

Report of the Chair

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 29 September 2014

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WITH SCRUTINY

Purpose	To propose how scrutiny can improve its communication and public engagement.
Content	The report includes a discussion of how scrutiny can improve in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raising awareness of the work and impact of scrutiny• Including public contributions in the work of scrutiny• Ensuring that the voice of the public is heard within council decision making An action plan is also proposed.
Councillors are being asked to	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider and endorse the proposals• Act on the proposals that relate directly to their own roles within scrutiny
Lead Councillor(s)	Councillor Mike Day, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee
Lead Officer(s)	Dean Taylor, Director – Corporate Services Lee Wenham, Head of Communications and Customer Engagement
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Communication and public engagement have become increasingly important aspects of the work of scrutiny. Guidance for the Local Government Measure (2011) states, for example:

Engaging the public more deeply in scrutiny activity may be regarded as a hall-mark of healthy democracy. Better communication about local decision making processes and greater representative participation will help ensure more direct experiences of community life inform strategic thinking and operational practice.

- 1.2 More recently the Wales Audit Office report: 'Good Scrutiny? Good Question!' argued that 'more effective engagement with the public and partners will improve scrutiny and increase public accountability'. The Characteristics of Effective Scrutiny, developed in parallel with that

report, highlights better engagement, along with better outcomes and better decisions as one of the three things that good scrutiny should seek to achieve. This is so that: 'Overview and scrutiny enables the 'voice' of local people and communities across the area to be heard as part of decision and policy-making processes'.

1.3 At the same time the Council has underlined its commitment to public engagement by incorporating the Principles of Public Engagement, developed by Participation Cymru working with TPAS Cymru, into its Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

1.4 This report considers communication and public engagement at the same time. While closely linked these are of course separate ideas. Communication is primarily a one way activity designed to inform and promote awareness. Engagement, on the other hand, is two way. Participation Cymru defines it like this: 'An active and participative process by which people can influence and shape policy and services that includes a wide range of different methods and techniques'.

2. Aims

2.1 In terms of scrutiny, communication and public engagement should have three aims:

- To raise awareness of the work and impact of scrutiny
- To include public contributions in the work of scrutiny
- To ensure that the voice of the public is heard within council decision making

2.2 The remainder of the report will consider each of these aims in turn setting out a brief analysis of the current position and highlighting proposals for improvement. These proposals have been captured in an action plan that can be found at **Appendix 1**.

3. Raising Awareness of the Work and Impact of Scrutiny

3.1 While councillors have a good awareness of the work of scrutiny, others are less aware:

- Only 53% of staff respondents to the 2014 annual scrutiny survey said they have a good understanding of the work of scrutiny (see the Scrutiny Annual Report)
- Research for a recent Cardiff scrutiny report into public engagement with scrutiny suggests that only 2% of the public have an understanding of what scrutiny does

3.2 While awareness of what scrutiny does, particularly for the public, may not, by itself, be so important, effective communication does provide the platform for engagement more generally. It ensures that people are

aware of opportunities to get involved and gives them confidence that it will make a difference if they do.

Current Activity

3.3 The following communications are produced for the Committee by the Scrutiny Team.

- Agenda papers / packs
- Scrutiny letters
- Reports for committee / panels / working groups
- Inquiry reports
- Scrutiny Dispatches
- Witness guides
- Emails
- Blog posts
- Press releases

3.4 In addition the Scrutiny Team manages the following communications channels:

- Dedicated scrutiny webpages on Swansea.gov.uk
- Swansea Scrutiny bilingual blog site
- The @swanseascrutiny and @craffuabertawe twitter feeds

3.5 The Scrutiny Team also works with the Communications Team to generate content for:

- Staffnet
- Council website news pages

3.6 Reports and activities are also advertised through the regular publication of agendas via the Democratic Services function.

3.7 Communication is an important aspect of the scrutiny officer role. For this reason each job description includes 'communication' as one of five core competencies which is detailed as follows:

- Prepare detailed and comprehensive public reports setting out the findings, conclusions and recommendations of in depth scrutiny inquiries
- Prepare agendas, reports, letters, minutes and notes for councillor meetings including public meetings
- Publicise the work of scrutiny including through the preparation of draft press releases
- Deal with public enquiries and ensure that public requests for scrutiny are dealt with in line with the agreed protocol
- Communicate directly with the public through social media including blogging and twitter

Improvement Proposals

3.8 With advice from the Council's Communications Team three proposals are presented here to improve the existing activity in relation to raising awareness.

