

‘How scrutiny councillors are making a difference’

## Boosting Support for Job Seekers

*(Lead: Councillor Chris Holley)*

Scrutiny has given a boost to support for job seekers. A single point of entry to pool together information for job seekers has been established. A website called [‘Inform Swansea’](#) is now operational, providing a wide range of practical advice, guidance and information in a one-stop-shop format on training, skills and employment.

Proposals from scrutiny councillors have encouraged the council and its partners to reduce economic inactivity in Swansea. For example:

- An initiative from the Youth Engagement Priority Framework Implementation Plan is targeting a recommendation about young people who are at risk of not being engaged in any education, employment or training, from an earlier age.
- The Council in conjunction with Gower College has received the prestigious ‘Enterprising Britain’ award for Swansea. The ‘Young Business Dragons’ competition encourages young talent and schools compete against each other. A consortium has been formed consisting of two banks, the universities, Gower College and the Council to create a ‘Swansea Seed Capital Fund.’ This will provide small amounts of funding and large levels of mentoring support to young people wishing to create their own business.

The convener of the Panel, Councillor Chris Holley said: “We had hoped that our recommendations would help take measurable steps towards improving the situation and encouraging partnership participation. At the very least we hoped that our report would be thought provoking and lead to further discussions and reviews”

The Panel was told by the Cabinet Member for Enterprise Development & Regeneration that: “the Scrutiny Inquiry has helped raise the profile of the many issues relating to tackling economic inactivity and provided a basis for further exploring how the Council and its partners can work together to identify the specific aims, barriers and possible solution to each segment.”

Since the Inquiry concluded changes have taken place, particularly in relation to the funding of regional and national schemes designed to tackle economic inactivity.

Most of the recommendations agreed by Cabinet have been implemented whilst others are being addressed within other strategies and work streams.

The inquiry was carried out during 2013. Seven recommendations were made by a Scrutiny Panel and agreed by Cabinet in June 2014 together with an action plan. The Panel of councillors that produced the scrutiny report followed up on the implementation of recommendations and impact made in June.

## Partnership now open to the public

*(Lead: Councillor Joe Hale)*

A key meeting of local service providers is now open to the public for the first time. Since July Swansea's [Local Service Board](#) is holding its meeting in public, with the public also being able to ask questions at the meeting. The Board meets every two months and includes representatives of the Council, Local Health Board, Police and Welsh Government.

This was one of a number of suggestions for improvement made by a scrutiny inquiry which has changed the way the Council engages and consults with different groups of people.

Other changes include:

- Providing feedback to people that took part in consultations will now be a requirement in the new consultation & engagement strategy.
- A new employee engagement strategy will strengthen the Council's commitment to staff engagement, communication, involvement and feedback.

The Inquiry Panel of scrutiny councillors met with the Cabinet Member for Transformation & Performance in August to review progress with the recommendations and the difference made by this piece of scrutiny. The Cabinet Member pointed to demonstrable change as a direct result of the Panel's work. He said "the inquiry had helped bring focus to delivering better customer satisfaction for residents, improving Swansea Voices by using a reputation tracker and quicker analysis of the data and improving engagement with councillors, staff and residents".

The [final report](#) of the Public Engagement Scrutiny Inquiry Panel was presented to Cabinet in October 2014. Cabinet formally responded in February and agreed all 16 scrutiny recommendations (1 in part).

## Swansea needs a strong city centre

*(Lead: Councillor Jeff Jones)*

Scrutiny has added its voice to those saying that Swansea needs a strong city centre. The City Region Board, chaired by Sir Terry Matthews, also believes that strong city centre is needed in the region and that Swansea is perfectly suited to being that hub.

This relates to a scrutiny inquiry into Inward Investment. The Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Development & Regeneration that: "the Panel's report has provided focus for how Swansea and the wider City Region should be promoted and presented to potential investors. The recommendations represent key elements of an effective process for establishing and operating inward investment response and support."

The Panel had emphasised the importance of communication to encouraging more inward investment and getting more positive messages out to potential investors is vital.

The Panel particularly welcomed the branding for 'Swansea: City of Innovation' which they felt to be relevant and current.

The Scrutiny Panel found that since the Inquiry report there have been a number of changes to the Swansea Bay City Region Board and that there is a new approach for developing transformational activity across the City Region, including identifying 5 'pillars' of economic momentum – Ideas, Skills, Capital, Opportunities and Infrastructure.

