

Scrutiny Dispatches

City & County of Swansea - June 2014

Scrutiny enables councillors who are not in the cabinet to examine the quality and effectiveness of services and policies, hold decision makers to account and make recommendations for improvement

Annual scrutiny work planning conference

(Lead: Councillor Mike Day)

Scrutiny councillors recently got together to explore topics for the work programme over the coming year. A Scrutiny Work Planning Conference took place on 12 May and was attended by 21 scrutiny councillors. At the conference councillors shared views about the scrutiny work programme and identified priorities for the year ahead. Councillors were asked to give thought to whether a particular topic merited in-depth inquiry, required monitoring, or could be dealt with through a 'one-off' discussion. As a starting point, suggestions that had been gathered from the annual councillor survey, cabinet members, officers, the public and partners were discussed. Ideas suggested were also cross referenced with the priorities in the One Swansea Plan (Swansea's Single Integrated Plan). A number of additional topics also emerged from the debate.

From the consultation the topics that gained most support were:

- *Corporate Building & Property Services*
- *Governance of Schools*
- *Corporate Culture / Co-operative Council*
- *Sustainability*
- *Services for those with Learning Difficulties*
- *Target Areas*
- *Mental Health Services*
- *Obesity / Lifestyle*
- *School Readiness*
- *Roads / Roadworks / Highway Maintenance*
- *Young Carers*
- *Western Bay Health and Social Care Programme*

The Scrutiny Programme Committee, taking into account feedback from the conference, will put together a scrutiny work programme for the year. The programme is guided by the overriding principle that the work of scrutiny should be strategic and significant, focussed on issues of concern, and represent a good use of scrutiny time and resources.

The Committee will also consider a report at each of their meetings that will enable the committee to maintain an overview of all scrutiny activities to ensure that the work programme is co-ordinated and effective. In particular the committee will monitor progress of work undertaken by the informal Panels and Working Groups and findings to ensure that this work is effective and has the required visibility.

Gypsy & traveller site provision – scrutiny review of process

(Lead: Cllr Robert Smith)

Special meetings of the Scrutiny Programme Committee are continuing in order to develop understanding of the process that was followed in the search for a second Gypsy & Traveller Site, culminating in the report to Council last October. The committee has now taken in evidence from officers and a number of councillors and members of the public who have wanted the opportunity to bring certain matters to the committee's attention. The committee will take stock of its work so far, determine next steps in evidence gathering, before drawing the review to a close, with conclusions and recommendations on the process and learning points for the future

Good Scrutiny? Good Question!

(Lead: Councillor Mike Day)

A report of the Auditor General for Wales called 'Good Scrutiny? Good Question!' was published on the 29 May 2014. The report concluded that 'Local government scrutiny in Wales is improving but councils need to do more to develop consistently rigorous scrutiny to increase public accountability in decision making. Councils demonstrated a genuine commitment to learning and improvement throughout the course of the study, and in many councils scrutiny practice at committees has improved. However many challenges remain.

In summary the report found that:

- Scrutiny practice is improving, but the impact that scrutiny is having is not always clearly evident
- Whilst a majority of councils consider that there is a supportive environment for scrutiny, some lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities can limit the effectiveness with which scrutiny holds the executive to account
- Better planning, more effective chairing, and improvements to the range, quality and use of information are required to improve scrutiny across councils in Wales
- In general, council scrutiny is not always fully aligned with other council improvement processes, nor builds on external audit, inspection and review; and
- More effective engagement with the public and partners will improve scrutiny and increase public accountability.

The report makes nine recommendations, including:

- Further developing scrutiny forward work programmes
- Ensuring that scrutiny draws effectively on the work of audit, inspection and regulation
- Undertaking regular self-evaluation of scrutiny

The full report can be accessed at: www.wao.gov.uk/publications.

Schools Performance Panel focusing on the key issues

The Schools Performance Panel met on the 29 April to assess their year and plan for the year ahead. The Panel highlighted the key issues it would like to focus on over the coming 12 months. It also agreed to make more use of case studies as examples to performance, and seek more insight from the public and meet in a school setting. Some of the topics the Panel has scheduled include: EOTAS Pathways and Behaviour Strategy, ensuring consistency in teacher and classroom assessments, and schools use of the Pupil Deprivation Grant.

Cabinet responds to economic inactivity inquiry recommendations

(Lead: Councillor Chris Holley)

Cabinet formally responded to the Economic Inactivity Scrutiny Inquiry report on 3 June. The inquiry considered how well the council and partners were tackling economic inactivity in our communities. Cabinet has accepted the report and provided an action plan to implement recommendations. The Inquiry Panel will monitor the action plan over the next year and report back to the Scrutiny Programme Committee its view about progress and the impact of the inquiry.

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