that since 30 March 2016 all local authorities in Wales have had a statutory duty to comply with the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure (2011) and with Welsh Language Standards imposed by the Measure through sub-legislation (Welsh Language Regulation Standards), commonly referred to as the 'Standards'.

It was noted that Swansea Council was required to comply with 163 standards across 5 categories. Standards 158, 164 and 170 require the Council to produce an annual report which detailed how it has complied with the standards.

Committee questioning and discussions focussed on the following:

- Signage – The Cabinet Member for Culture, Human Rights & Equalities stated that the Welsh Language requirements were that when we erect a new sign or renew a sign (including temporary signs), any text displayed on the sign must also be displayed in Welsh. Therefore it is possible that some older signs still in place are not bilingual, but would need to be when they are replaced in the future. A specific query was raised about signage in and around Parks, and a specific location which the Cabinet Member undertook to follow up with the Committee Member.
- Translation Service – following up on an issue raised when discussing last year's report, the Cabinet Member for Education & Learning detailed the cost comparison between the in-house Welsh Translation Service and external translation services. Whilst the provision of external translators, or an external translation service was significantly more cost effective per annum, there were reasons why an internal translation service was preferred. He referred to

improvements being made / explored to improve the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the service.

- Service Delivery Standards – the Cabinet Member for Culture, Human Rights & Equalities highlighted action taken to introduce new automated processes to improve the service in order that users access to services bilingually..
- Simultaneous Translation – there was a query about a reference in the report to Zoom licences having also been procured for facilitators to enable simultaneous translation. As the Council was corporately using MS Teams, which has functionality for translation, the Cabinet Members were asked why this was necessary. A written response would be provided.
- Welsh Language Complaints – there was some concern about the Council response to some of the complaints received, e.g. stating no action was taken. The Cabinet Members stated that they would look into this after the meeting and respond.
- Welsh Translation Unit – the Deputy Chief Legal Officer stated that a formal contractual arrangement existed in relation to the joint service with Neath Port Talbot Council, and that costs were recharged to Neath Port Talbot based on usage.
- Visibility of the Annual Report – whilst available online it was suggested that a hard copy of the Annual Report being available in Libraries would be positive. The Cabinet Members would clarify whether this is already the case and respond.
- Welsh Medium Education – Cabinet Members were asked about what arrangements should be in place for translation provision for School Governor Meetings within Welsh Medium Schools, and whether individual schools were responsible for the cost. The Cabinet Member for Education & Learning stated that a response would be provided to the Committee regarding expectations and arrangements, including funding.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Culture, Human Rights & Equalities, the Cabinet Member for Education & Learning and the Chief Legal Officer for their input.

Resolved that the Chair write to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Human Rights & Equalities, the Cabinet Member for Education & Learning reflecting the discussion and sharing the views of the Committee.

90 Annual Complaints & Compliments Report 2022-23.

The Cabinet Member for Service Transformation presented the Annual Complaints & Compliments Report 2022.

It was noted that the two reports at appendices A and B detailed performance on the operation of the Corporate Complaints Policy and Social Services Complaints Policy between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.

The Complaints reports had a new format in response to a request from the Governance & Audit Committee. The Annual Reports were also presented to the Governance & Audit Committee as it had a responsibility to consider the Authority's ability to handle complaints effectively, so assurance was provided to it on the complaints handling process.

It was highlighted to the Committee that the number of complaints received by the Council was a very small percentage of the vast number of interactions with citizens each year. However, the report stated that the Council recognises that complaints were a valuable resource, helping the Council to understand the needs and concerns of members of the public and to improve services. All complaints were taken very seriously and provide valuable customer insight. The report also highlighted the positive comments that the Council had received.

It was also noted that an internal audit of Complaints began at the end of 2022-23 and concluded in 2023-24 with the overall assurance level of substantial.

The Committee noted that the Social Services Annual Report had been considered by the Social Services Scrutiny Performance Panels on 12 March.

Committee questioning and discussions focussed on the following:

- Breakdown of Complaints – the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation referred to number of complaints that had not been upheld, which amongst other reasons could be due to issues or circumstances being beyond the Council's control, e.g. flooding, or complaints against parking tickets which were the subject of a different process.
- Ombudsman Cases – the report stated that in 2022-23 the Ombudsman received 94 complaints but closed 99 cases relating to the Council. The Head of Digital & Customer Services clarified that the discrepancy in these figures related to some Ombudsman cases still being considered from previous years.
- Reporting Timescales – the Head of Digital & Customer Services advised that every effort would be made to ensure annual reporting on Complaints and Compliments would be made available earlier. However, the compilation of information takes several months, but every effort would be made to produce the next report as soon as possible following receipt of the Ombudsman's Annual Letter in September / October.
- Process for Registering Complaints & Compliments – The Head of Digital & Customer Services outlined the process, with the majority of complaints being made online, however there were other methods and, in future reports, figures around the source of registration could be detailed, e.g. whether online, email, letter, etc. There was also a discussion around the logging of compliments, to ensure that positive comments received from the public are not missed.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation and the Head of Digital & Customer Services for their input.

Resolved that the Chair write to the Cabinet Member Service Transformation and the Head of Digital & Customer Services reflecting discussion and sharing the views of the Committee.

91 Scrutiny Performance Panel Progress Report: Education (Councillor Lyndon Jones, Convener).

Councillor Lyndon Jones provided the Committee with a progress report on the work / activities of the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel.

In the Convener's absence the Chair shared some comments made by the Convener in respect of the Partneriaeth Regional Partnership as there had been a recent announcement by the Welsh Government proposing a review of education partnership arrangements. There was some concern about the implications of such a review on Partneriaeth and on individual councils moving forward.

Resolved that the Scrutiny Performance Panel Progress Report: Education be noted.

92 Membership of Scrutiny Panels and Working Groups.

No changes to report.

93 Scrutiny Work Programme.

The Chair presented the regular report on the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2023/24 which the Committee is responsible for monitoring.

He confirmed that the main item for the next Committee on 16 April comprised:

- Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Session - Safer Swansea Community Safety Partnership.

94 Scrutiny Letters.

The Chair referred to the following letters, reflecting on recent Committee Scrutiny activity:

- Committee – Call In of Cabinet Decision – Customer Charter & Service Standards Framework - Letter to / from Cabinet Member for Service Transformation (Deputy Leader).
- Committee – Scrutiny of Workforce Strategy - Letter to Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance (Deputy Leader).

95 Date and Time of Upcoming Panel / Working Group Meetings.

The Chair referred to upcoming Panel/Working Group/Regional Scrutiny meetings, for awareness.

The meeting ended at 4.33 pm

Chair