## School children have more confidence to speak out

*(Lead: Councillor Fiona Gordon)*

Children and young people feel more able to speak out about child protection or welfare issues. This is one of the improvements that schools have reported in relation to attainment, attendance and wellbeing outcomes since engaging with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Schools have also reported the following improvements:

- Improved relationships, behaviour and engagement in learning with a reduction in bullying and exclusions and attendance has improved
- Children and young people have enhanced moral understanding and positive attitudes towards diversity in society and a reduction of prejudice
- Children and young people have become more involved in decision making

A [scrutiny inquiry](#) looked at a range of issues affecting the welfare of children at school and has made a significant contribution to improving attainment & wellbeing across schools in Swansea. The Attainment and Wellbeing Scrutiny Inquiry Panel met in June to look at the impact of their inquiry.

The Cabinet Member for Services for Children & Young People said that: “the inquiry has raised the profile of attainment and wellbeing specifically in helping to deliver the UNCRC in schools. There is an improved understanding and awareness of the UNCRC and the benefits of a rights based approach.”

The Panel were informed that there had been a positive impact from the implementation of the recommendations as a whole.

## Chair’s Roundup:

This is my first quarterly roundup of the work of [scrutiny](#).

I am very pleased with the impact made by our scrutiny of economic inactivity, public engagement, inward investment and attainment & wellbeing. However there is an awful lot of other work going which I would like to highlight in this roundup.

### **Making the work of scrutiny more transparent and accessible.**

Something really important to us is making the work of scrutiny more transparent and accessible. That’s why we have created an on-line [‘publications page’](#). Here you can access all scrutiny agenda packs, reports and letters as well as responses from Cabinet Members. Filters enable easy access to publications by topic, publication type or meeting type. Publications linked to a specific piece of work can now be viewed in one place. This initiative follows a suggestion from Wales Audit Office during the recent corporate assessment.

### **Positive feedback from auditors.**

Talking about audit findings it has been particularly pleasing to hear positive comments about scrutiny in Swansea from the Wales Audit Office, WLGA Peer Review, and Estyn. The [WAO Annual Improvement Report](#) (incorporating the Corporate Assessment) found that the Council has generally robust governance arrangements and is improving access to information about its scrutiny activity, highlighting how Cabinet Members are held to account and recognising that the Council’s scrutiny structure enables a flexible and focussed approach, and that access to information about scrutiny activity has improved in recent months. There are also positive messages from Estyn about the robustness of our scrutiny arrangements. It seems that our

arrangements are more structured and more appropriately challenging than in many other authorities.

### **We want to know if people have any issues of concern.**

Even with a work programme established [requests for scrutiny](#) from all scrutiny councillors or members of the public can be made throughout the year. I will consider any issue raised and, with the committee's agreement, determine how best scrutiny can deal with it to make a difference.

### **Holding Cabinet Members to account.**

Each month's Scrutiny Programme Committee meeting features a Q & A session with a Cabinet Member in order to hold them to account for their work. As I write we are due to meet with the Cabinet Member for Transformation & Performance in November and Cabinet Member for Finance & Strategy in December. We have developed a [programme](#) for all Cabinet Members to come before the committee during the year. Acting as a 'critical friend' we question and challenge them on their priorities, actions, achievement and impact. We invite members of the public and all scrutiny councillors to contribute ideas to ensure the committee asks the right questions. A summary of each session and views of the committee are published in the form of letter to relevant Cabinet Members. Over the last few months we have put questions to the Leader and Cabinet Members for Services for Children & Young People, Wellbeing & Healthy City, and Enterprise, Development & Regeneration.

### **Praise about the work of our Performance Panels.**

I was particularly pleased to hear praise from the Cabinet Member for Services for Children & Young People about the way she, and the service, felt challenged by the Child & Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel, vital to ensuring that the service continues to improve. She remarked on the high quality of scrutiny and questioning in relation to service performance, and valued the exchange of letters with the Panel.

### **Working in different ways to look at some issues.**

Adopting a more light-touch approach, some of the topics which we have looked at recently through one-off Working Groups have included Planning Services, Sustainability, and Car Parking, sharing our views and recommendations with relevant Cabinet Members.

### **Annual report for 2014/15 published.**

Perhaps more important to the Committee than the outside world, our [annual report](#) for the last 12 months was published in July. It gives a summary of what we have done, the feedback we have received and the things we want to improve in future. It shows that we are transparent in our work and open to scrutiny! The single committee system, introduced in 2012, has become a normal part of how we do things and continues to attract interest from other Councils. Feedback has given us encouragement that we are going in the right direction. Generally people see scrutiny as an important council function that is constructive, supportive, friendly and positive.

### **We've identified clear improvement outcomes for scrutiny.**

Looking forward, the annual report also highlights [six improvement outcomes](#) that we have agreed, following feedback, for the year ahead.

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