Report of the Chair

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 16 February 2015

MAKING SCRUTINY MORE EFFECTIVE – DEVELOPMENT SESSION

Purpose	This report presents the feedback from the recent development session: 'Making Scrutiny More Effective'.
Content	The report includes details of the session, key points and proposals.
Councillors are being asked to	• Review and discuss the key points • Endorse the proposals contained in the report • Consider whether further development sessions are needed
Lead Councillor(s)	Councillor Mary Jones, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee
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1. Introduction

1.1 Training and development is one of the Scrutiny Programme Committee's improvement themes for the current year. Scrutiny is also an element of the Council's overall training programme for councillors.

1.2 In order to support effective scrutiny a development session was held with the support of the Centre for Public Scrutiny in Wales. The purpose of this report is to share the main learning points and proposals from that session.

2. About the Session

2.1 The session was held on 29th January 2015 and facilitated by Ian Bottrill from the Centre for Public Scrutiny in Wales. Support for the discussion groups was provided by members of the Scrutiny Team.

2.2 The following councillors took part:

- Mary Jones
- Fiona Gordon
- Keith Marsh
- Jeff Jones
- Tony Colborn
- Lynda James

- David Cole
- Paul Meara
- Paxton Hood-Williams

The following co-opted members also took part:

- Jill Burgess (Standards Committee)
- Alan Thomas (Audit Committee)

2.3   The session had a flexible format. An initial discussion of concerns and hopes was followed by more detailed discussions of some of the topics raised.

2.4   A hand out provided by Ian Bottrill is attached at **APPENDIX 1.**

3.   Learning Points

3.1   Concerns

- Scrutiny tries to do too much, not enough in depth work
- We need to be better at prioritising
- The recommendations and impact of scrutiny are not promoted enough - staff/members of public don't know what is going on in scrutiny
- Are the questions we use to identify inquiries the right ones? (ie, significant, strategic, avoid duplication)
- We do not have enough officer or councillor resource to facilitate the large work plan
- How do we know we're doing a good job compared to other councils?
- Scrutiny needs more influence because it does not have decision making power
- Timescales for scrutiny of Cabinet work are too restrictive
- Better communications with all councillors by Cabinet…we need to build more consensus on important decisions

3.2   Hopes

- Increase the use of co-optees to positive effect
- A more focused work plan
- Better pre scrutiny of Cabinet decisions
- Bigger recognition of the role of scrutiny and its work and more publication of scrutiny recommendations and outcomes.
- We can be smarter in the way we make our recommendations (i.e. grade recommendations between quick wins, medium term outcomes and longer term outcomes)
- More influence on decisions (i.e. pre-decision, call in)

- Using different ways of working in panels – not just calling and questioning witnesses (using different ways to engage members and public when collecting evidence)
- Improve the style of reports i.e. less jargon and no acronyms

3.3   Discussion 1: How Can We Get the Public More Involved?

- Need to get the public more involved in work planning
- Increase our use of the Evening Post – regular column?
- Do not rely solely on social media given the age profile of Swansea

3.4   Discussion 2: How Can We Get Councillors More Involved?

- Publicise membership and attendance at panel meetings
- Consider involvement from a councillor perspective – what are the incentives and motivations?
- Highlight satisfaction of being included in a scrutiny topic and see out comes from that investigation
- Highlight benefits of more involvement such as broader experience and voices into scrutiny as ward members and citizen representatives

3.5   Discussion 3: How Can We Increase our Influence and Improve Recognition of Scrutiny?

- Publicise what scrutiny is up to now – this should be at the front of the Council's website
- Produce a diagram/map of scrutiny: include the different types of panels that are running and timelines
- Scrutiny reports should be discussed at Council so that it gives scrutiny work more status. Also the public can see the discussion.
- Needs to be more discussion of scrutiny reports at Cabinet and Council so that the public can see a discussion takes place (not much of a discussion takes place at the moment). It also shows the public that the Cabinet and Council think that scrutiny work is important.
- Publicise the time line of a scrutiny inquiry: would be helpful for councillors, staff and public.
- Recognition – Better publication of the work of scrutiny
- Better links with existing groups/networks: Access to Services have database
- Don't over consult with the same groups

