

Scrutiny Dispatches

City & County of Swansea – October 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

Good Scrutiny? Good Question!

(Lead: Councillor Mike Day)

There is an increasing emphasis in Wales on scrutiny, not just in terms of accountability but as a tool for the improvement of local services and engaging citizens. On the back of the report of the Williams Commission the Auditor General for Wales published his national improvement study called 'Good Scrutiny? Good Question!', on scrutiny in Welsh local government. The Scrutiny Programme Committee met with Helen Keatley and Tim Buckle from the Wales Audit Office to discuss this report.

During the meeting in September the committee considered the key findings, recommendations and implications of the report. As opposed to a detailed inspection or review, the report was founded on observations over the last 2 years (including self-evaluation and peer review) and good practice. The report concluded that local government scrutiny in Wales was improving but councils need to do more to develop consistently rigorous scrutiny to increase public accountability in decision making. The aim was to develop a model for what good scrutiny looks like, and the committee was referred to a set of outcomes and characteristics for local government overview and scrutiny which were included in the report.

The next step is for the committee to consider the recommendations made within the Good Scrutiny? Good Question! report and incorporate actions into improvement plans. It was noted that the Wales Audit Office would be carrying out an in-depth corporate governance review around November which will look further at progress with and the impact of the Council's scrutiny arrangements.

Apart from considering the specific audit recommendations there are a number of important issues that will influence the work of scrutiny in the future that will need careful consideration including:

- the drive to assess and improve the impact of scrutiny work
- increasing and improving our engagement with the public and interested parties in the work of scrutiny
- budget pressures and impact of budget reductions on services across Swansea
- regionalisation of services and how these will be scrutinised

It is important to ensure we have these issues in our minds when planning and carrying out our scrutiny work.

Improving the streetscene

(Lead: Councillor John Bayliss)

The Streetscene Scrutiny Inquiry Panel is about to conclude its work. Its final report is expected to come before the Scrutiny Programme Committee at the end of October. The inquiry has been looking at the maintenance and cleanliness of roads, footways and verges in Swansea, and what improvements could be made. The report will detail key findings from evidence gathered and conclusions from this work, and recommendations for Cabinet. Following a presentation of the final report by the convener, Cllr John Bayliss, the Scrutiny Programme Committee will be asked to agree its submission to Cabinet for decision. More on this to follow!

Service Improvement and Finance Performance Panel progress update

(Lead: Councillor Mary Jones)

Performance Panel conveners attend the Scrutiny Programme Committee on a regular basis to provide an update on progress. On 1 September that was the turn of Councillor Mary Jones who leads the work of the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel. This Panel has an overarching remit to ensure that the Council's budget, corporate and service improvement arrangements are effective and efficient. The Panel is currently meeting on a monthly basis and has a full work programme this year which will include being involved with the budget process throughout the year. In addition the Panel will be increasing its contact with cabinet members around budget and performance matters. The Panel have also identified the new ICT Contract and Flying Start performance amongst key pieces of work that would benefit from scrutiny.

Scrutiny of social services

Changes recently made to the scrutiny work programme mean that the former Wellbeing Scrutiny Performance Panel has been replaced with 2 new Panels. Firstly, a new Child & Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel will ensure continued focus on monitoring and challenging assessments on service performance and quality in respect of children's social services. Given the importance of, and past focus on, Child & Family Services, and, as it is potentially still an area of high risk, this warrants attention. Although the service has made good progress it is vital this is maintained and that further improvements are made across all areas of the service.

Secondly, a potential inquiry into Transforming Adult Social Services has been agreed. Councillors have identified this as a priority for scrutiny and the Panel could look at the change process and provide critical friend challenge to proposed or anticipated improvements. It is expected that this Panel will consider the outcome of the independent review into older people's services due to report shortly and how it will be used to progress the transformation of services, and inform budget discussions. This will start off as a 'working group' to gain a greater understanding of the background and develop the scope and terms of reference to determine how the Panel should operate. As the inquiry work of this Panel comes to an end, it will be set up as an Adult Social Services Performance Panel, and Terms of Reference will be changed to reflect this change.

Following up on scrutiny inquiry outcomes

Follow ups on scrutiny inquiries consider both the implementation of scrutiny recommendations and the wider impact made. Inquiry panels are reconvened between 6-12 months after the cabinet decision, to look at outcomes. The inquiry follow ups in the pipeline so far this year are:

Inquiry	Cabinet Decision	Recommendations		
		Agreed	Partly	Rejected
Services for Looked After Children	17 Sep 2013	14	1	0
Public Transport	12 Nov 2013	13	1	0
Affordable Housing	3 Dec 2013	7	2	4
Tourism	14 Jan 2014	14	0	0
Economic Inactivity	3 Jun 2014	7	0	0
Attainment & Wellbeing	1 Jul 2014	11	0	0

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