

## Report of the Chair

### Scrutiny Programme Committee – 29 September 2014

#### SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2014-15

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| <b>Purpose</b>                        | This report explains the background and purpose of the scrutiny work programme, and current position of all scrutiny activities. The report helps the committee to manage the work of scrutiny to ensure that the work programme is as effective as possible. The report also presents some proposals for agreement.   |
| <b>Content</b>                        | The scrutiny work programme is attached which refers to work currently active, showing progress with the established Scrutiny Panels and Working Groups. A work plan timetable for future committee meetings is also included.   |
| <b>Councillors are being asked to</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• accept or make changes to the committee's work plan timetable, and plan for the meetings ahead (<i>Appendix 1</i>)</li><li>• review progress of established Panels and Working Groups (<i>Appendix 2 &amp; 3</i>)</li><li>• consider response to public / councillors requests for scrutiny</li><li>• consider the information about future cabinet business and any opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny (<i>Appendix 5</i>)</li></ul> |
| <b>Lead Councillor</b>                | Councillor Mike Day, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee   |
| <b>Lead Officer</b>                   | Dean Taylor, Director – Corporate Services   |
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#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Programme Committee is responsible for developing the Council's scrutiny work programme, and managing the overall work of scrutiny to ensure that it is as effective as possible.
- 1.2 The broad aims of the scrutiny function are to carry out a significant and constructive programme of activities that will:

- help improve services
- provide an effective challenge to the executive
- engage members in the development of policies, strategies and plans
- engage the public

1.3 At the same time the committee must ensure that the work of scrutiny is:

- manageable, realistic and achievable given resources available to support activities
- relevant to corporate priorities and focused on significant areas
- adding value and having maximum impact
- coordinated and avoids duplication

1.4 The scrutiny work 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.

## 2. **Methods of Working**

2.1 The work of scrutiny is undertaken primarily in three ways – through the committee itself and by establishing informal panels (for in-depth activities) or one-off working groups:

- **Formal committee meetings** – as well as managing the overall work programme, the committee will focus on holding Cabinet Members to account by holding formal questioning sessions, and provide challenge on specific themes over the course of the year - this may cover a broad range of policy and service issues. Matters considered at committee meetings will typically be ‘one-off’ opportunities for questions, which will result in the committee communicating findings, views and recommendations for improvement through chairs letters to cabinet members, and where appropriate by producing reports.
- **Informal panels** – Scrutiny panels are established, with conveners appointed by the committee, to carry out in-depth inquiries (sometimes referred to as reviews) or undertake in-depth monitoring of particular services. The use of panels helps to ensure that scrutiny can be flexible and responsive to issues of concern:

a) Inquiry Panels: to undertake discrete in-depth inquiries into specific and significant areas of concern on a task and finish basis. These would be significant topics where scrutiny can make a real difference. Inquiry panels will produce a final report at the end of the inquiry with conclusions and recommendations, informed by the evidence gathered.

Every piece of scrutiny work suggested for inquiry will start off as a 'working group' – with an in-depth inquiry only following if the group agreed it was necessary and could suggest appropriate terms of reference to the committee (including key question that is to be explored, evidence gathering that might be necessary, and timescales). The 'working group' approach will involve a detailed presentation of the subject matter at the outset (with advice from relevant cabinet members / officers and provision of existing research & information) which will enable opinion and proposals to be submitted to cabinet member(s) if these can be clearly expressed at that point, with no further work needed, or help inform decisions about the focus of any inquiry that is necessary.

b) Performance Panels: to provide in-depth monitoring and challenge for clearly defined service areas. Performance panels are expected to have on-going correspondence with relevant cabinet members in order to share views and recommendations, arising from monitoring activities, about services.

- **Informal working groups** – Although the majority of scrutiny work is carried out through the committee and panels, the committee can also establish informal working groups of councillors. This supports flexible working where it has been agreed that a matter should be carried out outside of the committee but does not necessitate the establishment of a Panel. This method of working is intended to be light-touch – effectively a one-off meeting to consider a specific report or information, resulting in a letter to relevant Cabinet Member(s) with views and recommendations.

2.2 This arrangement should help to achieve more focused and potentially quicker pieces of scrutiny, and provide flexibility to deal with things in different ways depending on the issue, and improve impact.

2.3 Non executive councillors who are not members of the committee have the opportunity to participate in panels and other informal task and finish groups. New panel / working group topics, once agreed, are advertised to all non executive councillors and expressions of interest sought. The membership of panels and working groups is then determined by the committee. More than one political group should be represented on each panel / working groups. These bodies also need to be of a manageable size in terms of team working and effective questioning. A minimum of 3 members should be present at all meetings.

