

Report of the Chair

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 1 September 2014

WALES AUDIT OFFICE SCRUTINY REPORT: GOOD SCRUTINY? GOOD QUESTION!

Purpose	The committee will have the opportunity to hear from the Wales Audit Office about the findings and recommendations of their audit report on scrutiny in Welsh local government, and implications.
Content	Tim Buckle from the Wales Audit Office will attend the committee to provide an overview of the report and take questions from the committee.
Councillors are being asked to	Consider the audit report and agree next steps
Lead Councillor(s)	Councillor Mike Day, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee
Lead Officer & Report Author	Brij Madahar, Scrutiny Coordinator Tel: 01792 637257 E-mail: brij.madahar@swansea.gov.uk

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A report of the Auditor General for Wales called 'Good Scrutiny? Good Question!' was published on the 29 May 2014. This was the culmination of a national improvement study into scrutiny in Welsh local government which involved facilitation of self-evaluation and 'real time' peer review, learning and improvement in scrutiny over a period of just over a year. The committee will recall a visit from the Vale of Glamorgan Peer Learning and Evaluation Team, as part of this work, to observe a committee meeting in March 2013.
- 1.2 The report was shared with committee members soon after publication however it was agreed that time be set aside to consider the report in more detail, identify learning points and consider implications for scrutiny practice in Swansea.
- 1.3 Tim Buckle from the Wales Audit Office will attend the committee to talk about the main findings and recommendations of the report and implications.

2. Summary of Audit Report

- 2.1 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.

- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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
- 2.4 The full report is provided at **Appendix 1**.

3. Next Steps

- 3.1 It is important to address the recommendations which the audit report makes. Following the discussion, it is proposed to bring a further report back to the committee on action(s) that will be appropriate / necessary for the improvement of scrutiny in Swansea, in response to the audit report.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 There are no specific legal implications raised by this report.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no specific financial implications raised by this report.

Background Papers: None
20 August 2014

Legal Officer: Nigel Havard
Finance Officer: Carl Billingsley