- Build communications planning into the work of the Committee, panels and working groups
- Focus on and promote a small number of 'significant stories' through a number of channels
- Councillor to act as communication champions

Each will be discussed in turn.

Build communications planning into the work of the Committee, panels and working groups

3.9 One way to improve communications is to think about the different groups of people that communications are directed at and to think about their different needs when designing campaigns. Such stakeholder mapping can be a useful part of communications planning. There are a number of different ways of thinking about the people that scrutiny might want to communicate with. One example, using the metaphor of the theatre, is provided at **Appendix A**.

3.10 In order to tailor communications to the needs of different groups it is proposed that a series of communication checklists are adopted and used for different aspects of the work of scrutiny. The proposed checklists, which can be found at **Appendix B**, cover:

- Cabinet Member Question and Answer sessions
- Inquiry Panels
- Performance Panels
- Working Groups
- Scrutiny Dispatches

Focus on and promote a small number of 'significant stories' through a number of channels

3.11 For most people outside of the scrutiny world, the fact that an activity is being conducted by scrutiny is unimportant; it is the nature of the work and its impact that matters. At the same time scrutiny is competing with many other sources of news and information.

3.12 For these reasons scrutiny should concentrate on promoting no more than six public interest stories through the course of the year. In essence this means undertaking a mini media campaign, across a number of channels for these stories. Each campaign will be designed with advice from the Councils Communications Team.

Councillors acting as communication champions

- 3.13 Much of the work to support communications and media campaigns will be done by the Scrutiny Team working with other officers, for example the Council's Communication Team. However, to be really effective, these activities would also benefit from additional involvement by councillors. It is right in any case that the councillors undertaking scrutiny work act as the public face to promote it.
- 3.14 While it is the role of the chair and the vice chair of the committee to represent scrutiny in terms of press releases etc, other councillors can help raise awareness of scrutiny in a number of ways, for example by highlighting relevant pieces of scrutiny work:
- At meetings such as community councils, residents groups, management committees or school governors'
 - Through newsletters
 - Through social media
 - Directly to contacts and anyone who might have an interest in that particular topic
- 3.15 Councillors have extensive community networks that they can utilise to promote scrutiny work. By thinking of themselves as communication champions for the scrutiny work that they are involved in there is the potential to use these networks for the benefit of scrutiny.

4. Including Public Contributions in the Work of Scrutiny

- 4.1 The Wales Audit Office report: 'Good Scrutiny? Good Question!' emphasises the importance of public engagement for an effective scrutiny function. This is about much more than raising awareness but refers to the way in which the public can provide important evidence for scrutiny work.
- 4.2 Two-way public engagement is, however, challenging and can take a number of forms. The Wales Audit Office report, for example, suggests a number of options that council's might look at:
- Use of social media
 - Co-option
 - Citizens' panels
 - Public friendly meetings
 - Public input into work planning
- 4.3 While progress is being made, particularly in the use of social media, much remains to be done. The Scrutiny Inquiry Panel looking at the Council's approach to public engagement has found that many people still prefer to receive information through, for example, the Swansea Leader and the Council Website. More could certainly be done to promote scrutiny through these channels. Swansea's use of informal

panels for scrutiny should also provide an opportunity to promote public engagement.

- 4.4 One idea, suggested by the Wales Audit Office report is to apply the National Principles for Public Engagement that have been developed by Participation Cymru working with TPAS Cymru. These principles, which already form part of the council's overarching consultation and engagement strategy, provide a good framework for evaluating and improving how scrutiny approaches public engagement.
- 4.5 An assessment of scrutiny's public engagement work against the national principles can be found at **Appendix C**. The improvements suggested by this assessment are as follows:

Work Planning

- Using the annual scrutiny work planning conference to identify possible areas of planned corporate work that scrutiny can contribute to.

Inquiry Scoping

- During the scoping stage of an inquiry it needs to be made clear what can and can't be achieved.
- Stakeholder mapping to be done during the scoping process of all inquiries.

Partnership Working

- More use of partners to complete or assist with consultation exercise with their service users.

Planning Activities

- During engagement planning participants to have the opportunity to highlight any barriers.