4.   Proposals

4.1   From the session there are a number of proposals for the Committee to consider:

- Develop closer working with the Evening Post to get scrutiny work better publicised
- Consider how councillor attendance at panel meetings and working groups can be publicised
- Develop a smarter and consistent way of writing recommendations to recognise the difference between 'quick wins' and longer term outcomes
- Discuss with Cabinet how engagement with scrutiny might be developed
- Improve how the public are informed about the process for particular pieces of scrutiny work – in civic centre reception and online

Further development sessions for scrutiny councillors:

- More effective public engagement
- More effective work planning – giving the work plan greater focus

5. Legal Implications

5.1 There are no specific legal implications raised by this report.

6. Financial Implications

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

Background Papers: None

Date: 30th January 2015

Legal Officer: Nigel Havard
Finance Officer: Carl Billingsley

Handout for Scrutiny Development Session 29th January 2015

An Evaluation of Welsh Local Government Executive and Scrutiny Arrangements (Dec 2014) - Main Findings on Scrutiny

- The status of scrutiny has increased in the last few years
- Wide diversity in its operational structures, support mechanisms, impact, influence and status
- Its effectiveness is driven by context and whether it is valued

  - **If scrutiny is seen to 'Add Value' it is valued. If it isn't – it isn't!**
  - **This is largely a 'culture' rather than 'process' thing (although both are linked).**

- Enablers of effective scrutiny - strong Chair, focused work programme, shared understanding between cabinet and scrutiny, effective training, and good officer support
- Scrutiny of partnerships/joint scrutiny generally poorly developed
- The public have little idea what scrutiny is or what it does.

  "No matter how good your cabinet is – if your scrutiny operation is weak you haven't got the whole picture". (A Leader)

- *"The cabinet don't stop scrutiny doing anything but then they take no notice". (A non-executive councillor)*

Main recommendations on Scrutiny

- Councils need to publish the cabinet work programmes in a timely fashion, to be accurate and to provide sufficient information to enable scrutiny to effectively support policy development.
- Post-scrutiny in some authorities is hampered by delays in publishing decisions taken by officers (and in some cases cabinet members) under 'delegated/ individual decision making procedures'.
- Scrutiny of partnerships and joint scrutiny is currently poorly developed. Councils need to consider where there is 'added value' in working with other scrutiny teams.
- The requirement of political group balance in the election of scrutiny chairs should be re-considered so scrutiny committees can freely elect the best person for the job regardless of political colour.
- Councils need to improve the general quality of reports from officers to scrutiny committees and in officers' approach to attending and engaging with scrutiny committees. CfPS should encourage the sharing of good practice in these areas.
- Councils should consider the appointment of 'independent scrutineers' from the public or external organisations to assist councillors in their scrutiny work.

- Councils should produce a regular short briefing document summarising the work of each scrutiny committee and the impact it has made.
- Councillors should have the opportunity to discuss scrutiny reports at full council and not just 'note' the reports.
- Councils should determine whether the CfPS's model on 'return on investment' could be applied to all scrutiny activity.
- Councils should conduct a skills audit of scrutiny members which may result in, for example, some members conducting some research themselves.
- Councils should trial different methods of communicating the impact of each scrutiny committee to interested parties and the general public

Health Scrutiny – where all this started about 15 years ago:

- "Scrutiny is challenging and will sometimes be uncomfortable for the organisation being scrutinised, but if the process is aggressive, or relies on opinion rather than evidence, it is unlikely to lead to positive or sustainable improvement." (Guidance p. 7)

- "Scrutiny should be probing and incisive, focusing on… improving services for members of local communities.
  ….But committees must …recognise that some of the problems facing the NHS have no simple solutions." (Guidance p. 8)

    - Does the same apply to Local Government?
    - Simple solutions are attractive – but are they realistic?

Three big questions:

- Is it possible and practical?
    - By this I mean is it actually likely to happen – is it affordable (in cash and time), will it work, is it sustainable?
- Will it 'add value'?
    - In other words – will it help to improve things (services etc) for the people of Swansea, will it enable some necessary savings to be made, will it support the cabinet in making some progress?
- Will we enjoy it?
    - This is important – if it is an enjoyable exercise you and your colleagues are much more likely to get engaged and sustain that engagement, if its boring or pointless then that enthusiasm will soon vanish.