### 3. The Committee Work Plan

3.1 An up-to-date work plan timetable for committee meetings, based on the agreed work plan, is attached as **Appendix 1**.

- 3.2 The committee's own work plan will remain under constant review to ensure it is robust and effective. An updated work plan timetable will assist forward planning and help the committee to manage workloads and review progress made.
- 3.3 Members should always review and confirm items for the next and future meetings giving specific consideration to who should attend and confirm expectations so that meetings are always well planned and prepared for, e.g. information required and key questions that the committee wishes to ask.
- 3.4 The committee will have the opportunity to introduce issues of concern and review priorities, as and when they arise.

#### **4. Scrutiny Panels and Working Groups**

- 4.1 To facilitate monitoring of the overall scrutiny work programme **Appendix 2** provides a snapshot of the informal Panels and Working Groups that have been established by the committee.
- 4.2 **Appendix 3** provides a summary of progress with these current scrutiny activities.
- 4.3 For further information about the work of specific panels / groups a contact list of lead scrutiny members and officers is contained in **Appendix 4**.
- 4.4 The committee will be aware of the recent publication of a report on issues around child sexual exploitation in Rotherham. It is important that assurances are sought that nothing similar could happen in Swansea. Having already been asked about the situation in Swansea the Head of Child & Family Services has provided the following advice:

*'Child sexual exploitation has a high profile within children services, the police and with partners locally and our processes for responding to any concerns about individual children are well established.*

*I met with the police recently to double check that there was nothing arising from the police investigations of specific cases or from police intelligence otherwise that would lead us to believe that there might be any element of organised exploitation locally.*

*I have made similar checks with the safeguarding lead in children services.*

*There doesn't appear to be any evidence of organised or systemic exploitation locally.*

*However, we certainly can't be complacent and so are taking steps to further raise awareness amongst professionals across Swansea and*

*have been planning a conference in the Liberty stadium in October.*

*We are targeting council staff from outside of social services e.g. leisure, housing, street wardens etc, schools, health staff, third sector staff and Elected Members.'*

The conference, taking place on 20 October, will also explore how everyone can be more proactive. Social Services officers are liaising with community cohesion and race equalities officers about how to involve the BME community.

However, there is no room for complacency about the safeguarding of young people, and the committee should consider what scrutiny activity would be appropriate to ensure our processes, procedures, and work with partners, are as effective as possible.

## **5. Monitoring the Work Programme**

- 5.1 A report is provided to each meeting to 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. Performance Panel conveners will be asked to attend the committee on a regular basis to provide updates and enable discussion on key activities and impact.

## **6. Public / Councillor Requests for Scrutiny**

- 6.1 At the last meeting the committee was informed of correspondence received from 2 councillors with suggestions for scrutiny.

a) to look at the policy adopted by council regarding transport to faith schools and impact on budgets of schools facing possible increase in numbers.

b) relating to the handling of corporate complaints and procedures

- 6.2 The committee needs to consider whether and how to include the above in the work programme.
- 6.3 Further information is being sought and a proposal will be brought to the committee.

## **7. Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

- 7.1 To facilitate the ability to undertake pre-decision scrutiny a forward look document showing future cabinet business is made available to scrutiny. An internal 'Forward Look' document is maintained by Democratic Services and covers reports to both Cabinet and Council. Attached as **Appendix 5** is an extract from this document showing upcoming cabinet decision reports.

- 7.2 This information is already made available to all scrutiny councillors on a weekly basis and any councillor can make a request for pre-decision scrutiny.
- 7.3 If further information is sought about the content that would help inform whether pre-decision scrutiny should be formally requested on a particular matter then this should be identified as soon as possible and will be referred to the relevant Cabinet Member for response.
- 7.4 If the committee identifies any particular matter for pre-decision scrutiny a discussion with the Cabinet Member will be necessary in order to consider timescales and window of opportunity for scrutiny involvement. This may necessitate a special committee meeting.
- 7.5 To ensure the best use of time and resources it is assumed that pre-decision scrutiny will take place on an exceptional basis - decisions that may have big significance, thinking about things like:
- strategic impact
  - public interest
  - significant financial implications

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 Any costs that arise out of work plan activities, for example expenses for witnesses or transport costs, are not envisaged to be significant and will be contained within the existing Scrutiny Budget.

## **9. Legal Implications**

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

**Background papers:** None

Date: 17 September 2014

Legal Officer: Nigel Havard

Finance Officer: Ben Smith

Appendices:

Appendix 1: The Committee Work Plan 2013/14

Appendix 2: Scrutiny Activity Timetable

Appendix 3: Progress of Panels and Working Groups

Appendix 4: Scrutiny Councillor / Officer Leads

Appendix 5: Forward Look (Cabinet Business)