Delivering Activities

- Training for councillors in questioning skills and engagement of the public.
- During engagement participants to be asked how they would like to receive feedback.

Evaluation

- Any lessons learned from engagement to be shared through the annual report.
- Evaluation of engagements to be shared with all participants in a format that is suitable for them.

5. Ensuring the Voice of the Public is Heard Within Council Decision Making

- 5.1 Aside from the engagement undertaken as part of the scrutiny work programme, scrutiny has the potential to foster engagement in the decision making process more generally. For example scrutiny could act as a clearing house for consultation results (e.g. Swansea Voices) and oversee specific pieces of work on behalf of the Council such as budget consultation or engagement for the One Swansea Plan.

5.2 Scrutiny is well placed to take on this wider role. The involvement of councillors, independence from the executive and the specialist skills within the Scrutiny Team all point to scrutiny's suitability. From a council perspective utilising scrutiny in this way could ensure a more streamlined, visible and coordinated approach to public engagement and a more efficient use of resources.

5.3 Any public engagement work would need to be proposed by the relevant Cabinet Member and then considered by the Scrutiny Programme Committee as part of its work plan. Such proposals should also form part of the Scrutiny Annual Work Planning Conference.

6. Next Steps

6.1 The proposals contained in this report have been summarised in the attached action plan for the Committee to consider and endorse (**Appendix D**).

7. Legal Implications

7.1 There are no specific legal implications raised by this report at this stage.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no specific financial implications raised by this report.

Background Papers: None

4th September 2014

Legal Officer: Nigel Havard

Finance Officer: Ben Smith

APPENDIX A: Example of a Stakeholder Map for Scrutiny

Stakeholder Group	Characteristics
1. The Scrutineers 'Cast and Crew'	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny Programme Committee and Panel members • Democratic Services Committee • Non executive councillors • Scrutiny Officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High awareness • General interest and high level of involvement in some topics • Influence over scrutiny practice • Undertake scrutiny activities
2. Corporate Support 'Theatre Management and Staff'	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet • Executive Board • Departmental management teams • Democratic Services and Legal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High awareness • General interest in range of issues • Regular / scheduled involvement / input • Influence the environment that scrutiny operates in • Provide support, information and advice
3. Potential Contributors 'The Guest Stars'	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council staff • Partner agencies • Welsh Government • Press / Media • Voluntary sector • Community councils • Community / representative groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some awareness • Interested in specific issues • Occasional involvement / interest in particular pieces of work • Can influence others and raise awareness • Provide evidence on particular topics
4. The Wider Public "The Audience"	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public • (Press / media) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low awareness • Potential future visitors

APPENDIX B: Communication Checklists

1. Cabinet Member Question and Answer sessions

What	How	Who
Invitation to suggest questions	Blog post / Twitter	Staff, Public, Partners
	Email	Councillors

2. Inquiry Panels

What	How	Who
Call for evidence	Blog post / Twitter	Staff, Public, Partners
	Email	Councillors
	Relevant newsletters e.g. Open House, partner newsletters	Public, service users, relevant professionals
	Swansea Leader Press Release for SW Evening Post	Public, service users
	Relevant websites e.g. Swansea.gov.uk, staffnet, partner organisations etc	Public, service users, relevant professionals
	Include question in Swansea Voices survey if available	Public, service users
Invitation to observe evidence session	Blog post / Twitter	Staff, Public, Partners
	Direct Email/Telephone	Staff, Partners, relevant professionals
Feedback from evidence session or research activity	Blog post / Twitter	Staff, Public, Partners
	Email	Staff, Public, Partners
Announce final report	Blog post / Twitter	Staff, Public, Partners
	Staffnet	Staff
	Swansea.gov.uk	Public, service users
	Swansea Leader	Public, service users
	Press release for SWEvening Post	Public, service users
	CfPS – put in library	Relevant professionals
Announce report being presented to Cabinet	Blog post / Twitter	Staff, Public, Partners
Announce cabinet	Blog post / Twitter	Staff, Public, Partners

response		
Invitation to observe follow up session	Blog post / Twitter	Staff, Public, Partners
	Direct Email/Telephone	Staff, Public, Partners

3. Performance Panels

What	How	Who
Invitation to observe meeting	Blog post / Twitter	Staff, Public, Partners
Feedback from meeting	Blog post / Twitter	Staff, Public, Partners

