

Report of the Chair

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 12 October 2015

SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

Purpose	This report reviews the current scrutiny work programme.
Content	The current work programme is described, including the plan for future committee meetings, and progress of panels and working groups.
Councillors are being asked to	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• accept or make changes to the scrutiny work programme• plan for the committee meetings ahead• review progress of established panels and working groups• consider opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny
Lead Councillor	Councillor Mary Jones, Chair
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 work of scrutiny aims to:

- 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 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.

It also needs to be:

- manageable, realistic and achievable given resources available
 - relevant to council priorities
 - adding value and having maximum impact
 - coordinated and avoid duplication
- 1.4 The work of scrutiny is undertaken primarily in three ways – through the committee itself, by establishing informal panels or via one-off working groups.
- 1.5 Scrutiny will regularly send letters to Cabinet Members communicating findings, views and recommendations for improvement and, where appropriate, by producing reports. Inquiry panels 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. Inquiry panels will reconvene to follow up on the implementation of agreed recommendations and the impact of their work – usually 6-12 months following cabinet decision.
- 1.6 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 and letters relating to all scrutiny activities are published on-line: <http://swansea.gov.uk/scrutinypublications>.

2. Scrutiny Work Programme

2.1 Scrutiny Programme Committee:

- 2.1.1 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. This should be kept under review to ensure it represents a robust and effective plan.
- 2.1.2 Committee members should review and confirm items for the next and future meetings giving specific consideration to who should attend 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.
- 2.1.3 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.

2.1.4 Committee Review - the review of the Gypsy & Traveller Site Search Process (commenced in February 2014) has been carried out via special meetings of the Scrutiny Programme Committee. Evidence gathering has now been completed and a final report is being prepared to conclude this review.

2.2 Panels and Working Groups:

2.2.1 **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 their current position.

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

2.3 Scrutiny of Education through Regional Working (ERW)

2.3.1 A meeting for scrutiny councillors and officers from the six councils participating in ERW was held in Port Talbot on the 22 September. Swansea was represented by Councillors Fiona Gordon and Cheryl Philpott.

2.3.2 It was agreed that a scrutiny councillors group will be set up in order to coordinate scrutiny work across the region and ensure a consistent approach. Swansea Scrutiny Team will provide the support for this group as the Council's contribution to ERW.

3. **Scrutiny Improvement Outcomes**

3.1 At the last meeting the committee was encouraged to consider how it can contribute to agreed scrutiny improvement outcomes through its own work. Based on discussion ideas are shared below for agreement:

1. We need to talk more to Cabinet Members so that we can plan better and ensure that our work is making a difference:

Positives: Regular and structured Cabinet Member Q & A sessions; Cabinet Members invited to input issues for work programme.

Priority: Regular informal meeting with Cabinet Member for Transformation & Performance to discuss cabinet business and interface with scrutiny.

2. We need to align the work of scrutiny more closely to the five corporate priorities so that we can focus and impact on the things that matter:

Positives: Work programme ideas filtered for whether issues are strategic and significant. Work Planning Conference and Committee receive input from Director – Corporate Services on corporate priorities.

Priority: New panels on Building Sustainable Communities and Tackling Poverty are being established.

3. We need more briefings and development sessions so that we have the knowledge and skills we need:

Positives: The committee welcomed the upcoming opportunity to learn more about children's rights.

Priority: Sessions on Council budget / financial scrutiny; scrutiny questioning skills; and effective scrutiny

4. We need more coverage in the media so that the public are more aware of our work:

Positives: Social media presence: Swansea scrutiny bulletin board (blogs); twitter.

Priority: Making 'Scrutiny Dispatches' quarterly report more newsworthy and developing press releases from it.

5. We need more members of the public contributing to scrutiny meetings so that we can reflect their views in our work:

Positives: Clear process for public requests for scrutiny; opportunity to contribute questions to Cabinet Member Q & A sessions.

Priority: Developing further opportunities for public participation e.g. public speaking / question time, co-option.

6. We need closer links with regulators and inspectors so that we can provide a more coordinated and effective challenge:

Positives: Links with Audit Committee.

Priority: Discussion with Wales Audit Office on links between work plans, mutual awareness and use of audit / scrutiny findings.

3.2 Performance Panels have also been asked to consider the implications of the improvement outcomes for their own work. The outcome of these discussions will be reported to the committee in due course.

4. Public Requests for Scrutiny / Councillor Calls for Action

4.1 None.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 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.

6. Legal Implications

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

Background papers: None

Legal Officer: Wendy Parkin

Finance Officer: Carl Billingsley

Appendices:

Appendix 1: 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

Appendix 4: Scrutiny Councillor / Officer Leads