

Report of the Chair

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 13 July 2015

SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

Purpose	This report explains the background and purpose of the scrutiny work programme. The report invites the committee to consider the scrutiny work programme for the year ahead taking into account feedback from the recent Scrutiny Work Planning Conference.
Content	The current work programme is attached, including a plan for future committee meetings, which shows the topics that will be examined by scrutiny through various Panels and Working Groups. It includes work that needs to be carried over, either because of its importance or because work is incomplete.
Councillors are being asked to	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• accept or make changes to the scrutiny work programme, including the committee's work plan timetable• plan for the committee meetings ahead• review progress of established Panels and Working Groups• consider the information on future cabinet business and any opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny
Lead Councillor	Councillor Mary Jones, Chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee
Lead Officer	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 aim of the scrutiny function is:

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 council priorities and focused on significant areas
- adding value and having maximum impact
- coordinated and avoids duplication

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 developing and managing the overall work programme and keeping an oversight on all scrutiny activities, the committee will focus on holding Cabinet Members to account by holding formal questioning sessions, and provide challenge on a broad range of policy and service issues over the course of the year. 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 and members 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 are expected to take no longer than six months to complete and will produce a final report at the end of the inquiry with conclusions and recommendations for Cabinet (and other decision-makers), informed by the evidence gathered.

A pre-inquiry Working Group is arranged at the start of any proposed inquiry. The Working Group will receive a detailed presentation of the subject matter, with advice from relevant Cabinet Members / officers, and existing research and information available. This will enable the Working Group to determine whether an in-depth inquiry is necessary and

inform decisions about its focus. If so, the Working Group will suggest appropriate terms of reference to the committee (including the key question / line of inquiry, and timescales) for agreement. Alternatively, the Working Group may agree that no further work is needed, but can submit opinion and proposals to Cabinet Member(s) as required.

Inquiry Panels will reconvene to follow up on implementation of agreed recommendations and cabinet action plans, and the impact of their work – usually 6-12 months following cabinet decision, with a further follow up arranged if required.

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. Performance Panel conveners are required to provide the committee with regular progress reports on the work and impact of their Panels.

- **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 These arrangements should help to achieve more focused scrutiny activity 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 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.

2.4 Although much of the work of scrutiny is carried out by informal Panels and Working Groups these meetings are accessible to the public. Agendas, reports, letters relating to all scrutiny activities are published on-line: <http://swansea.gov.uk/scrutinypublications>.

3. Scrutiny Work Programme

3.1 Scrutiny Programme Committee:

3.1.1 The committee's work plan for the year ahead is attached as **Appendix 1**. This includes a schedule of future Cabinet Member Question & Answer Sessions.

3.1.2 Some other notable items:

10 August	Councillor Support and Development: Discussion on training and development needs develop knowledge and skills; Consideration of services on offer from the WLGA
14 September	Final Inquiry Report into Education Inclusion: To receive the final report (including conclusions and recommendations) of the Inquiry Panel from Councillor Cheryl Philpott, prior to submission to Cabinet for decision
16 November	Council Priorities: Update from Director - Corporate Services, on council priorities, strategic challenges, key decisions
14 March (tbc)	Crime & Disorder Scrutiny: Joint Chairs of Safer Swansea Partnership to attend to provide information and take questions on the performance of the Partnership to enable committee to explore plans / objectives, achievements, impact, challenges
Date tbc	Public Engagement: To discuss revision of committee agenda (and procedure rules) to increase public participation e.g. introducing a public question time

3.1.3 The committee 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 workload and review progress made. Committee members will review and confirm items for the next and future meetings giving specific consideration to who should attend and confirm expectation so that meetings are always well planned and prepared for, e.g. information required and key questions that the committee wishes to ask. The committee will have the opportunity to review priorities and introduce issues of concern as and when they arise, e.g. pre-decision scrutiny which may require extra meetings.