4. Working Groups

What	How	Who
Invitation to observe meeting	Blog post / Twitter	Staff, Public, Partners
	Direct Email/Telephone	Staff, Partners, relevant professionals
Feedback from meeting	Blog post / Twitter	Staff, Public, Partners
	Email	Councillors

5. Scrutiny Dispatches

What	How	Who
Publish dispatches	Blog post / Twitter	Staff, Public, Partners
	Staffnet	Staff

6. Scrutiny Work Plan

What	How	Who
Invitation to suggest items for scrutiny	Swansea Leader	Public, Service Users
	Swansea Voices	Public, Service Users
	Staffnet	Staff
	Scrutiny Website	Councillors, Public
	Annual Scrutiny Survey	Councillors, Staff, Partners, Public
Information about all upcoming meetings	Blog post / Twitter	Councillors, Staff, Public, Partners
Invitation to provide feedback on the work of scrutiny	Annual Scrutiny Survey	Councillors, Staff, Partners, Public

APPENDIX C: Assessment Using the National Principles of Public Engagement

Principle	Success Criteria	Positive Practice	Areas for Improvement
Engagement is effectively designed to make a difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A real chance to influence policy, service design and delivery from an early stage • Being clear from the start as to whether engagement is needed or not • Being clear about what can and can't be achieved • Measuring the outcomes or results to show how it has made a difference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent recommendations have had a positive impact on policy and service delivery. • During the scoping process of inquiries it is decided what consultation is required. • The follow up process of an inquiry includes looking at what has changed since the report originally went to Cabinet, whether the agreed recommendations have been implemented and what has been the impact of the scrutiny inquiry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the annual scrutiny work planning conference to identify possible areas of planned corporate work that scrutiny can contribute to. • During the scoping stage of an inquiry it needs to be made clear what can and can't be achieved.
Encourage and enable everyone affected to be involved, if they so choose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The people affected by an issue or change have opportunities to engage as an individual or as part of a group or community, with their views both respected and valued • People have the chance and the choice to be involved. Anyone who may have an interest in taking part is identified • Existing community and special interest groups are used to contact people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calls for evidence prior to the start of an inquiry let interested participants know that an inquiry on a specific topic is about to start and to get in touch if they would like to be involved. • During the scoping process potential interested parties/participants are identified. • Specialist groups are used to contact interested participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder mapping to be done during the scoping process of all inquiries.

Principle	Success Criteria	Positive Practice	Areas for Improvement
Engagement is planned and delivered in a timely and appropriate way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The engagement process is clear and communicated to everyone in a way that's easy to understand • There is a reasonable timescale • The most suitable methods for those involved are used • The most suitable level of engagement should be decided upon before any engagement activity is planned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the scoping process of an inquiry it is decided what engagement is most suitable depending on the inquiry topic, what methods will be used and the timescales for all the engagement to be carried out. 	
Work with relevant partner organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations work together to ensure that people's time is used well • Checks take place before engagement to make sure someone does not already have the information you need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of different organisations have been involved in scrutiny inquiries. In some cases a representative from organisations have been co-opted onto panels. • Prior to the start of inquiry officer briefings take place. This early discussion allows scrutiny officers to establish what work, if any, has been done in that area. • Use of partners to complete or assist with consultation exercise with their service users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More use of partners to complete or assist with consultation exercise with their service users.

Principle	Success Criteria	Positive Practice	Areas for Improvement
The information provided will be jargon free, appropriate and understandable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People have easy access to relevant information that is tailored to meet their needs • 'Easy read' information is available in a variety of formats e.g. large print, audio, DVD • Information is available in Welsh and English as well as other ethnic minority languages • Information is culturally and religiously sensitive • People are not overloaded with irrelevant information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality, social inclusion and engagement issues are addressed during the scoping process of an inquiry. • All engagement material is produced bilingually. • Information is available in a range of different formats/languages upon request. Contact details are always given to allow participants to request information in different formats. 	
Make it easier for people to take part	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers for different groups of people are identified and addressed • Organisers of engagement activities address typical barriers such as different languages, sight or hearing impairment, disability, transport access etc. as well as more specific needs and preferences whether cultural, LGB or other • Participants should have the opportunity to identify issues they feel are barriers to their involvement rather than the organisers alone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers to engagement are identified during the scoping process and again during engagement planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During engagement planning participants to have the opportunity to highlight any barriers.
Enable people to take part effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement processes develop the skills, knowledge and confidence of all participants • Engagement develops people's ability to take part in community and political activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of partners to complete or assist with consultation exercise with their service users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More use of partners to complete or assist with consultation exercise with their service users.

