

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

HELD AT COMMITTEE ROOM 3A, GUILDHALL, SWANSEA ON
MONDAY, 11 JANUARY 2016 AT 4.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor R V Smith (Vice-Chair) presided

Councillor(s)

U C Clay
A M Cook
N J Davies
J W Jones
R V Smith

Councillor(s)

A C S Colburn
S E Crouch
E W Fitzgerald
P M Meara
G J Tanner

Councillor(s)

D W Cole
J P Curtice
T J Hennegan
G Owens

Co-opted Member(s)

D Anderson-Thomas

Councillor F M Gordon

Councillor P R
Hood-Williams

Officer(s)

Brij Madahar
Dave Mckenna
Sandie Richards

Overview & Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Overview & Scrutiny Manager
Principal Lawyer

Apologies for Absence

Councillor(s): M H Jones

108 **DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL & PREJUDICIAL INTEREST.**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, no interests were declared.

109 **PROHIBITION OF WHIPPED VOTES AND DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPS.**

In accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, no declarations of Whipped Votes or Party Whips were declared.

110 **MINUTES.**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Programme Committee held on 14 December 2015, be agreed as a correct record.

111 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME.**

There were no public questions.

112 **CABINET MEMBER QUESTION SESSION: CABINET MEMBER FOR ANTI-POVERTY.**

The Committee took the opportunity to question Councillor Will Evans, Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty.

The question session focussed on Councillor Evans' role as Cabinet Member for Anti-Poverty in terms of priorities, actions, achievements and impact.

Councillor Evans was invited to make any opening remarks prior to taking questions from the committee.

The question session led to discussion around the following topics:

- The key priority of tackling poverty which is one of the five themes in the Corporate Plan;
- Tackling Poverty Strategy and Action Plan;
- Local Service Board Strategic Needs Assessment, Local Service Board Research Group and Established indicators;
- The effective running of the Communities First Programme – Welsh Government's tackling poverty programme in communities;
- The Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy and how well the Corporate priority and Poverty Strategy fit together;
- How a good education affects an individual's chances of getting out of poverty;
- People having a decent standard of living by receiving the maximum benefits they are entitled to and by receiving a good income if they are working;
- Income levels linked to basic acceptable minimum standards which are £17k for a single person and £40k for a couple;
- Work done to tackle poverty outside Communities First areas;
- Details of Foodbanks, allotments and growing spaces in Swansea and the support provided by the Authority;
- Levels of rent, particularly in Communities 1st areas;
- Homeless figures within the Authority and the reasons why people fall into poverty / homelessness;
- The involvement of Councillors in tackling poverty within their Wards;
- The impact of welfare reforms on households;
- Portfolio priorities going forward and long term objectives including regularly reviewing the services and assessing how they link with the Corporate Plan, developing a food and growing enterprise and the Communities for Work Programme – European Social Fund.

In response to Member questions the Cabinet Member confirmed that:

- There were currently 5 foodbanks run by the Trussell Trust and 5 run by churches within Swansea;
- The support provided to allotments was reduced from £50k to £30k per annum in the Sustainable Swansea Budget Report in 2014 and was further reduced to £20k for 2015/16 and will continue at that level for 2016/17;

- For the period April 2014 to March 2015 £27k in grants towards food and growing had been awarded;
- 22 grants had been awarded this year for food and growing and £9,400 had been spent to date. 6 organisations had received grants and 2 applications had been deferred subject to further information;
- The Authority would not be increasing the number of allotments but was encouraging people to increase growing spaces, which were smaller areas of land that did not require a lease.

He added that he would circulate the following: -

- Figures relating to homelessness in Swansea;
- Details of the food and growing enterprise business plan and the list of grants provided;
- A list of what has been transferred to date and what is being considered by the Community Action Transfer Fund;

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for his attendance.

RESOLVED that the Chair of Scrutiny Programme Committee write to the Cabinet Member, reflecting the discussion and sharing the views of the Committee.

113 **FINAL SCRUTINY INQUIRY REPORT: SCHOOL GOVERNANCE.**

Councillor F M Gordon, Convenor, presented the School Governance Scrutiny Inquiry final report.

Councillor Gordon highlighted that the report presented the conclusions and recommendations arising from the inquiry that sought to answer the following question:

'How can the Council ensure that school governors provide effective challenge for their schools?'

She outlined that the role of school governors had changed significantly over recent years, with governors playing an increasingly important part in the management of schools and school improvement. She added that in many schools, governing bodies had responded to this change and had sought new ways of ensuring they adapted to changing demands. However, in other schools old ways of working remained and required updating. Roles within governing bodies could become fixed with a lack of questioning and clarity about those roles and it was noted that relationships could become too 'cosy', therefore impacting on the capacity to challenge schools sufficiently.

The Panel looked at good practice within schools which involved a range of different methods and visited schools that had been identified for good practice. She added that the Panel were not convinced that governors were clear regarding their roles and further training would improve the situation.

