

Scrutiny Dispatches

City & County of Swansea - August 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

What difference is Swansea Local Service Board making for citizens?

(Lead: Councillor Mike Day)

This is the key question that is being explored by the multi-agency Local Service Board Scrutiny Performance Panel.

The Local Service Board (LSB) is made up of Swansea's main public service providers as well as representatives of the voluntary and business sectors and a representative from Welsh Government. Its purpose is to make sure that decision makers work together to tackle the issues that matter for Swansea. It is essential that the LSB is subject to the same level of scrutiny as all other aspects of the Councils work.

The Panel has used its initial meetings to understand how the LSB works and to gauge how partners are contributing to its objectives. Meetings so far have focused on the One Swansea Plan and the LSB's Delivery Statement which sets out the 21 priorities that it aims to tackle. The Scrutiny Panel has also had sessions with the Centre for Public Scrutiny to enable them to develop knowledge of current LSB scrutiny principles and practice.

The Panel is currently meeting on a bi-monthly basis. In July the Panel met with the Leader of the Council, Cllr David Philips, who chairs the LSB and in September it will meet with other members of the the LSB Executive Board, which is made up of the statutory partners including the Council, AMBU Health Board, South Wales Police, Swansea Council for Voluntary Services and the Welsh Government. This will enable the Scrutiny Panel to:

- Gain perspective on how well the LSB is working
- Learn about key successes
- Learn about key challenges
- Seek ideas for possible items to include in the Panel's work plan

Following this period of learning and development, the Panel will be in a position to agree a work plan for the rest of the year that will have the biggest impact.

Scrutiny Inquiry final reports on their way

A number of scrutiny inquiry final reports should be published in the next few months: Inward Investment (August); Public Engagement (September); Streetscene (October); Social Care at Home (October). These inquiries were commissioned by the Scrutiny Programme Committee in order to tackle issues of concern.

These reports will represent the culmination of a period of evidence gathering by Inquiry Panels and contain conclusions and recommendations. The Scrutiny Programme Committee will be receiving a presentation of final inquiry reports from those councillors who have acted as panel conveners, before agreeing their submission to Cabinet. Information about inquiry findings will be featured in the upcoming dispatches reports. Final reports will also be available to download from the Scrutiny Reports Library on our website.

Cabinet Member Question Time

(Lead: Councillor Mike Day)

The Scrutiny Programme Committee has scheduled all 10 Cabinet Members to appear before the committee over the course of the year. Each Cabinet Member is now expected to provide a short written report in advance of the meeting on the 'headlines' from their work to help the committee focus questioning on priorities, actions, achievements and impact. Holding Cabinet Members to account one is one the committee's primary objectives. The first two sessions of this year involved Councillor Mitchell Theaker and Councillor Mark Child, which enabled the committee to ask questions on the 'opportunities for children and young people' and 'wellbeing' cabinet portfolios. The rest of the Cabinet will be appearing as follows:

1 Sep	Cllr Christine Richards (Community, Citizen Engagement & Democracy)	24 Nov	Cllr David Phillips (Leader)	16 Feb	Cllr June Burtonshaw (Place)
29 Sep	Cllr Sybil Crouch (Sustainability)	22 Dec	Cllr Will Evans (Learning & Skills)	16 Mar	Cllr Nick Bradley (Regeneration)
27 Oct	Cllr Ryland Doyle (Target Areas)	19 Jan	Cllr Rob Stewart (Finance & Resources)	13 Apr	Cllr David Phillips (Anti Poverty)

Ahead of each meeting an invitation is extended to all scrutiny councillors and members of the public to contribute ideas to ensure the committee asks the right questions. A summary of each session and views of the committee are published in the form of letter to relevant cabinet members.

Historic buildings in the spotlight

(Lead: Councillor Paul Meara)

A Scrutiny Working Group has met to ask questions about the maintenance of Historic Buildings in Swansea, relevant powers and responsibilities. This was born out of some concern by scrutiny councillors about the state of repair of such buildings. To facilitate a discussion the Working Group considered a cabinet report on the 'Listed Building at Risk Strategy'. Following discussion with a range of officers the Group raised a number of issues for relevant Cabinet Members to consider, including: greater community involvement with decision making in respect of listed buildings; raising awareness of the historic environment and potential sources of funding; generating employment opportunities in building restoration as part of apprenticeship programmes; and making more of historic buildings when promoting the cultural heritage of Swansea. The Cabinet Members for Place and Regeneration have responded positively to the Group's recommendations and taken the issues raised on board.

A flexible work programme

Whilst it is important to have a forward plan at start of each year the scrutiny work programme remains flexible to ensure that there is capacity to pick up on issues of concern that may arise during the year, and review priorities as circumstances changes. The Scrutiny Programme Committee is now looking more closely at future Cabinet business to consider opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny. It also continues to welcome any public requests for scrutiny or suggestions from all councillors where scrutiny could add value and make a difference.

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