

Scrutiny Dispatches

City & County of Swansea – November 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

How can we improve public engagement?

(Lead: Councillor Joe Hale)

The Public Engagement Scrutiny Inquiry Panel completed its look at ways in which the Council could improve its engagement practices with the public, staff and external stakeholders, and presented its final report to Cabinet on 21 October.

The inquiry took place over a seven month period and took evidence from internal and external sources. The inquiry also benefitted from the co-option of Amanda Williams from Participation Cymru particularly in highlighting good practice examples elsewhere. The inquiry explored issues relating to current engagement strategies, the effectiveness of the Swansea Voices citizens' panel, engagement with staff, and the impact of financial pressures on engagement activities.

The Council has less money to spend and the Inquiry Panel's assumption was that this would diminish levels of consultation and engagement with the public, staff and interested groups. In the end, it found that capitalising on, and making improvements to existing mechanisms would improve engagement without the need to spend more money. The Scrutiny Inquiry believed that good public engagement was fundamental to the success of any large organisation especially when there are severe economic pressures to contend with. The Panel recognised the good public engagement that has taken place but also recognised where lessons have needed to be learnt. The Panel believed that all engagement needs to be citizen centered, genuine and not tokenistic, with clearer thinking behind the who, why and how when planning activities.

The Panel has made a number of recommendations to Cabinet including:

- adopting the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales
- demonstrating how Swansea Voices influences policy development
- opening up public access to the work of the Local Service Board
- retaining and improving opportunities for engagement through a variety of media
- regularly engaging staff and councillors
- changes to the Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

A response from Cabinet is expected within the next 3 months. The Panel hopes that its work will have impact by leading to a more inclusive approach to engagement.

You can find a copy of this report in the scrutiny reports library on our website:

<http://swansea.gov.uk/scrutinylibrary>

Social care at home

(Lead: Councillor Uta Clay)

The Social Care at Home 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 November. The inquiry has been looking at how the council and partners supports people to enable them to remain in their own homes, and what improvements could be made. The report will detail key findings from evidence gathered and conclusions from this work, and recommendations for Cabinet. Cllr Uta Clay is now leading the conclusion of this inquiry, taking the place of Cllr Jane Harris. Following a presentation of the final report by Cllr Uta Clay, the Scrutiny Programme Committee will be asked to agree its submission to Cabinet for decision. More on this to follow!

Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel progress update

(Lead: Councillor Fiona Gordon)

Performance Panel conveners attend the Scrutiny Programme Committee on a regular basis to provide an update on progress. This is to ensure awareness / understanding of the work of the Panel, consider its effectiveness and impact, and consider any issues arising and action required. On 29 September it was the turn of Councillor Fiona Gordon who leads the work of the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel. This Panel has an overarching remit to provide ongoing challenge to schools performance to ensure that pupils are receiving high quality education, and monitor the authority's objectives in relation to improving school standards and pupil attainment.

Recent work has included exploration of issues relating to:

- education other than at school;
- the role of the authority tackling the performance of teachers and dealing with competence issues and recruitment of senior staff in schools
- elective home education
- the support for schools from challenge leaders in order to ensure consistency of advice and guidance to schools;
- Estyn Inspections and advisory/practice documents

The Panel meets every month and future meetings will include engaging with a number of schools to discuss their improvement plans. Amongst other issues the Panel will also be looking at behaviour and restorative practice, and looks forward to the annual education performance data that will be available in December.

Transforming adult social services

(Lead: Councillor Uta Clay)

A Working Group met on 13 October to consider an overview from the cabinet member and officers and consideration is being given to how scrutiny can be involved in the Transformation of Adult Social Services programme. It was agreed that scrutiny should align its work to Cabinet decisions and the timetable for the transformation programme to ensure scrutiny has impact. A further meeting will take place to:

- receive a report on the rationale and the drivers for the transformation programme
- consider findings from the independent review into older people's services
- decide on a number of priorities to scrutinise

Improving communication and public engagement with scrutiny

(Lead: Councillor Mike Day)

An action plan for improving communication and public engagement has been agreed by the Scrutiny Programme Committee. The action plan has an emphasis on:

- building communications planning into the work of the Committee, Panels and Working Groups to raise awareness of the work and impact of scrutiny
- facilitating the ability of the public to contribute to the work of scrutiny and influence decision-making
- focusing on and promoting a small number of 'significant stories, through a number of channels
- Councillors acting as communication champions

Connect with Scrutiny:

Room 3.3.7, Civic Centre, Swansea. SA1 3SN (Tel. 01792 637732)

Web: www.swansea.gov.uk/scrutiny

Twitter: @swanseascrutiny

Email: scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

Blog: www.swanseascrutiny.co.uk

Like us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/swanseascrutiny