3.1.6 Pre-decision scrutiny – the committee is invited to consider the available information on future cabinet business (see Forward Look attached as **Appendix 2**) and any opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny, taking into account strategic impact, public interest, and financial implications. Any requests will require discussion with relevant Cabinet Member(s) to confirm timescales and window of opportunity for scrutiny involvement. Pre-decision scrutiny enables scrutiny to develop understanding about and ask questions on proposed Cabinet reports to provide 'critical friend' challenge and influence decision-making.

3.1.7 Committee Review - the review of the Gypsy & Traveller Site Search Process (commenced in February 2014) being carried out via special meetings of the Scrutiny Programme Committee is still in progress, although nearing conclusion. A meeting is taking place on 9 July at which a plan for the conclusion of the review is expected to be discussed.

3.2 Inquiry Panels:

3.2.1 The following Inquiry Panels are currently active:

In progress (yet to report):	Completed (follow up stage)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Inclusion (evidence gathering) - Expected End: Sept 2015 • School Governance (evidence gathering) – Expected End: Dec 2015 • Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (pre-inquiry stage) – Expected End: Feb 2016 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inward Investment (14 July 2015) • Public Engagement (Sep 2015) • Streetscene (Nov 2015) • Social Care at Home (Jan 2016)

3.2.2 Feedback from the recently concluded Sustainability Working Group is included in this agenda (item 12) for the committee's consideration. The Working Group has recommended the establishment of an Inquiry Panel to look at Food Security and Sustainability.

3.3 Performance Panels:

3.3.1 The following Performance Panels are now well established, with work ongoing:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Improvement & Finance • Local Service Board (<i>multi-agency</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools • Child & Family Services
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3.3.2 The work of the Transformation of Adult Social Services Panel is also ongoing.

3.4 Working Groups:

3.4.1 The following topics were agreed during the previous municipal year and Working Group meetings in the following order of priority:

1. Local Flood Risk Management	4. Target Areas
2. Roads / Highway Maintenance	5. Civic Events
3. Young Carers	6. Welsh Housing Quality Standard

3.5 **Appendix 3a & 3b** provide a snapshot of progress with the informal Panels and Working Groups established by the committee to carry out specific activities, and current position. The Terms of Reference recently agreed by the School Governance Inquiry Panel are also included. The key question that the Panel is exploring is: How can the Council ensure that school governors provide effective challenge for their schools?

3.6 For further information a contact list for lead scrutiny members and officers is also contained in **Appendix 4**.

4. Work Planning Conference

4.1 A Scrutiny Work Planning Conference took place on 8 June and was attended by 18 scrutiny councillors, 1 co-opted member and the Chair of the Audit Committee. The conference featured various perspectives on the work programme, including council priorities. Suggestions that had been gathered from the annual councillor survey, cabinet members, officers, the public and partners were shared for consideration. The conference papers are *attached (Appendix 5)*.

4.2 Those in attendance were asked to give thought to work plan priorities for this year, whether anything important was missing from current work, and whether the balance was right across Cabinet portfolios. Councillors present shared views about the work programme and identified priorities for the year ahead.

4.3 Key issues from the work planning conference:

- Focus on Corporate Priorities e.g. **Building Sustainable Communities** (objectives, actions, outcomes)
- Key Cabinet Decisions (forward look > pre-decision scrutiny) e.g. **commissioning reviews, asset disposal strategy**
- Financial Scrutiny e.g. **Budget** (cuts / savings, impact), **Commercialism, Procurement Process**
- **Poverty & Prevention** Service Area(s)
- Ensuring right balance of scrutiny activity across all Cabinet portfolios (e.g. **Anti-Poverty; Wellbeing & Healthy City**)
- Other topic suggestions: **Corporate Building Services** (e.g. issues re service model, cost, competitiveness); **Community Asset Transfer** (e.g. how to empower and support community groups / 3rd sector / other providers – is there a clear and consistent procedure, guidance or strategy?)