Principle	Success Criteria	Positive Practice	Areas for Improvement
Engagement is given the right resources and support to be effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate training, guidance and support is provided to enable all participants to effectively engage • Engagement is effectively managed and led • Appropriate time, people and resources are available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny officers are all trained and have a wide variety of skills to enable them to plan and undertake engagement. • Developing members questioning skills • All participants who want to take part in any scrutiny engagement will receive guidance and support to enable them to take part. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for councillors in questioning skills and engagement of the public.
People are told the impact of their contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely feedback is given to all participants about the views they expressed and the decisions or actions taken as a result • The form of feedback takes account of participants' preferences • Feedback is a mix of general information to all stakeholders and more specific feedback to the smaller number of active participants in the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After all engagement activities participants are giving the opportunity to give any comments and receive an evaluation form to give feedback. • During any engagement activities for scrutiny inquiries participants are asked if they would like to receive a copy of the final report to see the outcomes of the inquiry. • During the follow up process those who have been involved in the inquiry are invited back to a meeting to see the impact of the inquiry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During engagement participants to be asked how they would like to receive feedback.
Learn and share lessons to improve the process of engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People's experiences of the process of engagement are monitored and evaluated to measure its success • Lessons should be shared and applied in future engagements • Results are monitored and evaluated as part of the planning, action and review cycle • Evaluation is made available to participants in an accessible and appropriate format 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of the engagement process is monitored to see if any improvements could be made for future engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any lessons learned from engagement to be shared through the annual report. • Evaluation of engagements to be shared with all participants in a format that is suitable for them.

APPENDIX D: Improving Communication and Public Engagement with Scrutiny Action Plan

What	How	Who
Ensure that awareness raising is done consistently for different aspects of scrutiny work	Use communication checklists for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet Member Question and Answer sessions • Inquiry Panels • Performance Panels • Working Groups • Scrutiny Dispatches 	Scrutiny Programme Committee / Conveners
Promote up to six 'significant stories' each year	Develop and implement bespoke mini media campaigns with advice from the Council's Communication Team	Scrutiny Programme Committee / Conveners
Councillors act as communication champions for the work of scrutiny	Highlight relevant pieces of scrutiny work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At meetings such as community councils, residents groups, management committees or school governors' • Through newsletters • Through social media • Directly to contacts and anyone who might have an interest in that particular topic 	Scrutiny Councillors
Scrutiny undertakes a broader public engagement role on behalf of the Council	Invite suggestions from Cabinet Members at the Scrutiny Annual Work Planning Conference	Scrutiny Programme Committee
Ensure public engagement issues are considered fully at the scoping stage of inquiry work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the scoping stage of an inquiry it needs to be made clear what can and can't be achieved. • Stakeholder mapping to be done during the scoping process of all inquiries. 	Inquiry Panel Conveners
Make better use of existing public engagement channels	More use of partners to complete or assist with consultation exercises with their service users.	Scrutiny Programme Committee / Conveners
Address barriers to engagement	During engagement planning participants to have the opportunity to highlight any barriers.	Scrutiny Programme Committee / Conveners
Better support councillors to undertake engagement activities	Training for councillors in questioning skills and engagement of the public.	Scrutiny Programme Committee / Conveners / Scrutiny Councillors

Improve feedback to participants	During engagement participants to be asked how they would like to receive feedback.	Scrutiny Programme Committee / Conveners
Improve evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any lessons learned from engagement to be shared through the annual report. • Evaluation of engagements to be shared with all participants in a format that is suitable for them. 	Scrutiny Programme Committee / Conveners

Previously agreed as part of the Improving Impact Action Plan

Communicate the impact of in-depth inquiries	Press releases, blog posts and social media to raise awareness at key stages in the inquiry process	Scrutiny Programme Committee / Conveners / Scrutiny Councillors
Widen involvement in questions setting by councillors and the public	Emails to councillors, blog posts and social media	Scrutiny Programme Committee
Improve public engagement through greater use of social media by scrutiny councillors	Scrutiny bytes project	Scrutiny Programme Committee / Scrutiny councillors using social media