Members discussed the report and key issues included:

- The need for governors to be both supportive and challenging;
- Improved training for governors would improve the situation and how the current nature of the role could put people off volunteering;
- The policy within the Authority of giving Councillors priority for vacant governor posts;
- Attendance and re-appointments of governors who had poor attendance records;
- The importance, knowledge and effectiveness of the chair of governors;
- Possible remuneration of governors and combining governor bodies;
- The large amount of information being reported to governors which could overwhelm people;
- The timing of governor meetings which could cause difficulty for individuals who work.

The committee also noted that the Panel's report has identified an issue for further scrutiny – the function and operation of the Local Authority Governor Panel to ensure that it supports the work of governing bodies.

The Chair thanked the Convenor and Panel for their informative report.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The report be **AGREED** for submission to Cabinet; and
- 2) Scrutiny of the LA Governor Panel be added to the list of future Working Groups.

114 **SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE PANEL PROGRESS REPORT - SCHOOLS.**

Councillor F M Gordon, Convenor presented an update on the work of the Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel.

She added that the Panel was currently meeting on a monthly basis and the work completed since the last update in September included:

- a) In September the panel met twice to look at the performance and support for Looked After Children and for Gypsy Traveller Children and would also review the work of the School Improvement Service.
- b) In October the Panel also met twice to meet with the Challenge Advisor, Headteacher and the Chair of Governors of a Primary School and again to carry out pre-decision scrutiny on a report about the future of Education Other Than At School Services
- c) In November the Panel looked at the Post Inspection Action Plan arising from the Estyn Inspection 1 year on plus the Annual Audit of Schools report.
- d) Over this period the Panel had also kept up to date with individual school Estyn Inspections publications and any advisory/practice documents including for example: relevant Estyn Inspection outcomes for Swansea, Estyn and other guidance information.

She highlighted that the skills and good practice learnt in developing Gypsy Traveller education at Cefn Hengoed Community School be shared with others; particularly EOTAS services.

She also referred to the meeting with a primary school in October that had been identified as causing concern and spoke to the new Headteacher, Chair of Governors and the allocated Challenge Advisor. The Panel were pleased to find the improvements made with the development of an effective management team and all the building blocks in place for improvement moving forward.

The Chair commented that prevention of schools falling into difficult circumstances was a country-wide problem and a decision was required regarding who would support schools in difficulty.

RESOLVED that the update report be **NOTED**.

115 **SCRUTINY DISPATCHES - QUARTERLY IMPACT REPORT.**

The Chair introduced the draft of the quarterly report from the Committee to Council on the impact of scrutiny.

RESOLVED that the report be agreed and presented to Council.

116 **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2015-16.**

The report of the Chair reviewed the scrutiny work programme.

The report provided the committee with:

- The current scrutiny work programme;
- A plan for future committee meetings;
- A progress report on the various existing Panels and Working Groups;
- Cabinet forward plan for opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny.

RESOLVED that the committee work plan be accepted.

117 **MEMBERSHIP OF SCRUTINY PANELS AND WORKING GROUPS.**

The Chair presented a report which advised of changes to the membership of Scrutiny Panels and Working Groups.

RESOLVED that the following changes be made:

- 1) Tethered Horses Working Group – Councillor K E Marsh to be added;
- 2) Child and Family Services Performance Panel – Councillor C R Evans be removed.
- 3) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Inquiry Panel – Councillor C R Evans to be added.

118 **SCRUTINY LETTERS.**

The Chair reported the Scrutiny Letters Log and referred to recent correspondence between Scrutiny and Cabinet Members.

There was discussion regarding the findings of the Civic Events Working Group. The convener of the Working Group felt that a further meeting of the Working Group was needed to discuss the Cabinet Member's response and deal with any outstanding issues.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Scrutiny Letters Log be **NOTED**; and
- 2) the convener of the Civic Events Working Group be authorised to convene a further meeting as necessary.

119 **FEEDBACK FROM RECENT SCRUTINY EVENTS.**

The Chair stated that there had been no recent scrutiny events to report on.

120 **UPCOMING SCRUTINY EVENTS.**

The Chair stated that there were no upcoming scrutiny events to report on.

121 **FOR INFORMATION: AUDIT COMMITTEE WORK PLAN.**

RESOLVED that the Audit Committee Work Plan be **NOTED**.

122 **DATE AND TIME OF FUTURE COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR 2015/16 MUNICIPAL YEAR (ALL AT 4.30 P.M. EXCEPT WHERE NOTED):**

The date and time of future Committee Meetings for the 2015/16 Municipal Year was noted.

123 **DATE AND TIME OF UPCOMING PANEL/WORKING GROUP MEETINGS:**

The date and time of upcoming Panel/Working Group meetings were provided for information to help increase the visibility of this work and encourage participation.

The meeting ended at 6.15 pm

CHAIR