4.3.1 List of other suggestions from group discussion:

- Transition from Child & Family Services to Adult Social Services
- Disabled Facilities Grants
- City Centre Development (impact on Swansea generally)
- Children's Play / Youth Services
- Tethered Horses
- Community Involvement / Equality in Council decision-making (e.g. how to engage hard to reach groups)
- Elective Home Education (safeguarding issues) (*Schools Performance Panel already been looking at this*)
- Home to School Transport (*Schools Performance Panel already looking at this*)

4.3.2 Other issues raised:

- develop links with Audit / Inspection (work plans, reports, action plans, impact)
- Scrutiny / Cabinet Advisory Committee (CAC) relationship – clarity about role of CACs / impact of their work on scrutiny work programme
- consider timing of future Work Planning Conference – suggested before end of municipal year
- how to improve councillor engagement in scrutiny

4.4 Taking into account feedback from the conference, the committee should consider what additional work should be included in the work programme. This should be 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.

4.5 This year the committee is keen that the work programme engages more directly with the work of all Cabinet Members through, for example, pre decision scrutiny. At the same time the recent WLGA Peer Review has stressed the importance of aligning scrutiny work more closely to the corporate priorities. A summary of the existing work programme showing coverage across cabinet portfolios is attached as **Appendix 6**. Further guidance about selecting / prioritising topics is attached as **Appendix 7**.

5. Monitoring the Work Programme

5.1 A report will be provided to each meeting to enable the committee to maintain an overview of all scrutiny activities, monitor progress, and coordinate work as necessary. 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. Support

- 6.1 The work of the Committee, Panels and Working Groups will have the dedicated support of a member of the Council's Scrutiny Unit. This lead scrutiny officer will project manage scrutiny activities and help to ensure that things runs smoothly, for example for in-depth inquiries they will:
- contact and arrange witness sessions
 - carry out and assist with any consultation and public engagement exercises
 - carry out research on behalf of the Committee
 - help to keep the work to time
 - capture and reflect back the ideas, evidence gathered and any key issues that have been highlighted
 - assist in the compilation of final reports
- 6.2 The Executive Board and Service Departments are also an essential source of advice and support. Engagement with departments will be important in providing context for areas of work, knowledge about policies and service delivery, and technical expertise.
- 6.3 Prioritisation of scrutiny activities is vital in view of limited scrutiny time and resources. Aligning the amount of scrutiny with available resources will help to sharpen the focus on the quality of scrutiny and impact. The committee should recognise that a limited number of panels and working groups can be supported in any given year, keeping a degree of flexibility to adapt to issues that may emerge during the year.

7. Public Requests for Scrutiny / Councillor Calls for Action

- 7.1 In accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 the Scrutiny Programme Committee has agreed arrangements to deal with requests for scrutiny from individual councillors (who are not members of the committee) and/or members of the public.
- 7.2 Councillors who are not on the Scrutiny Programme Committee who have suggestions for scrutiny during the course of the year should make these known to the chair and vice-chair of the Scrutiny Programme Committee for consideration. However for a more formal route there is the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA). CCfAs specifically enable councillors to refer issues of local importance to an overview and scrutiny committee, however as a means of "last resort" in a broad sense, with issues being raised at a scrutiny committee after other avenues have been explored.
- 7.3 Members of the public are able to make requests for scrutiny by contacting the Scrutiny Team in writing detailing the issue of concern, its impact, and suggested action.
- 7.4 In accordance with the agreed protocol for both councillor calls for action and public requests for scrutiny the chair of the Scrutiny

Programme Committee will consider any requests received and bring about proposals to deal with these to the committee for consideration.

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

Legal Officer: Tracey Meredith

Finance Officer: Paul Cridland

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Proposed Committee Work Plan 2015/16

Appendix 2: Forward Look (Cabinet Business)

Appendix 3a: Overall Scrutiny Work Programme Timetable 2015/16

Appendix 3b: Progress of Panels and Working Groups (incl. Terms of Reference – School Governance Inquiry)

Appendix 4: Scrutiny Councillor / Officer Leads

Appendix 5: Scrutiny Work Planning Conference Papers

Appendix 6: Scrutiny Work Programme by Cabinet Portfolio

Appendix 7: Scrutiny Work Planning Guidance